

MYTH, ARCHETYPE, AND  
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

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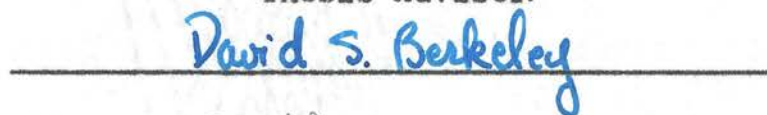
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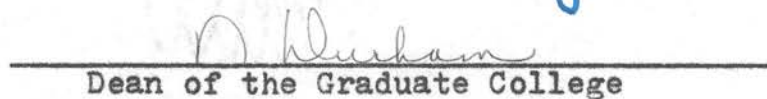
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## PREFACE

The most basic truths relevant to man's existence are the subjects about which one reads when he reads the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter. By basic truths, I mean not those truths which we find through trial and error, but rather those truths we all share as thinking beings, such as the certainty of death, the need for love, and other less easily defined fears and anxieties. Porter writes of these subjects with such facility of the English language that some scholars regard her style as a peculiarity within itself. This surface smoothness of Porter's work appears to me to work in a manner analogous to our own thin veneer of sophistication to cover certain of those less pleasant truths, those atavistic urges we have not grown away from. As Porter sketches in detail certain aspects of the condition of modern man, she achieves her effectiveness by sketching images and patterns of a mythic and archetypal nature. I must ask the reader to at least temporarily accept the premise of the Jungian "universal unconscious"; apparently no in-depth study of her work has been done from this point of view, and I believe such an analysis should increase our appreciation of her art.

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Mary Rohrberger for first introducing me to some of the subtleties of literature, and for her guidance as this effort came to be. I also thank Dr. David S. Berkeley and Dr. Clinton S. Keeler for their assistance in evaluating this work.

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## CHAPTER I

### MYTH, ARCHETYPE, AND KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

Katherine Anne Porter was born in Indian Creek, Texas, in 1890, moved to New York City in 1920, and was in her thirties before publishing her first short story. Flowering Judas, a collection of six early stories, appeared in 1930, followed by "Hacienda" (1934), Noon Wine (consisting of three short stories, 1939), "No Safe Harbor" (1941), and The Leaning Tower (a collection of later short stories, 1944). Aside from a book of essays entitled The Days Before and her only novel, The Ship of Fools, plus occasional articles of criticism, this marks the extent of Porter's literary production.

This relatively small body of work generally receives approbation from the critics. Robert Penn Warren credits Porter's "intellectual rigor and discrimination" for her work's "classic distinction and control," and describes such characteristics of her stories as the "rich surface detail," "the precision of psychology and observation," and "the texture of the style."<sup>1</sup> Harry John Mooney, Jr., praises another aspect of her art in The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter; he sees the effectiveness

of Porter's short stories deriving from her writing "out of a deep inner necessity" to "elucidate some particular problem or mystery in man's behavior."<sup>2</sup> George Hendrick strikes a similar tone in his study entitled Katherine Anne Porter when he states that Porter has "reordered, through art, the disorder of life."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of such laudatory remarks, however, John W. Aldridge argues that criticism of Porter's works has been "singularly unable to say exactly what is admirable about her." For this reason, Porter "remains the symbol and custodian of an excellence that is almost everywhere appreciated but almost nowhere clearly understood."<sup>4</sup> Edmund Wilson, too, expresses a difficulty in explaining the effectiveness of Porter's work. She is "baffling" to him, he says, because he cannot "take hold of her work in any of the obvious ways," and he further asserts that her pure and precise use of written English works to check the critic who would point out peculiarities.<sup>5</sup>

To this point one may readily share Wilson's bafflement: general critical acclaim appears to be based in large measure on glowing generalities. Porter's work is recognized as extremely well wrought and as characterized by philosophic urgency, yet close analyses are seldom offered by literary scholars.<sup>6</sup>

Porter's own theories of writing fiction seem to contain a clue to the difficulty of explaining her effectiveness. She says her aim in writing has been

to "discover and understand human motives, human feelings, to make a distillation of what human relations and experiences my mind has been able to absorb."<sup>7</sup> She explains that it is impossible for her to trace the origins of a story to its source in the "subterranean labyrinths of infancy and childhood"; there remain for her "all those ancient areas of mystery and darkness in which all beginnings are hidden . . . ."<sup>8</sup> Such phrases as "subterranean labyrinths" and "mystery and darkness" ring of that unknown part of each of us called the unconscious. Perhaps Porter's success results not only from her pure and precise use of written English, but also from her communicating through the use of mythic and archetypal images on this basic level of the unconscious; perhaps the reason critics have difficulty formularizing the effects of her stories is that our response is in that part of our selves where feeling, not conscious thought process, occurs.

Carl Jung formulated the concept of the unconscious by arguing that certain fantasies and dreams cannot be reduced to experiences in the individual's past, and thus cannot be explained as something individually acquired.<sup>9</sup> According to Jung (and most schools of psychological thought following him), the "universal unconscious" has "contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, when an archetype, which is described in Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman's Handbook to Literature as a primordial image coming



from the individual's collective unconscious, is employed by an artist like Porter, usually in the form of a plot pattern or a character type, it will work as a common denominator for all readers, eliciting unconscious responses not necessarily expected or apparent from the surface level of the work. It is this response which critics such as Mooney, Hendrick, Aldridge, and Wilson find so perplexing, so difficult to explain.

Archetypes work conjointly with myth, a semantically difficult term, as acknowledged by Wellek and Warren in their Theory of Literature.<sup>11</sup> For our purposes "myth" will signify the intelligible but not necessarily self-conscious use of the essentially religious formulation of the cosmic view to express something deeply felt by the individual artist which will ordinarily prove to have universal response.

The necessity of including "ordinarily" in the definition arises from a point made by Philip Wheelwright: the effect of the employment of myth depends not only upon the skill of the individual artist, but also upon the attitude toward myth held by his readers.<sup>12</sup> The idea that myth may be employed unconsciously, as indicated in our definition, is implicit in Porter's own statement concerning her inability to trace the origins of a story to its source. On this question, Northrop Frye says poetry is the product not only of a voluntary act of consciousness, but also

"processes which are subconscious or preconscious or half-conscious."<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars regard myth and its particular type of truth as the necessary accessory to the much more dominant empirically derived truths. They echo William Blake in their cries that man, top-heavy with intellect, will hunger emotionally and spiritually.<sup>14</sup> "Alienation of the individual" and "fragmentation of personality" are catch phrases now, and as Porter writes of human motives and human feelings she utilizes myth and archetypal images to convey the condition of modern man. Two of Katherine Anne Porter's most often anthologized works, "Flowering Judas" and "Noon Wine," are generally acclaimed as formal and stylistic masterpieces, but the masterful use of myth and archetype employed in them has been overlooked. An analysis of these stories from this point of view should increase our understanding of her art: we should have a fuller understanding of how a sensitive, responsible artist may function in attempting to create order from disorder.

"Flowering Judas" is Porter's story of an American girl named Laura taking part in a revolution in Mexico. Although she performs each duty assigned her by Braggioni, leader of the revolutionary forces, Laura becomes disillusioned and afraid. Dorothy S. Redden speaks of the subtle power of the story when she says Laura reflects a "widespread state of mind," for "her tangling of the moral and the emotional is deeply relevant to at least some of the

more painful confusions of modern man in the detritus of his civilization."<sup>15</sup>

I believe, as Redden does, that Laura reflects a confused state of mind, and I believe her confusions are representative of those common to modern man's experience. A careful examination of the religious symbolism and the archetypal pattern of initiation employed in the story will reveal deeper implications of Laura's dilemma than have been brought to light heretofore; in addition, students of literature will be in better position to understand Porter's (and by extension, other artists') art of imposing order on disorder, allowing the reader to be unconsciously reassured, and, still on the unconscious level, disturbed emotionally, these effects occurring simultaneously.

Mircea Eliade, whose theories of initiation will be relied upon heavily in this study of "Flowering Judas," relates in Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth that for primitive peoples initiatory ordeals imply a ritual death followed by a new birth. The simulated death marks the end of "childhood, of ignorance, and of the profane condition."<sup>16</sup> The ceremony is conducted for youths at a certain age, bringing to an end their dependency upon adults and admitting them to the sacred secrets of the tribe. Certainly the tradition has not disappeared from our culture today, although modern man has emptied the ceremony of much of its original meaning: as

man has become more secularized, he has relied less and less on religious ceremony, and initiation was essentially religious.

In "Flowering Judas" Laura is portrayed as having certain traits peculiar to the estate of youth and childhood. Her comrades tell her she is "full of romantic error."<sup>17</sup> In one instance she looks at Braggioni "frankly and clearly, like a good child who understands the rules of behavior" (p. 92), and she "walks back and forth on her errands, with puzzled eyebrows, carrying her little folder of drawings and music and school papers" (p. 95). This characterization implies that Laura is one of those persons who have not yet undergone the ceremony discussed by Eliade when he speaks of a type of initiation which "comprises the collective rituals whose function is to effect the transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood . . ." (p. 2). It is through initiation that the child gains access to the cultural mode, i.e., spiritual values are introduced. "From a certain point of view," Eliade observes, for the primitive world it is

. . . through initiation, that men attain the status of human beings; before initiation, they do not yet fully share in the human condition precisely because they do not yet have access to the religious life (p. 3).

There is clear evidence in the story that Laura does not fully share in the "human condition" in any of the major areas of symbolism pointed out in an analysis of the work by Ray B. West and Robert Wooster Stallman, i.e., faith,

secularism, and love.<sup>18</sup> She is devoid of faith, as we learn when

. . . she slips now and again into some crumbling little church, kneels on the chilly stone, and says a Hail Mary on the gold rosary she bought in Tehuantepec. It is no good and she ends by examining the altar with its tinsel flowers and ragged brocades, and feels tender about the battered doll-shape of some male saint whose white, lace-trimmed drawers hang limply around his ankles below the hieratic dignity of his velvet robe (p. 92).

Further evidence of Laura's lack of faith is implied in her anxiety-ridden relationship with Braggioni, who "has become a symbol of her many disillusionments" (p. 91). This disillusionment stems from the anti-Christian characteristics of Braggioni; effecting a reversal of the traditional Christ, Porter applies Christian imagery to characterize Braggioni, as when "Lupe the Indian maid meets Laura at the door and says with a flicker of a glance towards the upper room, 'He waits'" (p. 90). Braggioni has a "love of humanity raised above mere personal affections" (p. 91), and when he returns home his wife greets him by saying, "'Are you tired, my angel? Sit here and I will wash your feet'" (p. 101). She kneels in front of him and later asks his forgiveness. Braggioni, whose apocalyptic vision is built on faith in good dynamite (p. 100), is the hope of many men; the disparity between what Laura believes he should be and what she has found him to be serves to heighten her wasteland. Instead of truth and light, Braggioni offers deceit and death.

The same lack of sharing in the "human condition," the inability to genuinely share in a human cause, is true for Laura in the area of secularism. Her failure is shown first when she "will not wear lace made on machines. This is her private heresy, for in her special group the machine is sacred, and will be the salvation of the workers" (p. 92). Her act of slipping into church and attempting to worship is also a betrayal of secularism. The passage describing her "round white collar [which] is not purposely nun-like," juxtaposed as it is with "She wears the uniform of an idea" (p. 92), creates the image of a nun's dress; even her apparel suggests her failure as a secularist.

Finally, in the area of love, neither the "folk-hero" captain nor the brown shock-haired youth arouses Laura's emotions, and the school children remain strangers to her. She has great round breasts and beautiful legs, and Braggioni, "who considers himself a judge of women, speculates again on the puzzle of her notorious virginity . . ." (p. 97).

Dorothy Redden connects the title of the story to Laura's lack of love, proposing that "Flowering" is suggestive of life, of love, but they are Judas flowers, and "treachery is all that she can expect from love as her fears define it."<sup>19</sup> Porter herself wrote on another occasion, "It is hardly possible to exaggerate the lovelessness in which most people live, men or women: wanting love, unable

to give it . . . not knowing how to treat it."<sup>20</sup> Laura is representative of such people, and in primitive societies such a person is a candidate for the tribal initiation.

Eliade discusses the triumph of Christianity over the mysteries formerly associated with initiatory rites and notes that spiritual regeneration formerly sought in initiations is now found in the partaking of the Christian sacraments (p. 122). In a treatise on the same topic, Joseph Campbell, in The Hero With a Thousand Faces, lists the symbolical "eating of the flesh and drinking of the Blood" as mythology persisting in the contemporary church.<sup>21</sup> This persistent mythology is enacted when Laura eats of the buds of the tree traditionally thought of as the body of Judas. Her spiritual regeneration will not likely come about, of course, for although Laura partakes of the Eucharist she partakes not of a savior, but of a betrayer. Such is the vapid condition of the sacraments of the Church; the images of the "chilly stone" in the "crumbling" church Laura slips into (p. 92), and the desolate landscape in her dream, with no water, and "the rocky ledge of a cliff . . . a desert of crumbling stone" (p. 102) portray the modern wasteland. The images imply ruin and lifelessness; there is little hope for regeneration.

When Eugenio calls Laura a cannibal in her dream there is an additional mythic belief working in the story. Bronislaw Malinowski informs us that cannibalism involves the belief that by eating a slain enemy one acquires his

personal qualities and spiritual virtues.<sup>22</sup> When Laura eats the flowers of the judas tree she expects to satisfy both hunger and thirst, but Eugenio calls her a murderer; when she hears this and awakens she realizes for the first time her unintentional betrayal of Eugenio in passively aiding in his death. She has symbolically acquired the virtues of the judas tree by eating of it.

Eliade's fine study includes mention of some of the transformed and preserved initiation ceremonies; one form he elaborates is that of literary motif. This normally consists of the hero undergoing ordeals during a "passage to the beyond, the perilous descents to Hell " (p. 125), and as the events in the dream indicate, Laura journeys into Hell, or death. Joseph Campbell says that in the absence of an effective mythology, moderns resort to their pantheon of dream.<sup>23</sup> This is especially necessary when the biblical tradition, which formerly provided the myth for Western culture, is largely ineffective.<sup>24</sup> The absence of an effective mythology in Laura's situation is apparent from her experience in the church and in her relationship with Braggioni; the events of the day preceding the night of Laura's dream have produced in her a "bitter anxiety," and even while awake, with Eugenio dead and time threatening to stop (which would leave Braggioni singing forever), Laura's unconscious need for regeneration is manifested in dream.



We learn further from Eliade's study that

. . . the imaginative activity and the dream experiences of modern man continue to be pervaded by religious symbols, figures, and themes. As some delight in repeating, the unconscious is religious. From one point of view it could be said that in the man of desacralized societies, religion has become 'unconscious'; it lies buried in the deepest strata of his being; but this by no means implies that it does not continue to perform an essential function of the psyche (p. 128).

This further explains Laura's dream: her unconscious is active, and is "religious," so the religious symbols are a part of her being.

Not only are the patterns of initiation still recognized in the imagination and dreams of modern man but also, says Eliade, in certain ordeals he goes through, such as the spiritual crises, the despairs that each man must pass through in order to attain a "responsible, genuine, and creative life . . . . Man becomes himself only after having solved a series of desperately difficult and even dangerous situations . . ." (p. 128). While commenting on the task of the modern psychoanalyst as initiatory priest, Campbell says, "The crux of the curious difficulty lies in the fact that our own conscious views of what life ought to be seldom correspond to what life really is."<sup>25</sup> Laura meets these criteria for initiation during real ordeals when

. . . she cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be, and at times she is almost contented to rest in this sense of grievance of private store of consolation. Sometimes she wishes to run away,

but she stays. Now she longs to fly out of this room, down the narrow stairs, and into the street where the houses lean together like conspirators under a single mottled lamp . . . (p. 91).

Another time she "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" (p. 93).

Eliade gives one more reason for initiation being important to modern man's life: although one may achieve a degree of fulfillment, at a particular moment every man sees his life as a failure. This vision does not necessarily stem from a moral judgment made on one's past, but from

. . . an obscure feeling that he has missed his vocation; that he has betrayed the best that was in him. In such moments of total crisis, only one hope seems to offer any issue--the hope of beginning life over again (p. 135).

Certainly Laura has reasons to see her life as a failure, and her state of mind is made known to us by this passage:

'It may be true I am as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni,' she thinks in spite of herself, 'as callous, as incomplete,' and if this is so, any kind of death seems preferable. Still she sits quietly, she cannot run. Where could she go? Uninvited she has promised herself to this place; she can no longer imagine herself as living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering her life before she came here (p. 93).

Sad is Laura's predicament, for she has every reason to wish for a new beginning in life--she has nothing to look forward to with hope, nor can she look backward to anything with pride.

In another work entitled Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, Eliade, while discussing primitive images of the world, relates that each society had what was called a "Center," a place that was especially sacred.<sup>26</sup> One of the most common symbols of this Center is the Cosmic Tree, "situated in the middle of the Universe, and upholding the three worlds [Heaven, Hell, and earth] as upon one axis." The roots of the Cosmic Tree "plunged down into Hell."<sup>27</sup> This is an archetype of sacred and ritual trees, and if one sees the judas tree in "Flowering Judas" as such, the symbol works in a manner in addition to those we have observed.

The dream Laura has begins with a tolling bell, which traditionally announced a death. At Eugenio's bidding, Laura arises without fear, and she is still without fear when from the topmost branch of the Judas tree she is set upon the earth, and then she is in Hell. An unconscious need for regeneration manifested in the pattern of initiation in dream might be assumed to occur in an especially sacred place, and the connection between earth and Hell signified by the judas tree imagery in the dream marks it as a Cosmic Tree. The implication is another vicissitude of desacralization in the modern wasteland: the judas tree, with all its negative connotations, symbolizes the sacred "Center" of Laura's world.

That part of the dream which includes Eugenio acting as guide for Laura during her initiation journey reveals

another characteristic of modern myth. Campbell believes that whereas earlier generations were guided by spiritual exercises of their mythical and religious inheritance when encountering psychological dangers, today these dangers must be faced "alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not very often effective guidance."<sup>28</sup>

Eugenio takes his own life "because he was bored"; he does not want to wait to be set free. In the dream passage Laura asks that he take her hand, but he refuses. We see, with Laura, "that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small white petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light" (p. 102); such is the condition of Laura's guide, and such is the condition of modern quests for regeneration.

So we find that initiation, which once functioned to effect the transition from adolescence to adulthood, allowing men to attain the status of full human beings and, as such, to share in the religious life of the tribe, does not work for Laura. She awakens, unregenerated, and is afraid to sleep again. Today there are many such people, disillusioned and anxious, alienated and unable to interact in a fulfilling way with other men. Katherine Anne Porter refrains from offering a remedy for the pain encountered while a loss of illusion is taking place, but her empathy with and understanding of the human soul, coupled with her masterful use of language, results in "Flowering Judas" in

a story which fulfills the reader's desire to temporarily attain a different world from the one in which he is condemned to live and work.

Wayne C. Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, observes that when an author omits traditional commentary and presents "an isolated, unaided consciousness," the decreased emotional distance between the character and the reader allows the reader to "experience those circumstances with [the character] even more strongly because of his moral isolation."<sup>29</sup> This technique is employed by Porter so that Laura's experiences, described in mythic and archetypal terms, are especially effective, for we are used to everyday experience and routine, but the artist reveals a deeper reality that we share with other men. The unconscious or seldom-realized idea that the advance of civilization means increase in aloneness is tempered by Porter with stylistic smoothness in "Flowering Judas"; this increase of aloneness concomitant with the advance of civilization is central to the theme in "Noon Wine," also.

"Noon Wine" has been analyzed as the portrayal of a conflict between guilt and innocence,<sup>30</sup> as a social tragedy,<sup>31</sup> and as a fictional rendition of the private world being invaded by the reasonless forces of society.<sup>32</sup> These analyses are credible, but Glenway Wescott's interpretation is more helpful in explaining Thompson's motivation to kill Hatch. In Images of Truth: Remembrances and Criticism, Wescott maintains that Hatch has not hunted

madmen just for the money, but rather as a way "to satisfy his clear sense of right and wrong; and to exercise the power to which he is entitled as a democratic citizen."<sup>33</sup>

Wescott sees evils embodied in Hatch, evils such as the "blue-legal mind," the political genius espousing "law and order," and the intimidating policeman. Wescott concludes,

He is not only a man hunter, he is mankind as man hunter sempiternal. He is not only a busybody, he is the great American busybody; godlike as only a devil can be. Lucifer! No wonder that Thompson at first is reminded of someone he has seen before, somewhere.<sup>34</sup>

So Hatch may symbolize what some regard as the evil forces of society, but these forces are surely not reasonless. And to what is this societal force opposed? It is opposed to the private world of the individual, but it is more than that. It is Thompson's private world, a world in which Thompson, with the aid of a man-god and his magic, has returned to the mythical Garden, to a state of ease and plenty.

Porter employs myth and archetypal symbolism which works to universalize Thompson's situation, and his actions must be understood prior to abstracting a theme from "Noon Wine." I believe that Thompson kills Hatch and subsequently takes his own life because first, he is moved to defend the myth-type man-god who has given him his "Garden," and second, because he cannot adjust to the pressures of modern society encountered in a type of initiation after expulsion from his Paradise. These beliefs will be explained by

noting Helton's god-like characteristics (including his madness), the condition of Thompson's farm prior to and after Helton's presence on it, certain archetypal images surrounding the killing of Hatch, and Freudian concepts of guilt in Thompson's behavior.

Helton's supernatural disposition is apparent from the first of the story: his omniscience is implicit when we read that he enters the gate to Thompson's farm, walking "as if he knew the place well and knew where he was going and what he would find there."<sup>35</sup> When Thompson asks Helton if he knows what to do with butter, Helton replies, "'I know.'" And he swings the churn "as if he had been working on the place for years" (p. 225). When Mrs. Thompson wonders aloud what has become of her "little tads," Helton immediately tells her where they are (p. 228). His omnipotence is also revealed when he informs Thompson he can do everything on the farm (p. 223), and events prove this to be true.

While the reader only learns of Helton's madness from Hatch nine years after Helton's arrival on the farm, his condition is intimated throughout by Porter's method of dwelling on Helton's abnormalities, often expressed in paradoxical statements. In the initial meeting between Helton and Thompson, Thompson sees a man "with blue eyes so pale they are almost white, looking and not looking at him. . . ." When he sat down on Thompson's porch, he "folded up and settled down as if it would be a long time before he got up again." Even though he never looked at

Thompson there was nothing sneaking in his eye, and he did not appear to be looking anywhere else. "His eyes sat in his head and let things pass by them" (p. 223); he stared out "somewhere between the barn and the orchard and seemed to be sleeping with his eyes open" (p. 224). Helton's strange voice emphasis, his furious and silent chastisement of Arthur and Herbert for such a small thing as "fooling with his harmonicas," and his refusal to talk: all these images convey the idea that the new man is not normal.

Helton's strange characteristics are clarified by noting particular attitudes and myths held by primitive peoples concerning tribal magicians. These tribal magicians are often referred to as medicine men or shamans, and James George Frazer relates, in The Golden Bough, that primitives did not regard supernatural agents as being greatly, if at all, superior to man.<sup>36</sup> Frazer deduces that a god incarnate in human form, then, would not be startling to early man (p. 92). Mircea Eliade tells of the correlation believed to exist between mental illness and shamanism, that "the shamanic vocation often implies a crisis so deep that it sometimes borders on madness" (p. 89). Erwin Rohde offers similar information in Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks, for, says Rohde, the Greek religion at the height of its development regarded madness as a religious phenomenon of wide-reaching importance.<sup>37</sup>



Thus informed, one may understand why the Thompsons did not regard Helton as startling, but rather as a hard-working if queer-acting stranger, a stranger whose magic was to be regarded only as part of the nature of things. "Magic" will have in this context the meaning set forth by Bronislaw Malinowski, i.e., when a man recognizes his inability to deal with a situation and he throws himself on the mercy of a higher supernatural force.<sup>38</sup>

The earliest manifestation of Helton's supernatural power occurs when Mrs. Thompson awakens from her afternoon sleep the first day Helton is present on the farm. Mrs. Thompson's health is not good: her husband confides to Helton, "'My wife ain't very strong. She's sick today, that's a fact. She's been porely the last few days'" (p. 224). Just before she sleeps, Mrs. Thompson remarks, "'Looks like my head never will get any better'" (p. 225). When she awakens, however,

There she was, thank God, still alive, with supper to cook but no churning on hand, and her head still bewildered, but easy. Slowly she realized she had been hearing a new sound even in her sleep. Somebody was playing a tune on the harmonica, not merely shrilling up and down making a sickening noise, but really playing a pretty tune, merry and sad (p. 226).

The part music plays in myth is well known, and the most famous man-god musician is Orpheus, whose power with his lyre is set forth by Ovid in the Metamorphoses.<sup>39</sup>

W. K. C. Guthrie speaks of magic as well as music being closely allied with the name of Orpheus in the Greek mind.<sup>40</sup>

and Frazer, while discussing the myth of Adonis at Cyprus, relates that the music of the lyre or harp "formed part of the service of religion, the moving influence of its melodies being perhaps set down, like the effect of wine, to the direct inspiration of a deity" (p. 334).

The effect of Helton's magic is not restricted to Mrs. Thompson, however, for the entire farm changes for the better. Prior to Helton's presence the farm had not paid, partially because Thompson believed running a dairy was woman's work; cows worried him, calves worried him, milk worried him--only a few kinds of work were manly enough for Thompson (p. 233). He had almost resigned himself to failure; he knew, "without putting it into words, that he had been going steadily down hill" (p. 234). But "as the seasons passed, and Mr. Helton took hold more and more, Mr. Thompson began to relax in his mind a little" (p. 234). Helton did everything "all in the day's work and as a matter of course" (p. 234). In the second year Thompson stopped buying feed, and in the fourth year he was out of debt. And as the years passed Helton played his music, until at last the Thompsons "did not hear it any more, it was as natural as the sound of the wind rising in the evenings, or the cows lowing, or their own voices" (p. 236).

Understandably enough, Helton "was the hope and the prop of the family, and all the Thompsons became fond of him . . ." (p. 241). Malinowski explains that by giving leadership to one man, magic "establishes organization at

a time when organized and effective action is of supreme importance."<sup>41</sup> As the passages we have examined have shown, this is precisely what takes place in "Noon Wine."

So Thompson's approaching failure is not only averted, but, through Helton's mythic man-god power, a type of mythic Garden is brought into being. Arthur and Herbert grow into "good solid boys with hearts of gold" (p. 242), and Thompson, in the prevailing peace and innocence, cannot remember ever speaking a harsh word to them. The Garden is replete with a new gate, there is a miracle in the form of an icebox, and four cold beers are at the springhouse.<sup>42</sup>

But there is another, more sophisticated world outside the Garden, and one of its members takes the form of the mythic invader of Paradise. Glenway Wescott's analysis of Homer T. Hatch, cited earlier, is valid, I believe, so far as it goes. He sees Hatch as Lucifer, embodying evils of society, but there are additional images which aid in explaining the thoughts and actions of Thompson on the afternoon he kills Hatch.

The first image is that of a stranger, and each of us knows the involuntary antipathy felt toward the unknown, the potential threat. Frazer says that in primitive societies all strangers are suspected of practicing witchcraft or magic (p. 194), and that before they are allowed to mingle freely with the inhabitants ceremonies are performed by the natives to disarm the strangers of their magical powers (p. 195). That is the purpose of Thompson's discussion

with Hatch about origins of families (p. 244); the comparison of tobaccos (p. 249) is a similar effort by Thompson to establish common ground. In each instance, as in the discussion of wives (p. 248), Thompson is increasingly dissatisfied and distrustful. He has a Garden of Eden and a man-god to protect, but he is never consciously aware of what he is protecting. That is why he is later unable to satisfactorily explain what happens.

An additional archetypal image is embodied in the handcuffs carried by Hatch. In Luke 13:16 Christ refers to the woman who has a spirit of infirmity as having been bound by Satan (Hatch), and Eliade speaks of the ambivalence in the mythical use of knots and bonds, depending as it does upon whether the bonds are for "defence" or "attack."<sup>43</sup> The presence of the archetype of binding, Eliade says, tries to "realise itself upon the different planes of magico-religious life."<sup>44</sup> Hatch's handcuffs portend, then, not only an attack, but an attack involving magic. For nine years Thompson has unconsciously witnessed magic, and his reaction to Hatch is triggered by his unconscious. He has an awareness, an extreme feeling that he cannot verbalize. The handcuffs elicit Thompson's ordering Hatch to leave; his early feelings are proving right: this man is dangerous.

Thompson's motives for killing Hatch become clearer when his actions are examined in light of Sigmund Freud's discussion of ways men attempt to avoid suffering. One of these ways, as explained in Civilization and its Discontents,

is to recreate the world in conformity to one's own wishes.<sup>45</sup> This is what happens to Thompson: headed for failure, his direction is reversed and he is returned to the peaceful Garden, but reality is too strong, too omnipresent, for him to escape, and finally, it is too difficult for him to accept. As Freud observes, a man looking for a replacement for reality becomes a madman "who for the most part finds no one to help him in carrying through his delusion" (p. 28). When Thompson's unconscious dominates his reason, he is mad by society's standards, and he is alone.<sup>46</sup>

Although Thompson is acquitted at the trial, he feels tremendous guilt. He realizes that "he had killed Mr. Hatch, and he was a murderer. That was the truth about himself that Mr. Thompson couldn't grasp, even when he said the word to himself" (p. 261). Thompson's motive for killing Hatch is so deep in his unconscious he cannot reason about it, and he has been wrenched from a life based on magic to a life demanding cause-and-effect explanations. Freud states that the sense of guilt is "the most important problem in the development of civilization," and that "the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt" (p. 81). Thompson's attempts to reason out the events surrounding the killing to himself and to his neighbors mark the great distance he has come in the civilizing process; his loss of happiness and heightened sense of guilt are increased in the same proportion.

It is interesting to observe that those evil forces seen by Wescott as embodied in Hatch, such as the legal mind and strict justice, are those very forces in operation to clear Thompson at his trial. And there again we see Thompson's lack of understanding of the ordering processes upon which advanced societies rely, for he is cleared, and that should be that. Freud lists justice as the requisite of civilization, justice being defined as "the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual" (p. 42). This definition connotes an additional assurance that when there is law there will be guilt, and we have noted earlier that an advancing civilization heightens the sense of guilt of its people. By not allowing the acquittal to be a statement of his innocence, and by going from farm to farm claiming his innocence, Thompson only makes his guilt more evident. It is not surprising the air around him is sometimes thick with blame, for these people have a sense of guilt too, and they are, most of them, glad to place their guilt on Mr. Thompson. "At least," they might say, "I am not as bad as he is." Thompson senses this attitude at the McClellan place even before the woman there blurts out that her people "'don't hold with killin' . . .'" (p. 264).

Thompson's suicide takes place after all hope of removing his great burden of guilt is gone. His activities following the trial take the pattern of an initiatory quest as he tries to become a totally different being, free from

guilt. Eliade describes the purpose of initiation as being the producing of a change in the religious and social status, but it does not work for Thompson.<sup>47</sup> Home from the McClellans, Thompson, lying on his bed

. . . knew the end had come. . . . Mr. Thompson felt he was a dead man. He was dead to his other life, he had got to the end of something without knowing why, and he had to make a fresh start, he did not know how (p. 264).

His own family's turning against him, after everything else, is too much to bear: "So many blows had been struck at Mr. Thompson and from so many directions he couldn't stop any more to find out where he was hit" (p. 267).

Malinowski defines magic as what occurs when a man throws himself on the mercy of a higher supernatural force after he recognizes his inability to deal with a situation. When faced with failure nine years earlier, magic had worked well for Thompson. Again faced with failure, Thompson turns to magic by committing suicide.<sup>48</sup>

In "Noon Wine" Thompson follows, quite unconsciously, what some allege to be an archetypal pattern. As were the original inhabitants of the biblical Garden, the Thompsons are invaded, and are then expelled, laden with guilt, the guilt likely to increase as civilization increases, for the emphasis upon the individual's safety requires rules, laws to curb the headstrong, and these laws of necessity inhibit what were at one time normal and acceptable acts, such as protecting tribal territory. Porter's story reveals, therefore, a microcosm of the process of civilization.<sup>49</sup>

Eliade relates how the present historical situation may be transcended by myth; he argues that each person falsely identifies himself, and reality, with his own particular situation. Myth may raise the individual to "a superhuman and suprahistorical plane" which "enables him to approach a Reality that is inaccessible at the level of profane, individual existence."<sup>50</sup>

I believe Katherine Anne Porter's employment of myth in literature serves in the manner described by Eliade. First in "Flowering Judas," and now in "Noon Wine," we see her stories fulfilling the reader's desire to attain a world closer to reality than the profane one he inhabits. There are other short stories in which Porter effectively employs myth and archetype, such as "Magic," wherein the French-Negro woman's charm brings Ninette back to her madam. There is an archetypal pattern of initiation working in "Downward Path to Wisdom," where Stephen is introduced to the world of hate. James William Johnson notes the mythic undercurrents in "The Grave," and he shows how the use of names from Greek mythology reinforce characterization and theme in "Old Mortality."<sup>51</sup> Johnson also points out how Christian and pagan myths are central to the theme of the death of love in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider."<sup>52</sup> Further close examination of Porter's works will very likely reveal additional images and patterns affecting the reader's unconscious.



The difficulty encountered by most critics when attempting to detail Porter's effectiveness--the difficulty to which this study attempts an explanation--arises, as I have argued, from our responding to her works in that part of our selves where feeling, not conscious thought process, occurs. Dealing with a similar problem, Northrop Frye makes an analogy between an audience at a symphony and a person who reads a highly concentrated poetic drama. While the audience may know little about the sonata form and may fail to catch the subtleties revealed by an analysis of the score, the subtleties are there, and are heard as a part of a linear experience; the awareness is less conscious, but not less real. The same is true, Frye says, of the response to the imagery of the piece of literature.<sup>53</sup> We have "analyzed the scores" of "Flowering Judas" and "Noon Wine"; in so doing we have read of some of our own fears and experiences, and we have gained insight into our envies, ires, and despairs.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "Katherine Anne Porter: Irony With a Center," Kenyon Review, IV (1942), pp. 42, 32.

<sup>2</sup>Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (rev. ed., Pittsburgh, 1962), pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup>George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York, 1965), "Preface," [p. 8].

<sup>4</sup>John W. Aldridge, Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis (New York, 1966), pp. 178-179.

<sup>5</sup>Edmund Wilson, Classics and Commercialism: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties (New York, 1950), p. 219.

<sup>6</sup>Lodwick Hartley and George Core, editors of Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens, Georgia, 1969), list on p. xiv of their preface those few critics who have recently treated Porter's work comprehensively; they also mention each study's successes and shortcomings.

<sup>7</sup>Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York, 1970), p. 455.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>9</sup>C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis, tr. R. F. C. Hull (Bollingen Series, No. 22 [New York, 1942]), p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>Carl G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, tr. Stanley Dell (New York, 1939), pp. 52-53.

<sup>11</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (3rd ed., New York, 1956), pp. 186, 190-193.

<sup>12</sup>Philip Wheelwright, "Poetry, Myth, and Reality," The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate (1942; reissued, New York, 1960), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, 1957), p. 88.

<sup>14</sup>Scholars and their works representative of such an attitude include Elizabeth Sewall, The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History (New Haven, 1960); Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934; reprint ed., London, 1963); Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (12th ed. rev., New York, 1930); Mircea Eliade, Bronislaw Malinowski, Philip Wheelwright, and Joseph Campbell, all in works cited in this study.

<sup>15</sup>Dorothy S. Redden, "'Flowering Judas': Two Voices," Studies in Short Fiction, VI (Winter, 1969), p. 204.

<sup>16</sup>Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, tr. Willard R. Trask (1958; reprint ed., New York, 1965), p. xii. All subsequent quotations from this work are from this edition, and page numbers upon which they appear will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>17</sup>Katherine Anne Porter, "Flowering Judas," The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York, 1965), p. 91. All subsequent quotations from "Flowering Judas" are from this edition, and page numbers upon which they appear will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>18</sup>Ray B. West, Jr., and Robert Wooster Stallman, The Art of Modern Fiction (New York, 1949), p. 291.

<sup>19</sup>Redden, p. 198.

<sup>20</sup>The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (2nd ed., Bollingen Series, No. 17 [Princeton, 1968]), p. 143.

<sup>22</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, Sex, Culture, and Myth (New York, 1962), p. 188.

<sup>23</sup>Campbell, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Sam Keen, "Man and Myth: A Conversation with Joseph Campbell," Psychology Today (July, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup>Campbell, p. 121.

- <sup>26</sup>Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, tr. Philip Mairet (London, 1961), p. 39.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>28</sup>Campbell, p. 104.
- <sup>29</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1971), p. 274.
- <sup>30</sup>Warren, "Katherine Anne Porter: Irony With a Center," pp. 58-60.
- <sup>31</sup>William L. Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill, 1964), p. 56.
- <sup>32</sup>Mooney, p. 40.
- <sup>33</sup>Glenway Wescott, Images of Truth: Remembrances and Criticism (New York, 1962), pp. 40-41.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>35</sup>Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York, 1965), p. 222. All subsequent quotations from "Noon Wine" are from this edition, and page numbers upon which they appear will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>36</sup>James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (1922; abr. ed., New York, 1941), p. 91. All subsequent quotations from this work are from this edition, and page numbers upon which they appear will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>37</sup>Erwin Rohde, Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks (New York, 1925), p. 255.
- <sup>38</sup>Malinowski, p. 190.
- <sup>39</sup>Ovid, Metamorphoses, tr. Samuel Garth, et. al. (New York, 1961), pp. 353-354.
- <sup>40</sup>W. K. C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement (2nd ed., rev., London, 1952), p. 39.
- <sup>41</sup>Malinowski, p. 189.

<sup>42</sup>The objection could be raised here, of course, that whereas there was no labor performed in the Garden of Eden, the changes brought to pass on the Thompson farm are only through the labors of Helton. If one should assume, therefore, that the Thompson farm may not assimilate Paradise, he misses the point of Helton's supernatural power providing for the Thompsons in a manner analogous to God's providing for the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden.

<sup>43</sup>Eliade, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, p. 112.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>45</sup>Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, tr. and ed., James Strachey (New York, 1961), p. 28. All subsequent quotations from this work are from this edition, and page numbers upon which they appear will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>46</sup>Aside from the murder, Thompson's condition of being dominated by his unconscious may be gauged by his hallucination, during which he sees Thompson being stabbed. Frazer observes that in certain primitive societies the shadow is regarded as a living part of the man, and injury done to the shadow is felt by the person as if it were done to his body (Golden Bough, p. 190). Perhaps Thompson's attack on Hatch is precipitated by his hallucination that Helton has received an injury to his shadow.

<sup>47</sup>Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. x.

<sup>48</sup>While it may be charged that Thompson does not turn to magic in any defensible manner in his act of suicide, it should be kept in mind that his god has been destroyed. The God who deals with Adam and who affords hope of atonement has been superseded in modern society by the impersonal "due process" of law and science. In one manner of speaking, Thompson is a forerunner to the type spoken of by Melvin Maddocks in "The New Cult of Madness: Thinking as a Bad Habit," Time (March 13, 1972), pp. 51-52, when he discusses the "New Cult," which sees thinking as not only unlikely to solve problems, but as the problem itself. Maddocks says, "What is new and perverse in the '70s man . . . is the hope of finding salvation by jumping. It is as if Lear's soul-shaking prayer--'O! let me not be mad!!--had suddenly and rather casually been reversed."

<sup>49</sup>Adam and Eve undergo the civilizing process, also, in the sense that they are brought out of a primitive state through enlightenment. Their first cultural act is to cover their nakedness.

<sup>50</sup>Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup>James William Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Autumn, 1960), p. 608.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Frye, pp. 85-86.

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