DEATH AND KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

A READING OF THE LONG STORIES

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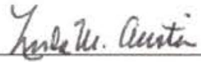

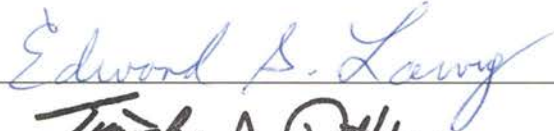

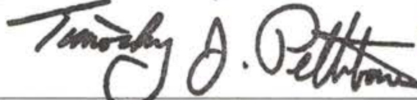

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Katherine Anne Porter's long stories, "Old Mortality," "Holiday," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," "Noon Wine," "Hacienda," and "The Leaning Tower," are obsessed with death, motherhood, and sexuality. The separate elements of this trinity have been discussed at least briefly by critics of Porter's work, but the connections between them have not been explored. The area of literary theory most conducive to an exploration of these themes is psychoanalytic theory, and the branch of psychoanalytic theory best suited to a study of Porter's work is classic Freudian theory, for it influenced both Porter and her culture. There are several reasons Freudian theory provides an effective framework within which these stories may be seen more clearly.

When Porter was twenty-two months old, her mother died after giving birth to Porter's younger sister; the aftermath of the trauma caused Porter to be deeply troubled throughout her life by death and motherhood, and by their connections with sexuality. These concerns may be evidenced in her stories, for she used her own experiences in her art and based most of her protagonists upon herself, and therefore psychoanalytic patterns can be found within the stories. Porter would have understood the events of her life in the context of her culture. The culture within which Porter lived and wrote—the Western culture of the first half of the twentieth century—was heavily influenced by Freud, and thus popular psychoanalytic processes and allusions are often found within the fiction of most modern American writers. Porter learned of Freudian themes from her culture, and claimed that her approach to writing fiction involved allowing her unconscious to stir her

actual experiences until a pattern emerged, which would seem to recognize the mental processes discerned by psychoanalysis. But Porter did not learn of Freud only indirectly. Porter studied Freud closely, reading and rereading his books; her views on human psychology mirror Freud's.

Why, then, despite its suitability to Porter's work have the connections between Freudian theory and Porter's aesthetic not been more fully analyzed? The answer lies in a pervasive contemporary reaction to Freud within popular culture and, to an extent, within academia. Freudian *ideas* have been used to explore Porter's work, but his theoretical framework has not. Porter scholars consistently seem fascinated with her life and use it to explore her stories, where they find ideas that anyone versed in psychoanalysis would recognize as Freudian. Because these critics are not consciously applying theory, the results are erratic and periodically lead them to expressions of bewilderment; at times it seems as if Porter's critics are attempting to independently rediscover Freud's theories, which the current anti-Freudian trend has apparently (and unfortunately) caused them to ignore or to understand only superficially. This is often less true of criticism of other writers, for psychoanalysis plays a major part in literary theory, particularly in gender studies.

Porter has long been a favorite of the critics. She is a writer's writer, and her fiction is well-suited to New Critical readings; accordingly, critics tend to focus on creating appreciation for her style, speculating about her influences, connecting her stories to actual events from her life, expanding on her themes, and discussing her characters. Recently, critical interest in Porter as a regionalist has been high. To this point, however, there have been no extended psychoanalytic readings of Porter's work.

Not just Freud, but Lacan and the contemporary gender theorists have been largely ignored in the study of her work.

Literary theory of any kind is rarely used in the study of Porter's work, although feminist readings of her stories have recently become a popular topic for dissertations. Before 1960 there were only scattered articles on Porter's fiction; the first scholarly examination was a 1940 article by Lodwick Hartley called "Katherine Anne Porter." Two years later Robert Penn Warren published his now classic article "Katherine Anne Porter (Irony with a Center)," which is still one of the most insightful presentations of Porter's themes and methods. The first long critical study on Porter is a pamphlet, Harry John Mooney Jr.'s *The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter*; Mooney simply but appropriately argues that Porter's stories explore the predicament of the individual in the modern world.

In the 1960s Porter published her novel *Ship of Fools* and *The Collected Stories*, and critical attention to her works expanded greatly. James William Johnson's "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter" is a serious attempt to classify Porter's stories according to theme, and Edward Schwartz's "The Fictions of Memory" analyzes Porter's autobiographical character Miranda according to her levels of cognitive development. The first major book on Porter appeared in 1963; William Nance's *Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection* finds a recurrent theme throughout the fiction, a regular pattern of dismissal in which the protagonist tests and rejects something or someone. Although the prominence of this theme has now been widely accepted, Nance's effort to categorize all of Porter's characters according to how closely they resemble Porter herself has not been widely admired. His discussion of the rejection theme seems careful, and he

makes many insightful points; his thinking tends to run along Freudian lines, though he mentions Freud only once, noting that Freud's concept of the death wish seems to be verified in modern Western culture as Porter presents it (247). This potential turn to Freudian theory was not fully realized in subsequent scholarship.

The first edition of George Hendrick's *Katherine Anne Porter* appeared in 1965. Hendrick provides a biographical sketch and studies the stories' settings, themes, and literary influences. Hendrick's analysis is accurate but general, providing a safe introduction to Porter's work. *Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium* is a useful compilation of short criticism, reviews, and interviews with Porter. Ray B. West Jr.'s pamphlet *Katherine Anne Porter* detects autobiographical elements in Porter's fiction and investigates her use of memory as a writing technique. In the 1970s interest in Porter continued. John Edward Hardy's *Katherine Anne Porter* examines Porter's treatment of the problem of evil and looks for common themes in her work. M.M. Liberman's *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* looks at Porter's use of rhetorical devices and classifies her works according to genre. Overall, the early, book-length works of criticism tend to be accurate but general; indeed, with the exception of Nance's book, they often seem indistinguishable. The shorter articles of this period tend to be more original and insightful, and include a number of good feminist studies.

After Porter's death in 1980, more revealing biographical studies of Porter were published. Hank Lopez's *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter: Refugee from Indian Creek* is based on interviews he conducted with the elderly Porter. Porter's tendency to dissemble about her personal life leads to numerous factual errors, but a reader who recognizes Porter's deceptions may find the book to be a valuable portrait of

her difficult personality. Lopez includes Porter's frequent references to the death of her mother, which he recognizes as important; he seems, however, uncertain regarding how to explain Porter's ambivalence towards her mother. The first traditional biography of Porter, Joan Givner's *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life*, appeared in 1982. This careful work cleared up many misconceptions about Porter's life but caused controversy when Porter's shocked friends had trouble admitting that Porter had deceived them. Many readers are ambivalent about Givner's book because the writer seems at times to actively dislike her subject.

One of the most insightful studies of Porter's work appeared in 1983. Jane DeMouy's *Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction* uses feminist psychological theory to study the fiction. DeMouy shows that Porter's women are torn between a desire for love and family on the one hand, and a desire for independent self-fulfillment on the other; in her reading this conflict has no acceptable solution, and leads inevitably to death or depression. While DeMouy mentions Freud occasionally, her approach is more feminist than Freudian. I find her readings to be admirably insightful, but her use of psychoanalytic theory is occasionally inconsistent. Drawing upon her successes and minor failures, I explore—extensively and exclusively—the connections between Freudian theory and Porterian aesthetics. Darlene Unrue's 1985 book *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* and her 1988 study *Understanding Katherine Anne Porter* present safe, general readings of Porter's fiction and effectively summarize prior critical views.

The 1990s saw a variety of critical approaches to Porter's work. Many articles appeared, covering a wide range of themes; feminist and regional approaches were very

popular. *Katherine Anne Porter and Texas: An Uneasy Relationship* is a collection of essays focusing on Porter's Texas childhood and the influence of Texas culture on her fiction, a theme treated at length in James Tanner's *The Texas Legacy of Katherine Anne Porter*. What is widely recognized as the best work on Porter, Thomas Walsh's *Katherine Anne Porter: The Illusion of Eden*, appeared in 1992. Walsh brilliantly and carefully shows the influence of Mexico on Porter's work, demonstrating that Porter was repeatedly attracted to potential utopias only to be quickly disappointed. Walsh employs Freudian concepts, but he demonstrates an almost complete lack of familiarity with Freud's theories and makes erratic use of other theorists. Robert Brinkmeyer's *Katherine Anne Porter: Primitivism, Traditionalism, and Totalitarianism* looks at the politics behind Porter's fiction; this book, with its emphasis on the "dialogic" theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, has been dismissed by most reviewers as being a negligible critical approach. On the other hand, Janis Stout's *Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times* is a widely admired intellectual biography that places Porter's works in their cultural context; while focusing on biography, Stout makes some use of theory and examines gender related themes in the fiction. *From Texas to the World and Back: Essays on the Journeys of Katherine Anne Porter* appeared in 2001; it is an interesting collection which again displays great interest in the connections between Porter's life and her work.

The criticism of Porter's works often focuses on how the author's life is reflected in her fiction, and there is frequent discussion of character motivation, relationships between characters, and the like. Critics, particularly Nance, DeMouy, Walsh, and Stout, often display originality and insight when dealing with these themes, but rarely do they make an attempt to apply psychoanalytic theory in a rigorous fashion, and thus there is a

gap which the present study hopes to fill. Freud may be out of fashion, but ignoring his theories can lead to less than fully substantial criticism, even among distinguished scholars.[1] An example of such criticism is Walsh's article "The Dreams Self in 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider,'" an essay which lacks more than the apostrophe missing from its title. Here he presents a close reading of the five dreams that are at the textual center of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" and finds that the protagonist's dreams reveal her to be vulnerable and afraid. This story cries for a Freudian reading, for Freud is the preeminent thinker on dreams. Walsh, however, makes the distinctly peculiar decision to apply instead the ideas of R.D. Laing, whose thinking has little to do with dreams. Walsh argues that the protagonist is what Laing calls an "ontologically insecure person"—in other words, a person who fears everything (83). Laing's ideas, at least as they are presented in the article, are obvious and thus provide little insight into the story; Walsh's original thoughts, however, are perceptive and useful. Although Walsh does not mention Freud, his own thinking in this article mirrors Freud's remarkably, if incompletely and unconsciously, and so his seeming reluctance to engage Freud directly has the effect of limiting his argument. In contrast, my own reading of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" applies Freud's theories on dreams directly and extensively, and as a result I am able to demonstrate the presence of Freudian concepts such as that dreams are wishes.

Freudian theory has not been rigorously applied to Porter's long stories, a puzzling neglect that this dissertation addresses. Perhaps Porter's critics are simply not interested in Freud; perhaps his notoriety threatens to overshadow their arguments. In

[1] Freud is not, of course, out of fashion among most literary theorists, who regularly adapt ideas derived from Freud. The difference between their approaches and the present one is that while they adapt Freud's theories to better reflect a contemporary understanding of "reality," or use his theories indirectly, I apply his theories directly and uncritically in order to present them as they were understood at the time Porter's stories were written.

any event, the various elements of Porter's fiction that have hitherto been perplexing to critics may be set into a fuller psychoanalytic context. To be sure, I do not intend to suggest a simplistic cause and effect relationship between Porter's life and her stories, for those stories may stand on their own merits without reference to the intent—conscious or unconscious—of the author. My reading likewise should be able to stand without reference to the authorial intent, although details from Porter's life inform and complement a Freudian reading. For example, as noted in the biographical studies mentioned above, a review of certain events in Porter's life shows her to have been concerned with the connections between death, motherhood, and sexuality.[2]

Porter was born in 1890 to a poor west Texas farmer whose constitutionally delicate wife died twenty-two months later from complications following the birth of another daughter. Porter's father, crushed by the death, moved the family into his mother's house, where he continued to make barely a subsistence level living as a farmer. According to Porter's biographers, the father was a cold, depressed, and angry man who was obsessed with the memory of his wife; he embraced the role of the victim, indulged his tendency to be both proud and lazy, and openly blamed his four children for his wife's death. He beat his children when they misbehaved, and Porter claimed that he rarely gave her attention, praising her only when she looked especially pretty. In her adult life Porter was to be preoccupied with her appearance; she thrived on the attention of men, and she had four or possibly five husbands, each of whom resembled her father

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[2] Because of their heavy emphasis on Porter's life, this biographical information is common knowledge among Porter's scholars. A brief review of the elements related to my theme may be helpful, however, and presenting this information here will enable me to keep references to her life in the dissertation that follows to a minimum.

in appearance and personality. In her stories, which are generally based on events from her life, she regularly portrays men as inept and worthless.

The father's failure to provide for his family caused them to live in poverty, and neighbors regularly gave them charity. Porter never admitted her early poverty, and until Joan Givner's biography, even Porter's friends believed her claim that she had come from a genteel Southern background complete with summer houses and servants. Givner discovered that Porter was extremely insecure and thus nearly a pathological liar when it came to the facts of her life. Porter's insecurity seems misplaced, however, for, as Givner suggests, her poor background makes her literary accomplishments even more admirable.

Her paternal grandmother gave the young Porter stability for a time, but she died when Porter was twelve; as her grandmother lay dying, Porter was left to wander in and out of the room in unattended disconcertment. With the only intimate female role model dying before Porter reached adolescence, her uncertainty of her status as a woman became clear when she reached maturity and she began to display a sense of femininity more exaggerated than a woman more secure in herself might have found necessary. This is evident in her excessive love of flowers, clothing, and cooking, and in less "wholesome" ways as well. She once had nude pictures taken of herself and, as if to prove that she was biologically female, mailed them to her relatives. Even in her old age Porter was famous for wearing glamorous but revealing gowns, and for expecting compliments on her appearance.[3]

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[3] Freud would probably have classified Porter as a narcissist, for Porter's troubles caused her to focus most of her energy upon herself.

After his mother's death, Porter's father lived off of his children and Porter earned money by giving dancing and acting lessons. At age sixteen, apparently to escape her father, she married her first husband. The marriage produced no children and was a disaster; Porter's dark suggestions of what her first husband did to her have never been fully explained. Some critics claim that Porter's anger is based on the fact that her husband took her virginity, and that this explains the frequent references in her fiction to virgins being violated. Porter herself stated that she was frigid during her first marriage, and there is evidence that she never came to enjoy sex although she became promiscuous and even attempted to seduce young men well into her eighties. In her copy of Freud's lectures Porter wrote next to a comment on clitoral excitation that "This has always been very slight for me" (qtd. in Stout, *Sense* 223). It is possible that Porter wanted to be desired by others, although she herself did not necessarily desire them. Following her first divorce, Porter became an actress and then a reporter. Porter was working as a reporter in Denver in 1918 when the flu epidemic struck; she fell ill, nearly succumbed, and claimed to have had a near-death experience in which she saw the afterlife. Porter also contracted tuberculosis as a young adult, and was regularly ill throughout her life.

Porter moved to New York City and then to Mexico, where she began to write fiction. It was at this time that she allegedly became very sexually active; she had at least one abortion and later caught a sexually transmitted disease that led to a hysterectomy. Despite the hysterectomy, however, Porter continued to buy feminine hygiene products, and she once pretended to be pregnant. Throughout her life Porter displayed ambivalence toward men, creativity, and death, regularly following a cycle in which one of these was approached and then rejected. For her, I believe, sexuality, motherhood, and death

became linked through the early death of her mother; to be sexual meant to die. This connection is seen in her art as well as in her life. Her characters, especially her women, are attracted to sexuality but also fear it, and again and again a female character who is sexual becomes a mother and then dies; this pattern is seen throughout her fiction, not just in the long stories examined here.

As she aged Porter's obsession with death became pronounced; she claimed to feel the presence of ghosts, including the ghost of Flannery O'Connor, and went so far as to have a coffin in her apartment, with which she would entertain visitors by climbing inside and pretending to be dead. On one visit to her mother's grave she buried a poem in the ground, and on another visit she began an incoherent address to her mother and became so emotional that she collapsed. Despite her lifelong claims that she wanted to die, Porter struggled to live as long as possible and died an unhappy, isolated death at age ninety, still making unlikely plans for more writing. Following her wishes, Porter's relatives had her body cremated and the ashes buried beside her mother.

The events of Porter's life may have made Freudian concepts attractive to her, and those concepts were available because they were embraced by her culture. Freud's theories may be seen as descriptions of his own late Victorian milieu, when patriarchy, sexuality, and family structures were idealized; in contrast, some non-Western cultures with extended family structures, matriarchal features, and variant sexualities do not conform to Freudian theories. But no matter: even assuming that this theory is best understood within the Victorian context, it may be applied usefully to Katherine Anne Porter and her fiction, for Porter's culture closely resembled Freud's. Moreover, her characters are distraught, and the settings of her fiction cultivate anxiety. Concepts such

as the Oedipus complex, memory repression, dreams as wishes, and the like are now accepted as truisms, but these were such new and exciting ideas in earlier times that they took on a discursive life of their own, and writers often applied them in an unsubtle fashion. As will be shown, it seems apparent that these concepts were a part of the life and art of Katherine Anne Porter.

The period of Freud's popularity in America, from roughly 1920 to around 1960, coincides with Porter's writing career. The name of Freud was in the air, and his ideas were widely discussed, particularly among young artists and intellectuals. His greatest popularity occurred in Greenwich Village during the early 1920s. According to Floyd Dell, one of the most prominent writers of that period and place, "Everyone at that time who knew about psychoanalysis was a sort of missionary on the subject, and nobody could be around Greenwich Village without hearing a lot about it" (qtd. in Hoffman, *Freudianism* 58). One of those who must have heard a lot about it was Katherine Anne Porter, who lived in Greenwich Village in the early 1920s, who became friends with many of the writers and artists who lived there, and who wrote for both *The Masses* and *The New Republic*. These two New York magazines, according to Nathan G. Hale, were among the first to regularly publish articles on psychoanalysis (58). Freud became so popular in Greenwich Village that by late 1923 there was a conservative backlash, and an editorial attacked psychoanalysis: "Now there remains the embarrassing subject of the great pollution of Village and American literature by that Freudian insidiousness, Psychoanalysis [...]. Freuding parties are frowned upon by the better Villagers as severely as petting parties" (qtd. in Hoffman, *Freudianism* 61-62). Porter, who at that

time lived a bohemian lifestyle and was far from conservative, would have probably relished anything attacked so openly by the status quo.

Young artists and intellectuals of this period were drawn to Freud for many reasons, most of which would have been especially attractive to Porter. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" demonstrates that Porter like many of her generation was disturbed by World War I, and psychoanalysis seemed to offer a means of understanding the irrationality manifested by that war, a way out of disillusionment and confusion. According to Frederick Hoffman, "Psychoanalysis suited most of them because it was new, unorthodox, shockingly frank, and because it implied—though it certainly did not advise—a more liberal view of sex matters. This was the 'mania psychologica' of the twenties, the 'insatiable passion for intricate mental analysis'" (*Freudianism* 73). Porter, who was prone to be self-absorbed, sexually active, anti-clerical, and rebellious, would have been drawn to it as a weapon that could be used against the old order. Nathan Hale states that psychoanalysis provided young intellectuals with the theory and rhetoric they needed for their attack on Victorian values, while simultaneously providing them with the therapy needed to ease the conflicts caused by that rebellion (57-58). According to Warren Susman, the psychological problem of this period was most often seen as guilt and the need to eliminate guilt (224). Porter, who described herself in her journal as neurotic and who was troubled throughout her life by guilt over the death of her mother, would almost certainly have been drawn to a theory that was widely believed to hold the solution to psychological problems.

To be psychoanalyzed became fashionable, and even the man and woman on the street often had a basic knowledge of Freudian concepts, for it was not necessary to read

Freud to learn about his ideas. Freudian themes abounded in the films and novels of this period; works of art portrayed psychoanalysts as both heroes and villains and as invariably brilliant. Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* describes the successful psychoanalytic treatment of a woman who has been sexually abused by her father; Virginia Woolf, who assisted in the publication of Freud's works in England, wrote novels demonstrating an insightful knowledge of the workings of the Western mind; H.D. was psychoanalyzed by Freud himself and wrote a book praising him. Reading D.H. Lawrence, particularly *Sons and Lovers*, without being reminded of Freud on nearly every page is next to impossible.

Many writers of that time considered themselves "disinterested devotees of art, revolution, and psychoanalysis." In order to make their art more serious, many of them adopted Freudian concepts, which they saw as scientific and true (Hale 59). One example is Sherwood Anderson, whose works of this period display Oedipal patterns prominently and suggest that he accepted Freud's claims as revealed truths. Porter herself rarely questioned them. When she read Freud's ideas regarding lost objects, she wrote in the margin, "One loses objects when one is in the company of a person who wearies and bores or annoys one, also whom one *wants to lose*[.] This is mysterious but I know it is true!" (qtd. in Stout, *Sense* 223).

Freud's theories on dreams were widely accepted. According to Hoffman, "Most people knew that dreams had a new significance as an index of character, and dream analysis became a parlor game" (*Freudianism* 66). In order to create more complex characters, writers began to construct their plots around dreams and they used dreams to suggest their characters' motivations (Hoffman, *Freudianism* 84). For these reasons,

Porter herself often used dreams in her fiction, and the dreams indicate a careful study of Freud. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," for example, the dreams seem like "real" dreams, but they are too coherent and suit the plot too well to be actual dreams.[4] Instead, they have obviously, if artfully, been constructed to fit into the Freudian model. This could not have occurred accidentally, and is good evidence that Porter studied Freud carefully before she constructed this story.

Porter's characters also suggest that she had been strongly influenced by Freud, either indirectly through her Freud-saturated culture or directly through her own study of Freud. Philip Rieff argues that the early twentieth century saw the emergence and eventual dominance of a new character type, the psychological man. This type of person "lives by the idea of insight—practical, experimental insight leading to the mastery of his own personality." Rather than living by the ideals of might or right, and instead of attempting to save others, this psychological person is "intent upon the conquest of his inner life, and, at most, like Freud, laying down the lines along which those that follow him can salvage something of their own" (357). Hoffman describes the characters created by writers of Porter's generation in similar terms: "The hero of this type of fiction [...] was frequently pale, shy, sensitive, given to much introspective brooding over the world, which struck him as being harsh and importunate. His experiences with the other sex were less affairs than adventures in understanding." This character's motives could not be easily explained; "rather, any one act presupposed a variety of motives, intricately bound with the 'hidden life' of the character" (*Freudianism* 73). While neither Rieff nor

[4] One might object that because the main character is modeled on herself Porter could have based the dreams on her actual dreams, and may have therefore merely remembered them. However, those dreams occur while the main character is nearly dying of influenza, and even if Porter had similar dreams she could not have remembered them in such detail years later. The main character herself forgets one of her dreams as soon as she awakes.

Hoffman mention Porter, their descriptions of this Freudian type could be precise descriptions of most of Porter's protagonists.

Of course, not every writer of the modern period was influenced by Freud, and some writers' methods make their work resistant to a psychoanalytic approach. For example, a writer that carefully and self-consciously crafts every detail of her stories to create an intended effect might not provide promising material for a psychoanalytic reading. Wallace Stevens and Gertrude Stein strike me as great writers whose works defy a Freudian reading precisely because of the self-conscious composition. Other writers, however, seem to depend less on reason and more on intuition, a faculty rooted in the unconscious. The works of these writers tend to display Freudian themes. The fiction of Katherine Anne Porter fits this perspective.

In "'Noon Wine': The Sources" Porter describes her writing process and attempts to trace the history of this story "to its sources in [her] blood and bones, the subterranean labyrinths of infancy and childhood, family histories, memories, visions, daydreams, and nightmares [and] to connect these gauzy fantasies to the solid tissues of [her] adult professional [life]" (*CE* 468). Her thinking here demonstrates the extent to which she had absorbed the theories of Freud during her time in Greenwich Village and after. As Porter lived her life she made notes on the story, but she allowed her unconscious mind to do most of the work:

> I was almost instinctively living in a sustained state of mind and feeling, quietly and secretly, comparing one thing with another, always remembering; and all sorts of things were falling into their proper places, taking on their natural shapes and sizes, and going back and back clearly

> into right perspective—right for me as an artist, I mean simply to say; and it was like breathing—I did not have consciously to urge myself to think about it. (*CE* 470)

Later she comments, "And here I am brought to a pause, for almost without knowing it, I have begun to write about these characters in a story of mine exactly as though they were real persons exactly as I have shown them" (*CE* 479). Her thinking here could hardly be more Freudian, and together with her approach to writing, which encourages the creation of patterns examinable by psychoanalytic theory, justifies the present study.

Many contemporary thinkers dismiss Freudian theory, but that is irrelevant to the present study. Freud was not dismissed by Porter's culture, he was embraced, particularly by the young writers of Porter's generation. Therefore, I will apply those aspects of his thinking that were widely known and accepted at that time. These aspects are his views regarding the effects of childhood trauma, guilt and mourning, the interpretation of dreams, female sexuality, the analysis of the uncanny, and the causes of modern malaise. Specifically, each chapter of this study uses one of Freud's texts to explore one of Porter's long stories. While other Porter scholars use Freud's ideas occasionally in order to support claims that often have little to do with Freudian theory, I present Freud's ideas in their original context. This is intended to give my argument rigor and focus, and to show that Freud's influence on Porter's stories was not limited to isolated ideas. In addition to providing a more fully developed perspective of Porter's stories, it is hoped that readers who are only familiar with postmodern extensions of Freudian theory will become acquainted with the basic context of "classical" Freudian theory.

The method of this dissertation, performing a close reading that focuses a different text by Freud upon each of Porter's long stories, is primarily intended to bring light to Porter's texts. As shown above, the published works on Porter demonstrate little knowledge of Freud, and the present study should supply some such knowledge to those in need of it. Without a basic understanding of Freud, readers would have little appreciation of a more contemporary psychoanalytic approach, and therefore the present study does not supply but instead prepares the ground for readings presenting a more advanced approach. While I might have applied a single Freudian concept, such as the uncanny, to each of the stories, such a reading might have become repetitive, and it is my hope that the application of a variety of Freud's most influential theories will create a fuller picture of his thinking and of his influence on Porter.

There are those who read Freud's theories in a linear fashion and emphasize the ways his thinking evolved. However, that is outside the interest of the present study, which examines his influence as it is found in Porter's work, not the development of his thought. I find that Freud's most influential period was his middle period, the period from roughly 1899 to 1920, when he produced the works that had the greatest influence on his culture: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, his major case studies, the introductory lectures, and *Totem and Taboo*. Because I wish to emphasize the connection between Porter's works and the influence of Freud on her culture, it is Freud's works of this period that I will emphasize, and when I refer to Freud's thinking it is to his thinking in this period that I refer.[5] I am interested in the popular understanding of Freud, not in the expert's conception of his

[5] I regularly refer to Freud's conception of repetition, and all such references are to his thinking as it is represented in his 1914 work "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through."

work. To the greatest degree possible, I focus on Freud's thinking as it is represented in the primary work emphasized in each chapter.[6]

Hale notes that many writers of Porter's time vastly oversimplified and overvalued psychoanalysis, as when they mistakenly believed that free love would solve their problems (70-71). Porter, however, seems to have been more judicious in her understanding of Freud. In her notes she once wrote, "Freud was so far misunderstood all the young clever people thought he meant you must sleep with anybody you chose or you would be crippled for life" (qtd. in Unrue, "KAP and Freud" 89). As stated earlier, I believe that as a part of her culture Porter did not necessarily need to read Freud in order to write stories with Freudian patterns, and I believe that she probably did not consciously try to create all of the Freudian associations the present study elucidates. However, the possibility that she did just that remains, for she studied Freud closely, as shown by both Janis Stout and Darlene Unrue. Porter claimed that she read Freud during the period from 1908 to 1915; this is possible but unlikely, and Unrue argues that she actually first read him in the early 1920s, when his lectures were published as *A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis* ("KAP and Freud" 80, 89). Apparently Porter read this book so often she wore it out, for in 1947 she acquired her second copy of the book; she read and reread *this* copy, underlining important passages and making comments in the margins (Unrue, "KAP and Freud" 80). Stout notes that Porter was so heavily influenced by Freud that she at times in her marginalia "uses Freudian interpretation to corroborate Freud's text" (*Sense* 223).

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[6] I do apply the theories of one late work, 1930's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, to Porter's long story "Hacienda," and the concepts of the 1931 work "Female Sexuality" to "Holiday," but in the dissertation as a whole I generally avoid references to Freud's later concepts such as the id, ego, and superego, emphasizing instead his thinking as represented in his conception of the conscious and unconscious, especially as they are presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Unrue notes that both Freud and Porter were concerned with dreams, the development of children, parenting, and the source of evil; Porter's agreement with Freud on these themes is indicated by her marginalia and by comments she made in letters ("KAP and Freud" 80-81). According to Unrue, "Throughout Porter's marked copy of Freud's *General Introduction* there is ample evidence that Porter drew on Freud's ideas and symbols for *Ship of Fools* as well as for much of her other fiction" ("KAP and Freud" 87). Unrue draws many convincing parallels between Freud's book and Porter's novel, but she also admits that Porter occasionally disagreed with Freud. Porter disagreed with Freud's theory of art as neurosis and with his phallocentricity, rejecting his idea of penis envy ("KAP and Freud" 88); it is possible that Porter, like so many others, understood the term *neurosis* to have a negative connotation, and her rejection of the validity of penis envy is not unusual. Late in life Porter rejected Freud completely, calling him along with Marx and Darwin modern civilization's "trinity of evil" ("KAP and Freud" 80). A reason for this reversal of thinking, as Stout theorizes, is that around the late 1940s Porter may have actually started psychoanalytic treatment and had a bad experience (*Sense* 224). That is entirely possible, for there have been many bad psychoanalysts just as there have been many bad psychoanalytical readings, but if so it was long after she had written her final long story; thus it is insignificant as regards the present study.

A final objection to the use of Freud in a study of Porter's stories may be that psychoanalytic theory has been extended, so more contemporary versions of the theory should be applied. But Freud was a part of Porter's culture and was actually studied by Porter; the same cannot be said of more recent psychoanalytic thinkers. The primary goal

of the present study is to read Porter's stories in light of how Freud was understood at the time those stories were written. I am most interested in achieving my goal by demonstrating how the ideas of the most important thinker of Porter's time, as they were understood and used then, are present in her texts.

Moreover, I am not alone in using Freud's theories to study literature. There are numerous literary articles published every year that make use of Freud's theories in a manner similar to mine; Freud's concept of the uncanny is particularly popular. And there are recent serious, respected books taking a similar approach. Richard Caldwell's 1989 study, *The Origin of the Gods: A Psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth*, is considered a classic in its field; it applies classical Freudian theory to the major Greek myths and argues that each myth "regularly represents through symbolic transformation unconscious ideas and conflicts" (6). Oliver Gerland's 1998 work, *A Freudian Poetics for Ibsen's Theatre: Repetition, Recollection and Paradox*, uses Freud to show how the text constructs an image of the past. A recent critical biography, Stephen Black's 1999 *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, uses a traditional Freudian approach to argue that O'Neill worked through his personal tragedies by representing them in his plays.

James T. Jones, in his 1999 book *Jack Kerouac's Duluoz Legend: The Mythic Form of an Autobiographical Fiction*, applies a classic Freudian approach when he discusses the family relationships in Kerouac's fiction in terms of Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex. Another book from 1999, Carl P. Eby's *Hemingway's Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood*, draws on Freud's classic work to study Hemingway's erotic attachment to hair, gender instability, latent homosexuality,

castration anxiety, narcissism, and ambivalence towards women. While Eby's argument that Hemingway had a hair fetish may initially seem bizarre, it is in fact fascinating and has been well-received. Each of these books applies "classic" Freud in a traditional manner, and thus while such studies may not be as widely popular as more postmodern applications of psychoanalytic thought, they do exist and are being received with interest.

Freud and Porter shared more than a contemporaneous existence; they each used their writings to present what they saw as the truth, regardless of what was popular or comfortable. Their goals were to increase understanding and destroy illusions. I believe they succeeded, and it is my hope that this dissertation will provide the reader with an increased appreciation of their works while setting the stage for additional psychoanalytic readings.

CHAPTER TWO

MIRANDA IN MOURNING

Katherine Anne Porter's fiction is obsessed with death. Everything dies, and in Porter's work readers are regularly reminded of that fact as chickens, horses, cattle, dogs, cats, rabbits, elderly people, infants, and young people die, sometimes of natural causes, sometimes violently. When a character does not actually die, she frequently thinks about someone who is dead, considers the various ways a person can die, and speculates about related issues, such as the aging process or the functions of the body. Most critics, however, only mention Porter's use of this theme, choosing instead to focus on her artistry, her morality, her culture, and her status as a woman.

Often critics discuss the problems Porter's female characters have with relationships, and in fact these problems are severe: her main characters seem unable to sustain a relationship of any kind. Family members dislike each other, friendships are shallow, marriages are a farce, motherhood is pure work, sexual relationships are nightmares. Porter's characters are severely ambivalent about becoming involved with anyone, and while her critics are therefore justified in fully considering the reasons the characters themselves offer for their problems, there is a larger pattern that can be found and that also explains these problems. In Porter's work, death is omnipresent.

Katherine Anne Porter's most autobiographical character is named Miranda. While there are some differences between Porter and Miranda—for example, Miranda's family has a higher standard of living than Porter's had—the two are nearly alike, both in personality and in experience. All of Porter's stories about Miranda involve death.

Again and again, Miranda hears or sees the details of someone's death and burial. George Cheatham points out that even the titles of the major stories reveal an obsession with death ("Death" 610). Many readers might initially be inclined to agree with Janis Stout's claim that Miranda is simply sensitive ("Miranda's" 260-61), or side with Shirley Johnson, who sees Miranda's problem as a struggle with love (82), and both claims are justified. But these claims do not explain everything, and I believe James Johnson reverses matters when he says that the theme of the Miranda stories is the death of love (88-89). The theme of the Miranda stories is the love of death.

Miranda's fascination with death can be explained by the early death of her mother, an event that is rarely spoken of but that hangs over the stories like a shroud. Some critics note the importance of the absent mother. William Nance, for example, says the "crucial fact [...] is that Miranda never knew her mother" (123). Nance, and other critics, do not discuss the issue further, and because it is a complex issue I believe it is worth more than the brief mentions it has received to date. Understanding Miranda's relationship with her dead mother should allow us to better understand her character and the stories themselves.

In the stories, Porter leads us from an early stage when Miranda completely denies death to a final stage when she confronts it. Her behavior, which at times seems inexplicable, can be understood if one accepts that she is unconsciously in mourning for her mother.[1] Mourning is not, however, a simple process, though it can be better understood through the use of the ideas expressed by Freud in his 1915 work "Mourning

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[1] As she progresses, Miranda passes through five stages of mourning for her mother, stages which Elisabeth Kubler-Ross calls the five stages of dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. First, Miranda denies that her mother is actually dead and wonders if she will return from the grave.. Soon, she is often angry. She bargains, in a sense, by trying to re-create the past. Later she is often depressed, and finally, in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," her last story, she accepts the reality of death.

and Melancholia." According to Freud, mourning has much in common with melancholia, which we would now call depression. In a state of melancholia, a person feels dejected, lacks interest in the world, is incapable of love, remains inactive, and has a low self-regard; in a state of mourning, a person feels exactly the same, except he or she does not have a low self-regard. Miranda, who may seem depressed, actually is better described as in mourning, for she has an extremely high self-regard: she consistently sees herself as better than those around her. A person in mourning, Freud argues, focuses her energy on the activity of mourning, leaving nothing over for interests unrelated to it. This is why, as will be shown, Miranda is unable to maintain interest in anything unrelated to her dead mother.

"The Source," the first of the stories to indirectly involve Miranda, is in many ways life-affirming, but not completely.[2] Miranda's grandmother, apparently still in mourning for the husband who died thirty years before, wears nothing but black and white clothing; her favorite hat is a "long veiled widow's bonnet" (*CS* 322).[3] Because she is Miranda's primary female model, Miranda would be likely to adopt her attitude toward mourning. When the family moves to a farm for the summer, the grandmother neurotically insists that everything be made sterile: that everything be made lifeless. Her rage for order is explained by her annual ride on an old horse. She insists on making the ride to show that she is not old, to deny that she will soon face death, for while the horse has aged, "she herself walked lightly and breathed as easily as ever, or so she chose to believe" (*CS* 325).

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[2] It may initially seem odd to include the shorter Miranda stories along with the long story "Old Mortality," but including them will allow this study to place "Old Mortality," "Holiday," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" in context. Further, the short Miranda stories form a story cycle, and could in a sense be considered one long story. Discussing these Miranda stories may provide a gentle introduction to both Porter and Freud.
[3] All quotations from Porter's fiction, except where specifically noted otherwise, are from *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. New York: Harcourt, 1965.

The Grandmother's denial of the disorder that symbolizes her decline annoys her grandchildren, who all the same love her orderliness because it gives them "the only reality" they have "in a world without fixed authority or refuge, since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely" (*CS* 324). This passage, which Porter characteristically does not stress, is the linchpin of the entire story, because the absence of the mother explains why the story emphasizes order in the first place. If there were a mother, Miranda might be relatively unaffected by the presence or absence of "the old order" because she would have some order of her own; she would also have less need for order, because the energies poured into mourning the mother would be available for other tasks.

Porter never discusses the mother at length. Instead, she drops reminders of her into every story so that Miranda's dead mother seems to be always standing just at the edge of the reader's vision. In "The Old Order" we are given a few facts about the mother. Again in an offhand fashion, as if the narrator is offering us the information only to explain something that is supposedly more important, we learn something vital:

> When [Miranda's father's] wife died—she had never approved of Harry's wife, who was delicate and hopelessly inadequate at housekeeping, and who could not even bear children successfully, since she died when her third was born—the Grandmother took the children and began life again, with almost the same zest, and with more indulgence. (*CS* 339)

This is the only time in any of the Miranda stories that the cause of the mother's death is mentioned, and at this point in the sequence of stories the reader does not realize that the third and youngest child, the child whose mother died giving birth to her, is Miranda.

This fact is crucial because of the guilt and anger any such child would face. Awareness of it makes Miranda's behavior much easier to understand, and we can grasp her ability to be simultaneously conscience stricken and angry at the world.

It is striking that such an important fact as the mother's death during labor is mentioned only once, and then in an offhand fashion. The reason may be that in "The Journey" the point of view is largely the Grandmother's, who could face the mother's death in childbirth without any fear, while in the other Miranda stories the point of view is usually Miranda's, who understandably might want to repress such an idea. Repression itself plays a large part in the stories; even the Grandmother experiences it, and her feelings for her dead husband foreshadow Miranda's later feelings for her dead mother:

> Her husband's ghost persisted in her, she was bitterly outraged by his death almost as if he had willfully deserted her. She mourned for him at first with dry eyes, angrily. Twenty years later, seeing after a long absence the eldest son of her favorite daughter, who had died early, she recognized the very features of the husband of her youth, and she wept. (*CS* 338)

But the Grandmother, unlike Miranda, did not cause the loved one's death. Miranda's feelings are understandably much more extreme.

Miranda's problems with death and with her dead mother in particular are clear in "The Fig Tree." Porter wrote this story in the same period as the other Miranda stories, but she did not publish it until 1960, too late to be placed within her three story collections. If it had been published earlier, the source of Miranda's problems might now

be more widely recognized. William Prater, for example, overlooks it completely and claims that Miranda does not discover death until "The Grave" (337), a story of a considerably older Miranda which involves death but includes nothing traumatic enough to make an ordinary person obsessed with death. Connecting "The Fig Tree" to the later Miranda stories shows that Miranda fits into a pattern typically followed by motherless daughters, who psychologist Jill Miller says show several signs of denial: "unconscious or conscious denial of the reality of the parent's death, increased identification with and idealization of the parent who has died, avoidance of the expression of affective responses to the death, fantasies about an ongoing relationship, and decreased self-esteem" (697).[4] Except apparently for the lowered self-esteem, this accurately describes Miranda's behavior, and possibly Porter's as well; the fact that Porter "lost" the story for thirty years may indicate her own problems in accepting the death of her mother in childbirth.

In "The Fig Tree" Miranda's obsession with death is well-advanced, despite the fact that she is very young—she has to be dressed, she can barely remember the summer before last, she plays with dolls, and her father refers to her as "the Baby" (*CS* 357).[5] For such a young child, she spends an exorbitant amount of time thinking about death. Her father calls her grandmother "Mama," and Miranda wonders why: "Mama was dead. Dead meant gone away forever. Dying was something that happened all the time, to

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[4] Though Miller does not mention Freud, her argument is in many ways a popularized summation of Freud's theories on mourning. Freud would disagree that mourning leads to lowered self-esteem, possibly because he defines that term more precisely than does Miller.

[5] Porter's younger sister, not Porter, was referred to in the family as "the Baby" and it was her birth that directly caused the mother's death. Porter's choice to eliminate her younger sister from the Miranda stories and assume for her alter-ego the role of the child whose birth caused the mother's death possibly indicates her ambivalence towards her mother. Freud notes that ambivalence can make mourning pathological, and the conflict due to ambivalence can "express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it" ("Mourning" 251).

people and everything else" (*CS* 354). She knows about the rituals surrounding funerals, and she knows how often various animals die, what happens to different animals' bodies, and how to tell if an animal is dead.

Whenever Miranda finds a dead thing, "she always buried it in a little grave with flowers on top and a smooth stone at the head. Even grasshoppers. Everything dead had to be treated this way" (*CS* 354). This might be a harmless game if Miranda did not *always* do it with *everything* dead. This strange obsession is a signal that there is something seriously wrong with this little girl. As Freud notes, "Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains [a] painful frame of mind, [a] loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—[a] loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and [a] turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him" ("Mourning" 244). This is why Miranda is obsessed with dead things, for they are connected to her mother.

In the story, Miranda finds a dead chicken, which she wraps in tissue paper, "trying to make it look pretty," lays it in a box, and covers "it up with a nice mound, just like people's" (*CS* 356). Once it is buried she hears the sound "weep weep," which makes her think the chicken is still alive. Her father forces her to leave, and she is too terrified to tell him what has happened. She imagines the chicken struggling in its grave, and later she is relieved when she is told that tree frogs make the "weep weep" sound. Her careful treatment of the body is partly explained by the simple fact that young children do not understand death; Mark Speece and Sandor Brent state that children think of death as like sleep, which is temporary, and often believe that dead people continue to

have feelings (21-22). If the dead chicken still has feelings, it would need a comfortable grave. However, Miranda's behavior is not typical of other young children.

Commenting on "The Witness," another story involving funerals for animals, Winfred Emmons claims that "The children's penchant for having funerals for deceased small animals indicates no particular preoccupation with death; children in the country who live around animals are early acquainted with death, as they are with mating and with birth" (18). It is no doubt true that a country child would be familiar with dead animals, but I believe this only supports the notion that Miranda's obsession with giving them funerals is symptomatic of a serious problem. A farm child would be so accustomed to death that she would probably regard dead animals as unremarkable, not as something to worry over and ceremonialize. Further, Miranda seems to be too young to be capable of feeling actual empathy (which develops in later childhood) especially for a bird that is not her pet, whether or not she buried it alive. Freud often points out that children are notorious for their ability to be cruel without remorse, and it may even be that Miranda's overstated concern masks her true fear and hostility, like that of the mother in Porter's "He." But while Miranda is very young, she is old enough not to fear a vengeful chicken. This indicates that she fears not the live chicken but what it represents, death.

More specifically, Miranda fears death less than the dead and their potential revenge, for as Freud states in *Totem and Taboo*, undeveloped people believe the dead may return and take the living with them; to avoid this, the living perform ceremonies that magically protect them and that deny their fear by portraying it as respect (61). This is why Miranda performs such elaborate rituals for all the dead things she finds. Miranda

does not *respect* the dead animals, she *fears* them, and she is not afraid of a *living* chicken, she is afraid of a *dead* chicken that might ghoulishly rise from its grave.[6]

If Miranda feared dead animals for their sakes alone, her fear would be merely eccentric. But Porter gives her character a deeper dimension by signaling to the reader that Miranda's fear of dead animals is connected to something more. In "The Fig Tree," her fear of the dead chicken is connected to her fear of her dead mother. Miranda's thoughts about death are sparked when she wonders why her father calls her grandmother *Mama*. Defining death for herself, she states that her mother is dead, as if her mother is the definitive dead being, and shortly afterwards she finds the chicken which again makes her question the nature of death. Therefore, the chicken represents her mother.

Again, to associate a chicken with one's mother would be merely eccentric if it did not signal something more complex. Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex provides us with that more complex meaning, and explains why Miranda needs to bury the dead. If Freud is correct, young girls want to replace their mothers in order to fully possess the father and his love.[7] Her mother's death has allowed Miranda to act out that Oedipal fantasy to a degree, for there is no longer a mother to compete with. It is possible that Miranda unconsciously knows that her mother would be upset if she returned from the grave to punish those who had killed her only to find her daughter acting as her husband's surrogate wife. Therefore, Miranda is not afraid that death is permanent; she is afraid that death is *temporary*, which is why she reassures herself that her father is

[6] This would probably be largely unconscious. Freud discusses our irrational attitude toward death in "The 'Uncanny.'"
[7] Again, this is largely unconscious. These girls do not consciously want to have actual intercourse with their fathers, for they usually have little conception of what that is.

mistaken when he calls someone mama: her mother is dead, and "Dead meant gone away forever" (*CS* 354).

At this stage, Miranda is beginning her mourning. Freud notes that the first stage of mourning is to confirm that the person is actually dead: "Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object." But this is not an easy process, for "people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them" ("Mourning" 244). Miranda is testing to confirm that her mother is dead, and struggling to understand what that means, but her need for the mother keeps her attached to her, despite the fact that she is dead. The positive feelings associated with that attachment, however, are not the only feelings Miranda has toward her mother.

The insistence on the mother's status as a dead person is further explained by Miranda's ambivalence toward her. We may wish to assume that a daughter would harbor only good feelings toward her mother, but Freud argues that this is impossible.[8] In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," written the same year as "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud states that every relationship is necessarily ambivalent, for we are bound to offend each other at times. Our unconscious is completely selfish, and the penalty for all crimes against it is death. When the person our unconscious had wished dead actually dies, we feel guilty and unconsciously fear being punished for the death (297). In Miranda's case, she would love her mother for giving birth to her and hate her mother for seeming to reject her by dying. Her unconscious wish that the mother would

[8] The ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship has been emphasized by many contemporary gender theorists, including Nancy Chodorow.

die as punishment for having died, then, would lead to great guilt and a fear of punishment. The guilt and fear that mark Miranda's character are inexplicable until one considers the mother's death.

Freud argues that a person who is crushed by remorse will feel shame in front of other people, as Miranda often does, but such feelings "are lacking in the melancholic [...]. One might emphasize the presence in him of an almost opposite trait of insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure" ("Mourning" 247). This makes it clear that Miranda's "problem" is her need to mourn her mother, not a state of depression. Full of floating guilt, unusually quiet and uncommunicative about her problems, and fearful of self-exposure, Miranda is in these ways unlike the simply depressed person that she otherwise resembles.

Miranda again shows signs of her problem with her mother's death when she is six, in "The Witness." Freud notes that mourning can be a very long process, for although reality insists feelings should be withdrawn from the dead person, this happens "bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged" ("Mourning" 245). Miranda is not the only one in her family who has lost a mother, and therefore not only she but also her brother and sister are obsessed with death, and they often pester an elderly ex-slave to carve wooden tombstones for them because tombstones "were often needed, for some small beast or bird was always dying and having to be buried with proper ceremonies: the cart draped as a hearse, a shoe-box coffin with a pall over it, a profuse floral outlay, and, of course, a tombstone" (*CS* 341). Once more, their efforts to formalize death by performing the proper ceremonies show how much they fear it, as well as their need to

attempt mastery of it. A Freudian perspective examines what the person does, and largely disregards excuses.

The children show their obsessions with death, with the revenge of the dead, and with the possibility of an afterlife in their talks with Uncle Jimbilly, the ex-slave. While he carves tombstones, the children ask him about torture and death, and when he strays from the subject by saying that he himself had not been mistreated, Paul immediately puts him back on course by asking, "Didn't they ever die, Uncle Jimbilly?" (*CS* 342). The older sister asks him to carve "Safe in Heaven" on the tombstone but he refuses, though he goes on to tell them gruesome stories about how slaves had been tortured to death. The older sister may desire dead things to be "Safe in Heaven" so they will no longer be a threat to those on earth.

At the conclusion of the story we learn that Uncle Jimbilly often threatens "to do something quite horrible to somebody and then [...] to dispose of the remains in a revolting manner" (*CS* 342). The children do not respond to the old man's gruesome threats, apparently because they are exaggerated and because at their young ages they imagine that only others can die.[9] While Porter states in "The Source" that only the oldest daughter even vaguely remembers their dead mother, all three of them perform animal funerals that re-enact their mother's funeral. Their need to do this shows how upset they are by the fact of their mother's death. Porter's choice not to mention this shows how deep in them it lies; they are not consciously aware of it themselves. This shows that the children perform actions for unconscious reasons, for they are enacting a pattern Freud finds in trauma victims; we may repress a trauma in order to avoid the pain

[9] Freud points out that we may accept death rationally, but we never actually believe we will die, for our unconscious sees itself as immortal ("Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" 289).

of dealing with it, but it continues to be active in our unconscious. The trauma is expressed in the form of actions which re-enact the traumatic event in an effort to repeat and work-through it.[10] If readers fail to see the dead animals as more than what they seem to be, they may follow Charles Kaplan in believing the children are both callous and innocent (322), although I believe that in fact the children are neither.

Miranda's obsession with death explains her actions in "The Circus." S. H. Poss calls this story a tale of the failure "of the American myth of Having Fun" (26), which it is, for Miranda recognizes the cruel sadism at the root of the crowd's enjoyment. The fact that Porter portrays Miranda as better than those around her, and that Miranda herself shows some awareness of this, indicates that her self-esteem is not low. The fact that her self-regarding feelings are healthy is another indication that she suffers from being in mourning, not from having melancholia. As Freud says, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" ("Mourning" 246). Repeatedly in the Miranda stories, the world and other people are found lacking; Miranda rarely is.

But Miranda's recognition of the crowd's sadism does not completely explain her extreme reactions. When a boy looks up her dress she stares at him and he returns "a look so peculiar she gazed and gazed, trying to understand it" (*CS* 344). Sex, like death, is a mystery she wants to understand, and while she is attracted she is at the same time repulsed and afraid. Often in her fiction, Porter connects sex with death. Esim Erdim notes that the fig tree is a symbol of femininity, partly because of its association with Eve

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[10] This is discussed in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," a work written in 1914, one year before "Mourning and Melancholia."

(57), and in "The Fig Tree" the chick eats a fig and dies, which is why Miranda then refuses to eat a fig herself. For her, to have sex is to die.

When the girl later thinks a tightrope walker is about to die, "Miranda shrieked too, with real pain, clutching at her stomach with her knees drawn up" (*CS* 345). Earlier, in "The Fig Tree," Miranda hears the "weep weep" sound and has a similar pain, though it is located higher than the stomach: "she had a dull round pain in her just under her front ribs" (*CS* 357). Apparently, combining the boy's lustful stare up her dress with the near-death of the tightrope walker, Miranda unconsciously re-enacts the pains of pregnancy which had killed her mother. In "The Last Leaf" Porter writes of the "mystical never to be forgiven debt to the womb that bore them" (*CS* 351).

Miranda's apparent and unconscious identification with her mother is peculiar, but Freud may explain it. According to Freud, when a libidinal attachment to a person is shattered, as by that person's death, the freed libidinal energy is not initially displaced onto another person; instead, it is withdrawn into the ego. "There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" ("Mourning" 249). This "special agency" that judges the ego would later be entitled by Freud the superego. In Miranda's case, therefore, her ego has become identified with the mother she has loved and lost, and the newly created superego judges the ego as if the ego is the mother who abandoned her child by dying. None of this is conscious, of course, and the veracity of this reasoning must be judged by how closely it predicts Miranda's behavior.

According to Freud, this situation often leads to a regression to narcissism: "The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up" ("Mourning" 249). Miranda, in deep need of a mother, holds on to her by incorporating her, and her love for the mother becomes love for herself. Her fundamental narcissism is seen in how she regards the world as an extension of herself, not as something not necessarily related to her, and in her frequent belief that everyone is concerned with her. For Miranda, her perception of things is not merely her perception, it is reality, and what she usually notices is death. The clown on the tightrope is death-like, "with bone-white skull and chalk-white face" and lips "turned up at the corners in a perpetual grimace of pain" (*CS* 344). He resembles a corpse. He seems to be walking on air, and Kaye Gibbons points out that this apparent magic does not frighten Miranda: she is frightened only when she sees the wire and realizes the man could actually die (76-77). Even a bizarre impossibility like walking on air is less frightening than death.

While the obvious explanation is that she is afraid for the clown himself, again she does not seem empathic: Miranda, a typical narcissist, usually behaves selfishly, and she is afraid *of* the clown, not *for* him. Again it is not the clown's death but death itself she fears, and at the same time she is *attracted* to it: she insists on going to the circus, and her mind will not stop thinking about it. Her basic fear and hostility is seen after her father sends her home, when on the way out of the tent she sees a dwarf who makes a face at her: "Miranda struck at him in sheer ill temper, screaming" (*CS* 345). When she realizes the dwarf is human, "It chilled her with a new kind of fear" (*CS* 345). The child

seems too full of fear for herself to be able to empathize with others, once more suggesting that she is a narcissist.

Later that day, as she lies in bed, Miranda feels that she is alone and that others are basically sadistic and hostile towards her. Out of fear, not love, she regrets her earlier rudeness to her family, and after a nightmare she decides to change: "Miranda sincerely did not want anybody, not even Dicey, to be cross with her" (*CS* 347). Dicey, who had had to leave the circus early to bring Miranda home, must be appeased, but for selfish and not altruistic reasons: "Now if Dicey must be cross, she still did not really care, if only Dicey might not turn out the lights and leave her to the fathomless terrors of the darkness where sleep could overtake her once more" (*CS* 347). She does not want to have another nightmare, but darkness and sleep also represent death. Miranda hugs her and cries, "Don't, don't leave me. Don't be so angry! I c-c-can't b-bear it!" (*CS* 348). Dicey, who acts as a mother-figure for Miranda, is both her protector and a threat.

All of these factors are seen in "The Grave," the story which completes the cycle of "The Old Order." Her grandmother has died recently, forcing Miranda to confront death without the protection of the old order. But since she is now nine, Miranda can deal with death more easily than in the earlier stories. Her attraction to death is seen in the fact that she investigates an old graveyard, even leaping into the hole that had held her grandfather's bones. (Her grandfather, like the imagined chicken of "The Fig Tree," has come out of his grave.) She tells herself that it is no grave without a coffin, but in fact she would not be there at all if it were only a hole in the ground.

Miranda finds a silver dove and gives it to her brother; George Cheatham points out that this is symbolic of Christ's resurrection ("Literary" 112-13). This seems very

likely, and it may remind us of the many references to and symbols of rising from the grave within the Miranda stories, from a reference in "The Fig Tree" to "another world" (*CS* 59) to Miranda's statement in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" that she will step out like Lazarus with a silver-tipped cane. If Christ was truly resurrected, Miranda has less reason to fear death. But these references also hint that Miranda is concerned about the state of her mother, and about her own future. Her brother finds a wedding ring and gives it to her, and while Porter leaves the original source unstated it seems possible that the ring came from the corpse of Miranda's mother: it is a family graveyard, her grandmother is buried elsewhere, and Porter mentions that the family is motherless.

With the ring on her finger, the tomboyish Miranda suddenly dreams of becoming a feminine Southern belle, and she wants to "take a good cold bath, dust herself with plenty of Maria's violet talcum powder, [...] put on the thinnest, most becoming dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a wicker chair under the trees" (*CS* 365). This seems like a peculiar dream to have after leaping into a grave, even with the explanation that it may be an Oedipal dream of taking her mother's place. At the same time, though, the dream may remind the reader of Miranda's difficult situation as a young girl approaching puberty with no mother to act as a feminine role model.

Porter makes the meaning of the fantasy clearer by next having Miranda's brother Paul shoot a pregnant rabbit. Showing that he clearly does not *respect* the dead, Paul slits open the rabbit's stomach and takes out the fetuses. Miranda stares, "excited but not frightened" and "filled with pity and astonishment and a kind of shocked delight" (*CS* 366). She touches one of the fetuses and notices the blood running over them, and she "began to tremble without knowing why. Yet she wanted most deeply to see and to

know" (*CS* 366). Paul makes her promise not to tell anyone, and she soon represses the memory altogether.

In the Miranda stories and elsewhere Porter repeatedly links sex with death. Judith Gardiner, a feminist critic, reads the rabbit shooting scene as symbolic of aggressive male control of female sexuality (267). This is true enough but disappointingly obvious, and it does not explain why sex and death are linked in other stories, such as "The Circus," and even by male writers. Faulkner's Quentin Compson, for example, is obsessed with both sex and death. A more satisfying explanation may be Freud's theory on why sex and death are linked in almost every modern Western mind.

In the late work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud argues that the two main instincts are the sex drive and the death drive, which oppose each other. If this is so, death reminds us of sex in the same way that day reminds us of night: because they are opposites. One of Freud's basic theorems is that we act for pleasure, for satisfaction, and he explains the paradoxical death drive by stating that the instincts are driven by a desire to return to their earlier state of inorganic stasis, at which there is no anxiety (*CS* 50).

Discussing how everything is done for pleasure, Freud gives us an explanation for why Miranda is driven to bury dead animals:

> In the case of children's play we [...] see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the [...] reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 45)

Traumatized by her mother's death, then, Miranda re-enacts that death by burying dead things. And, as she repeats the act, she does gain some mastery: in "The Fig Tree" she buries something but is terrified, in "The Witness" she can bury things calmly, and in "The Grave" she can investigate human graves and the bodies of dead animals, and she can even kill things. This takes years, but as Freud notes, the process of mourning can be a long and painful one.

The connection between birth and death may be relevant here. Miranda's mother died giving birth to her, and the Grandmother and Nannie later speak of the "grim and terrible race of procreation" (*CS* 334). Since Miranda is an autobiographical character, it may be relevant that Porter herself felt somewhat responsible for her own mother's death: she died when Porter was twenty-two months old, partly from the strain of repeated childbirths. Mary Titus claims Porter's mother's death remained a guilty and painful memory for her entire life ("KAP's Miranda" 204). Birth, then, brought death. It also brought guilt to the surviving child, and this may explain Miranda's earlier fear that the chicken might come out of its grave: if the dead mother also returned, she would hold Miranda directly responsible for her death.

Miranda's death-related fear and guilt may partly explain her behavior in "Old Mortality." In the first part of the story, Miranda is eight; her grandmother is still alive and the events of "The Grave" have not yet occurred. This is why she can so easily see Amy's life as attractive and romantic. However, she seems *unusually* interested in this woman who is after all only her aunt.

Amy, we should remember, is Miranda's dead relative, and a woman who might have died while pregnant. This links her with Miranda's mother, who is again huge in

her absence: she is almost never mentioned although the past is constantly discussed. The fact that Miranda represses thoughts of her mother is seen in that when she thinks of her family's tragedies she remembers "two great uncles [who] had committed suicide and a remote ancestress [who] had gone mad for love" (*CS* 180), but she does not think of the greatest tragedy, her mother's death. By understanding Amy, Miranda can understand her mother without actually thinking about her, for while she is unconsciously obsessed with her mother she is too ambivalent about her to deal with her consciously.

Charles Allen claims that *Amy* has a death wish which infects Gabriel (89), though he does not recognize Miranda's similar wish. As in several of the earlier stories, sex is linked with death in "Old Mortality," where weddings are equated with funerals. Amy tells her mother, regarding her wedding, "I shall wear mourning if I like [...], it is *my* funeral, you know" (*CS* 182). Miranda imagines "a long procession of living corpses, festering women stepping daily toward the charnel house" (*CS* 216). And, in fact, Amy dies shortly after her marriage. Because Miranda's mother died during childbirth, sex led directly to her death. Miranda, then, has good reason to be interested in Amy, a highly sexual woman who either avoided sexual intercourse and died after finally giving in, or had premarital relations and then committed suicide to cover-up the untimely pregnancy.

During the second part of the story, Miranda is eleven: her grandmother has died and the events of "The Grave" have taken place. Early in this section Miranda and her sister are fascinated by books about women who are "immured" in dark cells (as if they have been buried alive) and who kill their own babies. The nearness of this to Miranda's own possible fears about her mother, her mother's potential revenge, and her own future may explain its interest. No doubt it seems odd that Miranda would torture herself with

such thoughts, but Freud can explain it: "If the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself be given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" ("Mourning" 251). Miranda, who has identified herself with her dead mother, can punish the mother for leaving her by punishing herself, and she in fact frequently behaves self-destructively. There are frequent references to suicide in the Miranda stories, and in many of Porter's other stories, and Freud argues that "the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object—if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world" ("Mourning" 252). Miranda's self-destructive impulses, therefore, originate in her hostility towards the mother she unconsciously blames for rejecting her by dying.

"The Fig Tree" and "The Grave" include images of containment. But now the fantasy has altered, for Miranda and Maria imagine that *they* (not their mother or some mother surrogate) are the ones who are "immured" and who may kill babies. It is as if her unconscious identification with her mother has grown, not abated. It may also be because they have become pubescent, and therefore are capable of being mothers themselves. Because they are more experienced, they can now fantasize about death and partly see the reality of Amy that had been covered in romance. In math class, Miranda falls on the floor and refuses to move, as if she is dead; it is difficult to imagine her being brave enough to "play dead" at a younger age.

In the second section Miranda complains to herself about the silence and boredom, which may remind us that she rarely talks to anyone, even in her own family; a possible explanation is given in Porter's statement that when Miranda feels sorry for herself she engages in "secret mourning, for if one mourned too noisily, it simply meant another bad mark against deportment" (*CS* 195). Janis Stout shows that Miranda's family mocks her when she shows her emotions, so she learns to stay quiet (*Strategies* 128). At times she seems talkative, but, Stout points out, "The things she is talkative about are all relatively shallow; the things that engage her more deeply she does not discuss" (*Strategies* 133).

In the third part of "Old Mortality" Miranda travels by train to the funeral of a man she hardly knew, which indicates that she is still fascinated with death and funerals. Freud notes that "in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and [...] when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" ("Mourning" 252). In other words, when mourning is finished, the mourner will be able to love someone else, but Miranda's continued efforts to mourn indicate that she retains her strong feelings about her mother and is therefore still unable to love other people. This may explain why she has just left her husband, and why she reacts so coldly to the tragedies of others. She meets her relative Eva on the train, and when Eva describes her painful life Miranda can only *try* "to offer the sympathy of fellow suffering" (*CS* 209), she cannot be genuinely sympathetic. Eva says, "Yes, Gabriel drank himself to death at last" (*CS* 209). Earlier Gabriel had said, "If anything happens to [my horse] now I'll blow my brains out" (*CS*

199). If these stories are only about love, as some critics claim, the number of references to suicide is remarkable. Such references make sense if the stories are also about death.

Miranda is now eighteen and mature enough to face facts about the dead Amy, though again the truth about the mother is not discussed, which for Freud indicates that the truth must be painful. Eva says women are obsessed with sex, and Miranda responds, "My mother was not like that. My mother was a perfectly natural woman" (*CS* 217). Eva automatically responds, "Your mother was a saint" (*CS* 217), and Miranda angrily wishes she could say she was no saint. Miranda contradicts herself here when she tries to grasp both illusion and reality (she sees her mother as both a saint and a non-saint), though at least she is finally moving closer to reality as illusion becomes less attractive. Her desire to say her mother was not a saint is a step toward ending her mourning, for Freud argues that "Just as mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live, so does each single struggle of ambivalence loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging, denigrating it and even as it were killing it" ("Mourning" 257).

Miranda tells herself that she will face the truth about herself without any romance, though the narrator makes it clear that she believes this in "her ignorance" (*CS* 221). She travels to a funeral, but she has still not faced death head on or dealt with her desire for death. Eva reminds Miranda that she had once wanted to be a tightrope walker, and Miranda says, "I must have seen [the tightrope walker] at the vaudeville" (*CS* 208). She has repressed her memory of going to the circus, and this should not be surprising: the tightrope walker in "The Circus" is death, and Miranda still has a death wish she cannot face. Her desire to repress unpleasant things is seen near the close of the story,

where she becomes angry at her father and Eva and thinks, "I will be free of them, I shall not even remember them" (*CS* 219). Freud states that the impulse to repress rather than deal with painful issues is likely to result in the repetition of what has been repressed. Porter seems to intuit this, for she does not grant her character's wish to be free of her parents, and in "Holiday" her protagonist continues to express ambivalence toward mothers, while in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" Miranda confronts the death that she both loves and fears.

CHAPTER THREE

"HOLIDAY" AND FEMININITY

In the stories about her, Miranda struggles with her status as a woman. This explains her fascination with female relatives, for she seems to desire a clearer conception of what it means to be a woman. Her mother is dead, her grandmother dies when she is young, and her sister seems little more secure in herself than Miranda. With no clear guidelines, Miranda must decide for herself how she is affected by her gender and discover a place in her sexist culture. These would be difficult tasks for anyone, and they seem especially difficult for the motherless Miranda. The argument made by Freud in "Female Sexuality" can help explain why this is so, for he explores the ways a woman may establish her sexual identity.[1]

At the beginning of "Holiday," the narrator looks back to a time when she wanted to escape from an unhappy situation that she does not specify. As Thomas Walsh points out, the real life situation this story was based on was Porter's visit to a German-American family's west Texas farm following her first divorce (*Mexico* 100). While the narrator of "Holiday" is left unnamed, she is essentially the same character as Miranda. Like Miranda, she is intelligent, perceptive, quiet, withdrawn, and unhappy, and like Miranda she is interested in writing. Jane DeMouy actually refers to her as Miranda (*Women* 166), as do some other critics. Whether or not Porter intended the narrator of this story to be precisely like Miranda, she is an autobiographical character. If the narrator is Miranda, it is Miranda shortly after the conclusion of the third section of "Old

[1] Except where specifically noted otherwise, all references to Freud in this chapter are taken from "Female Sexuality."

Mortality," in which she states that she has left her husband, but before "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," in which she has been divorced for some time.

Speaking of the troubles she wishes to escape, the narrator states, "It no longer can matter what troubles they were, or what finally became of them" (*CS* 407), and when she first arrives at the plain farm she has chosen for her vacation she is disappointed but thinks, "I must go on, for there could be nothing here for me more painful than what I had left" (*CS* 411). The lack of a specific explanation allows readers to more easily interject themselves into the story, and also allows Porter to explore the larger issue of what causes her female characters to repeatedly isolate themselves as they withdraw from relationships. That is, she can explore the cause, not merely the effect, and as I will argue the ultimate cause of her female characters' difficulties in relationships is the absence of the mother.

Because her mother died while she was a baby, Miranda would not have later had conscious memories of her, but because her family seemed to repress honest discussion of her, the mother would be fully alive in her unconscious, and thus would have continued to influence her throughout her life. The mother's status as a dead person may have made her only more powerful, for our Western tendency to deny death gives the dead great power over us. Joan Givner says that Porter herself wondered if her later melancholy were the result of her mother's death, although she had no conscious memories of her (43). The power of the unconscious may explain the vague, non-specific nature of her characters' troubles, for while they usually seem quite deeply troubled the cause of their problems is rarely apparent. Critics like John W. Aldridge see this as a reason to be dismissive of Porter's work (99), but their attitude demonstrates a

limited understanding of how our minds tend to function: we cannot fully understand ourselves, and a writer who pretends otherwise is likely to produce work that is coherent but finally false and superficial.

Joan Givner quotes Porter on her writing process: "My work is done at a subterranean level and fragments of the work come to the surface. I record them as they come up" (203). Likewise, Porter admitted that she had a "habit of rather not exactly thinking things over but feeling them over" (qtd. in Stout, *Sense* 281). If the characters themselves ordinarily seem unable to grasp exactly what is wrong, that only makes them seem more human; the fact that the cause lies in their unconscious explains why they cannot understand their own behavior. Edward G. Schwartz notes that Porter typically "puts emphasis upon the use of reason, tempered by a suspicion that mysterious, irrational forces working in man's unconscious mind may invalidate reason and cause him to rationalize, to delude himself" (169-70). The narrator of "Holiday" seems aware of her unconscious impulses, for she states that "it is always a rediscovery, what kind of creature it is that rules me finally, makes all the decisions no matter who thinks they make them, even I" (*CS* 413). This "creature" that rules her unconscious is, I believe, her own dead mother and the sexuality, creativity, and death associated with her, as is seen in patterns that run throughout Porter's other work.[2]

In "Holiday," the narrator feels troubled and asks a friend where she might go for a spring holiday by herself. Her friend recommends an east Texas dairy farm inhabited by a large German family named the Mullers, and the trip is arranged. The narrator arrives by train and is initially disappointed when she sees the unattractive farmhouse, but

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[2] It is speculative to claim that the narrator's mother is actually dead, but it is justified by her ambivalent attraction to Mother Muller and by her response to her death.

she becomes more optimistic after she is greeted by the hearty family. The family is made up of the father, a gruff, wealthy man, the mother, a strong, masculine woman, and many sons and daughters, most of whom have wives, husbands, and children of their own but continue to live and work at the large, prosperous farm. The narrator enjoys farm life for a time, and she walks through the orchard noticing the signs of the approach of spring, assists the women with their babies, and observes the others as they go about their tasks.

She becomes more ambivalent when she discovers that the family's oldest daughter, a mysteriously deformed woman named Ottilie, is apparently overworked and unloved. While the rest of the family is united and happy, Ottilie is separated by her mental and physical disabilities. Spring arrives and another daughter is married, a baby is born, and shortly afterwards a storm strikes; the mother of the family works hard to save their cattle from the rising flood waters, suffers a heart attack, and dies. The family is thrown into disarray. Later, after the family leaves for the graveyard, the narrator discovers that Ottilie has been left behind and sets off with her to attend the funeral, only to be shocked to discover that Ottilie simply wants to be outside. The narrator decides to enjoy the spring day with her.

While this story's critics have focused on the narrator's relationship with Ottilie, I believe her relationship with Mother Muller and her large family is also important. This is supported by the fact that she chooses to holiday with the family despite the fact that her quiet, self-involved, possibly somewhat misanthropic personality would seem to be better suited to a solitary cabin in the woods or a crowded city where she could avoid close personal interactions. The narrator is ambivalent about families and relationships, and thus is simultaneously attracted and repulsed by them. The narrator hints at her

ambivalence about relationships when she states, "I confided to my friend Louise, a former schoolmate about my own age, not my troubles but my little problem: I wanted to go somewhere for a spring holiday, by myself, to the country, and [...] she was not to tell anyone where I had gone" (*CS* 407). Her distrust of her friend is indicated by her choice not to discuss her troubles with her, and her desire for distance from others is shown by her choice to vacation alone with no contact from others.

Antisocial behavior is characteristic of Porter's women; William Nance even titles his book *Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection*. However, Porter's women are fascinated with relationships and ordinarily struggle to overcome their fears about them; after all, before one can reject one must first embrace or be embraced. Louise's description of the farm would hardly entice someone who truly was uninterested in relationships and who did not feel some desire for an authority figure:

> "I know the very place," said Louise, "a family of real old-fashioned German peasants, in the deep blackland Texas farm country, a household in real patriarchal style—the kind of thing you'd hate to live with but is very nice to visit. Old father, God Almighty himself, with whiskers and all; Old mother, matriarch in men's shoes; endless daughters and sons and sons-in-law and fat babies falling about the place." (*CS* 408)

The narrator suspects that Louise may be exaggerating, and she asks, "Just where is this paradise?" (*CS* 408). Her cynical attitude is later seen when she travels to the farm and immediately notices everything negative, from the "desolate mud-colored shapeless scene" at the train station to the "gaunt and aching ugliness of the farmhouse itself," where she is jumped on by the family dog, "an enormous black dog of the detestable

German shepherd breed" (*CS* 409-11). This attitude apparently masks a deep if possibly unconscious desire for the parental figures and the relationships emphasized in Louise's description, for Freud might note that a person truly as apathetic as the narrator pretends would not react so strongly.

After the narrator is introduced to a string of brothers and sisters, she meets "the old mother," who she examines closely, from the shawl on her head to the rubber boots on her feet. While her children are blond and blue-eyed, the mother is ominously dark and different; she wears a black shawl, her eyes are "black and shrewd and searching, a band of hair showed black streaked with grey" and when she smiles she shows "her blackened teeth" (*CS* 412). The narrator is shown to her room, which is "homely and familiar, as if I had seen it before" (*CS* 412). Apparently unconsciously recognizing that this is an ideal setting for her to re-live her childhood, this time with a dark but strong and healthy mother, she immediately changes her attitude and thinks she will write to Louise and tell her, "I'm going to like it here. I don't quite know why, but it's going to be all right" (*CS* 412).

According to the argument Freud makes in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," an event that is too painful to be dealt with may be repressed to the unconscious where, however, it does not disappear; instead, the trauma will surface as the person is unconsciously driven to repeat the traumatic situation. In therapy, the person may be helped to remember the trauma, and then to work through it; once it has been consciously dealt with, the cycle is broken and the person may function in a more effective manner. This is what Porter repeatedly attempts to accomplish through her characters. Again and again she places them in situations where they must face a trauma

like her own: repeatedly, they are placed with a mother-figure who either smothers them or dies. Her characters, however, never work through this situation, and therefore the cycle repeats itself. In "Holiday," Porter once more places her main character in a situation dominated by a mother.

Critics like Enrique Hank Lopez claim the farm is a patriarchy ruled by a strong father figure (279). This is at least partially true, and Louise describes the farmhouse as being run in "real patriarchal style," but she also describes the mother as being a "matriarch in men's shoes" (*CS* 408), hinting that the mother disguised as a man is the real "patriarch," and finally the farm is much more of a matriarchy than a patriarchy. The bearded father is more show than substance, more words than actions; as Mother Muller says to him, "Ach, you talk, you talk" (*CS* 417). He is a man who spends most evenings reading *Das Kapital* but who also is the wealthiest man in his community, who can afford to loan his neighbors money and rent them land, and as such he is certainly capable but also confused and a bit of a buffoon, unlike the real power of the family, his wife. This is seen in Porter's description of a typical morning:

> Mother Muller strode about hugely, giving orders right and left, while Father Muller, smoothing his whiskers and lighting his pipe, drove away to town with Mother Muller calling out after him final directions and instructions about household needs. He never spoke a word to her and appeared not to be listening, but he always returned in a few hours with every commission and errand performed exactly. (*CS* 418)

At the dinner table, "Father Muller took his patriarch's place at the head of the table, Mother Muller looming behind him like a dark boulder" (*CS* 415). Likewise the other

wives stand behind their husbands and serve them food, but finally the husbands seem less like masters than like children who are incapable of feeding themselves and who are powerless in comparison to their women. The narrator herself is fascinated by the women of the farm and watches them closely, as if she is attempting to learn how to be a woman, but she is relatively uninterested in the men.

Mother Muller is a healthy, successful mother: she has given birth to and raised a large, loving family, her children now have children of their own, and she runs the most successful farm in her community. She is everything Porter's actual mother was not, and is extremely strong, healthy, and protective. For Porter, femininity seems to have little to do with appearances or with being weak: her women often dress like men, and are ordinarily stronger than her men, who are often lazy and inept. Femininity, for Porter, has to do with being creative, sexual, and emotional, and these are the sources of their strength. In "Holiday," Porter focuses on the woman as a creative force, and the center of the creativity is Mother Muller.

She is a farm woman, which is important because land itself is ordinarily gendered feminine, particularly in America, as Annette Kolodny points out. When the narrator is driving to the farm, she hopes to see "a field stripped down to its true meaning, ploughed and ready for the seed" (*CS* 410), implying that the "true meaning" of being a woman is being sexual and pro-creative. This feminine creativity is not an entirely positive force, and Porter implies this at the beginning of the story when from the perspective of her later years she writes, "we do not run from the troubles and dangers that are truly ours, and it is better to learn what they are earlier than later" (*CS* 407),

implying that "Holiday" will be a story about facing the source of one's troubles, and for Porter this means facing the simultaneously creative and destructive force of motherhood

Thomas Walsh argues that Porter had an unresolved Oedipus complex and that this is demonstrated in her fiction, though he uses Horney rather than Freud to discuss this point (*Mexico* 99). According to Freud, girls do tend to become attached to their fathers and hostile to their mothers at an early age, and this attachment to the father is often later transferred onto the men to whom they are attracted. This is classic Freud, and it is one aspect of his thinking with which most people are familiar. According to some of his critics, Freud overemphasizes the Oedipus complex and the role of the father in a child's development. This is true of Freud's early work but less true of his later work, including the 1931 study "Feminine Sexuality." In his later work Freud came to believe that the Oedipus complex operated in a relatively straightforward fashion with boys but not so with girls. Boys, according to Freud, are initially primarily attached to their mothers, or to the nurturing figure in their lives. In the Oedipal period this attachment is simply strengthened. As Freud realized, however, this process could not be so simple for girls: girls are initially attracted to their mothers, then the focus is shifted to their fathers.

Freud explained this shift by postulating that young girls notice that boys possess a penis and conclude that their own genitalia is lacking; the girls then become jealous of boys and angry at the mother who did not give them a penis. Hostility towards the mother causes the girl to shift loyalties to the father, who then becomes the object of her attraction. Freud is disappointingly literal in his discussion of penis envy, and feminists starting with Horney have justifiably rejected the claim that girls actually want a penis. However, following Lacan and re-thinking Freud's literal conception of penis envy to a

more figurative understanding of the issue may solve this problem. Girls may envy not the actual penis but the power it represents, for even a young girl would notice that males have more freedom than females; this would have been particularly true in Porter's time. Girls, then, would resent being placed in a culture in which they are figured as victims, become angry at the mother who created them as such, and turn to the father in an effort to attain a portion of his power.

This shift to the father, Freud argues, is necessary if the girl is to later establish stable heterosexual relationships. A problem arises, however, if the father is not a positive, loving figure. Porter and her female protagonists have fathers who are faulty men, and as a result they are attracted as adults to faulty men as well. The shift from the mother to the father, therefore, may not be a lasting, satisfying one. Freud claims that even when a girl unconsciously shifts her focus from the mother to the father, that shift is not necessarily permanent, for she may return her focus to the mother. This seems to occur repeatedly in Porter's work, for her female protagonists often seem to reject faulty males and to return to powerful mother-figures in an attempt to more successfully understand and appreciate their own femininity.

When the narrator arrives at the farm, she repeatedly mentions that spring is coming, and she diligently looks for signs of its arrival and its progress. She walks through the fields examining buds and blossoms, and comments on the changing colors and weather: "Almost every day I went along the edge of the naked wood, passionately occupied with looking for signs of spring" (*CS* 419). Whatever her mysterious "troubles," she anxiously looks for the solution to them in an understanding of the spring and the creativity it represents. When spring arrives in full, the narrator experiences one

of the most extended periods of happiness anywhere in Porter's fiction, reveling in the natural creativity that surrounds her and apparently overcoming her troubles for a time. She examines the changing farmland, the growing animals, and the many women with their babies.

According to Joan Givner, Porter discovered during her first marriage that she was barren (92), and because the farm vacation that this story is based on occurred immediately after the failure of that marriage, the narrator's interest in a woman's reproductive potential may be partly accounted for. As her friend Louise tells the narrator, there are "fat babies falling about the place." There are so many children that the narrator has trouble counting them; she first says there are six and then realizes there are seven. While the narrator sees these children as troublesome and somewhat gruesome—the oldest daughter "carried her newly born baby over her shoulder, where he drooled comfortably down her back" while the older children "ravened and gorged and reached their hands into the sugar bowl to sprinkle sugar on everything they ate" (*CS* 416)—she also recognizes their more positive side and seems impressed with their mothers' loving treatment of them: "They came at call to be fed and put to sleep with the docility of their own toys or animal playmates. Their mothers handled them with instinctive, constant gentleness; they never seemed to be troubled by them. They were as devoted and caretaking as a cat with her kittens" (*CS* 419). With such a description, it is difficult to agree with John Hardy's claim that this is a story about how children are crushed by their families (15).

The narrator imitates the young mothers to a degree, as if becoming motherly will allow her to become powerful and overcome the link she may unconsciously make

between motherhood and death. Givner describes one of Porter's nightmares, in which she saw dead women clutching newborn babies underwater; in the dream, Porter's sister appeared with a baby that turned out to be Porter's, and Porter became happy (266). Usually inactive and watchful, one of the narrator's few activities is pulling a two year old girl through the orchard in her wagon; she describes this in idyllic terms: "The baby would sit in a compact mound of flannel and calico, her pale-blue eyes tilted and shining under her cap, her two lower teeth showing in a rapt smile" (*CS* 419). The narrator seems to link this mothering with the growth of nature, and in the orchard that she walks through repeatedly she is "passionately occupied with looking for signs of spring" (*CS* 419), as if she is hoping to understand the secrets of fertility and to accept the female's role as mother as a completely positive one. However, as Freud shows, every role has another side.

Immediately following the narrator's happiest moment, when she wanders through an orchard glowing with fireflies, Porter signals that creativity is not entirely beautiful. As the narrator enters the house, she sees the unappealing side of nurturant behavior in Hatsy, who is on her knees scrubbing the floor. Hatsy "turned her young face to me in a stupor of fatigue. 'Ottilie! Ottilie!' she called, loudly" (*CS* 420). Hatsy's action, looking at the narrator but calling out another's name, is a signal that the narrator's double is Ottilie, a mysteriously deformed but vigorous mute. Despite her curiosity about the family, the narrator like Ottilie remains a misfit, distant and unattached, "a stranger and hopeless outsider" (*CS* 421). Like Ottilie, and like Miranda, the narrator is ordinarily silent but watchful, and she notes that Ottilie's eyes have pupils that are "very large and strained with the anxiety of one peering into a darkness full of

danger" (*CS* 420). In his analysis of the uncanny Freud argues that doubles are the result of ambivalence: when we are afraid, we may deal with our fear by splitting into two parts. The text suggests that the narrator's ambivalence about her status as a woman leads her to create a double in the form of Ottilie. The narrator does not literally create Ottilie, she unconsciously perceives her as a double. Another person in the same situation might react to Ottilie quite differently.

The danger that Ottilie faces is left unclear, as is the exact cause of her deformity. Hatsy tells the narrator, "That is Ottilie. She is not sick now. She is only like that since she was sick when she was a baby. But she can work so well as I can. She cooks. But she cannot talk so you can understand" (*CS* 420). The narrator, however, seems to want to blame the deformity on someone, for she refers to Ottilie's face as "mutilated," and describes it as looking "as if the perishable flesh had been wrung in a hard cruel fist" (*CS* 420). She at first thinks the deformity is "probably congenital" (*CS* 415), passed on through the genes from the parents. The "darkness full of danger" that Ottilie fears is reminiscent of the mother, for the mother has black clothes, eyes, hair, and teeth. The narrator's identification with Ottilie is strengthened when she finds that although she is treated like a hired servant, she is the oldest daughter of the family. The narrator's anger and outrage over this are understandable but overstated, for Porter consistently indicates that the family treats Ottilie no worse than any other daughter, except for adapting to her mental and emotional limits.

For the narrator, Ottilie is the physical personification of her own inner turmoil: she manifests how the narrator feels about herself. As Ottilie was physically deformed by her early sickness, so were Porter and Miranda emotionally deformed by the early loss

of the mother. Porter's obsessive interest in social outcasts and freaks, from the dwarf of "The Circus" to the retarded child of "He" and the multitude of physically deformed characters in *Ship of Fools*, seems possibly motivated by her own sense of difference as a woman writer with no children. As a woman who seems unsure of how to be a woman in the Modern age, she repeatedly examines characters that are separated from others by mysterious deformities. This is true for other women writers of the Modern period as well, including Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O'Connor, suggesting that women of that period often saw their undefined status as women as making them freakish. In Porter's work, these blameless victims function at unusually high levels and often are more capable than the "normal" people around them, but Porter emphasizes the pain they feel at being unable to connect with others, who take advantage of their abilities but exclude them from real interactions.

The narrator, apparently escaping from the pain of a failed relationship, has come to the Muller farm to heal, to re-establish herself as a person capable of social interactions. In the Mullers she sees how to function as a member of a group, but in Ottilie she sees herself: "I got the powerful impression that they were all, even the sons-in-law, one human being divided into several separate appearances. The crippled servant girl [...] seemed to me the only individual in the house" (*CS* 417). The individuality so characteristic of Porter's women comes with a heavy price: they are unable to establish relationships with others. While the narrator goes on to claim that she feels divided into other people as well, she emphasizes that she has lost parts of herself "above all, in every death of someone near to me that had carried into the grave some part of my living cells" (*CS* 417). The Mullers, except possibly for Ottilie, have invested parts of themselves into

each other, into the living people around them, but the narrator has invested parts of herself into the dead. Thus, although she seems only partly aware of it, she is far more like the misfit Ottilie than the loving family that fascinates her.

As Ottilie is the physical embodiment of the narrator's emotional problem, so for Porter actual sexuality is the symbol of emotional connections, and thus the way out of her isolation. This is similar to Freud's views on Eros, which includes sexuality but is not only sexuality. For the narrator, sexuality is apparently simultaneously attractive and frightening, and while she has come to the farm to escape personal connections and to possibly rebuild following the trauma of the end of a relationship, she can safely observe the evidence of sexuality around her on the farm and thus learn to more effectively use her own sexuality in the future as she again attempts personal connections. The farm is a safe location for this study, for the sexuality is located in the animals, in the plants, and in married couples, not in available single men who might potentially attract or attempt to seduce the narrator.

The husbands and wives in this story are affectionate but not romantic, and they behave more like happy brothers and sisters than like lovers. When she first meets them, the narrator notices that they all look alike: "And in every face I saw again the pale, tilted eyes, on every head that taffy-colored hair, as though they might all be brothers and sisters, though Annetje's husband and still another daughter's husband had gone by after greeting me" (*CS* 412). However, this is presented as unusual, not as perverse, and in Porter's work the brother-sister relationship is presented as ideal, for it is a loving but nonsexual pairing of a man and a woman, and thus is safe. In Porter's work sexuality is

quickly followed by disorder and death, and if the couples of "Holiday" are relatively non-sexual they may also be relatively safe for a time.

However, while sexuality is not openly discussed in the story, the evidence of sexuality is all around the narrator in the growing plants, babies, and bursting pregnancy of Gretchen. The characters express their sexuality shyly but accept it as a positive if private part of their lives. Porter signals the importance of sexuality in her description of Hatsy's wedding; the bride apparently wears white, but Porter repeatedly refers to the color red to indicate the unspoken sexuality beneath the ceremony: the wedding guests bring "mostly bed linen" but also a lamp "decorated with red roses, a stone china washbowl and pitcher also covered with red roses; and the bridegroom's gift to the bride was a necklace, a double string of red coral twigs" (*CS* 424). After exchanging rings—"the widest, thickest, reddest gold bands to be found"—the groom kisses Hatsy on the forehead and then the couple "exchanged the bridal kiss, a very chaste reserved one, still not on the lips" (*CS* 424). While the characters do not display their sexuality boldly, Porter shows that they have not repressed it either.

After the wedding, the women whisper to Hatsy, who blushes and tries to slip away, but she is pursued by the young women:

> we saw her running through the blossoming orchard, holding up her white ruffled skirts, with all the girls in pursuit, shrieking and calling like excited hunters, for the first to overtake and touch her would be the next bride. They returned, breathless, dragging the lucky one with them, and held her against her ecstatic resistance, while all the young boys kissed her. (*CS* 424)

Female sexuality, linked with the blossoming of the spring, is thus acknowledged and controlled by the community, although it seems not as harmless as the participants pretend and seems actively dangerous to the individual women; when Hatsy later comes to dinner her hair is dotted with "peach blossoms shattered in the bride's race" (*CS* 425).

The mother, normally a central figure at a wedding, is not mentioned in the wedding scene. Earlier, when Hatsy happily told the narrator that she would soon be married, "Everyone laughed except Mother Muller, who said in German that girls at home never knew when they were well off—no they must go bringing in husbands" (*CS* 416). The attempt to exclude the narrator by speaking German is a signal that the mother is not joking. With the marriage of her last marriageable daughter, the mother's function is obliterated, her power diminished, and her own sexuality negated. While Hatsy is associated with the color red, the color of sexuality, blood, and life, the mother is associated with the color black, often the color of mourning, evil, and decay.

While Freud initially saw the mother-child relationship as generally loving he later became more ambivalent about it. Freud argues in "Female Sexuality" that girls at the pre-Oedipal stage reject the mother and turn to the father for four reasons: the mother's failure to provide the daughter with a penis (with the symbol of power), the mother's failure to give her love only to the daughter, the mother's effort to control the daughter's sexuality, and the mother's failure to provide sufficient milk. This final claim was more fully discussed by Melanie Klein, who described how the infant's ambivalence split the mother into a "good breast" and a "bad breast," with the good breast being associated with the mother that provided nurturance and attention and the bad breast being associated with the mother who was absent when the infant desired something.

In Porter's work, her autobiographical characters usually consciously regard their mothers as good, as when Miranda tells Eva that her mother was saintly, but it seems apparent that they unconsciously are far more ambivalent. If Klein's "bad breast" is the absent mother, Miranda's dead mother is the bad breast that does not meet her needs. The fact that the mother did not intend to die makes no difference to an infant, who is not ready for logic and can only feel abandoned and betrayed. This partly explains the deep, floating anger characteristic of Miranda and the other autobiographical characters, and the ambivalence they feel toward women in general and toward their own femininity.

Although she may not have read Klein, in "Holiday" Porter expresses her ambivalence toward the mother of the story by associating her with the literal presence or absence of the breast.[3] While the main duty of the men on the farm seems to be plowing the fields, this is only mentioned; instead, the narrator focuses much of her attention on the main duty of the women on the farm, raising young animals and milking the cattle:

> The old woman strode down the path toward the cow sheds, Hatsy running behind her. The woman wore her wooden yoke, with the milking pails covered and closed with iron hasps, slung easily across her shoulders, but her daughter carried two tin milking pails on her arm. When they pushed back the bars of cedar which opened onto the fields, the cows came through lowing and crowding, and the calves scampered each to his own dam with reaching, opened mouths. Then there was the battle of separating the hungry children from their mothers when they had taken their scanty share. The old woman slapped their little haunches with her open palm, [...] the calves bawled like rebellious babies. (*CS* 414)

[3] This is seen in other stories as well, where Porter shows a fascination with milk and its production.

When a baby is later born, it "bawled and suckled like a young calf" (*CS* 428), and when a man attempts to help his exhausted wife with the milk pails the mother will not tolerate it: "'No!' shouted Mother Muller, so the poor young man nearly jumped out of his shirt, 'not you. The milk is not business for a man'" (*CS* 430). The women of this story are associated with nurturing—cooking, washing, feeding, healing—but Mother Muller is kept ambivalent, failing to nurture as often as she nurtures.

Mother Muller's suggested hostility toward her daughters may be explained by her apparent dismay at her youngest daughter Hatsy's display of sexuality. Hatsy's marriage with its symbolized sexuality is quickly followed by the birth of Gretchen's baby. In Porter's stories sexuality leads to births and births are quickly followed by disasters, and while in this story the mother of the baby survives, the birth is immediately followed by a flash flood that destroys the crops and drowns many of the animals. As if the storm manifests her dismay at being replaced, Mother Muller is placed at the center of it: "Even as Mother Muller [...] was striding to join them in the barn, the cloud rack was split end to end by a shattering blow of lightning, and the cloudburst struck the house with the impact of a wave against a ship" (*CS* 429). As if she cannot admit her age, Mother Muller leads the rescue and even carries a day-old calf on her back up a ladder, returning exhausted but still proudly in charge.

In the morning Mother Muller has an apparent heart attack, and her now leaderless household falls into chaos: "The family crowded into the room, unnerved in panic, lost unless the sick woman should come to herself and tell them what to do for her" (*CS* 431). She dies, and the storm soon passes, suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship, as if nature itself has been appeased after finally being given its sacrificial

victim. Although the baby's birth was not followed by the death of the actual mother, it is followed by the death of the "real" mother of the story, Mother Muller.

This story, then, expresses a great deal of ambivalence towards its powerful mother-figure. This may initially seem confusing, for Porter and her female characters often seem to express great longing for a mother and a female role-model who will allow them to be both strong and feminine, yet here the text seems to grant that wish through Mother Muller only to reject it through her sudden death. Ambivalence toward a mother-figure can be explored by applying Freud's claims about the pre-Oedipal stage. The relationship between a mother and her daughter, Freud states, is at its strongest in the pre-Oedipal stage, and if a daughter does not successfully shift her affections to the father she may remain arrested in this original attachment to her mother and never attain successful adult relationships with members of the opposite sex. This is particularly true, Freud claims, if the mother is perceived as powerful.

A young girl's dependence on her mother can lead to fear of the mother's power and anger based on the restrictions the mother places on the daughter; this leads the daughter to turn from the mother to the father. However, if the mother is particularly powerful and the father is weak, the daughter may be psychologically trapped in her relationship with the mother. Because she fears the powerful mother, the daughter may fear the consequences of breaking away from her; likewise, the daughter may be afraid of practicing her sexuality and of expressing the anger she feels toward the mother. The result of this is that as an adult the daughter would be unable to form successful relationships with men and would be uncomfortable with herself as a woman.

Ottilie, overwhelmed by the powerful mother, seems neutered and solitary. As her double, the narrator seems so as well. Whether or not one accepts the notion that the narrator is essentially Miranda, it seems clear that she has an ambivalent attraction to Mother Muller. The source of this attraction must lie in her relationship with her own mother, for if she had a good relationship with that mother she would feel no need for another. If a mother is perceived as especially powerful, Freud claims, the daughter may repress her sexual desires in order to appease her; this surrender in turn leads by extension to a fear of being killed by the mother and consequently a death wish against her. The logic of the text necessitates the death of the mother, for the narrator has attempted to suppress her own sexuality but continues to be drawn to express it; the mother has become a threat and must die.

Women, in charge of death, wash and dress Mother Muller's body, which lays in state in the parlor overnight. The family cries openly:

> Their tears were at once a luxury and a cure of souls. They wept away the hard core of secret trouble that is in the heart of each separate man, secure in a communal grief; in sharing it, they consoled each other. For a while they would visit the grave and remember, and then life would arrange itself again in another order, yet it would be the same. (*CS* 432-33)

This contrasts sharply with the mourning practices of the Victorian period of Porter's childhood, which sanctioned only certain emotions during mourning. Because the dead person was in heaven, unsentimentalized grief could not be expressed. Instead of being released, grief and any ambivalence felt toward the dead person had to be repressed, thus potentially causing the mourner to never fully recover. In "Holiday," however, Porter

explores the German farm family's more "natural" expression of mourning, which she implies is for them a healing communal ritual.

While she emphasizes the tears of the family, the narrator herself expresses no sadness over the passing of Mother Muller. Freud might argue that this is because she has unconsciously willed the death, and it serves a psychological need for her. Her feelings about the death are not simple, however, they are ambivalent. It is as if she, like the young Miranda, fears the mother will take revenge on her for wishing her dead. This may partially explain why she rarely speaks or draws attention to herself; in fact, the narrator observes the family's mourning so closely, and interacts with them so rarely as they mourn, that she seems invisible. As if she is a camera, she stoically reports on Mother Muller's laying in state: "Her husband sat in the plush chair near her, looking at her face, which was very contemplative, gentle, and remote. He wept at intervals, silently, wiping his face and head with a big handkerchief. His daughters brought him coffee from time to time. He fell asleep there toward morning" (*CS* 432). The father's actions are not unusual; what is surprising is the narrator's fascination with them, for she could not report his actions unless she herself had been nearby throughout the night, watching him as if she hoped to learn how to mourn for a mother, and as if she wished to be certain that the mother is actually gone.

However the narrator, as Porter's autobiographical character, cannot actively mourn for or escape a mother, no matter how much she may need to. As the family takes the coffin to the hearse, the narrator realizes "for the first time, not death, but the terror of dying" (*CS* 433). She lies on her bed and feels "as if my blood fainted and receded with fright" (*CS* 433). As the sounds of the funeral procession die away, she drowses with

relief and weariness. The narrator's reaction seems extreme, and her connection of the presence of the mother's corpse with her own catastrophic death seems irrational. However, if we assume that the narrator has not successfully mourned her own mother's death and therefore fears her mother, the reaction can be understood, as can be her decision not to attend the funeral out of that same fear.

Drowsing, the narrator is frightened awake by what she initially takes to be the howling of a dog caught in a trap. When she realizes that the cry is human, she rushes first to the sleeping baby and then to her own double, Ottilie. They briefly embrace, and Ottilie gestures toward the funeral train as if she wishes to be included. The narrator impulsively hitches a pony to a wagon, tugs Ottilie aboard, and sets off in pursuit of the others, only to change her mind when she accidentally touches the woman's flesh: "My sense of her realness, her humanity, this shattered being that was a woman, was so shocking to me that a howl as doglike and despairing as her own rose in me unuttered and died again, to be a perpetual ghost" (*CS* 434). Ottilie too suddenly changes, laughing and clapping her hands with joy and indicating that she apparently does not want to attend the funeral after all, and the narrator concludes, "There was nothing I could do for Ottilie, selfishly as I wished to ease my heart of her" (*CS* 434).

Darlene Unrue reads this scene as the narrator's attempt to use love and understanding to bring Ottilie into the family orbit (*Truth* 148), but the word *selfishly*, along with the narrator's admission that she has considered Ottilie essentially an animal, indicates that the narrator attempts to take her to the funeral not for Ottilie's sake but for her own: if she can force her double to mourn and to then reconnect with humanity, she can heal herself. But her discovery that Ottilie is already human, despite being so

horribly damaged as to appear to be an animal, apparently signifies to the narrator that she is beyond hope, and if there is nothing she can do for Ottilie, there is nothing she can do for herself: the narrator's howl is as "doglike and despairing as her own." As much animal as human because of her inability to connect with others and establish herself as a sexual woman, the narrator is "a perpetual ghost," a silent being that belongs less to the living than to the dead, and the ghost of her mother will perpetually haunt her.

Miranda's ambivalence toward her own femininity is rooted in her relationship with her mother, who may have been biologically dead but who was fully alive in her unconscious mind, where she could continue to exert a powerful influence on her daughter. Dead but not absent, the mother would have been the center of her desire and her fear. The influence of a mother's death on a daughter has only recently been fully recognized, chiefly because of Hope Edelman's 1994 book *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss*, which shows that when these daughters become women they commonly have difficulty establishing relationships, confirming their gender roles, dealing with death, and becoming mothers themselves.

George Core reads Ottilie's laughter in the final scene as an affirmation in the midst of sorrow, a celebration of the fact that life goes on (155), and this is true but the ending of the story seems more equivocal. The narrator concludes that she and Ottilie are "both equally the fools of life, equally fellow fugitives from death [who] had escaped for one more day at least," escaped from death and from the mother, and they drive to the river to "have a little stolen holiday, a breath of spring air and freedom on this lovely, festive afternoon" (*CS* 435). Critics like John Hardy who see the family as evil (15) fail to see this explanation as a rationalization, as a forced effort to salvage anything from a

disastrous failure. The living mother is beyond reach, broken from her daughters in their childhoods, and the daughters are therefore beyond reach of the sexuality, creativity, and death that ties humanity together; it is hardly worth the price they pay that they can at least celebrate the freedom that comes with independence; they are fellow exiles from the human community, if not from fear of dying.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DREAMS OF "PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER"

As its title suggests, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is about death, and in it Porter at last has Miranda deal with her death wish explicitly. Miranda's need to do this is clear, but she cannot deal with the loss of her mother, who is absent from her list of people who have died, and who is not mentioned when she has a near-death experience and sees those who died before her. This story links motherhood, sexuality, and death as Miranda attempts to confront the three fears that threaten to obliterate her. This is especially apparent in her six dreams, which may be elucidated with the assistance of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*.[1]

This story, which takes place near the end of World War I, begins with Miranda dreaming of taking a horse ride with Death. She wakes and thinks about her problems working as a newspaper reporter, and she considers how difficult it is to pretend to support the war. She remembers her experiences with a handsome soldier named Adam, who like her is cynical about the war and worried about the influenza epidemic. At work she discusses the war with her colleagues, and later she attends a play with Adam, where a propagandist angers her. The next morning Miranda awakes sick with the flu; Adam assists her, and Miranda falls asleep and dreams of being in a jungle. When she wakes, she and Adam discuss their feelings for each other until Miranda falls asleep again, and she dreams that Adam is killed. Adam again cares for her, and leaves to buy cigarettes;

[1] It is astonishing that Freud's theories have not previously been used to interpret Miranda's dreams. George Cheatham, in "Death and Repetition in Porter's Miranda Stories," considers the dreams and notes Miranda's obsession with death and her mother, but he focuses on the dreams as demonstrations of the modernist desire to escape the past, which he claims explains the repetition seen in the dreams (159-60). Thomas Walsh studies the dreams but uses R.D. Laing's theories on narcissism rather than Freud's ideas on dreams ("The Dreams Self" 82).

Miranda dozes, and awakes to find doctors preparing to take her to the hospital and Adam gone. At the hospital her condition worsens, and she has three dreams. She first dreams that the doctor is a murderer, then she has a vague nightmare, and finally she has a dream or experience in which she feels she has died and reached an afterlife. Miranda returns from the final dream involuntarily, and she discovers that she will recover, that the war has ended, and that Adam is dead of influenza.

In her first dream Miranda's mind takes her back to her childhood, where she can attempt to confront the problem that has obsessed her since then. She does not do so consciously, but the patterns show that she is unconsciously motivated to deal with her past; this is why Walsh can claim the dreams "reveal the hidden undercurrents of her mind" ("Dreams Self" 81). In the dream she confuses past and present, dreaming she is in "her own bed" even while she recognizes that it is not the bed she sleeps in as an adult, and she is in "a room she had known somewhere" (*CS* 269). She says, "Now I must get up and go while they are all quiet" (*CS* 269), as if she is in a house with family members, not with strangers in an apartment house. The horses she chooses among are the horses that belonged to her family when she was a child. It is as if her mind is taking her back to the source of her problem, forcing her to attempt to master it.

As the dreaming Miranda imagines her childhood home, she thinks, "Too many people have been born here [...]. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces [...] and oh, what accumulation of dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment" (*CS* 269). She associates the place with birth, possibly stating that there have been "too many" births because if she had not been born her mother would still be alive, and almost immediately

after mentioning births she thinks of deaths, because in her mind the two are linked. The reference to unsettled dust, following her comment about ancestral bones, suggests that she believes on some level that her dead relatives are not resting in peace despite having returned to dust. Apparently sexually repressed, she does not link the bed to intercourse, although as a farm child she would have witnessed the animals copulating and is now sexually experienced herself.

After reminding herself of the negative memories the place holds for her, Miranda makes it clear that she associates her house with death: "And the stranger? Where is that lank greenish stranger I remember hanging about the place, welcomed by my grandfather, my great-aunt, my five times removed cousin, my decrepit hound and my silver kitten? Why did they take to him, I wonder? And where are they now?" (*CS* 270). Stout claims that the dreams associate home with death because Miranda wants the security of home but also wants to remain independent ("Estranging Texas" 97), and this seems valid but not fully satisfying. Death for Miranda is like a member of the family, someone that was *welcomed.* Significantly missing from her list of dead relatives, including even a cousin removed five times and two pets, is her mother, who even in a dream state she seems unable to deal with. However, it is possible that for her the mother is present, in the form of death personified, whom she speaks of as a stranger who hung around the house, as the memory of her mother did, and whom she seems to almost recognize: "Ah, I have seen this fellow before, I know this man if I could place him. He is no stranger to me" (*CS* 270). Furthermore, there are Freudian symbols of maternity in the dream, including the house and the room, which she describes in language that suggests a womb: "the room was not the same but it was a room she had known somewhere" (*CS* 269). This suggests

a womb as well as her childhood bedroom because if it is only an actual room she has no reason to be evasive—she could state that it simply is that room, as elsewhere in the dream she makes it clear that the setting is her childhood home. Porter states that "Her heart was a stone lying upon her breast outside of her" (*CS* 269), and as Jane DeMouy states this "is at once the physical image of the oppression she feels from the war, a foreboding of the mortal illness to come, and an implication of the danger she faces in a love relationship" (*Women* 158), but it also suggests a baby at the breast and portrays that as something negative. Her ambivalence about the mother and her womb possibly causes her to suggest them indirectly so that the anxiety that they bring can be controlled.

Likewise, Miranda's first dream deals only indirectly with sexuality itself. When the typesetters of this story prepared it for publication, they commented on how odd it was that the story contained nothing sexual, apparently because in a romance involving the classic situation of a young woman and a soldier leaving for the front they expected something more than a little dancing. While Porter found this comment offensive, it can be seen that Miranda's unconscious thoughts revolve around not only death but also sexuality. As Don Graham points out in response to Larry McMurty's charge that Porter's fiction is genteel, "One does not have to write clinically or pornographically about sex to reveal an understanding of the subject" (2-3), and as will be shown this story contains a great deal of implicit sexuality. When a young woman rises in the middle of the night and sneaks out of the family home, one would ordinarily suspect that she is making a sexual liaison. At the literal level this is not true—Miranda is going for a horse ride with the personification of Death—but Porter's choice of this situation suggests that she is linking death and sexuality.

In this story, Death is male, and while in the house the phallic "ancestral bones" are "propped up" (*CS* 269), hinting at sexual difficulties, outdoors the likewise phallic trees "are trees in one stroke" (*CS* 270), suggesting that Death is fully potent. In the verse from Revelations that is the source of the story's title, the first specific power given to the pale rider is the power "to kill with sword." Horse riding itself, with its speed and rhythm, suggests sexuality, particularly for women. This is seen in the double meaning of the word *ride*, and the fact that the horse and its rider are pale may possibly suggest the paleness of a pair of nude Caucasian lovers. This is supported by the fact that while Revelations describes the horse as pale, it does not describe the rider as such: Porter makes both horse and rider pale.[2] The figure of Death in this dream seems mildly eroticized as he "swung into his saddle beside her, leaned far towards her and [then ...] rode beside her, easily, lightly [as ...] his pale face smiled in an evil trance" (*CS* 270). At the conclusion of their ride, Miranda seems more exhausted than a simple horse ride would justify, and her ribs heave as she regains her breath. Freud argues that our minds construct dreams out of our recent waking experiences, and if this is so Miranda's sexualized dream of "riding" with the male Death may be a representation of dancing with Adam a few hours before. While she may not have actually had intercourse with Adam, she almost certainly must have considered it: she is divorced and sexually experienced, and the attractive Adam is scheduled to leave for his army camp the next day.

In the dream Miranda chooses the horse Graylie "because he is not afraid of bridges," and purposefully goes for a ride with the personification of Death, only to change her mind and let Death ride on (*CS* 270). Graylie, significantly gray because he

[2] It may also explain why a notorious Bridgeport, Connecticut escort service is named after this story.

can blend black and white and provide the complex ambiguity Porter sees as truth (unlike the easy truths of her grandmother's pre-Modern generation, when the women wore black and white), can go over bridges, important because Death supposedly cannot cross water. Miranda points out that Death's horse is gray as well, showing her ambiguity about death, and as she rides with him it is a flirtation, a teetering between giving in and rejecting. Sarah Youngblood notes that Miranda "both seeks death as an escape, and yet flees from it" (347), and Thomas Walsh states, "Her fluctuating attention and aversion to the Pale Rider reveal her paradoxical attempt through death to preserve the self from extinction by others and her determination to live on despite her fears" ("Dreams Self" 82-83). As the dream concludes Miranda stops her horse and calls to Death, "I'm not going with you this time—ride on!" (*CS* 270). Her use of *this time* indicates that her choice is only temporary, and the dream itself suggests that she may be on the verge of at least considering suicide.

Importantly, while her careful choice of horses suggests that the ride will be a race, and while the fact that her riding partner is Death suggests that if he wins the race she will die, the actual ride is fast but noncompetitive, and at the dream's conclusion Miranda simply stops her horse and orders Death to ride on without her, which implies that this dream represents her wish not to actually die but to control death. Before she takes the ride, she describes it as "this journey I do not mean to take" (*CS* 270). The dream itself, despite the gloomy content, does not seem nightmarish and Miranda does not seem anxious, and thus it seems to be verification of Freud's argument that nearly every dream represents a wish, though that wish is often not immediately apparent. For example, a death wish, whether Miranda's or anyone's, arguably does not represent a

wish to actually die but a wish to remain in control and to avoid catastrophic death, even by committing suicide; it is a fear masquerading as a desire. John Hardy states that Miranda only appears to be self-destructive but "At the level of her subconscious, she does not, in fact, want to die" (85).

Porter emphasizes Miranda's difficulty in waking up, suggesting that she enjoyed the dream and the deathlike state of being asleep, or possibly that she is feverish and shows the first symptoms of influenza. As she wakes Miranda immediately forgets the dream, signaling that its implications are too traumatic to deal with consciously, and she represses her fears once more. This is how Porter encourages the reader to interpret the dreams, and as Walsh notes the dreams "enable the reader to understand [Miranda] in a way that she never understands herself" ("Dreams Self" 81). While she may not be consciously suicidal, Miranda's actions indicate that her fear of death has driven her to be self-destructive. She should be fully aware that she has the influenza that is killing people everywhere—her symptoms are obvious—but she does nothing to prevent the disease from killing her: she works and plays as if nothing is wrong, as if she wants to die. She makes no plans for the future with Adam, and she thinks of them both as doomed to die.

While Miranda had been married before, Porter makes it clear that she had never been in love before. The fact that she does fall in love is initially surprising, because Miranda had previously seemed far too selfish, damaged, and fearful to be capable of genuine love. And Adam himself is suspiciously like a fantasy; if it were not for the note from him which the nurse reads, it would be possible to regard him as an actual fantasy of

the lonely Miranda.[3] In many ways, Adam seems like a male version of Miranda, and Walsh argues convincingly that he is Miranda's narcissistic projection ("Dreams Self" 82). Immediately before Porter's first mention of Adam in the story, Miranda sees a depressed soldier and thinks, "It is like turning a corner absorbed in your painful thoughts and meeting your state of mind embodied, face to face, she said. 'My own feelings about this whole thing, made flesh'" (*CS* 277). Adam and Miranda are each twenty-four years old, and like her he is intelligent, attractive, stylish, cynical, and sensitive; they are both from Texas. Miranda recognizes their similarities: "Adam kept unwholesome hours too, or had in the ten days they had known each other [...]; he smoked also continually" (*CS* 280). Like Miranda, he seems self-destructive. He has joined the army to fight a war he does not believe in, and he has apparently sought out one of the most dangerous branches of the army. He asks Miranda, "Do you know what the average life expectation of a sapping party is after it hits the job?" She responds, "Something speedy, I suppose," and he tells her it is nine minutes (*CS* 283). Because Adam is an engineer, a reader of that time period would have realized that he himself will be a member of a "sapping party," a group of engineers that builds trenches on the front lines.

Adam's comment about the sapping party comes at an unusual moment, as he is saying goodnight to her; it is as if he intends it to be romantic, and in fact for Miranda it is. One wonders if she loves Adam not *despite* of the fact that he will probably die but *because* he will probably die. There is little risk that he will live for years and establish a relationship of true intimacy with Miranda, so she can safely fall in love with him. As Philip Yannella notes, none of Porter's autobiographical characters can "maintain viable

[3] It could actually be argued that the note as well as Adam is fantasized. It may not have been Porter's intention, but the evidence of the text may support a compelling argument that Adam is a complete fantasy, born out of Miranda's feverish desire for someone to love and care for her.

human relationships" (642), and Malcolm M. Marsdon states that Miranda's idealization of Adam indicates "an attempt not to accept life but to evade its demands" (34). When Adam tells her a sapping party lives for nine minutes, she responds, "Make it ten and I'll come along" (*CS* 283). Their "joking" masks their similar obsessions, which they both seem to recognize as they discuss funerals, killing, and dying, not typically romantic topics. While readers have accepted the figure of Death as the pale rider of the title, I believe it is valid to see Adam as another personification of death and therefore as the pale rider as well. Adam is consistently described as pale; he is "hay colored and sand colored from hair to boots" (*CS* 278), and his eyes are an unusual color, pale tan. DeMouy notes that Death's "greenish color links him to Adam in his olive drab uniform" (*Women* 164), and while Death rides a horse Porter emphasizes that Adam enjoys driving cars; both are quiet, thin, and stylish. It is possible that it is not just her mother but also Adam that Miranda cannot recognize when she says of Death, "Ah, I have seen this fellow before, I know this man if I could place him. He is no stranger to me" (*CS* 270). Because one may be the other's double, Adam and Death are never in the same place at the same time: Adam dances with Miranda, Miranda sleeps and dreams of riding with Death, then she wakes, forgets Death, and interacts with Adam again. Miranda is literally in love with death.

After her first dream, Miranda takes a long bath and considers the previous day, when two men had pressured her to buy a war bond that she cannot afford. She angrily considers their hypocrisy and shows that she is completely opposed to the war. While most critics take her claims at face value, it is hard to accept her as a peace loving woman concerned about the lives of others; in each of the stories centered on her, Miranda has

shown herself to be sensitive but self-involved, selfish, and somewhat misanthropic. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," she actively mocks women who appear unselfish by working for the Red Cross and visiting hospitalized soldiers, describing them as "wallowing in good works" (*CS* 275). I believe that Miranda is not concerned about the deaths of others, she is concerned about her own death, and the war seems to represent for her the coming punishment she fears for failing to *bond* with others, failing to accept her culture, and failing to be a "good" woman and a loving daughter. This is seen in her thoughts about the bond salesman: "Suppose I were not a coward, but said what I really thought? Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war? Suppose I asked that little thug, What's the matter with you, why aren't you rotting in Belleau Wood? I wish you were . . ." (*CS* 273). Her use of the word *coward* for herself shows that she is aware that she is a fearful person, but what exactly is she afraid of? It can be seen in how she is able to euphemistically refer to someone being dead by asking why he is not "rotting in Belleau Wood," but is unable to explicitly wish that person dead: she says to him that "I wish you were . . . ," leaving the word *dead* not only unspoken but unthought. She represses the thought of killing someone, apparently out of fear of punishment, and this may be because she has in fact killed someone, her mother, and seems to unconsciously fear that she will receive the punishment she believes that crime deserves.

Miranda's fear of punishment is reflected in her second dream, in which an expression of sexuality is immediately followed by violence. In the dream, Miranda seems to accidentally reinforce Freud's claim that all dreams are wishes by switching scenes according to her wishes:

> I wish I were in the cold mountains in the snow, that's what I should like best; and all about her rose the measured ranges of the Rockies wearing their perpetual snow, their majestic blue laurels of cloud, chilling her to the bone with their sharp breath. Oh, no, I must have warmth—and her memory turned and roved after another place she had known first and loved best, that now she could see only in drifting fragments of palm and cedar. (*CS* 298)

According to Freud, dreams that occur in close proximity are often re-workings of the same situation, and as in her first dream Miranda dreams she in bed and returns to her childhood home, the "place she had known first," which may also suggest once more the mother's womb.[4] The primary qualities of life in a womb are warmth and wetness, and after becoming warm Miranda suddenly finds herself by "a broad tranquil river into which flowed all the rivers she had known," and she is enclosed like a baby in a womb: "The walls shelved away in one deliberate silent movement on either side" (*CS* 299).

However, as in the first dream, she is not *only* back in the womb, she is also experimenting with her sexuality, for as Walsh notes, "The jungle landscape also reveals Miranda's sexual fears" ("Dreams Self" 88). While it may seem contradictory to suggest that her dream expresses more than one wish, and thus tells more than one story, Freud argued that our dreams are overdetermined: they express as many wishes as possible, and are particularly prone to express wishes that our conscious minds would otherwise repress. The womb, apparently, causes Miranda's sleeping mind to consider how she got

[4] Jane Alexander claims that, except for the first dream, this story "declines to see Miranda's sensibility impinged upon by the past, her immediate past or her ancestral past" (180). On the contrary, this story shows that Miranda is completely dominated by her past; the childhood trauma of losing her mother is at the root of her problems.

there, to consider the sexual act that precedes conception. After noticing the womblike walls, she notices a phallic ship: "and a tall sailing ship was moored near by, with a gangplank weathered to blackness touching the foot of her bed" (*CS* 299). There are other phallic images as well, and Miranda's mind regards them with disgust: there are "tangles of spotted serpents [...], screaming long-armed monkeys [...] and rotting trunks of unfamiliar trees sprawled in crawling slime" (*CS* 299). However, the female genitalia fares no better: "Back of the ship was jungle, and even as it appeared before her, she knew it was all she had ever read or had been told or felt or thought about jungles; a writhing terribly alive and secret place of death" (*CS* 299). As she had earlier in "The Grave," Miranda is connecting womb and tomb, death and sexuality, in the psychological trinity that may be in all our minds but is especially apparent in hers: mother-sexuality-death.

In her first dream, Miranda had left her bed for a sexual ride with Death. In her second dream she does the same, only taking the "ride" further:

> Without surprise, watching from her pillow, she saw herself run swiftly down this gangplank to the slanting deck, and standing there, she leaned on the rail and waved gaily to herself in bed, and the slender ship spread its wings and sailed away into the jungle. The air trembled with the shattering scream and the hoarse bellow of voices all crying together, rolling and colliding above her like ragged storm-clouds, and the words became two words only rising and falling and clamoring about her head. Danger, danger, danger, the voices said, and War, war, war. (*CS* 299)

It is difficult to imagine a more nightmarish vision of the sexual act. It expresses the wish of happy sexuality as Miranda's double waves gaily to herself, but as in all of Porter's work the expression of sexuality is soon followed by punishment and death. In her first dream Miranda had taken the sexualized ride herself but in this dream she splits herself, apparently in order to simultaneously remain safe and take a risk. This splitting is explained by Freud's theory of the uncanny, according to which we create doubles when we feel ambivalent about something, particularly when we feel ambivalent about death or sexuality. Freud further argues that a particular source of uncanny feelings are female genitalia, including the mother's womb.

Immediately following this second dream, Miranda awakes to see yet another vision of what she had expressed in her dream: "There was her door half open, Adam standing with his hand on the knob, and Miss Hobbe with her face all out of shape with terror was crying shrilly, 'I tell you, they must come for her *now*, or I'll put her on the sidewalk'" (*CS* 299). It seems possible that this half open door signals the entrance to Miranda's sexuality, which her ambivalence allows to be neither fully closed nor fully open, and the knob that Adam holds in his hand needs no explanation. It is significant that he is followed immediately by the motherly Miss Hobbe, who had earlier treated Miranda like a daughter, saying to her, "My dear *child* [...] what is the matter?" (*CS* 298). When Miranda told her she had influenza, Miss Hobbe had responded like a mother: "'*Horrors,*' said Miss Hobbe, in a whisper, and the tray wavered in her hands. 'Go back to bed at once . . . go at *once!*'" (*CS* 298). After her "child" expresses her powerful sexuality, however, the mother-figure's attitude suddenly changes, and she wants to put her not only out of the bed but out of the house. While she could not have

known Miranda's dream, she would likely have been suspicious of Adam's familiarity with Miranda and to have wondered about the implications of his willingness to walk into her room without knocking. When Adam tells Miss Hobbe that he will look after Miranda, Miss Hobbe shows her suspicious nature: "'Yes, you'll look after her, I can see that,' said Miss Hobbe, in a particularly unpleasant tone" (*CS* 299). This dream and its coda suggest that the mother punishes a daughter's sexuality with death, but (as will be shown) as the story progresses it seems to investigate the possibility that an ideal mother will do the reverse.

If Adam represents death, as I have argued, that does not imply that he only represents death. Just as dreams are overdetermined, so are stories, and so are the characters within stories; this is what makes this story interesting, for it cannot be reduced to one meaning but is open to a multitude of supportable readings. Miranda's love for Adam may signify that she is in love with death, and this is not a new experience for her. Throughout Miranda's saga, whenever she deals with death she also deals with sex: around puberty, around the time of her marriage (and probable loss of virginity), and now around the time of her first love. Adam is obviously an ideal match for her, but she cannot admit her love for him until she believes she is dying. While there is a good deal of religious imagery to support George Cheatham's well-argued claim that Adam is a Christ figure ("Fall and Redemption" 397), while the story makes sense as a tragic story about a man and a woman in love, and while I have argued that Adam represents death, I believe we can better understand it if we see what else Adam symbolizes in the context of the earlier Miranda stories.

In the earlier stories, Miranda is often hostile; she shows no real love for anyone. She often seems withdrawn, silent, and isolated. Janis Stout notes that with Miranda "The things that matter most she keeps inside" ("Miranda's Guarded Speech" 272), and Miranda very rarely speaks of her mother, though she is obsessed with other female relatives, and she often thinks of death. Her attitude toward older women like her grandmother and Mother Muller is covertly ambivalent. Her mother, then, is closely tied to her death-wish, for Miranda may want to die to punish herself for her mother's death and thus avoid the mother's vengeance, to understand her mother's death, or to punish her mother for "jilting" her. Then, in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," she prepares to die only to be saved by Adam.

George and Willene Hendrick claims that Adam is "masculinity personified" (61), John Hardy states that he embodies ideal masculinity (78), and Darlene Unrue says "he represents ideal American manhood" (*Truth* 158); this implies that he is simply a sexual fantasy. However, to read Miranda's relationship with Adam as a simply romantic one would, in my opinion, be a great mistake. There is nothing particularly sexual about their relationship, and except for a kiss and a dance they seem to have no romantic physical contact, despite the facts that the divorced Miranda is sexually experienced and that they both believe that at least Adam will be dying very soon. Their intimacy is emotional, not physical, and I believe Adam's behavior might be more accurately described as feminine and nurturing than as masculine and aggressive. According to Anne Goodwyn Jones, their relationship revises the traditional gender roles, for it is Miranda's work schedule that determines when they will meet and what they will do (144).

Adam, who resembles Miranda closely enough to be a relative, brings her medicine, juice, ice cream, and a thermometer, and when she vomits he "without a word and with a very concerned expression washed her face with a wet towel" (*CS* 234). Miranda tells him "That's what they always did at home" (*CS* 234). He calls the hospital to see if they have a room, and he tells Miranda, "They haven't even got a baby crib" (*CS* 236). Miranda calls him beautiful, and Adam responds that that is an odd word for him. She tells him she loves him, and he says he has loved her for a long time, despite the fact that they met just ten days previously. Later he kisses "her on the cheek and forehead with a kind of accustomedness, as if he had been kissing her for years" (*CS* 243). Adam acts as her *mother*.[5] And Miranda responds to him as if he is the reincarnation of her mother, telling him he is "Already the returned hero, and don't I wish you were" (*CS* 283).

Freud argues in "Mourning and Melancholia" that profound mourning involves a loss of interest in everything that does not concern the dead loved one, and a loss of capacity to adopt a new love interest (244). When we consider Miranda's life as a whole, we see that she has always been in mourning. She was most interested in death and in the social behavior of the previous generation of women, two topics directly related to her mother. And she was unable to care deeply for anyone, even her own family. But she can love Adam because she has progressed to the conclusion of mourning, and because he behaves like her mother, and therefore she can love him without betraying her mother. She tells Adam she has had a very sad life, and she says "for all this time I was getting

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[5] This is noted but not explored by Mary Gordon, who states that when Miranda falls ill Adam "nurses her with the tenderness of the mother she still yearns for" (18).

ready for something that was going to happen later" (*CS* 237); she was getting ready for her death.

As Adam cares for her, the usually silent Miranda makes what is for her an unusual suggestion: "Let's talk. Let's tell each other what we meant to do" (*CS* 302). Adam's failure to correct her use of the past tense indicates that he too expects at least one of them to die, but their discussion shows that despite their self-destructive behavior neither of them wants to die. Miranda tells him, "You'd get the notion I had a very sad life [. . .] and perhaps it was, but I'd be glad enough to have it now" (*CS* 302). A moment later, she asks an extremely uncharacteristic question: "Don't you love being alive?" (*CS* 302) and states her love of weather, color, sounds, and smells. This shows the human tendency to desire what one is losing, and it also shows that her death wish is not a wish for actual death but is a disguised wish to avoid (by seeming to wish for) the death she unconsciously believes she will be punished with.

The idea that Miranda believes she will be unfairly punished with death is seen in the special attention Porter focuses on innocent victims throughout the story: a bond salesman speaks of "martyred Belgium" (*CS* 273), Miranda wonders if she will be jailed for refusing to buy bonds, she remembers being demoted to a job she dislikes for an act of kindness, and she has become "hardened to stories of personal disaster, of outrageous accusations and extraordinarily bitter penalties that had grown monstrously out of [unimportant] incidents" (*CS* 278). Whenever the war is mentioned, pressure to be a martyr is usually mentioned as well. Miranda implies that she does not want to sacrifice herself when she speaks of putting more than the suggested one lump of sugar in her coffee: "I'll have two or none; that's the kind of martyr I'm being" (*CS* 281), and later

she seems disappointed when her friend Towney stops rebelling against the war: "Towney was now all open-faced glory and goodness, willing to sacrifice herself for her country" (*CS* 286). As she walks in a crowd she thinks "we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why?" (*CS* 291). One answer is fear—we let ourselves be destroyed out of fear of dying itself—but another answer is that Miranda unconsciously believes she may deserve it.

After speaking to Adam about her love of life, Miranda seems to consider why her life is being taken from her, and how she can avoid her fate: "'Do you remember any prayers?' she asked him suddenly" (*CS* 302). Miranda should know many prayers from the Catholic convent education described in "Old Mortality" despite the fact that she is not religious, and these prayers would cover a variety of topics. The prayers she does remember, however, focus on death and on our need for forgiveness of sins: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Confiteor, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, and Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild. Miranda claims to know a prayer that begins with the words "O Apollo," and even asks Adam if he'd like to hear it. Adam says no, and the prayer cannot be identified with certainty, but the best known such prayer is Cassandra's prayer from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* in which she cries woe to Apollo for destroying her by bringing her to a house in which parents have killed their children. Miranda asks Adam if he remembers the prayer that begins "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John / Bless the bed that I lie on." Adam does not remember it, and while Miranda does not finish it the reader may realize that this children's prayer ends with a request for four angels: "One to watch and one to pray / And two to bear my soul away." It would seem natural enough for a dying

person to pray for divine assistance in reaching heaven, but there is just as much emphasis in these prayers on the desire to avoid punishment through forgiveness of sins.

After her rather flaccid attempt to pray, Miranda and Adam attempt to sing a Negro spiritual that supposedly begins "Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away" (*CS* 303). They both seem anxious to sing the song, but Adam claims he cannot remember the next line. Miranda then attempts to sing, but is mysteriously unable to sing the second line as well: "'Pale horse, pale rider [...] done taken my lover away—' [...]. But we ought to get on with it. What's the next line?" (*CS* 303-304). Freud explains that we consciously forget things that are too traumatic to remember, though an awareness of anything repressed remains in our unconscious minds. Adam indicates the trauma that Miranda is repressing when he suddenly remembers the rest of the song: "'There's a lot more to it than that,' said Adam, 'about forty verses, the rider done taken away mammy, pappy, brother, sister, the whole family besides the lover—'" (*CS* 304). Presumably, considering the order of deaths provided by Adam, the line of the song that Miranda has repressed is concerned with the death of the mother; Adam has little need to repress this because his own mother is alive.

Every critic who mentions this song assumes that it is an actual song, but as far as I have been able to discover, the song Miranda sings does not actually exist. Porter's original title for this story was "Pale Horse and Pale Rider," and if an actual song began with the worlds "Pale horse, pale rider," as the song in the story does, presumably Porter would have chosen that more poetic phrasing for her title from the start. Further, the only lines of the song quoted by critics are the lines provided in the story. Porter apparently made up the song, although there is a similar old spiritual entitled "Pale Horse and His

Rider," which Porter would likely have known and which begins with lines Miranda would likewise want to forget: "Listen poor sinner you're drifting away / From the dear Savior who's pleading today."[6] When Adam starts to list the people who have died in the song they have been attempting to sing, Miranda interrupts him to insist on one thing: "But not the singer, not yet [...]. Death always leaves one singer to mourn. 'Death [...], oh, leave one singer to mourn—'" (*CS* 304). It is not characteristic of Miranda to interrupt people, and one would expect her to be especially hesitant to interrupt Adam, but she seems driven to insist that the song implies that one of them will survive, and she suggests that *she* will be the surviving singer by taking over the singing from Adam, though Adam as well shows his desire to avoid death by in turn interrupting Miranda to sing a line implying that *he* will be the one to survive: "Pale horse, pale rider [...] done taken my lover away!" (*CS* 304), ending with an exclamation point that implies his triumph. Despite their earlier self-destructive behavior, both Miranda and Adam now seem anxious to survive.

They also seem aware that one of them must die, and this apparently allows them to finally declare their love for each other: there is no risk that this ten day relationship will turn into a real relationship or that one of them will reject the other. Once more Adam acts like her mother, treating her as a mother would a child who does not want to go to sleep: "He pulled the covers about her and held her, and said, 'Go to sleep, darling,

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[6] As noted previously, Revelations mentions the horse's pale color but not the rider's, which makes it unlikely that an actual spiritual would add such a detail. One can only wonder what exactly Jane DeMouy was singing when she sat with Porter at her death bed: "I sing what I can: 'Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my love from me...' and tell her she will finally be with Alex, the lover she lost in 1918; that her mother, her sisters, Gay and Mary Alice, her grandmother and her father will all be there to welcome her with shining eyes" ("Elegy" 510). DeMouy possibly sings what she *can* because there is nothing more than that first line, and it is hard to imagine what Porter's thoughts must have been as she lay dying while DeMouy tried to sing a nonexistent song, told her she was going to meet a man she had hardly known sixty years before, and reminded her that she was soon going to face the parents she felt such fear and ambivalence towards.

darling, if you will go to sleep now for one hour I will wake you up and bring you hot coffee and tomorrow we will find somebody to help. I love you, go to sleep—'" (*CS* 304). Miranda floats off to sleep and into her third dream.

In her first two dreams Miranda had dreamed of returning to her childhood home and of having a covertly sexual experience. The sexuality of the first dream is ominous but controlled, the sexuality of the second dream is frightening but vague, and the sexuality of her third dream will be not only frightening but deadly. When she falls asleep Miranda dreams that she is in "an angry dangerous wood full of inhuman concealed voices singing sharply like the whine of arrows and she saw Adam transfixed by a flight of these singing arrows that struck him in the heart and passed shrilly cutting their path through the leaves" (*CS* 304-305). These voices that turn into arrows are no doubt partly a reference to the war propaganda she finds so offensive, but the word *singing*, repeated twice, suggests that Miranda, who has just finished singing, has some repressed anger at Adam, possibly due to his playing the part of the mother toward whom she feels ambivalence. Thomas Walsh notes that "Miranda's premonitions have their source, not in unjustified hindsight or in wartime uncertainty, but in her unconscious desire that Adam die, for she fears love" (*Mexico* 185). After the first flight of arrows, "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" (*CS* 305). Noting that he is named Adam, most critics read this as a reference to Christ, the New Adam. This seems valid, for a death-obsessed person would wish for Christ to both appear and

be resurrected so that death is defeated, but the manner in which Adam bounces up and down, being *perpetually* killed and resurrected, does not seem to make sense in a Christian context.

It is also possible that this repeated death and resurrection is a mirror of Miranda's feelings about her mother, who died for her but who is continually coming back as Miranda obsessively remembers her and repeatedly acts out the trauma and the self-destructive urge that were the results of her mother's death. What she has not done is *work through* her mother's death—she can only repeat it. In the dream, Miranda rushes in front of Adam 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 yet she lived" (*CS* 305). Even though Adam is Christ-like, it is unlikely that Miranda (who has little apparent religious feeling) would want to die for him because he is Christ. And if she is willing to die out of romantic love for this man she has known for only ten days, that seems almost as unlikely. As S.H. Poss points out, Miranda's failure to die with Adam signals her "final inability to share, even with the man she loves: she is the ultimate solipsist" (24). But if for her Adam represents her mother, as the fact that she behaves "like a child" suggests, then it is more believable that she would immediately rush to save him, be willing to trade her life for his, and be left "broken hearted" (and guilt ridden) when he finally dies and does not return. Although Adam is dead, "she still lived, and the wood whistled and sang and shouted, every branch and leaf and blade of grass had its own terrible accusing voice" (*CS* 305). Foreshadowing the ending of the story, and as in the song she sings, she is the one singer left to mourn.

If Adam's death represents the mother's death, why does he fall and rise twice, only to die after the third volley? The mother did not die three times. But Christ did not die three times either, and despite Porter's claim in a letter that "Miranda's dream takes in something of the Adonis legend too—he was transfixed by arrows to a tree in a wood, remember? One of the origins of the Crucifixion legend" (*Letters* 547) and DeMouy's argument that Adam is Adonis (*Women* 163-164), Adonis did not die three times. In fact, Adonis died once, not after being shot with arrows, but after being gored by a wild boar. Porter's probably unconscious mistake here, Freud might argue, could reflect her desire to cover up a traumatic truth associated with the three flights of arrows. The only major incident of Adonis's life associated with arrows was not at his death but at his *birth*, and Porter's confusion of the two may once again indicate her tendency to link tomb with womb. According to one version of the myth, Adonis's mother Myrrha tricked her own father into committing incest with her; when her father discovered the deception, he chased Myrrha into a forest where Aphrodite hid her by changing her into a tree. The father struck the tree with an arrow, causing the tree to open and Adonis to be born.

It does not take imagination to see the symbolism behind a man who shoots an arrow and ends up with a son. The shooting of arrows in Miranda's dream, then, can be regarded from a psychoanalytic perspective as her father's impregnation of her mother, who is represented by the feminine Adam. The remaining mystery here is why there are three flights of arrows, and why Adam dies only after the third one, but this is solvable: Miranda's mother was pregnant three times. The father's first flight of arrows resulted in Maria, the second led to Paul, and the third engendered Miranda, and while the mother recovered from the first two births she died giving birth to Miranda. The story's repeated

references to Adam (and thus the mother) as a sacrificial lamb, along with the parallels Porter establishes between his death and Christ's, indicate that this dream is an effort to exonerate the mother of responsibility for her own death. Likewise, Miranda's effort to save the mother from the arrows establishes her as not guilty of killing her mother, leaving just one person responsible: Miranda's father.

While the mother is death, it is the males who in Porter's work do the actual killing. Writing a letter to a critic about "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter said, "You are quite right, that story is so completely autobiographical it amounts almost to a document" (*Letters* 177). This is definitely an exaggeration, and although Porter never admitted it her biographers have shown that Adam is largely an invention; there was a young man who helped Porter deal with her influenza, but he was hardly a great love. However, using Porter's claim that the story is autobiographical, I may be justified in pointing out that Porter's father blamed his children for their mother's death, and that he thus cruelly avoided all responsibility for his wife's death. But it was Porter's father who chose to have intercourse with his wife despite her doctor's claim that she was too weak to bear children: his children did not choose to be born, but he chose to risk his wife's life. In this story, then, responsibility for the mother's death is shifted away from Miranda and toward the father, which may explain the many hostile references to older men in this story.

Typically, Porter portrays men in her fiction as weak and inept, not as truly evil. But here older males are regarded with fear and contempt. One of the bond salesmen is "a pursy-faced man, gross-mouthed, with little lightless eyes," while the other has a nasty voice and "his stare was really stony, really viciously cold, the kind of thing you might

expect to meet behind a pistol on a deserted corner" (*CS* 272). Her friend Chuck's father is an alcoholic who "slapped his son on the back and beamed upon him with the bleared eye of paternal affection while he took his last nickel" (*CS* 286). Wishing he could have gone to the war, Chuck says, "I could have been there and back with a leg off by now; it would have served the old man right" (*CS* 286). An older man, angry that Miranda has criticized his acting, tells her, "If you was a man I'd knock your block off" (*CS* 289), causing Miranda to run away and wish she was dead. After an older man interrupts a play to give a speech about war bonds, Miranda tells Adam, "Just another nasty old man who would like to see the young ones killed [...]; the tom-cats try to eat the little tom-kittens, you know" (*CS* 294).

The apparent extremity of her hostility toward father-figures may partly explain why Miranda wakes up from her third dream and immediately represses the negative feelings it had aroused, turning it instead into an innocent story. She tells Adam, "It was a very odd sort of dream, I don't know why it could have frightened me. There was something about an old-fashioned valentine. There were two hearts carved on a tree, pierced by the same arrow—[...] this doesn't seem to be quite the way it was, but it was something like that" (*CS* 305). The fact that her mind turns the death into a romance indicates once more its tendency to link death and sex, and the familiar reference to the hearts pierced by an arrow indicates that this tendency is not limited to Miranda alone: it is a part of our culture. The Elizabethans used the word *die* to mean both to expire and to have an orgasm, and this may partly explain why Miranda steps in front of the phallic arrows and proclaims, "It's my turn now, why must you always be the one to die?" (*CS*

305). Her desire to be pierced by the arrows also suggests that she wishes to be struck by Cupid's arrows, to love as others are able to love.

After Miranda gives him her version of the third dream, Adam tells her he is going to the store for ice cream and coffee and will return in five minutes, after which she never sees him again, or so it seems. Miranda apparently falls asleep for a brief time, and when she wakes up there are two young interns in the room preparing to take her to the hospital. She asks one of them, Dr. Hildesheim, where Adam is, and he feels her forehead and gives "her a shrewd look. 'Adam?'" Miranda states that Adam was there but now he is gone, and the doctor is suddenly and mysteriously aware of Adam's actions: "Oh, he'll be back [...], he's just gone round the block to get cigarettes. Don't worry about Adam. He's the least of your troubles" (*CS* 306). If the doctor had met Adam on his way in, he would have had no reason to give Miranda a shrewd look when she asks about him: he would have instantly known who she was referring to. Further, his statement that Adam has gone for cigarettes contradicts Adam's statement that he is leaving for coffee and ice cream. I believe that this mystery can be cleared up by noting Hildesheim's next action: he wraps Miranda in a blanket and carries her down the stairs to the ambulance. When Miranda asks him his name, he tells her "in the tone of one humoring a child" (*CS* 306). While Adam had acted as Miranda's mother, he was killed in Miranda's dream, so Dr. Hildesheim must now take over that role. This is why Adam states that he will return in five minutes, only to be replaced as Hildesheim returns in roughly five minutes. And this is why Adam and Hildesheim never meet: they are the same person; earlier in the story Porter carefully constructs the plot so a doctor, possibly Hildesheim, visits Miranda to give her a prescription while Adam is oddly absent.

Hildesheim shares Adam's chief personality traits: he is quiet, direct, capable, and honest. The three main male figures of the story, Death, Adam, and Hildesheim, never interact and secede each other in the plot; they are from a psychoanalytic perspective simply three versions of the same person: the mother.

While he may represent the mother, Dr. Hildesheim, whose name is reminiscent of the womb in that it combines a sound close to *child* with the German word *heim*, which means in English *home* and is one of Freud's main symbols for the womb, is not only a mother figure. Unlike Adam, who is pale and athletic, Hildesheim is dark and stout. And Miranda rarely thinks of him by his last name alone, he is almost always Dr. Hildesheim: the doctor of the child's home, a covert gynecologist. Therefore, he can represent for Miranda not only the mother, who was neutralized by being figured as an innocent martyr in the third dream, but also the father, toward whom at this point Miranda still has unconscious hostile feelings. It may seem contradictory that Miranda's mind uses one person to represent both parents, but as will be shown by examining Miranda's fourth dream, this is another example of Freud's claim that our sleeping minds are driven to express multiple wishes simultaneously even when those wishes are contradictory.

Miranda's unconsciously hostile feelings toward the doctor are immediately apparent in her fourth dream:

> Across the field came Dr. Hildesheim, his face a skull beneath his German helmet, carrying a naked infant writhing on the point of his bayonet, and a huge stone pot marked Poison in Gothic letters. He stopped before the

> well that Miranda remembered in a pasture on her father's farm, a well once dry but now bubbling with living water, and into its pure depths he threw the child and the poison, and the violated water sank back soundlessly into the earth. (*CS* 309)

Miranda wakes up screaming that "Hildesheim is a Boche, a spy, a Hun, kill him, kill him before he kills you" (*CS* 309). This complex little dream is read by most critics as signifying the negative effects of propaganda on even a good liberal like Miranda, who judges the doctor on the basis of his German name despite her best intentions to disavow the outrageous stereotypes generated in wartime. No doubt this is true, but it may be somewhat superficial and does not explain many of the details from the dream. Why, for example, is the well on her father's farm, and why does the water sink soundlessly into the earth?

As in the first three dreams, Miranda's sleeping mind takes her back to her childhood home, where she sees an important male figure performing a symbolized version of the sexual act. Dr. Hildesheim's head is a skull, linking him to Death of the first dream, and he is wearing a German helmet. Freud claims that men's hats are often phallic, and this particular helmet with its sharp point seems particularly phallic. According to Freud, a dream is constructed of material observed while awake, and Miranda had earlier referred to a bond salesman's expected description of "innocent babes hoisted on Boche bayonets" (*CS* 293). But a dream will make maximum use of any image, and the bayonet also links Hildesheim to Adam, who had described at length his training in the use of the bayonet: "I gouged the vitals out of more sandbags and sacks of hay than I could keep track of." Miranda had responded, "It's perfect nonsense" (*CS*

283), but her mind's repeated references to it show that the penetration imagery has frightened her. Adam, then, is linked by the bayonet to Death, Dr. Hildesheim, and Miranda's father, and sexual penetration is linked to dying. Freud's claim that dreams in a series often contain the same content hidden under different forms is demonstrated in this fourth dream when we see a naked infant writhing on a bayonet as in the third dream Miranda was pierced with arrows and as in the second dream a phallic ship pierced a feminine jungle. As she approaches her own death, Miranda's unconscious mind seems to grow increasingly desperate to express its fears in order to ward off disaster, and thus the idea of a father-figure killing a baby is made increasingly obvious.

The pot of poison poured into the well initially seems like just a reference to another common piece of propaganda, and to simply demonstrate that Miranda's mind has become infected with the war hysteria that surrounds her. In fact, it does demonstrate that, and quite well: there is a medieval myth that plagues were caused by Jews poisoning wells, and Miranda and her co-workers had earlier mocked the claims of war-mongers that the Germans had started the plague by bringing it in by ship or submarine and spraying it over the city of Boston, another example of Porter's tendency to link the phallus with war, the plague of influenza, and death. But because our dreams are overdetermined, the poison in the well does not *only* indicate the effects of propaganda. A well, particularly one on the "family farm," is a fairly obvious symbol of the female sexual organs. The poison poured by a father-figure into the well, then, would seem to suggest the father's sperm, and to once more indict the father for the mother's ensuing death. The baby is implicit in the sperm and is therefore thrown from the phallic bayonet into the mother's vagina, where it will kill the mother due to its poisonous nature. The

well was "once dry but now bubbling with living water" because Miranda's mother had died but has returned to life in her dreams, only to be killed once more by the father's sexual penetration: "the violated water sank back soundlessly into the earth." The word *violated* is usually associated with rape, and there is no logical reason why poisoned water in a well would literally sink soundlessly into the earth: it makes sense only when seen for what it symbolizes, the death of the mother. The mother is portrayed in this dream as innocent, for the water has "pure depths" before it is poisoned, and the baby is shown to have had little choice in the matter, but as in the previous dream the father is held to blame for the mother's death.[7]

However, when Miranda wakes up shouting against him she sees Dr. Hildesheim sitting beside her as he takes her pulse, behaving nothing like the vicious man in her dream. She apologizes and Dr. Hildesheim seems understanding, as if he believes she is delirious, which shows that Porter recognizes Miranda's hostility to be based on her internal conflicts, not on the actual behavior of the men around her. Throughout the story Miranda struggles to hold her hostility in check and to recognize that others are not as vicious as she seems driven to believe, but in the depths of her illness she is barely able to control herself: "her mind tottered and slithered again, broke from its foundation and spun like a cast wheel in a ditch" (*CS* 309). This is why Thomas Walsh states that this story is as much about Miranda's broken personality as about the social forces that the story's critics have focused on: "Miranda's dreams offer convincing evidence that the agonizing circumstances of war and disease trigger rather than cause her despair at the

[7] This dream may express Porter's anger at the man who infected her with gonorrhea and at doctors; Porter's doctor had treated her venereal disease by giving her a hysterectomy, removing the reproductive organs she seems to have felt such ambivalence towards. An earlier doctor had failed to save her mother.

end of the story, bringing to the surface what lay submerged in her character prior to their event" ("Dreams Self" 81).

Miranda's mind slips into her short fifth dream, in which she wonders why she feels guilty and seems to observe the split between her conscious and unconscious mind:

> The wrong she had done followed her and haunted her dream: this wrong took vague shapes of horror she could not recognize or name, though her heart cringed at sight of them. Her mind, split in two, acknowledged and denied what she saw in one instant, for across an abyss of complaining darkness her reasoning coherent self watched the strange frenzy of the other coldly, reluctant to admit the truth of its visions, its tenacious remorses and despairs. (*CS* 309-310)

This vague and abstract dream seems to comment on her other dreams, acknowledging that she feels both guilty and desperate although there is no rational reason for those feelings. It is possible to read this dream as the simple expression of her attempt to remain in control despite the disease that is ravaging her body, but that would not explain the dream's emphasis on sin and regret.

Throughout the story Miranda has emphasized the punishment of the innocent, and just before her fourth dream she imagines two orderlies are escorting an old man to his execution as "In a high weeping voice he was trying to explain to them that the crime of which he was accused did not merit the punishment he was about to receive" (*CS* 308). The old man says, "Before God I am not guilty," and the narrator comments, "The road to death is a long march beset with all evils" (*CS* 309). This implies that the old man, and Miranda, feel guilty of original sin. The source of this feeling in Miranda, I believe, is

the guilt she apparently feels over causing her mother's death, but because it is too traumatic to face that act directly she has repressed it—Miranda "could not recognize or name" the horrors that afflict her, and her mind is "reluctant to admit the truth of its visions"—and is left with only the vague feeling that she has been judged guilty of some terrible crime that she cannot specify.

For Miranda this presents an insoluble problem: like Joseph K., Quentin Compson, and numerous other characters of the Modern period, she has been found guilty of *something*, apparently something related to sex and the parents, and she struggles to avoid the death that she feels will be her punishment. This would have been less of a problem for a woman of her grandmother's generation, for whom religion solved the dilemma: Adam and Eve sinned against God in a symbolically sexual manner, and consequently they and their descendents were punished with concupiscence, a clouding of the intellect, and death, but these punishments were nullified when Christ restored the balance by dying for their sake. For Freud, this is the Oedipus complex writ large, and in *Totem and Taboo* he argues that the original sin was a historical murder of a father committed in order to gain sexual possession of women; religion, then, allays the guilt an individual feels due to the Oedipus complex. In the Modern period, as religion seemed less viable, characters like Miranda were left in their state of uncontrollable sexuality, confusion, and fear of death (their state of original sin) without a psychological means of escape. Discussing James's "The Turn of the Screw" on a radio program, Porter shows her serious interest in the concept of original sin: "But I was thinking that one of the really interesting levels of analysis in this story is theological, admitting the existence of original sin, of the fact that we really are conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity. I

think that is a very interesting point in the study of this story" ("New Invitation" 226). Porter's awareness of this problem may partly explain the odd interest her characters take in religion, for despite their intellectual rejection of religion they repeatedly refer to religion and make hopeless attempts to embrace it.

Miranda's life reverses the sex roles as she re-enacts the Freudian version of the original sin by killing her mother, taking sexual possession of the father (as is seen when she steps in front of the phallic arrows directed by the father at the motherly Adam and declares that it is her turn to "die"), and is punished with guilt-ridden sexual impulses, intellectual confusion, and fear of death. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" explores that problem in an implicitly Christian context, and as George Cheatham says, Adam is "at the same time both the original Adam and Christ, and his literal death symbolizes at once the fall of mankind and mankind's redemption from that fall" ("Fall and Redemption" 397). If Adam is the original Adam, Miranda is therefore Eve. Most of the story takes place after the Fall, as the pair attempt to understand and avoid the punishment represented by the war and the influenza epidemic. One of Eve's punishments, the pains of childbirth, would have seemed particularly harsh to Miranda, whose mother died giving birth to her. According to Kaye Gibbons, "In all the time that Miranda digs beneath surfaces, she does not realize that the very act of digging will destroy anything of value she might find on her way down through layers of meaning or time" (79), but this is a naïve point of view that misunderstands Miranda's need to understand the source of her problems rather than remain in ignorance. As Miranda's mind burrows increasingly closer to the root of her problem, she must go back before the Fall, to the happy innocence of the Garden of Eden, and this occurs in her sixth and final dream.

According to William Nance, "This last dream must be approached by way of the events leading to it and studied carefully, for it is the most important episode in all of Miss Porter's work and the key to the rejection theme which underlies everything she has written" (147). In her last dream, Miranda imagines that she is dropping into oblivion. Her earlier dreams had returned her to her childhood and this is true of this dream as well. She lies "on a narrow ledge over a pit that she knew to be bottomless, though she could not comprehend it; the ledge was her childhood dream of danger" (*CS* 310). Later, when she wakes up, she describes this dream as "a child's dream of the heavenly meadow" (*CS* 314). She tries to convince herself that the pit of death is nothing to fear but she is still afraid, and she shrinks "against the granite wall that was her childhood dream of safety" (*CS* 310). She is on the verge of reversing her own birth, facing the birth canal but afraid to return to the womb, then she tells herself that death is nothingness and she falls:

> she sank easily through deeps under deeps of darkness until she lay like a stone at the farthest bottom of life, knowing herself to be blind, deaf, speechless, no longer aware of the members of her own body, entirely withdrawn from all concerns, yet alive with a peculiar lucidity and coherence; all notions of the mind, the reasonable inquiries of doubt, all ties of blood and the desires of the heart, dissolved and fell away from her. (*CS* 310)

In this womblike state there has been no original sin because Miranda has not killed her mother by being born, and thus Miranda has no confusion, no sexual desires, and no fear of death, making this dream a particularly strong example of Freud's claim that dreams

are wishes. At this point in her dream, a "hard unwinking angry point of light" appears, and Miranda regards it as a representation of her will to live; it "set itself unaided to resist destruction, to survive and to be in its own madness of being" (*CS* 311). This point of light reflects Miranda's earlier claim to Adam that she loved life, implying that she does not actually want to die, and in her dream it spreads out like a fan through which Miranda sees a peaceful beach landscape. Enchanted, she runs into the scene where the waves roll in peacefully and the grass silently flurries in the breeze. In this feminine landscape there is no conflict or violence, possibly because unlike in her previous dreams there is no phallic imagery, once more fulfilling a wish.

Porter claimed that this dream was based on her own near-death experience, and said that she had a great deal of trouble completing the story because this scene required her to describe the indescribable. According to Sonia Gernes, who studies this dream as a near-death experience and notes the parallels between it and other descriptions of near-death experiences recalled by people who believe they died and returned to life, this dream "fits almost perfectly the pattern of 'death experiences' traced by Raymond A. Moody Jr. in his study *Life After Life*, and reaffirmed in the research of Elisabeth Kubler Ross" (669). Typically, these experiences involve passing through a tunnel, seeing a bright light, and being reunited with dead friends and relatives, and there is disagreement over whether these experiences are the result of chemical changes undergone by the brain as it approaches death or are genuine experiences of an actual afterlife. Based on the evidence of Miranda's dream, one would have to conclude that these experiences are not based on exposure to a real afterlife, for her dream contains something no afterlife can contain, living people: "Moving toward her leisurely as clouds through the shimmering

air came a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known" (*CS* 311). Critics are generally stymied by this statement, and offer explanations that may seem not entirely satisfying. Philip Yannella, for example, says, "Ironically, the dead are absent; even here, Miss Porter seems to be saying, there is supreme distortion" (*CS* 641). However, if it is illogical that Miranda goes to heaven and meets her *living* acquaintances, it makes sense in the context of a dream because, as Freud argues, dreams are wishes. Miranda, afraid of death, wishes for a heaven that contains no dead people. Further proof that this dream is based more on her wishes than on any actual experience is seen in how it so fully includes everything that she in particular has reason to wish for, but that others might find less appealing: complete silence, serenity, water, warmth, absence of blood ties, lack of desire and physicality, and solitude somehow combined with social connection—"each figure was alone but not solitary [and…] within touch but not touching" (*CS* 311).

The ecstasy does not last, however, because Miranda suddenly realizes that there is one wish that has not been fulfilled:

> something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something, she had left something valuable in another country, oh, what could it be? There are no trees, no trees here, she said in fright, I have left something unfinished. A thought struggled at the back of her mind, came clearly as a voice in her ear. Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they? (*CS* 311-312)

This is read by Gernes and others as a signal that she misses Adam, her true love, and gives up heaven in order to find him in the world of the living (672), but that is not

entirely sensible. She has no reason to assume that Adam is already one of "the dead," for it would take weeks for him to reach the war in Europe and she has no knowledge that he has caught her influenza. But because he represents the mother he must die, and throughout the story Miranda has shown a mystical awareness that he will die; she does not consider the possibility that he might live, because there was no possibility that her mother could live. This may be why once she has returned she is magically aware that Adam is dead, that he died for her as her mother did—that he died for her *because* her mother did—and in fact when she reads her mail she reads that Adam has died of the influenza he apparently caught while helping her. If she returns for Adam, the trees she links with him would be phallic symbols, yet she has shown that she fears the phallus and sees it as an instrument of violence.[8] But if we instead read the trees in light of the Adonis creation myth mentioned earlier, we can see them as representations for Miranda of the womb and of femininity: trees are rooted in the earth, trees protect, trees produce their own offspring in the form of seeds. It is as if she is once more seeming to refer to Adam in order to covertly refer to the mother that he represents for her. However, despite having to some degree come to terms with her mother in the earlier dreams, her ambivalence toward her remains: she wishes for the mother, but she does not find her. This can be read as a wish, for she expresses her love and need for the mother even as she also expresses her desire to avoid her.

The dreaming Miranda dreams that she is suddenly in a stony, cold place, where she calls, "Oh, I must go back! But in what direction?" (*CS* 312). If Freud is correct, this

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[8] While many people assume that Freud believed certain symbols had definite meanings, he was circumspect about such things. He repeatedly states that individuals vary, that cultural differences should be considered, and that possible meanings have to make sense in their context. A tree may represent a phallus for one person but not for another.

wish to search for but not to find is rooted in her ambivalence towards the mother, and this may explain Miranda's reaction as she feels a hot pain in her veins, wakes up, and discovers that not Dr. Hildesheim but Nurse Tanner has brought her back from the dead: the nurse has just given Miranda an injection, and when she gives her another "the unbelievable current of agony ran burning through her veins again. She struggled to cry out, saying, Let me go, let me go; but heard only incoherent sounds of animal suffering" (*CS* 312). The doctor is present, but Porter emphasizes that it is mostly the nurse who saved Miranda, and this justifies an otherwise extraneous passage in which Nurse Tanner applauds herself for doing so and lectures the other nurses: "Nursing is nine-tenths, just the same [...]; keep that in mind" (*CS* 314). The heavy emphasis on the word *nurse* in this passage links Tanner to the mother, as does the fact that Miranda goes looking for her mother and finds Tanner.

When she wakes up, Miranda hears the sounds of celebration and is told by Tanner that the war is over. She listens to old women down the hall singing in triumph, which suggests that Miranda's mother has at last won retribution. The price Miranda pays for killing her mother is the loss of her own femininity, her own ability to love: "her hardened, indifferent heart shuddered in despair at itself, because before it had been tender and capable of love" (*CS* 315). Without the ability to love, Miranda seems to see herself as no longer feminine, and she attempts to cope with this by embracing an asexual approach: she asks her friend Towney to bring her various items that will allow her to appear feminine, such as make-up and perfume, but she also asks her for "One walking stick of silvery wood with a silver knob" (*CS* 316). Embracing for herself the violent

phallus she had earlier refused, she calls herself by a male's name and sets out to do battle: "Lazarus, come forth. Not unless you bring me my top hat and stick. Stay where you are then, you snob. Not at all. I'm coming forth" (*CS* 316).

Even as a young girl Miranda had secretly craved attention, and she had imagined herself in careers which would place her at center stage: tightrope walker, jockey, airplane pilot. Porter herself shared this desire, and she attempted for a time to be an actress before temporarily deciding on a career as a drama critic, a position that provides some attention from others and requires regular social interaction. It is possible to interpret these desires as narcissistic, but a more sympathetic view would be that these desires indicate a powerful wish to be loved. An intense wish to be loved, in turn, suggests that one has not been loved. In Miranda's case, the death of her mother deprived her of the love she still desperately needs, and her attempt to take the stage as Lazarus is one more attempt at gaining attention and love, this time with a phallus to fight off those who threaten her because she is a woman.

Without her mother, however, the world is dull and meaningless, and Miranda refigures the world of the living as the land of death, describing those around her as "dead and withered things that believed themselves alive" (*CS* 314). But the reader will realize that this is not true; those around her are not dead, they are *dying*. Miranda's death wish is not based on a fear of death itself (represented by her mother) but on a fear of dying (represented by her father). Throughout the Miranda stories, Porter emphasizes her ability to deny the truth of a situation and to embrace false but comforting views, and thus Miranda's belief that she is now in the land of the dead seems like one more self-serving distortion that allows her to avoid her fear of dying.

When she reads a letter confirming that Adam is dead, Miranda claims, "If I could call you up from the grave I would," then she realizes that she cannot, and she goes on to face a dull but new life in which "there would be time for everything" (*CS* 317). What that "everything" will involve is left unclear, for Miranda dislikes her job, is not close to her family, remains misanthropic, and seems unlikely to again become emotionally involved with a man. She is cut off from the past, which leaves her in uncertainty but also with freedom. This ending is important, because it shows that Adam does not simply replace her mother, leaving Miranda to again repetitively re-enact her earlier obsession with death, he allows Miranda to at least partly finish with the mother, to stop repeating and to face grim reality to some degree. This was apparently Porter's intention, for Jan Gretlund shows that Porter wrote, in the margins of a book which claimed the Miranda stories ended in desolation, that she intended them to end "in an exhilaration of having faced one's destiny" (442).

Edward Schwartz claims that in the end Miranda returns only for herself and immediately begins her old pattern of lying (213). This seems so, but it may overstate the matter, for it seems that Adam allows her to partly break out of her cycles, possibly by demonstrating to her how her own mother must have felt and by causing her to re-vision the loved one's death not as a murder or an accident but as an intentional self-sacrifice. Miranda's mother chose to give birth to her, despite the risks of childbearing at that time, and Adam chose to nurse her through her influenza, despite his awareness that he could die if he did so. Then, rather than flirting with death or denying it, Miranda finally to some degree confronts it, and because she faces it she is able to at least partially overcome her death wish, despite the attraction not living and thus not dying still holds

for her: "Adam, she said, now you need not die again, but still I wish you were here; I wish you had come back, what do you think I came back for, Adam, to be deceived like this?" (*CS* 317). Miranda imagines that Adam's invisible ghost is present, and she asks to see him once more, but when he does not appear and instead leaves, it implies that her mother will no longer return, despite Miranda's ambivalent desire to see her. Miranda however recognizes her own desire as unwise, for she concludes, "Oh, no, that is not the way, I must never do that, she warned herself" (*CS* 317).

This is a relatively positive ending for Miranda, because although she is not happy her state is possibly the best one could have realistically imagined for someone with her problems. Miranda's desire to wear perfume and make-up and to dance out like Lazarus with a top hat and cane is in some ways an absurd and empty gesture, a desperate play for love. However, this embrace of style, as Cheatham shows, is a typically Modernist gesture, a turning to art in the absence of religious faith out of a desire for order ("Fall and Redemption" 404). Porter once said that there are "only two possibilities for any real order: in art and in religion" (*CE* 459). Apparently for Porter, however, turning to art did not completely solve the problem, for in her fiction she continued to explore death and related themes, and her characters continued to be unhealthily obsessed with motherhood, sexuality, and death.

CHAPTER FIVE

"NOON WINE" AND "THE 'UNCANNY'"

The bare plot of Katherine Anne Porter's "Noon Wine" is not immediately promising: the farm of a lazy but proud Texas man declines until he hires an eccentric farmhand whose hard work slowly transforms the farm. Nine years later, a bounty hunter arrives and attempts to capture the farmhand, who he claims has escaped from an asylum; the farmer, defending the farmhand, kills the bounty hunter. Although acquitted at his trial, the farmer travels the community protesting his innocence, and when he realizes that even his family does not believe him he prepares to commit suicide. Few readers could identify with this situation, and few would immediately sympathize with or be interested in the characters: a lazy, selfish, and slow-witted farmer, his sickly, prudish wife, a hard working but antisocial farmhand, and a boorish bounty hunter. In fact, reduced to its basic elements the farmer's story seems pathetic, not tragic. However, critics acclaim "Noon Wine" as one of Porter's best stories, and it is anything but banal. Certainly, much of the appeal of this strange story is due to Porter's remarkable style. But the truly intriguing nature of the story lies in the story's use of what Freud calls "The 'Uncanny.'"[1]

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[1] An example of the story's potential banality can be heard in the radio production of "Noon Wine" done for *NBC University Theater* on August 20, 1948. This serious and well-meant but obtuse adaptation switches the center of consciousness from Mr. Thompson to his wife, removing the bulk of Mr. Thompson's confusion and thus making the story more comprehensible but far less uncanny. The radio version of the story sanitizes the family, turning it into a happy unit, and implies that Mr. Thompson's suicide was the result of being misunderstood. As a result, the story seems dull and simplistic, and the suicide seems absurd. Porter herself was so dissatisfied with the radio adaptation that she called it an "almost pure disaster," said it missed the whole point, tried to have it suppressed, and attempted to control any future film version of the story by setting conditions and insisting on being named consultant (*Letters* 378-79).

"The 'Uncanny'" is Freud's germinative study of horror stories and of how they relate to memory. According to that study, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220).[2] Not everything that is frightening is uncanny, but everything that is uncanny is at least somewhat frightening. Simply put, the uncanny is a frightening or unpleasant feeling brought on by the recurrence of something that has been repressed. The uncanny is thus composed of two elements that are only seemingly opposed: the familiar and agreeable (the *heimlich*), and the concealed and hidden (the *unheimlich*). Freud notes that insanity, "animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition, and the castration complex comprise practically all of the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny" (243). Not coincidentally, "Noon Wine" includes each of these elements. I am uncertain of whether Porter actually read "The 'Uncanny.'" She may have, for she closely read at least some of Freud's books and was a voracious reader, but more likely what Freud describes as the uncanny was an element of her culture, and that culture was the source of the uncanny elements found in the story. As will be shown, Freud's concept of the uncanny is crucial to an understanding of how Porter's story functions.

In "'Noon Wine': The Sources," Porter attempts to trace the story's "history to its sources in [her] blood and bones, the subterranean labyrinths of infancy and childhood, family histories, memories, visions, daydreams, and nightmares—or to connect these gauzy fantasies to the solid tissues of [her] adult professional" life (*CE* 468). She goes on to describe the actual events she used in the story, how her memory reshaped those events into new patterns, and how she realized the unreliability of memory. Writing about the

[2] Except where otherwise noted, all references to Freud in this chapter are from "The 'Uncanny.'"

characters of the story, she suddenly realizes that "almost without knowing it, I have begun to write about these characters as though they were real persons exactly as I have shown them" (*CE* 479). Edward Schwartz notes that Porter's fiction puts "emphasis upon the use of reason, tempered by a suspicion that mysterious, irrational forces working in man's unconscious mind may invalidate reason and cause him to rationalize, to delude himself" (169-70). Porter's writing process, her understanding of it, and the subject matter she chose to use combine to make her stories especially well-suited to a psychoanalytic approach such as the present examination of how "Noon Wine" works as an uncanny tale.

It may initially seem odd to classify "Noon Wine" as a horror story, but Porter establishes a sense of uneasiness from the start. As the story opens two boys, playing in the dirt of their yard, call out hello to a tall bony man who comes in at the gate, but the man does not look or speak to the boys: "He just clumped down his big square dusty shoes one after the other steadily, like a man following a plow, as if he knew where he was going and what he would find there" (*CS* 222). Something is uncanny when it is both familiar and unfamiliar, and here a man comes to a place he has never been and yet seems to recognize it. Porter emphasizes how the stranger is uncannily at home, as he is described on his first day of work as being able to swing a butter churn "as if he had been working on the place for years" (*CS* 225). While many readers would not recognize it, Porter also makes the setting uncanny by situating it in two places at once; Janis Stout notes that the farm of the story is modeled on a farm in central Texas near the town of Kyle, where Porter grew up, but Porter shifts the farm to the east, towards Louisiana. Mr. Thompson says his old farmhand is in jail at Cold Springs, a town one hundred miles east

of Kyle, and Thompson claims to recognize the Cajun dialect, which is not used in central Texas. This shift to the east is a common pattern in Porter's stories of the South, and Stout states that "She sets up a pattern that is repeated in less geographical ways as well, a pattern of the *unfamiliar familiar*. Thus the home place is Texas, and yet it is not Texas" ("Estranging Texas" 89).[3] Some critics argue that Porter does this in order to shift away from the masculine West toward the more feminine South, and to enable herself to deal with something uncomfortable without dealing with it directly, but as Stout's use of the words *unfamiliar familiar* demonstrates, Porter's setting of the story has an uncanny effect because it leaves readers feeling displaced.

This uncanny setting is then populated with uncanny characters. The silent farmhand who transforms the farm, who turns out to be the wanted man Olaf Helton, is bony and walks like a zombie. When Helton bargains with his soon-to-be employer, the farmer Mr. Thompson, he stares into the distance and "seemed to be sleeping with his eyes open" (*CS* 224). His voice reflects his status as well: "'I'm good worker,' said Mr. Helton as from the tomb, 'I get dollar a day'" (*CS* 224). Later in the story Mrs. Thompson complains that Helton never speaks at meals, explaining that "It's like sitting down at the table with a disembodied spirit" (*CS* 236). He eats very little, seems to need no human comforts, and rarely speaks or looks at anyone. The boys nickname him "Brother Bones" (*CS* 242), and the bounty hunter, Mr. Hatch, says that everyone had assumed Helton was "as good as dead long while ago" (*CS* 253). According to Unrue, Helton is associated with death because "Figuratively, Helton is a dead man, simply

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[3] Stout's use of the phrase *unfamiliar familiar* is apparently not a conscious reference to Freud's concept of the uncanny, though it might as well be. In fact, it is surprising how often Porter's critics use the very adjective *uncanny* when describing this story, and further surprising how few critics explore why the story

waiting for law and order to catch up with him, just as he brings death indirectly to other characters" (*Understanding* 79). However, besides being a somewhat dissatisfying metaphor, this seems like only a partial explanation, for Helton is also an extremely active and efficient worker, he makes intelligent decisions about the farm, he enjoys playing his harmonicas, and he displays his emotions occasionally. The reader, then, may possibly question why Helton seems both alive and dead, and Porter sustains the tension by not providing an answer. Both alive and dead, Helton is familiar and unfamiliar: he is uncanny.

If Helton is simply dead, readers can dismiss him. If he is simply alive, he loses our interest. But the notion that he *might* be dead both attracts and repulses us: we have an uncanny feeling about him. Freud states that one thing always gives us an uncanny feeling: doubts as to whether something that appears to be alive might actually be dead, or conversely whether something that is apparently dead might be alive (226). For example, were a roasted turkey to flap its wings, we would feel uncanny. Jentsch describes the device used by Porter:

> In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately. (qtd. in Freud 227)

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makes us feel uncanny. Elsewhere Stout describes the story as a "combination of strangeness with ordinariness" (*Sense* 256), another phrase that implies the uncanny.

This is the main device Porter uses to create suspense in the first half of this story, where she consistently causes her readers to feel ambivalence towards Helton. We admire his work ethic, but at the same time we feel uneasy about him, uncertain of whether or not he should be embraced. Likewise, some critics portray Helton sympathetically, while others see him as a negative force. However, to take either side is to oversimplify him: he functions in the story as both an angel and a devil.

Porter's ambivalent presentation of Helton is seen in the famous scene when Mrs. Thompson admires the work Helton has done in the garden and then sees "a sight that struck her as very strange" (*CS* 237) and that combines the familiar and the unfamiliar:

> If it had been a noisy spectacle, it would have been quite natural. It was the silence that struck her. Mr. Helton was shaking Arthur by the shoulders, ferociously, his face most terrible fixed and pale. Arthur's head snapped back and forth and he had not stiffened in resistance, as he did when Mrs. Thompson tried to shake him. His eyes were rather frightened, but surprised, too, probably more surprised than anything else. (*CS* 237-38)

This brutal shaking disturbs our sympathy for Helton, and at the same time we are left uncertain how to feel about it. Readers may worry that he could hurt the children, yet Porter makes us wonder whether this treatment is not exactly what the boys needed; early in the story the boys are undisciplined and out of control, and "Mr. Thompson sometimes grew quite enraged with them, when imagining their possible future, big lubbers sitting around whittling or thinking about fishing trips" (*CS* 234). After Mr. Helton has been on the farm for nine years, "Their parents could see they were good solid boys with hearts of

gold in spite of their rough ways. Mr. Thompson was relieved to find that, without knowing how he had done it, he had succeeded in raising a set of boys who were not trifling whittlers" (*CS* 242). Thus the reader is provided with questions, not with answers.

Freud states that insanity strikes us as uncanny because it forces us to realize that unconscious forces we have repressed do in fact exist, and Porter includes frequent references to insanity in this story. Helton's obsession with his harmonicas is unsettling, and according to Frederick Hoffman it "surely indicates a madness" (*Art* 46). Porter, in "'Noon Wine': The Sources," describes Helton as mad and as therefore beyond good and evil (*CE* 480), but at other times she describes him as a normal person who has been misunderstood: "For of course he is not mad, never was; a dislocated being, warped, out of balance, but not mad" (*Letters* 173). Readers may feel the same ambivalence towards whether Helton is insane, for surely no insane person could work as effectively as he does for nine years without some sort of breakdown; but when we discover that a court has committed him to an asylum for murdering his brother over a lost harmonica we feel that he must have been insane the entire time.[4]

Porter keeps the uncanny issue of insanity in the forefront by frequently reminding readers of the issue and by causing us to wonder who is sane and who is not: Mrs. Thompson seems possibly neurotic, Mr. Thompson may be an alcoholic, and Hatch's behavior disturbs Thompson from the start as he thinks that "this feller laughed like a perfect lunatic" (*CS* 245). Upon learning that Helton had been committed, Thompson tells Hatch that his own aunt was in an asylum, then he defends Helton by

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[4] Fornataro-Neil argues that Porter purposefully leaves the question of Helton's alleged insanity ambivalent (355-57).

stating that if Helton is crazy "why I think I'll go crazy myself for a change" (*CS* 247). Thompson later states that life is so stressful that it is surprising that more men are not in straitjackets, and Helton comments that some people "would jus' as soon have a loonatic around the house as not, they can't see no difference between them and anybody else" (*CS* 250-51). Thus, Porter makes the story more uncanny by not only bringing up the issue of insanity, but also by keeping us off balance by making readers uncertain of who is insane and who is not.

Besides her characterization of Mr. Helton, another way in which Porter creates an uncanny feeling in the reader is through combining realism with the absurd. Most critics read "Noon Wine" as a realistic story, and Porter encourages this by situating it in a specific place at a specific time; following the title, there are two lines: "TIME: 1896-1905 / PLACE: Small South Texas Farm" (*CS* 222). There is nothing vague about the setting, and the story includes numerous realistic details that situate it in a definite place at a definite period. Mr. Thompson states that one of his old farmhands is in jail in Cold Springs, he offers Helton precisely seven dollars a month wages, his wife had taught Sunday school at the Mountain City First Baptist Church, Thompson buys a cheese press out of a mail order catalogue, his son Herbert reads *The Katzenjammer Kids*—details like these encourage us to regard the story as if it were a description of actual events, not as something invented. The characters are developed, and the dialogue is fully believable and real. But at the same time the story is full of unlikely coincidences that take away from the verisimilitude: Helton arrives just after the previous farmhands have left, the extremely lazy Thompson hires the extremely hard-working Helton, the one tune Helton plays on his harmonica just happens to relate to Thompson's life, Helton had killed his

brother on a hot day just as Thompson kills Hatch on a hot day, Helton lives a relatively stable life for nine years and is then discovered to have been allegedly insane for the entire time. This combination of the real and the fabulous leaves the reader unsettled, and urges us to speculate about the meaning of it all.

One of the least realistic elements of the story is the presence of numerous doubles, which Freud says appear "in every shape and in every degree of development" in uncanny stories (234). Most recent critics of "Noon Wine" have noted the doubles in this story, though their analyses tend not to extend far beyond identifying the presence of various doubles. In 1967 Frederick Hoffman became the first critic to note that Thompson and Hatch are doubles: "[Hatch's] every gesture, every remark, serves as a kind of grotesque parody of Thompson's own nature. It is as though Thompson were glowering at himself in a mirror" (*Art* 46). C. F. Keppler, the first critic to discuss doubling in the story at length, explains in his 1972 book that both Thompson and Hatch are doubles. Hatch is a copy of Thompson; both men are loud, boorish, and fatuous. But Hatch is an exaggerated copy of Thompson:

> Where Mr. Thompson's joviality, if a little overdone, is in the main genuine, Mr. Hatch's is wildly uproarious and empty as a drum. Where Mr. Thompson's egotism is generally innocuous, Mr. Hatch's is insistent and insufferable. Where Mr. Thompson is sometimes tactless, Mr. Hatch, under a thin veneer of geniality, is deliberately insulting, with a fine sixth sense for just those points where the other is most vulnerable: his penny-

> pinching, his petty pride, his tendency to justify himself on the score of his wife's illness. (Keppler 86)

Keppler concludes that "Where Mr. Thompson is a man of good intentions that don't get very far, Mr. Hatch is a man of thoroughly evil intentions that are thoroughly efficacious" (86). While this is a provocative reading, and while the importance of Thompson and Hatch as doubles cannot be doubted, Keppler's analysis is overly broad. As will be shown, Thompson cannot be accurately described as jovial or innocuous, and his flaws are more than peccadilloes.

Keppler's reading, while interesting, is essentially more descriptive than analytical, a trait it shares with the cited source, Otto Rank's *The Double*. Rank's short and readable book is essentially a collection of examples illustrating the existence of doubles in literature, life, and anthropology. Despite its brevity, Rank's argument is not tightly organized, and his comments often come in a few dense paragraphs following a leisurely series of examples. To be sure Rank's comments are insightful but tend towards the descriptive, as in the following notation of the typical traits of doubles: "We always find a likeness which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars. [...] Always, too, this double works at cross-purposes with its prototype; and, as a rule, the catastrophe occurs in the relationship with a woman, predominantly ending in suicide by way of the death intended for the irksome persecutor" (33). As will be shown, this is a distillation of the plot of "Noon Wine," but it is possible for readers of *The Double* to finish the book convinced that doubles exist but uncertain of their significance, and these readers will therefore be limited in their ability to analyze the doubles that they recognize with the aid of the book. This difficulty, I believe, can be overcome through the use of

Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" as that work includes an extended, well-argued analysis of doubles. Unfortunately, Keppler limits his use of Freud's argument to a single footnote, and later critics, following Keppler, tend to recognize the doubles in "Noon Wine" without fully exploring their significance.

The best of the critics who discuss the story's doubles, Thomas Walsh, points out in his insightful 1975 article "Deep Similarities in 'Noon Wine'" that Hatch is not Thompson's only double.[5] Walsh points out that Thompson has another double in Helton, who is his double in that they are exact opposites: Thompson is talkative, wasteful, lazy, and proud, while Helton is quiet, frugal, hard-working, and humble.[6] Defending Helton against Hatch's claims, Thompson attributes to him every trait he himself lacks: "He always acted like a sensible man, to me. He never got married, for one thing, and he works like a horse, and I bet he's got the first cent I paid him when he landed here, and he don't drink, an he never says a word, much less swear, and he don't waste time runnin' around Saturday nights" (*CS* 247). Further, while Thompson is too proud and insecure to perform what he considers women's work, Helton simply does whatever needs to be done, and while Thompson is obsessed with appearances, Helton has no concern with what others may think.

In isolation, either character could be accepted as real, but having two such total opposites in close proximity strikes us as unlikely and makes us speculate about what forces beyond reality are operative in this story. And from a larger perspective we can

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[5] Like Keppler, Walsh uses Rank and ignores Freud. This limits his argument in some ways, but that argument is an effective discussion of the roles of Helton and Hatch as Thompson's doubles. Walsh attributes the doubling, accurately in my opinion, to a psychic struggle within Thompson, but he does not develop that point at length or speculate fully about the possible origins of that psychic struggle.

[6] The theme of Thompson and Helton as doubles is capably discussed by Stout ("Mr. Hatch's Volubility" 289-90).

see that even two such apparent opposites actually have much in common: Helton plays the harmonica, just as Thompson previously played an accordion, which as Unrue points out has a similar sound (*Truth* 41). Helton used to drink and had a wild youth, just as Thompson presently drinks and has not matured. When Thompson first sees Helton he guesses he is Irish, and later the bounty hunter guesses that Thompson is Irish. Helton cannot express himself in words, just as Thompson cannot communicate to his neighbors his sense of what happened when Hatch died. Helton killed his brother on a hot day after he lost his harmonica, just as Thompson kills the bounty hunter on a hot day after he attempts to take away the prize farmhand. Both men are suggested to be insane. Thompson is essentially a less mature version of Helton.

Besides the doubles Thompson / Helton and Thompson / Hatch, a third set of doubles can be found in this story. Since Thompson and Hatch are doubles, any double of Thompson must also be a double of Hatch; therefore Hatch and Helton are doubles. According to Rank, the double may be presented as love, but this is only a denial of its repressed meaning as death (70); thus Hatch as death is in essence the same as Helton as love. Their doubling can be seen in their entrances: both Hatch and Helton show up at the farm on a hot day and enter at the gate, and both claim to be from North Dakota. Just as Hatch is apparently able to read Thompson's thoughts, so too does he knows a great deal about the life of his other double, Helton: "Now when I knew Mr. Helton he was pretty wild, yes, sir, wild is what he was, he didn't know his own mind atall" (*CS* 245). He knows the details of Helton's crime and of his time in the asylum, and even knows that Helton sang a certain song while there. He mysteriously knows Helton's mother and speaks of her reaction when she received a letter from her son, although it is unlikely that

he could have been there. Both men are repeatedly referred to as "the stranger." M. Wynn Thomas discusses the story's repeated usage of the word *strange* and concludes that the characters' status as strangers is the point of the story: "They are unaware that in their lives they act out the ceremony of fate. We, through them, are made aware of the fearful symmetry of a life" (246). Exactly so, but I believe Thomas goes too far when he states that "The order of 'Noon Wine' is gradually sensed in the fine confusion of people's talk. It cannot be extracted; it must be left where it is" (245). Applying Freud's theory of the uncanny to this story, we can see the order behind the apparent confusion.

It should be noted that occasionally critics reject the notion of doubles in this story. J. Oates Smith writes, "The Swedish farm hand who enters out of nowhere, like the stranger after him, is not related except incidentally to Mr. Thompson. They clearly do not represent a 'split-self,' the hard-working Helton corresponding to physical drives, the lazy Mr. Thompson to a malfunctioning kind of ego" (159). This reduction of Freud's theory to a facile notion of a simplistic "split-self" allows Smith to reject the doubles, for she is actually (and unconsciously) rejecting not doubles but her own misconception of doubles. Most critics accept the presence of the doubles, and it is so widely accepted among Porter scholars that the idea has become common knowledge and is no longer cited; Darlene Unrue, for example, discusses doubles at length without mentioning Hoffman, Keppler, or Walsh (*Truth* 40-44).[7] What has not yet been fully addressed is why the story includes doubles at all.

[7] This creates a confusing situation at times. For example, Fornataro-Neil credits Unrue with ideas about the doubles that actually originated with Walsh (355).

I believe that the story uses doubles because it is centered in Thompson's mind, and Thompson is unconsciously in great fear of sexuality and death; his fear leads to ambivalence and to narcissism, which in turn leads to doubles. As Rank puts it, the double, a personification of narcissistic self-love, is "originally created as a wish-defense against a dreaded eternal destruction, [but] he reappears in superstition as the messenger of death" (86). Thus Helton delays death until it is brought by Hatch. An analysis of Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" not only fleshes out Porter's use of doubles, but further explicates many heretofore puzzling details found in the story.

The prototypical uncanny story used by Freud is E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sandman." In Hoffman's story a boy's father has a double; when the double attempts to pluck out the boy's eyes, his father protects him. The double kills the father and escapes. Years later the grown-up boy happens upon the double, who sells him a pair of binoculars, which the boy uses to spy on what he believes is a woman but is actually a mechanical doll with no eyes. After the double symbolically castrates him, the boy chooses instead to marry a woman who has been raised as his sister. In the end, however, he sees the double again, thinks of his father's death, and goes insane; he attempts to murder his fiancé but is prevented by her brother, and finally throws himself off a tower.

This general pattern is seen in "Noon Wine," though the elements are re-ordered and some are repressed: Nine years before the action of the story begins, Thompson chose to marry a woman who was an inappropriate match, like a sister. Submitting to his new wife's wishes, he moved to a dairy farm, where he had to perform what he saw as women's work. This symbolic castration, a self-punishment, is apparently performed to ward off the Oedipal punishment he unconsciously fears: actual castration and death at

the hands of the father. After nine years of decline on the farm, the good father arrives to reward Thompson with nine years of prosperity. The good father, who moves mechanically and behaves at times as if he has no eyes, also functions as the good wife, and Thompson falls in love with him. This good fortune however seems to lead to guilt, for the bad father arrives with a knife to symbolically castrate the son by taking away the source of his power, the good father, who dies after attempting to protect his symbolic son. Thompson kills the bad father, becomes mentally unstable, and attempts to reconcile with his wife, whose sons rescue her from what they see as Thompson's aggression; finally, he is driven by guilt to commit suicide.

Coincidence? A forced comparison? On the surface it can appear so. But once one pushes further, especially considering the final section of the story, which has not yet been adequately explained, Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" can be found to be instructive. First we must establish that Thompson has a fear of sexuality, for fear leads to ambivalence and narcissism, which leads to uncanny effects such as doubling. As the story begins, Thompson is performing what was traditionally considered a woman's job, churning butter. His sons are playing in the dirt and his wife is lying down with a cloth over her eyes. One can easily imagine that Thompson feels victimized and emasculated. His repressed resentment towards his wife is apparent in what he tells Helton, a stranger: "My wife, she was set on a dairy, she seemed to like working around with cows and calves, so I humored her. But it was a mistake [...]. I got nearly everything to do, anyhow. My wife ain't very strong" (*CS* 224). Later we learn that "Mr. Thompson had never been able to outgrow his deep conviction that running a dairy and chasing after chickens was woman's work" (*CS* 233). He considers things like plowing, killing pigs,

construction work, and handling money to be manly enough, "But from the first the cows worried him, coming up regularly twice a day to be milked, standing there reproaching him with their smug female faces. [...] Wrestling with a calf unmanned him, like having to change a diaper. Milk worried him, coming bitter sometimes, drying up, turning sour. Hens worried him [...]. Hens were a blasted nuisance" (*CS* 233). His resentment towards anything associated with being female is suspicious, and cannot be explained as merely a sign of his laziness. A man more certain of his masculinity would not be so anxious to *appear* masculine, he would simply *be* masculine, and Thompson's overstated insistence on performing only duties that others would consider manly makes him seem fearful and insecure, the opposite of masculine.

Some critics regard the Thompsons' marriage as a happy one; Nance calls their marriage "the single convincing portrait in all the works of normal love between husband and wife" (56), a statement I believe could be more accurately applied to the Mullers' marriage in "Holiday." Winfred Emmons claims that "There is real mutual respect and affection between them; each has weaknesses but each is tolerant of the other." Emmons adds that Mrs. Thompson is sickly and cannot do her share of the work, "but Mr. Thompson does not hold that against her. She is his dear wife Ellie, although she is not strong" (30). However, a closer look reveals that the marriage is desperately unhappy. This is partly because, as Malcolm Marsden finds in a study of relationships in Porter's fiction, their relationship "between a dutiful wife and a vulnerable husband [...] make[s] it impossible for the person whose identity is threatened to carry his inner resentment to the point of a purging quarrel" (30). But their unhappy relationship is also caused by Mr. Thompson's failure to measure up as a man. Larry Herold notes that Porter's women

typically "expect little beyond companionship and a gainfully employed mate; her men want a partner who will share the chores and stay out of the way" (103), and thus we see that this marriage is bound to satisfy neither partner. Thompson's wife seems to regard him as not quite a man when she says it is just like him to hire useless farmhands, and "She did wish he would be more considerate, and take a little trouble with his business. She wanted to believe in her husband, and there were too many times when she couldn't" (*CS* 226). Later she tells her lazy and talkative husband why she appreciates Helton: "I think it's a mighty good change to have a man round the place who knows how to work and keep his mouth shut" (*CS* 232). Thompson responds by criticizing her supposed desire to do all the talking, insulting her grandmother, and mocking her prudishness. He concludes by passive-aggressively indicating that he does not desire her sexually: "He gave her a good pinch on her thin little rump. 'No more meat on you than a rabbit,' he said, fondly. 'Now I like 'em cornfed'" (*CS* 232). It is possible to regard this as good natured kidding, but in context the disguised aggression is clear.

Mrs. Thompson shows that she on some level recognizes this hidden threat by herself pretending to joke: "'Why, Mr. Thompson, sometimes I think you're the evilest-minded man that ever lived.' She took a handful of hair on the crown of his head and gave it a good, slow pull. 'That's to show you how it feels, pinching so hard when you're supposed to be playing,' she said, gently" (*CS* 233). Porter's use of the adjectives *fondly* and *gently* in this scene serves to keep readers off balance, as uncanny stories do, but the aggression beneath the play is clear. Porter herself was prone to pulling men's hair to demonstrate both sexual desire and aggression. Hank Alvarez reports that once when Christopher Isherwood mocked her, Porter instantly "grabbed his hair with both hands

and yanked it slowly but firmly, jerking his head back and forth two or three times. Momentarily stunned, Isherwood didn't make a sound until she let go" (252). She later told Alvarez, "It was a visceral thrill that I could feel in every fiber of my body," adding that she would enjoy pulling Norman Mailer's curly hair (252). Alvarez, rather oddly, reported this in turn to Mailer, who told him, "She's about the meanest little old lady in tennis shoes that I've ever met. And I guess you know that hair-pulling is a sure sign of sexual frustration" (253).

Whether or not Mailer was correct about Porter, his point applies to Mrs. Thompson. The exact nature of her physical problem is left unspecified, but she seems a great deal like the "hysterical" women of the Victorian age who expressed their repressed sexual desires and their anger at male oppression by becoming apparently ill or neurotic. According to Freud, a depressed person may punish herself in order to take revenge on a person who has been a disappointment in love, thus "tormenting their loved one through their illness, having resorted to it in order to avoid the need to express their hostility openly" ("Mourning" 251). Mrs. Thompson seems to suffer from migraines, and her husband's vague reference to her "operations," along with the nagging pain in her side, suggest that her doctors may have operated on her reproductive organs.

Likewise, Porter's numerous references to her weak eyes seem suspicious. If Porter is implying only that Mrs. Thompson cannot see herself or her husband clearly, the metaphor is vastly overdone—her weak eyes are mentioned repeatedly, not just occasionally, and if there is not some further meaning to it her eye pain is a largely artless addition to the story. According to Freud, "anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of

the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*" (231). There is a connection between the eyes and stories of the uncanny: "Elements in the story like these, and many others, seem arbitrary and meaningless so long as we deny all connection between fears about the eye and castration; but they become intelligible as soon as we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected" (232). As was discussed earlier in connection to "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter's female characters often seem to fear the loss of the female reproductive organs, of their potential fertility, and for all of her prudishness Mrs. Thompson seems openly disappointed that her husband does not fulfill what she sees as his duties.[8]

Mrs. Thompson refers only once to her father, calling him cranky, but she has good reason to feel uneasy about the husband who has replaced him. The second thing Thompson tells his wife in this story, after telling her he has hired Mr. Helton, is that he is going to town, supposedly to buy some groceries. The wife is immediately suspicious: "'Don't you linger now, Mr. Thompson,' said Mrs. Thompson. 'Don't go to the hotel.' She meant the saloon; the proprietor also had rooms for rent upstairs" (*CS* 225-26). He says he will have only a couple of drinks, but when he returns he stinks of alcohol. The reference to rooms above a saloon possibly implies that she suspects her husband of visiting prostitutes, though his drinking seems to be the larger problem. Nine years later, he admits to the bounty hunter that he still enjoys drinking, and the bounty hunter

[8] Freud believed that women did not feel castration anxiety, for they supposedly saw themselves as already castrated. Porter's work, possibly unconsciously, seems to reject this sexist view by demonstrating that females regard their reproductive organs as no less valuable than the male reproductive organ. Porter's personal uneasiness about castration is seen in her nephew Paul's story of her horror at the idea of neutering her cat, despite the fact that the cat was spraying and thus discoloring a valuable purple sofa once praised in a poem by Marianne Moore (Paul Porter 29).

explains to him that the tune Helton constantly plays on his harmonica is a drinking song about a man who drinks up all of his wine in the morning and is then depressed when noon arrives and he has none left. This works as a reference to Thompson's life, for he wastes his young manhood, drinks too much, and does not plan for the future, eventually paying the price.

While he somehow had enough money to buy the farm when he was younger, after his marriage Thompson self-destructively allows it to go to waste. To have married his wife at all seems like a self-destructive act, for he could hardly have found a worse match. While he drinks, seems unreligious, enjoys loud talk, and prefers strong, curvaceous women, he chose a woman who disapproves of alcohol, taught Sunday school, prefers quiet, and is weak and thin. His wife's weakness, he claims, handicaps him so much that he must resign himself to failure, and although he is very proud he "knew, without putting it into words, that he had been going steadily downhill" (*CS* 234). His wife seems fully aware that he does not care about his family, as is seen when she first tells Mr. Helton about the farm: "'We always have plenty of good butter and milk and cream, that's a blessing. Mr. Thompson says we ought to sell all of it, but I say my family comes first.' Her little face went all out of shape in a pained blind smile" (*CS* 228-29). Her husband's drinking, along with his failure to support the family, gives Mrs. Thompson good reason to be dissatisfied with him as a husband.

Stout claims that her fear of her husband is groundless ("Strategies" 125), but I believe she has good reason to fear him. He has a bad temper, and his speech throughout the story is interspersed with threats of violence. He becomes "a hurricane of wrath" and threatens to "take the hide off" his sons (*CS* 231). When they anger the farmhand by

handling his harmonicas, Mr. Thompson says, "I'll tan their hides for them [...]. I'll take a calf rope to them if they don't look out," and his wife responds, "Maybe you'd better leave the whipping to me [...]. You haven't got a light enough hand for children" (*CS* 239). He continues his threats, saying "I'll break every bone in 'em" and tells the boys "I ought to break your ribs" (*CS* 240). He concludes, "It's a wonder [Mr. Helton] don't just kill 'em off and be done with it" (*CS* 241). Porter never shows us Mr. Thompson actually beating his children, and some critics claim that he is therefore all bluster and not a real threat. But Mrs. Thompson's comment that his corporal punishment is too rough indicates that he does beat them, as does the narrator's comment on the boys' maturation: "They were such good boys Mr. Thompson began to believe they were born that way, and that he had never spoken a harsh word to them in their lives, much less thrashed them. Herbert and Arthur never disputed his word" (*CS* 242). Further, Thompson's threats of violence indicate his *desire* to inflict violence, whether or not he consistently follows through. When he later forces his wife to lie to their neighbors, she "always without moving a muscle seemed to stiffen as if somebody had threatened to hit her" (*CS* 264).

Thompson may not consciously be aware of his violent hostility towards his wife and children, but the story indicates that it nevertheless exists at least unconsciously. When Hatch claims that Helton is insane, Thompson defends him by stating that his sanity is proven by the fact that he never married. Hatch, who seems able to read the unconscious impulses behind Thompson's words, responds, "Let's all go crazy and get rid of our wives and save our money, hey?" (*CS* 247). Thompson feels he is being misunderstood, but he nevertheless moves his visitor away from the house so they can

continue their discussion of eliminating wives without being overheard. Thompson tells Hatch that his wife has been ill for fourteen years, and he has spent a great deal of money on doctors. Hatch tells him that his own wife is dead, and advises Thompson, "I'd get rid of her mighty quick, yes, sir, might quick. It's just as you say: a dead loss, keepin' one of 'em up" (*CS* 248). Thompson, who cannot comprehend that his words may mean more than he consciously intended them to mean, believes he has not been criticizing his wife, but he immediately sits down with Hatch and pulls out his knife.

The scene in which Thompson and Hatch chew tobacco reads like a description of two men competitively comparing their sexual equipment:

> He cut himself an enormous plug of tobacco with his horn-handled pocketknife, and offered it to Mr. Hatch, who then produced his own plug and, opening a huge bowie knife with a long blade sharply whetted, cut off a large wad and put it in his mouth. They then compared plugs and both of them were astonished to see how different men's ideas of good chewing tobacco were. (*CS* 248-49)

The underlying insecurity about size here may indicate once more Mr. Thompson's fear of being emasculated, as does the emphasis on knives. While Thompson has a simple pocketknife, Hatch has "a huge bowie knife"; this is significant because a bowie knife is from twelve to fifteen inches long, and is an absurdly large knife for slicing tobacco. Hatch, as Thompson's wished-for double, possesses what the other lacks.[9]

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[9] Porter's equation of a knife with a phallus is seen as well in *Ship of Fools*, where a character remembers seeing a death struggle between a man and a woman who clutch together, a bloody knife in his hand and a bloody stone in hers: "Their flesh swayed together and clung, their left arms were wound about each other's bodies as if in love" (144).

This story is centered in Mr. Thompson's consciousness, and in some ways it functions like his dream. At the beginning of the story, he is angrily performing the "woman's work" his wife is incapable of, when a man magically appears to relieve him. Helton goes on to become the perfect wife Thompson's actual wife is not—silent, hard-working, profitable. Likewise, Helton becomes Mrs. Thompson's perfect husband, and Nance notes that when Helton is dead she remembers him in a mood "that suggests the mood of a woman grieving for her lost lover" (106). This verifies Rank's claim that the double can be either a messenger of death or a rival in sexual love (86). Nine years after Helton arrived, another wish is magically granted as if in a dream: "Mr. Thompson must have dozed, for he opened his eyes and shut his mouth just in time to save his face before a stranger who had driven up to the front gate" (*CS* 242). The wish that this stranger, Mr. Hatch, represents is Thompson's desire to destroy his wife, as seen by how their conversation is so heavily larded with otherwise irrelevant references to burdensome wives. However, the wife that Hatch ironically destroys is not the bad wife Thompson wishes to be rid of, but the good wife he wishes to retain, and because in stories of the uncanny the death of one double implies the death of the other, Mrs. Thompson has good reason to behave as if her fears of Mr. Thompson's violence are being realized.

The climax of the story comes when Thompson and Hatch argue, Helton comes running, and Hatch appears to stab Helton: "Mr. Thompson saw it coming, he saw the blade going into Mr. Helton's stomach, he knew he had the ax out of the log in his own hands, felt his arms go up over his head and bring the ax down on Mr. Hatch's head as if he were stunning a beef" (*CS* 256). It is unlikely that an actual bounty hunter would carry just a knife and not a gun, but Porter apparently uses the knife here in order to stress

the phallic nature of the perceived act: sexual intercourse and killing are equated, as they frequently are in Porter's work. Thompson, of course, leaps into the nightmare with his own phallic ax, thereby fulfilling several wishes at once: the wife-figure dies, the double that represents his own most obnoxious self dies, and he himself is the ultimate penetrator or killer. But while the phallus had represented power, in the Lacanian sense, its exposure implies its loss, and from this point of the story Thompson is fully emasculated.

The riddle that Thompson faces for the rest of the story is how he could have seen Hatch's knife enter Helton, for when Helton is later captured he has no knife wound. The answer, although he never realizes it, is that he sees the knife penetrate Helton because that is what he unconsciously wants to see, for it would kill the "wife" and provide him with an excuse to kill his own hated double. As if to emphasize the connection between the killing and the marriage, Porter switches immediately from Thompson's axing of Hatch to Mrs. Thompson, who is listening inside the house. Throughout the story she has expressed fear of punishment, seen in her efforts to prevent her husband from punishing the boys and in her own failure to discipline them, and now when the feared punishment arrives she overreacts: "Mrs. Thompson sat down slowly against the side of the house and began to slide forward on her face; she felt as if she were drowning, she couldn't rise to the top somehow" (*CS* 256). Mr. Thompson leaves to get the sheriff, and on the way back they find Mrs. Thompson a half mile from the farm, sitting beside the road. It would be natural to behave like this if she loved her husband, if she knew Hatch, or if Helton had been killed, but none of these is true. She reacts hysterically, I believe, because she unconsciously recognizes what the killing of Hatch represents: her husband's ability and desire to kill her.

This would explain the later scene in which she lies in bed with her husband after traveling the countryside trying to convince their neighbors that he had to kill the bounty hunter. Thompson is angrily recalling Hatch's behavior when he has a sexualized reaction to the memory: "Mr. Thompson felt the veins of his forehead start up, his fists clutched as if they seized an ax handle, the sweat broke out on him, he bounded up from the bed with a yell smothered in his throat, and Ellie started up after him, crying out, 'Oh, oh, don't! Don't! Don't!' as if she were having a nightmare" (*CS* 266). No doubt Mrs. Thompson consciously fears that her husband will kill her at this moment, but the scene is written as if she is in fear of sexual penetration: they are in the dark and in bed, Mr. Thompson becomes passionate, a phallic ax handle is mentioned, and he suddenly shakes the bed as if he is preparing to pounce on his wife. The sons burst into the room to save their mother from this return of the repressed primal scene, and the defeated Thompson leaves to commit suicide.

The fear of castration that I believe is expressed in this story is finally a fear of death, for that is what castration represents. In "'Noon Wine': The Sources" Porter claims that the ultimate source of the story was a memory from before age three, when she heard a shotgun blast and a man scream as he died (*CE* 474). But who is the castrator and killer that Thompson fears, that has been repressed only to return and punish? Critics focus on the idea that Hatch represents Thompson himself, and no doubt this is true, but it is not fully satisfying; for example, it is difficult to completely accept Hardy's claim that Thompson does not recognize Hatch as himself because he "hasn't, indeed, 'met himself' for so long that he cannot be sure of his identity" (103). If Hatch represents *only*

Thompson the story makes no sense as an uncanny story, for Thompson would not fear that he will punish himself.

If we return to the scene in which Hatch confronts Thompson we can see that the castrator and killer feared by Thompson is his own brutal father. This connects to Porter's childhood memory, for at that early age her father would have been the powerful figure in her life; additionally, she knew that her father had once taken a shot at another man, and her father had much in common with Thompson: both men are proud, lazy, and thin, and both men blame their problems on others, Porter's father writing to her in 1929 that "If there is such a thing as bad luck groping its way among the atoms . . . it never fails to track me up and run me down" (qtd. in Walsh, *Mexico* 180). Thompson's status as a son is emphasized by his name, and fear of a father would explain one of Thompson's key flaws, his sexual insecurity, for an overbearing father would cause a boy to fear expressing himself as a male. It also explains Thompson's failure to love his wife, for Freud argues that a young man who is fixated on his father by his castration complex will become incapable of loving a woman (232). Rank notes that the double frequently represents the father or a father substitute such as a brother (75). And as Freud notes, the elements of an uncanny story seem arbitrary until "we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected" (232).

Thompson dislikes Hatch on first sight, and notes that he looks like a man who has lost a great deal of weight, as older men often do. As has been noted, his personality is like an exaggerated version of Thompson's, and one expects that Thompson's father's personality and appearance would have been a great deal like Thompson's. Thompson looks at Hatch and thinks, "He certainly did remind Mr. Thompson of somebody, or

maybe he really had seen the man himself somewhere" (*CS* 244). They discuss their ancestors, whom they both claim moved to Texas years ago. Hatch criticizes young people for being wild, and Thompson makes excuses for them. Hatch claims to know Helton's family, particularly his mother, and because Helton is one of Thompson's doubles, Helton's mother represents Thompson's mother, who his father would of course know.[10] Everything about Hatch seems big, including his body, his knife, and his personality, as a father would appear to his son. He lectures Thompson in a condescending fashion, and Thompson resents it: "Who was he to go around telling other people what kind of tobacco to chew?" (*CS* 249). In these ways Hatch is like Thompson's father.

Hatch's arrival on the farm, then, is like the return of the violent father, who has come back to punish his son. This is supported by the otherwise extraneous references to violent parenting in the story, by the frequent images of castration such as failing eyes, sharp knives, and lost harmonicas, by Thompson's exaggerated fear and hatred of Hatch, and by the final scene of the story, in which Thompson's sons, playing the part he himself had played earlier, take possession of the mother and banish the father. The violent parenting, which must be at least unconsciously resented by the children, is seen in Thompson's ambivalent desire to and fear of punishing his own sons, and in one of only three references he makes to his own father: "My pa used to knock me down with a stick of stove wood or anything else that came handy" (*CS* 240). Elsewhere he states that he looks forward to his sons growing up so he can "put them through the mill just as his own

[10] Helton's mother has eye trouble, which may be significant because Thompson's wife also has eye trouble, and we tend to be attracted to people who resemble our opposite sex parent.

father had done with him when he was a boy" (*CS* 234), and he later tells Hatch his father lived in Texas, as Hatch claims to have done.

As has been noted by critics, in some ways this story functions as a version of *Faust*, where an egotistical man agrees with the devil that for a lifetime of power and happiness he will give the devil his soul. The egotistical Thompson has been married and has lived on a farm for nine years, during which time the farm has slowly lapsed towards ruin. A man miraculously appears, and they bargain over how much Thompson will pay for an equal period of prosperity, because Thompson "hated like the devil to pay wages" (*CS* 224). This man, Walsh notes, has used a pitchfork to kill his brother, and he later leans on a pitchfork as he rudely refuses an offer to go to church (*Mexico* 178). When the deal with the man is concluded Thompson states, "Well, I'll be damned" (*CS* 225). After nine years, during which time the man makes the farm prosper, which seems to Mrs. Thompson "like a miracle" (*CS* 259), the man's double appears to claim Thompson's soul; according to Glenway Wescott, Thompson recognizes the second man because he is the devil (39), Stout describes him as "demonic" and discusses his deceptive style of speaking (*Sense* 255), and Unrue claims that his status as stranger has "connotations of devil or evil" (*Truth* 43). Thompson resists for a time but finally gives in by killing himself. However, the Faustian narrative itself, Freud has shown, is a cover for the larger drama of the child's relationship with the parent.

In "A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis," Freud examines the history of a man who claimed to have signed a deal with the devil. The man, Freud argues, had difficulty with an overbearing father, and this difficulty expressed itself in his hallucination of the father as devil and in castration imagery. Freud also argues that our

images of God and of the devil are projections of our feelings about our parents. Because our feelings about our parents are necessarily ambivalent, we split them: God contains everything good about the parent, the devil contains everything bad about the parent. In this way, we control our fear of the parent and can embrace one side while avoiding the other. Ultimately, then, for Freud the devil and God are the same person, and that person is the parent. In "Noon Wine," Thompson behaves like a man who fears his father, for he splits that father into two parts: Helton the good father and Hatch the bad father. Their status as opposing doubles of Thompson is discussed by Unrue, who makes the interesting point that "Helton and Hatch are the two extremes, and Thompson stands between them and shares traits with them both. Hatch's name is Homer T. Hatch; his 'middle name' is symbolically 'Thompson,' and his surname provides an image that suggests the 'door' to the darkness of the hold below" (*Truth* 45). This is because both Helton and Hatch are ultimately the same person, the father. Defending Helton, Thompson tells Hatch, "Why, he's been like one of the family" (*CS* 255).

Thompson's part in this play is the part of Oedipus, the son who kills the father and must pay the price. This is why Thompson feels such extreme guilt over killing Hatch: he has killed his father. Without this understanding, the final section of the story, frankly, makes little sense. Hatch is an ugly, obnoxious stranger, and if he is indeed only a stranger a person like Thompson would feel little guilt over killing him. Thompson has no apparent religious sensibility, he cares little about the feelings of others, he is violent and enjoys killing pigs, and he is focused on inflating his own ego and on justifying his sense of himself as a victim. The idea that such a man would be guilt-ridden over the accidental killing of a stranger makes little sense. In fact, while 1905 Texas was no

longer quite the wild West, it was wild enough; in "'Noon Wine': The Sources" Porter describes men of her childhood fighting duels and "carrying loaded pistols inside their shirts next to their ribs, even to church" (*CE* 473). In that environment, killing a man for coming onto your land and interfering with your livelihood would have been a cause for *bragging*, not for embarrassment and guilt. This is seen in the fact that the jury acquits Thompson, and in the story Thompson's lawyer unembarrassedly tells him: "He even told about how his own father in the old days had shot and killed a man just for setting foot inside his gate when he told him not to. 'Sure, I shot the scoundrel,' said Mr. Burleigh's father, 'in self-defense; I *told* him I'd shoot him if he set his foot in my yard, and he did, and I did'" (*CS* 260). An insecure man like Thompson would be particularly likely to brag about killing a stranger, which would bolster his uneasy sense of masculinity.

According to most critics, Thompson travels the countryside in an effort to erase his neighbors' view of himself as a murderer, and when this fails and he realizes that even his own family sees him as a killer he is driven to suicide. Unrue, for example, states that "it is Mr. and Mrs. Thompson's fear of what their neighbors think that finally forces the concluding tragedy of the story" (*Truth* 95). Unless the killing of Hatch represents more than the killing of a stranger, this makes very little sense. The neighbors seem astonished and embarrassed not at the fact that Thompson is a murderer, but at his efforts to deny that he is a murderer. However, if we accept the view that for Thompson the killing of Hatch represents the killing of his own father, everything falls into place. He is like Oedipus in denial, traveling the countryside and proclaiming that he did not intentionally kill his father, and that he did it in order to save someone else. Neither

claim is true: he killed Hatch intentionally, and he did so not to save Helton but out of anger at what the man represents for him, his father. Even before he realizes Hatch has come to capture Helton, Thompson is angry at him and shows his desire to kill him: "He wanted to turn around and shove the fellow off the stump, but it wouldn't look reasonable. Suppose something happened to the fellow when he fell off the stump, just for instance, if he fell on the ax and cut himself" (*CS* 250). Hatch's effort to capture Helton merely provides Thompson with the excuse to kill him with that ax, and thus it is an intentional murder.

What Thompson underestimates is the guilt he will feel for killing Hatch, for he does not consciously realize that the man represents his father. If the court or his neighbors were to punish him, his guilt would be alleviated. But the court finds him "not guilty." Unfulfilled, he travels through the countryside, pleading his case to his neighbors. Does he want absolution or punishment? As in one of Porter's favorite plays, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Thompson is proclaiming his status as a father killer, but as in that play, and as in Porter's story "Maria Concepcion," he meets an unexpected response: his neighbors affix no blame for his killing act. Therefore, to alleviate the Oedipus-like guilt he feels over killing Hatch, to acknowledge that in killing his double he was destroying himself, and to free himself from his intolerable fear of death, Thompson kills himself. To be more exact, he prepares to kill himself, for Porter ends the story with Thompson on the verge of suicide, a shotgun barrel in his mouth and his big toe reaching for the trigger. Thus the story concludes on a final uncanny note, for Thompson will be forever teetering between life and death.

Each of the elements that Freud notes as factors that turn something frightening into something uncanny are found in "Noon Wine." Insanity is seen in Helton's past, and in the references to Hatch and Thompson as lunatics. Animism is seen in the presentation of Helton, who behaves like a dead man who can move. Thompson's apparent ability to magically conjure up what he wishes for is seen in the miraculous appearance of Helton, which illustrates his egotistical desire for omnipotent thoughts. His attitude toward death is seen throughout the story, as is his castration complex. Finally, involuntary repetition is seen in the appearance first of Helton, then of Hatch, both of whom represent for Thompson the father-figure he had repressed but whom he cannot prevent from returning; repetition is also seen in how Thompson's mind repeatedly returns to the murder. Each of these elements is uncanny in that each is both familiar and unfamiliar because it has been repressed but returned. Readers, whether consciously or not, pick up on these elements and apparently apply the underlying theme of the Oedipal drama to their own lives, which makes this story for us both uncanny and powerful.

CHAPTER SIX

"HACIENDA" AND MEXICAN CULTURE

"Hacienda" is an uncharacteristic Katherine Anne Porter story, for it does not emphasize character development. Instead, as will be shown, it emphasizes culture, and this may explain its relative lack of critical attention and why, until Robert Perry's 1965 study, "Porter's 'Hacienda' and the Theme of Change," which shows that the story is about the illusion of change, there was not widespread agreement on the story's unifying theme or frequent acknowledgement that it even had a plot. William Nance, for example, refers to it as a "strange work" and wonders if it should even be classed among Porter's other stories (49). Glenway Wescott claims it is "all a clef; mainly a portrait of the great Russian film maker Eisenstein" (*Images of Truth* 50), despite the fact that Eisenstein's alter ego is actually only a minor character in the story and despite Porter's many fictional additions to her actual experience. George Greene argues that the story is "involved with too many diverse and contradictory characters," which causes it to lack "some principle of organization" (433, 436).

Porter's technique, which Robert Mellin shows involves presenting the story as a montage rather than as a traditional narrative (48), helps explain the story's critical reception. To make the story work like a montage, Porter nearly removes the narrator and her thoughts from the story; this causes the reader to struggle to discover the meaning of what is shown with few of the guidelines she would usually receive from the author or narrator: it is as if the reader herself must become a participant in the story. Although George Hendrick defends the narrator's detachment as a sign of the extremity of her

isolation ("Katherine Anne Porter's *Hacienda*" 28), other critics have been less understanding. Porter herself agonized over the story as she wrote it, calling it a "monster" that had grown to "twice its original size [and is] still growing, expanding in all directions" (*Letters* 102). Later however, despite the critics, Porter valued the story and called it along with "The Grave" one of the two best works she had written (Stout, *Sense* 249). Placed in the context of Porter's other works on Mexico, "Hacienda" can be shown to function as Porter's rejection of the Mexican culture that had previously fascinated her. As Joan Givner notes, the story is a summation of Porter's feelings about Mexico (239). Her dissatisfaction with Mexico, of which the hacienda is a microcosm, can be explained through the use of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which discusses the functions and the problems of "civilization."[1]

In "Hacienda," the narrator travels to a Mexican pulque hacienda in order to observe the making of an unnamed film. Porter based this story of a visit to what she saw as a heart of darkness on her own experience in July 1931 of visiting the set of Sergei Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!*, a stylized documentary on the people and culture of Mexico that was never completed and that was released at that time in only a severely bastardized form; it has only recently been restored and released. Porter first published her experience as nonfiction, later revising and greatly expanding it into fiction. In the story, the narrator travels to the set of the film with a business manager and an assistant director; their trip to the hacienda is disturbed when the narrator's party is told that one of the film's actors has shot and killed his sister. This upsets the filmmakers, not because a

[1] Except where otherwise noted, all references to Freud in this chapter are from this work, which was written in 1929 and published in 1930. Freud's and Porter's views on culture may strike contemporary readers as elitist and unenlightened, but my intention is to present their views in the context of their time. I do not intend to suggest that their views of either Mexico or of any culture are valid.

crime has been committed and a woman has died but because it will delay their film and cost them money; they spend the rest of the story in a fruitless effort to have the actor released from jail. At the hacienda, the narrator observes the often absurd and coldhearted actions of its inhabitants and of the filmmakers, witnesses the unhappy marriage of the owner and his wife, learns about the history of the hacienda, and watches the production of pulque; apparently bored and disgusted, she finally leaves despite the pleas of those who claim that things will change soon.

The plot of "Hacienda" in some ways resembles that of "Holiday," Porter's only other long story told in the first person. In both stories, a silent but observant female narrator travels by train and then by animal-drawn cart to a farm which has a culture that is foreign to her. The narrator closely observes the interactions of those involved in that culture, only to finally reject it. However, if the Mullers' farm is essentially life in Eden before the Fall, the Mexican hacienda is life outside Eden after the Fall: while the Mullers produced milk, the hacienda produces a milky and unappealing intoxicant called pulque. While the farm was peaceful and loving, the hacienda is violent and filled with hate. While the couples on the farm physically resembled each other and thus were involved in relationships that merely appeared incestuous, the hacienda has been the scene of actual incest. While the farm revolved around fruitful heterosexual relationships, the hacienda's inhabitants tend toward sterile homosexuality. While the farm had one tortured "freak," the hacienda seems populated with unhappy freaks. And while the well-ordered farm was ruled by a powerful, competent matriarch, the elderly patriarch of the chaotic hacienda avoids its inhabitants by going away on an extended visit and never appears in the story.

If "Holiday" is the story of a healthy, functioning culture, "Hacienda" is the story of a sick culture trapped in a terrible cycle. Freud argues that a culture can be understood in the same way that a person can be understood, and just as there are neurotic people there are neurotic cultures. This partly explains the story's frequent references to insanity: Kennerly expects his companions to say anything in their "madness" (*CS* 138), he says the Mexicans "would drive any man crazy in no time" (*CS* 139), Justino runs away from the murder "like a crazy man" (*CS* 148), there is "some crazy law about criminal negligence" (*CS* 155), and so on. In Freud's terms, the story's characters remember and the culture repeats, but there is absolutely no working-through: like a traumatized person who cannot stop reliving her abuse, the culture of the hacienda endlessly repeats the same cycle and discovers no way out. That cycle, which makes references to "the revolution" ironic, is one in which the strong repeatedly oppress the weak and nothing truly changes, and this is clear from the first sentence of the story: "It was worth the price of a ticket to see Kennerly take possession of the railway train among a dark inferior people" (*CS* 135). The ironic narration continues as Kennerly, the film's American business manager, pointlessly plows through the crowd and leads the party away from the second class coach, which was formerly called the third class coach because "the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico" and therefore "the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures" (*CS* 135).

As he is an American capitalist, it would be expected that Kennerly believes they are in an "appalling situation of being three quite superior persons of the intellectual caste of the ruling race at large and practically defenseless in what a country!" (*CS* 136). But

this attitude, that the powerful are superior and that the weak deserve their treatment, seems to be shared by all of the other characters in the story with the exception of the narrator. Socialism, the inspiration of "the true revolution of blessed memory," has changed nothing except some names, and the socialists of this story behave no differently from the capitalists: all are concerned only with their own pleasure, with power, and with material gain, and unconcerned with justice and with the situation of the suffering Indians. This is apparent in one of the only scenes in which the narrator has an outward response to what she sees, on the cart ride to the hacienda:

> A big rabbit leaped across the track, chased by lean hungry dogs. It was cracking the strings of its heart in flight; its eyes started from its head like crystal bubbles. "Run, rabbit, run!" I cried. "Run, dogs!" shouted the big Indian with the red cords on his hat, his love of a contest instantly aroused. He turned to me with his eyes blazing: "What will you bet, senorita?" (*CS* 151)

While the narrator of "Holiday" described Ottilie as the only individual within her unified household, the main characters of "Hacienda" are all individuals, and thus are entirely selfish and self-absorbed; only the poor are united, and they are united only in their suffering, not in opposition to their treatment.

This situation would have been unsurprising to Freud, who considered communism fundamentally flawed because "the psychological premises on which the system is based are an untenable illusion," that illusion being that "man is wholly good and is well-disposed to his neighbour" (113), but it must at some point have been surprising to Porter, who apparently did not formally join the communist party but

considered herself a fellow traveler and regularly wrote about the unjust treatment of Mexico's poor, particularly the Indians. Although it is subtly conveyed, the narrator's attitude towards what she witnesses in "Hacienda" is one of anger, disgust, and surprise; she does not have the hardened cynicism of the other characters, who were apparently never idealists and thus never disillusioned. The bitterness of this story can be partly explained when it is placed in the context of Porter's other, earlier works set in Mexico, which explore the culture that "Hacienda" despairs over and gives up on.

It may initially seem surprising for Porter to have ever chosen to live in Mexico. At a time when many aspiring American writers and artists were finding themselves in Paris, the sensitive young Porter left New York City for Mexico, a violent, poor, dangerous country still suffering the aftershocks of a recent revolution. The question the art director Andreyev asks of Kennerly, "Why do you always choose these inconvenient countries?" (*CS* 140), could have been asked of Porter as well. Porter herself offered a variety of excuses for her choice, some more convincing than others. In "Why I Write About Mexico" she claims she writes about it "because that is my familiar country"; she grew up in Texas, where her father told her stories about Mexico, and "therefore the land did not seem strange to me even at my first sight of it" (*CE* 355).[2] This is possible, but she oddly follows the last statement with a claim that she witnessed a street battle during the Mexican revolution, watched the dead being piled for burning, and was told by a very old Indian woman that "It is all a great trouble now, but it is for the sake of happiness to

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[2] "Why I Write About Mexico" and several other works discussed in this chapter are available in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*. New York: Delacorte, 1970. Other works from that collection quoted in the present chapter are "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," "The Necessary Enemy," "Leaving the Petate," "The Mexican Trinity," and "Where Presidents Have No Friends."

come." The woman crosses herself, Porter asks if she is referring to heaven, and the woman replies, "No, on earth. Happiness for men, not for angels!" (*CE* 355). This is, frankly, unbelievable, and Thomas Walsh shows that Porter witnessed nothing of the kind (*Mexico* 5). However, Porter's choice to claim this fantasy indicates that part of the attraction of Mexico for her was the opportunity to witness death and to take part in a Marxist movement.

Marxism for Porter seemed to mean freedom from tradition, and the pattern of the moves Porter made in her early adulthood, away from her father, away from her first husband, to Dallas, to Denver, to New York City, and finally to Mexico, shows that she moved towards areas of increasingly greater freedom. In the Miranda stories there is nostalgia about "the old order" of her Victorian parents and grandparents, but Miranda yearns to escape from the oppressions that come with living in an organized society, and in all of her stories Porter's main characters struggle against those who would limit their freedom. Freedom must have seemed an especially attractive element of Mexican culture, as no doubt did its more open attitude toward sexuality and pleasure, and its acceptance of death.

As Jessica Mitford and others have shown, American culture did and does deny death: we celebrate youth and avoid the aged, we avoid thinking of our own deaths, we use euphemisms such as "passed on" rather than "died," we embalm our dead so that they appear to be living.[3] Yet even as we deny death, we embrace violence and killing, and thus perhaps the United States would be more accurately described as a culture of killing

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[3] Mitford discusses these issues in her classic study of the American funeral industry, *The American Way of Death*. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who first postulated the five stages of the acceptance of death in *On Death and Dying*, has attempted to change attitudes by openly discussing death and by starting the hospice movement. Kubler-Ross once wrote to Porter to ask about her near-death experience during the influenza epidemic.

than as a culture of death; this partly explains why few besides Miranda are disgusted with the warmongers of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and why in "Noon Wine" Thompson's community accepts his killing of Hatch and is surprised when it bothers him. Mexico, however, openly accepts and even celebrates death, which must have seemed romantic and attractive to a death-obsessed young woman such as Porter. Janis Stout states that Porter "encountered in Mexico an objectified version of the disillusion, fear, and preoccupation with death that had haunted her at least since her own near-death from the flu in 1918 and implicitly since her mother's death in 1892" (*Sense* 80).

Victor Fosado, discussing the prevalent death-consciousness of Mexico, states that "Since pre-Hispanic times, death has been considered part of daily life, duality, the beginning and the end, the everlasting" (431-32). The Mexican attitude towards death is displayed in *Que Viva Mexico!*, in which Mexicans are shown celebrating November 2, the Day of the Dead, by parading in skull masks, dressing as the Grim Reaper, and eating skull-shaped candy. In one scene, Mexicans are shown sitting on a heap of skulls, which may explain Porter's unlikely claim to Hank Lopez that she herself had done so (Lopez 70). In the film, Eisenstein argues that the Mexicans control death by mocking it, and it seems that Porter may well have envied such a healthy attitude.[4] In fact, something about Mexico seems to have released Porter's creative energies, for it was in Mexico that she began to write fiction, including the Miranda stories that most critics consider her finest work, and some of her most productive years were the years she spent in Mexico. As time passed, however, the dangers of the country apparently impressed themselves upon Porter, and while a largely unconscious death-wish may partly explain her rather self-

[4] Freud would probably have approved of this approach as well, for he consistently shows the negative effects of denying what we fear. The American attitude toward death seems to be the opposite of the Mexican attitude, for we are prone to deny death.

destructive attraction to a dangerous country, the reality of those dangers may have shocked her away from that fantasy.

Since Daniel Curley's 1961 article, "Katherine Anne Porter: The Larger Plan," critics have accepted the argument that Porter gradually became disillusioned with Mexico, and that this is reflected in her fiction as she moves from the optimism of "Maria Concepcion" to the pessimism of the later Mexican stories. Thomas Walsh argues that Curley oversimplifies the matter; Walsh shows that Porter's pessimistic "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" should be dated 1920 rather than 1923, and thus predates the optimistic "Maria Concepcion" (*Mexico* 17). However, as will be shown, the overall pattern of a shift from optimism to pessimism nonetheless holds.

Porter first arrived in Mexico in November of 1920, and quickly began to write relatively optimistic nonfiction about the country. In her first book review, written in late 1920, "Blasco Ibanez on 'Mexico in Revolution,'" she attacks the writer for his cynical views on Mexico and defends the country's revolutionary leaders. She declares that "one feels that somewhere along the road, early or late, Ibanez has laid down his burden of faith in his kind, and groaningly cannot make shift to take it up again" (*UEP* 30), a charge she could have made against herself by the time of "Hacienda."[5] In an article also written in late 1920, "The Fiesta of Guadalupe," Porter emphasizes the suffering of the Mexican Indians and blames that suffering on religion: "In my dreams I shall see those groping insatiate hands reaching, reaching, reaching, the eyes turned

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[5] Several of the Porter works quoted in the present chapter are available in *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1993. These works are "Blasco Ibanez on 'Mexico in Revolution,'" "Fiesta of Guadalupe," "Striking the Lyric Note in Mexico," "The New Man and The New Order," "Children of Xochitl," "The Dove of Chapacalco," *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts*, "Corridos," "The Lovely Legend," "The Evening," "Return," and "Parvenu . . . Review of *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* by Stuart Chase."

blindly away from the good earth which should fill them, to the vast and empty sky" (*UEP* 36). Apparently, if the Indians will turn from religion to the good earth, their suffering will be relieved, and Porter concludes the article with the statement that "I think to myself, hopefully, that men do not dream forever" (*UEP* 37). Unlike in "Hacienda," then, there is a clear cause of the suffering, and there is some hope.

The broad statements and the condescending approach of Porter's early Mexican writings may be partly explained by her status as a new arrival; Walsh notes that she often seems shocked by the suffering she sees, too shocked to see anything besides that suffering (*Mexico* 19). While Porter's pessimism is clear from the beginning, at other times in her early nonfiction about Mexico she lapses into what seem like wishful fantasies about life there. In 1921's "Striking the Lyric Note in Mexico," she describes good-hearted policemen politely assisting and protecting striking but peaceful and joyful workers, and declares that "the warp of humor and sanity in the Mexican mind is laid too straight to tangle in smaller complexities" (*UEP* 47). In "The New Man and The New Order," Porter praises President Obregon and declares with no irony that he stands for "An open door to men of culture and morality; a barred portal to the exploiters of the poor and ignorant, the fomenters of discord and the preachers of anarchy" (*UEP* 61). In these early articles, Porter often seems overly sure of herself and somewhat naïve; it is surprising that someone who had been in the country for only a few months would claim to understand it as well as Porter does, but that shows the degree to which she was initially drawn to it..

That same year Porter produced an article with a similar theme, "The Mexican Trinity," which seems vastly more informed than her earlier articles. In this thoughtful

article she examines Mexico's troubles and finds their sources in "the great triumvirate, Land, Oil, and the Church" (*CE* 402). The large landowners, the oil producers, and the Catholic Church work together to control the country's resources, and in order to do so they oppress the people. The crucial element is land, for it is the source of wealth for farmers, oil producers, and the Church, and by keeping land out of the hands of the people the status quo can continue. However, the people are weak and illiterate, and thus they cannot understand why they should rebel against their oppressors:

> Yet they are the very life of the country, this inert and slow-breathing mass, these lost people who move in the oblivion of sleepwalkers under their incredible burdens; these silent and reproachful figures in rags, bowed face to face with the earth; it is these who bind together all the accumulated and hostile elements of Mexican life. Leagued against the Indian are four centuries of servitude, the incoming foreigner who will take the last hectare of his land, and his own church that stands with the foreigners. (*CE* 401-402)

This is a pessimistic point of view, yet Porter is not completely cynical. The situation is difficult, but it can be understood: everything comes down to the ownership of land. Further, if the Indians allow their oppression only because they are ignorant, they can potentially be educated and then attain justice by reclaiming their land. While this article seems pessimistic, in fact Porter had not yet surrendered her romantic vision of Mexican Indians.

In 1922 Porter wrote *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts in Crafts*, which presents a romantic vision of Mexican Indians, whose artistic works "are personal, authentic

creations, by the peasant craftsmen of a race that expresses itself simply and inevitably in terms of beauty" (*UEP* 139). "In idyllic peace and simplicity the villagers sit before their door steps or under the trees, or in their tiny clean houses with their open doors, decorating jars and jugs" (*UEP* 175). In the time of their ancestors, "Moral cruelty was unknown" (*UEP* 145), "The legal or religious bondage of women was unknown" (*UEP* 150), and their gods conceived without having sexual intercourse: Quetzalcoatl was immaculately conceived, as was Huitzilopochtli, and the first man was as well. A young god supposedly shot an arrow toward the sun, and when it pierced the earth it became a man, a myth Porter describes as "the most innocent and splendid legend I have found in any mythology" and as "a happy legend" with "no death nor sin in it," adding that "Not even among the Norse peoples have I found a legend more epically simple and great than this" (*UEP* 148). In fact, many readers would find this legend rather plain, not particularly splendid, and not entirely innocent: the arrow that pierces the earth and creates a man seems to be a clear symbolization of the sexual act. But Porter's love of the legend may spring from her fear of sexual intercourse, for here there is birth without the sexuality and death she associates with it, and thus once more Mexico becomes for her at this early stage another Eden.

This tendency to fantasize about Mexico reached its height in "Children of Xochitl," which Porter expurgated and published as "Xochimilco" in May of 1922. Especially in the unpublished version, Porter has a Rousseau-like response to the Indians of Xochimilco, whom she portrays as happy because they have spurned the modern world in order to live close to nature. The Indians float about gracefully in their canoes, tossing flowers to each other and enjoying life. While there are Christian churches, the narrator

of "Children of Xochitl" discovers that they are also churches of an Indian goddess. An older man tells her about that goddess:

> the great Reina Xochitl was also a patroness of this church, and was often more abundant with her favors than all the others together. . . . Xochitl is the legendary Aztec goddess of the earth, of fruit, of abundance, who discovered pulque—especially the strawberry flavored kind!—and also made known the many other uses of the maguey plant, by which the Indians can live almost entirely. (*UEP* 79)

He adds, "Xochitl sends rain. Xochitl makes the crops grow—the maguey and the maize and the sweet fruits and the pumpkins. Xochitl feeds us!" (*UEP* 79).

This article, which is reminiscent of "Holiday," is extremely uncharacteristic of Porter. If "Hacienda" functions as her dismissal of Mexican culture, this article functions as her optimistic embracing of it. Everything that "Hacienda" presents as negative or dead—Indian religion, life as an Indian, beneficent nature, romantic relationships, pulque, hope—is here presented as alive and good. Thomas Walsh points out that the article is also mostly nonsense: the man who showed Porter the church was a drunk who offered to arrange a prostitute for Porter's companion, he did not mention any Aztec goddess, and Xochitl herself was not an actual goddess but was the literary creation of a seventeenth century writer (*Mexico* 34). However, the fact that Porter was driven to create such material for what was supposed to be a nonfiction article shows the strength of that fantasy for her: she wants a loving goddess, she wants peace, she wants freedom from worry, she wants a healthy life with no fear of death. The narrator's friend Michael notices an Indian woman and is impressed: "'She should live for a century,' says

Michael, who is tormented with neuroses. 'Fancy her inner repose!'" (*UEP* 83). When reality later intruded the fantasy died, and Porter could see only the miserable culture she dissects in "Hacienda."

An article of the same year, "Where Presidents Have No Friends," shows great faith in the abilities of Obregon, who Porter for a time seemed to regard as Mexico's messiah. Porter describes other Mexican leaders who she sees as honest and altruistic, including the leader of the party, whose "pride is in his factories and plants, where the working conditions are ideal, and the wage is the highest paid in the republic" (*CE* 414). These leaders are convinced "that twelve million of their fifteen millions of people cannot live in poverty, illiteracy, a most complete spiritual and mental darkness, without constituting a disgraceful menace to the state" (*CE* 415). Once more the heart of the problem is land, and the government plans to change this: "the old haciendas will be destroyed" (*CE* 410). Of course those haciendas are still flourishing years later when Porter visits one, but at this early stage she still believed that the bad situation could be changed through political action. Porter concludes the article with a call to action: "Land and liberty for all, forever!" (*CE* 415), a call that would almost certainly have embarrassed her by the time she wrote "Flowering Judas."

Porter's naïve faith in radical politics is clear in her first Mexican fiction, an unfinished story from 1922 entitled "The Dove of Chapacalco." In this melodramatic tale a young girl who is seduced by a demonic archbishop eventually uses her sexuality to control him and finally murders him and decides to remain independent of men. This unpromising story was followed, however, by her first success. In "Maria Concepcion," Porter's first serious published fiction, the Indians are shown as oppressed but as gaining

power through their connection to nature and their communal identity; when the police come to arrest Maria for killing her husband's mistress, her neighbors protect her until the police submit, and Maria reigns as a sort of earth goddess. The later Mexican stories, "The Martyr," "Virgin Violeta," and "That Tree" are progressively more pessimistic about the state of Mexican culture, although these stories emphasize character rather than culture.[6]

These early Mexican stories often emphasize the oppressed status of women. In another unfinished story, "The Lovely Legend," two artists are fascinated with a dying prostitute; the first man uses her for his art, and the second man falls in love with her when he mistakenly believes she has died. The woman eventually returns to prostitution, and the narrator states that "she had been cheated of her death when the labor of dying was half done, and now she must begin all over again her interrupted business" (*UEP* 217). While Porter portrays one man as monstrous and the other as a fool, the woman's lot is little better: her role is to be abused, to have sex for money, and to die, as a woman's expression of sexuality leads to her death.

This is shown in another unfinished story, "The Evening," where a man links femininity and sexuality with death: "For a flash some bubble in his mind held a pre-vision of her face, relaxed and pale in sleep on a tumbled white pillow after a night of love. Brrr! She would look like a dead woman" (*UEP* 221). Later a man declares, "The perfect thing is already dead. It dies of its own consent. . . . To be perfect is to commit suicide. The living thing is that which struggles" (*UEP* 223). Increasingly, the role of the woman in Porter's Mexico fiction is to struggle without success against the culture

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[6] Porter's major Mexican short stories, "Maria Concepcion," "The Martyr," "Virgin Violeta," "Flowering Judas," "That Tree," and "Hacienda," are available in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*.

that wants to control her and to die, which shows the growing bleakness of Porter's view of Mexico. In these stories the focus is often on the individual, but the consistency of the pattern across stories indicates that Porter believed this was not a matter of individual choices but a part of Mexican culture itself. In "Why I Write About Mexico" she states that "My stories are fragments, each one touching some phase of a versatile national temperament" (*CE* 356). The pattern of women being pushed towards death by their sexuality is apparent in her stories set elsewhere as well, but it is especially strong in the Mexican stories.

This may be one reason Porter did not remain in Mexico for long. Instead, she repeatedly moved to Mexico with high hopes, became disappointed and returned to the United States, and moved back to Mexico again with renewed if lessened hopes. She lived in Mexico three times in the 1920s, promising herself she would not return each time she left and finally leaving essentially for good after the brief visit that is portrayed in "Hacienda."[7] Thus she acted out the Freudian pattern of remembering, repeating, and working-through, and her increasing cynicism about Mexican culture was an element of that working-through. After her third return to Mexico in 1923, she was still hopeful about the people and their arts, but not about their politics.

In "Corridos" Porter declares that "In Mexico, most of the birds, and all of the people, sing" (*UEP* 195). The Mexican people are "A race of singing people . . . used to sorrowful beginnings and tragic endings, in love with life, fiercely independent, a little desperate, but afraid of nothing. They see life as a flash of time against a wall of darkness. Conscious players of vivid roles, they live and die well, and as they live and die, they sing" (*UEP* 200). Thus she sees the Mexicans as facing reality, as conquering

[7] More than thirty years later, in the 1960s, she returned for quick visits.

the fear of death she shared by admitting death, and it is the culture—the "race of singing people"—in which she still has hope. The folk songs of Mexico, *corridos*, resemble her own stories for they are "always concerned with immediate fundamental things; death, love, acts of vengeance, the appalling malignities of Fate" (*UEP* 196). Showing her increasing rejection of Mexican politics and of the possibility of reform, Porter notes that "there is not a single revolutionary *corrido*. With the true temperament of the minor poet, the folk singer concerns himself with personalities, with intimate emotions, with deeds of heroism and crime" (*UEP* 197). Likewise, as Porter aged, her stories became less and less optimistic about politics and culture, and increasingly concerned with personalities. In "Hacienda," as will be shown, Carlos sings a *corrido* focused on personalities that cuts through the political dissembling of the other characters to reveal the truth of the situation they are in.

"Corridos" includes a long discussion of a *corrido* about one of Porter's favorite themes, a mother who gives birth and dies unjustly at the hands of her brutal husband; the baby survives just long enough to declare, "I tell you truly, my mother is going at once to Paradise without a stain on her soul. And now [...] I shall follow my mother into death" (*UEP* 200). Porter was endlessly fascinated with the links between sexuality, childbirth, and death, and with placing the blame for a mother's death on the father rather than on the baby. In the Mexican stories and articles, Porter shows a growing belief that the culture encourages the exploitation of women, and while in the early stories women explore ways to gain freedom, in the later stories there is a growing sense that the exploitation of women is unavoidable.

Even though she must have been aware that Mexico was a dangerous place, the actual shock of facing frequent deaths there seems to have depressed and disillusioned Porter. In her final unfinished story set in Mexico, 1928's "Return," a character clearly based on Porter herself returns once more to Mexico, where she tells a friend, "In all my life in the United States, even from my childhood, I have lost only three friends by death. But here in Mexico, whenever I come back, even if it has been only a year, I find two or three gone . . . for all sorts of causes" (*UEP* 244). Nevertheless, she tells her friend, "I may go to Morelia. If there's fighting, it would start there" (*UEP* 244). Her friend asks her, "What do you want with more revolution?" (*UEP* 244). And she responds, "I like to see things move. But I want to sit in an Indian house and play with parrots. Good bye" (*UEP* 245). Her attraction to death draws her to Mexico, yet at the same time she is repulsed and wants to live, to play with parrots; she is ambivalent, for to act is to die, and to live she must remain static—there is no way out of her dilemma.

The sense of being caught in a trap is clear in "Flowering Judas." This story studies Laura's character, but it also examines the political climate of Mexico, and reaches far more pessimistic conclusions than had "Maria Concepcion." In "Flowering Judas" the revolutionary leader Braggioni is a not an altruist but a narcissist, and because he cares only about himself he is "cruel to everyone, with a kind of specialized insolence" (*CS* 90). The heavily ironic narrator declares that "Braggioni loves himself with such tenderness and amplitude and eternal charity that his followers—for he is a leader of men, a skilled revolutionist, and his skin has been punctured in honorable warfare—warm themselves in the reflected glow" (*CS* 91). Braggioni, apparently a representative example of a Mexican leader, cares not about the people but about eating, killing, and

seducing, and his followers likewise care only about increasing their own power. When the starving poor people he supposedly leads beg for Braggioni's help, he reacts with disgust to their bad breath and makes empty promises, only to later tell Laura that "They are stupid, they are lazy, they would cut my throat for nothing" (*CS* 98). While Porter never falters in her sympathy for the poor, unlike the Indians of "Maria Concepcion" the oppressed people of "Flowering Judas" are given no hope of resistance; even their own supposed leaders want only to oppress them.

Laura, one of Porter's alter-egos, fears Braggioni and the Mexican culture she has become a part of: "Laura feels a slow chill, a purely physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death wait for her with lessening patience" (*CS* 93). Porter, characteristically linking sexuality, motherhood, and death, emphasizes Laura's efforts to escape a violent death by avoiding sexuality, but her own body betrays her as men are irresistibly attracted to "the incomprehensible fullness of her breasts, like a nursing mother's" (*CS* 97). The virginal Laura has been infected by the culture that surrounds her, and thus she is responsible for the death of a young man who commits suicide with the sleeping pills she provides for him, and in the dream that concludes the story he can call her murderer.

As the narrator of "Hacienda" seems to wonder about herself, the Mexicans "cannot understand why [Laura] is in Mexico" (*CS* 95); Laura herself seems uncertain of why she is there, but the narrator suggests that she has been driven to Mexico by a self-destructive urge, an urge that is, Porter states in her essay "The Future Is Now," ironically often caused by a fear of dying (*CE* 200). In a diary entry written in Mexico, Porter said, "I think the truth is that I do not wish to die. And yet I have set my sails for death, rather

than to ask for help, the whole experience here has set me a little mad, I think" (qtd. in Walsh, *Mexico* 43). While Porter's Mexican stories are filled with references to violence against others, there are an almost equal number of references to violence against oneself: after his lover leaves him the main character of "The Martyr" eats himself to death; after she is kissed and then told that the kiss was meaningless the title character of "Virgin Violeta" declares "I want to run away—to kill myself!" (*CS* 30); after being rejected by his first love Braggioni had attempted to drown himself; and after a young man is refused in love by Laura he kills himself. Again and again, sexuality leads to rejection, rejection leads to fear of death, and fear of death leads to escapist suicide. This pattern is not apparent in "Maria Concepcion," where rejection leads to action, but the relative optimism of that early story is gradually eroded in the later stories set in Mexico, where the culture is presented as increasingly sexual, violent, chaotic, and dangerous, and where hope for change becomes increasingly dim.

When she published a late article on Mexico, 1931's "Leaving the Petate," Porter portrayed Indians as completely infected with modern culture and thus combative, greedy, and deceitful; the motives of the Indians she portrays have become simple personal self-interest. She wrote a segment showing some Indians who choose to retain their simple and harmonious lifestyles, but she allowed this segment to be edited out of the published article, possibly because it no longer seemed realistic. Porter's final article about Mexico, 1931's "Parvenu. . . Review of *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* by Stuart Chase," dismisses the culture she once had loved and captures the mood of "Hacienda." The article begins bluntly:

> Mexico is not really a place to visit any more, or to live in. The land has fallen prey to its friends, organized and unorganized; its arts and customs are in the dreadful convulsions of being saved, preserved, advertised and exploited by a horde of appreciators, amateur or professional. They swarm over the place and eat the heart out of it like a plague of locusts. (*UEP* 253)

Porter criticizes Chase for repeating clichés about Indians, though she herself had earlier embraced those clichés, and she concludes that the best manner of helping Mexico is to stay uninvolved: "I know better than to give advice to Mexicans, after living here for four years over a period of ten" (*UEP* 255). Porter no longer had hope for Mexico, and she soon administered the coup de grace in "Hacienda."

Porter argued in "The Mexican Trinity" that Mexico was ruled by three forces: the Church, oil producers, and large landowners. Thomas Walsh has shown that "Hacienda" includes each of these forces, which Porter "thematically integrates" into a united force that dominates post-revolutionary Mexico (*Mexico* 157). The story also includes the other elements of Mexican culture, Indians, farmers, aristocrats, politicians, artists, and the military, and thus the hacienda is a microcosm of the country as a whole. Jane Krause DeMouy points out that the subject of the story is "the psychology of a country, a whole people, a culture, which becomes an objective correlative for a psychosexual role the narrator has all but left behind her" (*Women* 94). In her insightful reading, DeMouy emphasizes how the story operates as a projection of the narrator's psyche, but it is also possible to focus on the story as a dissection of Mexican culture by

applying Freud's theories as they are expressed in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a work written just two years before "Hacienda."[8]

The main theme of *Civilization and Its Discontents* is the incurable antagonism between the demands of instinct and the restrictions of "civilization." To live together peacefully people must suppress their instincts, yet that very suppression tends to make us unhappy; thus there is an unsolvable dilemma at the heart of civilization itself. As has been shown, Porter was drawn to Mexico partly because of its potential to be a culture that did not restrict an individual's instincts: unlike in the United States, a person could be openly sexual or aggressive, for the very chaos of Mexican culture prevented it from efficiently regulating the impulses of its members. This accounts for the Rousseau-like atmosphere of many of Porter's early Mexican works, where the less powerful the impact of the civilization, the more happy are the people. In Porter's early works, Mexican Indians who have not embraced modern culture are particularly happy, and they openly accept sexuality, aggression, and death. In "Maria Concepcion" the main character murders her rival, and that murder is celebrated; likewise in "Why I Write About Mexico" Porter seems to enjoy her fantasy of witnessing a bloody street battle. However, in the later works Porter grows increasingly dubious of the unregulated expression of instincts, and increasingly aware of the need for their control. The question for her becomes how to construct a civilization that will regulate the instincts fairly and thus ensure the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number of people, but by the time of "Hacienda" she seems convinced that uncontrolled instincts have enveloped the

[8] Because this well-known work appeared before the events described in "Hacienda," it may have directly influenced Porter's writing or revision of the story. It is more likely, however, that both writers were reacting in similar ways to the social disruptions that followed World War I. Freud analyzes the modern culture that Porter portrays.

culture that should regulate them, and therefore the self-interested greed, aggression, and sexuality of the powerful overrule justice and the common good. Because a just civilization seems impossible for Mexico, her best option becomes abandoning the country.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud begins his analysis of why modern civilization seems to lead to increased unhappiness with a discussion of the function and origin of religion. This discussion initially seems out of place, but for Freud religion was inconsonant with the rational, scientific worldview of modern culture, and thus this traditional source of happiness had to be analyzed and dismissed; to do otherwise would be to encourage an illusion, and for Freud as for Porter truth was the ultimate value. Freud argues that religious feeling has its source in childhood, when the infant's unbounded ego includes the world; as the infant realizes that it is separate from the world, its ego shrinks to include only itself, and a feeling of helplessness arises. This helplessness leads to a longing for the protection of the parents, and thus the parents are believed to have godlike powers; these feelings about the parents later lead by projection to a belief in God.

Freud claims that "The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father" (74), but this claim may be the result of Freud's Judaic and Protestant culture, for a Catholic worldview would include an enormously exalted mother in the form of the Virgin Mary. This may explain why Porter usually associates religion with the worship of a mother-figure, whether that is Xochitl or Mary. In her Mexican works, Porter often makes a special effort to deride the Indians' tendency to pray to Mary, devoting an entire article to that theme. "The Fiesta of

Guadalupe" presents the Indians who believe in Mary as ignorant and miserable, although as Thomas Walsh has shown the same fiesta was described by another writer as a happy celebration, so "One wonders whether the reporter of *El Heraldo* and Porter witnessed the same fiesta" (*Mexico* 19). Porter presents the Mexicans' belief in Mary as idol worship based on magical thinking, an oddly literal point of view for a former Catholic who would be expected to realize that the statues themselves are not worshipped.[9] The explanation may lie in the early death of Porter's mother, which could cause her to resent reminders of an absent mother who seems to not care about the suffering of her children; this may also explain Porter's initial celebration of Xochitl, who as a literary creation and a representation of nature is never absent.

Porter's anticlericalism seems to have cooled by the time of "Hacienda," for one does not finish the story feeling that it is particularly opposed to religion; the hacienda is set in a former monastery, but there are no priests and no one seems to practice traditional religion. Closer examination reveals that her antagonism had not abated. Near the end of the story the narrator visits the room where pulque is produced, the heart of the hacienda:

> We walked through the vat-room, picking our way through the puddles of sap sinking into the mud floor, idly stopping to watch, without comment, the flies drowning in the stinking liquor which seeped over the hairy bullhides sagging between the wooden frames. Maria Santisima stood primly in her blue painted niche in a frame of fly-brown paper flowers, with a perpetual light at her feet. (*CS* 165)

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[9] Porter claimed to be a cradle Catholic but was in fact raised a Methodist and converted to Catholicism only when she married her first husband. She became virulently anticlerical after her first divorce, though she became somewhat more religious as she aged. She was never a devout Catholic.

The association of Mary with the disgusting pulque is reminiscent of Marx's comment that religion is the opiate of the people, and the placement of the statue at the center of the hacienda indicates that religion remains a force that allows the powerful to prevent the oppressed from achieving justice. However, not just Mary but Xochitl as well have become problematic in this late Mexican story:

> The walls were covered with a faded fresco relating the legend of pulque; how a young Indian girl discovered this divine liquor, and brought it to the emperor, who rewarded her well; and after her death she became a half-goddess. An old legend: maybe the oldest: something to do with man's confused veneration for, and terror of, the fertility of women and vegetation. (*CS* 165)

Because Xochitl is linked to fertility, she is vulnerable to the attacks of males who may fear or desire her fertility. Because women's bodies are the source of their problematic fertility, they cannot escape their oppression without escaping their own bodies. In a culture that embraces this way of thinking, a woman's only hope is to leave.

Freud points out that there are other ways besides religion to deal with painful reality. Intoxicating substances make us insensitive to our misery and thus are one means of dealing with the suppression of instincts imposed by civilization. In her early works Porter had celebrated pulque, happily exclaiming in "Children of Xochitl" that the goddess discovered pulque, "especially the strawberry flavored kind!" (*UEP* 79). But her views on alcohol quickly changed; in "The Martyr" a man eats and drinks himself to death, a drunken man in "Theft" cheats a woman of the money he owes her, Uncle

Gabriel of "Old Mortality" is a sloppy alcoholic, Mr. Thompson drinks too much in "Noon Wine," and the main character of "A Day's Work" loses his job by getting drunk.

The descriptions of pulque offered in "Hacienda" make it extremely unappealing; at the beginning of the story Indian women run beside the train calling out to the passengers:

> "Fresh pulque!" they urged mournfully, holding up their clay jars filled with thick gray-white liquor. "Fresh maquey worms!" they cried in despair above the clamor of the turning wheels, waving like nosegays the leaf bags, slimy and lumpy with the worms they had gathered one at a time from the cactus whose heart bleeds the honey water for the pulque. (*CS* 138)

It does not help to learn that Indians harvest the pulque by sucking it out of a cactus and spitting it into jars, nor to discover that the fermentation process has a nauseating smell: "The smell had not been out of my nostrils since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood" (*CS* 161).

Near the end of the story, Porter underlines her revulsion with the pulque that is the hacienda's main source of income, and connects it to the sick culture of Mexico:

> The white flood of pulque flowed without pause; all over Mexico Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; don Genaro and his fellow-hacendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and ambitious politicians in the capital would be

> stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas for themselves. It was all arranged. (*CS* 168)

The neurotic cycle in which the culture is caught is clear, for while the Indians have chosen illusion over reality, the powerful have chosen greed over altruism: the people of this culture are focused on their own pleasures, and no one recognizes responsibility for the welfare of others. Freud notes that intoxication causes us to turn from others to ourselves: "For one knows that, with the help of this 'drowner of cares' one can at any time withdraw from the pressure of reality and find refuge in a world of one's own with better conditions of sensibility" (78).

Besides religion and intoxication, a third means of averting suffering according to Freud is to displace the suppressed libido onto other areas, such as the creation of art. In her earlier Mexican works Porter emphasizes this as a healthy activity of the Indians, who she regards as "naturally" artistic when they have not been corrupted by foreign influences. In "Hacienda," however, no one produces art of any kind. The Indians work in the fields, the actors gossip, the powerful Mexicans plot to increase their power, and the bored filmmakers lounge about the hacienda waiting for their jailed actor to be released so they can continue their work. Despite the fact that it is a film set the narrator witnesses no filmmaking of any kind, just a great deal of discussion of what was done in the past and pointless speculation about what might have been done differently.

Clearly, "Hacienda" is not a rejection of civilization itself—it is a rejection of *this* civilization, one that prevents the production of art and suppresses justice by allowing the powerful to act freely and by encouraging religion and intoxication. Initially, Porter had agreed with a point of view that Freud describes as "astonishing," one that "holds that

what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be so much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions" (86). Almost as if he is describing Porter during her first visit to Mexico, Freud notes that the first explorers of the Americas had a naive view of the Indians: "In consequence of insufficient observation and a mistaken view of their manners and customs, they appeared to Europeans to be leading a simple, happy life with few wants, a life such as was unattainable by their visitors with their superior civilization. Later experience has corrected some of those judgements" (87). The solution for both Freud and Porter is to create the best possible civilization, not to destroy it.

Because the current state of civilization is unsatisfactory it must be changed, but why is it unsatisfactory? The achievements of science and technology should make life happier, and early in her story Porter describes the happiness of the Indians on the train: "They were pleased because, sitting still, without even the effort of beating a burro, they were on the point of being carried where they wished to go, accomplishing in an hour what would otherwise have been a day's hard journey, with all their households on their backs" (*CS* 136). This is, however, only a set-up for the rest of the story, where Porter emphasizes the various ways modern life has made people unhappy. Betancourt, the film's censor, is an evil fool who claims he can communicate telepathically and levitate; he "found a great deal of pleasurable stimulation in the control of machinery [...]. Speed, he said, was 'modern,' and it was everyone's duty to be as modern as one's means allowed" (*CS* 154).

The second most foolish person in the story, don Genaro, the owner of the hacienda, spends his money on fast automobiles that frighten other drivers off the road,

and he considers buying an airplane so he can travel even faster to places there is no hurry to see. Betancourt says, "Nothing could move too fast for don Genaro [...], whether a horse, a dog, a woman or something with metal machinery in it" (*CS* 155). Porter mocks the belief that modern technology brings happiness, and Freud agrees when he states that men "seem to have observed that this newly-won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, which is the fulfillment of a longing that goes back thousands of years, has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier" (88). The American belief that technological advances, capitalism, and economic well-being necessarily bring happiness is rejected by both Freud and Porter, and another, better type of civilization is searched for.

For Freud, "the word 'civilization' describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations" (89). The civilization of Mexico has for Porter served neither purpose well, for we learn in the final sentence of the story that the Indians have been starving, and the relations between people are acrimonious at best. According to Freud, "Beauty, cleanliness and order obviously occupy a special position among the requirements of civilization," and civilization must impose these values on human beings because they "exhibit an inborn tendency to carelessness, irregularity and unreliability in their work" (93). Porter shows Mexico as having clearly failed in this area, for the hacienda is ugly, dirty, and chaotic; flies nest in the pulque, pigs root in the yard, dogs roam about chasing what they please. The people too seem to have no sense of beauty; Uspensky,

Eisenstein's alter-ego, sits "in his monkey-suit of striped overalls, his face like a superhumanly enlightened monkey's now well overgrown with a simian beard" (*CS* 153). The filmmaking is disordered, and rather than encouraging order the government creates chaos by randomly jailing the filmmakers, releasing them just as randomly, demanding bribes, and imposing censorship rules that change unpredictably.

One of the characteristic features of a functioning civilization, Freud claims, is "the manner in which the relationships of men to one another, their social relationships, are regulated" (94-95). Civilization begins "with the first attempt to regulate these social relationships. If the attempt were not made, the relationships would be subject to the arbitrary will of the individual: that is to say, the physically stronger man would decide them in the sense of his own interests and instinctual impulses" (95). At the hacienda, social relationships are not regulated in any manner, and as Freud would predict the powerful form relationships that suit their own needs and instincts; the judge bargains for a bribe, a brother has intercourse with his sister and kills her, don Genaro uses his position to sell his milk for twice the market value. Each individual does as he or she pleases, to the degree that his or her power allows, and the community passively accepts it. Freud notes that the "replacement of the power of the individual by the power of the community constitutes the decisive step of civilization" (95), and this step has simply not yet occurred in Mexico as it is represented in this story.

Because communal relations require that powerful individuals be controlled, "The first requisite of civilization [...] is that of justice—that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual" (Freud 95). In "Hacienda," no one except the narrator has any conception of justice. When the filmmakers learn that Justino

has killed his sister with a gun from the set, supposedly accidentally, the filmmakers worry only about the possibility of being sued and about how to continue the film without the actor. The narrator asks how a loaded gun could have been among the guns used for the film, but her question is ignored—no one is interested in the possibility that the shooting was not accidental, because that would be inconvenient. Darlene Unrue notes that comments like "Justino did not do it on purpose" suggest unconscious motivation (*Truth* 27), but this does not justify absolving him of all responsibility. Likewise, the inhabitants of the hacienda are upset that when Justino attempted to run away his friend Vicente chased him down and brought him back. They criticize Vicente for his "senseless" act, and Vicente himself cannot understand why he did it: no one even considers that a murderer should be punished. The judge holds Justino in jail, but only in order to receive a large bribe for his release, and the others can see no reason why he should be punished. The powerful individuals of "Hacienda" do as they please, and their power is based on their oppression of the Indians, the majority of the population, but that oppression is never questioned.

Freud argues that the price individuals pay for the benefits of belonging to a civilization is the renunciation of their sexual and aggressive instincts; this renunciation works for the common good and reduces the vulnerability of an individual to the brute force of another, although it results in the frustration of instinctive desires. A civilization's "first, totemic, phase already brings with it the prohibition against an incestuous choice of object, and this is perhaps the most drastic mutilation which man's erotic life has in all time experienced" (104). At the hacienda, however, even incest is

tolerated, for the revelation that Justino killed his sister out of jealousy of her new lover Vicente surprises no one. "These family love affairs," says Carlos, "what can you expect?" (*CS* 160). As an artist, Carlos the songwriter intuits the truth of the situation that others deny, and he expresses it in a *corrido*:

> Ah, poor little Rosalita
> Took herself a new lover,
> Thus betraying the heart's core
> Of her impassioned brother . . .
>
> Now she lies dead, poor Rosalita,
> With two bullets in her heart. . . .
> Take warning, my young sisters,
> Who would from your brothers part. (*CS* 160)

No one protests or seems surprised by this song, and Betancourt only objects that it was one bullet, not two. The singer's sympathy here is with the oppressor, not the victim, and the song ends with a warning that women must submit to men and to incest. Porter's works occasionally show a fascination with incest; in "The Grave" Miranda's sexual awakening occurs beside her brother, in "Virgin Violeta" a man attempts to seduce his cousin, and in "Holiday" the narrator stresses that the wives and husbands resemble sisters and brothers, but actual incest does not occur except in "Hacienda," as if Porter intends to suggest that this culture is particularly savage.[10] The first, nonfiction version of "Hacienda" includes no references to incest, homosexuality, or extramarital affairs,

[10] Likewise, in her novel *Ship of Fools*, Porter underlines the demonic nature of the twins Ric and Rac by suggesting that they may have committed incest.

and Porter's addition of these elements to the later version of the story apparently indicates her sense that they are connected to her theme, the corruption of Mexican culture.

Freud notes that civilizations restrict other sexual activities besides incest, for "the choice of an object is restricted to the opposite sex" although this ignores the differences in "the sexual constitution of human beings" and therefore "cuts off a fair number of them from sexual enjoyment, and so becomes the source of serious injustice" (104). This occurs, apparently, in order to encourage the production of children and to encourage men to remain with women and provide for those children. In "Hacienda," however, homosexuality flourishes while heterosexuality is almost absent. During her first years in Mexico, Porter had been unusually accepting of homosexuality and had many homosexual friends. Her attitude toward homosexuality, like her attitude toward the country, soon changed and she became actively homophobic. She began to claim that most of the men she met were gay, and she complained that men invited her to weekends with their "limp haired boys" although she had no desire to play "gooseberry to a homosexual honeymoon" (qtd. in Walsh, *Mexico* 139). Walsh speculates that Porter resented not having all attention on herself and quotes a letter written by her friend Ernestine Evans: "A gossip came in the other day who described Katherine Anne as now horrendous in her hate of homosexuals, her court for so long" (*Mexico* 140). Therefore, to portray the country as corrupt Porter peoples her microcosm with homosexuals.[11]

On the train ride to the hacienda, Andreyev tells the narrator about the relationship between an actress and don Genaro's wife: "The story of Lolita and dona

[11] Porter's homophobia did not affect her friendship with some homosexuals. Her lifelong friends Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler were a gay couple, and Porter thrived on the praise they regularly gave her.

Julia was very gay" (*CS* 143). Initially, don Genaro himself had an affair with the actress, and this angered his wife; dona Julia flirted with other men, then she threatened to kill Lolita, which caused the frightened don Genaro to leave for two days. Upon his return, don Genaro discovered that his wife and Lolita were now lovers, but he did nothing to stop their affair, for in this culture the sexual impulses are unregulated. The other characters laugh about this affair and the narrator does not comment on it directly, but in the context of the other events of the story it is clear that Porter condemns the lesbians. The love triangle is complex because it is not a simple matter of one person betraying another; all three members have sex with each other.

The story also includes suggestions of male homosexuality. Betancourt and Carlos are suggested to be former lovers, and Betancourt's appearance is effeminate: "The neat light figure beside me posed gracefully upon its slender spine, the too-beautiful slender hands waved rhythmically upon insubstantial wrists" (*CS* 159). Porter's opinion of male homosexuality is suggested by the fact that she makes the evil, foolish Betancourt appear to be gay. Porter also suggests that the incestuous Justino was having sex not only with his sister, but also with his friend Vicente; when the narrator wonders why Vicente did not allow Justino to escape, Andreyev replies that Vicente had wanted revenge: "Imagine [Vicente's] friend betraying him so, and with a woman, and a sister! He was furious. He did not know what he was doing, maybe" (*CS* 167). Andreyev does not comment further on the homosexuality, suggesting that he accepts it and regards heterosexuality as perverse. In this complex triangle all three members—Vicente, Justino, and Rosalita—had been having sex with each other, just as in the don Genaro, dona Julia, Lolita triangle; the cycle is repeating.

The presence of so much homosexuality in the story might seem more innocent if it were counterbalanced with heterosexuality, but it is not. While in "Holiday" the heterosexual couples produced babies regularly, in "Hacienda" there is only one living heterosexual couple, don Genaro and his wife, and in that relationship the husband betrays the wife, the wife has a lesbian affair, and there are no children. Porter suggests that sexuality, allowed to flourish without restriction, turns in unusual directions and finally leads to the self-destruction of the culture. Without direction from their culture, the characters seem uncertain of which way their sexuality should flow, and thus they seem to make little distinction between male and female sexual partners, resulting in the chaotic situation the narrator discovers at the hacienda.

Freud points out that "civilization demands other sacrifices besides that of sexual satisfaction" (108). When a civilization restricts the libidos of its members, that libido is displaced and is expressed as friendship and altruistic love of others; this strengthens the communal bond. Freud claims this is why religion encourages us to love our neighbor; despite the fact that our neighbor more often deserves our hostility, we must repress feelings of hostility for the good of the community. According to Freud, despite our desire to believe otherwise, humans "are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness" (111). Because of this innate aggression, our neighbor is not only a potential helper or lover, he is "also someone who tempts [us] to satisfy [our] aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him

sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him" (111). In "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," Porter enjoys the bullfighting and this makes her "face the cold fact that at heart I was just a killer, like any other" (*CE* 100). Freud notes that when the culture provides insufficient control of the individual's instincts, these aggressive impulses will be freely expressed, as they are in "Hacienda."

By the time she wrote "Hacienda," Porter seemed to be in full agreement with Freud's pessimistic view of human nature. Each of the temptations to which our aggression leads are fulfilled in the story, with the possible exception of rape, which is however suggested by the incest and which is central to the plot of *Que Viva Mexico!* The victims are generally the Indians, who are overworked but paid so little that they are starving, but the inhabitants of the hacienda take pleasure in humiliating and using each other as well. The main pastime of the characters is spreading malicious gossip and portraying each other as fools, and their aggressive desires are indicated by their actions and their words. They use others whenever possible, but they also fear them. When Andreyev suggests that the narrator take Kennerly's money, Kennerly jumps "as if he had discovered that he was stabbed clean through" (*CS* 137). Whenever Kennerly lets a Mexican carry his bags, "he had a fight to the death in simple self-defense" (*CS* 137). His jaw muscles jerk "in continual helpless rage" (*CS* 139), and he believes "it was a miracle they hadn't all died or had their throats cut" (*CS* 140). For him, getting up in the morning in Mexico means "slamming himself into a fight in which there are no rules and no referee and the antagonist is everywhere" (*CS* 141).

Kennerly is not alone in fearing and using aggression. The narrator looks at some still photographs and notes that "The camera had caught and fixed in moments of violence and senseless excitement, of cruel living and tortured death, the almost ecstatic death-expectancy which is in the air of Mexico" (*CS* 143). Because the moments of aggression are fixed, there is no hope of change, only endlessly repeated cycles of violence. In Mexico, "strangers feel the acid of death in their bones whether or not any real danger is near them" (*CS* 143). When dona Julia first learned that her husband had betrayed her, she "threatened to kill Lolita—to cut her throat, to stab her, to poison her" (*CS* 144). The country's most popular sports are bullfighting and boxing, and everyone except the narrator enjoys seeing a dog chase a frightened rabbit, a dog chase a fat soldier, and a dog chase a screaming pig, the sight of which causes even the sensitive Carlos to roar "with joy, holding his ribs, and the Indian boys laughed with him" (*CS* 164).

Carlos tells the narrator that when rebels attacked the hacienda, the well-armed inhabitants "had the time of their lives" shooting at the raiders and firing their guns in the air; the next day "They wanted to have the whole show over again" (*CS* 165). The narrator asks him if they really hated the rebels that much, and Carlos replies, "No, they love excitement" (*CS* 165). The justice system that should control such violence instead encourages it, and the judge who holds Justino in jail as he waits for a bribe is bloodthirsty; don Genaro tells the filmmakers what the judge said to him:

> He said he had heard we were making a picture over here with men shooting each other in it. He said he had a jailful of men waiting to be shot, and he'd be glad to send them over for us to shoot in the picture. He

> couldn't see why, he said, we were pretending to kill people when we could have all we needed to kill really. He thinks Justino should be shot, too. (*CS* 167)

Justino's shooting of his sister was not a unique event, for the narrator learns that it "was the second child to be killed by a brother" (*CS* 149-150); this earlier murder is not referred to again, and the point once more seems to be that the cycle of violence is continuing.

The idea that sexual and violent fantasies are becoming realities, and that an unconscious cycle is repeating itself, is clear in a scene that occurs late in the story. The first of Freud's steps, remembering, is stressed when Kennerly states, "Do you remember [...]—I thought of it all night and couldn't sleep—*don't* you remember" (*CS* 163). The second step, repeating, is then stressed:

> those scenes we shot only two weeks ago, when Justino played the part of a boy who killed a girl by accident, tried to escape, and Vicente was one of the men who ran him down on horseback? Well, the same thing has happened to the same people in reality! And [...] the strangest thing is, we have to make that scene again, it didn't turn out so well, and look, my God, we had it happening really, and nobody thought of it then. (*CS* 163)

The coincidence upsets Kennerly, not because the cycle is uncannily repeating itself but because they missed their chance to film the actual murder. Porter stresses the cycle and causes the reader to speculate about it when she has Kennerly state, "That kind of thing [...] has been happening ever since we got here. Just happens over and over. . . . Now, what was the matter, I wonder?" (*CS* 163). As if this is not enough, Porter has the

cameraman state that they can film the scene again, and Kennerly speculate about how Justino will feel as he acts out what he has done in reality. Once more, there is remembering, there is repeating, but there is absolutely no working-through in this microcosm of Mexican culture.

Freud argues that the compulsion to repeat implies that besides Eros, the instinct to preserve life, there is another instinct that seeks to destroy life. The death instinct can be diverted outwards through aggressiveness and thus serve Eros, and when aggression is restricted it can turn inward and increase self-destruction. The two instincts do not appear in isolation from each other; instead they become linked and therefore can seem indistinguishable. Sadism is an example of this, "while its counterpart, masochism, would be a union between destructiveness directed inwards and sexuality" (119). Porter's intuitive awareness of this is indicated by Mary Titus's argument that Porter's Mexico fiction exposes "the sadomasochism that Porter saw fueling the transformation of women into symbolic and erotic objects" and that Porter came to see romantic relationships as basically sadomasochistic ("Booby Trap" 617). In her essay "The Necessary Enemy" Porter argues that hate is a necessary counterpart to love that should be recognized (*CE* 186). Freud's theory of a death instinct has been rejected by most later psychoanalytic thinkers, but "Hacienda" seems to support it, for the power of Eros alone cannot explain the many signs of aggression in the story.

According to Freud, the evolution of civilization presents "the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species" and this is why the evolution of civilization may be

"simply described as the struggle for life of the human species" (122). In "Hacienda," Death is winning the struggle with Eros, and sexuality has become destructive, not an act of love that will bring people together. This is shown in Justino's shooting of his sister, an act the characters repeatedly discuss as if they too intuit that it is the heart of their culture's problem. Porter links the pistol with the phallus:

> It was true [Justino] was not supposed to touch the pistols, and there was his first mistake. He meant to put it back at once, but you know how a boy of sixteen loves to play with a pistol. Nobody would blame him. . . . The girl was nineteen years old. Her body had been sent already to the village to be buried. There was too much excitement over her; nothing could be done so long as she was on the place. (*CS* 150)

The fact that Porter follows the statement that nobody would blame Justino with the statement that the girl was nineteen years old implies that nobody would blame him for the sexuality expressed by the act of shooting her in the heart, for she is young and attractive and causes excitement even when dead. As many critics have noted, Braggioni's pistols in "Flowering Judas" are phallic symbols as well, and in that story Laura believes "it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death—ah, Eugenio!" (*CS* 101). In "Hacienda" loving is confused with killing, sexuality has become aggression, and fertility has become a threat as the culture self-destructs, and the narrator is so depressed she cannot muster even a protest or an "ah, Eugenio!"

Civilization, Freud claims, controls the individual's desire for aggression by creating the sense of guilt; guilt comes from fear of authorities and fear of the superego, both of which insist on the renunciation of instinctual satisfactions. The superego is

created when aggression is internalized, where a portion of the ego becomes the superego and can in the form of the conscience act aggressively toward the ego. Tension between the ego and superego leads to guilt when an individual does something that his or her society considers wrong. To avoid losing the love of others and to avoid feeling guilty, the individual conforms to the dictates of society, and thus people can unite in groups. Guilt, then, is a necessary element of civilization although it makes individuals unhappy. Where there is no guilt the individual may feel relieved but the culture will destruct.

In "Hacienda" a man betrays his wife, a wife betrays her husband, Indians are overworked, Indians are starved, consumers are cheated, a judge demands a bribe, an unhealthy intoxicant is produced, everyone gossips, incest occurs, and a man murders his own sister, and no one shows any sense of guilt, except Vicente, who feels sorry that he brought a probable murderer to justice. This is because the culture, as Porter sees it, allows the sexual and aggressive instincts to be expressed without limits: because sexuality and aggression are not seen as wrong, individuals have no sense of guilt; their weak consciences have no power over them. If the culture has no ethics, the individual will have no values beyond self-interest. There is no apparent fear of authorities in Mexico, for the authorities act randomly and cannot be understood: the good Indian is no less oppressed than the bad Indian. Freud argues that the initial turning in of aggressiveness that leads to the formation of the superego is caused by the experience of being loved, and there is hardly any love in this story, only self-interested lust and aggression, and therefore little of the social cohesion that consciences bring.

Porter underscores this issue by frequently referring to the film's unpredictable censors, who have some power, few ethics, and little sense. Kennerly states that he would prefer headhunters or cannibals to the Mexicans:

> At least you knew where you stood with them. Now take for example: they had lost ten thousand dollars flat by obeying the laws of the country—something nobody else does!—by passing their film of the Oaxaca earthquake before the board of censorship in Mexico City. Meanwhile, some unscrupulous native scoundrels who knew the ropes had beaten them to it and sent a complete newsreel to New York. It doesn't pay to have a conscience, but if you've got one what can you do about it? (*CS* 140)

Kennerly himself does not seem to have much of a conscience; he is accustomed "to the clean, four-square business methods of God's own Hollywood" (*CS* 145) and dislikes the Mexican censors because they cost him money. He wrote to the censors, "charging them with letting the Mexican film company get away with murder, accusing them of favoritism and deliberate malice in holding up the Russian film," but they do not even answer (*CS* 140). According to Kennerly, he soon learned how to do business in Mexico: "Graft, bribe, bribe, graft, that's the way it went. [. . .] Whatever they ask for, I give 'em half the amount" (*CS* 140). Although they interfere with the film, "The government officials themselves did not seem to know what was going on. They took all sides at once" (*CS* 145).

The government surrounds the film company with censors who are to "show them all the most beautiful, significant, and characteristic things in the national life and soul"

(*CS* 146), an ironic foreshadowing of what Porter herself attempts to accomplish with this story. Porter's sardonic use of the censors is made clearer when she assigns the role of chief censor to Betancourt, a cruel, shallow, foolish homosexual:

> Being trustworthy and of a cultured taste it was his official duty to see that nothing hurtful to the national dignity got in the way of the foreign cameras. His ambiguous situation seemed to trouble him not at all. He was plainly happy and fulfilled for the first time in years. Beggars, the poor, the deformed, the old and ugly, trust Betancourt to wave them away. "I am sorry for everything," he said, lifting a narrow, pontifical hand, waving away vulgar human pity which always threatened, buzzing like a fly at the edges of his mind. (*CS* 152)

Betancourt's role as the inept, corrupt conscience of his culture is made clearer by Porter's linkage of him to trendy popular philosophies: "Betancourt had spent his youth unlocking the stubborn secrets of Universal Harmony by means of numerology, astronomy, astrology, a formula of thought-transference and deep breathing, the practice of will-to-power combined with the latest American theories of personality development" (*CS* 158). Betancourt is given a surprising amount of space in this story, considering how little he contributes to the plot, and thus Porter causes the reader to recognize the ineptitude of this censor, this conscience, and to wonder if a functioning, intelligent, ethical censor or conscience would better manage corruption, uncontrolled sexuality, and rampant aggression. In "The Mexican Trinity" Porter complains that in Mexico "there is no conscience crying through the literature of the country" and thus there is no justice (*CE* 401), and Robert Brinkmeyer notes that in "Hacienda," "Without a meaningful

context and perspective to shed light on their endeavors, the artists remained firmly centered in the self, their dominant emotion self-pity" (68).

"Hacienda" demonstrates Freud's point that while a restrictive society may cause an individual unhappiness by inhibiting her instinctive sexual and aggressive desires and thereby causing her to feel guilt, a chaotic culture that allows the free expression of those desires will fall into a dangerous, self-destructive cycle. This is why, as Darlene Unrue notes, after "Porter's departure from Mexico in 1931 and the publication of her final version of 'Hacienda' in 1934, she abandoned for the most part her use of the primitive as a symbol of unseen forces" (*Truth* 29). Porter's choice to leave the safe but puritanical culture of the United States for the more open but dangerous culture of Mexico was surprising, but when she rejected Mexican culture she made an even more surprising choice for her next area of residence. Ending her visit to the hacienda, she traveled to Europe on the ship she would later portray in *Ship of Fools* and settled in a culture known not for its chaos but rather for its order, Hitler's Germany. She would portray this fascistic culture as nevertheless just as problematic and dangerous as Mexico in her long story "The Leaning Tower."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE LEANING TOWER," WAR, SEX, AND DEATH

Katherine Anne Porter's obsession with death must have made wartime especially fearful and exciting for her, and this may explain why so many of her works are concerned with the causes and effects of war: *Ship of Fools* examines the causes of war, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" demonstrates the effects of war on civilians, and both "Flowering Judas" and "Hacienda" show a culture adjusting to an uneasy postwar milieu. One work, "The Leaning Tower," looks for both the causes and the effects of war by placing its protagonist in a country both ravaged by and returning to war, the Germany of late 1931. A work with a similar intent, Freud's "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,"[1] can be used to explicate the causes and effects of war as they are presented in "The Leaning Tower."

"The Leaning Tower," like "Hacienda," studies a culture in microcosm. While the narrator of "Hacienda" seems to reject Mexican culture because its disorder allows human instincts to be expressed without control, "The Leaning Tower" rejects German culture because its excessive order has likewise failed to control human instincts. This seems paradoxical, but it can be understood; German culture apparently suppresses the sexual instincts but only partly suppresses the aggressive instincts: aggression against fellow Germans is restricted, but aggression against non-Germans is allowed and even encouraged, and thus aggression is focused and applied, and this encourages war. While

[1] All references to Freud in this chapter are, except where otherwise noted, from the 1915 work "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death."

the chaotic aggression of Mexico damaged only its inhabitants, the organized aggression of Germany is a threat to the world.

After leaving Mexico for the final time, Porter traveled by ship to Europe, where her husband-to-be went to Spain and she went to Berlin. In Berlin, where she lived from September of 1931 to January of 1932, Porter wrote the first draft of "Hacienda" but was often sick and miserable, and after several months she moved on to Paris, where she was happy for a time. "The Leaning Tower," written in 1940 and published in 1941, is Porter's only story with a European setting, her only story in which her alter-ego is a male, and her final serious story, for she was to spend the next twenty years writing her novel *Ship of Fools*. Unlike "Hacienda," "The Leaning Tower" examines both a culture and a character, a young American man named Charles Upton who has come to Berlin to study art. Charles's experiences mirror Porter's, although they are significantly changed to suit the story's theme, and Porter shows the effects of the culture on her protagonist's mind.

Porter's choice to emphasize theme more than plot or character partly explains the story's negative critical response, for many critics would agree with William Nance's verdict that the story is overly didactic, humorless, and artistically flawed (69). These flaws cannot be denied, and are seen in Porter's unsubtle description of "typical" Germans: "The streets were full of them—enormous waddling women with short legs and ill-humored faces, and round-headed men with great rolls of fat across the backs of their necks, who seemed to support their swollen bellies with an effort that drew their shoulders forward" (*CS* 442). As if this is not enough, Porter has her Germans stare hungrily into a shop window filled with roast pigs, candy pigs, cloth pigs, and toy pigs:

"With their nervous dogs wailing in their arms, the people, shameless mounds of fat, stood in a trance of pig worship, gazing with eyes damp with admiration and appetite" (*CS* 443). This is particularly peculiar in a story intended to expose those who are hostile and prejudiced, as if the writer believes their repugnant behavior justifies her hatred of them.

If the negative critical response is somewhat justified, the story is nonetheless more important than its relative lack of attention would suggest, and it does have its defenders. Glenway Wescott wrote in his journal that the story is "not only all right but (it seems to me) rather godlike." He added that "I envy her having written this.... I feel practically dead with fine rivalry" (qtd. in Stout, "Practically Dead" 453). And while Thomas Austenfeld claims "The Leaning Tower" is an unliterary, prejudiced tale in which Porter used too many actual events that "she copied without much shaping, perhaps even without full understanding" (41), Robert K. Miller describes it as "richly textured" (213) and F.O. Matthiessen praises its "fine touches" and its "interpenetration of form and moral meaning" (70). Joan Givner connects it to a scene in Dante's *Inferno* and describes it as "fine" (321-22), and Darlene Unrue reads it as an insightful study of the disillusion of ideals (*Truth* 139-45). Janis Stout admits that the story's gloomy atmosphere makes it uncomfortable to read, but she describes it as a "richly suggestive" piece of political commentary and as a major work that is "only slightly lesser than ["Noon Wine" and "Old Mortality"] in its polish and total import" (*Sense* 114).

Jane Krause DeMouy notes that "The Leaning Tower" marks a turning point in Porter's career "when her thinking had shifted from its original perspective—the individual woman's own psychological conflict—to broader concerns for humanity's

capacity to survive without love" (*Women* 7).[2] Paradoxically, Porter did not respond to this crisis by supplying more of the love the world seemed to lack but turned instead to apparent misanthropy, concluding a letter in which she attacked former friends and various cultures with this all-encompassing rejection: "Good bye now, and a thumb at my nose for the lot of you" (qtd. in Walsh, *Mexico* 198). Porter, like Freud, constantly emphasized the need for truth, and her late works suggest that her recognition of the existence of humanity's inherent sexuality and aggression shocked her so badly that she could not respond except by escaping other people. This is demonstrated in "The Leaning Tower."

The events of "The Leaning Tower" take place in the specific period from December 27, 1931 to January 1, 1932, apparently to emphasize that the story examines the end of something, possibly the end of Porter's hope in civilization's ability to control human nature and avoid war. Charles Upton, an aspiring young artist with little money, has been in Berlin for six days, living in an overpriced, dull hotel. Struggling against depression, Charles wanders the streets looking for more affordable housing and encounters ugly, brutal, and poor Berliners. After rejecting various overpriced, unattractive rooms, he meets a middle-aged widow named Rosa Reichl who shows him an over-decorated room furnished with shabby furniture. As he examines the room, Charles accidentally crushes the landlady's plaster model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa; overcome with guilt, he agrees to take the room despite his misgivings.

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[2] Freud's career followed a similar pattern, and met with a similar cultural response. I believe that both writers were alarmed by the uneasy transition to modernism and by the brutality of World War I, and later by the aftereffects of the war, including the Depression. They were probably most alarmed by the signs that there would be another war. I doubt that Porter actually read Freud's work on war and attempted to apply his ideas in this story, although she may have. More likely, both writers were responding to a similar situation. Freud's ideas support Porter's, and vice versa.

Charles soon meets the other boarders, three young men who, along with the bourgeois landlady, form a microcosm of German society: Otto Bussen, an aspiring mathematician with little money whose ancestors are peasants, Tadeusz Mey, a talented Polish pianist who dislikes Germany, and Hans von Gehring, a militaristic student with an infected saber scar on his cheek. Charles discovers that Bussen is mistreated, Tadeusz is tolerated, and Hans is respected, while he himself is hated for being American and therefore supposedly rich. William Nance points out that their attitudes are shown when Bussen covers an apparent suicide attempt by pretending to have food poisoning: the landlady worries about her rug, Bussen tries to maintain his dignity, Tadeusz recognizes the fact that it is a suicide attempt and is helpful, Hans leaves in disgust, and Charles goes to buy medicine (73).

During his stay at the boardinghouse, Charles examines his surroundings and the people of Berlin, which deepens his depression. A barber pressures him to have his hair cut like Hitler's, and everyone Charles meets seems desperate, angry, and anxious to cheat him out of his money. Charles paints but makes little progress because the landlady often bursts into his room without knocking and re-arranges his papers and clothing, but he becomes friendly with the other boarders and agrees to celebrate New Year's Eve with them at a cheap cabaret. When the four boarders get drunk and discuss the ethnic groups of Europe, the two Germans are revealed to be racial supremacists. Hans and Bussen insult every European culture except their own, and Hans declares that only power matters and that Germany will win the next war. Suddenly afraid, Charles decides he cannot trust them and stops drinking. At midnight, they all pretend to be good people, but Charles cannot forget the submerged hatred he has seen; they stumble home, where

Charles finds that the landlady has repaired the model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and left it in his room; he goes to bed with a sense of hopelessness and curls into the fetal position.

This story presents German culture as degraded and its people as miserable and brutish. This is not what Charles had expected, for his dead childhood friend Kuno had described Berlin such that Charles imagined it to be "a great shimmering city of castles towering in misty light" with wide, polished streets, stone and marble buildings covered with carvings, and statues everywhere (*CS* 439). But instead of a refined world of Beethoven, Goethe, and Holbein, Charles discovers a land of drinking songs, tasteless furniture, and crude decorations, including the view from his window: "a dozen infant-sized pottery cupids, gross, squat limbed, wanton in posture and vulgarly pink, with scarlet feet and cheeks and backsides, engaged in what appeared to be a perpetual scramble to avoid falling off the steep roof of a house across the street." Charles observes their "clutching fat hands, their imbecile grins," imagines their buttocks protruding from the snow, and disdainfully thinks that "whoever had put them there had meant them to be oh, so whimsical and so amusing, year in, year out" (*CS* 447). In this decadent city, kitsch has replaced art and the people desperately cling to their dreams of a more elegant past that they cannot accept as having faded away.

Porter seems to put much of the blame for this situation on World War I, for Charles constantly meets maimed war victims and hears talk of the war. When Charles complains that the Germans are obsessed with money, Tadeusz explains their behavior by observing that "They lost that war, please don't forget...That damages a nation's

personality no end, you know" (*CS* 474). When the barber complains of his constant cough, Charles asks if he has the flu and the barber replies that he was gassed in the war. Porter also shows the effects of the war that are commonly accepted as having led to World War II; in a somewhat unrealistic scene Charles's landlady shows him a boxful of money and explains at length that it will not even buy a loaf of bread, emblematic of the economic desperation of the country. Bussen apparently attempts suicide partly because he is poor, and Charles sees starving beggars on the streets. The cabaret scene illustrates how the Germans have not forgiven other countries for defeating their country and that they regard the defeat as an injustice that cries for revenge, as seen when Hans tells Charles that Germany was ruined "because your country deserted and betrayed us in the war, you should have helped us and you did not" (*CS* 476-77). But Porter also looks for other underlying causes of this culture's thirst for blood.

In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," written during World War I, Freud attempts to find the source of the disturbance felt by civilians during wartime, when people are confused and even scientists become irrational. According to Freud, the war was a shock because we do not expect "civilized" countries to engage in brutal wars. Instead, highly developed countries should be tolerant of other cultures, and if a war is necessary we expect it to be civilized, with killing kept to a minimum. However, the war in fact was extremely bloody and cruel, and both sides showed little understanding of the other. This disillusioned the people, who had to recognize that humans are brutal, aggressive creatures, not refined and altruistic (276-79). Freud predicted that the disillusionment brought on by the war would make people bitter and that there would be

no trust or bond between combatant countries for many years (279), an observation that is echoed in "The Leaning Tower."

Societies restrict their members for the common good, Freud notes, but when in wartime those same societies are seen as running wild their members feel free to do so also; individual morality suffers, and individuals become as brutal as their culture (280). This uncivilized behavior shocks the naïve Charles, who seems constantly surprised to see people who are suffering, brutal, selfish, deceptive, and irrational: who are, in other words, animals. Porter's fiction contains frequent references to humans as animals, but nowhere is that point made more blatantly than in this story where the Germans are repeatedly and directly referred to as pigs. As Freud saw it, war causes people to behave like animals, which shocks them into the realization that they *are* animals, a fact they had done their best to deny in their desire to be the angelic altruists they wished they were (Freud 285). Charles asks Tadeusz if he should give Bussen his spare coat, and Tadeusz says that is an odd notion. He asks what he would gain by doing so, Charles replies that he would gain nothing, and Tadeusz points out that "You would gain from it the pride in being able to give a coat" (*CS* 475).

Freud argues that evil cannot be eradicated—we have instincts, and they can only be suppressed. Our chief instincts are the sexual and the aggressive instincts, and these are intertwined, which leads to ambivalence: we cannot be purely one or the other. Culture suppresses an individual's instincts for the common good, chiefly through the creation of a conscience which encourages us to suppress our desires in order to gain the love of others (281-82). The Germany of "The Leaning Tower" has not successfully suppressed the aggressive instinct, for the war sanctioned the individual to behave

aggressively. However, Germany has suppressed the sexual instinct, and far too well. According to Freud, society suppresses sexuality for the common good, but this makes the individual unhappy. Too much suppression may cause those instincts to burst out in unexpected ways (284), as they seem to be released in the form of aggression and nonstandard sexuality as seen in Porter's story.

The men in Porter's Mexican stories are typically sexually aggressive, but the men of this German story are sexually repressed. Although the German boarders are young men who often talk together, there is remarkably little discussion of women. Charles is an American, but he seems mysteriously drawn to Germany, as if he on some level recognizes that it will satisfy his unconscious needs. Porter causes the reader to question why Charles is in Germany by having him regularly question himself on that matter and by having others repeatedly ask him why he is there. Charles tells himself that he came to Germany to study painting because his childhood friend Kuno created such a romantic picture of the country, but this is not entirely satisfying: Kuno was a child, and any investigation at all would have shown Charles that post-war Germany was not a romantic place to be. Further, it is peculiar that an aspiring American artist would choose to live in Berlin when he could as easily live in Paris.

What, then, draws Charles to Germany? I believe he is sexually insecure, and this drives him to a place he chiefly associates with masculinity, "a great shimmering city of castles towering in misty light," with hard, firm buildings of stone and marble, and "pillars and statues everywhere" (*CS* 439). When he heard this description, Charles thought, "Those things were what he would like, what he most longed to see" (*CS* 439). What he finds, however, is just the opposite, a city where "small white worms [...] come

squirming out of the liver sausage on his plate" (*CS* 436). He goes to buy cheap socks and is upset when the salesclerk tells him that they only come in small sizes. The people are either fat or sickly and are physically unattractive, and the men are often emasculated: "Those blind or otherwise mutilated in the war wore a certain band on their sleeves to prove that they had more than any others earned the right to beg, and merited special charity" (*CS* 441).

Charles's sexual insecurity is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the story. When he checks out of his first hotel, an older man demands that Charles first show him his papers; Charles opens one of his suitcases to retrieve the papers, "exposing a huddle of untidy clothing. The man and the woman leaned forward to gaze at his belongings, and the woman said, 'So,' in a contemptuous voice. Charles, in outraged silence, closed the suitcase and opened the other" (*CS* 449-50). Later, he is again outraged when he discovers that his new landlady has unpacked his belongings and has done his laundry:

> He peered into the lumpy laundry bag hanging on a hook, and shuddered with masculine shame. Its snowy sweet-smelling whiteness concealed his socks that needed darning, his soiled shirts worn too long for economy's sake, and his stringy underwear. On the pillow of his bed, half concealing the long effeminate lace pillow ruffles, lay a pair of neatly folded clean pajamas. (*CS* 453)

It is peculiar that Charles's clothing is tattered, for he had enough money to travel to Europe and has been there for only six days, and it seems that he may be most discomforted by the fact that a woman has seen his underwear, hardly something a sexually secure man would worry over. When he clumsily crushes the landlady's plaster

model, he stammers and feels "shamefully exposed before her" (*CS* 447). Later, Rosa complains about the dirty bathroom; Charles stammers and rushes away, "appalled at Rosa's lack of decency and her shameful knowledge of his own untidy bathroom habits" (*CS* 469).

The perverse voyeurism to which sexuality in Germany has sunk is clear in other scenes as well. Charles notices that the landlady has seen his apparently pornographic drawings: "Had she looked into them? He hoped she had a good time. A great many of his sketches were not meant for publication" (*CS* 453). He later takes revenge on her: "With concentrated malice he drew Rosa, first as kitchen sloven, then as a withered old whore, finally with no clothes on" (*CS* 470). When he sees a prostitute on the street, he does not approach her; instead, he hides and draws her: "He sketched a specially haggard and frustrated looking streetwalker with a preposterous tilt to her feathered hat. He tried at first not to be seen at his occupation, but discovered soon he need not worry, for, in fact, nobody noticed him" (*CS* 444). His perverse behavior draws no attention because it is not out of place in this culture, and his suspicion that others want to watch him reveals his own desire to watch others.

What precisely does he want to see? Repeatedly, he notices items associated with the male or female sexual organs, including underwear, diapers, the buttocks of infant cupids, legs, and anything shaped like a phallus. Such items hold a revolted fascination for him, apparently not because he wants to possess a woman sexually but because he seems to unconsciously regard them as relating to his disturbed sexuality. When he looks for a room he feels guilty, "as if he had been peeping through cracks and keyholes, spying upon human inadequacy" (*CS* 444). Porter connects aggression with sexuality

and underscores Charles's problem when she describes his search for a room: "He peered into a sodden den fit, he felt, only for the scene of a murder; and into another where a sullen young woman was packing up, and the whole room reeked of some nasty perfume from her underwear piled upon the bed. She had given him a deliberately dirty smile, and the landlady had said something in a very brutal tone to her" (*CS* 445). Charles's fear of the feminine seems based on his fear of his own ability to measure up as a man, and is seen in his description of the landladies he meets as "smiling foxes, famished wolves, slovenly house cats, mere tigers, hyenas, furies, harpies" (*CS* 444).

Germany's emasculated status is seen in the room Charles chooses, one that he feels is typical of many of the rooms he has seen there. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud claims that rooms are often symbols of the female reproductive organs (248), and Charles's room is emphatically feminine: it has a "sober rich oriental carpet, the lace curtains under looped-back velvet hangings, the large round table covered with another silky oriental rug in sweet, refined colors." There are "deep couches heaped with silk and velvet cushions [...] and upon the table stood a huge lamp with an ornate pink silk shade, fluted and fringed and draped with silken tassels. The bed was massive with feather quilt and shot-silk cover" (*CS* 445-46). Another person might find this room comfortable, if in poor taste, but Charles declares that it is "A hell of a place, really, but he would take it" (*CS* 446). Freud, suspicious of excuses, might argue that Charles is in fact unconsciously attracted to the room, which is suited to his feminine nature, and the fact that it is typical of the rooms Charles sees implies that the country itself is feminized. While Charles may be unconsciously attracted to the feminine room, he is also ambivalent about it and often makes degrading comments about it.

Porter shows that Charles has little conscious awareness that he is threatened by feminine sexuality. He goes walking along a street habituated by prostitutes, but he does not act: "They seemed quite unapproachable to Charles in their black lace skirts and high gilded heels, their feathered hats and grease paint" (*CS* 443). Clearly, other men do not regard these prostitutes as unapproachable, but they *seem* so to the fearful Charles. Whenever a woman presents herself as available, he makes excuses: "On his first evening in Berlin a young unsmiling [prostitute] had spoken to him, inviting him without enthusiasm to come with her. He had stammered a phrase which he hoped meant, 'I haven't time now,' fearing that she would insist" (*CS* 443). Of course he has nothing but time, and his odd fear that she will insist shows his fear of women; the apparently experienced prostitute intuits the real problem: "She had given him a serious, appraising glance, saw, to his shame, that the market was no good, and had turned away with an indifferent, 'Well, good evening'" (*CS* 443). Other women too seem to regard him as less than fully masculine: "He hoped quite constantly he was going to meet some gay young girls, students perhaps; there seemed to be plenty of them about, but not one had given him the eye yet" (*CS* 443).

Germany's repression of sexuality is not limited to Charles; the other male boarders seem similarly repressed. The fact that they are heterosexual only becomes apparent when they are drunk at the cabaret, for while they are drunk their inhibitions are removed and, arguably, the possibility of actual sexual intercourse is lessened because alcohol lessens a male's ability to perform. Others in the cabaret lose their inhibitions, and Charles notices "boys kissing boys or girls alike with indiscriminate warmth" (*CS* 488). Charles, apparently excited, waves at an attractive model and immediately feels

afraid: "She was a knockout and he hoped quite violently to know her better. And even at that moment, like the first symptoms of some fatal sickness, there stirred in him a most awful premonition of disaster" (*CS* 488). Charles apparently intuits Freud's argument that sexuality and aggression are linked, for sexual excitement leads to fear of dying, and his thoughts of the attractive model are rather oddly followed by thoughts of Napoleon, Genghis Khan, and Attila the Hun.

When the model begins to dance alone, however, the drunken Charles suddenly and surprisingly has the self-confidence to dance with her, and they both clumsily attempt to imitate their male and female roles:

> She held her face back from him stiffly, smiled with a fair imitation of a cinematic *femme fatale*, and rather clumsily but with great meaning bumped her hip against him. He gathered her in, folded her up to him as close as he could, but she stiffened again and bumped him, this time full in the stomach. 'What say we give up the technique and let nature take its course,' said Charles, with a straight face. (*CS* 489)

The model does not understand his awkward proposal, but he kisses her on the cheek and asks her not to bump him as they dance; revealing the real reason why she is willing to dance with him, she asks him if he can get her work in Hollywood. Charles awkwardly jokes that they should leave for America immediately because everyone wants to go there, which angers the model, who drops him immediately in favor of Hans, with whom her "manner changed completely" (*CS* 490), apparently because he unlike Charles has some sexual attractiveness due to his militaristic pose.[3]

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[3] Porter based Hans von Gehring on Hermann Goering, whom she met socially during her stay in Berlin and claimed to have dated (Givner 320).

The key symbol of Germany in this story is of course the model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa that Charles finds in his room. A blatant phallic symbol, it attracts Charles on first sight:

> On the silk rug, near the lamp, there stood a small plaster replica, about five inches high, of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. As they talked, his hand wandered towards it, he picked it up lightly by the middle with his finger tips, and the delicate plaster ribs caved in. They simply crumbled at his touch, and the fragments dropped around the weighted base as he snatched back his hand. (*CS* 446)

The tower has no one single meaning, and as Janis Stout shows Porter spins it out "until it takes on a penumbra of meanings" ("Practically Dead" 457), but several of those meanings can be isolated. Robert K. Miller notes that "a critic inclined to psychoanalytic readings might make much of the story's title—that vulnerable tower that Charles likes to touch, getting himself in trouble for putting his hands where they are not supposed to be" (221). Given the obviousness of this symbol, and the fact of the title, it is surprising that no critic has risen to the task of formally giving it a psychoanalytic reading, but squeamishness should not curtail such a reading any longer.

In size and shape the tower resembles a penis, and Miller seems justified in reading Charles's grasping of the tower as a prohibited masturbatory act. Charles's sexual anxiety might well cause even masturbation to be unsuccessful, but this interpretation seems incomplete. Why, for example, does it belong to the landlady, and why does she repair it? If it represents Charles's phallus, why does someone else own it?

Why is it the Leaning Tower of Pisa rather than, say, the Statue of Liberty or Big Ben? Why does it lean, why does it crumble, and what is it doing at the center of a story about the causes and effects of war? These questions can be answered by looking at the tower in the context of the other events of the story and by applying Freud's ideas on sexual symbols.

Porter emphasizes the connection between the tower and the landlady, who goes very pale when Charles breaks it. He offers to replace it and is told that it cannot be replaced: "It was a souvenir of the Italian journey. My husband and I brought it back as a pleasantry from our honeymoon. My husband has been dead for many years. No, the little tower is not a thing that can be replaced" (*CS* 447). The fact that the landlady obtained it on her honeymoon, and that it is linked to her husband, suggests that it represents her dead husband's penis. Mummified and put on display, it represents the power and pleasure she once possessed but has lost: it cannot be replaced. The fact that it leans, that it is described as little and is in fact just five inches tall, that it is said to be delicate, and that it crumbles into fragments at a touch suggest that it was not much of a penis to begin with, as does the fact that it is a replica of something genuine. In these ways it is an appropriate symbol of the sexual insecurity Porter associates with the German culture.[4]

Porter associates sexual security with non-Germanic cultures. There are several references to Italy in the story which may initially seem extraneous. Just before he crushes the tower, the landlady asks Charles where he will go when he leaves Berlin:

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[4] It is true that the Germans of "Holiday" seem to have no sexual insecurity. This may be due to the fact that Porter wrote "Holiday" long before "The Leaning Tower," for as she aged Porter became notoriously prejudiced against Germans. It may also be due to the fact that the Germans in the earlier story live close to nature while the Germans of the later story live in a crowded city. The setting of "Holiday" is before the Fall, while the setting of "The Leaning Tower" is long after the Fall.

"'To Italy, perhaps,' said Charles. 'First to Rome and then to Florence. And then all over Europe,' he added recklessly, feeling certain for the first time that this was really true, it was bound to happen" (*CS* 446). The wording here suggests that this is Charles's dream, but one he is uncertain of achieving. If Italy represents for him only a country, there is no clear reason why he should not go there: he could as easily be in Rome as in Berlin. But in this story Italy represents sexuality, as Germany represents asexuality, and this is seen in the landlady's comment: "'Oh, Italy,' cried the landlady. 'I spent the three happiest months of my life there, I have dreamed of going back'" (*CS* 446). Charles then crushes the tower, suggesting that it is an impossible dream for both of them: the landlady cannot relive her honeymoon, Charles cannot become masculine.

Porter's emphasis of Italy in this scene suggests that she intends it to operate as Germany's opposite. Another Latin country, Spain, is also opposed to Germany in Charles's conversation with the barber. The barber, in what again initially seems like an extraneous conversation, tells Charles at length about his stay in Malaga, where he claims the weather was warm year round and lack of money was not a serious concern. He tells Charles, "The barber shops there are not like ours, they are very dirty, but there, flowers were in bloom outside, in December" (*CS* 451). He adds, "It was strange there in many ways, naturally, considering the kind of people they are, but then they did not have to worry so much about living" (*CS* 452). Charles tells the barber that Malaga had in fact been cold that winter, but Porter's point is clear: unlike the Latin countries, Germany is clean and orderly, and thus it *is* a place where one must "worry so much about living," for it seethes with organized aggression.

Freud can explain why this is so: excessive orderliness is a sign of repression, and in successfully suppressing the sexual instinct Germany has attained cleanliness and social order but sacrificed the individual's ability to attain happiness through the attainment of sexual desires. Suppressing the instincts creates cultural order but individual unhappiness, Freud notes, and these suppressed instincts may be released in unexpected channels (284). Because Germany focuses on suppressing the sexual instinct, suppressed sexual desires can be released through the expression of the socially sanctioned aggressive instinct, directed against non-Germans. Diana Hinze states that this aggression is what holds Porter's microcosm of the country together:

> Hiding their private miseries from each other, the boarders' pride and class-consciousness establish needless barriers that are torn down only when they are united in common furor: when they can turn their long simmering anger on the outsider, the American who represents the nation that in their eyes betrayed them in the first world war and, thus, the nation they feel justified in blaming for their misery. (85)

The popular claim that one is either a lover or a fighter seems supported by both Freud and this story, and it may not be coincidental that countries traditionally regarded as romantic—such as France, Italy, Spain, Mexico—have generally not been successfully aggressive against their neighbors, while the more warlike countries—such as Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, the United States—are commonly regarded as both unromantic and repressed.

Porter expresses her points about the culture of Germany by examining its members, and the most anal retentive of this story's characters is the landlady, Rosa Reichl. Charles is frustrated and outraged by her habit of bursting into his room to restore order by rearranging his papers and his clothing, for he feels that this is an invasion of his privacy, once more suggesting that he is obsessed with hiding his personal inadequacies. No doubt the landlady's behavior would test the patience of anyone, but Charles's reaction is excessive. His relationship with the landlady is curious, for they establish an immediate if ambivalent bond, and one which a Freudian perspective can explain. Charles sees that his papers have been arranged neatly and symmetrically: "He had noticed before the strange antagonism of domesticated females for papers. They seemed to look upon papers as enemies of order, mere dust-catching nuisances. At home he had waged perpetual silent warfare with his mother and the servants about his papers" (*CS* 453). Thus the landlady's behavior mirrors his mother's earlier behavior.

Rosa is approximately the same age as Charles's mother; when he first meets the landlady he thinks she is "a fairly agreeable looking person of perhaps fifty years or more—above a certain age they all looked alike to Charles" (*CS* 445). In Charles's mind, then, she to some degree resembles his mother physically, and she behaves like a mother as well, doing his laundry, cleaning his room without permission, feeding him, nagging him, discussing personal issues with him. When Charles apologizes for not speaking good German, Rosa responds by "smiling graciously as a mother" (*CS* 445). When he goes out and returns late, the door opens and the landlady smiles: "She had been expecting him, she had wondered what was keeping him, she had happened to be in the hall and had heard his step on the stair." She asks when he would like his coffee, then

smiles and tilts "her head at him with what struck Charles as a slightly too intimate, possessive gleam" (*CS* 452).

A few minutes later he overhears Rosa criticizing another boarder for mistreating her chairs: "Herr Bussen, who began by defending himself half-heartedly, gave in and took his scolding dutifully as if Frau Reichl were his mother or his conscience" (*CS* 454). Bussen tells her that "His mother had such chairs too" (*CS* 454). Later Rosa tells Bussen "you drink milk like a big baby and leave the dirty bottles under the bed" (*CS* 459). At one point Charles seems close to realizing what she represents; Rosa gives him "a resentful look as if he had failed her, a look as personal and angry as if she were a member of his family, or at least a familiar friend, or—what on earth was Rosa to him?" (*CS* 478). Although Charles does not consciously realize it, Rosa in this story functions as the mother of her boarders, and this explains his charged attraction-repulsion towards her. She is a smothering mother, a common if often invisible character in Porter's fiction, one who in this story takes too great an interest in her sons' behavior and thus emasculates them.

If Rosa functions as the mother, her husband's mummified penis in the shape of the Leaning Tower of Pisa suddenly assumes great importance: it is the father's penis, severed from his body and put on display. This reading, far from being outrageous, is supported by details from the story that would otherwise be either random or extraneous, but which together make up a clear Oedipal pattern. Porter could have easily made Rosa into a distant, unmaternal woman, a young woman, or even into a man, but she chose to make her motherly and a widow, just as she chose to place an object shaped like a penis at the center of her story, and the implications thereof should be explored. While

Charles's actual father is alive, and thus the symbolism is not *literally* true, the "father" here is dead but his penis remains, suggesting that he died after being castrated. As if there is a cause and effect relationship, Rosa follows her comment that the tower was a memento of her honeymoon with the comment that her husband has been long dead. She says of the tower that it cannot be replaced: it cannot be re-placed on the father's body. This is similar to Porter's actual situation, for her mother died after having expressed her sexuality by becoming pregnant and giving birth; in "The Leaning Tower" Porter simply reverses the sexes: the mother is alive while the father is dead, and not the daughter but the son is to blame.

Charles's actual father in this story is absent, both from the action of the story and largely from his son's thoughts. On Christmas Eve, Charles thinks of his dead friend Kuno, not of his parents: "He had sent them a cable and had meant to think of them constantly, but he had not" (*CS* 437). He remembers his childhood as a time when his father barely provided for his family by working as a farmer, and he remembers that his one argument with Kuno occurred when his friend insulted farmers, causing Charles to defensively claim that as a storekeeper Kuno's father was no better. Charles's jealousy of Kuno is unacknowledged but clear, for while his own impoverished father merely told him stories of Mexico, Kuno's wealthy father took him on actual trips to Germany from which they returned with many new toys and much new clothing. While Kuno's parents forced him to practice the violin regularly, Charles's parents called his desire to paint a waste of time, "so he merely scratched around with charcoal on odd sheets of paper, or dabbled for hours in some retired spot with brushes that shed hairs in his poorly equipped paint boxes" (*CS* 439). Charles came to Germany partly because Kuno described it as

romantic, and although his father told him about Mexico he "had never listened to him as he had to Kuno" (*CS* 440).

As mentioned before, "The Leaning Tower" is filled with references to money, for example in how others regularly assume that because Charles is American he must be rich. Indeed, in comparison to the others in the story he is rich, but even so he cannot afford much more than the most basic of necessities. Because a young man's level of wealth is largely dependent on his father's, it is understandable that Charles would blame his father for his own lack of money. To be sure, the little money the father provides is given grudgingly: "The next boat would bring him a check from his father, who had decided, in a kind of mixed despair and pride in his son's talent, to help him. Charles, keeping accounts in a book, had resolved it should all be repaid" (*CS* 440). Later he wonders how long his father will send him money, and worries how long he should continue taking it, as if he does not want to feel greater guilt about their relationship.[5] These references to Charles's father occur early in the story, as if Porter is signaling the reader that there is a connection between parenting and war. Later in the story references to parenting recur, and these references are to *bad* parenting.

In the cabaret scene, after they have discussed racial theories, Germany's plans for the next war, and women, Tadeusz the Polish pianist tells the others about a time his mother waited at the top of the stairs for him when he came home drunk: "I waved one paw at her but she did not respond. And when I put my head above the last step she kicked me under the chin and almost knocked me out" (*CS* 491). Bussen then tells about

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[5] Freud would not have been surprised to discover that when Porter was in Berlin she waited for a check from her lover, just as her alter-ego Charles waits for a check from his father. Nor would he have been amazed that while Porter criticized her father for being lazy and inept, she repeatedly fell in love with lazy and inept men.

his own childhood, when his mother "had beaten him quite hard one day, without warning, when he was cracking walnuts and eating them. With tears he had asked her why, and she said, 'Don't ask me any questions. What is good enough for Martin Luther is good enough for you'" (*CS* 491). He explains that he was disappointed when he later read that Luther's mother had beaten him for cracking nuts: "Until then I had thought of Luther as a great, forbidding cruel man who loved bloodshed, but after that I felt sorry for him. He was once a poor helpless child like me, beaten for nothing [...] and yet he became great" (*CS* 492). Aggression, sex, and parenting are linked, and in this sick culture in which aggression has become a substitute for sex, love is impossible and the only means of conveying real feeling is through violence. It was so for Martin Luther, it was so for Kuno, whose German violin teacher "cracked him over the head with a bow when he made mistakes" (*CS* 439), and it is so for these modern Germans: the cycle continues and there is no way out.

According to Freud, the conscience is created when humans suppress their instincts in order to gain love (283), but in the German culture as Porter presents it the parents have no love to give. Instead, her Germans cry frequently because they are sentimental—they have *false* emotions—and they are aggressive; children of such parents have no motive to develop a conscience because doing so will not cause them to receive more love. Therefore, they are free to be completely selfish, and they are good only when being good will result in a personal gain; throughout Porter's story her characters are anxious to cheat each other. If aggression will make a person feel better, that person will be aggressive. Freud argues that any progress the culture had made toward transforming the instincts was erased by the war (299), and he would have agreed that

Germany's defeat brought with it a national feeling of having been castrated; this in turn led to massive denial of the country's castrated state, to an obsession with appearing manly and appearing to have power. It also led to a desire for revenge, a desire to castrate the castrator. This is not rational, but as Freud notes, when the emotions are aroused they rule the intellect and reasoning stops, even among leaders and scientists (287). Thus even Bussen the mathematician can sink into blind nationalism when Germany's defeat is discussed.

According to Freud, war disturbs civilians for two reasons. The first, as discussed previously, is that they become disillusioned and realize that they are basically animals; the second is that war changes our attitude toward death (275). Ordinarily, we deny death; we realize that others may die, but we secretly believe that we will never die. This attitude changes in times of war, when death is widespread; the death of someone close to us forces us to recognize that death is real and that we may die. We are bewildered, however, for we have no new way to handle this awareness of death; in turn we are led to depression and to a tendency to fear death so much that we are unwilling to risk really living (289-91). The fear of castration which Porter's story emphasizes is actually a cover for the fear of death, and Charles's fear of sexuality is also a fear of truly living, for to live is to risk dying. Charles can only live by painting what he desires, not by actually struggling for what he desires, just as he and other Germans can watch sexuality but cannot be genuinely sexual. The war, harsh parenting, suppressed sexuality, and sanctioned aggression thus explain the behavior of the Germans in the story, but they do not fully explain the behavior of Charles or his attraction to this sick culture.

After hearing the nationalistic claims of the Germans in the cabaret, Charles responds like a typical American: "I can't talk about whole countries because I never knew one, not even my own. I only know a few persons here and there and some I like and some I don't like and I never thought it anything but a personal matter…." (*CS* 483-84). A reader may initially see his individualism as attractive, but the Polish pianist Tadeusz sees through it in his sarcastic but insightful statement:

> Oh, dear fellow, that is being much too modest. The whole art of self-importance is to raise your personal likes and dislikes to the plane of moral or aesthetic principle, and to apply on an international scale your smallest personal experience…. If someone steps on your foot, you should not rest until you have raised an army to avenge you. (*CS* 484)

This is the point of this story, and while it is cynical it is in line with Freud. It is not that the personal is the political, it is that the political is the personal. Charles, clinging to his naïve American belief that people are basically good, believes that others may be racist but he is not; the more experienced Tadeusz, who has been kicked in the mouth by his own mother and lived through a world war, realizes that everything is subjective and that judgments are inevitable.

The veracity of Tadeusz's claim, originally made by Freud, is seen in Porter's Mexico stories: when she felt good the country was wonderful; when she felt bad the country was miserable. In "The Leaning Tower" aspects of Charles's personality color his ability to experience the culture; a less sensitive, more sexually secure person might never have regarded the people as piglike. But this does not lessen Germany's problem: in a country where the individuals' egos have been damaged by war, defeat, death, sexual

repression, and aggression, those individuals will project their hurt feelings onto the nation and look outward for revenge instead of turning inward and examining the culture that is in fact at the root of their problems. Despite the fact that his country is still suffering the effects of the last war, Hans becomes angered by criticism of Germany's militarism and tells Charles, "We Germans were beaten in the last war, thanks partly to your great country, but we shall win in the next" (*CS* 486). As Freud noted, strong emotions will overrule the intellect, and thus the country is prepared to make irrational choices.

Charles's aggression, the hatefulness he sees in others but not in himself, may be seen in his dream:

> Charles, lightly asleep, dreamed the house was burning down, silently alive and pulsing with flame in every part. With no fear or hesitation at all, he walked safely through the fiery walls and out into the wide bright street, carrying a suitcase which [...] contained all the drawings he meant to do in his whole life. He walked a safe distance and watched the dark skeleton of the house tall as a tower standing in a fountain of fire. Seeing that he was all alone, he said in wonder, "They all escaped, too," when a loud and ghostly groan was uttered in his ear. He spun about and saw no one. The groan sounded again over his shoulder and woke him sharply. (*CS* 459-60)

He wakes to discover that in the next room Hans is groaning in pain from the infected saber scar on his cheek, for as Freud notes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* our dreams incorporate sounds from the outside world in order to allow us to continue sleeping (262).

But nearly all dreams are wishes, and this dream fulfills a number of Charles's wishes. The house—Germany in microcosm—is destroyed, as is the feared phallus, the "tower standing in a fountain of fire." But the destruction is not threatening, for Charles for once has "no fear or hesitation." He has completed his life's work with no effort, for the paintings are finished. If this fire actually occurred the landlady would be devastated and the other boarders' belongings would be destroyed, but Charles's egotistic nature is revealed in the fact that he gives this no thought. The question remains, however, of who Charles's dreaming mind wishes to die in the fire, who utters the "loud and ghostly groan." It could be the landlady, but there is no particular reason her groan would be ghostly. There is, though, one German whose groan would be ghostly and who Charles would wish to be free of: his dead childhood friend Kuno.

Kuno's presence in this story and in Charles's thoughts is puzzling, for Charles repetitively remembers Kuno and is prone to think of him at odd moments: "he found himself remembering Kuno in rather sudden, unexpected pictures, even seeing himself as he was then, and these flashes of memory came against still other flashes, and back somewhere in the dark of his mind was the whole story, whatever it was" (*CS* 437). What, then, is the whole story in the dark of Charles's mind, and what is Kuno the dead childhood friend doing playing such a large part in this story's examination of German aggression? It is not enough that Kuno was German and encouraged his friend to think romantically of Berlin. The reader learns that Kuno and Charles were great childhood friends: "He and Kuno did not remember when they had not known each other" (*CS* 437), and their first memories were of standing next to each other. When Kuno traveled to

Europe he seemed to miss his friend, for he regularly sent him postcards, and Charles can remember only one argument the two friends ever had.

Kuno died at age fifteen on a trip to Germany, where he was buried, and when his parents returned to Texas with a new baby they "were very silent on the subject" (*CS* 439).[6] Charles claims that "He hardly ever thought of Kuno any more, or had not for a long time, except simply as dead, though that went on being hard to believe" (*CS* 440). But this claim is belied throughout the story, where he regularly thinks of Kuno. One reason may lie in the manner of Kuno's death, for because he died and was buried in a foreign land, and because his parents would not speak about his death, Charles apparently was unable to successfully mourn him: he still finds it hard to believe that Kuno is dead. On Christmas Eve he thinks of Kuno and not of his parents because Kuno is apparently the only person he ever loved: his mother is smothering, his father seems cold and cheap, and no other friends or relatives are mentioned. Another reason why Kuno haunts this story, however, may lie in Charles's unconscious hostility towards him. Kuno had parents who cared about nourishing his talents, and Kuno had money, two things Charles craves. Porter based the character of Kuno on a close childhood friend who had the loving, cultured, wealthy family that Porter did not (Givner 319), and her ambivalence towards that friend can be seen in the name she gives her, for Kuno is also the name of the fierce German shepherd in "Holiday," and in the fact that she turns her living friend into a dead person.

According to Freud, the death of someone close to us prevents us from denying death, which causes depression and a fear of death that can prevent us from risking really living (290-91). This may partly explain Charles's depression, fear of death, and fear of

[6] Once more, Porter links childbirth and death.

sexuality. Kuno's death has apparently affected him in the same way that the deaths of loved ones in the war affected the Germans, and thus Charles has much in common with the culture he is unconsciously attracted to. Freud argues that we inevitably feel ambivalent toward others, and thus when even a loved one dies we feel not merely grief but also happiness: we are bound to offend each other at times, and our unconscious is murderous towards those who offend us. Ambivalence, not merely grief, is what makes the death of a loved one difficult, for we cannot accept that we could feel happy at the death of someone we loved (298-99). It is possible that Charles's unconscious guilt over the death of Kuno, caused by his jealousy of him, may have driven him to punish himself by forsaking sexuality and by visiting the Germany that Kuno loved; he states that "If it hadn't been for Kuno I should have gone to Paris, or to Madrid" (*CS* 440). When Tadeusz explains why Bussen should not be given a coat he says, "we have to realize that a man's sufferings are his own, quite often he chooses them to some ends of his own—how do we know?" (*CS* 474). Charles may have come to Berlin partly in an unconscious effort to placate his dead friend, for Kuno "would be glad if he could know his friend was here at last" (*CS* 437). Charles often feels guilty about various things, and he thinks that he has been apologizing "to somebody or other, or thinking it, or feeling it, all day and every day since he had been in that city" (*CS* 460).

In Germany, Charles discovers the symbol of the guilt he had come there to escape, the castrated penis. Once a sign of life, masculinity, and power, it has become a sign of death, emasculation, and impotence, for as Freud suggests, fear of castration is based on a fear of death. Once the father's, it is also Kuno's, and it is a reminder that Charles unconsciously wished them both dead. Likewise, it is Germany's, for the

country was castrated by World War I and reacted with guilt, fear, and denial by putting its supposed power on display, propping up the image until it became a kind of reality. Charles, in search of the masculinity a father can provide, goes to the Fatherland only to discover the mother in charge and the father's phallus not rigid but leaning, horribly on display and somehow fragile yet indestructible. Germany, in search of its destroyed masculinity, self-destructively embraces a father-fuehrer who preaches that the way to life and power is through the killing of others.

Freud argues that in our unconscious minds we believe we will never die, although our rational minds tell us differently. Fear of death, therefore, is actually secondary, and is caused by guilt over the death of another (296-97). For Charles, this is guilt over the death of Kuno. For Porter, this was guilt over the death of her mother. For the Germans, this was guilt over the deaths of loved ones who had died in wars. Freud argues that this guilt led "primitive" people to create ethics (295); however, in the modern world guilt no longer leads to ethics, it leads to neurosis (298). Irrational behavior is set loose on the world, as if we have developed beyond our capacities and are intent on self-destruction, a theme that Freud was to develop in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and that Germany's relationship with Hitler seemed to prove. Everyday laypersons, Freud notes, reject all such notions, for they falsely believe that we have only our conscious minds, and therefore they narcissistically believe that good intentions are enough and that humanity's innate goodness will lead to progress and happiness, as if what they wish was true is in fact true (297-98).

We want to deny hate, Freud concludes, but we should face it in order to be on guard. Likewise, he states that we should admit death, for it is truth and admitting it

would make life tolerable; it is the illusions that are killing us, and "If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death" (299-300). This is, however, no easy matter. Katherine Anne Porter spent her life attempting to prepare herself for death, and in story after story she placed her characters in situations that required them to face their fear of death. As she aged and her fear of death increased, fear of death extended to fear of sexuality and then to fear of aggression, and from there it became fear of other people, a fear that damaged her later works. At the cabaret, Charles makes a desperate attempt to express his sexuality but is shocked by Hans's statement that there will be another war; he surrenders his sexuality, and when a young woman kisses him "he kissed back but like a child" (*CS* 493). Charles retreats to his room-womb, feels "the chill and the knowledge of death in him" (*CS* 495), encounters the source of his own guilt in the form of the repaired Leaning Tower of Pisa, and folds into the fetal position, much as Porter herself did as she gradually lost a lifelong struggle with guilt caused by the death of her mother; the difference is that Porter, much more than Charles, turned that struggle into art and thus, like Freud, she did her best to expose the illusions that are killing us.

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