REALITY AND REVELATION IN THE SHORT FICTION
OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

THESIS

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This investigation of Miss Porter's short fiction demonstrates that reality and revelation are predominant ideas in most of her writing. Reality for most of the characters differs from reality as the protagonist eventually perceives it. Through revelation of delusions--both his own and others'--the protagonist may better deal with life's difficulties. These difficulties are represented, as secondary themes in the stories, by three repeated human experiences: initiation, subjugation, and alienation. Subsequent chapters of this investigation explore reality and revelation in relation to each secondary theme. Discussion follows the development of increasing extremity in one's difficulties in life, from the initiatory childhood encounters with human nature and society, to the subjugating troubles incurred through continuing maturity, to alienation and the encounter of death's possibility and actuality.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The short stories of Katherine Anne Porter have appeared in *Flowering Judas* (1930), *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), and *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944); in 1965 the publication of her *Collected Stories* added only four works to those previously collected. Although the production of three slim volumes of short stories is unlikely to bring praise and admiration for most writers, Miss Porter has held, from the time of the first reviews of *Flowering Judas*, a formidable reputation as a writer of short fiction.

Miss Porter, of course, is not typical of most writers; her laconic prose has polish and dimension rarely equaled in modern fiction. She is noted also for perceptive appraisals of other writers' work, analyses in which she reveals the critical skill inherent in the creation of her own compact, meaningful prose. Analyzing

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1The full titles of the collections of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories are:

*Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (New York, 1930);
*Pale Horse, Pale Rider: Three Short Novels* (New York, 1939);
*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (New York, 1944); and
*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York, 1965).
Katherine Anne Porter's writing, however, has proved for most of her critics to be a difficult undertaking. One reviewer aptly states the dilemma:

The critic who attempts to isolate her fiction from the rest of her canon winds up rather self-consciously trying to evaluate her as a craftsman; hence the generalizations about style. The critic who tries to correlate all of her work tends to misread her stories within the context of her topical essays and to find a totality and synthesis which do not exist.²

Looking at Miss Porter's stories as a whole and attempting to categorize them is like trying to isolate the changing images of a kaleidoscope. Critics have found several kinds of "a totality and synthesis" within the stories, however, in surprising variety and number. George Hendrick, although drawing together in his study of Miss Porter and her work many biographical and critical details, is overzealous in stressing autobiographical and symbolic elements.³ Miss Porter herself has commented on the relationship between a writer's life and the fiction, and, although acknowledging the creative spark of her own memories, she maintains that "it is the intention of the writer to write fiction, after all--real fiction, not roman à clef,


³George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York, 1965).
or a thinly disguised personal confession."\(^4\) Her heritage and experiences contribute greatly to Katherine Anne Porter's work, but as impetus for a new being and experience, not as documentation for reporting her own. As for symbol-hunting, Hendrick's search for obscure allusion is too rigorous. For instance, Hendrick too fancifully suggests that the setting of "Noon Wine," near Buda, Texas, is meaningful in that "the first part of the story is filled with Buddhist peace and quiet."\(^5\)

Geographical setting is a factor used by another critic to unify Miss Porter's stories. In his monograph *Katherine Anne Porter: The Regional Stories*, Winfred S. Emmons includes only those stories set in Texas.\(^6\) For example, Emmons omits "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" because it occurs elsewhere in the West and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" because its setting is in Granny's mind. He maintains that geographical setting is important in the relationship of the stories, that the location contributes some intangible feeling to them. Emmons, however, fails to point out just what


\(^{5}\)Hendrick, p. 90.

this feeling is or where it occurs, as he recapitulates the stories.

The fact that Miss Porter's stories are set in New York, Mexico, Germany, and no place in particular—as well as in Texas—demonstrates that she is not a regionalist. Laura of "Flowering Judas" would be as alone in New York as she is in Mexico, just as Shakespeare's Portia could adjudicate in London as easily as she does in Venice.

The theme of rejection is the unity that William Nance finds to be central to Katherine Anne Porter's work. Although rejection certainly is an important element in a number of the stories, it is not the predominant theme of her short fiction. Nance seems to say that Miss Porter's work follows a negative pattern, and that the view of life presented in the stories is one of "unrelieved darkness." The narrowness of his thesis makes black-and-white distinctions where the implications are in shades of gray. The reality depicted in Katherine Anne Porter's stories does include unhappiness, fear, and death, but this reality also includes love, sympathy, and humor, which are equally necessary to a true picture of life. The tenderness and gaiety found in the stories are sincere emotions unclouded by

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8Ibid., p. 245.
maudlin sentiment, and they are heightened by contrast with darkness and rejection, which Nance emphasizes as predominant.

Perhaps each critic has a part of the answer; in specific instances and varying degrees, their claims are legitimate. In contrast to theses which are in part successful, a predominant theme which is sufficiently flexible to encompass most of Miss Porter's stories and sufficiently compatible with additional contributing themes does occur in the stories: it is the ironic balance between reality as it exists for most of the characters in the stories and reality as the protagonist comes to perceive it. The experience of the real world is balanced against existence as it must be intuitively altered before most of humanity can bear it. This theme of two realities and revelation will here be emphasized as a predominant idea explored in most of Katherine Anne Porter's stories; several other major themes shared by certain stories will be peripherally discussed.

The ideas of illusion, appearance, and reality, of self-deception and betrayal, and of revelation have often been mentioned in analyses of Katherine Anne Porter's fiction. Such critics as William Nance, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Edward Schwartz, and Sara Youngblood have all noted in passing that these
are significant themes in the stories. None of Miss Porter's critics, however, has pursued the ideas of dual realities and revelation, with the contributing themes of deception and betrayal, appearance and illusion, as a major unifying theme of her short fiction. Miss Porter herself has remarked that she writes about man's delusion, about

... self-betrayal and self-deception--[and] the way that all human beings deceive themselves about the way they operate. ... There seems to be a kind of order in the universe, in the movement of the stars and the turning of the earth and the changing of the seasons, and even in human life. But human life itself is almost pure chaos. Everyone takes his stance, asserts his own rights and feelings, mistaking the motives of others, and his own.  

Self-betrayal and self-deception are dominant in Katherine Anne Porter's short stories. The characters with whom Miss Porter is most deeply concerned come close to reconciling the two realities of the world: as it is and as they would like it to be.  

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her introduction to Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*, Miss Porter states a preference for the story in which the "external act and internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end." The theme of reality and deception unifies Katherine Anne Porter's stories, and most often the main character undergoes a revelation enabling him to see reality and to cope with it.

Through exposure of delusions—both his own and others'—the individual has a means of dealing with life's difficulties. These difficulties are generally represented in the stories by three repeated human experiences. The experiences of initiation, subjugation, and alienation are strong secondary themes in the stories; subsequent chapters of this paper will explore dual realities and revelation in relation to each of these secondary themes. Discussion of these secondary themes follows the development of increasing extremity in one's difficulties in life, from the first childhood encounters with human nature and society, to the troubles incurred through continuing

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maturity, to the encounter of death's possibility and actuality.

Initiation is an important theme in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "Virgin Violeta," "The Old Order," and "Old Mortality." The stories of initiation are concerned with characters who, as young people with little experience in the world, expand their understanding of reality. Through revelation, the protagonist in each of these stories is initiated into an increased awareness of life. Initiation, as it reveals delusions and reality, acquaints the young people in these stories with several fundamental experiences of life and with the forces of human nature and society.

These same forces of human nature and society in a large degree contribute, in other stories, to the subjugation of the individual; even though he discovers what some of these forces are, most often the individual remains subject to them. Subjugation, for the purpose of this discussion, implies obstructing control of the individual's life by forces difficult to combat. Characters beyond the unconditioned innocence of childhood appear, in the midst of life's difficulties, in "Theft," "Magic," "Holiday," "He," and "The Cracked Looking-Glass." In these stories, the main character is subject to various obstacles jeopardizing happiness, health, or even life; the dangers include the mores and laws of society, natural
phenomena such as age and physical or mental handicaps, and the character's own shortcomings. The character often does not overcome the forces that handicap him, but he does experience a revelation of the reality of his predicament.

Alienation is a strong secondary theme in "Mari'a Conception," "Flowering Judas," "The Leaning Tower," "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "Noon Wine," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." In these stories, as the protagonist becomes aware of his own delusions and those of surrounding persons, he also becomes aware of his alienation. The difficulties that face these protagonists all involve encountering the reality of death. Their reactions to the possibility of death and responsibility for death vary, in major ways, as do their reactions to alienation. For several protagonists, alienation is an escape or protection from the distorted world around them. For another, alienation is a self-created barrier limiting his life and the lives of others; and for still another individual, alienation is a temporary defense against the severe reality of death.

All three secondary themes of initiation, subjugation, and alienation are interwoven in the stories and contribute to the main ideas of reality and revelation. In most of Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction, then, delusions are eventually revealed to the
protagonist, and this revelation affords a means to see and to contend with life's reality. 12

Enlightened awareness through reality's revelation does not, however, result for all of Miss Porter's characters. In five of the stories, in particular, the author's purpose seems to be the opposite: to withhold revelation and emphasize the hopelessness and futility of deception and distorted reality. The five stories are "Hacienda," "The Martyr," "That Tree," "Rope," and "A Day's Work," and for their characters no enlightenment occurs. Only the reader sees the reality and the delusions of their lives. Among these five stories, three are set in Mexico during the late 1920's. "Hacienda," the longest and most complex of the three stories, demonstrates the decadence and oppressiveness of three disparate factions: the feudal, pseudo-aristocratic Mexicans; the opportunistic foreigners; and the corrupt Mexican revolutionaries. "Hacienda" is dark and unsettling to the last; no insight is gained, no new awareness revealed.

Two other stories, "The Martyr" and "That Tree," satirize the "revolutionary" artists who abounded in Mexico during the 1920's. Exaggerated to humorous proportions in "The Martyr,"

12 This discussion is limited to Miss Porter's short fiction, for her long novel, Ship of Fools, is generally considered to be uncharacteristic of her best writing.
the protagonist becomes a caricature whose self-deception and self-indulgence yield fatal consequences. In "That Tree," the ridicule is more subtle and is directed toward an American writer whose delusions typify the expatriated, disillusioned, but somewhat adolescent artist of his time. "That Tree" ends with the protagonist ironically proclaiming a new awareness although he actually perpetuates his self-delusion.

Of these five stories whose emphasis seems to be on the hopelessness of continued delusion, two demonstrate domestic hostility between man and woman. "Rope" pictures a husband and wife as they gnaw at each other and tear at the bonds between them; beyond being the superficial object of their argument, the rope represents a relationship beginning to fray and come apart under the strain. In "A Day's Work," marriage for a mismatched pair has degenerated until all that remains is a means for each to bedevil the other. In both domestic stories, the characters continue to deceive themselves and their partners; husband and wife are bound in unions ironically distorted from what they were established to be.

The characters of these five stories are presented as studies of the deluded individual. But more often in Miss Porter's stories, the protagonist is allowed to discover the reality distorted by his own and others' deceptions. Katherine Anne Porter supports
through her writing the unflinching scrutiny of self and of one's relationships with others. Self-knowledge and awareness of the individual's predicament in life are uncomfortable realities to face; but without facing them, one is not truly and honestly alive. Through her exploration of the individual's inner reaches, Miss Porter establishes awareness of self and of life's reality as difficult--even dangerous--to confront but enriching in proportion to the discomfort and hazard.

Such exploration demands a certain strength. Explaining the "uncorrupted consciousness" required for Katherine Anne Porter's scrutiny of life, Robert Penn Warren speaks of this necessary strength:

She knows . . . that if one is to try to see "all," one must be willing to see the dark side of the moon. She has a will, a ferocious will, to face, but face in its full context, what Herman Melville called the great "NO" of life. If stoicism is the underlying attitude in this fiction, it is a stoicism without grimness or arrogance, capable of gaiety, tenderness, and sympathy, and its ethical point of reference is found in those characters who, like Granny Weatherall, have the toughness to survive but who survive by a loving sense of obligation to others, this sense being, in the end, only a full affirmation of the life-sense, a joy in strength.  

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Miss Porter's writing, Warren continues, is "both a question asked of life and a celebration of life"; and Katherine Anne Porter knows "that the more corrosive the question asked, the more powerful may be the celebration." Through her corrosive questions, Miss Porter discloses the distortions and deceptions of life and the awareness, or revelation, that enables her characters to see through them to reality.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER II

INITIATION

In several of Katherine Anne Porter's stories, the protagonist, usually a child, becomes aware of certain aspects of human nature and some common deceptions in society and gains understanding of certain fundamental experiences in life. From the child's perspective, initiations common to all people are explored; these first initiations involve a conscious knowledge of phenomena such as love and hatred, danger and cruelty, and birth and death. As he learns more about human experience, the child discovers that inherent in human nature is the tendency to delude oneself rather than face unpleasant reality. He also discovers that society collectively functions, as do individuals, by ignoring or disguising disconcerting reality. For the children in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "Virgin Violeta," "The Old Order," and "Old Mortality," these discoveries reveal their delusions and those of the surrounding adults.

In "The Downward Path to Wisdom," a young boy experiences revelations concerning himself and his relationships with others. He becomes aware of himself as a person, of his
interaction with others in society, and of love and hatred. Initially the boy's animality is emphasized; the imagery reinforces an underlying fact: the surrounding adults do not recognize the boy as a person. For example, he comes to his parents' room and is swung into bed between them "like a bear cub in a warm litter"; he is eating peanuts and crunching "like a horse." To his father, he is "dumb as an ox"; the mother counters that "he's a dear lamb," and, meanwhile, "staring like an owl," he observes them both. Very much like any other young animal, he desires warmth, food, and attention; he is primarily concerned with his own needs.

He is becoming conditioned, however, to believe and to behave as do the adults around him. The example they set for him is difficult to understand, as the adults' overindulgence followed by harsh reprimands confuses and frustrates the boy. A violent quarrel between the parents results in the child's being hustled off to Grandmother's, "just like the last time." Although the words of the argument elude him, the emotion does not: he is aware of surrounding anger. He is more aware of the adults than they are of him, and he is more of a person than they realize. They call him "darling," "bad boy," and

1 Porter, Collected Stories, pp. 369-370.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 372.
"fellow," and only when the Grandmother sends him to nursery school does he learn that his name is Stephen.

The boy's first revelation in the story is that he actually is a person, with a name and an identity of his own. Stephen then begins to learn about human nature and society. For instance, when one child makes fun of the clay figure Stephen has modeled, the others join in laughing at him; when he gives balloons to the children, they include him in their games. He has learned of both the discomfort and the pleasure of his peers' attention. These revelations are steps on "the downward path to wisdom," as Stephen approaches an experience which initiates him into the society of those fallen from grace. With his initiation, Stephen discovers various deceptions of the people around him and sees the reality of his relationship with them.

Stephen's initiating experience occurs as Frances, a little girl from nursery school, comes with her nurse to visit him. As critic George Hendrick observes, "all of the adults had been expelled from paradise themselves, and the crucial scene in the story is Stephen's expulsion." Hendrick notes that many details in this scene suggest the Genesis story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from

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4 Hendrick, p. 98.
Eden. Unnoticed by their gossiping nurses, the children begin by blowing up balloons, with Stephen selecting an "apple-colored" one. Stephen feels his ribs and for the first time notices that they stop somewhere in front. Frances grows thirsty and threatens to go home; she is restless, like her predecessor Eve. Stephen boldly says he will make some lemonade. After taking the "forbidden fruit," Stephen shares the lemonade with Frances, pours the surplus as baptism for a rosebush, and shouts "Name father, son, holygoat." Ironically, the child's version of a religious ritual leads to his downfall. Roused by Stephen's exclamation, the nurses invade the little Eden and chastize the wrongdoers, like God discovering the erring Adam and Eve.

As a consequence of his experience, Stephen learns how people betray others. For instance, Old Janet, the nurse, does not mention, in her report to the Grandmother, that she was not supervising the children. Similarly, Uncle David scolds Stephen for taking balloons, after lying to the boy by saying that there were no more. Accused of stealing and lying by people who are themselves dishonest,

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5 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
6 Porter, Collected Stories, p. 379.
7 Ibid., p. 382.
Stephen has fallen from innocence and truly is on "the downward path to wisdom."

Stephen learns that people can be dishonest in their feelings toward others; he recognizes what Eudora Welty calls "the hate that is love's twin, love's impostor and enemy and death." He sees it in his Grandmother's face, for example, and is frightened because "there was something wrong with her smile." In the anger, jealousy, and animosity surrounding him, Stephen discovers the feelings that unite his family. He sings to himself his new secret, his revelation--"a comfortable, sleepy song: 'I hate Papa, I hate Mama, I hate Grandma, I hate Uncle David, I hate Old Janet, I hate Marjory, I hate Papa, I hate Mama...'."

This litany of hatred he has learned from his elders. Each of the adults deceives himself, thinking that he knows what is best for the boy; Stephen sees with childhood's perception still undistorted by society's influence that hate is the tie that binds them all, so he reciprocates. He sees the reality of the situation while the adults perpetuate their self-deception. He has been initiated from childhood's

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9 Porter, Collected Stories, p. 384.
10 Ibid., p. 387.
unqualified love and belief into the reality of hatred that underlies self-deluding, self-centered, superficial love.

Beyond the all-trusting love of childhood comes the adolescent ideal of romantic love. Just as love is the façade of hatred in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," romantic notions in "Virgin Violeta" distort the reality of love between man and woman. Violeta, a young Mexican girl who has been nurtured on the dream of idealistic love, learns that it bears little resemblance to the reality of encounters.

Violeta's delusions about love have been fostered by her training at the convent school and by her parents' attitudes. Both adult influences perpetuate idealistic concepts of love and of a woman's role in life. At the convent, Violeta is taught mainly "modesty, chastity, silence, obedience"; she has "no native wisdom," and none of her training helps her understand "why the things that happen outside of people were so different from what she felt inside of her."¹¹ At home Doña Paz, Violeta's mother, encourages her daughters to behave as the young woman's role dictates.

Doña Paz enjoys chaperoning her older daughter Blanca and is pleased by the suitor Carlos' courtly manners. An evening of

¹¹Ibid., p. 23.
poetry reading by Blanca and Carlos is the story's main scene, in which irony is used to emphasize the contrast between appearance and reality. For instance, Doña Paz, who supposedly is watching over the young people, falls asleep. Carlos, who observes a religious picture on the wall, shows by his actions that he is sensual rather than cerebral. Even the picture he contemplates is ironic, as the Virgin Mary's face is "set in a detached simper" instead of divine compassion, and the saint before her grovels "in a wooden posture of ecstasy," with "wooden" contradicting "ecstasy."¹²

Violeta's sensitivity about her appearance is a further extension of the story's irony; while Violeta considers herself unattractive, Carlos finds her sufficiently appealing to pursue. Violeta feels ugly in comparison to her more sophisticated sister; she notices, uncomfortably, her own thick-soled sandals in contrast to Blanca's gray satin slippers. Just as typically adolescent as her self-consciousness is Violeta's secret love for Carlos, an idealistic love influenced by the spiritualism of the convent.

Carlos' pursuit precipitates Violeta's initiation into the reality of contact between man and woman. Violeta's experience occurs as the poetry reading is interrupted by Blanca's request for

¹²Ibid.
Carlos' latest volume of poems. As Blanca and Carlos search the bookshelves for the volume, the intimacy of their murmurs shuts out Violeta. In an effort to make them aware of her, Violeta says that she has the book and goes to another room to get it. Carlos, "as if he had thought of something interesting," follows her.\(^{13}\)

Unsteady with anxiety, Violeta knows something is to happen, but she does not anticipate the impending initiation into reality. Her visions of love change painfully, as Carlos swoops down, bird-like, to kiss her. Alarm, distaste, and embarrassment—not the expected rapture—fill her. "What did you expect when you came out here alone with me?" Carlos asks roughly.\(^{14}\) She is both frightened by his advance and humiliated by his coldness in response to her anxiety. Violeta is confused and disturbed, and later, as Carlos is bidding them good night, Violeta screams uncontrollably when he approaches her for a cousinly kiss. "Everything she could remember in her whole life seemed to have melted together in a confusion and misery that could not be explained because it was all changed and uncertain."\(^{15}\)

Violeta weeps at the thought of returning to the convent, for nothing is to be learned there anymore. Her revelation and initiation

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 28. \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 30. \(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 31.
have dissolved the image of idealistic love into actual experience with life, and she knows that the isolated existence at the convent ill prepares her for life in the world.

As Stephen and Violeta experience revelations about love and its distortions, so Miranda Rhea is initiated into a broadened awareness of delusions and reality concerning danger and cruelty, birth and death, legend and loyalty. Miranda, a major character in Katherine Anne Porter's writing, develops from childhood and adolescence in "The Old Order" and "Old Mortality" to womanhood in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider."

Miranda's name is often interpreted as implying a "discoverer," and many critics point out that Shakespeare's Miranda in The Tempest is an explorer of sorts. Consistently throughout the stories, Miranda is more perceptive than those around her and inclined to see through delusions to reality; even in childhood Miranda sees that some of society's conventions are deceptions accepted in place of discomfiting reality.

Significant initiations in Miranda's childhood occur in "The Circus," "The Fig Tree," and "The Grave"; the remaining stories of "The Old Order" are largely character sketches which give family history and establish the personality and force of Miranda's Grandmother, a strong influence on the two generations she rears.
In rearing her son Harry's motherless children, the Grandmother has definite ideas and a stubborn will enforced by the conviction that she always acts according to her own determination. This actually is one of the Grandmother's delusions, for, although she believes her opinion is correct, she allows her judgment to be influenced by her sons.

Such is the case in "The Circus." The Grandmother disapproves of the circus, although she has never seen one, and only after much persuasion does she allow the children to attend. Most anxious to see the circus is Miranda, the youngest child, who also has never seen a circus, and whose inexperience in life is a significant element in her terrified reaction.

As the circus begins, Miranda looks up to see a "creature" in billowy white, with "bone-white skull" and "chalk-white face," eyelids in a "black sharp angle," a long mouth extending to "sunken cheeks" and painted in "a perpetual bitter grimace of pain, astonishment, not smiling." At first Miranda thinks the clown is flying or walking on air, which seems perfectly possible to the unknowing confidence of a child. When she sees the wire on which the clown is balanced, however, she is terrified.

16 Ibid., p. 344.
To Miranda, everything about the clown suggests grotesque unreality; all the descriptions emphasize his inhumanity:

the inhuman figure pranced, he staggered, plunged, caught the wire with frantic knee, the other leg waving like a feeler above his head; turned his head like a seal from side to side and blew sneering kisses from his cruel mouth.  

Realizing finally that the clown is human, Miranda is frightened of him and for his danger. As he dangles precariously from the wire, she sees the sadistic pleasure of the audience: "the crowd roared with savage delight, shrieks of dreadful laughter like devils in torment."  

Clutching at her stomach and drawing up her knees, Miranda shrieks, too, with real fright. As in "Virgin Violeta" when Violeta screams with the reality of Carlos' approach, so Miranda screams at the reality of danger and cruelty which entertains the crowd.

Miranda is so upset that the little servant Dicey is ordered to take the frightened child home. Reluctantly, Dicey obeys. Near the exit, they pass a dwarf, who looks at Miranda with "kind, non-human golden eyes" and grimaces in an imitation of her crying face.  

Miranda strikes at him and then sees in his face a grown-up

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17 Ibid., pp. 344-345.  
18 Ibid., p. 345.  
19 Ibid.
look of displeasure; she is newly frightened, because she had not believed he was human.

Miranda sees the reality behind the clown on the high wire and the costumed dwarf, and the reality disturbs her. Her sleep that night is filled with the real nightmare of "the bitter terrified face of the man in blowsy white falling to his death--ah, the cruel joke!--and the terrible grimace of the unsmiling dwarf."20 She sees beyond the superficial appearances of the funny clown and dwarf to behold their unhappy reality.

None of the other children has been so affected, and the Grandmother is the circus' only detractor. Although admitting that she had been somewhat amused, the Grandmother still maintains that the circus has "sights and sounds . . . not particularly edifying to the young."21 She sees the possibility of harm to come, as she tells Miranda's father that "the fruits of the present are in a future so far off neither of us may live to know whether harm has been done or not."22 For Miranda, the result is painful, but not harmful; she has seen through appearance to reality and gained a sensitivity to humanity.

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20 Ibid., p. 347.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Contrary to her enlightenment is the deluded state of the audience. For others, the grotesquerie and danger of the circus are socially-accepted, humorous entertainment, and the figure on the high wire is only a clown, until he falls. In death they would recognize him as a man and see the horror of the joke. Miranda's perception is clearer than theirs. In his comments on "The Circus," Edward Schwartz offers a reason for her sensitivity:

Her [Miranda's] lack of preconceptions causes her to see the circus as dreadful and isolates her from family and society. Not understanding the conventions, she catches her first glimpse of the possible terrors and frustrations of human living.\(^2\)

Miranda's awareness of the discrepancy between appearance and reality is increased, in "The Fig Tree," as she is initiated into a deeper understanding of the reality of death. She also begins to see the reality of adults as imperfect, sometimes deluded humans, rather than infallible beings.

Miranda's knowledge of death is limited to her understanding that her mother is dead, and dead means "gone away forever."\(^2\) Miranda knows some of death's characteristics, and she tests creatures that she suspects are dead. She knows, also, how society


\(^2\)Porter, Collected Stories, p. 354.
deals with dead people, so when she finds a creature that does not move or make a noise, Miranda buries it and tops the grave with flowers.

In "The Fig Tree," Miranda learns that the appearances of life and of death are closely related and sometimes deceptive. While waiting for the family to leave for the farm one summer afternoon, Miranda discovers, beneath her favorite fig tree, a baby chick that does not move. She buries it and hurries to finish the grave, because the adults are calling for her. Just as the earthen mound is done, Miranda hears a tiny voice saying "weep, weep." The adults insist that they leave, and Miranda bursts into tears. Without explaining why, she cries to go back; her father supposes Miranda's distress is only for a forgotten doll, so they travel on.

Once at the farm, Miranda learns that, in many things, appearances can be deceptive. As she watches her Grandmother and her Great-Aunt Eliza, Miranda is disappointed to see that sometimes adults are simply children grown older:

... here they were bickering like two little girls at school, or even the way Miranda and her sister Maria bickered and nagged and picked on each other and said things on purpose to hurt each other's feelings. Miranda felt sad and strange and a little frightened.26

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25 Ibid., p. 356.  
26 Ibid., p. 359.
Miranda's reaction is much like Stephen's in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," when he witnesses the quarrels of the adults around him. For Miranda, seeing the contention of the two old women reveals that behind the appearance of infallibility and authority lies the reality of human weakness.

With the many distractions of the farm, Miranda has forgotten her unhappiness and uncertainty about the baby chick under the fig tree. One night as the children look at the stars through Great-Aunt Eliza's telescope, they learn that flaring lights in the night sky are in reality other worlds. On the walk back to the house, they pass through a fig grove, and Miranda is terrified to hear "weep, weep, weep." Just as she has a scientific explanation for the reality of stars, Great-Aunt Eliza explains that the sound comes from the tree frogs in the fig trees. This revelation of reality has again shown Miranda the deception of appearance.

Through such revelations Miranda has become more enlightened about the phenomena of life; she has learned to question appearances, and she has learned that people and society often have delusions obscuring reality. In "The Fig Tree," Miranda becomes more aware of death as a reality; "The Grave" describes her

\[27\text{Ibid.}, \ p. 361.\]
initiation into knowledge of birth and its paradoxical relationship to
death, that the beginning of life is the first step toward death.

The circumstances of this story contrast to those of "The Circus" and "The Fig Tree." The Grandmother has died; rumors speculate that she discriminated against her son Harry in her will and that the family is losing stature. Part of the Grandmother's land, one portion containing the family cemetery, is to be sold. Twenty bodies are taken up and buried again in the new public cemetery.

Miranda and her brother Paul, now nine and twelve years old, are hunting rabbits when they come upon the old cemetery and explore it. Miranda, "playing in the pit that had held her grandfather's bones," finds a small silver dove, a screw head for a coffin. Paul, at the same time, finds a gold ring carved with flowers and leaves. Each wants the other's discovery, so they trade, and Miranda wears the ring on her thumb. The glittering ring makes Miranda aware of her grubby clothes, and, although the wedding ring does not yet fit her finger, she begins to display feminine inclinations in her desire to exchange her dirty overalls for a frilly dress.

28 Ibid., p. 363.
Paul, meanwhile, has resumed hunting and kills a rabbit. As Paul skins it, Miranda sees the beauty of the scarlet flesh and silvery muscle. Accustomed to hunting, she is not alarmed or repulsed by the anatomy of animals. Paul then realizes that the rabbit was going to bear young; carefully he slits it open, and inside are tiny, perfect rabbits.

Miranda wants to see and to know about fertility and birth. Having seen, she comes to a realization:

... the very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this... She understood a little of the secret, formless intuitions in her own mind and body, which had been clearing up, taking form, so gradually and steadily she had not realized that she was learning what she wanted to know. 29

As Miranda becomes increasingly aware of what she is learning, she becomes disturbed. Paul's attitude, also, influences her feelings, for he speaks about the unborn rabbits "as if he were talking about something forbidden." 30 Miranda becomes "quietly and terribly agitated" as she looks down at the bloody heap which, moments before, she had regarded with "a kind of shocked delight in the wonderful little creatures." 31

Miranda has been initiated into the reality of fertility and birth, and into an increased awareness of death. Like Violeta when she has her first experience with love, Miranda is confused and unhappy. She has difficulty understanding the new knowledge and her consequent feelings. She has seen the reality of birth and discovered the potentiality of her own body, and she has become aware of death as the inevitable result of birth. Miranda's unhappy feelings include sensitivity about her new awareness of birth, guilt—or at least pity—for the rabbit's death, and uneasiness because of society's delusion that fertility and conception are evil, secret matters.

Her initiation has revealed reality, and, although it is painful for nine-year-old Miranda to accept, through time the knowledge is unconsciously resolved within her. Evidence of the resolution comes twenty years later when, in a foreign city, a vendor offers her a tray of sugar sweets, some of which are shaped like baby rabbits. Miranda's mind is triggered back to the previous similar image, just as, years before under the fig trees, a second weeping sound recalled the first. She is "reasonlessly horrified" by the sugar rabbits, for it is the image unaltered by thought that recalls her long past horror. 32 As she thinks of that day many years before,

32 Ibid., p. 368.
Miranda sees the rabbits in a perspective changed by intervening years of experience and maturation.

The horror passes, with happiness replacing it as Miranda sees Paul, "in the blazing sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands." Miranda has long since resolved within herself the facts of birth and death, and the significant reality of that day becomes the memory of her brother in a contented moment of childhood.

Miranda, the child continues to grow and develop an increased awareness of reality; in "Old Mortality," as Miranda grows from child to young adult, she discovers the deceptive and twisted world of her elders, whose past is always overtaking the present. Legend and loyalty are two mainstays of Miranda's old Southern heritage, and Miranda eventually sees how her family has misplaced its faith in distortions of those mainstays.

The romanticized legend of Miranda's Aunt Amy and Uncle Gabriel is presented in Part I of "Old Mortality," which is set in the years from 1885 to 1902. The major theme of distorted memory contrasted with reality is supplemented by the ideas of the hollow past.

33 Ibid.
and of children's desire to embrace wholeheartedly their elders' beliefs.

In Part II, the young girls, Miranda and her sister Maria, first became acquainted with Uncle Gabriel, a pitiful remnant of the legend. Initiation and disillusionment are main themes in this portrayal of one Saturday in 1904. Finally, a journey back to the home place actually carries Miranda farther from her family's world, in Part III, set in 1912. As she returns to Texas for Gabriel's funeral, Miranda rejects the distorted reality and confused loyalty of her elders and recognizes the irreconcilable disparity between reality for them and reality for her.

The discrepancy between the little girls' perception and that of the adults is developed in Part I. Miranda and Maria, aged eight and twelve, try to see the world as their elders do, but they find this difficult. An example of the differing perceptions is found in the effect of Amy's portrait. Although the girls find the portrait unsettling, their elders refer to Amy as lovely, incomparable in beauty and spirit. The girls try earnestly to believe, but the

34 Miss Porter gave 1894 as her birth year until recently, when she acknowledged 1890; based on the dates in "Old Mortality," Miranda was born in 1894 and Maria in 1890.
clarity of their perception cannot be reconciled to the adults' cloudiness.

The source of their elders' belief lies in a past the girls cannot know. Only through the retelling of Amy's romantic legend can they begin to understand the adults' view of life. Maria and Miranda are fascinated by the story of Gabriel's long pursuit of Amy, with the tragic note of her death shortly after their marriage. Somehow, the girls cannot associate the legend with the remaining scraps of the past. When the Grandmother pulls out the trunks full of dowdy ribbons and paste, these vestiges of the past "seemed to have no place in the world," or especially in the real world of Maria and Miranda.

A subtle aging of the girls occurs in Part II; they are now fourteen and ten, with differences appearing between them. Maria is beginning to be included with the adults, whereas Miranda becomes an independent individual. Miranda perceives reality more clearly than do the adults around her, and in Part II she is initiated into an awareness of legend's reality compared to its romance.

Miranda's enlightenment takes place as her father Harry takes the girls to a horse race, on a Saturday holiday from their

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New Orleans convent school. Much like Violeta in "Virgin Violeta," Miranda has been a very sheltered child with little experience in the world. Her experiences on this Saturday broaden her awareness of reality.

The first revelation that Miranda undergoes is acquaintance with Uncle Gabriel; far from possessing the angelic qualities of his ironic name, Gabriel is a fat, graying, sad-looking man who drinks too much and is down on his luck with his race horses. Miranda's disappointment in seeing the real Gabriel is temporarily eased when she wins money on his mare; her delight turns hollow as she sees the horse after the race. The mare's eyes are wild, knees weak, and nose bloody; in her second disillusionment of the day, Miranda thinks "that was winning, too," and her heart rejects such a victory. 36

Disillusionment continues as Gabriel insists they accompany him home, and Miranda sees his run-down neighborhood, ironically named Elysian Fields, and his bitter, faded wife, ironically named Miss Honey. Besides discovering the deception of the family legend, Miranda begins to realize its twisted loyalty, for Gabriel lives his life in the past with the present existing only in its relation to the dead

36 Ibid., p. 199.
Amy, in whose shadow Miss Honey lives her unhappy life. Miranda has been initiated into the reality behind the family legend, and she learns that the name or appearance of a thing may belie its reality.

Miranda progresses from attempting to accept the delusions of her family to recognizing the reality behind their delusions. The final step in her initiation finds her rejecting those delusions in an effort to find reality in her own life. In Part III, the year is 1912; eighteen-year-old Miranda eloped two years earlier and is now on a train bound for Texas and Gabriel's funeral. The vinegary old lady beside her on the train turns out to be Eva Parrington, a cousin and contemporary of Miranda's parents. Eva, long an old maid, is a campaigner for women's rights. Her name implies Eve as a "first woman" and could reflect her early role in the suffrage movement.

Underneath the realistic and disciplined façade of Eva's personality, Miranda discovers that her cousin has delusions, too. For one, Eva still pictures Miranda as a child, indicating an unrealistic or limited perspective of time and growth. Another, more significant delusion slowly becomes apparent, as a mention of Gabriel's funeral leads Eva to discuss Amy. She speaks of her "as a devil and a mischief-maker, but I loved her dearly."37 Eva continues to

37Ibid., p. 211.
voice her affection for Amy and declares her conviction that Amy was a "pure" woman, but as her elaboration on the legend grows, hatred and jealousy begin to show from beneath her sham of loyalty. The intensity of her implications reaches its height as Eva all but says that Amy's death was suicide prompted by the consequences of an affair before her marriage.

Miranda feels that Eva's story is no closer to reality than the other version of the legend; "of course it was not like that. This is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic." Disparate though they may be in attitudes, Eva and Miranda's father Harry are both romantics living in the past, and, as they meet after a separation of some years, they fit together like two pieces of a collection.

Miranda realizes that differences separate their world and the world for her. She senses that she is out of place and questions silently, "Where are my own people and my own time?" Miranda feels a strong separation from her elders:

She resented, slowly and deeply and in profound silence, the presence of these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes, who

38 Ibid., p. 216.
demanded that she accept their version of life and yet would not tell her the truth, not in the smallest thing.  

At this moment, Eva calls for Miranda to come back in the car with her and Harry, for "there is plenty of room"; Miranda takes a seat in the front of the car, with the driver.  

Eva's invitation implies to Miranda a summons back to "their version of life," though the old lady is unaware of the portent in her words. Miranda refuses and rejects the deluded reality of her elders.

She rejects love and swears that false hopes and promises are not for her, that she will know the truth about what happens to herself. Like Stephen in his primitive little song of rejection and like Violeta in her rejection of the convent, Miranda is alienated by the false affections and loyalties of her family. She is determined to know the truth about herself, as she assures herself "in her hopefulness, her ignorance."  

The last two words here--"her ignorance"--are significant, for they show that Miss Porter knows Miranda is human and subject to delusion, that Miranda will deceive herself about life just as those before her have done. Thus Miranda is a human, valid character, for even though she tries to see clearly, she is limited in her view

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39 Ibid., p. 219.  
40 Ibid.  
41 Ibid., p. 221.
and is hopeful, as most people are. Miranda has discovered the
distorted realities of others, and she has, through revelation, gained
valuable insight into the phenomena of human experience. She does
not yet know that awareness cannot give complete immunity from the
human failing of self-deception.
CHAPTER III

SUBJUGATION

The protagonists of "Theft," "Magic," "He," "Holiday," and "The Cracked Looking Glass," are beset by difficulties different from the initiation experiences of Katherine Anne Porter's younger protagonists. Although Stephen, Violeta, and Miranda are initiated into some knowledge of human nature and society, other protagonists discover that various forces of human nature and society—as well as physical or mental handicaps—are largely responsible for the individual's subjugation.

Subjugation, here, does not imply total oppression or enslavement, but, rather, an obstructing control over the individual's life by forces difficult to combat. Subjugation in this context is not intended to imply a predestined fate for all individuals. On the contrary, the forces that subjugate Miss Porter's characters vary from physical and mental deficiencies to the mores of society to the shortcomings of the individual himself. Whether or not the character escapes his predicament depends upon his ability and willingness to combat obstructing forces. For some characters, such as the
protagonists of "He" and "Holiday," the obstacles inhibiting them are far beyond their capacity to combat; for others, such as the protagonists of "Theft" and "The Cracked Looking-Glass," the forces jeopardizing their happiness are self-imposed and self-destructive. How each attempts to escape his difficulties is an individual experience, as in life itself.

What the main characters of these six stories—"Theft," "Magic," "He," "Holiday," and "The Cracked Looking-Glass"—share is a brief, clear revelation of reality. For at least one moment they see through the distortions that cloud their perceptions. Although they become aware of the obstacles interfering with their lives, most of these characters learn too late what Stephen, Violeta, and Miranda discover in childhood. Although the initiated youngsters approach maturity with insight into discrepancies between appearance and reality, delusion and fact, deception and truth, revelation comes too late to free most of these older individuals from their subjugation.

The main characters of "Magic," "He," and "Holiday" are almost overpowered by physical, mental, and social handicaps. Society is a significant subjugating force for them; even when sympathetic, society in these stories generally wishes to ignore the reality of abnormality. A distinct lack of societal compassion for the protagonist is found in "Magic." The narrator in this story,
like the narrator in "Holiday," is familiar with the incidents she relates. An absence of concern on the part of the narrators in "Magic" contrasts with the sympathy found in "Holiday."

"Magic" is told by a black maidservant who previously worked in a New Orleans brothel; while brushing her new employer's hair, the maid entertains her with stories of the bawdy house. The maid's story of Ninette demonstrates that although society largely ignores the existence of prostitution, it rejects those who try to escape the brothel. Ninette, the most popular girl in the house, saves her money and attempts to leave; the madam beats her, robs her, and kicks her out. Days later the madam regrets having thrown out her most profitable girl and has the cook perform a voodoo spell to bring Ninette back. One week later, the girl, who seems to be sick, returns and meekly resumes work.

Ninette has realized that, with no money and in her beaten condition, she cannot live on her own; she is trapped by circumstances into the oppressive existence that she has tried to escape. One of the customers greets her return with an ironic "Welcome home, Ninette!"\(^1\) Awareness that this job in the brothel is the best she can find leads Ninette to accept reality: that the house is the only home she has.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 41.
Whereas Ninette's handicap is imposed on her by society, the protagonist of "He" has a mental deficiency from birth. "He" is the simple-minded son of poor farmers who have two other children to care for. The retarded boy's given name is no longer used in reference to him, and the child's anonymity reflects a lack of parental recognition of him as a person. "He" is handicapped not only by mental retardation but also by parental dislike and neglect. His mother, Mrs. Whipple, is in turn subjugated by her guilt for disliking her son and by her concern for appearances. She assures the neighbors that she loves Him more than anyone else; repeating her vows of affection helps to ease her conscience, especially when she allows Him to do chores too dangerous for the other children.

Her husband says He is not afraid because "He ain't got sense enough to be scared of anything." Mrs. Whipple retorts:

You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking that way about your own child. Who's to take up for Him if we don't, I'd like to know? He sees a lot that goes on, He listens to things all the time. And anything I tell Him to do He does it.

She thus argues to convince herself, more than her husband, that she loves this child whom she does not even call by name and who is regarded more as a beast of burden than as a human being. She is

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 51.  \(^3\) Ibid.
like Stephen's family, in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," in her failure to recognize her son as a person. She deceives herself about her true feelings for Him, because she cannot bear the reality of her guilt and dislike. As William Nance remarks in his discussion of Mrs. Whipple's dishonesty, "the clearest sign of her self-delusion is a habitual hypocrisy which leads her to base virtually every judgment on 'what the neighbors will say.' "

Only when He becomes gravely ill does Mrs. Whipple undergo a revelation of her true feelings. The farm declines, the two able children desert it to manage on their own, and He suffers a bad fall and subsequent illness. He and his parents are subject to and trapped by the misfortunes forever befalling them. The doctor advises them to put him in the County Home for treatment. The doctor's opinion is representative of a society which, although mouthing sympathy for abnormal individuals, wishes them removed from contact and view.

Ever mindful of the appearance that her actions give, Mrs. Whipple at first rejects the advice as a stoop to charity, then rationalizes that He will receive better care than she could give him and that they will bring him home as soon as He is better. She

4 Nance, p. 19.
deludes herself about both her motives for sending him away and his condition. As a neighbor drives the carryall to the hospital, Mrs. Whipple sits beside him and notices that He is crying and seems to be accusing her of something:

Maybe He remembered that time she boxed His ears, maybe He had been scared that day with the bull, maybe He had slept cold and couldn't tell her about it; maybe He knew they were sending Him away for good and all because they were too poor to keep Him.  

Possibly He has a brief revelation of his predicament. Mrs. Whipple sees the reality of her rejection of him and of her self-deceptive sham of love. As she cries frightfully and clings to him, she admits to herself, "Oh, what a mortal pity He was ever born."  

She may rid herself of the physical burden of her son, but she is still subject to her guilt. As he is handicapped by his retardation, she is bound by her self-deception, pride, and guilt. She is bound, like Stephen's family in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," by "the hate that is love's twin, love's impostor and enemy and death."  

Mrs. Whipple's hypocritical love for her retarded child contrasts with the Mullers' attitude toward Ottilie, in "Holiday."

5 Porter, Collected Stories, p. 58.

6 Ibid.

Ottilie and the boy in "He" are both children of farmers; both are mentally impaired but hard-working. Both protagonists experience a glimpse of reality, but the significant revelations in the two stories are for secondary characters--Mrs. Whipple in "He" and the narrator in "Holiday." Mrs. Whipple discovers the reality of her deception, but does not change her behavior, whereas the narrator of "Holiday" learns that reality and responsibility must be acted upon honestly.

"Holiday" begins as an account of the narrator's spring holiday, a brief flight from many troubles, and ends as a broadened interpretation of escape. Early in the story comes a revelation concerning the confrontation of responsibility and reality:

... this story I am about to tell you happened before this great truth impressed itself on me--that we do not run from the troubles and dangers that are truly ours, and it is better to learn what they are earlier in life than later, and if we don't run from the others, we are fools.  

The narrator, a young woman, has retreated for a holiday to the Muller family's Texas farm, a place whose perpetual industry offers mental relief for the narrator. The Mullers resemble each other in appearance and opinion, with strong, handsome bodies and pragmatic attitudes, to the point of giving "a powerful impression

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8 Porter, Collected Stories, p. 407.
that they were all, even the sons-in-law, one human being divided into several separate appearances." In contrast to this healthy, muscular organism is Ottilie, whose deformities make her the only individual in the house.

Ottilie is bound by her deformities and subject to their constraints, whereas other people are turned from her because of her abnormalities. Despite her shaking head and hands, she efficiently manages the kitchen and produces sumptuous meals for the large family. As do all in the Muller household, she works hard for the common good, only, for Ottilie, no communication or fellowship is returned for her labor.

In considering Ottilie's differences from the people around her, the narrator is startled to learn that Ottilie is one of the Mullers' own daughters. With unsteady hands, Ottilie displays an old photograph of a pretty little girl who looks much like the Mullers; she points to her name carefully written on the back. For a moment, Ottilie's human sensibility meets another:

\[ \ldots \text{some filament lighter than cobweb spun itself out between that living center in her and me, a filament from some center that held us all bound to our unescapable common source, so that her life and mine were kin, even a part of each other, and} \]
\[ \text{the painfulness and strangeness of her vanished.} \]

\[ ^9 \text{Ibid., p. 417.} \]
\[ ^{10} \text{Ibid., p. 426.} \]
For an instant, Ottilie is fully alive and aware of what she is and has been. Tears give evidence of the knowledgeable suffering within her, but, even as her cheeks are wet, Ottilie's revelation fades, and she slips from reality back into her damaged semblance of it.

The revelation of Ottilie's kinship to the Mullers unsettles the narrator until she feels the rightness of how they had accepted the subjugating handicap of Ottilie's condition. The Mullers "with a deep right instinct had learned to live with her disaster on its own terms, and hers; they had accepted and then made use of what was for them only one more painful event in a world of troubles. . . ."\textsuperscript{11}

Ottilie's family has dealt with its handicapped member more honestly than the Whipples, in "He." The Mullers demonstrate no false love, feel no guilt, and accept Ottilie for what she is.

They do not expect affection or love from Ottilie, but the crippled daughter's reaction to a family tragedy shows that she feels an emotional bond, however tenuous and intermittent. After a fierce spring storm which inundates fields and kills livestock, Mother Muller falls ill and quickly dies. When all the Mullers have left for the funeral, the narrator hears the howling of Ottilie; through babblings and motions the girl demonstrates her desire to

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 428.
attend her mother's burial. In a broken-down wagon, the narrator takes Ottilie down the road toward the funeral.

In contrast to the buggy ride at the close of "He," this ride leads to a brief escape, rather than to confinement. With the buggy's jolting, Ottilie slips from the seat; in grabbing the girl by the belt, the narrator touches Ottilie's skin. This tactile sensation shocks her into further awareness of Ottilie's humanity. Peering at the narrator, Ottilie suddenly claps her hands. Certain impressions of their buggy ride have reached her; the hot sun and fresh spring colors, along with the "jolly senseless staggering of the wheels" make Ottilie happy and gay, "... waving loosely around her as if to show me [the narrator] what wonders she saw."12

The narrator realizes that Ottilie's brief perception of her mother's death is now gone, replaced by happy awareness of the warm spring day. Except for those rare moments when she knows reality, Ottilie does not share the Mullers' joys or troubles; she and the narrator are both "fools of life, equally fellow fugitives from death."13 Turning her back on the funeral cortège, the narrator takes Ottilie on a little holiday down the lane by the river. They

12 Ibid., p. 434.  
13 Ibid., p. 435.
are both escaping from other people's troubles; they need not be subject to any difficulties but their own.

Overpowering disabilities limit Ottilie and He; even Ninette, though not mentally or physically deformed, is ill-equipped to combat the social and economic forces that interfere in her life. Society condemns Ninette and dispatches the boy in "He" to be lost in an institution; Ottilie, although remaining among the society of her family, is not truly a part of it. These three characters may see the reality of their predicament, but they can do little to improve it. Characters such as Mrs. Whipple and the narrator of "Holiday," on the other hand, have the ability to free themselves of self-inflicted limitations. Mrs. Whipple cannot alter the facts of her hard life, but she can control the pride and self-deception which compound her difficulties. For the narrator of "Holiday," confronting reality includes accepting human defects, such as Ottilie's, and realizing that taking on troubles not truly one's own is a form of self-deception.

Protagonists whose subjugation is largely due to self-deception have the best possible chance to become aware of reality and deal positively with it. These characters whose dilemma grows from delusions of self often demonstrate the misplaced loyalty typical of Miranda's family. Eudora Welty recognizes their difficulty as she says, "Seeing what is not there, putting trust in a false picture
of life, has been one of the worst nightmares that assail her [Miss Porter's] characters.\textsuperscript{14} The protagonists of "Theft" and "The Cracked Looking-Glass" have put their faith in a "false picture of life"; although both are hampered by self-deception, they react differently to the revelation of their delusions.

The protagonist of "Theft" holds a self-deceptive, false image of herself as a generous and openhearted woman, although, in reality, she rejects the people and belongings which could be most valuable to her. She is a career woman in New York; she is growing older, alone, and in the story's brief span of one morning, the unfulfillment of her life is revealed. The story is told primarily through flashback, as the theft of the woman's purse prompts her to retrace her steps. At various times throughout the previous evening, the purse was associated with each of the woman's dying relationships, and finally her purse is as empty of money and valuables as is her life.

The revelation of her self-deception occurs as she confronts the thief who has taken the purse. After recalling her last use of the purse, she realizes that the janitress must have taken it from her apartment. Descending to the basement, she finds the janitress, whose face is

\textsuperscript{14} Welty, "The Eye of the Story," pp. 269-270.
streaked with coal dust from the furnace. The janitress makes great protestations of innocence, and the protagonist suddenly feels the full blow of the theft:

In this moment she felt she had been robbed of an enormous number of things, whether material or intangible: things lost or broken by her own fault, things she had forgotten and left in houses when she moved: books borrowed from her and not returned, journeys she had planned and had not made, words she had waited to hear spoken to her and had not heard, and the words she had meant to answer with; bitter alternatives and intolerable substitutes were worse than nothing, yet inescapable: the long patient suffering of dying friendships and the dark inexplicable death of love—all that she had had, and all that she had missed, were lost together, and were twice lost in this landslide of remembered losses.15

She discovers that she is responsible for many of her losses; through revelation she recognizes her "false picture of life" and the reality of the self-deception and self-betrayal that subjugate her.

The protagonist again robs herself, as she tells the janitress to keep the purse; repenting, the janitress forces the purse back on its owner. The protagonist then realizes "I was right not to be afraid of any thief but myself, who will end by leaving me nothing."16 She sees the reality of her self-betrayal as, in rejecting others, she robs herself.

15 Porter, Collected Stories, p. 64.
16 Ibid., p. 65.
Rosaleen O'Toole, in "The Cracked Looking-Glass," becomes aware, also, that she is responsible for many of the difficulties in her life. Rosaleen deceives herself with dreams of life as it never was and never will be for her; she is subject to her desire to regain lost youth and to have the excitement which her life has never held.

Rosalen's discontent is heightened by her awareness of her husband's aging. Dennis O'Toole was nearly fifty years old when he married Rosaleen, who is thirty years younger than he. Now, twenty-five years later, age is overtaking him. Rosaleen feels that she is both losing Dennis and being trapped by the old man he has become.

To avoid unpleasant reality, Rosaleen exaggerates the truth and invents dreams so vivid that she believes them; she sees everything as she sees her image in her cracked mirror: distorted and unreal. Rosaleen compensates for the dullness of her life by telling tales to traveling salesmen and by imagining the return of Kevin, a young Irishman who had stayed with them briefly, years before. Eventually these pastimes fail to satisfy her, and she becomes increasingly restless.

Utilizing her fertile imagination, Rosaleen attempts to escape from her unexciting life. She invents the story that her sister
in Boston is ill and needs her. Rosaleen enjoys the trip from her
Connecticut farm to Boston until reality encroaches upon her holiday.
An insolent young Irishman mistakes Rosaleen for a promiscuous
woman, and, her trip soured, she quickly returns home. Telling
Dennis that her sister is recovered, she talks no more of the trip.

Rosaleen's desire for excitement and glamour has encour-
aged a deluded self-image of the provocative but virtuous woman.
Upon discovering that she has a bad reputation because of the travel-
ing salesmen and the neighborhood drunk who frequent her doorstep,
Rosaleen is outwardly infuriated but inwardly pleased. She muses
about the local gossip and says softly, "Life is a dream."17 Her
dreams are life, for her, and the gossip reinforces her delusion of
beauty, a delusion which Miss Porter subtly points out. Rosaleen
tells tales of her beauty and popularity as a girl, but she anxiously
and often peers in the cracked looking-glass. While the traveling
salesman, the young Irishman, and Dennis all refer to her as a fine
woman, the most explicit description of Rosaleen mentions her "red
hair and yellow eyelashes and big arms and big strong teeth."18
Through delusions, Rosaleen has made dreams of beauty and

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17 Ibid., p. 132.  
18 Ibid., p. 110.
excitement her life; they replace reality for her, since reality has lost its appeal.

Rosaleen's delusions are dispelled, and reality is revealed to her as she feels herself rejected by a man who, in her imagination, desires her. One night the neighborhood drunk nears her house; Rosaleen thinks that he will stop, come to the door, and carry her off to "a ruined life." When he stops and then passes on, her heart sinks:

She was wondering what had become of her life; every day she had thought something great was going to happen, and it was all just straying from one terrible disappointment to another.

She sees Dennis in the lamplight and suddenly, "in an ordinary voice," asks, "Whyever did ye marry a woman like me?" Dennis answers that he knew he could do no better. Rosaleen has just realized that she could never do better, either; she sees her true condition in life, accepts the conditions of age, and resigns her futile pursuit of lost youth. Like the protagonist of "Theft," Rosaleen recognizes reality; however, Rosaleen rejects her delusions and accepts her ordinary existence, whereas, in "Theft," the protagonist's acceptance of reality remains indefinite.

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19 Ibid., p. 134.  
20 Ibid.  
21 Ibid.
Rosaleen, although resigning herself to the control of time and age, confronts reality and rejects her self-deceptions. In "Magic," Ninette attempts escape, but Ottilie and the boy in "He" are not even capable of making an attempt. The woman in "Theft" is uncertain whether or not she will change her self-destructive ways. Mrs. Whipple perpetuates her self-deception because she cannot face reality; she will not recognize her son's retardation, and she abandons her responsibility. Contrasting with Mrs. Whipple's attitude is that of the narrator of "Holiday," who accepts both the reality of Ottilie's deformity and realistic limits of responsibility.

"Holiday" holds perhaps the best demonstration of Miss Porter's ideas on subjugation, revelation, and reality. Miss Porter advocates the revelation of reality, subsequent acceptance of unchangeable difficulties, and altering of those difficulties that can be changed. Her attitude is suggested by the narrator's fundamental revelation in "Holiday":

... that we do not run from the troubles and dangers that are truly ours, and it is better to learn what they are: earlier in life than later, and if we don't run from the others, we are fools. 22

Accepting responsibility for other people's troubles and dangers is an inhibiting form of self-deception, and many times the troubles

22 Ibid., p. 407.
and dangers that interfere with the successful progress of one's life result from the individual's own delusions.

As "Holiday"'s basic revelation emphasizes, such awareness of reality is better acquired earlier in life than later, and Miss Porter's younger protagonists--Stephen, Violeta, and Miranda--have the advantage of gaining this insight as children. Most of the main characters of the subjugation stories, however, too late experience reality's revelation. The characters who are most successful in overcoming their difficulties in life confront reality and reject their delusions, whether manifest as self-imposed isolation, vanity, and discontent, or consummate pride. In all Miss Porter's stories, the characters who surmount the obstacles in their lives recognize the value of living in touch with reality instead of its distortion.
Throughout Katherine Anne Porter's stories, the theme of alienation recurs. Isolation, or estrangement, is experienced by many characters, and the degree of alienation, the cause for it, and the detrimental or beneficial effect of it vary greatly, from one fictional instance to another. In the stories, alienation variously occurs as a reaction to revelation or as an obstacle to revelation, as a means of accepting reality or as a means of escaping reality.

For instance, several characters experience alienation as a result of their initiation into fundamental experiences in life. Stephen, in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," is alienated from his elders by the hatred that supplants the love they claim to share. "Virgin Violeta," also, ends with the protagonist's estrangement from the deluded people around her, as Violeta rejects the institutions which fostered an unrealistic conception of romantic love.

Miranda experiences alienation in Part III of "Old Mortality," as she rejects "these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the
world with her own eyes. . . ."1 Each of these characters is initiated into an increased awareness of reality, and, as a result of his clearer perception, is alienated from his deluded elders.

Other characters experience alienation as a force that contributes to their subjugation. The young woman in "Theft" rejects others and alienates herself from them, whereas the protagonists of "He" and "Holiday" have handicaps which alienate them from other people. The experience of isolation or estrangement, then, occurs often in Miss Porter's stories of initiation and subjugation.

Alienation, however, is the predominant theme in "María Concepción," "Flowering Judas," "The Leaning Tower," "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "Noon Wine," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." The protagonist's alienation variously serves as a defense against deluded aggression, denial of love, willful evidence of self-affirmation, or protection for damaged sensibilities. As they come to see reality, the protagonists of these stories become aware of their delusions and of their estrangement from others.

Although the protagonists all undergo exposure of their delusions and realization of their alienation, the causes of isolation and their reactions to revelation vary in major ways. In "María

1 Ibid., p. 219.
Concepción" and "Flowering Judas," for example, the protagonists' alienation significantly differs from that of other protagonists because, in these two stories, alienation is self-imposed.

In "María Concepción," the protagonist faces the difficulties of her delusions, her alienation, and the threat of governmental justice. One of the most assertive of Katherine Anne Porter's characters, María Concepción takes her fate in her hands and succeeds in fighting the forces that obstruct her.

María Concepción's society, that of the Indians of Mexico in the 1920's, is an uncomplicated one where impulse is usually acted upon and where laws of state and church often give way to native opinion. Superstition remains an inhibiting force in this Indian society. Even in so simple a thing as her craving for honey, for instance, María Concepción feels that an unfulfilled need will mark her unborn child.

María Concepción's impulse for honey, ironically, will bring her a bitter taste of reality which awakens her from one delusion. As she nears the beekeeper's house, María Concepción sees her husband, Juan, consorting with the beekeeper, María Rosa. María Concepción is a proud woman who deludes herself that her marriage is inviolable because she and Juan were married in the church.
Like Rosaleen, María Concepción has allowed pride to distort her self-image, as well as her view of marriage. Filled with rage at María Rosa, María Concepción tells herself that she would never have allowed a man to take hold of her as Juan has the young girl. Her pride makes her forget that she resisted less than María Rosa, when Juan first approached her, but afterwards they were married in the church, and that was "a very different thing."  

María Concepción's pride is, again, detrimental as it forces her to reject the villagers' sympathy during a time of great sorrow for her. Juan and María Rosa run away to fight in the Mexican revolution and are gone for a year. María Concepción suffers during that time; the child she bears soon dies, and she retreats from village society. Her self-imposed isolation increases her suffering; María Concepción's pride alienates her from the village women who would offer support for her wounded spirit and body.

María Concepción's confrontation of her fate is precipitated by the return of Juan and María Rosa, who soon expects a child. Captured as a deserter, Juan is saved because an officer recognizes him as the head digger for an American archaeologist in the area. His good fortune doubles, for María Rosa bears him a son.

\[2\] Ibid., p. 8.
The return of the fugitives and the birth of the child jar María Concepción from her quiet inaction. The reality of what she must do to revenge her loss and regain her man suddenly dawns on her. After resisting drunken Juan, who comes to the house and attempts to beat her, María Concepción runs wildly across the fields. Her revelation comes like a blow: "at once she came to her senses completely, recognized the thing that troubled her so terribly, was certain of what she wanted."\(^3\) Sitting down, she gives way to "her long devouring sorrow"; within her is

\[\ldots\text{a dark confused memory of grief burning in her at night, of deadly baffled anger eating at her by day, until her very tongue tasted bitter, and her feet were heavy as if she were mired in the muddy roads during the time of rains.}\(^4\)

María Concepción discovers the reality of her need for revenge that is, in her mind, justice. She murders her rival and returns home, where Juan is shocked out of sleep by her low voice telling what she has done. Taking the necessary steps to protect her, he feels that she has become invaluable, though he cannot say why. The villagers protect María Concepción as Juan does, for, when the police question them about the murder, they lie for her and defend her.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 13. \(^4\)Ibid.
María Concepción realizes the error of her alienation from the villagers and accepts their testimony and support. Here, in one of the few instances in Miss Porter's stories, society is sympathetic to the protagonist and is a helpful rather than inhibiting force. The villagers' native justice overrules governmental law, as they save the woman who, however aloof, remained in the village, and they condemn María Rosa, who has left it. María Concepción feels the villagers' protection, as they are "around her, speaking for her, defending her, the forces of life . . . ranged invincibly with her against the beaten dead." 5

As the threat of the law passes, Juan and María Concepción face the reality of their altered lives. For María Concepción, reality is regaining Juan and taking María Rosa's baby to replace her own dead child. For Juan, reality is the confinement of his life. Bound to María Concepción by the act she has committed to regain him, he must relinquish his deluded freedom. He is buried in excavating the city of his ancestors, just as María Rosa is buried in her grave. Juan submits to his fate. María Concepción, on the contrary, has altered her destiny and succeeded once against the forces that would

5 Ibid., p. 20.
subjugate her. In accepting the villagers' testimony, she rejects her self-deceptive pride and alienation and accepts reality.

In "Flowering Judas," Laura's alienation, like María Concepción's, is self-imposed, but Laura perpetuates her isolation whereas María Concepción finally rejects hers. Like the young woman in "Theft," Laura rejects relationships and refuses to share herself with others. Ironically, her role in "Flowering Judas" is that of a humanitarian. She comes to revolutionary Mexico during the 1920's with a delusion of personal commitment, and then she feels betrayed by "the disunion between her way of living and what life should be."  

What Laura expects of life is unclear; what is definite is that she is responsible for her way of life. She denies a sharing of spirit and denies herself the reality of life. While working as a schoolteacher and messenger for the revolutionaries, she functions mechanically, without heart for the people:

No matter what this stranger says to her, nor what her message to him, the very cells of her flesh reject knowledge and kinship in one monotonous word. No. No. No. She draws strength from this one holy talismanic word which does not suffer her to be led into evil. Denying everything, she may walk anywhere in safety; she looks at everything without amazement.  

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6 Ibid., p. 91.  
7 Ibid., p. 97.
Like the protagonist of "Theft," Laura denies herself, through rejection. She rejects the revolution, the schoolchildren, the church, her past, and love. Her estrangement, while maintained for her safety, is dangerous to the beneficiaries of her warped humanitarianism. Through her inaction and poverty of spirit, Laura assists in the death of Eugenio, an imprisoned revolutionary to whom she has taken narcotics. Upon learning that Eugenio has taken all the tablets at once, she obeys his request and does not call the prison doctor. She is aware that Eugenio will die; she does not intervene.

The revelation of her self-deception and betrayal comes to Laura in a dream. The dream confronts her with reality, whereas her waking moments are clouded by delusion. In the dream, dead Eugenio calls Laura a prisoner, for she actually is the prisoner of her own denial of life. As Eugenio reveals Laura as his betrayer, Laura awakens with a cry of "No!"—again, the "talismanic word" in which she has trusted. Laura's revelation shows her the reality of her alienation and her rejection of life, but she will not accept that reality.

Perhaps Laura has rejected everything to insure her safety, to maintain her identity among foreigners. Considering her attitudes

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8 Ibid., p. 102.
toward her past and life in general, however, she would deny herself "knowledge and kinship" anywhere.

Contrary to Laura's attitude of withholding herself, Charles Upton's attitude, in "The Leaning Tower," is one of eagerness to learn from the people encountered on his first trip to Europe. Whereas Laura deludes herself about her humanitarian generosity, Charles is handicapped by his delusion which credits all people with inherent goodness.

"The Leaning Tower" is primarily a story of growing alienation resulting from revelation, but the theme of initiation, also, appears in Charles' expanding consciousness of danger and evil. A somewhat naive young man, Charles leaves the domestic familiarity of his Texas beginnings and arrives in Berlin during late December, 1931. The specificity of time and place, unusual in Miss Porter's stories, is important in the context of World War II's early hostilities; as the story progresses, an undercurrent of impending danger grows and then emerges in Charles' final revelation.

The first of Charles' delusions to be dispelled is his pre-conceived image of Berlin as "a great shimmering city of castles towering in misty light." A week's observation disillusioned Charles; 

\[\text{9 Ibid., p. 439.}\]
the pervading atmosphere is one of hopelessness, and among the people Charles sees "late medieval faces full of hallucinated malice and a kind of sluggish but intense cruelty."\textsuperscript{10}

Awakened from one delusion, Charles sees the reality of Berlin and its people. He still holds the belief, however, that closer acquaintance with the Germans will reveal their better qualities. As he comes to know the residents of his rooming house, Charles discovers the dangerous self-deception in granting basic goodness to all people, and he learns that some people live by delusions that endanger other people.

His landlady, Rosa Reichl, bears a similarity to Miranda's family, in her threadbare gentility and deluded adoration of the past. She is horrified when a little plaster replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa crumbles in Charles' curious fingers; Rosa's grief over the broken souvenir of her honeymoon seems exaggerated beyond even the tower's sentimental value. Paradoxical worth placed on valueless objects and deluded faith in hollow ideas characterize Rosa and, eventually, all the Germans whom Charles comes to know.

The other boarders are three young Europeans whose distorted views of reality surface, in time, from beneath their likable

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 443.
façades. Hans Von Gehring is a Heidelberg student; Otto Bussen, from Dalmatia, studies mathematics at the university; and Tadeusz Mey is a young pianist from Poland. A camaraderie grows among the four young men, but Charles soon discovers the dangerous delusions of his companions.

Von Gehring, for instance, is superficially an intelligent, personable aristocrat. His pride in an ugly dueling wound on his cheek gives insight into his true character, in an expression which "rose from within the mysterious place where Hans really lived, and it was amazing arrogance, pleasure, inexpressible vanity and self-satisfaction." A more overt sign of his nature appears during a philosophical discussion of national types; with "an alienated hostile glitter in his eyes," Hans discloses his militaristic delusions of German power and sanctioned aggression.

Otto's delusion is as racist as Hans', as Otto praises "the true great old Germanic type" which is "lean and tall and fair as gods." His words are ironic and self-deceptive, especially in the context of his own appearance: "his forehead formed a deep wrinkle which sank to a meaty cleft between his brows. His small puffy eyes

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11 Ibid., p. 464.  
12 Ibid., p. 486.  
13 Ibid., p. 481.
swam tenderly, the roll of fat across his collar blushed with emotion."  

Tadeusz, although the most humane of the three Europeans, reveals delusions of his own cultural superiority and of the inherent inferiority of other people, especially Jews. Tadeusz tells Charles that Americans are "like beings from another planet to us," and Charles at last recognizes this truth. He experiences a revelation, a "most awful premonition of disaster." He feels helpless, alienated, and undefended against his comrades who are, in reality, strangers. They are each dangerously deluded, and Charles, no longer blinded by his delusion of universal good in man, sees their potential danger.

The Leaning Tower replica symbolizes the delusions of Rosa, Hans, Otto, and Tadeusz; they look to the past, power, and national ego to substantiate their fragile and hollow faith. Charles recognizes his unqualified trust as a deception, too, and as a result of his initiation into skepticism, he is alienated from the Europeans.

Charles has discovered "the chill and the knowledge of death." His new awareness of the ominous possibilities within

\[14\text{Ibid.}, \ pp. \ 481-482. \quad 15\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 475.\]
\[16\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 488. \quad 17\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 495.\]
man's capability alienates him. A similar "knowledge of death"--augmented by the burden of accountability--becomes clear to Laura; her cry of "No!" demonstrates her rejection of the revelation and her attempt to maintain isolation. María Concepción, on the other hand, accepts the "knowledge of death" and considers her murder of María Rosa to be justice. In the remaining stories of alienation--"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "Noon Wine," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"--the protagonists also experience "the chill and the knowledge of death." Their causes for alienation and their views of death are varied, as are the delusions which hinder their perception of reality.

Granny Weatherall, for instance, has successfully weathered the hardships of life. As a pioneer widow with children to rear, she has faced reality all her life. Only in dying does the old woman discover the crucial instance where she has deluded herself. Granny's final revelation is that God jilts her, in the same way that her first fiance jilted her, many years before.

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is told as the old woman slips in and out of consciousness, as dreams mingle with waking. As she lies on her deathbed, Granny deludes herself that tomorrow will come for her. She also has a greater misconception, whose unreality proves even more difficult to accept. She believes in a
"secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her," and that she will, in death, see God. 18

Both deceptions fail her. As she realizes that she has no tomorrow, Granny is not ready, saying, "But I can't, it's not time. Oh, I always hated surprises." Just as Laura discovers reality in a dream, Granny perceives the truth in her semi-conscious state. Withdrawing from the living, she is "staring at the point of light that was herself." 20 She looks for God's sign, then:

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this--I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light. 21

Ellen Weatherall's last sensations are of alienation; no longer part of the living, she finds no God to be with her in death. Her revelation estranges her from both humanity and divinity. Strong-willed to the last, she does not merely accept her rejection; she does not forgive her second "jilting." Her reaction to "the knowledge of death" is the willful determination of her end, as she blows out "the point of light that was herself."

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18 Ibid., p. 86. 19 Ibid., p. 88. 20 Ibid., p. 89. 21 Ibid.
Pride is significant in Granny Weatherall's delusion of herself as a favored believer, in her alienation, and in her subsequent action; pride similarly augmented María Concepción's difficulties. In "Noon Wine," pride is also the principal factor in the delusions of the protagonist. For him, as for Granny Weatherall, death offers a final expression of self-determination and self-affirmation.

Like Mrs. Whipple, of "He," Royal Earle Thompson is a person to whom appearances are important: "all his carefully limited fields of activity were related somehow to Mr. Thompson's feeling for the appearance of things, his own appearance in the sight of God and man."²² In "Noon Wine," as in "He," the prominent usage of "Mr." and "Mrs." is ironic in reference to these hard-luck farm people; nowhere else in her short fiction does Miss Porter so extensively use such formal titles.

Thompson is a "noisy proud man" who is as pompous as his name, and his pride leads him to delude himself.²³ His doting on his masculinity hampers his managing the farm, because "there were only a few kinds of work manly enough for Mr. Thompson to undertake with his bare hands."²⁴ In keeping with his deluded notions of

²²Ibid., p. 233. ²³Ibid., p. 222.
²⁴Ibid., pp. 233-234.
appropriate labor, Thompson attributes part of the dairy farm's failure to the physical weakness of his wife Ellie.

He genuinely cares for Ellie, though, and this affection is critical in Thompson's final actions. Her attitude toward her husband, also, is significant. She is aware of his errors in judgment, but she "wanted to believe in her husband, and there were too many times when she couldn't." 25 Ellie's faith fails when Thompson needs it most, just as Laura's compassion failed in the most crucial instance, in "Flowering Judas."

Both Thompson's good luck and his misfortune result from the hiring of Olaf Helton. The thin, uncommunicative Helton is an unlikely bearer of prosperity, but his efficient operation of the farm brings favorable results. After several years of modest success, Thompson and Helton meet misfortune in the person of Homer T. Hatch.

Again, appearances belie reality, in both Hatch's character and in the critical action that causes the death of all three men—Hatch, Helton, and Thompson. As he engages the farmer in conversation, Hatch's overly jocular manner outdoes even Thompson's bluster. At length, Hatch drops his false, raucous exterior to reveal

25Ibid., p. 226.
"wicked and pig-like" eyes gleaming with pleasure as he informs Thompson of his intent to capture Helton and return the fugitive to a lunatic asylum. During the ensuing argument, Helton suddenly appears, and Thompson believes he sees Hatch pull a bowie knife and stab Helton.

As he swings the ax that kills Hatch, Thompson strikes the blow of eventual death for Helton and himself. Helton, who actually had not been stabbed by Hatch, is hunted down by townspeople and accidentally killed. Thompson is tried for murder and acquitted, largely due to Ellie's perjured story that she witnessed the fight. Thompson's inability to accept the fact that "he had killed Mr. Hatch, and he was a murderer" combines with his guilt for Ellie's lie and wears on his sensitive pride.

The revelation that Ellie and his sons do not believe his innocence is the final, alienating blow for Thompson. He is divorced from all he cares for in life. The suicide note that he leaves declares his death as proof of his innocence. Death for Thompson, as for Granny Weatherall, offers a last expression of self-determination and pride. Death is also an escape for Thompson, because he has deluded himself that Ellie believed in him, and he

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Ibid., p. 252.  
Ibid., p. 261.
cannot live with his own guilt compounded by the failure of her faith.

Thompson cannot live with his responsibility for Hatch's death, and because appearances and pride are so important to him, he cannot live alienated from community and family. Granny Weatherall's reaction to alienation is a demonstration of both resentment and pride. Laura, on the contrary, is unable to recognize either the burden of her guilt or her alienation. In "The Leaning Tower," Charles learns that his alienation and his "knowledge of death" are realities with which he must live. Only Charles and one additional protagonist, Miranda, accept life with an awareness of alienation and death.

Miranda has the benefit of her childhood discoveries about delusion and reality. She is more perceptive than other protagonists, and, as the closing paragraphs of "Old Mortality" demonstrate, she is on guard to avoid deception in her life. She has promised herself two safeguards, in particular: that she will not love, and that she will know the truth about herself. But Miranda promises this in "her hopefulness, her ignorance," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" shows that she cannot totally escape self-deception.28

28 Ibid., p. 221.
As in "The Leaning Tower," time and place are important in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." The threat of war and evil are again present, as the story occurs in a western city of the United States during the fall of 1918. A devastating flu epidemic and the urgency of dwindling time add to the difficulties for Miranda and her love. By chance meeting at her rooming house, Miranda comes to know and like Adam Barclay, a young Army lieutenant. Awaiting his overseas trip to join the war, he spends most of his leave in Miranda's company.

Despite her attempts to avoid self-deception, Miranda deludes herself precisely where she promised caution. She has promised always to know the truth about herself, but Miranda deludes herself in thinking that she is apathetic about the war. She and Adam joke about the war and appear to be taking it lightly: "they felt they had got the right tone, they were taking the war properly. Above all, thought Miranda, no tooth-gnashing, no hair-tearing, it's noisy and unbecoming and it doesn't get you anywhere."\(^\text{29}\) She also has vowed not to love, and she deludes herself that she does not love Adam:

\[\ldots\text{ she liked him, she liked him, and there was more than this but it was no good even imagining, because he was not for her nor for any woman, being beyond}\]

\(^{29}\) Ibid., pp. 281-282.
experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death. 30

Like the dreams of Laura and Granny Weatherall, Miranda's unconscious thoughts reveal the truth behind her delusions. In her first dream, Miranda sees the pale horse and pale rider, the "lank greenish stranger," and she mounts a horse recalled from childhood to outrun Death and the Devil; Death keeps up with her, so Miranda halts and shouts, "I'm not going with you this time--ride on!" 31 Miranda truly wishes to live, although she later deludes herself, in illness and depression, that she would rather die.

Her second dream reveals how deeply she is concerned about the war. In this dream, she sees herself in a hideous jungle; she is aboard a ship which sails into a forbidding tangle of vegetation. The jungle voices scream about her with "two words only rising and falling and clamoring about her head. Danger, danger, danger, ... War, war, war." 32

By the time that her third dream occurs, Miranda is aware that she is gravely ill with the epidemic flu, and she is recognizing her love for Adam. The dream discloses her feelings of responsibility and concern for Adam. This dream places Miranda in a small,
angry, and dangerous wood full of inhuman voices; she sees Adam shot through the heart by singing arrows that pass through him. He falls and then rises unharmed. Again the arrows strike, and, like a child cheated in a game, Miranda intervenes. The arrows pass through her but kill Adam, and the voices of the wood accuse her of his death.

As a result of her illness, Miranda's dreams become hallucinations. She has been taken to the hospital and is somewhat aware that she is being treated by a doctor named Hildesheim. In her delirium, Miranda sees the doctor as a monster, with German helmet and skull-like face, carrying a writhing infant on the point of his bayonet and bearing a huge stone pot marked poison. She wakes screaming, hearing herself calling, "Hildesheim is a Boche, a spy, a Hun, kill him..." The anti-German war propaganda has made an impression on her unconscious mind, although Miranda's reason has tried to suppress it:

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.  

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33 Ibid., p. 309.  
34 Ibid., pp. 309-310.
Miranda's final hallucination begins with her childhood dream of danger; she is on a narrow ledge over a pit. She feels that she is falling, unconcerned, through darkness, and that she is entirely withdrawn from all human concerns, yet alive with a peculiar lucidity and coherence; there remained of her only a minute intensely burning particle of being that knew itself alone, that relied upon nothing beyond itself for strength; not susceptible to any appeal or inducement, being itself composed entirely of one single motive, the stubborn will to live.

Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said. Trust me. I stay. 35

Like Granny Weatherall, Miranda sees the "point of light" that is herself, as she remains alive on the edge of death. The persistence of the particle of light reveals Miranda's desire to live, although she later deludes herself that she would prefer to die and return to the paradise that she glimpses during this hallucination. She returns to full consciousness on Armistice Day, and the widespread spirit of liberation contrasts with Miranda's feeling of defeat and alienation.

While the memory of the hallucinated paradise is still strong, illusion and reality are reversed for Miranda. The faces around her seem dull and lifeless, with no radiance such as she

35 Ibid., p. 311.
remembers in her vision of heaven. She feels estranged from everyone, alienated by her memory of paradise:

Miranda looked about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will. ³⁶

As her body and spirit heal, Miranda's awareness of life in preference to death grows, and her alienation slowly diminishes. She begins to feel not quite dead, with "one foot in either world now; soon I shall cross back and be at home again. The light will seem real and I shall be glad when I hear that someone I know has escaped from death." ³⁷ She learns of Adam's death, from the flu, and her acceptance of this painful reality grows as her damaged sensitivities heal.

Like Charles in "The Leaning Tower," Miranda accepts reality and alienation. She recognizes her estrangement as a necessary defense against the painfulness of both her recovery and the fact of Adam's death. Miranda and Charles both have the "knowledge of death" and accept it as an awareness with which they must face life. Unlike María Concepción, Laura, Granny, and Mr. Thompson, Charles and Miranda have found alienation a

³⁶Ibid., p. 313. ³⁷Ibid., p. 317.
beneficient force. His alienation protects Charles from the deluded Europeans, and Miranda's alienation shields her until she is strong enough to face the difficulties of life once again.

Alienation, then, serves as both a destructive and a protective force in Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction. María Concepción's pride forces her to suffer alone and alienated from the villagers. Laura's isolation results in death for Eugenio, and both Granny Weatherall and Mr. Thompson willingly embrace death because of their alienation. None of these protagonists find alienation to be a beneficial force in his life. Only Miranda and Charles accept their estrangement and receive its protection as a means of dealing with their difficulties.
In Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction, self-knowledge and awareness of the world's reality are advocated as desirable and necessary insights with which to face the troubles of life. Only through approaching the world honestly and without delusion can the individual live fully; Miss Porter's stories suggest that what is most valuable in life is one's enlightened participation, rather than passing from birth to death in a distortion of reality.

Confronting reality involves recognizing the unpleasant as well as the agreeable aspects of life. Instead of facing reality, human nature inclines toward acceptance of comfortable distortions of life. The characters in Katherine Anne Porter's stories, then, are typically human in their deluded views of reality—until they are touched by the revelations that disclose their deceptions and those of other people. Life is changed for these characters, from the moment of their revelations. Whether they accept the reality of their lives, try to improve their predicaments, or stubbornly deny
the truth that has been shown them, they will never be as before, because they have--however briefly--seen reality.

Those who face reality become aware that deceptions and distortions are the basis of many evils that interfere with honest living. Stephen, Violeta, and Miranda gain this insight, even as children—which is the best time to learn it, as the narrator says in "Holiday." They see the deceptions that foul the lives of surrounding adults, and they are alienated from these older people who perpetuate a distorted reality. Stephen's initiation acquaints him with the dishonesty and deception of his family. He senses the incongruity of discrepancies like his grandmother's smile and the dislike behind it, just as he feels the hatred which has replaced love in his family.

Violeta and Miranda recognize similar elements of deception in the adult influences around them. The convent's training is inadequate for Violeta, and the view of life which Miranda's family would impress upon her is equally useless. All three youngsters see the deceptions which interfere with the lives of their elders.

Miranda, particularly, represents the enlightened initiate, for, by the conclusion of "Old Mortality," she is approaching maturity. Miranda's childhood experiences increasingly reveal to her the discrepancies between appearance and reality, distortion and truth. At length Miranda recognizes the inhibitions and dishonesty
of her family's perspective of life, and she rejects their view. She hopes to find her "own people and time," to be responsible only for those troubles rightfully her own.

The acceptance of life's reality and contingent responsibilities is repeatedly suggested, in Miss Porter's stories, as the most effective means of dealing with one's difficulties. Often the difficulties are overpowering obstacles which simply must be accepted, as are the handicaps of the boy in "He," of Ottilie, and of Ninette. Some characters, like Mrs. Whipple, in "He," and Laura, in "Flowering Judas," do not confront reality. By rejecting their revelations, they perpetuate their submission to the fear, guilt, and delusions that handicap their lives. Like Miranda's family in "Old Mortality" and the Germans in "The Leaning Tower," they cling to their "false picture of life"; they allow their self-deceptions to compound their difficulties.

More successful in combating the forces which interfere in their lives are Rosaleen, in "The Cracked Looking-Glass," and María Concepción. Rosaleen accepts the inhibitions of age and the lack of glamour in her "ordinary" life, whereas she rejects her vain delusions of beauty and youth. María Concepción confronts reality and strikes out against her main difficulty, embodied in María Rosa. María Concepción also takes responsibility for the
child whose mother she has murdered; she faces reality in the child's need for a mother and her need for a child.

Confronting reality, for some characters, means recognizing their alienation from society. María Concepción confronts reality when she rejects her alienation and gains the support of the villagers. In "Flowering Judas," Laura is incapable of consciously recognizing her alienation or accepting her responsibility for Eugenio's death. Granny Weatherall recognizes her self-deception and her estrangement, but she does not forgive being "jilted" by God, and she makes her death a prideful assertion of her resentment. Mr. Thompson, in "Noon Wine," recognizes the reality of his alienation, but he cannot live with it. His pride, too, is instrumental in his death, as he attempts to demonstrate his innocence. Charles, in "The Leaning Tower," and Miranda, in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," both confront reality and accept their alienation. Charles turns from the deluded Europeans to his new-found skepticism, and Miranda acknowledges her past delusions and prepares to face again the difficulties of life. They realize that alienation, for them, is a protective force which shields them while they adapt to their new awareness of reality.

Throughout Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction, then, the theme of reality and revelation predominates, whereas the secondary
themes of initiation, subjugation, and alienation are interwoven. Miss Porter explores in her stories the variety of difficulties that distort and disrupt the individual's life, from childhood's painful emergence from innocence to the confrontation of death. Through discovery of the discrepancies between deception and truth, appearance and reality, the enlightened character gains a means of contending with life's difficulties. As a result, the individual is better prepared to face reality honestly. Through the majority of her stories, Miss Porter establishes this confrontation as the most valuable and significant endeavor of life.
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