

ANALYSIS

Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1938, 1939)



Katherine Anne Porter

(1890-1980)

“I was quite young during World War in Denver and I had a job on *Rocky Mountain News*.... I met a boy, an army lieutenant.... Our time was so short and we were much in love. But we were shy. It was a step forward and two steps back with us.... I was taken ill with the flu. They gave me up. The paper had my obit set in type. I’ve seen the correspondence between my father and sister on plans for my funeral.... I knew I was dying. I felt a strange state of—what is it the Greeks called it?—euphoria.... But I didn’t die. I mustered the will to live. My hair turned white and then it fell out. The first time I tried to rise to a sitting position I fell and broke an arm. I had phlebitis in one leg and they said I’d never walk again, and in six months I was walking and my hair was grown back.”

“And the boy, Miss Porter?”

“It’s in the story.” At the sudden memory she fought back tears—and won gallantly. “He died. The last I remember seeing him... It’s a true story... It seems to me true that I died then, I died once, and I have never feared death since...”

Porter
Interview
Denver Post (22 March 1956)

“He was so patient with me, those nights when I was sick and delirious, getting me things and always just sitting there. When I would wake up he would be there, sometimes with his foot propped up. After I went to the hospital he sent me two dozen roses and a note. They took the roses away from me because they said flowers used up oxygen. And the nurse read me the note, and I could hear that she was reading but I couldn’t make out the words. And that was all. He died. And no one seems to think that was important, and it was one of the most important and terrible things that ever happened to me’....

Miss Porter remembers now, still—two husbands, a career and half a century later—still in love with him. ‘I always thought it was so funny that he should have died and I should have lived, because I was small and not particularly strong, and he was big and magnificent looking. And I trusted him so. I had absolute faith in him. I remember saying to a Spaniard in Mexico once that Alexander was the only man I could ever have spent my life with. And he replied, “Just think, now he can never disappoint you.” And I suppose if there is anything at all good about it, that’s it, but it does seem an awfully high price to pay to keep one’s illusions, doesn’t it?’”

Porter
John Dorsey, “Katherine Anne Porter On”

Baltimore *Sun Magazine* (26 October 1969)

“It took me a long time to go out and live in the world again. I was really ‘alienated,’ in the pure sense. It was, I think, the fact that I really had participated in death, that I knew what death was, and had almost experienced it. I had what the Christians call the ‘beatific vision,’ and the Greeks called the ‘happy day,’ the happy vision just before death. Now if you have had that, and survived it, come back from it, you are no longer like other people, and there’s no use deceiving yourself that you are.”

Porter
quoted by Thomas F. Walsh
“The Dreams Self in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*”
Wascana Review 2.14 (Fall 1979)

“There is in all these three novelettes [in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*] an absoluteness of technique and a felicity of language that are seldom encountered even in the best fiction. Both the title story, set in the influenza epidemic of 1918, and *Old Mortality*...are as keen and polished as slim steel.”

Wallace Stegner
Virginia Quarterly Review 15
(Summer 1939) 444-45

“On the whole the most interesting novels this year have come from America... What gives distinction to [Miss] Porter’s work is the strain of poetry in it. The poetry is consistently elegiac... The thing that comes all too rarely in fiction nowadays, the thing that is most sorely missed and that reconciles so-called escapism with literature, is the poetic vision—the seeing eye, the invocatory and evocative power of words. Prose is not poetry; but good fiction never lacks a quality that must ultimately be called poetic. It is this that appears...in each of the three stories in [Miss] Porter’s volume.”

Anonymous
“Away from Near-War Consciousness”
London Times Literary Supplement (27 May 1939) 311

“Katherine Anne Porter may have published relatively few works, but these have been hailed universally as among the most finished examples of the short story in contemporary fiction.... Her two finest stories [short novels], *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *The Leaning Tower*...are frankly pessimistic in tone: the first is the story of a girl brought back from a nearly fatal illness to realize that her life, pillaged by the death of someone who meant much to her, must continue to be lived for whatever empty virtues it may still possess.... [Porter’s] isolation from contacts with celebrated writers gave her an independence which is one of the most marked characteristics of her writing and enabled her to avoid the inevitable cliques and groups which lead to artistic and esthetic bias of one kind or another.... Even [her] earlier works exhibited a surprising maturity of execution, range of interests, and strength of attack upon her central problem or situation. Virtually all of her stories have raised a social challenge in the minds of discriminating readers. Her style has always been direct and sinewy, with nothing of the ‘arty’ or the over-delicate poses of many modern short-story writers.”

George K. Anderson & Eda Lou Walton, eds.
This Generation: A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present
(Scott, Foresman 1939, 1949) 322-23

“When we turn to the second Miranda novelette, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, we can see the significance of the stress on ‘her ignorance’ which concludes *Old Mortality*. In this second story, the year is 1918, the last of the war, and Miranda is no longer as ignorant or as naïve as she was when she promised herself independence in 1912. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is more a mood piece and less a sustained narrative than *Old Mortality*; its action is confined to a brief, haunted period and its stage is carefully set for doom by a skillful use of symbols and details, a story of presentiment, a concrete embodiment of...Miss Porter’s sense of disaster. The disaster here is represented by the huge public forces, war and disease, which invade and destroy the private right to happiness....

Miranda is working on a newspaper in a Southwestern city, near which there is a large army camp. Before the story opens, she has met a soldier of her own age, Adam, and has begun to fall in love with him.

She loves him almost against her will, however, since she believes that real love, in such a time and place, can have no happy outcome. On the morning on which the story commences, Miranda awakes from a dream of doom and rises, feeling an unaccountable malaise. She bathes, dresses, and waits for Adam, thinking meanwhile of two men who had come to her office the day before to try to pressure her into buying a Liberty Bond she can not possibly afford. Adam arrives, and walks with her to the office. There she chats with her co-workers, Chuck and Towney, confronts a third-rate vaudeville performer who comes in to upbraid her for having written an unfavorable review of his show, and takes Chuck off to another show for which she must write another review.

She is beginning by this time to feel ill, though she does not admit this to herself. After the show, she meets Adam, whom she takes to still another play. Adam waits in a restaurant while she writes her review and they go off together to dance. The next day, Miranda is terribly ill, able only to phone Bill, another of her colleagues on the newspaper, who is attempting to get her a doctor and a hospital bed. Meanwhile, Adam arrives with coffee and medicine and watches over her and even talks to her in between her bouts of delirium. When he goes out to replenish the supply of coffee, some doctors appear and remove Miranda to a hospital. In the hospital she receives a note from Adam, saying that he had returned to find her gone, and that he has been refused admission to the hospital. There follows a prolonged illness for Miranda, an illness in which she meets and recognizes death but only to return to life. Strangely, however, she finds life less desirable than she had before her illness. She feels wan, disillusioned, almost old. On the day that Chuck and Towney appear to take her home, she opens a letter from a man in Adam's camp informing her that Adam has died during her illness....

What makes *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* such a moving and unforgettable work of art is the nearly incredible precision of its language particularly in those parts which describe Miranda's confrontation of death, and the haunted atmosphere which Miss Porter evokes in telling her story. Like all art of the first order, it leaves us with the impression of having shared in an actual experience, rather than merely having read about it. The atmosphere is sustained by an adroit and unobtrusive use of symbols and details which have an immediate effect on us even before we recognize their meanings. In her dream, at the beginning of the story, Miranda is back in the house of her childhood, and her thoughts echo *Old Mortality*.... The symbols and details of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* underline and prepare us for its tragic impact. In the dream, Miranda rides out on the old family horse, Graylie (after deciding not to take Fiddler), and a pale, greenish stranger rides after her. Taking Graylie's bridle, Miranda tells the horse that they must outrun "Death and the Devil." But the stranger rides with her.

Excepting Miranda's growing love for Adam, this dream gives us the whole of what is to come. And the mood created by the dream is sustained in the details of everyday living under the shadow of war and disease: the seedy, shabby men who had come to Miranda about buying a Liberty Bond has somehow seemed to threaten her, telling her 'it wasn't so much her fifty dollars that was going to make any difference. It was just a pledge of good faith on her part. A pledge of good faith that she was a loyal American doing her duty,' and they had stopped at the head of the stairs on their way out, 'lighting cigars and wedging their hats more firmly over their eyes'; Towney, the Society Editor, had been discovered in the cloakroom by Miranda, where she was 'quietly hysterical' because the men had told her would lose her job if she didn't buy a bond; and Miranda had spent the whole day among society women 'wallowing in good works...setting out, a gay procession of high-powered cars and brightly tinted faces to cheer the brave boys who already, you might very well say, had fallen in defense of their country....

Miranda, walking with Adam towards her office, passes first one funeral procession and then another.... And, in the drugstore, having breakfast with Adam, Miranda realizes she could love Adam.... Later, leaving the theater with Chuck, the sportswriter, Miranda watches the crowds in the aisles moving towards the exits: 'What did I ever know about them?...' Later that evening, after Miranda has written her review, she comes out to the street and goes towards the restaurant where Adam is waiting for her. She is feeling quite ill by now, and when she sees Adam's face by the window of the restaurant, she has the most terrible of her premonitions... 'For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be.' While Adam and Miranda are dancing, Miranda notices a woman at a table weeping and being consoled by her man, who holds and kisses her hand. Miranda envies them....

Suddenly we leap forward into the twilight world of Miranda's illness, into what may be called the second part of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. For the next day, she is very ill, and the landscapes of her mind are different from those of reality [Expressionism]. And it is here, I believe, that Miss Porter reaches the deepest and most meaningful level of her art. The imagination and lucidity which she brings to her descriptions of Miranda's illness seem to me to make *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* the height of her achievement. Though she reveals these qualities constantly, of course, in her fiction, nowhere else is the human situation quite so deeply felt and purely conveyed. And nowhere else is the final irony quite so tragic....

She uses a kind of stream of consciousness, introducing us directly to Miranda's thoughts...and then goes on to give us her own evocation of the scenes Miranda's imagination conjures up. The mixture of a direct transcription of Miranda's thoughts with Miss Porter's own more literal description of the embodiments of those thoughts is used throughout *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. We have, therefore, two kinds of methods interwoven to carry us forward, the mental image, seen or longed for, reinforced by the description of its physical attributes. The story proceeds in the same way in the delirious moments of illness, when the images of fantasy and those of reality are merged in Miranda's mind.... From these weird subjective states, made up of the prodigal images which the imagination of desperate illness sees and of the cold threats of the words which it hears, we are suddenly brought back to the plane of reality; Adam reenters Miranda's room and commences an argument with her landlady, who wishes to remove her tenant from the house immediately.... Miranda suddenly sees her life threatened by death. She determines to live at the same time that she is afraid she is going to die... She and Adam begin to sing, 'Pale horse, pale rider, done take my lover away'....

Then, 'almost with no warning at all, she floated into the darkness, holding his hand, in sleep that was not sleep but clear evening light in a small green wood,' and here, as if she realizes that these few scant scenes of her illness are to represent the culmination of her and Adam's love, as if she knows that doom has caught up with them and that her lover has met the sacrifice for which he has been marked out, she has a vision of arrows flying in which Adam finally lies dead, but she remains unwounded, untouched. Finally she screams, and Adam runs to her; but Miranda has seen his fate, has recognized the risk he runs in staying with her in her illness, a testament to his love for her....

After Miss Tanner, the nurse, has read her Adam's note, Miranda has her final confrontation with death.... Miranda follows the point of light to a 'deep clear landscape of sea and sand, of soft meadow and sky, freshly washed and glistening with transparencies of blue,' and comes away from death and slowly back to life, wondering, 'Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they?' Coming to life again, Miranda hears bells, horns, and whistles mingling, and discovers that this 'far clamor' is the armistice, the end of war but not of life. And only now she discovers that she does not want life. She tries to reassure herself: 'That was a child's dream of the heavenly meadow...' She has earned her way to heroism, fought the greatest adversary of all, and now the substance of life itself seems disappointing, and at night she wept 'silently, shamelessly, in pity for herself and her lost rapture,' longed for the great lighted visions of her most heroic moment.

But her greatest tragedy, her final disappointment, the last gratuitous sacrifice is yet to come. When Chuck and Towney come to take her home, to secure the things she wants to begin her life again, Miranda opens the pile of letters that have accumulated during her illness. Only now does she realize how long she has been ill, for time itself has been a blur of delirium and semi-consciousness.... One of the letters 'was from a strange man at the camp where Adam had been, telling her that Adam had died of influenza in the camp hospital.' So he had sufficiently taken her disease unto himself and all Miranda's visions of doom are now fulfilled. Miranda does not say a word about this letter, but goes on enumerating for Towney and Chuck the trivial things she needs....

Miranda comes full circle and meets her grandmother, whose heart had broken in two when she knew her sons were hungry. Now, at last, she is more than ever the granddaughter of the ancestor whose own children she had rejected, and whose strength now passes on to her. Miranda, too, will lead a joyless life, threatened and insecure, armed only with her fortitude to face the emptiness of a life to which she has heroically regained her right. And so she goes again into the world, another Miranda altogether from the

one she had been in the past; with the mark of tragedy in her heart, she turns again to the vagueness and sorrow conveyed in the final, ironic lines of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.”

Harry John Mooney, Jr.
The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter
(U Pittsburgh 1957) 25-31

“Katherine Anne Porter has long been regarded as one of the finest writers of contemporary fiction.... The first section introduces Miranda and extends to her collapse from illness; the second describes her night of delirium in the room of the boarding-house; the third presents her hospital experience.... [There is] a large cast of characters, by which we follow Miranda’s reaction to her world: the newspaper staff, the bond salesmen, the Junior League girls, the lovers in the dance hall, the soldiers in the hospital, the has-been vaudeville actor.... The influenza epidemic is...the physical counterpart of the illness of society at war.... War has unreined the ‘pale horse’ of destruction.... The confusion of appearance and reality ...disturbs Miranda’s equilibrium in the world. The war creates fear and suspicion, distrust and hypocrisy, which transforms daily reality into a disturbing set of distorting mirrors.... Everything in Miranda’s experience of the daily world that rightly should have been an act of love has degenerated to an act of duty done out of fear: the buying of bonds, the comforting of soldiers....

War...creates the necessity for a ‘code’ or ‘system’ among the younger generation, much like the code of Hemingway’s characters, which makes possible for them a ‘proper view’ of chaos, a proper existential formula of casualness and flippancy for maintaining cynical control: because the situation is absurd, behave as if it were amusing.... The system of attitudes is so rigidly adhered to that only delirium can finally compel Miranda to admit in speech to Adam the reality of her terror and her love.... Miranda is pursued by the pale rider, ‘that lank greenish stranger,’ but she is also herself the pale rider on Graylie, the pale horse, since she carries the seeds of death within her. This dream foreshadows the final outcome of the story, since ‘the stranger rode on’.... [The] image of sleep as a pit, and synonymous with death, anticipates the later dream in which death itself is the pit. This image also, by suggesting the bottomless pit described in *Revelation*, forms part of the pattern of religious imagery in the story.... The final conflict [is] between her rational will to die and her irrational instinct to live....

She views [Adam] simultaneously as Adam, Unfallen Man, and Isaac, the victim, offered to propitiate the wrath of God. As the latter he shares with all the young soldiers the role of sacrificial victim.... Adam himself, far from being a romantic, is a very stable and normal person, which Miranda senses, and she clings to a strength in him which she lacks.... Miranda is revealed to be a Catholic, and her preoccupation with religion, anticipated by her earlier allusions, is emphasized... The arrows which finally kill Adam but not Miranda symbolize the disease and its actual final results....The whiteness of her hospital environment...is to be contrasted with the lush colors of the earlier dream... Images of whiteness seem to be a general symbol of negation; the passage recalls Melville’s chapter on the whiteness of the whale; here there is the same element of terror in response to the whiteness.

Miranda’s dream of Dr. Hildesheim, who becomes, like the Hun torturer in her nightmare, a variant of the pale rider figure and almost a parody of it, indicates how deeply her mind has absorbed the jargon of the current propaganda which she hates.... In her dream of paradise her mind postulates what death ideally should be (all that actual life is not), and its features are the opposite of those associated with death in the earlier nightmares. The jungle, the angry wood, becomes the meadow, the darkness becomes radiance, the incessant voices become silence and ‘no sound’... The distinctive features of the paradise are silence, radiance, joy. In its features this paradise suggests the traditional mystical experience, and Miranda’s later revulsion to the colorless sunlight and pain of the actual world suggests the disillusioned ‘stage of experience’ which a mystic undergoes after his return to the world of a tangible reality. This suggestion of the mystical experience is strengthened by the variety of religious imagery elsewhere in the story, and by the presence within the paradise of the rainbow-symbol. The paradise is Miranda’s personal interpretation of the apocalyptic revelation alluded to in the title....

To Miranda now ‘the body is a curious monster, no place to live in,’ as the flesh is alien to the returned mystic, and she is like ‘an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language’.... The irony of Miranda’s situation is overwhelming: the ‘humane conviction

and custom of society' insist that life is best, and will force her to pay twice for the gift of death, making her endure again at some future date the painful journey to the blue sea and tranquil meadow of her paradise.... The [walking stick] is richly connotative. Its silvery wood and silver knob suggest Miranda's emphasis upon 'the art of the thing,' the appearance she must maintain. Its purpose is to help her, a kind of cripple, through her journey back again to death....

Her mental image of herself as Lazarus come forth with 'top hat and stick' is a dual vision of herself as he has been and as she will be in the world where appearances must be maintained; imaginatively, we have come full circle again to the 'disturbing oppositions' of that world of appearances. She is, with her walking stick, herself the pale rider, unhorsed and alone now, crippled by her first journey and preparing for her next: 'Now there would be time for everything'."

Sarah Youngblood

"Structure and Imagery in Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*"
Modern Fiction Studies (Winter 1959-60)

"*Pale Horse, Pale Rider*...is a literal account of the death of love in the person of Adam, whose tragic death in the influenza epidemic of 1918 leaves Miranda...to mourn and to rebuild her life on the single principle of refusing to be comforted by a flight into religious illusion [Atheist projection].... His fate...is worse than merely being exposed to sin (and it is significant that Miranda, like Eve, is the agent of the evil). He becomes a pagan god, whose beauty and love must be thematically divorced from the Christian tradition Paradise thus is irrevocably lost, never to be regained." [This critic fails to notice that Miranda visits Heaven and expects to return soon. He accuses her of a "sin" though she does not sleep with Adam, applying Christian morality while interpreting the story as pagan--an example of how Atheism falsifies perceptions in literary analysis and results in nonsense.]

James William Johnson

"Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter"
Virginia Quarterly Review (Autumn 1960)

"As revelation is its object, the image of the pit appropriately suggests 'the bottomless pit' in the book of Revelation (9:1-2, 20:3). Biblical allusions reinforce the ironic structure of the story: the plague, the war, the vision of the heavenly meadow, the pollution and the purification of waters appear in a quite different context in Revelation (16:1-21; 19:1-21; 20:11-14; 21:1-6; 22:1-3). Miranda's lover, Adam 'committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death,' has an obvious biblical counterpart (Miranda thinks of him as an innocent 'sacrificial lamb' and, punning, compares him to a 'fine healthy apple.') The title of the story, taken from a Negro spiritual about love and death, also has its biblical analogue (Revelation 6:8)....

Association of the insidious war jargon and the corruption of conscious action with the failures of love and the ensuing guilty conscience is nearly spectacular.... Miranda's dreams return her to the world of her childhood... Death and hell and evil are suggested by her dream of a jungle.... Miranda's entry into this jungle symbolizes her journey into the unconscious. The end of her dream adventure appropriately is with the present danger, the war... Her next dream...[is a] foreboding of the future (satisfying a Jungian concept of dream as revelation)... The simile, 'inhuman concealed voices singing sharply like the whine of arrows,' recalls Miranda's 'O Apollo' prayer. God of light and poetry, Apollo also is the archer god whose singing arrows wreak pestilence upon a corrupted people (cf. *The Iliad*). The Dark Forest...recalls Dante's 'Midway in our life's journey...alone in a dark wood'... Miranda's dream takes in something of the Adonis legend too: he was transfixed by arrows in a tree in a wood; one of the origins of the Crucifixion legend....

What a comfort the grave is, for is there any point to life in all this pain? None, Miss Porter seems to say to the reader in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, but the burning point of life itself.... The contrast between the bright atmosphere and people of her vision and the pallid objects around her is dreadful to her. But in some ways Miranda is free, for she remembers the vision she gained of her essential nature... The parallel between Miranda's restoration and Lazarus' suggests an ironic transformation of the biblical tale (John 11:1-44; 12:1-5). After four days in the tomb, Lazarus had been brought back to life by the faith of his sister Martha in the divinity of Jesus.

But here Miranda is *restored not by faith in a divinity, but by faith in a deluding dream* concocted by the instinct of self-preservation.... The joy of the heavenly meadow was the joy that belongs to unentangled spirits.... But soon she will 'cross back and be at home again'... [This is another Atheist critic who does not recognize Heaven as "home" in the story and imposes his own ideology. The parallel of Miranda to Lazarus implies that she too was brought back to life by Jesus. It should be obvious that all the Christian allusions and parallels do not express Atheism. Italics added.]

Edward G. Schwartz
"The Fictions of Memory"
Southwest Review (Summer 1960)

"*Pale Horse, Pale Rider* gives Miranda her own people and her own time, but they turn out to be horrors. The action occurs during World War I, when she is working on a newspaper somewhere in the United States. The vagueness of the site intensifies the nightmare quality of this admirable tale. The influenza epidemic is raging; Miranda contracts the disease, and her lover, Adam, dies of it. The story from the beginning has the feverish atmosphere of illness. The two sinister men who come to Miranda's desk to solicit fifty dollars for a Liberty Bond might be gangsters on a 'protection' shakedown. The war hysteria has crazed her world, so that Miranda, untouched by it, feels set apart, a shivering lamb amid bellicose wolves who howl safely, three thousand miles or more from the front. 'The audience rose and sang, "There's a Long, Long Trail A-winding," their opened mouths black and faces pallid in the reflected footlights; some of the faces grimaced and wept and had shining streaks like snails' tracks on them.' Miranda is the one sane person in the asylum; the others have 'pulled down the shutters over their minds and their hearts'."

Louis Auchincloss
Pioneers & Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists
(U Minnesota 1961) 141

"This is again a story in three parts, like *Old Mortality*, but the parts are not announced, are, rather, blurred in their outlines... What Miranda learns, essentially, is that the parts—the past, the present, the future—cannot be separated: one decrees another, backward and forward, and it is all therefore confused, dreamlike, feverish, trancelike, hallucinatory, all a mixture of the actual and the imagined, the real and the dreamed, the past and the future both flowing through a misconceived present.

Still, there are three stages in the story: Miranda, awakening from a dream half caught in childhood to her work in the present world at war, and her hope for Adam's alleviating love; then, sinking into her sickness, suffering her delirium in her bedroom, with Adam in and out; finally, her 'death' in the hospital, her recovery, the knowledge of Adam's real death in the interim, her nostalgia for that moment when she was in 'paradise,' released from all bonds, and her grudging return to a present where all bonds would grip her again except for one—the bond of illusions about life.

Perhaps this story, so subtle and so complex that one is unwilling to try to take it apart in any detail, is really about the birth of an artist, the one who has suffered everything, including death, and comes back from it, disabused, all-knowing, or knowing at least all that we can know.... She asks for some new accessories... items suggestive of death and the death of the heart. But the heart has also made a great surge forward into understanding and feeling. She has lost Adam, the beautiful original innocent, and she is no longer any Miranda that we have known—certainly not Shakespeare's Miranda, that lovely innocent first observing humankind in her lovely illusory world; and certainly not Miss Porter's first Miranda, less bedazzled as she may have been than Shakespeare's.

The Miranda who emerges from *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is Miss Porter herself, the artist, who will proceed to write these stories and others with that ultimate clarity—clairvoyance—that only the true artist possesses. The artist must know everything—past, present, and future—and the true artist must know as much of that most difficult third member of the triad as it is given to man to know. What Miss Porter makes me know, finally, is that with every present creation the artist dies into his past in order to bring forth another creation. That is why the artist makes us weep as we exult. Who else tells us anything else that is finally important?"

Mark Schorer

Afterword
Pale Horse, Pale Rider by Katherine Anne Porter
(New American Library/Signet 1962) 174-75

“Part of the strength of those classics, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *Noon Wine*, lies in their concision, their economy, their simplicity. *There* is my Katherine Anne Porter.”

Wayne Booth
Yale Review (Summer 1962)

“It pleases me to recall a conversation that I had with Katherine Anne while she was writing *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and was having trouble with a passage in it toward the end in which Miranda, desperately ill, almost dead, was to see heaven. She told me that she herself, at the end of World War I, had experienced this part of what she had created this heroine to experience and to make manifest; and because, no doubt, it really was heaven, she found herself unable to re-see it with her lively, healthy eyes....

‘Why not at that point just write a page about your inability to recede, your impotence to write? Eternal curtain, blinding effulgence! Let each one of your readers fill in the kind of heaven that his particular life has prepared him to go to, when his turn comes. What else is heaven, anyway?’...

Katherine Anne did not take to this suggestion...

In due course, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* appeared in book form, in 1939, with the vision worth a year’s waiting: ‘thinned to a fine radiance, spread like a great fan, and curved out into a curved rainbow’..”

Glenway Wescott
“Katherine Anne Porter Personally”
Images of Truth: Remembrances and Criticism
(Hamish Hamilton, London 1963) 37-38

“*Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is set in the concluding days of World War I. Miranda is now twenty-four years of age and is working as a reporter on a western newspaper. She falls in love with Adam Barclay, a second lieutenant from Texas who has completed his training and is awaiting orders for shipment overseas. Events of the story concern their attempts to preserve sanity in the nightmare hysteria of war: the pressure to buy ‘Liberty Bonds,’ the enforced attentions of society ladies upon hospitalized soldiers, the confusion of identities amid the constant movement and uniformed dress, and, finally, the influenza epidemic that struck senselessly and without warning. Miranda contracts influenza. She recovers, but Adam has been infected by her, and when she wakes from delirium, she learns that he has died.

The parallel between Miss Porter’s story and the Adam and Eve *legend* [sic] (the initial initiation) is interesting and meaningful. It recalls the author’s use of Christian atonement to define and clarify the events of ‘Flowering Judas.’ As Eve was tempted to knowledge, and through her temptation brought about Adam’s fall, so Miranda, who sees through the incompleteness and the pretense of the war orators, wishes to face the facts of life and death in wartime; but in so doing she brings about the death of her lover. The use of the legend raises the story to a level above its specific time and place, so that it is really a story about how a person faces death (knowledge) anytime, anywhere.

A second legend fortifies and enriches the first; it is Miranda’s childhood fable of the Pale Horseman, the not wholly fearful rider who calls to escort her into the land of death, but to whom she says, ‘I’m not going with you this time.’ Death (evil) is a tempter, and one is more cleverly armed to resist him when one has knowledge (truth). Adam, who is presented as more innocent than Miranda (‘...there was no resentment or revolt in him. Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be’), appears unaware of danger, though he is facing the most direct threat of death in war. Miranda’s delirium in her illness is really a descent into a world of her own evil, a world that is represented during full consciousness by all the hypocrisies and cruelties of war and wartime.

When she recovers, it is to discover that Adam, the personification of health and life, had ridden away with the pale rider. But Miranda’s descent is also a descent into knowledge (one of Miss Porter’s later stories is entitled ‘The Downward Path to Wisdom’); death and evil were facts to be faced and recognized for what they were, not hidden behind war slogans or the smooth phrases of the patriotic orators. Adam was

gone, and he could not be summoned back, either by magic or by an act of will. All that was left was time ('the dead cold light of tomorrow'). The war, too, was a descent, and so the theme broadens and picks up all the specific ugly incidents connected with wartime hysteria. Adam's death was, of course, the final descent, and this fact suggests that love, which was the means by which Miranda is saved, was also a first step toward death.... Miranda's awareness of the finality of death is heightened by the irony of the fact that Adam met death, not on the battlefield, but through her, at a training camp on the very eve of the armistice."

Ray B. West, Jr.
Katherine Anne Porter
(U Minnesota 1963) 20-22

"It is easy to understand why Miss Porter has selected this as her best work, for in it she has tried, and with remarkable success, to record an experience which was quite possibly the most important of her life. For *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, in its central experience of near-fatal illness, is autobiographical.... The technical skill exhibited in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* can hardly be praised too highly. Miss Porter's ability to represent the physical and mental sensations of dream and delirium has been seen in 'Flowering Judas' and 'The Tilting of Granny Weatherall,' but in this story she achieves her most sustained intensity of poetic beauty. Qualities observable here as in any of her works are mastery of sentence and paragraph rhythm, vivid powers of description, and extreme compression, power, and swiftness. Smooth and rapid transitions from one state of consciousness to another are often effected through the use of association. The end of the vision of the pale horseman furnishes a good example.... Whatever remains to be said of other aspects of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, it must be acknowledged that the brilliance of its prose style is almost its dominant element, raising it above even the usual high level of the author's stylistic performance....

This is the only story in which Miranda is mature and in which her mind is entered through a variety of stream-of-consciousness techniques.... Frequent illness is one of the teachers from which she has learned... In rejecting the rigid world of her youth, she has rejected all that went with it, from its religion to its timetable. She has not, however, abandoned her vague ideal of happiness or her insistent demand for truth.... She is repelled by the snob and the phony and she finds them everywhere, especially among men. It is her sensitive desire for truth that causes her to reject the visits to military hospitals as futile, and to write honest drama reviews which return to haunt her.... There is a strong parallel between the romantic loves of Laura and Miranda.... Like Laura, Miranda provides the means of her lover's death... It is clear that Miss Porter consciously employs in this story some elements of the Eden myth, with its overtones of knowledge and love leading to death.... Adam...looks clear and fresh to Miranda, 'like a fine healthy apple'.... [After giving Porter due credit, based upon his theory of Porter's love life this critic argues that Miranda never really loved Adam. On the contrary, in her vision of the arrows striking Adam, Miranda even expresses a willingness to give her life for Adam.]

William L. Nance
Katherine Anne Porter & the Art of Rejection
(U South Carolina 1963) 131-37

"Miss Porter [said this] was 'the best story she has yet written'.... [1956] Gray, the color of [Miranda's] chosen horse, indicates her own ambivalent feelings, although her reason for choosing Graylie demonstrated her wish to win the race with death and the devil. 'I'll take Graylie because he is not afraid of bridges,' she had thought in her dream, and it is obvious that she had in mind the folk belief that the evil spirits dared not...cross a running stream.... Miranda found stability and peace with Adam Barclay... He is also Adam the first man, made from a bar of clay; Isaac, subject to sacrificial slaughter; Apollo, a handsome young man.... From the first dream at the beginning of the story, Miranda was infected with the plague that was sweeping the country.... In her dream she entered into tropical scenes combining her early memories of the grandmother's farm... She set sail on a river, a combination of all the rivers she had known and, symbolically, the river Styx... Waving to herself in bed—saying good-bye to her physical body... She and Adam sang, 'Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away'...

In her mystical vision, Miranda found quiet instead of the noise of the jungle, serenity instead of violence, purity instead of corruption, understanding instead of separation. She found the soft green meadow... She did not know how she would be able to bear the drabness of the world after the reality of

her mystical dream, for in the world she now felt the grayness and was acutely aware of her alienation.... Miranda made her symbolic preparations for entering the world of withered beings who believed they were alive: cosmetics for her mask, gray gauntlets for protection, gray hose without embroidery—the gray is consistent with her feeling about the world she is about to enter and is thematically connected with the gray horse of the first dream; it is also a rejection of the mourning clothes which her grandmother habitually wore—and a walking stick.... She knew, as one initiated into both heaven and hell, life and death, ‘Now there would be time for everything’.”

George Hendrick
Katherine Anne Porter
(Twayne 1965) 77-81

“In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* the older Miranda asks Adam, out of her suffering, ‘Why can we not save each other?’ and the straight answer is that there is no time. The story ends with the unforgettable words “Now there would be time for everything’ because tomorrow has turned into oblivion, the ultimate betrayer is death itself.”

Eudora Welty
“The Eye of the Story”
Yale Review (Winter 1966)

“The narrative technique is more subtle and more complex than in any other of Miss Porter’s stories. The exact chronological sequence of events is difficult, at times almost impossible, to determine. Past and present, night and day, dream and waking, the world of the mind and the world of the senses, are interfused—seldom, and never for more than moments, to be distinguished.... [Expressionism] The pervasive sense of ‘unreality’ that Miss Porter creates with image and rhythm, with mischievous settings and resettlings of the narrative clock, is appropriate to the abnormal state of mind in her protagonist... Miranda experiences, only more intensely...than most people, the universal paranoia of wartime.... The first symptoms of her near-fatal illness are apparent in the opening episode of the story, her troubled waking from the dream of a horseback ride in the company of a sinister stranger....

On her salary of eighteen dollars a week, Miranda is barely able to maintain a respectable existence. She is nevertheless being constantly badgered by Liberty Bond salesmen to pledge five of the eighteen to the glorious cause. Totally disenchanted with a job to which she was not so much appointed as relegated, because she had showed herself lacking the emotional toughness believed indispensable for a news reporter, Miranda has little conscious incentive for maintaining the wearying routine of existence.... However much she might even *like* to buy, not only the Bond, but the solidarity with her society that it represents, she refuses to submit any more than necessary either to the inward or to the outward pressures. However, quietly and haltingly, she marches to a different drum....

She is induced to join a group of women visiting an army hospital, with gifts of flowers and candy and cigarettes for the patients. Out of instinctive sympathy for his very aloofness, in the self-isolation of physical and mental pain, she chooses an especially somber patient to talk to. But he will not answer or so much as look at the basket she has placed on his bed. She leaves with the sick determination never to attempt such a visit again. A play she is attending is interrupted for an unannounced speech of patriotic exhortation by one of the local dollar-a-year men. She feels assaulted by the tawdry cliches.... She is stubbornly conscientious about her work as critic. But when a traveling actor, a seedy has-been, who she has panned, shows up at the office to protest...she can feel nothing except a desperate embarrassment. Her job suddenly seems to her worse than pointless, and she wants only to get away from the pathetic little man as quickly as possible.

She falls in love with a young engineering officer from Texas... Adam is the embodiment of ideal masculinity—earthily handsome, strong physically and emotionally, sympathetic, easily affectionate, intelligently simple, uncynically realistic. But very early in their acquaintance, Miranda has a premonition that Adam is destined to die young. Her love for him, the vision of sane and creative life that it offers her in the midst of the shabby bad dream of her routine existence, is to turn out the greatest sham of all. On the day she and Adam first openly acknowledge their love, Miranda contracts influenza. Because of the

epidemic, hospital space is not readily available, and for a few days Adam looks after her in the rooming house. Finally he does succeed in getting her into a hospital, shortly before his outfit is transferred.

For several weeks she hovers between life and death, in a shadowy state of recurrent delirium in which it is difficult to distinguish between dream and waking reality. Then, surviving the critical phase, she recovers full consciousness on the day the armistice is announced. Several days later, when she is strong enough to go through the bundle of letters that have been saved for her, she comes on one in an unfamiliar handwriting that tells her Adam is dead—of influenza.... For a time, Miranda is unable to reconcile herself to the fact of Adam's death, which it seems to her makes an intolerable 'cheat' of her own effort to come back to life. She talks to him in her mind. Once she conjures his ghost, pleading with him to let her see him once more. But at last she sternly rejects such fantasies, determining that she will face unflinchingly the reality of her lonely future.... At the end, awakening from the long sleep of her illness to a cacophony of bells, she is told by the nurse that the uproar is in celebration of the armistice.... The tolling is the intrusive voice of social responsibility, demanding that she rise up from her dream of death and take her place in the nightmare of life.... The demands of public time...are symbolized in the stockings without clocks that she wants for the wardrobe of her resurrection...on the day she is to leave the hospital....

The society of the newspaper people is superficially liberated and liberal.... They affect a bohemian carelessness and cynicism about patriotism and all bourgeois pieties. But, in truth...the newspaper is designed to serve the system.... Adam...represents, as opposed to her newspaper friends, Miranda's last and best hope for accommodating her personal needs to the demands of society. Adam speaks her language. She can 'be herself' with him... Without rejecting Miranda and her feelings, sharing her embarrassment over the speech and her contempt for the superpatriot, he attains a transcendent tolerance that cools her anger.... Adam is unabashedly all-American.... He accepts it as his duty to fight.... And for a time Miranda is almost persuaded, allowing herself to hope that in Adam something *can* be made of civilization, after all. In Adam we have a fairly obvious embodiment of the notorious American dream. Very briefly, Miranda is ready to believe that that dream can be redeemed, if necessary even by the hated war—that it is worth redeeming if it can command the loyalty of such as Adam....

Later, he waits for her in a coffeeshop... She catches a glimpse of his unguarded face... She sees that the war has already started to kill his youth, his mind and spirit of youth. 'For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be.' The glimpse is a premonition of his physical death. But, what is even more important, it is a glimpse of the truth that the Adam of her hope, the youthful Adam, is already as good as dead.... Innocence—the innocence of Adam, of the youthful American he represents, of the American Dream—has too little strength to survive.... Abandoning the hope that Adam brought to her, Miranda enters upon the dark journey of her nightmare-ridden illness in quest of the wisdom that will enable her to survive. Idealist that she is, the beautiful dream being impossible, she wants to die with Adam. But the death wish is repeatedly denied in her bad dreams. At the level of her subconscious, she does not, in fact, want to die.... She intends, as she says to her horse [in the opening dream], to 'outrun Death and the Devil.' At the end of the dream, she tells the stranger to leave her and ride on; and he does, without looking back....

Later, when she is helplessly sick, and Adam is taking care of her, she has a dream in which she sees him in a jungle being repeatedly struck by flights of arrows. Each time he is struck down, he miraculously rises up, only to be felled again. At length, in an impulse of protective jealousy, she throws herself in front of him, to take the arrows into her own body. But they pass through her and again strike Adam, this time to kill him. The familiar symbolic association of death with the experience of sexual climax—such an association as is embodied in the commonplace ambiguity of the word 'die' in Elizabethan poetry—is involved here. Miranda wants to 'die' with Adam in the erotic sense; but her dream expresses her fear that one or both of them will actually die before their love can be consummated.... The final outcome of the dream action plainly fulfills her truer and deeper wish, *not* to die....

Briefly, a heavenly vision of tranquil beauty is generated... The happy enchantment is soon broken.... And she awakens to a sickening stench of corruption that, after a moment, she recognizes as coming from her own body.... But, it is clearly implied, the hard faith of the first vision does endure. The 'fiery motionless particle,' the 'hard unwinking angry point of light' that is the simple will 'to survive and to be

in its own madness of being' is not quenched. It is a faith without joy...a faith in which the social impulses are reduced to a bitterly good-humored tolerance.... For the Miranda of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, to entertain hope would be to deny the knowledge of death that is synonymous with her faith.

To the orthodox Christian mind, such faith—faith without hope and charity—is insupportable. And again, it would be a mistake to completely identify Miranda with Miss Porter. But there is no blinking the fact that such is the faith Miss Porter attributes to her protagonist—and that attribution is made with total artistic integrity. The gray Miranda of the ending here—Miranda ordering gray gloves without straps and gray stockings without clocks, Miranda this reluctant Lazarus—is the only Miranda the story will yield.” [Lazarus was raised from death by Christ.]

John Edward Hardy
Katherine Anne Porter
(Ungar 1973) 77-86, 88-89

[Beware of this psychoanalytic critic, who contradicts Porter’s statements about the story with his own theory]: “My reading [is] that Miranda deceives herself into thinking that, like Juliet, she has returned to her beloved only to find that he has died in her service.... *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is her new spiritual, justifying her role as artist and assuaging her guilt over her survival at the cost of another.... Miranda’s very act of idealizing Adam is proof that she, like Porter, never wanted a lasting love relationship at all.... [This is the opposite of what virtually all other critics believe.].... Her dream of the Pale Rider suggests that Miranda’s fear and insecurity are rooted, not in the present circumstance of war, but in her childhood. The young Miranda awakes before her family to escape their demands which she considers a threat to the self; her escape is from the human condition, conceived in terms of sleepers who are shocked into an unhappy resurrection by the sun... Miranda’s sense of mutual danger and distrust between herself and others is reflected by the Pale Rider’s ‘blank still stare of mindless malice’ and by her preoccupation with eyes throughout the story....

Her frequent premonitions betray her unconscious desire that [Adam] die, for she fears love.... Adam does not seem real because he is a narcissistic projection of Miranda—that is, her double.... It is doubtful that she was ever capable of truly loving Adam, who appears as a projection of her desire to escape time, and of her fearful knowledge that she cannot escape, that she is doomed to grow old, lose her beauty, and die.... Miranda, then, projects Adam as dead or soon to die to protect herself from the engulfment of his love and to express her death wish through him.... He becomes her ‘sacrificial lamb’ because he enacts her death wish, allowing her to follow her stronger instinct of self-preservation.... The arrows of her dream represent war, pestilence, love, and sexual contact. To Miranda they are all equally lethal...

She has not envisioned an after-life, for eternity to her is ‘unknowable.’ Rather she had projected an idealized version of this life... Miranda’s vision of paradise is crucial to her view of herself and of the world. It confirms her despair of ever finding happiness.” [This critic makes an illogical leap: Eternity is not the same as the afterlife. Miranda cannot know eternity, but she dies and *experiences* the reality of an afterlife, instilling absolute knowledge that will give her hope and inspiration to endure. This critic is the one, not Miranda, who projects his own vision of life into the story, the Atheism that is crucial to his view of himself and of the world. It confirms his despair of ever finding happiness.]

Thomas F. Walsh
“The Dreams of Self in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*”
Wascana Review 2.14 (Fall 1979)

“After she saw the televised version of the story, in which Dorothy McGuire played Miranda, Porter told Gay [Porter Holloway] that the young soldier was someone who happened to be living in the same rooming house, whom she did not know at all, but who looked after her for three days before a doctor and a bed could be found for her. She said he nursed her and gave her medicine and came in three times every night to see how she was.... Ten days later, while she was unconscious in the hospital, he died of influenza. She said that she could not forget this and it was terrible that he should have lost his own life and saved hers. She said she felt directly responsible.... Toward the end of her life she spoke of him as the one person she had really loved and with whom she might have had a lasting happy relationship. When she was seventy-one and living in Italy she visited the room in which Keats died. She found the experience moving and said

that she had never felt such a living sympathy with a dead person before, 'except with Alexander—the Adam of my World War I story.' She said consistently in her later years that his name was not Adam Barclay as in the story but Alexander Barclay. (The name is that of the translator into English of Brandt's *Ship of Fools*.)... In the story, Adam...is an idealized saintly person whose features are obscured because he usually appears in a flash of light or surrounded by an aura of brilliance."

Joan Givner
Katherine Anne Porter: A Life
(Simon and Schuster 1982) 127-29

"After many stories of female conflict, Porter gives us in this short novel a tragic resolution: the story of Miranda's death as a lover and her resurrection as an independent loner.... Told in the metaphor of the wasteland and the charnel house, the story inverts the Edenic potential of human union to dust and death and completes the cycle of Miranda's education.... In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, we meet a Miranda who is solitary, independent, and alone, if not completely lonely, who is nevertheless still vulnerable to love; who must yet experience the shattering destruction of love in her life and learn to live after....

Her sense of oppression is translated metaphorically into a physical pressure on her chest...which is at once the physical image of the oppression she feels from the war, a foreboding of the mortal illness to come, and an implication of the danger she faces in a love relationship. She thinks of the horses she might ride in her race with death—Fiddler, Graylie, and Miss Lucy—unwittingly invoking the presence of her grandmother, whose horse was Fiddler, and Amy who owned Miss Lucy. Having established her link to them, she chooses Graylie, 'because he is not afraid of bridges.' Since it is folk belief that evil spirits will not cross water, Miranda perhaps unconsciously believes she can outrun death and the devil if she makes it to a bridge. Spurring her horse forward, she establishes the journey motif which prevails in her dream sequences; all the while, the familiar stranger rides easily beside her and passes her by when she reins in and shouts, 'I'm not going with you this time—ride on!'

This threatening dream begins the story and sets a tone that pervades Miranda's subsequent waking hours like a fateful curse.... The story takes place in autumn, amid the dying of natural life.... The 1918 influenza epidemic has made hearses a common sight in the city streets—but the Great War is an even more potent manifestation of a diseased society... Not only does it kill numbers outright, it corrupts all who are touched by it: it encourages sentimental patriotism and thoughtless chauvinism; it requires senseless conformity and meaningless rhetoric. Its evil is personified not only in the 'lank greenish stranger' who invades Miranda's dreams, but in the grotesque Lusk Committeemen who sell Liberty Bonds by intimidation and the 'unfriendly bitter' soldier in the army hospital who refuses Miranda's candy and cigarettes. What alleviates her sense of oppression and disgust is the presence of Adam, a young lieutenant she has known only ten days. It is plain they are in love, and it is plain that love makes them terribly vulnerable.... If it is obvious that influenza is a disease and war is a disease, the most subtle implication of the metaphor here is that in such an environment even love is a disease which debilitates and devours. This will be one of Miranda's 'truths' by the end of her experience....

The people who inhabit this place are for the most part grotesques... They are people without values, like her pressroom colleagues who think Miranda is a fool for trying to protect a young girl's privacy by suppressing a story.... Even the men who appear whole hide some defect, like Chuck, who has bad lungs. The rest are wounded and hospitalized or, like Adam, marked for death at the front. The women, too, are shallow human beings, 'wallowing in good works' that do nobody any good... Like Miranda's landlady, who threatens to put her out on the street on discovering that she has influenza, these modern women seem totally without compassion, harpies who descend on a hospital ward with 'girlish laughter' that has 'a grim determined clang in it calculated to freeze the blood.' Men like Chuck, rejected by the army, are just as estranged from women as the soldiers more graphically marked by the war.... In the face of this separation of the sexes, it follows naturally that human communication is poor, distorted, or nonexistent, like the pressroom sounds that punctuate Miranda's thoughts....

Miranda and Adam engage in ironic exchanges that force them to laugh—rather than cry—over the war. Their mild cynicism and their 'small talk' identify them as people with style who know how to take the 'right tone' in regard to the war and who recognize that tearing their hair over it is very 'unbecoming.'

They cloak their despair under a patina of slick talk. Their careless conversational patter not only hides their serious feelings, it eliminates the possibility of their voicing them.... [These people are much like “the lost generation” in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*--after the war.] It takes nothing less than a mortal illness for them to declare their love for each other verbally. Unfortunately, love cannot thrive in the wasteland, and that declaration soon proves a death knell.

The third motif in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* opposes the wasteland; it is the image of an uncorrupted Eden where a loving pair can live a life of natural happiness.... Meaning turns crucially upon Miranda’s wish for paradise.... Not only is Adam a primary man, he is the best man, a prelapsarian Adam. He has ‘never had a pain in his life’... ‘pure’... Miranda thinks he looks like ‘a fine healthy apple,’ which suggests at once his well-being and his innocence, since the apple is uneaten, and, inversely, the temptation he is to Miranda, a jaded Eve who already knows a fear of love.... In an unsettling dream her subconscious desires and fears are revealed, yoked in the rich descriptive imagery of a baroque Eden so awesomely attractive and threatening that it might be lifted, along with the pale rider, from the Apocalypse. She dreams of a tall ship which beckons her to sail into...a rotting Eden, an Eden after the advent of knowledge.... She boards the ship and sails toward clamorous voices chanting ‘danger’ and ‘war’....

Adam makes Eden seem possible... Adam in fact represents an ancient archetype: the dying and reviving god whose death assured life for his people...Tammuz, Attis, Osiris, Adonis.... No matter what the name of the god or the manner of his ritual, the essentials—birth, death, and resurrection—result in the same meaning: new life for old. In Adam, the only love of Miranda’s ever portrayed by Porter, all the characteristics of both the Christian and pre-Christian myths are encompassed.... Just as he is Adam, he is also Adonis.... More than anything else...he reflects Adonis as a sacrifice. Miranda thinks of him as a ‘sacrificial lamb’ [also like Christ].... Adam and the other young soldiers are the human sacrifices the community is willing to pay to ensure its own security and survival....

After her dream of a jungle-like Eden, she is frightened into wakefulness and [she and Adam] remember childhood prayers and end by singing the Negro spiritual they both know: ‘Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away’.... He is the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, who is, of course, death, but who is also identified in the Bible as pestilence. His greenish color links him to Adam in his olive drab uniform.... Their reserve broken down by the deadliness of Miranda’s illness, they declare their love for each other as Miranda drifts into another potentially Edenic dream world... [Adam] is struck through with arrows, falling and rising in ‘a perpetual death and resurrection,’ suggesting Saint Sebastian, the celebrated Christian martyr who was shot with arrows, left for dead, revived, and martyred again. With his fellow believers he thought through death to find eternal life in heaven and thus his faith both kills and saves him.... That Adam is pierced by arrows through the heart connotes Cupid’s wounds as well as mortal sacrifice. It is when she tries to save him by interposing her body between him and the deadly arrow that Miranda herself is struck cleanly and Adam takes a mortal wound, in effect reversing her intention, giving his life for hers....

Buried in the hospital, den of pestilence and death, Miranda gives up her conscious life to hallucination and despair, caught in the image of the corpse wrapped head to foot in white which lies next to her, and in the pale rider, now translated by her delirium into a menacing German killer. Finally...she sees herself poised on a ledge above the pit of eternity and fears the fall into the unknown... Like Granny Weatherall, Miranda sees her ‘self’ simplified to ‘a minute fiercely burning particle of being’ whose tenacity becomes a fan of radiance and rainbow which entices her into a third vision of Eden [Heaven], this time rarefied beyond human imagining in return for the simple sacrifice of her self.... Her apprehension becomes ‘ecstasy.’ Ironically, the emotional weakness that originally made her vulnerable now resurrects Miranda, cheating her of paradise. Her return from the grave is necessary because she believes she has lost or left something behind; and so she has, for Adam...is now dead...

Miranda’s revival occurs simultaneously with the Armistice. War and the sacrifice of the living are now complete; the plague is over.... Sardonicly, she thinks of herself as Lazarus coming forth from his cave in top hat and walking stick.... She prepares to cover the ravages of her illness with cosmetics as she buries the desire for love, with Adam, in her psyche. Thus, the ghost of death at the end of the story is not the pale rider, but Adam, now as unbearably invisible and as cruelly separate from her as her vision of paradise

when it slipped from her grasp.... She has unburied herself for love only to be buried alive by loss. Bereft of its object, her heart does not cease longing, but torments her with visions of her lost happiness.”

Jane Krause DeMouy
Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction
(U Texas 1983) 157-66

“Miranda’s experience in Denver takes place before the epiphany of ‘The Grave’.... The theme of spiritual malaise...is tied directly to wartime, and thus *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is aligned with *The Leaning Tower* and *Ship of Fools*, all of which constitute Porter’s contemporary response to war.... *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is written in a structured stream-of-consciousness form with Porter guiding the reader through Miranda’s dreams and describing the action that holds the dreams together in a plot.

The story falls into three parts, like a play, with the first part introducing Miranda and extending to her collapse from illness. The most panoramic of the units, it depicts Miranda as a social being, the scenes shifting from her room to the newspaper office to the theatre, the dance hall, and the streets of the city. The second part describes Miranda’s night of delirium in the room of the boardinghouse, with Miranda and Adam in the fore-stage. The third section reveals Miranda alone in the hospital, with the only minor characters in the background, and it ends with her reentry into the world. Dispersed among the three units are five dreams... *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*...is a combination of the waking life of Miranda and the sleeping reality in which truth is revealed to her in ways it could not otherwise be revealed.

The opening dream...displays Miranda’s early struggle to assert her identity within her family (a link to *Old Mortality*), her fear of engulfment by her family, and her emerging awareness of death. The color gray (or silver) is prominent, as the middle ground between black and white...in the name of Miranda’s horse ‘Graylie,’ who is not afraid of bridges, in the color of the stranger’s horse, and in the memory of her kitten. The stranger, who is Death, is vaguely familiar to Miranda... A symbolic journey also is begun in this section, but Miranda ‘does not mean to take it’ (her dying is premature at this point) and wakes before it is completed....

In the second dream Miranda dreams of the Rockies wearing their perpetual snow...images of black, white, and gray that amplify the opposition of life and death and their midpoint, which is neither and both.... Miranda awakens from this dream to two words, ‘danger’ and ‘war’...In the third dream Miranda floats into ‘a small green wood’... This wood, a version of the jungle, may also be Dante’s image of mortal life. Within this wood, Adam, who has not appeared in the first two dreams, is twice seen falling from a flight of arrows but rising unwounded and alive both times. Only when Miranda interposes herself between Adam and the arrow does he die, an image that foreshadows Adam’s death and expresses Miranda’s guilt in exposing Adam to her contagious illness....

The fourth and fifth dreams appear in the last section, in which Miranda is alone dying and then recovering, in the hospital... A white fog, like that which moved into Granny Weatherall’s consciousness, rises in Miranda’s view. In it [are] concealed...images and ideas that are the sum of mortal life. She thinks of the German doctor, Dr. Hildesheim, who is treating her, as the enemy... The dream suggests that Miranda’s childhood innocence has been poisoned by the war, and it also illustrates the degree to which wartime hysteria and racism, exhibited in the first unit, have invaded Miranda’s private world, in which death and war have mingled.... The war song ‘There’s a Long, Long Trail,’ mentioned several times in the story...amplified by the three funeral processions Miranda and Adam observe, point to war as a metaphor for the state of mortal existence, which is a continuous journey to death.

After the fourth dream, Miranda’s mind splits into two parts, one reasoning and one frenzied. The split continues in the fifth and last dream...as Miranda, still clinging to mortality but close to death, tries to contemplate oblivion... She thinks of it as a whirlpool of gray water and of herself lying on a granite ledge over a pit that she knows is bottomless.... As she begins to understand nothingness and to accommodate herself to it, ‘all notions of the mind, the reasonable inquiries of doubt, all ties of blood and the desires of the heart,’ dissolve and fall away until all that is left is ‘a minute fiercely burning particle of being that knew itself alone’ and that was ‘composed entirely of one single motive, the stubborn will to live.’ This

particle of being says 'Trust me' and 'I stay' and grows to a fine radiance that curves out into a rainbow through which Miranda sees Paradise....

In the midst of Miranda's ecstasy, in the company of all the living she had known...someone is missing. It is of course Adam, who Miranda thinks is still among the physically alive. Upon this thought the curtain falls, and Miranda is alone in a strange stony place reminiscent of the symbolic terrain of Dante's journey through hell and purgatory. Pain returns, and Miranda resumes her journey back to life and thereon to death. This dream ends, like the first and third dreams, on a note of war as screaming bells, shrill whistles, and exploding lights signal the Armistice....

When Miranda is approaching death, the prospect is terrible, a landscape of disaster. But the perspective is that of the physically alive person to whom death is abhorrent and whose physical being suffers the agonies of physical decay. Once in Paradise, however, the physical self and consequently the pain and fear left behind, Miranda rejoices in the land of the spiritually alive, of those who cast no shadows in a place where it is 'always morning.' The perspective now is that of the pure spirit to whom the physical life is the equivalent of death. The inversion explains Miranda's difficult adjustment to being physically alive again.... The human faces around her seem dull and tired with none of the radiance she remembers from her dream.... Miranda's illness...symbolizes the spiritual malaise of the twentieth century that nurtured catastrophic world wars.

The title is from *Revelation* 6:8: 'And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him'.... It is an allegory of Miranda's mortal experience. Adam is in many ways Miranda's opposite, his masculinity opposed to her femininity, his innocence opposed to her cynicism. The Biblical significance of his name lies in his experience within the story. As the innocent (he is referred to as the lamb), he must be sacrificed on the altar of the modern century's awful knowledge."

Darlene Harbour Unrue
Understanding Katherine Anne Porter
(U South Carolina 1988) 105-112

"Such salvation as Miranda desires...requires some reconciliation...of the personal and the mythic... represented...here by the promise made to herself and the promise (of an apparently Christian life beyond life) made to her long ago. [She actually visits Heaven, it is not merely "apparent."] In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* both promises depend on Adam and the question of his final absence or final presence. And both promises are reflected in comments by Eudora Welty and Caroline Gordon. Why, after all, can they not save each other? Is it, as Welty says, that 'there is no time... because tomorrow has turned into oblivion, the ultimate betrayer is death itself'? [Welty seems to be referring to their earthly situation in a war, not to the afterlife.] Or do they, in fact, save each other? Does Adam, at least save Miranda? Does the story end, in other words, in 'the soul's ultimate union with God' (Adam symbolizing God), as Gordon says? Numerous Christian references—a seeming superabundance of them, actually—do float through the story: the work's allusive title, Adam's suggestive name, references to sacrificial lambs and healthy apples, to Hail Mary's and confessions, to prayer and Sunday School, to Lazarus and resurrection.

The question, though, is whether Miranda (Porter too?) can convincingly reconstruct the Judeo-Christian framework of inherited meaning within which such allusions make sense after having so convincingly vexed it in *Old Mortality*. [A visit to Heaven would be "convincing" to most people.] Do the references coalesce around Adam's ultimate presence or disperse at his ultimate absence? That is, does Adam's final ghostly presence—symbolizing the resurrected savior—fulfill a Christian promise made long ago, affirming that her near-death vision of an afterlife... 'Why, of course, of course, said Miranda, without surprise but with serene rapture as if some promise made to her had been kept long after she had ceased to hope for it'? Or does his *final absence* underscore the hollow factitiousness of all supposed meaning...? [Adam is dead, therefore absent. This does not turn her from a Christian who just visited Heaven into a nihilistic Atheist. Italics added.]

In the story's final two paragraphs, the interpretive crux, Miranda must choose to believe or not [She says twice aloud, "I believe"]; she must choose between the transhuman promise made to her long ago and

the personal promise made to herself [She has been allowed to visit Heaven—*because* she has already chosen.] Sensing an ‘invisible but urgently present’ ghost, ‘more alive than she,’ she nevertheless remains unsatisfied. She still clings to the self-promise made in *Old Mortality*. She resists the transcendent [not so] and clings [momentarily] to the temporal knowing even as she does so the ‘unpardonable lie’ of such bitter desire’... [The transcendent is not the lie, clinging to the temporal is the lie.]

Miranda believes, she says, but is that belief answered? Possibly. [In her visit to Heaven her belief is answered.] For one might interpret this passage as a coalescing of the story’s pervasive religious images, generally recalling, as it does, especially the unusual phrase [unusual to an Atheist] ‘I believe,’ the biblical postresurrection narratives, and the difficulty of believing in a risen Christ [difficult for this critic]. During Adam’s visible presence, Miranda quickly realizes, is not the way. Such a desire, she understands, is ‘false,’ an ‘unpardonable lie.’ She should not, as it were, seek the living among the dead. The way is rather for her to accept the transcendent meaning Adam represents. Miranda’s situation seems specifically to recall Jesus’ words to his doubting disciple: ‘Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou has believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20:29). The allusions thus suggest that Miranda’s final state is one of peaceful acceptance, even blessedness, and not of despair. Miranda now has time to rebuild and to complete her life artfully, basing it on the sure knowledge both of Adam’s sacrificial love and of a future paradise, a promise fulfilled ‘long after she had ceased to hope for it.’ Interpreted this way, the story’s conclusion opens not into oblivion, as Welty says, but into eternity. For Miranda the otherwise single and meaningless present moment is redeemed, as in the coda to ‘The Grave,’ by its subsumption into the eternal pattern of Christian history.

Or is it? [asks the Atheist] All the pieces for such a positive interpretation are, of course, present in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*—the references to Adam, to sacrificial death, to resurrection, and so on—but they never seem quite to come together as do the pieces in ‘The Grave,’ even though the story, the text, *seems to want* such a positively ordered conclusion [Here the critic rejects the meanings the story “seems to want” in order to impose his own belief.] For in something of an obverted repetition forward [?], *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* repeat *The Old Order* to recover not a new possibility of meaning from Miranda’s experiences but the possibility of their meaninglessness [to an Atheist].

Her thoroughgoing skepticism having upset the delicate balance of force and form [?], Miranda finally must face the possibility that chaos, once freed, might not be recontainable [?]. Having once ungrounded meaning, in other words, the modern consciousness [this critic] can never fully escape the doubt that any regrounding is merely a convenient fiction in the face of oblivion [A visit to Heaven might change your mind.] And this unexorcisable doubt haunts the ending of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* [quite the opposite: she is recovering her faith] as surely as does the other ghost, threatening momentarily to dispel Adam’s possible presence. Thus the final coalescence of religious references around Adam, their regrounding, remains problematic [for an Atheist critic, whereas Porter and Miranda actually visited Heaven, leaving no doubt. This critic ignores the main event, the visit to Heaven.]”

George Cheatham
“Death and Repetition in Porter’s Miranda Stories”
American Literature 61.4 (December 1989) 610-24

“Informing this story is a conflation of the Judeo-Christian myth of the Garden (before the Fall) and the Greek myth of Aphrodite and Adonis... The Adam/Eve/Miranda motif is clear, but the Aphrodite/Adonis/Adam Barclay/Miranda theme must be gleaned from the poetically evocative passages of description—passages whose beauty is unsurpassed anywhere in English or American fiction.... And as ‘the lank greenish stranger’ from Miranda’s dream, Adam—in his olive drab uniform—unites the Adam and Adonis motifs in the story. And it is Adam’s birth, death, and symbolic resurrection that promise new life in place of the old.... For Porter personally, the story is an allegorical depiction of her troubled relationship to Texas.... The five dreams that Miranda experiences become part of the structural complexity of the tale.... With Adam Barclay dies a lingering innocence, gentleness, and passivity that Porter will now no longer need in her quest for artistic dominance. Porter was in this sense ‘reborn’ during the 1918 influenza epidemic in Denver.”

James T. F. Tanner
The Texas Legacy of Katherine Anne Porter

(U North Texas 1991) 91-94

“Miranda awakes transformed, utterly dominated in thought and vision by her near-death experience.... She ironically acts *precisely* as the elders of her family had done—*precisely* as she has pledged to avoid acting.... [obviously false] Miranda’s idealized version of eternal mornings and beautiful people mirrors the romanticized past that her family had celebrated.” [This critic does not admit that Miranda sees Heaven, as Porter said she herself did. He insults and ignores the author by calling Miranda’s vision of Heaven merely a “memory of oblivion.” He compares her to a “drug addict.” Projecting his prejudice rather than explicating the text, he claims that her Heaven “precisely” mirrors slave plantations in the Old South. He is not a literary critic, he is a propagandist for Atheism who lies about literature. Italics added.]

Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr.
Katherine Anne Porter’s Artistic Development
(Louisiana State 1993) 177-78

“Miranda is an all-too-accurate representation of Porter herself, who had already experienced the souring of love and for the rest of her life would move from one idealized and ultimate disappointing lover to another, never able to find and maintain a love adequate to her need.... She fell ill with the Spanish influenza that was sweeping the country and would kill some 300,000 in the United States alone.... [This] story has been called ‘the most accurate depiction of American society in the fall of 1918 in literature’.... [Porter] developed the atmosphere of epidemic into a metaphor for spiritual illness associated with the nation’s aggressively patriotic entry into the war.... ‘the worst of the war’ was ‘the fear and suspicion’ it created among American citizens and, for dissenters, ‘the skulking about, and the lying’.... Equally pervasive is Miranda’s sense of personal insecurity lest she be accused of disloyalty to the United States. She hates the war, and she hates the atmosphere of intolerance it has created....

The fact that Miranda dares to share her dissent with Adam is a mark of the depth of personal trust they have quickly established.... Even Adam, however, does not despise the bigoted speaker [in the theater] as Miranda does.... The issue of language as a measure of honesty and honor is one of the major themes of the story, though certainly a less obvious one than the theme of doomed love in a cruel world. The two idealized lovers, Miranda and Adam, define themselves in opposition to the atmosphere of warmongering and shallowness all around them by means of a severely restrained and ironic language. They converse, and Miranda even dreams, in the epitome of Porter’s own compressed style, which takes on a symbolic power. Their speech shows, by contrast, that the language of patriotism is formulaic and specious, and shows up the slack garrulousness of others for what it is, a symbol of their slack moral state. Only Miranda and Adam maintain their honest resistance to the war mania.... The rhetorical style shared by Miranda and Adam both establishes their honesty with each other and measures the dishonesty and inauthenticity of those around them. That is, their rhetoric is a symbolic ethical standard. Its style is compressed, understated, and witty—the conversational equivalent of Porter’s own mature style.”

Janis P. Stout
Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times
(U Virginia 1995) 28-31

“In... ‘Pale Horse, Pale Rider,’ Miranda in time of war falls in love with a young officer awaiting orders for shipment overseas, contracts influenza and slips into delirium, but waking learns that her lover, who has been infected by her, has in fact died. Miranda’s bitter coming to terms with the finality of death is only chronologically the end of the Miranda series. *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944) contained several more, one of which, ‘The Grave,’ is considered by many to be the finest of all the short stories.”

J. A. Bryant, Jr.
Twentieth-Century Southern Literature
(U Kentucky 1997) 72

“Porter’s descriptions equate [Adam] with the golden apples of the sun, prizes hard-won by fairy tale heroes and heroines who thereby gain a ‘happily ever after’.... Such perfection cannot exist in the wasteland world the war brings into being... As the story progresses, Miranda travels deeper into the

wasteland.... Seated in a bar, Adam and Miranda overhear a conversation that again reveals the absence or failure of love in a modern world without faith or meaning.... Porter extends her gender-thinking to an analysis of the enforcement of masculinity, making it clear that she recognized how, during wartime, the social control of gender roles becomes more intense for men as well." [This analysis is routine contextual Feminist criticism governed by dehumanizing attitudes such as "the personal is political" and by falsehoods such as gender is "an entirely arbitrary construct."]

Mary Titus

The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter
(U Georgia 2005) 144-45, 161-63

"Miranda follows her family's example of mythicizing a lost order, as Robert Brinkmeyer has observed [Atheist quoted above], for she longs to behold once again her vision of heavenly bliss, and she denigrates the moribund world to which she returns... No belle from Aunt Amy's generation ever combined more desire with more deceit than does this revived poseur." [This critic depicts Miranda as a stupid romantic girl who regresses to being like Aunt Amy the southern belle rather than developing, in contradiction to Porter's depiction of Miranda in *Old Mortality*. Borrowing from the Atheist critic Brinkmeyer, he equates Heaven with the slave-holding aristocratic order of the Old South, which is illogical because the Old South actually existed and he means to imply that Heaven does not. He knew that Porter believed she actually saw Heaven, yet he purports to be *interpreting* her story. He is a liar. He is too arrogant to respect the author's testimony as to the basis of her story, he has ignored all the evidence documenting that the afterlife is real, he cannot even imagine that Heaven is a possibility, and he is too intolerant to be a scholar. As an Atheist, his mind is closed. He exemplifies the smug bigotry of Political Correctness.]

Gary M. Ciuba

Desire, Violence & Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction
Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy
(Louisiana State 2007) 108-109

Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939) is set in the same time period, is about the same war and renders many of the same themes as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), the hugely popular novel of World War I twice filmed. One common war story plot is about a wounded soldier who falls in love with his nurse but then gets killed. Hemingway reverses the convention in *A Farewell to Arms* by having the soldier survive the war and the nurse die in childbirth. Porter reverses Hemingway by having the soldier nurse the woman and then die of influenza while she survives, ironically. In both novels the woman is more experienced than the man and has had a prior romance, but Miranda is more complex than Catherine. Porter's parallels with Hemingway in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* are in thematic agreement on many points, as in affirming the possibility of true love, unlike Faulkner's cynical reply to *A Farewell to Arms* in *The Wild Palms* (also 1939) which satirizes what Faulkner sees as Hemingway's romanticism. In style and technique *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is Porter's most Expressionistic and Modernist work before *Ship of Fools* (1962). She compresses so much content in each of her three short novels Porter proves that she can be more economical than Hemingway and at least as great in that genre as the master Henry James.

What is most unique and significant in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is the dramatization of a death experience that goes beyond any depicted by Hemingway, Emily Dickinson or anyone else in American literature. The first dream of Miranda is a premonition of almost dying and asserts her determination to "outrun Death and the Devil." Later, her experience of Heaven is proof that she succeeds, reviving her religious faith, a fact ignored or falsified by most critics: "Why, of course, of course, said Miranda, without surprise but with serene rapture as if some promise made to her had been kept long after she had ceased to hope for it." The promise of Heaven was made to her during her education at the convent school in *Old Mortality*. World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918 contributed to the pervasive loss of faith and spiritual death in modern life expressed by T. S. Eliot in "The Waste Land" (1922). In the United States alone, over 300,000 people died of influenza, more than the number of Americans who died in the war. Worldwide, 500 million people were infected, one third of the world population at the time. The rumor that the epidemic was brought into the country through Boston by our enemy the Germans evokes the panic sweeping the country, ominously imaged by all the funeral processions that pass Miranda and Adam on the streets of Denver: "The streets have been full of funerals all day and ambulances all night."

As a journalist dedicated to telling the truth, Miranda is disgusted by wartime propaganda and shares her skepticism with Adam, who says, "Oh, there won't be any more wars, don't you read the newspapers?" One of the most famous passages in *A Farewell to Arms* likewise criticizes the perversion of language by political rhetoric. Miranda laments that "the worst of war is the fear and suspicion and the awful expression in all the eyes you meet... It's the skulking about, and the lying. It's what war does to the mind and the heart, Adam, and you can't separate these two—what it does to them is worse than what it can do to the body." The separation of the head from the heart is a major theme in Hawthorne that defines his villains Rappaccini, Ethan Brand, Chillingworth, Judge Pyncheon, and Westervelt. War and politics increase the tendency of the mind to dissociate from humanity, opening the soul to evil, the Devil that Miranda must outrun. During her delirium, "Her mind, split in two," she herself experiences delusions induced by her fever, stereotyping her doctor as evil because he is German.

World War I induced a tyrannical *rightwing* conformity: "There must be a great many...here who think as I do, and we dare not say a word to each other of our desperation, we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why? Does anybody here believe the things we say to each other?" Today students on campuses all over country are saying this to themselves under the tyranny of *leftwing* Political Correctness. Miranda feels oppressed by enforced conformity, as by those who try to intimidate her into buying a Liberty Bond. She does not have the liberty to refuse, but she cannot afford to buy into the social bond of patriotic enthusiasm for the war, neither with money nor with her mind.

Miranda's gray gloves symbolize her rejection of black-and-white thinking and her effort to insulate herself from a contaminated environment. During a theater intermission, when a Liberty Bond salesman makes a pitch to the audience inflated by the rhetoric of patriotic clichés—"our keyword is Sacrifice"—she thinks to herself, "Coal, oil, iron, gold, international finance, why don't you tell us about them, you little liar?" Porter makes the same criticism of World War I that Hemingway did in *A Farewell to Arms*, that it was promoted by capitalist greed. Miranda visits wounded soldiers in the hospital with a basket of sweets and cigarettes and the like, but she identifies too much with their misery—meeting her own "state of mind embodied, face to face"—and she is disgusted by the pretensions of the superficial women "who were wallowing in good works." She proves to be the opposite of a nurse. Porter is a "feminist" in criticizing gender stereotypes, as when Miranda and Towney are "degraded publicly to routine female jobs," but she is anti-Feminist in opposing groupthink, criticizing both genders, appreciating men and affirming romantic love. She is a Realist in depicting Miranda as unable to defend herself when the bad actor she reviewed unfavorably threatens to beat her up: "Come out in the alley." Her coworker Chuck defends her and she runs away: "I'd like to sit down here on the curb, Chuck, and die." She gains the strength to resist death with help from Adam and from her religious faith.

Miranda has another premonition of death when she feels that "Something terrible is going to happen to me." With the Rocky Mountains nearby, she wishes she were up "in the cold mountains in the snow." This is parallel to Catherine's premonition in *A Farewell to Arms* that she is going to die in the rain, which she does after retreating through the snowy Alps to Switzerland. Porter shows how the war affected people at home in the United States much as it did those in Europe where it was fought, due in particular to the threat of influenza. Miranda and Adam sound much like the characters on the Left Bank in Paris *after* the war in *The Sun Also Rises*, except that they are innocent rather than decadent. They speak with poignant rather than cynical irony and try to transcend pessimism with laughter: "She wiped the tears from her eyes. 'My, it's a funny war,' she said, 'isn't it? I laugh every time I think about it'." When she is about to die, she says to her doctor, "Well, Dr. Hildesheim, aren't we in a pretty mess?" The word "mess" is a thematic motif in *A Farewell to Arms* and the word "pretty" is spoken in the last sentence of *The Sun Also Rises* when the impotent Jake Barnes answers Brett Ashley's wishful speculation by saying, "Yes. Isn't it pretty to think so." The word "pretty" here connotes romantic fantasy. Brett is the opposite of Miranda in being an atheist and a rich, dishonest, selfish, promiscuous "lady." She is too selfish to be capable of love, whereas Miranda would give her life for Adam. However, "'I don't want to love,' [Miranda] would think in spite of herself, 'not Adam, there is no time and we are not ready for it and yet this is all we have--'"

Adam is (1) a fellow Texan the same age as Miranda, 24. She is no Eve. She is a savvy journalist who has already been married once, acquiring knowledge that led to a Fall, a divorce. Her name associates her with the Miranda of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* ironically, as her own "brave new world" is not bright but

deadly, and she has no Prince in her future. Adam is an innocent compared to Miranda, having “never had a pain in his life,” having never read a book, and having apparently never spoken the word *love* before. (2) Adam is “a Second Lieutenant in an Engineers Corps, on leave because his outfit expected to be sent over shortly.” As soon as he gets to the front he will start leading “sapping” parties, crawling forward under barbed wire to place or throw explosives into enemy trenches. Second lieutenants have the shortest life expectancy of any rank. Once in combat, Adam can expect to live for “nine minutes.” This is why Miranda resists falling in love with him, not because she is incapable of love: “It was no good even imagining, because he was not for her nor for any woman”; “There was nothing at all ahead for Adam and for her. Nothing.” In *A Farewell to Arms* the lovers escape the war by investing in their romantic love, which does not save them from tragedy in the end. In contrast, Miranda knows that she and Adam “cannot save each other.” He will soon be dead: “For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be.”

(3) Adam is “the American Adam,” the innocent young American destined to fall—one of the dominant cultural myths of American history. (4) Adam is also the archetypal Adam, the essence of a Man. At one point Miranda thinks that he looks “like a fine healthy apple.” To her he represents knowledge to be gained from a healthy relationship with a man that would offset what she learned in her marriage to a bad apple. Like the apple in Eden, however, Adam is forbidden by her knowledge of impending death. To fall in love with Adam would soon result in a painful loss of their brief Eden. The theme of lovers becoming like Adam and Eve when they fall in love is recurrent throughout Hawthorne, as in “The Maypole of Merry Mount.” (5) Adam turns out to be an ideal man in his character, values, personality, manners, and capacity for self-sacrifice—a traditional gentleman, hated today by Feminists but once the most desirable of potential husbands. As they walk together she thinks, “I hope we don’t come to a mud puddle, he’ll carry me over it.” Of course she is idealizing him. They only know each other for a brief time and in a longterm relationship they might find themselves incompatible after all, as in his not having ever read a book. Nevertheless, her idealization of Adam makes her learning experience possible.

(6) Most importantly, Adam evokes Christ: “Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be.” Christ is the “lamb of God” who sacrificed Himself to save believers from eternal death—out of love. Adam nurses Miranda, inspires her not to give up and saves her life before an ambulance finally arrives to take her to a hospital. “‘You’re running a risk,’ she told him, ‘don’t you know that? Why do you do it?’” They pray together and sing the Negro spiritual “Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away.” Adam even “lay down beside her with his arm under her shoulder, and pressed his smooth face against hers... ‘What do you think I have been trying to tell you all this time?... I love you...’ kissing her on the cheek and forehead...” He is willing to give his life for her. She slips from his arms into a dream of floating away into a “dangerous wood,” an allusion to the opening of Dante’s *Inferno*. Adam is identified with Christ when the flights of arrows repeatedly strike him in the heart without killing him “in a perpetual death and resurrection.” Here he also represents all Adams collectively, all the innocent soldiers who have and will die in all wars. Miranda loves them all. So much that she dreams of trying to replace Adam as a sacrificial lamb: “It’s my turn now, why must you always be the one to die?” Here Porter expresses her belief in gender equality tempered by the wisdom of a Realist. Miranda’s desire to sacrifice herself for Adam expresses the spirit of Christ within her. This dream foretells the ironic ending of their short experience of true love: “He lay dead, and she still lived.”

While her mind is “split in two” Miranda has visions. “The midnight of her internal torment closed about her” and “She lay on a narrow ledge over a pit that she knew to be bottomless.” The pit is a common image of Hell. “Silenced, she sank easily through deeps under deeps of darkness until she lay like a stone at the furthest bottom of life.” Finally “there remained of her only a minute fiercely burning particle of being.” What remains is her soul, which has “the stubborn will to live.” Her resistance to death is like a fire, like anger—“Rage, rage against the dying of the light,” goes the line by Dylan Thomas. “Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said.” Christ is the light. As soon as Miranda trusts Him, she is saved. His light expands. “At once it grew, flattened, thinned to a fine radiance, spread like a great fan and curved out into a rainbow through which Miranda, enchanted, altogether believing, looked upon a deep clear landscape of sea and sand, of soft meadow and sky... She rose from her narrow ledge and ran lightly through the tall portals of the great bow that arched in its splendor over the burning blue of the sea and the cool green of the meadow on either hand.” Here, she knows, “it was always morning.”

After she recovers enough to hear the letter revealing that Adam has died of influenza, Miranda reacts with a resigned stoicism comparable to that of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. Like Jake, Miranda will live on by a code of grace under pressure: “No one need pity this corpse if we look properly to the art of the thing.” She will perform with dignity and flair the role in which she has been cast. The show must go on. “Lazarus, come forth. Not unless you bring me my top hat and stick. Stay where you are then, you snob. Not at all, I’m coming forth.” Calling herself a “snob” expresses humility at being among those who have been privileged to visit Heaven and gain knowledge of their salvation. Beginning before the publication of this story in 1939, dozens of accounts have been published by people who had near-death experiences and visited Heaven. Many did not want to come back. Afterward, like Miranda most of them found the world a drab and disappointing place compared to Paradise. “The body is a curious monster, no place to live in, how could anyone feel at home there?” Hence the irony is resonant when Miss Tanner says, “Look, my dear, what a heavenly morning.”

Comparing herself to Lazarus implies that (1) Miranda actually died. Lazarus was in his grave four days before Christ raised him from the dead and when Miranda revives “the smell of death was in her own body.” (2) There is an afterlife. (3) She was raised from the dead by Christ, just like Lazarus. “She reassured herself, one foot in either world now; soon I shall cross back and be at home again”; “I’ll be back in no time at all,” she said; “this is almost over.” She summons the spirit of Adam—“a ghost but more alive than she was”—and tells him again “I love you.” She declares aloud to his spirit, “I believe”—affirming her faith that eventually they will be reunited in Heaven.

Yet she feels cheated by surviving death only to lose Adam and she tries to reunite with him in the present: “for knowing it was false she still clung to the lie, the unpardonable lie of her bitter desire.” The lie is the desire that they can still be together on earth, but “that is not the way. I must never do that, she warned herself.” She must not allow herself to be haunted, she must accept the loss and move on. She will be sustained by “remembering that bliss which had repaid all the pain of the journey to reach it.” Miranda must perform the rest of her life before returning to Paradise, with her gloves to insulate her and her walking stick to lean upon, like many other wounded veterans of the war.

Michael Hollister (2017)