

## FEMINISTS ASSAULT KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

(1890-1980)

### CREATIVE PROCESS

Porter was reborn and recreated herself in various ways during her life, in the traditions of Christ and the reborn soul, Ben Franklin and the self-made person, Modernism and the self-made artist, Existentialism and the created self, Transcendental Feminism and the independent woman, Hollywood and the make-over. She had a poetic mind that compressed and transformed the literal into the figurative when she consulted her memory. To the serious fiction writer, the literal fact is not as important as its *meaning*, just as to the saint the material is not as important as the spiritual.

Porter's literary friends such as Glenway Wescott understood that her "fabrications" about her life were part of her creative process. As she put it, "I shall try to tell the truth, but the result will be fiction"; "No memory is really faithful"; "My fiction is reportage, only I do something to it"; "My material consists of memory, legend, personal experience, and acquired knowledge. They combine in a constant process of re-creation." Her hostile biographer, the dogmatic Feminist Joan Givner, tries to discredit Porter for telling such stories as that "she had eloped from a New Orleans convent when she was sixteen and had married a man much older than herself who shut her up."

Porter here compresses the meaning of her experiences as fictionalized in Miranda in *Old Mortality*. Her statement is not a lie, it is an ironic allegory expressing truths: (1) "New Orleans" is a city that represents the world beyond her knowledge, depicted as corrupt in her story "Magic"—more symbolic and evocative than Lufkin, the obscure town known to her where in mere fact she actually got married; (2) the "convent" such as the one she attended in 1903-04 is a symbol of confinement; (3) "eloping" characterizes the marriage as her impulsive immature rebellion in search of freedom; (4) a "man much older than herself" identifies her husband with much greater experience and with the Old Order—a man who returns her to confinement, ironically; and (5) getting "shut up" again is the consequence of her foolish mistake. Porter displays her integrity by accepting responsibility rather than blaming others, unlike her dishonest Feminist biographer Givner, who does not understand her and calls her a liar.

Likewise dumb is criticism of Porter's statement that "I belong to the guilt-ridden white-pillar crowd myself, but it just didn't rub off on me." She is not claiming to have had an aristocratic background herself literally, she is accepting southern white guilt for slavery and the Civil War while repudiating racism and the aristocratic Old Order. Porter enlarged her vision by identifying herself with the whole South—all classes, not just poor white Texans. The aristocratic social order of the Old South is part of her past as a white southerner, part of her vision as a fiction writer, and part of her burden as a modern woman. Her white ancestors, regardless of class, participated in and to some extent benefited from that Old Order, and passed on its prejudices, as seen best in *Old Mortality*. To share its values is to "belong" to the aristocratic order in the broadest sense. In "The Old Order" Porter is purging white guilt.

Modernists were prone to misinformation about their personal lives because they believed in re-creation of themselves as artists. Sherwood Anderson published three autobiographies that contradict each other. Ford Madox Ford was famous for making up stories about himself. William Faulkner returned home from World War I wearing a Canadian Air Force uniform and limping with a cane. He fostered by never correcting the legend that he was a war hero injured when his plane got shot down in action in France, whereas in fact he was injured when he got drunk and crashed a training plane in Canada after the Armistice kept him from reaching the front. Friendly critics have laughed at the legend as a humorous tall tale that makes the author more interesting and entertaining. Critics such as Givner have not been similarly tolerant or understanding of Porter.

## DISHONEST FEMINIST BIOGRAPHER

Many critics of Porter cannot be trusted. She was one of the last Modernists and many of her critics are Postmodernists—dogmatic Feminists and Atheists—who detest her politics and disdain her religion. The worst of these critics falsify her work and her character. Feminists dislike Porter because she disliked them. For example, in 1991 Joan Givner, a Canadian women's studies professor, published a revised edition of her 1982 biography in order to smear Porter. She was given a weapon by Elinor Langer, a radical Feminist on the editorial board of *The Nation*, who was researching a biography of the Feminist fiction writer Josephine Herbst. Langer is so far overboard to the left that she continues to deny the guilt of Alger Hiss, the infamous Communist agent in the U.S. State Department sent to prison for perjury, the most famous spy in American history. Without proof, Langer accuses Porter of being guilty of treason to the Left: "The shocking story was given currency [by Langer] that Porter in a 1942 interview with the F.B.I. had turned informer." That is, she told the truth when questioned by the F.B.I.: "She had given details about her longtime friend's activities as a Soviet courier, an opponent of the American form of government and a follower of Stalin."

Givner emphasizes "the enormity of the betrayal" and claims that "Porter's version of Herbst's activities was false. Langer's research into the F.B.I. files is meticulous, and there is no reason to doubt her charge." Reasons to doubt her charge: (1) According to the biographer Kenneth Lynn in *The Washington Post* (12 August 1984) the F.B.I. report on the Porter interview was "error-ridden." (2) The F.B.I. background investigation of Herbst as a whole concluded that what Porter is alleged to have said was *true*, and more: that Herbst was married to a Communist courier, that she lobbied for the admission of Communist aliens into the United States, that she belonged to half a dozen Communist front organizations, that she voted Communist, and that she was a "great admirer of Stalin." (3) Herbst was one of the many Communist agents hired by liberals in the government; consequently in 1942 she was fired from her job writing for the agency that evolved into the C.I.A. because she wanted to overthrow the democratic government of the United States. (4) We do not know what Porter actually said in the F.B.I. interview because Givner does not quote her from the report. What is she hiding?

(5) Givner claims that Porter made "serious charges [that] had the potential of destroying completely Herbst's career and chances of finding work," as if Porter was the only witness interviewed by the F.B.I., and as if Herbst should not be held responsible for treason. Givner is a Canadian leftist who *supports* treason against the United States. (6) Moreover, Porter repeatedly expressed severe criticism of the U.S. government's investigations because she believed government officials were more numerous, dangerous and fascist than the Communists, making it unlikely that in any F.B.I. interview she would volunteer information. (7) Givner sides with a Communist traitor against a patriotic American: She vehemently condemns Porter for failing to *lie* to protect Herbst, discrediting herself as a truthful source of biography or anything else. (8) As an advocate of lies, Givner freely lies about Porter throughout her biography. (9) Givner expresses a vindictive malice toward Porter. She takes revenge upon her for being an independent woman rather than a dogmatic radical Feminist like herself. Joan Givner speaks for the academic police state called Political Correctness.

Without *any* evidence at all, quoting Langer but not Porter, Givner agrees with Langer that "Porter was motivated by cold-blooded malice and delighted by the thought of destroying her friend." Givner expresses regret that attacking Porter on behalf of Herbst "in this preface rather than in the text itself gives it undue prominence. On the other hand, the prominence is perhaps justified since it is a key incident, astonishing in itself and also because the abhorrence of such an act is a recurrent theme in Porter's work." That is to say, I want to prejudice you against Porter at the outset of my biography, to persuade you that she was a liar and a hypocrite. Givner goes so far as to use the word "collusion" in accusing Porter of betrayal, alluding to the phrase Porter used in explaining the theme of *Ship of Fools*—"collusion with evil." Adding to all her slander, Givner also implies that Porter was a hypocrite in her dislike of lesbians: "Elinor Langer notes that 'Josie [Herbst] hinted at this time to Porter that some physical comfort would not come amiss'." Porter was known to be angered by lesbian advances, yet in order to enlarge and intensify her false allegation of betrayal, Givner hints by tone and the juxtaposition of events that Porter was influenced to separate from her then husband because of a lesbian affair with Herbst.

An unsuccessful fiction writer herself, Givner feels competitive with Porter. She suggests that both she and Herbst are more intelligent than Porter and declares that Porter “was a little threatened by the well-educated, well-informed, articulate women who were now speaking out”—radical Feminists like Herbst and herself, that is. Givner strikes an arrogant pose of being above criticism: “Let me say in passing that I think the practice of having fiction writers review biographies is akin to having fundamentalist preachers review books on the great vineyards of France.” Givner is boastful and proud to think that writers are afraid of her: “Fiction writers often suffer from acute fear (biographobia) of the skill that is the hallmark of literary biography—the uncovering of repressed motivations in the fiction.” Givner demonstrates no such skill. Her interpretations of stories are among the worst that exist. On the whole the most trustworthy critics of Porter are fellow writers, not academics like Givner. Porter trusted Givner to write her biography fairly, certainly without malice. The real betrayal here is by Givner.

The slander by Langer and Givner was increased by Robert Brinkmeyer, a consistently unreliable critic: “She apparently provided damning information—most of it made up—to the F.B.I., which was then investigating her friend Josephine Herbst.” Brinkmeyer cites Langer and Givner as his authorities; he did not see the F.B.I. report and cannot know to what extent if at all Porter was guilty of “cooperation” with the F.B.I., whether she “made up” information or whether it was “damning.” Based on slander such as this, he turns his entire book into a Marxist (Communist) attack on Porter’s “anti-totalitarian politics.” (*Katherine Anne Porter’s Artistic Development*, 1993: 191-92). Givner is especially angry at Porter because Givner supports the Communists, as is evident in her identification with Herbst, her belief that traitors should be employed in U.S. intelligence agencies, and her objections to Porter’s unflattering depiction of the corrupt Communist leader Braggioni in “Flowering Judas.”

Feminist critics derive status from publishing on Porter due to her high status. They celebrate her for being a star “woman writer” at the same time that they try to discredit her character and judgment because she does not agree with them. Givner sides with Herbst and the other most negative critics of Porter’s fiction, calling *Ship of Fools* “monotonal”—evidence of her own limitations. She claims to be uncovering “repressed motivations” but what she exposes is her incapacity for literary analysis. She lacks the skill to explain the ending of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, for example, and resorts to offering half a dozen possible meanings including “necrophilia” as if one interpretation is as good as another. As if salvation of the soul is the same as a desire to have sex with corpses. She quotes Porter’s account of her “beatific vision” of Heaven yet does not see its significance. Givner claims that Porter “could not imagine characters with the capacity to develop, and she was never able to create them.” Much to the contrary, there are many—most obviously Miranda. The Miranda stories, including *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, are all about her development from childhood to womanhood. All the critics discuss this. Clearly, Givner did not read them. They might differ from her point of view, hence they are a threat to her.

Givner also defames Porter by implying that her religious practice was just an act and that she lost her faith. Her own atheism is expressed when she says that Porter’s father “bluntly refuted the dogma of the virgin birth.” The word “refuted” implies that he *proved* that Christianity is based on a falsehood. Later in the biography, Givner implies that she has proven that Porter “wavered in her ability to believe in God,” though she has given no evidence of this: “Even when she wavered...” Just as Givner claimed to read Porter’s mind in accusing her of betraying Herbst to the F.B.I., she claims to read Porter’s mind in accusing her of losing her faith: “Perhaps the most accurate apprehension of her delicate balance between skepticism and faith was that sensitivity recorded by Flannery O’Connor half a century later: ‘When she asked me where we were going in Europe and I said Lourdes, a very strange expression came over her face, just a slight shock as if some sensitive spot had been touched.’” Givner falsifies by withholding what Porter said her expression meant: “She said that she had always wanted to go to Lourdes, perhaps she would get there some day and make a novena that she would finish her novel...” (Letters, *The Habit of Being*, 275) This expresses Porter’s *faith*, not “skepticism” about the existence of God.

Givner identifies Laura in “Flowering Judas” with Porter and refers to “her loss of the Catholic faith of her childhood.” Atheist critics often incorrectly equate Porter with a character who lacks religious faith as evidence that she lacks faith herself, but Laura has not lost her faith. She prays and goes to Mass and at the end of the story she dreams in terror that she is going to Hell for betraying Jesus—as implied by the title of the story—as well as Eugenio. This nightmare is proof of her continuing religious faith. At the end of her

discussion Givner diminishes Laura's faith even more by calling it "the lost religion of her childhood," as if she outgrew it. If she had, she would not have had the nightmare.

In 1944 Porter rented a room from a Catholic family and Givner says that "Porter quickly returned to Catholicism." And years later, "she turned once again to the Church." Porter opposed some traditional attitudes and principles of the Catholic Church, especially from a feminist perspective, and she once got so insulted by a priest at confession that she felt alienated from the Church for years, but Givner offers no evidence that Porter ever doubted the existence of God. Even if you equate Porter with Miranda as rejecting her religious faith at the end of *Old Mortality*, she regains it in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. Atheist critics such as Givner give the false impression that Porter's temporary alienation from the Catholic Church is the same as losing faith in God. Givner acknowledges that for the last ten years of her life Porter was a very active Catholic, loving to go to Mass and regularly going to confession.

Yet Givner argues that Porter still had a "terrible need" to believe: "She longed to believe in God and in life after death." Givner mentions that Porter saw the ghost of her little dead brother when she was two years old and once felt the ghost of her little niece Mary Alice lay down beside her in bed, but Givner does not reveal that while being interviewed by Enrique Lopez for *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter* (1981: 135-36, 139), Porter told him of being visited by an evil spirit. And that just then a good spirit came into the room: "It's Flannery O'Connor—she's come to visit. She must have known we were thinking about her." Lopez adds, "Knowing that Miss O'Connor had died two or three years before, I simply sat there in dead silence...Miss Porter kept staring at the unseen presence for at least ten minutes, her hands loosely folded on her lap, an expression of calm inner happiness in her face." Porter had already visited Heaven when she died in 1918. In "The Cracked Looking Glass" Porter's tone implies that she believes her woman protagonist has indeed seen ghosts all her life. Having seen ghosts and Heaven herself, how could Porter have any doubt about the reality of the afterlife?

Givner tries to destroy respect for Porter at the outset of her biography by accusing her of betraying Herbst and throughout her book she continues repeatedly to stab Porter in the back. At the end, she delivers a killing thrust. She admits that as Porter neared death she told Sister Maura, "Death is beautiful. I long to die. I love God. I know that he loves me." And that when Father Roseliep assured her that eternity would be better than this world, she told him, "Oh yes, I know that." And that her priest declared that "those five words expressed the Christian faith of Katherine Anne Porter as he had known it: 'A faith as indestructible as the love.' Yet *still*, Givner refuses to believe Porter or her priest: "Clearly she yearned deeply for the promise of life after death, but whether that yearning was ever transformed into true faith before she died, it is impossible to say." How much evidence of faith does a biographer need? Givner claims to know the soul of Porter better than her priest does, but as an atheist she does not even believe in the soul. Givner never supports her point with any evidence at all, only evidence to the contrary. She claims it is impossible to say whether Porter's religious faith was true, but then she *does* say. She implies it was *not* true—that Porter was a liar and a hypocrite and a fake—by comparing her to a delusional old lady who loses her faith at the last moment: "She lay like Granny Weatherall..." The last word of her biography is "failed," implying that Porter failed in character and that her religious faith is not true.

As her final cutting stroke, Givner tries to behead Porter's reputation by equating her to a debauched old atheist aristocrat who chases after men--dependent, alone and pathetic. This is the most insulting Givner contrives to be: "At the very end she lay, like La Condesa on the *Vera*, drugged and demented...defiant until the last moment when...the little point of light flickered and failed." Once again Givner claims to read Porter's mind without even witnessing the event. How does she know that the light "flickered"? How could any dying person be "defiant" while drugged and demented? As Elizabeth Hardwick says, "The truth is that Katherine Anne Porter was drugged and demented from strokes and the ghastly illnesses of extreme old age. It is not a useful summarizing sentiment to think of her as a fiction, just as it has not been altogether wise to think of her fiction as her life....The biographer's rather smug provincialism distorts the worldly and amusing mishaps of a woman who was not made for marriage." (*American Fictions* 305, 307) Jane DeMouy, who was holding Porter's hand when she died, did not see her as "defiant": "Gradually, softly finally, she lets the light die"; "There were times when she repeated that she wanted to die." ("Elegy for Katherine Anne," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 75, 1999: 504-10).

Earlier in the biography Givner says that La Condesa was based on the journalist Jane Anderson, who had been a feminist role model for Porter in her youth, but who was eventually indicted for treason after broadcasting for the Nazis from Berlin. Givner takes revenge on Porter for the exposure of her friend Herbst as a traitor by repeatedly calling Porter anti-Semitic and identifying her through La Condesa with Anderson and treasonous Nazism. Givner belongs to the hit squad of radical Feminist critics who attack the classics and try to destroy the reputations of great writers who disagree with them. Her words accusing Porter of betraying Herbst apply not to the author but to herself: She “was motivated by cold-blooded malice and delighted by the thought of destroying her friend.”

#### *Maria Concepcion*

Maria Rosa is the “independent woman” in the story and she ends up dead. She joins the revolution that was supposed to establish women’s rights but is killed by the traditional woman (both Indian *and* Catholic). Maria Rosa is identified with an “evil spirit” because independent women like her are destructive to the community. Feminism would destroy what remains of Indian culture in Mexico.

#### *Virgin Violeta*

Two of the Feminist critics impose themselves on Violeta much as Carlos does, as predators who take advantage. Like other academic Feminists today, Titus is quick to cry *Rape!*: “Although Violeta receives only a kiss, the impact of Carlos’s act is *equal to a rape.*” [Clearly this is a Feminist who has never been raped. Italics added.] These days if Carlos had committed this kiss on an American campus it is likely he would be accused of rape and convicted without due process. Titus the exaggerating Feminist says Violeta feels like a “guilty whore.” No, Violeta says “She had behaved like an immodest girl.”

Such exaggeration makes the girl sound ridiculous. Violeta exaggerates partly because she is only fifteen years old. Presumably the Feminist critics are somewhat older, yet they are inclined to be just as puritanical about heterosexual sex as Violeta, for different reasons. Mary Titus seems to be expressing her own revulsion at the idea of being kissed by a man. Her hatred of Carlos is expressed in the allegation without evidence that he is “sadistic” and a “misogynist.” Titus purports to know him better than Violeta’s mother: “Mamacita was wide-awake and smiling, holding Carlos’ hands. They kissed.”

Jane DeMouy claims that Carlos “has ruined her self-esteem and destroyed her hope for the future.” One little kiss? Violeta does not lose her virginity. She is not a melted “snowflake,” as pampered Feminist girls are called in the press these days. Her “safe space” is the convent and she hates it. As the story ends, Violeta “quarreled on more equal terms with her sister Blanca, feeling that there was no longer so great a difference of experience to separate them.” This is Porter’s joke on Blanca, but also humorous evidence of a little *too much* self-esteem in Violeta, adolescent inflation in fact—like a Feminist.

#### *The Cracked Looking-Glass*

The three female critics are radical Feminists and implicit atheists—Unrue (1988), DeMouy (1993), and Titus (2005). By the 1980s, Feminists had taken over higher education and a woman would not be hired or published if she was not a politically correct Feminist. Rather than providing a window through which the story may be seen more clearly, each of their analyses resembles a cracked looking-glass with most of the pieces missing. Their interpretations reflect themselves rather than Porter. Unrue begins by apologizing for the presence of religion, explaining that “Religion is a visible part of the lives of Porter’s Irish Catholics in New England.” She never admits that Porter herself is a Catholic. Then she reduces the faith of Rosaleen to “a nostalgic grasping for the past, a journey backward to a romantic state.” Unrue declares herself superior to all other critics—especially males of course: She claims to provide “the only defensible interpretation.” Hence, as an editor, presumably she would not publish any other.

The Feminist atheist DeMouy ridicules the religious Rosaleen as “primitive” for “talking to animals and assuming that her favorite cat is living some kind of life after death.” Rosaleen “goes to pray for Honora in a church...steeped in girlish romance and emotionalism.” Although this critic uses the expression “Before God and everybody, Rosaleen...” DeMouy ignores God in her analysis. She declares that all of Rosaleen’s

dreams are “untrue.” Like Unrue, this Feminist also declares herself infallible, saying that Rosaleen “can only be seen as a thwarted mother.” No other interpretations are politically correct. Of all the critics, Feminists are the most self-righteous and intolerant. Titus acknowledges that Rosaleen is religious, but she belittles her faith by attributing it to her “upbringing,” as if she is merely conditioned and might outgrow religion and its “strict moral codes,” including fidelity in marriage. Rosaleen is trapped by her “self-image as an honorable woman.” To Feminists, selfishness in a woman is a virtue.

Porter reinforces the religious significance of the Billy-cat dream by having the stranger listening to Rosaleen’s story exclaim: “For God’s *sake*...you can’t get around that now, can you?” You can if you are an Atheist liberal. You simply ignore the text. You use selective perception to reinforce your own beliefs. The dream is a sign from the merciful Holy Spirit that relieves the believer of her anguish over what happened to her cat. It is not necessary to know anything about Christian symbolism in order to see that the Billy-cat dream is both paranormal and accurate. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, spirits of deceased cats and dogs still inhabiting their homes have been photographed and shown on television. Atheists and skeptics are afraid to look at objective evidence contradicting their materialism, or like Dennis do not believe any evidence contrary to their beliefs. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* Miranda visits Heaven, based on Porter’s own experience when she died of influenza in 1918, yet Atheist critics did not recognize Heaven when they saw it and interpreted the story pessimistically. Far from representing the reality principle in this instance, Dennis is more concerned with appearances than with reality: “Dennis shuddered for fear she was going to shed tears before this stranger.” Similarly, academic liberals fear that they will be scorned as politically incorrect by their Atheist colleagues.

Rosaleen is one of the “belles” recurrent in Porter, epitomized by Amy in *Old Mortality*. But her stories exaggerating her attractiveness, desirability, and joyful youth are not unusual among women in general. Furthermore, in her limited way, as a storyteller she enhances and adds to facts drawn from memory as Porter and other writers do. It is not just the Irish in her, it is the artist. A “picture” of her neighbors up the hill comes into her mind, a family that goes to church but are sinful and have no “Christian look out of their eyes for a living soul.” This establishes that Rosaleen is trying to be a good Christian herself, but she recalls demeaning Kevin’s girl as “a brassy, bold-faced hussy, the kind the boys make jokes about at home, the kind that comes out to New York and goes wrong.” Her lack of charity drove Kevin away. Ironically, she discovers that her neighbors see her the same way that she described Kevin’s girl. After he left, she looked into the cracked looking-glass and denied the truth: “Before God, I don’t look like that.”

A former “belle of the ball,” Rosaleen is preoccupied with appearances like her husband, and like Mrs. Whipple in “He.” It is true that literally, outwardly, she does not look like she does in the cracked mirror, but inwardly, psychologically, she is flawed like the mirror. According to her religion, all human beings are flawed. That is why everyone needs to be forgiven to be saved from hell. It is evidence of Porter’s religious faith that so many of her major characters fear going to hell, such as Laura in “Flowering Judas,” Granny Weatherall, and the woman writer in “Theft.” Rosaleen feared going to hell after she and her sister failed to tend to their great-grandfather on his deathbed and he cursed them both—“to hell with ye!” In her second dream in the story, once again she is visited by the dead. The spirit of her great-grandfather comes to her from Purgatory and demands that she arrange a Mass for him “because it’s by your misconduct I’m here.” Rosaleen was “off to Mass before daybreak.”

Her third dream in the story proved to be true like her dream of Billy-cat. Years before she had dreamed that her boyfriend back in Ireland got struck on his head and left for dead in a ditch. “Surely I dreamed it, and it is so. When I was crying and crying over him--” This dream resembles the Billy-cat dream and had the same function, to relieve her of anguish about what might have happened to a loved one. That both dreams proved to be true argues for the truth likewise of the dream from her great-grandfather in Purgatory. The dense Dennis and the critics have an even greater “coincidence” to disregard, that not one but *two* of Rosaleen’s paranormal dreams have definitely proved to be accurate. The critics skip over this third dream because it is obvious evidence that her dreams are *not* “tall tales.”

The critics do discuss her fourth dream in the story, that she sees Kevin’s grave, because unlike two of the previous dreams in this case there is no such proof. It is easy for critics to dismiss this dream as a wish-fulfillment satisfying Rosaleen’s need to know what happened to Kevin, why he has not written or visited,

and ending her pining for his return. Although both of her previous dreams that a loved one is dead have proved to be true, the critics deny the truth of all three dreams. All three dreams have the same source and the same function: By the grace of God she is saved from suffering, as she will be again upon her own death. The critics miss the most important theme of the story.

Rosaleen has frustrated sexual desires, but she is inhibited. In bed when Dennis refers to her enthusiasm on their wedding night, she chides him “prudishly.” Her prudery intensifies the drama of her struggle against sexual temptation. “Once she had let entirely the wrong man kiss her, she had almost got into bad trouble with him, and even now her heart stopped on her when she thought how near she’d come to being a girl with no character.” Currently, the threat to her character—her honor and Christian virtue—is her neighbor Guy Richards, a rowdy drinker “fit to do any crime.” Guy is the all-too common single man without restraint. Guy and his friends, other guys, are “like the devils from hell.” Guy is the form taken by her sexual temptation, virtually a Satan figure. “‘We’re always up to some devilment,’ he said, looking straight at Rosaleen, and before she could say scat, the hellion had winked his near eye at her.” He turns her cold as ice. “She had a series of visions of Richards laying a finger on her and herself shooting him dead in his tracks. ‘Whatever would I do without ye, Dennis?’ she asked him.” Without him she might yield to the Devil in the form of Guy, be ruined and go to hell.

Her dream that Kevin is dead is a sign that her relationship with him is dead. Unlike her two accurate paranormal dreams of dead loved ones, in this case there is no evidence in the story as to whether Kevin is literally dead. As if explaining why she had the dream, she tells Dennis that “It was because he hadn’t the power any more,” suggesting that she is no longer in romantic love with Kevin. She declares, “I’m a settled woman over her nonsense!” She then proceeds to tell the traveling salesman how big and strong and virtuous and invincible with his fists Dennis was as a young man, contrary to the facts. This tall tale is inspired by the seductive commercial exaggerations of the salesman and has emotional truth and moral value. Dennis is wrong to dismiss it as nonsense because she is expressing her pride and love and allegiance to him, contradicting the gossip that she is unfaithful to Dennis and tries to seduce traveling salesmen. However, she does need a young man like Kevin to help her with the outside farm work and her dream that he is dead helps her to give up the idea that he will return someday.

Her next dream is that her sister Honora is dying in her bed and calling for her. Ironically, hints have been given that “sneaky” Honora herself is not very honorable, but since the name Honora evokes honor, the dream is a sign that Rosaleen’s honor is dying, that her craving for a romantic sexual relationship is becoming so strong it is threatening her virtue as an honorable woman. Her desire for a new coat is a desire to cover up, and expresses concern for appearances, for protection against the cold opinions of others. She plans to buy “something in the new style.” While being honorable in answering her sister’s deathbed call, Rosaleen is unconsciously indulging her desire to escape from the farm and Dennis, doing something in a “new style” of behavior for her. She does not rush honorably from Connecticut straight to her dying sister’s bedside in Boston, she goes first in the opposite direction to New York. Her highest priority is not even the coat but the nostalgic desire to relive her romantic youth. Before she leaves, Guy Richards drops by and offers her a drink from his bottle and “his eyes had the devil in them.”

Rosaleen counters the devil with her experiences of God: She “began to tell again about the persons without number she’d known who came back from the dead to bring word about themselves... She told again the story of the Billy-cat...” The proven accuracy of her dreams about the cat and the Irish boyfriend are evidence that her many other experiences of the dead returning to communicate are true also, yet Dennis remains in denial. He is like a current skeptic who sees proof of the afterlife on television but claims it is all coincidental, hallucinated or faked. “There’s not a word of truth in it, not a word,” he says. “And she’ll to on telling it to the world’s end for God’s truth.” Yes she will, because her dreams are, in fact, God’s truth. In the hundreds of paranormal television programs that have documented proof of the afterlife, there is a pattern of responses so consistent as to be comical: In a great majority of cases, the wife has paranormal experiences while the husband denies they are real, often with considerable irritation, usually until he finally has such an experience himself. Yet even after multiple paranormal experiences some husbands remain skeptics with no explanations for what happened. Dennis has “a nightmarish feeling that somewhere just out of his reach lay the truth about it, he couldn’t swear for certain, yet he was *almost*

willing to swear that this had been all.” He feels his wife talks too much because hearing his skepticism repeatedly challenged by valid evidence is “nightmarish.”

Honora is not to be found at her old address and there is no trace of her. Consequently, Rosaleen and all the critics assume that the dream of Honora was false. However, the dream did not say that Honora was still in Boston just as her dream of Kevin’s grave did not include a location. Dreams are usually symbolic rather than literal. The name Honora evokes honor. To save her honor before it dies and she succumbs to sexual temptation, Rosaleen must see herself truly. She is led to this awareness through a set of circumstances that skeptics will call another “coincidence”: (1) Honora no longer lives at her old address in Boston; (2) Rosaleen happens to arrive there exactly at the same time that Hugh Sullivan happens to be sitting in the nearby park; (3) Hugh happens to “have the look of Kevin”; (4) he happens to be an Irish immigrant who says he is from the same county in Ireland as Rosaleen; (5) he happens to need work and a home; (6) he happens to have already been a hired man on a farm where he got caught with the woman by her husband and “there was a holy row!”; (7) the husband peeked at them through a crack just as Dennis listens to Rosaleen through a keyhole when she is talking to another man. One of the Feminist critics (Titus) accuses Hugh of “grasping seduction,” though Rosaleen “leaned over and took him by the arm very urgently.” She buys him lunch, gives him money, and invites him to come home with her. He infers that she is looking for a young lover: “‘The *cheek* of ye.’ She said, ‘insulting a woman could be your mother. God keep me from it!’” The story traces how God keeps her from it.

Rosaleen “could have almost put a curse on Honora for making all this trouble for her.” This makes sense only if Rosaleen believes that her dishonorable sister came to her in the dream and lied. “She was jealous always.” Like the critics, Rosaleen is not able to understand her dream as symbolic. She takes it literally and in response, to avoid seeming foolish to Dennis, she lies about Honora: “I left her in health.” Symbolically speaking, her own honor is alive and well. Perhaps because he missed her and is afraid she might leave him, Dennis has improved as a husband. In the past he has been a poor listener, but now he is “waiting to hear the wonders of the trip; but Rosaleen had no tales to tell.” He is finally paying respectful attention to her storytelling and no longer cares how tall her tales are: “He knew he would never hear the straight of it, but he wanted Rosaleen’s story about it.” There is hope for Dennis.

On her train ride home she had realized that “she had loved Kevin.” Past tense. That evening she allows the neighbor boy who works for her to spend the night “in Kevin’s room.” The descent in eligibility from Kevin down through Hugh to the “dim-witted” neighbor boy suggests that Rosaleen is no longer looking for a romantic young lover, she is looking for a farm worker and a surrogate son. Her proposition to Hugh was more innocent than it seemed, making his inference the more outrageous to her. Morally speaking, to Rosaleen his image of her was like her reflection in the cracked looking-glass, like a “monster”—like an adulterous pedophile rather than an honorable woman.

She treats the neighbor boy like a son by indulging his fear of a ghost, allowing him to stay the night, sharing her own experiences of ghosts, and teaching him how to defend himself by calling on God. The author acknowledges that many claims of seeing ghosts are bogus by suggesting that the black creature that walked beside the boy on its hind legs in the dark was not a ghost but his own “starveling black dog [that] rose up at the kitchen door and stared sorrowfully at his master.” Implicitly, Rosaleen is aware that the boy is “away in his mind.” Nevertheless, unlike her husband who refuses to believe her true paranormal experiences, Rosaleen respects the boy’s mistaken belief: “Your boy saw a ghost last night,” she tells his mother, who is even less sympathetic than Dennis. The nasty woman goes farther than Hugh in defaming Rosaleen, virtually calling her a whore. Yet it is comical—Porter is often funny in the midst of serious dramatic scenes—that Rosaleen takes most offense not at the moral defamation, but at the woman accusing her of dying her hair: ‘May God strike you dead’... ‘May ye be ten years dying!’” With this curse, she commits the same sin that landed her great-grandfather in Purgatory.

Rosaleen takes pride in having been “a good woman all this time when many another would have gone astray.” She counters the irony that “I’m a woman of bad fame with the neighbors” by continuing to exaggerate her beauty and desirability: “The women were jealous, because the men were everywhere after her.” Although she is after a man rather than the other way around, this tall tale, like some of her others, has moral value. Her bad fame motivates her to prove her neighbors wrong: “She was a good woman and she’d



show them she was going to be one to her last day. Ah, she'd show them, the low-minded things." The long tablecloth she has been working on "for fifteen years" and would never finish is a metaphor of how she will never be able to finish working on her reputation. Her cats will continue to get up on her table without a cover and she will have to keep chasing them off. When she hears the rattle and clatter of a buggy coming down the road with Guy Richards's voice roaring a song, "her embroidery had fallen on her knees." The feral Guy is approaching her table. Will she chase him off? She listens like a sailor to the song of a siren on the rocks. "She stood up, taking hairpins out and putting them back, her hands trembling." Then she runs to the cracked looking-glass and "saw her face there, leaping into shapes fit to scare you." Sexually excited by the approach of Guy, she sees herself as distorted by passion as well as by the mirror and it scares her. This is her epiphany. Paradoxically, her flawed mirror both conceals her true physical appearance and is a true symbolic reflection of her emotional disorder.

Rosaleen receives the grace of God when (1) her dream about her cat and (2) her dream about her Irish boyfriend reveal that they are dead and gone, relieving her of anguish about what happened to them. (3) Her dream of her great-grandfather in Purgatory moves her to have a Mass said for him that absolves her of guilt for failing to tend him on his deathbed and motivates her not to sin that way again when she has the dream of her sister Honora on her deathbed. (4) Her dream that Kevin is dead indicates that her relationship with him is dead and like her dreams about her cat and her boyfriend relieves her of anguish and wasted pining for him. (5) Her dream that Honora is dying motivates her to go to Boston, where (6) Hugh Sullivan happens to be, an encounter that cracks her self-image and sends her back home to Dennis, who is content with her as she is, saying "It's a good enough glass." (7) Her misunderstanding of her Honora dream leads her to doubt her dream of seeing Kevin's grave, reviving her hope: "All day long I've been thinking Kevin isn't dead at all, and we shall see him in this very house before long." Dennis replies correctly, "That's no sign at all." It is wishful dreaming. This makes ironic her claim that "I don't put the respect on dreams I once did." Like many Christians, when she misreads a sign she loses faith in all signs, even when they save her. (8) She is tempted sexually by hearing the approach of Guy Richards, even though she knows "a woman would have a ruined life with such a man" and "it was courting death and danger to let him set foot over the threshold." She is emotionally vulnerable to let him in, but "she stopped herself from running to the door, hand on the knob even before his knock should sound." By the grace of God, after pausing at her gate Richards moves on and leaves her with her unfinished tablecloth.

At the end, Rosaleen is literally leaning on Dennis. They are warm to each other and they need each other. "If anything happened to you, whatever would become of me in this world?" she says to him. As implied by her sinful desire for adulterous raw sex as represented by Richards (dicks) and her cracked looking-glass image, without Dennis she would be ruined and out in the cold. They agree not to think about it because in any case she will be losing him to death in a few years. Her vision of an ideal place "beyond everything like a green field with morning sun on it," which she identifies with her past in Ireland, resembles the Heaven visited by Miranda in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, the ideal place Rosaleen will implicitly attain in the future because of her paranormal dreams, especially the one of Honora that she misunderstood. Although she may be tempted again in the future, the concluding tone of resignation, contentment, peace, and love suggest that Dennis is correct for once when he feels that "it was going to be all right with everything, he could see that."

Most of the critics, Feminists especially, interpret the ending inadequately because they do not see the religious dimension in the story. An exception is Brother Wiesenfarth, who sees the ending in appropriate relation to St. Paul, as Rosaleen "abjures her faith in the dream and her hope in the illusion and recognizes that for her the only reality is love in the present." However, we should notice that her mistaken belief that her symbolic dream of Honora was false and the divine ambiguity of her dream about Kevin's grave permits her to doubt that he is dead after all and keeps her hope of his return alive, giving her solace. Tanner is correct that "the fact that she forgets to purchase another looking-glass...bodes well for the continued marriage relationship....So with the marriage: it is "good enough." Rosaleen forgets to buy a new mirror and does not mention it again because she has accepted the moral truth revealed in her cracked looking-glass, while also not having to face her aging face. She does not mention the new coat she forgot to buy, because false gossip destroyed her need for protection from cold opinions. She is resigned to her old-fashioned coat just as she is resigned to her comfortable old-fashioned loving marriage.

Warren is vague, seeing no “solution which Rosaleen can live by with surety.” Johnson thinks Rosaleen “has overworked her fancy almost to the point of dementedness.” Hendrick believes that she “wanted” to be ruined by Richards but accepts reality, yet her story ends on a “note of despair.” Hardy rejects all her dreams as “false art” and concludes that “Rosaleen’s resignation...is distinctly, if only in a measure, an affirmation.” Nance reduces her to a dominating mother: “Because the oppressiveness of this marriage results only from the disparity in age, her dominance will take the form not of destructive nagging but of gentle mothering. She returns to Dennis not as to a lover but as to a child.”

The Feminist critics agree in finding that the complexity of Rosaleen should be reduced to her failure to become a matriarch. Feminists have difficulty finding love. They avoid the word. DeMouy says Rosaleen “can only be seen as a thwarted mother....Her unsatisfied erotic energy merges falsely with the motherly instincts she is denied using, resulting in a shallow epiphany that produces no real self-knowledge for her in the end.” Disregarding the tone of the ending, DeMouy claims that Rosaleen “does not turn toward truth.... Her final stance is both childish and mothering.” This contradicts the claim above that Rosaleen is “denied” using her motherly instincts. Unrue agrees with DeMouy but adds that “there will be other young men,” missing the changes in Rosaleen, the danger of Guys, her resolve to retain her honor and the hell that might await her if she does not. Presumably the Feminist critics would have Rosaleen abandon her husband to die, leave the comfort and security of her loving marriage and resume her career as a chambermaid in New York, where she might hook up with a feminist male among the Guys.

The most doctrinaire Feminist critic, the politically correct Titus agrees with DeMouy and Unrue and continues her war against marriage and “the cultural myth of romantic love.” Titus is bitter about romantic love and denies that it is real. She projects her prejudices onto Porter, who married frequently and *affirms* romantic love, just not its illusions, most obviously in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. Titus claims that Porter believed that a woman artist “becomes unsexed, sterile, no longer fully a woman.” On the contrary, Rosaleen is an artist and she is not “unsexed”—quite the opposite. That is her problem. Titus insists that “The close of ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ is even more terrible than that of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.” The prospect of Heaven is “terrible”?

Titus finds Rosaleen guilty of “self-abasement” in “yielding to Dennis’s authority” and “promising always to anticipate his needs and put away her own.” Self-sacrifice is a characteristic of true love, epitomized by Jesus. Feminists do not believe in self-sacrifice or true love. Titus thinks Rosaleen is living in a “wasteland.” As a Feminist critic she ignores marital love and Rosaleen’s views of herself: “If Dennis hadn’t been such a good man, God knows what might have come out of it. She was lucky.” “Whatever would I do without ye, Dennis?” She celebrates their anniversary and sees herself as “a settled woman over her nonsense!”; “I’m a woman doesn’t have to think of money, I have all my heart desires”; “She wanted to be home and nowhere else”; “She was a good woman and she’d show them she was going to be one to her last day.” A good woman, not a Feminist.

#### *Holiday*

George Hendrick declares that “Neither Christianity, nor Marxism had taught the Mullers compassion.” He equates Christianity with Marxism as ineffective, a false equation. He lacks compassion in accusing the Mullers of lacking compassion. It is sentimental presumption to blame the Mullers for their treatment of Otilie, since the narrator was closer to the family than the critic is and she forgives them. Furthermore, it is possible that after her childhood affliction family members tried to express compassion and to interact with Otilie but soon learned that, because she was incapable of responding, such attempts were cruel. They only confused her, upset her, made her howl and hide, and distracted her from the routines that alone gave her any feeling of security. Mother Muller may have given orders to leave Otilie alone. Hendrick loses his credibility altogether with comparisons of “Holiday” to an unrelated poem by Frost.

Robert Brinkmeyer is such an unreliable critic that sometimes his interpretations are the exact opposite of what a story means. For example, in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* Miranda dies, escapes hell, visits heaven, and is brought back to life by Jesus, giving her absolute knowledge of her salvation. Brinkmeyer sees none of this, refuses to see it and interprets the story as pessimistic, projecting his own Atheism onto a Christian story. His interpretation of “Holiday” is just as perverse: He acknowledges that the narrator “comes to accept” Otilie’s place in the family, that she has an “admiration” for the Mullers, that she sees their

“rightness in their dealings with Otilie,” but then Brinkmeyer spins around and declares that in the end the narrator feels a compulsion to let out a fierce howl “to voice her rage at the Mullers’ injustice.” The pressure of Political Correctness required Brinkmeyer to reverse his position because otherwise he would be validating a patriarchal family—a thought crime against Feminism. Otilie howls because her mother just died, not because she feels unjustly treated.

Brinkmeyer concludes by groveling to the Feminists, claiming that the lives of the patriarchal Muller family are “a dehumanizing existence of assembly-line efficiency, each person confined to his or her place in the rigid order.” False. The order is not “rigid” it is flexible, as the Mullers demonstrate during the storm. Farm families must adapt to changing weather as well as other problems that arise with animals and crops and children and otherwise, as when Mother Muller goes outside and does the work of a man. The cows are grateful for the “assembly-line efficiency” at milking time. Brinkmeyer exposes himself as a liberal by his ignorance and by criticizing efficiency. Presumably he would neglect the animals and crops and children to avoid being dehumanized. The Mullers are more human than Brinkmeyer. They are not dehumanized academics, they are doing what is natural, what humans have been doing since civilization began with agriculture thousands of years ago. As peasant folk toiling on the land they represent the common people worldwide. Porter expresses her humanism and spiritual connection with such people throughout the story and especially in the symbolism of saving the lamb with Annetje.

Later in his book, Brinkmeyer contradicts himself by praising the Mullers for efficiency: “Certainly impressive is the family’s efficiency in running their very successful farm.” He also contradicts his earlier claim that the Mullers are dehumanized: “Likewise impressive is the family’s cohesiveness as manifested in its communal solidarity and identity, even if this bonding means that individual concerns and developments *at times* are sacrificed to the group’s needs. As a tight-knit unit, the family marshals great strength in the face of adversity.” Earlier he implied that each family member was “confined to his or her place in the rigid order” all the time [italics added]. However, this praise follows implicit condemnation of the Mullers as Nazis: “‘Holiday’ can be read as a parable of the totalitarian state, with the Muller family representing the emerging power of Germany under Fascist ideology.” Nonsense. Father Muller and his neighbors have “a shrewd worldly distrust of all officeholders not personally known to them, all political plans except their own immediate ones.” These are peasants, Nazis were of the ruling class—politicians and militarists, urbanites and professors like Brinkmeyer.

Brinkmeyer stoops so low as to associate the Mullers with the mass extermination camps of the Nazis: “Insiders deemed physically or mentally unfit, like Otilie, are also disempowered.” The Mullers did not disempower Otilie, Nature did. And she is not “disempowered,” she performs an essential function as the family cook. The worst lie that Brinkmeyer tells is that Porter herself was “attracted” to the Nazis: “The narrator’s ambivalence toward the Mullers may suggest that in the early thirties Porter herself shared similar feelings.” All her life Porter was a fierce enemy of fascism in any form. See especially “The Leaning Tower” and *Ship of Fools*. As a Christian and a lifelong champion of individual liberty Porter is the opposite of a Nazi, whereas Brinkmeyer, as a totalitarian Marxist, Atheist, and lying propagandist for Political Correctness, is very like a Nazi.

The most ironic aspect of Brinkmeyer’s propaganda is that his false description of the Muller family as totalitarian applies not to them but to himself. He is part of the academic police state that enforces the rigid order called Political Correctness. Each professor is confined to her or his field yet “There is little room for individual identity within the tight-knit and systematically organized family. All work as one, and the corporate identity supersedes the individual’s...Nor is there much space for private emotions and enthusiasms.” Brinkmeyer reveals that he is a totalitarian Marxist as well as a dogmatic Feminist by calling the family “corporate,” equating it with evil Capitalism.

In her revised biography of Porter (1991, p. 5) Joan Givner claims that “Holiday” is about “the woman writer in the larger world.” On the contrary, the narrator declares that she is escaping from troubles, but “It can no longer matter what kind of troubles they were or what finally became of them.” Porter keeps those troubles out of the story because the story is not about them. Givner ignores the narrator’s admonition that “the plain facts...should be stuck to.” She refers to the dime novels by Victorian women stacked in the attic

room as “material that she expects will connect her with a series of foremothers.” False. The narrator pays no attention to these works because “her foremothers” were Romantic and she is a Realist.

As a dogmatic Feminist, Givner also attacks the Muller family, claiming that Otilie “has been banished from their presence and their consciousness. There is no room in the patriarchy for a woman who cannot fulfill the roles of wife, mother, and bearer of children.” Nonsense. Otilie is the family cook, she feeds them, they see her at every meal, they praise her for working hard. And obviously there is “room in the patriarchy” for millions of childless unmarried women in all kinds of jobs. Givner is a sloppy reader who projects her prejudices and is intolerant of Porter’s opinions when they differ from her own. Her biography is a biased product of Political Correctness.

The dogmatic Feminist Mary Titus likewise ignores the author: “That Porter did have troubles...that have bearing on ‘Holiday,’ is very clear from biographical evidence.” Repeating Givner’s errors, Titus insists that “Holiday” is “about a woman writer’s search for identity within the confines of patriarchal culture.” False. The narrator has said that her problems do not matter in this story. As a Feminist enemy of patriarchy, Titus delights in agreeing with Brinkmeyer that the Mullers are Nazis: The patriarch imposes “unified ideological control, enforcing obedience to a single order while denying and even erasing difference.” False. It is the matriarch Mother Muller who imposes order and enforces obedience, Father Muller does not impose his atheism, he does not accept his wife’s Christianity, and Porter differentiates among the children in detail, characterizing their differences as well as their similarities.

Titus claims that “In her portrayal of Mother Muller, the matriarch, Porter suggests the negative side of traditional womanhood.” False. Porter emphasizes the *positive* aspects of traditional gender roles in her Realist debunking of Feminist dogmas. After claiming that Father Muller has all the power, Titus admits that Mother Muller is a “powerful, fearsome woman” with “control and power.” Titus tries to associate the narrator with “the silenced woman artist,” a Feminist myth--Romantic self-pity: Contradicting herself, she has just referred to books published by “foremothers” of the narrator, proving that women writers have not been “silenced.” Women have always had their own periodicals and they have been the great majority of successful novelists because women have always been the great majority--up to 80 percent--of the readers. Titus asserts that “Both Porter’s narrator and Otilie are alienated from the patriarchal household” and ‘mutilated’ by the hard fist of a tight patriarchal order.” Nonsense. Patriarchy is not responsible for the accident of Nature that alienated Otilie; and the narrator is not alienated, she is spiritually *connected* to the family as symbolized when she helps Annetje revive the lamb.

Otilie is fortunate to be performing useful work in the security of her family rather than sent to a state institution like the retarded boy in “He.” Hatsy gives her the highest praise a Muller is likely to bestow: “She can work so well as I can.” Titus consistently reverses the meanings in the story: “In ‘Holiday’ darkness swiftly follows light: as spring brings new life to the story’s artist-narrator, death comes for the great Mother Muller.” False. Titus reverses the order in the narrative: light follows darkness, not the other way around. The story ends in the bright sunlight of spring, a rebirth in Nature and in the narrator transcending death—a metaphor of religious faith in rebirth. Titus’s reversal of narrative order exposes her dishonesty and projects the atheism that darkens her Feminist worldview. “It is a holiday from oppressive gender roles,” according to Titus. False. Otilie is oppressed by her disability not by her gender role and the narrator is not oppressed at all. The narrator howls in empathy with Otilie: “My sense of her realness, her humanity, this shattered being that was a woman.” Overcoming their sorrow and transcending death, together they celebrate “our good luck...a breath of spring air and freedom.”

### *That Tree*

Only 3 of the 9 critics include the tree in analyzing a story entitled “That Tree.” Nance says the tree is a symbol of “independence-isolation,” DuMouy calls the tree a symbol of Miriam “sheltering” the journalist, and Unrue thinks the tree is a symbol of “carefree living” that is “associated universally with knowledge,” as if carefree living is all knowledge. Unrue is an Atheist with no knowledge of the Bible. In history, the tree is an archetypal symbol with diverse meanings in various mythologies and religions—the Tree of Life, the Tree of the World, and so on. The most famous image of a man under a tree in the history of religion is Buddha sitting under a bodhi tree where he attained Enlightenment. Porter parodies Buddhism by implicitly

comparing it to merely lying under a tree all the time writing bad poetry. This bad poet is so lazy he does not even want to *sit* under a tree, he wants to lie down under it. But he would rather get drunk: “He had spent a good deal of time lying under tables.” A vague form of Buddhism has been popular in the bohemian tradition represented by the bad poet satirized here, as evident in the Beatnik movement of the 1950s—Kerouac and Ginsberg and others—who adopted Buddhist concepts that got reduced to mere sentiments as they trickled on into the counterculture of the 1960s. Porter was too independent and dedicated to respect the expatriate bohemian movements of the 1920s in Mexico or on the Left Bank in Paris—Gertrude Stein and that crowd.

The two most famous symbolic trees in history are (1) the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, containing Satan in the form of a serpent, who tempted Eve; and (2) the Cross of Jesus, traditionally called a tree—the true “heaven tree”—on which He redeemed the sins of the human race and offered Heaven. All 9 critics ignore these and the other implicit allusions to Christianity, in chronological order: (1) Miriam’s “sense of humor never worked for salvation”; (2) “For crisesake, Joe”; (3) “she Preferred Milton”; (4) “For God’s sake”; (5) “Christmas checks from her father”; (6) “the heaven tree in full bloom”; (7) “his Franciscan notions of holy Poverty”; (8) “good God.” Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is a classic example of “Sacred Art” in contrast to the “filth” produced by the hedonistic protagonist. Additional evocations of religion, sometimes in ironic contexts, are “devilish,” “mystical faith,” “his faith had renewed itself,” and “I thought art was a religion.” His bad poetry was bad religion. He chose the wrong “heaven tree” to sit under. Then he abandoned all trees and got on “in the world of affairs.”

Ironically, in becoming a success in the world, the journalist has become worse as a man, while Miriam has become more humble and forgiving—more Christian. It is no wonder that two more women have divorced this guy. He is going to take Miriam back into the same primitive lifestyle that made her cry, even though he has published a bestseller and has the money to provide what she would like: “She was going to live again in a Mexican home without any conveniences and she was not going to have a modern flat. She was going to take whatever he chose to hand her, and like it.” He intends to treat Miriam like an Indian mistress, like he is one of the macho aristocrats who provoke revolutions in Mexico. He is still essentially the same “no good” bum, drinking in the same café, but as a bad poet he was passive and did little harm, whereas now, as a journalist he has acquired social power and become more contentious and aggressive. His picking the verbal fight with a rival journalist suggests that he will be more likely now to pick fights with Miriam. Now that he has status and has published a bestseller he will feel even more superior to her. The explosion that interrupts his monologue prefigures what is likely to happen again in their relationship: “Another revolution.”

#### *The Circus*

All the critics miss all the religious implications of the ending. None of them even mentions the word “Christian.” Among liberal academics that word is a taboo like the N-word. You would think that critics purporting to interpret the story would read the last paragraph. After all, it is only four sentences long. The only words capitalized within those last sentences are *Dacey* and *Christian*. The Feminist critic DeMouy declares that the “proper context” at the end of the story is “alienation and destruction,” projecting her own belief as an Atheist. Other incompetent critics ignore the last paragraph because it clearly affirms Dacey’s religious virtue. One critic (Stout) grants only that Dacey has “moral status.” The critics quote Miranda’s feelings throughout the story but then ignore them at the climax because she is embracing an embodiment of Christianity, the only “deliverance from her torments.”

Postmodernist critics (1960s-- ) are secularists who do not acknowledge spiritual content in literature for one or more of the following reasons: (1) They are poorly educated in literature; (2) they are too ignorant of religion to know what to say about it; (3) they are dishonest, censoring evidence because religious faith is Politically Incorrect and their academic careers would suffer if they gave any attention to religion; (4) they are ideologues whose personal agendas are hostile or indifferent to religion; (5) their Atheism blinds them to spirituality in literature as well as in life.

#### *A Day's Work*

Ironies satirize the Hallorans as hypocrites: Mr. Halloran criticizes his daughter for never listening to him after refusing to answer her persistent call on the telephone. His cynical remark, “But what’s a father?”

is parallel to his own failure to listen to God the Father. On the one hand he thinks his daughter should leave her abusive husband, on the other hand he identifies with the husband because he got a job with corrupt Tammany Hall: "It's like myself beginning all over again in him." Mrs. Halloran blames her daughter and any wife for all the problems in any marriage except her own. Both the Hallorans are more concerned with appearances than with the truth, both idealize themselves, both collude with evil and each makes valid criticisms of the other.

The Hallorans represent the continuation of Victorianism in marriage but Porter parodies the Victorian paradigm by reversing its stereotypes. Mr. Halloran criticizes his wife for making career decisions for him: "It's not the woman's place to decide such things." Yet he is the one who advocates that his daughter leave her husband, a feminist rather than a Victorian attitude: "But she's no daughter of mine if she sits there peeling potatoes, letting a man run over her." Yet he sits there smoking a pipe, letting a woman run over *him*. Mrs. Halloran is the conservative Victorian who insists that their daughter stay trapped in her bad marriage. Her name Lacey is an evocation of genteel Victorian ladies with lace on their bosoms and doilies on their furniture, ironic because she is an overbearing brute feared by her husband. She is also a prude: "Would you believe there was a woman wouldn't take off all her clothes at once even to bathe herself? What a hateful thing she was with her evil mind thinking everything was a sin, and never giving a man a chance to show himself a man in any way." It is further ironic that in relation to men this old-fashioned Victorian woman so much resembles a current radical Feminist.

The more ironies a reader discerns, the more comic the story becomes. Feminist critics not only miss the religious vision in the story, they miss other major qualities of Porter's art. Ideologues intolerant of beliefs that differ from their own are not disposed to irony and have no sense of humor.

### *Ship of Fools*

Feminist critics were self-absorbed as always, but the most ridiculous allegation by fools was that *Ship of Fools* is too negative and hopeless. These critics had no historical awareness. Everyone else knew that World War II was very negative, but that civilization was in fact saved in the end. Porter perfectly evokes the causes of the war and her novel derives great power from history--from the collective knowledge of what happened next in Germany and in Spain. Most of the negative critics are liberals who would prefer hopeful sentimentality to the truth. They would have improved the ending of the film adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* by showing happy Nazi children pausing at play, waving goodbye to Anne as she is driven off to a gas chamber.

Michael Hollister (2018)