

ANALYSIS

“The Cracked Looking-Glass” (1932)

Katherine Anne Porter

(1890-1980)

“Yesterday I ran across a copy of *Ulysses* and saw again that phrase of Joyce’s which had stuck in my mind: about the Art of Ireland being ‘the Cracked Looking-glass of a Servant.’ I had remembered the word as *Mirror*, and so have called my story ‘The Cracked Mirror’ when it should be ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass--’ If it is not too late, I beg of you to have the title changed...to ‘looking glass’.”

Porter

Letter to editor of *Scribner’s Magazine* (1932)

“[Porter’s fiction is] so pointed and compressed [with] such perfection of style that one is sometimes forced to concentrate more on word patterns than on the substance of a story. It is not absurd to speak of perfection in this context.... These generalizations apply to Miss Porter’s talent as a whole.... ‘Maria Concepcion’ and ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ would be almost perfect by any standard. In these two...the author has superimposed rhythm and melody on the confused feelings of an inarticulate person.”

Eleanor Clark

“*Flowering Judas and Other Stories: Cameos*”
New Republic 85 (25 December 1935) 209

“‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’...is about guilt and innocence. It is the story of a high-spirited, pleasure-loving Irish girl, married to a much older man, faithful to him, yet needing the society of young fun-provoking men, to whom she takes a motherly or sisterly attitude. She lives a kind of lie—in fact, she can’t tell anything without giving it a romantic embroidery. Then she is horrified to discover that her Connecticut neighbors think her a bad woman, suspect her of infidelities. At the end, sitting in her tight kitchen with Old Dennis, ‘while beyond were far off places full of life and gaiety...and beyond everything like a green field with morning sun on it lay youth and Ireland,’ she leans over and puts her hand on her husband’s knee, and asks him, in an ordinary voice, ‘Whyever did ye marry a woman like Me?’

Dennis says mind, she doesn’t tip the chair over, and adds that he knew he could never do better.... “‘I want you to wrap up warm this bitter weather, Dennis,’ she told him.... For if anything happened to you, whatever would become of me in this world?’”... Again the provisional resolution of the forces of the story: not a solution which Rosaleen can live by with surety, but one which she must re-learn and re-earn every day.”

Robert Penn Warren

“Irony with a Center”

Selected Essays of Robert Penn Warren
(Random House 1941, 1969)

“‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ [is] a sustained miracle of Irish feeling and rhythm... We have again the rare combination of virtuosity with moral penetration.”

F. O. Matthiessen

“That True and Human World”

Accent 5 (Winter 1945) 121-23

“[One] group of stories deals with unhappy marriages and the self-delusion attendant upon them.... ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ is the novella archetype of the theme, with its characterization of the fanciful Rosaleen, wed to the aging Dennis and trapped in rural New England. Similar in its external qualities to Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire under the Elms*, the longer version of the mis-matched couple (‘A Day’s Work’ is the shorter) concerns itself with the wife’s deficiencies in the marriage state. Rosaleen’s unrealistic dreams

of what her marriage should be have been so constantly eroded by the realities of her life that she has overworked her fancy almost to the point of dementedness.”

James William Johnson
“Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter”
Virginia Quarterly Review (Autumn 1960)

“It is the story of a dreamer whose every day is spent in anticipation of ‘something great...going to happen’ [like “The Beast in the Jungle” by Henry James].... The action of the story...develops through an interplay between reality and...illusion until the point is reached when Rosaleen is able to accommodate herself to the truth that Dennis invariably sees so clearly.... This pattern repeats itself again and again: first the painful reality presents itself, and then the dream that assuages the pain occurs.... When the young Irishman Kevin left the O’Tooles after having lived with them for a year, he wrote to them only once. His obvious ingratitude is argued away by Rosaleen’s dream...that Kevin is dead....

Rosaleen proceeds to Boston, only to find that Boston is the point of no return. Rosaleen has allowed her imagination to take her too far this time: in leaving her Connecticut home she has left the place where the dream can safely be believed in. Her attempt to live the dream in Boston is an utter failure. Honora is not only not sick, but she has moved from her old address without ever having notified Rosaleen. Faith in the dream is no longer possible... But reality is still too difficult for Rosaleen to accept.... She seeks...to create a substitute for Kevin when she happens upon Hugh Sullivan, the down-and-out Irish immigrant whom she meets in Boston.... Hugh, however, takes her generosity to be a solicitation of another kind.... Rosaleen loses the support of another illusion almost immediately after her return to Connecticut. She finds that her neighbor thinks of her in the same way that Hugh Sullivan did....

Guy Richards becomes the next object of her hope.... Throughout most of the story Rosaleen denies his attractive features. He has loomed as a danger to her.... Guy...is all that Dennis is not. Toward the end of the story she admits the part that Richards plays in making reality a little more endurable. She waits for him to stop in and exchange a word of greeting.... As Guy Richards goes rattling down the road, Rosaleen’s hope is shattered.... The failure of the visions of faith and hope to substantiate themselves has made meaningless that past and that future which were structured on them. Only love and the present remain for Rosaleen, and these she accepts as she makes her whole-hearted return to reality.... Rosaleen breaks the pattern of her life. She frees reality from the dreams and illusions that she used formerly to disguise it....

The plot structure of ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ parallels in part that of two of Henry James’s *nouvelles*: ‘The Beast in the Jungle’ and ‘In the Cage’... In relation to them ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ takes on a more profound significance—in the same manner that any story does when its relation to a basic myth or archetype is understood. The fact, for instance, that Rosaleen is in danger of suffering the same fate as Marcher makes her predicament more meaningful to the reader who knows something about Marcher. The facts, too, that Dennis has a pipe that is carved with a ‘crested lion glaring out of jungle,’ and that he sets aside this pipe when Rosaleen is on the verge of rejecting her last chance to return to reality, suggest Katherine Anne Porter’s interest in extending the boundaries of meaning in her story to create connotations of her central symbol....

Rosaleen does not see clearly when she looks into [the cracked looking-glass]. Also Rosaleen consults the glass on special occasions only; when Kevin *leaves*, when she *leaves* Guy Richards, when Guy *leaves*, and when she *leaves* to visit Honora. It has nothing to do with *staying* with Dennis. This is so, probably, because the glass is certainly a symbol of their marriage, which does not reflect the romantic love of the New York movies that Rosaleen relishes.... If for Stephen [in *Ulysses* by Joyce] the cracked mirror is a symbol of Irish art, for the reader—as he refers it to Rosaleen—it is the symbol of her imagination. Her view of the world, like that of Irish artists for Dedalus, is distorted. Through Joyce...this new dimension is added to the symbol’s complex of meanings, and by reference to Joyce the defective mirror symbolizes Rosaleen’s involvement with an unreal world.

The incidental and otherwise irrelevant note that Rosaleen has been sewing a never-to-be-finished tablecloth for fifteen years suggests a connection with the Lady of Shalott [by Tennyson]...Rosaleen goes to Boston, just as the Lady went to Camelot, and her confrontation with reality deals a death blow to the

dream and spells the beginning of the end for her illusions. The symbol of reality for both, then, is the cracked looking-glass...

The inadequate looking-glasses of the ancients, which Paul refers to [“We see now through a mirror in an obscure manner, but then face to face”] were as unsatisfactory as Rosaleen’s cracked mirror when like that mirror they literally attempted to reflect reality. The crack in Rosaleen’s glass and the inadequacy of the one referred to in I *Corinthians* 13:12 require an eventual face-to-face confrontation. For Paul that confrontation takes place when charity is perfected in heaven; for Rosaleen and Dennis it occurs when she 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. Husband and wife then meet face to face in the final tableau without even the suggestion of the defective glass (which Joyce had referred to as ‘crooked’): ‘I could cry if ye crooked your finger at me.’ If for St. Paul in one sense faith and hope pass away, so for Rosaleen faith in the dream and hope in the illusion represent, in a non-theological way, ultimately unsatisfactory answers for human fulfillment; and for both—again in their own sense of the word—*love* abides in its sustaining greatness....

The mirror symbol...stands at the center of the story in a chameleon-like fashion, meaning one thing now and one thing later while still being the same thing and having all the possibilities of its meaning simultaneously. In the cracked looking-glass the imagination of Rosaleen, the imperfection of human love, the necessity of accepting that love as it is, the marriage of Rosaleen and Dennis, reality, the difficulty of knowing reality, and many other meanings that the story incorporates are symbolized. Thus, along with the linear organization of the meanings patterned by the interplay of reality with the dream and the illusion, the centrifugal and centripetal action of this symbol testifies to the craftsmanship of Katherine Anne Porter as it shapes the esthetically satisfying form assumed by those illusions and allusions that are so carefully reflected in ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’.”

Brother Joseph Wiesenfarth, F.S.C.
“Illusion and Allusion: Reflections in ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’”
Four Quarters (November 1962)

“In ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’...the marriage of a young woman to an older man is revealed as the incomplete image reflected by a broken mirror, the sensibilities warped and tangled by unfulfillment.”

Ray B. West, Jr.
Katherine Anne Porter
(U Minnesota 1963) 9

“‘Looking Glass’ is a loose and leisurely short story which seems to delight in long Irish monologues. Its most noteworthy stylistic quality is its excellent imitation of Irish speech-rhythms, both in and out of dialogue. This quality, which it shares with ‘A Day’s Work,’ is evidence of Miss Porter’s careful listening. Indeed, each of her stories is pervaded by the diction and speech-rhythms of the characters it portrays. The dialect in ‘Looking Glass’ is an integral part of its warm humor, most of which derives from the loquacity and the prejudices of Rosaleen. Humor, in addition to adding its own values, plays an integral part in the characterizations. Even the long comic story Rosaleen tells about the time she and her sister gossiped beside the bed of their dying grandfather, who expired cursing them for their inattention, touches upon the important youth-age theme. So also does the very telling of the story, another instance of Rosaleen’s compulsive speech and Dennis’ sleepy patience. Both characters are partly comic, and the humor, though it may touch tragedy, is never bitter and always leads to greater sympathy.... A more fundamental method employed to gain the reader’s sympathy is alternating the point of view between the major characters. This achieves a balance found in none of the other stories....

Her marriage is for Rosaleen an unsatisfactory union and her trip to Boston is a flight from its oppression. The marriage is rather unpleasant for Dennis too, aware as he is of Rosaleen’s discontent—and his first was even worse.... Rosaleen is not fully aware of the motives of her flight, and this lack of insight is an important factor separating her from the alpha heroine. It is also the heart of the story... The central problem is the heroine’s failure to distinguish between appearance and reality, especially in herself, and the dominant reality within her is the desire to make an impossible escape from her marriage. The cracked looking-glass, one of the few explicit object-symbols in the stories, represents her dream-distorted view of

herself and the world. [The critic] James W. Johnson sums up its meaning as follows: 'Rosaleen is constantly distressed about the cracked mirror, which blurs her face so unrecognizably; but her imperfect and unsatisfactory marriage as mirrored in her "cracked" imagination cannot be replaced, and so the cracked looking-glass remains hanging in the kitchen, after Rosaleen has fully pondered the consequences of its doing so.'

Rosaleen escapes unconsciously through her dreams and tall tales, her innocent friendship with young men, and finally her dream-inspired trip to Boston. False vision leads to her error about the young man she meets there, which leads in turn to her disillusion and return to reality. She receives a strong lesson in the harmful effects of crediting appearances when she learns that her own moral character has been seriously misjudged by her neighbors, just as it was by the young man. It is her meditation on this shocking discovery that leads her to the comforting conclusion that 'life is a dream.' She begins to suspect that all appearances, even her dreams, may be deceiving, and that it is the plain certainties of the heart in which we must trust: 'She knew in her heart what she was, and Dennis knew, and that was enough.'

Rosaleen's return is inevitable, but she returns to dominate. Here the tone of the story gives a new meaning to the familiar theme. 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: 'She sat up and felt his sleeves carefully....' Her disillusion is not without pain, however, or her acceptance without suffering, and in this she reflects the familiar theme of loss. Her 'wondering what had become of her life' recalls another character's musing on that tree he never found, and the regret of many others over their lost dreams."

William L. Nance
Katherine Anne Porter & the Art of Rejection
(U North Carolina 1963) 47-49

"Stephen Dedalus [*Ulysses*] said of the mirror Buck Mulligan stole from a servant: 'It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked looking glass of a servant'.... The mirror symbol in Miss Porter's story was reference not only to Joyce, since Rosaleen had formerly been a chambermaid and practices the Irish art of self-deception, but also to Tennyson's *Lady of Sallot* who wove her web while observing through a mirror the life outside the tower. Likewise, Rosaleen observed herself through a mirror and often worked on a tablecloth which apparently would never be completed. Miss Porter may also have had in mind I *Corinthians* 13:12, 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face'.... The mirror symbol, central to the story, changes constantly, encompassing 'the imagination of Rosaleen, the imperfection of human love, the necessity of accepting that love as it is, the marriage of Rosaleen and Dennis, reality, the difficult of knowing reality....' (Brother Wiesenfarth)

'The Cracked Looking-Glass' (1932) is filled with Joycean techniques and allusions. Rosaleen, an Irish woman, was similar to Molly Bloom in being married to a man no longer sexually satisfying to her; like Molly, her son had died; and without son, without husband-lover, she had taken literally or in spirit other lovers. It is not quite certain how many young boys she had had in the house: Kevin had been with them for a year but had gone away when Rosaleen became jealous of his young girl friend after seeing the girl's picture. Rosaleen asked Hugh Sullivan to come live with them, but he declared that it was too dangerous. And a neighbor extended the whole field of promiscuity: 'A pretty specimen you are, Missis O'Toole, with your old husband and the young boys in your house and the traveling salesmen and the drunkards lolling on your doorstep all hours.' Although the reader sees events and characters from the point of view of both Rosaleen and Dennis, he never finds any final statement, never reaches an absolute truth.

The story is an account of Rosaleen's progression from illusion to reality. Thirty years younger than Dennis—the name is ironic because it is derived from Dionysus—Rosaleen was sexually starved and constantly improved on stories, Irish fashion, to make the grim reality of her existence more endurable: the story opens with an account of her Billy-cat and his death which she learned of in a dream. Dennis showed the story to be a fabrication; like Mr. Bloom, Dennis was an outsider because he had grown up not in Ireland but in Bristol, England; and he considered himself 'a sober, practical, thinking man, a lover of truth.' As observer, though, Dennis has his weaknesses; he was filled with self-pity and could not see that

Rosaleen had changed in the twenty-five years they had been married. He lived almost entirely in the present instead of the past.

Rosaleen lived much in the past, because it could be improved upon in memory and in story. She thought of her girlhood in Ireland as a great triumph, and she still longed for men to fight over her. Instead of the glorious green past, she had in reality a farm in Connecticut, an old husband growing senile, and her own fading looks. In her dreams, she triumphed by having others die; she dreamed that Kevin, the house painter, did not write because he was dead; she dreamed the Irish boy she could have married was dead. When she had to face actual death, she put aside the grim reality by dreaming about it, as she did after the great-grandfather's death.

The most important episode of the story, the one that shocked Rosaleen back to reality, was her trip to Boston to see her sister Honora, whom she dreamed was dying. Life on the farm was grim, and the dream gave her a chance to escape, a pretext for an adventure away from the small village. Instead of going directly to Boston, she went by way of New York, where she had lived with Dennis, who had been a headwaiter at a hotel. She saw, as part of her adventure, two romantic films: 'The Prince of Love' and 'The Lover King.'

In Boston, she discovered her sister had moved, without leaving an address, dramatic proof that her dream was not true. She also found that Hugh Sullivan, a young Irishman, either understood exactly or completely misunderstood her invitation to come to the farm. Her dream of having a young man in the house was shattered, and she was left with the reality of living out her life with Dennis. Guy Richards (his name suggests Grant Richards, the publisher, with whom Joyce had many unpleasant dealings), the local drunk, was her last hope of escape from her life with Dennis. She wanted him to visit her, but he did not; and again her dream was shattered.

She had forgotten to buy a new looking-glass, and with the acceptance of the old glass, she accepted her life and marriage. Life was 'a mere dream,' she thought, accepting that too; and she put aside the dreams of the green field of her youth. She asked Dennis why he had married her, and he replied that he could not have done better. Suddenly, she felt solicitous, wanted him to keep warmer, and said she didn't know what would happen to her when he was gone. Dennis turned from the reality of his death, saying, 'Let's not think of it,' and she agreed not to do so, ending compassionately, 'I could cry if you crooked a finger at me.' Rosaleen had accepted the reality of their life; but, in order to go on living, they could not think of the future, of his approaching death. The story ends on the same note of despair on the human condition that one finds in many of Miss Porter's other stories. The poetic Irish language, the realistic details, and the literary echoes are superbly combined in this complex, subtle story."

George Hendrick
Katherine Anne Porter
(Twayne 1965) 103-06

"Rosaleen O'Toole is the discontented wife of a man thirty years her senior. Both are Irish immigrants. When Rosaleen first met Dennis, he was headwaiter in a New York restaurant, and she a domestic servant. Now, they have lived for many years on a farm in Connecticut. Although often exasperated, Dennis is not radically dissatisfied with Rosaleen. He was married before, as a very young man, to an English woman who died shortly after their arrival in America. But 'they had never really liked each other.' He feels that, on the whole, he has done not all that badly in his second marriage, with the strong, good-looking, and essentially good-natured Rosaleen....

Rosaleen, a country girl from County Sligo, feels that she never had a fair chance to explore her youth and beauty in the glamorous activities of the city. (This, despite the fact that when it suits her purposes she pretends to distrust and disdain city people.) And she feels totally isolated among her Connecticut neighbors—the 'natives,' as she and Dennis call them, presumably English or Scotch Protestants, and the non-Irish immigrants, 'Rooshans and Polacks and Wops no better than Black Protestants when you come right down to it.' She endlessly commiserates with herself over all the deprivations of her life, but especially over Dennis's sad decline from the fine figure of a man he was when she met him. Early in their marriage, she had given birth to a male child. But the baby had died within two days; and, apparently, she

had never conceived again. Now, she treats her old and impotent husband more as a child than as a man, chastising, scolding, and coddling.

For a time, a young man named Kevin, a house painter, had made his home with them. A famous talker, as Rosaleen herself is, Kevin had been a great comfort to her. She had conscientiously thought of him as a kind of combination son and brother, not as a lover. And there is no evidence of any overtly improper behavior. But in the incident that preceded, and no doubt provoked, his leaving—when he showed Rosaleen a picture of the girl he had been ‘keeping steady’ with in New York, and she put her down as a ‘brassy, bold-faced hussy’—the motive of sexual jealousy is obvious.

For the five years since Kevin’s departure, with no word of his whereabouts, Rosaleen has suffered for lack of an audience. She is an inveterate story teller, of incidents of her past life, and of her prophetic dreams. One of her favorite tales is of the death of her great-grandfather, in Ireland, when she and her sister Honora, watching over him during the last night of his life, became so engrossed in a giggling exchange of secrets about boyfriends that they forgot their duty. They were startled out of their wits when the old man suddenly sat up and with his last breath cursed them to hell. Six months later, she says, he came back in a dream to tell her that she must have a mass, said to release him from Purgatory, to which he was condemned for having cursed her.

And there is the story of the Billy-cat, who disappeared for several days, and then came to her in a dream to tell how he met his death in a trap. And Dennis went to the place in the woods that the ghost cat had described and found the body. She has dreamed, too, of finding Kevin’s grave, and is content thereafter that it was because he was dead that he could not let them know where he had gone rather than because he had rejected them.

Dennis is a poor listener. He has heard it all a hundred times. Besides, he is a born skeptic. Rosaleen makes the most of the occasional visits of traveling salesmen, whose business interest requires them to be attentive. And a few times she had exchanged stories with a certain rapsallion ‘native’ neighbor of theirs. This is an aging hellion of a bachelor named Richards, who, when he is not drunk and out tearing around the countryside with his cronies, now and then stops in for a casual, front-porch visit with the O’Tooles. But she is afraid, at the same time that she is tempted, to encourage Richards, who has shown signs of a more than neighborly interest in her. And the salesmen’s visits are all too brief and infrequent. Most of the time, she has to talk either to herself or to the farm animals.

The climactic action of the story is precipitated by a dream she has that her sister Honora is dying at her home in Boston. It is the middle of a hard winter, but Rosaleen decides she must go. And the long-suffering Dennis, although he is reluctant to be left alone because he has a bad cold that might turn into pneumonia, does not try to dissuade her. More than ever, Rosaleen is a grievous mystery to him; he cannot imagine, dares not imagine, what the real purpose of the absurd trip might be. But he has learned that it is best not to cross his wife once she has made up her mind—especially on the evidence of a dream.

The next morning, she makes herself ready, as best she can before the cracked and wavy mirror that is the prime symbol of all the frustration and disappointments of her life. The only heavy coat she has is a shabby old thing, which she is ashamed to have Honora see. But she tells Dennis that she thinks she will take the opportunity of being in the city to buy both another coat and a new mirror. Reaching New York City, on the first leg of her trip, she permits herself the luxury of two movies and a dish of strawberries and ice cream before boarding an overnight boat to Providence. From there, she takes another train to Boston, only to discover that Honora has moved away without leaving a forwarding address. The janitor at the apartment building offers his help. But no one can recall even having heard of an Honora Gogarty or a Mrs. Terence Gogarty. And the name is not in the telephone directory.

In a daze whirl of emotions, rebuking herself for her folly and Honora for her callousness in not having written to tell her she was moving, Rosaleen wanders aimlessly about the cold streets. Sitting on a park bench helplessly weeping, she is joined by a thin, poorly dressed young man...with red hair and freckles—who strikes up a sympathetic conversation with her. Inevitably, he reminds her of Kevin. And, momentarily forgetting her own troubles in listening to his, she invites him to lunch. His name is Hugh Sullivan, he tells

her. In Ireland he had worked as an hostler at the Dublin racetracks. Now, after more than eleven months in America, he cannot find a job and is penniless. Touched... Rosaleen is so carried away that she not only slips him a ten-dollar bill but suggests that he come to Connecticut and live with her and Dennis. He deserves a good Irish home, she says, and in the farm country there should be work for a man who knows horses. Understandably, however, Sullivan thinks that her interest in him is not entirely motherly. He has been in a 'scrape' once in Dublin with a married woman like her, and wants no part of another such escapade.

She rises up in a fine fury and drives him out of the restaurant. But she is shattered by the experience. The journey back to Connecticut, even by the shortest train route, is a long and bitter one. And she has altogether forgotten her intention of buying a new coat and mirror. By the time she gets home, she has recovered herself enough to deceive Dennis. She cheerfully lies about Honora, telling him that she has left her in good health.... The witless neighbor boy, who looked after Dennis while she was away, has seen a black shape on the road that he took for a demon. The tale appeals to Rosaleen's superstitious mind. She persuades the boy that he should stay overnight at their house rather than go home in the dark. In the morning, she walks home with him to explain to the mother what has happened. And, once again, she is confronted with a malicious interpretation of her charity. The woman all but accuses her of having kept the halfwit to share her bed.... They part with an exchange of enraged insults and imprecations....

Once more, she is able to put up a good front to Dennis.... But it is clear that she is about at the end of her rope. On the train from Boston, she had thought bitterly that Kevin might have become her lover if she had not driven him away with her jealous anger. Now, she tries to take a paradoxical comfort in the realization that her dream about Honora did not come true. If that one was false, she argues with herself, then she need not believe any of them—and it follows that Kevin is not dead. But when she tells Dennis this last, and adds that she is sure Kevin will be coming to see them again, he grumpily rejects her logic. And, hearing the drunken Richards outside roaring a song from his rattling buggy, she gets up to fix her hair. Now she realizes for the first time that she has forgotten to buy the new looking-glass in Boston.

She is at least as much relieved as disappointed that Richards does not come in. The buggy stops but then starts up again after a moment. But the wild thought she has entertained for an instant, even as she started for the door to open it—how 'a woman would have a ruined life with such a man, it was courting death and danger to let him set foot over the threshold'—seems to scare her at last into submission to the fate of her dull life with Dennis. She indulges one final nostalgic review of the broken dreams of a lifetime. Then she turns, at once protecting and appealing for protection, to her old husband....

The quality of the humor in 'The Cracked Looking-Glass,' mildly satiric and at the same time deeply affectionate, sets this story apart.... The dialectical authenticity of the story, its sure control of the Irish idiom, has been widely and justly admired.... The control of language embodies a deep understanding of the whole Irish-immigrant experience, in its shaping of sensibility and character. And, further, Irish-ness is an explicit and carefully developed theme in the story. The title...is from Joyce's *Ulysses*. Stephen Dedalus calls Buck Mulligan's shaving mirror, which he has stolen from a serving girl, 'a symbol of Irish art. The cracked looking glass of a servant'.... Rosaleen is Irish; she was a domestic servant before her marriage, and, with the aging Dennis, has once more assumed the role. In her inveterate habit of story-telling, she is herself a type of the artist. Moreover, she is the Joycean artist-in-exile....

Rosaleen uses [the flawed mirror] to avoid facing the truth about herself and her situation.... She is incapable of admitting that she herself might be fundamentally responsible for her fate. But she does not entertain herself with simple-minded, pleasurable fantasies.... In defiance of Dennis's skepticism, she may insist...that Billy-cat came to her and spoke—but she never denies that the cat is dead. When her dreams are wish fulfillment dreams, as they obviously are in the dream of Kevin's death and probably in that of Honora's illness, they are revengeful rather than pleasantly self-indulgent. Rosaleen is a proud woman, and artfully conceals her hurt and anger in images of grief and solicitude.... Her reluctance to leave New York is undoubtedly motivated in part by her own fear that her dream will be proven untrue when she reaches Boston.... The way she entertains herself, with the two romantic love movies, reveals what the real purpose of the trip has been all along.... It is [Hugh Sullivan's] insulting interpretation of her motives in her kindness to him—an interpretation that so infuriates her because it contains some truth—that is the truly

shattering experience of the adventure in Boston. She is revealed to herself unmistakably as an aging, sexually frustrated woman, who has used the excuse of her duty to an old and impotent husband as a mask for her own sense of sexual and emotional inadequacy.

The dream in which she has not lost faith...is the lifelong one of finding a young and devoted lover, who will confirm the reality of that picture of herself, of a woman of charm and beauty, that she has cherished in her imagination through the bleak years on the farm with Dennis. On the way home, she tries to restore the dream, at least in retrospect. She persuades herself that the greatest tragedy of her life was her failure to realize that Kevin loved her and that he would have stayed if only she had asked him.... Her admission to Dennis that she no longer believes in the prophetic power of her night dreams allows her to spin new daydreams of Kevin's return. If her dream of visiting Kevin's grave is untrue, then he is alive, and, therefore, must intend soon to come back. But Dennis sourly rejects her pseudo-logic. 'That's no sign at all,' he says.

But when the drunken Richards comes and goes, and when she has found herself, in a moment of terrible panic, wishing that he would come in—wanting him because he would ruin her—she is finally stripped of all her defenses. It occurs to her, as she hears the buggy outside and starts frantically to straighten her hair, that she forgot to buy a new looking-glass in Boston. It is clear enough why she forgot, why indeed she has put up with the flawed glass for so many years. So long as she lacks a true mirror, one that will accurately reflect her face, she can imagine herself as beautiful as she pleases. Dennis's routinely indifferent assurance that the old mirror is 'good enough' is richly ironic. But it is doubtful now that she will ever again be able to deceive herself with it....

Her own need and acceptance of [Dennis], as real as his need and acceptance of her, are apparent in her new solicitude for him. One sense that she is beginning to perceive that all her romantic dreams were doubly false. It is likely that Kevin would never have become her lover, that he fled precisely because he suspected and feared her suppressed desire. But it is just as likely that she never really wanted him to be. She did not want the virile Kevin, whom if only 'she had said the word' she might have kept away from the 'brassy, bold-faced hussy.' Rather, the Kevin she wanted, and has cherished in her idealistic memory, is the 'sweet decent boy [who] would have cut off his right hand rather than give her an improper word.' At an emotional level deeper than desire, the old child-man that she has, a person to be wrapped up and put to bed—the man who has taken the place of the child she lost—is the man she wanted. She too is almost ready to admit: 'I knew well I could never do better.'

And the reader who appreciates Miss Porter's wryly sympathetic characterization of Dennis O'Toole will agree. For all his grumbling, Dennis emerges as a remarkably tolerant and understanding man, prudent and infinitely patient with his wife, and unswervingly loyal to her, despite the capricious abuse and the embarrassment to which she repeatedly subjects him. When Dennis reproaches Rosaleen for her addiction to tall tales, and she answers complacently 'that's the Irish in me,' one sympathizes with Dennis's reflection that she 'was always doing the Irish a great wrong by putting her own faults off on them'....

The ending here is distinctly, if in a very low key, positive. Rosaleen's resignation—her resignation of her dreams, her resignation to her marriage—is distinctly, if only in a measure, an affirmation. It would be a grave critical error to sentimentalize Rosaleen's relinquishment of her dreams as cause for despair. Stephen Dedalus makes his remark about Mulligan's mirror as symbol of Irish art 'with bitterness.' And, if there is no bitterness here, if Miss Porter acknowledges at least a superficial charm in Rosaleen's version of [Irish] art, still here can be no doubt that she shares Stephen's fundamental critical attitude toward it. The art that Rosaleen's dreams represent—the art of illusion and self-deception, of pseudo-magic—is false art. Miss Porter's story clearly defines it as such, and clearly and firmly rejects it."

John Edward Hardy
Katherine Anne Porter
(Ungar 1973) 47-59

"The Cracked Looking-Glass'...was inspired by a story Porter heard while she was living in a Connecticut farmhouse and involved a widow who was talked about because she kept young boys in her home.... Its most important theme [is] illusion versus reality, and the cracked looking-glass is the central

symbol of the story, providing the clue for the only defensible interpretation of the conclusion. Rosaleen had been a fine, lusty girl when Dennis, widowed and thirty years her senior, had courted her. According to natural sequence, Rosaleen's youthful animal energy should have been channeled into motherhood, but the only child she and Dennis had, a boy, died within two days of birth. Dennis has long since ceased to be either a proper husband or lover to Rosaleen, and at the beginning of the story, Rosaleen is not content to let Dennis replace her dead son. She has sublimated both her sexual energy and her maternal instinct in storytelling, often taking the form of dream interpretation or of reliving her youthful past, and in ambiguous liaisons with young men.

Rosaleen has created illusions by which she lives because her present reality is intolerable. Since motherhood has been denied her, Rosaleen fantasizes about her girlhood, remembering the parties and feast days and the boys who chased her during her triumphant maidenhood in Ireland. She still wears bright colors and worries about the curl in her red hair, and she can deceive herself as long as she does not look into a clear mirror. The looking-glass she has is cracked across its center (suggesting the two opposing personalities of maiden and mother in Rosaleen), and while the glass may cause her to look like 'a monster,' Rosaleen is comforted by knowing that the image is a distortion. The looking-glass allows her fantasy about her unchanged looks to flourish.... [The critic] DeMouy describes Rosaleen's dilemma: 'Undefined as a mother, Rosaleen is essentially a maiden caught on the other side of mid-life with only the dry laurels of her successful girlhood to drape around her head.'

Rosaleen's relationships with the three young men in the story illustrate the confused identity. The most important of the young men was Kevin, who has been gone for several years when the story begins. An important passage illustrates the young men's role in Rosaleen's life. When she thinks of the 'fine man' Dennis was when she first knew him, before his 'getting old...took the heart out of' her, his image becomes Kevin's, and when she thinks of her dead son and the fine young man he might have become, his image also becomes Kevin's. DeMouy concludes, 'As both Prince Charming and son, he admits both sides of Rosaleen's personality.' Hugh Sullivan in Boston and the dull-witted neighbor boy, in progressively more desperate substitutions, offer her the same kind of sublimation.

The journey Rosaleen makes to Boston to find her sister Honora was instigated in Rosaleen's subconscious to bolster the illusions which are the breath of life for her. The trip itself is an external form of the escape from reality she has been practicing. Rosaleen says that she has learned in a dream that Honora is dying and that she must go to her. She will also use the trip to buy a new coat and a new mirror to replace the cracked one. The journey occurs in two parts, the first from Connecticut to New York, where Rosaleen looks at beautiful lingerie as a form of sexual fantasizing, cries through two romantic movies, eats chocolate and ice cream, and goes to pray for Honora in a church richly dressed in candles and flowers and the fragrance of incense. It is a nostalgic grasping for the past, a journey backward to a romantic state like that of Virgin Violeta or the young Miranda of *Old Mortality*. In spite of the serious purpose of the trip, the first part is devoid of unpleasant reality; it is instead a pleasure trip filled with a feast-day atmosphere and an adolescent romantic haze. For the moment, Rosaleen seems to have recaptured her girlhood.

From New York Rosaleen boards a boat that will carry her overnight to Boston. After this night sea journey, which DeMouy sees as a symbolic journey to the land of the dead, Rosaleen arrives in Boston where harsh realities await her in the discovery that Honora does not live there and in her encounter with the shy young man Hugh Sullivan, who misses Rosaleen's maternal interest in him...and sees only her sexual interest. He rejects her offer to return to Connecticut to live with her and Dennis, explaining that he was 'caught at it once in Dublin' with 'a fine woman like yourself...and her husband peeking through a crack in the wall the whole time.'

From the perspective of Boston, home and Dennis look good, and Rosaleen flees a harsher reality to a more comfortable one with which she has already dealt. Critical commentary over the story's meaning has centered on the ending. Hardy, for example, sees the conclusion as distinctly positive, as Rosaleen's relinquishing her dreams and resigning herself to her marriage. But DeMouy sees the ending differently. She says that 'in rejecting tales and dreams Rosaleen does not turn toward truth but toward another kind of fantasy—maybe Kevin will return to her after all.'

Proof that Rosaleen has not had a true awakening lies in several more details. She 'forgot' to buy a new looking-glass, one that would have removed the monster from her vision but also would have revealed a reality she was not ready to accept. She lies to Dennis about Honora, and after supporting the dim-witted local boy's story of ghosts, declaring she has seen the same phenomenon many times. She tells the boy, 'Eat your supper now, and sleep here the night; ye can't go out by your lone and the Evil waiting for ye.' She beds him down in Kevin's room, an act that suggests he is another replacement for Kevin.

At the very end of the story, Rosaleen mothers Dennis, who is all she has for the moment. The reader is left, however, with the impression that Rosaleen's reduction is temporary. While she has said she doesn't have the respect she once had for dreams, she still has her cracked looking-glass and there will be other young men."

Darlene Harbour Unrue
Understanding Katherine Anne Porter
(U South Carolina 1988) 96-101

"Rosaleen and Dennis O'Toole have been married for twenty-five years, and it seems clear that they deserve each other. The fact that he is thirty years older than she has only recently become anything of a problem for her. His impotence is accepted, but Rosaleen reminisces about Dennis as a younger man, when he was a headwaiter at a fashionable restaurant. Advancing age has caused him to be shiftless and passive, sexually impotent, and constantly in the way when chores are to be done. (Once again, the passive, ineffectual male—resembling Porter's Texas father—interacts with a female willing to take charge.)

Rosaleen's vague, unrealized sexual urges are not unconsciously directed to traveling salesmen, neighborhood teenagers, and a local Irish ruffian named Hugh Sullivan, whose sly passes she resents. Kevin, a young man of the village, who left for New York after a quarrel with her, was young enough to be her son, but she later comes to realize that erotic yearnings were not altogether absent from his mind. After a misbegotten journey to visit her sister Honoria in Boston (though she travelled by way of New York), where she encountered an Irish lad with a dirty mind, she is happy to return to Connecticut, to her old husband, and to the comforts of her domestic arrangement. As the story ends, the reader is given to understand that things will go well from now on. The marriage is a stable one; neither partner could, after all, do much better.

Porter's Protestant upbringing in rural Texas comes into play in this story, as does her subsequent aesthetic preference for Roman Catholicism. On one occasion, in her musings, Rosaleen wishes that things could have been different, that she and her husband had never come to Connecticut.... The barrenness of the Protestant faith, contrasted with the richness of Catholicism is, of course, vintage Porter.

Another interesting facet of 'The Cracked Looking-Glass' is its depiction of a marriage in which the age difference is thirty years. By internal evidence, Dennis married when he was almost fifty; the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary makes him seventy-five years old; Rosaleen, whom we know to be thirty years younger, is therefore forty-five years old as the narrative unfolds. Katherine Anne Porter's own penchant for younger men, and her understanding of the poignancy of such relationships, supplies a psychological context for this narrative. The story, in fact, seems almost a prefiguring of her marriage, in 1938, to Albert Erskine (twenty-one years her junior). Erskine, who was twenty-seven years old at the time, and Porter, who was forty-eight, experienced a relationship similar in some ways to the characters in this story.

The central symbol of the story, the cracked looking-glass, functions as a device for Rosaleen to reflect upon her present situation and the strange ways by which she has come to it. The fact that she forgets to purchase another looking-glass while on her abortive journey bodes well for the continued marriage relationship. The glass, as Dennis remarks, is 'a good enough glass.' So with the marriage: it is 'good enough.' In 'The Cracked Looking-Glass,' Porter looks through a glass darkly at the married state, its threats and promises. Marriage, never idyllically presented by Porter, seems in this case to be not the worst situation for the pair involved.

From the standpoint of technique, 'The Cracked Looking-Glass' is a masterful tale involving constant shifts in point of view. Porter's intention, apparently, is to inform the reader of the attitudes of each of the

partners toward this strange marriage. Consequently, it is not really through dialogue (which tells us very little here) but through the reportage of the inner thoughts of each of the partners in turn (not shared with the other, of course) that the full portrait of the marriage is rendered. Point of view shifts admirably at just the right points in the story.

It is probable that Porter's longing for home, her distrust of foreigners, and her sense of alienation supplied much of the tone of this story about the Irish of New York and Connecticut; the tale was composed in Mexico City and Berlin in 1931. That part of the characterization that is most suggestive of Katherine Anne Porter personally is Rosaleen's storytelling 'lies.' These lies are certainly *that*; but they prove to be lies that give shape and substance to an otherwise bleak existence. Rosaleen's age is approximately the same as Katherine Anne Porter's at the time the story was written."

James T. F. Tanner
The Texas Legacy of Katherine Anne Porter
(U North Texas 1991) 158-62

"Rosaleen O'Toole...can only be seen as a thwarted mother.... Rosaleen has natural maternal instincts but no outlet for them. Consequently, 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... 'The Cracked Looking-Glass' has all the earmarks of a Porter story: an insightful view of the woman's repressed sexuality, a utilization of dreams to provide that insight, and the overriding presence of death. Rosaleen's psychology illustrates the typical dichotomy between the figure of the romantic belle she was in her youth and the matron she ought to become. Her looking-glass symbolizes her narcissisms; with 'a crack across the middle,' it is divided, as is her perception of herself. Like the wicked queen in 'Snow White,' Rosaleen has been accustomed to look into her mirror and confirm that she is 'the fairest one of all.'

Now fortyish, in mid-life, with a seventy-five-year-old husband who no longer makes love to her, she must accept the rebellious message of her mirror just as the queen mother of the folktale must. The fair young maiden is no longer reflected in it, and thus at times she can't see 'herself' in it. When she does see an image, her face is, significantly, 'like a monster's.' Thus, it seems there are two Rosaleens in the looking-glass: the high-stepping maiden who was a sought-after belle and the middle-aged matron who must content herself with mothering her elderly husband, Dennis... The missing link in Rosaleen's adult female development is motherhood.... With language, she spins yarns and tells tall tales—folklore that is the rudimentary stuff of the primitive artist, talk that is fueled by her barely controlled, rampant libidinal energy. Her attempt to control that sexual energy is the thrust of the story. How difficult that might be is symbolized in the frenzied activity of the several cats which keep Rosaleen company in the kitchen and which scatter 'in all directions' when she raises her voice to them. Her favorite, the Billy-cat, is lost to her except for two visions she has of her old pet—a painting of him...and a dream she had in which the cat came to tell her of his death....

A fascinating belle in her youth, she still hungers for male attention and sexual fulfillment although she hasn't the temerity to seek it outside her marriage. When Guy Richards, her neighbor, pays attention to her, his overt sexual appeal is completely unsettling to her.... She dreams that her sister is calling her from her deathbed... Not finding her sister, she decides that for the first time a dream has 'gone back' on her...but finally admits to herself that she has loved Kevin, a young house painter she sheltered five years earlier. Returning home, aware that both dreams and love are lost, she refuses to tell any stories. But in rejecting tales and dreams, she does not turn toward truth, but toward another kind of fantasy—maybe Kevin will return to her after all. That she remains fixed psychologically, despite her change in attitude, is caught in the final reference to the looking-glass. She has forgotten to replace the cracked one with a clear piece. Her trip has not yielded a new clear vision of herself; the distorted image remains.... A new glass would have removed the 'monster' from her vision, but would also reveal an image of herself she is not able to accept, the one seen by the lad in Boston....

Far from being a character with arrested sexuality, like Laura in 'Flowering Judas,' Rosaleen O'Toole is a spirited woman whose husband remembers her in youth as 'a great tall rosy girl, a prize dancer,' who had the boys 'fairly fighting over her' when she met him.... Without becoming a mother she cannot accept age gracefully.... In her own mind, at least, she is still the pretty belle of her youth, with nothing to concern her

except dressing and dancing and teasing the boys.... Dennis finds her a lusty young wife and almost begins to 'wish sometimes he had let one of those strong-armed boys have her'.... He knew he could have never done better.... She still behaves like a young girl who leads the boys a merry chase.... It is the courtship game that she enjoys most. Teasing the boys and playing hard to get is what she relishes.... Her triumphant girlhood...is highlighted by stories of dances and young men kept dangling in hopes of a favor from the heartbreaker Rosaleen.... Rosaleen repeats the pattern of tempting, withholding, and finally acquiescing when she meets Dennis.... Dancing expressed for Rosaleen youth, freedom, and desirability, while simultaneously controlling her spirit and allowing her the pleasure of feverish anticipation.... Marriage does not assuage her narcissistic need for attention.... Even on one's wedding day one begins to sink into the obscurity of housewifery.... Rosaleen learns only through her own experience that being the belle is better than being the bride....

Instead of her lusty dancing, she now has the quiet chores of the farm, most of which involve the motherly activities of feeding and comforting. Milking links her to the female symbol of the cow.... Rosaleen speaks to her as a fellow creature.... 'When a young girl marries an old man, even if he has money she's bound to be disappointed'... Real motherhood has eluded her, and babying animals and an aging husband have proved a frustration rather than a satisfaction. The result is a double, confused identity, reflected in Rosaleen's responses to the men in the story.... Kevin, the young house painter, and, later, the young Irish boy she meets in Boston represent both suitors and sons to her. She offers them mothering—food and shelter—to hide her sexual attraction to their youthful masculinity.... Kevin, who is the most significant of them, is Prince Charming to Rosaleen's chaste princess.... There is high attraction between them and the pleasure of sexual tension, but that attraction is never named or acted upon, just as the implicit sexual meanings of fairy tales are never spelled out....

When she thinks of her lost son who might have grown into a becoming man, the image again becomes Kevin's. As both Prince Charming and son, he admits both sides of Rosaleen's personality—maiden and mother.... When he shows Rosaleen a picture of his girlfriend, she cries out and tears come to her eyes. She can neither admit to herself her jealousy nor tolerate this sexual rival... It is easy to disguise her pining for Kevin as motherly longing... After he is gone from her house, Rosaleen is saddened by the fact that the only 'word' she gets from him is a postcard picturing a tall building in New York, which suggests his phallic significance to Rosaleen.... Significantly, the mention of Kevin angers Dennis....

[Her neighbor Guy] Richards is a bold speaker as he would be a bold lover, and Rosaleen's inability to 'put him in his place' verbally underscores the fact that she could never dominate him sexually, or even control the relationship, as she has been able to do with every other lover. Both she and Richards are verbally quick and prone to storytelling, and each is engaged by the other's tales, suggesting that they are sexually quite compatible.... It is almost as if she has finally met her match in him: he reveres the memory of a mother while she reveres the memory of a son; both frequently distort reality, he by drinking and she by her fantasizing. As the cracked looking-glass suggests, distortion of reality is the most pervasive element in the story, from the first scene in which Rosaleen beguiles the traveling salesman with the story of Billy-cat while her husband listens at the keyhole, muttering against the 'tall tales' she tells as truth... The picture [of the cat] is not an accurate presentation, and Rosaleen's conjuration of him seems less so...

Like Maria Concepcion, Rosaleen has a primitive mind.... [This atheist critic thinks religious faith and belief in the afterlife are primitive.] Ultimately, her blarney has a right to exist for its own sake, as a demonstration of the creative power of a woman too confined to realize her potential."

Jane Krause DeMouy
"Maidenhood vs. Matriarchy in 'The Cracked Looking-Glass'"
Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction
(U Texas 1992) 61-72

"Much like Porter and her modern female contemporaries, Rosaleen must contend with the tensions between her sexual desires and a traditional upbringing that binds ideal love to strict moral codes.... The heroine of 'The Cracked Looking-Glass,' Rosaleen, is as voluptuous in body and language as Joyce's Molly Bloom, but her husband, Dennis, is past desire... What remains for this richly generative woman is

the pleasure she finds in verbal play, sparring with Dennis until he falls asleep like a stone, flirting with visiting salesmen, telling and retelling with great feeling stories from her past.... Although a gifted storyteller, Rosaleen is also a naïve one, unaware of the longings inscribed in her effusive texts. Her art works to transform past disappointment and present desire into palatable romance. Like so many women, Porter tells us in this story, Rosaleen was herself seduced by the cultural myth of romantic love, and she cannot relinquish this ideal...

When Rosaleen passes through New York on her way to Boston, she initially wishes 'she had an hour to visit her old flat... However, there is enough time to consume chocolates, 'ice cream with strawberry preserves in it, and two movies... Rosaleen has no time for the real past; she stuffs herself with sweetened romance. The plot of *The Lover King* parallels her own youthful, thrilling courtship with Dennis.... Likewise, Rosaleen, herself 'a country girl from Sligo, was bedazzled by richer, much older, urban Dennis, a Dublin man... In Rosaleen's oft-told tales, two topics frequently recur: the death of her cat, Billy-cat, and memories of 'a lad named Kevin,' a house painter who stayed one summer with Rosaleen and Dennis. The cat's death and the young man's departure mingle in her mind; grieving for the cat, she expresses her yearning for the young man, a potential lover and son.... In Rosaleen's mind, her baby son 'that died in two days' also mingles with Kevin... The image of him floated before her eyes plain as day, and became Kevin.' Unfulfilled sexual desire and unfulfilled motherhood live confused in Rosaleen's mind... Lost sons are lost lovers, and lost lovers are lost sons....

When she travels alone to Boston, ostensibly seeking her sister but in fact yielding to undefined desires for freedom and a return to her lost youth, Rosaleen is vulnerable to the attentions of a young Irish man, misreading his seductions in maternal terms.... Rosaleen herself cannot admit her physical desire... In the rich verbal relations with Kevin [her] maternal longing and erotic energy found an outlet. Throughout Porter's tale, Rosaleen peers into her looking glass, seeking confirming images of herself as young, beautiful, and not without hope. She looks first in the glass after Kevin's departure; again after a disturbing exchange with her wild, virile neighbor, Guy Richards; and yet again at the close as she almost yields to but finally resists Richard's dangerously attractive appeal. Each time she hopes to see the young, sensual Rosaleen she feels inside; each time what looks back at her is a face broken into fragments.... For Rosaleen hope ends with her unsuccessful trip to Boston. She set out with twin goals, to find her sister Honora and to purchase a new looking glass, one without a crack. She seeks, in other words, to regain her self-image as a woman still rich in physical potential while at the same time keeping her relation to her honor. But the story tells us this is all a fantasy...

Sexual self-expression appears in the grim reality of Hugh Sullivan's grasping seduction. The two are thoroughly opposed... Hearing Guy Richards's sensual song out on the highway [she] momentarily leaps to her feet only to realize that she cannot follow that appeal and retain her self-image as an honorable woman. 'It flashed through her mind that a woman would have ruined life with such a man... The looking glass reflects not only Rosaleen's unfulfilled womanhood but also, disturbingly, her imperfection as a woman artist.... When Rosaleen looks in her glass, what she sees frightens her. As she tells Dennis, the glass makes her 'face look like a monster's. For a feminist reader, the image richly resonates across the history of women's writing, linking Porter's gender-thinking with that of many women who wrote, in varying ways, of the monstrous self that is a thinking woman. At the same time, the image of a woman as a monster connects to Porter's own gender-thinking on the problems of reconciling women's potential as creators and procreators.... Unfulfilled as a mother, locked in her sterile marriage to wintry Dennis, Rosaleen uses her art, storytelling, as creative outlet.... 'Through language, Rosaleen is the creator she cannot be through her body'.... Rosaleen is a Scheherazade with her art, weaving work after work—her goal, the deflection of sexual energy from body to text....

At the close... we see Rosaleen accept her husband's dreary limitations.... Turning away from the door, away from the possible dangers and delights of Guy Richards's virile songs, this frustrated May sits down by the side of her wintry husband [December]. Drawing again on Eliot's language of modern anguish and ennui, Porter connects Rosaleen, immobilized and unfulfilled, with her other wasteland heroines. The dream of romantic love is dead... Rosaleen...finally yields all to the sterile Dennis.... In Rosaleen's final self-abasement, Porter represents her own view of marriage's dangerous potential, which she described most fully in her 1951 essay 'Marriage Is Belonging.' Yielding to Dennis's authority, Rosaleen enters into

a marriage of 'possessing,' which requires, according to Porter's definition, 'surrendering gracefully with an air of pure disinterestedness as much of your living self as you can spare without incurring total extinction; in return for which you will, at least in theory, receive a *more than compensatory share* of another life, the life in fact presumably dearest to you, equally whittled down in your favor to the barest margin of survival'. " [This Feminist critic is sour on marriage, whereas Porter married again the year after writing this story, divorced, then married again. Italics added.]

Mary Titus
The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter
(U Georgia 2005) 147-51

Realism is established at the outset with the husband's common marital complaints that his wife talks too much and keeps "saying the same things over and over." If there is nobody to talk to she talks to her cats. This is not abnormal. Lots of people talk to their pets. Likewise the wife has complaints commonly made about husbands—he is dull, unromantic, and a poor listener--although this marriage is unusual in that he is thirty years older than her and impotent, as all men eventually become. At times they bore each other—also true of many marriages. Nevertheless, Rosaleen clearly loves Dennis, calling him "darlin'." "She tucked Dennis into bed with great tenderness"; "When they were in bed Rosaleen took his head on her shoulder"; and in the end "she leaned over and put her head on Dennis's knee."

Her cats are an audience like the men in the story, but when the cats get "on the table" she shouts at them and "the cats would scatter in all directions." By analogy, but unintentionally, she scares men like Kevin and Hugh away when they get "on the table" in the sense of being out of place when they both see that she is repressing her desire for a young lover. Guy Richards is a feral cat beyond her controlling and she wants to "put him in his place." Kevin's painting of Billy-cat is inaccurate but she likes it anyway, as people like poor art depicting and done by loved ones. Kevin is not a very talented artist, he is merely a house painter, just as Rosaleen is not a very talented artist. However, within their personal lives both are "good enough," as Dennis says of the cracked looking-glass.

Rosaleen's dream of Billy-cat is a key to the meanings of the story, yet its importance is totally missed by the critics. Of the 10 critics quoted above who analyze the story beyond simply praising it, none recognize the significance or divine origin of the Billy-cat dream. They call the dream "self-indulgent" (Hardy); merely an "illusion" (Unrue & Nance); "not accurate, a "tall tale," and "blarney" (DeMouy). Most Postmodernist critics (1960s-present) are Atheists who are consistently blind to the spiritual content of literature. As liberals rather than scholars they cannot see what they do not believe in themselves. Even Brother Wiesenfarth, who might be expected to recognize the spiritual importance of the Billy-cat dream, sees it as just another illusion. The critics who mention the dream tend to conflate all of Rosaleen's dreams as illusions, making her the embodiment of illusion in contrast to her husband as the reality principle. Even the Feminist critics are sexist in demeaning Rosaleen. This story becomes an allegory of her salvation in the tradition of Hawthorne, but you would never know that from reading the critics. There are 8 instances of her receiving the grace of God, all missed by the critics.

The first clue to the spiritual meaning of the Billy-cat dream is that it comes on the "third night" after he goes missing. Three is a symbolic number in Christianity, evoking the Holy Trinity in particular. Porter's story "Rope" begins with the words "on the third day," evoking the resurrection of Christ on the third day after the crucifixion, introducing a parallel with the protagonist's resurrection within her marriage. Here the Billy-cat rises from death in a revelation brought to her by the Holy Spirit. "The Billy-cat came into my room and leapt upon my pillow and said: "Up beyond the north field there's a maple tree with a great scar where the branch was taken away by the storm, and near to it is a flat stone, and there you'll find me. I was caught in a trap." Dennis goes out and finds the cat in exactly that place. Just as Rosaleen says, "it was all true." Yet Dennis is still a denier, exclaiming "Always telling a tall tale!" and "Always making a thing more than it is." Dennis is making it *less* than it is, like the critics who deny the existence of a spiritual dimension and an afterlife. They are discredited here. Deniers represented by Dennis regard the accuracy of the cat dream as merely an accident—a "coincidence." One critic (Hendrick) claims Dennis "showed the dream to be a fabrication." No, he showed the dream to be *accurate*.

A coincidence would be meaningless. Porter places the dream in a spiritual context that gives it a lot of meaning. She does not write meaningless passages. In her spiritual context, the dream is powerful evidence confirming the love of a merciful God. Porter uses Christian themes, allusions, parallels, and references to God and Jesus throughout her fiction—often as ironic expletives—that clearly establish her Christian vision. Both the protagonist and the author are Catholics. They do not see their religion as just another “tall tale.” It is their context that should inform analyses of the story, not Atheism or skepticism. In their context, a skeptic is an unreliable interpreter, like Dennis and the critics. Here it is Rosaleen, guided by the Holy Spirit in the dream, who is reliable. Later, ironically, she loses faith in her dreams after they have saved her, much like Granny Weatherall loses faith in her salvation at the moment it will be realized. The rare critic who is honest enough to acknowledge that the author is a Catholic (Tanner) trivializes her faith by calling it merely an “aesthetic preference.”

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 21st 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 go 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 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.

Michael Hollister (2018)