CHAPTER V

TECHNIQUE: SHORT STORIES
Miss Porter's work reveals a great variety in length, tone, theme, subject-matter and attitude, and her technique is excellently adapted to her purposes. Her art reveals a great similarity with her British contemporary Katherine Mansfield. Miss Porter's comment on Katherine Mansfield brings out equally well the basic quality of her own fiction:

"With fine objectivity, she bears a moment of experience, real experience in the life of some human beings; she states no belief, gives no motives, airs no theories, but simply presents to the reader a situation, a place and a character, and there it is; and the emotional content is present as implicitly as the germ in the wheat grain". 1

1 Katherine Anne Porter, "Katherine Mansfield: Fictional Method", *Nation*, (1937), p. 86
Like Henry James's, Miss Porter's language represents an effort to find a most direct and precise method of presenting emotional effects. She has kept her language as simple as possible for any given situation, however complex. However, Miss Porter's talent rests essentially on the sense of form, the determination of means to present situations and relations as effectively as possible.

Her stories are more or less tightly plotted, and focus on the fate of a single individual. The plot of *Noon Wine* is compact in the conventional sense and relatively uncomplicated, and covers the events of nine years in the life of the Thompsons. The murder of Hatch triggers off the action, and leads to the suicide and final tragedy of Mr. Thompson. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Miranda's alienation from the family, her love for Adam, her illness and Adam's death provide the basic plot elements. In *Flowering Judas*, Laura's love for Eugenio and the symbolic dream provide the principal plot-elements and bring out the despair of Laura's isolation. The *Downward Path to Wisdom*, on the level of plot, is a tragedy which covers the bitter experience of a child caused by his relatives. In *Maria Concencion*, the plot

However, in some stories which are primarily studies in atmosphere, there is scarcely anything like a plot. The main thing is the situation to which the characters react. It is a safe generalization to say that her plots are not episodic or complex; they are simple, straight-line plots, often thin.

The settings of Miss Porter's stories reveal a great variety — a Mexican Indian peasant community, the political life and corruption against the background of the Mexican revolution, the Old South, the modern urban background of the Southern city, Germany during the period of the rising tide of Nazism, an isolated small South Texas farm house, a New York rooming house,
a farm in Connecticut. The setting serves the purpose of dramatizing the actions. For instance, for the most part of the story the Thompson farm is presented in isolation and peace away from the outside world, which provides a solid, contrasting background for the murder.

The titles of the stories are aptly devised and point towards the central meaning. The title *Noon Wine* refers directly to the words of the song which Helton plays constantly on his harmonica. As Hatch says:

"That part about getting so gay you jus' go ahead and drink up all the likker you got on hand before noon. It seems like up in Swede countries a man carries a bottle of wine around with him as a matter of course, at least that is why I understood it. These fellers would tell you anything though." 

It is obvious that the wine of noon is heady enough to drive first Mr. Helton and then Mr. Thompson to commit murder. Similarly, the titles *The Cracked Looking Glass* and *He* also express the central meaning

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1 *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, p. 94
of the stories. In He, the use of the personal pronoun in place of a name indicates the author's attempt to universalize the theme.

The characters in Miss Porter's stories are the aptest vehicles of her themes:

"My whole attempt has been to discover and understand human motives, human feelings, to make a distillation of what human relations and experiences my mind has been able to absorb. I have never known an uninteresting human being, and I have never known two alike; there are broad classifications and deep similarities but I'm interested in the thumb prints". 1

It is obvious that all her characters conform to the thematic pattern in her stories. However, according to their traits and their response to the situation and the circumstances, they can be classified under different groups.

The first group of characters are those who have a misconception of reality. But their experiences and responses to circumstances contrast with their own initial version of reality, or they

1 Katherine Anne Porter, "Three statements About writing", The Day Before, pp. 127 - 28
wish that the truth did not exist. Among them are Mr. Thompson (Noon Wine), Mrs. Whipple (He), Rosaleen (The Cracked Looking Glass), Holoran and Lacey (A Day's Work). And the character who seems to accept the reality as he sees it without understanding it is interestingly the character who belongs to the peasant agricultural community. Such a character is Maria Conception (Maria Conception).

The second group is of characters who, in varied ways, reveal attitudes of non-conformity, alienation and isolation. They are Miranda (Old Mortality), and (Pale Horse, Pale Rider), Grandmother Sophia Jane (Old Order), Granny Weatherall (Jilting of Granny Weatherall) Eva, Amy, (Old Mortality), Laura (Flowering Judas), and the nameless heroine of Theft. In some characters the attitude of alienation is forced on them by circumstances, but in some it is psychological and negative.

Miss Porter's understanding of the characters in Noon Wine is so deep that she grants them full human stature. This aspect of her art is conspicuously visible in her stories also. The story centres in Mr. Thompson's consciousness. From the very beginning, Miss Porter has emphasized Thompson's "tragic flaw"—
his self-esteem. This means his overconcern for his standing in the eyes of others. But ironically his actual experiences and responses to the circumstances and situations contradict the self-image he had built about himself. The same is the case with Mrs. Whipple in a different way. Miss Porter has emphasized the point that essentially Mr. Thompson was a lazy man and by the presence of Helton he has been rescued from the hard work of the farming. Helton has taken over the running of the farm. The contradiction in the character further emerges in the truth that, despite enjoying the fruits of Mr. Helton's labour all these years, he secretly despised the man as "a pretty meeching sort of fellow", and unmanly the very frugality of the hirling that is the basis of the family's new found prosperity. And under the disguise of a philosophy of tolerance for eccentricity, he has fastidiously resisted all his wife's urging "that he get to know Helton". 'Letting him alone' was actually his way of refusing Helton human companionship. All he knew about him was that Helton was a Swede.

1 Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 77
2 Ibid., p. 81
However, Thompson is aware of his intentions and motives so much so that he sees in Hatch's attitude a maddening reflection of his own hypocrisy — for Mr. Thompson had also exploited Helton in his own way as Hatch intended to do.

Hatch has been described in an obviously contemptuous way. His business was to catch escaped lunatics in cold-blooded and scheming way. He exploited the affectionate concern of Helton for his mother.

Psychologically, it is the intolerable image of himself that Mr. Thompson strikes at when he takes the axe to Hatch. In his imagination he sees Helton knifed because he wants it to be so, wants to get rid of the living human evidence of his own mean spiritedness and hypocrisy. His guilt obsession also takes the form of a compulsive need to explain to his neighbours who cannot justify or help him. He judges himself through the eyes of others and makes himself a genuinely pathetic figure. However, Miss Porter also reveals his extraordinary sensitivity and strength of conscience. This is a most significant feature of his character which makes him a true tragic hero.

Miss Porter has very subtly detected, as in the
case of Mr. Thompson, the signs of self-delusion
in Mrs. Whipple in *He*. From several instances one
gets to know that her persistent compulsive desire to
appear what she is not in reality makes her base
judgement of hers on what neighbours might say.
The following lines highlight her actual condition and
reveal her hypocrisy:

"Life was hard for the Whipples. It was hard
to feed all the hungry mouths, it was hard
to keep the children in flannels during the
winter, short as it was: "God knows what
would become of us if we lived north,"
they would say; keeping them decently
clean was hard. "It looks like our luck
won't never let up on us," said Mr.
Whipple, but Mrs. Whipple was all for
taking what was sent and calling it
good, anyhow when the neighbors were
in earshot. "Don't ever let a soul hear
us complain," she kept saying to her
husband. She couldn't stand to be pitied.
"No, not if it comes to it that we have
to live in a wagon and pick cotton around
the country," she said, "nobody's going
to get a chance to look down on us."

This passage sharply and effectively conveys
Mrs. Whipple's concern for material well-being as
well as her desire to keep up appearances.

1 *Flowing Judas and Other Stories*, p. 61
Robert Penn Warren perceives this aspect of Miss Porter's art of characterization and describes it aptly as "a good example of that delicate balancing of rival considerations which is the core of Miss Porter's work." It is obvious that Mrs. Whipple, like other professed Christian pietists in Miss Porter's fiction, is notably lacking in humility. Contrary to her thinking, her love for her son is not a genuine concern for the boy but an obsession and a piece of selfish sentimentality which cannot deceive others.

In The Cracked Looking Glass, Rosaleen looks at herself in the broken mirror; she does not realise that she really wants to believe that the distorted image of herself she sees in it is her true self.

Rosaleen cannot realize that her marriage is a failure. The life of sterility, futility and hardwork is quite contrary to her dreams and preconceived notions. She does not have the strength to leave Dennis. Hence she escapes through day-dreaming. Her dream of Honora's illness and her eventual journey

on the basis of it, "is not so much the one of Honora's illness as it is the 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 in the farm with Dennis". ¹

Throughout her journey she plays the role of the woman of her imagination. She buys a bar of chocolate 'though she is not hungry', and a magazine of love stories 'though she was never one for reading'. Since she had not seen a movie for six years, she decided to see two of them in New York. Both the films, The Prince of Love, and the Lover King are sentimental and escapist in their plots.

But finally, when in Boston, Hugh Sullivan misunderstands her kindness, she is offended because it contained some truth — she is revealed to herself as an ageing, 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

¹ John Edward Hardy, p. 56
sexual and emotional inadequacy. Rosaleen's friendly relation with Kevin and her overeagerness to talk also reveal her suppressed desire for sex and companionship. She uses a family of cats as a substitute for a real family and uses Dennis sometimes as a son substitute:

"She sat up and felt his sleeves carefully. I want to wrap you up warm in this bitter weather Dennis, she told him 'with two pairs of socks and the chest protector, for if anything happened to you, whatever would become of me in this world?" 1

The character of Rosaleen has a unique emotional force, and she is the best example of Miss Porter's ironic portrayal. Rosaleen clings to her illusions even when she is forced to recognize the truth about the situation and Rosaleen's return to Dennis does not mean her acceptance of reality. Till the end of the story her life remains an endless series of self-deceptions.

However, Rosaleen draws our compassion and understanding more than Mrs. Whipples does. Both reveal self-delusion in varying ways, but Rosaleen's

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1 Ibid., pp. 218 - 19
response to the situation is more human and appealing is her naivety, extremely touching.

Holloran in A Day's Work, like Rosaleen, is another dreamer who refuses to face reality. He builds up a dream-world to compensate for his failure. His wife Lacey is also unable to accept the reality. Her belief till the end of the story that Holloran, in spite of his drunkenness, at least has a job is not a reality. Her 'religion-sanctioned frigidity', ¹ constitutes one of the disillusions of marriage for her husband. She has such a strong sense of self-righteousness that it becomes a species of arrogance. Her assurance of always being in the right enables her to judge and condemn others readily. Years before, when her husband had introduced her to McCorkery's wife Rosie, she had "turned upon him a face ugly as an angry cat's, and said, 'she is a loose, low woman, and 'twas an insult to introduce her to me'." ² Lacey's remarks on the fancy feminine apparel, "God's mercy look at that indecent thing", ³ reveals the type of

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1 See Chapter III.
2 The Leaning Tower p. 119
3 Ibid., p. 115
person she is.

Miss Porter has also brought out the morally complex quality of Lacey.¹ The blend of outward goodness and inward shallowness is emphasized when the young policeman, scolding the drunken Holloran, praises Lacey in one of his stock phrases:

"I know her from old when I used to run errands for St. Veronica's Altar Society, amid the cop, 'and she was a great one, even then. Nothing good enough'. 'It's the same today', said Mr. Holloran almost sober for a moment." ²

In her portrayal of the characters, Miss Porter employs irony, which springs from the inability of Holloran and Lacey to recognize their intellectual and emotional inadequacy which is the root cause of their troubles.

The character of Maria Concepcion is entirely different from other characters. Maria belongs to the Mexican Indian peasant community. She is one of those characters who have been portrayed at length and with obvious sympathy and admiration. Maria Concepcion also reveals a contrast between what she thinks about

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¹ William L. Nance, p. 68
² Ibid., p. 139
herself and what she actually is. She is a self-reliant and self-possessed woman, who obviously dominates her marriage. It was she who had brought the licence and insisted on a church wedding because she thinks herself different from the women of her community in which a church wedding was not usual. Though her husband Juan has a job, he is immature and a delinquent during the entire period covered by the story. It is Maria who earns and saves. It is commonly known that "she wished to buy a rebozo for herself or a shirt for Juan. She would bring out a sack of hard silver for the purpose."\(^1\) The hut in which they live is referred to as "her house"\(^2\). During the months when her husband is away at war, accompanied by Maria Rosa, Maria Concepcion lives an isolated life of prayer and hard work. She considers herself deeply religious, and her insistence on her marriage in the church with Juan also shows it. However, she cannot recognize the conflict between her racial heritage and her religion.

The self-sufficiency which characterizes her in

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1 Flowering Judas, p. 5
2 \textit{ibid.}, p. 9.
the beginning of the story is the result of her ignorance about herself and about the situation. She does not suspect her husband when she hears Maria Rosa and a man laughing together. She thinks complacently, "so Maria Rosa has a man". 1 Ironically, the man is her husband Juan. When she knows the reality, her reaction of her rival is violent:

"She heard herself saying a harsh, true word about Maria Rosa, saying it aloud as if she expected someone to agree with her: 'Yes she is a whore! she has no right to live!". 2

And her silence about Juan's betrayal indicates that she unconsciously accepts the double standards of sexual morality, characteristic of her primitive society.

Even after having murdered her husband's mistress and having taken her child for her own, Maria does not suffer from a guilty conscience, because her instincts justify her act. Maria Concepcion's refusal to accept the Christian belief that murder is a sin establishes her closeness to other Indians who too are not worried about her act.

1 Ibid., p. 6
2 Ibid., ibid.
The same incident has brought out also the difference in the characters of Maria Concepcion and Juan. Juan’s desire to repent like a child and his very awareness that he does not know why he saved his wife contrasts with the completeness of Maria Concepcion’s acceptance of the situation. Though both of them act instinctively, only Maria Conception has the strength of character to accept fully the inspiration of her instincts. She accepts the reality of the situation in which she finds herself by acting on the instinctive level. Discarding her former exterior of the pious Christian, she accepts a non-rational order of existence because the community she belongs to is based on the primacy of instincts. Hence the contradiction which could trouble a highly rational person does not trouble her.¹

The Downward Path to Wisdom is the best example of Miss Porter’s penetrating psychological insight, especially into the thought process of children. The character of Stephen is revealed through Miss Porter’s keenly discerning attention to detail and her heightened, almost

refined sensitivity, to words. The following passage reveals the influence of the adult conversation on a child. From the very beginning the elders speak as if their meanings passed beyond the child:

"Bright-looking specimen, isn't he?" asked Papa, stretching his long legs and reaching for his bathrobe. "I suppose you'll say it's my fault he's dumb as an ox."

"He's my little baby, my only baby," said Mama richly, hugging him, "and he's a dear lamb." His neck and shoulders were quite boneless in her firm embrace. He stopped chewing long enough to receive a kiss on his crumby chin. "He's sweet as clover," said Mama. The baby went on chewing.

"Look at him staring like an owl," said Papa.

Mama said, "He's an angel and I'll never get used to having him."

"We'd be better off if we never had had him," said Papa.

This kind of conversation gives Stephen his sense of a threat to himself in adult relations.

Once the boy overhears a Negro servant talking to his grandmother, "all this upset all the time, and him such a baby." And not only his father and mother

1 The Leaning Tower, p. 82
2 Ibid., p. 87
hurt him but his uncle David too hurts the innocent boy by accusing him of stealing balloons. All the incidents put together create in Stephen a certain distrust of adults who are devoid of any feeling of love and are preoccupied with their own selfishness.

When Stephen's mother tells him that his father is waiting for him, "he raised his head and put out his chin a little"¹ and replied that he did not want to go home or to see his father.

It appears that the boy has withdrawn into himself; he dissociates himself from the family which brings him relief. But ironically he cannot totally isolate himself from his parents because of his extreme youth and his dependence on them.

Miranda's alienation varies from Stephen's, but she also rejects her family in Old Mortality. The oppression of her father's family drives her to married life. There also she experiences disillusionment, loneliness and lack of understanding, and finally decides to alienate herself completely from any

¹ Ibid., p. 110.
relationship:

"She did not want any more ties with this house, she was not going back to the husband's family either. She would have no more bonds that smothered her in love and hatred". 1

It is obvious that the childhood experiences of Miranda depicted in The Circus, The Fig Tree and The Grave influence her constantly throughout her life. She is characterized by a certain detached objective view of her surroundings. Miranda registers as a determined, idealistic, perceptive and romantic character. These qualities are reinforced in the final Miranda story, Pale Horse, Pale Rider. Her attitude of non-conformity is reflected in various ways. Her bohemian lifestyle reflects the society of the newspaper people, superficially liberated and liberal, working while others sleep, sleeping while others work. They affect a bohemian carelessness and cynicism about patriotism and all bourgeois pheties. Miranda also shares such attitudes, although she is not a hard-boiled professional like her other colleagues. She is repelled by the snobs and phonies, and she finds them everywhere

1 Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 60
especially among men. It is her extreme awareness of her each and every motive which induces her to avoid the visit to the military hospital as futile and to write honest drama reviews. She remains honest and true to herself, despite realizing the practical advantages of conformity. As the events reveal, she refuses solidarity with society and refuses to submit anymore than necessary either to the inward or to the outward pressures. Her responses to the war are also rebellious and she sees through the pretense of the whole thing.

Miranda's attitude of non-involvement conforms to the usual pattern of Miss Porter's heroines. She is cautious about what she has to say even to the friendliest of her fellow journalists, and her relationship with them is also marked by a sense of cool detachment. However, she is open only with Adam, but interestingly, her initial interest in Adam is aesthetic and not emotional. It develops gradually into love. And yet she wants to remain uncommitted and tells herself, in spite of herself;

"I don't want to love, not Adam, there is no time". With his nearness 'a deep tremor set up in Miranda, and she set about resisting herself methodically as
if she were closing windows and doors and fastening down curtains against a rising storm". 1

This reveals the complexity of Miranda's attitude which is a combination of both denial and acceptance. After her illness, Miranda's alienation includes her own body. She reflects. "It is 'a curious monster', no place to live in, how could anyone feel at home there? Is it possible I can never accustom myself to this place?" 2 And she feels like "an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will". 3 She now finds oppressive "the precise machine of the hospital, the whole humane conviction and custom of society, conspired to pull her inseparable rack of bones and wasted flesh to its feet, to put in order her disordered mind, and to set her once more safely in the road that would lead her again to death". 4

Her friends come to cheer her and though she

1 Ibid., p. 138
2 Ibid., p. 161
3 Ibid., p. 161
4 Ibid., p. 162
pretends to be cheerful, she realizes that she cares for no one, "her hardened indifferent heart shuddered in despair at itself". With the death of Adam, her capacity to love is dead and she is incapable of deep feelings, and her alienation is complete.

Miranda's alienation, it appears, is from family, from society, from human relationships, and lastly even from herself. Miranda's sense of alienation is also shared by her earlier counterparts in the Grandmother, Sophia Jane. She is the fixed centre of Miranda's childhood and sums up in herself the social and moral system of the old order. However, Miranda's eventual rejection of that order does not conflict at the deepest level with her respect for her Grandmother for, in her, Miranda respects not the society she represents but her triumph over it. Since the time and circumstances of her life make a literal flight impossible, the Grandmother of The Old Order partially escapes from the oppression of the family and society by dominating it. At the spiritual level, she remains largely a captive of the old order's strict orthodoxy

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1 Ibid., p. 163
and narrow morality.

Granny Weatherall of *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall* shares Grandmother Sophia Jane's traits of their disdain for men, more or less bitter, and usually in the form of regarding them as spoiled children, is apparent. Both these characters also embody a supercilious attitude towards men. She disliked in her husband all the faults she disliked in her brother:

"lack of aim, failure to act at crises, a philosophic detachment from practical affairs, a tendency to set projects on foot and then leave them to perish or to be finished by someone else, and a profound conviction that everyone around him should be happy to wait upon him hand and foot. She had fought these fatal tendencies in her brother, within the bounds of wifely prudence she fought them in her husband, she was long after to fight them again in two of her sons and several of her grandchildren. She gained no victory in any case, the selfish careless, unloving creatures lived and ended as they had begun". 1

*The Grandmother in The Old Order* Sophia Jane, and Granny Weatherall in *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*, also begin to isolate themselves from men and eventually establish a sort of matriarchal tyranny.

1 *The Leaning Tower*, pp. 47 - 48
Grandmother's strong character has also been emphasized in *The Old Order*. She is described as "stubborn", having "already begun to develop her implicit character which was altogether just, humane, proud and simple".\(^1\) And her faults are also emphasized, "She had many small vanities and weaknesses on the surface: a love of luxury and tendency to resent criticism".\(^2\)

As a variation, Miss Porter has depicted the urge to escape (like Miranda) in two more counterparts of hers, Amy and Eva in *Old Mortality*. Amy's escapes in a different way from Eva, because she has asserted her independence by death. Eva is a self-reliant person who also left the family in search for identity. She is a chinless, ugly spinster, a comic character, more pathetic than admirable. Although Eva possesses courage and some of its related virtues, she is deeply embittered by the cruelty of her mother. She is filled with deep dislike and suspicion and is always preoccupied with sex, although she is quite ignorant about it. She hates Amy because Amy embodied all the graces she herself lacked. She is cynical and

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 46
\(^2\) Ibid.
intelligent enough to see rather deeply into Amy's romantic world. She hates the family because the family has given her a bundle of complexes:

"Ah, the family," she said, releasing her breath and sitting back quietly, "the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth. It is the root of all human wrongs," she ended, and relaxed, and her face became calm. She was trembling. 1

Although Eva's responses to the family appear exaggerated it is obvious that she, like Miranda, reveals alienation from it.

In the nameless protagonist of Theft, the sense of isolation takes a different form. Unlike the protagonist of other stories, she is not formally introduced. But her character is defined gradually as the story develops, by casual references to her surroundings, especially by the symbolic revelation of her deepest motivation. The casual references also reveal the restrained and distant attitude of the heroine and show the hints of pronounced coldness in her. The loss of the purse is the symbol of the loss

1 Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 81
of all her possessions, and in a way it becomes an occasion of self-revelation to her:

"She felt that she had been robbed of an enormous number of valuable things, whether material or intangible things lost by her own fault, things she had forgotten and left in the houses where she moved: books borrowed from her and not returned, journeys she had planned and not made, words she had meant to answer with, bitter alternatives and intolerable substitutes worse than nothing, and yet inescapable: the long patient suffering of dying friendships and the dark inexplicable death of love—all that she had had, and all that she had missed were lost together and were twice lost in the landslide of remembered losses". 1

Her attitude of withdrawal is also apparent. She reads the letter from her lover, and then tears it carefully into narrow strips and burns it. The theft of her purse makes her realize her flaw—her strong sense of denial which is the cause of her grief:

"She remembered how she had never locked a door in her life, on some principle of rejection in that made her uncomfortable in the ownership of things... a certain fixed, otherwise baseless and general faith which ordered the movements of her life without regard to her will in the matter".2

1 Flowering Judas and Other Stories, p. 87
2 Ibid., p. 89
Laura's isolation in Flowering Judas differs conspicuously from that of Miranda and the heroine of Theft, although like the heroine of Theft, she also experiences self-revelation. The symbolic design of Flowering Judas helps in the revelation and understanding of the character. She participates in the revolution, but the revolution disillusions her because it is permeated with death and corruption, and is symbolized by Braggioni, whose appearance and attitude challenge many of her preconceptions. There is no subtlety in Braggioni except animal cunning; he is corrupt and sensual. All this alienates her from politics. But she still continues to perform her duties assigned to her.

Her impulse of non-involvement and withdrawal is apparent even when she is not related to politics. Even the children she teaches cannot evoke an iota of feeling in her. She is unable to form any kind of relationship and her interest in children is only aesthetic. 'Every day she teaches children, who remain strangers to her, though she loves their tender round heads and their charming opportunistic savagery'.

1 Flowering Judas, p. 151
the blackboard, "we lov ar ticher". But the love between the teacher and the pupils remains impersonal. She cannot change her attitude since she has foocased herself in a set of principles derived from her early training as a Roman-Catholic. The last scene of the dream which effectively symbolizes the final revelation of Laura is in the past tense. The personal responsibilities which Laura refuses to accept in her waking life haunt her in her dreams. Her subconscious mind is terribly guilt-ridden which finally finds its expression in the dream. Thus her dream can be viewed as her recognition of her failure to perfect her self-imposed negation and stoicism which have adversely affected her chances of happiness. Just before falling asleep, she realizes that "it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death. . . ." But she remembers that Eugenio, one of the political prisoners, took all the tablets she gave him, and so he is dead. Since she is unconsciously the cause of his death, she dreams that he is charging her with murder. In her dream he promises to take her to

1 Ibid., p. 140
2 Ibid., p. 141
3 Ibid., p. 159
a new country, the country of death. Wondering but
fearless, she refuses to follow him, unless he takes
her hand: only in dream she can express freely her
desire and need for him. He gives her Judas flowers
to eat:

"Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner,
said Eugenio, in a voice of pity, take
and eat, from the warm bleeding flowers
and held them to her lips. She saw that
his hands were fleshless, a cluster of small
white petrified branches, and his eyes
sockets without light, but she ate the
flowers greedily for they satisfied her
hunger and thirst. Murderer! said Eugenio,
and Cannibal? This is my body and blood.
Laura cried No? and at the sound of her
own voice, she awoke trembling and was
afraid to sleep again". 1

Hardy interprets the dream thus:

"The dream makes it clear that Eugenio
had been trying to seduce her. She had
evidently felt strongly attracted to him.
But to help him to sleep she had given
him narcotics, not herself; and she
obviously suspects that he took the
overdose because he had lost hope of
winning her love, not because of despair
at his continuing imprisonment. . . .Her
high-minded frigidity is no less inhumane
than Braggioni's cruel sensuality". 2

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1 Ibid., p. 160
2 John Edward Hardy, p. 74
The dream symbolically suggests that Laura is Judas as much as Braggioni is. It is obvious that Laura identifies Eugenio with the Judas tree; his flesh and blood are the blossoms of that tree; its twigs are the finger bones of his skeleton hands. In legend it was from the red bud of Judas tree that Christ's betrayer hanged himself. But in eating the flowers she acknowledges herself as traitor and guilty of betrayal.

The dream very adequately exposes the emotional inadequacies and intellectual deficiencies of Laura by revealing the innermost thoughts of the protagonist's mind.

Miranda, Laura, and the nameless heroine of Theft show an instinctive sense of isolation. It becomes obvious that Miranda's isolation is justified by the plot as inevitable. The pain of Miranda is more intense because, like Laura, she does not try to evade the awareness. Hers is a more human and nobler response to an essentially painful world. But Laura's isolation is exposed in its negative aspects and in a less flattering light. One can perceive that Laura's superficial and cultivated stoicism really highlights
her psychological inadequacies. Hence her isolation is psychological. Having fled from the disharmony and contention of the external contacts, Laura rediscovers the same disharmony and conflict within herself.

The success of a novelist depends upon his ability to build up a person and a personality. In her statement in *The Day Before*, Miss Porter said that "theme and characters are important in a story. First have faith in your theme; then get so well acquainted with your characters that they live and grow in your imagination exactly as if you saw them in the flesh; and finally, tell their story with all the truth and tenderness and severity you are capable of."¹ To this end the author employs certain devices, depending upon the purpose and subject-matter.

Among the devices used by Katherine Anne Porter for character portrayal, the first and the simplest is description. She describes some characters externally before proceeding to give us an internal

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1 Katherine Anne Porter, "No Plot My Dear No Story", *The Day Before*, pp. 135 - 36
picture. The description of Maria Conception suits the elemental and serene wisdom of Maria. The description in this passage identifies Maria Conception with a primitive culture in which people live on the instinctive level:

"Instinctive serenity softened her black eyes, shaped like almonds, set far apart, and tilted a bit endwise. She walked with the free natural, guarded ease the of the primitive woman carrying an unborn child. The shape of her body was easy, the swelling life was not a distortion, but the right inevitable proportions of a woman, she was entirely contented. Her husband was at work and she was on her way to market to sell her fowls". 1

In the same way Laura's denial of life and austerity is described by the 'nun-like severity of her clothing with its numerous restraints'. "...she is tired of her hair pins and the feel of her long tight sleeves". 2 Braggioni's clothes also fit him tightly but, whereas Laura's appear to confine her flesh, his only emphasize his sensual corpulence:

"He bulges marvelously in his expensive garments. Over his lavender collar, crushed upon a purple necktie, held by

1 Flowering Judas, p. 4
2 Ibid., p. 139
a diamond hoop; over his ammunition belt of tooled leather worked in silver, buckled cruelly around his gasping middle; over the tops of his glossy yellow shoes Braggioni swells with ominous ripeness, his mauve silk hose stretched taut, his ankles bound with the stout leather thongs of his shoes". 1

These descriptions project the austerity of Laura and show temperament of the character and reveal their contrast too. "The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni is the symbol of Laura's disillusion.

Although Mr. Thompson's wife is portrayed less directly, her mind is entered in a few passages with the result she becomes real. Some of the finest descriptive lines are devoted to her. The following lines which describe her first confrontation with Helton project her personality in the reader's mind:

"She was a little frail woman with long, thick brown hair in a braid, a patient suffering mouth and diseased eyes, which cried easily. She wove her fingers into an eyeshade, thumbs on temples, and winking her tearful lids, said with a polite little manner, "'Howdy do, sir. I'm Miz Thompson, and I wanted to tell you that I think you did real well in the milk house. It's always been a hard place to keep'. " 2

1 Ibid., p. 143
2 Pale Horse, Pale Rider, pp. 69 – 73.
In *The Downward Path to Wisdom*, the physical description in the beginning and at the end are very meaningful. When Stephen’s father lifts him up into bed in the first scene he goes as "limp as a rag for Papa to take him under the arms and swing him up over a broad tough chest. He sank between his parents like a bear cub in a warm litter, and lay there comfortably". \(^1\) This description reveals the malformation of the child, as William Nance perceived:

"The bodily plasticity symbolizes the malleability of the soul. . . . The description of him lying between his parents like a bear cub in a warm litter recalls the ancient superstition that bears licked their young into shape". \(^2\)

Physical description helps to portray the character of Stephen and to develop the general theme of the story. The following passage which gives a physical description of Miranda tells about her childhood ambition and reveals the irony.

"Miranda persisted through her childhood in believing, in spite of her smallness, thinness, her little snubby nose saddled with freckles, her speckled gray eyes and

1. *The Leaning Tower*, p. 31
2. William L. Nance, *The Art of Rejection*
habitual tantrums, that by some miracle she would grow into a tall, cream-colored brunette, like Cousin Isabel; she decided always to wear a trailing white satin gown. Maria, born sensible, had no such illusions". 1

The physical description of Adam as observed by Miranda also emphasizes her aesthetic interest in him and her way of looking at people.

"Adam is the embodiment of ideal masculinity — earthily handsome, affectionate, intelligent, simple, uncynically realistic" and "He's tall heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks". 2

Some characters are not of major importance but minister to the theme and establish a personality or a type. One such character is Hatch in Noon Wine, whose description indicates his sinister motives. The quasi-hallucinatory quality of Mr. Hatch's sudden appearance on an insufferably hot afternoon is repeatedly emphasized. Thompson with the buzzing head and dry mouth is like a man caught in a dream. At no point does he rationally plan to rid himself of his unwelcome visitor. Instead, he merely wishes him

1 Pale Horse, Pale Rider p. 13
2 Ibid., p. 124
away. Hatch's sinister role is explicitly suggested when Thompson feels that "he had seen the man himself somewhere".¹

Among the characteristics which Miss Porter strongly emphasizes in the first scene of the story is Thompson's exaggerated good humour: "When Mr. Thompson expected to drive a bargain he always grew very hearty and jovial".² Determined to hire Helton at the very lowest possible wages, "he began to laugh and shout his way through the deal".³ It is precisely the same technique, disguising the sinister purpose of his visit, that Hatch uses on Thompson himself nine years later.

Miss Porter has very convincingly and subtly revealed the characters by deft touches which highlight their trait and build up the theme. She often creates an impression of a character by the tone she employs for the description. The characters of Rosaleen and Dennis in The Cracked Looking Glass

1 Ibid., p. 86
2 Ibid., p. 64
3 Ibid....
are partly comic, and the humour, though it touches pathos, is never bitter. Humour is mainly derived from the loquaciousness of Rosaleen. It is a tone Miss Porter had struck before but nowhere else in such sustained manner. There is gentle humour seen in Noon Wine also where, however, it serves the purpose of irony. The relationship of husband and wife in Noon Wine is described in a gentle tone. There is conscious humour in the portrayal of the semiliterate farmer, Mr. Thompson. His pompous name Royal Earle, is designed to serve the purpose of irony, and it also helps to project Mr. Thompson's pretentious nature. It is obvious that the narrative tone with which Noon Wine begins is misleading.

J.E. Hardy rightly observes:

"One who reads the story for the first time might expect it to reach no higher level of seriousness than of comic pathos. But at the end, Thompson is as tragic a figure as any in modern literature". 1

The character of Granny Weatherall in The Jilting of Granny Weatherall is presented in a humorous way. The broad humour of the name's

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1 John Edward Hardy, p. 101.
appropriateness is carried into the whole technique of the story. The comedy which dominates the beginning reappears frequently up to the end of the story, and the atmosphere created by the humour contradicts the death-bed sentimentality. It starts with Granny's prudish and pretentious remarks on the bedside manner of the 'young' (who is really middle-aged) Doctor Harry:

"The brat ought to be in knee breeches Doctoring around the country with spectacles on his nose! Get along now take your school books and go. There is nothing wrong with me". 1

When the priest is administering the last rites, her mind wanders, and for an instant she responds mentally to his touch:

"Father Connolly murmured Latin in a very solemn voice and tickled her feet. My God, will you stop that nonsense. I'm a married woman". 2

However, it becomes obvious that the comedy here is very near hysteria.

Nance rightly observed that Granny Weatherall

1 Flowering Judas, p. 131
2 Ibid., p. 136
is one of Miss Porter's most sympathetic characters, and humour is the principal means by which she is made sympathetic. 1

Among other characters with whom Miss Porter seems sympathetic are Miranda, Grandmother Sophia Jane and Maria Concepcion. She treats Stephen (The Downward Path to Wisdom) in a particularly sympathetic manner. On the contrary, Laura is treated with obvious irony. The nameless protagonist of That Tree and Lacey and Hélloran (A Day's work), are treated in a satirical vein and with obvious contempt. In this connection Miss Porter's use of symbolism, coupled with appropriateness in the naming of the character, has been pointed out by James W. Johnson.

"Lacey' while perfectly suited to the setting, is a triumph of suggestiveness Lacey might have suited the early delicate beauty mourned by her husband, but it is hardly appropriate for the 'scrawny strange woman'. 2

This shows that the naming of the characters also serves the purpose of satire.

The most significant feature of Miss Porter's

1 William L. Nance, p. 42
2 James W. Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter", The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Autumn, 1966) p. 607
characterization is her objectivity which makes the characters credible. The characters Stephen, Rosaleen, the nameless character of Rope, Ninette in Magic, are marked by artistic objectivity. Technically, Flowering Judas is the most objective in its characterization of the heroine Laura.

Miss Porter's means of achieving objectivity is the dramatic point of view. The 'point of view' enables her to understand the character's point of view. Norman J. Friedman comments on Miss Porter's art of characterization:

"She has not been content to show only the surface of life. Her problem has been to win an understanding for her character's point of view, to present their world as they see it. Her success is an achievement of technique and possibly her most distinctive trait as a writer is her mastery of a primary technique of fiction: point of view."

Her method intensifies the experience of the characters and adds further dimensions to their personality. It is a very significant device which explores and reveals the innermost activity of their

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1 Norman J. Friedman, "Point of view in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept", PMLA, LXXX (December, 1953) p. 116
psyche. The stories which deal with man-woman relationship—The Cracked Looking Glass, Rope, A Day's Work and That Tree—show their technical brilliance in various ways.

In The Cracked Looking Glass, the point of view, constantly alternating between the characters, reveals the discords and cracks in the married life of Rosaleen and Dennis. Rosaleen's conversation with the salesmen reveals the outlet of her suppressed desire for sex and for self-expression because Dennis is quiet and uncommunicative. As the salesman leaves, Rosaleen tells her husband "That is a nice decent family man", . . . as if rebuking his evil thoughts . . . He is full of admiration for ye too Dennis; He said he couldn't call to mind another man of your age as sound as you are".1 But the comments of Rosaleen do not deceive Dennis. He realizes that it was she, not the salesman, who had spoken about Dennis's former strength. He also realizes it when she complaints:

"Sat wordless under her unreasonableness (thinking) that she has very little work

1 Flowering Judas, p. 168
for a strongbodied woman, and the truth
was she was blaming him for something he
couldn't help. Still she said nothing
he could take hold of, only nipping his
head off when the kettle dried up or the
fire was low. There would come a day
when she would say outright, 'It's no
life here, I won't stay here any longer',
and she would drag him back to a flat in
New York, or even leave him may be. Would
she? Would she do such a thing? Such a
thought had never occurred to him before.
He peered at her as if he watched her
though a key-hole. He tried to think of
something to ease her mind, but no plans
came. She would look at some harmless
thing around the house, say the calendar,
and suddenly tear it off the wall and
stuff it in the fire. 'I hate the very
sight of it,' she would explain, and she
was always hating the very sight of one
thing or another, even the cow . . ." 1

The point of view of Dennis very subtly conveys
the simmering discontent between the couple.

The point of view in Rope makes the reader
understand the characters fully and renders them with
objectivity. The constantly shifting stream of
consciousness or point of view between the couple
makes the reader see things from the character's
point of view:

1 Ibid., p. 191
"The whole trouble with her was she needed something weaker than she was to heckle and tyrannize over. He wished to God now they had a couple of children she could take it out on. Maybe he'd get some rest.

Her face changed at this, she reminded him he had forgot the coffee and had bought a worthless piece of rope. And when she thought of all the things they actually needed to make the place even decently fit to live in, well, she could cry, that was all. She looked so forlorn, so lost and despairing he couldn't believe it was only a piece of rope that was causing all the racket. What was the matter, for God's sake?"

In the depiction of child psychology, Miss Porter reveals her unique artistic objectivity. This quality of hers shows her close affinity with Katherine Mansfield. With her, Miss Porter shares the scrupulous and perspicacious attention to detail, and the capacity to probe into the psychology of children. Like her, Miss Porter adheres to the child's point of view which renders credibility to the theme and the character. The Downward Path to Wisdom, The Circus, The Fig Tree, The Grave, and parts of Old Mortality reinforce this aspect of her art.

1 Ibid., p. 51
2 Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature, p. 297
Miss Porter tells the story from the child's point of view in *The Downward Path to Wisdom*. Stephen is made convincing as a sufferer. Even other characters in the story are seen from Stephen's viewpoint:

"The little boy had to pass his father on the way to the door. He shrank into himself when he saw the big hand raised above him. 'Yes, get out of here and stay out,' said Papa, giving him a little shove toward the door. It was not a hard shove, but it hurt the little boy. He slunk out, and trotted down the hall trying not to look back. He was afraid something was coming after him, he could not imagine what. Something hurt him all over, he did not know why."

It is obvious that the point of view technique lends objectivity to Stephen, and saves him from maudlin sentimentality. In *The Circus* also the point of view of young Miranda is significant, because the central meaning of the story lies in the way things appear to Miranda. They teach her about human deformity and about the fear and hatred and bitterness concealed under the apparently delightful spectacle of life. She takes every scene of the circus seriously:

"Miranda thought at first he was walking on air, or flying, and this did not surprise..."

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1. *The Leaning Tower*, p. 83
her, but when she saw the wire, she was terrified. High above their heads the inhuman figure pranced, spinning the little wheels. He paused, slipped, the flapping white leg waved in space; he staggered, wobbled, slipped sidewise, plunged, and caught the wire with frantic knee, hanging there upside down, the other leg waving like a feeler above his head. . ."1

Miss Porter achieves objectivity by means of the stream of consciousness device. In Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Jilting of Granny Weatherall, by the help of this device, readers are brought completely into the heroine's mind. Miss Porter's ability to present the physical and mental sensations of dream and delirium is seen in Flowering Judas and The Jilting of Granny Weatherall, but in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, she achieves her most sustained depth and poetic beauty. In this story the stream of consciousness of the heroine, Miranda, is revealed. This device creates a sense of unreality and reveals the abnormal state of the protagonist's mind. The exact chronological sequence of events is difficult and at times almost impossible to determine. Past and present, night and day, dream and waking, the world of the mind and the world of senses are interfused quite frequently.

1 Flowering Judas, p. 25
1 Ibid., p. 25
The end of the vision of the pale horseman furnishes a good example of the technique of stream of consciousness. The rapid transitions from one state of consciousness to another are often effected through the law of association:

"She pulled Graylie up, rose in her stirrups and shouted, I'm not going with you this time — ride on! Without pausing or turning his head, the stranger rode on. Graylie's ribs heaved under her, her own ribs rose and fell. Oh, why am I so tired, I must wake up," she said opening her eyes and stretching, 'a slap of cold water in my face', for I've been talking in my sleep again, I heard myself but what was I saying?"

Here 'ribs' provide the association, from dream speech to waking speech quietly indicated by the quotation.

In *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*, the stream of consciousness account is given by the third person, an omniscient author. So it is not difficult to reconstruct the events of the story. The fluid language of mind in its dreams and wanderings intensifies the experiences of the protagonist, Granny Weatherall.

1 *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, p. 115
Her memory after a mental survey of the long life of achievement returns to the fateful day when she was jilted by her lover: "such a fresh breeze blowing under such a green day with no threats in it. But he had not come, just the same!" ¹

Miss Porter's narrative style shows quite some variety. *The Cracked Looking Glass* and *A Day's Work* show the imitation of Irish-speech rhythms in dialogues and monologues. The dialectical authenticity also helps build up the character and the theme, and reveals the Irishness of the characters. But *A Day's Work* is in a colloquial vein. *That Tree* is a long monologue of the protagonist. In *The Rope*, the device of dialogue alternates between direct and indirect, reproducing speech almost exactly without the usual dialogue signals. The style has subtle and powerful effects, the most obvious of which is the speed resulting from the absence of retarding punctuation and the flawless blending of dialogue with narrative.

Miss Porter's reducing punctuation to the minimum shows her tendency to avoid non-essentials.

¹ *Flowering Judas*, p. 128
and achieve smoothness and intensity. It is obvious from some stories that semicolons are reduced to commas and even commas are skipped quite frequently. A good example of Miss Porter's fastidious avoidance of every non-essential word is the following passage in *Noon Wine* which describes Mrs. Thompson's collapse after the murder:

"Mrs. Thompson sat down slowly against the side of the house and began to slide forward on her face; she felt as if she were drowning, she couldn't rise to the top somehow, and her only thought was she was glad the boys were not there, they were out, fishing at Halifax, oh, God, she was glad the boys were not there". 1

In addition to avoiding non-essentials, Miss Porter's stories reveal extreme compression and economy also which make them strikingly effective.

The narrative language reveals its semi-poetic beauty in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *The Grave*. In fact, what makes *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* such a moving and unforgettable work of art is the superb precision of language, particularly in those parts which describe Miranda's confrontation with death. The

1 *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, p. 99
language evokes a haunted atmosphere and the readers feel as if they are sharing the actual experience. In her dream at the beginning of the story, Miranda is back in the house of her childhood. The language reveals its poetic quality:

"How I have loved this house in the morning before we are all awake and tangled together like badly cast fishing lines. Too many people have been born here, and have wept too much here, and have laughed too much, and have been angry and outrageous with each other here. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces, there have been too damned many antimacassars in this house, she said loudly, and oh, what accumulation of storied dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment". 1

One may note that the reiteration of the word 'too' gives to the passage its particular rhythm and cumulative meaning. The passage is also replete with symbols which indicate the tragic end of *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider*.

The finest example of the artistic beauty of language can be seen in *The Grave*. There is unforced

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1 *Ibid.*, p.113
handling of symbolism, which reinforces the sensuous and psychological details of the story. The following passage, which describes the examination of the rabbit Miranda's brother has just shot reveals Miss Porter's skill:

"The children knelt facing each other over the dead animal. Miranda watched admiringly while her brother stripped the skin away as if he were taking off a glove. The flayed flesh emerged dark scarlet, sleek, firm; Miranda with thumb and finger felt the long fine muscles with the silvery flat strips binding them to the joints. Brother lifted the oddly bloated belly. "Look", he said, in a low amazed voice. "It was going to have young ones".

Very carefully he slit the thin flesh from the center ribs to the flanks, and a scarlet bag appeared. He slit again and pulled the bag open, and there lay a bundle of tiny rabbits, each wrapped in a thin scarlet veil. The brother pulled these off and there they were, dark gray, their sleek wet down lying in minute even ripples, like a baby's head just washed, their unbelievably small delicate ears folded close, their little blind faces almost featureless." 1

The passage is superb for its minute details and the poetic style. Lodwick Hartley praises this quality of Miss Porter's art:

1 The Leaning Tower, pp. 75 - 76
"The greatest gift of Miss Porter's is her consummate mastery of detail ... she has the uncanny power of evoking richness from minutiae. The gift is manifested everywhere in her work, but no more astonishing bit of observation can be found than in The Grave". 1

The language also creates and evokes the atmosphere in the Leaning Tower and Hacienda. The sense of isolation dominates the mind of the protagonist. Almost every page of the story provides examples that emphasize the theme of oppression and isolation, and the language itself is packed with words which communicate it. Even the opening lines depict isolation:

"Early one morning on his sixth day in Berlin, on the twenty-seventh of December, 1931, Charles Upton left his dull little hotel in Hedemanstrasse and escaped to the cafe across the street. The air of the hotel was mysteriously oppressive to him; a yellow-faced woman and an ill-tempered looking fat man were the proprietors, and they seemed to be in perpetual conspiracy of some sort ... His room was dark, airless, cold, ..." 2

The emphasis on the words dull, oppressive, dark, airless and cold draws our attention to the thematic motif of oppression.

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1 Lodwick Hartley, "Katherine Anne Porter", Sewanee Review, XLVIII (April, 1940), p. 214
2 The Leaning Tower, p. 149
In Hacienda also the author has created an atmosphere of futility, antipathy, opposed purposes, homosexuality, unwholesome love, boredom and murder, all permeated by the "sickly adour of narcotic". ¹

The narrator is particularly sensitive to the atmosphere of the place and describes it graphically.

"The smell had not been out of my nostrils, since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood". ²

All the images intensify the general sense of monotony, boredom and futility.

Similarly, in Noon Wine also, the deliberate emphasis on the heat of the day serves the purpose of creating a peculiar, and mysterious atmosphere in the story and also of revealing the mental states of Mr. Thompson and Helton who is also declared to have become crazy with heat. The heat of the day, it appears, induces Mr. Thompson to violence. The casual statement that "idea of drinking any kind of likker in this heat made Mr. Thompson dizzy" ³ also suggests that Helton might have been dizzy with

¹ Flowering Judas, p. 268
² [Missing citation]
³ Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 94
noon wine when he killed his brother. Besides, Miss Porter has also emphasized the slovenly state of the farm for lack of attention. All these together help in the development of the theme.

This survey of Miss Porter's technique reinforces the opinions of the critics who are virtually unanimous in assigning her a unique and preeminent position as a stylist. All her works, including her fictionalized autobiography, indicate that she has developed a style on her own. On reviewing the first edition of Flowering Judas, Allen Tate rightly observed:

"Miss Porter neither overworks a brilliant style capable of every virtuosity nor forces the background of her material into those sensational effects that are the besetting sin of American prose fiction... While American prose fiction as a whole is chiefly occupied with the discovery and then the definition of its materials... Miss Porter already has a scene which is her instinctive, automatic, unconscious possession; a background that she does not need to think out, nor approach intellectually; a given medium which at once liberates the creative impulse from the painful necessity to acquire its material and sets it about the true presentation of it". 1

1 Allen Tate, "A New Star", Nation CXXXI, (October, 1930), p. 352