CHAPTER III

THEMES : SHORT STORIES
The stories discussed in this chapter have a wide variety of setting, material and style; yet they possess an underlying thematic unity, because their protagonists are people whose desperate preoccupation with themselves cuts them off from effective communication with all other human beings. These stories, Maria Concepcion, Magic, Rope, He, Flowering Judas, Theft, That Tree, The Jilting of Granny Weatherall, The Cracked Looking Glass, Hacienda, Noon Wine, The Downward Path to Wisdom, A Day's Work and The Leaning Tower deal with the conflicts in human relationships on several levels; conflicts arising out of the man-woman relationship, (particularly of childless couples), estrangement and stifling relationships in the family with the struggle of the individual to maintain a personal identity and, finally, the disparity between the ideal and the actual which is a conspicuous feature of the most poignant story, Noon Wine.
The protagonists of *The Leaning Tower* and *Flowering Judas* resemble the protagonist of *The Miranda Stories* in many ways. All three find themselves in situations in which personal integrity and normal desire for relationship are threatened by impersonal forces like War-hysteria, the after-effects of the first World-War and the Mexican Revolution, and all three realize their impotence in the face of catastrophe.

In this section, ten stories of *Flowering Judas* are discussed and, in the next one, the remaining ones from the two volumes *The Leaning Tower* and *Pale Horse* *Pale Rider* are taken up.

In *Maria Concepcion*, unlike in the other stories, the heroine dominates the scene till the end. This is Miss Porter's first story in this vein. It depicts the conflicting situation in the relationship of Maria Concepcion and her husband Juan Villegas and his mistress.

*Maria Concepcion's* husband Juan Villegas is an overgrown child, unreflecting and acting largely on instinct. Maria has only a narrow field in which she can exercise the strength of her character. The conventions of society, her instincts, and her strong
Catholic faith demand that she preserve the family by all means. Therefore she murders her husband’s mistress and takes their baby for her own and restores her universe to order. This murder does not disturb her as she regards it as merely something she has to do in order to retain her peace and happiness. The story closes on a note of contentment and peaceful domesticity, a contrast to the violent means by which the peace has been achieved:

"Maria Concepcion could hear: Juan breathing. The sound vapored from the low door way, calmly; the house seemed to be resting after a burdensome day. She breathed, too very slowly and quietly, each inspiration saturating her with repose. The child's light faint breath was a mere shadowy moth of sound in the silver air. The night, the earth around her, seemed to swell and recede together with a limitless, unhurried, benign breathing. She dropped and closed her eyes, feeling the slow rise and fall within her own body. She did not know what it was, but it eased her all through. Even as she was falling asleep, head bowed over the child, she was still aware of a strange, wakeful happiness."

This last scene emphasizes that Maria Concepcion's feelings are in consonance with nature and, as Mooney

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observes, this scene reveals, "Maria Concepcion's return to the elemental existence of the earth she loves and understands". ¹

The theme of the story is slightly different from that of the others, since Miss Porter indicates here that acceptance of reality is possible and the acceptance of reality, as portrayed in this story, is at the same time the central character's return to a satisfactory but intuitively preconceived order of existence. Schwartz has rightly observed:

"This story centres around the conflict between (1) Maria Concepcion — woman as a conceiver and mother, and Maria Rosa (with whom Maria Concepcion's husband Juan Villegas is having an affair) — woman as an exotic rose, the mistress. (2) Maria Concepcion the mother type, and her husband the male gamecock type; (3) Maria Concepcion the suffering individual and the towns~ women Lupe and Soledad, who represent the community from which Maria Concepcion has been separated by what Lupe and Soledad consider to be the sin of pride; and (4) the primitive native culture, represented by an archeologist in their midst."²

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¹ Harry John Mooney, *The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter*, p. 49

Hardy emphasizes the significance of this story and remarks:

"The exotic pastoralism of that story has obscured Maria's character for many readers. In most interpretations, she is misrepresented as a pure primitive, who triumphs by the power of instinct over the disorder that the encroachments of alien civilization have brought to her society. As her name is surely meant to indicate, Maria is actually the victim of her own tragic 'conceit', she commits the murder in a desperate effort to realise her obsessive idea of herself as a wife and mother — an idea that she has from her oversimplified training in Catholicism, not from her Indian heritage".

This point could be disputed. It is not quite certain that the name 'Concepcion' is meant to indicate conceit — it could quite as well indicate 'conceiving' in the physical sense of motherhood. Similarly, in acting as she did, Maria reveals not so much an "oversimplified training in Catholicism" as her "Indian heritage", a throwback to savage primitivism, the blind force of instinct, which her Catholic training is powerless to control.

In this first of her stories, Miss Porter confronts the mysterious forces of nature through the transparency of primitive society and finds that these forces act most strongly through a woman. In obeying them, the protagonist of the story, Maria Concepcion, attains a dignity which sets her apart from others. It is a kind of stooping to conquer since by yielding to the primitive instincts, she achieves fulfilment and triumphs as a woman.

Magic is a subtly written story. J.E. Hardy calls it "an exquisitely wrought satiric vignette". The situation involves a New Orleans lady of quality, Madame Blanchard and her personal maid. The talkative servant is dressing her mistress's hair. She has overheard Madame's remark to the laundress earlier that she thinks someone must have bewitched the sheets because so many of them fall apart in the wash. The maid instantly is very eagerly prompted to tell an anecdote on the theme of witchery about her people, the Louisiana Negroes of mixed French blood, among whom sorcery is practised traditionally.

1 John Edward Hardy, Katherine Anne Porter, p. 41
She tells a sordid story, an episode in the "fancy house" where she formerly worked as a chambermaid. The madame of the brothel was very ruthless and habitually cheated the girls. When a girl, Ninette, accused her and announced her intention of leaving the house, the madame very cruelly beat the girl and threw her out penniless, bleeding and half-naked into the street. But the madame soon realized her mistake when after a few days, men coming to the house repeatedly asked about the missing whore. She took the help of a Negro Voodoo specialist among her servants in an effort to find Ninette and lure her back. To materialize this scheme of magic, a potion was made and due rituals performed. Subsequently, after a week, the girl returned very haggard; yet she was happy to be back and "lived there quietly".

It is apparent that the story reveals the failure of Ninette's escape and emphasizes not only physical enslavement but also the enslavement of the spirit.

The quarrel arising out of the conflict between a young husband and wife is depicted in Rope. A young city couple living in the country fall into a bitter
quarrel over the husband's selfish absentmindedness. On a shopping trip into the town, he forgets to buy the coffee that his wife had repeatedly reminded him to get. On the contrary, indulging in an absurd whim, he buys a large coil of heavy rope, for which he has no definite use.

The rope symbolizes the invisible bond of their destructive but probably unbreakable and stifling union. They are "at the end of the rope, of their patience with which to hang themselves". But they cannot work free of each other. At the end of the story, exhausted by a long exchange of recriminations, they are temporarily reconciled. But it is obvious that they are doomed to resume the quarrel once they have rested.

Rope is a delicately graphed record of a verbal duel between a generic "he" and "she". Referred to as "he" and "she", they have all but lost their personalities in the degrading perennial struggle that is their marriage. The absence of names for the characters indicates an obviously symbolic or universalizing intention. The style of Rope gives the story a certain intensity. The sense of oppression in the story is built up by the
masterful manipulation of style, which reinforces the theme of mutual hatred in marriage and the bitterness of the union.

One of the most popular of Katherine Anne Porter's stories, He is a unique masterpiece of finely balanced satire and pathos. In this story Katherine Anne Porter expresses her attitude through the ironic narrator:

He is the son of a poor farm family, the Whipples. The personal pronoun, 'he', used throughout the story, is the only name the boy has. If the parents ever gave him another name, they ceased to use it. Mrs. Whipple is fond of saying that she loves him, the idiot, better than anyone else. But neither she nor Mr. Whipple pampers him. Physically strong and fearless, the boy is able to take simple instructions. Although he cannot speak intelligibly, he does more than his share of the work on the farm. And he can be entrusted with some tasks such as tending the bees and taking a suckling pig from the ferocious sow that his older brother and sister are afraid to undertake. Once when his sister falls sick during a winter, Mrs. Whipple does not hesitate to take the blanket from his bed as an extra
cover for the girl, since He always seemed immune to the cold. On one occasion, towards the end of the winter, He too becomes ill, and the doctor instructs Mrs. Whipple to take proper care of the boy and to feed him well with lots of milk and eggs until the weather improved.

He seems to recover during the ensuing spring, summer and fall. Meanwhile the other children have gone away, one to school and the other to a job in town. But one day, shortly before Christmas, coming up from the barn to the house, He slips and falls on the ice. This accident incapacitates him to stand on his feet. Now he becomes more than ever mindless and unresponsive. The doctor suggests that they take him to the county home, where he can get proper care and where he will be "off their hands". Mrs. Whipple at first protests. She does not want charity. Nor does she want to have her neighbours say that she sent her sick child to live among strangers. But at length she is persuaded by her husband's arguments. And a neighbour offers to drive Mrs. Whipple and her son on his wagon to the home.
On the way she tries to convince herself that she is doing what is best for Him, as well for herself and her husband and their normal children. But she is increasingly uneasy. And when he suddenly starts to weep, she is overwhelmed with sharp remorse because she could not realize that He was weeping because of his love for his mother with whom he did not want to part. She argues with her guilty conscience that she has done the best as she knew how, that she could do little against a merciless fate; she fears that He has felt himself overworked and abused. His accusations are piercingly terrible because that He is unable to put them into words. She cries out in her soul "what a mortal pity He was ever born"? And the neighbors drive on, "not daring to look behind him".  

The story expresses the agony of the character He. The question of just how human he is, is the crux of the story. Before the concluding scene, in which the revelation of his humanity strikes a note of ambiguity that vibrates back through the story, the retarded boy

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1 Flowering Judas, p. 78
functions simply as a reference point by which when we read the story we feel a growing distaste for Mrs. Whipple, the real centre of emotional interest.¹

The meaning of the story is symbolically concentrated in its title. The inability of the Whipples to recognize even his personality and their failure to give him a name is the root cause of their suffering and error. Mrs. Whipple's refusal to face reality has become her total blindness and neglect and portrays her character ironically, exposing her wilfulness and self-justification. J.E. Hardy comments on the story in these words:

"There is something ugly and self-centered even in her final grief, in her interpretation of His sobs only as reproaches to her. . . . there is a suggestion too, that Mrs. Whipple's incapacity is the common incapacity of mankind, the curse of our intelligent being. Life is indeed 'too hard' for most of us to be able to sustain such love as He, in His innocence may feel. If like the neighbor driving the wagon, we do not look behind us, it is the essential, universal and eternal misery of the human condition that we cannot countenance".²

² John Edward Hardy, p. 38
One may also notice that this story reveals a classic case of lack of communication, of which isolation is the corollary. The situation is made sharply clear by having at the centre a character who is mentally retarded and more than usually inarticulate; but the situation is not much better even when people are articulate.

Flowering Judas is Miss Porter's most beautifully written story. It concerns a young girl who has devoted herself wholeheartedly to the revolutionary movement in Mexico, but suddenly discovers that she is a traitor to herself as well as to the ranks of the oppressed, and that she must identify herself with Judas rather than any liberator of mankind.

The central character, Laura, is an American teacher living in Mexico. A lapsed Catholic, she has retained attitudes and habits of mind formed by her religious training. For the romantic piety she experienced as a Catholic, she has tried to find a new vehicle in the Socialist revolution. Now she is disillusioned with the revolution which has come down to petty factionalism and corrupt struggle for power among
the leaders of the various groups. But because she knows no other outlet for her deep inner need for dedication, she remains faithful to her commitment, doing her share and trying to discipline her thinking. Laura teaches children in the daytime and at night runs errands for Braggioni, acting as a go-between for him and the foreign revolutionaries, delivering messages and narcotics to the members of the party who are in jail.

Braggioni is the embodiment of all the forces of corruption that threaten the revolutionary ideals and movement from within. He is a notoriously lustful man, vain, self-indulgent, ruthless and in love with power. It is distressing for Laura because he had launched upon a stubborn campaign to seduce her. She would like to be rid of him, but she repeatedly reminds herself that she can do nothing for others in her faction without his help. At the point where the story opens, Braggioni has come to Laura's apartment to discover, if possible, whether it would be worth the effort to attempt an assault upon her "notorious virginity", which he, like the others, cannot understand. Laura is physically attractive and this is not the first time that she has
been courted by the Mexicans. Her first suitor was a young Captain whom she evaded by spurring her horse when he attempted to take her in his arms, pretending that the horse had suddenly shied. The second was a young organiser of the typographer's union who had serenaded her and written her bad poetry which he tucked to her door. She had unconsciously encouraged him by tossing a flower from her balcony, as he sang to her from her patio. A third person Eugenio, is unknown to the reader until the end of the story, when it turns out that he is expected to die of a self-imposed overdose of the narcotics which Laura had delivered to him at the prison. He is however, the principal figure in a dream which ends the story, a dream in which Laura imagines him to have accused her of murdering him and in which he forces her to eat the blossoms of the Judas tree which grows in the courtyard below the window.

Leon Gottfried interprets the theme of Flowering Judas, and perceives the thematic unity between T.S. Eliot's The Hollow Men and The Waste Land with this story:
"In *Flowering Judas*, as in a number of her other stories, Miss Porter is concerned with the problem (or sin) of non-involvement and the waste which it is responsible. Among many other writers who dealt with the theme of the half alive spiritual state during the period (Post-War-period), perhaps most important was T.S. Eliot. It is therefore not surprising that we find Miss Porter in *Flowering Judas* drawing, as did so many other authors of this period, upon T.S. Eliot's poetry. Her story owes its title and the use of the tree's blossoms as a substitute for the host of travesty of Christian communion directly to his *Gerontion*. But the landscape of the heroine's dream at the end of the story, in which the infernal communion takes place, is even more reminiscent of the imagery of *The Waste Land*, and *The Hollow Men*. Thematically the story has affinity to all these poems, but *The Hollow men*, seems especially close in theme and imagery to the problem of Laura. Like the life-death of the hollow men, Laura's life is characterized by 'shape without form, shade without color, paralysed force, gesture without motion'. ¹ Each of Eliot's negation is carried out in the imagery of Laura's story."²

It is obvious that the story has, including the title, several symbolic references which together emphasize and convey the point that there is no true

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1. All quotations are from T.S. Eliot's poetry.
revolution without love. The puritan mind that regards
the inevitable "confusion" of the human condition —
"love with death", "spirit with body" — as monstrous
must end with making a monster of man himself.

One may note that the story obviously embodies the
sense of isolation which the protagonist experiences in
her failure to establish normal human relationship because
of the very fact of the inadequacies of her own nature,
herself-imposed discipline and reserve. The fact is that
Laura tried to find meaning or significance for her life
by revolutionary activities, but eventually it proves
a vain attempt and she is simply locked within the prison
of her own self.

In Theft the protagonist is a not-so-young woman
writer living alone in the city. She discovers one
morning that her new purse is missing. She mentally goes
through the events of the previous evening. She left a
cocktail party with a young man named Camilo, who walked
with her to the Elevator — with pathetic gallantry
spoiling his beautiful new biscuit-coloured hat in the
rain. She looked in her purse to be sure she had the
subway fare. But before she climbed the steps, another
male friend, a painter named Roger, stopped to offer her a ride home in a taxi. When she finds that he was ten cents short of taxi fare, she opened her purse for the coin. When Roger admired the purse she told him that it was a birthday present.

She came back home and accepted the invitation of another roomer, Bill, to stop in for a drink. Bill was feeling frustrated over his latest play. He fretted over his ex-wife's demands for money. The protagonist offered him sympathy, but mindful of her own poverty, she reminded him of the fifty dollars he owed her for a part of the play she had written. He said that he could not give her the money and she impulsively told him to forget about the money. When she reached home, she left the purse on a wooden bench. Before going to bed she read over again and then destroyed a letter from an estranged lover. Then coming into the room for her bath in search of cigarettes and unable to find the purse, she concludes that the janitress must have stolen it. When she was in the bathroom she heard the janitress entering the apartment to see the radiator. Still in her bathrobe, she goes down to the basement and accuses the woman of stealing the purse.
At first the janitress flatly denies having taken the purse and swears before God. But when the protagonist bitterly confronts her by saying "Keep it if you want it so much", she explains and confesses that her niece needs the pretty things, that "we oughta give the young one a chance". The implicit meaning is that the writer had her chance. Ironically when the writer tries to give it to her, saying she no longer wants it, the janitress angrily retorts "I don't want it either now... My niece is young and pretty... I guess you need it worse than she does". And lastly taunting the heroine, the janitress says, "It's from her (niece) you are stealing it".

The ironical and satirical statement of the janitress fills the heroine with despair. Settling down to her cold cup of coffee, she thinks: "I was right not to be afraid of anyone but myself, who will end by leaving me nothing." She gets the purse back, but then she feels that the contempt of the janitress was justified.

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Flowering Indas

1 Ibid., p. 95
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 91
4 Ibid.
The central meaning of the story expresses the theme of alienation. The loss of the purse is symbolic of the loss of all her possessions. The irony lies in the fact that while on the surface the story stresses material loss, in its essence it is concerned with an intense anguish in terms of spiritual loss.

_That Tree_ describes the life of a miserable couple, who, like the protagonists of Miss Porter's other stories, is frigid or impotent or both. Some of her spouses seek in marriage a refuge from their families but find themselves bound into a still more oppressive bondage.

The story is an almost uninterrupted monologue in which an American poet-journalist in Mexico, agitated by his estranged wife asking him to take her back and by his decision to do so — tells the story of their marriage and divorce to a guest with whom he is drinking in a cafe. Part of the interest of the story is its description of life in Mexico City, especially among the kind of people who were artists. The central interest of the story, however, is a close
examination of the deep conflict between romanticism and realism in life and some of its implications for the psychology of the married couple. This story also examines the American temperament against the Mexican background.

The marriage described in this story may be classified as a particularly destructive union. The separation has been a sort of escape for both of them, but their reunion after such a long estrangement only emphasizes their enslavement. This unhappy marriage is a sort of allegory of the conflict within the protagonist's own mind. His wife is an embodiment of repressed traits in himself, as the following passage points out:

"Miriam had become an avenging fury, yet he could not condemn her. Hate her, yes that was almost too simple. His old fashioned respectable middle class hard-working American ancestry and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam's side. He felt, he had broken about every bone in him to get away from them and live them down, and here he had been overtaken at last and beaten into resignation that had nothing to do with his mind or heart. It was as if his blood stream had betrayed him".

1 Ibid., pp. 113 - 114
The protagonist is disillusioned with his married life but he does not have the power to escape from it. The title of the story emphasizes a sense of loss—the loss of all ideals. Nance further elaborates it, "The tree under which the would-be poet wanted to sit is the symbol of the ambiguous ideal of independence— isolation—in his case muted to irresponsibility-degradation which he will never reach." ¹

The centre of interest in The Jilting of Granny Weatherall is the dying lady's mind. Miss Porter has written this story with gentle and subtle humour. The protagonist has the author's sympathy. This story is relatively balanced, and has a sense of humour uncharacteristic of the author's general attitude towards characters. This story, being unusual in its general approach bears witness to Miss Porter's artistic versatility.

The Southern setting of this story has similarity with Miranda's family. ² Ellen Weatherall, the Granny

¹ William L. Nance, p. 41
² In Miranda Stories, Miranda, the heroine, is a semi-autobiographical figure, and the other character, of major importance is the grandmother—the protagonist of The Source and The Old Order.
of the title, is a character strikingly similar to Sophia Jane, the grandmother in *Old Mortality* and in the stories of the *Old Order*.

The name Weatherall shows Miss Porter's concept of the character and means that the old lady had indeed weathered all in her life-time except, of course, the grief of jilting. The old woman is dying in the house of one of her daughters. The events of the day — the morning visit of the doctor, and his wide ranging conversation with the relatives, the daughters coming and going during the following hours, the gathering of Mrs. Weatherall's living children at her bed-side in the evening with the priest (who comes to administer the last rites)—all get mixed up in her failing consciousness with episodes of her past life.

People and things become vaguer and escape their identities. She confuses the living daughter with one long since dead. Conversation between the daughter and the doctor becomes in her mind the rustling of the newspaper. The lamp beside her bed becomes the light of her own consciousness, her life. At the end of the story she watches the lamp diminish and
fade. She loses her sense of time. The room in which she lies becomes the room in which she awaited her bridegroom, and in which she bore her last child.

Although the author has adopted the technique of the stream of consciousness, it is easy to reconstruct the principal events of Ellen Weatherall's life. Her first fiancé, George, never arrived for the wedding. She eventually married another man John, with whom she had a brief but happy life, bearing him five children. He died when he was a comparatively young man. An energetic woman, she withstood all adversities to see her children grow up into responsible and relatively prosperous adults.

Once she had a premonition of death at the age of sixty. Hence she visited all her children, presuming it would be her last visit. However, she recovered from her illness to live another twenty years. Till her last days, she refuses to admit that she is seriously ill, and is still the same strong-willed roughly humorous matriarch she has always been. She looks back on life with great satisfaction, though her end is not entirely untroubled. The thought of all the incomplete things — household tasks planned but
undone—distress her: "I mean to do something about the Forty Acres, Jimmy does not need it and Lydia will later on, with that worthless husband of hers."

She is also distressed by the absence of her younger child, a daughter called Hapsy, who, it is implied, had died as a young woman shortly after giving birth to a child.

Finally, the old woman is further filled with despair by the realization that she has not conquered her bitterness against George, the man who had jilted her. After sixty years of unrelenting effort to convince herself that she has overcome her frustration and resentment, her mind, at the last moment of her life is filled with the grief of betrayal.

Watching the seemingly, flickering and dwindling light of the blue shaded lamp on the bedside table, she cries out in her soul asking God to "give a sign". But:

"For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the

1 Flowering Judas, p. 135
house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this - I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light.

Granny Weatherall's story is really a pathetic story, and even the comic instances do not relieve the undercurrent of grief of the character, and at the time of her death Granny Weatherall recalls the pain of jilting, an event which for sixty years, she has prayed against remembering.

The Cracked Looking Glass combines several aspects of the theme of estrangement. The conflict in this story arises out of unsatisfactory relationship between man and woman and their tense life together. Hardy's remarks about such stories are very appropriate:

"Katherine Anne Porter's childless couples are, if anything, even more miserable than the mothers and fathers in her fiction. In the description of their stifling lives

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1 Ibid., p. 136
together all the vices of the 'hideous institution' are painted in intense miniature. 1

The consistency of her concern with the oppressive condition of the family life overrides all ethnic, regional, religious and economic distinctions. Her protagonists have to carry throughout their lives the burden of family consciousness. The same theme, with a slight variation, may be seen in That Tree, Rope, and A Day's Work.

In The Cracked Looking Glass, the central interest of the story is focussed on the heroine's failure to distinguish between appearance and reality, especially within herself, and the dominant reality. Rosaleen O' Toole, the central character, indulges in the fantasy of escape and clings to her illusions even when she is forced to recognize the truth about the situation finally. She is the frustrated wife of a man thirty years her senior. Ironically they had married for the security that marriage provides to husband and wife.

1 John Edward Hardy, "Man and Woman", Katherine Anne Porter, p. 46

Eva, the spinster suffragette in Old Mortality, bitterly describes the family as a "hideous institution", one that is the root of all human wrongs.
Formerly, Rosaleen had been a domestic servant. Dennis, her husband, had been married before as a young man, to an Englishwoman who died shortly after their arrival in America. But they had "never liked each other".¹ He was not dissatisfied with Rosaleen because his first marriage had been even more unsatisfactory. Besides Rosaleen was "strong, good-looking and essentially good natured".²

Dennis was a city-bred man, and he had had enough of the struggles of urban existence. But Rosaleen, a country girl from Sligo, feels that she has never had an experience of the glamorous life of a city. She feels very lonely among her Connecticut neighbours — the "natives"² as she and Dennis call them. The situation is not unlike that of the stolid Clym Yeobright and the passionate Bustacia Vye in Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native. She always laments regrets and rants about all the deprivations of her life, especially over Dennis's sad decline from the "fine figure of a man he was when she met him".³

Early during their marriage, she had given birth to a

¹ Flowering Judas, p. 169
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 168
male child. But the baby died within two days and she never conceived again. When her maternal instincts could not be satisfied, she treated her old husband more like a child than a man, scolding, coddling and chastising him.

A young man, Kevin, stayed with them for some days. She consciously thought of him not as a lover but a kind of a combination of son and brother. But when he showed Rosaleen a picture of the girl he had been "keeping steady" with in New York, she commented on the girl as "brassy", bold-faced hussy", and the motive of sexual jealousy becomes obvious.

Since Kevin left, Rosaleen who by nature was loquacious, feels very frustrated without any companion to whom she could tell stories of her past life, her premonitions and her prophetic dreams. Dennis is by nature skeptical, and a poor listener. Therefore on a few occasions she has exchanged stories with a bachelor neighbour of theirs named Richards who, when not drunk, drops in or she chats with salesmen who occasionally visit them. Most of the time she has to talk to herself or to the farm animals. In this way
Rosaleen escapes unconsciously and finally escapes through her dream-inspired trip to Boston. Where her wrong ideas lead her to error about the young man she meets and also cause her disillusion and return to reality. She is full of anguish when she realizes that her own moral character has been seriously misunderstood by her neighbours, not as it was by the young man. At the end of the story she indulges in one final nostalgic review of the broken dreams of a lifetime and realizes that life has given her no alternative except to submit to the fate of her dull life with Dennis.

Rosaleen and Dennis, in the imperfection of their union, have much in common with other married couples in Miss Porter's fiction. The mildly satiric humour and the Irish idiom and linguistic authenticity of the story have brought out the full meaning of the theme.

The critics differ in their opinion about the dominant emotion of the story. Hendrick remarks: "The story ends on the same note of despair on the human condition that one finds in many of Miss Porter's
other stories". But Hardy differs and says:

"The ending here is distinctly in a very low key positive. Rosaleen's resignation of her dreams, her resignation to her marriage — is distinctly if only in a measure an affirmation. It would be a great critical error to sentimentalize Rosaleen's relinquishment of her dreams as cause of despair."

As the contents of the story show, this story begins with a sense of rejection and intense urge to escape from the dull melancholy of a sterile life, but ends up on a note of acceptance. However the acceptance, we may note, is not without pain and despair. It is not so positive as Hardy contends. It is clearly the end of a phase. It is not very clear whether it is also the beginning of a new one, of a clear-eyed determination to lead a more realistic life without 'undue expectation'.

James W. Johnson seems to be nearer the truth when he sums up the central theme of the story in the following words:

2 John Edward Hardy, p. 67
"Rosaleen is constantly distressed about the cracked mirror, which blurs her face so unrecognizably; but her imperfect and unsatisfactory marriage in her 'cracked' imagination cannot be replaced, so the cracked looking glass remains hanging in the kitchen, after Rosaleen has fully pondered the consequence of its doing so."  

The theme of the story shows the protagonist's unwillingness to accept the harsh facts of her life, the frustration, her husband's impotency, the routinized life of hard work and the loneliness of her exile. These conditions drive her to such escape-tactics for they provide her for the time being a sense of wish-fulfilment.

In Hacienda, Miss Porter records her total disenchantment with the revolution in Mexico, and the subsequent corruption pervading the life of that period. Reviewers and critics have had problems

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with Hacienda. One general complaint is that the story is not focussed on any single person or event. It appears that the peculiar inconclusiveness of the story and the author's refusal to provide a focal point are deliberate.

The story concerns a group of people who are directly or indirectly connected with the production of a movie about Mexico. Mexico has gone through a revolution, and the:

"Government officials . . . wanted to improve the opportunity to film a glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution . . . and the Russians (the movie makers) found themselves surrounded and insulated from their material by the entire staff of professional propagandists, which had been put at their disposal for

1. Mooney observes: "Hacienda like The Leaning Tower, deals with political issues, and only by implication. But its method is much less concrete than that of The Leaning Tower, and its meaning is at once general and less clear." *The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter*, Harry John Mooney, p. 39

2. Eleanor Clark observes that in Hacienda "Miss Porter's vivid selection of details and sympathetic music in words are superficial and not pointed enough to give life to any of the people involved".

the duration of their visit. ¹

The film makers are also determined to present their own version of the Mexican situation, and since their version and that of the Mexican government, do not agree with each other, every step in the making of the movie proves to be a frustrating experience. However, the makers of the movie have to face some other difficulties also. The Mexican government is determined to justify the revolution by creating an illusion that the condition of the people has changed.

The confusion in the situation is so total that it is not surprising that even at the end of the story the movie is not completed.

The narrator, an American woman and a writer, seems more interested in the quality and the kinds of people who reinforce the central theme of the story. These characters are the decadent Mexican aristocrat, Don Genaro, at whose pulque hacienda a group of Soviet moviemakers are shooting a film about Mexico; his wife

¹ Flowering Judas, p. 244
Dona Julia, who is her husband's rival for the sexual favours of an actress in the company; the unlucky Indian peon Justino, who is arrested and imprisoned for shooting his sister in an incident reminiscent of the part he played in the film, the arrogant and mercenary American businessman, Kennerly, who is the emissary of the film's financial backers in California; the gentleman of ascetic elegance, Betancourt, who represents the Mexican government; the ruined alcoholic musician, Carlos Montana, who composes a mocking poem about poor Justino and his sister; the strange monkey-like homosexual, Uspensky, who directs the film company. Hardy observes that "they all act out their doomed and futile, pointless life roles, which are obviously indistinguishable from the roles in the film". 1

It is obvious that the story does not set out to provide the real situation about Mexico; rather it attempts to reveal the inadequacies of the notions about the Mexican situation entertained by the characters in the story. This is done by consistently drawing the reader's attention to the difference between the

1 John Edward Hardy; p. 115

Katherine Anne Porter
various notions. *Hacienda* stresses that although the revolution is accomplished, nothing has really changed. Even the falsified vision of reality cannot alter the bitter facts about Mexico.

Cont'd.
Noon Wine depicts the sad irony in the life of the protagonist Mr. Thompson. Miss Porter has herself remarked:

"Noon Wine is a story of the most painful moral and emotional confusion in which everyone concerned is trying to do right. The painful moral and emotional confusions result largely from an inability on the part of Mr. Royal Earle Thompson and his wife Ellie Thompson to recognize fully and in time the truth about the situation they find themselves in". 1

In this connection, J.E. Hardy makes a general observation on the psychology of Miss Porter's characters:

"What all these characters have in common from Miranda of Pale Horse, Pale Rider to Royal Earle Thompson of Noon Wine is a consuming devotion to some idea of themselves — of their own inestimable worth and privilege which the circumstances of

1 Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources", The Yale Review, XLVI (1956) p. 57
Later reprinted in The Days Before.
their lives do not permit them to realize in actuality but which they are powerless to abandon. The idea lives in them like a demon, directing all their thoughts and actions. Whatever it may be ... they pursue it (this idea) relentlessly through all discomforts and deprivations, even to death — and if not to the death of the body then of the spirit, incapacitating themselves not only for love but for the enjoyment of any common good of life, to walk forever among strangers". 1

Noon Wine is Miss Porter's most objective work. Many critics rank it as the best of her stories. In Noon Wine, she has surpassed in some respects the limitations of the central thematic patterns which govern most of her works. There is gentle humour, seen in the stories rarely, and the single convincing portrayal in all the works, of normal love between husband and wife. It is a very original and brilliant work which reaches the height of tragedy.

The story of Noon Wine covers the events of nine years in the life of a family on a small South Texas farm. On a hot summer day in 1896, the owner of the farm — "a tough weatherbeaten noisy proud man" 2 named Mr. Royal Earle Thompson — is approached

1. John Edward Hardy; p. 63
by a stranger looking for work.

Accustomed to expecting the worst of all hired help, the lazy, shrewd Mr. Thompson agrees to take the man on at wages of seven dollars a month, plus lodging, and meals at the family table. The stranger, a Mr. Olaf Helton, accepts Mr. Thompson's offer without quibbling.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson soon discover the real bargain they have got in Helton. He is punctual, hardworking, frugal and efficient. He methodically tidies up the operation of the farm which the slovenly Thompson, blaming fate and his wife's chronic illness has allowed to fall into deplorable disorder.

Helton has no pleasure in anything except the lonely music he makes with his remarkable collection of harmonicas. The title of the story refers to his favourite Scandinavian drinking song, about a farm worker who improvidently drinks up during morning the bottle of wine he brought to the fields to have with his lunch.

Once a mild family crisis develops over Helton's
strangely violent reaction to be Thompson children's sneaking into his shack to try out the harmonicas. Mrs. Thompson is disturbed when she sees him shaking the frightened boys in a cold and silent fury. But both she and her husband are expedient in their attitude to Helton because they realise his economic value, and are also anxious about their children's delinquent tendencies. Although they are troubled by the incident, they prefer to stand by Helton. And as the years go by, the farm flourishes.

Nine years later a second stranger arrives.

There is something oddly and unpleasantly disconcerting about the man, for all his outward joviality, something indefinably sinister. He identifies himself as Mr. Homer T. Hatch, and, after a good deal of joke-cracking and random fat-chewing, tells Thompson that he has come to inquire about Olaf Helton.

The odd manners of this stranger make Mr. Thompson uneasy, and he wants to produce Helton immediately so that the stranger can be dispatched. But Hatch alternately provokes and mollifies Thompson through several rounds of conversation, and finally announces
in a roundabout way that he intends to arrest Helton.

It appears that the hired man is a fugitive from a lunatic asylum in North Dakota to which he was committed after killing his brother in a fit of rage, as he had borrowed and lost one of his harmonicas. Hatch had learned of his whereabouts from Helton's mother to whom he sent a large amount of money saved over the years. The story of the murder is shocking to Thompson, but he dislikes the shifty and patronizing Hatch.

The dizzying effects of the heat and his confused feelings provoke Thompson, and he orders him off the farm. In the meantime Helton appears suddenly from around the corner of the house and confronts Hatch with his fists raised. Hatch, armed now with his handcuffs in one hand and a knife in the other, charges Helton. And Thompson, thinking that he sees the knife plunge into the hired man's stomach, picks up an axe and strikes Hatch on the head with it.

Helton, it turns out, is not knifed. He runs away into the woods. But Hatch is dead. After the
sheriff arrives and a posse is formed to hunt down Helton, Thompson is arrested for murder. Helton dies later in jail from injuries inflicted by his captors when he tries to fight them off.

Thompson is tried and acquitted, but the episode breaks him, and a sense of guilt haunts him. He is morbidly convinced that all his neighbours take him for a murderer. For weeks he wearily drags himself and his wife around the countryside, calling on people somewhat like the Ancient Mariner, to ask them to listen to his story and to believe in his innocence.

Psychologically he is obsessed with guilt and it is obvious that he can never come to terms with the murder. His conscience is further burdened by a lie that he persuaded his wife to tell that she saw Hatch attack Helton. He feels at last there is no one but God to whom he can appeal for understanding and justice. Then one night, in the agony of his sleepless thoughts, he leaps out of bed, and his wife gets up screaming in a nightmare and collapses in a faint. He tries to arouse her when the boys awakened by her screams rush into the room and look at him accusingly, as if they
suspected that had struck their mother. This incident completely isolates him.

He rebukes them for their thought when she has recovered from her faint. He instructs them to take care of her, and on the pretense that he is going for the doctor, dresses up to leave the house. Taking along a lantern and a loaded shotgun and pencil and paper, he makes his way across the fields to the farthest boundary of his farm. There sitting against a fence post, he carefully composes his suicide note. Then he takes the shoe and sock off his right foot, props the gun against the fence with the muzzle pointing at his head, and gropes for the trigger with his big toe.

_Noon Wine_ is a tragedy of a good-hearted but weak man, brought upon him by the circumstances and some mysterious defect in himself. Helton brings Thompson good luck, but ironically he has to pay a great price for it. One may note the "tragic flaw", in his character. The man has an excessive concern for his standing in the eyes of others; he is a small
man, but proud. The scheming Hatch plays on this sensitive point. He tells him that harbouring an escaped lunatic "Won't look very good" to his neighbors, and "Mr. Thompson knew almost before he heard the words that it would look funny. It would put him in a mighty awkward position." After the murder, while a man less concerned with status-seeking would have kept his guilt obsession on a more personal level, Thompson takes the form of a compulsive need to explain because, like Mrs. Whipple in the story He, he has become so used to judging himself through the eyes of others that his self-justification must follow the same path. It is his excess of social sense which is condemned and which eventually causes the tragedy. He has an overactive mental state, but unfortunately he lacks the strength of character to accept the reality. As the suicide note reveals, he is also deeply disturbed by the fact that he has lied and caused his wife to lie in the trial which exonerated him.

The story obviously points toward the thematic

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1 In her essay on the story Noon Wine: The Sources, Miss Porter shows that she considers Thompson's pride rather typical of his social milieu. He is a man who had married slightly above himself and is intensely aware of social status.

2 Pale Horse Pale Rider, p. 15.
motif of oppression. The Thompsons are oppressed by the ironic good fortune by the presence of Malton, — first by his taciturnity, next by his harsh treatment of the boys, and finally by the flood of evil he brings upon them. The oppression motif, in fact, leads to the final tragedy.¹

The escape impulse lies in the portrayal of Thompson. He wants to get rid of the intense feelings of oppression, but his excessive deference to public opinion makes him a prisoner of society and a stern judge of all his neighbours. The sense of suffocation and oppression he experiences, is expressed in these words:

"Sometimes the air around him was so thick with their blame he fought and pushed with his fists, and the sweat broke out all over him, he shouted his story in a dust-choked voice, he would fairly bellow at last: "My wife, here, you know her, she was there, she saw and heard it all, if you don't believe me, ask her, she won't lie!" and Mrs. Thompson, with her hands knotted together, aching, her chin trembling, would never fail to say: "Yes, that's right, that's the truth."²

¹ William L. Nance, p. 60
² Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 106
Thompson's tragic fate seems to isolate him from his wife and sons. Even the sons avoid their father:

"Mr. Thompson did not like their silence. They had hardly said a word about anything to him since that day. They seemed to avoid him, they ran the place together as if he wasn't there and attended to everything without asking him for any advice".

Mr. Thompson's isolation is complete. The members of his family reject him. Although they want to forget the situation they cannot cope with, their own sense of right and wrong does not let them forget it. Having experienced the ultimate disillusion, he seems already claimed by death:

"Now lying on his bed, Mr. Thompson knew the end had come...there as was with his whiskers already sprouting since his shave this morning; with his fingers feeling his bony chin, Mr. Thompson felt he was a dead man. He was dead to his other life, he had got to the end of something without knowing why, and he had to make a fresh start, he didn't know how. Something different was going to begin, he didn't know what. It was in some way not his business. He didn't feel he was going to have much to do with it".

1 Ibid., p. 108
2 Ibid. p. 108
Thompson becomes utterly alone, ostracized by society, even by his wife and sons, and he is full of despair. Hence it is inevitable that since he is directly involved in this estranged situation, he should seek a violent solution to his problems. He shoots himself to escape from the sense of oppression. But ironically, as it is, till the end of his life he could not justify himself, and shooting himself had to be his final attempt to justify his killing because he cannot accept the real situation.

There is a strong suggestion in this story that what alienates Mr. Thompson from his family is his crime. In this sense, it is a traditional theme. It is not the circumstances of modern life but an "inexorable" moral law, which isolates him from his environment. What we see in this story is a crazy combination of character and circumstance to bring about a tragic end.

The *Downward Path to Wisdom* is one of the most poignant stories of Miss Porter. It conforms to the pattern of the *Miranda Stories* in several ways. The
theme of the story is also a child's confrontation with reality. It is evident that, in this story also, the family to which he belongs does not act as a connecting link between the child and the outside world. As a result the child's perception of the complexity of the adult world is a source of confusion for him.

This story enacts several of the crucial steps in a child's initiation into social life which is full of painful confusions and suffering. Stephen is an unwanted child whose emotionally retarded parents and relatives use him as a weapon in their neurotic conflicts. Nance regards The Downward Path to Wisdom as:

"a tragedy of pathos, for the inadequacy of Stephen's family leads him into a complete rejection, not maturely willed as in Miranda's case, but instinctive and inevitable, and calculated almost certainly to warp him into abnormality". 2

The real situation has been made more poignant

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1 H.J. Mooney; p. 52
2 William L. Nance; p. 63
by the misleadingly pleasant and friendly behaviour of his uncle David, which promises normal relationships. Stephen forgets the estrangement around him. But when he takes some of his balloons with him, he finds himself suddenly popular among the children. But uncle David humiliates him and calls him a thief. It becomes obvious that Stephen receives no wholesome love from his relatives. His mother, father, grandmother and uncle, instead of helping him to establish satisfactory relationships with others, create problems for him. Even the bullying nurse who looks after him most of the time teaches him a guilty fear of sex. His school relations are normal, the teacher is kind and the children are as fickle as children usually are. But his life within the home taints his life outside it and, at the end, he includes everyone in a blanket rejection. Driving home with his mother Stephen began suddenly to sing to himself, a quiet inside song so Mama would not hear. He sang his new secret; it was a comfortable sleepy song:

"I hate Papa, I hate Mama, I hate Grandma,"
I hate uncle David, I hate old Janet,
I hate Marjory, I hate Papa, I hate Mama.¹

and only after falling asleep he does relax and lean
against his mother.

The path to wisdom is a downward one; it is
also a path to despair. It shows that the betrayal
of Stephen is a betrayal of love to hatred. Stephen's
family is unknowingly insensitive to the emotional
needs of the four year old child. It defeats the
force of love and hope in him, and leads him to a
sterile and precocious cynicism.

This story recalls James Joyce's Portrait of The
Artist as a Young Man. The protagonist of Joyce
is also Stephen, who is alienated from his family
and has to seek out the meaning of life for himself.
Miranda's experiences in 'Miranda Stories' may be
compared with those of Stephen in The Downward Path to
Wisdom. In both the cases, the childhood experiences
lead to a painful initiation into life and to a
recoil from it.

¹ Katherine Anne Porter, The Leaning Tower and
Other Stories, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and World
Inc., 1944), p. 110
In *A Day's Work*, the middle aged New York Irish couple have a married daughter, but she no longer lives with them. In most respects, the life of the Hollorans runs true to the type of childless unions. The wife, Lacey, is vicious and puritanical, who has robbed her husband of his pride and manhood. Lacey's rigid pietism and propriety lead her to forbid him the kind of associations he would like to cultivate with men of the world. Thus her lopsided view offers him an excuse for his natural laziness, and he is condemned to embittered failure. Old before his time, out of work, reduced to begging drinks and money from petty politicians, Halloran is a study of the *uxorius* man who is hopelessly bound to his wife by soured love and enmity. Nance right observes:

"This story contains more unrelieved bitterness than any other story she [Miss Porter] has written. It is the example par excellence of the destructive union and of the degraded type of character who is doomed to remain in it. As in the several other stories, the basic flaw in the marriage is a failure of communication rooted in the wife's religion-sanctioned frigidity."  

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*Katherine Anne Porter and The Art of Reception*, William L. Nance; p. 64
Obviously, like the husband in That Tree, Holloran blames his wife for his failure to achieve success, ignoring his own laziness and incompetence, and like Rosaleen of The Cracked Looking Glass he builds a dream world to compensate for his failure and thus confirms himself in it.

A Day's Work has a powerful emotional force which results from its central theme of despair. The subordinate themes of the story such as the destructive nature of narrow morality and the transmission of evil through the generation also accompany the sense of despair. Escape is impossible for this couple, but Holloran asserts his desire for it vicariously by advising that his daughter escape from her unhappy marriage. Lacey, of course, favours perpetuation of the destructive union, and the story closes on a note of dull melancholy.

The Leaning Tower, conveys Miss Porter's premonition of disaster, communicated through the consciousness of the central character, Charles Upton. The story, as Theodore Spencer observes, "is the microscopic picture of Post-War Germany, its poverty,
desperation, fear, and incipient cruelty which is the
document of human life." 1

The story centres around an individual's search
for meaning and relationship in the face of public
catastrophe. It covers the experiences of Charles
Upton, an American art student and caricaturist, who
visits Germany in the 1930's in which Hitler is
beginning to rise to power. The major concentration
of the story is upon the city of Berlin, and the
character of the German people as seen by the young man.
Its simple plot records a suicide attempt by a young
German boarder in the house where Charles is staying,
several conversations in the rooming house, and a
long discussion of Germany, Europe and America at a
New Year's party in a newly opened cabaret.

Charles escapes from the artistic barrenness of
his home and country and seeking the romantically
ideal spot for his art-work, goes to Berlin. His
experiences in Germany isolate him from the Germans
and establish the reality of the German situation

1 Theodore Spencer, "Recent Fiction" (Review of
The Leaning Tower and Other
Stories), The Sewanee Review,
LIII, 1945, p. 301
with which he has to define his relationship. He finds the situation in Berlin frightening and full of despair. His experience with German land-ladies is uniformly unpleasant. He sees them as:

"...smiling foxes, famished wolves, slovenly house cats, mere tigers, hyenas, furies, harpies and sometimes worst of all they were sodden melancholy human beings who carried the history of their disaster in their faces".1

One may note here the sub-human imagery which emphasizes the central theme of the story.

Charles's desire not to get involved in unpleasant situations is normal enough, especially since his experiences in Berlin are extremely unpleasant, but ironically his attempt to escape one unpleasant situation leads him to another. After the unpleasant episode at the hotel, his search for a comfortable room ends at the boarding of Rosa Reichl, 'a fairly agreeable looking person of perhaps fifty years or more ...'2 "Though he does not like the room, he decides to take it since the landlady

1 The Leaning Tower, p. 162
2 Ibid., p. 163
looked human, and the price was not higher than he would be asked anywhere else for such a monstrosity".² Charles's conversation with her is pleasant until he accidentally breaks a plaster replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa on the table. Critics have offered various explanations of the symbolism of the tower, but at this point in the story it can be taken only as a memento of Rosa's honeymoon trip to Italy. Her honeymoon and her dead husband are associated in Rosa's memory with better days which, she is convinced, have gone forever. She is angry when Charles offers to replace the replica and tells him:

"It is not your fault, but mine, . . . 'I should never have left it here for —' She stopped short, and walked away carrying the paper in two cupped hands. For barbarians, for outlandish crude persons who have no respect for precious things, her face and voice said all too clearly". ²

Rosa's anger draws the reader's attention to the German preoccupation with their own sorrow and misfortune, a preoccupation which makes them unjust and violent in their responses to others. The

1 Ibid., p. 165
2 Ibid., p. 167
intolerable situation created by the defeat in war
makes them turn either to personal or national
memories of better days for compensation.

The complexity of the German situation and Charles's
inability to understand it are both made clear when on
New Year Eve, he with Bussen, Hans and Mey, goes to the
cabaret of Bussen's friends. The long discussion by
the four men of racial types, emphasize the tenusness
of their fellowship and their stiff attitudes toward the
Americans. Hence he fails to establish a relationship
with Germans. Finally, when he goes back to his room,
the sense of difference or oppression asserts itself
when he sees the Leaning Tower again. In the earlier
scene the tower symbolized the gulf between him and
Rosa and the Germans, but now its significance is
considerably enlarged:

"It stood there in its bold little frailness,
as if daring him to come on, how well he knew
that a thumb and forefinger would smash the
thin ribs, the mended spots would fall at a
breath. Leaning suspended, perpetually ready
to fall but never falling quite, the
venturesome little object — a mistake in the
first place, a whimsical pain in the neck
really, towers shouldn't lean in the first
place, a curiosity, like those cupids falling
off the roof — yet had some kind of meaning
in Charles's mind. Well, what? . . . what the
silly little thing reminded him of before?
There was an answer if he could think what it
was, but this was not the time. But just the same, there was something terribly urgent at work, in him, around him, he could not tell which. There was something perishable but threatening, uneasy, hanging over his head or stirring angrily, dangerously at his back. If he could not find out what it was that troubled him so in this place, may be he would never know. He stood there feeling his drunkeness as a pain and a weight on him, unable to think clearly but feeling what he had never known before, an infernal desolation of the spirit. . . .

This last passage of the story symbolically communicates his awareness of the Tower's frailty as well as permanence and symbolizes the precariousness of the German situation. One may also note and become aware of Charles's fear of the pervading violence and his inability to understand the significance of his apprehensions.

Mooney interprets The Leaning Tower quite convincingly:

"Like The Leaning Tower, the whole rotten structure of German society is hanging over Charles, ready to fall; and we now know how fully his premonition of disaster was justified. What Miss Porter has

1 The Leaning Tower, pp. 245 - 246
succeeded in capturing here is nothing less than the huge and public disasters of her time, their mysterious and terrible nature rendered clear and meaningful by her prose and through the medium of Charles Upton's consciousness”.  

But this is not the whole truth. It is not only the German situation, 'the huge and public disasters of her time' that the story tells us. It is also the story of Charles who is not merely a medium but the protagonist, and it is about that individual's vain attempts to integrate himself abroad after failing to do so at home.

All these stories discussed in this chapter are not only marked by a wide diversity of setting, material, style and structure, but also by a fundamental unity in the thematic pattern. In all of them, as the conditions created by the conflicts either in the family or in the general life of that period provide dramatic circumstances which lead to the alienation of the protagonist, and in general they all explore the recesses of human psyche and depict the experiences of isolation and despair.

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1 Harry John Mooney, p. 39