

WOMEN TRAPPED IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT IN KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S SHORT STORIES

Shim, Bang Ja *

I.

A. Walton Litz, who completely agrees with Frank O'Connor's opinion that the American short story is "a national art form," declares that "the history of the American short story is a faithful record of our [American] literary and cultural development."¹⁾ Litz and O'Connor's opinion show us the importance of the short story genre in the American literary history. Ever since "Rip Van Winkle" appeared in The Sketch Book by Washington Irving, many first-rate short story writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe and Herman Melville have appeared and made great achievements in the American short story form.

This tradition has also continued through the twentieth century, and many great American writers of this era have written first-rate short stories—William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck to name a few. Another important characteristic of the twentieth-century American short story is the appearance of many women writers and their brilliant accomplishments. Such women writers as Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Joyce Carol Oates are regarded as first-rate modern short story writers because they have revealed their sincere insights, bold technical innovations, and genuinely feminine subtlety and lyricism in their works.

Katherine Anne Porter is one of the most famous among these writers. Studying and introducing her literary world might be very meaningful to our society these days when the higher education for women has become wide-spread; and the numbers of women with professions, including those working in the world of letters, have remarkably increased.

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1) A. Walton Litz. Pref. to the First Edition, in *Major American Short Stories*, ed. A. Walton Litz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

II.

Katherine Anne Porter was born on May 15, 1890, at Indian Creek, Texas, the youngest of the three children of Harrison Boone Porter and Mary Alice Jones Porter. Her mother died when she was only two years old, and her family moved to live with her grandmother, Catherine Anne. The family farm was sold after Catherine Anne died. Katherine was educated in convent schools in Louisiana, but ran away from school at sixteen to get married. After the termination of this unfortunate marriage, she drifted about doing odd jobs in the literary world including journalism and gaining spiritual maturity from the experiences. She lived in New York, Mexico, Paris, and other places in the United States and in Europe for short periods. She worked as a reporter for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, before she became critically ill with influenza. At this time, it is said that she went to the doorstep of the Underworld. After her recovery, she did hack work and ghost writing. She visited Mexico and stayed there for some time. Fascinated by the country, she studied Mexican art. Her first book, Flowering Judas, and Other Stories was published in 1930. Pale Horse, Pale Rider was published in 1939 and The Leaning Tower, and Other Stories in 1944. Her long novel, Ship of Fools was published in 1962. She was awarded Guggenheim Fellowship and stayed in Mexico. Beginning in 1949, she was a guest lecturer at Stanford University, University of Chicago, University of Michigan and many other colleges and universities. In 1966 she received the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for fiction. She died on September 18, 1980.

Katherine Anne Porter is a highly personal writer, and her life is of great interest to any one studying her art. However, the facts about her personal life are veiled and scanty as George Hendrick points out.²⁾ Porter is said to have edited her life story as she might have shaped one of her short stories, rejecting certain experiences which she felt should not have happened and did not really belong to her, and substituting others which seemed more appropriate³⁾. She transformed herself and her personal history, creating Katherine Anne Porter, an aristocratic daughter of the Old South and the descendant of a distinguished statesman in place of Callie Porter, raised in poverty and obscurity.⁴⁾ In a word, she tried to give herself an image of her own fancy.

In her real life, Porter once referred to her father: "I have sometimes felt myself under

2) George Hendrick, Pref., in *Katherine Anne Porter* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1965).

3) Joan Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 20.

4) Givner, P. 16.

a curse with such father.” His neglect of the family left her with an insatiable hunger for masculine admiration; his wasted life increased her determination to “amount to something.” She was married four times: first to John Henry Koontz; secondly to Ernest Stock; thirdly to Eugene Dove Pressly; and fourthly to Albert Erskine. She also attracted numerous lovers including younger literary disciples during her life.

There were many people who influenced her personality. Erna Schlemmer Johns was not only her lifelong friends, but also represented her earliest ideals of beauty who provided her a glimpse of life, richer and fuller than her own. Both Kitty Barry Crawford and Jane Anderson influenced Porter in her desire to be a writer and journalist. Joseph Retinger became the model for Tadeusz Mey in the “The Leaning Tower.” Her friendship with Josephine Herbst was very important to her personal and literary growth. Charles Shannon became “the love of a lifetime,” the one man with whom she might have found lasting happiness had he not been married.

Porter had a deep-rooted didactic impulse and a natural penchant for teaching. Even at fifteen, she taught other children dancing and dramatic skills. She cherished her teaching experiences at the Academy Oaks school for tubercular children. She was proud of the fact that she never entered a university until invited there to teach and that she received many honorary degrees from universities. In 1952, Porter was invited to attend the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris and later joined the anti-communist organization. She had her literary aspirations for her nephew Paul and hoped that her own talent might be manifested in him. When he chose business against her will, she was extremely disappointed.

Her life was “a variation on that theme so persistent in the history and literature of her country— the American Dream,” as Joan Givner mentions.⁵⁾ In her acceptance speech at the American Academy of Arts and Letters for the National Institute's Gold Medal for Fiction, she said:

I had at first thought everything was going to come very easy, but it was a long war, and exhausting one, and I have a feeling now that this medal is a little bit like a laurel leaf put around my brow. . . .⁶⁾

Though she started life with nothing and reached extraordinary pinnacles of fame and

5) Givner, P. 17.

6) Givner, P. 476.

fortune, she could not remain always in public view. Inevitably, she had to return to her private world and face who she really was and what her life and loves had been.⁷⁾

Among many things Porter has said about her career, perhaps the following statement is the most quoted:

I am the grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation.⁸⁾

However, she was not a regionalist or historical novelist, but instead she was preoccupied with the transformation of all life into art.⁹⁾

III.

The actual volume of Katherine Anne Porter's artistic work is "relatively small but of extremely high quality" and Porter has a special place in modern American literature.¹⁰⁾ Not only the high quality of Porter's work but also "the brevity of her canon" and "apparent diversity" have been regarded highly by many literary critics and her fellow writers.¹¹⁾ Concerning the exceptionally high quality of Porter's fiction, M.M. Liberman lists her "historical-biographical means," and gives "exclusive attention to her serious and universal themes" with "analysis of her striking use of mythic material" and "its formal properties, verbal and rhetorical."¹²⁾

Porter, who befits a classical modern artist, is often compared with Henry James because both of them have conscientious concern for their styles and both of them were writers of great subtlety. V. S. Pritchett, referring to Porter's power, points out that she "belongs to the explicit Jamesian period and suggests the whole rather than the surface of a life." Pritchett asserts that Porter is "an important writer in the genre because she solves the

7) Givner, P. 511.

8) Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1967), P. 39.

Hoffman quotes Porter's own word from "Portrait: Old South," in *The Days Before* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), P. 155.

9) Hoffman, P. 40.

10) Hendrick, Preface.

11) Jane Kruse Demouy, *Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), PP. 3-4.

12) M.M. Liberman, *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1971), P. 7.

essential problem: how to satisfy exhaustively in writing briefly.”¹³⁾ George Hendrick declares that Porter is correct in her estimation: she is an artist, and introduces Porter's own words of 1958, “I am one of the few living people not afraid to pronounce that word. . . .”¹⁴⁾ Any qualified reader might notice that Porter's stories show a mastery of technique, honesty, and an exploration of the human personality and society itself. From the beginning of her literary career, Porter began writing her stories with fully developed, mature form.

Porter's themes, as James William Johnson suggests, are as follows: “of the individual within his heritage”; of “unhappy marriages and the accompanying self-delusion”; of “the death of love”; of “man's slavery to his own nature and subjugation to a human fate which dooms him to suffering and disappointment.”¹⁵⁾ Warren points out a peculiar similarity between Porter and William Faulkner as follows:

They both turned to the past. . . to an informed and moralized, not romanticized, past; both in the end tell a story of the passing of the Old Order and the birth of a New Order. . . saw in it certain human values now in Jeopardy, . . . the sense of the responsible individual . . . man's loss of his sense of community and sense of basic relation to nature.¹⁶⁾

Porter introduced her themes in a skillful manner through the use of accepted mythical concepts. In regard to this, Ray B. West Jr. overestimates Porter that she is superior even to Hawthorne and Melville, for all their superlative qualities, whose central themes would be overlooked by their common readers.¹⁷⁾

Porter's one long novel, Ship of Fools, written over a period of thirty years, is about a voyage from Veracruz to Bremerhaven, Germany in 1931. In Ship of Fools, the ship symbolizes the world, and its passengers are strangers to each other. What fixes our attention is “the self-centered cruelty” we see in these passengers, and what is left out are “the possibilities of sympathy.”¹⁸⁾ Porter asserts in Ship of Fools: first, independence is

13) V.S. Pritchett, “The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter” in *Katherine Anne Porter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren. (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), Twentieth Century Views, P. 111.

14) Hendrick, P. 153.

Hendrick quotes from *Texas Observer*, Oct. 31, 1958, P. 6.

15) Hendrick, P. 154.

16) Robert Penn Warren, “Introduction” in *Katherine Anne Porter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren (N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979), P.8.

17) Ray B. West, Jr., *The Short Story in America 1900-1950* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1952), P. 75.

18) Jacqueline Hoefler, “Katherine Anne Porter” in *Contemporary Novelists* (London, New York: St. James/St. Martin's Press, 1977), PP. 1101-2.

lonely and refusing to love breeds insensitivity; and secondly, collective loneliness and failure to love have sinister, staggering implications for human survival.¹⁹⁾ There are many controversial criticisms on this novel: some say that Porter abandoned her high artistic standards to gain popularity in this novel, but some insist that this novel is one of the major achievements of our time. Hendrick regards it as “a candid, frank, realistic, symbolic story which brings together all of Miss Porter’s knowledge of the world and its people”, and he highly acknowledges Porter’s artistic powers in it.²⁰⁾

Katherine Anne Porter is most famous as a short story writer and she is one of the best short-story writers to come into Prominence in the 30’s. Arthur Voss quotes Warren’s remark that she is “a writer whose artistry and originality entitle her to rank with such acknowledged masters of the modern short story as Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Anderson, and Hemingway.”²¹⁾

Porter’s stories, written in “English of a purity and precision almost unique in contemporary American fiction,” show us “human relations in their constantly shifting phases and in the moments of which their existence is made.”²²⁾ In Edmund Wilson’s opinion, Porter’s short stories can be divided into three groups: first, “the studies of family life in working-class or middleclass households”; secondly, “pictures of foreign parts”; and thirdly, “stories about women—particularly her heroine Miranda.”²³⁾ In the first group, there are two stories in The Leaning Tower, which, in spite of the fact that Porter is sympathetic with her people, tend to be rather bitter and bleak. These stories seem to be less satisfactory than the best of her other stories. In the second group, Porter is much more successful. These stories are examples of what Porter means when she says, in her forward to Flowering Judas in the Modern Library edition, that most of her “energies of mind and spirit have been spent in the effort to grasp the meaning” of the threats of world catastrophe in her time, “to trace them to their sources and to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western World.” Pale Horse, Pale Rider belongs to the third group, which is said to be the most interesting, most wonderful, and most significant of all her stories. If the meaning of these stories is elusive, it is because the natural and essential human spirit is so hard to isolate or pin down.

19) Demouy, P. 204.

20) Hendrick, P. 155.

21) Arthur Voss, *The American Short Story: A Critical Survey* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1973), P. 288.

22) Edmund Wilson, “Katherine Anne Porter” in *K.A.P.* ed. Warren, P. 126.

23) Wilson, “Katherine Anne Porter” in *K.A.P.* ed. Warren, PP. 127-8.

IV

Practically, all of Porter's protagonists are women. Thus, many famous critics as Wilson, Cleanth Brooks, Warren, Liberman, Jane Flanders and Judith Fetterley note the significance of Porter's stories about women.²⁴⁾ Porter's fiction chronicles what she discovers about who she was, what her feminine identity meant and how women were affected psychologically by attitudes in their society and the other women they encountered. Reading Porter's work from the viewpoint of feminine psychology provides a unity to her work" and "a sensitive prophesy for contemporary femininity."²⁵⁾

Moreover, the women in Porter's fiction deserve to be studied for "the richness of characterization in them" and for "what they reveal about the psychic experience of womanhood."²⁶⁾ Three stories are selected in this study to explain the variety of Porter's women struggling in their environment: "Rope," "He," and "Flowering Judas."

"Rope"

"Rope" is a wonderfully comic and satirical depiction of a domestic altercation by a young married couple over a very trivial matter. The man and the woman in "Rope" are unnamed and undescribed. The two characters and the narrator speak in the third person and the past tense: "He thought there were a lot of things a rope might come in handy for. She wanted to know what, for instance."²⁷⁾ This technique gives a distancing effect as if the reader were watching a film of the incident.²⁸⁾ The wife in this story wants comfort, order in her life, and time to do the work she thinks is important. She is restricted by their lack of money, by the clutter of an unorganized household, and by the trivial chores of housework. The problem is that she is frustrated and he cannot comprehend it. They are tied together in marriage; but, in their love-hate relationship, they are hanging onto each other, giving one another enough rope for hanging, forcing the other on the ropes, and each is at the end of his or her rope.²⁹⁾ When he forgot to bring home the coffee she had

24) Demouy, P. 5.

25) Demouy, P. 15.

26) Demouy, P. 206.

27) Katherine Anne Porter, "Rope" in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York & London: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1958), P. 42.

28) Demouy, P. 41.

29) Hendrick, P. 95.

been looking forward to and brought rope instead, she takes the fact as a proof that he doesn't care for her. He returned to the store two miles away for her coffee, for the laxative, and for the other items she suddenly remembered. He took the rope to exchange it, but secretly hid it behind a rock. When he appeared again, rope in hand, she had changed and offered an apology. Although they are temporarily reconciled, their burdens are still with them, for she is not completely satisfied.

The following quotation from the story shows us her frustrated psyche originating from the harsh reality that she confronted: "The whole trouble with her was she needed something weaker than she was to heckle and tyrannize over." (p. 44)

The rope her husband still carries with him symbolizes her husband still wants to maintain his pride and dominance in his household. Accordingly the final scene means that the reconciliation between the husband and wife is based on his condescension and her concession.

"He"

"He" portrays the attitude of a mother toward her mentally retarded son. Its central figure, Mrs. Whipple, is a family woman with family responsibilities. She doesn't possess any confidence nor any sense of her own identity. Lacking talent and self-knowledge, she has no direction in life and lacks the grit by which Porter women survive.³⁰⁾ In her view, respectable people are able to feed their families, look prosperous, and love their children. The difficulty is that in trying for these things Mrs. Whipple must deceive not only her neighbours but herself. For she is really poor, and she does not love him—not in the way she imagines she should.³¹⁾ She is unable to call Him by any given name. When He bolts from the sight of her butchering a suckling pig, she ignores it. When He refuses to come to the dinner table when the roasted piglet is set out, she brushes it off. Ignoring His demonstrations of human feeling, she is able to treat Him like an animal or "like an ax brought in to do the heavy work, a creature impervious to pain and fatigue."³²⁾ He must keep the bees, lead home dangerous bulls, and steal the suckling pig from its angry sow. As they get "poorer and poorer" and the farm seems "to run down of itself," He develops latent pneumonia, begins to limp and, finally, to have seizures. The local doctor

30) Demouy, P. 36.

31) Hoefler, "Katherine Anne Porter" in *C.N.* P. 1099.

32) Demouy, P. 37.

puts an end to Mrs. Whipple's maternity by admitting Him to the county home, where "He'll have good care and be off your hands." Mrs. Whipple has not been changed by adversity. But His crying touches her deeply and unexpectedly. She admits the love and guilt and resentment that she really feels. She also admits that these complicated feelings are rooted in a truly "very hard" life—it is "a mortal pity He was ever born."

However, after the reluctant confession of their hard life, Mrs. Whipple returns to her false pride and hypocrisy as expressed in the following; "it ain't as if He was going to stay forever," said Mrs. Whipple to the neighbor. "This is only for a little while." (p. 58) Although there is scanty hope of their improving their life, Mrs. Whipple still consoles herself by escaping into an illusion of their better future.

"Flowering Judas"

"Flowering Judas" is the best of her Mexican stories, and one of the finest of all twentieth-century stories. Porter's own account of the composition of this famous story provides a key to its meaning:

"Flowering Judas" was written between seven o'clock and midnight of a very cold December, 1929, in Brooklyn. The experiences from which it was made occurred several years before, in Mexico, just after the Obregon Revolution.

All the characters and episodes are based on real persons and events, but naturally, as my memory worked upon them and time passed, all assumed different shapes and colors, formed gradually around a central idea, that of self-delusion, the order and meaning of the episodes changed, and became in a word fiction.³³⁾

The character study of a young woman conveys its meaning and this story achieves its comic, ironic, and poignant effects through refined style and symbolism in a highly subtle and complex way. The conflict used as its theme is explicit: Laura, an idealistic American girl with a Roman Catholic background, has gone to Mexico to work for the revolutionary cause, but her experience has disillusioned her. She is betrayed, perplexed and in agony, but she cannot come out of the trap.

The story is written in the present tense so that it evokes "the alert concentration of the conscious mind" and establishes "its intensity by calling up the complex psychological associations behind each action and each comment."³⁴⁾

33) Hendrick, P. 39. Hendrick quotes from Whit Burnett, *This Is My Best* (New York: Dial Press, 1942), pp. 539-40.

34) Demouy, P. 81.

The well-fed, self-loving, expedient, yet skillful and courageous revolutionary leader, Braggioni, symbolizes for Laura her many disillusionments:

The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusionments, for a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues. This is nonsense, she knows it now and is ashamed of it. Revolution must have leaders, and leadership is a career for energetic men. She is, her comrades tell her, full of romantic error, . . . (p. 91)

The discrepancies of Braggioni as a revolutionary leader are his "love of small luxuries," "taste for elegant refinements," "expensive garments," and power to indulge all these opposites. However, despite this realization, Laura cannot escape and save herself and others.

Braggioni's image as a false Messiah is shown as follows:

He [Braggioni] says to her [Braggioni's wife] tenderly: "You are so good, please don't cry any more, you dear good creature." She says, "Are you tired, my angel? Sit here and I will wash your feet". (P. 101)

In this scene Braggioni and his wife parallel Christ and Magdalene. But Braggioni fails to ensure redemption for anybody.

The following quotation shows us how Braggioni betrays his people:

"Where do you think we can find money, or influence?" they are certain to answer, "Well, there is Braggioni, why doesn't he do something?" . . . But Braggioni says, "Let them sweat a little. The next time they may be careful. It is very restful to have them out of the way for a while." (p. 94)

Laura feels betrayed, but she fails to take a decisive action and save herself as can be seen in the following:

... she can not help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be, and at times she is almost contented to rest in this sense of grievance as a private store of consolation. Sometimes she wishes to run away, but she stays. (pp. 91-92)

In Laura's nightmarish dream at the end of the story, the figure of Eugenio, the young revolutionary who took an overdose of the drugs she brought to him in prison, appears to her and offers her the flowers of the Judas tree, a symbol of betrayal. When she greedily eats them, he calls her "Murderer" and "Cannibal." This incident demonstrates that Laura is a betrayer not only of others but also of herself:

Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner, said Eugenio in a voice of pity, take and eat: and from the Judas tree he stripped the warm bleeding flowers, and held them to her lips. She saw that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small white petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light, but she ate flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst. Murderer! said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood. Laura cried No! and at the sound of her own voice, she awoke trembling, and was afraid to sleep again. (p. 102)

This dream made explicit her subconscious apprehension that she is leading her life in a wrong way. She realized for the first time her betrayal of herself and of her religious, ethical, and humanitarian principles.³⁵⁾ There are many layers of betrayal in the story. Unable to act according to her own values, Laura confronts reality in her nightmare.³⁶⁾

The title of the story, "Flowering Judas," occurs in Eliot's "Gerontion." Laura is as the old man in "Gerontion," a wasteland figure, outside of religion, revolution, and love. Therefore, the theme of the story may be stated: "Only in faith and love can man live."³⁷⁾

V

Porter had a discerning and perceptive eye in reading the psyche of American women struggling in their environment. Some of her women have become victims trapped in their environment because they are blinded by their own prejudices and flaws. Some women feel unsatisfied with their reality, but they chose to compromise with resignation. A few women achieve spiritual growth with keen perception and sensibility despite the undergoing hardships in their life. As Porter herself revealed, she also struggled to rise in the world in miserable environment in her early life.

Indeed, the variety of women portrayed in Porter's short stories is impressive, ranging from a very young girl to an old, dying woman. In addition, Porter always implies her sympathy and understanding for her women characters, though with subtlety. Porter well knows loneliness and frustration felt by women trapped in their environment.

In this research, three stories depicting women suffering in harsh reality are chosen to illustrate Porter's genuine sympathy for the unfortunate American women of her day. These stories, much anthologized are selected to explain the variety of Porter's women characters and her excellence in portraying women's psyche.

She (the young woman) in "Rope" is a newly married bride. But her sordid reality and

35) Hendrick, P. 42.

36) Demouy, P. 92.

37) Hendrick, P. 41.

callous husband make her disillusioned and unhappy. Isolated and lonely in her farm, she leads an unsatisfactory life. Nevertheless, she settles into compromise with her reality. She flatters her husband and accepts his decision to buy the rope which symbolizes his obstinacy.

Mrs. Whipple in "He" is a pathetic figure victimized by her own flaws as well as her environment. Immersed in her false illusions, she fails to perceive the reality surrounding herself and her family. Thus she fails to give the necessary care and love to her retarded child, He, and leads him and herself to deeper misery. To the end she cannot break out of her illusions and face the reality with courage and determination.

Laura in "Flowering Judas" goes to Mexico in pursuit of her high ideals. She has idealized the revolution as the just means to liberate common people. But the reality that she confronts in Mexico is far from her expectations. Instead of heroic revolutionary leaders, she meets with false, selfish leaders such as Braggioni. However, in spite of her disillusionment and perplexity, she does not have the courage to break out of her illusions. She remains in Mexico and fails to save herself.

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한 글 초 록

Katherine Anne Porter의 단편에 나타난 여인상

심 방 자

20세기 미국 단편문학의 특징의 하나는 뛰어난 여류작가들의 등장이다. 많은 여류작가들 중에서도 Katherine Anne Porter는 흔들리지 않는 자리를 차지하고 있다. 기교의 뛰어난과 섬세한 심리묘사에 있어서는 Henry James와 비교될 수 있는 작가라는 평을 듣는 Katherine Anne Porter는 많은 작품을 끊임없이 양산하는 작가는 아니다. 그러나 그녀의 단편소설은 하나하나가 주옥같은 작품이고 타작이 없다는 평을 듣고 있다. 그녀의 말년의 야심작인 *The Ship of Fools*에 관해서는 비평적인 논란이 있지만 Katherine Anne Porter가 20세기의 위대한 미국의 단편작가의 하나라는 점에서는 이의가 없다.

Katherine Anne Porter의 단편소설속에는 많은 여인들이 등장한다. 이들 여인들의 대부분이 그들의 현실에 만족하지 못하고 실의와 좌절속에서 몸부림치고 있는 사람들이다. Katherine Anne Porter는 이들 불행한 여인들에게 대해 깊은 관심과 동정심을 갖고 있고, 이를 작품속에서 은근하고 섬세한 수법으로 암시하고 있다. Katherine Anne Porter 자신이 어린 소녀시절부터 작가로서 대성하기까지의 청춘시절을 빈곤과 고독속에서 보낸 경험이 있다. 따라서 Katherine Anne Porter는 자기와 동시대의 미국여인들이 암담한 환경속에서 살면서 느끼는 비애를 잘 알고 있는 작가이고, 또 이들 여인들의 비극을 작품속에서 생생하게 부각시켰다.

본 연구에서는 Katherine Anne Porter의 단편중에서 가장 많이 읽히는 세 작품 “Rope” “He”, “Flowering Judas” - 을 선정하여 그녀의 작품세계의 특질을 연구하고자 한다. 이들 세작품은 모두 현대 미국 여성들의 비극적인 삶을 소재로 삼고 있다. 이 세작품 속에 등장하는 여인들은 일차적으로는 그들의 환경의 희생자로 볼 수 있다. 그러나 그에 못지 않게 주목해야 할 점은 그들의 비극이 그들의 허황한 환상과 그들 자신 속에 내재하고 있는 어떤 결함과도 관련이 있다는 점이다. 물론 이 세작품의 여주인공들의 환경과 성격이 다르므로, 이 세 여주인공의 인생행로도 판이하다. 그러나 이들이 모두 불행한 여인들이며, 작가 Katherine Anne Porter가 이들을 딱하게 여기고 있다는 점은 공통인 것이다.

“ Rope ”에 나오는 것 결혼한 새댁은 가난하고 외로운 신혼 살림 속에서 행복한 결혼 생활에 대한 환상이 여지없이 무너지는 비극을 맛본다. 믿었던 남편조차 너무나 자기중심적이어서 그녀의 고통을 이해하지 못한다. 그러나 현실을 박차고 새로운 생활을 개척하는 대신에 그녀는 남편의 비위를 맞추고 남편의 고집을 받아들임으로서 현실과의 타협을 모색하는 것이다.

“ He ”에 나오는 Mrs Whipple은 그녀가 가난한 사람이라는 현실을 인정하려들지 않는다. 그녀의 그릇된 자존심은 그녀와 그녀의 가족, 특히 그중에서도 그녀의 불쌍한 아들 He를 더욱 더 비참한 생활로 몰고 가게 하는 것이다.

“ Flowering Judas ”에 나오는 Laura는 혁명에 대해 막연하고 낭만적인 환상을 품고 있었다. Laura는 자기의 꿈이 현실화되는 것을 보기 위해 Mexico로 왔지만 그녀가 맞부딪친 현실은 그녀의 이상과는 너무나도 맞지 않는다. 극도의 실망과 환멸에도 불구하고 Laura는 Mexico를 떠나지 못하고 자기 자신의 구원의 길을 모색하지 못하는 비극적인 인물인 것이다.

