Flowering Judas Study Guide

Flowering Judas by Katherine Anne Porter

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Introduction

Katherine Anne Porter allegedly wrote "Flowering Judas" in a single evening in December of 1929. After writing the story, she then rushed out after midnight that same night to mail it to the literary magazine *Hound and Horn.* Regardless of this anecdote's accuracy, it is indisputable that "Flowering Judas" represented an artistic breakthrough for Porter. The next year—1930—she named her debut collection of short stories after this richly symbolic tale of an alienated young American woman set in Mexico City just after the Mexican Revolution. *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* garnered enthusiastic critical praise. Reviewers were consistently impressed with Porter's original narrative style, her complex and tightly controlled symbolism, and her beautifully intricate language. "Flowering Judas" remains a staple of anthologies and is considered one of the best works of a master of the short story form. Its complex symbolism has intrigued several generations of readers and scholars.

The character of Laura, the story's protagonist, is set against that of Braggioni, a corrupt revolutionary leader who is courting her. The story takes place during an evening they spend together, as Braggioni's singing and conversation mirrors Laura's growing disenchantment with the revolutionary ideal that brought her to Mexico. Laura, a former Catholic, rejects the hypocrisy of the socialist revolutionaries who have come to power and she rejects the advances of Braggioni and several other ardent suitors, which leads to a crisis of faith and a sense of acute isolation. The theme of lost faith is amplified through the story's Christian imagery, central to which is the complex figure of the flowering Judas, named for Christ's betrayer.

Author Biography

Porter was born Callie Russell Porter on May 15, 1890, in a two-room log cabin in the Texas frontier community of Indian Creek. Porter's mother died when she was two and her father brought his five children to live with his mother, Catherine Anne. Later, Porter took her grandmother's name. When the grandmother died in 1901 the family suffered from emotional and financial instability. Porter and her sister helped support the family by giving singing and acting lessons, and she aspired to be an actress.

After the family resettled in San Antonio, Porter attended a private Methodist school for two years, which comprised her only formal education. The Porters were Methodists, though Porter later claimed that she had been raised Catholic. She converted to Catholicism upon her marriage, at age sixteen, to a Catholic man.

Porter was a free spirit who defied convention. At age 25 she left her husband and set out to pursue an acting career. She worked at a movie studio in Chicago and as a traveling singer-dancer in Louisiana. Her life's course took an important turn in 1918 when she became seriously ill with influenza and nearly died. She reevaluated her goals and emerged with a new aspiration to be a writer. She found work as a reporter in Denver and then moved to New York City where she met a group of young Mexican artists and revolutionaries. In 1920 she went to Mexico City to witness the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and to gather material for her fiction. The first short story she published in 1922, "Maria Conception," was set in Mexico and inspired by events she observed during this visit.

In 1930 Porter published *Flowering Judas and Other Stories,* the work that established her critical reputation. The following year she won a Guggenheim Fellowship, which allowed her to return to Mexico and then to travel extensively in Europe. She continued to write, working on short stories, a biography, and a novel, but published only sporadically, often distracted by love affairs, politics, and illness. She returned to the United States and continued to live a nomadic life, traveling from one teaching position to another. Her next several books of short stories, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *The Leaning Tower* solidified her reputation as a masterful stylist. With her 1962 novel, *Ship of Fools,* she became a best-selling author. In 1966 she received a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award for her *Collected Stories.*

Porter was a beautiful, charismatic woman with a tendency toward self- dramatization. Though she lived an exceptionally independent life for a woman of her generation, she was at times paralyzed by a chaotic personal life. She had numerous lovers and married four times, twice to men far younger than she. Despite her success as a writer, she remained insecure about her lack of education and poor Texas upbringing. Some facts of her biography remain uncertain because Porter was evasive about many aspects of her life and misleading about others. She died in 1980 at age ninety.

Plot Summary

A young American woman, Laura has come to Mexico City in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution in order to work for the revolutionary cause, in support of a socialist regime. She is a schoolteacher and also acts as a go-between for the local revolutionary leader, Braggioni, and his adherents. Braggioni has a personal interest in the lovely but cold young woman and he pays her nightly visits, hoping to seduce her. As the story opens, Braggioni is in Laura's room, singing to her. It is the end of the day and Laura is tired, but she receives Braggioni's attention politely, not wishing to offend the powerful man.

There is little action in the story. The events are mostly internal, as Braggioni's terrible singing and bantering conversation triggers Laura's thoughts and emotions. Laura knows that Braggioni would like to seduce her and that she "must resist tenaciously without appearing to resist." She finds him grossly sensual and corrupt, but Braggioni is a local hero, embodying all of the hypocrisy that threatens the ideals of the socialist revolution. Laura longs to flee from him and from the disillusioning cynicism of the revolutionaries, but she sees no other option than to continue her commitment.

As they sit together, Braggioni flaunts his elegant clothing, telling Laura that she is more like him than she realizes and warning her that she will be as disappointed in life as he is. Laura wonders about her devotion to the cause, thinking about her duties teaching English to Indian children, attending union meetings, and delivering messages and supplies to political prisoners. Despite her disgust with Braggioni's blatant hypocrisy, Laura has her own lapses as good socialist. The revolutionaries are politically opposed to the Catholic Church, but Laura sometimes goes to church and prays, though she is no longer faithful. She also has a secret love of luxury, favoring handmade lace, which also runs counter to socialist ideology.

Braggioni continues to sing to Laura and flirt with her. Laura has had several suitors in Mexico in addition to Braggioni. She has skillfully rebuffed the pass of a former soldier in the army of another revolutionary faction. She draws a parallel between this "rude folk-hero" and the children she teaches, who express a surprising and unrequited affection for her.

The other suitor is a young union activist who serenades her according to the Mexican tradition. Laura's maid advised her to toss him a flower from the Judas tree outside her window in order to stop his singing. She does this, not realizing that this is actually a signal of encouragement. The young man continues to follow and watch her. She ignores him, but does not regret her mistake. She maintains an attitude of stoicism and negativity in all of her interactions.

Braggioni goes on to tell her about the confrontation planned for the next day in the nearby town of Morelia, where a Catholic festival for the Blessed Virgin will coincide with a celebration of labor activism by the Socialists. He predicts violence and asks her to clean and oil his weapons, which she does obediently. She returns his guns to him and,

with uncharacteristic boldness, tells him to "go kill someone in Morelia, and you will be happier." She then reveals that a prisoner, one of Braggioni's adherents, whom she had visited earlier that night, had committed suicide by taking sleeping pills she had brought to him the day before. Braggioni pretends indifference, but he leaves abruptly and reconciles with his wife.

After Braggioni leaves, Laura undresses and goes to bed, plagued by oppressive feelings of guilt and alienation. When she finally falls asleep she has a disturbing dream. The prisoner who committed suicide is beckoning her from the house. She says she will follow him only if she can hold his hand, but when he refuses her, calling her a murderer, she follows him anyway. He offers her flowers from the Judas tree to eat, and when she consumes them greedily he again calls her a murderer and cannibal. She awakens to the sound of her own voice crying "No!" and is afraid to fall asleep again.

Summary

Laura, a twenty-two- year old North American woman, is living in Mexico and earning a living working for the self-absorbed leader of a revolution, Braggioni (braggart). He courts her by coming to her home in the evening and singing to her, although she manages to resist his sexual advances. He is a powerful and cruel man, and she must tolerate his attentions even though she is holding on to her virginity, determined that she will yield only if her life depends on it. His musical talents are poor, but she passively sits and listens to his annoying love songs. He has moved out of his home and away from his wife for a month while he courts Laura.

He is overweight and disgusting to her, not her concept of what a revolutionist should be. He affords luxury for himself even though he is leading a revolution of workers whose living scale does not match his, and is proud that he can wear Jockey Club perfume imported from New York. He has been coming and singing to her every evening during this month of separation from his wife. She has mixed feelings of revulsion, fear and despair, and dreads the inevitable outcome of his courtship. She feels that she is as corrupt as he is because she permits him to continue to court her.

Braggioni is a successful professional revolutionary and lover of humanity. "He will never die of it," we are told. "He has the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness, the sharpness of wit, the hardness of heart, stipulated for loving the world profitably. He will live to see himself kicked out from his feeding trough by other hungry world-saviors." He has no respect for the men he is working to rescue. "They are stupid, they are lazy, they are treacherous, they would cut my throat for nothing," he tells Laura.

Laura's apparel is nun-like blue serge with a round collar, which conceals a voluptuous figure. Although the revolution is against the Catholic Church, she goes from time to time and kneels in an out of the way chapel to say a Hail Mary on a rosary she has bought in Tehuantepec. She deliberately avoids the adornment of lace on her collars even though she likes fine lace. The group she is representing in Mexico is a women's union that is protesting to improve their ability to produce machine-made lace. Laura acknowledges to herself that she is a hypocrite and again senses her own corruption. She has escaped a life that was bad enough that her life in Mexico is preferable.

She teaches children, who profess to love their "titcher," although she remains aloof from them. They bring her flowers and write love notes that they embellish with drawings of flowers on the blackboard with their colored chalks. "They make of her desk a fresh garden of flowers every day." Even so, she feels no emotional involvement with them.

She has many suitors but does not yield to any of them. They wonder why she is in Mexico and find creative ways to court her. One comes to sing to her in her courtyard. When she throws him a flower at the suggestion of Lupe, the Indian maid, he doesn't go away as the maid said he would, but stalks her. He follows her on the streets; wherever she goes, she is aware that he is watching her. He begins to compose poems and have

them printed. She knows that he will tire of all of this soon and go on to another love interest, so she is annoyed but not afraid.

Another takes her for a horseback ride. When he tries to precipitate a romantic encounter by dismounting and loosening her foot from the stirrup, she "accidentally" spurs the horse and it gallops away. The romantic young man is left to recapture his horse, which has also galloped away.

The wife Braggioni has temporarily left organizes the women who work in the cigarette factory. She does not respect his desire to be free and weeps, and mourns when he separates himself from her to court another woman. Laura must tolerate his attentions and his wife must suffer his desertion.

There is to be a Catholic celebration and Braggioni is expecting violence, so he asks Laura to oil and load his pistols, which she does. He strokes the pistol as it lies in her hands. She tells him to go and kill somebody and he will be happier.

Braggioni returns to his wife, and Laura knows that she will now have some peace and freedom. However, she is filled with foreboding because she knows that her life is in jeopardy. He has already warned her that he doesn't bear rejection without retaliation, that women have suffered because of their rejection of his love.

Laura runs errands for Braggioni and carries messages to operatives both on the streets and in jail. She also takes drugs to imprisoned revolutionaries. She tells Braggioni that one of these, Eugenio, has deliberately overdosed on pills she has taken him, and when she went to see him, he was going into a death stupor. The story ends with a dream/nightmare Laura has about Eugenio where he is leading her to death by way of a Judas tree. He takes the red flowers from the tree and and tells her to eat them. ". . . he stripped the warm bleeding flowers and held them to her lips. . . she ate the flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst." Eugenio says, "Murderer!" and "Cannibal! This is my body and my blood."

Analysis

This is a story about a young woman on a tightrope of her own choosing. She did not have to come to Mexico in the first place, and she has sought out this revolutionary cause even though she seems to have no passion for it. Her impassivity dominates the story. The children respond to her with love, but she has no feeling for them. She is courted by an array of attractive suitors, yet she remains passive. She has put herself in a precarious position, being courted unsuccessfully by a powerful, cruel, and dangerous man.

The conflicts are between a very dangerous world and this young woman who is likely to be a victim to the violence around her. There is no climax to the story. She continues to walk the fine line between life and death in this environment. The story ends, and we do not know what the outcomes of the conflicts will be. We only know that she will go back out into the dangerous streets and that when Braggioni once again beckons her,

she will go to him. It seems almost certain that she will either become his mistress, which will carry its own dangers, or he will run out of patience with her resistance and do away with her. The pistol is a sexual symbol and a graphic clue to the inevitable outcome of this tension between her and Braggioni. He requires her to clean and polish it and he strokes it while it lies in her lap. The message he sends is clear to Laura. The crude handling of the guitar and the pitiful melodies suggest the nature of the sexual encounter that is awaiting her. Even so, there is also the suggestion that Laura, a young woman who is making her own life choices, may continue to find ways of avoiding having sex with him, or that even if she must give up her virginity for her life, that she will survive it and overcome.

The Judas is a form of the redbud tree and is said to be named for the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Legend has it that he hanged himself from one of these trees and that the white blossoms turned red with blood or shame. Laura's betrayal is of herself. She has sold out. She is not emotionally involved in this revolution. She is merely being used by those who have a stake in it. She goes through the motions of being Catholic, but she is Catholic in name only and is simply using the rituals as a way of resisting, in a small way, a revolution that she does not believe in. She loves fine lace, just as Braggioni loves luxuries such as Jockey Club imported perfume, but she is again betraying herself in pretending in her dress not to desire such things. She has no commitment to Marxism, but she uses the revolution to associate with the power elite. She demonstrates that she is as capable as Braggioni of killing a human being when she makes it possible for Eugenio to overdose.

At one level, this story is autobiographical. Porter did go to Mexico in 1920 at the time of the Obregun revolution and returned to Mexico many times after she moved back to the United States. She wrote a number of analytical essays dealing with the situation in Mexico. Also, she seems to have been going through a period in 1930, at the time this story was written, when she was trying to sort out the direction she wanted her life to go. Did she want to be famous, travel the world, and do the things that would bring her visibility and notoriety, or did she want to become a first-rate writer? Her ambivalence about these two directions seems to be reflected in Laura's passive go-with-the-flow approach to her very dangerous situation. Laura seemed unable to choose escape and safety over the lifestyle she had created in the Mexican revolutionary scene.

This is considered by many critics to be one of the greatest of American short stories and Katherine Anne Porter's best. It has sometimes been called a lyric poem. Most major anthologies of short stories include Flowering Judas.

Passivity on the part of one character or another is featured in many of Porter's stories. This seems to have been inspired by her father's reaction to her mother's death when Katherine was only two years old. He dropped out of life and took the children to his mother to be brought up. Katherine was annoyed by his passivity and impatient with him, and he is the model for many of the men in her stories, particularly the earlier ones. In this story, however, it is the heroine who exhibits this trait. Perhaps at this point in her life, she is exploring the reasons for her father's behavior.

While Porter was born and baptized Methodist, she converted to Catholicism in 1908, and there are many religious symbols in this story, which are worth mentioning. Braggioni's wife washes his feet when he returns to her, reminding one of the washing of his disciples' feet by Jesus. The return of Eugenio in a dream after his death might be considered a symbol of the resurrection. The name Eugenio means well-born or savior. Laura seems to remain in a constant state of repentance because of the dissonance in her feelings and behaviors. The Judas tree itself and the dream where Eugenio feeds Laura the "warm bleeding flower"are religious symbols. Further, Porter uses the sacramental phrase, "This is my body and my blood." The title itself suggests the New Testament story of the betrayal of Jesus, and the story focuses on the protagonist's pervasive feeling that she is betraying herself.

Characters

Braggioni

Braggioni is the most powerful revolutionary leader in town, as well as Laura's suitor. She also works for him carrying messages to members of the movement who are in prison or in hiding. He comes to her house every night to sit and talk with her and to sing songs he has composed as part of a campaign to seduce her. Braggioni is vain and self-obsessed; Laura is repulsed by him, but she accepts his attention because his is a powerful man. Fat and disgusting, he represents the corruption and cynicism of the revolutionary movement. Some critics note that he embodies all of the Seven Deadly Sins. He personi- fies the hypocrisy of the movement—he is a "good revolutionist" because "he has the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness, the sharpness of wit, the hardness of heart, stipulated for loving the world profitably."

Mrs. Braggioni

Braggioni's wife is, in her husband's view, an "instinctively virtuous woman." She remains faithful to him and to his cause while he indulges his appetites and philandering impulses. During the month preceding the evening when the story takes place, Braggioni has been living separately from his wife and courting Laura. His wife has spent much of this time weeping. After he visits Laura, Braggioni returns home to his wife who greets him by weeping and begging his forgiveness. She washes his feet in an act of obeisance that echoes Mary's washing of Jesus's feet, in an ironic reflection of Braggioni's role as savior of his people. In contrast to Laura, Braggioni's wife has completely given herself over to love and martyrs herself before the powerful man.

Eugenio

Eugenio is one of Braggioni's followers, an activist in the revolution who has been imprisoned for political reasons. On the night that the story takes place Laura has just returned from visiting him in prison, where she finds him near death from an overdose of sleeping pills. When Laura tells Braggioni about the suicide Braggioni calls him a fool, but his mood changes and he leaves her. That night, Eugenio comes to Laura in a symbolic dream that serves as the ambiguous resolution of the plot. Eugenio beckons her toward death and offers her flowers from the Judas tree to eat, saying, "This is my body and my blood," a reference to the Eucharist, thus identifying him as a Christ figure. He then calls her a murderer and a cannibal, to which Laura responds, "No!"

Laura

Laura is the protagonist of the story. She is a young American woman living in Mexico and working for the socialist revolution. She is a schoolteacher and also performs tasks,

such as running messages, for Braggioni as part of her revolutionary commitment. She is very idealistic but yet cold; thus she is disgusted by Braggioni's sensuality and corruption. "She cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be." However, she continues to be loyal to the revolution despite her misgivings. She is a lapsed Catholic but she occasionally enters a church and says a Hail Mary, even though this is against the beliefs of the revolutionary movement. She feels both betrayed by and guilty of betraying her Mexican comrades.

Laura is graceful, womanly, and virginal. She conducts herself with reserve and dresses in nunlike clothes. When she finds herself the unwilling recipient of the romantic interest of several young revolutionaries she rebuffs them, while she skillfully keeps Braggioni at arm's length while appearing to indulge him. Braggioni comments that he does not understand her commitment to the revolutionary ideal since she does not love a man who is involved. Laura is an isolated and sexually repressed figure, refusing to admit to a need for love. However, the figure of Eugenio—who is both ominous and seductive—suggests that she longs for merging and communion even as she denies it.

Lupe

Lupe is Laura's maid. She advises Laura to throw her suitor a flower from the Judas tree outside her window so that he will stop serenading her and tells her not to trust him or any man. But she does not tell her that the flower is encouragement for him to return night after night. Lupe's familiarity with the culture and its social conventions underscore Laura's alienation.

The Serenading Youth

A young man who is an organizer of the Typographer's Union. He courts Laura by singing serenades outside of her window, following the elaborate romantic rituals of his culture. She unintentionally encourages him by tossing him a flower, so he pursues her further. She is "pleasantly dis turbed" when she notices him watching her, a phrase signaling her sexual repression and ambivalence.

The Young Captain

A young captain—a hero of the Mexican Revolution— makes a pass at Laura, attempting to embrace her as she dismounts her horse at the end of a ride. She avoids his embrace by covertly spurring her horse. Described as "gentle" and a "rude folk hero," he represents a model of the kind of man through whom she might express her love of revolution sensually. Instead, she rejects him.

Themes

Faith and Betrayal

In "Flowering Judas" there is no faith that is not betrayed. The story is structured through a series of contrasts and parallels between religious faith, faith in revolutionary ideals, and romantic-sexual fidelity, all of which are misguided or transgressed. For example, Laura is a Roman Catholic and has been raised in the Catholic tradition. Yet the revolution rejects religion, in particular the Catholic Church. Unable to divorce herself from either her religious beliefs or her political ideals, she ends up feeling as if she has violated both.

Braggioni is a hero who fought for the redistribution of wealth to the masses, only to indulge his every whim for luxury and power when he became part of the new ruling elite. He furthermore expresses his supposed love of humanity through womanizing, betraying his wife's fanatical devotion. Even Eugenio, a martyr of the revolution whom Laura betrays by enabling his suicide, kills himself out of boredom rather than for any principle.

Ideals and Reality

The contrast between ideals and reality is closely tied to the contrast of faith and betrayal in "Flowering Judas." Laura has high ideals, but the reality of her situation is very disappointing to her. Her loss of faith is presented as an inevitable part of life. Extremely disillusioned, she feels she has no other choice than to continue with her mission.

The reprehensible Braggioni becomes for Laura "a symbol of her many disillusions." Despite his corruption, he is a successful leader, representing the pragmatism and self-interest that permeate the political system. Though Laura is herself no longer idealistic about the cause she works for, neither can she adopt the blithe attitude of her cohorts that corruption and betrayal are merely part of reality. Instead, Laura continues her denial, refusing to regret her choices but also declining to truly participate in life. She can no longer say yes to her ideals, but she continues to say no to reality, leaving her radically alienated from those around her.

Alienation

Laura is a young American woman living in a foreign country and participating in a political struggle that has nothing to do with her own interests or history. The revolutionary ideal that she works for is invested in the unity and cultural pride of Mexican workers and peasants, a population with whom she has little in common. She confronts belief systems and behaviors that are objectionable to her and hard for her to understand. She speaks the language poorly and misreads cultural cues, as when she

throws the flower to her suitor. These factors, in addition to her own philosophical crisis in faith, characterize Laura as an alienated individual. She does not belong anywhere or believe in anything. Her condition is more extreme than mere loneliness. Everyone appears as a stranger to her and she is "not at home in the world," so she has little chance of overcoming her acute isolation.

Love

One way of understanding Laura's alienation is to attribute it to her inability to love. She is disciplined in her commitment to the cause but she lacks the love for the Mexican people that underlies the revolutionary ideals she professes. She is cold in response to the peasant children's affection and to her various suitors' fervent advances. Related to this shortcoming are Laura's sexual repression and her loss of faith in Catholicism.

She lacks the capacity not only for socialist love of humanity, but divine Christian love and erotic love as well. Braggioni doubts her commitment to the revolution given that she does not love any man who is a fighter in it, which he sees as the only way a woman can participate in revolution. Braggioni, in contrast, is a "professional lover of humanity." He 'loves' the Mexican people, especially women, indiscriminately and selfishly. Braggioni is cruel, but not cold in the sense that Laura is. He abuses the faith of his followers and of his wife, but sees their faith in him as good in itself. In this way, he encourages participation in what he sees as the reality of love and its inevitable counter part, betrayal, while Laura ignores her appetites and suffers from the despair of self-denial, isolation, and faithlessness.

Style

Symbolism

Symbolism is the most important stylistic feature of "Flowering Judas." The most important thing to understand about Porter's use of symbolism is that it is multi-faceted and ambiguous. Indeed, symbols that Porter employs often refer to one idea and also its opposite. The story's central symbol, the flower from the Judas tree, is a example. The flower first appears when Laura tosses it out the window, which misleads her suitor. She uses the flower, an encouraging sign, in order to say "No" to her suitor—the "holy talismanic word" from which Laura draws her strength. The exotic flower is a sensuous image, and the fact that she uses it to reject the man suggests Laura's sexual ambivalence and repression. When the flower appears later in Laura's nightmare it is again a sensual image—she eats it greedily—but this time it doubles as a symbol of the Eucharist, wherein the body and blood she consumes belong not to Christ but to Eugenio. The flower is thus simultaneously a sign of purification and corruption.

The flower's name refers to Judas Iscariot, Christ's betrayer. The tree is named for Judas because, according to mythology, it is the tree from which he hanged himself out of repentance for his deed. The flower is a symbol of the betrayal of Christ, reflecting Laura's alienation from the Catholicism of her girlhood and also from the revolutionary cause. She is, in this way, like Judas.

Yet she also sees those around her—most exaggeratedly, Braggioni—as betrayers and hypocrites themselves, which is one source of her loss of faith. Braggioni and Eugenio represent contrasting Christ figures, with Braggioni serving as a grotesque perversion of Christ's self-sacrifice and "love of humanity" while Eugenio represents Christ's martyrdom. Braggioni's self-aggrandizement and Eugenio's self-negation are connected through this figure.

The central matrix of Christian symbolism is only one example of how Porter's use of symbolism gives the story meaning. On a simpler level, Braggi oni's opulent, garish clothes represent his hypocrisy and sensuality. They serve as a contrast to Laura's severe high-necked dress, but the hand-made lace collar that is her secret luxury suggests an underlying similarity to Braggioni's self-indulgence. Thus, again, things that seem like opposites are revealed as similar. The "monstrous" confusion between opposites that Laura refers to as she drifts off into her nightmare characterizes Porter's use of symbolism throughout. Laura longs for clear distinctions and purity, but the very language which Porter uses to tell her story reveals this as impossible.

Setting

Porter sets "Flowering Judas" in Mexico City in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The dramatic foreign setting and the loaded historical moment are evoked in an oblique

way, described only in relation to the ideas and feelings they trigger in Laura as she sits in the upper room of her house listening to Braggioni's singing and conversation. Eudora Welty's description of Porter's style suggests that one may understand "Flowering Judas" as actually being set inside of Laura's distressed mind. "Most good stories are about the interior of our lives, but Katherine Anne Porter's take place there," Welty writes in *The Eye of the Story.* "They show surface only at her choosing. Her use of the physical world is enough to meet her needs and no more."

For example, Porter offers exquisitely detailed physical descriptions of the exterior world only as they reflect Laura's inner conflicts, such as the "battered doll-shape of some male saint whose white, lace-trimmed drawers hang around his ankles below the dignity of his velvet robe" that she observes as she furtively visits a Mexican church. But the larger social and physical environs are, for the most part, characterized in abstract or subjective terms. For example, Porter's description of Laura's duty as a messenger for Braggioni highlights Laura's state of isolation: "She knocks at unfamiliar doors not knowing whether a friend or a stranger shall answer, and even if a known face emerges from the sour gloom of that unknown interior, still it is the face of a stranger."

Point of View

"Flowering Judas" is narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator. That is, the narrator is not an actor in the story, but has access to the thoughts, motivations, and feelings of characters. While a third-person narrator's omniscience signi- fies a position of knowledge, often making this a straightforward mode of storytelling, the fact that the narrator in "Flowering Judas" is so tied to Laura's conflicted perspective makes the narration obscure and disorienting. Indeed, as Welty suggests, the narration is so tied to Laura's inner experiences that the story creates the effect of taking place within her consciousness. And the fact that she feels so alienated from what is going on around her creates a further barrier between Laura's thoughts and the reality of the outside world.

Historical Context

The Mexican Revolution

Porter based the story on events she experienced and observed in Mexico during 1920 and 1921, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. In 1910 the revolution started as a struggle against political and economic repression; in Mexico at that time, a dictator controlled the government under a one-party system and an elite class of landowners controlled the country's resources. After the dictator was overthrown, a series of factions formed and struggled for power over the next decade. A socialist agenda of land reform (the redistribution of land to the common people), workers' rights, and the separation of the educational system from the control of the Catholic Church were among the main objectives of the revolutionary position as laid out in the Constitution of 1917.

However, the revolutionaries who assumed political power failed to live up to these ideals. There was an ongoing struggle for leadership between agrarian revolutionaries who strongly supported the interests of the workers, led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and bourgeois revolutionaries who subordinated these interests to those of developing a capitalist economy. The latter faction eventually prevailed. It included Alvaro Obregon, a former general in the Mexican Revolution who became president in 1920 and served until 1924. The Obregon presidency was marked by compromise and has been referred to as "the rule of the millionaire socialists." Though he gave lip service to socialist ideals in order to appeal to the radicalized population of Mexican peasants, Obregon's accomplish ments were centrist, pragmatic, and, in the eyes of many, marred by corruption.

The story takes place in the early days of the Obregon presidency when the revolution was over but Mexico was still undergoing a complex political and cultural upheaval. The country was devastated and divided from the years of war. The human costs of the revolution were enormous. War casualties were so great that the Mexican population had declined by a million people since 1910. The revolution had also shaken Mexico's rigid class system to its base. In the aftermath of the war, many generals of peasant origins who had gained status during the revolution vied for positions in a govern mental structure that maintained many features of the earlier dictatorship. Thus the heroes of the socialist revolution assumed roles of the power elite. In the words of Benjamin Keen and Mark Wasserman's *A History of Latin America,*" Obregon summed up the problem when he said that the days of revolutionary banditry had ended because he had brought all the bandits with him to the capital to keep them out of trouble." The ethos of Mexican leaders, who were worn down from years of war and political instability, became marked by a certain amount of irony or cynicism about the revolutionary cause. The character of Braggioni is a hyperbolic representation of this attitude.

Porter spent much time in Mexico during her life. Her first visit to Mexico was in 1920. At first, she went to Mexico for education and adventure and was drawn into revolutionary circles by her artistic friends. By her second visit in 1922 she was completely

disillusioned by the country and its government. Porter claimed that the story was inspired by an acquaintance of hers, a young American Catholic woman named Mary Doherty who was a zealous supporter of the revolution, but scholars have shown that some of the events portrayed are also inspired by her own experiences.

Modernism

"Flowering Judas" reflects not only the political context of 1920 Mexico, but also the aesthetic and cultural ethos among Porter's artistic peers— most notably, the literary movement of modernism. Modernist writers focused on the aesthetic qualities of language and pushed images to their limits, often resulting in an inconclusive meaning. This style reflected—and often mourned—a loss of faith in those sources of meaning that had organized art and civilization previously, including belief systems such as religion and scientific rationality. Modernist experiments with plot and imagery also reflected the confusing and disorienting aspects of modern life, in which traditional communities and ways of life were uprooted. Porter's statement that Laura "is not at home in the world" reflects this modernist sentiment.

The flower from the Judas tree that Laura throws to her suitor and recurs in her dream of Eugenio provides the story with its title and ties it to Porter's aesthetic influences. The Judas tree is named for Judas Iscariot, Christ's betrayer in the New Testament. According to myth, Judas hung himself from this tree in repentance for his betrayal of Christ. Many scholars have pointed out that the figure of the flowering Judas is an allusion to a poem by T. S. Eliot, one of the great masters of modernism. In his poem "Gerontion" the following lines appear. "In the juvenescence of the year / Came Christ the tiger // In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas, / To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk / Among hispers." Eliot's poem relates to the story's themes of betrayal and loss of faith. Its images of eating and drinking also correspond to the dream at the end of "Flowering Judas".

Critical Overview

When Porter hurried out after midnight to mail the just-finished manuscript of "Flowering Judas" to the editors of the magazine *Hound and Horn* in 1929, Porter was an obscure writer, hoping that she was on the verge of a breakthrough. Because she had not yet established her reputation when Harcourt Brace accepted a collection including "Flowering Judas" and five other stories for publication the following year, they agreed to print the book only as a limited edition. *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* did not sell widely for this reason, but the collection received uniformly favorable reviews and, on its strength, Porter was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931.

Reviewers gave elaborate praise to Porter's stories, in particular her controlled and original use of language. In *Bookmark,* E. R. Richardson maintained of the stories: "All are exquisitely done, with feeling for dramatic values, with clarity, with delicate delineation of characters, and in language transcendently beautiful." Allen Tate of the *Nation* commented that "her style is beyond doubt the most economical and at the same time the richest in American fiction," and that "every sentence, whether of description, narrative, or dialogue, create[s] not only an inevitable and beautiful local effect, but contribute[s] directly to the final tone and climax of the story."

Louise Bogan, writing for the *New Republic,*, singled out the title story of the collection for praise. "The firm and delicate writing in Miss Porter's "Flowering Judas," a story startling in its com plexity, were it not based on recognizable fact, would be to no purpose. As it is, its excellence rises directly from the probity of the conception. It is as impossible to question the characters . . . as it is to find a flaw or lapse in the style that runs clear and subtle, from the story's casual beginning to the specter of life and death at the end."

The *New York Times Book Review* also comments on the "scrupulous distinction of phrase" in the story, though it finds its dream conclusion confused. When an enlarged edition, with two additional stories, appeared four years later, Porter had arrived on the literary scene. She was at the height of her powers and had come to be widely considered one of the finest short story stylists of her time.

The startling complexity of "Flowering Judas" attracted much critical commentary. Much of the early scholarship unraveled the meanings of the story's symbolism. The figure of the flowering Judas was resonant with modernist themes of alienation and lost faith and thus appealed to modern critics. Furthermore, Porter's dense prose lent itself well to New Criticism, the dominant school of literary scholarship in the mid-twentieth century. New Criticism is a language-based approach to literary criticism, where symbols are decoded through close reading. Ray B. West, in a chapter of his 1949 *The Art of Modern Fiction,* offered an extensive New Critical explication of the symbolism in "Flowering Judas," that served as a point of departure for many later critics. West focused on religious symbolism, arguing that Braggioni is capable of redemption, while Laura, who is unable to love, is not.

In the 1960s the first book-length critical studies of Porter appeared, notably those by Ray B. West, Brother William Nance, and George Hendrick. Though this kind of academic study signaled Porter's status as a historically significant literary figure, Porter objected to the interpretations offered by all three scholars. Scholarship focused on autobiographical elements of her work—which Porter particularly resented—and her use of symbolism. Later scholars reevaluated Porter's fiction according to more accurate biographical information as it became available and, in keeping with the academic trends, with more attention to her feminism, her politics, and the historical context of her work. She remains of interest to scholars of modernism and of Southern regional writing and is considered one of the finest American short story writers of the twentieth century.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Madsen Hardy has a doctorate in English literature and is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, she discusses Laura's alienation through an exploration of the concepts of home and 'homelessness' in "Flowering Judas."

Laura, the troubled young protagonist of "Flowering Judas," is disillusioned with Mexican politics, but her unhappiness goes much further than this. She walks through life feeling anxious and detached, always afraid, though she knows not of what. "She is not at home in the world," Porter writes, summing up Laura's state of mind. This overarching sense of 'homelessness' may be seen as the crux of Laura's problem. *Home* refers to a physical and geographical place and it also refers to a set of feelings —security, belonging, connectedness, even love. Laura has none of these. The entire story takes place inside Laura's house—her nominal Mexican home—where Braggioni's overbearing presence makes Laura feel pressured and ill at ease. It is easy to see why she does not feel at home there. It is also understandable why, as a foreigner, a *gringita,* Laura does not feel at home in Mexico, and why, as a supporter of socialist revolution, she does not feel at home in her native capitalist America. However, not only does Laura not feel at home in any particular place, but she also does not feel at home "in the world" at large. Such alienation—that is, such separation and disharmony between the self and the outside world—is a feeling that many writers of Porter's generation sought to express in their fiction.

Laura is 22 years old when the story takes place, sometime during Alvaro Obregon's 1920-24 term as president of Mexico. Born approximately at the turn of the century, Laura may therefore be seen as a representative of what is known as the "lost generation." The "lost generation" refers broadly to Americans who were born around 1900. Not unlike "generation X," the "lost generation" found it difficult to put faith in the ideals and beliefs that had given meaning and structure to the lives of their parents. They rejected given values, but remained "lost" because they did not find new ones to replace the old. More narrowly, the "lost generation" refers to a circle of writers who defined the spirit of the age in their fiction, many of whom chose to express their alienation from their native culture by living abroad in self-imposed exile. In *Exile's Return,* his canonical portrait of "lost generation" writers, essayist Malcolm Cowley describes the process that defined the generation as primarily geographical. He writes that the generation was lost "first of all, because it was uprooted, schooled away and almost wrenched away from its attachment to any region or tradition." According to Cowley, the "lost generation" saw themselves as "homeless citizens of the world." Indeed, being lost suggests being out of place, not belonging anywhere or with anyone.

Central to Laura's feeling of homelessness is her status as an expatriate. Laura has given up residence in and allegiance to her American homeland. She has renounced the Catholic faith of her childhood and is uprooted from her past. Porter writes, "Uninvited she has promised herself to this place; she can no longer imagine herself living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering her life before she came here." Laura seems to fit Cowley's description of a "homeless citizen of the world"

perfectly, but in other ways she is an atypical figure of the "lost generation." First of all, all of the writers whom Cowley discusses are men, as are the main figures of alienation they create. Secondly, World War I and its aftermath are considered formative for the generation, with an essentially male experience of war figuring prominently as a source of alienation. In "Flowering Judas" Porter offers a different vision of modernist alienation by setting her story in Mexico and by making her protagonist female. Laura lacks a sense of belonging in the country of Mexico and in the revolutionary belief system, both of which seem compromised to her. Her alienation in each realm relates to her status as a woman. While Laura's feeling of being "not at home in the world" transcends any specific place, her discomfort in the Mexico setting—and, particularly, in the house where she lives—reflects the gender-specific nature of her alienation.

It is significant that the action of the story unfolds within Laura's home, rather than in any of the public places mentioned in the story—the school, the prison, or the May Day confrontation. Laura's sense of being entrapped in her own house with Braggioni's coercive presence permeates the story. For Laura, home is a site of struggle and anxiety rather than security. She works all day, teaching children whose love she does not understand and delivering messages to people she perceives as strangers, all out of commitment to a political struggle in which she no longer believes. At the end of the day she avoids coming home because she knows that Braggioni will be waiting for her and that her duty as a devotee to the revolution will continue in its most onerous form. "Laura wishes to lie down, she is tired of her hairpins and the feeling of her long tight sleeves, but she says to him, 'Have you a new song for me this evening?'" The male revolutionaries in the story act out their commitment through public acts of violence and martyrdom, while their private conduct reveals them as hypocrites. Laura understands that, as a woman, her role in the revolution lies largely within the private realm. She must flatter the powerful man without encouraging his improper advances. Though she sees this role as equally ignoble as the masculine forms of heroism in which she has lost faith, she complies, "like a good child who understands the rules of behavior." She is not at ease in this role but, because she sees no alternative, she conforms to it passively. "Sometimes she wishes to run away, but she stays." Her external actions are at odds with her inner feelings, leaving her perpetually at odds with the world through which she moves.

Braggioni draws parallels between his revolutionary love of mankind and his voracious sexual love for women. In his view, a woman's role in the struggle is as a lover of its male participants. His wife is an almost comically extreme figure of revolutionary/ sexual devotion, begging Braggioni's forgiveness and washing his feet when he finally returns home to her. When Porter writes that Mrs. Braggioni's "sense of reality is beyond criticism," it is a way of saying that, despite her misery, she is not alienated, not detached from her place in her world. She is, in this sense, the perfect counterpart to Braggioni—the self-effacing mirror image of his self-love and the passive feminine version of his anti-heroism. Braggioni cannot understand why Laura "works so hard for the revolutionary idea unless she loves some man who is in it" because he sees women as incapable of revolutionary action or the abstract idealism from which it derives. But Laura wishes to adhere to ideals rather than to a man. The men around her are part of

the flawed reality she rejects, even as she rejects the parts of herself that are drawn to them.

Like Braggioni, the serenading youth comes to Laura's home uninvited and sings to her. He is more benign than Braggioni, but the youth also encroaches on Laura's privacy and contributes to her feeling of uneasiness in her home. While Braggioni's advances are untoward, she interprets the youth's actions as the observation of a convention "with all propriety, as though it were founded on law of nature, which in the end it might well prove to be." This signifies that Laura's discomfort with his serenade goes beyond her ignorance of Mexican courting rituals and even her ambivalent sexuality. He reminds her of her disconnection from what she sees as the "laws of nature" governing love and romance between men and women. She knows that she does not fulfill the role of a proper revolutionary woman but she is, in fact, still deeply attached to the idea of propriety. However, she simply cannot believe in his ritualized courtship any more than she can believe in Braggioni's leadership. She feels no connection to him because his feelings are expressed through conventions that seem empty to her. Again, she can envision no alternative kind of connection, so she resorts to rejection and suffers continued isolation. Just as she cannot imagine experiencing security or belonging in the compromised revolutionary movement, she cannot imagine experiencing security or belonging within the compromised conventions of romantic love.

The last man to come to Laura's house is the ghostly figure of Eugenio, who visits her in a nightmare. In life, Eugenio symbolizes Laura's failure in the feminine role of comforter of revolutionaries— her soothing sleeping pills enable him to commit suicide. In her nightmare, he is an ambivalent figure, both seductive and accusatory, who pushes her beyond proper, passive actions. He represents a fluidity of roles, pitying her as a "poor prisoner" and offering her flowers to eat, then calling her a murderer and cannibal a moment later. Though he himself was a political prisoner, he recognizes her as imprisoned in her house and in the reality from which he, as a suicide, has fled. He is the first man in the story to invite her out of the house, which he acknowledges as "strange." "What are you doing in this house?" he asks, and promises to show her a "new country." Because Eugenio is dead, he is not of this world, not part of the world in which Laura cannot feel at home. He suggests the possibility of escape from the walls of her home and from the compromised forms of connection associated with its worldly reality, even though the escape is still a lonely one—for he refuses to take her hand. But the hand she seeks and the flower she eats are the only examples in the story of Laura's desire for the comfort and sustenance associated with home. Laura is not so lost in her dreamlike vision of death as she is in the world to which she again awakens.

Source: Sarah Madsen Hardy, "This Strange House: Home and Alienation in 'Flowering Judas,'" for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Madden studies Porter's use of "charged images" and their thematic content to portray the state of mind of the heroine of the story.

In *Writers at Work, Second Series,* The interviewer asked Katherine Anne Porter whether "Flowering Judas" began as a visual impression that grew into a narrative. "All my senses were very keen," Miss Porter replied. "Things came to me through my eyes, through all my pores. Everything hit me at once . . ." Without words or images, her stories began to form. Then she starts thinking "directly in words. Abstractly. Then the words transform themselves into images." On several occasions Miss Porter has testified to the potency of the real-life image that generated "Flowering Judas."

She chose this story for inclusion in an anthology called *This Is My Best* (1942). Commenting on the story at that time, she said: "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. . . ." In the Paris Review interview some twenty years later, she elaborated:

That story had been on my mind for years, growing out of this one little thing that happened in Mexico. . . . Something I saw as I passed a window one evening. A girl I knew had asked me to come and sit with her, because a man was coming to see her, and she was a little afraid of him. And as I went through the courtyard, past the flowering Judas tree, I glanced in the window and there she was sitting with an open book on her lap, and there was this great big fat man sitting beside her. Now Mary and I were friends, both American girls living in this revolutionary situation. She was teaching at an Indian school, and I was teaching dancing at a girls' technical school in Mexico City. And we were having a very strange time of it (1965). . . . I had a brief glimpse of her sitting with an open book in her lap, but not reading, with a fixed look of pained melancholy and confusion in her face. The fat man I call Braggioni was playing the guitar and singing to her [1942]. . . . And when I looked through that window that evening, I saw something in Mary's face, something in her pose, something in the whole situation, that set up a commotion in my mind [1965]. . . . In that glimpse, no more than a flash, I thought I understood, or perceived, for the first time, the desperate complications of her mind and feelings, and I knew a story; perhaps not her true story, not even the real story of the whole situation, but all the same a story that seemed symbolic truth to me. If I had not seen her face at that very moment, I should never have written just this story because I should not have known it to write [1942]. . . . Because until that moment I hadn't really understood that she was not able to take care of herself, because she was not able to face her own nature and was afraid of everything. I don't know why I saw it. I don't believe in intuition. When you get sudden flashes of perception, it is just the brain working faster than usual. But you've been getting ready to know it for a long time, and when it comes, you feel you've known it always [1965].

As raw material for literature, this real-life image was already, implicitly, dynamically charged with feeling and meaning. The author's physical distance from her friend that evening was an analog to the objectivity that was necessary when she transformed the real-life image into the fictive image. And out of this actual image was to grow also the structural, stylistic, and technical conceptions of "Flowering Judas," a created, transcendent image with an organic life of its own. This story is one of the most lucid exemplifications I know of what Croce calls "the aesthetic image," compounded of "a tissue of images," and of what I call *the charged image.* Ezra Pound's definition of great literature as "language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree" (to "meaning" I would add the word "feeling") suggests the source of power in "Flowering Judas." Before I feel out the anatomy of this charged image, I want to quote Miss Porter again.

Soon after *Flowering Judas,* her first book of stories, was published in 1930, Miss Porter wrote to a friend:

I can't tell you what gives true intensity, but I know it when I find it, even in my own work. . . . It is not a matter of how you feel at any one moment, certainly not at the moment of writing. A calculated coldness is the best mood for that most often. Feeling is more than a mood; it is a whole way of being; it is the nature you're born with, you cannot invent it. The question is how to convey a sense of whatever is there, as feeling, within you, to the reader; and that is a problem of technical expertness.

Mr. Hagopian's response to Miss Porter's statement reflects my own conviction: "Thus, from the beginning, Miss Porter knew what she was doing—embodying the *true intensity* of experience into literary form with *technical expertness.*" Mark Schorer, writing about technique in general, describes what Miss Porter does most brilliantly in "Flowering Judas": "When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it." Technique "objectifies the materials of art." The forms of the finest works of fiction, Schorer argues, are "exactly equivalent with their subjects," and "the evaluation of their subjects exists in their styles." He cites Miss Porter's work as exemplary. "The cultivated sensuosity" of Miss Porter's style has not only "charm in itself" but "esthetic value . . . its values lie in the subtle means by which sensuous details become symbols, and in the way the symbols provide a network which is the story, and which at the same time provides the writer and us with a refined moral insight by means of which to test it. Some readers may cite Miss Porter's phrase "a calculated coldness" to explain the coldness her technique and her sensibility instill in some of her stories. But that phrase and her comments in *Writers at Work* suggest her attitude about technique as a means of discovery; although she testifies that she knew the ending of "Flowering Judas" before she began to write (as she *usually* knows the ending before she begins to write a story), the powerful final stroke came unconsciously (but was made possible, most probably, by her habitual consciousness of technique). "I knew that the vengeful spirit was going to come in a dream to tow her away into death, but I didn't know until I'd written it that she was going to wake up saying, 'No!' and be afraid to sleep again."

Although, as friends and critics have observed, one must regard Miss Porter's comments on her own work with almost the same caution with which one regards Faulkner's self-scrutiny, it is no contradiction of our image of Miss Porter as a conscious craftsman that she claims to write her stories in single spurts of energy. "I always write a story in one sitting. I started 'Flowering Judas' at seven p.m. and at onethirty I was standing on a snowy windy corner putting it in the mailbox" (*Writers at Work*). Miss Porter glimpsed a girl and a man through a window in Mexico City and two years later, in a few hours in Brooklyn, recaptured and transformed that image into a work of art.

In her introduction to *The Selected Short Stories of Eudora Welty* (1954), Miss Porter describes the kind of story she prefers: one in which "external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end." Magalaner and Volpe declare that "Flowering Judas" is "from the first word of the title to the last word of the text" a model of that kind of story. They go on to say that it "is a sensitive and discerning philosophical statement of human relationships, made universal by the mythic elements which intrude as early as the hint in the title." But more than that, it is a remarkable aesthetic achievement to which we may return again and again, just as we return to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; for long after we have absorbed its universal philosophical and psychological truths, "Flowering Judas" remains a "thing of beauty," a "joy forever," embodying Keats's declaration that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

In some ways "Flowering Judas" resembles literary form less than it resembles dance, mother of all the arts, especially of poetry and of the most contemporary of the arts—cinema (I use these analogies simply for their suggestiveness). The dynamic imagery of dance, the compression and the expressive juxtapositions of poetry, and the montage effects of Eisenstein's cinema are transmuted by Miss Porter, unconsciously, I imagine, into fictive techniques that produce what interests and moves me most in this story—the charged image. The omniscient author's psychological analysis of and philosophical reflections about Laura's predicament and the self-delusory processes that follow from her predicament are everywhere in the story, suffusing the very style that creates the tissue of images. But overwhelming her own overt interpretations when they threaten to intimidate the life of the story, the images embody Miss Porter's meaning with expressive vitality; ultimately, of course, this vitality cannot be separated from the vitality of Miss Porter's meditations about Laura. The story exfoliates from a tight intermingling of showing and telling. And that story, were it not for the author's technique of dramatically juxtaposing tableaux, is so rich and multi-faceted as to require the scope of a novel.

As the elements of Laura's exterior and interior worlds intermingle, they cohere in a developing pattern of images which expands from the charged image that inspired Miss Porter in life and that she sets forth in the beginning of her fiction:

Braggioni sits heaped upon the edge of a straightbacked chair much too small for him, and sings to Laura in a furry, mournful voice. Laura has begun to find reasons for avoiding her own house until the latest possible moment, for Braggioni is there almost

every night. No matter how late she is, he will be sitting there with a surly, waiting expression, pulling at his kinky yellow hair, thumbing the strings of his guitar, snarling a tune under his breath. Lupe the Indian maid meets Laura at the door, and says with a flicker of a glance towards the upper room, "He waits."

This central, most potent image is the hub, and all other images spoke out from it, and the author's meditating voice is the rim, and (to complete the metaphor) the reader's active participation is the energy that makes the wheel turn. Paralyzed, Laura is locked into this image, as though in a small box stage set, and we see her at a distance, as though through the original real-life window. With each image that Miss Porter shows us, we feel that Laura is withdrawing more and more deeply into herself, that her will is becoming more and more paralyzed. The controlling image (Laura and Braggioni sitting opposite each other by the table) is a simplified visual and thematic expression of the entire story; this image recurs at strategic points in the pattern, creating that sense of simultaneity that makes a work of art cohere and seem inevitable. Laura's posture varies only slightly; and though Braggioni is singing and playing his guitar, the tableau virtually does not move— it vibrates from within, sending its electrical charge in a radial fashion out into the other images connected to it.

In 1961 at Centre College in Kentucky, I discussed "Flowering Judas" with my two classes of freshman students. Mystification over my charged image concept only compounded their boredom with the story itself. To enable them to see Miss Porter's story, and my point, more clearly, I arranged a demonstration with the Drama Department. Using multi-level space staging and lighting as a means of isolating one acting area, one scene, from another, we mounted a series of tableaux in pantomime, while a young woman read the story over a public address system. The images enacted were these (following the sequence in the story):

Laura and Braggioni sit opposite each other by the table. In the first image that is juxtaposed, montagefashion, to this hub image, we see Laura sitting in church. Cut to Braggioni at the table in Laura's house again, singing, playing the guitar. Fade to Laura in the classroom with Indian children. Fade to a composite image: Laura at a union meeting; Laura visiting prisoners in cells; Laura meeting men in dark doorways with messages; Laura meeting with Polish and Roumanian agitators in cafes. Fade to another composite image: Laura riding horseback with the Captain; Laura and the Captain at a table in a restaurant; Laura in the classroom responding to a floral design and message of affection to her drawn on the blackboard; Laura at her window responding to the youth who serenades her. Fade to another composite: Laura and the children again; Laura at the doors of fugitives again. Cut to Laura and Braggioni at the table again; he talks of love; her response is negative. Superimposed image of Braggioni in the streets. Fade to a composite: Braggioni's wife weeping on the floor in her room; Eugenio's body lying on the floor of his cell. Cut to Laura with Braggioni again; she cleans his pistols; Braggioni puts his gun belt on. Fade to Laura in the street on errands again, meeting strange faces. Fade to a composite: Braggioni and his wife; she washes his feet; they eat; they lie in bed together. Cut to composite image: Laura in white in bed; Laura at dark doors; Laura with children in classroom; Laura with prisoners. Fade to Laura with Eugenio in a nightmare, as he leads her away, offering

her the blossoms of the Judas tree to eat. Cut to Laura awake, crying No! She is afraid to sleep again.

To this day, students tell me that this dramatic enactment of the story's charged image structure was one of the most electrifying theatrical experiences they have ever had. Re-reading the story itself, they were able to come closer to the kind of experiences the story offers readers who are more aesthetically responsive.

Miss Porter's technique of creating a dynamic interplay among images that are strategically spaced in an unfolding pattern is appropriate for the rendering of Laura's state of mind—self-delusion producing paralysis of will. Not only does she move very little in the recurrent scene set in the present, but her recent, habitual past life as well is presented in terms of static images. The reader feels the tension between these static images and Laura's impulse within the images to flee. From a positive standpoint, the static quality of the pictures is expressive of Laura's desire for stasis. The energy of the story is transmitted in the kinetic juxtaposition of one charged image to another. A few similes may make my simple point even clearer: reading the story is like watching a single photograph, simple in outline but rich in detail, yield more and more auxiliary images each time it is redeveloped and enlarged (I am thinking of the experience the photographer has in the movie *Blow-Up*); or the images are superimposed, causing a cumulative density of texture; or reading the story is like watching a cubist painting being painted, from the first stroke, the title, to the last word, No.

The contrast between the static quality of the images and the immediacy of the historical present tense generates a tension that enhances the effect of Miss Porter's basic image technique. She declares that not until someone asked her why she used it did she realize she had employed the historical present tense. In any case, it is clear that the present tense keeps the images themselves alive while they portend the incipient moribundity of Laura, the character who is at the center of each (even when, in the scene in Braggioni's hotel room, she isn't physically present). Miss Porter's technique resembles the early montage techniques of the European movies of the late Twenties and anticipates cinematic methods used by Resnais in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad.* She shows us one scene, stops the camera, goes on to another scene, goes back to an earlier scene, holds, then goes further back to an even earlier scene, then leaps far ahead. But the image technique is also similar to one used long before the birth of the cinema—Spenser's tableau juxtapositions in *The Faerie Queen*.

Laura has just come from the prison and "is waiting for tomorrow with a bitter anxiety. . . . but time may be caught immovably in this hour, with herself transfixed, Braggioni singing on forever, and Eugenio's body not yet discovered by the guard." The result of Miss Porter's charged image technique is that the reader is left with this timeless image of Laura sitting opposite Braggioni at the table, transfixed in fear and accidie, all the other images clustered around her like spokes in a hub. Laura's one act in the present tense of the story comes toward the end: "The presence of death in the room makes her bold," so she "holds up the [gun] belt to him: 'Put that on, and go kill somebody in Morelia, and you will be happier!'" This is a futile gesture. In numerous little

ways, Laura herself, we have seen, has already killed various kinds of generous human impulses toward love, including Braggioni's. So at this point, the recurrent static picture at the hub of all the other images moves, but to no purpose: Braggioni leaves, Laura goes to sleep.

Along with her use of present tense, Miss Porter's frequent use of questions— "Where could she go?" —is another technique for enlivening her overt thematicizing and the progression of static images. And the routineness of Laura's life is another element that makes Miss Porter's technique of repeating the same images in a pattern effective.

Laura has dehumanized herself by encasing herself "in a set of principles derived from early training, leaving no detail of gesture or of personal taste untouched." Miss Porter's attitude toward people like Laura is suggested in her comment on a certain kind of writer: "By accepting any system and shaping his mind and work to that mold, the artist dehumanizes himself, unfits himself for the practice of any art" (quoted in Magalaner). Braggioni tells Laura that they are more alike than she realizes; she sees the possibility of her being as "corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni . . . as callous, as incomplete," but rather than do something about these faults, she prefers "any kind of death." Figuratively, Laura and Braggioni reveal two perspectives on a single person; each exhibits aspects of the other. They also contrast with each other. But finally, Laura's personality embodies many aspects of Braggioni's, carrying them to a negative extreme. It is appropriate, then, that Miss Porter employs a modified omniscient point of view, favoring Laura, but shifting, strategically, to Braggioni near the end.

Braggioni, "a professional lover of humanity," who began as a "hungry world-savior," but who will never die of this love (one of many suggestions that he is a false Christ), tells Laura his true feelings about the common men who follow him: any of them might easily turn Judas (as, in spirit, Laura already has). In many instances, Laura is a Magdalene to one man, a false Magdalene or a Judas to others. Loyalty to one group necessitates Laura's betrayal of trust in other groups; thus "she borrows money from the Roumanian agitator to give to his bitter enemy the Polish agitator"; through her, Braggioni *uses* these people.

"Flowering Judas" delineates a maze of ambiguity of roles, beginning with Laura and Braggioni, going on down to the minor characters. Everyone seems to be both a savior and a Judas to everyone else. Braggioni is both a false and, in a purely human way of course, a real Christ to various people; but he is also a Judas. So is Laura both secular savior and betrayer of the same people. The author conceives of these complex savior-Judas relationships paradoxically and ironically and enhances them with a controlled atmosphere of ambiguity; this nexus of savior-Jesus analogies extends from the inner psychological realm of Laura and Braggioni out into the public realm and up to a symbolic level. Many kinds of service and betrayal are depicted and implied in the story; but Laura, by denying sex, love, meaningful purpose, and action, inclines too far toward betrayal, as the climactic nightmare scene stresses.

Miss Porter shifts scene and point of view deliberately for a dramatic contrast to Laura. Returning to his wife, who is still weeping, Braggioni is glad to be back in a familiar

place where the smells are good and his wife does not reproach him, but offers to wash his feet (she is a genuine Magdalene to his Christ-role). We see that Braggioni is in many ways a more creative person than Laura. Out of remorse, he weeps, saying, "Ah, yes, I am hungry, I am tired, let us eat something together." His supper with his wife contrasts with Laura's devouring of the Judas flowers. His wife asks his forgiveness for failing to be sufficient to all his needs, and her tears refresh him—she weeps *for* him as well as because of him. At least with one other person, Braggioni experiences a rich sexual and affectionate relationship. He is lonely, soft, guilt-ridden, we see now, though we've sensed this all along; but because of his external public role and because of her rigid demeanor, Braggioni and Laura were unable to meet. Rilke says that "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch and greet each other." If nothing more, Braggioni and his wife experience this touching of solitudes.

Now Miss Porter shifts point of view back to Laura as she "takes off her serge dress and puts on a white linen nightgown and goes to bed." Her virginal uniform of white mocks her sterility. She thinks of her children as prisoners who bring their jailor flowers. Numbers tick in her brain, turning her mind into a clock, a machine. Within her own solitude of mind and flesh, Laura cries out in anguish that "it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death," and invokes Eugenio's spirit "—ah, Eugenio!"

The midnight bell seems to be a signal she can't understand. Miss Porter handles the intermingling of interior and exterior worlds so adroitly that the dream passage comes with a controlled abruptness, and the change in tone does not jar, but seems inevitable. Without warning the reader, Miss Porter has Eugenio speak to Laura—without quotation marks, for his voice is pure expression, like an object. Echoing Christ's command to his followers, he tells Laura to get up and follow him. He asks her why she is in this strange house (in Mexico, in the world, in her own mind; one thinks of Lucifer's "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."). Here Miss Porter, though she is describing a dream that is happening now, shifts into the past tense to enhance our feeling that Laura's life, insofar as its capacity for responding to possibilities, is over, whether literally she dies soon after the story ends or not.

Eugenio calls Laura a murderer (she is *his* Judas, but the charge covers all her crimes of the body, the mind, and the spirit, for they affect *other* bodies, minds, and spirits, including his own.) But even to his offer to take her to a new country, death, Laura says, "No," fearing anything more than the fear to which she has grown accustomed and from which she is unable to imagine a separate identity for herself.

Miss Porter gives the reader a sense of the fluid, surrealistic changes of the nightmare landscape as Laura clings to the "stair rail, and then to the topmost branch of the Judas tree that bent down slowly and set her upon the earth, and then to the rocky ledge of a cliff, and then to the jagged wave of a sea that was not water but a desert of crumbling stone." All this suggests again Eliot's mental-physical Waste Land, and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and, as one critic has pointed out, "Gerontion," as well.

The ambiguous title of the story interprets all its images. The Judas tree gets its name from the belief that from such a tree Judas hanged himself. Abundant purple flowers appear in the spring before the leaves. A certain elder is called a Judas tree because it bears "Jew's ear," an edible, cup-shaped flower, resembling an ear, which is cherished as a medicine. So the tree itself and Miss Porter's title ultimately have both positive and negative connotations, and the story depicts in its charged images the gestures of both betrayers and betrayed; the reader feels his way through an ambiguity that deliberately makes it difficult to distinguish with any final clarity one from the other. Thus, Eugenio, who has qualities of Christ, as one betrayed offers *Judas* flowers to Laura, the betrayer; and thus, in eating of the body of Christ cannibalistically she is also eating of the body of Judas, for Eugenio, too, is a kind of Judas, betraying Laura. But the "flowering Judas" is Laura.

Eugenio offers her the flowers of the Judas tree, and as she devours them, he calls her "Murderer!" 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." She wakes, but not to enlightenment (although one may argue that it is perhaps enlightenment that makes her afraid to sleep again), for the dominating idea in her life, as in the nightmare, is denial, and with this No, Miss Porter appropriately ends the story. By now the No (in contrast to the Yes with which Molly Bloom ends *Ulysses*) is both a strong auditory image and an object. Just as Eugenio's eyes, unlike Christ's, do not bring light, the dream does not result in self-revelation for Laura, and her self-delusion persists at the end, along with the paralysis of her will (reminiscent of Gabriel Conroy's predicament at the end of "The Dead," a story that concludes with a similar elegiac vision). When we discover Laura sitting at the table in the initial, persistent charged image, she has already lost in her conflict between ideal aspiration and actuality. What self-knowledge she has she fails to employ in an act of self-discovery.

While "Flowering Judas" is not concerned with religion in itself, suggestive religious terms and motifs recur throughout the story. The images are almost like black parodies of religious icons or such tapestries as the Bayeux, or scenes in church panel paintings, frescoes, and mosaics (scenes of worship, charity, love, and betrayal). Miss Porter's frequent use of paradox in style and characterization suggests her purpose in employing religious mo tifs—as analogies to patterns of human behavior and relationships on secular levels.

While politics is closer than religion to Miss Porter's concern with her characters as people alive or dying in the secular world, politics, too, functions almost expressionistically. Braggioni tells Laura about the May-day disturbances soon to occur. On the same day on which Catholics hold a festival in honor of the Virgin (a parallel to Laura, whose virginity is neither spiritual nor quite natural), the Socialists will celebrate their martyrs, and the two processions, coming from opposite ends of town, will clash. Thus, rather neatly, Miss Porter summarizes in a composite dialogue image the two con- flicting public contexts (religious and political) of Laura's private despair. There is almost no sustained dialogue in the story until this scene; the fragments of dialogue are verbal parallels to the series of charged visual images. On Laura, Braggioni's voice has the same hypnotic effect it has on crowds; and as he expresses his vision of a world

completely destroyed so that a better world of "benevolent anarchy" can be built upon the ruins, Laura feels he has forgotten her as a person. He will create a physical Waste Land (an objective correlative to the spiritual Waste Land of which Laura is a major exemplification). All separate identity will vanish, and "no one shall be alive except the elect spirits destined to procreate a new world" (that excludes Laura).

Institutionalized religion and political ideals, perverted in revolution, are escapes from ordinary love. Laura refuses not only Braggioni but the Captain and the youth as lovers; more crucial to her general dilemma is her failure even in non-sexual ways, for she cannot even love the children she teaches, nor Eugenio, the man to whom she offers release from the world in which she herself must continue to suffer. Failure to distinguish illusion from reality in the conflict between ideal aspiration and brutal actuality produces Laura's self-delusion and the "No" with which she arms herself against the world. Thus, she waits in fear; a sense of overwhelming futility paralyzes her.

In preparation for the public violence that is imminent, Laura, who so intensely fears violence to herself, oils and loads Braggioni's pistols; no more grotesque half-parody of Freudian symbolism can be imagined. Laura peers down Braggioni's "pistol barrel and says nothing." The barrel's sexual connotation is reinforced by the literal lethalness of its purpose. Corresponding with this double-barreled significance Laura feels "a long, slow faintness" rising and subsiding in her, while Braggioni "curves his swollen fingers around the throat of the guitar and softly smothers the music out of it." This juxtaposition is the most powerful of several in which Miss Porter makes the guitar an analogy to Laura's body.

A psychological examination of Laura will reveal the organic unity of the story more closely. One may look at Laura in light of six forces that, simultaneously, dominate her life: 1) Laura's predominant state of mind is denial: No. Her general negativity as she waits in fear is the frame for everything else we discover about her. 2) rejects sex; she evades love; she substitutes a grim charity; she radiates a deadly innocence. 3) She gives everything (though it is not enough) to revolutionary politics, while refusing social fellowship and religious transcendence. 4) She fails to distinguish between illusion and reality. 5) Denying everything, overwhelmed by a sense of futility, she waits in fear of violent death. 6) These dominant elements in the story suggest a missing element: self-realization. But the reader sees what Laura fails to see. If one examine the story from beginning to end keeping in mind the pattern of images delineated earlier, one may see how each of these aspects of Laura's psychological and physical predicament is embodied in charged images that recur and cluster. I have suggested the thematic content that Miss Porter's images embody. In his introduction to *The Nigger of the Narcissus,* Joseph Conrad said: "A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line." "Flowering Judas" realizes that aspiration to an uncommon degree.

Source: David Madden, "The Charged Image in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Flowering Judas,'" in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. VII, No. 2, Spring, 1970, pp. 277-89.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Redden argues that Porter does not present a unitary view of life through her character but a view of life in tension between the way one lives life and the way life should be.

Katherine Anne Porter's "Flowering Judas," an unusually cryptic, complex, and challenging story, has been variously interpreted. Of the two bestknown and most complete readings, that of William L. Nance maintains that Miss Porter follows "the principle of rejection," while Ray B. West, Jr., argues that she "embodied an attitude that demonstrated the necessity for the application of the ancient verities of faith and love as a fructifying element in any human existence." Though contradictory, both conclusions are right; each underestimates the presence of the other—an equally forcible opposite "principle," or opposite "attitude"—in the story. The paradoxes of Miss Porter's fiction, it seems to me, are insufficiently illuminated by tacit reliance on the assumption that this author holds a strictly unitary view of life. If, however, one explores the hypothesis that Miss Porter's outlook is essentially and irrevocably dual, many things fall into place, including the basic role of tension in her work.

"Flowering Judas" is perhaps her most remarkable story of tension sustained, threatened, and reestablished. Its protagonist is enduring an inner war between two contradictory attitudes, neither of which she can wholly accept or reject. Although "the desperate complications of her mind and feelings" must have a long history, or she would not be as troubled as she is, the story gives very little of this background, and remarks of Laura's past only that it was one of "many disillusions" and unspecified "afflictions" which she prefers to forget. To her present situation, on the other hand, Miss Porter devotes all but the final paragraph of the story in a probing analysis of the statement that Laura "cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be."

I should like to examine these two poles separately, starting with Laura's strange and painful "way of living," itself a clash of the opposing forces, seen in terms of fear. For Laura is "afraid of everything." That she fears death, even that she finds it evil, may be considered unexceptionable, at least in our civilization. An important part of her, however, feels the same way about life, and especially about its vital component of human relationships. To this part of Laura, life is not only a stifling emotional tyranny of love and sex, but a kind of death, equally vicious and sinister, equally terrifying.

Although she goes on living, she fears and hates life. At the same time, although she is drifting toward it, she fears and hates death. Obviously, these two attitudes create an insoluble dilemma. Because Laura's warring forces are evenly matched, their unresolving antagonism generates an almost overpowering tension. She feels herself mired in a perpetual waking nigthmare, and for twelve pages of exposition the reader is held, with her, violently immobilized, suspended in a wild, frozen trance.

She is, in fact, barely alive. Life is motion; like wheels, human beings remain erect so long as they move ahead. They are (in our culture) propelled from behind by a fear of death, and drawn forward by a desire for life. The negative and positive forces work together to keep the organism upright and moving. Laura, however, is almost static. She is held erect not by her barely discernible motion, but by the pressures of two contradictory forces. The negative fear of death propels her from behind, it is true; but there is almost no positive force working with it to draw her forward. On the contrary, she is blocked by another negative, the fear of life.

The result is a horrible transfixion in which she feels that she must, at all costs, avoid losing her balance. As long as the two forces exert more or less equal pressure, she remains upright between them, safe. This, of course, is another delusion, for safety, if there is such a thing, lies in movement, in living, and not in a rigid stasis, which is dangerously close to extinction. But, allowed her premises, Laura is right. She cannot give up her defenses because to her they are justified; she believes that she knows the "truth" about life, what "reality" really is. If she were to relinquish her fear of life, she would have no love or hope or faith to put in its place. There would be only a vacuum, and she would topple.

Therefore, she feels that she can do nothing but try to keep the opposing pressures equal. And there is no way to do this except by complete negation. If she repudiates in one direction, she must repudiate in the other; she must deny "everything." *No* is the "one holy talismanic word which does not suffer her to be led into evil."

Laura's stance, then, is one of an almost unbearable equilibrium maintained by total denial. All of her strength is harnessed to preserving that uncertain balance, with its demand for unremitting vigilance. Fortunately, she has astonishing self-control, at least temporarily equal to the strains put upon it; it is no less impressive for being negative, and she needs every jot of it. It is her only defense against "that disaster she fears, though she cannot name it."

In a general sense the revolutionist leader Braggioni is the symbol of all that Laura hates and fears, the "reality" that seems to dominate her existence. Specifically, his characteristics are those that she finds typically human (which is to say animal), and as such they amply justify her rejection of human relationships.

These traits, overwhelmingly repellent and menacing, center around Braggioni's vastly bloated ego. Chief among them is his sensuality, for bursting out of his binding orchid-colored clothes he resembles nothing so much as a huge tumescent phallus, the opposite of everything romantic, sentimental, and "harmless." His handling of his guitar suggests what he has in mind for Laura: he scratches it familiarly, curves his swollen fingers around its throat, rips a thumbnail across its nervous strings. Sex Laura will resist to the end; her knees cling together under her heavy "nun-like" attire. But Braggioni can wait; she will drop into his lap finally "like an overripe pear."

Why does Laura not flee while she can? Although she knows what is in store, "violence, mutilation, a shocking death," she stands immotile, waiting. There is no place for her to

go; since Braggioni comprises all of "reality," there is nothing to escape to. She is an alien not only in this country, but in this world. And although her fear of death is intense, it is offset by her fear of life; in her inability to choose between them, the tension is nearly insupportable. So far as Braggioni will put an end to this terrible indecision, he is, as he insists, her "friend." If only she can do nothing long enough, the choice will be taken out of her hands.

To avoid blurring the essential issues involved, I have temporarily isolated the fears on which Laura's "way of living" is based. Actually, her attitude toward life is ambivalent, and contains an important, albeit shackled, counterforce, as the fact that she stubbornly retains a "feeling" of "what life should be" implies. This element, although in a sense allied with her fear of death, is not itself grounded in terror.

On the contrary, something in Laura yearns for an entirely different kind of life, a positive existence including faith in God and confidence in human beings both in the aggregate and individually—in short, a life rich in love, the opposite of the smothering "reality" to which one side of her make-up is committed. This other part of her instinctively needs and longs for human contact; Laura's "feeling" is the involuntary cry of her half-drowned self.

But the idea of a love which is not oppressive and threatening is too alluring, with its suggestions of impossible joy and order and freedom. Since all of what Laura considers real is ugly and frightening to her, this element which does not fit into her scheme of things must be, by definition, illusive. She has had too many disappointments to dare to hope; she cannot really believe in her own insistent urge toward life. Neither can she put it aside.

In a general sense the jailed revolutionary Eugenio is the symbol of all that Laura vaguely hopes for in spite of herself. (It is not surprising that in her dream he takes on the attributes of a Christ- figure, associated with man as well as with God, with love and with life.) Specifically, Eugenio is one human being Laura might have—but has not—loved.

It is significant that Miss Porter does not mention him until late in the story, and then only briefly, to establish the fact that he is already dead. He has been much on Laura's mind, however. While solid, paunchy, callous, greasy, corrupt "reality" flourishes in her life, the pale insubstantial "ideal" seems hardly to exist there—but its tenacity will be demonstrated, for she senses that Eugenio stands for something which can bring her relief, and she will dream that.

If Braggioni and Eugenio are antithetical symbols personifying the tension between Laura's fear of and desire for life, the third and most important symbol in the story, the blossoming redbud tree, whose name expresses its divided nature, combines both of these attitudes in one emblem. It also shifts the emphasis to love (and sexuality, although this is sternly repressed). *Flowering* is a lovely word, and flowers are indeed associated with love in Laura's mind. But these are not just any flowers—they are Judas

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flowers; treachery is all that she can expect from love as her fears define it. Once again, Laura is simultaneously attracted and repelled.

The Judas tree (which, like all of the symbols in this story, is multiple and complex) has another function, for it embraces a further aspect of Laura's conflicting attitudes—her self-image. Laura's feelings about herself are directly related to her feelings about other people, and consist, like them, of two incompatible elements. On the one hand she respects and defends her self; on the other she undervalues and prosecutes it. In her own eyes she resembles the Judas tree—delicate, beautiful, per- fidious. She feels not only that she has made a grotesque blunder in allowing her fears to drive her to negation, but that she is to blame for doing so. In other words, Laura has somehow learned to experience her private "revolution" against life and love as worse than simply mistaken—she sees it as morally reprehensible, a betrayal of herself as well as of others. Her sense of error is intensified by a sense of guilt, and she finds herself "wrong" in both of the meanings which our language gives to that word. ("It may be true I am as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni." she thinks, "as callous, as incomplete.") As she drifts off to sleep, this repressed feeling of culpability, reinforced by her Christian training, begins to emerge from the unconscious, and she accuses herself harshly with "it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death—ah, Eugenio!"

With this, the long, taut prelude of the story ends. Although nothing important has happened, Laura's state of paralysis and her feelings about it have been exposed with surgical precision. Now, in the final paragraph, where the entire action of the story begins, rises to its climax, and subsides, something is happening at last, if only in a dream.

It has to happen in a dream. Only in a dream can Eugenio appear as a savior, can Laura even momentarily believe in and reach out toward "life as it should be," an alternative to her deathlike "way of living."

With the tolling of the midnight bell, the signal for the dead to arise, the wraith of Eugenio appears. Come, he beckons, leave this "strange house" you have built for yourself; I will guide you to death— not to physical death (that belongs to Braggioni), but to the death which is rebirth.

Laura is irresistibly drawn after him, although the goal is distant and the way tortuous. Eugenio can no longer give her physical support, and anyway, there are some things one must do for oneself. There is no time to hang back, yet she cannot brave the journey alone; perhaps the vacuum caused by the removal of her defenses will not be filled, and she will lose her precarious balance fatally in the wasteland that stretches ahead. She is still the prisoner of her wretched fears.

As if he understood this, Eugenio responds with pity. Poor creature, he seems to say, this will give you the strength you need; and he strips the pulsing flowers from the Judas tree and holds them to her lips. In promising this new life which is also the death of the old life, Eugenio seems forgiving, compassionate, Christ-like. He offers the life-bringing

nourishment with Christ's words; and the flowers themselves, like the bread and wine which satisfy spiritual hunger and thirst, are warm and bleeding, suggesting Christ's corporeal being. Laura accepts them, crushes them eagerly into her mouth, for she is starving for love in all of its forms.

But these are still Judas flowers: not even in a dream can Laura wholly overcome her profound distrust. The act of acceptance makes her vulnerable to her pervasive sense of guilt, her feeling that she is unworthy of love and forgiveness. She feels responsible for Eugenio's death not because she brought him drugs, but because she has closed off in herself the springs of compassion. Laura has been taught to believe that self-betrayal is also a betrayal of others, and thus of Christ. It is a mortal sin. Eugenio turns from a figure of mercy to one of vengeful justice, the personification of her own relentless conscience.

"Murderer!" he calls her, and "Cannibal! This is my body and my blood." The ritualistic words touch a buried nerve in Laura, for they evoke the whole of her religious upbringing. It is true that she has intellectually repudiated her childhood faith, but that does not mean that it does not still have immense power over her; the "set of principles derived from her early training," in which she has rigidly "encased herself," is an iron load of moral accountability.

In this context, Laura feels that she is subverting the sacrament which is a remembrance of and a participation in Christ's atoning death and resurrection, the visible sign of an invisible grace. When one has committed a mortal sin, one must cleanse one's soul in repentance and confession before receiving the Host. Laura has not been able to do so, and she feels that she is committing another and greater sin in taking communion unworthily. This is an act of murder and cannibalism; like Judas, she has betrayed Christ to his death and yet feasts on his symbolic flesh and blood. It is to her a false communion, a desecration of the Host. Eugenio, she dreams, is pointing out to her the visible sign of her invisible damnation; she is on the brink of horrifying self-knowledge.

But Laura cannot consciously confront her mistakes, ensnarled as they are with a guilt-laden concept of "her own nature"; to do so would undermine her resistance to death and collapse the personality she is holding together by sheer will. She must negate *everything.* Recoiling in fright from the threat of disintegration, she reacts with a final "No!" and the shattering revelation goes underground again.

With this her balance is restored—but it is again a balance of tension, rather than of resolution. On one side, the secret burden of self-accusation, with its moral overtones, is heavier, for Laura stands in her own court doubly condemned—guilty first of transgression, now of refusing to confess. On the other side, the instinct of self-preservation still operates; she is "determined not to surrender her will to such expedient logic." And there is something strong and admirable about Laura's fierce resistance to annihilation. She does not go to pieces. She is not insane. She holds on.

Her future is not spelled out. So far as this story shows, Laura will remain in her private limbo indefinitely, afraid to live or to die. (As Braggioni says of the coming May-day disturbances, "There will be two independent processions, starting from either end of town, and they will march until they meet, and the rest depends. . . .") The rest depends. Possibly her two embattled forces will gradually crush her between them, but more likely Laura will survive her civil war; one feels somehow that she will never die of it, however joyless her days.

The significance of her moving and terrifying experience is, I take it, that it is impossible to break the deadlock between inner needs and inculcated precepts—at least when those precepts are founded on conventional Western ideas of moral responsibility. Miss Porter records the conflict—not dispassionately— but with her passions tightly in rein and equitably divided.

One voice in her concurs in Laura's self-condemnation, on the familiar grounds that good and evil (however hard to identify) exist, that the individual possesses—or should possess—the means (however rudimentary) to discriminate between them, and that his decisions (however well-intentioned) are subject to inexorable review. Laura has been trained in this school; she knows—or ought to know—right from wrong; she has somehow chosen the latter; and to her, the infallible sign of her guilt is her ineradicable feeling of guilt. At the same time, another voice in Miss Porter, while not directly contesting these assumptions, concurs in Laura's self-acquittal, as it were. The author clearly understands and respects her heroine's torment, and silently cries "Bravo!" to her spirited refusal to yield. Whether one chooses to consider Miss Porter half-persuaded or half-skeptical of both verdicts, "Flowering Judas" is, in my opinion, "the testimony of a mental attitude", and that attitude is dual.

The contention that Miss Porter, like her protagonist, takes a double view in this story may not be subject to any concrete "proof." It is impractical to adduce here the evidence of her other work, which (again in my opinion) reflects a similar duality. Still, the reader may speculate about the effect on "Flowering Judas" if Miss Porter were presumed to take a single view of its dominant character and her dilemma. (It is a tribute to the authenticity of Laura that she elicits and supports such speculation.)

But which view? It would be naive to label Miss Porter either simple moralist or simple individualist; she is too perceptive and experienced to be either, and hardly simple in any case. The only viable possibility is that she is fully aware, as Laura is not, of the nature of an estrangement such as this character feels: its origins, its symptoms, its remedy.

Suppose for a moment that Miss Porter meant to show that her protagonist is the victim of feelings she can neither understand nor control, much less trace to their source. Yet from her present situation one unmistakably infers a certain kind of past. The details cannot be guessed, but "the desperate complications of her mind and feelings" clearly indicate that Laura is following a typical neurotic pattern forced on her by early emotional deprivation, which she experienced as a betrayal of love. In such cases, the unloved child usually assumes that it is *prima facie* unlovable, somehow a "bad" rather

than a "good child who understands the rules of behavior." Out of the resultant feelings of guilt and fear such a child develops a defensive personality marked by negation of the moralistic relationships that are the source of its disappointment and pain, and, by extension, of all human relationships. This movement, of course, involves a misapprehension, not of the nature of the child's experience, which it reads accurately, but of the nature of life outside of its experience—of, for example, the unconditional quality of love.

Laura has obviously constructed a large part of her existence around some such misapprehension. Irony piles upon irony. Her "reality" is not real; her "truth" is not true. There are times when people are savage, when sex does destroy, when "love" does suffocate. But she has mistaken these qualified facts for the whole fact; human relationships are not by definition hostile to her individuality, and one cannot dismiss them without incurring the ache of loss, as she has learned.

Suppose further that Miss Porter were also showing that mistakes are not "sins," that evil, as Socrates put it long ago, is simply error. From this standpoint, Laura's mistakes were inevitable, her only protection when she was too young to question the price of survival. She could not have done other than she did. Her most self-destructive error was the assumption of guilt in the first place, but this too was a mistake she could not help making. As for her dream, Laura's refusal to confess is not at all an act of moral cowardice, but evidence that a vital spirit of independence still persists in her, still fights tenaciously for its life. She is no more treacherous than the flowering Judas tree, a pretty bush to which, because of its name, she has attached some unfortunate connotations. Her feeling that she is self-betrayed might better be replaced with selfforgiveness— or rather (for it is gratuitous to forgive oneself for trying to survive), with self-acceptance.

If this were Miss Porter's unitary view, it would cap the story with a final ironic twist—that far from being either guilty or not guilty, Laura need not be on trial at all. "Flowering Judas" would be a different—not a better—story, and its gist that human beings are seldom given enough light to see by.

But this is not the story Miss Porter wrote, and I am not misguidedly trying to improve on it; it is a superb achievement just as it stands: a study in irreconcilables, a portrait of stress. As such, it cannot easily be the product of a single undivided viewpoint. If Miss Porter did not stand in the same relation to both of her heroine's attitudes, one or the other would exert less force, and a disequilibrium between them would make itself felt. The whole affective power of this story results from its balance, as well as its quality, of feeling—from the high pitch of equally disposed forces. The double outlook, moreover, is integral to the success of the story, for it increases the tension which is also its subject. This reinforcement of theme extends to even the smallest details, and creates an almost electric intensity, an emotional impact of impressive voltage.

Another telling indication of the dual point of view of the story is that one cannot imagine Miss Porter relaxing her allegiance either to the felt rights of the instinctual identity or to the fundamental moral strictures of our culture. Concerning individuality, she is as

passionate as Hawthorne (and shows much the same cast of mind) in resenting any intrusion upon the inviolable soul. As for morality, her very language, which is scrupulously exact protests a loyal adherence to what she has elsewhere called "some very old fashioned noble" values. For example in saying, as she has, that this story coalesced around a central idea of "self delusion," she selects a term which, like *betrayed* and *Judas*, bows under a weight of implicit moral judgment.

This does not mean that Miss Porter accepts her heritage without qualification, however. She is also in continual, if incomplete, revolt against it. "Flowering Judas" is (to borrow her description of another first-rate story of her own) "a story of the most painful moral and emotional confusions." The extent to which Laura reflects a widespread state of mind cannot be investigated here, but her tangling of the moral and the emotional is deeply relevant to at least some of the more painful confusions of modern man in the detritus of his civilization. While Miss Porter is not inclined to parry the thrust of the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, she effectively questions one basic aspect of it in this story, and provokes conjecture about the nature and validity of the sense of guilt, as well as of guiltiness itself.

Source: Dorothy S. Redden, "'Flowering Judas': Two Voices," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. VI, No. 2, Winter, 1969, pp. 194-204.

Adaptations

"Flowering Judas" is included on an audiotape read by Sioban McKenna, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter,* recorded in 1990 by Publishing Group West.

Topics for Further Study

At one point in the story Braggioni tells Laura, "We are more alike than you realize in some things." Are these two contrasting characters at all alike? Find some descriptions of Braggioni and Laura from the text to support your ideas about the characters.

Porter concludes "Flowering Judas" with a strange and complicated dream. How does the dream connect to themes, images, and issues raised earlier in the story? To what extent does it offer a resolution?

Research the role that Judas Iscariot plays in the New Testament. How does his background and relationship to Jesus reflect on the themes of faith and betrayal in the story?

Research the role of Catholicism in Mexican culture and the role of the Catholic Church in the Mexican Revolution. How does this historical context enrich your reading of the story?

Braggioni finds Laura's political commitment confusing in light of the fact that she is not attached to any man in the revolution. Research the role of women in the Mexican Revolution. How is Laura typical or exceptional in her political activities?

Compare and Contrast

1920s: In 1920 Mexico's *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), the National Revolutionary Party, is founded out of a coalition of military, labor, and peasant leaders. The party takes a conservative approach to the reforms demanded by socialist revolutionaries, seeking economic and political stability above social justice. According to the government that is established, the president of Mexico can only serve one term but chooses his successor, creating a one-party democracy.

1990s: The PNR, renamed PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, the Revolutionary Institutional Party) has ruled Mexico for seventy years, holding the presidency and both legislative houses. In 1997 the PRI lost the lower legislative house for the first time in what has been called the "freest election in Mexican history." The PRI still holds the upper house and the presidency.

1920s: The capitalist PNR slowly and ineffectively implements the socialist policy of land reform—the redistribution of land from large private estates to the peasant farmers. Between 1920 and 1930 over four thousand villages receive more than eight million hectares of land, but less than a quarter of that is arable, and peasants are not given the supplies, machinery, and credit necessary for success. Grain production falls precipitously and land reform is deemed a failure.

1990s: The economy of Mexico is dominated increasingly by the private sector. There are fewer than 200 state-owned enterprises. Income distribution is unequal, with 20% of the population owning 55% of the wealth.

1920s: Mexico remains an overwhelmingly Catholic country, but the institution of the Catholic Church, which had been closely affiliated with the former dictatorship, wanes in power. Conservative Catholic clerics organize service strikes, boycotts, and guerrilla attacks in protest of the PNR's secular cultural policies.

1990s: 97% of Mexicans are Catholic. The institution of the Catholic Church remains politically conservative, but, since the Second Vatican Council in 1962, a branch of Catholicism inspired by a school of thought called Liberation Theology has become associated with grassroots activism and social change.

1920s: The federal government seizes control of Mexico's schools from the Catholic Church. The new secular schools have a mission to educate Mexico's native Indian peoples, whose assimilation is considered important for the creation of a stable capitalist Mexico. A well-funded program to bring literacy to remote pueblos and to distribute free copies of cheaply-printed literary classics is launched.

1990s: Mexico has a literacy rate of 87%. The school system is public, funded by the federal government. Fifteen percent of school-age children don't attend school. In rural areas education is particularly poor, with secondary schools virtually nonexistent.

What Do I Read Next?

Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939) is a set of three short novels based on Porter's autobiographical protagonist Miranda. The acclaimed title story is set in Denver in the midst of an influenza epidemic near the end of World War I, taking up themes of illness, war, and death.

When the Air Is Clearer (1958), a novel by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, depicts the cynicism of post-revolution Mexico and explores the betrayal of revolutionary ideals by former revolutionary fighters.

Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), by Willa Cather, an author Porter greatly admired, tells the story of the confrontation between faiths and cultures set at a mission in the southwest territories of the United States.

A Farewell to Arms (1929), by Ernest Hemingway, takes up themes of romance, idealism, and disillusionment in a love story between an American soldier and an English nurse set on the Italian front during World War I.

The Waste Land (1922), a famous poem by T. S. Eliot, in many ways defined the ethos of the modernist movement. Eliot shares with Porter an interest in elaborate imagery and themes of spiritual desolation and the alienated individual.

A Curtain of Green and Other Stories (1941), by Eudora Welty, offers animated portraits of characters in the modern South in a series of acclaimed short stories.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Katherine Anne Porter,* New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

A collection of critical essays on Porter's fiction.

Givner, Joan. *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life,* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.

This definitive biography of Porter sets the record straight on the flamboyant and enigmatic author's life and paints a detailed portrait of her times.

Hendrick, Willene, and George Hendrick. *Katherine Anne Porter,* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.

A concise critical introduction to Porter's fiction groups her stories according to theme, setting, and character, and offers a brief, lucid interpretation of each.

Lopez, Enrique Hank. *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter: Refugee from Indian Creek,* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.

A biographical study based on a series of taped conversations with Porter during the last years of her life offers a glimpse into Porter's fascinating personality, though the facts are subject to her fanciful fictionalization.

Walsh, Thomas F. *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden,* Houston: University of Texas Press, 1992.

A detailed scholarly study of Mexico's influence on Porter's art includes useful analysis of the political and historical background to Porter's stories as well as literary interpretations based on a psycho-biographical approach.

West, Ray B. *The Art of Modern Fiction,* New York: Rinehart, 1949.

West focuses on religious symbolism, arguing that Braggioni is capable of redemption, while Laura, who is unable to love, is not.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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