

# Representations of Truth: The Significance of Order in Katherine Anne Porter's The Old Order Stories

Heather Fox

## *Abstract*

Katherine Anne Porter submitted a group of stories called "Legend and Memory" to *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1934, but instead of the reception she hoped for, *The Atlantic Monthly* responded with a request for significant revisions. These recommendations, as Porter adamantly explained, would change the collective meaning of the stories. And yet, Porter ultimately chose to concede, publishing the stories separately in other magazines before finally collecting them together again in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944). Over the next twenty years, Porter would publish the stories (later called The Old Order stories) in two more collections— *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas* and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. Each time she chose not to edit individual stories but rearranged the order of the stories. Individually, each story is like a sketch, or one component of the protagonist Miranda's construct of identity from the perspective of an adult looking backward and remembering as a child. And yet collectively, these stories reveal memory's process of reconstruction and how the perspective of time transforms event through addition, elimination, and arrangement. Using text, correspondence, manuscripts, and cognitive research to examine the progression of Porter's work on The Old Order stories in three collections over more than thirty years, "Representations of Truth: The Significance of Order in Katherine Anne Porter's The Old Order Stories" traces the progressive ordering of these stories from their original submission to their final collection in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965). This essay argues that Porter's rearrangements reflect a reconstructive process of memory. Over time, the reorganization of The Old Order stories demonstrate a shift in Miranda's memories from a chronological

positioning to a representational ordering, allowing Miranda to reexamine her perspective on past experiences.

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There are many levels of performance within a text, but in Katherine Anne Porter's *The Old Order* stories, the outer text, or arrangement of story content, is as important as the inner text, or the content, itself. Over several publications, Porter does not alter the content of the individual stories; however she does rearrange their order. Moreover, throughout the publication process, she maintains control over this evolving order. Order, therefore, in Porter's *The Old Order* stories, develops its own context as the stories are rearranged in three collections over thirty years, each time deconstructing the previous order which, in turn, subsequently reconstructs the meaning of the memory narrative over time.

Representative of some of her earliest work, *The Old Order* stories were written between 1932 and 1934<sup>1</sup> as part of a three section project called *Many Redeemers* and submitted for publication in 1934 as "Legend and Memory." In the project, Porter combines legend and memory to (re)create the past in the present. As she explained to her father, Harrison Porter, "I am trying to reconstruct the whole history of an American family (Ours, more or less) from the beginning by means of just those two things—legend, and memory. I want you to tell me all the stories you know, . . . and thus I hope to build a bridge back."<sup>2</sup> But Porter never completed *Many Redeemers*; and frustrated by *The Atlantic Monthly's* suggestion that she should publish "Legend and Memory" in fragments,<sup>3</sup> she wrote to her publisher Charles Pearce that she was glad it was sent back because she "should not like at all for it to be published in such a state."<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, all of the "Legend and Memory" sections—I. The Grandmother, II. Uncle Jimbilly, III. The Circus, IV. The Old Order, V. The Grave, VI. The Last Leaf<sup>5</sup>—were first published as individual magazine stories: "Uncle Jimbilly" and "The Last Leaf" sections as "Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf" in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (January 1935), "The Grave" in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (April 1935), "The Circus" in *Southern Review* (1935), "The Old Order" in *Southern Review* (1936), and "The Grandmother," renamed "The Source," in *Accent* (1941). Years later, the stories were collected in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944), *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas* (1955), and *The Collected Stories of Katherine*

*Anne Porter* (1965). Even though Porter initially was adamant about the arrangement of the “Legend and Memory” sections, these sections (now stories) were ordered differently in each subsequent collection.

When discussing these sections, stories, and collections, it is important to differentiate between Porter’s various uses of *The Old Order* title. For instance, in the “Legend and Memory” submission (1934), *The Old Order* is the title of the fourth section which becomes “The Old Order” short story in *Southern Review* (1935) and subsequent collections. Even though the six sections of “Legend and Memory” were published together in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944), there is no distinction between the “Legend and Memory” stories and the other three stories in the table of contents. In fact, it was not until *The Old Order: Stories of the South* (1955) and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965) that the six stories (or seven stories once “The Fig Tree” was added in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*) were grouped together under the subtitle *The Old Order*. *The Old Order: Stories of the South* (1955) is a collection that includes the “Legend and Memory” stories in addition to other “southern” stories. *The Old Order*, therefore, indicates the group of stories that began as “Legend and Memory” and ended under the subtitle *The Old Order* in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. Additionally, since the complete “Legend and Memory” manuscript does not exist in the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, references to “Legend and Memory” are cited from *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories*, first edition, which is closest in both publication date and story order to “Legend and Memory.”

Like the changes in *The Old Order* title over time (fig. 1), both Porter’s physical arrangements of the stories and the narrator Miranda’s narrative within the stories replicate a reconstructive process of memory. Individually, each story is like a sketch, or one component of Miranda’s construct of identity from the perspective of an adult looking backward and remembering as a child. And yet collectively, these stories reveal memory’s process of reconstruction and how the perspective of time transforms event through addition, elimination, and arrangement. Over time, *The Old Order* stories shift Miranda’s memories from a chronological positioning to a representational ordering that allows Miranda to reexamine her perspective on truth. As Porter explains in a 1955 letter to Edward

Schwartz in response to his request to write her biography: “How can we write a story until we know the end? In a special and almost literal way, In my end is my beginning; nobody will be able to see what my life meant until it is ended; how can you sum up my work until it is finished” (Unrue 246). For The Old Order stories in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, their end (in terms of their narrative placement in the final collection) is their beginning in the sense that Miranda’s narrative progressively evolves outside of the confines of chronological time and within the fluidity of episodic memory, or memory that places past event in the present. From their initial inception in “Legend and Memory” to their subsequent arrangements in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas*, and finally *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, the progressive reordering of The Old Order stories reflects the reconstructive process of memory as it repositions itself over time as an extension of the past, present, and future.

To understand the progressive reconstruction of The Old Order stories, it is important to examine Porter’s original submission, “Legend and Memory.” In a letter to Kenneth Burke on March 30, 1936, Porter writes that “Legend and Memory” is “a consistent, steady tapping of all the sources I have, and it is precisely what I have called it—my memory and the memories of my elders, their legends, and mine, and it is a book very necessary to be written before I shall go on to other things.” Most likely, Porter began writing “Legend and Memory” in Switzerland in 1932 as part of her project, *Many Redeemers*,<sup>6</sup> and by October 19, 1933, she had written thirty thousand words.<sup>7</sup> As Darlene Harbour Unrue argues in *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist*, “before the enterprise exhausted itself, it would go on for more than thirty years, expand, change forms and titles, shed pieces of itself, and shift focus. It would become the widest stream in her fictional canon” (113). The project and, in particular, the sections originally submitted as “Legend and Memory,” remained foundational to Porter’s interest in the relationship between legend and memory as integral components of identity.

Within “Legend and Memory” there is a series of episodic memories in which Miranda acquires a new understanding about herself and her relationship to others as a result of direct and indirect experience. Miranda’s narrative looks both within and without, as a child experiencing and as an

adult remembering. While it is difficult to determine the precise source of Many Redeemers, it is possible that the idea for the project originated from a short sketch in which Miranda remembers a conversation with her father as a young child. In an undated "Legend and Memory" manuscript fragment, Miranda recalls her father's explanation about the "truth" of Virgin Mary:

Don't ever let me hear you talking any of that nonsense about the slavery of women," said her father, "I wishall (sic) you women who talk about slavery had to be turned into men for just one day . . . .Then you'd know the meaning of slvery. (sic) "He wrapped his ragged old bathrobe around him and had started down the hall. "Just look at me with my elbow out trying to keep a houseful of women in fine proper clothes. Where are you going at this time of day, anyhow?"

Miranda loved her father when he took that tone with her, and she answered a little primly, thinking she was going to please him: "I'm going to mass.

Her father stoped (sic) and turned back: "Good God, it isn't Sunday again, is it?"

"It's the feast of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," said Miranda" (a double feast of the first class with common octave) One (sic) always goes to Mass . . ."

"Do you know the meaning of the words immaculate conception? Asked her father in quite an everyday voice, which left her unprepared for what was to follow . . .

"Yes, it means that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without stain of original sin," gabbled Miranda prissily.

Point of this: "If Jesus was not the son of Joseph," said Father etc, (sic) very deliberately, "why then he was the son of some other living, mortal man . . . .The laws of nature, he said have never

been reversed, even in one instance . . . the sooner you get that firmly fixed in your mind, the better off you'll be," he said . . ."

Mirand (sic) horrified, and confused and ashamed . . . expected the floor to open and swallow him. What a mean, horrible, evil minded man he was! She ran , , her head roaring and her face scarlett . . .and besides, he had got everything mixed up. She [was not telling]<sup>8</sup> about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!<sup>9</sup>

Beneath the sketch, Porter wrote Many Redeemers and outlined three sections: I. Legend and Memory, 2. Midway this Mortal Life, 3. The Present Day. The positioning of the project outline beneath the conversation between father and daughter suggests a relationship between this manuscript fragment, not included in *Many Redeemers* submission, and the eventual content of the sketches. Psychologists Vinaya Raj and Martha Ann Bell argue in "Cognitive Processes Supporting Episodic Memory Formation in Childhood: The Role of Source Memory, Binding, and Executive Functioning" that the contextual detail of an episodic memory attributes a memory episode to its source which, in turn, provides an experience that binds certain features of a memory episode together with certain features of another memory episode (384). In other words, the source memory is not only an origin but also a future perceptual encoding for subsequent memories. In the manuscript fragment when Miranda's father asks, "Do you know the meaning of the words immaculate conception,"<sup>10</sup> she anticipates that her reply will demonstrate her knowledge and gain her father's approval. Instead, her father's response contradicts her previous understanding of truth. For Miranda, the Virgin Mary represents truth; but according to her father, the Virgin Mary represents how legend is mythologized to appear as truth. Thus, even though the sketch between Miranda and her father is not found in any of the submitted or published versions of the text, the tension between legend, memory, and truth becomes a context for her future memories in *The Old Order*.

Since the six sections of "Legend and Memory" are connected, in part, by legend, memory, and truth, their collective meaning is dependent on the interrelationship between sections. Porter was disheartened by *The Atlantic Monthly's* suggestion that the sections of "Legend and Memory" be cut and reorganized into a separate story about Grandmother and Aunt Nannie<sup>11</sup>

because she recognized the importance of the sections' connections. After attempting the edit, Edward Aswell, assistant editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, wrote that they were "not wholly satisfied with it: the writing is good and the characters of the two old women are very clearly delineated, and yet as a story the thing does not really get anywhere but tends to fade out at the end. . . . our editing has convinced us it will take more than a blue pencil to carve a story out of this material."<sup>12</sup> And in frustration, Porter explained to Pearce the irony of the decision:

. . . wouldn't you think that the editor, as he read it and liked it, would have been able to learn something from what happened to it when it was cut? . . . it is horribly tiresome and discouraging . . . . There is one section which could better stand alone as a short story—if that is what they must have—but they overlooked it completely. It is "The Grave." But if I take it out the rest of the manuscript will be incomplete. It is a fragment, but it belongs where it is.<sup>13</sup>

As Raj and Bell argue, memory's binding processes are "crucial . . . because they connect separate parts of an event into a cohesive and memorable whole" and without proper binding, episodic memory representations become compromised (396); or, as Porter points out to Pearce, the representations are incomplete. In "Legend and Memory," each episodic memory moment is a fragment that relies on its connection to a different but similar memory in order to develop and extend its meaning. Aswell inadvertently recognizes the connectedness between the "Legend and Memory" sections when *The Atlantic Monthly* editors are unable to disassemble it in order to construct a new meaning. When separated, the sections become a distortion instead of a component of identity, isolated fragments instead of progressive insight into the interconnectivity of remembered experience.

Another element that binds the memories together in the "Legend and Memory" sections is Miranda's progression of age, which acts as a chronological framework for the individual sections. Porter asserts that "one lives an enormous span of life between one's first memory and one's thirteenth year;"<sup>14</sup> and notably, Miranda is younger than thirteen in all of

the “Legend and Memory” sections. In “Uncle Jimbilly,” she is “a flighty little girl of six” (“The Witness” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*), and she is “nine years old” at the time of “The Grave” (“The Grave” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 70). From narrative content in other sections, it can be deduced that Miranda was approximately six or younger in “The Grandmother,” seven or eight when she cannot comprehend why the boys are looking up at her from beneath the seats in “The Circus,” and older than nine in “The Last Leaf” since Grandmother’s death was in the past and the family’s financial stability was quickly deteriorating: “They [Miranda, her sister Maria, and her brother Paul] were growing up, times were changing, the old world was sliding from under their feet, and they had not laid hold of the new one” (“The Last Leaf” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 61). According to Yee Lee Shing et al’s neurological study, “Episodic Memory across the Lifespan: The Contributions of Associative and Strategic Components,” throughout life the capacity for episodic memory functions differently. It rapidly increases during childhood. The ability to remember events begins around six; and by middle childhood, children are capable of “mental time travel” and the “self-referential nature” of episodic memory (1081). Within episodic memory, there is, as psychologist William Friedman asserts, an “internalized view of the past and future as part of a temporal framework” which is dependent on multiple kinds of representations and processes (“Developmental and Cognitive Perspectives on Humans’ Sense of the Times of Past and Future Events” 146).

Since Miranda’s narrative works from both within (as a child) and without (as an adult remembering childhood experiences), her age is significant at the time of each memory’s original experience. At the age of six, when all of her previous knowledge is based on Grandmother’s mythical legend, it is not surprising that she questions whether Uncle Jimbilly’s stories are true. Paradoxically, his stories seem less realistic than Grandmother’s illusory construct of reality. At nine years old in the family cemetery with her brother Paul, she easily buries experience deep within her memory. Most poignantly, Miranda’s ability to remember episodically appears twenty years later when Miranda, as an adult, suddenly remembers her experience in the family cemetery with Paul. The image resurfaces in the same way that it was initially experienced, “plain and clear in its true colors as if she looked through a frame upon a scene that had not stirred nor changed since the moment it happened” (“The Grave” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*



78). Miranda, now at least thirty years old, has developed multiple representations and processes, as Friedman suggests, to encode the original source of the memory so that what she remembers in the market is not only the scene, itself, but also the relationship between the remembered scene and her brother: “the dreadful vision faded, and she saw clearly her brother, whose childhood face she had forgotten, standing again in the blazing sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands” (“The Grave” in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 78). Miranda’s age relates individual memories to one another through their place in chronological time.

Part of the reason that episodic memory relies on contextual binding is that it loses specificity over time. According to Lynn Nadel and Oliver Hardt in “Update on Memory Systems and Processes,” with the passage of time, two things happen: First, some of the links to the elements are lost, and second, a parallel representation directly linking elements and events, independent of context, develops outside the hippocampus [the location of the brain where studies suggest that episodic memory begins]. The former accounts for the loss of specific details and the latter for the generalization of behavior to new contexts (263). To this end, Porter tried to persuade her father, Harrison Boone Porter, to help her remember the details from the past so that she might utilize them more accurately in her writing. In a letter on January 21, 1933, she asks, “Couldn’t you just take your time and tell what you remember of your childhood, where you were born, what life was like, how we came to go to Louisiana and Texas?” She continues, “For example, I remember your telling once—this was when I was a child— . . . How you and one of your brothers got sick for Louisiana and ran away, trying to get back to where the sugar cane grew.”<sup>15</sup> Noticeably, this memory resembles Miranda’s memory of Grandmother’s sons in “The Old Order”: When Grandmother asks Harry and Robert, “‘Why did you run away from me?’ . . . All the answer they could make, as they wept too, was that they had wanted to go back to Louisiana to eat sugar cane. They had been thinking about sugar cane all winter” (“The Old Order” in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 54).

While the remembered details of this episode are important for comparing the actual event to its fictional counterpart, the way in which the memory

of the experience creates new meaning is even more important. In “The Old Order,” Harry and Robert’s longing for the sugar cane symbolizes more than just physical, or literal, hunger; it also represents a psychological, or figurative, hunger: “These two had worked like men; she felt their growing bones through their thin flesh, and remembered how mercilessly she had driven them, as she had driven herself, . . . because there was no choice in the matter” (“The Old Order” in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 54). As psychologists Daniel Bernstein and Elizabeth Loftus describe in “How to Tell If a Particular Memory Is True or False,” in the process of reconstructing the past, “we color and shape our life’s experiences based on what we know about the world” (373). After recalling the story about Harry and Robert, Miranda notes that “this day was the beginning of her spoiling her children and being afraid of them” (“The Old Order” in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 55). Miranda’s memory of Grandmother’s experience is significant not because of its remembered details but because of the meaning within the remembered details of the experience. Miranda recognizes that Grandmother’s relationship with her sons was never the same after the moment.

Therefore, Miranda’s narrative position acts as a perspective, or lens, for encoding memory’s experience with meaning. Even when directly participating in the experience of memory, such as in “The Circus” or “The Grave,” Miranda’s voice is distant or even silent. When present, her dialogue is almost always indirect. According to M. K. Fornataro-Neil in “Constructed Narratives and Writing Identity in the Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter,” that silence allows for “greater opportunity to comment on constructed identity and objective truth” (349). In other words, Porter’s position between conscious recollection and the perception of that recollection allows her to analyze the “truth” of the memory in a way that direct involvement does not allow. For instance, when she remembers Grandmother’s yearly gallop with her horse, Fiddler, in “The Grandmother,” she describes how Grandmother “walked lightly and breathed as easily as ever” but then adds: “or so she chose to believe” (“The Source” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 9). The judgment, disguised as description, *seems* objective even though it is explicitly addressing the reader. In “Boundaries of the Relation between Conscious Recollection and Source Memory for Perceptual Details,” Thorsten Meiser and Christine Sattler found that “‘remember’ judgments” occur when memories are closely associated to a source memory with similar perceptual

attributes (192). The way in which Miranda conveys her adult perceptions about Grandmother's legend (which are different than her childhood perspective) are similar to her "silent" response to her father's revelation about Virgin Mary in the manuscript fragment. Miranda does not directly confront her father but, instead, internalizes her counter-argument, as evidenced by Miranda's response which Porter handwrites after the typed dialogue: "and besides, he had got everything mixed up. She was not telling about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!"<sup>16</sup> Miranda's voice is outside the narrative and, consequently, it is the perspective of the memory's experience and not the source of the memory that possesses relevant truth.

Like Miranda's narrative in "Legend and Memory," *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* is primarily organized chronologically. Furthermore, as evidenced by letters from her publisher, Donald Brace,<sup>17</sup> Porter chose the order of the stories for the collection. In the table of contents, the "Legend and Memory" stories come first (but are no longer grouped under the heading "Legend and Memory"), followed by three other stories: "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "A Day's Work," and "The Leaning Tower." Porter expressed concern about how to demonstrate that the "Legend and Memory" stories belong together and Brace suggested two options: a "half-title" such as "Plantation Sketches" with another half-title for the remaining three or a space in the table of contents between the first six and the final three stories.<sup>18</sup> In the end, however, the stories appeared undifferentiated in the table of contents.

Porter did not revise any of the content of the individual stories before publishing them in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, but she did change the order of the final two stories so that "The Grave" became the last story instead of "The Last Leaf." Most likely, she did not realize the significance of this change, which would begin a process of reordering over time and reconstruct Miranda's perception of identity. In *Understanding Katherine Anne Porter*, Darlene Harbour Unrue describes "The Grave" as less realistic in its details than other stories, "honed, pared, and shaped in such a way that the events seem placed in a spotlight that illuminates only central details and relegates everything else to peripheral darkness" (59). "The Grave" begins with knowledge of the distant past, "THE grandfather,

dead for more than thirty years, had been twice disturbed in his long repose" (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 69), progresses to Miranda's memory of hunting with her brother, Paul, in their old family cemetery, and ends in present-day at a market where the adult Miranda is admiring a vendor's tray of sweets.

Time moves from past to present; but, within the narrative, there is also a blending of time that is different from the chronologically-ordered sections in "Legend and Memory." For instance, Miranda literally and physically leaps into "the pit that had held her grandfather's bones" (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 70), an action which is also figuratively and psychologically symbolic of her connection to her ancestral past. Additionally, when she smells "the mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled that other day in the empty cemetery at home," the past not only blends with the present but, in this instance, even overtakes the present so that "the scene before her eyes dimmed by the vision back of them" (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 78). Structurally, as well, while Miranda is remembering her childhood, those same memories are simultaneously responsible for her response to the present. In a neuropsychological study, "Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future: Common and Distinct Neural Substrates during Event Construction and Elaboration," Donna Rose Addis, Alana Wong, and Daniel Schacter define episodic memory as an individual's unique ability to "project themselves backward in time and recollect many aspects of their previous experiences" (1363). Friedman complicates this definition by suggesting that there is a connection not only between the past and the present in episodic memory but also between the past and the future. He argues that "we have internalized a view of the past and future as parts of a temporal framework, . . . allow[ing] us to consider the pastness or futurity of events, their temporal distances from the present, their 'locations' within patterns of time (e.g., the day, week, or year), and their order" (Friedman 146). Moreover, Friedman cites research on temporal reality, which considers the past-future distinction "unnecessary" for describing the physical world: "When adults think about when past events have occurred and future events will occur, time often appears to be a seamless, integral continuum. But our examination of the psychological processes underlying adults' sense of past and future times leads to a very different conclusion: these abilities rest on a patchwork of representations and processes" (155). This "patchwork of representations and processes" is possibly what Unrue describes as the "peripheral darkness" (59).

surrounding spotlighted events within Miranda's episodic memory in "The Grave." Unlike the arrangement of the sections in "Legend and Memory," Porter positions "The Grave" as the last story. This first reordering begins a process of reconstruction, which first deconstructs the chronological structure of the stories and then reconstructs meaning through episodic representation.

Porter's movement from chronological to episodic ordering, which began with her reorganization of the final two stories in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, is most evident in *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas*. In a response to an interviewer, Porter explains that her "material consists of memory, legend, personal experience, and acquired knowledge. They combine in a constant process of re-creation" ("Three Statements about Writing"123). This re-creation in *The Old Order: Stories of the South* does not include story-level revision. However, it is a complete revision of the stories' arrangement. Catherine Carver from Harcourt, Brace, and Company proposed the idea for the collection in a letter to Porter on January 25, 1955, outlining their story preferences as the six stories in *The Leaning Tower* about Miranda and the Grandmother and "Old Mortality." However, Porter, who in past collections determined which stories would be included and the order of those stories, was displeased and wrote to Donald Brace,

I thought the selection was limited, I should like all the southern stories; that is, besides the six under the heading The Old Order, and Old Mortality, I want He and Granny Weatherall—they'll help give backbone. I should even like Magic, the New Orleans story, a kind of little low-life gloss on the gay New Orleans Amy knew, . . . The way it is now, the selection seems a little half-hearted, incomplete.<sup>19</sup>

Porter also wrote to Carver about how the collection *should* look, noting that her arrangement would ensure that no one would "mistake them [The Old Order stories] for random sketches, as so many reviewers did, or fragments from an unfinished novel, which they are not."<sup>20</sup>

### *The Old Order*

The Source

The Old Order

The Witness

The Circus

The Last Leaf

The Grave

THE JILTING OF GRANNY WEATHERALL

HE

OLD MORTALITY

Next to THE JILTING OF GRANNY WEATHERALL and HE, Porter admonished, “If this were my book I’d never leave out these two utterly southern stories. The collection is crippled without them.”<sup>21</sup> The stories were selected for their “southernness”; and yet, the binding between them, particularly in the reordering of The Old Order stories, reveals more than a shared cultural context.

Their reordering indicates a transition from chronological time to representational time, which began by positioning “The Grave” at the end of The Old Order stories in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, and exchanges veracity of detail for representational truth. For instance, Grandmother’s legend is still the first story; but by the end of the second story (“The Old Order”), she “dropped dead over the doorsill” (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 33). In “The Witness,” there is only one reference to Grandmother in her youth as Miss Sophia Jane, but it is implied that she is still alive. In “The Circus,” she appears completely alive as the matriarchal voice that provides stability in the midst of Miranda’s disconcerting experience at the circus; but by “The Last Leaf” and “The Grave,” she is no longer alive. Thus, time in The Old Order stories becomes “detached and floating” (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 15). In a manuscript fragment, Porter admits that she must work in three dimensions of time: “There is only the present; one lives always in memory, anticipation, and the split second of time which is the present, a transitory thing; where the past is in eternity, and the future, also. The past is real in the sense that it has occurred but the future is only a concept.”<sup>22</sup> Grandmother’s physical presence—as depicted by life, burial, and “resurrection”—is actual in the sense that the events have occurred in the past; but, with the anachronistic arrangement of stories in *The Old Order*:

*Stories of the South*, which encompasses all three dimensions of time, the representation of the present through Miranda's narrative becomes symbolic of each memory's significance beyond a framework of chronological time.

Consequently, The Old Order stories now connect events through episodic-based memory and not through Miranda's chronological age. Moreover, Miranda's understanding of truth becomes a representation of truth from the progressively changing context of her episodic memories. For example, in *The Old Order: Stories of the South*, the first three stories idealize the past. Grandmother's legend in "The Source," which is representative of Miranda's understanding of truth, is problematic because it is, in actuality, a myth beginning like a fairy tale—"Once a year"—and perpetuating a Persephone-like immortality based on Grandmother's cyclic relationship with the seasons (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 3). Miranda's initial experience with "truth," then, is a false representation of truth, an illusion without beginning, middle, or end that is overturned by the reality of Grandmother's actual death at the end of "The Old Order." Similarly, Miranda first questions authenticity with Uncle Jimbilly's stories, assuming that direct experience *must* be true; but her perception of the relationship between direct experience and truth is subsequently overturned in "The Circus" with her inability to differentiate between illusion and reality. "The Circus," for Miranda, is a turning point in which she finds herself separated from her family both physically and psychologically for the first time as an identity separate from others. After "The Circus," Miranda is left with two options: to reject the past and establish a new identity like Nannie in "The Last Leaf" or to bury the past as Paul instructs in "The Grave." Both options position the past behind the present; but, as evidenced by her experience at the end of "The Grave," even though her memories are buried, they are still capable of resurrecting themselves in the future (like Grandmother's death and resurrection throughout the new arrangement of the stories). As Edward Schwartz argues in "The Fictions of Memory," Miranda needs "to see and understand that self precisely, to render her perceptions and understanding without abandoning the identity between the self that knows and sees and the self that's seen and known" (72). While the reordering of *The Old Order* stories may seem less structured by its deconstruction of chronological time, its (re)construction allows Miranda to examine truth in terms of a contextual representation that

analyzes both experience and the perception of that experience through episodic memory.

*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, then, is Porter's final positioning of *The Old Order* stories. The "Southern stories" — "He," "Magic," and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"—which were added to *The Old Order: Stories of the South* are returned to the *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* section in this collection. The only significant changes in the arrangement of *The Old Order* stories between *The Old Order: Stories of the South* and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* are the addition of "The Fig Tree," which expands the *The Old Order* to seven stories, and "The Old Order" story's title change to "The Journey." In the preface to *The Collected Stories*, "Go Little Book," Porter clarifies the textual history of the story additions:

This collection of stories has been floating around the world in many editions, countries and languages, in three small volumes, for many years. There are four stories added which have never been collected before, and it is by mere hazard they are here at all. "The Fig Tree," now in its right place in the sequence called The Old Order, simply disappeared at the time *The Leaning Tower* was published, in 1944, and reappeared again from a box of otherwise unfinished manuscripts in another house, another city and a different state, in 1961. . . . A friend fished them out of the ancient Century files, got them re-published, after forty-odd years and so they join their fellows. (v-vi)

The volume represents thirty years of (re)ordering and is divided into three sections: *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, and *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*. It represents Miranda's final understanding of truth.

The most prominent change between *The Old Order: Stories of the South* and *The Collected Stories* is the addition of "The Fig Tree," placed as the sixth story between "The Last Leaf" and "The Grave." If the source and binding of the episodic memories in *The Old Order* stories relates to representations of truth, then "The Fig Tree's" examination of death, life, and resurrection is a crucial addition to Miranda's sense of identity. In a letter to her sister Gay Porter in 1928 (the same year that she most-likely



wrote "The Fig Tree"), Porter describes how she was beginning to feel as if "the world grows to be a familiar place, with no dark and terrifying corners, and no shocks and almost no strangeness" (Unrue 46). In "The Fig Tree," of course, the world is not a familiar place to Miranda. She feels isolated by events out of her control—Nannie's discipline, Grandmother's and her father's expectations, and, most significantly, her mother's death. In fact, she feels as if she can only gain a sense of control by ritualistically burying dead farm animals. Since Shing et al. assert that "a core part of our identity formation is rooted in the ability to mentally travel back in time and re-experience events" (1080), it is significant that Miranda's memory in "The Fig Tree" begins with what death looks like to her (as a child): "When Miranda found any creature that didn't move or make a noise, or looked somehow different from the live ones, she always buried it in a little grave with flowers on top and a smooth stone at the head. Even grasshoppers. Everything dead had to be treated this way" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 354). Difference indicates death and "dying was something that happened all the time, . . . and [after burial] that person was never seen again by anybody" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 354). Miranda, even at a young age, understands death to be permanent and assigns its physical location to underground. Therefore, it is not surprising that she feels guilty when she thinks that she might have buried a live chick instead of a dead one. Even though it is clearly dead, "spread out on his side with his eyes shut and his mouth open" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 355), the weeping sound that she hears constantly reminds her of the possibility that something buried might actually be alive or, more frighteningly, that observed truth might not be actual truth. In all of her previous experiences with death, burial was permanent; but, as Great-Aunt Eliza reveals when she explains the actual source of the weeping sound, experience is not always truth. Instead of burying knowledge, Great-Aunt Eliza unburies it.<sup>23</sup> In the final arrangement of *The Old Order* stories, resurrection takes many forms: Grandmother's death and reappearances in the anachronistic arrangement of the stories, the multiple times that Grandfather's remains are exhumed and reburied, the psychological resurfacing of Miranda's buried childhood memory of her experience with Paul in the family cemetery, and finally, Great-Aunt Eliza's revelation that the source of actual truth can be different from the experience of perceived truth.

Thus, if, as Daniel Schacter et al. discuss in “Memory Distortion: An Adaptive Perspective,” the primary function of episodic memory is actually to support the future (468) and not simply to remember the past, then by adding “The Fig Tree” to *The Old Order*, truth is resurrected perspective that connects all dimensions of time—past, present, and future. In the “Legend and Memory” manuscript fragment, Miranda’s father reveals the “truth” about Virgin Mary; and in “The Fig Tree” Great-Aunt Eliza reveals the “truth” about the weeping sound. Both “truths” challenge Miranda’s perspective in relation to her previous understanding of truth. However, unlike her father’s revelation that complicates her understanding and renders her silent, Great-Aunt Eliza’s explanation relieves Miranda’s concern, smoothing out the “dark and terrifying corners” (Unrue 46) by deconstructing the perception of experience to reveal what lies beneath (or within) the source of that experience: “‘Just think,’ said Great-Aunt Eliza, in her most scientific voice, ‘when tree frogs shed their skins, they pull them off over their heads like little skirts, and they eat them. Can you imagine? They have the prettiest little shapes you ever saw—I’ll show you one some time under the microscope’” (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 362). The microscope symbolizes Miranda’s new lens of perception, which is not just a scientific lens, as the story suggests, but knowledge that does not render Miranda silent. Her voice, unlike the inner, suppressed dialogue after her conversation with her father in the manuscript fragment, is still heard at the end of “The Fig Tree”: “‘Thank you ma’am,’ Miranda remembered to say through her fog of bliss” (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 362). Great-Aunt Eliza’s revelation to Miranda is central to Miranda’s understanding of truth.

In an uncompleted *Many Redeemers* fragment (c. 1930-1931), Porter divides a page in two parts with the titles, “The Ancestors” and “The Fig Tree.” In “The Fig Tree” section she writes that “when the fig tree does not bear it must be cut down and cast into the fire—(find this passage in King James Version) . . . I do not want us to die and be altogether dust . . . the roots must n t (sic) be destroyed, there must be a replanting.”<sup>24</sup> By adding “The Fig Tree” to *The Old Order* stories, Porter’s original intentions for depicting Miranda’s evolving perception of truth are finally complete. Miranda’s narrative in *The Old Order* is not only capable of transcending chronological time but also capable of resurrecting what lies beneath the surface.

In the final publication of The Old Order stories, Miranda’s understanding begins as actual truth in legend but evolves into a representation of truth through legend. Truth, as Porter contends in “My First Speech,” is a “very tall word” (692); but Porter’s insistent rearrangement of The Old Order stories in four collections over thirty years confirms that truth must encompass the past, present, and future as both a deconstruction and a (re)construction of meaning. With each new memory episode, Miranda adapts so that she learns to depend on something “*deeper than knowledge*.”<sup>25</sup> And, in this way, legend, memory, and truth are all components of Miranda’s identity in The Old Order.

*The Old Order Stories – Katherine Anne Porter*

Collection Story Order	“Legend and Memory” (submitted 1934) and Magazine Publications	<i>The Leaning Tower and Other Stories</i> , 1944	<i>The Old Order: Stories of the South from Her Books The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Flowering Judas</i> , 1955 Stories given heading: The Old Order	<i>The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter</i> , 1965
1	“The Grandmother”  <i>Accent</i> , 1941	“The Grandmother ”  renamed “The Source”	“The Source”	“The Source”
2	“Uncle Jimbilly” <i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i> , Jan. 1935, published as	“Uncle Jimbilly”	“The Old Order”	“The Old Order”

	"Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf"	renamed "The Witness"	renamed "The Journey"	renamed "The Journey"
3	"The Circus" <i>Southern Review</i> , 1935	"The Circus"	"The Witness"	"The Witness"
4	"The Old Order" <i>Southern Review</i> , 1936	"The Old Order"	"The Circus"	"The Circus"
5	"The Grave" <i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i> , Apr. 1935	"The Last Leaf"	"The Last Leaf"	"The Last Leaf"
6	"The Last Leaf" <i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i> , Jan. 1935, published as "Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf"	"The Grave"	"The Grave"	"The Fig Tree" (written 1928; first published in <i>Harper's Magazine</i> , June 1960
7				"The Grave"

\* "The Grave," "The Witness," and "The Old Order" were also collected in *Selected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, Armed Services Edition* (1945).

Fig. 1: The Old Order Stories Publications Chart

The first row identifies the collections in chronological order by publication date. The first column indicates the order of the stories within these published collections.

*Acknowledgment*

The author would like to acknowledge Beth Alvarez, Curator of Literary Manuscripts Emerita at the University of Maryland, and Ann Hudak, Special Collections Librarian at the University of Maryland, for assistance with Porter's manuscripts. Additionally, the author would like to thank Bryant Mangum, Professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University, for his guidance with this project.

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## Notes

- 1 In Porter's correspondence with Caroline Gordon (1932, 1935), Harrison Porter (1932, 1933), and Josephine Herbst (1934), she mentions work on "Legend and Memory." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and Bayley, 109, 127.
- 2 Porter's letter to Harrison Porter, 31 May 1934, Papers of Thomas F. Walsh. In Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 3 Edward Aswell, *The Atlantic Monthly* assistant editor, recommends to Charles Pearce on 17 May 1934, that the novel be cut into a short story about the Grandmother and Aunt Nannie. A week later editors advise that "it will take more than a blue pencil to carve a story out of this material." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 4 Porter's letter to Charles Pearce, 8 June 1934, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 5 Aswell's letter to Pearce, 17 May, 1934, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and Alvarez, p. 267.
- 6 Porter writes to Caroline Gordon from Switzerland, 1932: "Little by little I have got out all my manuscripts and began very tentatively to experiment with writing again. I have about thirty short stories, and two novels, all in the first ragged stages of notes and occasional full paragraphs; the main novel is not even half done." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 7 "To Mr. Moe," Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 8 Most likely, the fragment reads "She [was not telling] about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!" but Porter's handwriting is not definitively legible in the bracketed words.
- 9 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 10 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 11 Aswell's letter to Pearce, 17 May 1934. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 12 Aswell's letter to Pearce, 24 May 1934. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.



- 13 Porter's letter to Pearce, 8 June 1934. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
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- 15 Porter's letter to Harrison Porter, 21 Jan. 1933, Papers of Thomas F. Walsh. In Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. Print. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
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- 17 Brace's letters to Porter, 2 June 1944 and 6 June 1944. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 18 Brace's letter to Porter, 6 June 1944. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 19 Porter's letter to Brace, 30 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 20 Porter's letter to Carver, 28 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 21 Porter's letter to Carver, 28 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 22 *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, Preface?, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 23 See also Fox, "Resurrecting Truth in Katherine Anne Porter's 'The Fig Tree.'"
- 24 Many Redeemers, c. 1930-1931, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. Print. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 25 Porter's letter to Gordon, 9 June 1935. In Bayley, 127.

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