



THE ORDEAL OF URBAN WOMEN IN SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S "THEFT" AND "FLOWERING JUDAS"

*Katherine Anne Porter'in "Theft" ve "Flowering Judas" Adlı Öykülerinde Kimlik Arayışı
İçindeki Şehirli Kadınların Zorlu Sınavı*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the subjective pursuit of identity in Katherine Anne Porter's urban heroines with their internalized identity of 'Other'ness and 'the Object' and their struggle of being 'the Subject' in their societies. It deals with "Theft" (1929) whose setting is America and "Flowering Judas" (1929) taking place in Mexico which reflect the aura of the early decades of the 20th century in terms of urban women. Porter in the stories, depicts the women characters who are grown up in accordance with patriarchy but who can stand on their feet in the rapidly modernizing American society, on the other hand alone and unhappy in their spiritual lives. While telling their struggle, she does not completely blame patriarchy for the failure of the women characters' search for identity; she also finds defects in their characters. Although they are educated and have financial independence, they are squeezed between the life they dream and their realities; their gender, social status and their relationships with the opposite sex. They do not have enough courage and sense of reality to realize their dreams. Therefore, Porter displays that female protagonists undergo similar hardships in the formation of identity.

Keywords: Katherine Anne Porter, America in the early decades of 20th century, urban women, 'the Other', 'the Subject', 'the Object'.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Katherine Anne Porter'ın, içselleştirdikleri 'Öteki'lik ve 'Nesne' kimliği olan kentli kadın kahramanlarının öznel kimlik arayışlarını ve toplumlarındaki 'Özne' olma mücadelesini incelemektedir. Çalışmada 20. yüzyılın ilk yıllarının havasını yansıtan ve Amerika'da geçen "Theft" (1929) ve Meksika'da geçen "Flowering Judas" (1929) kentli kadınlar açısından ele alınmıştır. Porter öykülerde, ataeril düzene göre yetiştirilmiş, ama hızla modernleşen Amerikan toplumunda kendi ayakları üzerinde durabilen, öte yandan tinsel yaşamında yalnız ve mutsuz olan kadın kahramanları betimlemektedir. Yazar, kadın kahramanların mücadelesini anlatırken kimlik arayışlarındaki başarısızlıklarında bütünüyle ataeril düzeni suçlamaz, onların karakterlerinde de kusurlar bulur. Karakterler bir yanda eğitilmiş ve ekonomik özgürlük sahibidirler ama düşledikleri yaşam ve gerçeklikleri, toplumsal cinsiyetleri, toplumsal statüleri ve karşı cinsle olan ilişkileri arasında sıkışıp kalmışlardır. Düşlerini gerçekleştirmek için yeteri kadar cesaret ve gerçeklik hissine sahip değillerdir. Dolayısıyla Porter kadın karakterlerin kimlik oluşturmada benzer sıkıntıları yaşadıklarını gösterir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Katherine Anne Porter, 20. yüzyılın ilk yıllarında Amerika, kentli kadınlar, 'Öteki', 'Özne', 'Nesne'.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, most of the middle-class American women followed the tenets of "True Womanhood". True womanhood required them to be the samples of naivety, chastity, piety, submission and obedience to their husbands. They used to be seen as belonging to the domestic sphere, and their duties were to provide their husbands with clean homes, food on the table and to raise their children according to the patriarchal system. They had such a life that the pregnant ones had to stay at home from the first moment their baby began to appear. With this

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given identity, they were expected to be just like ‘angels’; they had to serve their husbands, obey them all the time and conserve their own chastity and piety. Towards the late 19th century into the early decades of the 20th when job and education opportunities increased and some rights were bestowed, an educated, autonomous and upper-class ‘New Woman’ – a term coined by Henry James – emerged. These women had professions or financial security and sensibility about femininity. In addition, with the World War I, a young generation of women got out of their constrained domestic life and participated in working life, taking the roles of many factory workers, who went to the fight in the war. Therefore, by the 1920s, most American women had to break gradually from the restrictive bond of true womanhood, believing that they could pursue both work and family life successfully. On the other hand, although in the legal sphere there was no problem, social restrictions were still felt.

With the 19th Amendment (1920) that gave women the right to vote, allowing them to take part in the politics as well the American women began to make themselves heard more than ever. While the women of the pre - WWI era had been interested in education, careers, and social reform, these women got out of the traditional lines of true womanhood. In 1920s, they championed new ideas about womanhood by rejecting traditional female roles. Because, they, enjoying the post-war American affluence “in tune with the capitalistic spirit of the era, was eager to compete and to find personal fulfillment” (Woloch, 2002: 256). The change in their approach to their femininity reflected to their physical appearance and behaviors. In their changing attitude, the spreading effects of the writings of many thinkers of the time, such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), and Ellen Keys (1849-1926) were influential, too. These thinkers advocated the idea that “sex was not only central to human experience but the women were sexual beings with human impulses and desires just like men and restraining these impulses was self-destructive” (Woloch, 2002: 274). The women read these scientists, but evaluated their writings not scientifically; they understood them in the benefit of their bodily pleasures disregarding their traditions. Thus, shortening skirt, wearing make-up, drinking alcohol, smoking, going out with young men and sunbathing became fashionable manners of the time. Ironically, most of the young girls began to attend colleges and universities with the intention of finding suitable husbands. Here, a reality becomes apparent: the conflicting attitudes one, the values of the pre-World War I era’s women, second, the values of women of the 1920s, in other words, the principles of true womanhood and the Other/the Modern. This phenomenon is evaluated by Cowan in reference to Betty Freidan’s “feminine mystique” typology, which describes the American women of the 50s, despite for the different time spans, the multifaceted 20s:

“Despite women's increased knowledge of pleasure and sex, the decade of unfettered capitalism that was the 1920s gave birth to the 'feminine mystique'. With this formulation, all women wanted to marry, all good women stayed at home with their children, cooking and cleaning, and the best women did the aforementioned and in addition, exercised their purchasing power freely and as frequently as possible in order to better their families and their homes” (Cowan, 1976: 184).

The “feminine mystique” according to Freidan, is the type of woman signifying woman’s role in society as wife, mother and housewife - nothing else. On the other hand, this attributed image is in direct contrast to the ‘masculinity’ of women who want to do other things such as having a career by means of their intellectual capabilities, because even having a career is thought to be masculine. There were also the extreme types, who drink alcohol, smoke, or dye their hair. However, these changes in women’s cast of mind and behaviors drew the anger of many people, especially that of the Southerners. Many of the Southerners had a more conservative and traditional way of life in comparison with the Northern ones. Breaking stereotypical concept of womanhood with the extreme behaviors and images is condemned by the conservative Southern people.

Born in Texas and grown up according to the strict codes of Southern social life, Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) was against this confining way of life as a woman writer, which was an

extraordinary situation in Texas at that time. She preferred to see other places and see her place from distance to be able to write freely. As a Southerner, Porter was brought up in a period when the South witnessed many changes which were not accepted by most of the Southerners. She also experienced the conflict between being a traditional Southerner and a modern writer in her life. “She neither became a Southern *belle*, nor was able to free herself completely from her past as a writer” (Koçsoy, 2008: 178). When mentioning about her leaving Texas to write, she states: “I escaped the South because I didn’t want to be regarded as a freak. That was how they regarded a woman who tried to write. I had to make a rebellion... When I left, they were all certain. I was going to live an immoral life. It was a confining society in those days” (Schwartz, 1979: 82). With these words, Porter delineates the negative point of view towards women who want to assert themselves as free writers or people.

Porter observes that many segments of society were scornful to women by claiming that many governmental institutions and churches dominated by men put limits on women’s lives. She admires Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) for its truthfulness, fights for women’s suffrage in her writings and discusses her displeasure with the Catholic Church’s treatment of women which prohibits abortion and divorce. She who had four marriages and a few lovers also “praises women who resist pressures to curb their nature, assert their opinions, defy parents, take lovers, educate themselves, and have the courage and self-awareness to give shape to their experience in writing” (Flanders, 1976: 45). These ideas are the same as a feminist’s; but she refuses to participate actively or allegedly in any feminist movement like The Second Wave Feminism (1960-1980), which prescribes woman’s equality rights and is radical in its principles. In the mid-1960s, she states:

“I’ve never felt that the fact of being a woman put me at a disadvantage, or that it’s difficult being a woman in a ‘man’s world.’ The only time men get a little tiresome is in love—oh, they’re OK at first, but they do tend, don’t they, to get a little bossy and theological about the whole business?” (Givner, 1982: 462).

She claims that she has never experienced the difficulties of a woman in a man-centered society. When she is asked about her idea to Second Wave Feminist’s offer, she tells: “I don’t agree with them. I told them, ‘I will not sit down with you and hear you tell me men have abused you.’” (Givner, 1982: 462). Therefore, it is clear that Porter criticizes the Second Wave Feminist’s views about men and the way of their struggle for women. This uneasiness and conflict of the writer are reflected in her writings. She is careful with the choice of her protagonists. She presents women with whom every female finds something from herself. In her work *Katherine Anne Porter’s Women: The Eye of Her Fiction*, DeMouy states that the protagonist “sometimes appears in the guise of Mother (Granny Weatherall, the Grandmother), Virgin (Violeta, Amy), or Artist-Creator (the protagonists in “Theft” and “Hacienda”) and adds that despite this seemingly difference in the guises, Porter creates “a universal, an Every woman, an archetypal female who feels her vulnerability but acts as... [a] tower of strength” (1983: 14).

Porter portrays characters, who escalate between traditional way of life and the modern one. They strive to appear powerful no matter how much they suffer from their vulnerability and sensitivity in their lives. In her selected stories, “Flowering Judas” (1929) and “Theft” (1929) the same ideas can be seen. Both female protagonists have been grown up in the patriarchal society, which still had prominence in the early decades of the 20th century. There were also extreme women/’flappers’. Moreover, there were the types who cannot break away from the traditional and going in between modernity and the traditionalism. Due to their upbringing and their inner conflicts that they are incapable of taking over, both protagonists lack the ‘courage’ and ‘self-awareness’ to shape their lives. There is no evidence about their past and their families. They are anxious that men will be bossy and restrictive when an idea of marriage comes into being. They are squeezed between the roles they lead and the ones they desire to lead and suffer from the differentiation of these roles and their costs. Therefore, Porter’s works can be studied from a feminist perspective,

though she is not a feminist or there is no direct attack on patriarchal society in her works. She emphasizes in the stories that their search in personal and subjective ground is not only directly and completely related to society, but to their incapability of surpassing their inner limitations.

Both protagonists of "Theft" and "Flowering Judas" are self-reliant young women in their twenties, but they are inexperienced. They are unnecessarily idealist to the degree of ignoring the potential dangers in their lives and they both do not have career plans for the future. In "Theft", the heroine is unnamed, as she is in search of identity by rejecting being 'the Other'. She is a writer who seems strong enough to be able to stand on her feet by living alone in a flat in New York City. She leads an autonomous life by "working as an artist for wages, roaming the city freely at late hours of the night, and attending lively parties where she drinks to inebriation. Superficially, she appears equal to the men in their autonomy and social status" (Riney, 2007: 33). When considering the general way of life in the big cities at that time for lonely young women, her sense of freedom seems somewhat exaggerated and it may be said that she is a flapper.

In "Flowering Judas", the protagonist is an American girl called 'Laura' who moves to New Mexico, the time of Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920) where she teaches Indian children English. She attends union meetings, visits prisoners, who share her political beliefs and she delivers them messages and drugs. It is obvious that she does these for the sake of her ideals - she is a leftist who is for the revolution - much more than an ordinary woman can be. She claims herself to have the capacity of balancing herself among two roles: being a teacher and a revolutionist at the same time. She is another figure of urban woman standing on her feet in the male-dominated society. "She is not afraid to knock on any door in any street after midnight, and enter in the darkness, and say to one of these men who is really in danger" (Porter, 1965: 94). Thus, both heroines seem to hold on to concrete positions regarded as extraordinary for any woman even in the America of 1920s.

The challenge of urban women is depicted in their relationships with male characters. Their way of life which is compatible with the male world has disadvantages and vulnerability for them, because the woman who 'acts as... [a] tower of strength' conflicts with the identity given to them by the patriarchal society: the identity of being 'woman', 'the Other' and 'the Object'. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", biology is not the determinant of 'womanhood' (Beauvoir, 1989: 267). A female becomes a woman by learning her role determined by the patriarchal society. Like Beauvoir, Porter thinks that love and marriage are the concepts consuming women's freedom and she attributes this idea to her characters. Therefore, they have to make decision between choosing to be an object and choosing freedom. They choose to be free, but this has a cost: to live alone, without a family and children.

A woman must contend with the difficult psychological battle within the self, a disparity between her intellectual desires and the expectations she adopted from the dominant culture. According to Beauvoir, by avoiding from the confining conditions of marriage and motherhood, in modern society "[W]oman enjoys that incomparable privilege: irresponsibility" (Beauvoir, 1989: 720). On the other hand, it is a suffocating duty for most of them to give birth to a child and take care of it. It seems difficult for urban women to achieve equality in a man-centered world. The characters are also obsessed by their sense of freedom. Therefore, they choose loneliness by refusing some privileges granted to their nature such as motherhood, thus irresponsibility functions avoidance from dependency on man and children. However, the loneliness of the urban women as individuals leads to frustration and unhappiness in women. The only way for them to maintain security in the male-world seems and means sterility. "As Porter's women struggle within dominating male relationships in the patriarchal culture, they also have an internal conflict of whether to accept or reject the notion of motherhood" (Harwin, 2008: 10). Therefore, the theme of woman's oppression, especially emotional and sexual inhibition - not directly, but implicitly - may be found in her stories.

"Woman's emotional frustration, sexual repression and subjection to the laws of a man's world constitute a major theme in Katherine Anne Porter's fiction. Female characters, who predominate in

her works, are typically damaged by their experience. Family ties, marriage and love are threats to freedom; those women who attempt to escape are usually thwarted; and even those who gain independence achieve it at great cost" (Flanders, 1976: 48-49).

Similarly, since the setting in both "Theft" and "Flowering Judas" written in the 1929, a time when society still objectified women, the characters alienate themselves from family ties, marriage and love. In "Theft", the unnamed heroine's physical appearance, clothes or family relationships are not told about. However, her inner conflicts are dealt with subtly. She is mentioned to read her lover's letter in which "there were phrases that insisted on being read many times, they had a life of their own separate from the others..." After reading again eagerly the letter ending as "why were you so anxious to destroy...even if I could see you now I would not...not worth all this abominable...the end ...", she is said to burn it (Porter, 1965: 63). It is implied that she refuses her lover in spite of her love for him. She also seems to refuse her suitors like Camilo seeking to "make effective a fairly complete set of smaller courtesies" (59) in a firm attitude even responding his insistence on taking the Elevated: "You know it simply will not do" (59). She rejects his offer in a clear refusal expression because he comes from a lower class. She closes all the ways going to any expectation of relationship with Camilo by disregarding his courtesy of taking the Elevated, for instance. Although the types of urban women in the period were promiscuous, drinking, sexy, that is the ones who try to stand out with their bodies, Porter's characters strive to stand out with their career rather than their bodies. Being identified with the body objectifies woman herself, automatically falling her into the category of 'the Other'. Although the characters do not identify themselves with their bodies, they cannot escape from being 'the Other'. That is why they are very rigid with their chastity. For example, in "Theft" the unnamed character suggests her friend Roger to "hold out" who is complaining about his work and relationships (61); she implies the notion that one should hold out what he thinks precious. Because she appears to hold out only on her femininity. As a woman brought up in the patriarchal system, she subconsciously keeps its tenets. She does not make a claim to her money or to the materials she gives importance. The main thing she achieves to hold out is her chastity. She avoids intimacy with men not to depend on men, marriage and motherhood. "The protagonist suffers from a dissociation of sensibility. Unable to enact the natural roles of woman in society, she substitutes passion for love, bohemian careerism for marriage and motherhood" (Stein, 1960: 223). In other words, she chooses careerism by rejecting motherhood and marriage but this costs her a life neither with love nor with passion. Thus, Porter presents "an 'emancipated' career woman who is starving emotionally in the Wasteland of urban anonymity and alienation" (Prager, 1960: 230).

In "Flowering Judas", Laura also seems to alienate herself from family ties, marriage and love that she thinks as threats to her autonomous life. Her excessive self-protection makes her retreat in a stoic manner into her surroundings, in accordance with her patriarchal upbringing. Laura who is identified as "a modern secular nun", "a virgin but faintly interested in love" wearing "a rigid little uniform of dark blue cloth" (90) seems to adopt the order of the society that she lives in. However, her compliance to the social norms is suffocating for her: "...she is tired of her hairpins and the feel of her long tight sleeves..." (Porter, 1965: 92). It is obvious that she is disappointed with the life she leads: "...she cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what should be..." (91). Being tired of the patriarchal codes, the only way for her to stand out in man-centered world is alienation from love and sexuality like the protagonist in "Theft". Therefore, Laura feeling "not at home in the world" holds her stoicism out as a sword. "Nobody touches her, but all praise her gray eyes, and the soft, round under up which promises gayety, yet is always grave, nearly always firmly closed..." (95). She thinks that "she may walk anywhere in safety" (97) by denying everything.

She refuses her suitors such as a gentle captain and a young man who serenades her every night, who may be in fact a suitable partner for her. However, it is significant that her refuse is not firm. When the young captain offers her to ride with him, she remembers that she must return to Mexico City at noon, however, she does not give any hopes for another night, though she does not

directly refuse him. Again, when the young man continues serenading her after she throws flower at him upon her housemaid Lupe's suggestion to indicate her decline, she is said to "refuse to regret it" although "she is pleasantly disturbed by the abstract, unhurried watchfulness of his black eyes..." (96-97). She is said to be "gradually perfecting herself in the stoicism she strives to cultivate against that disaster she fears..." (97). Therefore, no matter how gentle the suitors are, "the very cells of her flesh reject knowledge and kinship in one monotonous word. No. No. No..." (97).

It is clear that both the heroine in "Theft" and Laura in "Flowering Judas" are so afraid of losing their independent, autonomous lives that they insulate themselves from love and sexuality by choosing loneliness, even though they long for passion and love. It is related with the fact that "...a character's fear of extinction has become so excessive that [s]he has withdrawn from and remains impervious to vital human intercourse" (Marsden, 1967: 30). The characters prefer absolute loneliness for fear of extinction resulting from intimacy with men.

The protagonists are in struggle of getting rid of the identity of 'the Other' or 'the Object' they internalized, because, most women find themselves psychologically trapped by men who have control over their lives. "By the men's controlling actions, women appear as objects that the men can mold into what they desire. Even though they make these choices, their fate is ultimately determined for them by men" (Harwin, 2008: 1). Even if there is not any apparent physical man force upon women, they feel men's controlling effects on themselves. The unnamed one feels pressure of a coming relationship with her boy-friend and Roger, who accompanies her and Laura feels the same with Braggioni. In "Theft", while the protagonist tries to hold the control of her own life, she fails. Whenever she does an attempt to manage it, she retreats. She is pacified by her subconscious mind of being 'the Other'. While having conversation with her friend Roger in a taxi "skidding slightly on every curve", she tells him: "The more it skids the calmer I feel..." (Porter, 1965: 60). She may hint that the struggle of taking over a woman's life does not bring so much comfort and peace for woman. It seems that the struggle costs for her much.

Women feel as if they owed their existence to men; their upbringing prescribes this. According to Beauvoir, "[Man] attaches himself to woman - not to enjoy her, but to enjoy himself" (1989: 205). In other words, while the existence of woman is a source of enjoyment for man, the existence of man is regarded as a primary need for woman in the patriarchal society. That is why, 'the Other'/'the Object' perceives that she owes her life to the Self / 'the Subject'. Thus, urban women are aware of this reality and they neither want to be 'the Other'/'the Object' or the toy for men. They are in power conflict with men in the patriarchal world.

Although she sees Camilo who is coming from middle class hiding his expensive hat under his coat from the rain after leaving her and she feels she gets power over him by witnessing his behavior afterwards his courtesy manners which she thinks to be artificial. Through his behaviors she deduces that he comes from a lower class, but tries to seem belonging to an upper one and she stops the possibility of his being her boyfriend. She feels betraying him. She takes into account her suitor's socio-economic status because she acknowledges the fact that Camilo ignores "the larger and more troublesome" (59) courtesies, while making smaller ones. For her, Camilo's accompanying her along the way and offering her to take a taxi are "small courtesies". She senses that he cannot afford it. She is also aware that Camilo's allowing her to be 'the Subject' over himself is a kind of "larger and more troublesome" courtesy. In other words, she does not allow Camilo to make her 'the Other' by ignoring his "small courtesies". She does not want to be objectified by a man who is open to a relationship with her, and most probably desiring her. Her internalized feeling of being the 'the Other' is in a clash with her desire to be 'the Subject'. On the other hand, for her, Camilo is already 'the Subject' in the male-centered world. She appears to accept in advance that Camilo will never renounce his identity of being 'the Subject' in the society or she does not trust him in achieving this.

The same acceptance is seen when she makes another move to be 'the Subject' while demanding the money she lends to her dramatist friend, Bill. She enters the subject by saying: "It's

no time to speak of it”, when Bill says he cannot pay it, she responds “Let it go...” by returning to her passivity, even though she is in an urgent need of money. It is also striking that Bill tells her about his wife’s “extravagance” because he gives his wife “ten dollars every week” of his “unhappy life” (62-63). It seems that Bill’s wife no more enjoys him therefore; their relationship is away from love and respect. This impression may strengthen her fear of marriage and of love and of intimacy.

Men’s illusion that women are sexual objects is contrasted with the sensuality of women. The two characters know this and adopt fear of intimacy against the opposite sex. For example in “Theft”, the people passing by the taxi in which the protagonist and Roger stop at traffic lights illustrate this reality. It is striking that when one of the three boys says “When I get married it won’t be jus’ for getting married, I’m gonna marry for *love*, see?” the other two boys make fun of him and scramble across the street by beating him on the back and pushing him around. Then, she overhears the conversation of two girls. One of them says to the other one: “Yes, I know all about that. But what about me? -You’re always so sorry for *him*...” (61) By means of these two different dialogues, Porter seems to portray two different worlds: the men looking at women from the perspective of sexuality and the women looking at men from the perspective of sensuality. Men need women to enjoy themselves, whereas women need men to enjoy them in return, again.

In “Flowering Judas”, the profile of Laura is revealed in her relationship with the revolutionary man Braggioni not so much different from the unnamed protagonist in “Theft”. After leaving his wife and beginning to stay at a hotel, Braggioni visits Laura every evening to sing songs for her. Braggioni behaves like a concrete figure of patriarchy: “He is rich, not in money, he tells her, but in power, and this power brings with it the blame-less ownership of things, and the right to indulge his love of small luxuries” (Porter, 1965: 94). He indulges with the privilege of being ‘the Subject’ and ‘the Self’ in the male-centered world. Being ‘the Subject’ brings him ownership of everything including women, regarded as objects. He claims: “One woman is really as good as another for me, in the dark, I prefer them all” (99). Although Laura is a virgin mentioned to have “encased herself in a set of principles derived from her early training, leaving no detail of gesture or of personal taste untouched” (92), she asks him every night whether he has a new song for her or not. It is striking why she does not refuse Braggioni who stands out as an authority over her. She feels violence behind him: “Nobody dares to smile at him. Braggioni is cruel to everyone with a kind of specialized insolence...it is dangerous to offend him, and nobody has the courage” (90-91). Furthermore, “Laura, who, with so many others, owes her comfortable situation and her salary to him” (94) When he comes near her, she “feels a slow chill, a purely physical danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death, wait for her with lessening patience” (94). Therefore, she is careful with her reactions to him, even though she is aware of the fact that he is trying to seduce her: “She knows what Braggioni would offer her, and she must resist tenaciously without appearing to resist...” (91). She cannot become ‘the Subject’ beside Braggioni, because, it requires her to make him the equivalent, that is, a task that requires immense power which Laura lacks.

The characters cannot use their power and prudence over men. They let them do what they like, except preserving their chastity. According to Beauvoir, “[a] woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources...” (1989: xxi). Laura here is in need of definite resources to be ‘the Subject’. “She wishes to run away, but she stays. Now she longs to fly out of his room, down the narrow stairs...” (92). She does not have enough power to escape from him, feels squeezed between her dreams and the reality. Braggioni represents the disunion between her idealistic view of life and the life she is actually living. Laura “having chosen to be passive...has completely lost emotional and mental strength and energy” (Arima, 2006: 22). Therefore, in spite of her young age, she looks emotionally and mentally exhausted in the face of a ‘Subject’.

For Beauvoir: “On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself - on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger” (1989: 669). However, Laura does not love Braggioni who is “a symbol of her many disillusionings, for a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues” (91). Although she sees many defects in his character she is in the weak position in comparison with Braggioni, she wants to escape herself as she abases herself beside him, and Braggioni’s love is a mortal danger, not a source of life for her. Braggioni cannot understand why she works “so hard for the revolutionary idea even though she does not love some man in it” (100). He questions her when he is suspicious that she likes Eugenio upon her asking about his death in prison. As a patriarchal man, Braggioni thinks that her existence in Mexico is related with her loving a man. However, she remains silent upon this question. She seems unclear about the purpose of her existence in Mexico.

“Porter’s Mexico essays and fiction continued to evolve artistically throughout her career, according to her shifting views on Mexico, ultimately leading her to write stories that reflect her sense of alienation in a land she had once described as her ‘familiar’ country” (Johnson, 2001: 192-193).

In Porter’s Mexico fiction, Mexico serves as a revolutionary setting reflecting women’s desire to rebel against their oppressive living conditions. “Flowering Judas” presents “sexualize[d] struggle of dominance and submission” where the male characters “subject women to their will, consume them as sexual objects, or use and then discard them in the service of some creative artists” (Titus, 1997: 235). There is a complexity of women’s reactions to the male advances: The passive women respond in a complex manner. They do not imagine a different, active existence; rather their desires are either for safety, escape from or protection against the controlling male gaze, or, more frequently, pleasure. This is another reason the characters feel estranged from men.

Porter presents two different worlds to portray the internal conflicts of the protagonists. One of them belongs to the protagonists, who are the urban women striving to stand on their feet in the man-centered society. The other one belongs to the traditional women operating patriarchal codes by marrying, giving birth, and childrearing or living as ‘Other’ in the world of men regarded as ‘the Subject’. Porter intends to make the protagonists face with the things granted to them as females. Thus, the protagonists realize that they are also misfits in the male world. In fact, they do not belong to these two worlds, but are caught between them.

The heroine in “Theft” trades marriage and motherhood for independence and career. Thus, she attempts to avoid traditional woman role in the society she lives in. However, the janitress who comes to her flat to check radiators and steals her purse belongs to the traditional woman world. Their confrontation results from her attempt to get back her purse of gold cloth, which has a symbolic meaning. When the losses in love and relationships in the male world are combined with the losses in the material world, she feels anger and disappointment. For the protagonist who is a beautiful strong urban lady in appearance, but unhappy inside, the purse functions as a significant bond that takes her to face with her internalized patriarchal codes.

The janitress is shaking up the furnace, when the heroine goes downstairs to take her purse back. She is identified with her “hot flickering eyes” and “a red light” coming from the furnace in her eyes (64) representing the traditional woman world the heroine rejects and the fact that she is more powerful than the urban one. She claims that she took it for her young niece who “needs pretty things” to attract her young suitors (65). The janitress who is most probably married considers about the marital future of her niece and confirms Beauvoir’s claim: “To catch a husband is an art; to hold him is a job” (1989: 468). Reminding that the protagonist missed the opportunity of marriage, she says: “You’re a grown woman, you’ve had your chance, you ought to know how it is.” When she regrets claiming her purse, the janitress claims: “I don’t want it either now....I guess you need it worse than she does” (65).

Her rebuke results in the confrontation of the protagonist with herself. Her “alienation, physical and emotional emptiness conclude with the realization of ‘self-betrayal’ ” (Hendrick, 1988: 82). She realizes that she will never achieve success or happiness because she pretends living her idealistic life she desires. The struggle of getting out of the life dictated by the patriarchal society leaves her nothing, but a feeling of displacement. She concludes that she is the thief herself by betraying herself, by placing herself between the two worlds to both of which she does not belong.

In “Flowering Judas”, Porter presents Braggioni’s wife the representative of the traditional woman world as different from Laura. The wife appears to be so much dependent on Braggioni that she is told to employ “part of her leisure lying on the floor weeping because there are so many women in the world, and only one husband for her, and she never knows where nor when to look for him” (Porter, 1965: 99). She treats her husband as if he were her master because of her psychological, social and material dependence on him. When Braggioni returns home, she welcomes him without questioning where he has been for days: “Are you tired, my angel? Sit here and I will wash your feet” (101). Furthermore, she wants him to forgive herself by leaning “her head on his arm” (101). She is always anxious that she could not do her job of holding her husband properly, applying her internalized patriarchal identity and behaving as a typical ‘Other’. Braggioni’s response to her verifies their traditional marriage roles as slave and master: “You are so good, please don’t cry any more, you dear good creature” (101). As for Braggioni, he is the ‘Subject’ himself embodying patriarchy.

In the story, Laura confronts with herself in her allegorical dream. In her dream, she sees the revolutionary prisoner, Eugenio killing himself with overdose of drugs Laura has brought to him. In the dream, he says he will take her to the land of death. He addresses her as “poor prisoner” (102). Their roles seem to be changed in the dream. Eugenio seems to be free by death, whereas Laura is still in prison torn between her idealistic life and the real life. Laura wants him to take her hand. She seems to be devoid of enough courage and strength to move. However, Eugenio presents her a branch of Judas tree to take and eat. Then she discerns that it is his fleshless hand which she eats to satisfy her hunger and thirst. The name of the tree is symbolic and originated from the belief that Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ, hanged himself on one of them. Laura eats the warm bleeding flowers which symbolize her betrayal of her own femininity and humanity. She feels herself as betrayer and betrayed at the same time. She feels betrayed by her revolution that does not fulfill the early idealistic aims. On the other hand, she betrays the ideals of the revolution by going to the church. She feels betrayed as the church cannot give her the expected peace. She also betrays her religion, which promises spiritual life, by replacing it with the revolution that practices death. She feels that she betrays Eugenio by contributing to his suicide by providing him drugs. However, the most significant betrayal is the one which she does to herself. Taking the flowers she eats as symbols of love, it can be claimed that Laura faces with her womanhood, her crave for integrating with it, and the passion she sought to repress. That is, she attempts to fulfill her womanhood while eating them. However, not giving a chance to Eugenio, who loves her, she betrays not only herself but also him. She also deceives herself by appearing to be a strong, independent virgin standing out as a claimer of ‘the Subject’. However, her dream reveals the reality she is supposed to confront. She can never be ‘the Subject’ unless getting rid of her role of the ‘Other’ness in the patriarchal society.

In both “Theft” and “Flowering Judas”, Porter presents women robbed of their subjectivity in the patriarchal society, thus drawing the portrayal of these women’s challenge in their lives. She achieves it with her female protagonists oscillating between the life they dream and the life they lead, dominant male characters symbolizing patriarchy and her presentation of urban woman world and traditional woman world in clash. “Katherine Anne’s failure to succeed as either a wife or a mother lingered darkly in her mind as a betrayal not only of her mother but, indeed, of womanhood itself, a theme that runs through her fiction.” (Harbour, 2001: 39) This reflects to her protagonists. That they are not firm in their decisions can be the cause of their failure in the formation of their

identity and their unhappiness. They have no future plans or prospects. They lack motivation, self-assessment in shaping lives. They know that most men regard women as sexual objects and they retreat from any intimation. Porter shows how patriarchal patterns females internalize lead to handicaps for them in their endeavors of gaining the identity of 'the Subject'. She proposes that they should first face and come over their lack of self-confidence and adoption of patriarchal values. They should define love and its conditions for both sides. Only after these, they can assert themselves as free 'Subjects'.

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