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Critical Research Analysis Essay

The short story “Maria Concepcion” by Katherine Anne Porters is about a killing that appears like a simple act of anger and jealousy. The murder becomes a lot more meaningful with reason after reading it more closely. Maria Concepcion kills Maria Rosa who stole her husband and had his child. This killing at first just seemed personal and private between them both. Porter uses the killing to reveal how pressure from society can push a person toward violence and how culture and tradition can do the same. When we compare this story with ideas explained in Willene and George Hendrick’s biography Katherine Anne Porter, and a study from JSTOR that explains how cultural systems in Latin American communities can encourage violence. Especially when honor or reputation is threatened. We begin to see that the murder in Porter’s story is a tool for understanding a bigger truth. It reveals how societies sometimes support, tolerate or even expect killing when honor, control, or tradition are at risk. Porter tells us that not only the killing was done out of anger but also because their culture tells them that killing is the only way to restore order in their world. Another way to understand the killing is to look at how deeply culture shapes Maria Concepcion’s thinking. She does not see the murder as being an act of crime. She sees it as something she must do to make her seem okay and better with herself. Porter shows that Maria Concepcion is calm because she was raised to believe this action makes

sense. This helps explain that violence is not always about anger. Sometimes people act violently because their culture teaches them that this is the “correct” way to fix a problem.

In *María Concepción* the killing happens when María Concepción follows María Rosa into the woods and kills her with a knife. María Concepción had many reasons to be angry because her husband Juan abandoned her, her own baby died and now María Rosa lives with Juan and has taken her place. But Porter does not describe the murder as an uncontrollable act. Instead María Concepción is calm, focused, and almost certain that this is what she has to do. After the killing, she quietly returns home and immediately begins caring for the baby that María Rosa left behind. What is surprising is how the community reacts. Instead of punishing her or calling the police. They protect her. They give false information to the authorities and make it clear that they allow her actions. This reaction reveals that the killing is not seen as a crime in their eyes. To them María Concepción has simply restored what was her and what she was never supposed to allow to happen. Porter shows that the killing is accepted within the cultural world of the story because it fits into the community’s beliefs about honor, loyalty, and justice. Porter also shows how little power women had in María Concepción’s society. A woman could not get a divorce and could not support herself alone and had no real rights. When Juan leaves her and her baby dies. She loses everything that gives her value in her community. She cannot choose a new life. She can only try to take back the life she lost. Because she has so few choices, she believes killing María Rosa is her only way to survive. This shows that sometimes violence happens because society gives a person no safe or fair choices.

In Willene and George Hendrick's book *Katherine Anne Porter* explains that Porter was deeply influenced by the Mexican culture she observed while traveling. Hendricks pointed out that Porter tried to capture the strict roles and traditions that ruled rural communities. According

to their analysis people in these communities valued cultural order more than modern law. A woman's worth was tied to her marriage, her ability to run a household, and her loyalty. When that structure broke. Violence was sometimes seen as a natural path to fixing the problem. Hendricks also explained that Porter believed that characters like María Concepción were shaped from childhood to follow these expectations without questioning them. This helps us understand why María Concepción does not hesitate when she decides to kill María Rosa. She is acting within a belief system that has trained her to protect her place in society at all costs. Her killing is not random. It is a learned behavior supported by tradition. By including these ideas in her story, Porter shows how cultural pressure can lead someone to kill because they feel they have no other acceptable choice. The community's reaction is one of the most important parts of the story because they do not punish Maria Concepcion. They protect her. This shows that violence is not just between two people. It is supported by the entire group. Porter is saying that a community can help create violence by saying nothing or by excusing it. When the neighbors lie to the police, they are choosing tradition over fairness. They are helping continue a system where violence is used to "fix" problems.

The themes in Porter's story connect strongly to research on cultural violence in Latin America. In the JSTOR article "No More Killings! Women Respond to Femicides in Central America," researcher M. Prieto-Carrón explains that many killings in certain communities do not happen because individuals are simply violent, but because their culture silently approves of certain types of violence. The article says that in some regions, women are harmed or killed "because a culture of impunity has made it acceptable." Prieto-Carrón also writes that social traditions can "justify violence when a person's honor is believed to be threatened." These points connect directly to María Concepción's own world. Her honor has been damaged by her

husband's betrayal and her identity as a wife and mother is at risk. The community in Porter's story behaves exactly like the cultural systems Prieto-Carrón describes. They shield the killer and pretend nothing wrong happened. The article makes it clear that when society values reputation and control more than law, killing can be seen as the correct way to restore order. Porter's story reflects this reality and uses the killing to show how dangerous cultural expectations can be. Prieto-Carrón's article helps explain why the community acts this way. In many Latin American cultures, honor is more important than the law. If a person loses honor, they lose their identity. Because of this, some people believe violence is a normal answer when honor is damaged. Porter shows this clearly in the story. Maria Concepcion kills to get her honor back. The community agrees with her because they were taught the same values. This shows how culture can create a cycle where violence feels normal or even expected.

When we look at the killing through the lens of both Hendricks' biography and Prieto-Carrón's research, we see that María Concepción is trapped by culture as much as by grief. She has lost her baby and Juan has humiliated her by replacing her with a younger woman. She lives in a world where women cannot simply walk away and start over or seek legal help. Instead, they must maintain their place in the community or risk losing everything. In this world, a woman's role is her whole identity. Killing María Rosa becomes María Concepción's way of saving her identity, her pride, and her future. The community reinforces this by helping her, showing that they believe she did what any honorable woman would do. This reveals one of Porter's main messages: people sometimes kill not because they are evil, but because culture pushes them toward violence when society leaves them no peaceful path. Porter is also sending a warning about tradition. In the story, tradition looks simple and peaceful on the outside. But on the inside it is going to be strict and unforgiving. It makes people act a certain way and whoever

breaks the rules will get punished. Porter shows that tradition can be dangerous when people follow it without thinking. The killing happens not just because Maria Concepcion is upset, but because tradition made her feel like violence was her duty.

The killing in *María Concepción* becomes a symbol for the human tendency to use violence when social rules make violence seem logical. Porter suggests that killing often grows from pressure, expectation, and cultural approval rather than pure anger. *María Concepción* is not described as a cruel person. Instead she is steady and almost honorable in her actions. Which makes the story even more unsettling. The point Porter makes is that humans are capable of terrible acts when their community silently demands it. When tradition and reputation carry more weight than compassion or law, killing becomes almost a language, a way to speak through actions when words have no power. The murder in the story shows that the human desire to kill is sometimes less about personal hatred and more about needing to survive inside a strict cultural system. In the end, Porter uses this killing to ask a big question: why do humans kill? Her answer is that people kill when they grow up in systems that make violence seem normal. Humans learn from their community because if a society teaches that violence is a way to solve problems. Then people will believe it. *Maria Concepcion* is not born violent. She becomes violent because her world teaches her that killing can fix her pain. Porter suggests that humans are shaped by the rules around them, and those rules can push people to do terrible things.

Katherine Anne Porter uses the killing in *María Concepción* to reveal how culture can shape, excuse, and even encourage violence. When examined with help from Hendricks' analysis of Porter's themes and Prieto-Carrón's JSTOR study of cultural violence in Latin America, the killing becomes more than a single crime. It becomes a commentary on how societies create the conditions for murder by pressuring people to defend their honor, follow tradition, and protect

their place in the community. The story suggests that human beings often learn violence from the world around them and that cultural forces can make killing feel like the only choice. In this way, the murder of María Rosa becomes a tool for exploring the larger theme of the course: the human tendency to kill when culture gives permission.

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