

INTRODUCTION

Katherine Anne Porter's short story *María Concepción* centers on a shocking killing that, at first, seems like a simple act of jealousy and anger. But when the story is read more closely, the murder becomes much more meaningful. *María Concepción* kills the young woman, *María Rosa*, who stole her husband and had his child. While this appears to be a private fight between two women, Porter uses the killing to reveal something larger: how culture, tradition, and pressure from society can push a person toward violence. When we compare this story with ideas explained in Willene and George Hendrick's biography *Katherine Anne Porter*, and a scholarly 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 larger truth. It reveals how societies sometimes tolerate, support, or even expect killing when honor, control, or tradition are at risk. Through the murder of *María Rosa*, Porter shows that human beings do not kill only because they are angry, but also because their culture tells them that killing is the only way to restore order in their world.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 – The Killing in the Primary Text

In *María Concepción*, the main killing happens when *María Concepción* follows *María Rosa* into the woods and murders her with a large knife. *María Concepción* has many reasons to be angry: her husband Juan abandoned her, her baby died, and now *María Rosa* lives with Juan and has taken her place in the home. But Porter does not describe the murder as a wild, uncontrollable act. Instead, *María Concepción* is calm, focused, and almost certain that this is what she must do. After the killing, she quietly returns home and immediately begins caring for the baby that *María Rosa* left behind. What is even more 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 support 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 should never have been taken from her. 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.

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 – Cultural Pressures from the Secondary Text (Hendrick)

Willene and George Hendrick, in their book *Katherine Anne Porter*, explain that Porter was deeply influenced by the Mexican culture she observed while traveling. The Hendricks point 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. The Hendricks also explain 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.

BODY PARAGRAPH 3 – JSTOR Source and Cultural Violence

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 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.

BODY PARAGRAPH 4 – How Cultural Pressure, Grief, and Identity Lead to Violence

When we look at the killing through the lens of both the 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, 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.

BODY PARAGRAPH 5 – The Larger Message About the Human Predilection for Killing

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 or bloodthirsty 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.

CONCLUSION

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 the 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.

Works Cited (MLA Format)

Primary Source

Porter, Katherine Anne. *María Concepción*. 1922.

Secondary Source

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

JSTOR Scholarly Source

Prieto-Carrón, Marina. "No More Killings! Women Respond to Femicides in Central America." *Development Bulletin*, no. 72, 2007, pp. 28–31. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20461179.

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 a crime. She sees it as something she must do to make her world right again. 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. Porter also shows how little power women had in Maria Concepcion's society. A woman could not get a divorce, 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 Maria Rosa is her only way to survive. This shows that sometimes violence happens because society gives a person no safe or fair choices. The community's reaction is one of the most important parts of the story. 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. 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. 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 strict and unforgiving. It tells people how to act and punishes anyone who breaks the rules. 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. 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. 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.