



Pale Horse, Pale Rider

Katherine Anne Porter

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First published in 1939, these three short novels secured the author's reputation as a master of short fiction.

From the gothic Old South to revolutionary Mexico, few writers have evoked such a multitude of worlds, both exterior and interior, as powerfully as Katherine Anne Porter. This collection gathers together the best of her Pulitzer Prize-winning short fiction, including 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider', where a young woman lies in a fever during the influenza epidemic, her childhood memories mingling with fears for her fiancé on his way to war, and 'Noon Wine', a haunting story of tragedy and scandal on a small dairy farm in Texas. In all of the compelling stories collected here, harsh and tragic truths are expressed in prose both brilliant and precise.

Pale Horse, Pale Rider Details

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From Reader Review Pale Horse, Pale Rider for online ebook

Rachel says

While all three novellas in this book are excellent, both "Noon Wine" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" quietly tragic, my heart belongs to "Old Mortality." The first story in the collection, it explores how a family's reverence for its past generations tends to be as romantic as it is based in reality. There's tragedy in this story too, but it's the everyday tragedy of unmet expectations.

"Pale Horse, Pale Rider" continues where "Old Mortality" left off, with the story of the family's youngest generation, Miranda, as she falls in love with a soldier and catches influenza during World War I. Her fever dreams are vividly rendered in stream of consciousness, making it sort of difficult at first to establish what is real. The romance at the core of the story is sweet and believable, but what I liked most about this story was how well Porter captured the personal pessimism of the World War I era. Even before the influenza kills one of the two lovers, it is openly assumed between Miranda and Adam that they have no future together, that he will die in the war or she will die of the illness.

The tragedy of "Noon Wine," the unrelated story in the collection, is the most violent and most (questionably) preventable. I saw a lot of echoes of Flannery O'Connor in this story, although it predates O'Connor by almost 20 years.

I would have loved any of these stories on their own. All together, they make for one of my favorite books of the year. I will be seeking out more of Porter's work for sure.

Donna Brown says

For decades I have wanted to read Pale Horse, Pale Rider, but who recommended it or what they might have said is lost in the cobwebs of my mind. For that reason, I jumped straight to this novella, which is last. In no way did it disappoint. The strength of that WWI bleakness squirms through the story. The promise of love torn away, shattered as completely as if it were on a battlefield. The lesser men hawking patriotism as if it were a vacuum cleaner. The close intimacy of the slow dance, the hand tightening on her back.

One thing so different about the early 1900s from my era is the underlying fear of true poverty, losing a job and not having enough to eat. Nothing like that happens in this story, but I think it's there nonetheless. There is the same bleak view as in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

The moral here is: life ain't all it's cracked up to be, but let's don't tell the rubes. Put on the makeup and smile, Darn You, Smile. Except for rare occasions of feverish joy, I've always felt this way. It's so wonderful to find an author who puts it in words, like a secret we share long after she's gone.

I'll write more after I read the other two novellas.

Jesse Hanson says

I'm a horseman by birth (my older brother is an accomplished long distance rider) so this ghostly equestrian title kept popping out at me whenever I'd be browsing the quiet and narrow sacred halls of No Particular

Library. In fact, the book has not much to do with horses, although it has some to do with them. Katherine Anne Porter is a brilliant writer--I'd compare her easily to Steinbeck, with a distinctly feminine and completely unique style. She comes at each story from such an angle, through such a perspective, that the reader is thinking the story is going one way, when it is inevitably going another. My complaint--because I do have one--is that the result is inevitably bleak. Now, I haven't read any of her other work, but bleak is the very tone of Pale Horse, Pale Rider. I've said the same thing about Steinbeck, if you happen to have read my previous reviews.

It's just my personal opinion that we already know the world, that people in the world, and the things we do, are... well, the novels of the world hold all the adjectives about it, so for me to say bad, or ugly, or cruel... kind of redundant. Am I wrong in my perception that almost all (maybe not 100%) of the widely accepted, great works of literature, are utter tragedies? We revel in the gutter.

Well, back to the book at hand. It's three short novels in one book. The first, Old Mortality, starts out all girl stuff; the writing was excellent but stuffy (they were actually going through the old stored stuff of memories in an attic. I didn't like the title, Noon Wine, of the second story, so I went to the title story, Pale Horse... I loved it. Saw a completely different take on the civilian side of World War I than I had ever been told. That took me back to Old Mortality, which I then finished and really appreciated. By then, I was hooked and I read Noon Wine. I don't know if it was just the rural setting (I'm from North Dakota) or what, but this story was absolutely riveting for me.

So I probably seem out of integrity with only four stars. Well, I hate the stars--I've made no secret of it. But I see the purpose of life as a search for truth. Grandiose? Maybe. I don't care. So when tale after tale ends in dead end hopelessness, I don't see the art serving a useful enough function. Sorry Katherine, you're a better writer than me.

Reader, in my opinion you won't find many better written, in a unique, yet classic style, than Pale Horse, Pale rider.

Tom Leland says

The word that comes to mind is 'masterful'. Porter has been mentioned in the same breath as Flaubert and Hawthorne, and I see why. Particularly in the first two stories, Old Mortality and Noon Wine, detailed depictions of each character, as well as their thoughts, reveal truths that otherwise in our day-to-day life lie just beyond our consciousness -- a rare gift only the finest writers have. Beyond that, the most vast themes of human existence are explored and illuminated, sometimes openly, and always within the fabric of the stories themselves.

Anina e gambette di pollo says

Nonostante quattro mariti e una salute cagionevole (la tubercolosi) morì a 90 anni.

Un romanzo e tanti racconti più o meno lunghi, un Pulitzer, un National Book Award.e tre candidature al Nobel.

Un numero imbarazzante di anni fa lessi La nave dei folli, il suo solo romanzo.

Forse se ne avessi ricordo potrei dire che la misura a lei più congeniale sono i racconti. La sola cosa che ricordo è che ne fu tratto un film abbastanza deludente.

Questi racconti sono belli.

Antico stato mortale

Una bimba e un'adolescente si trovano i mezzo ai polverosi ricordi di una famiglia e come tutti i giovani vedono tutto vecchio, persone e cose. Solo personaggio che attrae la loro curiosità, quella di Miranda in

particolare, è la zia Amy. Forse perché ognuno ne ha un ricordo diverso, forse perché è morta giovane. Forse perché i personaggi si scoprono poco alla volta ed ogni strato porta ad un altro, in verticale. La scoperta di quella vita lontana convince Miranda a prendere le distanze da tutto e farsi una vita propria, nuova, dove la verità riguarderà solo ciò che accadrà a lei.

Vino a mezzodì

Qui esce il sangue texano della Porter in una storia che ha tutti i sapori del sud.

Una fattoria stentata, un uomo semplice, una moglie dalla salute fragile, due ragazzini da crescere.

Un giorno compare un uomo, Olaf, di poche parole e poche esigenze: un fienile e le sue armoniche.

Passano gli anni nel silenzio dello svedese che è diventato il sostegno della fattoria, ciò che Thompson non è riuscito ad essere.

E dato che puoi abitare nel centro del territorio più solitario del mondo, ma ci sarà sempre chi viene a rovinarti la vita, anche Thompson dovrà fare i conti con una realtà durissima. Il suo mondo che era diventato così scorrevole si spezza: in fondo era stata la follia a creare quella realtà. Ciò che lo distrugge è l'omicidio compiuto o il fatto che neppure quello è servito?

Bianco cavallo, bianco cavaliere

Primo verso di una canzone di cui veniamo a conoscere solo il secondo "non portare via il mio amore."

Miranda è ormai una ragazza che lavora a Denver in un giornale, anche se alla cronaca mondiale ed altre sciocchezze.

La narrazione va qua e là: il lavoro, la presenza ossessiva dei venditori di buoni statali per i fondi di guerra, la vicinanza sempre più cara con un giovane, Adam, che vorrebbe tanto non andare nei campi delle Fiandre, ma non si può, la presenza di quella febbre devastante e mortale che è la spagnola. Per i giovani, in quegli anni, la vita è una trappola.

La morte cavalca accanto a noi sul suo cavallo bianco, ci prenderà una volta o l'altra, prima uno poi l'altro.

La febbre prende Miranda e si apre per lei un viaggio onirico. Sogni, incubi, visioni sono i suoi compagni..

Quando esce da tutto questo, perché lei sopravvive, è un'altra Miranda. Meglio, peggio? Sicuramente diversa.

Forse come tutte le volte che Katherine Anne uscì dai cuoi crolli di salute.

Naturalmente non sono le storie in sé, ma il modo in cui sono raccontate.

Perché questa autrice è scomparsa dal mercato per anni?

Forse la chiave è la parola mercato.

19.04.2018

Ivan says

Three short novels collected in one volume. I thought the first - Old Mortality - brought a time and place to life vividly and created an almost voyeuristic feeling - not unlike those opening scenes of Geraldine Page in The Trip to Bountiful. I felt like one of the characters, present though unacknowledged by the narrator. So perfectly realized were these characters that I recognized cousin Eva Parrington pages before Miranda did. She was a tart middle-aged lady that I'd have loved to have spent more time with. The second short novel is the very famous Noon Wine - a tragic family saga that plays out in roughly sixty pages. It had a bit of a Steinbeck feeling to it - farm life, drudgery, menace and a final brutal ending. The titular story is the last in this collection. It is a love story, and again a tragic tale about the capricious nature of love and life and death. This is another of Miss. Porter's 'Miranda' stories. Set at the close of WWI the drama involves the great

influenza epidemic and the horrific toll in human suffering. Does it sound like bleak material? The writing is so rich and evocative that one remains enthralled from beginning to end. Great artists render sorrow and tragedy palatable, even beautiful.

Jamie says

How on god's green earth hadn't I picked this up before? A girl I worked with and took classes with in college wrote her senior thesis on Porter's 'feminist' revisions of Faulkner, but I suppose I was so busy with my own thesis & worries about grad school that I didn't pick her up at that time and simply forgot about her until forced to read these three short novels (not "novellas", says Porter!) for a seminar last month. Books remain neglected on my shelves for years & years and nothing is better than to find myself in a state of wonder when finally meeting one as lovely as this.

"Old Mortality" and "Pale Horse Pale Rider" are at least tenuously connected by Miranda, a central character in each. As I recall, there's no tangible evidence that they're the same Miranda, but I think it's more interesting to consider them as such than not to. The first is a kind of coming-of-age tale; two young Southern girls confront their dynastic histories, particularly w/r/t a sexually non-conformist aunt, who was both beloved and despised by her family, and who met a tragic end that seems to have tidied her excesses enough to make her palatable for the 'dark romance' that surrounds her by the time the girls begin hearing stories about her. It seems too easy to suggest that the story transitions from a romanticized nostalgia to jaded realism, when so much of the story appears invested in the meta-politics of tale telling, to boot. Which story can be trusted when imagining the past? Seems to me to be a persistent anxiety in Southern literature, perhaps because of the fraught relationship Southerners have with their own not-so-far past.

"PH, PR" follows Miranda yet again, though now we're in the trenches of WWI and facing an influenza epidemic. Both of these terrors become integral to Miranda's story, for she's being hounded by nationalistic bondsmen and dating a soldier who feels as wary of the 'patriotism' of war as she does. Miranda moreover contracts the flu, and so a great deal of the short novel is in fact hazily stream-of-consciousness, though oddly more Woolf in flavor than Porter's more proximate contemporary, Faulkner. The prose in any case is stunning--do try not to become teary-eyed in those final paragraphs. Though Miranda and her soldier-lover remain fairly shadowy in terms of conventional character development (we learn really nothing of what has come before; only of the ways in which they grapple their presents), there's something quite delicious in this alienation, as though to be trapped in one's present-tense becomes a kind of self-distancing, a disorientation. To live entirely in the moment means, also, to have no past and no future, and, therefore, no coherent sense of stable selfhood. For what is identity except a kind of consistency or development across space and time? So the amputee sort of sensation becomes mirrored for the reader (or for me, I suppose) even as it's played out in Miranda and Adam. A stunning tale, really.

"Noon Wine" merits attention as well, though personally, it seemed somewhat out of place sandwiched between the others. If "PHPR" is somewhat Woolfian and "Old Mortality" feels something like a strange union between Faulkner and Edith Wharton, "Noon Wine" is Flannery O'Connor through and through. Of course, Porter, in point of fact, predates O'Connor, but I didn't think the story would have been out of place in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. The end certainly has a kind of shock value in the best possible way, and the buildup instills a sense of lazy indifference, much as O'Connor will set you up so persistently in the mundane only to then demonstrate how fragile any stability in this world will necessarily be.

If you've any interest in Southern literature, read these. Now. Do it! I'm looking forward to working through more Porter, though I hear *Ship of Fools* is something of a failure. Might read that one next anyhow, if only because I'm curious to figure out why *Mad Men* has Betty Draper reading it on two separate occasions in the

show.

Kristel says

Fuck. Fuckkkk. It's amazing how Porter's unshowy writing has caused me to spiral down a lovely backroad of existential dread. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" > Soderbergh's *Contagion* but "Old Mortality" is the standout for me.

John says

In this review I'm speaking only on the title piece, a "short novel" according to Porter, but I do have to say that "Old Mortality" (in the same collection) is also nothing short of magnificent. Still, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is the one that clings to the nerves, a masterpiece of illness and the implacable rooting after truth. The illness is personal, to be sure; this is the great work out of the influenza epidemic of the late 19-teens, a border-jumping holocaust that no other artist has found a way to work with. The fever scenes are rendered with an intensity and a manipulation of the surreal that also -- can it be? -- tells a story. Porter, that is, brings off her climax in the midst of hallucination. The passage remains, in fact, among the very few finest renderings of hallucination in our literature, precise yet singing. More's the miracle, all this is embedded with gutty singularity in the mind of her heroine (no lesser word will do). That would be the freethinking Miranda, with no Prospero to corral her tempest. Porter's Miranda shares a number of struggles with her author: a young woman writer working freelance and living on a shoestring, trying to honestly dig into the arts and at the same time turn out her heart's inner sediments for her sometime-lover Adam, a reluctant soldier. But Adam also brings with him another of this novella's accomplishments, a mighty theme and a brave one. Adam's been more or less shanghaied into serving in the Army, doing his part for "the War effort," just as he and Miranda are shamed and bullied into making donations and otherwise supporting a fight that they know has been forced onto them by the rich and powerful. The lies that drive these young people into harm's way cohere as a sickness that infects the very spirit of a nation... and here in the midst of Oil War II, the mortal sickness lingers yet. Katherine Anne Porter had more than a breathtaking writerly gift; also she was a Cassandra, a prophet without honor. Even now you can hear the ragged exhale of her pale horse, looming behind all of young and vulnerable America,

Tim says

I was given this book in the early 1970's from my Army buddy Butch Drury, himself in the Ph.D. program in English when he was drafted; he now is in the Hospital Administration department at Northwestern, but remains a Renaissance Man, but I digress. This wonderful short book by the author of *Ship of Fools* contains three short novels about change, sadness, tragedy, sometimes hope, and deep character study, about both individuals and the environment they're in. Her prose is carefully and thoughtfully worded and I'm sure she was an influence on the likes of Annie Proulx and Joyce Carol Oates.

The first story, "Old Mortality," follows a young girl, Miranda, through some 27 years from 1885 through 1912, as she slowly questions and then rejects her social status/situation (sort of lower-upper-class), because of the pretensions and concerns for appearances of her family. The process of realization of this issue, and rebellion against it, is reminiscent of Richard Wright's "Almos' A Man," although in the latter the environment is the deep South and the characters are African-American' the theme remains the same,

however.

The second, "Noon Wine, involves a farmer who becomes involved with a drifter from North Dakota who helps him for some 20 or so years and helps his small dairy farm thrive. Then a bounty hunter shows up and says the drifter is an escapee from a lunatic asylum and wants the farmer to help him capture the man. This throws the farmer into a moral dilemma, with tragic consequences.

In the third, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," we again see Miranda from the first story, this time as a young woman doing volunteer work during WWI. She meets a soldier and they, I guess, fall in love, or what passes for it during wartime. He has to leave and she falls gravely ill; some of the best passages in this story are descriptions of her delirious experiences, and indeed she almost dies. Nonetheless, the story, while ending up with some tragedy, also emphasizes strength of character in going on and emotionally surviving after traumatic experiences.

I would recommend this book highly, and indeed if I can locate Butch again after these many years, I plan to send this review to him.

Cody says

I came to this while looking through the "Literary Pillars" by Gass. I'm a sucker for Southern Gothic, and two-out-of-three of these short novels are absolute killers. "Noon Wine" is canonical, the best 'genre' work I've read in a while. Pick it up, read it, put it down. Then find yourself shell-shocked for the rest of the evening. Sorta like listening to the Bay City Rollers.

João Carlos says

Katherine Anne Porter, commemorative postage stamp, 2005, US Postal Service – Michael J. Deas, Oil on Panel

“**Cavalo Pálido, Pálido Cavaleiro**” é uma pequena “coleção” de três novelas “curtas” da escritora norte-americana **Katherine Anne Porter** (1890 – 1980) – “**Velha Mortalidade**” (1936), “**O Vinho do Meio-Dia**” (1937) e “**Cavalo Pálido, Pálido Cavaleiro**” (1939).

A produção ficcional de **Katherine Anne Porter** foi limitada – um romance “**A Nave dos Loucos**” editado em 1962, que levou vinte e dois anos a escrever, as referidas três novelas “curtas” e um conjunto de contos – que lhe valeram em 1966 o prémio Pulitzer e o National Book Award.

(view spoiler)

“Cavalo Pálido, Pálido Cavaleiro” engloba três novelas “curtas” magníficas, existindo uma interligação entre a primeira **“Velha Mortalidade”** e a terceira **“Cavalo Pálido, Pálido Cavaleiro”**, onde Porter “confere centralidade a personagens e a pontos de vistas femininos, e reescreve o papel sofredor da tradicional heroína romântica”, mulheres que se conseguem libertar das amarras educacionais e das figuras masculinas dominadoras, numa narrativa plena de significados e de simbolismos. “Agora haveria tempo para tudo.”

“O Vinho do Meio-Dia” apresenta-nos um relato devastador sobre segredos e revelações inesperadas, sobre o passado e sobre o presente, com um desfecho absolutamente surpreendente.

Donald Mclean says

It may be that there is some great literary value to this book. If there is, I really just don't care.

There are some books that are very sad, as if the dog dies heroically at the end, and everyone cries. I have no problem with this. Sometimes we all need a good cry.

There are other books where the author goes out of there way to show the reader how horrible the universe can be, as if the dog dies meaninglessly near the beginning of the book, and the characters spend the rest of the book kicking its poor, dead body.

Yes, the universe can be a horrible place. Anyone who has ever watched the news regularly know that. I certainly don't want or need to read about it.

Laura says

"Don't you love being alive?" asked Miranda. "Don't you love weather and the colors at different times of the day, and all the sounds and noises like children screaming in the next lot, and the automobile horns and little bands playing in the street and the sound of food cooking?"

It's always good when I enjoy reading something I'm studying. What a great short story. I refer only to the title piece "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" in this review, although I'm keen to try some of Katherine Anne Porter's other short stories having enjoyed this one.

Dreams, illness, a backdrop of war and the pain of love with the fear of time running out... A solid and enjoyable 4 stars.

Tony says

Porter, Katherine Anne. PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER. (1939). *****. The three short novels that comprise this collection, in addition to the title story, include “Old Mortality,” and “Noon Wine.” They are all three excellent examples of story-telling at its very best. “Old Mortality” traces the life of Amy, a long-dead aunt of the two young girls who tell her story – or reassemble it – over a period of years. “Noon Wine,” – my favorite of the three – tells of the relationship between a farming family in Texas and an itinerant worker from North Dakota that becomes symbiotic over the years, but ends violently when the specter from the worker’s past turns up. “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” tells the story of a young woman just at the end of WW I, who falls

in love with a soldier about to be sent to the front, but at the same time as she contracts influenza. It's difficult – if not impossible – to recap the plots of these tales, since it is Ms Porter's imagery that makes them so memorable. Highly recommended.

Sonja says

4,5 stars! i'll be thinking about these stories for a long time to come.

Jeanette says

This holds characterizations that are struck deeply. Some of the best I've read in my life to sickness and to the discontent of "not fitting" - as well. All three novellas are brilliant.

I'm doing a reread and the review will be forthcoming. Probably after Thanksgiving.

Jimmy says

“Blue was never my color.” She sighed with a humorous bitterness. The humor seemed momentary, but the bitterness was a constant state of mind.

William Gass's Fifty Literary Pillars, which is a list of the 50 books that influenced him most, contains this book: one of only 4 by female authors (the others were Virginia Woolf, Colette, and Gertrude Stein), so I thought I *had* to check this out.

It's a book of 3 novellas (or long short stories). Immediately I was gripped by the voice in 'Old Mortality': smart and observant with a subtle humor. It reminded me of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry at times. The story itself wasn't that special, but sweet Lord, the telling of it was! You're led to see the characters one way and then slowly more layers get revealed. The story doesn't progress chronologically (although it does do that on the surface) but the real story (of the family) progresses along the z axis, deeper and richer, with counter stories laid upon them so that there are multiple versions you can see through. The characters are funny, but dark, and believable. Not much else to say, other than *perfect*. 5/5

On the positive side, all the stories in this collection are completely different, so she's not like one of those writers who writes the same story over and over again. On the downside, I *really* loved the first story, so the rest of the collection seemed like a bit of a let-down. I especially missed the humor mixed with the bitterness. Like the quote above, the humor seemed to have left after the first story.

The second story 'Noon Wine' was more of a traditional story. I get the impression that the author had a dark view of knowledge, what can be gained from it and what will inevitably be lost. Or what will be gained against one's will. Insanity infects Mr. Thompson as if the mere suggestion was all it took. Then, he couldn't get the facts straight in his head, and the lack of knowledge drives him insaner. 3.5/5

'Pale Horse, Pale Rider' was also really good, with descriptive lines like this:

His eyes were pale tan with orange flecks in them, and his hair was the color of a haystack

when you turn the weathered top back to the clear straw beneath.

The prose shines, and then takes a wild turn when she goes through the delirium of her illness, mirroring her sick state. A sad story that captures well what it would have been like to be alive and young during the end of the first world war, and when the flu epidemic was spreading. 4/5

mark monday says

O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? such soothing words. the afterlife as a just reward - Jesus has taken the sting of death away; the victory that lies beyond the grave - for all those who love Him. but alas, there is no such savior, no such leavening of pain, no embracing of the afterworld in the three novellas that comprise Pale Horse, Pale Rider.

"Old Mortality"

first: death is a mask, a veil, a shadow cast long and dark... it reshapes those it has taken, makes them more than themselves, makes them grand symbols of what has been and what you could never be. they tower over their children and their children's children; death has given them a terrible glamour and death has reshaped memories. death is a snare in that first tale, it catches and it keeps. it takes some away while it clutches the living to its bosom, it captures their memories so their paths move never forward but always behind, always in contemplation and replication of the past. brave Miranda! idiosyncratic girl. that idiosyncrasy could save her, that yearning to be apart, to be different. she sees through those veils. they aren't just veils, or memories or rituals, or quaint pictures on the mantle or keepsakes in the attic... they are obsessions, they doom her family, death smothers them with wistful sighs. go, Miranda, escape! leave that living death behind! Miranda is diffident in her own way, callous even, but you root for that escape. I liked her story, I respected "Old Mortality" but I did not love it. I felt very little connection to it on a personal level and I thank my parents for that, they are the children of Miranda, each escaped their terrible and shadowy families, each fled: little of the past obsesses them. the lives and deaths and obsessions of my ancestors mean virtually nothing to me. I'm a modern sorta guy, rootless. I read this as if I were reading a story of fantasy.

"Noon Wine"

second: death is a sudden thorn in the side, a surprise bite from an animal that you did not know was beside you. it's just a thorn, it's just a bite, it's what happens, right? wrong. the bite itches and burns: you scratch that bite: it becomes infected. all you are, all you were, all you could be... reduced to that awful and painful infection. your life seeps out of you like pus. and you die, all because of a random bite. "Noon Wine" carefully and calmly sets up its story, its living & breathing characters. it makes you care for them, in its own hard way. unlike the stories that surround it, Porter's life had little in common with this portrait of dairy farmers. but you wouldn't know that from reading it, so thoroughly and completely does she imagine these lives. she does not condescend to these characters. she does something else: she destroys them, and with a terrible sort of randomness. I can see myself as Mr. Thompson, his quick and angry act, a terrible reaction, that ax; a sudden thorn in the side, a surprise bite - they happen. but it was hard for me to envision an itch afterwards, a scratching to an infection to a death. sometimes people have to die. right? I wouldn't scratch that itch, I did what I did and now it's time to move on. or so I say to myself, imagining myself as different, condescending to him and his family, their reactions, their horror. but how would I know? I've never killed a man, not yet at least.

"Pale Horse, Pale Rider"

and last: death rides beside us, always! it is not something to escape; it is our partner, our guide; it is a sudden bite and it is a velvety shadow; it will transform us and take us, one and then the other. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is a work of perfection. not a phrase, not a word out of place. it moves from vivid dream to prosaic reality, to hallucination, and then to a new, cold-eyed reality. death is present in every crevice of this story. Miranda returns; she is full of life and yet she dreams of death. not of making her own death! death is separate from but yet still connected to her, not an idea but a thing, a real thing. in the beginning of this story, death rides beside her but as a glamorous stranger. the time, the people, the place: world war one is coming to a close; a 'lady reporter' and a soldier about to be deployed are deeply in love; there is an outbreak of influenza in Denver. the novella is swooningly romantic and the novella swooningly despairs. but it breaks through it, in its own way. Miranda emerges but as someone truly different. someone better? no, someone harder, someone deeper. not better and not worse but different. the Miranda of "Old Mortality" has been obliterated; it is as if she never existed. who is this new Miranda who has seen death up close, who has lived and loved and lost and died and been reborn... who has made death her friend? why, she has become Katherine Anne Porter, of course.

Lori says

I read this as a teenager and to this date have never ever forgotten it. I get goose bumps remembering it. One day I will reread, and see what I think of it almost 40 years later, especially now that I know it was about the 1911 flu pandemic.
