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The Conflict of Idealism and Naturalism in the Works of Katherine Anne Porter: Fiction in Search of Reality

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THE CONFLICT OF IDEALISM AND NATURALISM IN THE WORKS OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER: FICTION IN SEARCH OF REALITY

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS AND DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS TO BE USED

Introduction. Katherine Anne Porter is the internationally known novelist and short story writer who received the Pulitzer Prize in 1966 for her work, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter. Miss Porter, a near octogenarian from Texas, has done a regional type story with settings in Southwestern United States, Mexico, Central Europe (Germany) and the Old South.

Her life parallels her work in many instances, to a minor degree, but both confront good and evil in situations and episodes, and her works and philosophies are developed by the literary and philosophical media of idealism and naturalism. Her honesty forces her to search for the truth in each situation and episode, so that she will not be self-deceived into fantasy and delusion.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The aim of this work is to analyze the search for the reality and the struggles in the lives of Miss Porter and her characters, as they confront good and evil, through the media of idealism and naturalism and to show in her writings how the personalities under psychological observations develop and adjust to situations through benign and malignant ego-defense mechanisms.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Idealism. The absolute is universal and back of it all is Reason, Spirit, or God. The idea of the Absolute is that the whole of an existence is a web, a unity of which everything is an integral and indissoluble part. The entire material universe has always existed in the divine consciousness, and the external world is known to us only through our sensations and ideas. Mind is the primary and ultimate reality, and things cease to exist when not sensed. Classical idealism has the attributes of wholeness, purpose, and ethical values which are in essence, Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. The Grecian life was structured on four cardinal virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, or Self-Control and Justice.

Naturalism. Naturalism comes from the assumption that all that is real exists in nature; man is an animal of brute force who is at the mercy of nature and is controlled by determinism in a world that is chaotic and purposeless, and in which reality is found in scientific laws.

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[1] Clifford Barrett, Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1959), pp. 313-23; Robert F. Davidson, Philosophies Men Live By (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 299; Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 273, 310; Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap, A Modern Introduction to Philosophy (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 507; John H. Randall Jr. and Justus Buchler, Philosophy An Introduction (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1942), p. 222.

It is a form of literary composition calculated to present actuality; in fact it is a philosophy of determinism, a bias toward pessimism, an amoral attitude disciplined by science toward agnosticism, an artistic theory of the production of the world as an end in itself, and by hypothesis disinterested, objective and impersonal.[2]

Sources used. There seemed to be no approach prior to this thesis treating the subject in this manner. Mooney[3] has done a criticism on the works of Katherine Anne Porter; Nance[4] has a larger study on the art of rejection in her life and works, and several others such as Schwartz.[5]

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[2] George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, This Generation (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), pp. 31, 187; Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger and Randall Stewart, American Literature (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), pp. 168, 186-88, 206; Clifford Barrett, Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1959), pp. 354-356; Robert F. Davidson, Philosophies Men Live By (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 272-73, 192-223.

[3] Harry J. Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962),

[4] William L. Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

[5] Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1953).

West[6] Stalling,[7] and Hendrick[8] have done major studies on Katherine Anne Porter and her works. However, the contributions of these authors will be used to verify and enhance some of the ideas promulgated in this thesis. Most of the other writings to be used are criticisms from periodicals, and they pertain to her perfections, her distillation method, her irony, and her art as a storyteller. After the publication of Ship of Fools there were some harsh criticisms, especially the caustic reports of the German Press concerning Porter's art. The primary sources that will be used are the articles and books in print by Katherine Anne Porter. Secondary sources will be criticisms from books and articles that relate to Miss Porter and her works, and other material that may become available as the study progresses.

Importance of the study. Katherine Anne Porter's fiction and her life to some extent reflect experiences in search of reality. Both Porter and some of her characters search each situation for actuality, so as not to be hampered and deluded by illusion and fantasy. It is assumed from her

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[6] Ray B. West Jr., Katherine Anne Porter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952).

[7] Donald Stalling, Life and Literary Mirror (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University, 1951).

[8] George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965).

writings that Miss Porter's thoughts correlate with the definitions cited. Reality is the world as it actually is as distinct from the world of daydreams and fantasy. The opposite of reality is delusion, and delusion is a false belief maintained despite experiences and evidences to the contrary. The ego functions as a controlling reality-oriented, mastery mechanism, and if an individual sees himself as behaving in a manner consistent with his picture of himself, he generally has a feeling of adequacy, security, and worth, but if he acts differently from the way he defines himself, he experiences what is known as "threat" and feels insecure, inadequate, or worthless; then if he realizes no other alternative he may defend himself against this threat by way of defense mechanisms.[9]

Summary of each chapter. An introductory section has been cited, aims have been given, definitions were condensed, primary sources and secondary sources have been made available, and a short sketch of the aim of each chapter will follow.

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[9] James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Man (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1956), pp. 653, 643; Lawrence M. Branner and Everett L. Shostrom, Therapeutic Psychology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), pp. 28, 37; Aaron Sartain, and Others, Psychology Understanding Human Behavior (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1958), pp. 113-125.

The classical education and classical background of Miss Porter will be reviewed so as to relate them to the theme, and the sources that will be used are the Miranda and Grandmother stories, "The Old Order" and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall."[10]

From "Old Mortality," written about the times of 1885-1902, Miss Porter produced a story about her family not facing reality, in which Miranda decides that she will make a history of her own. In this story there is an example of excessive romantic idealism which is almost as destructive as annihilating naturalism.[11]

The examination of Pale Horse, Pale Rider will aid in the attempt to depict the struggles of Miss Porter and Miranda with philosophies of idealism and naturalism as they evade reality, and later face it in locales of Texas, New York, and Colorado.[12]

"Flowering Judas" will furnish data and some biographical material about Miss Porter's life during the twenties when she was on a Guggenheim scholarship in

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[10] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), pp. 321-328.

[11] Ibid., pp. 173-221.

[12] Ibid., pp. 269-317.

in Mexico. The Mexican Revolution was being fought at this time and Laura, a partial Miranda character, is closely identified with it.[13]

"Noon Wine. In this creative fiction there is an excellent example of excessive naturalism developed into a brute force of destruction. Noon Wine is a long story written about the times of 1896-1905. The characters are situated on a farm in south Texas, and the story will be analyzed in relation to excessive naturalism.[14]

During the twenties and thirties Porter was out of the States. This era deals with her writing which reveals some prophecy and disillusionment. The Leaning Tower, a short novel, written while she was living in Central Europe, had its setting in Germany but much of the material refers back to earlier days in Texas. In this novel she senses the degradation of the Nazi regime and the coming destruction of Germany.[15]

Ship of Fools will be studied and evaluated on Porter's large canvas of naturalism. It is depicted by representatives of pre-World War II society in Western

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[13] Ibid., pp. 90-102.

[14] Porter, op. cit., pp. 222-268.

[15] Ibid., pp. 436-495.

culture and is symbolic of all mankind. Porter produced this study from an observation of mankind over a period of thirty years.[16]

Conclusion. To conclude this study there will be an attempt made to solidify the positions taken and an effort put forth to prove the validity of the thesis. Porter leaves the impression that there are some questions that are not answered in this life, even if one searches for and faces actuality. She indicates that few people actually search for factuality, and many who do are deluded into the use of malignant ego-defense mechanisms whereby they escape reality. Some use delusions of grandeur and others employ delusions of persecutions to evade many disagreeable realities and ignore or refuse to acknowledge the facts of every day living.

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[16] Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools (New York: The American Library, 1965), pp. ix-476.

CHAPTER II

CLASSICAL EDUCATION AND CLASSICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction. Miss Porter's writings are all colored and influenced by her classical education and background. In the Miranda stories often Grandmother voices the philosophy of Miss Porter. It is impossible to distinguish between facts and fiction in the lives of writers, unless the author gives information to the reader. However, Miss Porter has given little information concerning this area, except that she identifies in some way with nearly all of her characters of fiction. She is known as a partial autobiographical writer, and common sense as well as ethical considerations will declare that the fine margin between the life of Porter and her characters of fiction is impossible to know. To correlate these two concepts dogmatically, the life of Porter and the fiction of the author would be character assassination to say the least. In her stories some minor characteristic or experience is likely to begin to develop from a personal relationship and stay in that realm, or others may be blown up to such proportions that the original experience or characteristic could not possibly be recognized.

Classical education. Katherine Anne (Callie) Porter was born on May 15, 1890, on a backwood spread near Indian Creek, Texas, which was about seventy miles from Austin. Her mother died soon after the birth of Callie, who, with her brother and sister, was soon moved to Kyle, Texas, the home of her paternal grandmother. Here her grandmother, a southern belle from Kentucky, had helped establish a modified version of the "Old South." Cash's description of the classical culture that structured the way of the "Old South" is an authentic portrayal of her Grandmother's girlhood and early adult life.[1]

In a taped interview with Katherine Anne Porter, reporter Newquist makes known that Porter was educated in the convent schools of Texas and Louisiana, "because they were less expensive than Protestant schools," and the Catholic schools in that day generally taught a classic type education. According to Stalling the Porters were all Methodists. But the greater part of her education was obtained in the home of her grandmother from a private tutor and by reading from her grandmother's library. She obtained most of her education from books, for her

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[1] W. F. Cash, The Mind Of The South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1941), p. ix.

grandmother had an excellent library, "as did most literates of that time." From "The Journey" Porter mentions Grandmother's library:

> Grandmother's attention was turned to the main house, which must be overhauled completely. The big secretaries were opened and shabby old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson's dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare were dusted off and closed up carefully again.[2]

Most of the reading that she did before she was twenty-one was classical world literature, and all her early years were lived completely outside literary centers. She had no contact with writers to consult about the single vital issue of her life: the desire to become a writer. In fact, to write was a compulsion to her, but no member of her family was able to understand Katherine Anne's urge to be a writer.[3]

By her own admission, when she was six years of age she wrote a "nobble," made sketches of the characters, and sewed it together like a book. When it was passed for the family inspection, they were overcome with mirth instead of an appreciation and an understanding of her desire for

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[2] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 334.

[3] Roy Newquist, Personal taped interview, McCall's Dayton, Ohio: August 1965, Vol. XCII No. 11, p. 89.

creative art. The "nobble" was passed on to the neighbors who joined in the derision. Miss Porter's comments were: "I got to be such a laughing stock that I learned something: to keep things to myself. No child had less encouragement; but I suppose the 'nobble' was funny."[4]

Perhaps this derision could have caused some injury to her inner-self and led Miss Porter to withdraw and isolate herself, which later contributed to the rejection theme in all of her works as suggested by Nance in Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection.

Grandmother's influence. Katherine Anne Porter's grandmother was of the familial, social, and moral, system of the old order and was the stable influence in the life of Miss Porter.

Classical background. Grandmother is the mouthpiece of Miss Porter in many of her works of art. To cite an example, Miss Porter may speak with derision of her grandmother's morality, when she proclaims that "She dreamed recurrently that she had lost her virginity (her virtue, she called it), her sole claim to regard, consideration, even existence." Miss Porter may have fled far enough from this morality to enter into three marriages, but she stayed near enough to this moral philosophy, that in the Miranda stories she uses great care to protect the virginity of the

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[4] Ibid., p. 137.

young protagonist.[5] Although she did not always agree with her grandmother, she respected and admired her wit, strength, courage, and hope. A dependance on and a rebelliousness toward Grandmother is seen in the "The Old Order" by this quotation:

> They loved their Grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or a refuge since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely; just the same they wished to be free of her; so they were always pleased when, on a certain day, as a sign that her visit was drawing to an end, she would go to the pasture and call her old saddle horse, Fiddler.[6]

Her developing character. Grandmother was middle-aged when she found herself a widow (by war wounds no longer glorious) her property dissipated by a husband who had been a poor financier, with a houseful of children making a new life for them in a frontier locality, and possessing all the responsibilities of a man but none of the privileges. According to Miss Porter in "The Journey," Grandmother called forth her basic honesty and began:

> to develop her implicit character, which was altogether just, humane, proud, and simple. She had many small vanities and weaknesses on the surface: a love of luxury and a tendency to resent criticism.

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[5] Porter, op. cit., p. 135.

[6] Ibid., p. 324.

> This tendency was based on her feeling of superiority in judgment and sensibility to almost everyone around her.[7]

Grandmother's authority and order. Grandmother sensed that one must have plans to keep a sense of balance in this unpredictable world. Even if the plans failed to accompolish what was started in the beginning, "it was good to be strong enough for everything, even if all you made melted and changed and slipped under your hands," so that "by the time you had finished you almost forgot what you were working for."[8] Grandmother knew her role well. It was

> authority, she knew that; it was her duty to portion out activities, to urge or restrain where necessary, to teach morals, manners, and religion, to punish and reward her own household, according to a fixed code. Her doubts and hesitations she concealed, also, she reminded herself, as a matter of duty.[9]

One of Grandmother's favorite theories was that a change of occupation was probably the best way of resting. She then began plans for her yearly trip to the farm. Upon the instant after arrival at the farm she would walk straight through the house, seeing that everything was out

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[7] Ibid., p. 334.

[8] Ibid., p. 83.

[9] Ibid., p. 328.

of order; pass silently through the yards and gardens, making instant plans for changes, inspect the barns as she passed and on to the negro huts where she greeted all, but held no promise of exemption from the wrath to come, even after all of their explanations at being behind; but they would get at it right away.[10]

The attention of Grandmother was them turned to the main house, which was completely renovated. The kitchen changed from a dingy and desolate place to one of heavenly order, where it was a temptation to linger. Some restoring touch was given to the barns, the smokehouses, the cellar, the gardens, and even every tree or vine, or bush had some care given to it. For two weeks Grandmother had been "a tireless, just, and efficient slave driver to every creature on the place." After her yearly gallop on Fiddler she would indicate that she must get back to town where there was so much to be done at home. Upon her arrival at home, "she set at once to work restoring order to the place which no doubt had gone astray in her absence."[11]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 321-324.

[11] Ibid., pp. 324-25.

Grandmother's faith. Grandmother and Nannie (an ex-slave, but lifelong companion) talked of the past: who knows why? Both of them had much bitterness in the past. They talked about God and religion, and the slack way the world was going nowadays, the decay of behavior, and about the younger children. They kept their faith and hope, at the same time asking why about so many happenings--not really expecting an answer--but looking for some sign or reason for so much that had happened or was happening. However, they kept to the task of their devotion to duty:

> without rebellion and without expecting an answer. This unbroken thread of inquiry in their minds contained no doubt as to the utter rightness and justice of the basic laws of human existence, founded as they were on God's plan; but they wondered perpetually, with only a hint now and then to each other of the uneasiness of their hearts, how so much suffering and confusion could have been built up and maintained on such a foundation.[12]

The jilting. In the story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" a new type grandmother is introduced. This piece of work was created a number of years later than "The Old Order" and "Old Mortality." The changes seem to reflect the effects of two influences. First, Miss Porter is a combination of a modified version of the grandmother of "The Old Order" and an exaggerated pattern of Granny Weatherall, who may have changed as time passed. Secondly, Grandmother

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[12] Ibid., pp. 327-28.

of "The Old Order" may have changed after her heartbreak. The incident which may have brought this about is the occasion when her two small sons ran away from home, because they were hungry for sugar cane in Louisiana:

> Sitting there with her arms around them, she felt her heart break in her breast. She had thought it was a silly phase. It happened to her. It was not that she was incapable of feeling afterwards, for in a way she was more emotional, more quick, but griefs never again lasted with her so long as they had before. This day was the beginning of her spoiling her children and being afraid of them.[13]

After this Grandmother suffered much from her children, especially, as they grew older, which is seen from Miss Porter's "The Journey":

> They went about their own affairs, scattering out and seeming to lose all that sense of family unity so precious to the Grandmother. They bore with her infrequent visits and her advice and her tremendous rightness, and they were impatient of her tenderness.[14]

Facing reality. From Miss Porter's "The Fig Tree" there is a hint that Grandmother has met reality and has employed to some degree the defense mechanisms of regressive behavior in the use of fantasy by a return to the past and by curbing all emotion which is suggested by the look of her eyes. "Grandmother's eyes were always the same. They never

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[13] Ibid., p. 339.

[14] Ibid.

looked kind or sad or angry or tired or anything. They just looked, blue and still."[15] The Grandmother of "The Old Order" and "Old Mortality," is more genteel, more refined, and more kind than the tart, almost cynical, Southwestern Granny in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Granny Weatherall resembles the tough old weatherbeaten sea captain who has been landed, but the toughness and tartness of his sea experiences have remained.

Granny is much like Grandmother in "The Old Order" in the manner of asking why, or looking for a sign, a characteristic which is symbolic of the search for reality or the wondering why in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." However, Granny seems to have been more rebellious, not enough to become a revolutionist as Laura in "Flowering Judas," but more than Grandmother, and it is revealed by a harsher personality and a lack of manners and refinement such as Grandmother possessed.

In the fiction of Miss Porter it appears that the jilting of Granny is symbolic of all the unanswered questions in life. Those who serve without rebellion and often look for signs or answers as they face reality, and those who rebel and still have no signs nor unanswered

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[15] Ibid., p. 357.

"whys," but all are left to wait for some answers until they enter the unknown realm.

Granny's love for her children is still uppermost in her thoughts, but they too have failed her in many ways, as have Grandmother's children, and Granny wishes they were little again and she could start all over again. It hurts her pride to be treated as a child and to be constantly reminded of her advanced age.[16]

Symbolic lights and "whys". As Granny faces death she longs for some "whys" to be answered, she looks for a sign, but Miss Porter is too intelligent and realistic to attempt a fictional trip into a realm of the unknown. Some questions can only be answered when Man knows all. Miss Porter leaves the conclusion to different readers of varied viewpoints.

Some critics have said that Granny was doomed to utter destruction, but this seems unlikely when her confession is examined. Granny had been reliving an experience with her children when they were small; how dear they had been to her when she had begun the lighting of the lamps. They would huddle around her like young calves:

> Their eyes followed the match and watched the flame rise and settle in a blue curve, then they moved

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[16] Ibid., pp. 89, 84, 86, 83, 82.

> away from her. The lamp was lit, they didn't have to be scared anymore. Never, never, nevermore. God for all my life I thank Thee. Without Thee, my God, I could never have done it. Hail, Mary, full of Grace.[17]

Lights here are symbolic of carrying the torch of living from one generation to another. Granny gave to her children the light of hope, faith, and reality which was a good start on the journey of life and then they did not depend on her so much; they were no longer like frightened calves.

Miss Porter's subtle humor is graphically displayed in Granny's words: "You have to live forty years with kerosene lamps to appreciate honest electricity," and not waste a good clear light by "blue lampshades." This was no sort of light at all, "just frippery."[18]

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[17] Ibid., p. 84.

[18] Ibid., pp. 87, 89.

CHAPTER III

EXCESSIVE ROMANTIC IDEALISM IN "OLD MORTALITY"

The different versions. Amy was the gift of naturalism to romantic idealism in the long story "Old Mortality." She had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy, and she died young.[1] "Old Mortality"portrays in a very graphic manner an example of excessive romantic idealism. This extreme form of idealism becomes a mockery of sentimentalism. In no way does this treatment of the story infer any derision of sentiment, only the excessive use of it. Such affectation of idealism can be as harmful and destructive as annihilative naturalism.

Miranda's version. Miranda as a child wanted to see and know and feel all about the experiences that went on around her. The search for actuality was an obsession of hers. The different versions of the romantic tragedy in the family of Miranda were disturbing to her. She gathered her version from the portrait of Aunt Amy, the heroine on the mantle who was to Miranda and her sister Maria, the picture of a spirited looking, "reckless," and indifferent personality because of her eyes and smile.

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[1] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New YorK: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 173.

However, Miranda secretly believed that someday she would suddenly undergo metamorphosis and become a great beauty like Aunt Amy had been: "Not as she appeared in the photograph, but as she was remembered by those who had seen her" and those who loved her.[2]

Grandmother's version. The version that Grandmother had of Aunt Amy was somewhat different. She wondered how she happened to bring such a beautiful girl into the world. Her face was "angelic in sleep" and "she had spirits and wit without boldness." Grandmother had wanted all her daughters to wear conventional wedding dress, and Amy would have looked angelic in white, but "she would not wear white, nor a veil," and she had said she would wear mourning if she liked, it was her funeral, and that Lou and Isabel were not like her. Grandmother could not persuade her to explain what she meant when she talked in such a manner. Amy had

> a way of speaking, a tone of voice, which made it impossible to discover what she meant by what she said. It was possible always that she might be serious. And she would not answer questions.[3]

Amy reacted toward her father and Gabriel, her long-time lover, in a cruel way. Anything they liked or wanted

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[2] Ibid., pp. 173, 177.

[3] Ibid., p. 182.

done she took the opposite stand and tried to destroy whatever they set out to do. Her father ordered her to dress in a certain manner; she made him think she had changed and then laughed behind his back in just such a way:

> They agreed with kindly tolerance that old people were often tiresome, but one need not upset them by open disobedience: their youth gone what had they to live for?[4]

Such deception and disrespect was most unkind and the crux of it was that it was extremely dishonest in a very destructive manner. Grandmother and Grandfather had disagreed in a matter of discipline, but Grandmother later agreed that Grandfather had been right, when she told Amy "you shouldn't have done that, Amy. That was not wise of you. It was better the other way." Amy had responded

> "Mammy, I'm sick of this world. I don't like anything in it. It's so dull," she said, and for a moment she looked as if she might weep. She had never been tearful, even as a child, and her mother was alarmed.[5]

Amy had slipped out of bed, having a high fever, and had ridden with her two brothers and Gabriel to the Mexican border. Harry was to hide out a year in Mexico because he had taken a wild shot at Amy's lover. After a three-day trip in the saddle she was so ill she had to be lifted from the saddle and carried into the house, but

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[4] Ibid., pp. 185-86.

[5]

in the gayest of humor. Grandmother and Grandfather had planned to be severe with her, but at sight of her their feelings changed. After the shooting scandal and the ride to Mexico and back Amy went to bed to recuperate, and the rest of the family suffered in silence, bearing the disgrace of the scandal, which touched the family nerve center all the way to Kentucky.[6]

Two letters were in Grandmother's packet from New Orleans; one was from Amy and the other was from Amy's nurse. Amy's letter stated that she was having a grand time and that she and Gabriel were going into the streets during the Mardi Gras even though Gabriel said it was not safe. She stated that her mother-in-law would be shocked at a new dress she had bought for the ball, and Amy expected to be so dashing in it that her mother-in-law would have an attack. She had them quite often. The other letter from her nurse said that Amy often asked about taking more pills than were prescribed for her by the doctor, and although she always told Amy to take only what the doctor had ordered, she had taken too many and died.

Cousin Eva's version. Miranda heard Cousin Eva's version many years later as they were going home to Uncle Gabriel's funeral. He was brought back to lie by Amy,

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[7] Ibid., p. 215.

who never loved him in life, and aided in his complete destruction by her psychopathic personality. His inability to face actuality by chasing a fantasy and following an illusion caused him to lose the love of his second wife and the respect and admiration of a fine son. Eva's Mother had been like Aunt Amy, and she had expressed her cruelty and sadism toward her ugly, chinless daughter. Eva had become a teacher and a fighter for the rights of women. Miranda admired her courage and morality, but she wondered why these attributes were sometimes so deforming. Miranda thought:

> "Beauty goes, character stays," said the small voice of axiomatic morality in Miranda's ear. It was a dreary prospect; why was a strong character so deforming? Miranda felt she truly wanted to be strong but how could she face it, seeing what it did to one? [7]

Cousin Eva exploded ferociously as she related her version. "Your Aunt Amy was a devil and a mischief-maker, but I loved her dearly," and defended her when her reputation wasn't worth a snap of your finger. "She went through life like a spoiled darling, doing as she pleased and letting other people suffer for it," shattering things and letting other people pick up the pieces. Breathing heavily cousin Eva continued, "She was a bad girl, wild girl,

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[7] Ibid., p. 215.

but I was fond of her to the last, . . . She got in trouble somehow, and she couldn't get out again, and I have every reason to believe she killed herself with that drug." It was unbelievable what went on at one of those parties, and the rivalry was something else according to Cousin Eva. "She was too free," and it seemed nothing was too mean or too false for those girls to do to one another.[8] Cousin Eva whispered to Miranda:

> What connection did this man Raymond of Calcasieu have with Amy's sudden marriage to Gabriel, and what did Amy do to make away with herself so soon afterward? For mark my words, child, Amy wasn't so ill as all that. She'd been flying around for years after the doctors said her lungs were weak. Amy did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced.[9]

Cousin Eva's logical mind wandered on and some of the facts did not agree with her opinion, but her family loyalty caused her to evade reality. She said I never believed for

> one moment that Amy was an impure woman. Never! but let me tell you, there were plenty who did believe it. There were plenty to pity poor Gabriel for being so completely blinded by her. A great many persons were surprised when they heard that Gabriel was perfectly miserable all the time, on their honeymoon in New Orleans. Jealousy. And why not? But I used to say to such persons that no matter what the appearances were

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[8] Ibid., pp. 211-214.

[9] Ibid., p. 214.

> I had faith in Amy's virtue. Wild, I said, indiscreet, I said, heartless, I said, but virtuous, I feel certain. . . .[10]

An amusing aspect of the story is in connection with Amy and her virtue, and that aspect is important in any situation. The way in which Amy so recklessly handled sexual relationships previously, whether that last morsel of virtue was preserved or not, seems unimportant. The forms of evil which she had committed were dishonesty, rebellion, disrespect, lying, cruelty, and sadism, all of which seem to go unnoticed, and Miss Porter calls attention to this fallacy in her ironic manner by the excessive stress on Amy's virtue. Her serious humor was to ridicule the hypocritical code and suggest that if virtue is all that a woman has left by way of morals it is scarcely worth defending.

Psychopathic personality. Coleman and Levy indicate that a psychopathic personality, a term that is not used too readily in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, has many of the characteristics which Porter attributes to Amy. A psychopathic personality manifests:

> a marked lack of ethical or moral development and an inability to follow socially approved codes of behavior. . . . prone to thrill seeking, deviant sexual behavior patterns and other unconventional behavior, callous

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[10] Ibid., pp. 211-212.

> disregard for the needs and rights of others, rejection of constituted authority and discipline, quick ability to rationalize and project blame for his disapproved behavior, lies readily, . . . usually cynical, unsympathetic, ungrateful and remorseless.[11]

Levy finds two prevailing parental patterns in the background of psychopaths:

> (1) Parental rejection and other types of deprivation, and (2) parental indulgence, allowing the child free reign of his aggressions and desires. Sometimes these patterns are also combined.[12]

Amy's behavior patterns. Amy was a spoiled reckless daring girl who had kept her faithful lover, Gabriel, dangling for five years. The delay was supposed to have been because her lungs were weak, but she had been engaged to two other young men during that time, and had broken her engagements for no reasons. Amy's attitude toward her mother was nearer love than in any other relationship shown. She tried to please her brothers, but to her father and Gabriel she responded in a sadistic manner. Her health was of no concern to her; she would dance all night three nights in one week, and then have a hemmorhage from the lungs. During this era, according to the literature of western culture, tuberculosis was a disease of great distinction.

Accompanied by Gabriel, Amy wore a shocking costume

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[11] James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1956), p. 343.

[12] Ibid., p. 341.

to the Mardi Gras Ball. She left Gabriel after her first dance and spent most of the time dancing with a Creole gentleman to whom she had been engaged. She greeted him as a lover and later they waltzed out of the ballroom into a balcony where Gabriel challenged the Creole to a duel over a kiss or a compliment about Amy's shingled hair. Gabriel had told Amy how beautiful her long hair was and she had it shingled just to spite him. As Raymond was leaving to prepare for the duel, Harry, Amy's brother and Miranda's father, took a wild shot at Raymond in order to defend his sister's honor. Harry's shot had so angered Raymond that Harry was forced to hide out in Mexico for a year. However, the duel had been stopped by the law officials.

Amy recuperated from the scandalous affair and the trip to Mexico with much needed rest and seclusion while the rest of the family had to carry on in public life. She decided she would marry Gabriel if they could get to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras season, but if not till after Lent that might be too late. Six weeks after her wedding she had died from an overdose of pills. One letter came saying she was having a lovely visit, but fuller details indicated she was living as recklessly and destructively as ever.[13]

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[13] Ibid., pp. 173-193.

Gabriel's personality. According to Cousin Eva, Gabriel had been perfectly miserable on the honeymoon, and after Amy's death he had moved away, though he still held to the ties of the family as if Amy were living. Gabriel had been a follower of race horses and his grandfather has dismissed him as his favorite heir because of Amy and horses, both excesses of Gabriel. Later Gabriel had met a fine "blonde woman" who gave him an intelligent son, but Gabriel continued to follow his illusions and dreams and eventually lost the love and respect and admiration of his wife and son. He died from living the life of a drunkard and was shipped back to lie beside Amy who never loved him. His memory of and obsession with her destroyed his second chance at a good family life, but still he remained loyal even in death. These characterizations of Porter are created to cite the absurdity of persons who follow after the cliches and facades of an excessive movement of any type when the basic foundation has turned to rot and corruption.[14]

Amy was an excellent example of a personality who rebelled against the set patterns, but the new ones she followed after were more destructive than the falsity and deception that had polluted some of the old ones. Gabriel, a relatively good person, was either led by his obsession to a downfall or was too deluded to face the truth. He was too

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[14] Ibid.

weak a character to make any favorable impressions on society as to the value of ideals, only a mockery of them. Honesty is the basis of idealistic character traits and an idealistic society; and if actuality is not faced, lies soon lead to the destruction of personality and society.

Cousin Eva had warned Miranda, "You musn't live in a romantic haze about yourself," and Miranda had said, "I won't be romantic about myself." Porter closes the romantic idealistic novel by having Miranda striving to know the truth and face factuality:

> What is the truth, she asked herself as intently as if the question had never been asked, the truth, even about the smallest, the least important of all the things I must find out? and where shall I begin to look for it? Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering. Not the past, . . . other people's memory of the past, at which she had spent her life peering in wonder like a child at a magic-lantern show. Ah, but there is my own life to come yet, she thought, my own life now and beyond. I don't want promises, I won't have false hopes. . . . At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, and her ignorance.[15]

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[15] Ibid., p. 221.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH EXPERIENCE AND IDEALISTIC LOVE

Introduction. The major theme in Pale Horse, Pale Rider is the death experience, but of secondary importance is the love story. The events in this story and some of the happenings in Miss Porter's life are closely correlated. during World War I, Miss Porter worked for a newspaper in Colorado; Bill was the city editor of the Rocky Mountain News where she was employed, and she covered the theaters as in the story. She contracted influenza and almost died, and according to the following quotation her lover died as did Miranda's. Hendrick relates that in a television interview Porter remarked:

> I met a boy, an army lieutenant, . . . our time was short and we were much in love. But we were shy. . . . I was taken ill with flu. . . .

What about the young man? some one asked.

> It's in the story. At the sudden memory she fought back the tears--and won gallantly. He died . . . . It's in the story. It seemed to me that I died then, I died once, and I have never feared death since.[1]

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[1] George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Ywayne Publishers, 1965), p. 76.

Lank greenish stranger. The story opens with a stream-of-consciousness account of Miranda's troubled sleep. Already in the first stages of the plague which had swept the country, she was carried back in her delirium to childhood experiences which had been filled with too many conflicts and too many tragedies. She selected the horse most capable of outrunning "death and the devil" because she had seen that "lank greenish stranger" lurking near, as she rode out of the stables. Soon the pale stranger was seen riding alongside her; she sidled closer to him and shouted. "I'm not going with you this time. You ride on." The shout sent the stranger on his way and awakened Miranda.[2]

Conflicts. The first conflict that entered her mind as she awoke was the "threat" imposed by the "dollar a year men," who had a stale air of borrowed importance which apparently came from the same source. Yesterday they had pressured her to buy a war bond, which she could not possibly afford now nor in the future unless her wages were raised. She confronted them in her office as soon as she arrived and was startled by the tone of the young man's voice, as she met his gaze: "his stare was really stony,

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[2] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), pp. 269-70.

really viciously cold, the kind of thing you might expect to meet behind a pistol on a deserted corner." They again pressured her with insults and she thought:

> Suppose I were not a coward but said to hell with this filthy war? Suppose I asked that little thug, what's the matter with you, why aren't you rotting in Belleau Woods? I wish you were. . . ."[3]

Schwartz's comment about the above quotation was

> But in this dangerous world she knows she must utter the safe, the habitual, automatic response. Through intimidation and fear, the people of Miranda's world are compelled to live with lies, to deny their individual feelings as evil and dangerous, to accept slogans and automatic responses.[4]

Red Cross efforts and reality. Miranda tried to flee from or evade reality because she was too crushed from the pain of it. Another conflict with actuality was felt when she had gone with a group of young women to take baskets of fruit and trinkets to the hospital. The money for the loot had been raised at tea dances and their task toward the war effort was "to cheer the brave boys who already, you might very well say, had fallen in defense of their country." Miranda was not lucky enough to get a good-natured, friendly one, but she caught the "unfriendly bitter eye of a young fellow lying on his back, his right leg in a cast and pulley." She looked into his hostile face and

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[3] Ibid., p. 273.

[4] Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1953), p. 143.

his eyes said, "not having any, thank you, and be damned to the whole business, and will you be so kind as to take your trash off my bed." Miranda could not pick up the basket but rushed from the room. She felt as if she had turned a corner and met her own painful thoughts embodied face to face. Her thoughts were exactly as he had spoken with his eyes, and she said, "never again will I come here, this is no sort of thing to be doing. This is disgusting."[5]

Schwartz in his observation feels that Miranda's decision has solidified:

> Her intention to avoiding future false situations like her present Red Cross work is an important decision because by it Miranda temporarily avoids one of the traps set for the unwary who are transformed (by war slogans) and cliches into automatons, unable to distinguish between the real and the illusory.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Surrounded by a world of illusion, of evil and death, Miranda desires to escape to her childhood or to lose her identity (i.e. to die); yet her negative impulses are countered by her hope of finding a refuge in love, which might restore her to the world.[6]

Evading reality. Miranda had tried in every way to evade the harsh realities all around her--war, death, disease, threats conflicts and excruciating suffering.

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[5] Porter, op., cit., p. 277.

[6] Schwartz, op. cit., p. 148.

Schwartz stated that her "negative impulses are countered by her hope of finding a refuge in love," but an early commitment to love was also evaded. "Once they turned and their eyes met, but only once and the two pair of eyes were equally steady and non-committal."[7]

Pale Horse, Pale Rider is an idealistic love story which portrays a world shattered by war, disease, and death. These forces of destruction are on every corner and in every passageway. The love story in Pale Horse, Pale Rider is a contrast to the one in "Old Mortality." The evil, death, disease, and decay are inflicted by unknown assailants upon the young lovers, and their reactions are shadow boxing, but they are dearer than life to one another. In "Old Mortality" the pains and suffering are inflicted by Amy upon Gabriel or herself. Their love story is tragic; it is built on evil and illusion. Although Adam's and Miranda's love is real but ended in tragedy, Miranda is strong enough to start again and go on eventually to a meaningful life.[8]

According to some critics Adam made his avowal of love to Miranda by his special care of her when she was

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[7] Porter, op. cit., p. 292.

[8] Harry J. Mooney, Jr. The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 25.

ill. Influenza had struck the city, and the sick and dying were on every street and were filling the hospitals. Miranda's landlady was terrified and wanted to put Miranda in the street, but Adam ordered the landlady out of her room and demanded that she stay out. Bill, the editor for whom she worked, finally sent someone from the hospital to carry Miranda to the hospital, and she was carried away while Adam had gone for ice cream and coffee. Adam could not see her at the hospital because of her serious condition, and soon he was ill and died of the influenza contracted from Miranda.

Classical idealism. Porter's idealistic concept of a young man is depicted by the following quotation and it also portrays some of Miranda's love and admiration for Adam. As she silently walked along, this picture flashed through her mind:

> No there was no resentment or revolt in him. Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrifical lamb strode along casually, accommodating his long pace to hers, keeping her on the inside of the walk in good American style, helping her across the street corners as if she were a cripple--"I do hope we don't come to a mud puddle, he'll carry me over it" -- giving off. . . a manly smell of scentless soap, freshly cleansed leather and freshly washed skin, breathing through his nose and carrying his chest easily.

Later that evening she saw him through the restaurant window:

> It was an extraordinary face, smooth and fine and golden in the shabby light, but now set in a blind melancholy, a look of pained suspense and disillusion. For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of a man he would not live to be.[9]

Death scenes. Pale Horse, Pale Rider has a rather eerie atmosphere, due to the scenes of a non-real world, the use of stream-of-consciousness method, the illness of Miranda, and the reality of her special insights. In her first deliriums she had seen Adam's death executed in a wooded area, by the same type arrows that did not even harm her. In her illness she traveled to the brink of death, but later fought her way back to life after putrefaction had begun in the body. This experience of Miranda was most extraordinary, and this perception colors some of Porter's later works. The author's portrayal of the near-death experience was incredible. Her premonitions indicated in an uncanny manner throughout the story that something unusual and tragic would happen. Aside from all the the attempts to elude reality, conflicts, and painful situations with the crowd, one trace of loneliness and isolation was voiced by Miranda as she watched the theater crowd leave the building:

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[9] Porter, op. cit., p. 295.

> What did I ever know about them? There must be a great many of them here who think as I do, and we dare not say a word to each other of our desperation, we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why? Does anybody here believe the things we say to each other?[10]

Miranda and Porter and their friends try to evade factuality by negation, but in their isolation they desire the human contact that is helpful in reaching a sense of actuality that comes from understanding and compassion toward and from other personalities.

Symbolic light. Light plays a very significant part in this story and others that Porter has composed. Near the close of the death scene Light reaches out to Miranda saying: "Trust me. I stay." Soon it had grown, flattened, thinned to a fine radiance, spread like a great fan and curved out into a rainbow which led Miranda through the most peaceful and beautiful places and sensations: truly it was a time of serene rapture fulfilled, Miranda in the quietude of her ecstasy:

> felt without warning a vague tremor of apprehension; some small flick of distrust in her joy; a thin frost touched the edges of this conflict tranquillity; something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something, she had left something valuable in another country, oh what could it be? . . . I have left something unfinished. . . . Where are the dead?[11]

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[10] Ibid., p. 291.

[11] Ibid., pp. 311-313.

The quotation seems to infer that Miranda's subconscious mind knows that Adam was back there in the death region. Earlier she had been taken to a strange stony place of bitter cold; on a steep path of slippery snow, where eventually stench and death were all around her. She called out that she must go back from the land of the dead; back to life. The odors of stench and death were from her own body, and the Light that had been leading her came through a coarse white cloth over her face; leading her back to life and away from the putrefaction and deterioration of near death.[12]

Facing reality. It has been suggested that in Pale Horse, Pale Rider the characters tried to evade reality because of the terribleness of it. However, disease, death, war and oppression lurked in every corner; in just such a setting Adam and Miranda first evaded reality--their love--then finally confessed it. From the beginning they seemed to sense no hope for their love. Some of the facts that aided in this assumption were Miranda's previous marriage, her uncanny perception, Adam's scheduled sapping party (with an average life span of nine minutes) and Miranda's premonition of his death in her delirium. Miranda was so ill for a month that she knew nothing of what had happened. She learned the facts about

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12 Ibid.

Adam's death when she finally awoke following the light. She was in a state of depression when she came back to life and faced reality. All seemed dull after the brightness of her death experience. Adam is gone and she is asking "why" as did Granny Weatherall after she had been jilted. One of the reasons she came back was to be with Adam again, and the other was her love of life even if it were terrible at times.[13]

Resisting illusions. Miranda is now searching for reality and she says: "Adam you need not die again, but still I wish you were here; I wish you had come back, what do you think I came back for, Adam to be deceived like this?" Soon he is there beside her, "invisible but urgently present, a ghost but more alive than she was, ... knowing it was false she still clung to the lie, the unpardonable lie of her bitter desire." Miranda knows she must face reality and not be deluded into fantasy and self-delusion. "Oh, no that is not the way, I must never do that, she warned herself." Her earlier dream is so much more desirable than reality. Life is all too harsh to face, but alas she must go on to more tomorrows.[14]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 317.

CHAPTER V

FLOWERING JUDAS: COMMUNISM

Hendrick and Burnett make known some of Porter's comments which are a key to the meaning of the story "Flowering Judas":

> All the characters and episodes are based on real persons and events, but naturally, as my memory worked upon them and time passed, all assumed different shapes and colors, formed gradually around a central idea, that of self-delusion, the order and meaning of the episodes changed, and became in a word fiction.
>
> The first idea came to me one evening when going to visit the girl I call Laura in the story. I passed the open window of her living room on my way to the door, through the small patio which is one of the scenes in the story. I had a brief glimpse of her sitting with an open book in her lap, but not reading, with a fixed look of pained melancholy and confusion in her face. The fat man I call Braggioni was playing the guitar and singing to her.
>
> In that glimpse no more than a flash, I thought I understood or perceived, for the first time, the desperate complication of her mind and feelings, and I knew a story; perhaps not her true story, not even the real story of the whole situation, but all the same a story that seemed symbolic truth to me. If I had not seen her face at that very moment, I should never have written just this story because I should not have known it to write.[1]

Ray B. West in Katherine Anne Porter and "Historic Memory" implied that he was puzzled by the naming of the central character in "Flowering Judas,":

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[1] Whit Burnett, ed., This is My Best (New York: 1942), pp. 539-540.

> because so many of the background facts concerning Laura were similar to those in Katherine Anne Porter's own experience, . . . the interest in modern social causes, and the fact that Miss Porter had taught in Mexico. . . . Mr. West asked why the character was not named Miranda, and Miss Porter replied that "Laura was modeled upon a friend" with whom she taught in Mexico, but the character was a "combination of a good many people, just as was the character Braggioni. . . . " Autobiographical qualities, therefore, may be present; for she may have combined some facets of her own character and those of the fictional Miranda into the fictional Laura.[2]

Social issues. Although, the absolute truth is not known about the connections between Miss Porter, Miranda and Laura, they are closely related in enough places and situations to unite some traits of the three to produce this one person of fiction, Laura. Few critics have cited much correlation among these three in "Flowering Judas," but to expound this thesis the assumption will be made that Laura was a partial Miranda-Miss Porter, whose idealistic concepts had gotten her involved in the revolution. Many intellectual idealists at this time were socialists, even to the point of identifying with the Communist Party. Since destruction, rebellion, and revolution have been methods by which the Communists have infiltrated society from the start, it can be assumed that Miss Porter may have become associated with the revolution, for she was living

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[2] George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, (Chicago: University of Illinois, Twayne Publishers Inc., 1965), pp. 39-40.

in Mexico at this time. She was teaching in the schools, and she had been connected with social movements in the United States a number of times. Twentieth Century Authors indicates that Porter had said, "politically my bent is to the left. As for aesthetic bias, my one aim is to tell a straight story and to give testimony to it." Porter has said, "I just got up and bolted. I went running off on that wild escapade to Mexico, where I attended, you might say, and assisted at, in my own way, a revolution." As she continued, "It was a time of revolution, and I was running with almost pure revolutionaries."[3]

Heresy and disillusionment. To continue the Miranda series she could have moved from her fortitude and endurance in Pale Horse, Pale Rider to Laura in "Flowering Judas." In rebellion against her tragedy Miranda-Laura could have turned away from her church, an evidence of her inclination toward the communistic philosophy. It was said that Laura in her private heresy against the party "slips now and again into some crumbling little church, in spite of her fear of being seen by someone who might make a scandal of it." Also in her war against machinery,

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[3] Stanley J. Kunitz & Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1942), p. 1119.

she would not wear lace made on machines, reflecting her disenchantment with the party. In her special group the machine was sacred, and thought to be the salvation of the workers.[4] By the time of her arrival in Mexico she had developed the attitude of negation to a fine art:

> She persuades herself that her negation of all external events as they occur is a sign that she is gradually perfecting herself in the stoicism she strives to cultivate against the disaster she fears, though she cannot name it.[5]

Laura had been led into the revolution because of her idealism and a desire to help the masses of Mexico. She had developed her attitude of negation to prevent any more suffering, and the negation had made her isolated:

> Nobody touches her, but all praise her gray eyes, and the soft round underlip which promises gaiety, yet is always grave, nearly always firmly closed: and they cannot understand why she is in Mexico.[6]

Her idealistic concept had been that a revolutionist "should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues, and possessing real nobility, . . . and a love of humanity raised above mere personal affec-

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[4] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), pp. 97, 42.

[5] Ibid., p. 97.

[6] Ibid., p. 95.

tions." She knows now that that was nonsense; revolutionists must have leaders, and leadership is a career for energetic men. Her comrades tell her she is full of romantic error, for what she defines as cynicism in them they say is merely "a developed sense of reality." She feels that she does not understand such reasoning and makes a secret truce not to surrender her will to such expedient logic. The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusions

> Not for nothing has Braggioni taken pains to be a good revolutionist and a professional lover of humanity. He will never die of it. He has the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness, the sharpness of wit, the hardness of heart, stipulated for loving the world profitably. He will never die of it. He will live to see himself kicked out from the feeding trough by other hungry world-saviors.[7]

Braggioni is the prize package of naturalism developed into a force that is most destructive. He speaks with a hypnotic voice to a close-gathered crowd:

> Everything must be torn from its accustomed place where it has rotted for centuries, hurled skyward and distributed, cast down again clean as rain, without separate identity. Nothing shall survive that the stiffened hands of poverty have created for the rich and no one shall be left alive except the elect spirits destined to procreate a new world cleansed of cruelty and injustice, ruled by benevolent anarchy: 'Pistols are good, I love them, cannons are even better, but in the end I pin my faith to good dynamite,' he concludes,[8] and strokes the pistol lying in her hands.

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[7] Ibid., pp. 91,98.

[8] Ibid., p. 100.

Searching for reality. Laura wondered if she was not as corrupt as Braggioni in another way: "as callous, as incomplete and if this is so, any kind of death seems preferable. Still she sits quietly, she does not run."[9] What are her motives and the reason for her devotion? She teaches the Indian children part of the day, she goes to the union meetings, she visits the prisoners of her own political faith, and owes her comfortable situation and salary to Braggioni. "Laura feels a slow chill, a purely physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death, wait for her with lessening patience."[10] She knows she must resist what Braggioni would offer her, and she must do so tenaciously without appearing to resist; and if she could avoid it, she would not even admit even to herself the slow drift of his intention.

Facing reality. Laura has been an idealist who favored the revolution; at least she had participated in it, for the destruction of the power structure of the rich and powerful church and state. Yet in her state of negativ-

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[9] Ibid., p. 93.

[10] Ibid.

ism she had no love nor compassion for the children she taught; she ignored or rejected any attention or developing romances by the young men she met, and she was in constant battle to outwit the lustful Braggioni. As Laura faced reality, she wondered if anyone could be truthful who professed a concern for the social, political, and economic affairs of these people and still had no real love or compassion for them?

Death dream. Three interpretations of this dream will be cited because the meaning is not made obvious. Eugenio could be considered a counterpart of Adam, whom Miranda had lost by death, and whose murderer she has been in the sense that she gave to him the influenza that took his life. Eugenio could have been, like Adam, a soldier of idealistic view points and a lover with whom Laura, like Miranda, had evaded reality until it was too late.

Or Eugenio could have been a silent lover because she would not listen, but they both knew the actuality of his love. He could have been an idealistic soldier in the revolution who has suffered disillusion and defeat from the corruption, destructiveness, uselessness of it all and who ended his life because Laura would not come out of her state of negation and isolation and give to him the hope of exercising the courage of endurance.

Or he could have just been another unlucky revolution-

ist, whose reverence for life was less vibrant than his self-destructiveness, a person whom Laura may have felt empathy toward and who recalls to the reader's mind the memory of Adam in a new setting.

Near self-preservation. Laura awakes, by refusing death and by facing reality again, biding her fortune and her time a little longer. "Now she is free, and she thinks, I must run while there is time. But she does not go."[11] She is not negative enough to want death as she may have thought, even though her life lacks love, and though determinism all around her proclaims death. She may go back to her faith and receive some of the "spirit" that many of Porter's alpha characters possess, which will lead her away from negation and death. If she continues in her state of no love, negation and skepticism she could be destroyed; however, a return to her church, love, and idealism can redeem her life and combat this evil force symbolized by the revolution. She may stay a little longer because she loves the peril involved, or it could be she is still rebellious toward things that cannot be changed. Death can also come by the corruption of her ideals from violence and chaos.

Miss Porter seems to leave more evidence in the

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[11] Ibid., p. 101.

direction of the theory that Laura will digress before it is too late and return to faith and love. Schwartz sums up Porter's Mexican stories in the following manner:

> Miss Porter's Mexican stories are characterized first, by a preoccupation with the individual human being; second, by a recognition and acceptance of man's function and limitations as an animal in nature; third, by a counterbalancing respect for the integrity of human personality, for the inexplicable mystery of man's unconscious life, which is uniquely human; fourth, by a this-worldly orientation that is intensely moral in its insistence upon man's need for recognition, understanding, and acceptance of his human responsibilities and opportunities; fifth, by a concern for the loss of order brought about by the new standardized machine world which man had created but which threatens to deprive man of his humanity; sixth, by an awareness of the discrepancy between external appearances and internal realities.[12]

Hendrick relates Porter's thoughts on the revolutions in Mexico and other uprisings and upheavels:

> I had had time to grow up, to consider, to look again, to begin finding my way a little through the inordinate clutter and noise of my immediate day, in which very literally everything in the world was being pulled apart, torn up, turned wrong side out and upside down; almost no frontiers left unattacked, governments and currencies falling; even the sexes seemed to be changing back and forth and multiplying weird, unclassifiable genders.[13]

Likewise from The Days Before Porter comments:

> When I say, then, that the evening Mr. Forster spoke in

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[12] Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1953), p. 67.

[13] Hendrick, op. cit., pp. 225-26.

> Paris it was dusty and crowded, it was literally true; but it also is a way of saying that the Communists in numbers running a show anywhere always gave me this sense of suffocation; and heaven knows they were there, with their dullness, all over the place making muddlement, as ubiquitous and inescapable as a plague of June bugs in Texas.[14]

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[14] Katherine Anne Porter, The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), pp. 116-117.

CHAPTER VI

DESTRUCTIVE NATURALISM: NOON WINE

Introduction. According to some critics Noon Wine is Porter's most objective story, because she identifies least with the setting, situations, and characters. The setting for the story is from the year 1896-1905. It depicts more real love, communication, and compassion than any of her other works. Found in it is a unique example of the idealistic theory of Aristotle concerning the organic whole or completeness of units. To cite the example, three people who have partially whole personalities work together and unite to form a well-developed and healthily functioning organism for a period of time. Noon Wine reveals in an excellent manner the clash of mankind with the forces of good and evil, but the major emphasis in this thesis is the portrayal of excessive naturalism developed into a force of destruction, which eventually annihilates all.

Social relationships. In this story Porter displays the Thompson family living successfully, in the social relationships, by facing reality and living with their limitations. In some of the other areas they have problems. However, in the successful area they have adjusted to situations by the use of defense mechanisms and the possession

of hope or some of the personal and fictional characteristic of Miss Porter called "spirit." In his day to day existence Mr. Thompson used the defense mechanism of fantasy to make the tasks of drudgery less painful to him. Mrs. Thompson by the exercise of a hope and a faith that there was a better time ahead handled her problems rather successfully. "She wanted to believe that tomorrow, or at least the day after, life, such a battle at best was going to be better."[1] However, in the matter of finances they were steadily going down hill. Mrs. Thompson had inherited their small farm; a dairy farm, a chicken farm and a small acreage for planted crops. Mrs. Thompson was not an integrated personality because she was not a healthy woman and had suffered many serious illnesses from time to time. Her deficiency was a lack of physical strength. Mr. Thompson was insecure, perhaps from family background and treatment, and had minor limitations in the areas of the mental and spiritual to the degree that he depended on others to help stabilize himself. He was a dependent "noisy, proud man who held his neck so straight his whole face stood level with his Adam's apple," and his concern about the appearance of things, "his own appearance in the sight of God and man"

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[1] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 226.

and his "dignity" and "reputation."[2]

Alpha and beta stories. Nance has divided Miss Porter's stories into three types, the alpha and beta groups and a few borderline cases, of which Noon Wine is an example. "The criterion for this division is the presence or absence of the semi-autobiographical or subjective protagonist embodied most fully in Miranda, who is identifiable with the author even in many of the biographical details of her life."[3] The initial division of the stories is quite easy, for all the stories which do not contain the alpha protagonist are peopled by "characters distinctly inferior to or remote from that protagonist in terms of intelligence, sensibility, self-awareness, courage, independence, desire for truth,'spirit.'" The alpha protagonist is, in terms of these qualities, almost identical with the author. "Beta characters are distinctly removed from the author by: portrayal as inferior in the aforementioned qualities, obvious remoteness in race or social class, and/or ironic criticism of their vices and defects."[4]

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[2] Ibid., pp. 222-223.

[3] William L. Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 6.

Limitations, love, and communication. According to Nance's division the Thompsons are alpha characters in a partial sense at least, because they do face reality, have courage, desire truth and are somewhat independent as a functioning organism to accept limitations and do something about their problems toward a solution. Beta characters do not have these abilities, but alpha characters are independent enough to reject and are strong and secure enough to live after they are isolated. Mr. Thompson could not stand the isolation, because of his dependence on others. The Thompsons are nearly beta characters because of social class. Miss Porter makes it clear that the Thompsons are the small farmer class, and Mr. Thompson was a notch lower than that, perhaps a sharecropper's son. This seems to have some effect on his reactions to society. By the language used it is clear that the Thompsons are not highly educated; by the conditions on the farm it is indicated that they are having difficulties financially, but they are good people who are striving toward a better life with all the possibilities which they possess. The outstanding traits about them from the beginning were the real love, appreciation, communication and compassion shown toward and with each other, especially the understanding shown toward each other in relation to their individual weaknesses.

Mrs. Thompson. She was a gentle, kind and understanding woman. She wished that her husband would take a little

more trouble with his business, justly rebuked him for his occasional drinks, dutifully laughed at his retold jokes that were not quite appropriate for mixed company; but loved and responded to him in an affectionate manner.[5]

Mr. Thompson had fallen in love with the "big blue eyes" and the "delicate waist" of Miss Ellen Bridges, popular Sunday School teacher of the First Baptist Church. Though all these charms had disappeared, "she had in the meantime become Ellie to him, . . . his dear wife Ellie who was not strong. . . he had almost without knowing it resigned himself to failure, because of his wife's poor health."[6] He was almost crude in manner, close to vulgar in speech, and a "hurricane of wrath" who promised brutality to their sons, but there was never any indications that the threats were carried to completion. It was indicated that "he was going to put them through the mill as his own father had done with him when he was a boy," and Ellie had said she would discipline them since they were so young and "tender." Mr. Thompson remarked, "My pa used to knock me down with a stick of stove wood or anything else that came in handy."[7]

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[5] Porter, op. cit., pp. 226, 229, 230.

[6] Ibid., p. 234.

[7] Ibid., p. 240.

Perhaps this type of treatment could have lent itself to the development of insecurity and aided in the growth of other weaknesses in Mr. Thompson. "Head erect, a prompt payer of taxes, yearly subscriber to the preacher's salary, land owner and father of a family, employer, a hearty good fellow among men, Mr. thompson knew, without putting it into words, that he had been steadily going down hill."[8] Aside from the enumerated weaknesses, in the depths of himself, Mr. Thompson was a good, kind man.

First visitor. One day Olaf Helton, a Swedish immigrant from North Dakota, came looking for work on the Thompson farm. He was a narrow-chested man, with pale blue eyes under white eyebrows set in a long gaunt face. "He never had looked at Mr. Thompson, but there wasn't anything sneaking in his eye, either." His eyes just sat in his head and let things pass by them because he did not seem to be expecting anything worth looking at. He stated that he could do everything on the farm, and as time passed he proved that he could do it exceedingly well. The whole place changed after Helton came with his cleanliness, order, beauty, and knowledge of successful farming. The Thompsons were soon out of debt, and out of gratitude to Mr. Helton for a job well done, they gave to him two raises

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[8] Ibid., p. 234.

in salary. Helton would never talk, so he was isolated from the family almost completely except in his labors and the simple beauty of his incessant playing of the one tune on his many harmonicas.

> Mr. Helton was the prop and hope of the family, and all the Thompsons became fond of him, or at any rate they ceased to regard him as in any way pecualiar, and looked upon him, from a distance they did not know how to bridge, as a good man and a good friend. Mr. Helton went his way, worked, played his tune. Nine years had passed. The boys grew up and learned to work. They could not remember the time when Old Helton hadn't been there.[9]

The three, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson and Helton, had united and made a whole personality of a well-functioning organism. Mrs. Thompson gave mental and spiritual strength to the unit, Helton gave physical strength and stamina to get work done, and Mr. Thompson added some to all three areas and gathered from both of them strength. The two boys of the Thompsons had grown to be fine young men, and all were having a good life and a successful existence.

Agent of naturalism. One hot, dusty, August day another stranger came to the farm. He was a repulsive personality. He had a loud, hearty voice, a free manner and rabbit teeth, brown as shoeleather. His clothes were baggy as if he slept in them and also looked as if he had lost a lot of weight recently. Instinctively Mr. Thompson

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[9] Ibid., p. 241.

whose eye expressions did not match the sounds he was making, and he laughed like a perfect lunatic. He told the life story of Helton. According to him, Helton was an escapee from a mental institution, who had spent time in a straight jacket. His offense had been the murder of his brother, who had borrowed and lost and would not replace Helton's favorite harmonica. Hatch had turned his wicked and pig-like eyes on Mr. Thompson and told him in the past twelve years he had rounded up about twenty-five escapees. He stated that he got a reward but he was not interested in the reward, but law and order. He said that Helton had been his hardest customer, and he would not have caught him if he had not written to his mother. Helton had mailed a letter to his mother containing a check of seven hundred and fifty dollars. This sum amounted to about eighty per cent of his earnings for the nine years he had been away.

Hatch said, "The old woman practically lost her mind with joy," and when she cashed the check all the information got out, and I decided to look into the matter. Mr. Thompson "felt the corners of his mouth turning down. Why the dirty low-down hound, sneaking around spying into other people's business like that. Collecting blood money, that's what it was."[10] Hatch continued the conversation:

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[10] Ibid., pp. 253-54.

> I talked to the old woman. She's pretty decrepid, now, half blind and all, but she was all for taking the first train out and going to see her son. I put it up to her square--how she was too feeble for the trip, and all. So just as a favor to her, I told her for my expenses I'd come down and see Mr. Helton and bring her back all the news about him. She gave me a new shirt she had made herself by hand, and a big Swedish kind of a cake to bring to him, but I must of mislaid them along the road somewhere. It don't really matter, though, he prob'ly ain't in any state of mind to appreciate 'em.[11]

The rejection. Mr. Thompson told Hatch that Helton was the best standby a man ever had, that he was not crazy, and had been perfectly harmless for nine years. He shouted that Hatch was crazier than Helton had ever been, and ordered the bounty hunter off his farm. Helton had heard the shouts and had come around the corner to aid Thompson, "his jaws dropped, his arms swinging, and his eyes wild." He jumped in between Hatch and Thompson, "fists doubled up, then stopped short, glaring at the fat man, his big frame seemed to collapse, he trembled like a shied horse; and then the fat man drove at him, knife in one hand, handcuffs in the other."[12] Mr. Thompson saw it coming, he saw it going into Helton's stomach, and he had the ax "out of the log in his own hands, felt his arms go up over his head,

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[11] Ibid., p. 254.

[12] Ibid., pp. 254-56.

and bring down the ax on Hatch's head as if he were stunning a beef."[13]

Dismay of the Thompsons. Mr. Thompson cannot believe that he has killed a man, he never wanted to kill anyone, and he cannot accept the fact that he is a murderer. The courts have freed him of any guilt, but they have not let him express how it actually happened; if they had, it would have been healing therapy for him. This family has lived by the idealistic code, and when they are confronted by this excessive naturalistic force they are all left in a state of shock. In this condition each of the family withdraws within himself and fails Mr. Thompson. If only Mrs. Thompson had assured him that he was not a murderer; being in a state of shock she has failed him. This story reveals graphically the dismay and feelings of threat a good person experiences when he confronts such a evil force as Hatch represents. Mr. Thompson thinks he saw the bowie knife going into the stomach of Helton, and if he had not interfered when he did, that is just what would have happened. Hatch is so evil and inhuman that Mr. Thompson is thrown into a violent response, but his perception is excellent. He knows Hatch is like a viper that crawls out from under a rock to get his prey and slinks back again. The well-functioning organism is blown into fragments by this

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[13] Ibid.

terrible tragedy. Mrs. Thompson is in a state of shock, the two boys think their father a violent murderer, Helton is hunted down like a wild animal, and Mr. Thompson has no one to help him find some defense mechanisms to aid him till he can build back some self-esteem and come out of the shock of it all. Mr. Thompson rejects this evil force as an alpha character would have done, but he cannot survive the isolation that rejection produces. He is a beta character because of his dependence on others for help to function as a whole personality.[14] Family, friends, courts and his own defenses fail him because of their inability, unconcern or pure sadism. Some personalities do respond with traces of sadism when one is suffering, as do a flock of chickens. If in a flock of chickens there is one that is sick, blind, or crippled, the entire flock will peck, chase, and flog the injured one, even the mother hen is not exempt from the infliction of torture. Mr. Thompson rejects this evil force and becomes isolated. Being a person who depends on the thoughts, opinions, and human companionship from others to sustain him, he takes his own life in despair.

According to Nance Noon Wine is the minor tragedy of a good-hearted but weak man whose destruction is:

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[14] Nance, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

CHAPTER VII

THE LEANING TOWER: NAZISM

THE Leaning Tower has more meaning after a glimpse at some notes which Miss Porter entered in her journal in December, 1931. A young poet in Berlin objected that Miss Porter should not bother reading Rilke's Elegies:

> "He belongs to the old romantic soft-headed Germany that has been our ruin. The new Germany is hard, strong, we will have a new race of poets, tough and quick, like our prize fighters." The poet gave Miss Porter some of his poems, and she found that the "words were tough and rhythms harsh, the ideas all the most grossly brutal; and yet, it was vague and weak stuff in the end."

In another note that December Porter described a conversation with L. and Von G. about Nietzsche:

> Nietzsche is dangerous because his mind has power without intelligence; he is all will without enlightment. His phrases are inflated, full of violence, a gross kind of cruel poetry--like Wagner's music. They both throw a hypnotic influence over their hearers. But I could always resist hypnotists. When I think of Nietzsche and Wagner, at once by simple association I find charlatans of all kinds and degrees. . . . And madness. In Nietzsche's case, a real, clinical madness: his diseased brain gave his style the brilliancy of a rotting fish. L. and Von G. worship them both with a religious awe.[1]

In January, 1932, still in Berlin Miss Porter wrote that R. always spoke about religion:

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[1] James Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter" Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Autumn, 1960), p. 611.

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[1] James Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter" Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Autumn, 1960), p. 611.

> but that he was a man filled with maliciousness, one who spoke evil of everyone. He told her that she could know nothing of the higher levels of religious experience because "Religious experience belongs exclusively to the masculine principle." Without seeing the irony of his words, he assured her that "Only ample, generous natures are capable of the love of God." Miss Porter does not use these philosophical and religious and esthetic statements in the book, "The Leaning Tower," but she does incorporate the malignity in German society which she is aware of and writing about in her journal in 1931 and 1932.[2]

In The Leaning Tower Miss Porter moves from Communism in"Flowering Judas" to another extreme form of political philosophy, Nazism. However it is not named as such in any place in her story, and she mentions Hitler by insinuation only. Miss Porter is not a political nor a social propagandist, but an individual who uses her perceptive ability to face and try to analyze the unique personal experiences of the individual unit of mankind and her own life. In a few of her creations she reaches out farther in a more specific manner and treats mankind in a world wide scope as she travels on her journey through life.

Vernon A. Young, one of Miss Porter's most capable critics, states that "there is no writing today which is more organically connected with its subject matter than hers, "[3] and it could be added that none is more closely

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Vernon A. Young, "The Art of Katherine Anne Porter," New Mexico Quarterly, XV (Autumn, 1945), p. 327.

related to its author than is Miss Porter's art. She is also identified with The Leaning Tower through the Miranda series and her personal life. Miss Porter spent much time in Germany during the thirties at which time her husband was an attache of the Foreign Service, and connected to the countries of France and Germany. She could have observed and sensed the impressions and gathered the prophetic insights that are included in this short novel.

Charles Upton, a partial Miss Porter-Miranda character in The Leaning Tower is an artist from Texas, who comes to Berlin because a childhood friend, a German, Kuno Hillentafel, leads him to believe that Berlin is the "one desirable place to be." Now disappointed with Berlin he at attacks the weather, because he cannot draw out of abstraction this suspicion and evil he senses all around him. He is like the

> northern traveler at home in Texas, who would turn upon the southern weather with the ferocity of exhaustion; it gave them the excuse they needed to hate everything else they hated in the place, too. It would be so easy and simple, it would put an end to the argument to say, "I can't settle down in this place, because the sun doesn't rise until ten o'clock in December," but that was not his trouble here.[4]

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[4] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 457.

In this piece of art Miss Porter displays the atmosphere of Germany in the pre-World War II days. Charles is unhappy because of the suspicion, the poverty, and the lack of real concern or friendship in his interpersonal relations. Charles cannot possibly understand and identify with the people; there are just no grounds of community, to unite both his south Texas background and morality. Mooney thinks Charles has been

> missing the spirit of humanity all through his stay in Berlin, and suddenly he realizes what a dire threat its absence constitutes to him: it presages an actual and imminent disaster. His private world has been invaded as swiftly and surely as Miranda's, but less dramatically and more vaguely, since malice and vulgar nationalism, frustration and race hatred, are often less concrete than war, flu and a dead lover. Both Miranda's tragedy and Charles Upton's horror spring from contemporary history; they are the result of those hostile elements, only dimly perceived in the order of the world, which spells death for the individual plan for happiness.[5]

The people. Charles notices that the young people in the street and everywhere are lean and tough, boys and girls alike dress in leather jackets or a kind of uniform blue ski suit, who whizz about on bicycles without a glance at the windows. But the most prevalent type of persons on the streets are the window gazers:

> the streets were full of them--enormous waddling women with short legs and ill-humored faces, and round-headed

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[5] Harry J. Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 38.

> men with great rolls of fat across the backs of their necks, who seemed to support their swollen bellies with an effort that drew their shoulders forward. Nearly all of them were leading their slender, overbred, short-legged dogs in pairs on fancy leashes. . . . The creatures whined and complained and shivered, and their owners lifted them up tenderly to show them the pigs.
>
> With their nervous dogs wailing in their arms, the people, shameless mounds of fat, stood in a trance of pig worship, gazing with eyes damp with admiration and appetite. They resembled the most unkind caricatures of themselves, but they were the very kind of people that Holbein and Durer and Urs Graf had drawn, too: not vaguely, but positively like, their late-medieval faces full of hallucinated malice and a kind of sluggish but intense cruelty that worked its way up from their depths slowly through the layers of helpless gluttonous fat.[6]

Gross naturalism. The German society had begun to crumble by the deterioration from the force of an excessive form of naturalism dominating all areas of life. This growing force became more gross and brutal through each succeeding generation. This society was founded on some of the idealistic concepts and values, but had so deteriorated that idealism remained, to a great extent, in facades and cliches. The movers of society were, or at least were dominated by the supermen, bred from the choice stock of naturalism, which had begun to be a force that would destroy and near annihilate all.[7] The young meet these deficiencies

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[6] Porter, op. cit., pp. 442-43.

[7] George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, This Generation (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1949), pp. 2, 3, 869-88.

by chasing around looking for the new thrills and excitement to fill the gap--perhaps, one which they have never known--substitutes for the real values and ideals of an idealistic society. The window watchers (without hope) resort to gratification from the physical since the spirit is so sluggish. Idealistic concepts of real value lost or near dead, they resort to food they do not need or do not have, to dogs in the place of the children they do not have or have lost to the new reign, and love from dogs in place of the human companionship that suspicion and human degradation have destroyed. Naturalism and its near deification of the lower animals was about to arrive at Kafka's classification, placing man alongside the insect or lower.[8]

Mensur scar. Hans is a young Nazi whom Charles likes very much, but he cannot accept the "amazing arrogance, pleasure, inexpressible vanity and self-satisfaction," that glows from his face about his mensur wound. "Hans embodied the Germany of militarism, racist pride, and bitter resentment of defeat; his wound, painful and festering, symbolizes well all these qualities and their combined unwholesomeness." Charles looks with horror and disgust at the face of Hans; puzzled at the strange expression on Hans' face. It

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[8] Ibid., pp. 858-59.

was incredible because of what it revealed about the personality of Hans.[9]

> The left side of his face was swollen badly, the eye was almost closed from beneath, and glued along his cheek from ear to mouth was an inch-wide strip of court plaster, the flesh at its edges stained in dirty blues and greens and purples.
>
> It was there like a change of light, slow and deep, with no perceptible movement of the eyelids or face muscles. It rose from within the mysterious place where Hans really lived, and it was amazing arrogance, pleasure, inexpressible vanity and self-satisfaction. He lay entirely motionless and this look came, grew, faded and disappeared on the tidal movement of his true character.[10]

Charles pictures Hans in a small town in America with that scar. In San Antonio the people would think he had been in a disgraceful cutting scrape, probably with a Mexican, or that he had been in a terrible automobile accident. "They would think it a pity that such a nice fellow should be so disfigured, they would be tactful and not mention it and try and keep their eyes off it." Even in Paris they would disapprove; Hans would be another German with a dueling scar carefully made livid and jagged to last a lifetime. Charles muses that "no where but in this one small country could Hans boast of his scar and his

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[9] William L. Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 71.

[10] Ibid., p. 464.

way of getting it." In any other "It would seem strange, a misfortune, or discreditable."[11]

Charles rejects this mensur scar, because there is no condition for acceptance in his mind for idolization of such violence. All kinds of things happen to men in the course of their jobs, deformities or accidents that come on because of their jobs, deformities or accidents that come on so gradually they are not noticed until it is too late to do anything about them. Dueling had been a respectable custom in some countries, but there had to be that clash or conflict or hatred first.

> But what kind of a man would stand up in cold blood and let another man split his face to the teeth just for the hell of it? And then ever after wear the wound with that look of self-satisfaction, with everybody knowing how he got it? And you were supposed to admire him for that. Charles had liked Hans on sight, but there was something he wouldn't know about him if they both lived for a thousand years; it was something you were, or were not, and Charles rejected that wound, the reason why it existed, and everything that made it possible, then and there, simply because there were no conditions for acceptance in his mind.[12]

Society's maze. Hans is symbolic of the old Prussian militaristic society and also the new Nazi regime of terror. He is representative of a minority group, but one that has the power and prestige. The window gazers are symbolic of

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 465.

the majority group are not so evil, but are in such a state of negation they can be easily manipulated. Charles' inebriation is symbolic of the maze he has been in since he came to Germany, and he also has been too much at sea and too frightened to face reality. He will escape from his inebriation and go on to more realistic responses in life. The fictional Miranda will be metamorphosed into a multi-personality in Ship of Fools, and Miss Porter will be represented because she says that some of her is in each of her characters. Mr. Mooney states that:

> The Leaning Tower deals with political concepts, not as they are mirrored in headlines or in the movement of troops, but only as their mysterious, destructive force is felt by the individual. Miss Porter deliberately keeps the political and historical threats vague and ambiguous. In each story they are felt but never fromulated by the individual center of consciousness.[13]

Tadeusz, another of the major characters in the story exclaims:

> "Type," finished Tadeusz, mildly rude. "Let's agree then, the Germans are all of the highest type of beauty and they have preposterously fine manners. Look at all the heel-clicking and bowing from the waist and elegant high-toned voices. And how polite and smiling a seven-foot policeman can be when he is getting ready to crack your skull open. I have seen it. No, Hans, you have great culture here, no doubt, but I think no civilization. You will be the last race on the earth to be civilized, but does it matter?"[14]

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[13] Mooney, op. cit., p. 35.

[14] Porter, op. cit., p. 482.

Charles notices that the replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa which he had broken when he first came to Rosa's pension had been mended. Breaking this made him feel like a heel.

> Leaning suspended, perpetually ready to fall but never falling quite, the ventursome little object--a mistake in the first place, a curiosity. like those cupids falling off the roof--yet had some kind of meaning in Charles' mind.[15]

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[15] Ibid., p. 495.

CHAPTER VIII

COMMENTARY ON WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Criticism. When the long awaited novel Ship of Fools came off the press in 1962, Miss Porter received much adverse criticism. From Hendrick's book come these comments:

> Time informed its readers "that Ship of Fools is a study in despair. The despair is not relieved by the usual dilutions. . . . In fact. . . . her statement is objective and her verdict is unemotional: the world is a place of foulness and fools."
>
> Newsweek proclaimed that "Katherine Anne Porter has produced a work of rugged power and myriad insights, a book of the highest relevance to the bitterness and disruption of modern civilization."[1]

Mooney argues that the novel is too restricted because Miss Porter portrays a hate driven world "little susceptible to the claims of reason and intelligence." His opinion as to the major defects of the novel is its lack of the "possibility of human nobility."[2] Hendrick refutes this argument with equal validity stating:

> that had Miss Porter emphasized "human nobility" or even the possibility of human nobility, she would not

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[1] George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 120.

[2] Harry J. Mooney, Jr. The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), pp. 62-63.

[3] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 140.

> have given a true picture of the 1930's or of much of man's experience in the twentieth century.[3]

After an interview with Miss Porter, Rochelle Girson stated:

> It is the sum, she has said, of all I know about human nature, the fatalities of life and the perils of human relationships. Everything I was able to express I was able to put in it.[4]

Later she expressed the opinion that persons who were most critical of her book, Ship of Fools, saw themselves portrayed in one of the characters and did not like what they saw. Carl Bode in his timely article comments that:

> Ship of Fools is an honest disheartening book. It is not over written or overblown. Quite the reverse; it has been revised downward. Its basic image is old but as the author develops it, it becomes modern and more complex. I do not believe that Ship of Fools reaches the heights of Katherine Anne Porter's earlier works, but I am sure it will find a place, if a small one, in our literary histories.[5]

The corruption in Ship of Fools is alarming, especially, since she is writing a commentary on Western civilization. William Bysshe Stein says: "Miss Porter

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[4] Rochelle Girson, "The Author," Saturday Review, XLV (March 31, 1962), pp. 15-16.

[5] Carl Bode, "Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, III (Fall 1962), pp. 90-92.

correlates the corruption of the instinct and spirit with the disintegration of traditional religious authority."[6]

Aberrations. Much has been said about the degeneration of the characters in the book, as indicated by their obsession with doing evil. If it were possible to measure evil, it might be shocking to know that possibly the mean of the characters of Western civilization or American society would be a more degenerate, cruel, sadistic, and inhumane person, than the majority of characters in Ship of Fools, as indicated by the mass cruelty in the past three decades. To cite two examples of unbelievable horror and degradation are World War II and the riots and destruction of the cities in the sixties. The Spanish zarezuela troupe seem less evil when these horrors are visualized. Miss Porter has said of her novel "it is the story of the criminal collusion of good people-- people who are harmless--with evil."[7]

Concerning Miss Porter's painting a true portrait of society Vernon A, Young has said that, "Miss Porter is the most flawless realist of her generation."[8] Nance declares,

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[6] William Bysshe Stein, "'Theft:' Porter's Politics of Modern Love," Perspective, XI (Winter, 1060), pp. 223-28.

[7] William L. Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 167.

[8] Vernon A. Young, The Art of Katherine Anne Porter," American Thought (New York: The Gresham Press, 1947), pp. 223-238.

"Certainly there can remain no doubt that for Katherine Anne Porter the search for truth and the process of artistic creation are one and the same."[9] These quotations substantiate the theory that she wrote a true picture of great areas of Western civilization as she saw it and others agree with limitations.

Commenting on the theme of the book Lietzmann replies, "If there is any one central theme it may be said to be the terrifying inability of most of these people to extend any comprehension of mind, magnanimity of feeling, or compassion of heart to those around them."[10] Nevertheless, others think the theme centers around the "love me" passage, and choose to call it lovelessness.

Lovelessness. Some critics have said that Porter's novel has the atmosphere of lovelessness, and from "Orpheus in Purgatory" she has given her opinion on the subject:

> It is hardly possible to exaggerate the lovelessness in which most people live, men and women: wanting love, unable to give it, or inspire it, unable to keep it if they get it, not knowing how to treat it, lacking the humility, or the very love itself that could teach them how to love: it is the painfullest thing in human life, and, since love is purely a creation of the human imagination, it is merely perhaps the most important of

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[9] Nance, op. cit., p. 242.

[10] Sabina Lietzmann, A German from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zietung (July 16, 1962), p. 16.

> all examples of how the imagination continually outruns the creature it inhabits. . . . Having imagined love, we are condemned to its perpetual disappointments; or so it seems.[11]

The "or so it seems" is that one gleam of hope that will not die, no matter how excruciating the pain involved, but combats the near cynicism of the latter part of the above quotation. And on the subject of romantic love Porter adds her abstruseness:

> Romantic love did not come by hazard, it is the very imperfect expression of the need of the human imagination to create beauty and harmony out of chaos, no matter how clumsy its method.[12]

In Ship of Fools Miss Porter has used sexual aberrations as symbolic of the folly and weaknesses of Western civilization, or she has implied that in the realm of sexual expression mankind more adequately expresses its evil nature. Consequently, she has clothed the evils of mankind in garments of sexual aberrations in her long novel. Out of such needs expressed in the book, some form of love would be the answer, even if it were degraded to such levels that it would not be recognizable as a form of love, just human contact.

Nance and others think that the "love passage" is

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[11] Katherine Anne Porter, The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1952), p. 88.

[12] Ibid.

the theme of the novel. The following quotation expresses the needs of the passengers, to say the least:

> Love me, love me in spite of all! whether or not I love you, whether I am fit to love, whether you are able to love me, even if there is no such thing as love, love me![13]

With the sickness of much of modern society, in many lives this need is the clarion call to persons searching for some form of human contact even though much of it becomes expressed in a naturalism which is even more brutal than found among the lower animals.

A voyage and Brant's influence. In the year of 1931, Miss Porter made an ocean voyage from Mexico to Germany. She kept a journal of her travels and scarcely spoke a word to anyone. "It is well known that Miss Porter kept a journal on the voyage, and she is, in effect, casting doubt on the validity of diary keepers,"[14] as is expressed in Ship of Fools. Porter commented on her voyage in The Days Before: "I don't think I spoke a half-dozen words to anybody. I just sat there and watched--not deliberately though."[15]

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[13] Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1962), p. 460.

[14] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 136.

[15] Porter, op. cit., p. 112.

The following year with the impressions of the voyage clearly imprinted on her mind, "Miss Porter read Brant's Das Narrenschiff (1494). When she planned the novel Ship of Fools she took, as she says, 'this simple almost universal image of the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity,'" and chose the name because, "the Vera is meant in a general way to present the truth about the world."[16] Brant's influence on the novel "is much more pronounced than most critics, Mark Schorer, excepted have seen."[17]

According to Zeydel, Brant was a man of deep religious convictions who possessed a stern morality, and was activated by the highest motives. In addition, he was a fifteen-century savant "who wanted to evaluate his generation, and dreamed too of improving its political condition through moral regeneration." He satirized the foibles and weaknesses of men, but Henry Charles Lee wrote in the Cambridge Modern History:

> the important feature of his work is the deep moral earnestness which pervades its jest and satire; man is exhorted never to lose sight of his salvation, and the future life is represented as the goal to which his efforts are to be directed.[18]

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16 Nance, op. cit., p. 159.

17 Hendrick, op. cit., p. 131.

18 Ibid., p. 132.

Moss in speaking of the concept of morality in relation to Porter's Ship of Fools advances the idea:

> Katherine Anne Porter is a moralist, but too good a writer to be one except by implication. Dogma in Ship of Fools is attached only to dogmatic characters. There is not an ounce of weighted sentiment in it. Its intelligence lies not in the profundity of its ideas but in the clarity of its viewpoint; we are impressed not by what Katherine Anne Porter says but by what she knows.[19]

Miss Porter has retained much of the moral earnestness and satiric thrusts of Brant, and she has also made special use not only of his ship image but of the deadly sins. In the opinion of Hendrick the deadly sins are:

> The sins against society, including injustice, dishonesty and uncharitableness; the sins of the church, clerical excesses; the sins of lawyers, doctors, patients, bad women; the sins at the carnival, to name only some of the categories, are also abundant on Miss Porter's ship.[20]

Hendrick continues:

> By the end of the novel, she has explored attitudes toward life and death, love and sex, religion and religiosity, love and hate, racism and politics; she has presented the deadly sins in old and new forms and in new guises. She has drawn on all her years of experience and upon all her artistic powers, upon the artistic methods which she has learned from Joyce, James, Eliot, Brant, and others.[21]

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19 Howard Moss, "No Safe Harbor," The New Yorker, XXXVIII (April 28, 1962), pp. 165-173.

20 Hendrick, op. cit., p. 132.

21 Ibid., p. 140.

Unlike Brant, Miss Porter developed representations of characters instead of abstractions, and Schwartz comments on her respect for the individual:

> Her respect for the dignity of the individual, whose complicated life, both conscious and unconscious, cannot be explained away by ingenious theories or impressive abstract words, enables Miss Porter to reject the dogmatic line of political parties as well as religious sects.[22]

Conflicting opinions. The opinions of Nance and Hendrick are somewhat conflicting.

Truthfulness and self-delusion. It is the opinion of Nance that the

> standards by which Katherine Anne Porter's characters are judged are not those of good and evil, but those of truthfulness and self-delusion. To Miss Porter, truth is not a philosophical concept but an index of the individual's awareness of his immediate circumstances, including memory and sense of the future. It is a lack of this awareness she seems to say, which leads one to 'evil'--that is, oppression of others. Miranda, and other characters in proportion as they resemble her, are pre-eminent in truthfulness and hence 'good' to others. Viewed in this way, such goodness as there is in Miss Porter's fiction is seen to be purely negative, for it results from the heroine's tendency to move away from others rather than toward them.[23]

However, in Ship of Fools Porter has her hero move toward others, and he becomes involved almost to the point of destruction. This refutes Nance's argument just stated in

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[22] Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter, (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1953), p. 10.

[23] Nance, op. cit., p. 169.

the later quotation. Mark Schorer puts in a concise manner his opinion on the subject:

> When they are indifferent to one another, they are impelled by active hostility or chill malice. When they appear, within the groups, to be loving one another, they are usually destroying one another and themselves, if they had not already done so.[24]

Good and evil. Nevertheless, Hendrick explains that:

> the allegory of good and evil is implicit in Miss Porter's version, but she has made the meaning more clear by using as a focal point the rise of the facists in the 1930's, and the world wide calamity which resulted from the mass movements led by Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. She catalogued in detail the inertia and political naiveté among most Americans and Europeans on the Vera.[25]

Nance's viewpoint of the theory of evil in the novel is pertinent at this point:

> Certainly man is surrounded and sometimes over whelmed by evil. But, as inductive reasoning in the sciences must begin with an adequate grasp of a multiple reality, so the artistic apprehension of evil, to be universally meaningful, must arise from a reasonably comprehensive grounding in the variety and complexity of life. One cannot, for example, speak with authority of the paradoxical sufferings involved in human love if he denies love from the start. It is a deficiency in the primary vision of reality that vitiates much of Miss Porter's art; the very existence of that art is proof that her deficiency is not one of honesty or of courage.[26]

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[24] Mark Schorer, The New York Times Book Review, April 1, 1962, p. 5.

[25] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 132.

[26] Nance, op. cit., p. 207.

But her denial of love, if it is, maybe only the response of a suffering idealist; who in a very subtle manner proclaims the existence of love. At least, she seems to be crying out in search of love.

In the treatment of the subject of evil, Porter depicted how the Spanish dancers, prostitutes, pimps, and criminals of the Zarzuela troupe managed to terrify the whole ship and survived and even thrived. Hendrick feels that "the dishonest drawing for the prizes were only a few of the actions of the fools, actions which stripped from them the last vestiges of civilization."[27] This drawing episode cites again Porter's declamation of how masses of people do stand by and see enormous evils being done and seem to ignore the actions. Nance's response is again pertinent:

> The members of the dancing troupe shade off into absolute evil, but there is no one who approaches absolute good. "Goodness like love," is a word which all the most significant characters would dismiss with scorn.[28]

The purest approach to evil is represented in Ship of Fools, by the Spanish troupe. In the twin children, Ric and Rac, Porter has

> embodied an evil so natural and primitive that it usually defeats the more calculated and sophisticated

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[27] Ibid., p. 139.

[28] Ibid., p. 205.

> designs of the other passengers on the Vera. . . . The Spanish troupe represents an evil so total that most forces yield to it automatically.[29]

Final comparisons. In all probability Ship of Fools is Porter's last work, with the possible exception of the biography of Cotton Mather. In her long novel Porter has reached her apex in skepticism; her zest for the naturalistic style of writing is unsurpassed, her "spirit" or hope is weak in most of her characters, and evil personalities seem often to be the most powerful. A few passengers were idealistically inclined, but they were on the peripheries; one only was in on the action. This is the last appearance of the partial Miranda-Porter personality. The three characters that fit more closely into this multi-personality are Mrs. Treadwell, Jenny, and Dr. Schumann. However, when asked by Rochelle Girson in an interview which characters she identified with, Miss Porter responded:

> I am nowhere and everywhere. I am the captain and the sea-sick bulldog and the man in the cherry-colored shirt who sings and the devilish children and all of the women and lots of the men. . . . You know, I got attached to my gang on the boat. I hated to give them up.[30]

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29 Mooney, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

30 Rochelle Girson, "The Author," Saturday Review, XLV (March 31, 1962), 15.

The multi-personality. Miss Porter and Mrs. Treadwell have in common these traits: They are divorcees, forty-five or forty-six years of age, they are bordering on alcoholism, they express a hatred toward all male species, and they both keep a journal on their voyages. Jenny and Miss Porter are both young artists from the South; each had a large family which disapproved of them being artists, they are both obsessed with liberal causes and believe in direct participation in political protest, and each of them is slightly disillusioned.[31] Dr. Schumann is the voice of Porter's idealism and the advocate for Christianity in the setting of Western civilization during the twentieth century. His goal in life was known early as was Porter's, his to be a doctor and hers to be a writer. According to the story the "wise and noble" Dr. Schumann realizes at sixty years of age the potential for evil in the best of hearts and is shocked and disillusioned for awhile at this reality.

Conflicts of good and evil. The conflicts of idealism with naturalism are seen in the persons of Dr. Schumann and La Condesa. His idealistic concepts are constantly ridiculed by La Condesa, and her amorality is repulsive to him but he continues to admire her physical attractions and sympathize with her problems until he is involved with evil.

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[31] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 137.

Nance believes and Hendrick seems to agree, that:

> Dr. Schumann and La Condesa represent some of the most profound moral paradoxes that man faces. Their meeting is a clash between traditional Christianity and its almost complete negation (amorality). They are drawn by romantic-aesthetic attractions into a brief union which is highly oppressive to them both; each inflicts terrible pain upon the other; then by an inevitable repulsion, they are forced apart and left with only a sense of loss.[32]

Many of the characters in Ship of Fools are known through the mind of the doctor. He becomes a near cynic because of his illness, the evil and pettiness of the passengers, the absorbing attitude of his patients, and the recognized sin in his life. "The gradual growth of the awareness of evil in the human heart and in fate is a theme illustrated by Dr. Schumann but also evident in others."[33]

It is said that two components are essential for masterpieces--a hero and a heroic extravagance. Mooney states emphatically that Ship of Fools lacks the components to be a masterpiece:

> Both comments isolate the precise quality one misses in Ship of Fools: the possibility of human nobility

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[32] Ibid., p. 206.

[33] Nance, op. cit., p. 205.

> upon which all the greatest works of literature have, in one way or another been built.[34]

But it appears that Porter has discounted Mooney's statement, because Hendrick, Nance and others think she has made of Dr. Schumann a hero. At first he is thought to seem suspect because of two dueling scars on his face. This was soon proved wrong for Dr. Schumann

> is not a bigoted fraternity man; but a professional man of talent, a professional observer with a clinical eye but with human compassion, a representative of what was good in a Germany of the past; but he is dying of a heart disease, just as the "good" Germany was dying.[35]

Dr. Schumann is a realistic picture of a good man, who has flaws in his character, but has the ability to recognize his weaknesses, and is frustrated by the conflicts of evil but is not destroyed by them. His early quest is noble, for his heart's desire is to be a good doctor and relieve the suffering of mankind; but his natural and compassionate heart gets him into trouble. The question is whether to reject mankind and isolate or to be compassionate and encounter the risk of being involved. Some characters do reject mankind and isolate themselves, but they soon become lonely and cynical and are thoroughly disgusted with the evil and destructiveness of others. Dr.

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[34] Mooney, op. cit., p. 63.

[35] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 135.

Schumann's dying of heart disease could be symbolic of the dying of the good and "noble" in Western civilization. In many situations the "good" and "noble" are"done to death" by a naturalistic or evil force produced, in all likelihood, by the scientism that Ransom describes and discusses in God Without Thunder. This philosophy has produced an objective, inhumane, mechanistic, loveless mankind--crying out for love or human contact to counteract this terrible lovelessness--that will eventually destroy and annihilate all unless some healing balm is applied to cure the disease and restore some compassion and integrity to mankind. It will not be a forced love or compassion from without but will break forth as bubbles in boiling lava from within the dying or near-dead heart of man.

La Condesa. In an interview with Elizabeth Janeway, "Miss Porter reveals that La Condesa is based on a real woman whom she observed 'in glimpses and snatches for a couple of weeks' on the voyage that inspired the novel."[36]

According to Hendrick, La Condesa is also a spokesman for Miss Porter:

> a slightly grotesque, once beautiful woman constantly in need of sex, she accepted the company of the Cuban medical students; in the use of drugs, she received them from Dr. Schumann. But with all her foibles and

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[36] Nance, op. cit., p. 204.

> large and small human failings, she is much more than a decayed member of the aristocracy. She is a grief-stricken Greek driven to the point of madness by the uncertainty of the fate of her two sons. Her emotions are larger than life; but, in a world of dislocation, her sufferings are understandable and telling. . . . Lastly, she was capable of love; and the love affair with the doctor, though doomed, is one of the most admirable (which is to say, less animalistic) example of love in the novel.[37]

It is unlikely that Miss Porter should be identified with La Condesa unless in a symbolic manner, for the personality of La Condesa is too degraded; but because of her physical beauty, she is a more subtle personification of naturalism or evil. In all likelihood, circumstances and environment had helped make her the type personality that she was. But basically it came about because of her decisions as to her philosophy of life. Her lack of moral stability, her ruthless possessiveness, her psychopathic lying, her self-centeredness, and her inability to face reality without the use of drugs place her awareness on a physical level only. After she has gone ashore, she has no desire to "return an aswer" to Dr. Schumann's note of concern for her. In all likelihood she has attached her fangs to someone else as she had done to Dr. Schumann

> Dr. Schumann's hair moved crinking upon his crown, he had a savage impulse to strike her from him, this diabolical possession, this incubus fastened upon him like a bat, this evil spirit come out of hell to accuse

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[37] Hendrick, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

> him falsely, to seduce his mind, to charge him with fraudulent obligations to her, to burden his life to the end of his days, to bring him to despair.[38]

Moral desolation. Truly the good ship Vera is filled with fools, according to Mooney's estimation:

> the novel conveys a tone of the greatest moral desolation, for there is no suggestion in it of any kind of hope, of any redeeming factor in man's behavior. Nor does it provide any opportunity for the characters to understand themselves; most of them have little idea why they act as they do, out of what bitter necessity they hate and act so pettily and nastily. At no point does the novel suggest a kind of human comedy; written with the utmost seriousness and intensity, it can be understood only as an indictment, although its tone is not savage, but resigned and rhetorically speaking, beautifully controlled and artistic. . . . although the stories are usually concerned with the bleak fates of unfortunate men and women done to death by forces which they do not comprehend, they escape desolation because of their compassion. Ship of Fools, on the other hand, suggests that the writer's final position is such that she finds no hope of even a limited redemption for mankind, and can see only a world in which each individual, the victim of his own compulsions and obsessions, is not sufficiently his own master to work out any kind of salvation for himself.[39]

Porter has stated that she does not use symbols in her writing, but she may have employed the misuse of sex in Ship of Fools as symbolic of evil. Readers are alarmed at Mrs. Treadwell's rejection of response in communication with Freytag concerning his wife. Later in the reading of the

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[38] Porter, op. cit., p. 306.

[39] Mooney, op cit., pp. 59-60.

book the cause becomes clear. She is either an idealist who has been sucked into the muck because of a compassionate response and does not want to renew the suffering or she has rejected so much that she has become isolated and is in danger of being submerged in the sea of lovelessness.

Dr. Schumann is unique as an alpha character, because he does not reject an oppressive situation and become isolated, but responds and gets into a lot of trouble and suffering. He later rejects the repulsive situation, and is disillusioned. In his period of disillusionment he is cynical and unconcerned, but he is suffering intensely at this time. He is a wiser man though, because he has faced reality and realizes the power of potential evil in the heart of mankind, even a man sixty years of age, who has spent a lifetime in quest of idealistic goals.

Porter may be saying that man has failed because of either one of two philosophies, one propagated by determinism and the other humanism. The theory of humanism has a tendency to make men feel entirely self-sufficient. Determinism makes a man ineffective because he has little power to act. In humanism many are relatively powerless in the idealistic realms because they have been disconnected from the real source of power, and by their own sense of self-sufficiency.

Miss Porter's fuzzy or impressionistic ending seems to indicate that she has some hope for mankind, even after

painting this gloomy picture in Ship of Fools. Young says that Miss Porter can tell us little more than "how immensely difficult, for all but the stupid and cruel, is the task of sheer day-by-day living in our time."[40] And Nance makes a sensible statement:

> Skepticism is valued highly in our modern world; but perhaps it was valued more highly in the third and fourth decades of this century than it is today--and it is to those decades that Miss Porter's fiction, including Ship of Fools, belongs. Most early critics after praising her style, went on to praise her penetrating skepticism; it is only recently that readers have begun to question her values in a systematic way.[41]

However, as in most of her stories Miss Porter leaves the reader to form his own opinions about the conclusions in the lives of the characters in Ship of Fools. When Porter's stories and short novels are read as a unit, their meaning emerges with all the continuity to be expected from a novel. "Her people are a small and noble company for whom an abiding faith in humanity has been a religion; and their bleak fates and tragedies have resulted from the loss of an illusion through the experience of reality."[42]

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[40] Vernon A. Young, "The Art of Katherine Anne Porter," New Mexico Quarterly, XV (Autumn, 1945), p. 341.

[41] Nance, op. cit., p. 247.

[42] Mooney, op. cit. p. 35.

The natural "human spirit" which they represent is the very substance of life and endurance, hope and belief. Without it, the world is a dismal place, which is filled with many sordid characters as in Ship of Fools. This "spirit" is as universal as life itself and can be threatened and even killed in Berlin, Mexico, or Texas and preserved in Kentucky and Louisiana.

> This spirit is not always triumphant, but it is vigorous and splendid even in defeat. It is based on the desperate, childish, enduring hope for the best in life and human relations. It is preserved and defended through love and loyalty and fortitude. It is a very lonely spirit, often exposed to the onslaughts of the evil and the vulgar. But it can find lovely and endurable expression in an act of faith in human solidarity.[43]

All of Porter's heroes and heroines have this spirit in common; it divides them from the Hatchs, Hans, and the Spanish troupe in Ship of Fools. It is a very real and lofty ideal of which they never lose sight and for which they expend the very substance of their lives. And yet it is an ideal which is over and over again "done to death" in the private and public struggles for survival. Those who possess it constantly advance the cause of humanity at the same time that they are inevitably disillusioned by the sudden knowledge of the evil in mankind. It is the horrible shock for which they have never been prepared, and their very highmindedness

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[43] Ibid.

often keeps them from understanding the nature of their destinies. That is why, for them, the path to wisdom is often a downward one; and it is also why they matter, and persist, and endure, and why they are important to those who wish to continue believing and struggling and surviving.[44]

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[44] Ibid., p. 55.

SUMMARY

It was the purpose of this study to show the conflicts in the life of Katherine Anne Porter and her characters as they encountered good and evil in their day-to-day existence. In their search for reality the confrontations between good and evil are embodied in the traits of idealism and naturalism. Another aspect of this thesis was to show the correlation between Miss Porter's autobiographical content in her fiction and the characters created.

In the Grandmother stories Porter indirectly implies that whether one rebels or stands firmly by his duties, there are some questions in life that man cannot find the answers to. She indicates that it is more courageous and healthier for the next generation if one does not elaborate too much on the unanswered questions which have a tendency to delude and destroy the younger generation coming into their own.

Gleaned from "Old Mortality" is the truth that facing reality is to look at situations in the clear light striving to know what is real and what is deceptive. In order not to be deceived by sophistication, false concepts, and organizations of fraud which embody evil and prey upon youth, mankind must be alert at all times.

Miranda found in Pale Horse, Pale Rider the strength and courage to live in a world full of evil, death, and corruption without being completely destroyed by the shock of it or by losing all of her ideals. The symbolic use of light in the story also suggests that the personality should search for and reach out to this inner light or "spirit" to have guidance along the way, as did Miranda in the death scene.

"Flowering Judas" exemplifies that rebellion, negation, and death are states of being that lead to decay and destruction if adhered to and lived out as in the lives of revolutionists. Miss Porter is careful to show the weaknesses of Communism, by constrasting it with the idealistic. Also the impression was felt that Porter is saying that life is valuable and should not be wasted, but should be preserved and developed into a piece of handiwork in different areas of expression.

Noon Wine proclaims that human understanding, love, communication, and compassion are qualities desperately needed in any social order. Some persons must have an abundance of these qualities, others can get by on less, but all must have some of these qualities or soon all ends in chaos and destruction.

The Leaning Tower portrays that mankind is in a maze without this sense of humanity or community, and what

a force of annihilation can be developed without it. The impression was gathered that the unity or communities of different cultures are so difficult because there are no places to begin, with enough room for complete acceptance, because of such different ideas, concepts, and backgrounds.

In Ship of Fools Western Civilization seems to be drowning in a sea of "lovelessness" and unless something is done to combat this naturalistic progression of these destructive and annihilating forces it may go the route of many earlier civilizations. Porter's voice of idealism and Christianity is terrified at the reality of the potential for evil in the life of even the best of mankind. Rays of hope flicker across the sea of lovelessness from the voice of idealism; especially do they gleam forth in Porter's impressionistic ending of the story.

Finally, Porter's life does correlate with much of the material in her fiction and especially in the Grandmother and Miranda stories. Grandmother is her mouthpiece, as are others in each of her works, and they are partial expressions of Porter's living philosophy. The lesser characters are not autobiographical personalities, but they do express and possess and live out some of Porter's philosophies and strengths, and the rest of the characters express her versions of evil, destruction, and death. Many of her works are expressed in the naturalistic vein, but beams of idealism are also there in most of her writings.

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