

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER: A  
STUDY IN THE USE OF CULTURAL CONFLICT

by

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## ABSTRACT

Katherine Anne Porter uses cultural conflict as a central theme throughout her short stories and novel. She uses it to penetrate into character, to portray the importance of traditions and heritage in influencing behavior and to show the extent to which culture affects the vision a person has of the world beyond his society. In stories of the South, Porter juxtaposes the past and present showing the older generation as a standard for judging the modern and also as responsible for some of the failures of the present time. In stories of Mexico, she shows the futility of an individual's attempt to adopt another culture and contrasts the primitive Indian with the pseudo-primitive American or Mexican. And, in her cosmopolitan stories, she portrays certain German character traits at the time of the rise of Naziism and contrasts the Germans and other Europeans to Latin Americans and Americans. In all of her work, Porter takes a dual view toward culture, its necessity to the individual for providing fixed values and order, identity and security and, on the other hand, its liabilities in fostering social insularity and preventing people from communicating with each other and understanding and helping each other.

## INTRODUCTION

The stories of Katherine Anne Porter have been the object of much critical attention. Her critical reputation is, however, in inverse ratio to the volume of her published work. "Maria Concepción," her first short story, was published in 1922; forty years later, in 1962, her novel, Ship of Fools, was published. During the intervening years her publication has consisted of less than thirty short stories, and various essays, reviews and translations.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with her first collection of short stories, Flowering Judas (1930), and until the publication of Ship of Fools (1962), critics have praised her work with great intensity. Allan Tate, for instance, in a review of Flowering Judas, states that Porter's style is "beyond doubt the most economical...and richest in American fiction"; that she has a "direct and powerful grasp of her material" and "makes every sentence create not only an inevitable and beautiful local effect, but contribute directly to the

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1. Appendix I of this thesis contains a chronological list of Porter's published fiction.

final tone and climax of the story."<sup>2</sup> Then, upon the publication of Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939), the Saturday Review placed Porter "in the illustrious company headed by Hawthorne, Flaubert, and Henry James...the company of storytellers whose fiction possesses distinct esthetic qualities, whose feelings have attained harmonic expression in their work."<sup>3</sup> And, upon the publication of her third collection of short stories, The Leaning Tower (1944), Edmund Wilson described Porter as "absolutely a first rate artist...."<sup>4</sup>

In all of the criticism, the most often praised aspect of Porter's work is her incomparable style. Such words as "exquisite," "precise," and even "perfect" appear frequently in this criticism. In fact, sometimes so lavishly and unequivocally is Porter's style praised that the more important aspects of her work, such as her mastery in handling of theme, and her penetrating and imaginative perception of human motivation, are overlooked. Porter's

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2. Allan Tate, "A New Star," Nation, CXXXI (October 1, 1930), 352.

3. Paul Rosenfield, "An Artist in Fiction," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX (April, 1939), 7.

4. Edmund Wilson, "Books," New Yorker, XX (September 30, 1944), 74.

objective has been, rather than technical accomplishment, "an attempt to discover and understand human motives, human feelings...."<sup>5</sup> And, as Robert Penn Warren has said, "...it is just and proper for us to praise Miss Porter for her English and for her artistry, but we should remind ourselves of what we well know already: that we are [only] concerned with her English and her artistry...because she uses [it] to create vivid and significant images of life."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that from 1944 to 1960, Porter published no fiction but excerpts from her novel, her reputation remained at a peak. The liabilities of such a unique position however showed themselves when, in 1962, Ship of Fools was celebrated more as a publishing event than as a literary event. At the outset, Ship of Fools was hailed as a "vivid, beautifully written story bathed in intelligence and humor....," a book in which Porter makes her reader feel "how easy it would be for anyone to turn into even the most

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5. Porter, "The Situation in American Writing," Partisan Review, VI (Summer 1939), 38.

6. Robert Penn Warren, Introduction to "Katherine Anne Porter; A Critical Bibliography," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LVII (May 1953), 213.

repellent of these incipient Nazis, how simply the most monstrous things can grow out of fear."<sup>7</sup> However, conscious of the great speculation and anticipation elicited by this book, some critics, while agreeing that Porter is "one of the finest writers of prose in America," feel that the book is "not a masterpiece."<sup>8</sup>

In discussing Porter's stories, many critics have, for ease of handling, attempted to classify the stories into categories. Although different names are used, three general categories seem to be prevalent: 1) Autobiographical, or Southern, or "Miranda" or stories of the Past; 2) Love, or Marriage, or Family, or Woman Against Man; and 3) Foreign, or International or stories of Cultural Displacement. However, in separating the stories of different cultures from the other stories, one important idea has been neglected: to Porter no place is foreign; to her a character may be just as alien in his own culture as in the culture of another country. Cultural conflict, rather than being an

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7. Louis Auchincloss, "Bound for Bremerhaven--and Eternity," New York Herald Tribune Book Review. April 1, 1962. P. 3.

8. Granville Hicks, "Voyage of Life," Saturday Review of Literature, XLV (March 31, 1962), 15.

aspect of only a few of Porter's stories, is an important aspect and central theme in almost all of her stories and in Ship of Fools.

Thus far there has been no treatment of Porter's use of cultural conflict as a central theme throughout her work. However, treatment of cultural conflict in a Mexican setting can be found in Cecil Robinson's book, With the Ears of Strangers; the Mexican in American Literature (Tucson, 1963); here Porter's three stories, "Maria Concepción," "That Tree," and "Flowering Judas," are analyzed for the use of Mexican culture. Partial treatment of Southern culture as it is reflected in Porter's stories may be found in John Bradbury's Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1963). Also articles by Ray B. West, Jr.,<sup>9</sup> James Johnson<sup>10</sup> and Sidney H. Poss<sup>11</sup> contain some treatment of Porter's use of

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9. Ray B. West, Jr., "Katherine Anne Porter and Historic Memory," in South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting, eds. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs (New York, 1961), pp. 301-314.

10. James Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Autumn 1960), 589-613.

11. Sidney H. Poss, "Variations on a Theme in Four Stories of Katherine Anne Porter," Twentieth Century Literature, IV (April-July 1958), 21-29.

Southern culture. Then too, many of the reviews of Ship of Fools deal with Porter's treatment of German culture.

Porter's attitudes toward the various cultures are shaped to some degree by her familiarity with them and by the conditions under which she encountered them. All the things she writes about she has first known; they are real to her. As she says, "...the artist can do no more than deal with familiar things from which he can not and above all would not escape."<sup>12</sup> During her life, no matter where she was living, she found "the constant exercise of memory...to be the chief occupation of my mind and all my experience seems to be simple memory with continuity, marginal notes, constant revision and comparison of one thing with another."<sup>13</sup> Porter's attitudes toward the cultures which she uses may be understood in part from a brief summary of her homes, her travel, her opportunities to compare different societies.

Porter, Katherine Anne Maria Veronica Russell Porter, was born in 1890 at Indian Creek, near San Antonio, Texas;

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12. Porter, "Why I Write about Mexico," The Days Before (New York, 1952), p. 240.

13. Porter, "Notes on Writing," New Directions, 1940 ed. James Laughlin (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1940), p. 203.

her heritage was Scotch and Catholic.<sup>14</sup> Her father, a land-owning farmer, traced his ancestors to Daniel Boone's brother Jonathan and to Colonel Andrew Porter, a pre-Revolutionary aid to George Washington. Brought up in a typically Southern culture, surrounded always with a deep sense of the past, Porter was educated in private schools and convents in Texas and Louisiana. Of her childhood acquaintance with various cultures Porter said:

....In my childhood I knew the French-Spanish people in New Orleans and the strange "Cajans" in small Louisiana towns with their curious songs and customs and blurred patois; the German colonists in Texas and the Mexicans of the San Antonio country, until it seemed to me that all my life I had lived among people who spoke broken, laboring tongues....<sup>15</sup>

At sixteen, Porter ran away from a convent and was married. Then, already dedicated to becoming a writer, she left Texas the next year to "escape the South" because she "didn't want to be regarded as a freak. That was how they regarded a woman who tried to write." She had to "make a rebellion"

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14. Unless otherwise noted, the factual information contained here may be found in "Katherine Anne Porter," Current Biography, XXIC (March 1963), 30-33.

15. "Why I Write about Mexico," p. 241.

from what she found was the "confining society" of the South.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the Mexicans in the San Antonio country where she spent much of her childhood, and because her father lived part of his youth in Mexico and told her "enchanted stories of the life there," Mexico never "seemed strange to her," even "at first sight of it."<sup>17</sup> Her interest in Mexico increased when, early in the revolution, she watched a street battle between the Maderistas and the Federal troops. After the battle, while she was watching the dead being piled for burning, an old Indian woman said to her, "It is all a great trouble now, but it is for the sake of happiness to come." The woman crossed herself. Porter, mistaking her meaning, asked, "In heaven?" The Indian woman answered with scorn, "No, on earth. Happiness for man, not for angels!" Porter thought then that the Indian woman had "caught the whole meaning of the revolution...in a phrase." Porter said that the revolution "permitted many fine things to grow out of the national soil...It was as if an old field had been

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16. Archer Winsten, "The Portrait of an Artist," New York Post, May 6, 1937. P. 7.

17. "Why I Write about Mexico," p. 240.

watered and all the long buried seeds flourished."<sup>18</sup> (It might be noted here that Porter's attitude toward the revolution later changed considerably as can be seen in her stories "Flowering Judas" and "Hacienda" and at the beginning of Ship of Fools.) In 1922, when she began submitting stories for publication, the stories were not about the South, which she had rejected, but about Mexico.

After the publication of her first volume of short stories, in 1930, Porter received a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel, study and write abroad. Her voyage then, from Mexico to Germany, occasioned the genesis of her novel, Ship of Fools, published more than thirty years later. While visiting in Germany, Porter met Goering, Goebbels and Hitler, who impressed her as "detestable and dangerous."<sup>19</sup> During her travel in Europe, she discovered within herself the past that she had rejected. She says of this time in Europe, "...it served me in a way I had not dreamed of...it gave

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18. "Why I Write about Mexico," p. 240.

19. "Katherine Anne Porter," Current Biography, I (New York, 1940), 658.

me back my past and my own home and my own people...."<sup>20</sup>

However, this sense of the past which Porter had been "given back" was not disconnected from her sense of and concern for the present, for the times, for the world. Her work--stories in Flowering Judas, Pale Horse Pale Rider, The Leaning Tower, and her novel, Ship of Fools--all reflect her attempt to fulfill a purpose, her purpose, as explained in her introduction to the 1940 edition of Flowering Judas:

....all the conscious and recollected years of my life have been lived to this day under the heavy threat of world catastrophe, and most of the energies of my mind and spirit have been spent in the effort to grasp the meaning of those threats, to trace them to their sources and to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world.

Porter is not a provincial writer, writing only of Southern culture, nor is she an exotic writer, writing only of strange lands. Porter is a subtle and penetrating writer, writing about various cultures, Southern, Irish, Mexican, German, using them in her attempt to find the "source" of "this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world." Porter values stable societies with their traditions and customs, the order which they give to

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20. "Noon Wine"; The Sources," The Yale Review, XLVI (Autumn 1956), 26.

life, the societies in which the past is looked upon with uncritical devotion, but she also realizes that, in these times, we can no longer rely upon the past; the customs and convictions of any one culture are insufficient to deal with the radically changing life and values of the present. The concept of social insularity maintained by the shells of protective culture is basic to Porter's vision of a darkened Western society.

## I. CULTURAL CONFLICT AS A CENTRAL THEME

Porter's praise of Henry James for his "extreme sense of the appearance of things, manners, dress, social customs, the lightest gesture" which enabled him to "convey mysterious but deep impressions of individual character"<sup>1</sup> is apt commentary on her own writing. Throughout her work she is able to make penetrating insights into character by presenting them within, or alien to, a particular culture. By juxtaposing two cultures, she makes sharp contrasts between the "romantic" and the realistic and exposes the illusions that individuals have about themselves and about their societies. In conjunction with this, the manner in which the individual conducts himself, the extent to which he acts in accordance to, or in opposition to, the surrounding society, provides opportunity for Porter to make many astute psychological insights concerning the importance of heritage and tradition. At times, the individual in an alien culture seems to possess an increased sensitivity to signs of malevolence and decay; this gives Porter a subtle means for probing into the

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1. Porter, "The Days Before," The Days Before, p. 18.

study of evil. In addition to these other uses, and because of its great influence on human motives and feelings, the phenomenon of cultural conflict is, in itself, a subject of great interest to Porter.

In contrasting the "romantic" and the realistic, Porter reveals the truth about individuals, destroys the illusions they have about themselves and about their own or other cultures. Especially in her stories of the South, Porter uses the juxtaposition of two cultures, the past and the present, to point out and expose the "romantic" notions of the past. In "The Source," "The Last Leaf," "The Old Order," and "Old Mortality," the present, the observations of Miranda and the other children, is set against the past, the memories of the grown-ups. For instance, in "The Last Leaf," the sentimental notion that Old Nannie had always been treated as a member of the family is shown to be untrue when, in her last days, Old Nannie requests a house apart from the family so that she could have "a little peace." And in "The Witness," Old Uncle Jimbilly's fantasies of the horrors of slave times are contrasted with Miranda's observations that he "seemed to have gotten over slavery very well." Since the children had known him, he "had never done a single thing that anyone told

him to do." Also, in "Old Mortality" the legend of the beautiful but unfortunate Amy is divested of its glamour when, some years later, Miranda meets Amy's gallant, faithful and handsome suitor, now a seedy drunkard. Miranda, confused by all the discrepancies between the legendary past and the commonplace present says, hopelessly, "Oh, what did grown-up people mean when they talked, anyway?"

The "romantic" notions about life in Mexico, as harbored by the American protagonist in "That Tree," are contrasted by Porter to the ideas of middle-class American puritanism as held by the protagonist's fiancée, Miriam, a Midwestern school teacher. He goes to Mexico to be a "cheerful bum lying under a tree in a good climate, writing poetry...with no respectability, no money to speak of...." However, when Miriam comes to marry him, he can't make her understand his "Franciscan notions of holy Poverty." Miriam sees his artistic friends as dirty and lazy; she thinks that they are only "looking for the main chance." He criticizes Miriam for not having the "temperament" of the Mexican girls; Miriam says the word "temperament" is a kind of "occupational disease among artists." After Miriam leaves, unable to tolerate his "romantic" way of life, he gets a job and later becomes a

successful journalist. He realizes then that Miriam is, after all, "abominably, obscenely right."

In viewing culture, Porter shows the importance, the need, for individuals to be able to identify with a fixed order; identity gives security; people who can not identify with the society in which they find themselves are lonely, sometimes fearful, and unable to find meaning or sanctions for their actions. On the other hand, an individual, once identified with one culture, a tradition and heritage, finds it difficult, if not impossible, to completely identify with another. Miranda, in "Old Mortality," recognizing the past for what it is, and acknowledging that she is not a part of that legendary past and its memories, feels she must reject it entirely. Her first step towards rejection is an early marriage; however this marriage does not give her security or identity. When she returns to her family for a short time, she feels like an outcast. Her family does not accept her marriage and she is not a part of their memories. In desperation, searching for self-definition, Miranda asks herself, "Where are my own people and my own time?" Similar to Miranda, in her search for identity, is the character Laura, in "Flowering Judas," who goes to Mexico and becomes involved in revolutionary activities. Having attempted to reject her

heritage and tradition, she tries to substitute the ideals of the revolution. However, she is still, as her comrades tell her, "full of romantic error...." She is disillusioned by the revolutionary leader, Braggioni, who is "a gluttonous bulk," whereas she thinks he should be "lean, animated...a vessel of abstract virtues." Laura is unable to adopt the ideals of the revolution because she has "encased herself in a set of principles derived from early training."

The importance of the principles acquired in childhood, a person's heritage and traditions, and the extent to which the principles influence an individual's subsequent behavior, is one of the psychological questions explored by Porter. In a primitive society, for example, one must act according to the established mores in order to survive. The story, "Maria Concepción," is a case in point. Maria Concepción is a woman respected in the community as an "energetic religious woman who could drive a bargain to the end." When her husband, Juan, is unfaithful to her, and goes off with a young girl, Maria Rosa, to war, Maria Concepción continues her daily work and prays each day in church. When Juan and the girl return, Maria Concepción gets revenge by killing the girl and adopting the girl's baby. Since this action is sanctioned by community tradition, Juan, and the others of the

community protect Maria Concepción from the village investigating authorities whose law the community does not acknowledge.

In contrast to the peace which comes about to the individual living in harmony with his culture, is the disquiet that comes to a person living in an alien culture. Subconscious fears engendered by the unfamiliar surroundings cause him to be acutely sensitive to real or supposed signs of discord, of corruption, of hostility. For Porter, the contrast of an individual of one culture, isolated and engulfed by an alien culture, provides a resourceful method for examining evil. In the stories, "Hacienda" and "The Leaning Tower," for example, Porter probes into atmospheres of disaster and depravity. In "Hacienda," the atmosphere surrounding the pulque hacienda, was pervaded by a thick vapor which "rose through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood." The camera of the Russian film director caught "moments of violence and senseless excitement, of cruel living and...almost ecstatic death-expectancy" in the air; all this, as the narrator recognized, and is translated by Kennerly into a concrete fear, a fear of the food and water.

Like Kennerly, Charles Upton, a young American painter in "The Leaning Tower," does not comprehend the impending disaster but rather senses it. He is impressed by the animal greediness of the German people; something about the all of the rooming houses depresses him; he feels helpless in the hands of people whom he does not understand. On New Year's Eve, even while in the midst of beer drinking, Charles suddenly has a feeling "like the first symptoms of some fatal sickness...a most awful premonition of disaster...and his thoughts blurred with the strangeness and the sound of half-understood tongues and the climate of remembered wrongs and hatreds...."

In Ship of Fools, while continuing to apply the uses of cultural conflict to examine character, find motives for action and scrutinize evil, Porter uses the conflict of cultures as a study in itself. Each person on board is an heir and possessor of a given identity which has been reinforced by the sanctions of tradition. However, because cultures are continually undergoing changes, being thrown together and intermixing, not only on the ship, but in the world, the individual is forced to recognize differences. The standard reaction to another culture, aside from romanticizing about it from a distance, is a feeling of superiority, of condescension.

Continued association of conflicting cultures often results in attitudes of hostility and contempt; these attitudes of hostility and contempt develop not only toward people of other nationalities, but also toward people of different religions or social classes. In Porter's view, the "terrible failure" of man, in present times is the result of his inability to unshackle himself from his protective culture which he places around himself in an attempt to ward off evil; he feels secure only at home. Porter's apprehensive vision, however, is that there is no "safe harbor" and there will never be one until people try to understand each other's differences, learn from each other and finally help each other. People must not retreat back into their cultures but must go out and form bonds with others. When she writes, in the preface to Ship of Fools, "I am on that ship," she means, and emphasizes throughout her work, that we are all in a common predicament.

## II. CULTURAL CONFLICT IN STORIES OF THE SOUTH

Porter's stories of the South, collected under the title of one of the stories, "The Old Order," focus on the culture of the past as it impinges on and contrasts with the present. The dual view towards this "old order," the traditional, which Porter seems to take is represented by the attitude of the children in "The Source," toward the Grandmother: They "loved their Grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge...just the same they felt that Grandmother was [a] tyrant, and they wished to be free of her...." For Porter, the old, stable order represents fixed authority, meaningful values; it is a standard by which to compare the failures of modern man. At the same time, however, the old order, because it will not change with the times, and has not prepared itself for replacement, is responsible for many of the present failures.

The order represented by Grandmother is demonstrated in "The Source." Each year the Grandmother goes through a ritual of visiting the house in the country. On the pretense of needing a change and relaxation, she travels to the farm

and, without even taking off her hat, she proceeds to "walk straight through the house observing instantly that everything is out of order"; from the house, she goes to the gardens and yards, and then to the Negro quarters. The Negroes, Little, Dicey, Hinry, Bumper and Keg, here representing disorder, the need for authority, follow Grandmother around, "trying to explain that things is just a little out of shape right now because they's had so much outside work...but they were going to get at it right away." While Grandmother was there, she directs the cleaning, patching up, straightening out and painting of everything in sight. Then, suddenly it would "come over her powerfully that she was staying on idling when there was so much to be done at home" and she would go back to the house in town which "no doubt had gone somewhat astray in her absence."

Another ritual which Grandmother performed yearly, as related in "The Source," was her gallop with Fiddler; this proved her "strength" and her "unabated energy." She chose to believe that she walked lightly and breathed as easily as ever, although she might say of Fiddler, "He's getting stiff in the knees," or "He's pretty shortwinded this year." Grandmother's authority was as unquestioned as her endurance. Her sons learned never to dispute her and, even after they were

married, she continued to assert her matriarchy over their affairs. An example of this is shown in "The Old Order." One daughter-in-law objected to the way the Grandmother had made the gardener change their garden; her husband appeased her by saying that "everything Mother was doing could be changed back after she was gone"; as this change included moving a fifty-foot adobe wall, the wife was not much consoled. Many of the things the Grandmother had established were not easily modified by the next generation. Her end came suddenly one day, when, just after coming in the door and saying how well she felt in the "bracing mountain air," she "dropped dead over the door sill."

After the Grandmother died, as we see in "The Last Leaf," the only person who represented authority and order was the Negro servant, Old Nannie. Although she was as old as the Grandmother, she assumed more and more of the responsibility for the family; they "went on depending on her and letting her work harder than she should have." They could hear her at night "groaning on her knees beside her bed, asking God to let her rest." Then one day she asked to live apart from the family and subsequently moved out of the house; it was then that the family began to realize how much they had depended on her. Almost immediately after she left, "everything

slackened, lost tone, went off edge. Work did not accomplish itself as it once had. They had not learned how to work for themselves...they had not been taught...." As the family fortunes went down, they "needed Old Nannie terribly." The children were growing up, "times were changing, the old world was sliding from under their feet, they had not yet laid hold of the new one." The old order represented by the Grandmother and Old Nannie had stood for fixed order, but it failed to entrust this in time to the succeeding generation; it failed to provide for the future.

Just as the members of the older generation failed to relinquish their authority, they also failed, in their self-veneration, to distinguish between the legendary past and the true past. They brought up their children in an atmosphere permeated by "romantic" notions and sentimental ideas about former times. For example the children, in "The Last Leaf," had believed complacently that Nannie was a "real member of the family, perfectly happy with them"; when Nannie moved away, however, they were astonished to discover that she had "always liked and hoped to own certain things, she had always seemed so contented and wantless." Too, in "The Old Order," they never realized that, when Nannie had first come in to the family, way back in the mythical past, she was treated

with a "species of kindness not so indulgent, maybe as that given to the puppies." And, in "The Last Leaf," they never knew that Old Nannie and Uncle Jimbilly had been husband and wife in a "marriage of convenience" which "dissolved of itself between them when the reasons for its being had likewise dissolved."

Even more of a distortion of the truth than the concept of Nannie's equality in the family, was the whole aura which emanated from the past, the afterglow of gallant and heroic men and beautiful ladies. The family remembered Amy, for instance, in the story, "Old Mortality," as a vivacious, daring and extremely beautiful girl, a girl whose beauty and grace were such that they served as a standard by which all the later women in the family were judged. Amy used her cruel beauty to tantalize Uncle Gabriel, her devoted, handsome and wealthy suitor, until he despaired of ever winning her. Then, suffering terribly from an incurable illness, Amy arose suddenly from her sick bed, married Gabriel and then died tragically a few months later. This whole legend, which Miranda had grown up believing, showed its disingenuousness for her when, years later, she met the ideal Uncle Gabriel, who was now a "shabby fat man with bloodshot blue eyes, sad beaten

eyes, and a big melancholy laugh like a groan." His language was coarse, and he was a drunkard.

There were other discrepancies too, which Miranda discovered, between the family's memories and reality. For instance, according to the memories, all the women of the family were slim; "...there were never any fat women in the family, thank God," says Miranda's father, in "Old Mortality." Certainly this was true of most of the women of the family, Miranda knew, but "how did her father account for Great-Aunt Eliza, who quite squeezed herself through doors," and who, when seated, was "one solid pyramidal monument from floor to neck?" And too, Miranda thought, "What about Great-Aunt Keziah...whose husband had refused to allow her to ride his good horses after she had achieved two hundred and twenty pounds." Miranda couldn't understand what "happened to her father's memory" on that point, nor could she understand any of the older generation's memories of the past, viewed in the face of much contrary evidence.

In an effort to escape from a life she can not understand, Miranda elopes; although to her, the marriage is every bit in the tradition of Amy's, her family will not accept it, and Miranda thus feels the estrangement when she returns home for a visit. She can find no common grounds for communication

with her family because she is not a part of the past, of the legend, and because she no longer believes in the memories. Her dwindling belief in their view of life is replaced by a total rejection of her identity with them. She asks herself, "Where are my own people and my own time?" She feels resentment in the presence of

these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes, who demanded that she accept their version of life and yet could not tell her the truth, not in the smallest thing... "I will be free of them, I shall not even remember them."

Unable to resolve the conflicts between the past and the present, Miranda disowns her heritage and traditions and begins a search for values and an identity which will not conflict with her perception of reality.

In the story "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" we see Miranda at the age of twenty-four; she has completely cut herself off from her heritage and is living a lonely life as a critic on a small newspaper. In her dreams she remembers the family house as a place where "too many people have been born...wept too much...laughed too much...been too angry and died," a place with "far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpiece." And, in all of this, she says,

"Nothing is mine." She has no identity, and asks herself, "Do I even walk about in my own skin or is it something I have borrowed....?" As she wakes up from her dream of the past, her thoughts rove "hazily in a continual effort to bring together and unite firmly the disturbing oppositions to her day-to-day existence." There is a war going on and Miranda cannot accept it. She cannot identify with the "Patriot" who might be "anything at all...advance agent for a road show, former saloon keeper--any follower of...one of the crafty haphazard callings." Nor can she identify with the young women "fresh from the country club dance, the morning bridge, the charity bazaar" who are "wallowing in good works" entertaining the men in the hospitals. When she looks over the soldiers in the hospital, she singles out one who looks back with a "hostile face," a face which seems to reflect "her own feelings about this whole thing [the war and the entire environment] made flesh."

An alien to the surroundings, Miranda walks around in dread and fears to express her feelings.

...the worst of the war is the fear and suspicion and the awful expression in all the eyes you meet ...as if they had pulled down the shutters over their minds and their hearts and were peering out at you, to leap if you make one gesture or say one word they do not understand instantly. It frightens me....

Although she feels isolated, she can't help but think that there are others who share her sentiments but who are also afraid to speak out against the war. She thought that "there must be a great many of them 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?"

Only once in the story does Miranda have any feeling of belonging; this belonging is a fleeting emotional identity with the soldier, Adam, when, just before losing consciousness from her illness, she expresses her love for him. After she recovers, months later, the war is over and Adam has died. Once more she places herself in isolation; her feeling of fear becomes resentment and hostility towards the whole world, a place in which she can find no values nor identity. She "looks about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will." Miranda's rejection of her past has become a rejection of life itself and an enmity toward it.

Unlike Miranda, Mr. Thompson, in "Noon Wine," accepts his culture; he is the embodiment of the regional mores and

customs of his rural Texas surroundings. The Thompson family had been there for "so long," since 1836, that, as he says, "it don't make much difference any more where they come from." However, it does make a lot of difference to him where other people come from. As he believes, "It doesn't pay to be friendly with strangers from another part of the country. They're always up to something, or they'd stay at home where they belong." The first two questions he and his neighbors have about a stranger are, "...who was he and where did he come from?"

Mr. Thompson always does things with regard to the "appearance" of the matter. He has deep convictions about the division of labor on a farm. For instance, the man's work was plowing, handling the team, buying and selling, killing hogs; the woman's work was milking, collecting eggs and dressing and smoking the hogs. "It don't look right," was his final reason for not doing anything he did not wish to do. Unfortunately his family situation was such that his wife could not work because of her illness, and his sons were of no use because of their youth.

However, one day these problems were solved by a stranger who arrived seeking work as a hired hand. At first Thompson "judged him to be another of these Irishmen" by his

"long upper lip." But the man spoke with an accent that was neither Irish, nor "Cajun and it wasn't Nigger and it wasn't Dutch"; Thompson could hardly stand it until he found out what "kind" of foreigner he was dealing with. When he found out that the stranger, Mr. Helton, was a Swede, he said, "Well I'll be damned...you're practically the first Swede I ever laid eyes on." And Helton came from North Dakota which was, as far as Thompson was able to place it, "a right smart distance seems."

Mrs. Thompson's attitude, and that of the boys, towards Helton was the same attitude they had toward any foreigner. She, at first, thought it a "shame to keep him when he don't know the language." The boys, in turn, mimicked his speech. Mrs. Thompson was hurt when Helton declined her "Christian invitation" to accompany her to church. And, when she saw that Helton didn't eat much, she worried; as her "granma used to say 'it was no use putting dependence on a man who won't set down and make out his dinner.'" And Mr. Thompson who, although he was big-hearted enough to treat Helton "like a white man," sometimes "felt a little contemptuous of Mr. Helton's ways"; judging from Helton's conduct, he "had never heard of the difference between man's and woman's

work on a farm." Nevertheless, Mr. Thompson never gave way to these feelings, for he knew a good thing when he had it. Helton had taken over, in effect, not only Mrs. Thompson's work but also almost all of Mr. Thompson's duties.

Nine years after Helton had come to work for the Thompsons, another stranger appeared at the farm, a stranger who jolted Thompson's growing complacency and sense of well-being. Mr. Homer T. Hatch came to "buy something" or rather he used this as an entrance because, as he reasoned, "...when a feller says he's come to buy something, nobody takes him for a suspicious character." Thompson, who instantly was disturbed by Hatch's extreme joviality, felt a growing resentment toward the man and had the urge to push Hatch off the stump where he was sitting; however restrained himself because, as he reasoned, it "would look mighty funny." Hatch, as he explained, was a representative of "law and order" and had come to arrest Helton as an "escaped loonatic." Thompson refused to help him arrest Helton and tried to explain that Helton was like "one of the family, the best standby a man ever had." Unmoved, Hatch set a trap, tempting Thompson in a most vulnerable spot. He said, "Now a course, if you won't help, I'll have to look around for help somewheres else. It wont look very good to your neighbors that you was harbring

an escaped loonatic who killed his own brother, and then you refused to give him up. It will look mighty funny."

Suddenly Mr. Thompson felt caught; he saw his whole image and reputation shattered, that is, he realized what a "fix" he'd be in if Hatch went around the countryside talking about him in that way. He couldn't think of any way out. When he saw Hatch stab Helton who had come running at the sound of their raised voices, Thompson picked up a nearby ax and brought it down upon Hatch's head. At least, this is the way Thompson remembered the action afterwards despite the fact there were no knife wounds found on Helton.

After the trial, even though he was acquitted, Thompson knew he had lost his established, respected position in the community; he was an alien from the countryside, a place where the people "don't hold with killin'." Unable to stand this isolation, Thompson felt compelled to go about, house to house, trying to explain exactly how it was that he happened to hit Mr. Hatch with an ax. And Mrs. Thompson, accompanying him on these trips, said each time, "Yes, that's the truth. Mr. Thompson was trying to save Mr. Helton's life." The days dragged on and Mrs. Thompson, in despair, regarded life as "all one dread, the faces of her neighbors...the face of the whole world..." was "horrible" to her. "There was a

time when I had neighbors and friends...a time when we could hold up our heads," she thought. And Mr. Thompson, finally exhausted from his failure to convince the people of the countryside of his innocence, and foundered by the realization that his boys, and even his wife, regard him as guilty, painfully admitted his guilt to himself. Having lost what he had fought all his life to preserve, the right "appearance" of things, Mr. Thompson could no longer face life and committed suicide.

Thompson's estrangement from society came about ironically from his unconscious attempt to maintain the right "appearance" of things in the eyes of his neighbors. Thompson used to "sit for hours worrying" about the deterioration of his farm, and yet he couldn't bring himself to do the work that was traditionally the work of women or hired hands. When Helton rescued him by effectively managing all the farm work in exchange for meals, a little pay, and a chance to play his harmonica, both Thompson's farm value and self-esteem were enhanced; Helton, in becoming the "hope and prop" of the family, reinforced Thompson's self-image of himself as a respectable man of the community. Although Thompson had come to regard Helton as a "good man and a good friend," his unconscious reason for killing Hatch was not to save Helton,

but to preserve all that Helton symbolized.

The obstinate yet unconscious effort of Mr. Thompson to preserve his tradition, even in the face of adverse circumstances, is the same quality which Miranda discovered in the older generation, the characteristic which caused her to reject them. This phenomenon of tradition, the necessity for it and the liabilities of it, is demonstrated throughout Porter's stories of the South. She shows how it operates upon the mind, the memory, making everything conform to a certain order, judging everything by established standards; Porter studies the importance of tradition in determining behavior. To Miranda, the legend of Amy epitomized the older generation's view toward all of the past; once the legend was exposed, contrasted to present realities, she could no longer believe it. Nothing destroyed the older generation's faith in the tradition; they had created it and it was real to them. Similarly, Mr. Thompson had a tradition: he was a hard-working farmer with a good reputation who never committed any unreasonable action; only when he had become totally isolated from the society which reinforced his self-picture did he admit the truth to himself. Further, in her stories of the South, Porter portrays the hostility and despair of an individual living in a society in which he is an alien.

### III. CULTURAL CONFLICT IN STORIES SET IN MEXICO

There is an old order in the South but an even older order in Mexico: this is the primitive culture of some of the Indians in that country. Uncomplicated by abstract ideals and rationalizations, by involved social, legal or political restraints, the life of these Indians follows a pattern closely related to their basic needs. Porter portrays this simple society, with its unfettered but ordered ways, in the story, "Maria Concepción." Although she admires this primitive society, Porter satirizes those who would try to imitate it. In "That Tree," Porter lampoons the American protagonist, who rejects his middle-class, hard-working American heritage and goes to Mexico to live the simple life of a poet. And, in "The Martyr," Porter satirizes the self-conscious Mexican painter and the tourists who patronize his art. In regard to primitive art, Porter says,

...you can hardly blame certain grown-up artists for struggling to regain this paradise [the paradise of children's art with its energy, its color and its freedom]. They call it being primitive and name it a virtue. But a primitive is one not fully equipped who does his best; he does not throw

away a developed technique in order to be simple once more.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to satirizing the pseudo-primitive of Mexico, Porter censures the corrupt revolutionary leader and the whole desecration of the revolution. Whereas earlier Porter had praised the revolution for permitting "many fine things to grow out of the national soil,"<sup>2</sup> later, in the stories, "Flowering Judas" and "Hacienda," she depicts its moral turpitude and political subterfuge.

The American archeologist, Givens, in "Maria Concepción," provides a contrast to the native Indians and their customs. Givens felt quite superior to the simple Indians; he liked the Indians who worked for him best when he "could feel a fatherly indulgence for their primitive childish ways." He often "told comic stories of the escapes of Juan [Maria Concepción's husband], how often he had saved him, in the past five years, from going to jail, and even from being shot, for his varied and always unexpected misdeeds." After Juan was married, Givens "used to twit him with exactly the right shade of condescension, on his many infidelities to Maria

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1. Porter, "Children and Art," Nation, CXXIV (March 2, 1927), 233-234.

2. Porter, "Why I Write about Mexico," p. 240.

Concepción. 'She'll catch you yet, and God help you!' he was fond of saying, and Juan would laugh with immense pleasure."

In turn, the Indians felt patronizing toward their American chief, Givens. The men worked all the year through and prospered, digging every day for "those small clay heads and bits of pottery and fragments of painted walls" for which "there was no good use on earth, being all broken and encrusted with clay." They themselves "could make better ones, perfectly stout and new, which they took to town and peddled to foreigners for real money." Maria Concepción too regarded Givens with condescension. When selling her fowl to him, she felt sorry for that "diverting white man who had no woman of his own to cook for him, and moreover, appeared not to feel any loss of dignity in preparing his own food." Whereas Givens got "the creeps" if he had to cut off the head of a fowl, Maria Concepción "took the fowl by the head, and silently, swiftly drew her knife across its throat, twisting the head off with the casual firmness she might use with the top of a beet." Givens was a "mysterious man," but he was "undoubtedly rich, and Juan's chief, therefore to be respected, to be placated."

Maria Concepción represented the order and tradition of the community. Each day she sold fowls and went about her other duties while Juan, her husband, worked for Givens. She was a "good Christian" who had "no faith in the charred owl bones, the singed rabbit fur, the cat entrails..." sold by Lupe, the medicine woman. The neighbors respected her as an "energetic religious woman who could drive a bargain to the end," and further, a woman who had "actually been married in the church instead of behind it, which was the usual custom, less expensive." Maria Concepción was "entirely contented"; she walked "with the free, natural, guarded ease of the primitive woman carrying an unborn child."

Suddenly one day Maria Concepción discovered that Juan was being unfaithful to her; the contentment she had felt vanished, and she "burned all over...as if a layer of tiny fig-cactus bristles, as cruel as spun glass, had crawled under her skin." She wanted to "sit down quietly and wait for her death, but not until she had cut the throats of her man and that girl...." The night Juan and the girl, Maria Rosa, went off to war but Maria Concepción didn't weep; nor did she cry when her baby was born and died within four days. Her face was "stone."

If she had not gone so regularly to church, lighting candles before the saints, kneeling with her arms spread in the form of a cross for hours at a time, and receiving holy communion every month, there might have been talk of her being devil-possessed, her face was so changed and blind looking. But this was impossible when, after all, she had been married by the priest.

A year later when Juan and Maria Rosa returned, Juan was thrown into prison as a deserter from the army. Luckily however the captain recognized him as one of Givens workers and turned him over to Givens. Admonishing Juan's indiscretions, Givens scolded, "Some day I'm going to be five minutes too late." He added, "What will Maria Concepción say to all this?...You are very informal, Juan, for a man who was married in the church...You be careful. Some day Maria Concepción will just take your head off with that carving knife of hers." When Juan left Givens, he became drunk and found himself "unaccountably in his own house, attempting to beat Maria Concepción by way of reestablishing himself in his legal household." After he fell asleep, Maria Concepción, without realizing what she was about to do, went to Maria Rosa's house, killed her and returned to beg Juan's forgiveness.

When the village authorities came to investigate the murder, they were certain that Maria Concepción was guilty,

but they could find no evidence. Juan and the people of the community defended Maria Concepción and acted as a "sheltering wall cast impenetrably around her"; she was "guarded, surrounded, upborne by her faithful friends." Even Lupe, Maria Rosa's godmother who could "have ruined that Maria Concepción with a word, "found it even sweeter to make fools of these gendarmes who went about spying on honest people." The people of the community thought that Maria Rosa "had thrown away her share of strength in them, she lay forfeited among them." As Maria Concepción said to herself, "Maria Rosa had eaten too much honey and had had too much love. Now she must sit in hell, crying over her sins and her hard death forever and ever."

Thwarted, the gendarmes "shrugged their shoulders ...and shuffled their feet," and left, apologizing for their disturbance. Because these "authorities" were of "mixed-bloods themselves with Indian sympathies," they knew they were intruding in a place where they were powerless, a community which recognized no law but their own. After the gendarmes left, Maria Concepción, with the silent consent of the people, took Maria Rosa's baby saying, "He is mine." And, that night, with Juan sleeping in the jacal, and a baby

cradled in her lap, Maria Concepcion once again felt the "repose" of a primitive woman whose elemental yet culturally sanctioned needs are fulfilled.

In Porter's view, the elemental life of the primitive, so appealing to the people from more inhibiting and complex cultures, ceases to be primitive when it becomes, through prolonged contact with a "higher" culture, self-consciously simple. Porter never satirized the true primitive, but rather the pseudo-primitive. Especially ridiculed is the "artist" who becomes aware of the material gain possible to those who are alert to opportunities. And, implicit in this ridicule, there is satirizing of the patrons, usually Americans, who encourage this "primitive" art.

The "tragic" life of the "most illustrious painter in Mexico" is narrated by Porter in the story, "The Martyr." Ruben, the painter, was "deeply in love" with his model Isabel, who was in turn romantically attached to a rival artist, "whose name is of no importance." Many "earnest-minded people" used to make "pilgrimages down the narrow, cobbled street," picking their way "carefully over puddles in the patio," and clattering up "the uncertain stairs for glimpse of the great and yet so simple personage...." However, one day Ruben's rival sold a painting to a rich man

whose decorator had recommended a panel of green and orange for a certain wall of the man's new house. By a "felicitous chance," this painting was "prodigiously green and orange." Soon afterwards, the rival and Isabel went off together leaving poor Ruben to mourn. He could no longer paint; deprived of his inspiration all he could do was eat and finally died from over-indulgence.

The day after Ruben died, his friends hastened to the place of disaster, a small cafe called "The Little Monkeys"; one friend had "already begun gathering details" for the biography of the country's "most eminent painter," and was delighted to learn from the cafe's proprietor that Ruben's last words were, "Tell them I am a martyr to love...Isabelita, my executioner!" After an "appropriate" silence the proprietor added, "Ruben was also supremely fond of my tamales and pepper gravy; they were...his final indulgence." "That shall be mentioned in its place," replied the biographer, "...with the name of your cafe even." "The cafe shall be a shrine for artists when this story is known...."

Probably one of the artists who would frequent such a place in Mexico is the American protagonist in the story "That Tree," a man who goes to Mexico to be a "cheerful bum lying under a tree in a good climate, writing poetry"; he

wants a life with "no respectability, no responsibility, no money to speak of, wearing worn-out sandals...." For a time he leads this life. However, when Miriam, his fiancée, comes to marry him, she cannot conform to his ideas; she is a school teacher from the Midwest and finds it hard to understand his explanation of the "Franciscan notions of holy Poverty as being the natural companion for the artist." In her opinion, his assorted artistic Mexican friends are "just looking for the main chance"; they are lazy. The trouble with Miriam, he thinks, is that she hasn't the "temperament" of the Mexican girls that he had gotten used to. For example, one time he took Miriam out dancing at a Mexican cafe. While they were dancing, they noticed that, in the corner of the room, four generals were quarrelling when suddenly one of the generals got up and reached for his gun; everyone in the cafe saw him and "every right-minded Mexican girl seized her man about the waist" and held him "like a shield"; Miriam, however, dived under a table and hid until he had to "drag her out by the arm before everybody." He thought Miriam's "instincts" were definitely "out of tune."

Miriam wasn't at all like the Indian girl he had been living with when he first came to Mexico; Miriam went about "holding her nose when she went to the markets, trying to

cook wholesome civilized American food over a charcoal brasier" and thought he should get a job because the money she had brought to Mexico had been rapidly dwindling. The Indian girl, on the other hand, wasn't critical of the way he lived; he managed to support her on what he had, since "naturally" the painters that she posed for did not pay her for posing. Later, however, the girl was "taken up by one of the more famous and successful painters, and grew very sophisticated and a 'character'...." Then she, took to "wearing native art-jewelry and doing native dances in costume, and learned to paint almost as well as a seven-year-old child; 'you know,' he said, 'the primitive style.'" But when he knew her, she was still "simple and nice."

The importance of his tradition and heritage was realized by the protagonist after Miriam left him. After four years of putting up with his "romantic" notions, she had packed up and gone home to Minnesota; shortly afterwards, he found a job and soon became a successful journalist of Latin American affairs. His poetry, as he realized then, was "filthy," and the notions he had held about artists were "from books." The conflict that had raged inside of him, between his rejected American past and his "romantic" Mexican life, between Miriam's Midwestern standards and his adopted

notions, reached a climax when his "old-fashioned respectable middle-class hard-working American ancestry and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam's side." He had tried so hard to reject his past; he "felt he had broken about every bone in him to get away from them and live them down, and here he had been overtaken at last and beaten into resignation...It was as if his blood stream had betrayed him." When Miriam wrote to him, after five years, praising his success and asking to be taken back, he admitted to himself that Miriam was "absolutely, obscenely right" and agreed to take her back.

Laura, the idealistic American girl in "Flowering Judas," like the protagonist in "That Tree," renounces her past, her heritage, and tries to substitute the culture of Mexico. She tries unsuccessfully to find some identity by devoting herself to Communist party work in the revolution. Part of the day she spends teaching little children who "remain strangers to her." And everyone she calls on in her party assignments, "even if a known face" is always "the face of a stranger." Laura knows that "uninvited she has promised herself" to Mexico; "she can no longer imagine herself as living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering her life before she came here." Nevertheless she is unable to identify with any of the people.

Although she claims to have rejected the values of her past, Laura admits having "encased herself in a set of principles" derived from her "early training," principles which leave "no detail of gesture of personal taste untouched." The white collar of her blue serge dress is not "purposely nun-like, and the collar is trimmed with fine lace, not lace made on machines; this is her private heresy, for in her special group the machine is sacred, and will be the salvation of the workers." Because of Laura's rigid standards, Braggioni, the revolutionary leader from whom she must take orders, becomes a "symbol of her many disillusionments." Dressed in a "lavender shirt" with a "purple necktie, held by a diamond hoop," "mauve silk hose" and "glossy yellow shoes," he tells her that his power "brings with it the blameless ownership of things, and the right to indulge his love of small luxuries." Laura, however, believes that a revolutionary leader should be "lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues." Instead, Braggioni is a "gluttonous bulk" and has all the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness of a "professional lover of humanity." And, whereas Laura is idealistic, self-denying and defenseless, Braggioni is materialistic, sensual, and powerful. Laura's comrades tell her that she is "full of romantic error, for what she defines as cynicism in

them is merely 'a developed sense of reality,'" In trying to reconcile her doubts, Laura is "almost too willing to say, 'I am wrong, I suppose I don't really understand the principles....'"

Disillusioned about the revolution, and alienated from her surroundings, Laura walks about in constant fear. She dreads Braggioni and knows she is entirely at his mercy. Her "physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation and a shocking death wait for her with lessening patience" she has "translated...into something homely, immediate," she sometimes "hesitates before crossing the street." However, and then, despite her "fear of being seen by someone who might make a scandal of it," Laura goes into "some crumbling little church, kneels on the chilly stone, and says a Hail Mary...." But "it is no good and she ends by examining the altar with its tinsel flowers and ragged brocades, and feels tender about the battered doll-shape of some male saint...." Laura's unrealized fears, her "uneasy premonitions of the future" so shape her thinking that even the houses "seem to lean together like conspirators under a single mottled lamp...." Her only defense, her only safety, in a world she sees as a disaster, is in the "rejection of both "knowledge and kinship" with one "monotonous word.

No." This word "does not suffer her to be led into evil."

Laura feels that she has been "betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be, and at times she is almost contented to rest in this sense of grievance as a private store of consolation." However, in spite of her self-pity, she thinks, "It may be true I am as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni, ...as callous, as incomplete..." These two feelings, the betrayal and the possibility of her corruption, combine with her guilty feeling about Eugenio's death caused by an overdose of the pills she had given him, in a dream. In the dream, Eugenio wants to show her a "new country" but Laura denies him. "Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner," Eugenio says, giving her blossoms of the Judas tree. When she eats them "greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst," Eugenio says, "Murderer! Cannibal! This is my body and my blood." And Laura denies it. Because of the fear engendered by alienation from her surroundings, and because of her disillusionment at being unable to find meaningful values, Laura negates every human tie and thus betrays not only the cause for which she is working, but also betrays herself.

The tangled political manoeuvring of Braggioni, as he had Laura "borrowing money from the Roumanian agitator to

give to his bitter enemy the Polish agitator," was typical of the subterfuges of a revolutionary Mexico. In the story, "Hacienda," the intricacies of revolutionary politics conducted by foreign elements are delineated by Porter. Against the background of a pulque hacienda, conflicts between the past and the present, between the European and the Mexican, between the American and the Mexican are portrayed.

Kennerly, the American in the story, "Hacienda," is a blustering, fearful motion picture adviser working for a Russian film company in Mexico. On the train to the hacienda, the narrator of the story contrasts Kennerly to the "dark inferior people" among whom he is very uncomfortable. Against the calm, quiet ecstasy of the Indians in the second-class coach, into which he had mistakenly climbed, Kennerly

...strode mightily through, waving his free arm, lunging his portfolio and leather bag, stiffening his nostrils as conspicuously as he could against the smell that "poured," he said, "simply poured like mildewed pea soup" from the teeming clutter of wet infants and draggled turkeys and indignant baby pigs and food baskets and bundles of vegetables...each little mountain of confusion yet drawn into a unit, from the midst of which its owners glanced up casually from dark pleased faces at the passing strangers.

When Kennerly finally reached his seat in the first-class coach, he spread down coats and scarves until he had built a "nest" which temporarily secured him from the "appalling

situation" of being a superior person of the "intellectual caste of the ruling race at large and practically defenseless in what a country!"

The problems that Kennerly found in filming a picture in Mexico were numerous. "It's these Mexicans," he explained as if it were outrageous to find them in Mexico, "They would drive any man crazy in no time...Just for example they don't know the meaning of time and they have absolutely no regard for their word." Kennerly went on to describe how he had to bribe them every step of the way. With the prevailing conditions, he'd prefer to be in Africa; "at least you knew where you stood" there. Kennerly was accustomed to the "clean, four-square business methods of God's own Hollywood."

The purpose of the film being made by the Russians was to show the "glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution." Part of the film was being made at a pulque hacienda, a timeless embodiment of a past way of life, a place which was really an "old-fashioned feudal estate with the right kind of architecture, no modern improvements to speak of, and with the purest type of peons"; The film showed the "Indian in his hopeless rags" in contrast to the "theatrically luxurious

persons" within the house. The film company was being sponsored by Communists, and "various other shady organizations." The Mexican government was paying them heavily; Moscow was paying Mexico; the Mexican anti-government party was at heart in sympathy with Russia and had paid secretly an enormous sum to Russians for a picture that "would disgrace the present regime." The government officials themselves did not seem to know what was going on. Suspicion and censorship pervaded the atmosphere.

The presence of all the aliens at the hacienda serves to emphasize the conflict between the past and present way of life there. Don Genaro's grandfather represents the old order. He didn't approve of his granddaughter-in-law who "got herself up in a fashion unknown to the ladies of his day, a fashion very upsetting to a man of the world who had always known how to judge, grade and separate women into their proper categories at a glance." He considered a "temporary association with such a young female as this...a part of every gentleman's education," but marriage was "altogether a different matter." The grandfather didn't understand his grandson and didn't try any more: he moved away to the farthest patio of the hacienda and lived "in bleak dignity and loneliness without hope and without philosophy, perhaps contemptuous of

both...." And Don Genaro, although his marriage was not in keeping with the established family customs, was nevertheless greatly influenced by tradition. For instance when the "imbecile village judge" refused to let him have one of his peons, Justino, a boy who had accidentally shot his own sister, Don Genaro answered the judge's lengthy explanation of law saying, "All that has nothing to do with this case...Justino is my peon, his family have lived for three hundred years on our hacienda, this is MY business...." Don Genaro was upset further when his wife, disregarding all tradition, became good friends with his mistress. A "wife's first right is to be jealous and threaten to kill her husband's mistress," Don Genaro believed; he knew how to react in that case; but in this situation, however, there was no "precedent" for a husband's conduct.

The tragedy of Justino's fatal shooting of his sister brought about varied reactions from the contrasting cultures. Kennerly's first reaction was, "My God! We are ruined!...Her family will have a damage suit against us." Andreyev, a Russian Communist, took the matter calmly; he explained that the Indians didn't understand such a law and told Kennerly not to give them "all sorts of strange notions not necessary to anybody's peace of mind." The Indians, on the other hand,

expressed sympathy for the unlucky family. They related to Kennerly and Andreyev the excitement over the incident that went on at the hacienda. "Don Genaro had gone, according to custom to cross the girl's hands, close her eyes, and light a candle beside her. Everything was done in order," they said piously, their eyes dancing with rich, enjoyable feelings. "It is always regrettable and exciting when somebody you know gets into such dramatic trouble."

The trouble over Justino brought a temporary halt to the operations of the filming and the people at the hacienda, a German, two Russians, a man of French-Spanish descent, the Mexican hacienda owner and his wife, and the American Kennerly, suddenly felt "for the moment imprisoned." As the narrator explained, they were now just "change-gathered" people with nothing to do, nothing to say to each other. "Action was their defense against the predicament they were all in, and for the present, nothing was happening." The suspense in the air seemed ready to explode until Kennerly disrupted the silence by announcing that he needed to leave the hacienda to take care of some business in Mexico City. Then, one by one, the rest of the people found excuses to escape the stifling, hostile atmosphere of the conflicting cultures.

As the longest of Porter's stories of Mexican culture, "Hacienda" demonstrates several of Porter's uses of cultural conflict. In this panorama of Mexican life, Porter portrays the Mexican peons, similar to those in "Maria Concepción," with their almost timeless way, in contrast to the rapidly changing ways of hacienda owners at the top level of the society; she juxtaposes the past, Don Genaro's grandfather and the family traditions, against the present, Don Genaro's "modern" wife, the village judge, and the revolutionary leader. Also, in "Hacienda" Porter is concerned with the individual's need for cultural security; Kennerly, like Laura in "Flowering Judas," finds himself surrounded by the alien society and senses hostility and death in the atmosphere, but he cannot articulate this; and he translates it as fear of contamination from the food and water. And finally, in "Hacienda" Porter examines the interaction of several different cultures, Russian, German, Mexican and American, their mutual distrust, contempt and lack of communication; this interaction of contrasting cultures becomes, for Porter, a study of central interest in her novel, Ship of Fools.

#### IV. CULTURAL CONFLICT IN AN INTERNATIONAL SETTING

Porter chose the year 1931 for events which occur in both the story, "The Leaning Tower," and her novel, Ship of Fools. This was a crucial year for Western civilization: there were revolutions in Spain, Mexico and South America; Mussolini was in power in Italy, and Hitler was rapidly gaining strength in Germany. In view of these facts, and considering Porter's social awareness, it is not surprising that these two works contain greater political implications than her previous stories. In "The Leaning Tower" Porter probes into several German character types by contrasting them with Charles Upton, a young American who tries to understand the people of Berlin; she skillfully, but unobtrusively, portrays the atmosphere of fear, frustration, and destitution out of which the megalomania of Naziism was to germinate. Porter's treatment of the Germans in "The Leaning Tower" presages her concern with and attitudes toward the German passengers in Ship of Fools. In both of the works, Porter studies the traits prevalent in her German characters which were ready to lend themselves to the new fury of Naziism, although this political philosophy is never named.

Charles Upton, a young American painter in "The Leaning Tower," experienced extreme disappointment upon his arrival in Berlin. During his childhood in San Antonio, Texas, he had listened to tales of Berlin's glory, the "polished streets" and buildings "all of stone and marble and...carved all over with pillars and statues everywhere..." as related to him by his friend Kuno. Kuno and his family used to take frequent trips back to Germany and send beautiful postcards; Charles' family never went back to their homeland, Kentucky. Kuno's parents used to force him to practice the violin for three hours a day and take lessons from a "stern old German teacher who cracked him over the head with a bow when he made mistakes"; Charles, on the other hand, had always wanted to paint and draw, but his parents objected to his wasting time when he "could have been doing something useful." The only time Kuno and Charles ever quarrelled was the time Kuno "spoke contemptuously of farmers, calling them a name in German which Charles did not understand." Charles, in retaliation, had shouted back that Kuno's father was "just a storekeeper" even if his mother was a Baroness in Germany. Charles had never been able to understand the pride that Kuno took in his father's store windows, because, to the Kentuckians, "land was the only honorable means to a living...."

Once in Kuno's beloved Berlin, there were other things Charles could not understand. He saw none of the glory that Kuno had described but rather beheld streets filled with ragged beggars, some blinded or otherwise mutilated from the war; one man was "so emaciated his teeth stood out in ridges under the mottled tight skin of his cheeks." He was "standing at the curb with a placard around his neck which read: 'I will take any work you can offer.'" In contrast to these lone beggars, Charles observed groups of middle-class people who were "all strangely of a kind...enormous waddling women with short legs and ill-humored faces, and round-headed 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." A sight that particularly disgusted Charles was a group of these people standing in silence, gazing into a window which displayed nothing but pigs: sausages, hams, bacon, almond paste pigs, wooden mechanical pigs. To Charles, the people seemed in a trance of "pig worship...their faces full of hallucinated malice and a kind of sluggish but intense cruelty...."

Charles, becoming apprehensive toward his surroundings, sought for some "visible object" causing his fear. The hotel where he stayed was "mysteriously oppressive" to him,

and the proprietors "seemed to be in perpetual conspiracy" of some sort. When he left the hotel, he was forced to pay an outrageous bill under threat of police arrest; he felt "like a criminal on parole" when his papers were examined. His unsuccessful attempts to find a more suitable room deepened his depression. Everywhere he was confronted by the shoddiness of decayed luxury, rooms of "gilded carving and worn plush, full of the smell of yesterday's cabbage...stuffy tidiness...a kind of repellent gentility," rooms "varying only in the depth of feather bed and lavishness of draperies ...." In all of the pensions, Charles felt "trapped."

Finally, however, Charles chose a room in a pension owned by Frau Rosa Reichl, a bitterly sentimental Viennese aristocrat. Before the war, she mourned to Charles, she had owned five servants besides a gardener and a chauffeur; her frocks came from Paris and her furniture from England; now she had to "make up beds like a servant" and "wash dirty floors." Her world was one of constant fear of poverty and of reminiscences of the past. Frau Reichl attributed her lamentable situation to the Americans who had "deserted and betrayed Germany in the war"; the only outlet for her frustrations was a constant tyrannizing over her boarders, especially over Herr Otto Bussen, a poor Platt Deutschmann.

Explaining her harsh treatment of Otto, she said, "When you are so poor, you are frightened of the poor and unfortunate...such a man will drag us all down...."

Charles was going to give his coat to Otto but Tadeusz, a Polish student at the pension, stopped him by saying, "...you can't do that. [Otto] is very proud and he would be furious as hell...he would feel like throwing it back at you...there are worse things than cold and hunger." When Charles protested, Tadeusz explained condescendingly that evidently he did not "understand" the German people. "If you set yourself up as a benefactor, you must expect to be hated."

Tadeusz was right. Charles could not understand how Otto, in the face of obvious poverty could maintain such immense pride. Nor could Charles understand another student, Hans, who was recovering from a festering Mensur wound. He could fathom neither Hans' pride in his disfigurement nor the German admiration for such a mark. It occurred to Charles that in no other place in the world would Hans be able to boast of it; in Paris, the people might understand, but even so, they would disapprove. And, in San Antonio, Texas, the people would "think he had got into a disgraceful cutting scrape, probably with a Mexican, or that he had been in an

automobile accident." Charles wondered, "What kind of man would stand up in cold blood and let another man split his face to the teeth just for the hell of it?" This question was answered when Hans, upon being complimented on the wound said, "It will last," and over his face there "spread a change, slow and deep, with no perceptible movement of eyelids or face muscles...", a look which was one of "amazing arrogance, pleasure, inexpressible vanity and self-satisfaction." Charles at that moment instinctively rejected "the wound, the reason why it existed, and everything that made it possible...simply because there were no conditions for acceptance in his mind."

On New Year's Eve, Charles became aware of the relative innocence of his outlook toward world affairs as compared to the cynical or Machiavellian attitudes of the Europeans. In the course of the conversation concerning national character types, Charles defensively asserted that all Americans were "not rich," that most Americans "just wanted to be liked." Tadeusz asked him why Americans expected to be liked when "Europeans hate each other for everything and for nothing" and have been trying to "destroy each other for two thousand year...." Otto chimed in saying that Americans were really a "coldhearted indifferent people...because they never had any

troubles." Charles, seeing that he was rapidly losing ground, argued that it was impossible to talk about a whole people, that likes and dislikes were "a personal matter." Tadeusz sarcastically replied that Charles was being "too modest"; Tadeusz believed that the "whole art of self-importance is to raise your personal likes and dislikes to the plane of moral or esthetic principle, and to apply on an international scale your smallest personal experience...If someone steps on your foot, you should not rest until you have raised an army to avenge you...." Then Hans in "youthful oratory" added to this that a country should "unite and attack the enemy instead of waiting to be attacked...

Power, pure power is what counts to a nation or a race. You must be able to tell other peoples what to do, and above all what they may not do, you must be able to enforce every order you give against no matter what opposition, and when you demand anything at all, it must be given you without question.

Charles, in reflecting upon the conversation's drift, suddenly had a feeling "like the first symptoms of some fatal sickness,...a most awful premonition of disaster...He felt helpless, undefended, looked at the three strange faces near him...he trusted none of them." Although for awhile, during the singing and embracing of the celebration of New Year's Eve, Charles felt happy, once back at the pension, he again

had a sense of dread. His eyes fixed on Frau Reichl's little plastic replica of the Leaning Tower, a souvenir of her honeymoon; Charles had carelessly broken it a few days before, but it was now "mended pretty obviously." The tower symbolized a sinister, but as yet unarticulated trepidation in the back of Charles mind, something which was "perishable but threatening, uneasy, hanging over his head or stirring angrily, dangerously, at his back."

This vague stirring of fear that Charles felt had begun with his disillusionment upon seeing the stark poverty in Berlin's streets instead of the "glory" he had anticipated. He was revolted by "sluggish but intense cruelty" in the expressions of some pig-like people, and he became resentful toward the hotel proprietors and Frau Reichl because they made him feel "trapped." Otto's submission to a state of privation and willing subjection to Frau Reichl's tyranny sickened Charles; Hans' pride in his festering Mensur wound, a symbol of youthful "arrogance, inexpressible vanity" and "self-satisfaction," horrified Charles. In his innocence of the complex European civilization, with its climate of centuries of remembered wrongs and hatreds, Charles was shocked by Hans' famished, burning lust for power, his worship of power unfounded on any moral judgement. In bringing together all

his impressions, Charles sensed an impending doom. Against an atmosphere of fear and poverty, the separate traits of arrogance, bitter sentimentality, willing submissiveness and pride, found in these German types, lacked only some kindling of hope, promised by aggressive authoritarianism, to draw them into the ranks of Naziism.

Porter's delineation of certain German character traits in "The Leaning Tower" anticipates her treatment of the German passengers in Ship of Fools; also, "The Leaning Tower" forshadowes Ship of Fools in its concern with European culture as opposed to the Southern and Mexican cultural interests in her other short stories. However, all of Porter's stories in some way point to Ship of Fools; as she wrote in her introduction to the 1940 edition of Flowering Judas, in answer to the growing speculation concerning the small quantity of her published work, "I was not one of those who could flourish in the conditions of the past two decades. [These stories] are fragments of a much larger plan which I am still engaged in carrying out...." The "larger plan," published more than twenty years later, was her novel, Ship of Fools (1962). Porter describes the novel as "the sum of what I know about human nature, the fatalities of life and the perils of human relationships. Everything I was able to

express I put in it."<sup>1</sup> Because Ship of Fools presents in culmination the working out of her dominant themes and character portrayals, it is significant that aboard the ship are not only Germans but also Americans and Mexicans, some of whom are quite similar to those in her short stories. And of even more significance is Porter's skillful handling of the interaction of alien individuals who temporarily lack the security of a familiar background. Ship of Fools as a study of man's present problems is, and will remain, a valuable condensation of Porter's knowledge of human motives and human relationships as portrayed through the use of cultural conflict; Ship of Fools is Porter's definitive view of the cultures of a "darkening" Western society.

In Porter's short stories, such characters as the Grandmother, Mr. Thompson, and Maria Concepción are portrayed as embodiments of their respective cultures, acting consciously or unconsciously according to established customs. In contrast to these characters are Miranda, Mr. Helton and Laura who, for reasons of their own, go against the established mores. The protagonist in "That Tree," Miranda, and Laura attempt to reject their heritage and seek substitute values in another

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

society; whereas, Miriam, Kennerly and Charles Upton refuse to admit or cannot understand the values of a foreign culture. Whatever the case may be, in each story Porter contrasts one or more individuals to an alien environment.

This same theme of cultural conflict is also central to Porter's novel, Ship of Fools. Here, not only some, but all of the individuals find themselves in an alien environment; no one is at home on the ship. The traditions and prejudices which prevail on board are those which the passengers have brought with them. Illusions and self-deceptions which the characters harbor concerning themselves and other people are exposed when divested of their reassuring backgrounds. The importance of tradition and the need for identity are other components of culture continued in the novel from the short stories. Combining these manifestations of instilled traditions, Porter treats, in this novel, cultural conflict as a study in itself. By particularizing the individual reactions to the alien background of the ship and then generalizing the attitudes of culture groups, Porter adroitly but subtly presents the problem of cultural conflict.

Among the passengers on the Vera, the German ship voyaging from Mexico to Germany, from Veracruz to Bremerhaven, are the Germans: Captain Thiele, the crew, Dr. Schumann and

fourteen other Germans. The Latins on board include a company of Spanish singers and dancers, six Cuban medical students, several Mexicans and the Spanish noblewoman, La Condesa. Other travelers on board are four Americans, a Swiss family of three and a Swede. And, traveling in the steerage there are some seven hundred Spanish migrant workers, deportées from the Cuban sugar fields on their way back to the Canaries and various parts of Spain.

Before embarking on the voyage, the travelers found it necessary to spend the day in Veracruz getting papers signed and visiting various consulates and departments of "this and that." The Veracruzanos were contemptuous of all travelers and never tired of ridiculing and "fleecing" them. To the people of this port town, travelers were all alike. They

...crept off the train which brought them from the interior, stiff from trying to sleep fully clothed in their chairs, sore in their minds from the recent tearing up of their lives by the roots, a little gloomy with some mysterious sense of failure, of forced farewell, of homelessness no matter how temporary...each one carried signed, stamped papers....(p. 21)

The travelers were all in a similar predicament but they chose not to acknowledge each other. Each maintained his pride and separateness, and only after repeated ignoring of each other's eyes did there appear any recognition of each other. Although

they all went through the same exasperating and unpleasant experiences, "no bond was established between them." (p. 23)

Once on the ship, the passengers felt no lessening of hostility. They eyed with suspicion the strange luggage next to their own in their rooms. Each traveler hastened to spread out his possessions as proof of his identity, as assurance that he had not always been a "harassed stranger, ...an unknown name and a caricature on a passport." (p. 32)

Besides their material possessions, each passenger brought with him his preconceived notions concerning other people, other cultures. Alone in an alien environment, many of the travelers sought satisfactory relationships, but none were successful; it was difficult to find people of one's own status and, of course, one wouldn't want to associate with a "lower" type. William Denny, a tall young Texan, although he wasn't particularly seeking friends, nevertheless was frustrated in his attempts to maintain his identity. His home was a small town on the border where his father was a "prominent citizen"; the lower classes there consisted of "Mexicans and Negroes, that is greasers and niggers, with a few polacks and wops... and he had always relied simply on his natural superiority of race and class, backed by law and custom." (p. 35)

Denny's frustrating experiences in Veracruz were fairly typical of those undergone by most of the travelers. At first Denny took the "proper white man's attitude" toward the natives and was greeted with "downright insolence." Then, realizing his mistake, after all it was their country, Denny tried being polite and the natives thought he was "patronizing them"; when he tried giving orders, they didn't obey; if he was indifferent, they showed they "despised him." In despair, he thought, "Well, damn it all they are inferior--just look at them...."(p. 35) Once aboard ship, Denny never had any better luck. He was continually defeated in his efforts to "get" Pastora, a woman in the Spanish dancing company, and he could find no other satisfactory relationships. Overcome by his troubles, Denny began to look forward to the end of his stay in Germany and to "getting back to Brownsville once more, where a man knew who was who and what was what, and niggers, crazy Swedes, Jews, greasers, bone-headed micks, polacks, wops, Guineas and damn Yankees knew their place and stayed in it." (p. 323)

Somewhat reminiscent of Frau Reichl in "The Leaning Tower," is Frau Schmitt, a sentimental widow who is accompanying her husband's coffin back to Germany. Sometimes she is so bitterly lonely for her husband that she thinks of going down

into the hold to sit by the coffin just "for the dear company of it." (p. 153) For friendship on the ship, Frau Schmitt could find no one really suitable: the Spanish passengers she naturally "didn't count"; the Americans she thought "odd but nice," however, David, the young painter, had a "wax face with blue marble eyes" and the young woman with him Frau Schmitt could not "understand"; and too, Mrs. Treadwell, the middle-aged divorcee, she "did not trust"; and even the handsome Herr Freytag, she thought had most certainly done wrong to pass himself off as a Christian when he was married to a Jew. "'Yet, oh God,' she said, and made the sign of the Cross with her thumb and forefinger, 'what shall I do? Die of my loneliness?'" (p. 373)

There were other lonely people on board. Frau Rittersdorf, another widow, although she was quite occupied with writing in her notebook apt criticism of the other passengers, felt "uneasy at being alone...." (p. 367) And Arne Hansen, the Swede, went around "frowning deeply without a glance for anyone...looking as a man might look if he were alone on a desert island." (p. 317) Except for his "arrangements" with Amparo, a woman in the Spanish dancing company, he spent his time in the bar. Johann too, the young German

boy nursing his uncle, walked about with the "look of an outcast dog." (p. 129)

Resembling Miranda and Laura in their self-imposed isolation from the surrounding society, preferring this state of isolation to an involvement with people with whom they had absolutely nothing in common, many of the passengers made no effort at all to associate with each other. David, the young American painter, for example, "refused to...take part" in the activities on the ship because "he knew well there was no place for him and nothing that he wanted anywhere...." (p. 129) Similarly, Mrs. Treadwell, the middle-aged divorcee, spent the entire voyage trying to "escape" from any kind of relationships; her wish "not to be touched, neither with hands or words," (p. 294) echoes Laura's desire to reject "all knowledge and kinship...."

The one Jew on board, Löwenthal, was glad of his isolation from Goyim, the gentiles, because his "natural hostility" to the whole heathen and enemy world was "so deep and pervasive it was like a movement of his blood...." (p. 257) All he ever wanted from Goyim was their money. And La Condesa, the "déclassée" Spanish noblewoman being deported as a political exile from Cuba, declared to Dr. Schumann, who was trying to help her, "I do not intend to reconcile myself with a society

I despise." She preferred to derive her pleasure from taking ether and drugs. (p. 124)

Because of their proximity, however, these alien people were unable to avoid some contact with each other. The forced interaction of the passengers, the juxtaposition of their opposing values and attitudes, served to show each individual in a most unbecoming light which magnified all of his inadequacies. As one of the passengers, Wilhelm Freytag, observed, the people on the ship "went on behaving as if they were on dry land...Every smallest act showed up clearly and looked worse because it had lost its background. The train of events leading up to it and explaining it was not there." (p. 135) By the conscious or unconscious attempts of these individuals to find some meaningful order, some standard for behavior in this unfamiliar background, the powerful influence of tradition and heritage on behavior was revealed.

Although the various Germans on board disagreed on religion, on morals, and on social behavior, they were alike in their respect for and worship of order. The "blood and iron" mystique which so irascibly imbedded itself in German culture was manifested most clearly in the German passengers' attitude toward Captain Thiele, a concrete embodiment of authority and order. When he first appeared at the honored

table, the chosen Germans "ranged round him faces bent towards him like sunflowers to the sun...." (p. 49) They hung on his first words,

It is not usual for me to appear at the table so early in the voyage...since all my energies and attention must be devoted to the affairs of the ship. But...I never have been able to so swiftly and effectively dispose of them...On a ship, no detail is trivial; the slightest laxity at any given point may lead to the gravest consequences. (p. 108)

One of the Germans at the table, Professor Hutten, a former master of a German school in Mexico, was instrumental in instilling this type of order upon the German school children. When Professor Hutten saw the results of his discipline, the products of his life labors, the school children in their uniforms and with their good manners, he wished that "the whole world might be so orderly, so well arranged." (p. 86) He even extended this obsession to dumb animals; upon his dog Bebe's feeble attempt to obey the command to "attack," Hutten exclaimed to his wife, "Ah Käthe, how blood and training do form and sustain character." (p. 87)

Besides their reverence for order, the Germans shared a belief in their racial superiority. Because of this race pride, they abhorred association with the Jew Löwenthal, were scornful of the "mongrelized" Americans (p. 88) and were appalled by the frivolity, the swartheness and the immorality

of the Latins. So obsessed were they by their fear of contamination from a "lower" type of impure race, that they found it necessary to expel Freytag from their honored table, because he was "married to a Jew."

Freytag, in marrying Mary, believed that he had been able to "throw off stupid prejudices." (p. 72) He had rejected his heritage and tradition because of his great love for his wife. Although he spoke about her often, while traveling alone, he preferred to keep her Jewishness secret. She used to remark, "It's so strange that you never meet any Jews when you travel alone!" He would maintain that he made no Jewish friends because they "drew a line and refused association and friendship." (p. 136) Freytag could neither find identity with the Germans, for they would not accept Mary, nor with the Jews, who hated all Goyim. His life had in fact been one of constant exile. Upon this realization, suddenly, in a manner similar to the experience of the protagonist in "That Tree," all of his tradition and heritage rose up in him and his pride sickened.

What a shameful existence for any man, what a doubly shameful existence for a German! No matter what he might say for the sake of politeness about his mixture of nationalities, he knew he was altogether German, a legitimate son of that powerful German strain able to destroy all foreign bloods in its own veins and make all pure.

German once more;...Mary? You are no longer a Jew, but the wife of a German; our children's blood will flow as pure as mine, your tainted stream will be cleansed in their German veins. (p. 136-137)

In a moment, a fraction of a second, his "whole life split apart" when he admitted to himself that Mary "looked Jewish." He lamented, "What have I done to us both, Mary...what shall I do now?" (p. 141)

Besides its use in demonstrating the power of tradition and heritage and in exposing the anxieties and shortcomings of individuals, cultural conflict in and for itself becomes a theme in Ship of Fools. Not only are the pretenses and failures of the separate passengers exposed in the chance conversations, awkward situations and shabby incidents of the voyage, but also the delusions and insufficiencies of whole cultures. By the juxtaposition of German and Latin cultures, polarities in Western civilization, Porter presents the problem of cultural conflict.

The long-winded Professor Hutten, in his attitude toward the group of Cuban medical students, is the mouthpiece for the German feeling of intellectual superiority over all cultures, especially that of the Latin. That Cuban students could show any intellect at all was difficult for him to believe because they were, after all, savage and base. He

was appalled by the way they "bandied about the noble, the revered names of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant...besides lesser yet still venerable names such as Shakespeare and Dante." He lamented that the Cuban students had

No reverence...no proper humility in the presense of greatness--these were the failings of all the non-Nordic races, Iberian, Latin, Gallic especially; indeed, friivolity was endemic among them, a plague they had carried with them to the whole New World, truly appalling in its lack of intellectual sobriety. (p. 330)

Professor Hutten felt that he "could despair once for all of the whole human race if there did not remain a revival of the old Germanic spirit." (p. 331) Professor Hutten's theory was that the Cuban students were examples of "naturally base minds incapable of the higher understanding, exposed to education above their capacities...They were unable to endure, indeed they hated the very thought of nobility or greatness on any plane." (p. 331)

The Germans, from time to time on the voyage, were shocked by the lack of modesty in the Latins. Frau Rittersdorf, representing this gentility, was revolted by a particular scene at Tenerife, an island in the Canaries, where the Vera docked for a day. As she was methodically writing in her notebook, she watched the native men, women and children and animals going about their business and thought, "What had such

poor tired-looking beings to live for?" Sitting on the ground near her was a native woman nursing her baby. The baby was fat, and she thought it "should have been weaned months ago"; as the baby suckled and kicked in bliss at the woman's "great naked breast with its brown nipple big as a thumb," the mother ate "voraciously of onions, tomatoes, sausages...." This sight so repelled Frau Rittersdorf that she stopped writing. And, as she watched,

...the baby climbed out of [his mother's] lap, and stood up. He wore a single dirty shirt that reached barely to his navel. He squared himself off on his feet and spread legs, his infant male tassel rose and pointed acutely skywards and a very energetic spout of water ascended in a glittering arc, pattering in the dust not three feet from Frau Rittersdorf's immaculate light-colored shoes...The mother pulled him back...smiled gaily at Frau Rittersdorf and called out with pride, "Es hombre, de veras!--He's a man, all right"--as if that explained everything and made it a happy secret among women. (p. 368-369)

Frau Rittersdorf, almost fainting, stood up and backed away quickly, drawing in her skirt and then walked away "in a chill of horror...." (p. 369)

The order and the discipline of the German passengers, the restraint and contempt for disorder and sensuality, was most apparent in Captain Thiele. Throughout the voyage he was conscious of the Spanish migrant workers in the steerage; he felt them a threat to his authority and discipline, feared

they would create a disturbance; He was so obsessed by this thought that at one point in the voyage he gave an order for the confiscation of all of their weapons. Most of the time he pretended they didn't exist. However, one particular evening during his routine tour of the ship, he was attracted by the sounds of singing and dancing in the steerage. As he looked down at the scene in the steerage, he noticed that the people had brought "not clothing or household gear in their bundles but battered guitars and decrepit accordions, and numerous worn leather dice boxes and ragged packs of cards." (p. 212) The Captain, listening to their singing, guitar playing and foot tapping, felt "something in those savage rhythms that moved the blood, even against all efforts of the will"; he recognized this activity in the steerage as

the perpetual resistance of the elemental forces of darkness and disorder against the very spirit of civilization--that great Germanic force of life in which...Science and Philosophy moved hand in hand ruled by Christianity. Gazing downward, he despised these filthy cattle....(p. 213)

The conflict between the Germans and the Latins reached a climax during the last few days of the voyage. The zarzuela company, the eight Spanish singers and dancers who had, throughout the trip, demonstrated their contempt for the Captain and the other German passengers, suddenly decided

to stage a fiesta. By ridicule and bribes members of the zarzuela company managed to sell a ticket to almost every passenger. At the fiesta, in pretense of honoring the Captain, they seated themselves at his table. The German passengers were outraged and the Captain could hardly believe the event was real; never had his authority been usurped. The whole evening turned into a complete fiasco. When the dancing started, the Spanish cruelly parodied the German style of waltzing. The drawing for prizes, paid for by the ticket sales, was a farce.

When the passengers finally realized that they had been completely "taken" they sought some kind of explanation, some reason for the sinister event. Frau Schmitt said of the zarzuela company,

...those people should be denounced and punished. But who would denounce them? And to what authority? Who would listen to her? She had troubles enough, griefs enough, she could not bear the thought of one more piece of neglect from anybody about anything. This was a terrible, evil world and she was helpless in it. (p. 388)

And Arne Hansen declared that the fiesta was "...crooked... look at these Spaniards! You know they are whores and pimps, nobody wants their party--but here we are. We all pay and we all go, like sheep! They blackmail, they cheat, they lie, they steal...and everybody sees [this] and knows--what

do we do? Nothing." (p. 395) Jenny, a young American artist, said to David, "...I think this whole thing is wild and everything about it is crooked, we both know it; but I don't understand why, if you know it is all so wrong, you didn't do something about it...." (p. 414)

Not only during the evening of the "fiesta" but also throughout the voyage the passengers on the Vera underwent similar humiliations and frustrations. In the port town, Veracruz, before the ship embarked, the travelers saw each other being thwarted by the customs officials, confused by the strange language, and fleeced temporarily of their dignity and precious material possessions. Witnessing this, however, did not at all serve to lessen their mutual hostility and suspicion or cause them to admit anything in common. Rather they each "preferred to retain their separateness, their pride." And, after the harassing twenty-seven day voyage, during which they were all, in turn, beset by loneliness and dejection, subjected to insults and moral turpitude, the passengers still admitted no common ties. As the ship approached its destination, and the passengers prepared to disembark, their "eyes met eyes again vaguely, almost without recognition and no further speech." (p. 472) The voyagers were "not interested in anything others might say--their minds

were closing in and folding up once more around their own concerns, their only common hope being to leave the ship ...and to take up their...separate lives once more." (p. 472)

The Germans on the ship, despite their feelings of intellectual, racial and moral superiority over the "low" type cultures of the other passengers, found themselves ridiculed and wronged from the beginning to the end of the voyage. Their strict self-discipline, respect for order, was of no use in making the passage enjoyable. During the voyage, the only significant action effected by the Germans was the expulsion of Freytag from their honored table, an act which symbolized and reinforced a belief in their mutual superiority. Most incidents of the voyage were initiated by the Latins. These Latins sang and danced, entertained and laughed; they also thieved, swore, debased and exploited. The Germans were repelled by and scandalized at the Latin immorality, immodesty, disorder and disrespect for "higher" things in life. In turn, Latins ridiculed and insulted the Germans for their dull ways and out-manoeuvered them at every opportunity. The fear the Germans had of these "forces of darkness and disorder" might have been greater had not the Germans, in the person of Captain Thiele, been in command of the ship. As Professor Hutten proposed, the German security

rested in the fact that they were, "...after all, all good Germans together." (p. 472)

While the Vera was docking at Bremerhaven, the Germans looked out over the roofs of the town, and were "filled...with generous feelings--their hearts beat freely...with the illusion of joy; all mysteriously entranced as if they approached a lighted altar...the holy earth of their Fatherland." (p. 473) But, ironically, this, the Fatherland, the Germans' refuge from the inferior peoples and gross disorder of the world, was on the brink of sustaining one of the most regimented, terrifying and dehumanizing forces in Western civilization. The passengers, these ineffectual individuals--the bitterly lonely and sentimental Frau Schmitt, the poverty-fearing Frau Rittersdorf, Professor Hutten who held the deluded precept of the revival of the German spirit as the "only hope for civilization," Freytag, haunted by the fear that his wife might "taint" his children's blood, and the Captain, with his obsession for authority and power--all of these people were to become helplessly swept into the torrent of destruction.

Ship of Fools, as well as "The Leaning Tower," demonstrates Porter's concern with international culture. In "The Leaning Tower," the Europeans, with their consciousness of the past, the hatred and wrongs remembered over the centuries,

are contrasted to the American, Charles Upton, who is shocked by their cynical outlook upon world affairs. And, in Ship of Fools, William Denny, an American, with his provincialism, his limited outlook emanating from the regional prejudices of his hometown, Brownsville, Texas, is shown to be unable to communicate with people of various cultures.

In her effort to achieve some understanding of the calamity that befell Europe, Porter examines certain character traits of German types. In "The Leaning Tower" Porter examines the Germans in the context of their own society, familiar to them yet ominous to the outsider. In Ship of Fools Porter presents these similar types against an alien background, one which throws their character into bold relief. The worship of order, race pride aggressive to the point of cruelty and yet an underlying feeling of inferiority, produce, in Porter's view, that psychic state which a messianic leader was to understand and play upon so cunningly.

## CONCLUSION

Katherine Anne Porter uses cultural conflict both as a technique through which she can portray characters vividly by the use of contrast and as a central theme important and interesting in itself. By placing an individual in a situation in which he is alienated from his own culture or attempting to cope with another, she penetrates into character by exposing the individual's illusions divested of their reassuring backgrounds. By portraying individuals who have attempted in vain to reject their cultures, she demonstrates the powerful influence of traditions and heritage. Furthermore, in her attempt to understand man, she examines the extent to which culture effects the vision that a person has of the world beyond his culture.

In her stories of the South which treat rebellion from within a culture, in her stories of Mexico which treat primitivism as experienced by Mexicans and longed for by Americans, and in her cosmopolitan novel and stories which rehearse the mutual hatreds of Americans, Latin Americans and Europeans, Porter presents a paradox and a dilemma. Culture is both strengthening and weakening.

Although all of Porter's characters are highly individualized, they represent collectively the force of cultures. Furthermore certain similarities can be found among them in their reactions to their own or another society. For instance, the Grandmother, Maria Concepción, and Mr. Thompson, as well as William Denny, Captain Thiele and Professor Hutten, act as embodiments of the traditions of their respective cultures; whereas, other individuals for private reasons feel compelled to reject their societies and thus incur self-imposed isolation: such are Miranda, Laura, Mrs. Treadwell and La Condesa.

The power of traditions and heritage as they influence behavior is shown nowhere more clearly than in individuals who attempt to substitute the values and ideas of another culture in place of their own. Porter shows the futility of attempts to deny one's past in the portrayal of Laura, the protagonist in "That Tree," and Wilhelm Freytag. And there are those individuals who find themselves temporarily and uncomfortably surrounded by a culture whose values and customs they cannot understand. Miriam, Kennerly and Charles Upton longed to be back in their familiar backgrounds.

In Ship of Fools Porter contrasts not only individuals but two polarities of culture, German and Latin, as represented

by many individuals; in this way the dominant characteristics of both are sharpened to the view. However, Porter not only points out the contrasts between these two cultures but also the similarities of these and all individuals in their attitudes of condescension, hostility, distrust and contempt of all people of different nationalities, all people they cannot understand. The reaction of all the passengers towards the indignities they suffered at the hands of the zarzuela company is, "Why didn't somebody do something about it?" Porter's explanation of the triumph of evil is perhaps best expressed in the words of Schumann, the German doctor, in answer to Professor Hutten's statement that the problem of good and evil was insoluble.

I am a poor sinner...it takes a strong character to be really evil. Most of us are too slack, half-hearted, or cowardly--luckily, I suppose. Our collusion with evil is only negative, consent by default...the criminal commits the deeds we only dream of doing! Imagine if the human race were really divided into embattled angels and invading devils--no, it is bad enough as it is...with nine-tenths of us half asleep and refusing to be waked up. (p. 286)

Porter portrays the individual's need for culture; culture provides identity, sanctions actions, reinforces values, provides a fixed order of things, and in doing all this protects the individual. An individual who is isolated, alienated from society walks about in constant disquiet, guilt and fear of

evil. However, it is this very protective shell of culture which promotes social insularity and prevents people from understanding, from communicating with each other, and from helping each other in the face of catastrophes. Porter's dual view of culture, the necessity for it in terms of human needs for identity and security, and yet the liabilities of it as the force which seals people from human contacts beyond their own groups, this dilemma is basic to Porter's view of a darkened Western society.

## APPENDIX I

### Chronological Order of the Publication of Porter's Short Stories

- 1922 "Maria Concepción"  
1923 "The Martyr"  
1924 "Virgin Violeta"  
1928 "Rope"  
1930 "Flowering Judas"  
    "He"  
    "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"  
    "Magic"  
    "Theft"  
1932 "The Cracked Looking-Glass"  
    "Hacienda"  
1934 "That Tree"  
1935 "The Grave"  
    "The Circus"  
1936 "The Old Order"  
1937 "Old Mortality"  
    "Noon Wine"  
1938 "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"  
1939 "The Downward Path to Wisdom"  
1940 "A Day's Work"  
1941 "The Leaning Tower"  
1944 "The Source"  
    "The Witness" \*  
    "The Last Leaf" \*  
1960 "The Fig Tree" \*\*  
    "Holiday"

\* These appeared earlier, in 1935, under the title "Two Plantation Portraits," Virginia Quarterly Review, XI (January), 85-92.

\*\* This was written by Porter, in 1935, to be included in The Leaning Tower and Other Stories (1944); however, the manuscript was misplaced.

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