Constructing Identities
Ethnicity and Race in Katherine Anne Porter

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Abbreviations

Beinecke  The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University.
Hornbake  Hornbake Library. Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.

The numbers indicate the reelnumbers and frame-numbers respectively of the microfilm edition of Katherine Anne Porter’s personal papers.

Note: For the sake of completeness I have included in my quotations Katherine Anne Porter’s ellipses in her letters and notes. Other ellipses are placed between square brackets.
Introduction

In a highly critical book review Katherine Anne Porter wrote in 1926 of D.H. Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent* she accused Lawrence of being unable to invade the mystery of indigenous people of Mexico: “His Indians are merely what the Indians might be if they were all D.H. Lawrences” (*CE* 425). This review is an early example of Porter’s concern with ethnic and racial issues. The topic is not only found in her own Mexican work, but recurs in her later fictional, non-fictional and personal writings. Her preoccupation with ethnic and racial identity in her later work is revealed in her views of Jews, Germans and African Americans. She draws different portraits of Mexican Indians and Jews dependent on whether or not she sees them from a political point of view. Her notions of Germans after the rise of Nazism in the early 1930s and her views of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s changed from sympathy into ethnic and racial prejudice.

My study of Porter’s ethnic and racial attitudes aims to contribute to the critical debate about her attitude towards and representation of ethnic and racial difference. The debate started around the 1960s after the publication of her novel *Ship of Fools* and gained momentum in the 1990s in the wake of the culture wars. Before the 1960s there was hardly any debate on Porter’s views of ethnic and racial groups. Scholars generally praised her notions of Mexican Indians in her Mexican work published in the 1920s and 1930s.

After the publication of *Ship of Fools* in 1962, however, a controversy started about Porter’s representation of the Germans and the Jew aboard the ship. Some scholars in the 1960s and 1970s accused Porter of anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred. Theodore Solotaroff, for example, argues that Löwenthal, the Jew is “coldly reduced to an abstract tribal paranoia.” ¹ Lodwick Hartley contends

that “the Jew, Herr Julius Löwenthal, tends (perhaps unexpectedly but quite in keeping with the author’s plan) to be anything but a sympathetic character.” Sybille Bedford regards the novel as both anti-German and anti-Semitic: “Did the only Jew on board have to be such an utter wretch? did he have to trade in rosaries?” Jon Spence, however, argues that the ethnic hatred of some characters in the novel is qualified by satirical purposes:

From the beginning of the novel Miss Porter sets the various nationalities one against the other in encounters which are thinly veiled expressions of hatred. Within the groups of each nationality there is conflict between people of different social and economic strata, different regions, different ethnic and religious backgrounds […]. Miss Porter’s satire, by showing prejudice from two opposite angles, transcends the topical, shopworn outrage against anti-Semitism and becomes an attack on human beings who forget the humanity of their fellow-men.

Spence’s reading is supported by an undated note in which Porter describes her novel as

a picture of the human condition, and not a pretty one. Mexican newly-weds, the painters, divorcee, doctor, Condesa, young mother behave with some circumspection and might be admitted, at least periodically, to decent society. But the rest of them fill this “Ship of Fools” with fools and worse, from two criminal youngsters to the dying old German who believes he has healing power yet nearly drives his nephew to murder. The agitator eggs on the Catholics. The captain, the publisher and his girl and the ship’s officers hound the Jew (Hornbake 83-0779).

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As Spence argues, an important target of Porter’s satirical “picture of the human condition” is the hatred among the passengers of different nationalities. Although Spence’s interpretation of the book as a satire is convincing, I shall argue that Ship is not only a satirical but partly also a political novel in which the anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred are exposed from a political viewpoint.

In the 1990s Porter’s representations of and ideas about African Americans came to be the subject of critical attention in connection with her anti-Semitism. In her biography of Porter Joan Givner argues that Porter’s “comments in the margins of some of her books show that her virulent anti-Semitism was part of a general racism.” Givner sees ambivalence, however, in Porter’s attitudes in Ship of Fools: “She could not depict a likable Jewish character and yet the book consciously shows the irrational, mindless, dangerous nature of such prejudice and, by implication, its devastating course toward the Holocaust.” Robert Brinkmeyer contends that the views of African Americans Porter publicly expressed in the Richmond News Leader in 1958 “barely mask an ugly racism that was now an important part of Porter’s thinking and that was not unlike that which characterized Nazi thought. Toward Jews and blacks her racism was most virulent.” In her intellectual biography of Porter Janis Stout argues that “in earlier years [Porter] sometimes expressed sympathy toward blacks […]. As she grew older her racial attitudes hardened […].” Stout contends that “unfortunately, [Porter’s] acquaintance with the wider world, or at least the Western European portion of it, also developed in her a pervasive pattern of ethnic prejudice.” Discussing Porter’s manuscript for a story on lynching Stout observes that:

The view of the South presented in “The Man in the Tree” [an unfinished story about lynching] is obviously very different from the one Porter espoused in many of her letters as well as in published essays and stories. It might reasonably be regarded as a view that she tried to keep repressed, that

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reflected deep-seated feelings of guilt for her participation in racial injustice and for misrepresenting both the South she knew and her own place in it [...]. The notion of group guilt is one that she would reject in connection with the persecution of Jews and other groups in Nazi Germany [...]. One would like to believe that the views expressed in this uncompleted manuscript represent, in some respects, Porter’s real racial attitudes; that she understood that the system of racial prejudice and injustice evident in her sometimes-beloved South was indeed injustice and that all who participated in it, whether actively or passively, shared a real measure of guilt.\footnote{Janis Stout, \textit{Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995), 132, 110, 137.}

While Stout points to the contrast between Porter’s racial attitude in the unfinished story and her racial views expressed in her letters, essays and stories, Jan Nordby Gretlund unequivocally regards the lynching story valuable for showing “Porter’s compassion at a time in her life when she did not yet take the preponderance of evil for granted.” Gretlund argues that “the notes for this story read like a contribution to later debates on integration, and I always felt it was unfortunate that she chose not to finish it.” He concludes that the existence of the manuscript “should not be forgotten, and scholars should be allowed to quote readily from this text so full of hideous images of racism, especially from the passages that dispel any accusation of racism against Katherine Anne Porter.”\footnote{Jan Nordby Gretlund, “‘The Man in the Tree’: Katherine Anne Porter’s Unfinished Lynching Story,” \textit{The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South} 31. 3 (Spring 1993): 7, 15.}

Don Graham also sees in Porter’s stories of the South sympathetic representations of blacks: “\textit{The Old Order} grants a common humanity to black and white alike, and avoids both the stereotype of ‘darkies’ that characterizes the Confederate apologists and the other kind of stereotype that elevates blacks into pure victims or pure emblems of good. And in these stories, through compression, which is the essence of Porter’s art, she is able to tell more about black-white connectedness in the South than have many volumes of fiction and nonfiction written from the most sympathetic viewpoint.
and with the best intentions."9

My contribution to the critical debate is a systematic study of Porter’s notions of ethnicity and examines her representations of indigenous Mexicans, Chinese, Germans, Jews, and African Americans. Reading her work side by side with her personal papers, now on microfilm, I found that Porter’s personal papers help to shed light on the influence of her political convictions on her ethnic and racial attitudes. As we shall see, from an early age on Porter was interested in politics and liked to write about her political views in her work and personal papers. Though her political thinking develops from a radical stance into a more conservative point of view, Porter’s insistence on freedom, her social engagement, her liberalism, and her fear of political power are found throughout her fictional, non-fictional and personal writings. These views can be traced in her notions of ethnicity and race.

Studies that discuss Porter’s ethnic and racial attitudes do not cover her notions of ethnicity and race in depth. My study then intends to discuss more fully her representation of ethnic and racial identities in the context of her political convictions. I have examined the causes of the change in her views. For example, though Porter generally showed sympathy for the Indians and admired their art, her insistence on freedom and social engagement with the oppressed indigenous people of Mexico resulted in the representation of Indians as victims of oppression in her political inspired work. In a similar way Porter’s portraits of Germans, Jews and African Americans change when affected by her political and ideological views. In my distinguishing between the terms “ethnicity” and “race,” I have drawn on the views of the literary critic Werner Sollors and the sociologists Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann.

In Theories of Ethnicity Werner Sollors points out that “most commonly [...] ethnicity is not defined and discussed ‘as such’ but in relation to other concepts and terms.” Tracing the origins of the word “race,” Sollors points out that “the word ‘race’ is several centuries older than ‘ethnicity,’ the term that was intended to substitute for

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‘race’ at a time that the older word had become deeply compromised by ‘racism’ [...]” Sollors concludes that, it is useful to distinguish between the two terms because “a categorical refusal to find any possible relationship between ethnicity and race—even if that relationship should turn out to make ‘race’ an aspect of ‘ethnicity’—does not seem promising as a program of scholarship.”

Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, too, argue that “ethnicity” and “race” are “slippery” definitions and point to the diversity in the interpretations of the terms: “Why is ethnicity one thing here, another there, and both things somewhere else?” In their view “an ethnic group cannot exist in isolation. It has meaning only in a context that involves others [...]”. Like other contemporary scholars, Cornell and Hartmann dismiss the idea of “race” as a biological distinction because “physical differences are seldom consistently apparent.” They point out, however, that “despite the lack of a biological basis for the conception of distinct human races, race still wields monumental power as a social category. In many societies, the idea of biologically distinct races remains a fixture in the popular mind, a basis of social action, a foundation of government policy, and often a justification for distinctive treatment of one group by another.”

Following these three scholars I shall distinguish between the two terms in my discussion of Porter’s perceptions of ethnicity and race. Porter herself used the term “race” in her representations of not only African Americans, but also of the Chinese and Mexican Indians. Although she wonders what the Jews are to be called, “a race, a nation, a religious body,” she often sees them as “typically Jewish in appearance,” which in Sollors’s view means “race” in the “physical” and “visible” sense. The term “ethnicity” does not occur in Porter’s work and personal papers because it became common usage only much later. As Sollors points out, “in the 1970s, ‘ethnicity’ was still perceived as a new word that sent scholars to their dictionaries.”

Porter adopted different attitudes towards ethnic and racial

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groups, but in a political context she generally focused on group identity. In her encounter with indigenous people of Mexico in the 1920s political factors influenced her perceptions of the Indians she observed. As Cornell and Hartmann argue, “racial categories are not natural categories that human beings discover […] People determine what the categories will be, fill them up with human beings, and attach consequences to membership in those categories.”

Porter constructed the identity of indigenous people of Mexico as a poor and oppressed people in her politically inspired essays and stories of this time. In this part of her Mexican work she proves to be an observer, who is influenced by her leftist political convictions. For example, in an early essay her report of “downtrodden” Indian pilgrims appears to differ from a more favorable description written by another reporter of the same pilgrimage. As we shall see, she put the Indians in a different category in her non-political Mexican work, for example in her short story “María Concepción.”

In a similar way Porter perceived group identity when she observed German ethnic groups in a political context. Her representation of an unassimilated German settlement in Texas in 1912 in her story “Holiday” (1960) differs from her later, politically informed characterization of Germans from the early 1930s on. In “Holiday” the ethnic group is perceived as a hardworking German family, whose only diversion is their Sunday outing to the Turnverein. The relatively short description of the gathering, with its music and dancing, corresponds with Kathleen Neils Conzen’s analysis of German festive culture. Conzen argues that “if German-American festive culture was to survive, its rituals of celebration had to serve not only as ends in themselves but also as a means of bonding the group together and defending its culture from outside attack by creating a more positive image for it.”

However short Porter’s description of the Turnverein is, some of the other facets of the bonding mentioned by Conzen, such as music, the love of nature and the prevailing Gemütlichkeit are used by Porter to define the ethnic identity of the group she portrays. As in Ship of Fools, Porter as the narrator is the

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observer. Cornell and Hartmann argue that “ethnicity is a matter of contrast. To claim an ethnic identity (or to attempt to assign one to someone else) is to distinguish ourselves from others; it is to draw a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ [...].” In Ship, Porter as narrator creates a boundary between herself and both the sympathizers with Nazism and their Jewish victim.

In chapter 5 I shall elaborate on Porter’s use of satire in her partly political novel to ridicule Nazism and to warn against anti-Semitism. As Sollors points out in Beyond Ethnicity, “Laughing at others is a form of boundary construction and can be cruel, not only on an individual level. Humor may help to create serious collective boundaries, too. Anti-Armenian jokes in Turkey or anti-Jewish jokes in Nazi Germany served to support genocidal politics.” Porter used humor for the opposite purpose in her satirical caricatural portrayals of some of the characters in the novel to reveal the danger of Nazism.

Porter again draws a line between “us” and “them” in her representation of the only Jew aboard the ship. Her critique of the idea of a chosen people is expressed by the Jew’s insistence on his chosenness. Max Weber points out that “the idea of a chosen people derives its popularity from the fact that it can be claimed to an equal degree by any and every member of the mutually despising groups [...].” I shall show that the mutual hatred between the Jew and some of the proto-Nazis resulted from a sense of belonging to “a chosen people” on both sides.

Distinguishing between consent and descent in American culture, Sollors argues that, while “American identity is often imagined as volitional consent, as love and marriage,” ethnicity is imagined as “seemingly immutable ancestry and descent.” I shall point out that Sollors’s argument applies also to one of the characters in Ship. Being married to a Jewess, the proto-Nazi Freytag struggles with the conflict between what Sollors would call his consent and his descent.

Elaborating on his theory of consent and descent Sollors argues that “America is a country which, from the times of Cotton Mather to the present, has placed great emphasis on consent at the expense of descent definitions. The widely shared public bias against

15 Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, Ethnicity and Race, 20.
hereditary privilege [...] has strongly favored *achieved* rather than *ascribed* identity.” However, as Sollors points out, the consent-focused culture “also *produced*—not inherited—segregation, one of the most sharply formulated systems of descent-based discrimination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Sollors points out that “one can view the emergence of legalized segregation in a country of consent as a paradox […]. It was not the hereditary privilege of aristocratic blue blood but the culturally constructed supposed liability of black blood that mattered most in the United States.”

Sollors’s argument of the paradox can be applied to Porter’s views of segregation in her later notions of African Americans. As I shall discuss, Porter shared the prejudices of those of her time after *Brown*.

Dietmar Schirmer argues that

> racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, as aggressive and exclusive practices of the ascription of group characteristics, are only adequately analyzed as a function of collective identity. Collective identity, whether it refers to nation, race, or culture, always depends on the distinction between in-groups and out-groups. The borders may be more or less permeable, but they nevertheless are borders.

I shall argue that in contrast to her sympathetic representations of individual African Americans in the 1930s, after *Brown* and in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement Porter’s racial prejudice is found in her perceptions of African Americans as “a collective identity” to whom she ascribed “group characteristics.”

Porter’s early portrait of African Americans in the previously mentioned manuscript which describes the aftermath of a lynching in a small Southern community is an example of her sympathetic views of African Americans around the mid-1930s. In his analysis of racial violence in the South W. Fitzhugh Brundage discusses the role of class in the different explanations of the phenomenon of lynchings scholars have offered since the 1920s and 1930s. Brundage argues that “the work of recent scholars has reasserted the importance of class dynamics in the rural economy and the role of coercion in the

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17 *Beyond Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors, 132, 151, 37, 38.
perpetuation of the economic and political power of white rural elites.” It is precisely “class” with which the white protagonist in Porter’s notes for a lynching story struggles. Aware of the “never-ending wrong,” she is faced with the dilemma between observing the code of behavior for a southern white lady and her compassion with the blacks in the community.

In much of Porter’s work set in Mexico, Germany and in the South, her notions of ethnicity and race are expressed by a strong and independent female protagonist who rejects oppression and resists power. I shall point to the contrast between her views of indigenous people of Mexico as an oppressed people and her admiration of them she expressed in the portrayals of strong females. In a similar way I shall point to the contrast between her sympathetic representation of the German immigrant matriarch in her story “Holiday” and her later views of Germans in Germany that mainly resulted from her fear of power. As I shall argue, in her stories of the South in the collection “The Old Order” it is the white grandmother and her former African American slave Nannie that give their views on oppression of women and blacks. Jane Flanders points out that these stories provide a way of approaching Porter as a woman writer. Like Faulkner—also writing about the Southern past in the mid-1930s—Porter takes as her subject the artificiality and inhumanity of the Old Order, presenting it from the standpoint of the woman’s experience. While Faulkner emphasizes slavery and racial injustice, Porter takes as her subject the rigidly circumscribed experience and sexual repression of the white Southern woman—kept like the blacks in submission and fear by the doctrines, taboos and social realities of a paternalistic culture. This theme is not restricted to Porter’s stories of her native South. The theme of woman’s oppression, especially emotional and sexual inhibition, may be found in everything she wrote.20

Porter’s sometimes extensive correspondence with her husbands and lovers confirms what Flanders calls “the theme of woman’s

oppression.” Porter desired love and security in her relations, but at the same time she feared male oppression. As I shall point out, often there is a relationship between Porter’s sense of being oppressed and her ethnic and racial views.

For primary source material I have drawn on the large body of Porter’s personal papers stored at and microfilmed by the University of Maryland at College Park. The letters and notes I have studied gave me an insight into Porter’s political convictions and her notions of ethnicity and race. As Stout argues that, “not only does the Porter Collection there [College Park] provide material for biographical study of her life and achievement, but it offers quite tangible evidence why such biographical study is worthwhile. Her correspondence with so many of the people who made the cultural and literary history of the century in the United States is both the evidence and the medium of her place in their ranks.”21 I found that though some of her letters are apparently written to fit the addressees’ views, other recipients were her evident havens of security to whom she wrote spontaneously.22 The extensive correspondence she kept up with some of her good friends, lovers and husbands is revealing and contains “most of my real record” as she wrote in her letter of 21 October 1955 to Donald Elder (Hornbake 20-0484). Her letters to, for example, one of her husbands Eugene Pressly, her friend Josephine Herbst, the editor Donald Elder, the author Glenway Wescott, and her sister Gay supply material for understanding her personality. In one of her letters to her nephew Paul, dated 13 October 1952, Porter sees letter writing as “personal messages standing instead of talk between two persons who are not arguing, or trying to convert each other to anything [...]” (Hornbake 52-0793). In a letter to her sister Gay, dated 25 August 1952, she gives a plausible excuse for writing letters instead of writing fiction: “I have often been reminded by friends, and also thought of it myself vaguely, that if I had written my books instead of writing all these letters all those years, I should have at least a five-foot shelf of

21 Janis Stout, Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times, 11.

22 Stout argues that through her letters to “the figurative ‘home’ that her long-time friends constituted for her, she could maintain ties of security and continuity while also maintaining her freedom of exploration.” Janis Stout, “Writing Home: Katherine Anne Porter, Coming and Going,” Southwestern American Literature 24.1 (Fall 1998): 13.
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my own by now. Maybe so, but I cannot keep books with human feelings like that, a kind of you-owe-me and I-owe-you.” She sees her letters rather as offerings: “nobody owes you letters and you don’t owe anybody letters—I am still of the old-fashioned opinion that letters are offerings, not a tax to be paid” (Hornbake 51-0389). Evidently she considers her letters, which express “human feelings,” as gifts to the readers.

In addition to her personal papers Porter’s marginalia in the copies of her books are a valuable source for examining her views. During her life Porter accumulated a library of thousands of books on a great variety of subjects. As an interested reader she reacted to what she read and made notes in the margin or at the top or bottom of the pages. In her interesting study of marginalia, H.J. Jackson points out that “most annotators appear to assume that there are just two parties, two ‘voices’ involved and that they (the annotators) are talking either to themselves or to the author.” Porter’s notes, too, were either addressed to herself or to the author, whom she sometimes emotionally addresses as, for example, “fool” or “smart boy.” In her less emotional notes Porter is not “talking” to the author but rather to herself or she just corrects the text. Sometimes her notes show her self-awareness and suggest that they were meant for a third party that would read her comments. For example, reacting to one of Henry James’s remarks that “I knew at least what I wanted then—to see something of the world,” Porter wrote in the margin of her copy of the book, “my father told me that when I was very small someone asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up. ‘I want to know the world’ I said and spread my fingers ‘as I know the palm of my hand!’”23 Jackson argues that “a marked or annotated book traces the development of the reader’s self-definition in and by relation to the text. Perhaps all readers experience this process; annotators keep a log. The reverse of the process happens when outsiders study marginalia for clues to the identity of the writer.”24 As the “outsider,” then, I have studied Porter’s notes in search for her moral and political views.

The discussion of Porter’s political convictions in chapter 1 is

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Introduction

intended to point to the relationship between her ethnic and racial attitudes and her political views that will be the focus of the chapters that will follow. Chapter 2 will deal with Porter’s engagement with the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution during her visits to Mexico in the 1920s. Her Mexican essays, sketches, and stories show her disillusionment with the Mexican Revolution, while at the same time expressing her love for the country and the Indian’s art. In the discussion of her politically inspired and her non-political Mexican work I shall point to the contrast in her views of the natives. Chapter 3 will examine her story “Holiday,” dealing with her visit to a German settlement in Texas in 1912. Comparing her early and later encounters with Germans in the early 1930s described in her personal papers, her story “The Leaning Tower” and her novel Ship of Fools, I shall discuss how Porter’s view was affected by her experiences in Germany. Her notions of African Americans shown in chapter 4, again reveal political influences. Her sympathetic portrayals of African Americans in her notes, her stories of the South, and her unfinished lynching story dating from the mid-1930s turn into prejudiced views as a southerner in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement. In chapter 5 I have not followed the chronological order I used for Porter’s views of Germans and African Americans. I included in this chapter my discussion of My Chinese Marriage written in Mexico in the early 1920s and compared the racial views in this ghostwritten story with the racism in Ship of Fools published forty years later. Porter’s ethnic and racial views seen from the perspective of her lifelong sense of justice will be discussed in chapter 6 in the interdisciplinary approach of Law- and-Literature studies.
Chapter 1
Porter’s Political Thinking

The political views Porter developed in the course of her life are inconsistent, and contradictory, and sometimes emotional. A coherent political analysis is, therefore, hard to find in her writings. Like those of so many of the intellectuals of her time her views shifted from left radical to a more conservative stance. The following chronological overview discusses the development of her political thinking and its influence on her notions of ethnicity and race.

During the greater part of her life Porter was politically engaged. On her travels she was a keen observer and occasionally participated in political action. As an observer of the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the rise of fascism in Germany in the early 1930s and in her own country the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, she made notes, wrote about her impressions in her letters, and often fictionalized her experiences in her published and unpublished work.

Already at an early age Porter was politically interested. When she was fifteen she was taken by her father to hear the socialist Eugene Debs in her native state of Texas and, as she wrote in one of an undated autobiographical note, she was then “converted to Socialism” (Hornbake 65-0376). Later she became a close observer of political situations. Her early interest in politics and socialism may have been the result of the political climate in Texas in which she grew up. Janis Stout points out that there was “significant Socialist party activity” in Texas during Porter’s formative years.1 When Porter heard Eugene Debs speak in Texas she was impressed. In her letter to Kenneth Durant, dated 30 March 1936, she writes that it was her father who took her to hear the famous socialist. Though he “had been a rather indifferent father,” she writes, she likes him “best now,” because he had given her at the age of fourteen philosophical and other books she could not yet understand, but he “expressed the urgent hope that this sort of reading might knock some of the nonsense out of me … I hope in the long, long run his hope was justified.” Porter realizes her father’s influence in the impressionable years of her life. Many years later, at the time of writing her letter, she

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1 Janis Stout, Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times, 42.
remembers that “the southern newspapers were still referring to him [Debs] as a raging, blood-thirsty monster of revolution” (Hornbake 20-0285).

The historian Howard Zinn points out that “what Debs accomplished was not in theory, or analysis, but in expressing eloquently, passionately, what people were feeling.” As a socialist Debs was a pacifist and opposed to America’s participation in World War I. Later, in 1918, he was arrested for disregarding the Espionage Act. Although there is no evidence of Debs’s influence Porter later often expressed her anti-war feelings. In part of her autobiographical story “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” first published in 1938 in Southern Review, she wrote about her experiences during World War I. The story focuses on the protagonist Miranda and her lover Adam, “a second Lieutenant in an Engineers Corps on leave” (CS 279), the Spanish influenza, Miranda’s illness, and her near-death. At the same time the story reveals Porter’s pacifism, her fear of aggressive salesmen of Liberty Bonds, and the suspicion she noticed. Describing the atmosphere she felt, Miranda says to Adam: “the worst of war is the fear and suspicion and the awful expression in all the eyes you meet […] It’s the skulking about, and the lying. It’s what war does to the mind and the heart […] (CS 294). The insistence on free speech in this part of the story is an important part of Porter’s political thinking and often recurs in her correspondence and some of her essays. As Zinn points out, there was no free speech: “the Espionage Act was used to imprison Americans who spoke or wrote against the war,” while “the newspapers helped create an atmosphere of fear for possible opponents of the war.” Evidently Porter’s experiences, which correspond with Zinn’s descriptions of the time, made a deep impression on her. In her letter of 3 August 1934 to Janice and Ford Madox Ford she remembers what she felt:

Somehow the twentieth anniversary of the war led me to get out several books by our celebrated author no--names--mentioned, to remind myself of what happened then. And I had an apostolic fervor to get out and hand them around on street-corners and say “Read about yesterday’s war, how it was run and what happened to people […] It appears the world is

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rolling up for another disaster (Hornbake 21-0194).

A few years later, while in New Orleans in 1937, she completed “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” to which she would often refer in her later correspondence and interviews. In her letter to the Fords she proves to be as concerned with political activism as she had been in Mexico in the early 1920s.

Apart from the evidence in “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” not much is known about Porter’s political notions until her arrival in Greenwich Village in October 1919. In a letter, hand-dated 1919, Porter wrote to her younger sister Mary Alice (Baby) from Denver, where at that time Porter was a reporter with the Rocky Mountain News, that she enjoyed the company of “famous painters and musicians, and singers and writers” she writes that she was saving money to travel to New York and Europe and intended “to get a magazine or newspaper connection” (Hornbake 50-0002). Her ambitious plans resulted in getting acquainted with a good many artists and leftist intellectuals in New York.

As a dissenter, Porter loved the company of her radical friends in the Village. In her long January 1920 letter to her family from Grove Street in Greenwich Village she mentions her activities in the months since she had come to live there. It is evident that she seeks the company of artists. She relates that her job is to “live around on the stage, watching the players work, and write all the news of the picture making for the publicity office,” and tells her family that at Christmas she had been to “an all-night party with a congenial crowd of artists, writers and editors” (Hornbake 51-0945).

In Greenwich Village Porter shared her friends’ interest in feminism which she already expressed in some of her stories of the early 1920s, such as “The Adventures of Hadji: A Tale of a Turkish Coffee House” (1920) and “María Concepción” (1922). The editors of Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter, in which the former story is included, point out that the story was “the first example of the mordant irony Porter musters to describe a wife’s triumph over her unfaithful husband, roughly the same plot Porter employed two years later in ‘María Concepción.’”3 During her first visit to Mexico in 1920 she became a convinced feminist. She attended a feminist meeting of

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Mexican women together with her friend Thorberg Haberman, and as is suggested by a note, she “enrolled as member, making the 79th member of the women’s party in Mexico.” In the membership book she noticed that “a large number of the members are teachers. They were all ages and kinds--one very brisk tiny creature with bobbed hair. She gave me a wordless smile of good fellowship when she saw my cropped poll--verily the only two in Mexico, I believe.” Evidently she was impressed hearing at the meeting that the chief of police paid salaries to some of the feminists, so “they may be economically free to devote all their time to the work. I guess this is the first time in history of woman suffrage they ever had any sort of official help” (Hornbake 79-0179). Though she later protested against being called a feminist, throughout her life she advocated women’s rights.

In Mexico in the early 1920s she was associated with political activists, and as she wrote in one of her undated notes, she was “in touch with idealistic revolutionists.” She became so involved that she feared deportation. In her notes dated 1st May 1921 under the heading “A month of uncertainties” she wrote that she had been warned to keep indoors and that a friend had come to tell her she was “on the list of candidates for deportation” (Hornbake 79-0254). From one of her notes, hand-dated 1921, appears her sense of social justice and her awareness of what she called “power politics.” She realized that the revolution was

a beginning, though halted in its advance by a thousand cruching (sic) forces from within and from without. Within there is the hideous ignorance of the poor lost darkened people, without the combined forces of politics diplomacy and money of the world. I realize more plainly than ever that war and conquests are great games played by a few powerful men, with all the lives of the little peoples as wagers (Hornbake 79-0183).

She thought that “the revolutionists are children, playing in the pit of a volcano. They cannot think beyond the border of their own union, and the outside world as a thing to be reckoned with does not exist for them” (Hornbake 79-0184). Probably her view that the Mexican Revolution had failed is one of the causes of a change in her political thinking.

It is evident that her engagement with the aftermath of the
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Revolution had trained her in observing political situations. In her “Author’s Apology” for Ship of Fools written at the artist’s colony Yaddo and dated May 1941, she remembered what she had been told in Mexico by “an experienced international adventurer” about an “interesting political movement” that was taking place in Italy in the 1930s and the threatening danger for “Old Europe.” Showing her fear of fascism, she writes: “We know now, of course, exactly how ‘interesting’ that movement was, and what has come of it” (Hornbake 83-0792).

While in Mexico and in Greenwich Village Porter shared her radical friends’ attraction to communism in the 1920s and early 1930s. In the 1920s she probably was for a short time assistant to Kenneth Durant, the editor of ROSTA (later Tass), the official Russian news agency and propaganda center in the United States. However, her interest in Communism did not result in a party membership. In Mexico in 1922 she attended a meeting of a group of artists who intended to start a Communist party, but she was not asked to become a member because “they did not trust me, and how right they were! Yet I tried sincerely not only to understand, but to believe […]” (Hornbake 82-0729). To her friend Josephine Herbst she wrote on 21 December 1931 that she had had plans to go to Russia already in 1917 to find out what communism was “from the inside, as a worker, before I jumped” (Beinecke). Porter did not jump. Her communist sympathies conflicted with her insistence on independence as an author. She wanted to write novels “without having to cut and distort my natural shape to fit some cut-and-dried political platform […] and if you’d ever worked with a Communist organization, as I have you’d spew them out,” as she wrote to Pressly (Hornbake 54-0847). Her views corresponded with those of her Village friends. Daniel Aaron argues that “few if any [of the radicals in Greenwich Village] were prepared to subordinate art to ideological formulas or to act as disciplined adherents of this party, no matter how revolutionary their feelings.” In her letter of 27 January 1931 to Allen Tate she strongly disagreed with Donald Davidson, one of the most fervent members of the Southern Agrarians, for giving up writing poetry and not trying to

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be independent as an artist:

Donald Davidson alleging a political and social crisis as his reasons for giving up poetry would make me gloomy if I had not already passed the gloom stage through irritation to cold fury on this subject [...] I think they are being disingenuous, to say the least, to pretend they are giving up art as a grand sacrifice to revolution [...] The artist who comprehends his time and the movement of the world in which he lives brings something better to it than mere agitations and controversy …He may join in these, but there is something beyond, and his value lies exactly in his sense of the beyondness [...] I am thoroughly sick of artists talking against arts (L. 29, 30).

In her memoir The Never-Ending Wrong, published in 1977 on the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Porter looks back at her encounter with communists when she participated in the marches staged in Boston in 1927 to protest against the imminent executions of Sacco and Vanzetti. An important aspect of the memoir is her feeling betrayed by those who used the protest for their own purposes, in particular the communists. Of the many groups in the demonstration, she was among a group that was headed by a fanatical woman “who talked an almost impenetrable jargon of party dogma.” From her further comments on this woman it is clear that she realized that the demonstration “had been agitated for and prepared for many years by the Communists. They had not originated the protest, I believe, but had joined in and tried to take over, as their policy was, and is.” In this same part of her memoir Porter mentions the shock she received when the leader of her group told her that Sacco and Vanzetti had better be executed: “who wants them saved? What earthly good would they do to us alive?” Porter’s aversion of the party and party discipline is particularly evident when she describes the woman’s anger with her brother who, in Porter’s presence, had dared to question part of the doctrine.

Throughout the memoir Porter stresses she felt betrayed by the role the communists played in the protest: “for by now I knew too well that this whole protest was the work of a complicated machine or a set of machines working together [...]” Eudora Welty argues that, in a confrontation, “Miss Porter’s characters, behaving so entirely like ourselves, make the fatally wrong choice. Enter betrayal. Again and
again, enter betrayal.” As Welty has pointed out, “Katherine Anne Porter’s moral convictions have given her readers another way to see.” As we shall see, the memoir is interesting because in it Porter explores in retrospect her political and moral thinking over a period of fifty years.

From the moment she felt betrayed she gave up her communist sympathies: “I flew off Lenin’s locomotive and his vision of history in a wide arc in Boston.” Notwithstanding her hatred of communism, however, on several occasions in the 1950s her insistence on free speech made her publicly protest against the communist witchhunts in the McCarthy era. She defended Elizabeth Ames, the Executive Director of Yaddo, who was accused of communist sympathies and refused to sign the oath of allegiance, as she wrote in 1951 to the President of Colorado State College: “I cannot possibly sign the oath of allegiance […]. My memory goes back easily thirty years to the time this law was passed in Colorado, in a time of war, fright and public hysteria being whipped up by the same kind of people who are doing this work now. Only now we’re worse for thirty years of world disaster” (L 394). In a letter of 11 May 1947 to the editor of The Nation she openly expressed her concern about “the drive against the Communists”: “It is quite true that strategic positions are occupied methodically by Communists […] You find them everywhere; they mean business and they are dangerous. But judging by the present drive against the Communists, I should say there are even more fascists in Public Office, or at least more powerfully placed” (CE 203).

Her letter to the editor is interesting because she not only defends free speech, but also shows her political views of this time. As we shall see, after her Berlin experience, in the 1940s and 1950s Porter often feared the rise of fascism in America. In her letter Porter wrote: “Both fascists and Communist have been strangely successful in persuading the liberals of this country that only a democracy has no right to defend itself from its enemies […]. I think the liberals had better clear their heads and look the situation in the face before they

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are driven underground” (CE 203). In a similar way she compares the fascism she had observed in Berlin with her impressions of a political debate on communism she had attended in Hollywood in 1947. In a satirical description she ridiculed the aggressive behavior of the authoritarian redbaiter and compared him with Hitler, “lifting his hands for the applause to begin, slapping them down on the table for it to cease. I hadn’t liked it then, and I still don’t. My early-American Jeffersonian-Democrat hackles rose” (CE 206). Though no longer a radical in her protests of the 1940s, she continued to stress free speech and feared American democracy was endangered by the threat of fascism.

During her stay in Berlin her resistance against oppression was strengthened. She was greatly worried about the political situation she observed and to her friends she sometimes emotionally wrote about the rising Nazism in Germany. For example, expressing her fear of Hitler and Goering she wrote to Herbst in a letter of 11 November 1933: “unless you had seen it you could not imagine what a hold Hitler and Goering had on the enormous middle class…Their rallies were like old fashioned Methodist camp meetings…They are holding the plebiscite, I think tomorrow, or very soon, which will deliver Germany absolutely into Hitler’s hands…” (Beinecke). In her correspondence she frequently mentioned a meeting with Goering at a dinner. In another letter to Herbst, dated 16 October 1933, she wrote about this meeting: “At long last, he began to tell me that he and Hitler were going to make world history within the next half-year, and remarked merely in passing that the Jews were the ruin of Germany, and that when the Hitler regime was established there would not be left a Jew in Germany with any economical or political or cultural power” (Hornbake 22-0517). She later expressed her outrage in her portrayals of some of the characters aboard the ship in Ship of Fools.

During and after World War II Porter was much concerned about fascism. For example, in a marginal note in her copy of a study

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7 As appears from a letter she wrote to her sister Gay on 7 September 1947, Porter took the opportunity to express again openly her fear of fascism. Porter wrote: “You know how I do love to write a political piece now and then, but there are very few places I can get anything published. The editor of this paper [Westwood Hill (Calif.) Press] called me suddenly and asked me to go with him to the Town Hall. He printed just what I wrote, every word” (Hornbake 50-0591). Her article was reprinted in Collected Essays.
on Germany and the war, she wrote: “the Nazi Party has survived though with different leaders under the favor of the Western Allies.” Porter saw fascism as one of the greatest dangers in world politics. In one of her undated political notes she declared that she was “completely ‘antifascist’ if that means being completely opposed to dictatorship, in all forms, under all names, and in all countries” (Hornbake 82-0732). Later she came to regard fascism and communism as identical. In a letter to Russell Lynes, dated 27 October 1947, Porter wrote: “I don’t like Communism any better than I like Fascism, to me they are the same thing, two fractions of totalitarians tossing red herrings about, keeping up the confusion which is their terrible weapon; but Fascism is the most dangerous because it comes more naturally to more kinds of people. One can hardly be a Communist and not know it, but Fascism grows out of unconsciousness and natural evil” (Hornbake 24-0284).

As she wrote to her friends, the editors Robert Penn Warren, Albert Erskine and Cleanth Brooks on 28 January 1942, she feared the rise of fascism in America would lead to the closing of the *Southern Review*: “My own opinion, and the general opinion, is that the University was none too generous, and that the *Southern Review* was accorded existence on very grudging terms … That it was under fire from the Fascist elements of the faculty and administration” (Hornbake 29-0061). In her letter of 23 December 1944 to her sister Gay she again expressed her concern with fascism and her distrust of America’s role in international politics towards the end of World War II:

> So get it straight, darling. The treatment of Greece is on a par with our treatment of the democratic elements in China, and of the anti-fascists in Italy who are being put down in their efforts to found a democratic government…It goes hand in hand with our keeping up friendly relations with Franco Spain, who is openly an ally of Nazi Germany […] You simply have to keep in mind that there is a Fascist movement here that we have to fight as we go. If you had time to read, I would send you some subscriptions to political weeklies that would help keep you straightened out (Hornbake 50-0443).

Porter’s anxiety about the political climate in America in the 1940s was not unfounded. Sollors points out that
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starting in the 1920s, accelerating in the 1930s, and intensifying
to its highest pitch in the years of World War II and the
beginning of the Cold War, a new international context
emerged that was of some significance [...]. It was the global
battle of the ideologies of fascism [...] that pulled American
writers into these new international constellations. These
constituted real lures for some intellectuals in the period, and
threats for others.

Sollors points to Mussolini’s *My Autobiography* (1928) that “was pitched
to an American reading public and was, in fact, not available in Italian
for the entire duration of fascist rule.” Sollors argues that besides Ezra
Pound’s Nazi propaganda, Thomas Wolfe and Gertrude Stein, for
example, “cherished sympathies for Nazi Germany.” According to
Sollors Stein “reportedly also recommended Hitler for the Nobel
Prize.” Porter was concerned about what Sollors calls “the real
attractions and challenges that authoritarian movements presented to
modern American writers and intellectuals.”

As we shall see, Porter
satirized the German captain’s authority in *Ship of Fools*.

Porter supported, however, the award of the Bollingen Prize to
Pound and, like her public protests against the communist hunt, she
openly explained her role in securing the award in a letter to the editor
of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. In the “stinking row” (L. 373), the
term she used for the controversy surrounding the award, she strongly
defended the award on the ground that Pound was a great artist. In
her letter to the editor she elaborately explains her reasons:

I accepted this list of four, and voted for Ezra Pound precisely
within the limits set by the conditions of the award: of the four
final candidates who had volumes of poetry published in this
country in 1948, I considered Pound’s the best [...] I abhor his
treason and detest his emotional perversities, for they cannot
be called ideas, in politics, and not at all on the grounds
provided for my vote. This I think would have been side-
stepping the problem, a very serious one, and I was not
disposed to side-step (CE: 210, 211).

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In the 1930s and 1940s she again wrote about her anti-war feelings in her correspondence with Pressley and Erskine. In a letter to her father on 31 May 1934 she wrote,

Lord, how people in Europe do talk and think of nothing but war […]. And my young nephews will just crack their heels together for joy at getting a chance to be officers and wear those uniforms they have practically been brought up in… They will think their Aunt Katherine Anne is just off her bean on the subject of war (Hornbake 52-0100, 0101).

Porter hoped that there would be no war “so long as they keep on talking during all those conferences in Geneva” (Hornbake 47-0194). However, she denied her pacifism in her essay “Act of Faith: 4 July 1942.” In a highly rhetorical defense of World War II she praises the boys who “are getting off to camp, carrying their little two-by-four suitcases or bundles” and the girls who “knit and nurse and cook and are learning to replace the boys in skilled work in war production” (CE 194). The contradiction between her pacifism and the rhetoric in support of the war could not be greater, but may be explained by her intention to please the readers of the popular women’s magazine Mademoiselle, in which her article, entitled “American Statement,” was first published in 1942.

At the outbreak of World War II she was inconsistent again in her anti-war feelings. On 18 June 1940 she wrote to Erskine that she examined her “state of mind about war,” and “deep in her mind” she had “a perfect knowledge that if France had crushed Germany I would have felt the whole war well justified.” She justified her feelings by her fear that fascism “would undermine our system of government, it is the presence of their agents in this country living off of this country and working to destroy it.” She hoped that democracy would not tolerate fascism, but as in her Mexican period, she mistrusted power politics: “Power politics will decide this country’s fate as it has the fate of the others” (Hornbake 47-0589).

Evidently Porter’s dislike of power politics was reinforced in Berlin. She saw the same threat of political power in Berlin as she had noticed in her Mexican period. On 26 December 1931 she wrote to Pressly: “I wish I could believe that the new system would be better than the old, and not just a change of masters and oppressors….I do not know what to hope for because I do not believe in the power of
the mass of mankind to extricate itself from its difficulties; and it is in this mass, apparently, that one must put faith now, or nowhere” (Hornbake 54-0361). As in Mexico shortly after her arrival in Berlin, she put little faith in the power of the masses. Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian movements need masses that have no common interest and are not organized in political parties. Porter’s doubts about the masses are corroborated by Arendt’s argument that

potentially, they [the masses] exist in every country and form the majority of those large numbers of neutral, politically indifferent people who never join a party and hardly ever go to the polls. It was characteristic of the rise of the Nazi movement in Germany and of the Communist movements in Europe after 1930 that they recruited their numbers from this mass of apparently indifferent people whom all parties had given up as too apathetic or too stupid for their attention.

Porter rejected Eduard Heimann’s view of the masses and Nazism. Heimann argues that the most characteristic feature of Nazism is “its terrible mass movement-its appeal to the masses emancipated by democracy and disillusioned by its inoperativeness in the crisis. The democratic masses turned on democratic liberty with all the hatred born of their disillusionment [...]”. In an emotional note Porter wrote in the margin of her copy of Heimann’s book that, “there never were ‘any democratic masses’ in Germany.” She passionately reacted to Heimann’s argument that “modern democracy rests on the belief that its free citizens would be prompted by their reason to establish and operate a functioning order, so the collapse of the economic order was taken to refute the claims of reason, and Nazism prided itself on its fierce denunciation of all spiritual life.” Porter commented: “This is the most false and sinister argument and the whole book is a not-too-subtle attack on the Democratic idea of government.” In another note she explicitly expressed her view of democracy. Commenting on Heimann’s argument that modern democracy could be founded “on the belief in Christian values and virtues, in justice and peace, in goodness and love, in spirituality and community,” she wrote that “modern democracy was founded not on

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Christian teaching, but on the Greek political idea.”10 Porter shows here she advocated popular government. However, as is evident from one of the letters she wrote to Herbst in about the same period, she feared that the power of a few might endanger the freedom of the majority. In this letter of 12 July 1947 she wrote about fascism, democracy, power and world politics during the 1940s:

We are going towards Fascism, the western form of the totalitarian state, and the coalitions are forming very clearly … Europeans have been saying for more than a hundred years that Russia was the great threatening power that would engulf Europe, and it may be so. But there will be a war of annihilation first. I believe in the principles of Democracy, in the republic as a state form which may even yet be tried fairly, though not in my time […]. You are right it is only a struggle for world power, but what has statecraft ever been but that? (Beinecke).

Evidently Porter’s concern about totalitarian regimes and her distrust of statecraft prevailed over her belief in democracy.

Yet in her review of E. M. Forster’s collection of essays Two Cheers for Democracy (1951) she shared the author’s confidence in future democratic rule. In spite of her previous doubts and suggesting that democracy had been endangered by McCarthyism she writes: “He [Forster] manages to raise two mild cheers for poor old misprized, blasphemed, abused Democracy, who took an awful thrashing lately, but may recover; and he hopes to be able honestly some day to give three” (CE 74).

Porter was a member of the Democratic Party. In 1947 she supported the organization “Americans for Democratic Action” and during the war she was politically active as a democrat. She was a campaigner for Franklin Roosevelt during the 1944 election and was a Vice-Chairman of the Women’s Division of the National Citizens Political Action Committee. In 1940, however, evidently driven by her pacifism, she proved not to be as enthusiastic for the re-election of Roosevelt as she would be four years later. As she wrote to Erskine in 1940, she preferred the socialist and pacifist candidate Norman

10 Eduard Heimann, Freedom and Order: Lessons from the War (New York: Scribner’s, 1947), 6, 7, 266.
Thomas to Roosevelt, but feared that, like Debs, Thomas would be imprisoned: “I’d like best to see Norman Thomas in. What do you want to bet that when and if we go to war, Mr. Thomas is going to jail? Mr. Debs, Socialist candidate, did the last time, and maybe that’s one tradition that won’t be broken” (Hornbake 47-0775).

Her ambivalent political thinking in the 1940s turned into a more conservative point of view in the 1950s. In her essay “Reflections on Willa Cather,” published in Mademoiselle in 1952, she finds that “in the noise of my immediate day, in which very literally everything in the world was being pulled apart, torn up, turned wrong side out and upside down; almost no frontiers left unattacked, governments and currencies falling [...] And every day, in the arts, as in schemes of government and organized crime, there was, there had to be, something New.” She wonders when “looking around at the debris” if “newness [has] merely for its own sake any virtue?” In the conclusion of this part of her essay she makes a plea for the “splendid things” of the past: “Things you would have once thought incompatible to eternity take their right places in peace, in proper scale and order, in your mind—in your blood. They become that marrow in your bones where the blood is renewed” (CE 33, 34, 35).11 Though the rhetoric in this part of the essay was obviously meant for the readers of Mademoiselle Porter shared Cather’s protest against ambitious artists’ desire to “destroy the past” and their “contempt for the old.” In a marginal note, dated April 14 1952, Porter wrote at the bottom of Cather’s chapter on Escapism in her copy of Willa Cather on Writing: “Read this again, and how fine it is.”12

In a collection of notes on the 1920s, most undated and one dated June 1951, she expressed a similar view of what she called “those over-excited years” (Hornbake 81-0002). Looking back at the

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11 The essay is a much expanded version of her review of the posthumous volume Willa Cather on Writing, “The Calm, Pure Art of Willa Cather.” The review, which was published on 25 September 1949 in The New York Times Book Review, highly praises Cather’s art but the rhetoric in her essay is not found in her review. In her minute analysis of Porter’s working papers for the review and the essay Stout convincingly argues that the essay “had modulated into a complex rhetoric in which overt praise is undercut by traces of disguised belittlement.” Janis Stout, “Behind ‘Reflections on Willa Cather: Katherine Anne Porter and the Dilemmas of Literary Sisterhood,” Legacy 14.2 (1997): 110.

artists of the decade she thought that “they lacked richness because they had cut away from themselves all that traditionally gave meaning to human sorrow, to love, to all experience. They had no point of reference except their own unsupported emotions.” As she did in her essay “Reflections on Willa Cather,” she rejected “newness for its own sake” and disliked the music of the 1920s. In a similar way, though she had been an admirer of primitive Indian art, she now hates the “rush back to primitivism” in Harlem (Hornbake 81-0002, 0024, 0046). The collection of notes is not coherent, but the shift in her views towards the right is evident.

In a note in her notebook of 1956 she looked back “on the days when I was so broad-minded my mind had no more shape than a phial of water spilled on a concrete floor--I subscribed to various racial and religious magazines, trying to understand my fellow man” (Hornbake 68-0488). Her apparent turning away from politics may have resulted from her disillusionment with democratic rule. In her letter to the editor of The Yale Review of 1961 she wrote: “I believe firmly in the right to disobedience and dissent--did you ever read Thoreau on that subject? Not because ‘it is the essence of democracy’--how would I know what is the essence of democracy? I have never seen a democracy in action--but because it is our highest moral duty to protest against the swineries of governments, and that should include our own” (CE 225). Her distrust of governments and her lifelong insistence on the preservation of freedom show her liberalism, which can be regarded as the main characteristic of her political views. As we have seen, she was often suspicious of groups that would control the state and insisted on the right to protest, which as she wrote in her letter to the editor, was her moral duty.

Besides her disillusionment with the Mexican Revolution Porter’s affinity with the Agrarians may have contributed to a turn to the right in her political thinking. After she left Paris in 1936 Porter renewed her friendship with some of this group of southern intellectual reformers who opposed to industrialization in the South and defended the values of a simpler agrarian past. Apart from Allen Tate and some others of the Fugitives who later became the Agrarians, she became friends with Andrew Lytle and in particular with Robert Penn Warren. The longing for an ideal past she already expressed in her Mexican work may have been reinforced by the Agrarians’ view of
southern history. The conservative views she expressed in her essay on Cather and in her collection of notes on the 1920s are found back in her notions of the antebellum South. As will be discussed in chapter 4, she valued the “old” South, as she conceived it, and stressed a sense of the past in order to understand the history of the South. Her sense of belonging to the South may have led to her changing views of African Americans.

It is interesting to note that in 1937, after she had turned to her southern roots, she could no longer sympathize with radical movements, as she wrote in her letter of 19 February of that year to Pressly: “I’ve crossed several frontiers here [in New York] of late, made several important decisions. One of these is simply this: I am entirely finished with the radical movement as it goes on here in this country. I simply cannot stick the company” (Hornbake 56-0144). In her letter from Mexico to her father, dated 26 June 1931, in which she refers to the agrarian manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand* Porter wrote: “Between the Old South, or even the New One, and Russia there’s a long, long way to go. Let’s see whether or not I make it” (Hornbake 52-0032). Porter “made it.” Having abandoned her leftist ideals, she reaffirmed her ties with the South in the 1930s.

Yet she had not given up her engagement with social justice. In a letter, dated 3 May 1937, to her younger sister Mary Alice, Porter wrote that she had joined the May Day march: “Saturday being May Day, I got right out and marched with my old friends the proletariat” (Hornbake 50-0036). From the time of her plea for hot soup for “kids in he east side schools” she wrote about in her 1920 letter to her family until well into the 1950s Porter protested against the oppression of the poor. In her rather negative 1942 review of Boyden’s *The Pink Egg*, “The Sparrow Revolution,” she finds fault with the author’s choice of sparrows, because “they lack almost everything it takes to create a good world, they are noisy and selfish and dull as some people, really.” She does not think that “the working people, the proletariat as they used to be called, are at all like sparrows” and rejects the idea that “the intelligent, poetic, inspired, and heroic birds in the feathered revolutionary movement are nearly all renegades from the upper classes.” In her conclusion she expresses her faith in the working classes: “The really heavy job has been done by the working people” (*BR* 119,120,121).

In her letter of 15 December 1943 to her sister Gay and her
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niece Anna Gay, in which she fulminates both at “dirty little politicians” and the exploitation of workers in wartime, she urged her sister and her niece to become members of a trade union:

if you political employees were all in a strong union, you wouldn’t be worked more than eight hours a day […]. The employers stand together; and they work all the time to make division and hostility among the workers. […] But the time will come when they have got to pay decent wages out of their profits, which are always too high, and during wartime of course, they add millions upon millions. That is what they fight the war for. (Hornbake 50-0409)

In a similar way she wrote to Glenway Wescott about “the downtrodden minorities” and war: “As to war, I think the Dictators may fight among themselves, or they may come to some sort of compromise, but as to the Masses, capital M, they will take what is given them for their own good as usual (Hornbake 29-0926).

Porter’s sympathy with the working classes expressed in these emotional letters is prominent in her political thinking and figures again in The Never-Ending Wrong. In the following discussion of Porter’s memoir I shall argue that her “afterthoughts” not only reveal her moral feelings at the time of the protest marches against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, but also express her political views. It should be noted that Porter was an eyewitness of the protest, and as she did in much of her work, she assumes in her memoir the role of narrator and observer.

Porter points out that “some of the account was written at the scene of the tragedy [Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s execution] itself, and except for a word or two here and there in those early notes, where I have added a line in the hope of a clearer statement, it is unchanged in feeling and point of view. The evils prophesied by that crisis have all come true and are enormous in weight and variety.” The memoir is interesting, therefore, because fifty years after her experiences in Boston Porter examines the political and moral views she held at the time. Apart from participating in the marches Porter had “the melancholy pleasure of copying Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s letters to their friends working for them on the outside.” As we shall see, the letters strengthened her belief that the Sacco and Vanzetti were “already
condemned to death before the trial took place” (NIF’ 32, 33, 9).

Porter saw the case “as one of the important turning points in the history of this country,” but doubted if “such a commotion could be roused again for any merciful cause at all among us,” thus criticizing failing ethical values at the time she wrote her memoir. Looking back she realizes her political naiveté. Like some of her good friends she had “no definite political opinions” and “was then, as now, a registered voting member of the Democratic Party, a convinced liberal—not then a word of contempt” (NIF’ 5, 14). As she wrote in her 1961 letter to the Editor of The Yale Review, she believed in “the right to disobedience and dissent.”

Her Mexican experiences recur in her descriptions of the picketers. Similar to her representations of revolutionists who had betrayed the Revolution, she describes “plenty of people of the working classes there, but they had risen in the world and had become professional paid proletarians.” And, like her disillusionment with the Mexican Revolution, she had lost her faith in a “classless society which could not take root and finally withered on the stalk” (NIF’ 24).

Evidently her sympathy with the working classes and her concern with power were reinforced by Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s letters. Referring to the letters (“Read those letters!”) she remarks that “they [Sacco and Vanzetti] also had in common a distrust in general of the powers of this world, well founded in their knowledge of life as it is lived by people who work with their hands in humble trades for wages.” She shows her distrust of the law when she writes that “the two laboring men, who had managed to survive and scramble up a few steps from nearly the bottom level of life, knew well from the beginning that they had every reason to despair, they did not really trust these strangers from the upper world who furnished the judges and lawyers to the courts […].” Towards the end of her memoir she once more stresses class prejudice when she overhears one of the “entirely correct gentlemen” say that, “it is very pleasant to know that we may expect things to settle down properly again” (NIF’ 9,11,49). The scene closely resembles the opening scene of Ship of Fools, describing the arrogant class-consciousness of two men of “the white-linen class.”

The description of her encounter with the three gentlemen in the morning following the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti is an example of the frequent interruptions in her narrative. Her account of
the protest marches is not coherent, but it is precisely the reflections on what she experienced that reveal her moral and political views. For instance, in the account of her conversation with a “mild little blond officer” who arrested her every day at the end of a picketing she points out that she wants a fair trial. She remembers “best just what I felt and thought about this event in its own time, in its inalterable setting” and though she does not know whether Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty or not “I had my reasons for being there to protest the terrible penalty they were condemned to suffer; these reasons were of the heart, which I believe appears in these pages with emphasis.” Still feeling her engagement with the case she writes: “I am trying to sink back into the past and recreate a certain series of events recorded in scraps at the time which have haunted me painfully for life” (NW 32, 46).

The confrontation with her past experiences she expresses here is comparable with the self-examination in her autobiographical essay “St. Augustine and the Bullfight” (1955). In her essay she looks back at her first bullfight in the early 1920s, which she thinks was “one of the most important and lasting experiences of my life” (CE 95). Both the memoir and the essay explore her past views. As in her memoir she realizes that, “only by remembering, comparing, waiting to know the consequences can we sometimes, in a flash of light, see what a certain event really meant, what it was trying to tell us” (CE 94). About thirty-five years after the event she is confronted with her self-deception when she discovers her love of watching bullfights though before she had “for a great tangle of emotional reasons no intention of going to a bullfight” (CE 98). In her memoir there is a similar self-discovery when she reflects on the role the communists played in the protest. She is aware that “I was prepared to fall eagerly and with a light heart into the atmosphere I found established there [...] Politically I was mistaken in my hopes, also. For I see now that they [the communists] were only that, based on early training in ethics and government, courses which I have not seen lately in any curriculum.” She admits that “it is quite obvious by now that my political thinking was the lamentable “political illiteracy” of a liberal idealist--we might say a species of Jeffersonian” (NW 13).

The idealism that made her participate in the protest marches and join the communists turned into a sense of defeat after Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s execution: “It was no consolation to say their long
ordeal was ended. It was not ended for us—and perhaps I should speak for myself—their memory was already turning to stone in my mind. In my whole life I have never felt such a weight of pure bitterness, helpless anger in utter defeat, outraged love and hope.” Though she “was not an inexperienced girl” and “had witnessed a revolution in Mexico” she was aware that the Sacco and Vanzetti case “was something very different, unfamiliar.” The deep impression the case made on her evidently affected her later political convictions. In her afterword she writes that the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti “is worth weeping for. But it doesn’t work so well [...] The State goes on without end in one form or another, built securely on the base of destruction” (NJP 48, 56, 61).

Her reflections of her past experiences reveal not only her feelings and political views of the 1920s, but also the evolution in her political thinking. In *Ship of Fools*, written between 1942 and 1962, the naiveté of her political views is confirmed in the portrayal of the autobiographical character Jenny Brown. Jenny “believed warmly and excitedly in strikes, she had been in many of them, they worked; there was nothing more exciting and wonderful than to feel yourself a part of something that worked towards straightening our things—getting decent pay for people, good working conditions, shorter hours—it didn’t much matter what.” From the point of view of one of the other main characters Jenny “might have been a young girl talking about the gay parties of her débutante season. Freytag could not take her seriously” (SF 164, 165).

Though her views were changing and were sometimes inconsistent there is a thread of convictions in Porter’s political thinking that is unequivocal. Throughout her sense of social justice, a passion for freedom, and resistance to power and oppression is evident. She was a convinced pacifist and insisted on free speech which led to protests against authoritarian control. After the early 1930s she was so preoccupied with totalitarianism that it sometimes bordered on obsession. A letter written on 30 August 1956 to W. Chapman after rereading Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a clear expression of her anti-authoritarian feelings:

I have been reading again lately Orwell’s *1984*, surely one of the most frightening books ever written—what a tremendous writer he was—and it came over me again, but even more
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... shockingly than before, with our subject in mind, how the real horror of the totalitarian form of government is the brutal suppression of a human being's most important liberty--the right to a private life--that personal privacy which he chooses for himself, over and beyond his public life, whatever it may be. This is the first human dignity to be attacked by the Lenins, the Mussolinis, the Hitlers, the Francos [...] I feel that the practise of a private life in this country is getting to be more and more suspect (Hornbake 83-0002, 0003).

Porter's political and moral views can be traced back in her notions of ethnicity and race. In a general sense it is the insistence on freedom and independence and the threat of oppression that affected her ethnic and racial attitudes. As we shall see, “Hacienda” is the most bitter of her Mexican political work in which the portrayals of Indians reveal her disillusionment with the Revolution that aimed at freedom of the natives and redistribution of the land. In contrast, independence is expressed in the Indians' resistance to the law of the state in the non-political story “María Concepción.” As I shall discuss in chapter 6, in this story Porter fictionalized her moral belief in civil disobedience which she expressed in her 1961 letter to the editor of the *Yale Review*. There is a similar contrast between her sympathetic portrayals of independent, self-supporting German farmers and Germans in a totalitarian regime. Just as her sense of justice and her political views affected her notions of Indians and Germans, so did her political convictions cause her to change her notions of African Americans.

In the following chapters I shall elaborate on Porter's ethnic and racial attitudes in the context of her moral and political thinking.
Chapter 2
“A Moving Experience”:
Porter’s Impressions of the Mexican Indians in the 1920s and early 1930s.

When Porter arrived in Mexico in 1920, the preceding decade had been a turbulent period that was characterized by violent internal struggle. The movement against the dictatorship of president Porfirio Díaz, which started the revolutionary period between 1910 and 1920, was initially a political revolution but later became a social revolution: the peasantry wanted ownership of land. In 1911 Francisco Madero, who was not a strong leader, became president. After his assassination in 1913 he was succeeded by General Huerta whose regime lasted only from February 1913 to July 1914. In the following violent power struggle Carranza, leader of the so-called Constitutionalists, rose to power with the support of the popular general Obregón. In 1916 a convention was held to reform the Constitution of 1857. The new Constitution of 1917 aimed to change the social and economic structure of Mexico. John Mason Hart argues that “the end product revealed the hand of Obregón and his supporters in its emphasis on democratic and progressive reforms tempered by centralized authority.” An important article of the new Constitution was Article 27, the purpose of which was to bring private ownership of land under the control of the State. However, redistribution of land was not easy. One of the main problems for the repartition was the power of the large haciendas and moreover there was little belief in the capability of the independent Indian to cultivate land properly. Not until the era of president Cárdenas (1934-1940) was the agrarian reform carried out on a large scale.

In 1920 Obregón was elected president. Under his presidency the organization of trade unions was encouraged, education was reorganized, and the relations with the U.S. were improved. The U.S. were against the new Constitution because it put restrictions on the acquisition of land by foreigners. The Constitution also made it possible to deprive foreign oil companies of the ownership of their oil

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fields. The negotiations between Mexico and the U.S. led to the so-called Bucareli Agreements in 1923, in which the U.S. agreed to recognize the Mexican government and the new Constitution in exchange for Mexico’s agreement not to enforce the Constitution of 1917 on foreign oil companies. The period between 1924 and 1934 was politically and economically again an ill-fated period for Mexico, characterized by corruption and incompetence on the part of the political leaders.

Porter arrived in Mexico for her first out of four visits about a month before Obregón’s inauguration on 1 December 1920. On the occasion of Obregón’s inauguration Porter wrote “The New Man and the New Order,” published in 1921 in the first issue of the Magazine of Mexico, of which she had become editor. In the essay she expresses her admiration for the “simple working president with his feet firmly set in his native soil” (UEP 53). The essay is one of the first published works in which Porter shows her interest in Mexican politics. She may not actually have “assisted at a revolution or two,” as she wrote many years later on 29 January 1962, to Father Roseliep, but her interest in Mexican politics was strong (Hornbake 26-0863), as also appears from her letter of 17 June 1930 to Malcolm Cowley in which she offers him to write a political article on Mexico: “[...] In fact, would you like one of my political articles [...] I promise not to write as an authority on Mexico, nor apologist, nor propagandist, nor enemy, but as an observer putting two and two together in the probable but distant hope of getting four out of it” (Hornbake 18-0701).

Porter’s engagement with the political situation in Mexico appears to have affected her views of the natives. As I shall show, her representations of the Mexican Indians in her political essays, sketches, stories and her politically inspired observations of Indians in her personal papers differ from her portraits of the Indians in her non-political work, including her short story “María Concepción.” In

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2 In one of her undated notes she explains her reasons why she had come to Mexico: “The non-politicals thought I had come there to study their Indian arts and Aztec and Maya design, which was true, at first. The politicals thought I was there to assist at their revolution and to write good things about it and them for the devilish American Press and magazines. I got so side-tracked into revolution [...] the Indian arts, the life of the country, the popular songs and dances, the weather, the looks of the place, politics on so many levels I had to give up trying to disentangle it – Life, in a word, claimed my attention” (Hornbake 79-0440).
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the former group the texts mostly deal with the oppression of the natives, depicting them as victims; in the latter there is a more positive view of the Indians.

An early political essay in which Porter sees the Indians as oppressed people is “The Mexican Trinity.” It was published as a letter to the editor of Freeman, on 3 August 1921 and later reprinted in Collected Essays. Presented as a report from Mexico City on July 1921, Porter wanted to give her views of the political situation in Mexico and the condition of the Indians as she had observed them. Though she admits in her essay that she was “not yet able to say whether my accumulated impression of Mexico is justly proportioned” (CE 399), she does not hesitate to put forward some strong opinions. She attacks many people and institutions. The whole situation, Porter writes, is complex: many groups are motivated by self-interest, the coalition does not work, and worst of all, “the revolution has not entered the souls of the Mexican people” (CE 401).

Another politically inspired essay is “Where Presidents Have No Friends,” published in Century in July 1922, a month after Porter returned from her second visit to Mexico. In this essay, too, Porter presents a rather negative view of the revolution: “In Mexican revolution the cause and the leader are interchangeable symbols. A man has his adherents, who follow him in the hope of arriving, through him, one step nearer to the thing they want, whatever that may be” (CE 407). In the first part she relates the flight and death of President Carranza. By means of a narrator she describes Carranza sympathetically as a man “riding always ahead of us, without a word, his white beard blowing over his shoulder.” According to Thomas Walsh, the narrator of the story about Carranza’s flight with his many trains loaded with gold, guns, and soldiers heading for Vera Cruz is a fictional character. Walsh adds that one of Porter’s friends, Retinger, wrote her he thought the essay was nasty and untrue.3

In both essays Porter clearly approaches the political situation in Mexico from a critical point of view, emphasizing that Mexico was hardly capable of dealing with its enormous problems: “Every foreign opportunist with a point to make can find the support of other opportunists in Mexico. The result is a hotbed of petty plotting […]”


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(CE 413). Undoubtedly at this time Porter was influenced by some of her politically radical friends. One of them was Felipe Carrillo Puerto, a Maya, whose Leagues of Resistance organized Maya peasants to advance land reform. He also advocated women’s rights, legalized divorce and introduced woman suffrage.\(^4\)

In “Where Presidents Have No Friends,” in which she refers to Carrillo Puerto’s election as governor of Yucatán, she writes: “if he lives to take the chair, we shall see revolutionary theory practised freely in Yucatán” (CE 412). Carrillo Puerto also figures in the unfinished story “Trinidad.” In one of her notes in her Mexican Daybook Porter gives an outline of Carrillo Puerto’s history, which was to be used in a novel provisionally titled “Historical Present.” In the note she describes his assassination and the speeches he made “standing on chairs and shaking his fist […] ‘they took away your land in the name of Revolution I give them back again’” (Hornbake 79-0344). In her story “Return” (1928) Porter describes how Anna, who is based on Porter, was deeply shocked when she heard about his death. Carrillo Puerto’s radicalism probably had an effect on Porter’s views on the Revolution and the natives.

A person who must also have influenced her at the time when she wrote her two essays was Roberto Haberman, whom John W.F. Dulles calls “a man who was happy to offer helpful hints to North American writers who chose to render interpretations of Mexico.”\(^5\) The radical Haberman and his wife Thorberg were among Porter’s friends. Thorberg was the editor of the English language section of El Heraldo de México, a position Porter assumed after her. Stout points out that “The connection with El Heraldo is in itself one more piece of evidence of her [Porter’s] radical affiliations in those years.”\(^6\)

The often quoted passage in “The Mexican Trinity” in which Porter gives her views of the Mexican Indians is politically inspired rhetoric: “[…] this inert and slow-breathing mass, these lost people who move in the oblivion of sleepwalkers under their incredible burdens; these silent and reproachful figures in rags, bowed face to face with the earth” (CE 401, 402). Porter blames the Catholic Church

\(^4\) Thomas Benjamin, “Rebuilding the Nation” in The Oxford History of Mexico, 474.
\(^6\) Janis Stout, Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times, 47.
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for the oppression of the Indians. About the clergy she writes: “They are pulling their old familiar wires, and all the bedraggled puppets are dancing with a great clatter. The clever ones indulge in skillful moves in the political game […]” In this same passage Porter mentions a device of the priests in the “political game”: “a Virgin—this time of Guadalupe—has been seen to move, to shine miraculously in a darkened room!” (CE 402).

Porter describes the Indians’ worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe and her dismay at what she saw in her essay “The Fiesta de la Guadalupe,” which she wrote shortly after arriving in Mexico for her first visit. The essay was published in El Heraldo. Throughout the essay she laments the misery of the Indians and their irrational faith in “the new God brought with fire and sword” into Mexico. With phrases like the “worn hands of believers; the humble and beseeching hands of the millions and millions who have the anodyne of credulity” (CE 396, 398), this essay also makes the impression of a politically inspired indictment of the oppression of the Indians. Still, in contrast to “The Mexican Trinity” and “Where Presidents Have No Friends,” the essay offers an example of a more positive view of the natives when Porter portrays Indians other than those “silent groups, pursued by prayers of the blind” (CE 397). In these more positive descriptions of Indians, Porter dwells on the colorful costumes of Indian women and men and a group of solemn dancers, who have kept their customs; she is evidently impressed by this sight. Walsh has pointed out that a much more favorable description of the fiesta had been written by another reporter of El Heraldo, thus providing support for the idea that Porter’s main aim was political propaganda against the oppression by the Church. In his further comment on Porter’s sketch Walsh argues that it “did reveal her pessimistic cast of mind before entering Mexico” and that “The Indians at Guadalupe justified her pessimism.”

No doubt, Porter must have seen Indians who were obsessed by their faith, but considering her political essays of this early period, it is likely that her view of the natives in “La Fiesta de la Guadalupe” was heavily politicized.

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7 About two months before the essay was published Porter used practically the same phrases in a letter of 29 May 1921 she wrote to Paul Hanna, correspondent for the New York Call and the London Daily Herald to express her antagonism against the Church and the clergy as oppressors (Hornbake 22-0302).

8 Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 19, 20.
In 1922 Porter wrote fragments for “The Dove of Chapacalco,” a story which she never finished. In this unfinished story emphasizing the power of the Church, Porter again shows her engagement with the Mexican Revolution. More than in her previous prose she resorts to satire. Particularly the Archbishop of Chapacalco becomes the butt of her satire. He is a “mestizo with the arrogance of a Castilian grandee” and “loathed that part of himself which claimed kinship with these earth stained people” (UEP 112). But he also realizes that he is growing older now and that the power of his diocese is crumbling away. With satiric descriptions Porter represents the Archbishop as a ruthless man, who is confident that the child Vicenta, who becomes his mistress, is “an obedient child who would not trouble him.” In the end she becomes an accomplice to his downfall. As in “Fiesta,” Porter pities the enslavement of the Indians: “La Soledad! All the sorrows of the poor, the ineffectual, the sick, the desolate believers of the world had been brought to those primly covered feet, had been held up before those ininsolable clasped hands and lonely forsaken brows” (UEP 127).

The problem of landownership figures dominantly in several of Porter’s political essays and personal notes and also in this draft for a story Porter mentions it several times. One of the characters, Gomez the bomb-thrower, is cynical about giving land to the Indians, Vicenta does not believe in it and the priests scare the Indians away from accepting land. In one of her personal notes Porter made between 1920 and 1921 she writes: “At the first repartition, the priests began preaching to the peons, telling them that to accept land was stealing” (Hornbake 79-0213). This description of the priests’ opposition to land reform recurs in the reaction of an Indian woman in one of the fragments of the story when she is told about the possibility of the division of land: “The cura has told me if I accept this land, I am a thief and my soul shall not see God!” (UEP 125). She stresses once more her anti-clericalism in “The Mexican Trinity”: “The peons are further assured by the priests that to accept the land given to them by the reform laws is to be guilty of simple stealing, and everyone taking such land will be excluded from holy communion” (CE 403).

It is not only the Church that is attacked in the fragments for her story; Porter also directs her satire at the powerlessness of the chamber of deputees caused by discord, the ineffective commission of investigation which could only “Talk, talk” and “puke words as if they
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had eaten green fruit of ideas,” and the chief of police, who is at the head of soldiers who “were in the habit of selling their equipment, even to their water canteens […]” (UEP 117, 123).

Porter gives an imposing portrait of Vicenta, the young Indian woman “with her cleanly savage instincts” (UEP 121), who as a child of 14 left the convent and become the Archbishop’s mistress. From “a pitiful, bewildered child afraid even to weep” (UEP 121), Vicenta develops into a powerful young woman who gains complete control over the palace. This portrait represents Porter’s favorite theme of the strong, dominant, and independent woman. In the end Vicenta refuses to follow Gomez and marry him, because she wants to be free. Contrasted with this strong Indian woman is the anonymous mass of Indians figuring in the story. Seen through the eyes of the cynical Gomez the Indian women are “these mute and humble creatures,” while the narrator describes them as an inert, listless crowd, which does not believe “in the possibility of a change for the better.” The town is “a tomb; burial place of a lost race” (UEP 118, 124). The revolutionary party does not succeed in rousing the interest of the Indians. The men listen to their speeches “without comprehension” and then “moved on again,” while the women “remembering their immi
gurable sorrows […] go to pray at the altar of Maria La Soledad” (UEP 124). This representation of the Indians does not differ from that in Porter’s previous political Mexican work. However, the last but one fragment gives quite a different view of the Indians in this village. The fragment preaches the revolution. Roused by Gomez the Indians storm the palace: “Under the wall of the palace they rose and vomited howls like a beast sickened to death. Flares burned up and showered sparks upon heads bristling like the shoulders of dogs” (UEP 129). In the last fragment Gomez talks of freedom for the Indians. With this revolt Porter may have wanted to express her hope that, after all, there may be a change for the better for the Indians, as she also did in the conclusion of “The Fiesta de la Guadalupe”: “I think to myself, hopefully, that men do not live in a deathly dream forever” (CE 398).

The notes suggest that Porter intended to write a story which would make propaganda for revolutionary literature. In her earlier political essay “The Mexican Trinity” Porter wrote: “A small group of intellectuals still writes about romance and the stars, and roses and the shadowy eyes of ladies […]” (CE 401). The same satire is found in the caricatural portrait Porter gives of the revolutionist Angel Gomez,
who was put to sleep by “Revolutionary theory” and who “read aloud a Sonatina of Ruben Dario: evoking with the easy song of the words, his own picture of the blonde princess, pale, sighing through her little strawberry mouth, sitting in her golden chair, dreaming of love […]” (UEP 116).

The satirical portrait indicates Porter’s view that revolutionaries are hopelessly romantic, even sentimental. Rob Johnson points out that there is a close resemblance between María Cristina Mena’s story “The Sorcerer and General Bisco” (1915) and Porter’s “The Dove of Chapacalco.” He argues that “Porter consciously adapted the plot and details of Mena’s story for her own purposes.” Whereas Mena’s story is a romantic tale, “Porter’s critical attitude toward the pervasiveness of romance in Mexican literature, poetry and song coupled with her harsh opinion of the Catholic Church are the key factors guiding her transformation of María Cristina Mena’s 1915 story.”

The strong interest in repartition of land in favor of the Indians Porter shows in this story also appears in her book review “La Conquistadora” (1926). The female conqueror was Rosalie Evans, an American woman who described her long fight to regain her deceased husband’s property in Mexico in a long series of letters over a period of six years to her sister Daisy C. Pettus. The letters, collected by Pettus under the title The Rosalie Evans Letters from Mexico and published in 1926, prompted Porter to comment rather sarcastically on Evans’s fight as “gallant, brilliant and wholehearted, admirable as a mere exhibition of daring, energy and spirit,” but “as a human being she was avaricious, with an extraordinary hardness of heart and ruthlessness of will; and she died in a grotesque cause.” For Porter Evans was a conquistador, out for money and power and “as unscrupulous in her methods as any other invader”). Porter appears to be convinced that Evans was blind to “the causes of the revolution or the rights of the people involved” (CE 419, 418, 417, 420). It is true

10 Porter’s sarcastic remarks were not only politically inspired. As appears from one of her marginal notes she actually “detested this woman.” William Nance, Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 221.
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that Mrs. Evans emerges from the letters as an inflexible woman bent on regaining the hacienda. In her letter of 30 August 1918 she writes, for example, “I am not a yielding nature [...]” But she seems to have had good reasons for her fight. In her foreword to the collection of letters Mrs. Pettus writes: “Even before there was any attempt to apply the Agrarian Law to her hacienda, it was raided and looted repeatedly [...]. What [Evans] resisted was the forcible, unwarranted and unlawful seizure of lands by those exerting political power, who cloaked their misconduct under the guise of the Agrarian Laws.” In the end Evans lost her fight and was shot to death while riding in her buggy on 2 August 1924.

Ownership of the land of a large hacienda and unchanged conditions for the Indians are dominant themes in Porter’s politically inspired story “Hacienda,” which she wrote after she had visited a large pulque hacienda in Tetlapayac. On the invitation of Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian film director who was making a film on Mexico, Porter went to this hacienda mid-July 1931. She made notes during this visit, which resulted in the first version of her story, published in the Virginia Quarterly Review of October 1932, in the form of what might be called an eyewitness account. Later it was developed into a fictional story, which appeared in 1934. In both versions Porter, as the narrator, takes the stance of an observer who satirically exposes the failure of the revolution and repartition of the land in favor of the Indians. But she is not a detached observer who views the situation at the hacienda from a distance. Particularly the second and much longer version shows an even greater disillusionment with Mexico and the condition of the Indians than is found in some of her sketches and essays of the 1920s.

The 1934 version opens with a description of Kennerly, the business manager of the film, boarding the train which is to take them to the hacienda, followed by the narrator and Andreyev, the assistant manager of the film. Porter cleverly uses this scene to picture the contrast between the arrogant white man Kennerly pushing his way through the overcrowded train, and the Indians on the train, with “their dark pleased faces,” who were not troubled “by the noisy white man.” Once arrived at the first-class coach, the narrator points out

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31 Daisy Caden Pettus, The Raoulie Evans Letters from Mexico (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926), 74, 1, 5.
Kennerly’s relief now that they are “temporarily secure from the appalling situation of being three quite superior persons of the intellectual caste of the ruling race at large and practically defenseless in what a country!” When the train pauses they see Indian women running along the train, trying to sell pulque and mague worms to them. The narrator uses the scene to show the pitiful state of the Indians. The whites raise false hopes in the hearts of the women, with their “faces thrown back and arms stretching upward […]” (CS 136,138).

Satire is used in the scenes when Andreyev shows the narrator pictures of the film, which the government wanted to use as propaganda for the revolution. They had chosen “an old-fashioned feudal estate,” and tapping on the pictures of the Indians in their rags, Andreyev remarks satirically: “all this has been swept away by the revolution” (CS 142,145). The story contains one of the most bitter descriptions of the Indians in all of Porter’s Mexican work. Seeing the pictures of these Indians the narrator is deeply moved by their apparent suffering and defeat. The scene, expanded in the second version, is a long description of the fate of the Indians and the narrator’s feelings of sympathy with them. The pictures prove that nothing has changed for the Indians. The hacienda is still a feudal estate and the revolutionists are corrupt: “The camera had seen this unchanged world as a landscape with figures, but figures under a doom imposed by the landscape” (CS 142). After her arrival at the hacienda the narrator uses Don Genaro, the master of the hacienda, as the butt for further satire. Porter sketches a caricature who loves speed, high-powered automobiles, and airplanes, but he is “never on time anywhere.” He sees his peons at the hacienda as his property. When one of them gets into prison for killing his sister, he claims him back from the village judge because “Justino is my peon, his family have lived for three hundred years on our hacienda […]” (CS 154,155). Genaro decides he had better go to “Mexico and see Velarde,” because he was “the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico. He owned two pulque haciendas which had fallen to his share when the great repartition of land had taken place.” The satire Porter uses here shows again her disillusionment with the Mexican revolution; it was not the Indians who profited from the repartition, but the revolutionists. Doña Julia, the master’s young wife, “a figure from a Hollywood comedy,” thinks the Indians are animals,
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to whom “nothing means anything.” Still, as in some of Porter’s 
previous Mexican work, the story ends with a spark of hope. When 
the narrator leaves the hacienda at the end of her visit, the Indian 
driver advises her to come back when “the green corn will be ready, 
and ah, there will be enough to eat again” (CS 156,169,170).

“Hacienda,” written after her fourth visit to Mexico from April 
1930 to August 1931, is the culmination of Porter’s dark view of a 
people who were not better off after the revolution than before.12 
Porter had decided to go again to Mexico when she had been advised 
to go to a warmer climate after some months of bronchial problems. 
According to a letter she wrote to her sister Gay Holloway about a 
month after her arrival in Mexico, she was happy with the house she 
had found and the old piano she had bought. Indeed she was full of 
plans: “I shall have a young servant girl to do everything about the 
house. I shall do nothing but work, and in the intervals practise on the 
piano”(L 21). However, the visit was not as promising as she had 
hoped. Several of her notes and letters show her disillusionment with 
Mexico, the revolution, and the revolutionaries. Porter was right in her 
assessment of the deplorable economic and political state of Mexico 
during this time. After the assassination of Obregón in 1928, the 
country entered a period of transition with much social unrest, labor 
strikes, frequent changes in the Cabinet, and corruption, particularly in 
the Labor Union, the CROM. Moreover, the country had run into 
heavy debts because of the Great Depression.13 As to the condition of 
the Indians, Porter describes in a note dated November 9 and 10, 
1930, “a ragged peon” she had observed when walking through the 
Alameda in Mexico City. It is a dreary picture of a man carrying a 
weight on his back and with “blackened, calloused feet with their great 
ragged toe nails” (Hornbake 79-0174).

Though she still enjoyed the atmosphere in Mexico and its

12 In one of her marginal notes in her copy of Men of Mexico Porter 
expresses again her view that since the Spanish Conquest the Indians had remained a 
poor and oppressed people. Commenting on the passage that the Indians had lost 
their communal lands in the mid-nineteenth century “the Indians were reduced to 
the condition of peonage,” Porter wrote in the margin: “The Indians had never been 
anything but peons since the Spanish came.” James Magnet, Men of Mexico, 
(Milwaukee: Bruce, 1942), 510.

13 John Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936, 
503-519.
scenery, Porter now also saw what she called “the show-Mexico,” exploited by Tourist Bureaus. In a letter of 6 October 1930 to Kenneth Burke Porter deplored the social and economic condition of Mexico. The economic chaos led to a high rate of unemployment, Indian art was imitated, the artists were exploited, and there was corruption everywhere: “every smallest step taken towards economic readjustment, or even mere alleviation of present suffering, degenerates at once into a little combine of grafters and careerists.” Against this background she describes the Indians: “The Indian is poorer than ever, his heels are cracked as deeply, his face is despairing, he is more than ever a paintable object for the make-believe primitives” (L. 24, 26). The contrast between the beauty of the country and the poor condition of the natives is also found in a note dated 3 October 1930:

The country is as beautiful to look at, the air as fresh, the skies as heavenly. I went down to Cuautla for two days, to rest from this trying altitude and swim in the warm sulphur baths, and there in the midst of the warmth and loneliness were the same listless, ragged hungry people, and the same starving dogs and emaciated burros and inanimate babies and blind pock-marked beggars, and the same overpowering sense of death-in-life which only death itself can cure. I am wounded to the bone by it […] (Hornbake 79-0326).

In a letter Porter wrote to Herbst from Mexico on 11 February 1931 she cynically remarks: “the net result of this revolution is that now several politicians have good jobs and can buy airplanes and ranches on the public charity money” (Beinecke). About two months before she left Mexico she wrote a note dated 8 July 1931, in which she finally says that “The scenery is not enough, and the things I love in this country [Mexico] are being spoiled so fast I do not want to stay for the end […] and the Indian life is so hopelessly sad and deprived it weighs on your spirit like the memory of some mysterious mortal sickness in another life […]” (Hornbake 79-0368).

In an unpublished review of Stuart Chase’s book Mexico: A Study of Two Americas (1931) Porter argues that Chase based his book on “superficial observation” and that like “other self-appointed prophets” he is “trying to squeeze [himself] into the esoteric skin of the Indian.” She is irritated about Chase’s advice to the Mexicans and
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his “condescending kindness” in his book and thinks he had better visit Mexico “without meddling.” Porter wrote her review as a farewell to Mexico: “With these farewell words, I sit back and wait for the next flood of books written by this year’s crop of seminarists, folklorists, prophets, students, friends of Mexico, propagandists, art enthusiasts, and the common carriers of good will. But I shall not read them” (UEP 253, 254, 255). Evidently this harsh review is not only a critique of what Porter thought a shallow study, but also an expression of her disillusionment with Mexico after her four visits over a period of more than a decade.

From Porter’s story “Flowering Judas,” which she began in 1928 and was published in the magazine Hound and Horn in 1930, it becomes apparent that her disillusionment dates back to the early 1920s. In one of her autobiographical notes, dated 1964, in which Porter reacts to a book of memoirs written by one of her former lovers, Matthew Josephson, she says, “the story ‘Flowering Judas’ had been in my mind for about eight years. One cold January night, 1929, in Brooklyn in the house of my friends John and Rebeca Crawford, I went to my room after dinner, at about half-past seven, and began to write. At one o’clock in the morning I was out to a corner postbox in the snow, mailing the one-draft story to Mr. Kirstein” (Hornbake 65-0352). The two main characters, Laura and Braggioni represent people who have betrayed the revolution. Like Porter’s previous caricatures, Braggioni is fat and like the Archbishop in “The Dove of Chapacalco,” he is a mestizo: “His father was a Tuscan peasant who drifted to Yucatan and married a Maya woman: a woman of race, an aristocrat.” Similar to the revolutionary Gomez in this story, Braggioni likes romantic tales. Accompanying himself on his guitar, “he sings with tremendous emphasis, weighing his words. He has, the song relates, no father and no mother, nor even a friend to console him” (CS 98, 92). Porter satirically pictures a powerful man “who has the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness, the sharpness of wit, the hardness of heart, stipulated for loving the world profitably.” Laura is a more complex character. She realizes that “she is not at home in the

14 The review was intended for The New Republic. Malcolm Cowley wrote: “the trouble was that you didn’t get away with your attack. It had the sound of being bitter and unfair and the expression of a great deal of pent-up hatred against other people [...] I immediately tried to sell the review to The Nation, to the Hound and Horn; neither would take it, for the reasons listed above” (Hornbake 18-0722).
world.” The children she teaches remain strangers to her, she rejects lovers, and as far as the revolution is concerned she feels she is “as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni” (CS 98, 97, 93).

In her letter of 4 November 1957 to Professor Tatsonukuchi, who had selected an essay of Willa Cather’s and some of Porter’s stories for publication in Japanese translation, she writes about the theme of her story: “Mine is betrayal: that self-delusion, treachery to oneself and others, or to a situation; a falseness in the very grain of the character which often blinds him (or her) as to the real nature of his acts or motives […]. So, Laura has weakly let herself be drawn into a situation, a set of political activities in which she does not believe” (Hornbake 28-0503). Though Porter often said she took her friend Mary Doherty as the model for Laura and persistently denied that Laura was autobiographical, Walsh convincingly argues that Laura cannot be Mary Doherty, but must stand for Porter herself and that Porter transformed “her disillusion and spiritual isolation into Laura’s.”15 If Laura is actually based on Porter herself, she admits in the above letter that she should not have participated in the revolution, however small her role may have been. The failure of the revolution as Porter saw it and her disillusionment with her own role in it evidently influenced her views of the Indians as she described them in her political work.

Porter generally gives a different picture of the natives in her non-political Mexican work. A striking example is her sketch “Xochimilco,” published in the Christian Science Monitor about five months after her arrival in Mexico for her first visit. The sketch is presented as a journalistic report on her impressions during a boat trip through the canals of the idyllic village Xochimilco with its “splendid remnant of the Aztec race.” Porter creates here an ideal world of a people that live “in voluntary detachment from the ruling race of their country.” The village with its canals and floating gardens is famous for its flowers and breathes an atmosphere of peace and harmony. It is particularly the naturalness of the Indians living here that is stressed: “the women and children are washing and dressing themselves at the water’s edge” and there is “a fine jungle air about it” (UEP 75). The outside world does not seem to have penetrated too much into this

15 Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 128, 135.
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world.

The entire sketch, with its descriptions of a pure and closed community that is bound to disappear, resembles a local color story, a genre that was popular at the end of the nineteenth century. Susan Donaldson defines local color stories as “brief glimpses of worlds in decline,” which attracted a reading public with a yearning for a purer and simpler world. Though Porter’s sketch was written after the heyday of the genre, it may still have fascinated the readers of the Christian Science Monitor, who were also living in a rapidly changing world of modernization. The elements in regional literature that attracted readers, for instance, “literary tourism” and the contrast “between the complexities of the present with the simplicities of the past,” also occurs in Porter’s sketch.16 Whether or not Porter intended to write a local color sketch, she evidently wanted to please her readers with a portrait of a natural world populated with simple people living close to the earth.

A similar portrait of a friendly, peaceful race in close contact with the earth is found in Porter’s Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts (1922), written as a catalogue for an exhibition of Mexican folk art which she had helped to organize. Porter’s great admiration of the Indian as artist is clear from the Outline. The many descriptions of Indian art objects in the three parts of the monograph show that Porter was delighted by their beauty. In the third part she defends what she calls “a peasant art” and continues that “the artists are one with a people simple as nature is simple [...]” Porter warns that if the artist loses contact with “his mother earth [...] he might succumb [...] to the overwhelming forces of a world turned dizzyingly by a machine” (UEP 165,167). Though this remark is made in the context of a description of Indian art, it may point to Porter’s later interest in the Agrarianism of the 1930s.

In one of her digressions in the first part Porter stresses the rights of the Indians and their importance for Mexico. Scientist and artist, she writes, “are agreed in this essential: the problem of the native is the problem of Mexico today. His future is invaluable, and must be secured. Modern sentiment of humanity and economic wisdom alike declare that the Indio has in the life of today his rights,

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his uses and his destiny” (UEP 140). This idea of securing the future of the Indian was advocated by the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, whose work was among the sources Porter used for her text in the Outline. Gamio was among Porter’s acquaintances in the early twenties and may have influenced her views of the natives and their future.  

Porter’s descriptions of the Indians and their art in her monograph should be seen in the light of the purpose of the exhibition. The exhibition had grown out of an earlier one that had drawn much attention, and it was decided that the new exhibition was to be shown in the U.S. However, the U.S. objected to the exhibition because it was considered political propaganda. In an undated note Porter wrote about this refusal: “[…] they looked upon this show as dangerous propaganda and how right they were!” (Hornbake 79-0437).

There can be no doubt about Porter’s love of Indian art and her concern about the future of the natives, but she may also have had in mind the political effect of the exhibition in the U.S. when she wrote her descriptions of a friendly, peaceful, and simple race.

The painter Diego Rivera, whom she much admired for his mural paintings celebrating the revolution was one of the advisors for the exhibit and monograph. In her review titled “Rivera’s Personal Revolution in Mexico,” Porter praises him for his paintings: “Mexico does not appear to me as it did before I saw Rivera’s paintings of it. The mountains, the Indians, the horses, the flowers and children have all subtly changed in outlines and colors. They are Rivera’s Indians and flowers and all now, but I like looking at them” (BR 109). Later, however, she came to dislike Rivera for his insincerity and his communism. Porter frequently refers to him unfavorably in her personal papers. In one of her political notes written between 1937 and 1940 she says about him: “He is and has been a political and artistic opportunist from the beginning - I have known him since 1922 - I have seen the extremely wide gulf between his theory and practise and I do not trust him” (Hornbake 82-0734). Porter makes a caricature of Rivera in two of her stories, the unfinished “The Lovely Legend” and “The Martyr,” which was published in 1923. The stories

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17 Walsh has pointed out that Porter often accompanied Gamio to Teotihuacán and drew “from his vast knowledge of Mexican Indian culture, ancient and modern […],” Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 49.

18 The exhibit did make it to Los Angeles and was open from 11-25 November, 1922.
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are not only interesting as an example of Porter’s craft as a caricaturist, but also for the portrait she draws of Lupe Marín, who became Rivera’s model and later his wife. In his autobiography My Art, My Life Rivera highly praises Marín’s beauty, describing her as if she were an animal: “Her face was an Indian’s, the mouth with its full, powerful lips open, the corners drooping like those of a tiger. The teeth showed sparkling and regular: animal teeth [...]”. In another outline of her undated notes in her Mexican Daybook to be used for the novel “Historical Present” she had planned to write, Porter describes Lupe’s history and her affair with Rivera: “Lupe: her history of poverty, pride and bitterness as one of a family of fast beautiful girls in Guadalajara...not really fast, but poor, unconventional, and therefore prey to men...her affair with Diego. Her demand for marriage” (Hornbake 79-0342). In both stories Porter portrays this woman as a fierce woman, a “lean she-devil” in the “The Martyr” (CS 34) and a “brute” in “The Lovely Legend” (UEP 208). In the latter story the narrator describes her as a woman whose “harsh caverns under her fixed brows were fierce and blind looking. She was tall as a ghost.” Walsh sees a resemblance between Lupe Marín and María Concepción: “Porter partly modeled her heroine after Lupe Marín, Rivera’s tall, combative Guadalajaran wife.” This seems to be in conformity with Rivera’s description of his wife in his autobiography. It is, however, not clear why Porter elsewhere wanted to ridicule this Indian woman, whom she apparently knew personally.

María Concepción certainly is a combative character and like Lupe Marín she comes from Guadalajara, but there do not seem to be further resemblances between the two characters. She figures in Porter’s first published story “María Concepción”, written in 1922 after her second visit to Mexico and published in 1922 in the Century magazine. In one of her undated autobiographical notes Porter wrote that she struggled with it and wrote it during a long hot summer (Hornbake 65-0351). It has become one of her most famous and most praised stories. The story can be compared with “The Dove of Chapacalco,” because here too Porter uses a strong, independent, and clever woman as a protagonist. To a certain extent Vicenta and María Concepción are similar, but there are also differences. Vicenta “the

20 Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 76.
dove” develops into a revolutionist, while María Concepción is portrayed as the primitive woman who avenges herself against the wrong done to her. Moreover, Vicenta is not a fully developed character, whereas María Concepción is. An interesting aspect of the story is the close Indian community in which she lives. Though María Concepción’s pride results in her increasing isolation, the community comes to the rescue when she is in danger and defends her against a force they see as alien: “María Concepción suddenly felt herself guarded, surrounded, upborne by her faithful friends. They were around her, speaking for her, defending her […]” (CS 20). The sympathetic portrait strikingly contrasts with the picture of the inert and downtrodden Indians which so often occurs in Porter’s political work.

Honey plays an important part in the plot. The scene, in which María Concepción, on her way to bring food for her husband and his employer, thinks that she “would like a fresh crust of honey” (CS 4), is crucial for the plot, because it leads to María Concepción’s discovery of her husband’s adultery and finally to her murder of María Rosa, the beekeeper, who “had eaten too much honey and had had too much love” (CS 17). Coming to María Rosa’s place María Concepción peered “through the crevices in the thick hedge of cactus that sheered up nakedly, like bared knife blades set protectingly around the small clearing” (CS 4). As Walsh has pointed out, the natural image of the “bared knife blades” obviously “relate to María Concepción’s butchering knife,” with which she will later kill her rival María Rosa.

Among Porter’s papers are two undated notes she made in her Mexican Daybook about a honey girl. Both show her nostalgic longing for the girl’s oneness with nature. The first note, “I’d like to see again that honey-coloured girl, dipping her arms shoulder-deep in the hives of honey” (Hornbake 79-0407), may have inspired her to write her poem “In Tepozotlan” (1923):

21 Ruth M. Alvarez points to “the pictorial method” Porter used for the story and the many allusions to pre-Hispanic rituals and festivals. Alvarez also convincingly argues that, as Porter did in her essay “The Mexican Trinity,” she condemns in “María Concepción” the exploitation of the Indians by “the foreigners, the Church, and the Mexican government or political figures.” Ruth Moore Alvarez, “Katherine Anne Porter and Mexican Art.” Diss. Maryland U., 1990, 47.

22 Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 77.
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I should like to see again
That honey-colored girl
Dipping her arms shoulder-deep
In the hives of honey.
Who can tell me where she is gone,
That untroubled innocent
Whose hands were kissed by bees,
And whose fingers dripped honey? (P 74).

In the second note Porter adds that the girl was fated: “I wanted to see that girl again, standing in the bright sunlight, carefully lifting the tops from the bee hives...She was there; I felt as if she had always been there, I put her in a story once, and called her María Rosa, and gave her a very sad fate. But it was only because I felt the fatefulness of all beautiful creatures clinging about her. And yet her face was very calm and lovely as she stood there” (Hornbeck 79-0436). Apparently this pure Indian honey girl represented for Porter an ideal world that had been lost. In her poem of 1923 she asks where she can find it again. Porter may have had in mind the lost Indian peoples Manuel Gamio studied.

Porter also shows her interest in Gamio’s studies of ancient Indian races in her sketch “Two Ancient Mexican Pyramids - the Core of a City Unknown until a Few Years Ago,” in which she describes “the most fascinating of all Mexican ruins,” which she had seen in the valley of Teotihuacán. She concludes her sketch thus: “A superb race flourished there, and a wise one. Their religion was by evidence their reason for being there” (UEP 189, 193).

Porter had been in Teotihuacán a year before, during which visit she made notes for a never written essay based on her observations. Gamio carried out excavations there. Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara argues that “Gamio’s theory was based on the assumption that the glory of Mexico’s indigenous cultures lay entirely in the precolonial past” and that “Teotihuacán was chosen for reasons having to do at least as much with its preconquest past as with its miserable contemporary plight.”23 Referring to Gamio’s work La población del Valle de Teotihuacán (1922), Walsh points out that “Gamio characterized the population as spiritually demoralized, melancholic,

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and passive as well as economically destitute.”24 Porter concludes her notes thus: “It was not only to see churches that I went to Teotihuacán. Indians live there, uncorrupted by one drop of white blood. I wished to see what four centuries of civilization had done for them” (UEP 106). However, she never explicitly wrote about the Indians she saw there. We, therefore, do not know if she agreed with Gamio’s views of the Indians living in Teotihuacán. What Porter did agree with was Gamio’s theory that the Indians should be incorporated into Mexican society in order to improve their living standard. In the well-known series of lectures Aspects of Mexican Civilization held at the University of Chicago by José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio in 1926, the latter says at the end of a lecture titled “Incorporating the Indian in the Mexican Population”:

It is unquestionably urgent, most urgent, to investigate the indigenous population of Mexico scientifically, for until this is done thoroughly, social contacts cannot be normalized and orientated authoritatively, a thing by all means desirable since it requires convergent racial, cultural, and spiritual fusion to secure unification of tongue and equilibrium of economic interests. This, and only this, can place the Mexican nation as a nation, upon a solid, logical, consistent, and permanent base.25

Porter knew these lectures and commented upon them in her review “Paternalism and the Mexican Problem,” published in New York Herald Tribune Books, March 27, 1927. About Gamio she writes:

I feel he has come nearer to the real life of his own country than either of his compatriots or the liberal minded Mr. Priestley. During his work as director of the Bureau of Anthropology he made a profound sympathetic study of racial origins. His findings presented him with his own special phase of the Mexican problem: that of incorporating this deep-grounded native Indian life with the modern mixed currents of Mexican culture. This incorporation would result in a recognized Indian nation instead of a three-layer, disorganized structure of white, mestizo and Indian. He knows that Mexico

24 Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 50.
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and the Indian belong to each other, and consistently refuses to regard him as other than the rightful owner and proprietor of his country. He recognizes the futility of imposing on the Indian customs and standards alien to him: [he] considers the economic and geographical factors and the human one (BR 54).

Apparently influenced by Gamio, Porter was opposed to a policy of paternalism towards the Indians, which might lead to dependency.

Among Porter’s non-political work there is also her sketch “In a Mexican Patio” (1921), which she wrote during her first stay in Mexico. The sketch is a warm and humorous description of the events of one day and gives a vivid picture of the objects and inhabitants of the pension in Mexico City in which Porter lived at the time. The lively account of what she sees and hears gains special force from her descriptions of all the colors she sees. Nothing important happens during the day; the narrator just quietly and casually mentions a series of impressions and incidents during that day, ranging from the sounds and smells early in the morning to the piano-playing late at night. But the narrator also sees exploitation of the Indian servants in the house and there is a suggestion she feels guilty about her complicity in it. The servants are underpaid and their long hours of hard toil lead to fast ageing. Observing some of the servants’ children and referring to one of them, Porter writes: “She is very beautiful, with finely formed hands and feet. In a decade, she will be like her mother, a seventeen year old girl already haggard, who works with a baby on her arm, wound in her rebozo. In two decades she will resemble her grandmother who cannot be older than forty years.” Admiration and affection are shown in a passage which describes the looks of an Indian girl who carries an “immense tray of food on her head” (UEP 67, 64) and particularly in an episode about Indian men and women who are building a thatched hut to be used as a teahouse by Porter’s American neighbors.

There is a striking contrast between this early sketch and Porter’s later essay “Leaving the Petate,” in which she also describes Indian servants in Mexico City. Porter wrote this essay during her fourth visit to Mexico. Whereas she shows affection for the Indian servants in “In a Mexican Patio,” in her later essay she satirizes the wish of some of the characters to find a more comfortable way of life by leaving the petate, the Indian sleeping mat of woven straw, which to
Porter was the symbol for Indian simplicity and naturalness. The essay was published in a shortened version in The New Republic in 1931. In the shortened version the narrator mainly draws attention to three Indian women, Consuelo, Eufemia, and Hilaria. Porter suggests that the human inclination to take to “the delights of kinder living” (CE. 389) will affect the Indians, implying that the Indian’s traditional way of life is bound to disappear. Porter uses satire to voice her disillusionment. The simple petate with its smell of straw is now used by revolutionists “to profess Indian points of view, to make, in short, an Indian revolution.” Toward the end of this version of the essay she ironically predicts that the children of her Indian servant Eufemia and her husband “may become mestizo revolutionaries, and keep up the work of saving the Indian” (CE 388, 393), expressing not only her disillusionment, but also her dislike of racial miscegenation. The irony is continued in the descriptions of how Eufemia, after her engagement to a non-Indian barber, starts pilfering from the household money to save for a sewing machine. Through Consuelo, the Indian servant of another young American woman, Porter ridicules the Indian curanderas and their healing methods. When Consuelo falls ill she “prefers to stick to her own witch doctors, and lets the foreign ones alone” (CE 391). The portrait Porter draws of the third servant, Eufemia’s aunt Hilaria, is the most unfavorable: Hilaria is “a born intriguer, a carrier of gossip and maker of mischief” (CE 389).

In the part of the essay which was cut by Malcolm Cowley Porter unfavorably contrasts the Indian servants in Mexico City with the “natural” Indian family in Xochimilco. As in her sketch “Xochimilco,” Porter emphasizes the naturalness of the place, the houses, and the Indians living there. The owner of one of the houses “had white cotton clothing with a blue cotton sash, and thonged sandals on his feet,” and he “carried a hoe and a garden fork […]” (UEP 250). However, there is irony in her description of a little Indian errand boy of twelve, who showed “the most complete smiling dignity while waiting for an answer,” but prefers a more comfortable way of life in Mexico City. When invited to come and stay with the narrator at Xochimilco he feels miserable under the primitive living conditions of

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26 In his letter of 30 November 1930, Cowley wrote to Porter that though the sketch was “universally liked,” it was “judged to be longer than we could possibly use” (Hornbake 18-0706).
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the village and is only too glad when he can leave the place the following morning. Porter gives a satirical portrait of the boy’s aunts in this segment. The sisters “had been brought up in immense petty respectability in Mexico City”; three had married non-Indians, while the fourth, the boy’s mother who had died, “had disgraced herself in their eyes by marrying back into the Indian blood.” Concluding this part with the sentence “And the aunts never go to Xochimilco,” Porter stresses her view that the desire for more comfort will lead to loss of traditions (UEP 250, 251).

It is clear that Porter’s disillusionment with Mexico will have influenced her views of Indian servants. Still, there is a striking difference between the Eufemia of the essay, in which Porter describes her as “combative, acquisitive, secretive, very bold and handsome and full of tricks” (CE 389), and the Eufemia Porter wrote about in her letter of 12 July 1930 to Herbst: “My Eufemia comes in every morning with a bunch of flowers on top of the basket, having pinched out ten cents from the food money for pure decoration, which is the right spirit. She is an Indian girl, very amiable and lively [...] I choose this merry, good hearted little creature who brings a pleasant atmosphere with her” (Beinecke). Apparently Porter wanted to fictionalize her amiable servant and change her into an Indian servant “full of tricks” in order to express her disillusionment with the Indians’ wish for a higher standard of living at the expense of their traditions. In her essay Porter also fictionalized her Indian cook, who had been a soldadera (a female soldier) in the Mexican army. In an outline, dated 1940, with the heading “The Most Unforgettable Character I’ve met,” which she wanted to use for a story, Porter shows her admiration for Teodora’s “extraordinary character and personality” (Hornbake 79-0684). Towards the end of the published version of the essay, however, Porter uses Teodora to ridicule the social pretensions of the servants by having Teodora look down upon Eufemia: “Think of Eufemia going away with just a barber” (CE 393).

The same affection for another Indian servant of Porter’s appears in an undated note:

I want to write down all the things I can remember about María as they come to me, not adding anything not perfectly clear, or anything my imagination may have invented about her since I saw her. She was very beautiful, I like remembering her,
she was a complete being without any false notes in her, and when I call her to mind the way she looked in the life we had together, she is always walking very steadily, with even long steps, or sitting entirely quiet with her great volumes of crinkled black hair freshly washed hanging down her back: she was beautiful and she had a hopeless future not because of anything in her, she was beautiful and strong, but because she was an Indian and a servant (Hornbake 79-0410).

Here again Porter deeply regrets the exploitation of the Indians as servants.

From Porter's Mexican work as a whole emerges a notion of the natives that is dominated by compassion for an oppressed and exploited people. As I have shown, a number of her essays, her unfinished story “The Dove of Chapascalco,” and “Hacienda” are politically inspired or political propaganda, resulting in descriptions of a “down-trodden” people. Porter's disillusionment with the Mexican revolution also affected her views of the Indians, which is particularly shown in her story “Hacienda.” Part of her disillusionment with the revolution was caused by what she saw as the failure of land repartition.

But as we have seen, there are also other aspects to Porter's view of the Indians in her Mexican work and personal papers. She admires their art and in her observations of individual Indians, including those of her servants, she is often impressed by their cleanliness, industry, beauty, and colorful dress. In her later Mexican work, however, disillusionment dominates.

There is sometimes a striking contrast between Porter's disillusionment and the hope expressed in part of her work. Porter expressed her feelings of hope and her illusions in a revealing, undated note in one of her daybooks under the heading “About reality”:

A feeling (an emotion) is no less real because it is based on illusion. In my experience, some of my deepest feelings were invested in beliefs and hopes which on examination, or by later event, proved to have little basis in fact. Yet my feelings were real, my experience was real, it had a real effect on my mind, my acts, changed perhaps the course of my life, influenced my later point of view, touched and altered everything—except, perhaps, my tendency to illusion under strain of deep feeling. I
“A Moving Experience”:
Porter’s Impressions of the Mexican Indians in the 1920s and early 1930s

cannot see. That is my trouble (Hornbake 68-0740).
It is a cri de coeur about her beliefs and hopes not founded on fact. Coming to Mexico in 1920 she did invest her “deepest feelings” in the revolution and the natives of Mexico, but these feelings led to disillusionment. Porter finally comes to recognize that under the strain of emotions, swayed by her political fervor, she was not able “to see” the Indians.

In an undated note Porter gives a striking, general view of the Indians in Mexico:

They are not simple, for all they are so concerned with the pressing question of how and where shall they find their next batch of tortillas. It is a question of the first importance and it comes up to be answered again every morning, and you might think it would have a permanently depressing effect on their capacities for such things as love, learning, practised of esthetics (sic) such as making their household bits and pieces beautiful as well as useful, a wish to learn, even a wish to live, you might think, would be severely hampered….a sense of family and all human relations. May it does. We shall never know, now, what the Indian might have been if he had not been under the heels of such a discouragingly long and varied row of oppressors. We do not really know what he was, but we can surmise from the remains; we cannot really know what he may become, but there is good reason for hope (Hornbake 79-0427).

The note is characteristic for Porter’s notions of the Indians she observed during her four visits to Mexico. She stresses the poor living conditions of the natives as a result of long periods of oppression, sees beauty in their “household bits and pieces,” and refers to Gamio’s studies of ancient races in mentioning “the remains” of the preconquest Indians. The hope with which she concludes her note is typical of expressing her hope for a better future of the natives.
Chapter 3
The German Encounter:
Porter’s Observations of Germans in a pastoral countryside and Nazism in Berlin.

After Porter had witnessed the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi regime when she was in Berlin from late September 1931 to January 1932 she showed a dislike of Germans which is not found in her earlier views. Porter’s anti-fascism and her fear of Nazism apparently inspired her to write her autobiographical and political story “The Leaning Tower.” In her novel Ship of Fools Porter’s awareness of danger is shown in her satirical portrayals of the Germans aboard the ship. In the following two sections I shall discuss the contrast between Porter’s notions of Germans in her story and her novel on the one hand and on the other the positive views she showed in her story “Holiday” and her letters about South Germany.

On 26 April 1960 Porter wrote in her letter to the author and university teacher Eliseo Vivas that her story “Holiday” “was written thirty-seven years ago” and was “based on an episode in my life when I was twenty” (Hornbake 28-0848). Porter refers here to a visit she paid to a German settlement, the Hillendahls’ farm in East Texas, which belonged to relatives of Jules Hillendahl who was to marry her sister Mary Alice. Porter’s visit to the farm, probably in 1912, was an escape from the misery of her first marriage with John Koontz, from whom she finally divorced in 1915. The beginning of “Holiday,” is more explicit about her marriage troubles and her retreat: “At that time I was too young for some of the troubles I was having, and I had not yet learned what to do with them. It no longer can matter what kind of troubles they were, or what finally became of them. It seemed to me then there was nothing to do but to run away from them […]” (CS 407).

As is suggested in her 1960 letter to Eliseo Vivas Porter wrote her story in 1923, but it was not published until December 1960, when it came out in the December issue of Atlantic Monthly. In her letter of 27 December 1960 to Monroe Wheeler she explains the history of the writing of her story: “At thirty I started trying to write it. At intervals for the next ten years I made three drafts, all rejected by me. Last spring in turning over my papers, I found it and started working on it
again. I realized then that except for the very crux of the matter, I had
done the story in the first draft. So I used that and threaded in as I went
along the things I was unable to say so long ago, and got it said
somehow without disturbing the shape or tone or pace or direction of
the original story” (L. 579).  

The story is told by a first-person narrator, who is the observer
and partly participant in the activities at the farm. The story proper
about the narrator’s observations of these Germans starts when she
arrives at the farm in the evening and is introduced to the various
members of the hard-working Müllers, who had “streamed out of the
doors” to do their tasks for the evening. She is impressed by the “thick
hard decent peasant hands, warm and strong,” she shakes and feels at
home in her “attic room, with the sloping roof” which was “homely
and familiar” (CS 411, 412, 413).

The Müllers appear to be a close, unassimilated German family
living and working on their farm in East Texas “not far from the
Louisiana line,” “where Texas and Louisiana melted together in a
rotting swamp […]” At this place the narrator observes the Germans
who, as she notices, live “in a house of perpetual exile” (CS 408, 413).
The exile the narrator mentions refers to the emigration of Germans
to America, which started in the early nineteenth century and later
expanded greatly during the 1848-1849 Revolution in Germany, which
was aimed at economic and social reform. Unlike other immigrants in
America at this time, the Germans resisted assimilation and
Americanization. John Hawgood writes about this resistance: “Yet the
German immigrants, particularly after 1848, and especially when they
were settled in groups, struggled hard to remain unassimilated, (often
to their distinct material disadvantage) and to prevent their children
from becoming assimilated.” Hawgood also points out that “To a
great extent the Germans used their language as a weapon to ward off
Americanization and assimilation, and used every social milieu, the
home, the church, the school, the press, in the fight to preserve the
German language, even among their children and grandchildren.”

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1 Alvarez has pointed out that “There are three parts to the surviving
manuscript version, of which only the very beginning was written in 1960 about the
time the story was published.” “Katherine Anne Porter and Mexican Art,” 356.
2 John Hawgood, The Tragedy of German-America: The Germans in the United
States of America during the Nineteenth Century—and After (New York: Putnam, 1940), 37,
39.
The Müllers fit exactly into the picture Hawgood gives of German immigrants in this period. For the Müllers “life and the land were one indivisible thing; but never in any wise did they confuse nationality with habitation,” sticking instead to their customs: “[…] three generations in this country had not made them self-conscious or disturbed their ancient customs.” They do not intermarry and they continue to speak German, though it is “Low German corrupted by three generations in a foreign country” (CS 413, 415).

The portrayal of this German family focuses mainly on the women, who in contrast to the sons, are not shown as a group, but become individuals in the story. Mother Müller, “a tall strong-looking woman wearing a three-cornered black wool shawl on her head, her skirts looped up over a brown flannel petticoat,” is the matriarch of the family. She milks the cows, carries the milking pails, gives “orders right and left,” and when her husband drives away to town, she gives him “directions and instructions about household needs,” which he “performed exactly.” Mother Müller is an impressive woman, who knows what to do even under critical conditions. When the farm is hit by a storm and flooding rain, which destroy the crop, she carries “a day-old calf on her back up a ladder against the inside wall of the barn,” lines up the cows in the stable, and milks them all, “sitting on her milking stool in the rising water.” The narrator gives a moving picture of the matriarch, who the following morning appears to have caught pneumonia, is put to bed by her daughters and, after the family had gathered together in the room, dies leaving them in a state of bewilderment: “[…] they screamed and called and implored her in a tumult utterly beyond control. The noise of their grief and terror filled the place. In the midst of this, Mother Müller died” (CS 412, 418, 430, 431).

The portrayal of the matriarch shows the narrator’s affection for this German woman. Similarly, the daughters, ranging from the young Hatsy of seventeen, who is about to marry, to Annetje, the eldest daughter, are observed with fondness. Hatsy stands out in the story. It is Hatsy who kindly takes the narrator up to her attic after her arrival: “Hatsy took my hand as if I were a child needing a guide.” Later, when she observes Hatsy assist her mother in the cowshed, she admires her: “Hatsy’s long yellow braids whisked around her shoulders, her laughter was a shrill streak of gaiety above the angry cow voices and the raucous shouting of the old woman.” At table,
where Hasty is seated on the children’s side to attend them and keep
them in order, the narrator notices that Hasty shares “the enormous
energy and animal force” of the family. There is affection again in the
description of Hasty’s marriage with a young man “who resembled her
brothers enough to be her brother.” Hasty smiles and blushes during
the marriage ceremony, the bridal kiss is “a very chaste reserved one”
and the bridegroom “looked at Hasty as if he liked what he saw.”
Hasty’s two sisters, Gretchen and Annetje, both mothers of young
children, are less prominent in the story, but the narrator draws a
loving portrait of them too. Stress is laid on the motherhood of these
two women. Gretchen, “the pet of the family,” is expecting another
baby and has “the sly smiling manner of a spoiled child, who wore the
contented air of a lazy, healthy young animal,” while Annetje, who is
now mother of five young children, “carried her newly born baby over
her shoulder, where he drooled comfortably down her back […]” (CS
412, 414, 416, 421, 424).

Though there is hardly any individual portrayal of the men of the
family, Father Müller is prominent as the patriarch of the family
and moreover he is a wealthy man and an authority in the German
colony: “When Father Müller talked, [the German community]
listened respectfully, with faith in him as a strong man, head of his
own house and his community.” He is introduced into the story when
the family sit down to dinner: “Father Müller took his patriarch’s place
at the head of the table, Mother Müller looming behind him like a
dark boulder.” When at table the Lutheran pastor’s advice to attend
church more often is discussed, he strongly opposes the pastor
christening Annetje’s baby: “What I say iss, it iss all craziness to go to
church and pay a preacher goot money to talk his nonsense. Say rather
that he pay me to come and lissen, then I vill go!” he fiercely tells his
family. After a heated debate on the matter among the brothers and
sisters they again appear to be a whole and undivided family: “They
were united in their tribal scepticisms, as in everything else” (CS 423,
415, 417).

Father Müller, who is not a religious man, has put his faith in
Das Kapital, which for him is “a very bible.” He is a devoted reader of
the book, of which he “knew whole chapters almost by heart, and
added nothing to, took nothing from, the canonical, once-delivered
text.” The narrator is struck by Father Müller’s ideals: “And here was
this respectable old farmer who accepted its dogma as a religion - that
is to say, its legendary inapplicable precepts were just, right, proper, one must believe in them, of course, but life, everyday living, was another and unrelated thing.” The scene is interesting because Father Müller has his own interpretation of landownership. He owns much land and many farmers in the neighborhood rent land from him. He explains to the narrator his arrangements with these farmers:

These men, they cannot buy their land. The land must be bought, for Kapital owns it, and Kapital will not give back to the worker the land that is his. Well, somehow, I can always buy land. Why? I do not know. I only know that with my first land here I made good crops to buy more land, and so I rent it cheap, more than anybody else I rent it cheap, I lend money so my neighbors do not fall into the hands of the bank, and so I am not Kapital. Someday these workers, they can buy land from me, for less than they can get it anywhere else (CS 422, 423).

Alvarez argues that the portrait of the Müllers reveals a striking similarity with the frescoes by Rivera that Porter had seen during her third visit to Mexico, about the time she started to write her story: “Porter also drew on the Marxist philosophy of Rivera and other of her artist friends in depicting Father Müller and his ideas about land.”

This interpretation is confirmed by Porter’s ideas in the 1920s about the redistribution of land in favor of the Mexican Indians, as shown in chapter 2. Father Müller is not shown to be an entirely unselfish man, but it is evident that the land is divided among his neighbors not only in his own interest but also in theirs. Other critics, however, have given different explanations of Father Müller’s arrangements. For example, George Core sees the arrangement as “the close grip of the beneficent dictator” while John Hardy is of the opinion that Father Müller reads Marx eccentrically and is “in no way morally enlightened by his studies.” However, Hawgood points out that the German settler held the land in deep regard and did not buy land just for

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3 Alvarez, “Katherine Anne Porter and Mexican Art,” 360.
speculation. It is hard to believe, therefore, that the narrator wanted to represent Father Müller unfavorably as he is interpreted by the former two critics.

There is a remarkable letter Porter wrote on 17 and 18 March 1938 to Albert Erskine, whom she would marry a month later, asking him for information about Marx and Engels on behalf of one of her students, from which it appears that she knew little about the theories of Marx and Engels: “I have a student who is writing about a German settlement here in Texas made up of refugees after the 1849 troubles in Germany. So I told her to read Marx, and some of Engels, and get a line on what was revolutionary idea then…. and there…. She came back all cheerful and said her husband had volunteered to read Marx and Engels for her and summarize the doctrine …. Angel, would you do as much for me?” (Hornbake 47-0215). Father Müller’s views of land-holding, which, as he tells the narrator, also meant pressure on the community to elect one of his sons-in-law as sheriff: “I buy my land with my hard work, all my life, and I rent it cheap to my neighbors, and then they say they will not elect my son-in-law, my Annette’s husband, to be sheriff because I am atheist. So then I say, all right, but next year you pay more for your land or more shares of your crops” (C’s 423).

Besides land, Father Müller also owns the Turnverein, the pavilion in the woods where the German colony meets every Sunday. The narrator, joining the Müllers one Sunday, observes the social gathering of these Germans, who had come there to sit and talk, while the girls and boys dance, the girls “with energy and direction” and the boys “more awkward, but willing” (C’s 423). Here it appears that the Müllers do not only work hard, but also lead a social life. At the Turnverein “Mother Müller took her ease after a hard week. Her gaunt limbs would relax, her knees spread squarely apart, and she would gossip over her beer with the women of her own generation,” while Father Müller “would sit with the sober grandfathers, their long curved pipes wagging on their chests as they discussed local politics with profound gravity […]” The atmosphere the narrator describes is relaxed. There is a small brass band, which plays “clippity country dances,” the younger mothers are allowed “freedom to dance or sit in peace with their own friends,” while the children are playing nearby

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(Cs 423). Though these descriptions may be an idealized version of a Turnverein, Porter must have actually seen such a gathering. Dona Reeves writes about these meetings: “small-town social life in Germany transplanted successfully to the Vereinsleben of Texas, generally by means of close-knit family ties and a shared emigration experience.” As I have discussed in the introduction, the Turnverein served as a means of bonding the ethnic group.

From the visits of the neighbors to the Müllers recounted by the narrator, it is also evident that the family do not live an isolated life. The friends are present at Hasty’s wedding feast and after the birth of Gretchen’s son the neighboring women “from miles around” come to the farm, where “over coffee and beer the talk grew broad, the hearty gutturals were swallowed in the belly of laughter; those honest hard-working wives and mothers saw life for a few hours as a hearty low joke, and it did them good.” The family share their grief with their neighbors on the day of Mother Müller’s burial: “At every greeting the family gave way and wept afresh, as naturally and openly as children” (Cs 428, 432).

The family’s crippled servant Ottlie is a central figure in the narrator’s story. Ottlie not only cooks and serves huge meals for the guests, but must always be entirely at the disposal of the family. The narrator, who later discovers that the servant is “the elder sister of Annetje and Gretchen and Hasty,” is dismayed when she notices that the Müllers heavily exploit Ottlie and hardly take any notice of this limping, stumbling, dumb and mentally deficient woman. Ottlie had been a healthy young girl with “strong legs, round as sausages,” as appears from a photograph she shows the narrator. The narrator, who strongly sympathizes with Ottlie, thinks that the family “forgot her in pure self-defense” and tries to reason out their hard-heartedness: “what else could they have done with Ottlie? By a physical accident in her childhood she had been stripped of everything but her mere existence. It was not a society or a class that pampered its invalids and the unfit.” The narrator concludes that “in some way that I could not quite explain to myself, I found great virtue and courage in their steadiness and refusal to feel sorry for anybody, least of all for

themseless” (CS 426, 427, 428).

Much later Porter came to a different conclusion. In a letter of 22 September 1964 to Jon Tuska, who intended to write a critical book on Porter and her writings, she wrote:

I wrote it [the story] three times more than thirty years ago, set it aside because I could not resolve my own dilemma, brought it out one day and finished it in twelve days work. It was only that my own upbringing could not admit the family treatement (sic) of the afflicted member. I thought it cruel and terrible and could not accept it. After a long life I saw that they were right - in my class of people we would have done one of two ineffectual things: kept her isolated in an invalid’s chair, nursed and waited on, or would have sent her to a “home” for such unlucky persons - both wrong. Ottile lived safely in the very heart of her family, and was the most useful - really indispensable, member of it. But it took me a long time to arrive at this sensible, humane conclusion!! Imagine. They understood her condition exactly and knew just how to treat her; and I did not, as the story shows (Hornbake 28-0665).

Evidently Porter left her first portrayals of the Germans as she had described them at that time unaltered, but later in life understood that the family dealt with “this afflicted member” as they should, thus acknowledging she had given an inaccurate picture of the Müllers as far as their treatment of Ottile was concerned.

Though the narrator describes the Müllers in their daily lives as she had observed them during her stay at the farm, it should be noted that the portraits are framed in a pastoral setting, emphasized by frequent descriptions of nature, in which the narrator forgets her troubles. On her way to the farm she first notices “the desolate mud-colored shapeless scene,” which in the course of her stay changes into a landscape full of colors in springtime. There is, for example, an idealized portrait of Annetje’s two-year-old child, who is taken by the narrator into a narrow lane, which is her favorite walk and recurs in other scenes of the story: “I would turn again into a smaller lane, smoother because less travelled, and we would go slowly between the aisle of mulberry trees where the fruit was beginning to hang and curl like green furry worms. The baby would sit in a compact mound of flannel and calico, her pale-blue eyes tilted and shining under her cap,
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her two lower teeth showing in a rapt smile.” In this pastoral setting the land and the strong ties between the farmers and their land are stressed. One of the narrator’s first impressions is when she sees the German family as “solid, practical, hard-bitten, land-holding German peasants, who struck their mattocks into the earth deep and held fast wherever they were [...].” She also notices that “everybody worked all the time,” like Hasty, who will “be tired all her life” (CS 409, 419, 413, 421).

This sympathetic portrait of a settlement of a German family in Texas living in close harmony with nature and soil reminds one of the descriptions of the natives in some of Porter’s non-political Mexican sketches, in particular “Xochimilco” and “In a Mexican Patio,” which Porter also wrote in the early 1920s. In these sketches, too, there is an observer who describes what she notices. As in “Holiday” there is a close community in “Xochimilco,” whose Indians “seem a natural and gracious part of the earth.” The Indian girls of this ideal world are described with fondness and the observer admires the strong men who steer their boats through the canals of the village. She sees that one of them “drags his pole through the water with a tremendous gesture” and he “lives as a tree lives, rooted in earth, drinking in light and air” (UEP 75, 76). Though the pastoral world of “Holiday” is not as ideal as the one in “Xochimilco,” nature and soil are essential in both communities. In “Children of Xochitl,” an earlier unpublished version of “Xochimilco,” the narrator stresses the relaxed world of the village: “There are no neurotics among them [the Indians of Xochimilco]. No strained lines of sleeplessness or worry mar their faces.” And observing a girl washing clothes, she notices that “there is a trance like quality in her motions, an unconsciousness in her sharpened profile, as if she had never awakened from the prenatal dream.” Indeed, one of her companions on her visit to Xochimilco, “who is tormented with neuroses,” admires the girl: “Fancy her inner repose!” (UEP 82, 83) This therapeutic escape from anxiety, often found in local color stories, recurs in “Holiday.”

The therapeutic escape in “Holiday” is expressed in the descriptions when the observer begins to feel attached to the Müllers after she realized she could relax among them: “But the repose, the almost mystical inertia of their minds in the midst of this muscular life, communicated itself to me little by little, and I absorbed it gratefully in silence and felt all the hidden knotted painful places in my own mind
beginning to loosen. It was easier to breathe, and I might even weep, if I pleased. In a very few days I no longer felt like weeping” (CS 418).

Evidently, Porter’s notions of this German immigrant family, among whom she can find healing for the “painful places” in her mind, are closely informed by her views of the Mexican Indians in the three sketches, where there is no “sleeplessness or worry.” This near conflation of the two ethnic groups Porter described in the early 1920s is the more likely since Porter started to write “Holiday” only two years after she had written her Mexican sketches.

As Porter wrote in her letter to Jon Tuska, “Holiday” was one of her “most deeply rooted stories.” Much later she was shocked when she encountered warlike Germans in Berlin, instead of the peaceful peasant community she had observed in Texas.

Porter went to Berlin at the end of her fourth visit to Mexico in 1931. Looking back a year later at the misery she had felt before she left Mexico she wrote to her friend Mary Doherty on 25 October 1932: “I left Mexico sick spiritually and physically, my time and energies wasted, my work halted; I felt as if I had escaped from an army of blood-suckers” (Hornbake 19-0768). The misery Porter felt was caused not only by her disillusionment with the Mexican revolution, but also by the quarrels she had had with Hart Crane, who had come to Mexico about four months before she left. In her letter to Mary Doherty she wrote about Crane and his suicide in 1932: “The subject makes me sick, even now… What I really resented was the brutal and insolent obscenity of his conduct towards me… No death can wipe that out, and I have no patience with the corrupt and false sentiment of those who collapse before the dramatic and romantic aspects of suicide.” After some hectic weeks in Mexico, spent selling the household and packing up papers, Porter and Eugene Pressly went by train to Vera Cruz where they embarked on the S.S. Werna by the end of August 1931. Soon after their embarkation Porter apparently got into better spirits and, as appears from several of her letters of this time, she much enjoyed the voyage. For example, aboard the ship, she wrote to Josephine Herbst on 25 August 1931: “I could go on singing about the blue waters and flying fish and schools of porpoises cavorting about flipping their tails merrily: and the good food, and the long sleepy nights” (Beinecke). The tone in this letter and in the “letter-log” she wrote to Caroline Gordon on her voyage, differs
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greatly from the grim atmosphere of *Ship of Fools*. The difference may be explained by the relief Porter may have felt when leaving Mexico and later her sense of danger at the beginning of World War II, when she began writing her novel.

After Porter and Pressly disembarked from the S.S. *Werra* in Bremerhaven, they went to Berlin in September 1931. Pressly travelled on to Madrid to find a job and Porter stayed in Berlin, where she found herself in the midst of an economic and political crisis.

The economic crisis was the result of the Wall Street crash of October 1929 and of the financial and economic problems which had arisen after the defeat of Germany in World War I in 1918. At the end of the war large cash reparations had to be paid to the Allies, the industrial production was halved, and millions of soldiers had to be reintegrated into society. The war financing had caused inflation, which continued after the war and reached a peak in 1923. Stabilization of the economy came with the revaluation of the mark (the *Rentenmark*) in 1923, and in 1924 Germany entered a period of relative prosperity, which lasted until the worldwide depression of 1929. From then on Germany underwent profound social and political changes. The political situation in Germany after the First World War changed drastically with the abdication of Emperor William II on 9 November 1918. The authoritarian monarchist state broke down and after much turbulence and disagreement between the various political parties, elections were held in January 1919 for a constituent National Assembly, which resulted in the Constitution of August 1919. The Constitution finally led to the foundation of the Weimar Republic. However, it did not bring the stability Germany needed. The population at large had little confidence in the government of the Republic. During the first three years of the Weimar Republic there was unrest in the country with strikes, uprisings, assassinations and political demonstrations. During the second half of the 1920s the dissatisfaction among large sections of the population increased and faith was lost in the republican and democratic system. One of the main reasons for the widespread discontent was the huge inflation of the German mark and the inability of the government to pay adequate pensions to those who had suffered from the war.

The economic crisis of 1929 was the final blow to the unstable government of the Weimar Republic. In the years following the crisis the National Socialists had been able to gain more and more power
and in the election of 1931 the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), with Adolf Hitler as the key political figure, became the strongest party. On 30 January 1933 Hitler was appointed Chancellor. The end of the Weimar Republic came when in August 1934 Hitler became the Führer of what he called the Third Reich.

The NSDAP owed its success mainly to the inability of the other political parties in the Weimar Republic to form a majority coalition for a democratic government as well as to the Party’s efficient organization and successful propaganda campaigns. Throughout the country there were Nazi organizations for all sorts of groups of the population. With its slogans and promises to create jobs, return to Christian moral standards and fight Bolshevism, the Nazi Party appealed to many Germans, including militant young people and students, who were organized in the Hitler Youth.

During her four months’ stay in Berlin Porter was an eyewitness of the crisis and with her characteristic sensitivity to political situations she realized the consequences of the rise of the Nazis. From a letter Porter wrote to Seymour Lawrence on 2 May 1956 it appears that she was much alarmed at what she had observed during this time in Berlin, however short it was: “we were on the edge of world-catastrophe, I felt the very earth of Europe shake under my feet when I stepped ashore, but then I had been a little prepared to disaster through my political experience in Mexico […] and everywhere in Europe it was appalling to see how people just resolutely refused to look about them or to think about anything; and of course, most of them were incapable” (L. 504). With her satirical and caricatural portrayals of the Germans in her autobiographical and political story “The Leaning Tower” (1941) and her novel Ship of Fools (1962), which from a political point of view is a continuation of the story, Porter exposed Nazism and warned against fascism and the “world-catastrophe” she feared.

As usual, Porter made notes during her stay to be used for her story “The Leaning Tower,” which, however, was not finished until 1940. Some critics have argued that the story was written before and after the outbreak of World War II when anti-German feelings were strong and may, therefore, have had an effect on Porter’s views. However, I argue that Porter’s representation of the Germans and the political situation in the story were inspired by her political views in the early 1930s, which do not differ from the views she showed in her
personal papers dating from this time. For example, referring to the men in Goering’s company she had met in Berlin, she wrote to Herbst in a long letter from Berlin on 16 January 1932: “I listened to these men, all of them under forty, talking politics from the Conservative and the Fascist point of view: for Hitler’s plan is pure Fascism—and it is for them a game of chess, a pure career, unblushingly admitted. Indeed, they would be astonished if you said to them that politics might possibly involve human lives, and therefore they might well consider something else before their own personal careers….Not at all. They’re all stepping briskly upward on their carefully laid policies….” (Beinecke). Later, in a letter to the novelist Elizabeth Janeway, dated 2 February 1962, Porter wrote: “What Charles [the protagonist] found in Germany was what I found […] Germany was much worse than anything I wrote in ‘The Leaning Tower’” (Hornbake 23-0135).

Charles Upton, the protagonist of “The Leaning Tower,” has come to Berlin at the advice of his friend Kuno. Charles had been told by Kuno, who may be partially based on Porter’s friend of her early girlhood Erna Schlemmer, that “if you don’t go to Berlin, you miss everything.” Indeed, Kuno’s descriptions of Berlin had been such that “Charles in his imagination saw it as a great shimmering city of castles towering in misty light” (CS 438, 439). What Charles found in Berlin, however, was poverty and a threatening atmosphere. As a foreigner he was unwelcome; the police, he was told, “are not fond of outlanders here” (CS 470). The contrast between expectations and reality could not be greater.

Charles is the observer, who is shown as a “young, ignorant, awkward” man who “had so much to learn he hardly knew where to begin” (CS 459). In one of her autobiographical notes, dated 30 June 1975, Porter wrote: “the story was really about a silly boy [Charles], who was me, and the painting was writing” (Hornbake 65-0366). Porter, therefore, portrays the Germans and describes German politics as perceived by a young observer who comes to Berlin full of illusions and who, after a learning process, leaves it disillusioned. Already at the beginning of his stay, while sitting in a café, Charles realizes he would not have come to Berlin if Kuno had not recommended to him the beauty of the city. He feels “there is something wrong with the shapes, or the light, or something…” (CS 440).

Throughout the story Charles is aware of imminent danger,
but he cannot think what it is. In the last part of her story Porter expresses her own misgivings when Charles feels “a most awful premonition of disaster” after an emotional discussion in a cabaret to celebrate New Year’s Eve. Always the observer, Charles is surprised at his fellow boarders’ nationalism and their prejudice. Even the humble Otto Bussen points out that “we [the Germans] are not by any means all the pig type […] though I know the foreign caricaturists make us all appear so. Those were perhaps the old Wendish people, and after all, they were a single tribe, they are not of the old true great Germanic-” (CS 482). After the party, Charles thinks: “There was something perishable but threatening, uneasy, hanging over his head or stirring dangerously at his back. If he couldn’t find out now what it was that troubled him so in this place, maybe he would never know” (CS 495). The same sense of danger appears in Porter’s letters of this time. For example, in a Daybook note, dated 5 December 1931, Porter wrote, “[…] I really suffer from a feeling of personal danger […]” (Hornbake 68-0108). It is this imminent danger people would not or could not see, like the “ignorant” Charles, who “couldn’t find out what it was,” that Porter wrote about in her 1956 letter to Seymour Lawrence.

The threatening danger and the incapability of seeing it recur in the novel Ship of Fools, set in 1931, the same year as the events Porter described in “The Leaning Tower.” As she wrote to Eleanor Warren on 2 August 1956, Sebastian Brant’s satiric Narrenschiff (1494), which she had read in Basel in 1932, influenced her novel: “I read it [Brant’s work] in Basel in the summer of 1932, when I had still vividly in mind the impressions of my first voyage to Europe. When I began thinking about my novel, I took for my own this simple, almost universal image of the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity. It is by no means new—it was very old and durable and dearly familiar when Brant used it; and it suits my purpose exactly. I am a passenger on that ship” (Hornbake 29-0150).

There are structural and thematic similarities between Brant’s work and Porter’s novel. Both works are episodic in structure and, like the Narren, the characters in Porter’s novel are satirized as fools.

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8 According to an article in the Houston Chronicle of 17 July 1949 Porter received from one of her readers, the Wends were industrious farm dwellers living in small settlements. Apparently Porter knew these German settlements when referring to the “old Wendish people,” but fictionalized them unfavorably (Hornbake 18-0495-0512).
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_Narrenschiff_ consists of 112 chapters. Each of them is preceded by a Prologue and a woodcut. In chapter 108, titled _Das Schluraffenschiff_ and describing a voyage to a Utopian land, the passengers are warned against shipwreck. In Edwin Zeydel’s translation of Brant’s work into rhyming couplets the passage reads:

> With this I touch our native plane,
> In deepest mire we look for gain,
> We’ll suffer shipwreck, plain to see,
> Mast, sail, and rope will shattered be,
> We cannot swim in such a sea,
> The waves are high as high can be

Brant’s warning in this passage much resembles Porter’s warning against the destruction she feared in the early 1930s. Remarkably, the woodcut for the Prologue is also used for chapter 108. The motto of this chapter reads in Zeydel’s translation:

> You fellows, come and be on hand,
> We’re headed for Schluraffen land
> And yet we’re stuck in mud and sand

These lines suggest the same illusion found in a passage towards the end of Porter’s novel when the German passengers of the ship look forward to setting foot on their home soil: “For a moment all the faces were raised, eyes searching out the roofs of the town, filled and softened with generous feelings--their hearts beat freely and their stomachs trembled with the illusion of joy; all mysteriously entranced as if they approached a lighted altar, they prepared to set their feet once more upon the holy earth of their Fatherland” (SJF 494). It is one of the last passages of the novel in which Porter stresses the blindness of the “fools” on the ship. Darlene Harbour Unruh convincingly argues that “the most dramatic image in the novel begins building midway the voyage […]. It is the image of blindness, which has been central to other Porter stories.”

> Significantly, the woodcut for the Prologue appears on the title

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page of Ship of Fools. The motto Quand partons-nous vers le bonheur? for the first part of the book, titled “Embarcation,” emphasizes the passengers’ illusion from the very beginning. As appears from one of her research notes (Hornback 83-0787) she copied verse 34 of Brant’s work, Porter was affected by Brant’s representation of fools in this verse reading

For every fool this flaw doth show:
What’s new, for that he’d crave and glow,
But soon of novelty they tire;
And other novelty desire.
Fools often travel very far;
Yet never learn just where they are,
For every goose when once let loose
Returns and still remains a goose."

Porter began the novel as a diary aboard the ship, but it was not finished until 1961.\footnote{Zeydel, The Ship of Fools by Sebastian Brant, 353, 349, 141.} Though written much later than “The Leaning Tower,” the novel again deals with the threat of Nazism, which is expressed in the context of Porter’s preoccupation with evil and collusion with evil. As Porter pointed out in an interview with James Ruoff in 1961, a year before the book was published the novel was intended to warn against the evil, and the collusion with evil, she had seen: “The point is, I had seen these criminals - these clowns - like Hitler, and was stricken by an idea: if people like this could take over the world! Of course there were all the good people who didn’t believe in the clowns, but they still let the clowns commit the crimes good worthy people would commit if only they had the nerve [...] . The tragedy of our times is not an accident but a total consent. (C 67). Though set in 1931, the same year when Porter was in Berlin, Ship reveals it was written over a period of more than twenty years, in which Porter’s fear of fascism had grown, as I have discussed in chapter 1.

The theme of evil in the novel is developed in the

\footnote{As she wrote on 16 April 1963 to James Powers, she was pressed by publishers and others to write a novel: “I didn’t want to write this novel [...] I had intended it to be the fourth of my group of short Novels, ‘Pale Horse, Pale Rider,’ ‘Old Mortality,’ and ‘Noon-Wine.’ It wouldn’t compress properly, so I rather lost interest in it” (L. 610, 611).}
relationships among the passengers and particularly in the cheating Spanish Zarzuela company and the twins Ric and Rac with their mean tricks. In a draft for a letter to Andrew Lytle dated Bastille Day 1947, in which she comments on Lytle’s book *A Name for Evil* (1947), Porter writes on evil:

I am a student of western history, especially from St. Jerome, Augustine, Origen onwards to the death of Erasmus. This is my stamping ground and I am at home there....We have no evils now that were not prepared for then, and our evils are no greater except in scope—in mere volume, and man has preponderance of evil because he loves evil and cannot live without it. Indeed the whole concept of good and evil is the most tremendous work of the human imagination, it is in the end the only thing man has created” (Hornbake 24-0486).

Porter was always much interested in the concept of evil. For example, she discussed the theme of evil in Henry James’s story “The Turn of the Screw” with Allen Tate and Mark van Doren in 1942 (C 17-27) and mentioned the story in the draft of her letter to Lytle. At the time she was in Berlin, she mentions evil in a note to Pressly dated 19 December 1931: “Don’t ask me to define evil and good, they are concepts in the human mind capable of translation into action [...]. And I am sick of that stupidity which can have worse effects than deliberate malice, because it disarms you first by its apparent helplessness, blindness, harmlessness, and then grows into a monster on your hands...” (Hornbake 54-0338).

The notion of evil is discussed in the novel in the scene with Professor Hutten’s lecture at the captain’s table: “Human nature is entirely and unredeemably evil,” the Professor argues, but he also believes “unshakably in the fundamental goodness of human nature as a principle.” Presenting him as an arrogant and pedantic man, who looks down upon his audience, Porter satirizes Hutten and his speech, which does not in the least interest the others at the table, as his wife notices: “He was boring them to death again.” Hutten also argues that, “if men do evil through ignorance, they must not be condemned. It is because their education has been neglected, they were not subjected to good influences in their youth, in such cases it is often enough only to show them the good, the true, the beautiful—the Right, in fact, for them to embrace it eagerly.” Porter’s notions of evil and the collusion
with evil approach Schumann’s idea of evil who argues that “most of us are too slack, halfhearted, or cowardly […]. Our collusion with evil is only negative, consent by default you might say.” Frau Hutten, who dares to contradict her husband, argues, on the other hand, that “there are many evil people in this world, many more evil than good ones, even the lazy good ones, evil by nature, by choice, by deepest inclination, evil all through; we encourage these monsters by being charitable to them, by making excuses for them, or just by being slack” (SF 289, 291, 290, 294).

Collusion with evil is described in the novel in the scene with the pilfering Spanish company in the shops of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Frau Rittersdorf makes a note about the shoplifting in her diary: “They are all over the shops, everywhere, like a pack of invading rats. I have watched them, and I know they are stealing right and left […]. I feel they carry a kind of pestilence with them, they shed around them the true metaphysical odor of evil.” Although he believes “it is often enough only to show them the good, the true, the beautiful,” as he had pointed out at the captain’s table, Professor Hutten does not interfere. Neither do Frau Rittersdorf and the other passengers, who had also noticed the robbing. Herr Glocken, the hunchback, sums up the passengers’ collusion with evil: “He had then seen the dancers leaving with their loot, and so had all the others, and yet they stood there, gossiping all around the subject and never once admitting guilt or complicity…” (SF 382, 394).

Porter portrays the Germans in “The Leaning Tower” and Ship of Fools in the context of this debate on the nature of evil, and to expose the evil of Nazism, which she thought hardly anyone at that time would or could see, she caricatures and satirizes the Germans in her story and her novel.

Porter’s interest in caricatures can be traced back to her visits to Mexico in the 1920s where she particularly admired the young Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias. Between 1920 and 1921 she described the artist in her Mexican Daybook: “Miguel Covarrubias, who was about fourteen years old and not allowed by his parents to stay out later than ten in the evening. He sat there smiling making those unbelievably malicious caricatures of everybody” (Hornbake 79-0439). In her review of The Prince of Wales and Other Famous Americans: Caricatures by Miguel Covarrubias (1925) published in The New Republic, December 23, 1925, she wrote: “In Mexico there is a wellseasoned
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tradition of fine caricature: almost every one of the younger painters possesses this lacerating gift. It goes with the Mexican aptitude for deadly discernment of the comic in the other person […]. Covarrubias in this is more Mexican than the Mexicans. As a youth he moved among that group of younger insurgents who revolutionized Mexican painting almost overnight” (BR 39). From her politically inspired Mexican work onward, Porter used her talent of “discernment of the comic in the other person” to caricature her characters.

In “The Leaning Tower” Germans are caricatured by Charles Upton, the painter. Walking down the streets in Berlin Charles sees “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.” He feels disgusted when he sees middle-aged men and women watching the articles in a butcher’s window in Berlin and as a caricaturist he thinks that these fat and pig-like people “resembled the most unkind caricatures of themselves, but they were the very kind of people that Holbein and Dürer and Urs Graf had drawn, too: not vaguely, but positively like, their late-medieval faces full of hallucinated malice and a kind of sluggish but intense cruelty that worked its way up from their depths slowly through the layers of helpless glutinous fat” (Cs 442, 443). In her essay in the Survey Graphic of May 1924 on the corrido, a Mexican ballad printed on sheets of paper, which were sold in the markets, Porter interprets Dürer’s paintings in a similar way. Referring to the illustrations of these corridos, she writes: “Illustrations sometimes accompany them, rude cuts used many times over, of strange devils, horned and tailed and saber-toothed, blood kin to those of Albrecht Dürer. They urge weak mortals into crime, usually murder or sacrilege” (UEP 198). Evidently Porter saw a likeness between Dürer’s malicious and caricatural portrayals and the Germans she observed in Berlin.

Charles not only sees caricatural Germans, he also draws them as caricatures. Of the mean proprietors of the hotel in Berlin where he had first lodged, he draws the woman “as a sick fox,” the man as “half pig, half tiger.” And “with concentrated malice” he draws Rosa Reichl, the landlady of the pension where he stays “first as kitchen sloven, then as a withered old whore, finally without any clothes on” (CS 470). Charles exposes Rosa’s corruption by Nazism by portraying her as a
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whore. In the story Rosa is presented as an intrusive, authoritarian and rather hysterical woman, who appears to be an admirer of Herman Goering, one of the leaders of the Nazi Party. In a letter to Herbst, dated 11 November 1933, Porter described the pride Rosa felt when she heard Goering, whom Porter had met at a dinner during her stay in Berlin, had taken her home: “when my Wirtin learned that her idol had been at her very threshold, she almost fainted with pride and joy: I was the star boarder ever after [...]” (Beinecke). Rosa also appears to be a Hitlerite. In Porter’s Daybook note of 5 December 1931, she writes: “Ah, Der Führer,” says Frau Reichl, ‘he will bring us out of this. What Germany needs is another Mussolini’” (Hornbake 68-0108).

As in the caricatural portrayal of the Germans’ greed in “The Leaning Tower,” an early scene in Ship of Fools emphasizes their gluttony. When the German passengers at the captain’s table meet at the table for the first time, “They fell upon their splendid full-bodied German food with hot appetites” (SF 40). Thomas Austenfeld argues that “Porter’s writing about Germany is frequently punctuated by derogatory remarks about German gluttony. Many foreign writers routinely ascribe this vice to Germans, but Porter exploits it with gusto, especially in the pig-worshipping scene in ‘The Leaning Tower.’”13 I would argue that the gluttonous Germans strikingly recall the personified gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, in morality plays and other medieval literature, which were intended as a moral lesson. Rather than falling back on stereotypes, Porter, perhaps influenced by Narrenschiff, draws on medieval symbolism in her use of caricature. Gluttony and fatness were Porter’s favorite characteristics in her satirical caricatures. As we have seen in chapter 2, Porter drew in her story “Flowering Judas” a caricature of Braggioni, the corrupt party leader who betrayed the Mexican Revolution. For Laura, the protagonist of the story, “the gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusions” (CS 91). Similarly, the Archbishop in Porter’s unfinished story “The Dove of Chapacalco,” who resisted land repartition, is portrayed as a revoltingly fat man. When he gets into his carriage, his weight “bent the springs as he stepped in, his great feet fumbled among the rugs [...]” (UEP 111). Porter, then, used gluttony and fatness in her political caricatures

symbolically as a warning against corruption, just as the embodiment of gluttony in medieval literature was exposed as one of the vices in the struggle between good and evil.

Ugly, piglike, fat and glutinous Germans are prominent in “The Leaning Tower.” Porter wrote about her story in an autobiographical note of 1940-1941, under the heading “About the Carmel Snow in Harper’s Bazaar argument over ‘The Leaning Tower’:

I believe I am morally right, but I know that moral right quite often does not win in a case at law. The laws I like to think are based on the moral concept of administering justice so far as human nature can achieve such a noble thing. But I also am very well aware of all the qualifying clauses, exceptions, practical applications, expediences...We should make a great mistake if we confounded administrations of the Law with Justice...Often they are not even on speaking terms...I feel that I have both justice and moral law on my side, or I should never ask you this question; but it does remain to be seen whether I have legality on my side, and that is what I would like for you to tell me... (Hornbake 68-0195).

Porter referred here to the rejection of her story by Carmel Snow, the editor of Harper’s Bazaar.\(^{14}\) Porter’s insistence on her “moral right” in the unjust rejection of her story as she felt it expresses her moral views. As I shall discuss in chapter 6, Porter’s moral views are especially shown in her protests against abuse of power and against what she saw as miscarriage of justice. I shall show that Porter’s sense of justice can be traced in her notions of ethnicity and race.

Porter’s caricatures in Ship of Fools often involve comparison with animals. The fat, piglike caricatures of the Germans in “The

\(^{14}\) “The Leaning Tower” was meant to be published in two parts. However, the editor cut it without Porter’s consent. In her letter of 21 January 1941 to Glenway Wescott Porter wrote: “Darling, the real point is this: Mrs. S... is rather more than Naziish in her leanings, she was a little disappointed at what my story was leading to; she hoped, she said at lunch, I would manage a good word for the poor dear Germans. I was not interested in managing either a good or evil word for anybody or any nation; I was really telling a story. I explained this to her. She seemed satisfied... The cutting as done makes it a harmless sweet little affair showing how really good and charming the Germans are... Now I never denied they have good qualities, I would not willingly slander even an enemy, but I will not have my story mangled, and least of all by that of editors... (Hornbake 30-0046).
Leaning Tower” return in the descriptions of a number of embarking Germans in *Ship of Fools*, who later turn out to be the “chosen ones” at the captain’s table. The narrator sees an “unreasonably fat woman with legs like tree trunks” and “a little dumpling of a man, pink and pig-snouted.” The man is accompanied by “a tall thin young woman - a leggy ‘girl’ with a tiny, close-cropped head waving on her long neck, a limp green frock flapping about her calves.” The latter two are Herr Siegfried Rieber, publisher of a ladies’ garment trade magazine and Lizzie Spöckenkieker, who is in the ladies’ garment business. The anti-Semitic Rieber claims that Jews “are poisoning German thought.” Lizzie fully supports Rieber’s anti-Semitism. As a couple they are the object of ridicule throughout the novel. There is again caricature of Rieber as an animal when, in a fight with one of the other passengers, he is knocked down: “The blow knocked Herr Rieber still deeper into his fantasy. He bleated like a goat, ‘Baaah, meehee!’” ([SF] 12, 448).

The Germans at the captain’s table are caricatured as a group after the Captain’s decision to banish Wilhelm Freytag from the table because he was married to a Jewess. Like the captain, they leaned over their plates also, and there was silence for a time except for gurgling, lapping noises while everybody waded into the soup, and stillness except for the irregular rhythm of heads dipping and rising. The ring was closed solidly against all undesirables, ally as well as enemy. All the faces were relaxed with sensual gratification, mingled with deep complacency: they were after all, themselves and no one else: the powerful, the privileged, the right people. The edge being taken off appetite, they fell to being charming to each other, with elegant gestures, and exaggerated movements of their features, as though they were in a play […] ([SF] 247).

The scene is an example of Porter’s skill at drawing caricatures. Like puppets “as though they were in a play,” the Germans at the table as one body gulp down their food, show their superiority and feel satisfied now that the enemy has been driven out. It is interesting to note in this scene the exposure of the docility of the proto-Nazis Porter had been aware of already during her stay in Berlin. Without a word the Germans at the table follow the example of their captain and start upon their food. However, the scene also illustrates that Porter’s caricatures lack variety. The caricatures in both “The Leaning Tower”
and the novel often depict Germans as being too fat and gluttonous. After frequent repetition, these caricatural portrayals of Germans, which are meant to expose the danger of Nazism, are no longer convincing and therefore detract from the effectiveness of the satire.

Not only through caricatures, but also by satirical descriptions does Porter ridicule the racism and anti-Semitism of the sympathizers with Nazism at the captain’s table. The vain Frau Rittersdorf, who hates vulgarity, is the first to reveal her views on race. After her husband’s death at the battle of Ypres she had fallen in love with a Spaniard of good standing, but, as she writes in her notebook, nothing had come of “the adventure”: “So in a way, let me admit, this adventure - for is not all life an adventure? - has not ended as I hoped, yet nothing is changed for the worse. Indeed I may yet see the all-guiding Will of my race in it. A German woman should not marry into a dark race, even if the candidate is of high Spanish blood, of the ruling caste, of sufficient wealth … There are those fatal centuries in Spain when all too insidiously Jewish and Moorish blood must certainly have crept in--who knows what else?” Later in the novel Frau Rittersdorf also gives her views of America and Americans: “The gradual mongrelization of that dismaying country by the mingling of the steerage sweepings of Europe and the blacks had resulted only in a mediocrity of feature and mind impossible to describe!” Frau Rittersdorf shows she is proud of being a German and had much admired her husband, who had “received the Iron Cross for his displays of superhuman courage in action.” She is further satirized when she tells about her husband’s dueling scar, which had been “her life’s pride” (S.F. 34, 83, 156, 190). The excessive nationalism of the grotesque Frau Rittersdorf and her aversion of miscegenation and the “mongrelization” of the Americans, illustrate the danger Porter feared. With her arrogance, her belief in racial purity and a strong superior German race and her admiration of her husband as a soldier and of his dueling scar, Frau Rittersdorf strongly resembles Hans von Gehring in “The Leaning Tower.”

Porter stresses her fear of a catastrophe in the scene towards the end of the story where the observer recognizes Hans as a fervent advocate of a new war. In the heated debate among the four boarders at the cabaret, Hans gives his view of power: “Power, pure power is what counts to a nation or a race.” He tells Charles: “We Germans were beaten in the last war, thanks partly to your country, but we shall
win in the next” (CS 486). Porter emphasizes here not only the threat of a catastrophe, but also her concern about power on which I elaborated in chapter 1.

Porter’s further satirical jabs at the Germans at the captain’s table are directed at Professor Hutten and Captain Thiele. Hutten, who had been the head of a German school in Mexico City, is satirized for his racist theories. He feels that “he was part of a great universal movement towards the betterment of mankind” in protecting his students against “pernicious foreign custom,” he relied on “the infallible combination of German character and German methods of discipline.” Hutten fully agrees with the decision to banish Freytag from the captain’s table. His speech to the Captain on this occasion shows his belief in the superiority of the German race: “it is these apparently minor decisions [Freytag’s banishment] that help to remind us most clearly of our principles, and to see whether or not we are in harmony with the great pattern of our tradition…” (SF 245).

The authoritarian Captain, who presides at the table, is introduced into the novel as “a minor god: a god who had grown somewhat petulant and more than a little mean in his efforts to maintain authority.” He believes he belongs “to a larger plan, he fulfilled his destiny in his appointed place as representative of the higher law” (SF 174). Though the Captain thinks he could not really depend on Schumann, the ship’s doctor, he knows that he and the doctor belong to the German elite: “Yet he was of the good old Junker class; his instincts, training, natural point of view must surely support the great good old society in which both of them were born to take their rightful places…Junkers to the last” (SF 346). This bizarre portrait exposes Thiele as a German obsessed with racial hatred and having an extreme sense of superiority and desire to be obeyed. Since the guests at the table show much respect for Captain Thiele, Porter exposed not only the danger of the Nazis she had seen, but also their uncritical admiration of leaders.

The satirical portrayals of the proto-Nazis in the novel evidently represent the “clowns,” the “criminals,” who might “take over

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15 Porter overdid her satire. She received a letter, dated 26 March 1962, from Julius Held, Professor of Art History at Barnard College and Columbia University who argued that, “no man with the plain name of Dr. Schumann could possibly descend from a Junker-family, let alone the thoroughly plebeian Captain” (Hornbake 22-0383, 0384).
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the world,” as Porter said in her interview with James Ruoff. However, the novel with its grim atmosphere should also be seen in the light of what Porter later wrote about her book. From her correspondence it appears the passengers of the Werra reminded her of the residents at Yaddo, where she had stayed in the early 1940s. Though she loved the landscape, Porter gives an unfavorable account in some of her letters of the artists’ colony in upstate New York and the relationship among the residents. For example, in a letter dated 23 August 1949 to Robert Fitzgerald she wrote: “Between the Fascists, Nazis, Communists (all one party, so far as principles are concerned, any struggle between them is merely partisan, a kind of civil war, yet they do differ and fight about details) Catholics, Protestants, atheists, and those who are there to work and would like to be let alone, Yaddo sometimes resembles a basket of snakes on a hot stove…There is nothing to do but to go away” (Hornbake 21-0074). As appears from a letter, dated 8 January 1976, Porter wrote to the composer David Diamond, who lived in Yaddo at the same time when she was there, Porter still associated the residents at Yaddo with the passengers of Ship of Fools: “I will confide one little thing in you which I have never told anyone else, when I was writing Ship of Fools I had been on a ship that had a collection of people somewhat in the fix that later on I encountered in Yaddo and I must say that my stay at Yaddo did a great deal toward helping me to understand and organize the whole idea of Ship of Fools, that and Brant’s comic verses published in Basil (sic) in 1494” (Hornbake 19-0688). Reacting to unfavorable criticism of her novel, Porter wrote in a letter dated 18 November 1962 to Ira Morris:

If I had not known, by all sorts of ways, there is no need to listen at keyholes or eavesdrop, or open other peoples’ letters - what the great mass of common humanity is like, and how the malignities of human nature are in all of us, high to low, I should never have written this book, which does contain the history of my long, slow, cumulative disillusionment in life; and my characters are middle-class or serf class because they are the great majority, but the highest placed persons share all their grim faults and weaknesses, only not so baldly revealed […] I have gone beneath the skin, not concentrating on their surface world, but getting into their secret life, where what you
are doing to make a living, you might say, or a reputation is not the main point. And my point is the collusion in crime between the respectable moralistic conventional classes and the underworld; the inertia, the indifference, or the acquiescence, of those who (I'll put it crudely) do not steal or murder, but leave these things for the criminals to do for them (Hornbake 25-0633).

The caricatural and satirical portraits of the sympathizers with Nazism in Porter’s novel as a warning against nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism must also be placed, therefore, in the context of her experiences at Yaddo, her growing disillusionment and her awareness of “the collusion in crime,” which she called “consenting silence” in an interview with Jane Clark for the Globe-Democrat of 6 November 1964: “People must DO something to negate evils...I call it a ‘consenting silence’” (Hornbake 102-1066). The majority’s “total consent,” which she called “the tragedy of our times” as she said in her interview with James Ruoff, was Porter's lifelong concern.

The portrayal of the Germans in “The Leaning Tower” should also be seen in the light of Porter’s state of depression and her loneliness while she was in Berlin, as well as the deteriorating relationship with Pressly. In several of the letters Porter wrote to Pressly during this time, she mentions the oppressive atmosphere of the town and the pension. For example, in her letter of 26 December 1931 to Pressly, in which she describes the guests at a dinner party at which she had been present, she wonders what was lacking. Though the guests were well mannered and the food was good, the party “missed fire [...]”. This Germany is weighing too heavily on everybody here now, it is too painful a place to be unless one must stay here for a very good reason” (Hornbake 54-0371).

Porter’s impression of the Germany “weighing heavily on everybody” is further expressed in her poem “Bouquet for October,” published in the literary magazine Pagany in the winter edition of 1931-1932. The poem is particularly interesting because it gives Porter's earliest impressions of Berlin. According to a letter to her family dated 8 November 1931, she wrote the poem during the first week of her stay in the city. Already these first impressions show that Porter, “the spring-born,” was struck by the coldness and oppressiveness of the city and the monuments “celebrating potbellied kings.” The poem was
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addressed to Pressly as Porter explicitly mentions in her later and much longer version, titled “After a Long Journey” and published in Mademoiselle in the November issue of 1957.

As several critics have argued, the chill Porter feels partly reflects her doubt about her love for Pressly. Still, the first version concludes with Porter’s desire to be united again with him: “Here on a marble bench we are at peace to mingle the ashes/Of our cigarettes, and to exchange our tokens:/A peach stone for a pigeon feather, a grasshopper wing for a sea/shell.” (P 94). In the later version, directly addressed to Pressly, Porter describes her memories of their travels together. As in “Bouquet for October,” Porter alludes to the coldness in Berlin to express her feelings for Pressly: “This is not even a timely season for our love-/Kisses freeze in our mouths, our arms enfold by habit/Talking columns of stone; yet we do not talk of love.” In this version lines like “little pale eyes behind puffy lids buttoned up against the frail sunlight” and “The swaying bellies rumble with beer” again show Porter’s view of Germans. Porter concludes the stanza in which the above lines occur with “O sorrow, sorrow” (P 159, 161). Apparently the “sorrow” refers not only to the end of the relationship between Porter and Pressly, but also to the threatening danger she had felt throughout her stay in Berlin. Though Porter’s failing love for Pressly must have played a part in her observations of the Germans in Berlin, the portrayal of the Germans in “The Leaning Tower” is evidently meant to warn against the danger posed by Nazism. The fear is stressed towards the end of the story. In the abovementioned scene at the end of the New Year’s party, the observer Charles “felt helpless, undefended, looked at the three strange faces near him and decided not to drink any more, for he must not be drunker than they; he trusted none of them” (CS 488).

Porter also expressed her fear in the title of her story. Critics have argued that the leaning tower refers to the unstable German culture and society, which symbolically collapses when Charles accidentally breaks the small fragile replica of the tower Rosa had brought as a keepsake of her honeymoon trip to Italy. It is hard to see, however, that Rosa’s broken tower represents the end of German civilization. Rosa’s reaction to the incident does not suggest more than grief over the loss of “a souvenir of the Italian journey,” which had been brought back “as a pleasantry from [her] honeymoon.” Lying in bed after coming home from the party, Charles sees the plaster tower
is mended and he is pleased for Rosa’s sake: “[...] it was better than nothing. It stood for something she had, or thought she had, once” (Cf. 447, 494). The tower represented the prosperity Rosa had once known. In her Daybook note of December 1931, Porter also wrote: 
"But her [Rosa’s] hopes are simple: she was rich once and she thinks she may be prosperous again: she believes in the ruling class to which she once belonged, and her hopes are for a restoration of this class to power” (Hornbake 68-0108). Seen in this light, the title of Porter’s story is more likely to refer to the politically precarious position of the Weimar Republic. It should be noted, however, that the title may also refer to the strained relationship between Porter and Pressly. In the analysis of the story she sent to Kay Boyle, Porter wrote: “As my husband and I looked at just such a room [the room they had rented in a hotel], he touched it [the plaster replica of the tower], and it crumbled in his fingers, and I cried out in the greatest anguish: “Why must you always touch and destroy things?” It was perhaps the beginning of the end of our marriage, and so the Leaning Tower in the story has many meanings” (Hornbake 17-0692).

Both in the story and in the novel Porter reveals her notions of the Germans when they are observed from a political point of view. Whereas the novel describes sympathizers of Nazism in a wider context and was published thirty years after Porter’s stay in Berlin, “The Leaning Tower” is an account of the crisis in Germany in the early 1930s, though she was not the detached and ignorant observer she pretended to be in the story. Porter was aware that “there is something frightening in this country. Something horrible is going on here...” as she wrote from her pension in Berlin on 25 December 1931 in another long letter to Pressly (Hornbake 54-0361).

Porter carefully introduced into her story representatives of the various sections of the German population who supported the Nazis. The historian Paul Bookbinder has pointed out that “young men and members of the lower class, teachers and civil servants” and also “large numbers of university students and their professors” were among the Nazi voters.16 With the landlady Rosa Reichl, who admired Goering, the poor scholar Otto Bussen, the militant student Hans von Gehring and the Hitlerite barber, Porter portrayed the various groups

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listed by Bookbinder. Through these characters, the stress on Charles’s premonition of danger and the story’s suggestive title, Porter convincingly warns against the Nazi regime and another disastrous war. The portrayal of the Germans at the captain’s table in Ship of Fools, however, is less convincing. In contrast to the story, Porter sets apart in her novel a number of Germans from the rest of the passengers of the ship and uses them to reveal the evil of Nazism. These characters are reduced to stereotypes and particularly the repetitiveness of the caricatures and the satire results in a predictability which weakens the effectiveness of her warning against evil. However, besides these stereotypes, there are passengers aboard the ship, among them Germans as well as non-Germans, who also reveal racism and anti-Semitism. The views of these characters will be discussed in chapter 5.

As appears from Porter’s correspondence, the Berlin experience made a lifelong impression on her. Porter’s later views of Germans were deeply influenced by her experiences in Berlin and were reinforced during and after World War II. For example, the marginal notes she made in her copy of Heinrich Hauser’s The German Talks Back (1945) reveal ethnic dislike. Reacting to the author’s remark that “perversity of human nature is not a specifically German quality,” Porter wrote in the margin: “No, but the Germans continually illustrate it so well.”

Porter left Berlin in late January 1932 and with stays in between in Madrid and Paris, she went to Basel in June 1932. Her correspondence from Basel, where she was reunited with Pressly, shows she felt relaxed and loved the walking trips she took with Pressly in the Black Forest. In her letter to Herbst dated 1 July she wrote, “Berlin was my big German mistake. I should have gone to South Germany. But that’s past.” In her small, pleasant hotel in Basel Porter lives a regular life, she tells Herbst: “My working week is five

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17 Later Porter included her former husband Pressly in her dislike of Germans, as appears from a marginal note she made in her letter of 2 March 1933 to her father. In the margin of a paragraph in which she proudly described Pressly’s Scotch and English descent, she wrote: “Gene told me only of his father’s side - on his mother [s side] he was German, half German! And behaved like one at last” (Hornbake 52-0080).

days long, and little by little I am getting out of my nervous habits of irregularity and lack of concentration...I know positively that NOTHING can happen to interrupt me from nine in the morning until five thirty in the afternoon. I have got my life on an easy rhythm based on the securities I need [...].” Porter feels happy after the misery in Berlin: “I think we have tremendous luxury: a beautiful place to live, lovely air and water, good wine, work of the kind we both can do, personal independence, grand week-end outing to be had just for the taking...what more, for God’s sake, could I ask, did I ever ask? Indeed, I never asked so much...” (Beinecke).

Porter much enjoyed the walking trips in the Black Forest, which she enthusiastically described in her letters to several of her friends and to her sister Gay. To Gay she wrote on 25 July 1932 about one of those walks, “I cannot describe to you the beauty and gentleness of this country, where you may walk for days over mountain paths and down valleys of sweet smelling fir and fresh springs, and freshly cut hayfields literally on mountainsides, so that the hay-cutters must stand at an angle of seventy degrees while they work: and the whole country as fresh and green and tender and cared for as some lovely park...” (Hornbake 50-0181). Evidently these walking trips in the Black Forest offered Porter the healing she needed after the strain of her stay in Berlin.

In this pastoral landscape Porter observes Germans who live close to nature and care about their animals. In her letter to her sister she writes,

The people of South Germany are quite different from the Prussians, and oh, how different from the Swiss. The Swiss are simply lumpy and there is no other word for it. But the Black Forest Germans are grand people. Many of them are lean and dark: why not, climbing their fields in the sun! -- and the very old ladies still wear their head dresses, each village having a different style; they have quiet good manners, they all make pretty gardens around their big stone houses and barns, even the manure heap -- that pride of the peasant, is mixed with hay and braided in some odd way so it will be neat and not the revolting object it might well be ... They are good to animals, in all my trips I have never seen a thin or abused animal, nor have I seen a peasant strike his horses or cows or dogs.
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Everybody, animals included, look well fed and healthy.

There is a similarity between this sympathetic portrayal of Germans and the portraits of the German farmers Porter drew in her story “Holiday,” both inspired by the relief she found in a pastoral countryside. Both in “Holiday” and in these letters from Basel Porter shows affection for the Germans she describes, stressing the harmony with nature and portraying the German farmers as hard-working people who love their animals and live in peace with each other.

A comparison of Porter’s notions of Germans she observed in the settlement in Texas and those in South Germany on the one hand and the German Nazis in Berlin on the other shows the same contrast I have demonstrated to be present in her Mexican work. As in her politically inspired Mexican work of the 1920s and early 1930s, the political situation in Germany affected Porter’s view of the Germans she portrayed in “The Leaning Tower” and Ship of Fools, whereas she presents a more favorable view of the Germans in her letters from Basel and her story “Holiday.”
Chapter 4
Ambivalence:
Porter’s Views of African Americans

From the mid 1930s onward Porter expressed ambivalent and sometimes conflicting notions of African Americans. Her correspondence and her published and non-published work show that her later political views affected her racial attitude. The sympathy with African Americans, their social position and their past Porter showed in the 1930s made way for racial prejudice particularly in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement when her political convictions hardened.

Porter frequently wrote about the South since she had returned to her southern roots in the latter half of the 1920s and though there is ambivalence in her feelings for the South, she evidently strongly felt she belonged in the South, which was strengthened by her connection with the Agrarians during the 1930s. I shall argue that we should see Porter’s views of African Americans and racial segregation in the light of her emotional involvement with and investment in the South. I will first discuss the relationship between on the one hand Porter’s racial views and on the other her love of the Antebellum and the new South. The subsequent sections show Porter’s views of African Americans in her non-political stories of the South and in the notes for a lynching story she intended to write.

Porter left Basel for Paris on 1 December 1932, where she would stay nearly four years. With an interval of a few months from February to May 1936 which she spent in Boston, New York and Texas where she visited her family in April and early May, Porter finally returned to the U.S. early in October 1936.

When Porter visited her family in Texas in 1936 for the first time after fifteen years she felt estranged from her native country, as is suggested in a letter she wrote to Pressly from Houston on 20 April 1936: “Texas is pretty appalling too, in some ways.” In her view, “the young are all reactionary to an indescribable degree, full of local patriotism […].” Describing a procession of youngsters, cowboys, and Confederate Veterans, which she had watched from the sidewalk, she wrote, “Wobbly old Confederate Veterans went by on a float, with the Stars and Bars flying, giving their famous Rebel yell in shrill cracked voices […]. Marines and soldiers tramped. Everywhere flags and

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confetti. And all military […]” (Hornbake 55-0875, 0876). Porter paid a second visit to her family in Texas in early July 1937. In a detailed account of this trip she gives in an autobiographical note, dated July 1937, she mentions among other things her visit to the small house in Kyle where she had grown up, “empty, dusty, looking smaller, the garden gone,” the delicious food, and the people she had observed: “good manners and pleasant faces all the way […]” However, the country is largely uninhabited, with “dismal shacks, tumble down places, a strange kind of poverty for the country looks rich and the cattle, sheep and horses are thrifty […]” (Hornbake 65-0317, 0318).

Later that year Porter noticed the same kind of neglect and poverty during a visit she made with the Tates to farmers in a tenant cottage at Benfolly, Tennessee, where the Tates had come to live in 1930. In an undated autobiographical note, she wrote at the home of the Tates in 1937,

They [the farmers] are inept in everything, cannot plant and keep a garden going, cannot use their hands expertly, cannot milk a cow so that she will give her milk properly, cannot wash and comb themselves so they will be comfortable. The children, just standing about all day long, doing nothing, no love of life, nothing to look forward to, no interest in the present moment […] no memory of tradition…idle and weary and hopeless…Here are a hundred acres, beautiful woods, a good spring, a fine bottom land, two cows, everything neglected, nothing used properly; they live in misery and the Tates in a bitter, endless, futile anxiety… WHY? There is something wrong with this country […] (Hornbake 68-0090).

In the same year Porter wrote on 30 August to Pressly: “The south is troublesome to me for all the things, the same things, that I was troubled with before…The negroes, the poor whites, the ill-living, the fearful lack of energy and neglect of every day living. Tiresome small standards and provincial view points even in the most intelligent people” (Hornbake 56-0335). As she wrote in an earlier letter to Herbst, dated 29 December 1930, Porter left the South because “the atmosphere was too close for me, I could not breathe easily there” (Beinecke).

Nevertheless, Porter felt she was a Southerner. For example, after she had been on the staff for the Writers’ Conference at Olivet
College in Michigan in the summer of 1937, Porter wrote a letter to Herbst on 15 August 1937 about the trip with the Tates back through Virginia to their farm and about the second trip she had made with her father and sister in Texas that year. In the latter part of the letter Porter first starts giving an enthusiastic account of what she had seen and whom she had met on her trip with her family. At the Old Settlers Reunion at San Marcos, Texas, she was asked to speak and she proudly writes about the announcement by an old gentleman: “The littlest Porter girl, the curly haired one, is going to talk to you….” The descriptions of these people and the country suggest Porter’s sense of belonging to “my South” as she called it and the “pleasurable sense of possession” she felt. She admires the people for their fine features, their simple manners, and their “absolutely innate code of morals,” and she feels that “everything I had ever written about them was very pale and out of focus.” Indeed, she would like to live in San Marcos, “and have a good life and go on writing the way I have begun.” But Porter also realizes that these people belong to “a disappearing race,” that “the land is impoverished” and that there are “so many ills, peculiar to the region and its people and its needs and its failings.” At the same time, however, Porter is aware that it is “positively no good to compare the worst here with the best somewhere else, which is the habit of almost every stranger who comes here to observe….” This concluding remark corresponds with what she wrote at the beginning of her letter to Herbst when referring to the middle westerners who “don’t love their country enough”: “But then, my south is beautiful too, and still I went; but I have the same wish that you have to get back to base, and see, this time, whether the trouble was not in me rather than in the place. I needed all the travel and the living I have made to make me see and feel as I do […]” (Beinecke).

Referring to the California climate and landscape, she wrote in a letter, dated 18 December 1945, to Herbert Schaumann: “You might hate it. I realize that being a Northerner is a very serious business, you LIKE your damned rigors and frozen leafless trees […]. It frightens me. Being a Southerner, a semi-tropical plant, is a fairly permanent state too […]. In the history of the human race, it has always been the southerners who build up beautiful, easy, relaxed civilizations and the northerners who come along and pull them up by the roots. In a small but extremely illustrative way, that is precisely what happened in this country. It is no doubt perfectly normal but damned annoying to the
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southerner, I may say…” (Hornbake 27-0249).

Porter shows affinity with the Texas of her youth in a letter she wrote to Kenneth Durant on 30 March 1936. Referring to her story “Noon Wine,” set in Southern Texas, she wrote, “Until my thirteenth year, I spent every vacation, three hot summer months, on a black land farm in Texas. The country-side was full of such men [men like the protagonist Mr.Thompson]. I have seen Mr.Thompson swinging his churn, I have heard, I don’t know how nor when--these men talk; in the little village at the store. I have seen them swap plugs and discuss tobacco… After all, I had ancestors who raised tobacco, cotton, corn, sugar cane, coffee, rice… (Hornbake 20-0285).

Her essay “‘Noon Wine: The Sources,” first published in the Yale Review, 46 (September 1956), which contains elaborate comments on her story, is another example of Porter’s sense of belonging to the South she now calls “this summer country of my childhood, this place of memory.” Writing about the origin of her stories of the South, Porter mentions that during the time she spent in Mexico and Europe she made notes on “stories of my own place, my South,” which gave her back “my past and my own house and my own people--the native land of my heart.” In her essay she affectionately describes the

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1 Porter had been friends with the writer and university teacher Schaumann in the 1940s. When he came to see her in Santa Monica, Cal., in August 1946 she fell in love with him. In her letter of 16 August 1946 to Herbst she wrote that Schaumann’s visit “was the beginning of something very new in my life […]. His feelings make mine seem like apple sauce, and yet I love him very deeply” (Beinecke). Soon, however, the love affair ended. On 30 January 1947 Porter wrote to Herbst: “[…] one short week here [in Santa Monica] - I had had the presence of mind to find him a room several blocks away - exposed the most warped, perverted, pathological mind and nature I have ever seen, and I have known some lulus. His whole life and career are based on a complete lie […]” (Beinecke). Apparently Porter fictionalized the betrayal she felt in Ship of Fools in the scene when the ship’s doctor Schaumann, whose name suggests he is modelled on Schaumann, let his patient La Condesa disembark without any promise of future help, thus betraying their love and her faith in him. Porter’s January letter to Herbst is particularly interesting because it describes Schaumann as a German of the worst kind: “The last outrage, I feel, was his typical Prussian stupidity in thinking I would not see through him. Did you ever read a book called The German Talks Back? He had the same kind of mind and the same ideas, only trying to conceal it … the same utter blind illogic, fanatical will to power, self-absorption and self-pity and total lack of moral sense” (Beinecke). The letter is an example of Porter’s anti-German views as I have discussed them in chapter 3.
landscape, the smells, the food, the fruit, and the sounds she remembers. About her growing up she writes that “it was the grandparents who still ruled in daily life; and they showed plainly in acts, words and even looks (an enormously handsome generation they have seemed to have been I remember—all those wonderful high noses with diamond shaped bony structure in the bridge!) the presence of good society, very well based on traditional Christian beliefs.” However, Porter realized that all this was changing: “The elders all talked and behaved as if the final word had gone out long ago on manners, morality, religion, even politics: nothing was ever to change, they said, and even as they spoke, everything was changing, shifting, disappearing.” Porter sees the Civil War as the main cause of the change: “This [the change] had been happening in fact ever since they were born; the greatest change, the fatal dividing change in this country, the War between the States, was taking place even as most of my father’s generation were coming into the world” (CE 470,471). About twenty years before she wrote her essay, she expressed the same regret about “a disappearing race” in her letter of 15 August 1937 to Herbst.

In one of her marginal notes in her copy of George Hendrick’s critical study Katherine Anne Porter she commented on a passage that reads: “The myth of the South, a hint at another reality, self-knowledge, and self-deception are among the most important themes of the story [“Old Mortality”]. If the truth about events and people is not revealed, at least some of it is; and the gravestones of the past are cleansed, renewed, and preserved.” Porter wrote: “The South is no myth to Southerners who lived through its history.” A similar view is found in a note in her copy of Ray West’s analysis of the story, in which he argues that “In the first section of ‘Old Mortality’ we get the view of the past as seen through the eyes of the elders with their memories, not as it actually was, but as they wanted it to be.” Porter disagreed and wrote: “it had seemed to them and all they loved in their youth.” In her correspondence, fiction, and essays about the South Porter often insisted that stories about the South are not mythical but historical.

2 George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), 76.
3 Ray West Jr., Katherine Anne Porter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 17, 18.
Porter wrote about the Southern past and about Southern antebellum houses in her essay “Audubon’s Happy Land” (1939), a report of her visit to St. Francisville and the Feliciana country, Louisiana, in the company of Cleanth Brooks’s wife Tinkum in March 1939. On her “Audubon pilgrimage,” in the country of the bird painter Audubon, she observes “the charming houses” of the settlers, “who had on their side the strong arm of slave labor, and definite views on caste, property, morals and manners.” In the best tradition of the “old South,” “their daughters sang, danced, and played the harpsichord; their sons played the flute and fought duels; they collected libraries, they hunted and played chess, and spent the winter season in New Orleans.” Porter stresses, however, that “wealth in the pre-War South was very modest by present standards, and it was not ostentatious even then.” On her tour of East Feliciana Porter sees as “a returned Southerner, in effect a tourist,” a landscape, like “an April garden, flowering with trees and shrubs of the elegant, difficult kind that live so securely in this climate.” In this pastoral landscape with “its birds of Saint Francis and of Audubon,” Porter notices a number of “the white, pillared houses seated in dignity, glimpsed first at a distance through their parklike gardens,” but, she observes, “this landscape shares its peculiar treasure only with such as know there is something more here than mere hungry human pride in mahogany staircases and silver doorknobs. The real spirit of the place planted those oaks, and keeps them standing” (CE 167, 168, 169). Evidently, Porter wanted to make it clear to the readers of her essay one should have a sense of the past, or as she said in her marginal comment in Hendrick’s book, “live through the past,” in order not to see the past as a myth.

The essay with its descriptions of fine mansions and their former inhabitants, set in a pastoral landscape, must have appealed to the reading public of Vogue, in which it was first published, in the same way as her sketch “Xochimilco” was intended for a public who liked to read about an ideal and natural world. Like the sketch the essay can be considered a local color story describing a “strange and exotic portrait[s] of region and locality.”4 The similarity between essay and sketch is striking. Both are journalistic reports on an outing to a world that was threatened to disappear.

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4 Susan Donaldson, Competing Voices: The American Novel, 1865-1914, 51
Ambivalence: Porter’s Views of African Americans

About seven months before her essay was published, Porter wrote about her visit to Feliciana country to her long-time friend Glenway Wescott in a letter dated 23 March 1939. The letter reveals what she had seen and felt on her tour. Though, unlike the descriptions in her essay, “the houses are all worn” and there was “a thread bare (sic) poverty over everything,” she insists that the old mansions “remain as proof of all the good ever spoken of the south and the southern way of living.” Porter felt happy and at home in the Southern countryside: “Its (sic) all familiar, I have known it always, but suddenly after all these years I went back and saw it in one day, and it gave me an extraordinary sense of peace and happiness.” The people she met “are the pleasantest, best mannered, simplest people in the world […] and what amazes me is that I had myself begun to doubt their existence, the truth of what I knew, and forgot almost, and know again…” (Hornbake 29-0951, 0952). The déjà-vu Porter describes here to her friend is the sudden recognition that the kind of people she had once known truly existed.

These enthusiastic descriptions are in sharp contrast with some of Porter’s earlier letters, in which she expressed her dislike of her native state Texas and its close atmosphere, even to the extent that she could not live there. However, her sense of belonging in the South and especially the affinity she felt with the world of the antebellum South are evident from her letters and her essays.

Much has been written about Porter’s ambivalent feelings about the South. Robert Brinkmeyer, who deals extensively with Porter’s relationship with the South, points out that “Porter clearly was more interested in exploring the nature of her newly adopted southern identity, and in using that identity as a means of understanding herself and the world, than she was in living the everyday life of a southerner in the South.” Brinkmeyer argues that “the world of memory, Porter came to see, was always being reshaped and redefined in encounters with the conscious self […]”5 The folklorist Sylvia Grider similarly contends that “Porter is the perfect example of a Texas woman writer who ‘wrote her own story’ and ‘reinvented herself,’ not only in fiction but in her real life.” Grider argues, as do many other critics, that Porter “is often describing the

5 Robert Brinkmeyer, Katherine Anne Porter’s Artistic Development: Primitivism, Traditionalism, and Totalitarianism, 119, 132, 133.
past as it might have been if her family had not fallen on hard times or
the past as it should have been in order to provide a plausible explanation
for the genteel, great Southern lady that she really did become and the
image of which she carefully cultivated.” According to Don Graham
Porter profited in the market of southern writing by identifying with
the South and artistically playing the role of the beautiful southern
lady, the “Southern belle.” Critics have debated whether or not Porter
should be associated as a writer with Texas. Stout points out that “it is
small wonder that readers of Porter’s fiction, as well as of her life,
have had difficulty assessing her attitude and relation to her home
state.” Stout’s argument that “we do not readily see her as writing
about Texas” is corroborated by one of Porter’s marginal notes. In a
list of writers referring to “Texas in fiction,” in which she is included
Porter wrote: “Include me out please, for the sake of fact.” Two
reasons have been mentioned for Porter’s estrangement from Texas:
one the disappointment she felt when Pale Horse, Pale Rider was not
awarded the prize for the best book by a Texas writer, but went
instead to Frank Dobie and two the misunderstanding that arose in
1958 about the naming of a building at the University of Texas,
Austin, in her honor.

While all these arguments are plausible, my own conclusion is
that the ties that bound Porter to the South were the security and the
discipline she had found with her grandmother at Kyle in her
formative years, and in particular the “innate code of morals, the
simple manners and the simplicity” of the antebellum South. As is
evident in some of the stories of the sequence “The Old Order,” the
grandmother with her discipline, and her sense of propriety and
morals represents the values of “the old order” as Porter saw it. In the
often quoted opening sentence of her essay “Portrait: Old South”
Porter shows the affinity she felt with the antebellum South: “I am the

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6 Sylvia Grider, “Memories that Never Were: Katherine Anne Porter and
7 Don Graham, “A Southern Writer in Texas: Porter and the Texas Literary
Tradition” in Katherine Anne Porter and Texas: An Uneasy Relationship, 59. Graham may
be suggesting that Porter was successful in playing the role of the Southern belle
because of her physical beauty.
8 Janis Stout, “Estranging Texas: Porter and the Distance from Home,” in
Katherine Anne Porter and Texas: An Uneasy Relationship, 98, 87.
9 D. Rubin, Jr., C. Hugh Holman, eds. Southern Literary Study: Problems and

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grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation” (CE 160). Though Porter embellishes her past in the essay, as she often did, and her memories cannot always be trusted, the grandmother’s influence during her childhood is evident.

Porter’s regret at the loss of the people of the antebellum South who, she believed, belonged to a vanishing race, reveals the same yearning for an ideal world found in her poem “In Tepozotlan” about the lost honey-girl, “that untroubled innocent,” and in her sketch “Xochimilco.” As Walsh has pointed out, “Xochimilco, the place of perpetually blooming flowers, reminded Porter of an Eden she sought all her life.”

Porter’s love for the South was strengthened by her association with the Agrarians, who had published I’ll Take my Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition in 1930, some years before Porter had finished writing “Old Mortality” and her sequence of stories collected in “The Old Order.” Though the influence of the Agrarians on Porter’s views must not be overestimated, there are some similarities between the notions of these twelve Southern intellectuals and Porter’s views of the South. She had been friends with a number of the writers of the agrarian manifesto since the time she lived in Greenwich Village in the 1920s, but she had neither played any role in the production of the book, nor been present at the gatherings of the Agrarians at Benfolly. Yet, from a letter Andrew Lytle wrote to Porter from Benfolly on 1 November 1930, it appears she knew about the book soon after it was published. After praising her charms and Flowering Judas the first collection of Porter stories, Lytle wrote her, “we have had such a fine time here, discussing the old Confederacy and might I say its legitimate off-spring, which several of your friends are serving as w[el] nurses. Certainly you shall have a copy of I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition, all properly signed and sealed” (Hornbake 24-0466). The “fine time” Lytle mentions refers to the hospitality the Tates offered him and many other writers at Benfolly. Porter, however, was not a guest at Benfolly until the summer of 1937. In her 1937 letter to Herbst she describes the farm: “For seven years Caroline has been inviting me to Benfolly, and for seven years I have meant to be here, and here I am, and it is much nicer even than I

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10 Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 228.
expected. You know the place of course, and I suppose they have
improved it since you saw it. Miracles, in fact, I suspect have been
done here” (Beinecke).

Though the agrarian movement began to fall apart when
Porter visited the Tates in 1937, the convictions of the Agrarians and
the general drift of their essays appealed to her. In her letter from
Mexico dated 29 December 1930 Porter wrote to Herbst: “The Old
South had its points. I think what the Nashville group hate is the
industrialization of the south, which is an agrarian country, and should
remain one. After all, some one must raise the raw materials: and the
south is best fitted for this” (Beinecke). Porter’s belief in a southern
agrarian country is found again in her letter of 27 July 1932 to Herbst:
“In the long run, it [the Civil War] was really a war between agrarian
and industrial interests, and therefore, was idiotic, because a country
that destroys her agrarian resources is taking, at last, the bread out of
her own mouth, as we in our day have seen it happen...It is not only
the south that suffers from this conflict” (Beinecke).

The “war between agrarian and industrial interests,” as Porter
put it, is the central theme in the twelve essays of the Agrarians. In his
discussion of the manifesto Paul Conkin argues that, “what seemed
most common to the twelve contributors was a view of southern
history. The war between the states reflected primarily a competition
between two economic systems and ideals--on the one hand an
independent yeomanry of farmers and small shopkeepers, on the other
a commercial, financial, large manufacturing oligarchy which already
dominated the Northeast.” Andrew Lytle’s essay “The Hind Tit”
contains one of the strongest protests of the Agrarians against
industrialism: “Since 1865 an agrarian Union has been changed into an
industrial empire bent on conquest of the earth’s goods and ports to
sell them in. This means warfare, a struggle over markets, leading in
the end, to actual military conflict between nations.” The second part
of the essay gives an idealized picture of the daily life at an actual farm
in the South in the 1930s from early in the morning till sundown and
elaborate descriptions of the farmhouse, the milking of the cows, the
dinners, games, and other aspects of the social life of the farmers. The
resemblance with Porter’s portrayal of the Müllers in her story
“Holiday” is striking. Like the Müllers, the family Lytle describes lead
a harmonious agrarian life. They live close to the soil, are in harmony
with nature and know that “the fullness of meaning that rain and the
elements extend to the farmer is all contained in a mess of beans, a plate of potatoes, or a dish of sallet.”

The essay is a strong plea to return to a simple past. As Lytle sums it up in his well-known appeal, “Do what we did after the war and the Reconstruction: return to our looms, our handcrafts, our reproducing stock. Throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall.” In Lytle’s long idealized descriptions of country life, the songs and dances, African Americans are conspicuously absent. Porter thought the essay was “amusing” and that it would “whoop up” her sister Gay for the “old South” as she wrote in her letter to her father, dated 26 June 1931. About her own feelings Porter writes: “I told him [Lytle] I’d heard of the war being fought over again at intervals in those parts, and had even listened to some of it in my time, but I never saw it fit over round by round, charge by charge, volley by volley, until I read his Bedford Forrest. I have a deep sentimental feeling about it all, - near communist that I am--and am torn between a feeling that its (sic) all perfectly useless and a wish that it were not (Hornbake 52-0032). As I discussed in chapter 1, Porter shows here her ambivalent political views in this time of her life. Later, in the mid 1950s after the Brown decision, Porter shared the views of many southerners.

In contrast to Lytle, in whose essay African Americans do not occur in his envisaged agrarian society, Robert Penn Warren gives them a prominent place in his contribution to the manifesto, “The Briar Patch.”

In his essay Warren stresses the importance of vocational education for African Americans. After the Civil War, he argues, “the negro found himself in a jungle as puzzling and mysterious, and as little answering to his desires, as the forgotten jungles of Africa [...]. Now he had to find a place, and the attempt to find it is the story of the negro since 1865.” The black leader Booker T. Washington, Warren writes, “realized the immediate need of his race; he realized that the masses of negroes, both then and for a long time thereafter, had to live by the production of their hands [...].” Warren sees white and black as two different races, which should be kept apart: “He [the

white man] wishes the negro well; he wishes to see crime, genial irresponsibility, ignorance and oppression replaced by an informed and productive negro community […]. Let the negro sit beneath his own vine and fig tree.”

Warren’s plea for segregation concurred with Porter’s view. Conkin argues that “very clear in this [Warren’s] essay was an outlook, and a growing sense of guilt, that would soon lead Warren to embrace full racial integration. Warren’s essay, alone, tangled directly with the problem of race […]. From other sources it is clear that in 1930, Owsley, Lytle and Davidson already took an inflexible stand on segregation and supported this by a belief in some degree of Negro inferiority.”

Warren’s later support of racial integration is expressed in his Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South (1956), in which he gives an account of his conversations with white and black southerners on segregation, desegregation, and integration. As a southerner, Warren went back “to look at the faces, to hear the voices, to hear, in fact, the voices in my own blood.” For his interviews he selected a wide range of Southerners ranging from well-educated blacks to a white Baptist minister. The result is a well-balanced report. In his comments on what he is told in the conversations, Warren argues that it is “pridefulness, money, level of intelligence, race, God’s will, filth and disease, power, hate, contempt, legality” and disorientation that make whites oppose desegregation. In an imagined interview with himself Warren observes that he is for desegregation, but that it will not come soon. The problem is, Warren argues, “to learn to live with ourselves.” He further points out that a “division between man and man is not as important in the long run as the division within the individual man. Within the individual there are, or may be, many lines of fracture.”

Apparently the subtitle of Warren’s report refers not only to the inner conflict in the South, but also to the inner division he imagines within the Southern individual himself. In the interview with himself Warren shows he sees desegregation from a white Southerner’s point of view. He accuses the Northern press of distorting Southern news, but that is, he says “the Yankees' problem, not ours.” Warren argues that you cannot “live with yourself when you are humiliating the man next to

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you.” Evidently in Warren’s view segregation was not a political but rather a psychological issue, to be solved by Southerners in the struggle with their sense of justice. Should the Southerner lose his struggle, Warren hears, he is “automatically put in the role of the enemy of righteousness.”

From her correspondence it appears that Porter shared the views expressed in Warren’s book. Porter shows her own “inner division” on the problem of desegregation in a revealing letter to the writer and editor Donald Elder, with whom she had a long-established relationship of “confidential friendship” and whom she called her “subconsciousness.” The letter is dated Leap Year Day 1956. Referring to a request she had received from a newspaper to write, as she said “a few well-selected words on the desegregation mess,” Porter wrote to Elder:

I find myself getting very fed up with the smarmy moral superiority and the virulent self-righteousness of those people who, not having the problem on their necks, assume without question that there is no decent or admissible argument against it [desegregation]. There are many things to be said against it in the south, and I am happy to see that a good many of them are being said. I rejoiced when the Supreme Court made that decision [in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas], on the simplest, highest, broadest ground possible: that is, our Constitution says plainly that, as God created all men free and equal—(a demonstrable fallacy as a mere glance around you will prove) with the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it seemed only proper and just to correct what has always seemed a serious contradiction between our words, and our acts. I am just enough of a Paulist to believe firmly that faith without works is not only dead, it stinks on ice. But now, I am not so sure, really very doubtful indeed, of the wisdom of that act. It has already caused and will cause more trouble, serious troubles and as many injustices as it was designed to abolish. It is all very well to say that expediency is immoral in matters of justice: all human society is based firmly on expediency and the toleration of evils and injustice tacitly

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Robert Penn Warren, Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), 11, 45, 46, 71, 72, 83.
understood and agreed upon by all of us: all statement (sic) know and all judges too that one form of evil must be tolerated to a certain degree because its cure will bring a worse evil with it. But...Lord, here I am writing the piece to you instead of to the paper. And we are all going to be good and sick of the subject before we hear the last of it [...]. [I]t is a horrible, heavy, heartshaking problem--and I know everything that is wrong there, I know the very worst, I have faced it out long ago; yet I am southern to the end in my belonging to my own people, my own place: and it simply enrages me to read this smug, ignorant sentimental chatter of the poor dupes who really believe this new war against the south (sic) is about the welfare of the Negro (Hornbake 20-0521).

Porter shows her deep concern about the “heart-shaking problem” in the South, but her argument to tolerate evil “tacitly understood and agreed by all of us” is inconsistent with her lifelong protest against collusion with evil. Porter’s ambivalent views of segregation are also evident when on the one hand she is “rejoiced when the Supreme Court made that decision” and on the other she is outraged at the interference of “ignorant” outsiders. As a white southerner, Porter doubted “the wisdom” of the ordered desegregation of the public schools in 1954, because of the “troubles” and “injustices” it caused as she wrote in her letter to Elder.

In 1958 Porter publicly expressed her views of the Brown decision. In the issue of 20 November 1958 the *Richmond News Leader* wrote: “Katherine Anne Porter said here today the Supreme Court acted ‘recklessly and irresponsibly’ in the school desegregation decision. [...] Miss Porter said she believed the justices ‘acted with moral irresponsibility because apparently they are ignorant of the true situation’ and “that thing was taking care of itself very well” (C 39). These “fire-cracker opinions,” as the reporter called them, illustrate Porter’s view of the Court’s decision.

Porter was not alone in her protest against interference from outside. Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom point out that “shifting the struggle into a federal courtroom was a momentous and revealing development. Southerners had always insisted that they were capable of resolving racial conflict without the interference of outsiders—judges, in this instance. But the surge of white rage that led
Ambivalence: Porter’s Views of African Americans

to the mushrooming of Citizens’ Councils poisoned the political climate; the South, in fact, did not have the capacity to save itself.” The Ternstroms argue that in the South “there was an enormous pressure to rally around the flag [...]” Referring to David R. Goldfield’s study *Black, White, and Southern* they point out that “Even the great novelist William Faulkner was thrown off-balance by the powerful emotional currents swirling around him. Although Faulkner conceded that ‘the Negroes are right’ and southern whites were ‘wrong’ on civil rights issues, his southern patriotism and his rage at what he considered Yankee meddling drove him to say that if he had to make the choice, he would follow the path taken by Robert E. Lee --- who resigned from the U.S. Army to take command of the military forces of the Confederate States of America when the Civil War began.” Evidently Faulkner and Porter share the same inconsistency. Both feel the injustice of segregation, but as southerners they strongly protest against northern interference in the affairs of the South.

In her letter from Southbury, Connecticut, dated 30 July 1956, to her friend Glenway Wescott, Porter also refers to the reporter’s request to write on desegregation. Porter writes she did not comply with the reporter’s request, but instead in her letter relates and comments on the views of her African American housekeeper:

Yesterday, my big black, brash-mouthed North Carolina field negro came to clean up after the party, and God I am always glad to see her! Desegregation (or as she calls it)---“segregation” has about thrown her off her center of gravity if she ever had any, and she can talk of nothing if I am in hearing distance, but of the horrors of being a negro anywhere at all--worse here with the Yankees, she says, than in the south, because in the south if people don’t want you they let you know it, and here they pretend [...] And she is honest and decent and religious, sings around the house while she works, and I stop and listen to it with such feelings as I am not able to describe, unspeakably moved and touched by that sound with which all my childhood and youth are associated, when I was innocent enough to believe that my black nurse loved me just the way she said she did; and I did not dream it was an incurable

misfortune to be born black! […] And I think, well, here she is and I’ve got her on my hands in one way, and in another, she’s a godsend… No different from what it was in the south. One doesn’t get away from one’s destiny in the least thing! […]. I think I had something else to tell you, but the Reporter asked me to do a piece on this question for them and I sidestepped it because if I said what I really think, on all sides, I’d get lynched by all sides together. I just don’t want any arguments about anything until I finish the novel. So I write it to you instead, my dear friend and colleague […] (Hornbake 30- 0324, 0325).

As in her letter to Elder, Porter sympathizes with what she now calls the “incurable misfortune to be born black.” Porter is not only “glad to see” her “honest and decent and religious” housekeeper, but also listens “carefully” to her and though Porter does not always take her “brash-mouthed” employee seriously, there is evidently a mutual understanding between them.

In the same year 1956 Porter wrote a number of interesting autobiographical notes on this black housekeeper, named Lila, in which she reveals her sympathy with her. In one of her notes she writes, “We were as usual talking about her plights as negro--no good calling it the Race Question, its (sic) considerably nearer home, more personal to both of us, than that” (Hornbake 68-0490). In another note Porter describes Lila’s disrespect for the N.A.A.C.P. and her hatred of the “Yankees.” According to Lila, the N.A.A.C.P. “just go on organizing and organizing and walking tidy like a cat on soft boiled eggs, and they got no guts […].” When Lila predicts violence in “towns and the alleyways of places like New York,” Porter comments: “Her face has turned again into that gruesome African mask of the born killer, and I study it attentively. My head would be among the first to roll, and I know it…it always is, though it hasn’t rolled yet” (Hornbake 68-0487). Still, Porter is deeply impressed by Lila’s intense religiousness and her singing. In one of her notes Porter writes

Start singing anthems, hymns grandstyle, almost full voice, goes on to Drink to me only with thine eyes, partly whistled, and with indescribable swing to the phrase with thine eyes, and at last as the day wears on and the work is settled to a rhythm with the end well in sight, she settles, too, into that low-voiced
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rich eloquent wordless vocalise called “moaning low.” It is
pure improvisation in an endless melodic line of great beauty
with no phrase ever once repeated, as natural as a bird song,
but without its pattern, it has the risings and fallings of the
waves of the sea, or the wind in the summer tree tops…It is a
sound that filled all my childhood and now brings back too
many memories, some of them so beautiful, some so bitter and
painful, I do not know which is the harder to bear (Hornbake
68-0493).

These notes and the letters to her friends Elder and Wescott reveal
that in the 1950s Porter was fully aware of and sympathized with the
position of African Americans. However, from Porter’s personal
papers it is also evident that she was opposed to the way desegregation
was implemented. On the first page of a collection of notes Porter
called “the Negro Question,” written in the 1950s and 1960s, she
wrote

We were beginning to do rather well in the south altogether,
black and white, I thought, when I returned for a visit to Texas
and Louisiana after rather a long absence. The change seemed
to me mostly on the side of better living for the Negroses; it
was pleasant to see so many of them well-dressed, cooks and
day laborers, not all of them, but a great many, going to work
in their own cars; having their own moving picture theatres
and being able to pay their way into them; their children
looking happier, because they were better clothed and better
fed. It was not the Millenium (sic), by a long shot, but it was all
going in the right direction; and the Negroses were staying
reassuringly black, maintaining the virtues of their own blood
and in ours--by “ours” I always mean, the south [...]. I
thought, God bless them both--meaning both black and white;
and I blessed them for maintaining, each within his own race,
his own human dignity and self-respect. For we know well and
bitterly that black and white blood in this country or any other
do not mix often in the marrying bed. I am one of those who
believe that they are both better for not mixing at all
(Hornbake 79-0810).

Porter suggests here that separation can be seen positively. As we shall
see later in this chapter, she expressed in one of her stories of “The Old Order” and in her notes for a lynching story that the responsibility of the mixing of blood in the antebellum period lay with white Southern men. Porter was well aware, of course, that her rejection of miscegenation was shared by a great majority of white southerners. In another note Porter wrote, “My own feelings about Negroes formed from my childhood was, that they liked being themselves, they preferred their own society, their own way of dancing, singing, eating, and in a word, being. I always thought Negroes were very pleased with themselves, and if they were left in peace, they knew just what to do with their lives” (Hornbake 79-0819).

This partly handwritten and partly typewritten collection of notes contains a number of contradictory, confused, and emotional comments on African Americans. There is a curious note in the collection in which Porter shows sympathy with the history of African Americans:

[...] how strange a history they have! So that we may really understand it, put yourself in the place of any one of them [African Americans], even those three generations removed from slavery; suppose you were captured along with other white people, and not only that, but sold by your own rulers, your own people, taken to Africa, in chains--put under the whip, treated like a wild but trainable animal, taught a strange dialect, a strange religion, made to eat unfamiliar food, to suffer a climate against the grain of your being, to be, in short, a stranger in strange land, in captivity that seemed hopeless; well, how would you feel and what would you like to do about it? (Hornbake 79-0815). 16

The sympathy with African Americans and their history of slavery Porter shows in this note and in her notes on Lila is

16 At a panel discussion at Chapel Hill in 1972 Louis D. Rubin points out that “what we have in one sense is the breaking down of certain established southern modes, and also their continuance, as occasioned by the change in the South.” Porter is not included in the list of Southern writers. Suggesting that she, too, belongs to this group of writers, she wrote in the margin: “Name at least one more.” (Southern Literary Study-Problems and Possibilities, eds. Louis Rubin Jr. and C. Hugh Holman (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1975), 133.
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particularly shown in her short story sequence “The Old Order.”

In “The Journey” (1936), which later became part of the sequence “The Old Order,” Porter places the relationship between the two protagonists, the black servant Nannie and her former owner Sophia Jane, against the historical background of slavery by relating Nannie’s history as a young slave girl who had been sold for twenty dollars to be a playmate of Miss Sophia Jane, “a prissy, spoiled five-year old.”

As the title suggests, the theme of the sequence is the crumbling of the good manners and moral code that are traditionally associated with it. In “The Journey” the antebellum South is personified by the Grandmother, the former Miss Sophia Jane, daughter of “a notably heroic captain in the War of 1812” and “the great-granddaughter of Kentucky’s most famous pioneer” (CS 326).

“The Journey” is the journey through Grandmother’s and Nannie’s lives. It tells the story of two old women who “talked about the past, really—always about the past.” From their childhood on, Nannie and Grandmother had lived and worked together: “they fought on almost equal terms, Sophia Jane defending Nannie fiercely against discipline but her own” they marry at about the same time and “Miss Sophia Jane and Nannie had then started their grim and terrible race of procreation, a child every sixteen months or so, with Nannie nursing both, and Sophia Jane, in dreadful discomfort, suppressing her milk with bandages and spirits of wine.” In her turn Sophia Jane nursed one of Nannie’s children: “When they each had produced their fourth child, Nannie almost died of puerperal fever. Sophia Jane nursed both children. She named the black baby Charlie, and her own child Stephen, and she fed them justly turn about, not favoring the white over the black.” Nannie, who is a religious woman, turns to Grandmother when she “could not understand why God, Whom she loved, had seen fit to be so hard on a whole race because they had got a certain kind of skin. She talked it over with Miss Sophia Jane. Many times.” Sophia Jane reassures her that, “God does not know whether a

17 The sequence was first published in Winter 1936 and was part of the “Legend and Memory” manuscript which Porter considered the first part of a novel. The sequence is fiction created from the legend and memory of Porter’s family and life experiences. The stories are primarily set in the time period about 1892-1903. “The Journey” is set partially in the antebellum period.
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skin is black or white. He sees only souls. Don’t be getting notions, Nannie-- of course, you’re going to heaven.” Miss Sophia Jane taking pleasure in reassuring Nannie “as if she, who had been responsible for Nannie [...] might also be her sponsor before the judgment seat” (CS 327, 333, 334, 336, 337).

The two old women are acute observers. Sitting together at strategic positions near or in the house and doing patchwork, only minor events, such as Miranda’s pulling up “the whole mint bed to give to a pleasant strange young woman,” escape their attention. They need only “an exchange of glances, a lifted eyebrow, or a tiny pause in their talk” to understand what was going on in the household, and about the “slack way the world was going nowadays, the decay of behavior” they share the same feelings: “On these subjects they were firm, critical, and unbewildered.” However, though the narrator stresses the close connectedness which had grown between the black servant and her white mistress, there is no equality between the two: “Grandmother’s rôle was authority, she knew that; it was her duty to portion out activities, to urge or restrain where necessary, to teach morals, manners, and religion, to punish and reward her own household according to a fixed code. [...] Old Nannie had no ideas at all as to her place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she had all her life obeyed the authority nearest to her.” (CS 327, 328, 329).

Nannie’s place in the world was fixed by her having been “born in slavery” (CS 336). As the narrator, Porter relates what happens at the auction and afterwards from the perspective of the young girl. Nannie remembers she was on a small platform together with her father and mother, surrounded by a “thick crowd,” when finally the three of them were sold to a tall gentleman, who at the same time bought a team of horses, which he had wanted for years. The little slave girl understands that her price of twenty dollars was a gift in comparison with what was paid for a “really choice slave” (CS 331). Porter may have had Nannie in mind when she wrote in one of her notes on the “Negro Question” that in order to understand the position of the African Americans they should be placed in the context of the history of slavery.

The story portrays a decaying southern white society in Texas after emancipation and a strong but deeply disillusioned matriarch, who saw her world crumble. She noticed the weaknesses and faults of
her husband and her brother, fought against “these fatal tendencies” but lost: “She gained no victory in any case, the selfish, careless, unloving creatures lived and ended as they had begun.” When the family is scattered they seemed “to lose all that sense of family unity so precious to the Grandmother,” who is also forced to tolerate a steady mingling of white and black in her “tangled world”: “There were so many young men about the place […] They came visiting and they stayed, and there was no accounting for them nor any way of controlling their quietly headstrong habits […] but whenever a child was born in the Negro quarters, pink, worm-like, she held her breath for three days […]” (CS 335, 339, 337). Through the grandmother Porter expresses her rejection of what she called in her note “a mixture of black and white in this country” as quoted above.

In “The Source” (1941), the first short story of the sequence, Grandmother, however, is not yet represented as a disillusioned old woman who witnesses the unavoidable change of the old order. In a strong protest against Ray West’s view of the story that “it is the ambivalence of the children toward the old lady that justifies calling so slight a piece a story at all” Porter wrote in the margin of her copy of West’s book: “This story is the key to everything I have written about Southern life.” Indeed, however short the story is, it expresses Porter’s view of the South. In her descriptions of nature, the nostalgic longing for the orchards, the rosebushes, “the trellised honeysuckle,” and the stability and authority of Grandmother in her relationship with her black servants and the farm Porter shows her love of the South as she recalled it. Grandmother, the matriarch, is still fully in charge of both her house in town and her farm with the black servants and field hands in the country. The narrator tells about Grandmother’s annual trip to the farm early in summer accompanied by her three grandchildren, who love the trip and their stay at the farm. Once arrived and having noticed that “everything was out of order” in the house, Grandmother inspects the “Negro huts,” which results in much activity in the black community: “every hut was thickly whitewashed, bins and cupboards were scrubbed, every chair and bedstead was varnished […] and the uproar had all the special character of any annual occasion.” Grandmother is the mistress of the community, walking about her property and ordering the blacks about.

18 Ray West Jr., Katherine Anne Porter, 25.
Zealous to please Grandmother, everyone in the community from the women down to “every little Negro” is instantly set to work. In contrast with the black servant Nannie, who is left “in charge of the town house” after Grandmother leaves for the farm, the black community in “The Source” consists of servile blacks, whose portraits border on caricatures (C’s 321, 323, 322).

Grandmother is “a tireless, just and efficient slave driver of every creature on the place,” she hears their complaints and soothes their grievances against the “red-whiskered Mister Miller,” the stingy overseer. As in traditional plantation novels, the library in the main house contains “old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson’s dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare,” but the books are “shabby” and have to be “dusted off.” (C’s 324, 323). Porter may have suggested thus that the values of the “Old South” are worn and no longer in use, as she did in her story “The Journey” and in her essay “Audubon’s Happy Land.”

It is particularly in this story of the sequence that Porter portrays the Grandmother as she had known her as a child at Kyle and described her in her essay “Portrait: Old South.” Like the portrait in the essay, the Grandmother in the story is a disciplinarian, who demands order and who loves her horses.

Like Nannie, the black servant Uncle Jimbilly in the story “The Witness” (1944) is “born in slavery.” Three children are introduced in the scene where they sit around him and want him to carve tombstones for their pets, because “he had a gift for carving miniature tombstones out of blocks of wood.” While carving he tells the children about “the horrors of slave time”: “In the swamps dey used to stake ‘em out all day and all night, and all day and all night and all day wid dey hans and feet tied so dey couldn’t scratch and let de musketeers eat ‘em alive.”9 As we shall see, this story should be read in the context of Porter’s intended story about the aftermath of a lynching discussed below.

Nannie and her husband Uncle Jimbilly recur in “The Last Leaf” (1944). The children have grown up and Nannie leaves the family when she realizes the children allow her to work harder than she should. Nannie’s portrayal suggests the southern black Mammie

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9 It should be noted that there is no evidence of Porter’s hearing such stories from African Americans when she was a child.
Ambivalence: Porter’s Views of African Americans

who rules over the family and cannot be missed. After Nannie has left the house, the family “realized how much the old woman had done for them, simply by seeing how, almost immediately after she went, everything slackened, lost tone, went off edge.” The narrator draws an impressive picture of Aunt Nannie. She has “a nobly modeled Negro face, worn to the bone and a thick fine sooty black, no mixed blood in Nannie [...]”; when she has moved to “a little cabin across the narrow creek,” she “was no more the faithful old servant Nannie, a freed slave: she was an aged Bantu woman of independent means, sitting on the steps, breathing the free air.” Nannie is not going to give up her freedom when her husband Uncle Jimbilly, “lonely as a wandering spirit and almost as invisible,” comes along: “I don’ aim to pass my las’ days waitin on no man,” Nannie tells him. Porter evidently shows much affection for Nannie, who gains in dignity when she has finally won complete independence (CS 350, 348, 349, 351).

The sympathy with blacks and their history of slavery Porter shows in her stories is found again in a collection of notes she made for a lynching story. The notes, which were written at about the same time when Porter wrote her stories of the South, reveal once more the difference between her views of African Americans in the 1930s and her later views. The 67-page manuscript with corrections, handwritten additions and notes Porter wrote for herself offers a revealing insight into the creative process that might have resulted in one of Porter’s most moving stories of a white southern family and their black servants. As most of the pages are unnumbered and some describe different versions of the same scene, it is hard to find a coherent structure in the lynching story Porter intended to write. However, Porter evidently meant to write a story on the emotions and race relations in the community in which both whites and blacks are victims after the lynching of a black boy had taken place. Though the manuscript deserves to be studied, critics have given it remarkably little attention.

Porter alternatively called her notes “The Man in the Tree,” “The Southern Story,” and “The Never-Ending Wrong.” In a short fragment titled “The Man in the Tree,” Porter summarizes: “He [the black boy] hangs there, among the dark branches, a reproach and a witness, not only against his murderers, but to the shame of those who believed they were his friends” (Hornbake 69-0892).

The black boy in the tree is Hasty Bunting, Nannie’s
grandchild, “a poor little field negro in his working overalls all stained and patched and faded” (Hornbake 69-0886), who had been lynched by a mob in a southern town in Louisiana. On one of the first pages Porter mentions in an outline, meant for herself, the reason she meant to give for the lynching: “The boy is accused of attempted rape by a sluttish poor white woman, who lives on the edge of town” (Hornbake 69-0866). Later, Porter writes in a personal note that the woman had cheated Hasty out of a quarter after he had bought an orange at her fruit stand: “Let this be the real reason for the attack and the accusation” (Hornbake 69-0867). The “attack” is not explained, but in a later note Porter describes the woman’s reaction: “The fat woman with oily light brown hair, who ran the fruit and soda water stand, etc. accused him. She ran screaming into the street in a thin pink silk nightgown, and screamed until she drew a crowd of men from all over, and standing there before them, tossing her wild head from one of her hands to the other as if it were a football, she accused the negro boy, Hasty Bunting, of an attempt on her virtue and life.” At midnight Hasty is hanged by a mob “to a fine branch of the live oak in the center of the public square, near the bandstand, and there they left him hanging, as an example, no doubt, until about eleven o’clock the next morning” (Hornbake 69-0871).

The woman, also named Tarleton in the notes, is despised by everyone in town. Though she is a prostitute “whom ordinarily any man, white, can have for a dollar,” the men “eagerly seize on her lying testimony as revealed truth for the sake of having the pretext they need, however falsely based this pretext, consecrated by a tradition equally false.” But afterwards there is “a redoubled contempt” for her and her fruit stand is avoided. She is now seen as a “white woman that has been handled by a nigger…this is their excuse, even when they know perfectly that the negro never touched her…They fear her because she, their sexual scape goat, had power through her very sex to make them commit a murder in her defense” (Hornbake 69-0864).

A note under the heading “The Never-Ending Wrong” suggests she intended to incorporate into her story her view of the reason for the lynching:

Anyone reading the newspaper stories about it [the lynching] would have said it was an entirely stupid and ordinary lynching like any other: the stupid kind of cruel thing that must happen
now and again when men, needing to remind themselves of their power, wanting terribly the smell of blood and the sight of pain [...] seize a human creature, and it is necessary this creature should be helpless and in the wrong about something or it would be dangerous—and murder him. It is not ordinary murder, but has religion and morality on its side, by some fearful perversion of fact, and a special tang to it for the killers (Hornbake 69-0902).

Porter did not work out a further characterization of the “low-white woman,” but concentrated on the aftermath of the lynching, “the reaction, the sobering up, the poisoned feeling that comes after excess,” which she lists among the ideas to be treated in her story. Among these ideas there are some notes that suggest Porter’s intention to insert an episode describing a newspaper quarrel over the lynching. Though Porter calls the episode “basely comic,” it is rather a satirical description of the white editor’s efforts to suppress provocative letters to the newspaper by an “Innocent Bystander,” who had taken sides with the blacks. The satire is extended to the “Oldest Citizen” of the parish, Grampa Carleton, who had challenged Innocent Bystander to a duel. The quarrel ends in vague remarks by the editor and “the murder of Hasty Bunting disappeared from the newspapers and from common talk” (Hornbake 69-906). The satire Porter used here to expose the cowardly actions of the white community, resembles the satire in the fragments for her story “The Dove of Chapalco,” “Hacienda” and her novel Ship of Fools dealing with oppression and racial hatred respectively.

In her notes Porter focuses on the reaction of Maria Gay, the white mistress of the house in town. In a note on Maria’s struggle with her “sense of guilt,” Porter writes, “she tries to justify herself by remembering how good all her family had been to the negroes...Shall I put here Dad’s always tipping his hat to the old negroes—Uncle Squire Bunton—when Uncle Squire took his off and waved it at us as we went by in the sulky? Grandmother’s boast that no negro had ever been formally whipped on the place? The most was a blow with a small stick for the men or a good hearty box on the ear for the women?” (Hornbake 69-0865). Maria is aware that her close ties and even her sense of solidarity with the black servants may result in losing control of the situation. In her note Porter describes Maria’s doubt
about her relationship with her black servants: “She [Maria] realised that here she has lost ground …She was faced with an old situation inherited, in which the indispensable weapon was the same old point of view that had brought the situation about in the first place…to maintain a certain fixed (any given mode of) life, it is necessary to have the same state of mind, the same beliefs in the code, which formed it…She did not have it, subtly her ground had shifted under her […]. She was the repository of a never-ending wrong, the unwilling propagator of a state of affairs she did not believe in…” (Hornbake 69-0865). Maria’s dilemma, caused by on the one hand a deep felt compassion with her black servants and on the other the necessity to observe the “code,” is an illustration of the approach to the race relations Porter intended to take in her story. In another fragment on the same page Porter elaborates on Maria’s predicament in her relationship with the blacks, her fear that she is the “slave” and the burden she feels: “Maria Gay, the born mother, civilised, tend[er], a little sentimental about her negroes, yet knowing by intuition all that lies beneath this surface of friendly relations, of generosity and tolerance on one side, faithful service and devotion on the other…Might not this be reversed, she thought: are they not generous and tolerant of me, their slave? For they drain her life, and take all her supplies and resources, and are a horrible burden on her goods and her conscience” (Hornbake 69-0865). Maria’s portrayal shows the state of mind of a white southern lady in the aftermath of the lynching, who sympathizes with the blacks, but realizes the danger of her racial attitude.

Elsewhere in the manuscript Porter characterizes Maria again as a woman who is unable and also unwilling to manage her servants with a firm hand and exercise authority over the household and her children: “Her children did not obey her and her husband put no trust in her judgment and her servants sulked like privileged beings whenever she reproved them however gently for their shortcomings” (Hornbake 69-0893). Maria’s husband, Courtney, who is County Attorney, does not mind Maria’s weaknesses: “He saw through her alright (sic)...But he didn’t mind. He seemed to approve of her at these, to her, unworthy moments” (Hornbake 69-0877).

Courtney is depicted as the affectionate husband who supports his wife when necessary. When Maria says that their farm is a financial burden and proposes to sell it because it “badly needs repairs they
could not afford,” Courtney strongly objects: “Don’t be silly and morbid. This was your great-grandfather’s place, and he lived on it and brought up eleven children and educated them, supported sixteen negroes here…of course you’re not going to sell it […] We ought to be ashamed if we can’t do at least half as much” (Hornbake 69-0914). In another note Porter describes Maria as “an imaginative and tender [woman] who knows all about her servants and treats them as human beings, not as slaves or as pet dogs,” and in a fragment later on the same page she writes: “The horrible dilemma of the white people, who feel a share in the blood guilt of this crime, in which they had no hand and which horrifies them” (Hornbake 69-0866). The notes show that Porter meant to describe the race relations in this community not only from the perspective of a sensitive southern woman, but also from the point of view of the whole white family burdened by shame and guilt. In one of the notes Porter describes Maria’s emotions when the black cook Marty shows her a picture postcard of Hasty, which was sold for a quarter. Looking at Hasty’s picture, “Maria sat and stared, her eyes filled, without moving, trying to find the bottom and the meaning of the horrible sense of shame” (Hornbake 69-0870).

Porter also describes the aftermath through the eyes of Gabrielle, Maria’s young daughter, and the thirteen-year old black girl Loute, one white and one black. There are several pages in the manuscript that relate how every morning Gabrielle is taken to the kindergarten of the convent by the black servant Loute, “very black, very lank and gawky and charged to the eyes with responsibility and importance.” The pages describing Maria’s urging Loute to be careful, to walk fast, to look neither right nor left and to take Gabrielle straight to the convent door, express the mother’s concern and may have been meant as an introduction to the girl’s later experiences on her way to the convent. In one of her notes Porter describes that Gabrielle sees “a ladder and a black wagon standing by, and a big man in a black hat and a pistol at his belt, and they were scrambling around up in the tree and on the ground and they were terribly quiet, like people in a moving picture” (Hornbake 69-0894). Later Gabrielle tells her mother: “there was a man climbing in the tree, but there was another man too: he was tied on. She put her hands up to her neck. […] “The man in the tree didn’t move’ she said. ‘He was tied on … I saw him’” (Hornbake 69-0900).

While the five-year old Gabrielle reacts naively, Loute is
shocked. After coming home she looks “rather gray and limp, she was
trembling.” Maria hears her howls and cries from the kitchen where
Loute is “trying to peel potatoes.” Porter planned to expand this scene
as appears from a note to herself: “describe this, her efforts to see, to
stop, to handle the knife, and the potatoes.” Later, however, Porter
writes that Loute had not seen anything after she had returned from
the convent, but had heard what had happened from two white men
who walked ahead of her. In a handwritten note, which Porter
probably added later, she writes that, “she [Loute] has not seen -
imagines she has seen it - nightmares. Gabrielle also” (Hornbake 69-
0899, 0901). As Porter wrote various versions of Loute taking
Gabrielle to the convent across the town’s square, she may have
considered to give the two girls’ traumatic experiences a central place
in her story, whether or not she made them witness the lynching.

Because Loute has become hysterical, Maria and Courtney
decide to take her to the farm for a few days. In one of her notes
Porter expresses Loute’s fear of having to stay at the farm, because life
outside their own safe neighborhood “was always a thing of terror for
negroes.” In the following description Porter expresses the primitive
fears of the horrors of slavery the black girl had heard about: “[…] there
outside the safety of her own neighborhood] they were beaten,
cheated out of their wages, had to get up at four in the morning by a
big bell, had men with guns overseeing them while they labored
without enough food, they were at last lynched […].” The description
reminds one of Uncle Jimbilly’s stories in “The Witness” discussed
above.

Porter continues this fragment with the description of Maria’s
compassion with her black servant: “Maria suddenly realised that this
negro child, in the bottom of her soul, believed them [the whites]
capable of any crime or cruelty against her…(and why not? A racial
memory, and more…a vision of the man in the tree).” Porter’s
sympathy with Loute is evident from these passages. An interesting
personal note on this page suggests Porter’s intention to include in
this part of the story a description of the landscape Maria and
Courtney passed on their way to the farm. Porter’s note to herself
reads: “describe the sweet dark country, with its swamps and liveoaks
and pine and spanish moss and the mistiness and heavy tropical heat”
(Hornbake 69-0873). The passage would have become one of Porter’s
characteristic descriptions of a pastoral landscape, as found for
example in her early story “Holiday” and her later essay “Noon Wine: The Sources.” Porter concludes the fragment with Maria’s and Courtney’s decision not to leave the howling Loute at the farm, but to take her back home. Porter finally suggests the close relationship between the little white Gabrielle and the black servant Loute when they see each other again: “At the house, Gabrielle was having a tantrum... She missed Lute, and would take nothing in her place... When they saw each other, they ran together without a word, their tears and tantrums stopped utterly” (Hornbake 69-0874).

In some further notes on Loute, Porter describes in positive terms the “black, Bantu, thirteen years old, from the backwoods, enormous flat feet, legs like a herons (sic), wide flat flapping pinkpalmed hands [...]”. Porter gives a hilarious description of Loute’s fright of a bottle of medicine she needs for worms and in another fragment she relates the story of Loute’s insistence on sleeping on a pallet: “She had always slept on a pallet. If she only had a pallet bed she could sleep lak a lawg all night long. You wouldn’t have to be out nights pulling me around, Miss Kathin Ann, she said, hopefully” (Hornbake 69-0912).

Loute’s fear when outside her own neighborhood is shared by two black women in the community. In one of her notes Porter describes the conversation between the women, who speak loud enough to each other to make sure that they are heard by the whites in the house. The women warn their two little boys, standing “like storks on one leg,” to stay out of the towns where they may get into trouble. The two women tell each other: “‘And then I say, jes you [her son] do whut you know is right, and even if you git into trouble, why then, its not your fault...’ ‘Dats so, said the other, but fault or no fault, its trouble jes the same...’” (Hornbake 69-0891). The scene expresses the unrest and fear of whites among the blacks of the community after the lynching.

In another note on the race relations as seen from the point of view of the blacks, Porter expresses the fear of the black servant Skid who was dismissed by his white master in town, because “he [the

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20 Jan Nordby Greuland points out that the chapter of Loute is based on a black servant who took care of Porter “when the writer fell ill during a visit to her sister in Dubach, Louisiana.” “‘The Man in the Tree’: Katherine Anne Porter’s Unfinished Lynching Story,” The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South 31, 3 (Spring 1993): 16, note 7.
white master Runge] didn’t want none of my blood around his place.” Skid, who is frightened, wants to run away and asks Maria to lend him a dollar: “I’m gonna git out down the river a ways anyhow, ---d’ye reckon yo could let me have a dollah to buy a lil sumpin to eat till I find sumpin down there?” Just as she feels sympathy with Loute, Maria feels sorry for Skid and offers him to sleep in the garage and help her clean the place as she had always wanted it. The more practical Courtney tells his wife, “But I tell you, we can’t feed them all” (Hornbake 69-0920). In a fragment on the following page Porter expresses in a moving description Courtney’s despondence: “Court was thinking about his father, in some situation ‘to the last mouth, every fellow gets his share,’ said Court’s father, ‘and if there isn’t enough, we’ll all go a little hungry together.’ [...] Court felt tired and discouraged, it seemed to him sometimes he worked pretty hard to support all the negroes that had ever had any connection with his family. […] It had been going on for five generations, and what was he going to hand on to his son? The same hellish insufferable endless load to carry ….” (Hornbake 69-0921). Porter may have intended here to emphasize the white family’s strong ties with their black servants and their sense of responsibility. Though Porter may not have meant it as such the passage describing Courtney’s cares about the blacks suggests a version of the myth of the white man’s burden.

Maria particularly feels responsible for Nannie, whom she had given ten dollars and mourning clothes for her grandson’s burial. On several pages of the manuscript Porter gives different versions of Maria and her dog Hector’s walk to Nannie, who has fallen ill after hearing the news of her grandson’s lynching. As most of these pages are found at the end of the collection of notes, Porter may have intended to finish her story with Maria’s visit to the dying old Nannie. In contrast to Nannie’s portrayal in “The Old Order,” Nannie is represented in these notes as an obstinate and even hostile old black woman who insists on working for the ten dollars: “I oughta sent it right back--right back that minute, but then where the money come from to get that boy buried? I aint takin no mo’ favors fum white folks, fust thing you know they turn on you, they say you stole it. [...] I’m gonna work my way fum now on,’ said Nannie.” Maria feels uneasy at Nannie’s bedside: “What did one do or say before this wounded old creature who lay on her little wooden bed with a Whig Rose quilt over her.” From a personal note in brackets on this page it
appears Porter intended to expand on Maria’s feelings for and understanding of Nannie’s suffering: “try to explain the burden on the soul of any decent person in this situation…the really tragic sense of unpardonable guilt and helplessness” (Hornbake 69-0915). Just as Grandmother rejects miscegenation in “The Old Order,” so does Nannie abhor interracial sex. Mumbling and muttering as an “old sybil,” she “spoke out now and then: ‘Sin lead to crime, it sho does…You go mixin’ up black and white, it makes bad blood, bad blood ….I say to all the white ladies, raise up your boy chillun to let the dark meat alone […]” (Hornbake 69-0911). There is a striking resemblance between Nannie’s fear of whites who cannot “let the dark meat alone” in this scene and Grandmother’s fear of the uncontrollable “headstrong habits” of white young men she expressed in “The Journey.” In both scenes Porter not only voiced her dislike of miscegenation, but at the same time she denounced white sexual exploitation of blacks.

Evidently Nannie cannot get over her grandson’s lynching. Maria hears from Marty that Nannie is “just about crazy. She aint got nowhere to look and no place to turn. She’s about los’ her faith, and that’s the truth. Says she don’t believe God means to look out for her any mo” (Hornbake 69-0890). At the age of over ninety Nannie dies, “stubbornly addressing some invisible presence in the corner nearest the fireplace, where her old rocking chair stood. ‘No mo use foh um, and dat’s a fac. So now Lawd take me, I’m done...’” (Hornbake 69-0916). Near the end of the collection of notes Porter relates Maria’s cutting many flowers in her garden for Nannie’s burial: “Nannie should have every flower on the place…Why shouldn’t she? She had helped to plant and raise most of them...Children and plant alike, and helped to raise them all [...]” (Hornbake 69-0925).

The burial is the end of Nannie’s fictionalized life story, which Porter started in “The Journey” one of the first stories in the sequence “The Old Order.” As appears from the correspondence with her father in the early 1930s Porter intended to write a novel about her family. Porter asked her father to let her have his memories and the stories he knew to help her shape the family’s history. For example, in her letter of 31 May 1931 Porter wrote to her father: “I need you to help me with my next book. It is called ‘Midway of This Mortal Life,’ and the whole first half is called Legend and Memory. In it I am trying to reconstruct the whole history of an American family (ours more or
less) from the beginning by means of just those two things—legend and memory” (Hornbake 52-0096).

Besides Nannie, the portrayals of Maria Gay and Gabrielle suggest the fictionalizing of Porter’s elder sister Gay and her daughter Mary Alice. The relationship between Porter and her sister was very close, as appears from the correspondence they kept up for many years. The affection Porter expressed in her letters recurs in Maria Gay’s portrayal. Gabrielle, represented as “very sleek and grey-eyed and peach colored,” is for Maria “her unmatchable, irreplaceable child diving out into the world without a look backward,” when she sees her daughter taken to the convent by Loute (Hornbake 69-0872). Porter may have meant to express in this passage her sister’s fear of losing her child, which actually happened in 1919 when Mary Alice died at the age of six. Porter was very fond of her niece and commemorated her in her unpublished poem “A Dying Child,” which she wrote in New York in 1920. Porter often mentioned Mary Alice in her correspondence. For example, in her letter to Gay of 21 July 1924, Porter wrote: “I loved that adorable tender and innocent baby […] and I feel sometimes that when I cry for her, I am crying over all the lost things in my life, too. For she was the divine young victim who took upon her head all our dreams and visions, and went away into the wilderness” (Hornbake 50-0107). Porter’s lament in this passage over the loss of an innocent child, “the divine young victim,” who was the embodiment of her “dreams and visions,” shows again her nostalgia for a past ideal world.

Another striking similarity with an event that made a lasting impression on Porter is found in one of the notes which describes the fury of Miranda, who is based here on Porter, about her sister’s tender-heartedness: “Miranda stared coldly at her sweet tender-hearted sister […] ‘You’ll forget all about it. Its (sic) only because we knew him [Hasty], we know how helpless and decent he was […] I…I’m going to leave … get as far away as I—I can…I won’t stay in this filthy country’” (Hornbake 69-0886). In this emotional outburst Porter apparently wished to express once more the dislike of her native state

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21 Porter wrote part of her novel “Legend and Memory.” Her publisher rejected it as part of a novel and it was broken up and sold in pieces. The lynching story was projected as one of five “short novels,” three of which were published in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.
she felt at the time of writing the notes.

A fragment on one of the notes describes Porter’s memory of what had happened in the community: “The man in the tree hangs there, a reproach to and a witness against his murderers, and these are not only the men whose hands put him there, but many others who believed they were his friends. It is something I know well and remember with shame as if I had done it, etc...” (Hornbake 69-0896).

There is no evidence that Porter witnessed the aftermath of the lynching in the community as described in her notes. However, the manuscript is a valuable document when it is seen in the light of her views of African Americans. Throughout Porter sympathizes with the blacks and with the white family’s sense of shame and guilt, and rejects the racism in the community. The notes to herself testify to the sincerity of her views of the blacks during the mid-1930s when she wrote the manuscript.

In her papers and correspondence of the late 1950s and during the 1960s Porter’s notions of African Americans change. After the Brown decision in 1954 sympathy turned into intolerance towards African Americans, which Porter expressed in private in letters to some of her friends and her family. For example, in an emotional letter, dated 2 May 1966, to her niece Anna Gay, there is a striking change in Porter’s views of her former black housekeepers. While she had shown affection for some of her black servants, as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, in the 1960s she gives a different view of them. Praising her present housekeeper Rosa, Porter writes in her letter: “[...] what a relief at last to be free of the thieving, scrounging, lying, lazy negroes who have been one of the curses of my life--the curse of this country [...]” (Hornbake 49-0573). This change in her view of her black employees is characteristic in the pattern of the changing notions of African Americans Porter had over a long period in her life.

An example of her sometimes prejudiced view of African Americans is a note she wrote in the same period of her life, during the civil rights movement, titled “Note on the negro problem. Just before the Kennedy Election...1964.” As a white southerner, Porter protested against influence of African Americans in the U.S. government. Referring to the popular and politically active black baseball player Jackie Robinson, Porter wrote:
I suppose it is one more demonstration of our constitutional “freedom of speech,” when a baseball player presumes to dictate policy to the President of the United States. Mr. Jackie Robinson sounded off lately to the effect that the appointment of a negro cabinet member in the next administration is absolute requirement, no matter who is elected. He adds as an afterthought that of course the choice should be based on ability. He gives as his reason for this curious act of partiality [for] his race is the fact that more than half the world is governed by “colored people.” True, I believe, by “colored people” but not by negroes. Of our present population, considerably less than 10 percent are black [...]. Mr. Robinson’s logic and view of the country he lives in are both rather fuzzy. He should remember that this was founded as white nation, has been and is ruled by a 85 percent white population [...] (Hornbake 79-0821).22

It is Porter’s political views that affected her notions of African Americans as a white southerner during the Civil Rights Movement. Examples of a prejudiced attitude towards African Americans are not only found in her private correspondence, but also in her marginal notes of this time. For instance, Porter’s many and sometimes emotional notes, dated May 1965, in her copy of Warren’s book of interviews Who Speaks for the Negro generally express prejudice. In one of her comments she emotionally reacted to Warren’s interview with “an able and energetic [African American] woman, active in church and civil rights work,” who said that “my reason for remaining in the South and working and struggling is because I am hoping the South will point the way—because the problem is so serious and intense here. I hope we can point the way for the whole nation.” Porter underlined this last sentence and shows intolerance by accusing the woman of “impudence.”23

As I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, Porter’s stories of the South, her correspondence, her notes, and some of her

22 The Themstoms point out that, “in 1964 southern blacks were considerably less likely to be registered than their white neighbors [...],” America in Black and White, 152.
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...essays from the 1930s on show her southernness, her affinity with the antebellum South and its moral codes. It is Porter’s attachment to the South that made her protest against interference in Southern affairs from outside, which she shared with many white southerners of her time. As Goldfield argues, “the white southerner was also susceptible to arguments that outsiders were threatening a cherished way of life.”

Not until the mid-1950s, after Brown, did Porter’s view of African Americans turn into a prejudiced attitude. Porter’s political convictions, then, as a white southerner, especially during the Civil Rights Movement and after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, caused her attitude towards African Americans to change from sympathy into prejudice.

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24 Goldfield, Black, White and Southern, 64.
Chapter 5
Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

In chapter 3 I discussed Porter’s critique of Nazi views of the Germans at the captain’s table in *Ship of Fools*. However, central to the novel is her exposure of the anti-Semitism and the racial and racist attitudes of some of the other first-class passengers of the *Vera*. As in much of her work, Porter is again the observer. But, unlike her other German stories, “Holiday” and “The Leaning Tower,” the novel employs the technique of multiple viewpoints from which the events and the characters are observed. In the part of the interview with John Dorsey in 1969 in which the novel is discussed Porter points out that she is the “omniscient” author and that “my life is in that book” (C149). As the omniscient writer and observer, Porter, as she writes in her 1962 letter to Morris, goes “beneath the skin” of her characters, exposes anti-Semitism and the nationalist hatred shown by some of the passengers. Yet at the same time in her portrayals as a narrator she does not entirely escape Jewish stereotypes.

As I have shown in the Introduction, critics have generally pointed to Porter’s anti-Semitism in the novel. However, hardly any reference is made to her awareness of the Holocaust at the time of writing the novel. When the novel was published in early April 1962 it was initially highly praised and in the same month it was selected as the Book of the Month. George Hendrick points to the publishers’ advertising campaign “including full page notices in the daily *The New York Times* and in leading American magazines and newspapers [...].” The publicity and the favorable reviews resulted in high sales of the novel, but not all critics at the time were impressed. Theodore Solotaroff, who was one of the first to disagree with the reviewers, points out that “the insistence upon ‘a general failure’ of humanity creates not only a feeble portent of Hitler’s Germany but in time a

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1 In a marginal note in her copy of M.M. Liberman, *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* Porter remarks that the book was reportage and that she was the observer. She insists that “there was no fiction in it, but is what I saw, felt, heard, in utter banal reality—reportage in fact.” M.M. Liberman, *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971), 36. In another marginal note Porter wrote that she had actually seen the Indian beggar in the opening scene of the novel: “This maimed beggar is a classic character, but I saw him in person in Vera Cruz” (George Hendrick, *Katherine Anne Porter*, 133).
brutally indiscriminate one.” He argues that “the trifling attitude that lies behind the treatment of Löwenthal is only one example of Miss Porter’s compulsive tendency to simplify and close her characters and issues, to look down upon life from the perspective of a towering arrogance, contempt, and disgust.”

Apparently Solotaroff did not notice Porter’s warning against anti-Semitism and only saw a simplification of the characters. In Hendrick’s survey of some of the major favorable reviews published in the U.S. anti-Semitism is not mentioned. According to Hendrick the English and German reviews, however, are less laudatory. Referring to a review in the influential The Times Literary Supplement of 2 November 1962, Hendrick quotes part of the review: “One [the reviewer] cannot help wondering whether she [Porter] knows enough - of German history, of the sources of modern anti-Semitism, of European middle-class speech and values […]” Though Porter may not have had a thorough knowledge of German history and of the sources of anti-Semitism, she was well aware of the danger of the political situation in Germany in the early 1930s and of anti-Semitism, as appears from her novel and her story “The Leaning Tower.” As Hendrick points out, German criticism of the novel was even more unfavorable. In a review in the 1962 December issue of Der Monat the writer “complained that the German characters were clichés, and he objected to Miss Porter’s presenting Germans in 1931 as talking of gas ovens, as treating Jews as pariahs, or as boycotting a German married to a Jew.”

Though in 1931 the Jews may not yet have been treated as pariahs, anti-Semitism in Germany was already strong in the early 1930s. Avraham Barkai argues that after the ascendancy of the NSDAP in 1930 there was a “willing acceptance of racial anti-Semitism by the population at large once this had been elevated by the Third Reich to a state ideology and substitute religion.” It is evident that in her book Porter warned against the anti-Semitism she had observed when she was in Berlin in 1931-1932. The reviewer rightly objects to the suggestion of Germans “talking of gas ovens” in 1931, but it is hard to believe that he failed to notice Porter’s satire in her warning against the anti-Semite Siegfried

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3 George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, 119, 122, 124.
Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

Rieber. There is a reference to the genocide in Rieber’s words, when he exclaims: “I would do this for them [the steerage passengers]: I would put them all in a big oven and turn on the gas” (SF 59). In a revealing note Porter actually referred to the Holocaust. In the margin of John Edward Hardy’s observation that “German reviewers of *Ship of Fools* deplored what they saw as Miss Porter’s anti-German prejudice,” Porter underlined “anti-German prejudice” and wrote: “It is not prejudice to remember and to be horrified at the Germans who destroyed 6,000,000 Jews.” Her deep concern about what had happened appears from a note she made in her copy of *Man Against Myth*. Commenting on the author’s argument that “it becomes impossible to identify any one man or any one group of men as the source of social injustice […] such a man or such a group of men can hide behind the alleged common and equal guilt of all, and thus escape condemnation.” Porter wrote in the margin: “This was the favorite argument of the Nazis, Fascists—about concentration camps, gas-ovens, etc. ‘We are all guilty.’ Therefore nothing could be done about anything.” Among Porter’s library is a copy of a study on the Nuremberg Tribunal. Addressing the question of guilt, the author points out that “Hitler did not do it alone, nor could he have done it alone; […] nor under the Führerprinzip did Hitler even claim to do it all alone. The Führerprinzip has been twisted so as to make Hitler’s subordinates appear mere puppets or office boys. But it was not so.” Though Porter did not comment on this passage, at the end of Appendix three of the book, which deals with the role Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank, had played before and after the war she wrote a note commenting on those who were guilty of starting World War II: “But no one will say that if they had begun to hang the financiers who helped to make the war, not only Germany and Italy, but France, England and America would have been full of scaffolds with financiers hanging from them, and that would have been too awkward, wouldn’t it?”

Only in some of the major critical studies is the Holocaust occasionally referred to. For example, Lodwick Hartley argues that “both in ‘The Leaning Tower’ and *Ship of Fools* Miss Porter indicates

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6 Barrows Dunham, *Man Against Myth* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947), 44.
that she at an early stage unerringly sensed in the German character the destructive elements that would produce the holocaust of World War II.” In his defense of the book Liberman hints at the warning in the novel against the imminent catastrophe: “The resolution of the manifold conflicts in the work is part of the encompassing action of the work, that which the reader can logically suppose will happen after the story closes. The Germans will march against Poland and turn Europe into an inferno. The others will, until it is too late, look the other way.” Liberman refers here to Porter’s warning in the book against collusion with evil, but he does not explicitly mention the threat of a genocide. I argue that Porter also meant to point to the danger of anti-Semitism that finally led to the Holocaust.

In the following two sections I shall discuss how Porter’s political views informed her racial attitude.

**Anti-Semitism in *Ship of Fools***

The opening scene of *Ship of Fools* sets the tone. The scene describes the contrast between two men of “the white-linen class” at the terrace of the Palacio Hotel in the empty town square of Vera Cruz and “an emaciated Indian” with “ragged toenails and cracked heels” sitting on a bench. The two men only notice the Indian as part of the picture and the Indian on his part “seemed unaware of them.” The rest of the scene describes the violence of Mexican revolutionaries, the fear of the two men and the threat of the labor leaders to “rich and important persons” (*SF* 4, 8). The scene ends with the hopes and illusions of the embarking passengers. The isolation suggested in the encounter between the two men and the Indian, the oppression, the violence and fear, and the false hopes return in the relationships among the passengers and in the different views of Jews in the novel.

The isolation of the Jew aboard the ship, Julius Löwenthal, is stressed by the narrator already in an early scene. He “had been put at a small table by himself” and, drinking “half a bottle of good white wine to comfort himself,” he does not feel at ease. Löwenthal finds that he is shunned by the passengers: “he hung around searchingly for

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a while, first in the salon, then in the bar, then out on the decks, wandering and disturbed; but no one spoke to him and he therefore spoke to nobody.” Löwenthal is represented as an outcast and his reaction is one of hostility. When he realizes he is the only Jew on a German ship going back to Germany he feels frightened and “his natural hostility to the whole alien enemy world of the Goyim, so deep and pervasive it was like a movement of his blood, flooded his soul” (SF 49, 50). This first portrayal of Löwenthal shows a lonely and fearful Jew, who is hostile to the “world of the Goyim.” Löwenthal is portrayed as inaccessible for his fellow passengers. When he sits at the bar he waits until he is spoken to, because “he never liked to speak to Gentiles first, you might run into anything [...]” (SF 50). Löwenthal’s isolation shown here is found throughout the book. Just as she set apart the Germans at the captain’s table to expose Nazism, so does Porter isolate Löwenthal to portray his Jewishness and dramatize the anti-Semitism of some of the passengers in their confrontation with him.

The first passenger Löwenthal is confronted with is Herr Rieber. While he is waiting to see what kind of passenger “he had drawn” as a cabin mate, Löwenthal’s hope it will be “a decent Gentile” proves an illusion: Rieber shows “a deep look of repulsion” after entering the cabin. Löwenthal’s typical reaction is fear: “He would be careful, he could look out for himself, he would see that that fellow did not get the advantage of him.” Whereas from the narrator’s perspective Löwenthal is lonely, full of fear and hostile to Gentiles, in Rieber’s view Löwenthal is the Jew who invokes repulsion. But Rieber also looks down upon Löwenthal. When Rieber leaves the cabin he wishes him a good evening with “an immense cold finality of dismissal” (SF 50, 51). It is interesting to note that the anti-Semitism in this scene is shown from the perspective of a character who is ridiculed throughout the novel and who himself is looked down upon at the captain’s table.

Class-consciousness, revealed in the views of the white men in the opening scene, recurs in the portrayals of many of the relationships among the passengers. The lowest of them is Löwenthal who is represented as the stereotypical Jewish trader, who of all things sells “rosaries, plaster and wooden saint statues” in Europe, South America and Mexico (SF 96). He has chosen his trade because he “was making money, and he would make more [...] It would be a
positive pleasure some day just to see how far he could buy his way into places where they wouldn’t dare to throw him out!” Löwenthal’s fear of being thrown out is typical again; he fears “persecution by the heathen world, his unescapable destiny as Jew, the one unanswerable argument for his choseness, was once more under way […]” (SF 263). Löwenthal is portrayed as a victim of anti-Semitism. But he is also represented as the shrewd money-maker who sells what he calls his “stuff” in spite of his hatred of Roman Catholicism. Löwenthal can make money “anywhere there is a Catholic church” and he knows that “Indians not got enough to eat will buy a saint statue!” (SF 96). The scene resembles the satire Porter used in her politically inspired Mexican work to expose the oppression of the Indians by the Roman Catholic Church. In this unfavorable portrait Porter projects her hatred of the Catholic Church onto Löwenthal, who, like the Church, exploits the Indians’ worship of saints.

In a conversation with the Texan William Denny, Löwenthal expresses his disgust and fear of the Church. The narrator’s portrayal of Löwenthal becomes caricature when he thinks of his old grandmother who warns him “never in his life to pass a Catholic church at midnight, for at that hour the doors opened and the ghosts of all the congregations who had died that year would pour forth in the shape of swine and they would eat him, then and there […]. Then they turn into pigs when they die and eat little Jewish boys!” (SF 96, 97). Thinking of the captain, the steward and the food he is offered, Löwenthal rages on and shows his characteristic hostility and fear of the Gentiles: “Ah, he needed to be more careful and clever than he was […]. It occurred to him often that he was living in a world so dangerous he wondered how he dared to go to sleep at night” (SF 97). Löwenthal does not only hate Gentiles, he also dislikes “good [German] Jewish boys chasing after these towheaded shicksas.” He strongly rejects mixed marriages, and he himself has “never laid a finger on a Gentile woman […] and when I marry, I marry Jewish—and nothing else do I understand!” (SF 242, 243). He sees himself as “one of the Chosen People” and though he realizes that being a Jew is “hard luck” he becomes nauseated when he tries to imagine “being a Goy” (SF 242). Thinking of Gentiles Löwenthal knows that he “didn’t like them, so he was a jump ahead of them from the start. He didn’t want them to do him any favors—he would get what he wanted out of them by himself, and no thanks to anybody. All he wanted in the
world was the right to be himself, to go where he pleased and do what he wanted without any interference from Them--what right had They …?” (SF 335, 336). The narrator represents Löwenthal as a racist, who distinguishes himself “from Them” when he insists on his rights: “He distrusted all Goyim, but he distrusted most of all those who plagued him with talk about how they disapproved of all racial prejudice” (SF 336).

Löwenthal’s distrust of people who claim they are not racially prejudiced serves as an introduction to the encounter with Jenny Brown, “that American shicksa who carried a drawing book everywhere” (SF 336). In the meeting, Jenny sympathizes with Löwenthal and tells him “she couldn’t bear for him to think that everybody had felt the same as the Captain, or Herr Rieber or--well, people like them” (SF 336). Since there are many resemblances between Porter and Jenny, it is evident that Jenny is at least partly based on Porter herself. Givner argues on the basis of the original twenty-page “log letter” Porter wrote to Caroline Gordon that there is justification for assuming “kinship with the author.” Identifying with Jenny, Porter shows her dislike of anti-Semitism, but at the same time she portrays Löwenthal as the Jew who answers sympathy with hostility. Instead of appreciating Jenny’s approach, he does not care “what she thought, as if what she said would make any difference to him. The nerve of her!” (SF 336).

Seen from the perspective of David Scott, the character who is based on Eugene Pressly, the “Goy” is Löwenthal’s enemy. David tells Jenny she shouldn’t have said anything to Löwenthal, because “you’re just another Goy, so far as he’s concerned, the Enemy” (SF 338). Telling Jenny that Löwenthal hated her even more for being friendly to him, David stresses the narrator’s portrait of Löwenthal in his encounter with Jenny. As the adversary of anti-Semitism, Jenny’s reaction is typical: “I somehow wanted to have my part in the business [the Germans’ anti-Semitism] straightened out. I wanted him to know ...” (SF 339). Porter’s aversion of anti-Semitism, as shown in the descriptions of Jenny’s meeting with Löwenthal and the following conversation with David, is apparently inspired by her political views, which I have discussed in chapter 1. However, Porter is not consistent

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in her portrayals of Löwenthal. While she sympathizes with the pariah Löwenthal and rejects anti-Semitism, as the narrator she caricatures his superstitious fears and presents him as a Jewish money-maker who is trading in rosaries and images of saints.11

Towards the end of the novel the narrator pictures Löwenthal as a despairing Jew who realizes that his fears of being thrown out have come true. After discovering that he has to give up his berth to the anti-Semite Rieber, who had been wounded in a fight with the Swedish passenger Arne Hansen, Löwenthal flies into a rage: “A deep slow swelling soundless howl rose and echoed and died away in Herr Löwenthal’s soul. It was a howl and a song with words. ‘Take my table, take my bed, take my blood, grind my bones, God curse Them what do They want more?’” (SF 472). Löwenthal is here again shown in an unfavorable light as the passionate, cursing Jew who distinguishes himself from Gentiles. What is striking in this scene is the narrator’s stereotypical portrayal of Löwenthal as the hostile and passionate Jew. Jonathan Freedman argues that among the derogatory stereotypical representations of Jews is “the passionate nature of the Jews, their uncontrolled and uncontrollable bursts of feeling […]”.12 Yet, there is also sympathy shown by the narrator in her description of Löwenthal’s banishment. Raphael Patai points out that “for two thousand years they [the Jews] were not actors but were acted upon in the continuing drama of their encounter with the Gentile world. They settled in every country at the pleasure of the Gentile rulers […]. They experienced the trauma of expulsion from nearly every country in which they had been allowed to dwell. And, recently they were singled out as the main target of the only systematic genocide ever conceived and executed by human inhumanity.”13 Löwenthal’s outburst, then, is not simply stereotypical, but an expression of the Jewish trauma of exile.

Anti-Semitism aboard the ship is not only shown in the

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11 There is the same ambivalent view of Löwenthal in one of Porter’s marginal notes. Commenting on what Solotaroff had written about her representation of Löwenthal, Porter wrote: “All of us, Jews and Christians, have known personally too many examples of this kind of Jew to ignore him or deny him or defend him.” George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, 121.
various approaches to Löwenthal but also in the ambivalent views of the German Wilhelm Freytag, who is married to a Jewess. Freytag is represented as an arrogant German who reveals his class-consciousness when he reflects on the poor Spanish steerage passengers. Freytag “had a moral aversion to poverty, an instinctive contempt and distrust of the swarming poor spawned like maggots in filth, befouling the air around them” (SF 63).

Freytag is doubtful about his marriage, which took place “against terrible opposition from both families, against his own better judgment, against all common sense and reason.” The narrator contrasts the families of the German and those of his Jewish wife. While Freytag is “a German of a good solid Lutheran family, Christian as they come,” Mary’s family “made a point of broad-mindedness and liberality.” Mary is a descendant of typically wandering Jews, who “had come from wherever Jews did come in the Middle Ages […] and settled down in France.” But Mary’s branch of the family had kept on wandering and finally came to live in Germany. Expressing his fear of the anti-Semitism Mary’s family will be confronted with, Freytag thinks that living in Germany is “pretty poor judgment.” The rest of the scene describes their wedding “in a Lutheran church, with wails and sobs of Oi oï oï oï! rising from one spot in the small group on the left-hand side of the main aisle …” (SF 63, 64). Porter may have had in mind what she had written about Jewish marriages in her letter of 5 January 1932 to Pressly. Referring to the approaching marriage of Herbert Klein, a Jew whom she had met in Berlin in the 1930s, she wrote:

This evening I am going to dinner at the Klein’s--it is Herbert Klein’s twenty-fifth birthday. His girl will be here shortly, and he is going to be married early in February, and Mama Klein is being a grand Jewish mama about it all: eaten to the bone with jealousy, dying of a neurotic agony of family love and rapacity […]. And the feeling of the women: their whole intention is to get a husband, the very best they can find. It is their business, their end in life. At every marriage there is a chorus of Oy, Oy, Oys--for the poor mother of the man, who is losing a man to another woman. Oh, what a pity, what grief for the mother of a man. […] Oh, poor woman who is giving up her son to another just when he was beginning to be a comfort to her!
And so on and on and on...I feel as if I were set back suddenly in a pastoral ancient people assisting at the tribal dances...But it is interesting and touching too, for these are extremely well bred persons with a very antique code of morals and behavior, and everybody is carrying him-or-herself very handsomely—I think this terrible conflict of powerful, almost savage feeling, and the restraint of a severe moral code largely accounts for the Jewish neurosis...for they are the most neurotic race on earth, no doubt about it. But I admire them, just the same (Hornbake 54-0419).

There is ambivalence in Porter's view of the Kleins. On the one hand she admires the Kleins, on the other she criticizes their inability to control their feelings. Porter's sense of being “set back suddenly in a pastoral ancient people” when confronted with the mothers' behavior at Jewish weddings, reminds one of some of the descriptions in her non-political Mexican work and suggests sympathy with the Jewish family.

Porter's admiration of the “grand Jewish mama” Klein is reflected in Freytag's view of his mother-in-law. Because her family disapproves of her daughter's marriage to a gentile, Mary's mother has joined her daughter and her son-in-law, “cast in her fate with theirs and was prepared to live and die with them.” Freytag remembers “they had all three begun to be proud of themselves and each other for being able to throw off stupid prejudices” (SF 64). Since Freytag is represented as arrogant, his belief in his being able to discard “stupid prejudices” is apparently meant ironically. As the observer, Porter portrays a wavering character, whose views of Jews oscillate between his love for his Jewish wife and his anti-Semitism as a German.14 Imagining her walking on deck he realizes that “anybody—even I!—anybody would know she is a Jew.... What have I done to us both, Mary, Mary... what shall I do now” (SF 138). But later Freytag “was sunk in shame and contrition for his abject disloyal thoughts; he must

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14 Porter commented in a marginal note on John Hardy's view of Freytag's love for Mary. Hardy wrote: “Even the hapless Freytag himself, who thought that his love for his wife was beyond question, is dismayed to find that his loyalty to her has been undermined rather than strengthened by the experience” (Katherine Anne Porter, 122). Porter wrote in the margin: “shaken, but not undermined. He loves her.” It is evident that Porter intended to emphasize the emotions of a sympathizer of Nazism in his love for a Jewess.
be careful not to betray anything of his doubts to Mary [...]” (SF 140). However, Freytag is shown as an anti-Semite when he realizes “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 and German once more [...] there was no other country for him, and how was this taken away from us, Mary? [...] our children’s blood will flow as pure as mine, your tainted stream will be cleansed in their German veins” (SF 134). Porter’s hatred of Nazism is evident in this satirical portrait of an anti-Semitic German who is as much a sympathizer of Nazism in this representation as the Germans at the captain’s table.

With these descriptions of Freytag’s inner conflict the narrator does not only show the dilemma of a proto-Nazi banished from the captain’s table because he married a Jewess, but also stresses the anti-Semitism he is confronted with. Like Löwenthal he must suffer exile. In the company of his Jewish wife “he had been refused a table in places where before he had been welcome. But this never had happened except when Mary was with him” (SF 239).

Jenny’s opinion of the anti-Semitism Freytag experiences is similar to her sympathy with Löwenthal: “[...] she could always feel again, as ever, the same light blaze of indignation against the vulgar insult offered him [Freytag] by the Captain. She put the blame squarely on the Captain because he was the only one who could have stopped the nonsense with a word; instead he had given it shape and direction.” Jenny’s accusing the captain as the only authority on the ship who was to blame in the matter is characteristic for Porter’s dislike of authority which I discussed in chapter 1. The passage, however short it is, not only expresses Porter’s protest against abuse of power, but also voices her lifelong hatred of consenting with evil, her rejection of anti-Semitism and her belief in retributivsm to which I referred in the Introduction: “Poor Herr Löwenthal was mistreated too, and Freytag never seemed to give this a thought;—that was wrong of him. She believed in hitting back, blow for blow and as many extra as you could manage to get in.—Not to resist and punish an injury, to oneself or to anyone else, was to consent to the wrong, plain moral cowardice in her view and there was nothing she despised more” (SF 304).

Jenny hears Freytag’s view of his Jewish wife when he tells her about Mary’s self-consciousness as a Jewess: “I’d lose patience with
her being so self-conscious about her Jewishness and I’d tell her that she was just another persecuted Jew, determined to be hated and persecuted no matter what” (SF 305). From Freytag’s perspective Mary is shown in the same way as the narrator portrayed Löwenthal, who like Mary was “determined to be hated.” Like Löwenthal, Mary thinks that “All Goyim hate the Jews and those who pretend to like us are the worst, because they are hypocrites” (SF 305). Freytag accuses her she is one of the Chosen, which in his view “is the most unpardonably conceited and utterly beastly selfish idea that ever got into the brain of man!” (SF 305). The unfavorable representation Freytag gives of his wife is similar to the narrator’s portrayal of Löwenthal when she stresses his sense of choseness.

Patai points out that “throughout Israel’s history, its chosenness has always remained an obligation, a duty, a yoke to be carried, never a privilege to be frivolously enjoyed. But it has also become the religious, mythical, mystical, and emotional ground of Israel’s enduring existence in the world.”18 Porter may have thought of the “yoke to be carried” in her description of Löwenthal’s feelings of “hard luck” when he realizes his “duty” as one of the Chosen People.

Mary is only portrayed by the narrator through the eyes of Freytag. To Freytag, Mary, “for all her gaiety and worldly smartness was easily upset and nervous: she woke screaming in nightmares and clung to him pressing her face under his arm as if she were trying to hide inside him; but she could never tell him what had frightened her in her sleep” (SF 140). Mary is represented here as someone who belongs to a “neurotic race,” as Porter had characterized Jews in her letter of 5 January 1932 to Pressly.

The German Freytag does not only give his views of his Jewish wife Mary, but also of Löwenthal whom he arrogantly regards as “the kind that comes to the side door peddling trash.” He sees Löwenthal as a Jew with a “smooth oily face, his large heavy lids over chocolate-colored lightless eyes, the unpleasantly thick mobile lips that squirmed as he chewed or talked.” The narrator again shows Freytag’s ambivalent feelings when he realizes that he does not hate Löwenthal because he is a Jew, but “because of what has been done to both of us.” Freytag is an anti-Semite when he “recalled all the queer comic names the Jews made up for each other, names of contempt and ridicule, and

18 Raphael Patai, The Jewish Mind, 111.
the worst of them were meant for fellows like this [Löwenthal]” (SF 240, 241, 262).

As we have seen, Porter witnessed the rise of Nazism when she was in Berlin in the early 1930s and warned in her story “The Leaning Tower” and her novel Ship against the destruction she feared. Setting her novel in 1931 but writing it largely at the time that the Holocaust was being made part of public memory, Porter apparently intended to stress in her book the danger of anti-Semitism. Barkai argues that “between 1933 and 1941 the National Socialists succeeded, through education and propaganda, in totally isolating the Jews in Germany [...] Real Jewish people were converted into a collective and depersonalized mythical enemy stereotype. It was only a small step from that figure to the total dehumanisation that made possible the murder of six million European Jews.” Though Porter may not have known about the isolation of Jews in Germany, she did describe in her book the isolation of Löwenthal and later Freytag on the German ship. Barkai concludes: “The account given here does not claim to supply a complete or final answer to these frightening questions. It simply seeks to show how seven or eight years of fanatical ideological indoctrination and concrete visual instruction in racial matters could befog the consciences of millions of Germans and corrode their moral inhibitions. Without these prior developments the Holocaust would not have been possible.”16 Porter had noticed these developments. When in Berlin she had seen “young Hitlerites, marching like machines in close formation up and down the streets” (Hornbake 68-0106) and after she had started to write her novel she still vividly remembered the indoctrination, as appears from a letter she wrote on 17 March 1942 to Samuel Progue: “It is very easy to see swastikas in the mind’s eye when one speaks of Nazi [...] I have also seen twenty thousand Nazis in one gang, with swastika armbands, I have seen their faces as I listened to them howling like hysterical coyotes when their dreadful and psychopathic clown stood screaming before them...the image of themselves” (Hornbake 26-0267). Though Porter wrote her letter during World War II when her anti-German feelings increased it is hard to doubt the sincerity of her letter, the more so as similar expressions of her fear of the power she had observed abound in her

16 Avraham Barkai, “The German Volksgemeinschaft from the Persecution of the Jews to the ‘Final Solution,’” 95, 96.
personal papers.

The narrator describes the views of some of the Germans at
the captain’s table in a rather vague discussion about the question of
Jewishness, which is raised by Professor Hutten. He thinks that Jews
are neither a race, nor a nation and concludes that “Jewishness is a
state of mind,” with which some of his hearers fully agree. Rieber
thinks that Jews “are everything, utter mongrels” and Frau Rittersdorf
is annoyed by “their claim of Chosenness” (SF 229, 228). However,
Frau Schmitt appears to be unprejudiced in her views. Accusing
Rieber of being “a real anti-Semite,” she points out that she does not
“dislike” Jews. When he is asked to give his opinion Schumann “said
mildly and precisely, ‘I have nothing to say against them. I believe that
we worship the same God!’” (SF 230). Porter evidently intended to
contrast in this discussion the anti-Semitism of the proto-Nazis at the
table with the liberal views of Frau Schmitt and of an officer who is
respected by many of the passengers of the ship. Patai, who discusses
the question of Jewishness, points out that the definition of
Jewishness as a state of mind is “not the complete answer to who is a
Jew.” He argues that “a Jew is a person who considers himself a Jew
and is so considered by others. Which, of course, does not change the
fact that to be Jewish is a state of mind, except that we have
recognized that the state, or position, of more than one mind is
involved: that of the individual whose Jewishness is being adjudged,
and that of his social environment […] What matters is the feeling of
belongingness, which usually translates itself into efforts to pass the
same feeling to one’s children.”[17] The narrator’s portrayal of
Löwenthal and Mary, who each have a strong sense of belonging to
the Jewish people, corresponds with Patai’s view of Jewishness.

Among Porter’s papers there are a number of notes, some
undated and some dated 1956, under the heading “About My Jewish
Friends,” in which she writes about some characteristics of what in
her view was Jewishness. An interesting note reads:

My good Jews of all the world, the whole fifteen or twenty
million of you, the smallest and noisiest minority of the globe,
pull yourselves together and get the cobwebs out of your
eyes…You demand in effect one law of privilege for

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yourselves as against the other two billions of human beings who, much to your disgust, share this planet with you. You demand perfect immunity from adverse criticism, with the perfect right to say any slanderous or injurious thing you like about anyone else. You demand that others respect your religious superstitions, with the proviso that you are free to jeer at all others. You demand all the rights and privileges of citizens, social, legal, economic, in any country where you live, with the privilege of remaining outside of that nation precisely to the degree that suits your convenience: calling yourself a Jew, you decline to commit yourself further [...] why did they persist so? Well, they were Jews and chosen [...] (Hornblake 65-0007).

There are evident similarities between these views and Porter’s representations of Löwenthal and Mary as Jews. Löwenthal claims rights “without interference from Them,” while both Mary and Löwenthal consider themselves as belonging to the Chosen. Löwenthal is not prepared to discuss with others the subject of religion “for he did not admit the existence of any other.” In his view “all religions except his own were simply a lot of heathens following false gods” (*SF* 335). Porter’s disagreeable remark in her note on Judaism resembles Löwenthal’s views on religion. Part of the note occurs practically literally in the narrator’s comments on Löwenthal’s reflections on religion: “He had been reminded more than once by some Goy who wanted an argument that there were something like two billion human beings in the world, all presumably created by the same God, and only a matter of some twenty million Jews. So what had God in mind, showing such unjust partiality? Such nonsense never fazed Herr Löwenthal for an instant” (*SF* 335). It is evident from the note I have quoted that the narrator’s portrayal of Löwenthal represents Porter’s views.

In some confused notes in the same group of notes Porter is

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[18] As appears from one of her marginal notes Porter saw a similarity between Calvinists and Jews. In *Escape from Freedom* the author argues that “the Calvinists quite naively thought that they were the chosen ones [...]. Porter commented “this is the basic idea of Judaism. The whole foundation of their doctrine of being Chosen.” Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Rinehart, 1941), 89, 90.
annoyed at what she regards the Jewish sense of chosenness: “I do not consider the Jews as Chosen, in any sense of the word” (Hornbake 65-0013).

In contrast to this rather emotional approach to Jewishness, however, in two notes dated 15 January 1956 Porter shows she was disgusted at what she had heard during two encounters in Berlin in 1932, one with an “Orthodox Jew” and the other with Goering:

Description of the Orthodox Jew from Lithuania who told me, in Berlin, January 1932, that the mission of the Jew was to undermine the confidence of other nations in their beliefs, and to change the meanings of words in all languages, and to work inside of all cultures to destroy their traditions, and so to establish a moral and material superiority: He was saying this to me at a dinner given by some Jewish friends of mine, who I still believe would have been shocked if they had heard him, but he kept his voice low, and swirled his cognac in a large glass as he talked. This happened only a few evenings after Goering had told me, in a low, rather well-bred voice, just what the Hitler regime was going to do to the Jews: “we intend to purify the Nordic race,” he said, “and when we have done our work, there will not be a Jew left in Germany, or in any country where we are in power.” So I heard both sides of the controversy within a week’s time, at dinner parties, first from a semi-Orthodox very unappetizing looking Jew, who had never shaved in his life, whose ripe red lips pouted out obscenely from curly black hair, and whose eyes looked like slightly sucked licorice balls: and from a German so obese he was almost shapeless, with a roll of fat at the back of his neck, and a slit mouth that looked like a trap, and cold mean eyes. I got a very bad impression of both sides of the argument from these two men (Hornbake 65-0016, 0017).

Porter’s memories of the talks at the dinners may have at least partly affected some of her unfavorable portrayals of Löwenthal while she was writing her novel. It is also evident, however, that her memory of Goering’s prediction of the extermination of Jews inspired her to warn against anti-Semitism in the novel. On 29 April 1956, about two months after she wrote her note, Porter wrote to the editor Seymour Lawrence, who played an important part in the completion of the
novel\textsuperscript{19} \textquoteleft As you notice, I said then I was not going to bring this novel up to date, and I still do not intend to: the scene of this story is \textit{then} and \textit{there} (as well as here and now,) in the sense that people are still as wasteful, self-centered, unloving, and illusioned as always (yet with their virtues, their strengths, their hopes) and though on one level this is a parable of political action--no party or system is named\textquoteleft (L. 501). Though the story is not set after World War II, it is clear that it is a politically inspired parable.

In one of the undated notes under the heading \textquoteleft A Personal Statement,\textquoteright Porter reflects on \textquoteleft both sides of the argument\textquoteright she mentioned in her 1956 notes. The undated note reads: \textquoteleft In as few words as I can manage (to make myself clear) I shall here write a personal statement about the Jewish question, etc... growth of \textquoteleft anti-Semitism\textquoteright on the one hand, increase of Jewish fury against Gentiles, which I gather from their writings, and what I suppose might be called \textquoteleft anti-Gentilism.\textquoteright But I mistrust both terms, they are vague shapeless sounds designed to cover a very definite meaning in a foggy blanket\textquoteright (Hornbake 65-0011).\textsuperscript{20} One wonders how Porter could have noticed the growth of anti-Semitism and anti-Gentilism as she called it, if she did not know the real meaning of the terms. Yet the hatred on both sides is evident in the novel. Löwenthal is a Jew who is isolated from the rest of the passengers and who in his turn hates and fears the Gentiles. With this sharp demarcation between the Jew and the Germans on the ship Porter intended to expose the racism shown from two opposite viewpoints. As she did with the representation of the Germans at the captain's table, Porter pictures Löwenthal in some of her portrayals as a stereotype.

These stereotypical representations suggest that Porter shared and in any case reinforced the views of some of her contemporaries. Freedman argues that in the first two decades of the twentieth century \textquoteleft anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiment boomed in England and America, climaxing politically in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 but resonating throughout the next decades before receding in

\textsuperscript{19} Stout extensively explains Lawrence's \textquoteleft literary midwifery\textquoteright (Stout, \textit{A Sense of the Times}), 207-210.

\textsuperscript{20} Walsh argues that Porter \textquoteleft wanted to explore mutual hatred between Jew and (German) Gentile in her novel, a legitimate topic, but in fleshing out her ideas she created stereotypes of both,\textquoteright (\textit{Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden}, 213).
the aftermath of World War II. In the works of many writers of this
era, the Jew is invoked as a corrupt agent debasing culture with a
thoroughgoing commercialism, insistent sexuality, and resolute
neuroticism.”21 These views fit some of Porter’s portrayals of
Löwenthal as an offensive character. It is evident that the contrasting
sympathetic portrait of Löwenthal as the persecuted Jew and victim of
anti-Semitism resulted from the political views Porter held at the time.

Commenting on Porter’s annotations in her copy of Albert
Memmi’s Portrait of a Jew (1964), some critics point to Porter’s anti-
Semitism. Though some of Porter’s notes in her copy of the book are
disagreeable reactions to Memmi’s views, it should be noted that the
book is Memmi’s personal view of the contemporary situation of Jews
seen from the perspective of his own life. He insists that the portrait
in the title of his book is his own portrait. Porter’s comments on some
of the writer’s observations of his Jewishness as he experienced it, are
sometimes emotional. For example, Memmi asks, “And what do you
[the gentiles] actually do but stand aloof, refrain from doing anything?
Is not that, in the final analysis, the advice you are giving me:
discretion, silence, forgetfulness?” Memmi’s reproach of being denied
the right to be himself resembles Löwenthal’s claim to “the right to be
himself, to go where he pleased and do what he wanted” (SF 336).
Porter’s comment on the passage does not show any anti-Semitism,
but offers rather a friendly advice: “This works very well between
friends, in marriage and other relations, so it might help in this
tiresome ‘Jewish Question.’” Löwenthal’s view of Christianity can be
traced back in one of Memmi’s observations: “To the Jew who still
believes and professes his own religion, Christianity is the greatest
theological and metaphysical usurpation in his history; it is a spiritual
scandal, a subversion and blasphemy.”22 Porter’s emphasis on this
aspect in Löwenthal’s representation recurs in her comment in the
margin of this passage: “This is the rub of the matter.”

Porter’s approach to “the tiresome ‘Jewish Question,’” as she
saw it, is ambivalent and resembles the views she expresses in
Löwenthal’s portrayal. As we have seen, on the one hand Löwenthal is
represented as the stereotypical Jew. On the other hand, in the satirical

21 Jonathan Freedman, The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in
22 Albert Memmi, Portrait of a Jew, translated from the French by Elisabeth Abbott
descriptions of some of the anti-Semitic characters the narrator presents Löwenthal with sympathy when he is the victim of anti-Semitism. It is in these portrayals of Löwenthal that the influence of Porter’s political views is shown. When he is portrayed from the perspective of her fear of Nazism Löwenthal is represented as the Jew who suffers from isolation and the threatening danger of the anti-Semites. Perhaps the best example of the ambivalence in Porter’s views is found in the note, quoted above, which describes the influence of her unfavorable impressions at a dinner with “a semi-Orthodox Jew” who told her about his Jewish mission to establish superiority and her shock at an earlier encounter with the “obese” Goering who informed her about Hitler’s plans “to purify the Nordic race."

Prejudice
Besides anti-Semitism, Porter exposes the prejudice and contempt shown by some of the passengers in their views of different races and nationalities. In her letters of the early 1960s, after her novel was published, Porter often defended her grim story against negative criticism. For example, on 27 December 1963 Porter wrote about her novel to her friend father Raymond Roseliep, with whom she frequently corresponded during the last twenty years of her life: “But I have wondered at the attitude of so many reviewers of my book, that I take such a grim pessimistic view of things, especially human nature … In their minds it follows naturally that I hate people. This could hardly be more false— I hate the wicked things we do, and my feelings are very well expressed,— in a limited way— by Robert Frost’s delightful, ‘I have a lover’s quarrel with the world.’ You’d think reviewers would have read at least a daily newspaper now and then, if they can’t trust artists to see reality for them!” (Hornbake 26-0894). In her defense of the novel Porter stresses again that she had written her novel from an observer’s point of view. The hatred described in the novel should be seen, therefore, in the light of what Porter noticed and saw as “reality” during the voyage of the Vera. Porter observed the attitude of some of the ship’s first class passengers towards different nationalities, ranging from German to American.

In the opening scene of the story the description of the Indian on the square of the Mexican town Veracruz is a continuation of Porter’s representations of Indians in her political essays and sketches.
When she started to write her novel about ten years after she had left Mexico Porter apparently still felt sympathy for the oppressed “emaciated” Indian whose feet “lay meekly together on the gray earth” (SF 4). As in her politically inspired Mexican work there is again a suggestion of exploitation and contempt of Indians, which the narrator expresses in her description of the two white men on the square: “[…] and they [the white men] carry on their lives of alternate violence and lethargy with a pleasurable contempt for outside opinion, founded on the charmed notion that their ways and feelings are above and beyond criticism” (SF 3). A similar resemblance with Porter’s Mexican work is found in the portrayal of a native woman with her suckling baby in the market-place of Santa Cruz de Tenerife: “while she [the woman] ate voraciously of onions, tomatoes, sausages, apricots, all wrapped in a disk of tough half-baked unleavened bread. The baby suckled and kicked in bliss, she put her food down now and then to wait upon her customers […]” (SF 383). The sympathy the narrator feels for the naturalness of the mother and her baby is stressed by her satire of the German Frau Rittersdorf’s contempt when she watches the market-place: ‘What had such poor shabby tired-looking beings to live for? This was her great question, could they be called alive at all?’ (SF 383). As I discussed in chapter 3, Frau Rittersdorf is satirized for her racial views and her hatred of America and Americans.

Frau Rittersdorf’s hatred of Americans is shared by the ship’s purser, who is not only an anti-Semite, but also anti-American.23 In a conversation with Rieber he advises him not to accept a berth in a cabin with the Americans Scott and Denny: “[…] you don’t want to go in there [the cabin] with them. God knows what would happen. I do not trust Americans—they all have Indian, or Negro, or Jewish blood--mongrels and savages. They kidnap little children for money, and then murder them” (SF 251).

Porter particularly satirizes the Texan William Denny for his disagreeable caricatural portraits of different nationalities and races. Indeed, the representation of Denny himself is a caricature. He is introduced into the story by Schumann as “a tall shambling dark

23 In several of her letters of the early 1960s Porter wrote about anti-American sentiment. The satire in the caricatural portraits of Americans may have been inspired by the hostility against Americans she had sensed when she was abroad.
young fellow” who “lounged along in the wake of the Spanish girls, regarding them with what could only be described as a leer” (SF 18). Throughout the story Denny, whose reading matter is “a fully illustrated clothbound book entitled Recreational Aspects of Sex as Mental Prophylaxis with a subhead A Guide to True Happiness in Life,” is satirized for his sexual behavior and narrow-mindedness. Some of the women of the Spanish Zarzuela company regard him with contempt, but Denny “knew their kind. He had not lived most of his life in Brownsville, Texas, for nothing” (SF 24, 26, 27).

Denny is an intolerant and prejudiced character, whose ethnic and racial attitude is exposed. Denny’s father was a “prominent citizen” in Brownsville, “mayor for many years and rich from local real estate, the lower classes consisted of Mexicans and Negroes, that is, greasers and niggers, with a few polacks and wops but not enough to notice; and he had always relied simply on his natural superiority of race and class, backed by law and custom.” Denny had “taken the proper white man’s attitude […]” (SF 24). He despises Catholics, atheists and Jews and longs to be back in his home town Brownsville, “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” (SF 333, 334).

Denny’s showdown comes towards the end of the story at a Gala given by the Zarzuela company in honor of the Captain. After the drunken Denny molests the American Mrs. Treadwell mistaking her for one of the women of the Zarzuela company, she mutilates Denny’s face by beating him with “the sharp metal-capped high heels” of her sandals. 24 Looking on at the doctor’s careful and professional treatment of Denny, Herr Glocken characterizes Denny as “a species of monster, certainly not quite human” (SF 465, 469). This last portrait of Denny seen from the perspective of Herr Glocken, one of the few likeable passengers, reveals Porter’s intention to expose ethnic

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24 In the light of Porter’s moral views the passage about Mrs. Treadwell in her September letter to Tuska is interesting: “And here is an oddity of current morality: Mrs. Treadwell has been almost unanimously condemned for beating Denny with her slipper heel; nobody seems to notice that a drunken hoodlum had seized her by the breast, tried to drag her into the hall, had threatened her with broken bones at least–she was in great danger even of death. I think I myself wronged her not to give her a more effective weapon” (Hornbake 28-0667).
and racial hatred voiced by a character who is “certainly not quite human.”

Just as she caricatured the Germans at the captain’s table to satirize their racism, so does Porter draw a caricature of Denny as “a species of monster.”25 Denny is based on the prejudiced people Porter had met in the course of her life, as she wrote in one of her marginal notes. Commenting on Hendrick’s argument that “Denny is endowed with many of Crane’s boisterous, vulgar characteristics,” Porter wrote: “He is like all my characters a composite of half a dozen or more seen in many places in many widely separated times of my life.”26 A comparison of the novel with “The Leaning Tower” shows a similar prejudice in the characters’ view of nationalities. In a discussion among the four boarders of the pension about nationalities Charles is surprised at their prejudices: “It seemed to him [Charles] that the discussion was getting nowhere, and it reminded him of the quarrels during his schooldays between the German boys and the Mexican boys and the Kentucky boys; the Irish boys fought everybody […]” (CS 482).

Porter’s view of ethnic and racial prejudice is summed up in Jenny’s satirical advice to Freytag after he had told her he wished to take his wife to a country where they would never be confronted with anti-Semitism: “You might go to Africa,” said Jenny, ‘you might look for one of those fascinating surviving tribes of cannibals and headhunters where you would both be hated on exactly equal terms, because you’re another color’” (SF 306).

Porter regretted the unfavorable criticism of her novel. In her

25 Throughout the novel Porter uses her craft of drawing caricatures. Already at the beginning of the story Jenny, a painter of caricatures, tells David Scott she has to do “those silly drawings for somebody’s foul stories.” Later she draws a portrait of David at fifty: “She draped forty sagging pounds on David’s familiar bony framework, added jowls, thinned his hair back level with his ears, doubled the size of his unbelievably handsome aquiline nose, extended his chin so extravagantly he began to resemble Punch, and as a last satisfying luxury of cruelty, she added a Teutonic roll of fat across the base of his skull (SF 53, 339). Since this caricatural portrait of David closely resembles the caricatures of the fat Germans in “The Leaning Tower,” it is evident that Porter projected her dislike of Germans upon David Scott, who is based on Pressly. Porter’s representation of Pressly as a German reminds one of what she wrote in the margin of her letter of 2 March 1933 to her father (see note 17 in chapter 3).

26 Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, 129.
Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

letter of 28 April 1963 to Caroline Gordon she writes: “But I have been boiled in oil and passed around sliced with vinegar on both sides of the Atlantic, and I hear Germany is getting ready a corklined cellar for me...Let them! I wrote the damned book on purpose, I don’t take back one line, I wish I had made it tougher—I nearly sprained my soul pulling my punches at certain places—and not one reviewer even the best has yet guessed the real theme and point of that book [...]” (Hornbake 21-0655). Porter’s fear of racial and ethnic hostility, which may have been inspired by her pacifism I discussed in chapter 1, is “the point” of her book and explains what the purpose was of her novel, that is, a warning against anti-Semitism, which led to the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis.

*My Chinese Marriage*27

In 1920, before she went to Mexico, Porter was asked by one of her Greenwich Village acquaintances, the writer Gertrude Emerson and one of the editors of *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, to ghostwrite for the magazine the story of the love and marriage between the Scotch-Irish girl Mae Munro Watkins and the Chinese student Tiam Hock Franking. *Asia* started in 1898 and was intended to give a favorable picture of Asia to Americans and to encourage trade relations. The ghostwritten story should, therefore, be seen in the light of the aims of the magazine.

The story was first serialized in *Asia* in the monthly issues of June through September 1921 and later that year it appeared as a book. According to Holly Franking, granddaughter of Mae Franking, Porter based her story on the manuscript Mae Franking had written after her Chinese husband had died (*MCM* xix). Though there is no evidence of a manuscript and therefore cannot be compared with Porter’s ghostwritten story, it is likely that Porter shaped Franking’s story to some extent according to her own views of the time.28 Alvarez

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27 Porter wrote the story in 1921 while she was in Mexico and it might, therefore, have been discussed in chapter 2 which deals with Porter’s racial views in the 1920s. Yet the discussion of the story is included in this later chapter because it allows comparison of Porter’s racial attitudes shown in the early 1920s with her much later ethnic and racial views I discussed in the preceding parts of this chapter.

28 Whether or not there was a manuscript is not clear. In a note in one of her own copies of the book, dated 2 June 1969, Porter wrote: “I wrote this book from the dictated words of Mac Tiam Franking.”
argues that “the description of southern China incorporates elements of the Mexican scene: ‘tile-roofed houses, surrounded by arched verandas,’ ‘trees in winter foliage, not the brilliant green of summer, but the sage-green and pale tan of November […]” 29 In her foreword to the 1991 republication of My Chinese Marriage Givner points to some similarities between the novel and Porter’s fiction; comparing the story with Ship of Fools, Givner argues that “it is evident that, in spite of a forty-year time gap, the same hand, eye, ear and general sensibility inform both works.” Givner also finds resemblances with “The Old Order,” “In a Mexican Patio,” “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” and “Holiday” (MCM x - xvi).

The list can be extended. For example, there is a striking similarity with Porter’s early Mexican sketches “Xochimilco” and “Children of Xochitl,” which she also wrote in 1921. The narrator’s admiration of the Mexican Indians in their boats in the canals of Xochimilco returns in Margaret’s [pseudonym for Mae Franking] description of the arrival in her husband’s province: “Like giant fish, bobbing and dipping and swaying upon the waves, these sampans with their great eyes painted on each side of the prow and their curious, up-curved sterns, came toward us in a gala-fleet, rowed by lean, over-muscled men in faded blue cotton garments. I was very gay and much exhilarated by the soft sunshine that broke through the mist as I climbed down with Chan-King’s [pseudonym for Tiam] help into one of these boats” (MCM 36). Margaret’s observation of the rowing Chinese men in their boats resembles Porter’s affectionate descriptions of Indians in her non-political sketches in the early 1920s. Reaching their destination Margaret sees a pastoral landscape: “Through this intermittent curtain [of trees] the walls of the houses shone in dull blue and coral pink and clear gray. Jagged cacti shot up among the bulbous rocks and everywhere the scarlet poinsettia set the hills aglow with patches of brilliant color.” The pastoral landscape with its many colors, Margaret notices, is similar to the descriptions of nature given by Porter as the narrator in “Holiday.” Margaret tells her husband that she “loved this island instantly” and thinks that “this is our Island of the Blest” (MCM 36). In “Holiday” there is a comparable attraction to a peaceful and natural place, which the narrator found at the Müllers’ farm.

Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

It is evident that *My Chinese Marriage* is more than a mere recording of Mae’s story. In 1921 Porter took Mae Franking’s story with her to Mexico and struggled with the material, as appears from her letter of 28 March 1956 to Donald Stalling, in which she protests against the misinformation he had given about her later life: “I never wrote that Chinese story in ten days, but took it on to Mexico with me and suffered over it for months” (Hornbake 27-0895). In the introduction to the 1991 edition of the book, Holly Franking gives an interesting annotated summary of the story from the moment Mae and Tiam first met in 1907 until Tiam’s death in San Francisco in 1919. Holly Franking based her summary “on a personal collection of over five hundred letters, newspaper articles, photographs, and other documents written about Mae and Tiam” (*MCM* xx) and points to the differences between the actual story and the published version. In the following discussion of Porter’s version I shall show the change in the protagonist’s racial attitude.

Though Mae and Tiam actually first met as students at Ann Arbor High School, Porter upgraded the High School to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, which they later attended. Emphasizing in the story Margaret’s racial attitude towards the Chinese young man Porter presents her as a prejudiced girl who showed “an utter failure to regard him [Chan-King] as a human being like the rest of us. He was the first of his race I had ever seen” (*MCM* 1, 2). Since Margaret grew up in a small white town in the early twentieth century she could not be expected to have broadminded racial views. The emphasis on Margaret’s prejudice in the initial stage of the relationship may have been meant for the reading public of *Asia*. It may also have been Porter’s interpretation, which is the more likely as Holly Franking’s summary does not mention the high degree of racial prejudice on Margaret’s part as described in the beginning of the story. Later Margaret was “happily impressed” by Chan-King. However, “her impulse to friendship suffered a quick reaction from all that Chan-King was, when viewed against the background of his race as I saw it. I had no intention whatever of continuing our association” (*MCM* 2).

The description of the early relationship between Margaret and Chan-King is dominated by the difference in race and culture. When Chan-King visits Margaret’s family for the first time he brings “a flaming array of embroidered silks, carved ivory and sandalwood and
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curious little images in bronze and blackwood” (MCM 2). China comes to Ann Arbor and Margaret realizes “the whole world between us. I saw him as alien, far removed and unknowable.” When Chan-King symbolically offers Margaret “a small embroidered Chinese flag,” she hesitates to accept it: “Again the old prejudice swept over me.” Margaret’s prejudice is contrasted with Chan-King’s interest “in everything.” To him “it is all one world.” He is the son of a liberal father who “had perceived the limitations of a too nationalistic point of view and had planned western education for his sons” (MCM 3). With these introductory representations of the two characters of different races, racial prejudice is stressed.

Margaret’s conflicting feelings for Chan-King are not mentioned in Holly Franking’s summary, nor in Mae Franking’s letters included in the 1991 edition. An interesting passage in My Chinese Marriage is Margaret’s confession to herself that “in spite of all these reasons for close sympathy with Chan-King, I felt toward him at times something amounting almost to dislike. Against such states of mind my sense of personal justice, a trait I had directly from my Scotch inheritance, instantly rebelled” (MCM 4). The passage suggests that Porter projected her own sense of justice onto Margaret.

Besides her growing love for Chan-King, Margaret’s sense of justice plays a part in the development of their relationship. When the two are seen together more and more, Margaret begins “to hear small murmurs, a vague hum of discussion, and to observe an interested watching of us by the students and townspeople.” The murmurs and “comments from other sources” arouse in her “a yearning tenderness to shield him [Chan-King] from injustice” (MCM 5). After Chan-King had returned from his summer travels Margaret feels a “maternal tenderness” when she overheard “a remark, tinged with race prejudice” (MCM 6). Since the insistence on Margaret’s sense of justice in the relationship is not found in a letter Mae Franking wrote to herself about her feelings in this period, it is interesting to note that Porter introduced an element which would later affect her own racial

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30 Alvarez argues that Porter may have actually seen these objects: “Most of the vivid images in My Chinese Marriage seem to come from Chinese objects Porter had seen, photographs, or amusingly enough, landscapes of Mexico. The first clear visual image in the work is a still life of the items Chan-King, the Chinese student, brings to the home of Margaret […]” (Alvarez, “Katherine Anne Porter and Mexican Art,” 236).
views, as I shall discuss in chapter 6. As we have seen, in her correspondence of the 1950s Porter revealed a similar ambivalence in her notions of African Americans.

The couple finally made plans to marry in spite of the resistance of Mae’s and Tiam’s families. In a letter of 26 October 1910 (MCM 64) Mae Franking wrote to her aunt that she knew her duty, but she does not refer to any racial prejudice she had in the early stage of the relationship as mentioned in the published version. The various newspaper articles about the intermarriage in 1912 included in the 1991 version show the commotion caused by the marriage. For example, the Ann Arbor Times wrote in September 1912: “It is undeniable that, whether justifiable or not, there is a very widespread prejudice against close social intercourse or intermarriage between American girls and young men from the Orient. And as happened in the Ann Arbor case, marriage frequently brings social ostracism for the bride” (MCM 71). According to the published version Margaret did not much care about the “social ostracism.” After the wedding she discovered that “the gaze of the curious” did not matter at all (MCM 10). However, Tiam sent a letter to the editor of the Ann Arbor Times, dated 15 September 1912, in which he protested against sensational information and “the falsity of some of the statements in question” (MCM 76). In the conclusion of his letter Tiam reveals his liberal views and makes a plea for a better understanding between the two different nations: “May I hope in closing that the people of these two republics will have a chance to know and understand each other better than in the past; and the friendship of these two nations may be made warmer and closer in the future, through the exchange of ideas and ideals of the present” (MCM 76). In the story Chan-King is represented as a broad-minded young Chinese, who “championed the ways of the western world” (MCM 23). Indeed, Chan-King is westernized and even “had denied in himself the great racial instinct of the Chinese to obey his parents” (MCM 28).

On her part Margaret’s “old prejudice had passed away” and when she follows her husband to his native country she feels she “had come home to China” (MCM 15). In the following three chapters of the published version there is a curious change in Margaret’s perceptions of the Chinese way of life and culture. While she had first rejected Chan-King because “he belonged to the Chinese race” (MCM 4), she now feels sympathy for China. Already in her first year in
Shanghai Margaret, when she “came to know the Chinese,” was “pleasantly impressed by the measure of deference that they showed to wives, daughters, sisters and friends [...]” At their receptions and dinners Margaret admires the Chinese who “have so beautifully the gift of saying profound things lightly; they can think deeply without being heavy and pedantic” (MCM 19). An extensive description of one of these socials resembles Porter’s active social life in her Mexican period. Margaret describes the guests and mentions that “they [Margaret and Chan-King] belonged to a club or two and kept in close touch with the work of the returned students, who have become an important factor in the national life. Though wishing to conserve what is best in the civilization of China, they are bringing western ideas to bear upon the solution of political, sociological and economic problems” (MCM 18, 19).

It is in these reforms that Chan-King and Margaret are interested. Both were “deeply interested in the meeting and blending of East and West” and Tiam shows a “dauntless will to carry through great work in the education of China.” Like all returned students, however, he becomes disillusioned: “China has been her glorious, grim old self for too many centuries” (MCM 22). In her introduction Holly Franking points to a letter Tiam wrote to the Dean of the Law School where he was a teacher: “Personally, I believe the comparative idea is practical and particularly valuable for with the growth of Republican ideals our western law has a part to play which cannot be overlooked […]. The study of law is especially attractive to those who hope by judicial reform to make China a better example of representative government and to place China on equality with other nations in regard to international law” (MCM xxix). The disillusionment that follows may reflect Porter’s experiences at the time of completing the story when she noticed the failure of the Mexican Revolution.

Margaret’s descriptions of their socials show her gradual assimilation into the Chinese community at Shanghai. In elaborate descriptions of her mother-in-law’s stay at the home of her son and daughter-in-law Margaret proudly relates the progress she makes in her assimilation process. She wears Chinese clothes and “not only used chopsticks with ease but had a real taste for Chinese food.” Her Chinese mother “was not ashamed, in a public place, to acknowledge her American daughter” (MCM 33). When leaving she said to Chan-King [Tiam], “This is a Chinese house, with a Chinese wife in it.
Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

Everything is Chinese. I could never have believed it without seeing, for I thought your wife was a western woman” (*MCM* 34). From a prejudiced American girl Margaret has transformed into a Chinese woman. Though Mae Franking’s letters home during this period do not mention the metamorphosis, she did write a letter to her family on 9 July 1917 in which she protests against foreigners’ prejudiced views of the Chinese. Describing Shanghai as an international city, Mae Franking writes:

> For example, when one of the allies [in World War I] has a national holiday, the tram cars are decorated accordingly: on the French tram-line each car carries at each end two French flags, with the flag of the nation celebrating in the middle….The arrangement is the same with British flags, of course, instead of French. On days of general rejoicing the flags of all the principal allies are carried. Shanghai is an interesting place, for everybody who is not German. I don’t know what Mrs. Bauer [a German acquaintance] found to write about, but I often think that if she could live in a British community her miserable chickens of race prejudice would come fluttering home to roost and she’d find out just what vile scum of the earth she belongs to. Not that I really think they are, of course, any more than Chinese are all the things she thinks they are (*MCM* 104).

In the last chapter of the published version, describing Margaret’s stay at her in-laws at Amoy, she reveals affection and respect for her mother-in-law and feels that they “were under a benevolent matriarchate in the snug compound” (*MCM* 48). Margaret admires the customs of her “adopted people” (*MCM* 49) and is impressed by the women’s foot-binding. She points out that “it may be worth noting, when one remembers how America, with its own great unwhashed, jokes at the expense of the Chinese of whatever rank or station, that, in accordance with the fastidious cleanliness of upper class Chinese, the bound feet were exquisitely cared for” (*MCM* 47). These descriptions of Margaret’s love of Chinese customs and her assimilation were apparently meant to fit the goals of the magazine.

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31 Givner points to the resemblance with the relationship between Grandmother and Nannie in *The Old Order* (*MCM* xiv).
However, in spite of her assimilation Margaret is still doubtful about intermarriage. During her stay at Amoy Margaret “thought a great deal about intermarriage as a problem.” She realizes the “many, many ways in which everything might have been spoiled and decides “that no rules could be made about intermarriage” (MCM 50-51). About two years later after she had returned to America and had become a widow, Mae Franking looks back at her marriage. In her reaction to comments that appeared in Asia on Mae’s story, she wrote that she “never advocated intermarriage in general.” The excerpt of her letter to the editor, which was printed in the issue of August 1921, reads

My husband and I never advocated intermarriage in general, rather we consistently refused to advise it in any given instance, considering it a purely personal affair. In fact, the Chinese people have a strong sentiment against intermarriage, although they willingly admit exceptions. But how rare those exceptions may be is indicated that some friends of my husband (also American-educated) agreed that we were “one couple in ten thousand.” I am making no attempt to contribute to the “problem literature” of today. I am merely telling a simple little story which many of those who know it have expressed a desire to see given to the world for its own sake and not as an argument for or against anything […]

While Mae opposes intermarriage, she stresses that her own marriage was based on love. Holly Franking points out that “they accepted their situation [the estrangement from their own cultures] regretfully, yet, because of their love, willingly. Consequently, they became everything to each other […]” (MCM xxii).

As we have seen, Porter never favored mixed marriages and may not have known Mae Franking’s letter to the editor of Asia. Referring to Mae’s intermarriage Porter wrote in her 1969 note in her copy of the book that her ghostwritten book had been written “in all innocence and good faith on our own parts and God knows it couldn’t be more false because she [Mae] had no notion what had happened to her.”

A comparison of My Chinese Marriage with Ship of Fools not only shows the difference in racial attitudes, but also in the views of love.
Racial Attitudes in *Ship of Fools* and *My Chinese Marriage*

In *Ship* there is a continual vain search for love among the greater part of the passengers. The failure is summed up in Mrs.Treadwell’s often quoted italicized interior monologue after watching the German couple Baumgartner towards the end of the novel: ‘Love me, love me in spite of all! Whether or not I love you, whether I am fit to love, whether you are able to love, even if there is no such thing as love, love me!’ (SF 480). Treadwell’s skepticism about the existence of love between men and women reflects Porter’s own lifelong search for love, which practically always ended in disillusionment. Porter ascribed her disillusionments in love to various causes as appears from some of her marginal notes. In *Escape from Freedom* the writer argues that in relationships of parents and children an “attitude of domination and ownership is often covered by what seems to be the ‘natural’ concern of feeling of protectiveness for a child. The child is put into a golden cage. The result is often a profound fear of love on the part of the child when he grows up, as ‘love’ to him implies being caught and blocked in his own freedom.”32 Porter wrote in the margin of this passage: “my situation as a child with this result.” Agreeing with the writer’s argument in *Feminine Psychology* that there is a “masculine tendency to lower women’s self-respect” Porter commented: “I have never known a man as lover who did not try this with me. It was the real cause of every break-up.”33 About forty years before she started to write *Ship* Porter’s doubt about the “capacity for real love” is contradicted in her ghostwritten story.

What is prominent, though, in *My Chinese Marriage* is the exposure of racism, Mae’s change in her racial attitude and her interest in Chinese culture. The affection Porter showed for the Indian race, and the interest in their culture and art she expressed in her non-political Mexican work during the 1920s apparently affected her version of the story.

Chapter 6
Porter and the Law

As we have seen, in part of her work and her personal papers Porter protested against the law on moral grounds. Taking the Law-and-Literature studies approach I shall discuss in this chapter the relationship between Porter’s moral views and her views of the law on the one hand and her notions of ethnicity and race on the other.

The recent development of the study of the interrelation between law and literature started in the early 1970s and is subdivided into “Law-as-Literature” and “Law-in-Literature.” While both subdivisions deal with the power of language, the former generally discusses the language of judicial opinions, or as Richard Weisberg puts it: “a grouping of words endeavouring to express the court’s thinking and its action in a given dispute.”\(^1\) The latter is concerned with the ethical aspects of the law and analyzes the authors’ conception of the meaning of law in literary works with legal themes. My own approach will be that of “Law-in-Literature.” I shall discuss Porter’s sense of justice that affected her views of ethnicity and race from the perspective of a number of literary works that contrast the legal “is” with the moral “ought.” As James R. Elkins argues, “when we think of law as narrative we think of law differently than we do when we conceive of law as a system of rules or as an adversarial contest or game.”\(^2\) Porter perceived the law as “a system of rules” and, as she argued in one of her notes, “we should make a great mistake if we confounded administrations of the Law with Justice. Often they are not on speaking terms.”\(^3\)

Porter frequently expressed her sense of justice in her work and her personal papers, but she did not define what she precisely understood by justice. There is, for example, no evidence of any explicit reference to the classical concept of justice, such as the Platonic transcendental idea of harmony or Aristotle’s “golden mean” between extreme alternatives. Her pacifist conviction, discussed in chapter 1, comes near to Kant’s moral philosophy about war. Kant

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3 For the entire note see chapter 3, p. 83.
Porter and the Law

argues that “morally practical reason pronounces in us its irresistible veto. There is to be no war, neither war between you and me in the state of nature nor war between us as states [...] we must work toward establishing perpetual peace and the kind of constitution that seems to us most conducive to it [...].” Kant further argues that Punishment by a court [...] can never be inflicted merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society. It must always be inflicted upon him only because he has committed a crime." Kant’s rejection of the utilitarian principle corresponds with Porter’s view of punishment. As I have shown in chapter 5, Porter advocated retributive justice.5 Debra Moddelmog convincingly argues that “Porter’s fiction, and much of her non-fiction, not only criticizes utilitarian principles but also portrays a view of justice that is fundamentally aligned with retributivism.” Moddelmog refers to Porter’s article “Notes on the Texas I Remember” in which Porter writes that she is still “able to draw that fine hairline between justice and revenge.” I would add that Porter stressed her view of retributivism in a scene in Ship of Fools which I quoted on p.141 in chapter 5. In chapter 3 I have pointed to Porter’s rejection of the idea of divine command, which she explicitly expressed in her satirical portrait of the captain in Ship.

As we shall see, Porter’s favoring civil disobedience, shown in chapter 1, plays a part in her moral thinking and influenced her notions of ethnicity and race. Besides referring to Henry David Thoreau’s view of the right to disobey in her letter to the editor of The Yale Review, she expressed her admiration for Mohandas Ghandi’s non-violent civil disobedience. In her letter of 14 March 1948 she wrote to Monroe Cockerell: “Do you know, if it is a question of power, I choose Ghandi’s kind instead of Stalin’s, for example? Moral force is taking an awful beating at this time, but it has taken a good deal before, and will again, and it does not die” (Hornbake 18-0490).

As I have discussed in chapter 1, Porter’s memoir The Never-

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5 See note 24, p. 151.
7 Atlantic Monthly 235, 3 (1975), 106.
Endeavor's role was a protest against the role of the state and its power, and against what she called a miscarriage of justice. Though her role in the protest against the Sacco and Vanzetti trial was unimportant, the case had often been in her mind, but as she wrote on 29 June 1959 to her friend Glenway Wescott, she had never been able to write about the case (L. 540). Not until twenty years later, at the age of eighty-seven, did she write her memoir and respond to what she had experienced. As she did in her autobiographical essay “St. Augustine and the Bullfight” (1955), she explores in her memoir her past experiences and thus expresses what she felt as the betrayal of her moral values. As we shall see, Porter's view of the law she showed in her report of the Sacco and Vanzetti case recurs in some of her stories.

Generally the memoir is a protest against abuse of power. As I argued in chapter 1, an important aspect of Porter's political thinking was her distrust of power, as is confirmed by one of her marginal notes. In this note she agrees with Herbert Read's view by underlining his argument that man “is alone and against him is the State.” Porter wrote in her memoir that the protest was not only against “the terrible wrong about to be committed,” but also against “a blindly arrogant, self-righteous determination not to be moved by any arguments” (NII 43).

Porter compared “the trial of Jesus of Nazareth, the trial and rehabilitation of Joan Arc, anyone of the witchcraft trials in Salem during 1691, the Moscow trials of 1937 during which Stalin destroyed all of the founders of the 1924 Soviet revolution” with the Sacco-Vanzetti trial of 1921, in which they were found guilty. She wrote that in these trials like “the Sacco-Vanzetti trial of 1920 through 1927--there are many trials such as these in which the victim was already condemned to death before the trial took place [...]” (NII 8, 9). 8

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9 Justice Felix Frankfurter has analyzed the case in The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti: Analysis for Lawyers and Laymen (New York: Little, Brown, 1927). Porter's view that the victims were “already condemned to death before the trial took place” is corroborated by Frankfurter's argument that “the case against Sacco and Vanzetti for murder was part of a collusive effort between the District and agents of the Department of Justice to rid the country of these Italians because of their Red activities” (68).
At the end of the memoir Porter once more expresses her distrust of government. In her report of a conversation she had with the anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman in Paris in 1935 she underlines Goldman’s view of government:

she [Goldman] was a wise, sweet old thing, grandmotherly, or like a great-aunt. I said to her, “It’s a pity you had to spend your whole life in such unhappiness when you could have had such a nice life in a good government, with a home and children.” She turned on me and said severely: “What have I just said? There is no such thing as a good government. There never was. There can’t be.” I closed my eyes and watched Nietzsche’s skull nodding (NIW’ 62, 63).

Porter confirms here what she had written before in her memoir about Nietzsche’s view of the State: “The State goes on without end in one form or another, built securely on the base of destruction. Nietzsche said: ‘The State is the coldest of all cold monsters’” (NIW’ 61).

Porter gives an account of what she considered a farcical trial of the picketers. The charge was “loitering and obstructing traffic.” In the following passage Porter dwells on the legal aspects of the picketing. Their attorney, she writes

had explained that if we were to be tried on the real charge, God knew where it would end, there could easily be embarrassing consequences all around—more to the prosecution than to us, it seemed, and I remember wondering why, at that point, we should be troubled to spare their feelings. Naturally it turned out not to be a matter of feelings in any direction but of legal points obscure to perhaps any but the legal mind (NIW’ 52).

William Taylor, who at the time of writing his essay on civil disobedience was staff director for the United States Commission on Civil Rights, wrote about picketing: “almost all of the major forms of direct community action—sit-ins, freedom rides, demonstrations, picketing and rent strikes—in my judgment are properly understood as actions well within the framework of our legal system, rather than as
Porter and the Law

civil disobedience.”10 Yet the picketers considered insisting on imprisonment: “Our plan was to make a point of forcing them to observe that lunatic Baumes’ Law and overload their jails” (NW 53).11 However, “it was not to be; we should have known from the first.” A few years earlier Porter expressed her view of Mexican Indians by fictionalizing civil disobedience in her story “Mariá Concepción,” published in 1922, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Besides The Never-Ending Wrong, Porter’s story “Noon-Wine” (1937) is a primary source that expresses her moral views. Porter called her story, which contains a trial scene, “a story of the most painful moral and emotional confusions” (CE 479). Mr. Thompson, the protagonist, is tried for homicide but is acquitted on the ground of self-defense. Thompson’s lawyer, Mr. Burleigh, urged his client to plead not guilty, saying that he would “do the rest. The trial is going to be a mere formality, you haven’t got a thing to worry about. You’ll be clean out of this before you know it.” Indeed, it “hadn’t been much of a trial, Mr. Burleigh saw to that.” Burleigh is represented as a lawyer whose integrity can be doubted. Self-defense was Burleigh’s favorite argument in court. He told Thompson “about all the men he knew around the country who for one reason or another had been forced to kill somebody, always in self-defense, and there wasn’t anything to it at all. He even told about how his own father in the old days had shot and killed a man just for setting foot inside his gate when he told him not to” (CS 260, 261).

The murder leading to Thompson’s trial is the turning point of the story. The preceding part of the narrative focuses on the loud-mouthed and lazy Thompson, who neglects his farm, and the hired hand Swede, Mr. Helton, who “never got ready to talk.” Over the years the hard-working Helton has become “the hope and the prop of the family” until the bounty hunter Mr. Hatch comes along and ruins the lives of the Thompsons. (CS 236, 241). The “fat man” Hatch, who thinks that “the law is solidly behind [him],” had been after Helton for


11 Evidently Porter knew about this law: “there was then in existence--is it still I wonder--an infamous law called Baumes’ Law, which provided that anyone who had been arrested as much as four times--or was it more than four times?--should be eligible to imprisonment for life” (NW 52).
some time and tries to convince Thompson that Helton is “a
dangerous escaped loonatic” who had murdered his brother. Hatch
has come to collect blood money (CS 253, 252). Thompson,
hallucinating that Hatch tries to stab Helton with his bowie knife,
murders the hated Hatch with his ax: “Mr. Thompson saw it coming,
he saw the blade going into Mr. Helton’s stomach, he knew he had the
ax out of the log in his own hands, felt his arms go up over his head
and bring the ax down on Mr. Hatch’s head as if he were stunning a
beef.” Thompson’s hallucination is crucial in the story. He builds up a
hatred of Hatch which culminates at the moment the latter threatened
to inform his neighbors that “[he] was harboring an escaped loonatic
who killed his own brother and then [he] refused to give him up” (CS
255-256).

Later Thompson realized that however hard he tried “to piece
together” what had happened, “in fact it never did come straight” (CS
255). Thompson’s wife, however, had seen Helton “running all
stooped over through the orchard, running like a man with dogs after
him.” From the sheriff she hears that Helton “was already hurt too
badly, he couldn’t have lived anyway.” Mrs. Thompson is aware that
her husband was not only a murderer but had also ruined “his boys’
lives and caused Mr. Helton to be killed like a mad dog” (CS 256,
259).

Mrs. Thompson plays an important part in the story. In
“‘Noon Wine’: The Sources,” published about twenty years later,
Porter wrote about her:

Her great power is that, while both she and her husband
believe that the moral law, once broken, is irreparable, she will
stand by her principles no matter what; and in the end he
stands by too. They are both doomed by this belief in their
own way: Mr. Thompson from the moment he swung the ax
on Mr. Hatch; Mrs. Thompson from the moment she acted
the lie which meant criminal collusion […]. Confronted with
pure disaster she responds with pure suffering, and yet will not
consent to be merely the passive Victim, or as she thinks, the
criminal instrument of her husband’s self-justification […]. By
his [Thompson’s] standards of morality, he is a murderer, a
fact he cannot face: he needs someone to tell him this is not so
[…]. Alas, his wife, whose judgment he respects out of his
Porter and the Law

mystical faith in the potency of her virtue, agrees with him—he is indeed a murderer (CE: 478-479).

Indeed, Thompson cannot face the fact that he is a murderer. Lying in bed Thompson’s mind “started up and began to run like a rabbit [...]. It still seemed to him that he had done, maybe not the right thing, but the only thing he could do, that day, but had he? Did he have to kill Mr. Hatch? [...]. Why hadn’t he just told Mr. Hatch to get out before he ever even got in?” (CS 265).

From the outset Thompson is portrayed as a man who does not accept his responsibility to run the farm properly. He rather cares for appearances: “All his carefully limited fields of activity were related somehow to Mr. Thompson’s feeling for the appearance of things, his own appearance in the sight of God and man” (CS 233). In the end Thompson who has come to realize that he is guilty of murder commits suicide. In the note Thompson wrote before shooting himself he insists he is not a cold-blooded murderer: “This is the only way I can prove I am not a cold-blooded murderer like everybody seems to think. If I had been in Mr. Helton’s place he would of done the same for me, I still think I done the only thing there was to do. My wife—.” Thompson crosses out the last two words and continues: “It was Mr. Homer T. Hatch who came to do wrong to a harmless man. He caused all this trouble and he deserved to die but I am sorry it was me who had to kill him” (CS 268). By partly putting the blame on Hatch Thompson is unable to take full responsibility for the murder.

In her letter of 2 April 1936 to Pressly Porter confirms that hatred was the motive for the murder. Before completing her story she wrote:

This evening while doing some little last things, I suddenly sat down and added five pages to the Noon Wine story. It grows, develops very well...Mr. Thompson is going to kill that Virgil T. Hatch fellow, in a situation which is working itself out. He does it in defense of Mr. Helton, but he might not have done it if he had not hated the man himself. There might not have been occasion for it. He seizes the opportunity to kill Hatch, really, not knowing what he has done, or rather not knowing why (Hornbake 55-0815).

At the trial Thompson is not allowed to tell his story. His
lawyer instructs him to “hold your horses” and “keep your shirt on. And don’t say one word without I tell you” (CS 260). After his acquittal Thompson, accompanied by his wife, tours around the country to try and explain the whole matter to his neighbors, but he saw “something in all their faces that disheartened him, made him feel empty and tired out. They [the community] didn’t believe he was not a murderer […]. Sometimes the air around him was so thick with their blame he fought and pushed with his fists […]” (CS 262).

In his discussion of the legal aspects of Porter’s story James Boyd White elaborates on the question why Thompson’s acquittal did not work. White points out that the acquittal “seems on the face of it to be perfect: a public and authorized statement by the representatives of the community that he is innocent of any crime. Why is that not enough?” White gives two explanations. One: “no attempt is made to tell that narrative [of the killing] truly and fully” and two: “this legal judgment, like all legal judgments, is not self-validating but requires community acceptance.” White argues that “the evidence upon which the judgment rests is itself always constructed, second hand […]. What the judgment will mean after all, the judgment that pretends to end the story, is still open, as the trial and judgment themselves become the elements of a story: perhaps in a court of appeals, perhaps just in the neighborhood.” White points to Thompson’s portrayal as a shallow man, incapable of explaining moral matters and discusses the question why Thompson could “not tell his story in such a way that his neighbors could accept it, that he himself could accept it? One reason is the sheer difficulty of the moral questions presented by any version of this narrative, which Mr. Thompson’s mind and language, at least at the outset, are simply too crude to define and elaborate.”

As White argues, “what actually precipitated the blow [with the ax] was Mr. Hatch’s threat to tell the neighbors that Mr. Thompson was harboring a lunatic fugitive.”12 White’s argument about Thompson’s fear of esteem among his neighbors is corroborated by what Porter wrote about the community in “‘Noon-Wine’: The Sources”: “the higher laws of morality and religion were defined; if a man offended against the one, or sinned against the other, he knew it, and so did his neighbors, and they called everything by its right name”

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(CE 472). As Porter stresses in her essay, it is “the relations of a man
to his society” that is important.

As Porter was an admirer of classical literature, it is interesting
to discuss White’s comparison of Porter’s story with The Choephoroe,
the second part of Aeschylus’ trilogy The Oresteia. Orestes’s fear of
being exiled resembles Thompson’s dread of being an outcast in the
community. The Choephoroe is a dark tragedy with Orestes’s murder of
his mother Clytemnestra and the usurper Aegisthus in revenge for the
murder of Agamemnon, his father. From the oracle of Apollo Orestes
has learned that “From every altar fire the unseen rage/Outbars him:
none shall give him harbourage/ Nor lie in the same house with such
an one/Till, without worship, without love, alone/He crawls to his
death, a carcass to the core/Through-rotted, and embalmed to suffer
more.” At the end of the third part of the trilogy, The Eumenides,
Orestes is tried for homicide at the newly established court, the
Areopagus. At the trial the votes of the jurors are equally divided, but
Orestes is acquitted by the casting vote of Athene who presides over
the new tribunal: “Wherefore I judge that here, if equal be/The votes
ye cast, Orestes shall go free.”

White argues that

in the clear light of day Athena achieves a new organization or
composition of these forces in the establishment of the court
of the Areopagus. These forces are here integrated into a new
form of life and activity, an institution that will tell stories with
authority, so that they will remain the same and not slide into
other intolerable and mysterious meanings. The law will thus
rescue us all from the unbearable incoherence of the world
that has been presented to us—an incoherence of story,
intellect, of action, of the very self.

White points out that the play and Porter’s story move into
opposite directions. White argues, that in the Oresteia “the law and, in a
different way, the drama are celebrated as public places where the
different versions can be placed in open comparison and competition,
where the contraries can be comprehended within a larger whole.”
Porter’s story, however, White argues, “moves in the other direction,

13 Gilbert Murray, The Complete Plays of Aeschylus: Translated into English
Rhyming Verse with Commentaries and Notes (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952),
145-146, 239.
from the authoritative story back into the social world in which its authority must receive a new validation and beyond that into the private zone of individual life [...]” White concludes that “it is not that the legal judgment has no authority, but that its authority is not absolute and should always be defensible in other terms, in the language of the community itself.”

Thompson was acquitted but as we have seen, the legal judgment was not defensible “in the language of the community.” Their “higher laws of morality” as Porter put it, find Thompson was a murderer.

Both The Never-Ending Wrong and “Noon-Wine” express what Porter called in her memoir “a failure in the use of the instrument of the law.” While she protested in her report of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial against the arrogance of “a handful of men intoxicated with the vanity of power,” she portrayed in her story a lawyer who saw to it that the trial would not be “much of a trial.” In both the memoir and the story the failure of the law led to the protagonists’ death. As we shall see, the community’s verdict in “Noon-Wine” resembles the community’s view of the law in Porter’s story “María Concepción.”

Like Thompson in “Noon Wine,” the protagonist of the story “María Concepción” has committed a murder. The descriptions of the landscape and of the small community in “María Concepción” are convincing, as they are in “Noon Wine.” In the latter story she is “confronted with [her] own life, the whole society in which [she] was born and brought up, and the facts of it” (CE 468). The time of action in “Noon-Wine” is set between 1896 and 1905, while, as Alvarez points out, in “María Concepción,” “the events must be taking place during the period of roughly 1918 to 1920,”

María Concepción is represented as a strong young Indian

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14 James Boyd White, Heracles’ Bow, 180, 190, 191.
15 According to Walsh, Porter had given her version of the story’s origin to Hank Lopez, one of Porter’s biographers: “One day while exploring the area around William Niven’s excavations, she encountered in the doorway of an adobe hut a beautiful, almond-eyed woman who offered her tortillas. When the same woman appeared at the digs, live chickens draped around her neck, Niven told Porter the woman’s story.” Walsh argues that in the story Porter “attempted to penetrate the Indian psyche,” which may explain Porter’s scathing book review of D.H. Lawrence’s The Plumed Serpent, I mentioned in the Introduction. (Thomas Walsh, Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden, 71, 72, 73).
woman of nineteen, who to a large extent lives an independent life among her neighbors. The community knows her “as an energetic religious woman who could drive a bargain to the end” and who had paid for the license in order to be married in church, “instead of behind it, which was the usual custom” (CS 4). But María Concepción also has the reputation of being “altogether too proud” (CS 9). In this context the narrator relates the return to the village of María Concepción’s husband and his mistress, María Rosa, the murder, and the aftermath. After the murder of her rival, María Concepción is taken by the gendarmes, who are of mixed blood, to the hut of Old Lupe, the medicine woman and María Rosa’s godmother.

Although the following scene is not an official trial, in the hut María Concepción is confronted with the interrogating and suspicious gendarmes and some villagers who “had been called as witnesses” (CS 17). Old Lupe, who turns out to be the chief witness, circumstantially but guardedly tells what she had heard when she was in the back of the yard at the moment of the murder in the hut. In her testimony Lupe stresses she is an old woman incapable of running after people and with her “swelling oracular tone” she creates an uneasy atmosphere. She tells her audience that the footfalls she had heard sounded “like the tread of an evil spirit” (CS 18). Lupe realizes that “she could have ruined that María Concepción with a word,” but she does not do so because she prefers “to make fools of these gendarmes who went about spying on honest people” (CS 19).

Lupe’s story is incomplete, as Thompson’s story was. In his discussion of “telling stories in the law and in ordinary life” White stresses the importance of storytelling in law: “the law always begins in story” and “ends in story too, with a decision by a court or a jury […]”.17 The importance of Lupe’s story-telling becomes clear from her clever and equivocal testimony. She deceives the gendarmes, thus contributing to María Concepción’s release. The gendarmes feel “a sheltering wall cast impenetrably around her” and leave “though they were certain she had done it” (CS 20). The scene describes the confrontation between the official representatives of the state and the natives who regard the gendarmes as an alien force. Lupe’s portrayal and her protection of María Concepción express Porter’s view of the Indians and as she did in “Noon-Wine,” she contrasts the moral

“ought” expressed by the community with the legal “is” of the state. Porter reveals in her story not only her sympathy with the oppressed Indians, but also her distrust of power which she stressed in *The Never-Ending Wrong.*

As we have seen, Porter believed in the right to disobey unjust laws and evidently knew Thoreau’s essay *Civil Disobedience.* Thoreau’s disobeying the Massachusetts state law by not paying a poll-tax is to some extent comparable with the community’s refusal to cooperate. As Thoreau believed in passive resistance to a government which was losing “its integrity,” Porter described the Indians’ non-violent protest against the representatives of the legal system of the oppressor.15

Porter’s story also invites comparison with Susan Glaspell’s story “A Jury of Her Peers” (1917). The two stories show striking similarities. Not only is the murderess in both stories kept out of the law and judged by her equals, but both in “María Concepción” and in “A Jury of Her Peers” the community is a minority group who disobey the law.

In “A Jury of Her Peers,” first written in the form of a play titled *Trifles* (1916), the law is introduced already at the beginning of the story when Mrs. Hale, after stepping into the buggy, senses that Sheriff Peters “was to a dot the kind of man who could get himself elected sheriff—a heavy man with a big voice, who was particularly genial with the law-abiding, as if to make it plain that he knew the difference between criminals and non-criminals.” Though Minnie, the murderess, is not present in the story the women form a close community from whom the men are excluded.

The affection Martha Hale had felt for Minnie Foster before she had married John Wright, has turned into compassion. Minnie “used to wear pretty clothes and be lively—when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir;” but after her marriage she had grown into a lonely woman living with a husband who “was a hard man,” with whom “to pass the time of day […] was like a raw wind that gets to the bone.” As her name suggests, Minnie

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15 Thoreau did not wish to be associated with “this American government” and protests against the government’s support of the Mexican war. The merchants and farmers here [in Massachusetts], he writes, “are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico.” Henry Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” in *Civil Disobedience: Theory and Practice*, p. 31.
was minimized in her marriage with John Wright. Piece by piece Martha Hale and Mrs. Peters find the “trifes” that provide the evidence that Minnie had strangled her husband after he had wrung the neck of her canary, the pet that had been the only source of comfort to her.

The story contrasts the women’s perceptiveness in their search for clues in Minnie’s domain, the kitchen and the parlor, with the men’s incapability of finding the motive for the murder. As Annette Kolodny argues,

it is the particular irony of the story that although the men never question their attribution of guilt to Minnie Foster, they nonetheless cannot meaningfully interpret this farm wife’s world--her kitchen and parlor. And arrogantly certain that the women would not even “know a clue if they did come upon it,” they thereby leave the discovery of the clues, and the consequent unravelling of the motive, to those who do, in fact, command the proper interpretative strategies.19

Whereas the men cannot interpret the women’s trifes, there was “that look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing to something else” in Mrs. Peters’s eyes. Once they have found the final evidence, Martha Hale wonders “why do you and I understand? Why do we know--what we know this minute?” The women have found the truth in its context. The attorney, however, knows that “it’s all perfectly clear, except the reason for doing it. […] If there was some definite thing--something to show. Something to make a story about.” Martha hides and takes with her the “definite thing to make a story about” to prevent the conviction of “that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour.”

When Lewis Hale starts to deliver his testimony of what he and his son had observed in the house of the Wrights the day after the murder, his wife “had that sinking feeling of the mother whose child is about to speak a piece. Lewis often wandered along and got things mixed up in a story. She hoped he would tell this straight and plain, and not say unnecessary things that would just make things harder for

Minnie Foster.” When Hale refers to Wright’s indifference to his wife’s wishes, Martha is certain that Lewis was “saying things he didn’t need to say.” Martha, then, is prejudiced in her view of her husband’s story as a witness. Her fear reveals that already at this stage of the story she is taking sides with Minnie. Like Porter in her story, Glaspell stresses a close community that shields a murderess. From the onset Martha shows her sense of guilt: “Time and again it had been in her mind, ‘I ought to go over and see Minnie Foster.’” While the sheriff’s wife observes that “the law has got to punish crime Mrs. Hale,” Martha is aware she has failed in her duties: “Oh, I wish I’d come over here once in a while!” she cried. “That was a crime! Who’s going to punish that?”

Distinguishing between moral justice and legal judgment, Martha realizes that it is not Minnie but she herself is the criminal.

Glaspell’s compact story dramatizes the views of what “is” and what “ought” Porter expressed in her memoir, and her stories “Noon-Wine” and “María Concepción.” Like Porter in The Never-Ending Wrong, Glaspell in her story protested against abuse of power and like the moral views of the community in “Noon-Wine” and “María Concepción,” the moral views of the community of the women in Glaspell’s story are contrasted with the law of the state. Glaspell’s story, then, resembles Porter’s Mexican story in the communities’ disobedience of the law. Yet, there is a difference between the two stories. The bond among the women in Glaspell’s story is emphasized from the outset and finally leads to the protection of the criminal against the law. What is operative in Porter’s story, however, is race rather than gender, as is shown in the representation in María Concepción. For example, in the story the amateur archaeologist Givens is impressed by María’s “grand manner [that] sometimes reminded him of royalty in exile” (CS 7). As I have shown in chapter 2, the portrayal of the proud native María Concepción strongly contrasts with the representation of oppressed Indians in Porter’s political Mexican work. Whereas Porter portrayed Indians suffering from the oppression by the State and the Church in her politically inspired Mexican work, it is race that shields the protagonist of “María Concepción.”

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The impact of the community in “Noon Wine” and “María Concepción” is comparable with that of the community of the ship’s passengers who agree with captain Thiele’s actions in Ship of Fools. Aviam Soifer argues that “because groups are so pervasive and powerful in ‘real life,’ any one who wishes to reach others directly must focus on these groups.” In expressing her view of Nazism, Porter focuses on the group that is found at the captain’s table. Herman Melville’s famous unfinished story Billy Budd, Sailor shows parallels with Ship of Fools, and may help to show Porter’s view of Nazism from the perspective of the law. The evident parallels between Ship and Billy Budd are the ships serving as a microcosm, the pretended fear of a revolt, the role of the captains, and above all the theme of justice.

The trial scene in Billy Budd is central. Billy Budd, the “Handsome Sailor,” is tried and sentenced to death by captain Vere for the murder of John Claggart, the master-at-arms. As a result of his profound envy of “the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd,” Claggart falsely accuses Billy of complicity with mutiny. He tells the captain that “quite lately he (Claggart) had begun to suspect that on the gun decks some sort of movement prompted by the sailor in question was covertly going on.” When the captain asks Billy to defend himself the latter is hampered by his “vocal impediment” and “the next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck.”

The following drumhead court-martial scene describes in detail the hearing and the captain’s argument to find Billy guilty of murder of a superior. While the court realizes that Billy is innocent and that he had nothing to do with mutiny, the captain points out that not justice but “these buttons that we wear” must prevail. Vere is not prepared to reflect on Billy’s and Claggart’s characters to come upon a decision in his judgment. He is a formalist who thinks that “our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer to it.” The captain cloaks his verdict to hang Billy in the threat of mutiny: “[...] to the people the foretopman’s deed, however it be worded in the announcement, will be plain homicide committed in a flagrant act of

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mutiny. [...] They would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them - afraid of practicing a lawful rigor singularly demanded at this juncture, lest it should provoke new troubles.”\textsuperscript{22} For Vere the law is “embodied in a readily identifiable source which governs transactions and occurrences of the sort under consideration: here an imperial code of which the Mutiny Act is a part.”\textsuperscript{23}

Critics have pointed to the procedural errors in the trial scene: the case should have been referred to the Admiral, the number of judges should have been five instead of three, Vere plays conflicting roles in the trial as the sole witness, prosecutor, and judge, and the trial is not public. Richard Weisberg argues that “with supreme irony, Melville indicates Vere’s skewed sense of the real sources of ‘mutiny’ on board his ship. In the name of preserving the ‘good of the whole,’ an innocent man is sacrificed.” Richard Weisberg points out that Vere abuses his power in fulfilling his vow that “Yet the angel must hang!”: “All his [Vere’s] procedural breaches desperately seek to fulfill this single, intuitive vow. The powerful adjudicator knows the values of ‘forms, measured forms.’ He begins to use and abuse them as soon as he has articulated this basic desire.”\textsuperscript{24}

Much has been written about Vere’s verdict. Weisberg, for example, points out that “for many years, it was unthinkable to criticize Vere at all, much less to ponder his ‘alleged insanity,’ his was the unenviable and tragic task of preserving the whole at the expense of the innocent one.”\textsuperscript{25} The decade of the 1980s, however, as Weisberg argues, “was not kind to Captain Vere.” Robert Cover suggests that Melville modelled Captain Vere on his own father-in-law, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, “a firm, unbending man of stern integrity.” Though Shaw strongly opposed slavery, “in the great causes célèbres involving fugitive slaves, Shaw came down hard for an unflinching application

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of the harsh and summary law.  

The three main characters are extensively portrayed in the story. In chapters 6 and 7 the narrator prepares the reader for the coming events with his representation of Captain Vere: “He [Vere] had seen much service, been in various engagements, always acquitted himself as an officer mindful of the welfare of his men, but never tolerating an infraction of discipline.” Vere is portrayed as a bookish man, who is able to control his emotions, while his choice of books reveals he is interested in “facts and nothing but facts.” His bias was towards those books to which every serious mind of superior order occupying any active post of authority in the world naturally inclines: books treating of actual men and events no matter of what era […]. His settled convictions were as a dike against those invading waters of novel opinion social, political, and otherwise […].

Porter’s portrayal of Captain Thiele is comparable with Melville’s representation of Vere. While the latter did not tolerate “an infraction of discipline,” the former is convinced that “the very foundation of his duty was to exact implicit obedience from every soul on the ship, without exception.” Thiele, too, has “settled convictions” and rejects emotions, but, unlike Vere, who is a formalist and insists on facts, Thiele obeys Divine Law (SF 174). There is a resemblance, however, between Vere’s and Thiele’s actions when they are confronted with a possible revolt on their ships. While Vere uses mutiny as a pretext for his decision to hang Billy, Thiele orders that the knives of the steerage passengers be taken away. For one of the passengers, a woodcarver, the loss of his knife is a shock. Frau Schmitt, who reports that David Scott had been a witness of the scene, relates that “he was very angry in a cold pale way as if he had lost blood. Gone then for good were the hopes of that poor man, gone his happy occupation and his little knife, and so he cried, he cried like a baby” (SF 176). Later in the story there is a suggestion of suicide when the woodcarver jumps into the sea to rescue a dog that had been maliciously thrown overboard.

Porter introduces the element of mercy in the scene when Frau

Schmitt shows compassion with the woodcarver’s misery: “Forgetting her natural timidity in the interest she saw in the faces around her,” she relates her story about the woodcarver and notices the sympathy of some of her listeners. Thiele’s reaction is characteristic for his views of his duties as a captain: “I wish I might trust you to believe me when I say that all my acts are governed by a knowledge of the true situation regardless of sentimental considerations. In the end I alone am answerable not only for your safety but for the very life of this ship; therefore, please do allow me to advise you that I act from the gravest motives of responsibility” (SF 176). Later, however, the captain gives his personal views of the steerage passengers: “Gazing downward, he despised these filthy cattle, as he should; yet viewing the scene as a whole, he could not but in all fairness admit there was a kind of shapeliness and order in it” (SF 216). Indeed, these passengers prove to be harmless, as one of the officers finds when watching their dancing on deck. It is evident that Thiele did not disarm “these filthy cattle” for fear of a revolt, but for a personal reason that was inspired by his sense of superiority as a German. Here, in contrast with Billy Budd, ethnicity plays a role.

A similar rash decision is the captain’s resolve to banish Freytag from the captain’s table. After hearing that Freytag is married to a Jewess, the captain, “with no period for reflection […] set in motion at once a train of events that would shortly result in a slight but significant rearrangement of the seating order in the dining room” (SF 233). Neither in his decision to deprive the woodcarver of his “happy occupation” nor in Freytag’s exclusion from the community, does the captain show mercy. Reacting to Frau Schmitt’s remark that “after all, my Captain, one must often do severe things in self-defense?” Thiele typically answers: “What nonsense, my dear Frau Schmitt. To put people in their proper places and keep them there cannot be called severity, nor defense. It is merely observing and carrying out the natural order of things” (SF 248). Though Thiele apparently refers to the ethnic superiority of Germans, he is consistent in his view of his duties and of the “natural” law he must obey. The captain intimates that “the natural order of things” is ordained by “Divine Law.” Porter’s satire of Thiele’s views, then, ridicules the notion that ethnic difference is based on divine law.

Following Weisberg’s argument that Vere abused his power to hang Billy and that “Vere’s utter control over the court demonstrates
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the docility of his men.”28 I would argue that Thiele, too, abuses his power to control docile sympathizers of the Hitler regime. As discussed in chapter 3, Porter drew a caricatural portrait of the docility of these Germans at the table when they gulped down their food in imitation of the captain. The scene is meant as an illustration of the Germans’ submissiveness during the Nazi regime. Avraham Barkai points out, that when in September 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were enacted, “the population accepted these measures without demur. Evidently, it was no longer regarded as objectionable that a group of people should lose elementary civil rights and be socially marginalised up to and including the forfeiture of the most intimate human relations.”29 The laws were the culmination of a process in Germany in which the Jewish population gradually lost its rights, including the right of intermarriage with non-Jews. Porter may have had in mind the Nuremberg Laws, also called the “Act on the Protection of German Blood and German Honour,” in her satirical descriptions of fear of contaminated blood.

While Vere insisted that his responsibility to the King led to Billy’s death, Thiele demanded unconditional obedience to his authority. Both Billy Budd and Ship of Fools suggest that obedience to authority and the law can be enforced. However, the question is, on what moral basis? As we have seen, the disobedience in “María Concepción” expresses Porter’s sympathy for the Mexican natives. From one of her marginal notes in Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own it appears that Porter admired the disobedient Antigone and other “heroic women” in classical literature.

I would argue that the tyrannical Creon in Sophocles’ tragedy Antigone, comes close to Porter’s notion of a Nazi when the latter’s satiric representation is seen from the perspective of what Cover calls “oppressive legal systems.”30 The tragedy deals with the conflict between the law of the state and Antigone’s disobeying the law on moral grounds. Creon insisted that the law of the state should be obeyed because the law had been issued by authority. Teresa Godwin Phelps points out that “without Antigone’s actions Creon would have

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29 Avraham Barkai, “The German Volksgemeinschaft from the Persecution of the Jews to the ‘Final Solution,’” in Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History, 93, 94.

30 Robert Cover, Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process, 1, 2.
traveled even further down the path to being a tyrant [...]. If Creon represents the letter of the law, Antigone represents its future. Creon is control; Antigone, freedom.” But Antigone is not given a fair trial and dies because she opposes the law as an unjust and undemocratic law the tyrant Creon had created. Creon, then, abused his power by stressing the need to maintain stability, while Thiele refers to his responsibility as a captain.

Porter’s satiric portrait of Thiele is another example of abuse of power we found in her protest against prejudice in her memoir *The Never-Ending Wrong*.

In chapter 4 I have discussed Porter’s representations of African Americans in her work and personal papers dated around the 1930s. A novel that dramatizes Porter’s views of African Americans in this period is Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). As the scenes and characters described in some of the stories in “The Old Order,” “Old Mortality,” and the manuscript for her lynching story are strikingly similar to those in Lee’s novel, the latter’s story, which deals with racism and the law in the South, can help us to analyze Porter’s view of race and the law in the 1930s.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the events in the community in the Deep South are described from the viewpoint of the girl Scout who resembles Miranda in some of Porter’s partly autobiographical stories of the South. Porter’s independent and inquisitive Miranda grows up in a Southern community in a motherless family. Young Scout, too, is motherless, loves her brother, and, like Miranda in “The Grave,” she has a rifle and wears overalls, thus displeasing her aunt and some of the neighbors.

The family in Lee’s novel lives in Maycomb, South Alabama, a town which had “remained the same size for a hundred years” and was “an island in a patchwork sea of cotton fields and timber land.” Maycomb is shown as a racist town and it is the racism of the community that leads to the black Tom Robinson’s death. The children’s father, the lawyer Atticus, whose name suggests elegance of speech, is aware that “reasonable people go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up,” but he urges his children to try to understand people by climbing into their skin and walk around in it.

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Atticus, who is to defend Tom Robinson in court, is portrayed as a model father in his education of the children. From the frequent discussions between father and children it is evident that they grow up with the law. For Atticus justice and the law are identical.

The trial is preceded by a good many portrayals of the characters figuring in the novel that illustrate the relationships between the whites, blacks, and poor whites in the town. Besides Tom Robinson, who is “of clean-living folks,” the blacks of the community are represented by Calpurnia, the family’s black cook. Calpurnia is the typical Southern black servant who is the prop of the family. Like Aunt Nannie in some of Porter’s stories of “The Old Order” she runs the household and takes the children in hand when necessary. Atticus tells his sister Alexandra, who had “river-boat, boarding-school manners,” that “if anything, she’s [Calpurnia] been harder on them in some ways than a mother would have been [...]. She tried to bring them up according to her lights, and Cal’s lights are pretty good--and another thing, the children love her.” But Calpurnia is more than a good housekeeper. As the children’s educator she teaches Scout to write and one Sunday morning she takes the children to a service in a black church in the Quarters outside the town. The scene is interesting because one of the blacks shows a racial attitude towards whites in her protest against bringing “white chillun to nigger church.” The black minister Reverend Sykes assures them that “we were specially glad to have you all here.” Later, at the trial he invites the children to join the blacks in the balcony of the courtroom, thus allowing Scout to watch the trial from her own point of view.

The church scene is an illustration of how the various events related in the story form an introduction to the trial in which Tom Robinson is accused of raping Bob Ewell’s daughter Mayella. Earlier in the novel the Ewells are unfavorably portrayed as a motherless poor white family, whose children never went to school. They live “behind the town garbage dump” which was gleaned by them every day. Scout characterizes one of the sons as a mean boy, “the filthiest human” she had ever seen. Mayella’s accusation of rape resembles the prostitute’s charge in Porter’s manuscript for a lynching story. As I have shown in chapter 4, this slovenly white woman living on the edge of the town, falsely accused a black boy of attempted rape, which resulted in his lynching by some whites in the Southern community. While the prostitute in Porter’s manuscript is shown as a lying, contemptuous
woman, Atticus proves that Mayella had lied “to get rid of her own guilt.” Addressing the jury, he points out that Mayella’s desires for the black Tom Robinson “were stronger than the code she was breaking […]. She must destroy the evidence of her offence. What was the offence? Tom Robinson, a human being. She must put Tom Robinson away from her. Tom Robinson was her daily reminder of what she did. What did she do? She was white and she tempted a Negro […]. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man.” Though in Porter’s manuscript the lying testimony of the prostitute was seized by some of the white men of the community to lynch the black boy, both stories express the white’s fear of miscegenation.

The jury’s verdict in Lee’s story, is guilty as Atticus had predicted long before his defense at court. Later Atticus tells his son that the jury were “twelve reasonable men in everyday life, Tom’s jury, but you saw something come between them and reason […]. There’s something in our world that makes men lose their heads--they couldn’t be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it’s a white man’s word against a black man’s, the white man always wins.” Maycomb’s racial prejudice leads to hostility of part of the community towards the children when the news spread that their father would defend a black boy.

The emotional reactions in Maycomb to the trial described in Lee’s novel correspond with the atmosphere of the Southern community in Porter’s intended lynching story. While the descriptions of the trial scene To Kill a Mockingbird are a criticism of the law, Porter’s notes contain the same moral indictment that is found in Lee’s story. In both narratives the deep-rooted racial hatred, the whites’ sense of guilt, and sympathy with the blacks play a dominant role. Though To Kill a Mockingbird was published about twenty-five years after Porter wrote her notes, the story dramatizes her notions of the law, the more so as Lee’s novel expresses her view that “the victim was already condemned to death before the trial took place,” as Porter put it in The Never-Ending Wrong.

As I discussed in chapter 4, Porter’s notions of African Americans in the 1930s contrast with those she harbors in the late

1950s. While there are similarities between, on the one hand, some of her stories of the South and her unfinished lynching story written in the 1930s and, on the other, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, her later views are shown in her protest against desegregation. As we have seen, Porter shared with many white Southerners her resistance against the Supreme Court’s decision to abandon segregation in the public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.* C. Vann Woodward argues that “Southern whites were probably more united initially in their undeclared war against the civil rights crusade than they had been in their declared war against the Union in the Civil War.” The Thernstroms point out that “the overwhelming majority of southern whites were outraged at the Court’s order to revamp their school systems [...] Five years after *Brown*, resistance had actually increased; the proportion of white southerners who said they approved of desegregating the schools had actually fallen, from 15 to 8 percent.” In his extensive analysis of the *Brown* decision Richard Kluger points to the protests of some senators and governors of Southern states. For example, Senator Byrd of Virginia declared that the decision was “the most serious blow that has been struck against the rights of the states in a matter vitally affecting their authority and welfare.” In the mid-1950s and later Porter shared these protests against the interference of the Supreme Court in Southern affairs. However, as I discussed in chapter 4, in her 1956 letter to her friend Donald Elder she showed her ambivalence towards *Brown*. On the one hand she thought that, “it seemed only proper and just to correct what has always seemed a serious contradiction between our words, and our acts,” thus implying that in 1954 she had agreed with the Court’s decision to overrule the separate but equal decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and the earlier *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision in 1857 that had declared African Americans noncitizens. On the other, she protested against external interference in southern matters.

Porter’s emotions in the interview of 20 November 1958 in the *Richmond News Leader* on the *Brown* decision, I discussed in chapter

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37 163 U.S. 537 (1896), 19 Howard 393 (1857) respectively.
4, contrast with a letter that she wrote to Cleanth Brooks from the University of Virginia on 7 September 1958. The letter once more shows her ambivalent view of desegregation. Describing her impressions in Virginia, she writes that “there hasn’t been one word spoken about desegregation, and the newspapers are very moderate and discreet on the subject, and there is a certain kind of mannerly decent behavior all around, black and white […] I don’t intend to utter a syllable on the subject to anybody.” In this letter she again indicated that she regarded herself as a Southerner and felt at home in the South: “it is almost strange how at home I feel, I don’t really listen or look around me, but just let things soak in. I have known all this before and for a long time. My mother’s collateral relatives still live in bunches over in Roanoke” (Hornbake 17-1039, 1037).

In their table of the distribution of the population in the South the Thernstroms point out that in 1960 the percentage of blacks was sixty against twenty-seven whites. As a white southerner, then, Porter belonged to a minority, which she did not realize when she observed in her interview that “the downtrodden minorities are organized into tight little cabals to run the country so that we will become the downtrodden majority, if we don’t look out” (C 40). The threat of becoming one of a downtrodden group expresses her fear of abuse of power and reminds one of her portrayals of oppressed Indians. Yet, as a white Southerner, she could claim protection on the ground of the First Amendment of the Constitution. Soifer argues that “through the First Amendment, the constitutionalists of two centuries ago--including some who effectively dissented from the Constitution as it stood in unamended form--provided explicit protection for those people concerned enough to assemble together. They linked this right directly to other constitutional protections.”

Though the Richmond News Leader quoted Porter in an emotional outburst her views that the justices “acted with moral irresponsibility because apparently they are ignorant of the true situation” and “that thing was taking care of itself very well,” correspond with Soifer’s views: “The law is impoverished when it seeks to marginalize the role of groups.” The doubt Porter expressed in her 1956 letter to Elder about “the wisdom” of Brown and her

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38 Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom, America in Black and White, 80.
39 Aviam Soifer, Law and the Company We Keep, 52, 101.
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notion that the Court’s decision would cause many examples of injustice resembles Weisberg’s argument that “a nonminority individual might say, after Brown: if some social scientists find a stigma in one group that is being disadvantaged, it is not difficult to find another who will say that anyone (including me) forced to yield some advantage to a minority competitor also is wronged.”40 In her interpretation of the Brown decision, however, Robin West convincingly argues that “Brown is best understood as a sympathetic response to the pain caused the burdened group by the majoritarian preference for associational freedom and a belated recognition that that pain outweighs in importance, profundity, and intensity whatever pain the white majority feared from a regime of forced association.”41 As a white southerner Porter did not interpret Brown as West does. As I have shown, particularly later in her life, Porter rejected what West calls “a regime of forced association.”

It is interesting to consider Porter’s notions of mixed marriages I discussed in chapter 4, and her view of a declining South in the context of William Faulkner’s descriptions of Isaac McCaslin’s struggle with the history of his family of mixed blood in section four of his story “The Bear.”

In Faulkner’s story all characters are biologically related. When Ike reads the family’s ledgers at the age of sixteen he discovers that the blacks “were as much a part of his ancestry as his white progenitors.” Ike’s particular problem is his recognition the land originally belonged to the Indians which makes him conclude that his grandfather bought nothing when the Indian Ikkemotubbe had sold him the land: “on that instant it [the land] ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing.”

The world described in the story is a moral world. Ike realizes that when the Indians sold the land to the whites they committed a sin: God “created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name.” He is aware that there is a curse on the land. In the argument with his cousin McCaslin Edmonds Ike cries out: “Don’t you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it

40 Richard Weisberg, Poetics, 10.
ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse?" The ledgers reveal the family secret. He finds that Eunice, the mistress of Carothers McCaslin, who was the founder of the McCaslin clan, drowned herself because he had also made his own slave daughter pregnant. When he is twenty-one Ike decides to relinquish his inheritance. Soifer argues that “as McCaslin Edmonds, Isaac’s older cousin, debates with Isaac throughout section 4 of ‘The Bear,’ he tries to put the best face possible on Carothers McCaslin, but the best McCaslin can do is to describe Carothers as ‘him who saw the opportunity and took it […]. To Isaac, Carothers’s ruthlessness as slave owner and exploiter (including incest with his own slave daughter) is more pertinent in deciding what to do.’” The racial shame reappears in “Delta Autumn” when Ike, now an old man, hears about Roth McCaslin’s incest with an unnamed descendant of Tomey’s Turl, born out of Carothers’s incestuous relationship with his slave daughter. Ike’s renunciation of his heritage is futile. Soifer points out that “Roth’s mistress forcefully rejects Isaac’s advice to forget and to start anew in the North […]. In retrospect, his [Ike’s] singular renunciation, his youthful effort to redeem history, seems to have been a futile gesture.”

A comparison of the moral world in “The Bear” with Porter’s view in her stories of the South and her notes for a lynching story demonstrates the similarities between Faulkner’s story and Porter’s stories. As Faulkner does in his story, Porter deplores the decline of the South. Faulkner’s love of “Mammy” shown in his dedication to her in Go Down, Moses resembles Porter’s frequent affectionate references to and portrayals of the family’s black servant Aunt Nannie. Faulkner’s story appealed to Porter as appears from a marginal note she made in A Collection of Critical Essays on Faulkner. In the margin of Allen Tate’s reference to “The Bear” she wrote: “my continual favorite after Absalom, Absalom!” She did not make any further comments in her copy of this book, but she did make some notes in her copy of Cleanth Brooks’s William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country. Her notes mainly refer to what the author calls “the male-

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43 Aviam Soifer, Law and the Company We Keep, 244-245 note 20, 110.
female contrast.” She shares Brooks’s view in his general remark that “in the Faulknerian world men have to lose their innocence, confront the hard choice, and through a process of initiation discover reality.” Porter comments that “on this subject Faulkner was nearly right as usual.”45 Though there is no explicit reference to any of Faulkner’s stories, it seems likely that she sympathizes, too, with his descriptions in “The Bear” of Ike’s “hard choice” after he had gone “through a process of initiation.” The similarity in views shows that Faulkner’s representation of Ike and the latter’s notion of the law appealed to Porter’s sense of justice.

In chapter 5 I discussed the relationship between the Jew Löwenthal and the passengers in Porter’s novel Ship of Fools. As Shylock’s portrayal in Shakespeare’s play The Merchant of Venice resembles Löwenthal’s in the novel, the play can serve as a point of reference for Porter’s representation of a Jew when he is confronted with the law. Since the debate on Shylock’s portrayal varies, I shall show two contrasting views on whether or not Shakespeare’s play is anti-Semitic.

Warren Smith argues that “the evidence seems to indicate that through Shylock Shakespeare is really not satirizing Jews as such but is attempting to depict a usurer, by vocation a villain, who hypocritically conceals his evil designs behind the mask of a religion he himself does not believe in. Prejudice against Jews as we know it today is not at all an issue in The Merchant of Venice.” The gist of Smith’s argument is that the play stresses Shylock’s usury rather than his Jewishness: “Shylock would have provoked the antipathy of the Elizabethan audience not so much because he was a Jew as because he was a usurer.” Shylock’s usury is emphasized in the play by the contrast with Antonio who lends money without interest. The question arises why Shakespeare made Shylock a Jew as well as a usurer. Smith answers the question by explaining that “the term Jew was frequently made equivalent to usurer.” Moreover, Smith contends, Shylock is shown as an unbeliever. As an unbeliever and a usurer Shylock is the evil man who demands the pound of flesh. Smith sees Shylock’s famous speech “I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?” (III.i.62-78) as an “obtrusive example in the

play of the use of religion as a cloak for villainy.” 46

D.M. Cohen, on the contrary, stresses the anti-Semitism in the play: “Current criticism notwithstanding, The Merchant of Venice seems to me a profoundly and crudely anti-Semitic play.” He defines an anti-Semitic work of art “as one that portrays Jews in a way that makes them objects of antipathy to readers and spectators—objects of scorn, hatred and laughter, or contempt.” Cohen points to the frequent and deliberate use of the word “Jew” in the play to set Shylock apart from the rest of the characters and argues that “each time that Jew is used by any of Shylock’s enemies, there is a deeply anti-Jewish implication already and automatically assumed.” According to Cohen Shylock represents evil and hatred. Like Smith, Cohen refers to Shylock’s speech “Hath not a Jew eyes?” However, he disagrees with the view that in this speech “the portrait of Shylock is, ultimately, a deeply humane one […] and that his position in the Christian world has resulted from that world’s treatment of him.” He points out that Shylock “plots the ruthless murder of Antonio” and that for this reason pity for him is misplaced. Yet, at his last appearance Shylock is a pitiable character. After Portia’s verdict in Act IV that he “presently become a Christian” and that he ”do record a gift,/ Here in court, of all he dies possess’d,/Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter,” Shylock just asks the court to “give me leave to go from hence” (IV.i.388-396).47 As Cohen argues, Shylock is transformed from “a cowering blood-hungry monster into a quiescent victim” who invokes pity. Pointing to the ambiguity in Shylock’s portrait Cohen concludes: “it is as though The Merchant of Venice is an anti-Semitic play written by an author who is not an anti-Semite—but an author who has been willing to use the cruel stereotypes of that ideology for mercenary and artistic purposes.”48 Following Cohen’s argument that Shakespeare’s play is anti-Semitic, I would argue that the representation of Shylock resembles Porter’s portrayal of Löwenthal though, of course, Porter’s Löwenthal is not of the same stature as Shakespeare’s Shylock.

Both Shylock and Löwenthal are interpreted as pariahs and haters of Christians. In his first appearance Shylock says in an aside: “I

hate him [Antonio] for he is a Christian” (I.iii.43). As discussed in chapter 5, in the microcosm of the ship Löwenthal as a Jew is the outsider who in his turn fiercely rejects Christianity. In Ship and in the play the hatred is mutual. While throughout the novel the hostility between Löwenthal and most of the passengers is stressed, Antonio and his friends show their contempt of Shylock from the outset. The insistence on Shylock’s usury is comparable with Porter’s satirical portrait of Löwenthal, who makes money as a trader of rosaries and wooden statues. However, since the comedy was written at the end of the sixteenth century and critics hold different views on the representation of Shylock as a Jew, the similarities between the two characters should not be oversimplified. Shylock’s trial in Act IV, however, reveals the same antagonism between both parties that is found in the relationship between some of Porter’s characters and Löwenthal in Ship.

Portia in the disguise of Balthazar, “a young doctor of Rome,” arrives as a mediator at the Court of Justice in Venice. At the trial the tone is set when the Duke, who is presiding, tells Antonio that Shylock is “uncapable of pity, void and empty/From any dram of mercy” (IV.i.5-6). Shylock insists upon “the pound of flesh”: “by our holy Sabbath have I sworn/To have the due and forfeit of my bond:/If you deny it, let the danger of light/Upon your charter and your city’s freedom” (IV.1.36-39), thus appealing to the justice of the State. As Antonio “confesses to the bond,” Portia in her mediating role insists that “the Jew must be merciful.” Her following speech emphasizes “the quality of mercy” in the lawsuit: “it [mercy] is enthroned in the hearts of kings/It is an attribute to God himself/And earthly power doth then show likest God’s/When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew/Though justice be thy plea, consider this/That in the course of justice none of us/Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy [...]” (IV.i.194-200). Shylock’s rejection of mercy and his intent “to crave the law/the penalty and forfeit of my bond” will lead to his downfall.

Weisberg argues that the bond is unconditional and since Antonio failed to repay the loan in time Shylock insists on the literal text of the contract. Portia cannot “wrest the law” as “there is no power in Venice/can alter a decree established” and acknowledges Shylock’s legal claim to have the pound of flesh. Portia defeats Shylock, however, with his own legalistic interpretation of the bond:
“He shall have nothing but the penalty,” but the bond “doth give here no jot of blood” (IV.i.307). The verdict involves more. Portia points out to Shylock that as “an alien” he has endangered “the very life of the defendant” (IV.i.361, 362). Antonio requires Shylock to become a Christian and leave his property to his son Lorenzo and daughter. After this total defeat Shylock disappears from the play and is not even referred to in the last act. Likewise Löwenthal disappears from the novel after he has to give up his berth to the anti-Semite Rieber. In his emotional protest against this injustice as he sees it he appeals to the law: “Is there a law saying I shouldn’t have what I paid for?” (SF 472). As the outcast, Löwenthal seeks protection of the law and points to his contract. He has paid the shipping company for his berth and, like Shylock, he wants justice and declines mercy. In the trial scenes Shylock resembles Löwenthal. In both portraits there is ambiguity. On the one hand the two characters are revealed as detestable Jews who reject mercy, on the other they are shown as aliens and victims of discrimination by a dominant group.

The trial shows that Portia is as legalistic as Shylock. What is prominent in the various scenes describing the trial is the contrast between “the law” and “mercy,” which recalls Billy Budd’s trial and captain Thiele’s refusal to show mercy in his decisions. However, Shakespeare’s play is also an example of what the law can do to people, as is dramatized by Porter in her memoir The Never-Ending Wrong and her story “Noon-Wine.”

In my interdisciplinary approach of the “Law-in-Literature” studies to Porter’s ethnic and racial attitudes, I have selected literary works that can help to show the relationship between her view of the law and her notions of ethnicity and race. I would argue that the authors’ moral view of the law in the works discussed can serve as “the blinded obscured third eye,” as Porter put it in her memoir: “We need restored to us of course that blinded obscured third eye said once to exist in the top of the brain for our guidance. Lacking it we go skew-gee in great numbers, especially those of us brought up so bewilderingly on Judeo-Greek-Christian ethics, prone to trust the good faith of our fellows” [...]” (NW 30).
Conclusion

My study of Katherine Anne Porter’s ethnic and racial attitudes shows that not only her published and unpublished literary work, but also her personal papers offer the insight into her personal life and her art as a writer that is necessary to understand the relationship between her political views and her notions of ethnicity and race. It appears that Porter’s insistence on freedom and her fear of power are dominant in her ethnic and racial attitudes. Her experiences in Mexico in the 1920s and early 1930s set the patterns that can be traced in her work and her ethnic and racial views. As a writer, Porter sought the truth as she herself often pointed out. She transforms her observations into fiction and as we have seen in the preceding chapters, Porter’s craft of caricaturing her characters effectively enabled her to expose ethnic and racial hatred. Porter was influenced by the Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias whom she met in Mexico in the 1920s. In Mexico she admired his work and art and we often see that in her political satire she expresses her notions of ethnicity and race through caricatures. The following sections recapitulate the principal aspects of Porter’s ethnic and racial attitudes and point to the recurring themes in her work like oppression, resistance to power, pacifism and her sense of justice which influenced her notions of ethnicity and race.

In her personal papers Porter remarked that her experiences in Mexico made a lifelong impression on her. Not only do we see her experiences reflected in her work set in Mexico, but they can also be traced in her later work. Through her involvement in the turmoil after the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, her inside knowledge of the Mexican government and her acquaintance with influential revolutionists she gained the experience to observe political situations she would later use during her travels in Europe and the United States. At the same time, however, her political experiences in Mexico resulted in disillusionment and may have contributed to a change in her political thinking. Porter gave up her ideal of freedom for the Mexican natives precisely because she became disillusioned by those who had preached the Revolution. Hope and illusion followed by disillusionment is a pattern we find throughout her work.

When she visited the large hacienda at Tetlapayac in 1931, which resulted in her story “Hacienda,” her disillusionment with the
Revolution she had expressed in the early 1920s, was strengthened. Porter used the background of the hacienda for her story to expose once more the oppression and exploitation of the Indians by those in power. In “Hacienda” the narrator tells that nothing had changed for the peons. They are the “figures under a doom,” like “the suffering Indians” whom Porter already had seen in Guadalupe in 1920. The gloomy politically inspired sketch “The Fiesta de la Guadalupe” she wrote about her visit to the basilica of Guadalupe was published only a few months before her sketch “Xochimilco,” describing Indians in an ideal world she had perceived at one of her visits to the village Xochimilco near Mexico City. Written at about the same time the two contrasting sketches are representative of Porter’s impressions of Mexico and the natives. In “Xochimilco” she admires the authenticity of the Indians, whereas she represents Indians as poor and oppressed in her politically inspired “The Fiesta de la Guadalupe.”

In between her first sketches and her last story “Hacienda,” set in Mexico Porter wrote essays, reviews, her story “María Concepción,” and notes for her intended story “The Dove of Chapulínco.” They all express either her admiration and naturalness of the Indians, her love of the country and Indian art, or her political views of the failure of the Revolution, which resulted in representations of ragged Indians as an oppressed people. When Porter came to Mexico in 1920 for her first visit, she was among radical friends, like Felipe Carrillo Puerto, the governor of Yucatán, who strengthened her political ideals of freedom for the natives and repartition of the land. In the course of her four visits she came to realize that the Revolution had failed.

While in Mexico in 1920, Porter wrote for the magazine Asia a story about the love and marriage between a girl of English descent and a Chinese student. The influence of Porter’s Mexican experiences is evident and suggests, therefore, that the ghostwritten story is more than merely a report of a love story and of the protagonist’s changing racial attitude. The story describes the development of the protagonist’s views from racial prejudice to love of her Chinese fellow student. Though we do not know to what extent Porter followed Mac’s story, the book is worth studying it because it can be read as a work which expresses Porter’s own view of love and her racial attitude in the early 1920s.

As I pointed out, in an undated note I quoted in chapter 2
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(note 2), Porter came to Mexico for various reasons, but in a general sense as she writes, it was “Life” in Mexico which attracted her. The note suggests that her experiences in Mexican politics, her interest in the country and her study of the Indian arts, constituted a learning process. Porter wrote about her learning process and self-delusion in her memoir *The Never-Ending Wrong*, in which she dwells on her self-delusion in her political thinking and her sense of betrayal when looking back at the time she took part in the protest marches against the execution of the two Italians Sacco and Vanzetti in August 1927.

Self-deception, typical for Porter’s personal life, is a theme Porter often used to express ethnic attitudes. Some examples are her portrayal of Charles Upton, the autobiographical character in “The Leaning Tower” and the Germans aboard the *Vera* who are represented as passengers on their way to their imagined promised land. In “The Leaning Tower” the protagonist was misled by the picture of Berlin with wonderful buildings and polished streets his German friend Kuno had given him in their boyhood. Charles left Berlin disillusioned after observing the political situation there just as Porter left Mexico disillusioned after the failure of the Revolution. Both the story and the novel express the fear of power Porter had revealed in her portrayals of the Indians and show the influence of her political experiences in Mexico. While Charles in “The Leaning Tower” is confronted with the desire for power in some of the German characters, the observer in *Ship of Fools* is confronted with the danger of the German sympathizers with Nazism.

“The Leaning Tower,” based on the notes Porter had made during her four months’ stay in Berlin in the early 1930s, but not published until 1941, is a story in which the final scenes stress Porter’s anti-German sentiments and her fear of racism. In his pension with quarrelling boarders and an inquisitive landlady, Charles is the American outsider, who feels hostility everywhere around him in Berlin. The quarrelling among the boarders reminds the narrator of his Texan experiences in his schooldays resulting in fighting which suggests a warning against ethnic hatred in the same way as the warning against the warlike Germans Charles had observed. As the observer, Charles can only see Germans as stereotypes and, as a painter, he expresses his unfavorable impressions through caricatures. Charles’s sense of impending doom culminates in the last scene when, after a turbulent New Year’s party, he sees the mended plaster replica
of the leaning tower and wonders what the leaning tower had reminded him of. Though he cannot find the answer, he is aware that there is something perishable and threatening.

Apart from Charles’s ethnic prejudice, “The Leaning Tower” shows class consciousness, which recurs in Porter’s later work, for example in the opening scene of Ship of Fools, in which some arrogant white men look down upon the Mexican natives. In “The Leaning Tower” class consciousness is shown in the discussion between Charles and his German friend Kuno when they are still children living in a small Texan town. Each boy looks down upon the other because of their descent which results in antagonism bordering on ethnic hatred.¹

Whereas “The Leaning Tower” deals with Porter’s German experience in Berlin, her early story “Holiday” describes the kind of Edenic world we also see in her sketch “Xochimilco.” In the microcosm of a German farm in Texas the observer and narrator sympathetically portrays an ethnic group that is closely bound to the earth. When “Holiday” is read in the context of Porter’s political views of the early 1920s, we can trace the influence of her ideals of land repartition in Mexico in Father Müller’s ideas about land ownership. In some of her Mexican essays and in her private papers we see Porter’s concern with land ownership and repartition of land in Mexico in favor of the natives. In “Holiday” the patriarch of the German family, Father Müller, owns much land but as he tells the narrator, he cheaply rents his neighbors land so that they will not fall into the hands of the bank. Since the greater part of the story was

¹ In his interesting paper “Culture, Politics, and International Conflict in “The Leaning Tower,”” delivered at the Conference of the American Literature Association on 28 May 2004, Jerry Findley argues that the two boys Charles and Kuno “find themselves enmeshed in one of historiography’s debates. Which is dominant? cultural history or political history? [...] Porter aligns the two histories with her one great theme: good and evil at war within the human spirit or psyche [...]. Charles “can see himself as similar and related to others, here to Kuno; or he can see himself distinct and separate, his individual identity compromised and threatened by Kuno’s differences [...] with Kuno Charles experiences the two attitudes he can adopt towards others; and, that joined to these two attitudes toward others are two related attitudes he can adopt toward himself and the future he envisions, the same concerns he still struggles to sort through years later in Berlin.” I would argue that Charles lost the struggle within himself and chose to see the Germans from a political point of view.
Conclusion

written in the early 1920s, it is not surprising that some of the characteristics of her Mexican non-political sketches and essays recur in “Holiday.” Indeed, when she described the unassimilated Müllers in their settlement in East Texas Porter may have had in mind her sympathetic representations of Indians in “Xochimilco,” who live in a close community uncorrupted by the outside world.

“Holiday” is one of the first examples in which Porter shows her craft in describing nature. In the description of the narrator’s joy when observing the colors, the changing light and the sound of the birds Porter expresses her love of nature. In these pastoral settings the narrator reveals her ethnic attitude in her sympathetic portrayal of the German family. In “The Leaning Tower,” however, the Berliners are caricatured, which shows that Porter’s view of Germans has changed as a result of her fear of the rising Nazism in the early 1930s.

At the time Porter was in Berlin and wrote her notes and letters about her experiences there, she finished her story “The Cracked Looking Glass.” As she does in “The Leaning Tower,” Porter satirically exposes ethnic prejudice towards different nationalities. In her letter of 27 July 1932 to Josephine Herbst Porter wrote that she lost “the first manuscript, and had to do it all over again and it came out quite differently” (Beinecke), which suggests that Porter’s Berlin experiences may have influenced her when she was rewriting the story. Reality is difficult to accept for Rosaleen, the Irish protagonist of forty-five married to Dennis, “about seventy-five.” As is typical for so many of Porter’s stories and her novel, “The Cracked Looking Glass” deals with the contrast between illusion and reality, which in this story is symbolized by the distorted vision of the protagonist’s cracked looking-glass. In this context Rosaleen’s ethnic views are satirized. She is proud of being Irish and “she wished sometimes they never come to Connecticut where there was nobody to talk to but Rooshans and Polacks and Wops no better than Black Protestants.” In “The Leaning Tower” we find a similar satirical exposure of ethnic prejudice in the description of the boarders’ view of different ethnic groups.

In some of her stories set in Mexico Porter used her skill at caricaturing her characters to express her dislike of the Mexican revolutionists who had betrayed the revolution or to protest against landownership in Mexico. Similar to her caricatural portrayals of fat Germans in “The Leaning Tower,” Porter satirizes the fat Archbishop in her unfinished story “The Dove of Chapala,” who fears the loss
of his land. The unfinished story can also be read as an early example of Porter’s insistence on freedom, not only for the Indians, but also for the protagonist of the intended story, the young Indian woman who would like to “shoulder my pack and march ahead of an army. I should like to be free” (UEP 123). The caricatural portrait of the Archbishop, who resists land repartition, recurs in Porter’s representation of the fat Braggioni in her later Mexican story “Flowering Judas.” As a revolutionist Braggioni is corrupt and his “gluttonous bulk” is the embodiment of the failure of the Revolution. Among her stories set in Mexico, both “Hacienda” and “Flowering Judas” are remarkable examples of Porter’s political sense and her sense of betrayal which influenced her portrayals of the natives. As an American in a hostile town, the protagonist in “The Leaning Tower,” too, focuses on fatness and gluttony in his observations of Germans. Porter’s emphasis on the Germans’ gluttony suggests she may have been inspired by the moral lesson of the personified gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins of morality plays.

Porter’s only novel Ship of Fools, written over a period of about twenty-five years, again satirizes some of the Germans aboard the ship. Like the characters of her model, Sebastian Brant’s satiric Narrenschiff, the passengers are the fools who seek the truth expressed in the title of the novel and whose illusions are satirized. For her representations of the sympathizers of Nazism Porter once more used her skills as a caricaturist as a device to warn against the threatening danger that would lead to the Holocaust, stressing in “The Leaning Tower,” the Germans’ gluttony.

Ship of Fools, too, is informed by Porter’s Mexican experiences. Her illusion about Mexico becomes some of the German passengers’ illusion of their promised land which is indicated in the motto of the first part of the novel: Quand partons-nous vers le bonheur? Porter’s portrayals of the Spanish steerage passengers on the Vera suggest she recalled the Mexican Indians about whom she wrote in her political

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2 The editors of Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter, in which the unfinished story is included, argue that “The Dove of Chapucaeco’ could be considered a dress rehearsal for ‘María Concepción’ (UEP 108). Though this argument is convincing, the fragments for the story can also be seen as exercises Porter wrote for her later work in which she expresses her view of ethnicity and race.
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Mexican work. Similar to Porter’s politically inspired portrayals of oppressed Indians, the narrator in the novel describes the steerage passengers as “men of all ages, in every state of decay, children of all sizes and babies in arms. They were all unbelievably ragged and dirty, hunched over, silent, miserable […] in the helpless humility of complete enslavement they were waiting for whatever would be done to them next” (ST 57). This sketch recalls Porter’s impressions of the Indians she depicted in “Hacienda.”

As the narrator observed the Germans in the microcosm of the German settlement in “Holiday,” the passengers of the Vera are observed from the outside in the small world of the ship. Not much happens during the voyage, but the relationships among the passengers are analyzed in detail from different points of view. One of the main events that occurs is Freytag’s banishment from the captain’s table. Freytag is the perfect Aryan but once it is known that his wife is Jewish he is seen as a threat. After he is dispelled the ring at the table is closed again. The Germans’ racism as expressed in their treatment of Freytag does not come as a surprise. Soon after the introduction of the passengers, some of the Germans are represented critically as “the chosen ones” who look forward to “set foot upon a mystic Fatherland.” Frau Rittersdorf’s portrayal becomes a caricature when she expresses her prejudiced views of race, and the characters Herr Siegfried Rieber and Fräulein Lizzi Spöekenkieker soon appear to be anti-Semites.

The multiple viewpoints shed different lights on some of the characters. The omniscient narrator’s portrayal of Löwenthal is ambivalent, but from the perspective of Jenny Brown, who is modelled on Porter, he is sympathetically depicted as a victim of anti-Semitism. In a complex way Freytag is portrayed as a German who loves his Jewish wife but at the same time insists on the purity of his German blood. Freytag is an anti-Semite, as is shown in his view of Löwenthal. When he is read in the light of Porter’s fear of Nazism, Freytag is one of the most interesting characters of the novel. True love between man and woman is hard to find in the novel. Freytag, however, loves his Jewish wife Mary Champagne, as Porter wrote in one of her marginal notes. At the same time, however, he shows the conflict between his love and his Nazi sympathies. Thus, Porter did

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3 See footnote 14, in chapter 5
not just expose the anti-Semitism of the Germans at the captain’s table but describes the emotions of a German who himself as a pro-Nazi is confronted with anti-Semitism and banishment. Whereas the motto of the first part of the novel satirically indicates the illusions of the Germans at the captain’s table, the motto of the second part, Kein Haus, keine Heimat, suggests alienation. Not only the Jew Löwenthal, but also Freytag is an alien among the passengers. The latter motto is the song Freytag’s wife used to sing to express her emotions about the Jews’ exile. Though Porter’s view of Jews is ambivalent, it is in this motto that she reveals her sympathy with victimized Jews and her fear of anti-Semitism.

The search for love is a dominant theme in the novel. Examples of the vain search for love is Doctor Schumann’s betrayal of his Spanish patient La Condesa when he leaves her without further help and the disillusionment of young Elsa Lutz in her yearning for love. Prominent in the novel is the relationship between the autobiographical character Jenny Brown and David Scott, who is modeled on Porter’s husband Eugene Pressly. Jenny and David do not find the ideal relationship they were seeking: “They were both ashamed of the evil natures they exposed in each other; each in the first days of their love had hoped to be the ideal image of the other […] In their moments of truce both believed that the love between them was very pure and generous, as they wished it to be” (SF 44). The passage is characteristic for Porter’s experiences during her many love affairs and marriages. Her expansive letters to her lovers show that she idealized them, but in the end love repeatedly turned into dislike often caused by her fear of oppression. Her relationships with her lovers and husbands once more illustrate her lifelong longing for the ideal that ends in disillusionment. Porter’s fear of oppression in her relationships not only led to disillusionment but also affected her views of ethnicity and race as we have seen in her portrayals of oppressed Indians in Mexico.

The “evil natures” Jenny and David see in each other are typical for the perspective from which the characters in the novel are portrayed. Porter’s concern with evil and collusion with evil is found throughout the novel and is the political context in which her views of ethnicity are revealed. Her fear of fascism, which she saw as the greatest political threat before and after World War II, affected her views of Germans after her Berlin experience. In the novel the
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concept of evil is not only discussed by the captain and among some of the Germans, but it is also expressed in the portrayals of some of the characters, for example the young twins Ric and Rac who are the malicious evildoers among the passengers. Porter repeatedly pointed to the danger of fascism, which she did not only see in Germany, but also in her own country. In Berlin she had noticed excessive nationalism and racism, and as is shown in her personal papers, she realized the danger of mass movements. Already in the early 1930s Porter was aware of the threat of dictatorial leadership and the danger of anti-Semitism.

Porter warned not only against the Germans’ anti-Semitism but also against nationalism, which she exposed in the American William Denny, a young engineer from Texas. Denny’s portrayal is a caricature; he is seen as a monster by one of the characters of the novel. As a white man, Denny shows his ethnic and racial hatred of Jews, African Americans and various nationalities. Denny’s ethnic and racial attitudes remind one of the boarders in “The Leaning Tower” and Rosaleen in “The Cracked Looking Glass.” The novel’s themes, then, clearly reveal Porter’s attitude towards ethnicity and race. However, as appears from one of her letters to Caroline Gordon, Porter was surprised that some critics failed to see the theme of evil, the warning against the dangers of anti-Semitism and ethnic and racial hatred.

While her stay in Berlin played a crucial role in her later ideas about Germans, Porter’s sense of belonging in the South as a white southern woman affected her views of African Americans. Born in Indian Creek, Texas, Porter grew up in poverty in a small house, owned by her paternal grandmother, in Kyle, Texas, to which her father and his four children moved after his wife’s death. In a fair number of her letters Porter writes about Texas; the general tone is ambivalence, estrangement and sometimes even dislike of her home state and, as a writer, she did not wish to be included in the list of Texan writers of her time. As Janis Stout, herself a Texan, points out, “Porter writes of Texas in its Southern aspects.”4 Porter, then, felt a Southerner, as is confirmed by what she wrote in her essay ““Noon-

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Wine’: The Sources”: “my part of Texas was peopled almost entirely by Southerners from Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, Kentucky, where different branches of my own family were settled” (CE 470). It should be noted, however, that she did not turn to her southern roots until the late 1920s when she was in her late thirties. In her earlier years she felt affinity with Mexico and, as we have seen, her experiences there made a lifelong impression on her.

Porter’s well-known essay “Portrait: Old South,” published in Mademoiselle in February 1944 and reprinted in Collected Essays, opens thus: “I am the grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation” (CE: 160). Her “blood-knowledge” shows she identified with the South. At the same time, however, Porter reveals that she saw the “lost” Civil War as a white southerner, thus excluding the perspective of black southerners. Yet, as we have seen, in her letters and her stories of the South until the late 1950s and the 1960s she expresses, as a white southerner, her genuine sympathy for blacks in the South and her awareness of their past. For example, in the notes for her intended lynching story and the notes to herself, the exposure of sexual exploitation of black women by white men and her satirical descriptions of the racist attitude of some of the white men of the community show Porter’s sympathizing attitude towards African Americans at this time of her life.

“Portrait: Old South” is really about Porter’s grandmother, whom she characterizes as a disciplinarian. The passages about her grandmother express Porter’s respect of her strong grandmother’s personality and above all of the manners and morals she taught the children. Though the essay much embellishes her past, Porter’s relationship with her grandmother, her longing for order and stability, and the portrait of her elders, “noblly unreconstructed,” reveal the link she felt between her family and the white “old South.”

Porter’s interest in and examination of her family’s history suggest her sense of history, which we also find in the Agrarians. One of the Agrarians, Robert Penn Warren, her longtime friend, presents a changing view of African Americans that is not found in Porter’s views after Brown. In his contribution “The Briar Patch” to I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition (1930), Warren stresses the need to educate African Americans, but he rejects racial integration:
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“The Southern white man may conceive of his own culture as finally rooted in the soil, and he may desire, through time and necessary vicissitude, to preserve its essential structure intact. He wishes the negro well.” In his later, interesting book *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (1957), a report of his visit to the South and his talks with whites and blacks in the South, Warren describes the views of desegregation given on both sides. He meets hatred and fear of violence on the part of both whites and blacks and discusses the moral aspect of the *Brown* decision and the division among those he interviewed. Warren concludes that it is not so much “the division between man and man,” but self-division, the division within the individual, that he had encountered in the white southerner. In the concluding imagined interview with himself Warren, as a white southerner, speaks out for desegregation and points to the moral aspect of integration.

As I have shown in chapter 4, from some of Porter’s letters it is apparent that she, too, shows her “inner division” about desegregation. Porter read Warren’s book, but with the exception of a few marked or underlined sentences in her copy of the book she did not make any comments, which suggests she shared the gist of Warren’s book. The turn in Porter’s views is found in the notes she made in her copy of Warren’s later book of interviews, *Who Speaks for the Negro* (1965), written after the Civil Rights Act. Her many notes in her copy of the book reveal her prejudiced views of African Americans in this period.

Porter’s association with some of the Agrarians in the 1920s and 1930s may have influenced her views of the South and the antebellum South, but there is no evidence that in this period of her life she shared the prejudiced views of some of the contributors to the manifest, for example, Frank Owsley and Donald Davidson. What appealed to Porter was the Agrarians’ protest against the industrialization of the South and their sense of the past.

The past is present in Porter’s southern novella “Old Mortality.” In the three sections of the story Porter expresses white southerners’ views of the South from the perspective of the memories of the family who saw the past as they wanted it to be. While the past is seen from the point of view of a white southern family in “Old

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Mortality,” it is the relationship between black and white we find in her collection of southern short stories “The Old Order.” As she wrote in one of her marginal notes, the story “The Source” is “the key to everything I have written about Southern life.” Indeed, Porter’s perception of southern life is expressed in the story not only in her love of nature, but particularly in the relationship between Grandmother and the black servants at her farm. Grandmother is portrayed as the white matriarch who orders her black servants about after she had arrived at her farm. The story is set in an ironical tone, but the affection in the relationship between Grandmother and the blacks is evident. At the same time, however, the narrator points to the neglected library in the main house. Unlike the books in the traditional plantation novels, the books are shabby, thus suggesting that Grandmother’s world is crumbling. In the much longer story of the collection, “The Journey,” the narrator describes the decline of Grandmother’s world. The disillusioned Grandmother sees the values of “the old order” crumble. She shows dislike of her new daughter-in-law, “the new woman,” fears miscegenation in the family and regrets the loss of their sense of family unity.

The connectedness between Grandmother and her black housekeeper, Nannie, is the essence of the story and is meant to emphasize the affection between a white and a black woman having lived their lives together in a changing South. This story, too, can be read as an illustration of Porter’s interest in life in the South, which she wished to describe in her southern stories.

Porter’s southern story “Noon-Wine,” which was published in the same year as “Old Mortality,” is set in a community in southern Texas between 1896 and 1905. “Noon-Wine” contrasts thematically with Porter’s other stories. Unlike some of the stories of “The Old Order” that deal with the relationship between southern whites and blacks, “Noon-Wine” stresses moral values. In her essay “‘Noon-Wine’: The Sources” Porter insists that the story is fiction, but based on her childhood memories. As she writes, her aim was “to find the truth.” The truth of the story is the sense of justice of the protagonist’s wife and that of his neighbors, who cannot accept morally that he was acquitted after he had committed a murder. From a legal point of view the story is an illustration of miscarriage of justice.

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6 See footnote 17, in chapter 4.
Conclusion

since the protagonist’s lawyer does not allow him to defend himself in court. The story concludes with the protagonist’s suicide after he realized the truth about himself. “Noon-Wine,” then, can be read as a story about moral values and justice.

The theme of justice expressed in “Noon-Wine” is prominent in Porter’s memoir The Never-Ending Wrong and plays a part in her Mexican story “María Concepción.” In the interdisciplinary approach of the “Law-in-Literature” studies in chapter 6, I have argued that Porter’s sense of justice influenced her ethnic and racial attitudes. The literary works I discussed can be used to point to the relationship between Porter’s moral views and her notions of ethnicity and race. The contrast between the legal “is” and the moral “ought” in the works I analyzed can be found in Porter’s views of Mexican Indians, African Americans, Jews and Germans.

Particularly in Porter’s notions of Germans as a nation rather than a people from the early 1930s we see her construction of ethnic identity. In both “The Leaning Tower” and Ship of Fools Germans are typically observed by the narrator as collective groups.7 As I have shown, Porter perceived national identities, especially in her later views of Germans, when she feared fascism in Germany. Max Weber has pointed out that

the concept “nation” directs us to political power. Hence, the concept seems to refer—if it refers at all to a uniform phenomenon—to a specific kind of pathos which is linked to the idea of a powerful political community of people who share a common language, or religion, or common customs, or political memories; such a state may already exist or it may be desired. The more power is emphasized, the closer appears to nation be the link between and state.8

As I have demonstrated, Porter’s image of Germany after the early 1930s was mainly focused on what Weber calls “the idea of a powerful political community of people.” Where political factors play

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7 Interestingly, after her Berlin experience there is no evidence of identity construction of German Americans or any other ethnic groups of European descent in her own country, not even of native Americans

a role Porter distinguishes between “us” and “them.” In *Ship* she set
the Germans at the captain’s table apart from the rest of the
passengers, thus creating “others” to be feared. Her awareness of the
Holocaust resulted in an ambivalent notion of Jewish identity. While
there is a boundary between the Jew and Gentiles and hatred on both
sides in the novel, the distinction between “us” and “them” is absent in
her approach to Jews when they are victims of anti-Semitism. Similar
to her views of Germans, there is a change in Porter’s notions of
are affected by her affinity with the South. Since ethnicity and race are
subjective matters, Porter did not observe what “is” but rather what
she perceived as a white southerner and wrote about in her personal
papers and marginal notes of this period.

When Porter came to Mexico she used the journalistic
experience she had obtained as a newspaper reporter in Fort Worth
and for the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver. Several of her Mexican
sketches and her essays and her later work are written from the
viewpoint of an observer. However, as I have argued, Porter herself
was not a detached observer but showed her engagement with what
she noticed. In one of the letters to her friend and editor Donald
Elder, author of a biography of Ring Lardner, she points out that “I
did want to remind you of one point about fiction—you have been
nailed to a scrupulous observation of facts […] you have lost sight of
the blessed thing about fiction—you don’t have to stick to facts any
longer, and the only truth worth having is your own truth after you
have discarded the facts of the matter” (Hornbake 20-0493).

As an admirer of Henry James, she responded in a similar way
to the question, “when to push in and when to back out.” Porter
wrote in an undated note on the first of James’s three studies on the
life of George Sand: “It’s a great question, and one to be asked of
himself frequently by anyone with the human talent for taking part in
the affairs around him, how to strike the delicate balance between
intelligent sympathy and accurate observation, and the being a mere
busybod[y] […]” Porter argues that in the search for truth, “sometimes
the best, the clearest view of affairs is obtained by simply not looking;
unasked questions answer themselves by the final accumulations of
evidence, wind-born pollen floating from all directions, little by little,
and the truth thus fertilized comes to bloom before your eyes [...] but
Conclusion

we are not talking about artists but of ‘social human beings’ living in a circle of family and friends and acquaintances, under bond you might say, to keep the peace” (Hornbake 83-0023).

Throughout her life and career Porter sought her “own truth” both as an artist and as a “social human being” as she wrote in her note on Henry James’s study.9 From this perspective I have tried to find in my study Katherine Anne Porter’s ethnic and racial views in her fiction, non-fiction and personal papers.

9 In her study of Porter’s fiction, Darlene Harbour Unrué convincingly argues that “the grand theme of her [Porter’s] work has been all along the search for truth, which is knowledge, to be sure, but finally life itself. Throughout the stories and the novel, she has created characters struggling both toward truth and against it, and she imaginatively conveys the agonies of the human struggle while showing the tragedy of the failures and the glory of successes” (Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter’s Fiction, 219).
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Samenvatting

Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) had gedurende haar lange leven uitgesproken opvattingen over etniciteit en ras. De meningen van critici en biografen over Porters visie op etniciteit en ras blijken verdeeld te zijn en de studies hierover zijn niet grondig. Mijn dissertatie is het resultaat van systematisch onderzoek naar Porters houding tegenover etnische groeperingen, zoals weergegeven in haar literaire werk en persoonlijke geschreven en toont aan dat er een relatie is tussen haar politieke overtuigingen en haar veranderende opvattingen over etniciteit en ras.

In haar geboortestaat Texas raakte Porter al op jonge leeftijd geïnteresseerd in politiek. Haar belangstelling voor politieke en sociale veranderingen werd versterkt tijdens haar bezoeken aan Mexico, waar ze getuige was van en als activist gedeeltelijk deelnam aan de politieke beroering na de Mexicaanse revolutie van 1910-1920. Tijdens haar verblijf in Berlijn in het begin van de jaren dertig van de vorige eeuw zag ze de opkomst van het Nazisme. Later in eigen land voelde ze als blanke zuiderling een emotionele betrokkenheid bij de desegregatie in de jaren vijftig en de beweging voor burgerrechten in de jaren zestig van de vorige eeuw. In deze verschillende perioden van haar leven is te zien welke invloed haar politieke opvattingen hadden op de wijze waarop ze respectievelijk de inheemse Indianen van Mexico, de Duitsers, het Joodse volk en de Afro-Amerikanen als groep karakteriseerde.

Op haar reizen door Europa en de Verenigde Staten maakte Porter veelvuldig aantekeningen van wat ze opmerkte en ervoer. Mijn onderzoek is gebaseerd op deze bewaard gebleven aantekeningen, alsmede op haar fictie en non-fictie, haar uitgebreide correspondentie, en haar marginalia in de boeken van haar uitgebreide bibliotheek in de Hornbake Library van de University of Maryland in College Park. Hieruit blijkt dat, hoewel Porters politieke denkbeelden inconsistent en soms emotioneel waren, haar gevoel voor sociale rechtvaardigheid, haar afkeer van macht en onderdrukkende haar pacifisme sterk ontwikkeld waren en door de jaren heen onveranderlijk bleven. Bij de vorming van haar denkbeelden over etnische groeperingen blijkt onderdrukking vaak een rol te spelen.
Porter voelde zich aangetrokken tot het fundamentalisme. Ze ontkende fundamentalistische elementen in haar werk en ook in haar privé-leven benadrukte ze het recht van onafhankelijkheid van de vrouw.

In de jaren twintig kreeg Porter belangstelling voor het communisme, maar ze weigerde lid te worden van de communistische partij omdat ze zich niet wilde onderwerpen aan partijdiscipline. Porter werd een non-conformist en stond op haar vrijheid van meningsuiting. Later keerde ze zich ook openlijk tegen de communisten jacht in Amerika in de jaren vijftig van de vorige eeuw.

Hoewel haar rechtvaardigheidsgevoel niet gebaseerd was op bepaalde filosofische denkbeelden, protesteerde Porter vaak tegen onrechtvaardigheid. Haar verontwaardiging over misbruik van de wet keert in haar aantekeningen en correspondentie regelmatig terug. In 1929 nam ze deel aan de protestmarsen tegen de op handen zijnde executie van de van moord verdachte Italianen Sacco en Vanzetti. Vijftig jaar later schreef ze The Never-Ending Wrong, een rapport waarin ze terugziet op de protesten en op haar morele en politieke opvattingen in die tijd. Haar overtuiging dat rechtvaardigheid en de wet vaak niet “on speaking terms” zijn, zoals ze in één van haar aantekeningen schreef, is van invloed geweest op haar denkbeelden over etniciteit en ras.

In de jaren dertig en veertig veranderden Porters politieke denkbeelden van links radicaal naar wat meer conservatieve opvattingen. Porter voelde zich aangetrokken tot de ideeën van de Agrarians, een groep van twaalf intellectuelen die zich in hun manifest I'll Take My Stand (1930) verzetten tegen industrialisatie in de zuidelijke staten van Amerika en de waarden van een agrarische gemeenschap verdedigden. Haar mening over Afro-Amerikanen kunnen verklaard worden vanuit haar affiniteit met het Zuiden als blanke vrouw.

Bij het gebruik van de termen “etniciteit” en “ras” volg ik voornamelijk de theorieën van de literaire criticus Werner Sollors en de sociologen Stephen Cornell en Douglas Hartmann. Daarnaast heb ik enkele andere studies geraadpleegd bij mijn toepassing van de begrippen etniciteit en ras op Porters opvattingen. Ik toon Porters schering tussen “wij” en “zij,” aan bij haar opvattingen over de identiteit van etnische groepen. Steeds blijkt dat haar perceptie
van etniciteit, gezien vanuit haar politieke opvattingen, niet het individu maar een groep betreft.

Ik analyseer Porters roman *Ship of Fools* (1962) in twee aparte hoofdstukken, terwijl ik ook in verschillende hoofdstukken terugkom op enkele van haar verhalen om de invloed van haar politieke en morele overtuigingen op haar meningen over etnische groeperingen aan te tonen.

Aan de hand van Porters werk en haar aantekeningen, heb ik tenslotte willen aantonen dat haar ervaringen tijdens haar verblijf in Mexico in de jaren twintig en begin dertig van de vorige eeuw van een grote en blijvende invloed zijn geweest op haar politieke en morele denken. In veel van haar werk zijn overeenkomsten te zien tussen haar Mexicaanse en haar latere werk.

Als inleiding geef ik in het eerste hoofdstuk een overzicht van Porters vroege politieke opvattingen vanaf het eerste decennium tot aan haar overtuigingen in de jaren tachtig van de vorige eeuw. Met haar autobiografisch verhaal “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” (1938) toon ik aan dat Porter al gedurende de eerste wereldoorlog pacifist was, wat later ook zal blijken uit haar mening over het Nazisme. In mijn bespreking van *The Never-Ending Wrong* beschrijf ik Porters zelfonderzoek naar haar morele en politieke ideeën en haar gevoel van verraad in haar beoordeling van communisten in de Sacco en Vanzetti zaak. In dit hoofdstuk leg ik ook de nadruk op haar angst voor machtspoliticie, fascisme en totalitaire regimes. Ik kom tot de conclusie dat vooral haar streven naar vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid en haar verzet tegen onderdrukking een rol hebben gespeeld in haar meningen over etnische identiteit.

In hoofdstuk twee toon ik aan dat Porters mening over de inheemse bevolking van Mexico wisselt. Er is een duidelijk onderscheid te zien tussen haar denkbeelden over Indianen in haar politiek geïnspireerd Mexicaanse werk en haar niet politieke-fictie, essays en schetsen. In haar politieke werk keert ze zich tegen de onderdrukking van het Indiaanse volk. In dit deel van haar werk beschrijft Porter Indianen als een arm, apathisch volk, vaak gehuld in lompen. In haar niet-politieke werk geeft Porter een veel positievere beeld van de Indianen, die vaak trots zijn en één met de natuur. In dit deel van haar Mexicaanse werk is ook een verlangen naar een ideaal verleden te vinden dat in haar verdere werk terugkeert en haar ideeën
over ras en etniciteit heeft beïnvloed.

In hoofdstuk drie, dat Porters meningen over Duitsers beschrijft, is eenzelfde verschil te vinden als in hoofdstuk twee. Er is onderscheid tussen haar representatie van Duitsers in haar verhaal “Holiday” (1960) en die in haar verhaal “The Leaning Tower” (1940), haar roman Ship of Fools (1962) en haar vele aantekeningen over haar verblijf in Berlijn. In het eerstgenoemde verhaal geeft ze een sympathiek beeld van Duitse immigranten in een nederzetting in Texas in 1912, terwijl ze in het laatstgenoemde verhaal Duitsers als karikaturen beschrijft. In haar roman beschrijft ze racistische sympathisanten van het Nazisme satirisch en wijst erop dat anti-Semitisme kan leiden tot genocide. Ik toon aan dat de positieve karakterbeschrijvingen in het pastorale “Holiday” overeenkomen met die in de ideale wereld van enkele van haar niet-politieke Mexicaanse schetsen.

Hoofdstuk vier behandelt Porters affiniteit met het Zuiden en haar veranderende mening over Afro-Amerikanen. Sympathie voor Afro-Amerikanen en begrip voor hun verleden veranderden in intolerantie door een verharding van haar politieke overtuigingen na de afschaffing van de segregatie en de burgerrechtenbeweging in Amerika in de jaren vijftig en zestig van de vorige eeuw. Ik wijs op het verschil tussen haar opvattingen over Afro-Amerikanen in enkele van haar verhalen en haar aantekeningen voor een te schrijven verhaal over de gevolgen van een lynching, geschreven in de jaren dertig, en de denkbeelden over deze bevolkingsgroep die zij vanaf het midden van de jaren vijftig uiteenzet in haar persoonlijke geschreven.


Het laatste hoofdstuk gaat over de relatie tussen enerzijds Porters opvattingen over etniciteit en ras en anderzijds haar gevoel voor rechtvaardigheid waarbij gebruik gemaakt wordt van de inter-
disciplinaire benadering van de Law-and-Literature studies. Law-in-
Literature studies benadrukt de ethische aspecten van de wet in de
analyses van de opvattingen over de wet in literaire werken. Ik
bespreek Porters morele opvattingen in The Never-Ending Wrong, en
haar verhalen “Noon-Wine” en “María Concepción” en toon aan dat
dezelfde meningen overeenkomen met de morele interpretaties van de wet
van de schrijvers van enkele bekende romans en verhalen uit de
Amerikaanse literatuur.

In de conclusie toon ik het verband tussen Porters vroege en
latere werk in de context van haar politieke overtuigingen. In veel van
haar verhalen is ze als verteller niet de afstandelijke waarnemer, maar
voelt zich betrokken bij wat ze observeert en beschrijft. Porter
benadrukte dat ze in haar werk naar de waarheid zocht. Vanuit dit
gegeven heb ik haar meningen over etniciteit en ras onderzocht.
curriculum vitae

