

## The Good Ship *Werra*

By Darlene Unrue,  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The North German (Nord-deutsche) Lloyd\* ship the *Werra* was the steamer on which Katherine Anne Porter and Eugene Pressley traveled from Vera Cruz to Bremen, Germany, August-September 1931. Although the voyage and Porter's experiences on the ship provided the matrix of *Ship of Fools*, at the time she made the journey she had no idea it would result in a novel. She thought only "a very short short-story," based on a scene at the first night's get-acquainted party, would come of it.

She had chosen the *Werra* not because it was luxurious but because her friend Josephine Herbst had recommended it as a cheap and efficient vessel. Porter described it to Caroline Gordon in a long letter-log sent at the end of the voyage as "small as any old Ward Line tub plying around the coasts" and "a combination freighter and passenger ship, very steady, very broadbottomed and German in her style, doing sixteen knots an hour and keeping a level keel." As she depicted her fellow passengers to Gordon, she observed that "876 (exactly) third-class passengers, all Spaniards from the Canaries and the ports of Spain," came on board at Havana, and, as a result, combined with the first- and second-class passengers, 1200 people were crammed into space designed comfortably for 500.

Information now available in maritime archives reveals that Porter

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## Porter's "Magic" at "A Salute to Katherine Anne Porter"

What follows is a slightly edited transcription of the introduction to and discussion after the staged reading of Porter's short story "Magic" performed by Jewell Robinson at the "Salute to Katherine Anne Porter" held at Hornbake Library on the campus of the University of Maryland on April 13, 2003. The names of the participants have been abbreviated and include Beth Alvarez (RMA), Jackson R. Bryer (JRB), Jewell Robinson (JR), Janis P. Stout (JPS), Darlene H. Unrue (DHU), and Alexandra D. Subramanian (ADS).

**RMA:** "Magic" was probably written in early 1927. The earliest reference to it that I have located appears in an undated letter to her friend, the poet Genevieve Taggard. In it, Porter, who like Taggard, was living in New York City, mentions her editing work for J. H. Sears and

asks to meet with Taggard for lunch. At the bottom of the letter, after her signature and address, Porter adds, "Want to show you that story 'Magic.'" In 1965 when her stories were being collected into the volume that won the National Book Award, Porter wrote that "Magic" was based on a "story told me by a mulatto woman—then my maid in New Orleans who had worked in a Basin Street house." Ten years earlier in a letter to her publisher, she called it "a little low-life gloss on the gay New Orleans Amy knew" (KAP to Donald Brace, 30 January 1955). Amy is a character in the section of her short novel "Old Mortality" that is set in the period between 1885 and 1902. Apparently witchcraft was very much on Porter's mind in 1927. In a letter of September of that year, she associated snooping "around Voodoo doctors in Louisiana" with "Cotton Mather and the Witchcraft delusion," Mather being the subject of a never-published biography on which Porter began work at this time (KAP to Isidore Schneider, 11 September 1927).

"Magic" saw publication in the summer 1928 issue of *transition*, the first of Porter's stories to appear in one of the so-called "little magazines." In a 1961 memoir entitled "A Year of Disgrace," Porter's friend and fellow writer Josephine Herbst recalled the events of 1927 and explained the significance of these "little magazines":

"The little magazines, so different from the academic organs they were to become, tempted,

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Jewell Robinson, Jackson R. Bryer, Janis Stout, Darlene Unrue, Alexandra Subramanian, and Beth Alvarez during the discussion period after the staged reading of "Magic," Hornbake Library, April 13, 2003. Photograph by Mike Morgan.



## Katherine Anne Porter Society

*The Newsletter of the Katherine Anne Porter Society* is published at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, by the Katherine Anne Porter Society. Membership inquiries and renewals should be directed to Beth Alvarez, Archives and Manuscripts, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland 20742, [alvarez@umd.edu](mailto:alvarez@umd.edu). Entries for the annual bibliographical essay on Porter should be addressed to Christine Hait, Department of English, Columbia College, Columbia, South Carolina 29203, [chrishait@colacoll.edu](mailto:chrishait@colacoll.edu). Articles, announcements, and comments for the newsletter should also be sent to Beth Alvarez.

The officers of the Katherine Anne Porter Society are Beth Alvarez, President and Newsletter Editor; Darlene Unrue, Past President; and Janis Stout, Secretary. Members of the Executive Committee are Beth Alvarez, Thomas Austenfeld (North Georgia College & State University), Virginia Spencer Carr (Georgia State University), Christine Hait (Columbia College), John Edward Hardy (emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago), George Hendrick (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Janis Stout, and Darlene Unrue. Michael Yates provides editorial support for the newsletter editor.

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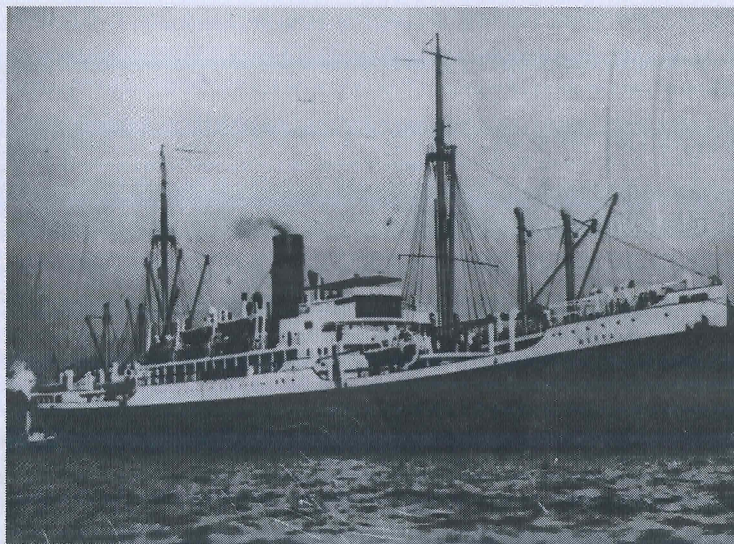
## KAP Society Membership

Katherine Anne Porter Society annual dues are \$10 a year. Checks made payable to KAP Society, UNLV Foundation, should be mailed to Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD 20742. The KAP Society has tax exempt status through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Foundation, the fundraising arm of UNLV.

## The Good Ship Werra

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was for the most part correct in her description of the *Werra*, for indeed it was a very small ship by standards of the time. One hundred, sixty yards long and barely twenty yards wide, it weighed a little under ten tons and had one funnel and two masts. Its average speed was 12.5 knots an hour. And she was right about the crowding. It supposedly had space for seventy-



*North German Lloyd SS Werra, 1931. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

four first-class, ninety second-class, and 506 third-class passengers. But the ship's owners made the accommodations sound more comfortable than they were, euphemistically describing "dormitories" for the third-class passengers that were a far cry from the "very miserable, hot, not clean" lower quarters Porter thought suitable in size for only 100 persons at best and in fact better suited for cattle.

Once landed in Germany and moving along to France, Porter seemed ready to put the *Werra* behind her except for making it the setting of the little story she had in mind. But that little story attached itself to the last of three parts of a long autobiographical novel she had conceived in the late 1920s and became the germ around which her long novel started forming. By the mid 1930s, she was writing scenes for the work that would become *Ship of Fools*, and, by 1962 when it was published, images of the *Werra* had been in her creative consciousness for thirty years. After 1931 she wouldn't have made an effort to chronicle the ship further—she had no reason to do so—but she might have been surprised to know the ship's remaining history after she and Pressley disembarked in Bremen.

The ship, which had been built by A. B. Weser for the *Norddeutscher* Company of Bremen, had made its maiden voyage February 3, 1923, from Bremen to East Asia. Between 1923 and 1931 it had made voyages to Asia and North, Central, and South America. In 1935 the ship was sold to the Italian line Genoa, which renamed it *Calabria* and made it available for Italian troop movement. The following year ownership was transferred to the Triestino line. On June 10, 1940, the ship was seized near Calcutta by British authorities and turned over to the British India Steam Navigation Company. December 8, 1940, on a trip from Freetown, Scotland, near Glasgow, about 380 miles west of Galway, Ireland, the *Werra/Calabria* was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U. 103. Since *Ship of Fools*, evolving in Porter's mind at the time, analyzes, among other phenomena, the roots of Nazism, she surely would have seen the irony in it all.

\* Wonder what a *Lloyd* ship is? *Germanischer Lloyd* was founded in Hamburg in 1867 as an organization for safety and quality control in the shipping industry. Now a non-profit foundation, the organization has continued inspection of vessel design and development of marine safety technology. A ship that announces itself as a "Lloyd" vessel, as did the *Werra*, is asserting its verified safety status.

## KAP Fiction Prize at University of Maryland

The winners of the annual graduate student poetry and fiction competitions sponsored by the Creative Writing Program in English of the University of Maryland read from their works on Wednesday, May 5, 2004, in the Ulrich Recital Hall of the Tawes Fine Arts Building. The Katherine Anne Porter Fiction Prize went to Andrew Gretes for "Future0 Days." Honorable mention was awarded to Emily Manus for "Alone" and to Michelle Von Euw for "Stand Still." The Porter Prize was established with an endowment from the Literary Trust of the Estate of Katherine Anne Porter, during the tenure of the late Isabel Bayley.



## Discovering Porter

By Christine Grogan,  
University of Richmond

I first came across the work of Katherine Anne Porter in the spring of 2003. At that time, I was enrolled in Dr. Welford Taylor's class "American Literature between the Wars" at the University of Richmond, and, although Porter's stories were not required reading for the course, Dr. Taylor thought that I would enjoy writing a paper on "Flowering Judas." On the first read, I was instantly captivated by Porter's crafted style: like Hemingway, she had mastered the literary virtue of simplicity. But even more so than her unique style was her subject matter. What immediately caught my eye was her emphasis on religion and sex—two subjects that were taboo for women of her time to discuss at all, let alone together.

The more I read Porter's work, the more I noticed her ambivalence regarding spiritual and sexual love, which she addresses through her memorable female characters Violeta and Laura. I was immediately intrigued by this woman who wrote like a cradle-Catholic but actually converted to Catholicism in the midst of a troubled marriage and who, nearing the end of her life, claimed to have been as devout a Catholic as one who has had three divorces can be.

Thinking that I had stumbled on something new, I grew disappointed when I turned to the criticism on KAP and realized that scholars had noticed the same thing. In fact, many critics responded to Porter's 20-page "Flowering Judas" with novel-length commentary, most of which touched on the religious and sexual aspects. However, the commentary shied away from addressing Porter's conflicted religious and sexual stance. So when it came time to write my Master's thesis, I felt compelled to write about Katherine Anne Porter's notorious virgins—female sexuality and Catholicism in her works. I set out to prove that although Porter seemed especially interested in the Catholic beliefs held by young girls like herself, she was never consistent in either rejecting or embracing her religion. Although I focused on the female characters in "Virgin Violeta," "Flowering Judas," and "Old Mortality," I soon found myself making parallels to Porter's own life.

I hesitate to make any statement with conviction when discussing Porter's life for she oftentimes contradicted herself: as many critics have said "one must regard Porter with almost the same caution with which one regards Faulkner." Admittedly, this was frustrating at first, but I soon started to enjoy reading one account about how Porter reveled in the aesthetics of the Catholic Church and another about how she cursed St. Jerome for his statements about Eve. In addition to her statements about religion, Porter's views on sex were just as varied. In an interview with Enrique Hank Lopez, she claimed she had no desire for sex, being frigid as a cucumber after her first failed marriage and not remarrying for twenty-six years. However suspicion was placed on her self-proclaimed celibacy after I read in Joan Givner's biography that she had four husbands and thirty-seven lovers.

Well, to do justice to my paper and to get a better sense of the real Porter, I went to the source itself: I visited the University of Maryland and toured the KAP Room and the Porter library. Fortunately, Dr. Beth Alvarez readily welcomed me and encouraged my research. As the late Thomas Walsh rightly noted, Dr. Alvarez "knows her way around

Porter's papers better than anyone," and I really couldn't have asked for a better "tour guide." It was during those visits that I got a taste of who Katherine Anne Porter really was. From the glamour shot hung on the wall to the brightly-colored coffin in the corner of the KAP Room, I discovered that Katherine Anne Porter, the woman, was just as unique as Katherine Anne Porter, the writer.

Needless to say, devoting months to one paper is an exhausting yet exhilarating experience. This past semester has been spent writing and rewriting my thesis. Although I had a clear focus when I began my paper, the more I learned about Porter, the more tangents I went off on. But I think those "tangents" were all too familiar to Porter. One of my favorite Porter quotes says that she would have been able to do much more if she wasn't distracted by any man who managed to jimmy his way into her life!

Although far from finished and even further from perfect, my thesis is defended and turned in. Just when I thought I had read every story about Porter, Dr. Taylor shared a couple more during the defense. He had the pleasure of hearing her speak, and he attested to her mesmerizing presence, enchanting beauty, and social grace. All in all, I can honestly say that I could not have chosen a better writer to study these past few months. It is true that Katherine Anne Porter's life was just as fascinating as her works of art. Discovering this talented woman was the capstone to my Master's work. And even though I never met Porter, for she died the same year that I was born, I am confident that she shined as brightly as that emerald ring she bought after the publication of *Ship of Fools*, which became a symbol of not only her literary success but also her personal fulfillment.

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## Porter Inducted Into Texas Literary Hall of Fame

Katherine Anne Porter was one of the inaugural inductees into the Texas Literary Hall of Fame that opened Saturday, May 8, 2004, during a gala event at the Fort Worth Central Library. A 8-foot-by-14-foot mural by Marjorie Stark Buckley entitled "Texas Tales" is the centerpiece of the installation; it includes scenes from Texas history and depicts the eight original members of the Hall of Fame. A project of the Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library, the Hall of Fame honors authors whose body of work contributes to Texas literary heritage and provides educational opportunities to citizens of all ages. Two of the inaugural inductees, John Graves and Horton Foote, attended the dedication ceremony at the library, located at 500 W. Third Street in Fort Worth. In addition to Katherine Anne Porter, the other original Hall of Fame authors featured in the mural are Larry McMurtry, Shelby Hearon, Elmer Kelton, Walter Prescott Webb, and J. Frank Dobie.

Master of Ceremonies for the event was Don Graham, the J. Frank Dobie Regents Professor of American and English Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. Each Hall of Fame member was presented with an etched glass award designed by Mark Avant of Avant Design Studio of Arlington, Texas. At the ceremony, Fort Worth author and poet Betsy Colquitt accepted the award for Katherine Anne Porter. The award has been donated to the University of Maryland Libraries' Special Collections and is now part of the permanent display in the Katherine Anne Porter Room in Hornbake Library.



## Porter's "Magic"

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teased, provoked, and ridiculed. The editors of *The Little Review* might publicly disagree, one stating that Hart Crane had better drop dead, the other claiming him as the finest of the hour. Irresponsible in any academic sense, the little magazines steered widely, invited hugely, and didn't care a rap if they printed a shapeless imitation of Joyce by a youngster from Davenport alongside a hunk of the actual Joyce. A writer might flit with ease from the pages of *The Little Review* to *The Dial* or on the same day send one manuscript to *transition* and another to H. L. Mencken. Or be aware that in the publishing house of Charles Scribner's Sons, Maxwell Perkins would be sorting the wheat from the chaff and, reading the little magazines, would know your name before he knew you. Whether it was the more solid, dignified *Dial*, whether it was the little magazine, the stage was set for an international set of players; the era that gave the Model T Ford to the farmers opened the world to its literary young on a scale never before ventured and not equaled since." ("A Year of Disgrace," in *The Starched Blue Sky of Spain and Other Memoirs* [New York: Harper-Collins, 1991] p. 74)

In the summer 1928 issue of *transition*, Porter's "Magic" was in illustrious company. The cover illustration was by Pablo Picasso. The first piece of fiction in it was a "continuation" of James Joyce's work-in-progress, *Finnegans Wake*. The copy of this particular issue in Porter's papers still has its cover attachment touting the contents: "The New Literature of America/ New York: 1928, A Manifesto/ 35 Young American Writers/ What Europe Thinks of the U. S./ James Joyce/ Picasso/ Gertrude Stein/ Man Ray." Other contributors included some of Porter's New York friends: Malcolm Cowley, Slater Brown, Kenneth Burke, Robert Coates, Matthew Josephson, John Herrmann, and Genevieve Taggard. The last of these, Taggard, is the person to whom she may have shown the story in 1927.

Although "Magic" is the shortest of Porter's stories, apparently she judged it worthy. It was included in the first collection of her work, *Flowering Judas* (1930) as well as in *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1935), *The Old Order* (1955), and her *Collected Stories* (1965).

Discussion moderated by Professor Jackson R. Bryer following staged reading of "Magic" by Jewell Robinson:

**JRB:** Jewell, I'll give you a chance to say something first because I think it would be interesting to hear what your impressions were just coming to the story cold. When I called you and asked whether you would like to read this story, I assumed you had never read it before. I just wondered what you thought about it.

**JR:** I hadn't read it before. When I got the call, I said yes because it was Jackson. And then Beth called me and told me what the story was about, and I said, "I don't play maids. But I will read the story and determine after reading it whether or not I'm willing to read it for you." And I liked it. I read Katherine Anne Porter when I was in high school and in college. That was such a long time ago that I realized that a lot of what I read in the past were kind of foggy memories. I really

enjoyed reading her, but I hadn't read anything of hers recently except for a piece we did a reading of at the National Portrait Gallery where I'm the Public Program Director. We do some programs about the people whose portraits we have in our collections. So this piece was a surprise, and it was kind of interesting because a lot of times you have connections that you hadn't counted on. I did a piece on stage season before last called "Gris Gris" which was about Marie Laveaux, who was queen of the voodoo in New Orleans. I delved into voodoo then quite a bit, and I thought this was an interesting perspective on that religion, which is what it is, and different from what is called hoodoo in other places, which is an aberration of voodoo worship. So I read this as a really interesting piece.

And by the way, I would like to say that the reason why I don't play maids is because I don't want to be pigeonholed. I don't want to be stereotyped as an actress. I've played Sarah Bernhardt, so I've done a wide range of roles. I have no problem with doing maids when they are not demeaned in the piece. There is nothing wrong with working with your hands, with working in service, but I do not want to do anything that is demeaning to African American people. This story, I think, is not. Also the fact that she was not, indeed, working in the house herself but working as the servant made it more interesting, and I agreed, and happily so, to do this for Jackson and also for Beth.

**JRB:** Janis, you want to start us with some remarks about, perhaps, how you see this in terms of Porter's work?

**JPS:** I'll try. Beth and I have known each other for some years now, and she knows very well that I habitually start with the apology that I am a reader of novels and poetry, and the short story just scares the hell out of me. So why work on Katherine Anne Porter? She's just so good. You have to set aside these limits of your own when you come to material that's really so wonderful and so artful. "Magic" I have always thought was a cryptic and a puzzling little story. But there are two particular things about it that interest me, and I am curious to see to what extent we will overlap in our particular interests. One, I've always thought it was a story that was very powerful about social class and economic exploitation, done with Porter's typical indirection and subtlety; but, nevertheless, the theme is there. In this evening's reading, when you came to the line, "it is a business . . . like any other," that line never really jumped out for me so much until I heard you read it. The other aspect of this story that particularly interests me is how it fits into Porter's emphasis on her Southern identity, which is one of the big puzzles in dealing with Katherine Anne Porter. She, indeed, was so determined to present herself as a Southerner, which really she was, being from Texas; but Texas can also be conceived as the West or the Southwest, and she wanted none of that. She wanted the South. She was so determined that she told people she was from Louisiana when, in fact, she was born in Texas. But Louisiana was more to the east, closer to the Old South. It seems to me that when we look at Porter's self-construction as a Southerner, sometimes we can almost see her portraying herself that way, accumulating the stage settings, if you will, for constructing herself as a Southerner. How New Orleans fits into that has a special significance of its own in her construction of herself as a Southerner.

**DHU:** I love the story. I think it is so rich and so complex, and it is amazing to me that there is so much meaning in those three pages. I thought the reading was brilliant and really conveyed the depth and



richness of the story. When I read it now, I try to think of what possibly is the deep kernel of personal experience in that story because Katherine Anne Porter said once that everything she wrote had a kernel of her real experience in it. She had warned a graduate student that it might be hard to find that kernel of experience; that's a challenge for those of us who work on Katherine Anne Porter, either her life or her fiction--to find out where the real life is in her works. I think she probably did hear a story similar to the one she wrote, but I doubt that it was the same story. I think that the story we hear and read today is something that has layers of her own experience, some far earlier than the story was written and some fairly close to the writing. I noticed in the *Collected Stories*, Beth, that she dated the story 1924, which I found interesting because we don't think that she started drafting it until sometime in 1927 and probably didn't finish it until the early months of 1928. So why did she link it to 1924? In 1914, when she was in Louisiana, not New Orleans, but in one of the western areas of Louisiana with her sister, she was trying to support herself and her sister by singing ballads on the Lyceum circuit. She said that she met an old woman during that period who told her stories about New Orleans and about voodoo. Whether that was the woman who told her the story about Ninette or not, we can't really know, but I would say that that possibly was the time she heard the story. She said also that it took her about ten years for the real experience to transform itself into art and that she thought maybe persons wouldn't be able to recognize the original story in what she finally produced.

I think that the story is about all the things other critics have seen in it. I think it is about class and equity, and it's about class conflict. I think it's also personal to her in that she had gone through a dreadful marriage, a very abusive marriage, in which she was beaten by her first husband. I found it really interesting that the madam in the brothel loves to beat the prostitutes over the head. Also we find that our narrator, as she becomes more and more enthusiastic in the telling of the tale, gets a little rough with Madame Blanchard, who says, "You are pulling a little here." At one point in this dreadful first marriage, Katherine Anne Porter was beaten unconscious by her then-husband with a hairbrush. And it was a head beating; so I think there is something very personal there. If we look at it in one way, she felt trapped in that first marriage because she didn't have any place else to go. She was uneducated. Her father and her younger sister simply were itinerant. They were vagabonds. They wandered around and visited relatives, and she felt as though she had no choice but to stay in an abusive marriage until finally she did bolt in 1914. She tried marriage again after that first one also. And I think she felt that a woman in her circumstances at that time and in that place simply had no economic choice but to remain either in the first case in an abusive marriage or to continue to look for a man who would take care of her. In 1924 she herself suffered a still birth, and I think there is an allusion to what possibly is a miscarriage in the story when Ninette is beaten by the madam. The bleeding suggests that she might have been suffering a miscarriage.

The other point I would like to make briefly is that I don't think we've given enough attention to the narrator. We think of her as being the conveyor of the real story, which is the story of Ninette and the madam in the brothel, but the narrator is also very important. Maybe it's the relationship between Madame Blanchard and the nar-

rator that is the real subject of the story. She had worked very hard in the brothel. We don't really know until later in the story that she worked as a chamber maid. She just tells us in the beginning that she worked in the fancy house. We could easily enough assume that she herself had been a prostitute, but later she says that she was cleaning the room that Ninette falls back into. She says she's happy to be in the Blanchard house because it is so serene. That's not very different from what Ninette supposedly says when she returns to the brothel--that she is happy to be there and she lives there quietly. The narrator entertains Madame Blanchard by telling her this horrible story; she says it will "rest you." Another meaning of the word "rest" is, perhaps, calm you down. Remember, Madame has said something to the laundress that might have an ambiguous meaning. She says that the sheets must be bewitched because they fall away in the wash. I am not sure that she means that they disintegrate but maybe that they disappear; there is an implied accusation that the laundress is stealing the linens or stealing the sheets. This is not very different--it's perhaps a more genteel version, but it's not very different--from what the madam in the brothel accuses Ninette of. It's still about money. So one of the interesting ways of looking at the narrator is that she's maybe delivering a little warning to Madame to not carry the abuse too far or not make the accusation too serious because, after all, and she says this three times, she compares herself with the cook, the cook who delivered the charm, who set up the charm and carried it out, and brought Ninette back. And she says she's "colored like myself." She has French blood "like myself." She has lived "among people who worked spells," who work magic "like myself." So if the cook could do this, then the narrator might very well do some magic of her own; it may be a subtle warning. She's also, perhaps, ensuring her security. She's like the woman in *1001 Nights* who saves her own life, perhaps, her economic survival, by entertaining the king. In this case, she entertains her employer by making the story so interesting that Madame wants to hear more.

**ADS:** That was very interesting, and I also thought the reading was brilliant. I have a few quotes from the story, and I wish I could say them in the same way. Darlene spoke about the earlier part of Porter's life and marriage, and I'd like to say a few words about my own research. When I read this story in light of my dissertation work, I made a few parallels between the way that Porter felt ultimately about her publishers and the way that--I know this might be dangerous--but the way Ninette feels about her madam. In "Magic," Madame Blanchard's servant relates a story that paints a vivid picture of economic exploitation. She tells Madame Blanchard that the prostitute Ninette is forced to give all the checks she's earned every week to the madam at the house who in turn only returns to Ninette a very small percentage of the money: "it is a business, you see, like any other--and the madam used to pretend the girl had given back only so many checks, you see, and really she had given many more, but after they were out of her hands, what could she do? So she would say, I will get out of this place, and curse and cry." The servant goes on to explain to Madame Blanchard that the madam of the fancy house unfairly used debt to control her employees: "It was nearly always about money, the girls got into debt so, and if they wished to go they could not without paying every sou marqué. The madam had full understanding with the

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police; the girls must come back with them or go to the jails." Ninette and the other prostitutes lived in a state of peonage, and the madam might best be described as a jailer rather than an employer.

I found this part of the story fascinating in that it reflected exactly how Porter came to see her own business partnerships with her publishers. While Porter cultivated strong personal friendships with her editors, these alliances over time always dissolved into acrimonious disputes, which, for Porter, resulted in bitterness and a sense of powerlessness and betrayal. The writer's publishers insisted upon loyalty, and she came to view the tactics they used to ensure her loyalty as manipulative and mercenary. Ultimately she framed her alliances with publishers in terms of economic and artistic incarceration. Her indebtedness to her publishers financially, in addition to her unfulfilled contracts, caused her to think of herself as living in a state of peonage to use her word. She ultimately referred to her publishers at Harcourt, Brace as her "jailers." In a letter to her editor Donald Brace, in which she declares her intention to abandon her contracts and pay back her debt if she could, she described her impending liberation from these contracts as equivalent to leaving her "cell," so she could "really live in the world" (KAP to Donald Brace, 9 September 1952). Porter threatened to leave Harcourt, Brace on several occasions when her frustrations with the firm came to a boiling point. But she did not gain the courage to leave the firm for twenty-five years, and she only did so when her editor Donald Brace died in 1955. Her feelings of resentment toward the house culminated when the new president of the firm, Bill Jovanovich, when trying to convince her not to leave Harcourt, Brace, informed her that she "belonged" to the firm and in Porter's words "belittled her chances of ever getting out of debt to them." According to his logic, she was a valuable "property," whose loyalty must be maintained because she "owed something to the stock holders" (KAP to Donald Elder, 23 October 1955). Porter's pride as an artist was wounded, and her fears of being viewed as a mere commodity were confirmed.

She had expressed her anxiety over this issue a few years earlier when she explained to one of her editors that she planned to abandon her oppressive contracts and pay back her debt to the firm through teaching or other means. Although she did not follow through with the plan, her choice of words reveals the sense of defeat she felt when it came to business arrangements that suffocated her artistic spirit and made her yearn for liberation: "At least I shall be using that part of my life and capabilities that are in my own hands. I can control it somewhat and not just be used as a commodity of doubtful value or as a stick for somebody to beat somebody else with or as a disputed old bone and not a very juicy one" (KAP to Catherine Carver, 23 December 1952). Here we see the way Porter had internalized her conviction that her publishers had reduced her to a mere property, depriving her of her artistic integrity and her humanity. Her language of powerlessness, defilement, and degradation reminds us of the violent beatings the madam inflicted upon Ninette to exert psychological control, punish her rebelliousness, and ensure her servitude. Although over the years Porter had cultivated deep and rewarding friendships with her editors, these friendships were always sullied because of her deep-seated resentment of the ways

in which she believed the economics of publishing tampered with the integrity and freedom of the artist. Throughout her writing life, Porter's experiences with publishers strengthened her belief that business alliances too often punished and debased the weaker party. Like Ninette, however, Porter felt bound to her business partners not because she was happy to be there but because she believed she needed them for economic reasons and to promote her art. At the age of eighty-five, Porter had this to say about the dangers and pitfalls of the publishing business. "My dear fellow artists, I suggest that you go ahead and do your work and do it as you please and refuse to allow any force, any influence (that is to say, any editor or publisher) to tamper with your life or debase your work. You are practicing an art and they are running a business and just keep that in mind" (quoted in Tillie Olsen, *Silences* [New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1978], p. 12).

**JRB:** All of that bespeaks the deep ambivalence Katherine Anne Porter felt as a woman in the period of the twentieth century in which she lived. She wanted to be independent at the same time as she was obviously very aware of her dependence on men, and it seems as if that also operated in her relationships with publishers. From what little I know of people who knew her, that was one of the deepest ambivalences in her life: namely her desire to be independent but her awareness that she couldn't altogether be independent and that, in fact, she wanted to depend on others, especially some of the men in her life. She was a very independent person. As many of you know, the reason Maryland has her papers is that she gave them to the Library of Congress and then turned around and decided that she wanted to withdraw them and just took them away and brought them to the University of Maryland. That's not the action of somebody who is a meek, dependent person; that's a pretty gutsy thing to do. On the other hand, there was an aspect of her that was very aware of her role as a woman in a male-dominated society in the twentieth century. From the way Alexandra describes her relationships with publishers, that ambivalence existed there too. So I wondered in terms of the story, which you could see as similarly ambivalent, I think, whether any of you think that might play into it or is that a completely crazy way to look at it?

**DHU:** I would only say this. Based on what Alexandra has said, what I said, and what Janis said, one way to look at it is that the brothel is a metaphor for a publishing house and also for marriage.

**JRB:** And for a kind of authoritarian society that she was constantly fighting against, whether it was male-dominated or just power-dominated.

**JPS:** Of course, in a publishing house, you frequently just refer to "the house."

**ADS:** Also she was drawn to relationships with men, to romantic relationships and to these torrid romances, and just enjoyed that whole game. At the same time, in her papers we see her compare marriage to incarceration. But with her publishers, I said, they were very strong relationships; they were incredibly strong. They were almost like literary marriages for her. She just became so deeply involved with them, in particular, with Seymour Lawrence, without whom she probably wouldn't have succeeded in finishing *Ship of Fools*. She was pushing seventy when she was really in the stretch, and he was in his late twenties, and their relationship was just extraordinarily intimate and interdependent, but it is was very paternalistic as well. She needed and cultivated those relationships very strongly; but at the same time, there was always



# The Year's Work on Katherine Anne Porter: 2002 (and 2003)

By Christine H. Hait,  
Columbia College,  
Columbia, South Carolina

In previous essays, I and, before me, Janis Stout reviewed Porter scholarship published two years before the year of the newsletter. This year, with the newsletter going to press a little later in the year, I review Porter scholarship published two years ago and last year.

## Books

*Adolescent Hero in the Works of Katherine Anne Porter and J.D. Salinger*, by Rashmi Gupta, published in India in 2003 by Atlantic, makes connections between the Miranda stories and *The Catcher in the Rye*. The adolescent hero of Salinger's novel and the adolescent heroine of the Miranda stories both experience alienation and feel adrift in a modern world cut off from sustaining values and traditions.

## Chapters in Books

Not included in last year's essay, *Catholic Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Mary R. Reichardt and published by Greenwood Press in 2001, offers an entry on Porter written by Russell Elliott Murphy. Focusing on Porter's relationship to Catholicism, Murphy presents a brief biography of Porter, a review of her major themes, and a response to the relevant criticism. Murphy does not survey Porter's work for specific allusions to Catholicism. Instead he investigates "how its tenets inform her fiction." He argues that through her protagonists' "lack of belief in something greater than self," Porter exposes "the poverty of self-reliance, a perennial Catholic theme."

*The History of Southern Women's Literature*, edited by Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weak and published by Louisiana State University Press in 2002, includes an entry on Porter written by Janis Stout. Porter, a "border southerner" and a "genuine cosmopolitan," offered a perspective on the South uniquely her own. Stout's essay helps readers to form a full and accurate picture of Porter as a writer with connections to the South; the volume in which the essay is included makes a significant contribution to Southern literary studies and offers an important context in which to view Porter.

## Articles

Beth Martin Birky's "Katherine Anne Porter's 'The Grave': Women's Writing and Re-visioning Memory," *Journal of the Association of Research and Mothering* 4.2 (2002): 51-64, is part of a special issue on "Mothering and Literature." Using Adrienne Rich's concept of "re-visioning," Birky offers a personal example of how feminist reading offers strategies for survival. She weaves together a discussion of feminist reading, a reading of Porter's story "The Grave," and an account of her miscarriage experience in order to demonstrate the "way . . . reading women's literature can frame the unexpected and incomprehensible moments of . . . life."

According to Tammy Horn, critics who recognize the importance of dress in "Old Mortality" tend to focus on particular outfits in the story,

Amy's wedding dress and Eva's second-hand clothes, for example, to the exclusion of others. In "Re-dressing the Past: Dresses as Domestic Texts in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Old Mortality,'" *Kentucky Philological Review* 16 (2002): 27-31, Horn focuses on Amy's Mardi Gras outfits. She argues that Amy "reveals more of herself and her body with each successive Mardi Gras costume" and that the story presents a "steady shedding of the Grandmother's narratives."

An 1825 incident known as the Kentucky Tragedy serves as the basis for William Gilmore Simms's *Charlemont* (1856). In Simms's novel, Margaret Cooper, a "beautiful, intelligent, heroine," is "gradually led astray—deceived, seduced, and abandoned." Caroline Collins, in "Jilted Southern Women: The Defiance of Margaret Cooper and Her Twentieth-Century Successors," *Studies in the Novel* 35.2 (2003): 178-192, compares Cooper to two other misused Southern heroines: Hulga Hopewell of Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" and Ellen Weatherall of Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Like Margaret Cooper, Ellen Weatherall is "hounded by a relentless inner voice." Collins points out the striking similarities between the characters' experience of betrayal.

Porter's "That Tree" has received little extended critical discussion, so Elena Ortells Monton's "Teaching K. A. Porter's 'That Tree,'" *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 7.2 (2003): 278-283, is a welcomed addition to Porter scholarship. The story, I suspect, is rarely taught, but teachers who read this article may be inspired to teach it, as the author makes a compelling argument for its value as a teachable text. The story offers the author, who teaches English Rhetoric and Poetics at the University Jaume I of Castello, Spain, an opportunity to apply theories found in Susan Lanser's *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction and Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Using Lanser's "poetics of point of view" as a framework, the author helps her students analyze the story's narrator, an American expatriate in Mexico, encouraging them to pay close attention to the narrator's stance or "relation to the discourse content or 'message' or narrated world." The article offers teachers specific step-by-step instructions for introducing students to various aspects of the narrator's stance in the story.

## Dissertations

Ruth Frendo, in "The Tyranny of the Soul: Mind, Body, and Humanity in Katherine Anne Porter, Caroline Gordon, and Flannery O'Connor," *DAI* 63.04C (2002): AAIC809598, completed at University of Essex, analyzes representations of the body in the writings of Porter, Gordon, and O'Connor. The authors' representations reflect both traditional Christian thought and modern ideologies concerning the mind and the body.

Because Porter wrote in a "Freud-saturated culture" and explored the themes of "death, motherhood, and sexuality," Freudian theory provides an appropriate lens for viewing Porter's long stories. Eric Rygaard Gray, in "Death and Katherine Anne Porter: A Reading of the Long Stories (Sigmund Freud)," *DAI* 64.06A (2003): AAI3094048, completed at Oklahoma State University, focuses a different text by Freud upon each of Porter's long stories. The text by Freud and long story pairings include "Mourning and Melancholia" and "Old Mortality," *The Interpretation of Dreams* and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," *Civilization and Its Discontents* and "Hacienda," and "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" and "The Leaning Tower."

Rachel Season Habermehl explores the relationship between the



American Transcendental Movement and American Modernism in "Transcendental Legacies in American Modernism (William Carlos Williams, Katherine Anne Porter, John Steinbeck, Kurt Vonnegut)" *DAI* 64.05A (2003): AAI3090478, completed at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The modern writers discussed in the dissertation share a "preoccupation with the importance of human responsibility."

Maryann Rosella Donahue finds connections between twentieth-century American women's travel narratives and contemporary women's personal essays in "Modes of Motion: Travel in the Nonfiction Narratives of Twentieth-Century American Women Writers," *DAI* 64.01A (2003): AAI3079192, completed at University of Tulsa. The

experience of difference and "otherness" in foreign landscapes of writers Edith Wharton, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Mary McCarthy, and Porter is compared to the experience of "marginalization and alienation within familiar American environments" of contemporary women writers Joan Didion, Alice Walker, Dorothy Allison, and Mary Gordon. A chapter of the dissertation "explores how Porter positions herself within a geographic and cultural 'borderland' in her travel essays and how Allison achieves a similar effect through her metaphorical 'excavation' of confining sociopolitical categories in *Skin* and *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*."



that flipping point. The flip side of it was these incredibly strong emotions of bitterness and resentment and feeling that she'd been cheated, disempowered, and stomped on. There was always that contradiction.

**JR:** I wondered if you could tell me to what extent her father played a role in all this because he doesn't seem to have been very reliable in terms of just material things. But I wondered if some of her feelings about marriage and about being controlled had its genesis in her relationship with an unreliable father.

**JPS:** The one story that's told which, as far as I know, is quite literally true is that he favored whichever of his daughters happened to look prettier at the moment. He would push them away and say you're disgusting if they weren't dressed nicely and clean and then favor the other one because she was prettier. Sometimes I think you have to resent psychiatric theory because it's so darn accurate, and this is one of those times. Many people have observed that her sequence of husbands and lovers tended to reproduce the appearance of her father when she was a pubescent young girl--again and again the man is tall and blonde and about thirty.

**JR:** Because I was a psychology and not a theater major, those kinds of relationships can often be seen in other social settings as well. If you haven't worked out those issues, you carry them with you.

**JRB:** It also sounds as if she was very much anxious to please her father as well as being terribly resentful, and that that might be part of the ambivalence.

**Audience member:** I appreciate what you've all said, but what was fascinating to me was the ending because the ending is full of mystery. She doesn't tell us what actually happened, she leaves it to the reader to imagine what possibly could have happened. And I think that's the genius of the story.

**JRB:** Well, it is called "Magic."

**RMA:** I hadn't really thought about the point that Darlene made about the actual character who is narrating it. What is going to happen in that relationship?

**JRB:** After all, if she tells her what happened, then she removes the air of mystery between her and her employer. In other words, if she doesn't reveal what happened then there is always is, as Darlene said, the potential that she could do the same thing.

**JPS:** I thought the reading really brought out that indeterminacy of the ending very nicely, just hanging in the air.

**JR:** I was fascinated by this kind of power relationship between the narrator and Madame Blanchard. African Americans have always known that servants have their own ways of dealing with servitude, of outsmarting people that you work for and of finding ways to gain control. So there are always apocryphal stories about what some servant did to some particularly unpleasant employer. You can see just a little bit of control in the story.

**ADS:** What seems to be communicated to us about the character of Madame Blanchard is that she's so voyeuristic and enjoys hearing this horrible tale so much. She's really titillated and entertained by it. She doesn't seem to be at all shocked or disgusted or just touched by it. It's like she's watching a really, really good movie that she's really enjoying. It sort of makes her even more complicitous.

**Audience member:** Why did Katherine Anne Porter want to be known as a Southern writer rather than a Texan? What was to be

gained by being known as a Southern writer?

**JPS:** The South had a lot more cachet as far as being literary; it had very strong political and economic ties with England, but this carried over to an image matter. Texas, certainly at that time and, perhaps, even today, had an image of rawness, of being an upstart, of being uncultured.

**Audience member:** Of being obnoxious?

**JPS:** I am a Fort Worth girl; I would not have said that. But, for the most part, the Southerners who went to Texas--and Texas was originally settled mainly by Southerners who became the people in control of state government, there's been a lot of history work done on this--were a lower socio-economic class. There is an early memoir by a person whose name I can't think of at all at the moment who travelled through east Texas, and he said he never saw a more debased group of people in his life, but he didn't say obnoxious. I think, yes, she did not want to be associated with Texas.

**DHU:** Her idea also was that Texans invariably preferred regional writers. She didn't want to be known as a Texas writer or as a regional writer. She was very insistent that she be associated with writers throughout time and throughout the world, that she be considered a person who was establishing universal themes and that she not be relegated to Texas subjects and Texas themes. She thought that Texans, in those years, prized regional stories more than what she was writing. There was a point at which she would have liked to have been known as Texas writer, and I think that in the fifties she became convinced--and it was a misunderstanding--that the University of Texas was going to build a building, not just a room in a building, but a building and name it for her. She was quite thrilled about that, and I think at that point she would have loved to have been known as the Texas Katherine Anne Porter. But that didn't happen, and it was a great disappointment to her. That's when the Library of Congress got her papers, and they came here not long afterward.

**JRB:** The story of how they came here is, correct me if I'm wrong, is that when Maryland gave her an honorary degree she couldn't come to the ceremony. And the then president of the University of Maryland went to her apartment and conferred the degree on her.

**RMA:** Actually, it was in her very nice house in Spring Valley. And it was a very large affair; it wasn't just the president.

**JRB:** But she was so taken by that fact that she then decided that she would move her papers to the University of Maryland. Isn't that true?

**RMA:** Yes, but I think also one of the factors that had something to do with it was that Wilson Elkins and his wife were native Texans, and there was something there that resonated for her. She was extremely close to Dorothy Elkins. Unfortunately, Carole Elkins Neal has recently moved out of the area. She has her own stories of the relationship. Porter was extremely fond of Dorothy Elkins. There's a picture of Mrs. Elkins in the Porter Room because of that. I think that aspect of it was part of it. Actually Carole has characterized her mother as very much the Southern lady form of Texan, while some of Dorothy Elkins's sisters are women who ride the range, even today. So it's an interesting story.

**JRB:** And it's yet another one of the complicated things about Katherine Anne Porter!



## Nicholson Baker Awarded KAP Prize

By Michael Yates, University of Maryland

On May 19, 2004, Nicholson Baker received the Katherine Anne Porter Award in Literature of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in a ceremony held in New York City. Presented by 2004 National Book Award winner Shirley Hazzard, the biannual monetary award recognizes a fiction writer in mid-career. In addition to Hazzard, the jury included Anthony Hecht, John Hollander, Romulus Linney, Jane Smiley, and Edmund White.

Mr. Baker was born in New York City in 1957. He originally pursued an education in music and attended the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. After studying composition for two years, Baker enrolled at Haverford College where he completed an English degree in 1980. He went on to hold jobs as a Wall Street oil analyst and stockbroker, before moving to Berkeley, California. There, he attended a two-week seminar run by Donald Barthelme, whom Baker has cited as a strong influence on his work. In the late 1980s, Baker was published in *Atlantic Monthly* and *New Yorker*, and by 1987 he had devoted himself full time to writing.

The award citation calls Baker "the quintessential archivist" for his pursuit of "the pleasures of the small and the ephemeral . . . of moments, of fugitive thoughts, of what passes unnoticed." Speaking of his work, Baker has said "I want the books to be about the things that you don't notice when you're noticing them." His first two novels carry out this mission in exacting, exquisite detail. The first, *The Mezzanine* (1988), concerns itself with the thoughts and observation of the protagonist while he runs errands on his lunch break. *Room Temperature* (1990), reduces its time span to twenty minutes, as the narrator ruminates on the objects and impressions of his domestic environ-

ment. Baker next shifted his focus to erotic impulses with his next two novels. *Vox* (1992) consists of a phone conversation between its two protagonists, while *The Fermata* (1994) is the story of a man who can stop time and acts out his sexual peccadilloes while others are frozen in space. With *The Everlasting Story of Nory* (1998) and *A Box of Matches* (2003), Baker returned to an examination of the everyday, the former through the eyes of a nine-year old American girl attending school in England and the latter in the thoughts of a man using up the matches in a box by lighting a fire on successive mornings.

Along with his fiction, Baker's essays and non-fiction include *U and I: A True Story* (1991) about the influence of John Updike on his work; the collection *The Shape of Thoughts: Essays and Other Lumber* (1996); and *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (2001), a controversial argument against the destruction of libraries' holdings of newspapers and other paper-based materials. In 2001, *Double Fold* was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for general non-fiction. Baker has again provoked controversy with his latest book, *Checkpoint*, which consists of a conversation between a man who is preparing to assassinate President Bush and his friend who tries to dissuade him. *Checkpoint* was published in August 2004 by Knopf; Baker's other fiction and non-fiction remains in print in Vintage Books paperback editions.

An outgrowth of *Double Fold* was Baker's founding of the American Newspaper Repository in 1999 in order to save a collection of original newspapers that would otherwise have been destroyed or dispersed. By April 2004, the repository was relocated to the Library Services Center at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, to be overseen by the Rare Books and Special Collections division. If the terms of the gift agreement between the repository and the university are met, the collection becomes a gift to Duke University in 2005.

Baker currently lives in Maine, with his wife and their two children. He is the second recipient of the Katherine Anne Porter Award; the first was Lynn Freed who received the prize in 2002. The prize was established by the Literary Trust of Katherine Anne Porter.

### Katherine Anne Porter Society Membership Application/Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (work) \_\_\_\_\_

(home) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to the Katherine Anne Porter Society,  
UNLV Foundation; mail to Beth Alvarez, University of  
Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD 20742.

### 2005 American Literature Association Conference in Boston

The Katherine Anne Porter Session at the forthcoming American Literature Association conference will be chaired by Professor Thomas Austenfeld. The topic for the session will be "Determining the Tragic in Katherine Anne Porter's Life and Work." The panel welcomes papers examining tragic events in Porter's life and tragic tropes in her work. Suffering, illness, deprivation, and exile are prominent topics in Porter. How does she deal with these in stories, essays, and letters? On what philosophical traditions, if any, does she base her response? How is her approach distinct from that of other modernist writers? Please send proposals of 250 words to Professor Thomas Austenfeld, [taustenfeld@ngcsu.edu](mailto:taustenfeld@ngcsu.edu), by December 10, 2004.

The conference will be held at the Westin Copley Place Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts, May 25-29, 2005. Details of the conference and information about hotel reservations will appear on the Web site of the American Literature Association (<http://www.americanliterature.org>).



## KAP Young Writers' Book Forthcoming

Twelve participants in the Katherine Anne Porter Young Writers Program held at the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center in Kyle, Texas, have authored a children's book that will be published in October 2004 by the University of Texas Press. Begun in January 2004 as part of this innovative program, the work recounts the adventures of a crab who overcomes obstacles to attend college. It combines the talents of students, Michelle Detorie and Alexandra Landerso, from the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Texas State University in nearby San Marcos, who taught the high school students, and students from the Academy@Hays, an alternative high school in Kyle. As members of one of the country's premier creative writing programs, KAP instructors bring their unique perspectives to the classrooms, where they foster not only writing talent, but show students how to become better readers.

The forthcoming publication is one result of a project launched by the College for Texans campaign and backed by \$80,000 from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the campaign's parent agency. The Texas Legislature formed College for Texans in November to persuade students, especially minorities and those from low-income families, to plan for college. The goal is for 300,000 more Texans to attend college by 2015. According to the Director of College for Texans, Lynn Denton, when the book is published, it will be pushed throughout the state and possibly in schools around the country. Barnes & Noble will help promote it, and former Motown Vice President Jonathan Clark is putting together an accompanying CD of original music performed by students, the Huston-Tillotson choir, and others.

Director of Texas State's MFA program Tom Grimes said the biggest winners so far are the Kyle students. They all plan to go to college now, but, before they became involved in the program, that wasn't the case, he said. Part of the proceeds from the book will go toward scholarships for them. "What a better success story than that?" Grimes said. The KAP Writers Program, which began in summer 2002, is generously sponsored by the Burdine Johnson Foundation.



*Katherine Anne Porter House, Kyle, Texas, 2004. Courtesy of Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center and English Department, Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas.*

Additional information on the KAP Young Writers Program can be found on its Web site, <http://www.english.txstate.edu/kap/youngwriters/youngwriters-03.htm>.

In addition to serving as a home for the KAP Young Writers Program, the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center at 508 Center Street in Kyle serves as a venue for readings and talks by visiting writers, a museum, and a home for writers-in-residence. Writers who appeared at the seminar house for readings and books signings in the 2003-2004 academic career included Tim O'Brien, George Saunders, Carolyn Forché, and Roddy Doyle. Matt Oates continued to serve as Writer-in-Residence at the KAP House in 2003-2004. Funded by a grant from Curt Englehorn's "Angel" Foundation, the Writer-in-Residence lives in the house and acts as curator of the museum.

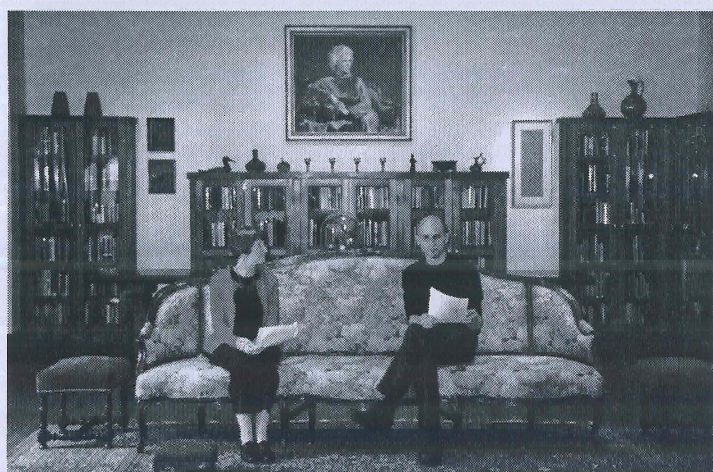
The Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center is open to visitors and school groups by appointment. To arrange a visit, call (512) 268-6637. Updated Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center information appears at <http://www.english.txstate.edu/kap/contact.htm>. Inquiries concerning Texas State's MFA in Creative Writing can be made through the program's Web site (<http://www.english.txstate.edu/MFA/default.html>), via email at [mfinearts@txstate.edu](mailto:mfinearts@txstate.edu), or by phone at (512) 245-7681.



## Porter Activities at the University of Maryland Libraries

By Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland

This report on the activities related to the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter and other Porter-related collections at the University of Maryland Libraries covers the period between May 2003 and April 2004. Four on-site researchers from Maryland, Texas, and Virginia, consulted Porter or Porter-related collections during this period. Telephone, mail, and e-mail inquiries were also been received from California, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas. I also communicated with individuals from Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Great Britain, India, the Netherlands, and Spain. During this period, the



Beth Alvarez and Jason Stieber during staged reading of KAP's "Rope" in the KAP Room, Hornbake Library, April 24, 2004.

Libraries supplied 677 Porter or Porter-related photocopies to meet researcher demand, provided five reproductions of photographs, and loaned eighteen reels of the microfilm edition of the Porter papers.

Clark Dobson, a devoted friend at the end of Porter's life, donated additional Porter and Porter-related materials for the Libraries' Clark Dobson Collection, including original manuscripts and letters, copies of books with Porter association, and photographs. Porter's nephew Paul Porter made a significant donation of valuable and, for some of them, unique photographs of and relating to Porter that have been incorporated into his papers. Bill and Fern Wilkins donated interesting correspondence Bill exchanged with John Malcolm Brinnin about Porter in 1977 and 1978. In addition, the Libraries benefited from Bill's volunteer efforts throughout the year.

There were 191 visitors to the Katherine Anne Porter Room in the last year, during which the room was open on fifty-five Monday and Thursday afternoons. Disappointingly, docent Dorothy Galvin was forced to retire; she was one of the first, with service that stretched back to November 1993. All of the remaining docents, Freddy Baer, Shirley Bauer, Beverly Lewoc, Joan Phelan, Betty Warner, and Maria Walsh, returned to serve in September 2003.

Visitors to the Porter Room from on-campus groups during the year included graduate students from the College of Information Studies and the Department of English. Groups that visited included the Association of Independent Maryland Schools

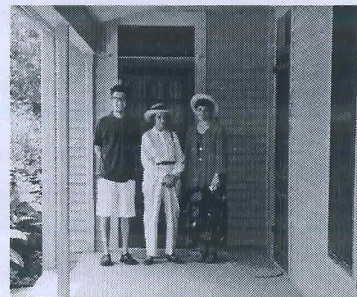


The Saturday Morning Quartet, Zeynep Dilli, Breno Imbiriba, Fredrica Baer, and Herbert Baer, after their performance in the KAP Room, April 24, 2004.

Librarians and the Maryland Caucus of the Mid-Atlantic Archives Conference. About forty individuals visited the Porter Room during our sixth all-campus open house on April 24, 2003. This year there were several events held in the Porter Room during the day. Docent Freddy Baer and her husband Herb's group, the Saturday Morning Quartet, performed a program of music by Pierre Certon, William Byrd, and Henry Purcell. Their program concluded with two pieces from *Katherine Anne Porter's French Song-Book*: "The King Beats the Drum" and "To Charlotte," performed a cappella by Zeynep Dilli accompanied by Breno Imbiriba on drum. Graduate assistant Jason Stieber and I performed a staged reading of Porter's "Rope." In addition, there was an opportunity for interested individuals to view Jim Day's 1973 interview with Porter, originally aired on WNET.

A highlight of the year was a trip to Texas in late July. Barbara Harr, Assistant Dean and Director of External Relations for the Libraries, and I enjoyed a visit with Paul Porter in Houston. In addition, Barbara and I travelled to Kyle where Writer-in-Residence Matt Oates gave Libraries' donor Virginia Phillips and the two of us a private tour of the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center.

Anyone who has questions concerning the Porter Room or the Libraries' Porter holdings should not hesitate to contact me, Curator of Literary Manuscripts, Archives and Manuscripts, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, 301-405-9298, [alvarez@umd.edu](mailto:alvarez@umd.edu). To locate the Katherine Anne Porter resources on the Libraries' Web site, begin at <http://www.lib.umd.edu/ARCV/litms> and follow the appropriate links.



Matt Oates, Virginia Phillips, and Barbara Harr on the front porch of the KAP House in Kyle, Texas, July 2003.



## New Study of Porter's Mexican Stories by Susana Jiménez Placer

Susana María Jiménez Placer, a professor at the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain, completed her Ph. D. in July 2003. Based, in part, on her research in Porter's papers and library conducted in April and May 1999, her dissertation, "Los relatos mexicanos en *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*: lenguaje, representación e identidad," offers a new approach to Porter's Mexican stories through the analysis of the linguistic attitudes of the main characters. Making use of some basic post-structuralist terms, she argues that some of the characters in Porter's Mexican stories suffer from an "excess of representation," an excess in the symbolic side of their discourse, while other characters suffer from a "defect of representation," a defect in the symbolic aspect of their discourse. Partly as a consequence of this, she argues, they can only barely achieve fulfillment in their lives.

Her study offers a new approach to "María Concepción," "Virgin Violeta," "The Martyr," "That Tree," "Flowering Judas," and "Hacienda," based on the linguistic attitudes shown by their characters. Some of the critical terms central to the works of Derrida, Kristeva, and Bakhtin constitute the theoretical background. According to Kristeva, human language has two basic functions: a representative, articulate and symbolic function separating language from immediate reality and a semiotic function containing the inarticulate and immediate expression of the human instinctual drives.

Jiménez Placer argues that, in Porter's fiction, the "excess of representation" usually stems from an excess of self-affection. This exaggerated self-love depends on the characters' elaboration of idealized images of themselves that are especially alive in their discourse. Since their words contain the essence of their self-affec(ta)tion, these characters see themselves forced to protect their discourse against any possible threat. For this reason, they constantly struggle to silence or at least control the words of other characters. Ironically, the discourse that carries these characters' self-representation is usually the discourse

of another, that is, it is usually fixed by an external authority and responds to the parameters that define Bakhtin's monologism. As a consequence of this subordination to the words of others, the discourse of these characters becomes divorced from their immediate reality--their everyday lives and their bodies. For them, the immediate reality, the present, and the body are consumed or even devoured by their words. These characters become actors and actresses who do not live their lives but represent their roles on the stage of a traditional drama--Derrida's theological stage--unconsciously enslaved to the external authority of another's text and subordinated to an unchangeable, repetitive representation. Their lives become mere representations, deprived of immediate, responsible acts. Braggioni of "Flowering Judas" and Rubén of "The Martyr" are among the characters who exhibit this "excess of representation."

The "defect of representation" in their discourse is a second problem affecting Porter's characters. She introduces characters who make use of articulate speech but insist on ignoring the distance, the symbolism, and the supplementary character on which linguistic articulation depends. Often these characters, when suddenly confronted with an "excess of representation," blame any linguistic distance as the space where lies and falsity originate in human speech. As a consequence, they become obsessed with eliminating this evil linguistic distance from their discourse. They try to provide their articulate speech with immediacy--linguistically destructive because the only immediacy possible in the linguistic articulation destroys language as such and transforms it into a mere object. Instead of searching for immediacy through the semiotic instinctive function of language, they do so through the articulate, symbolic function of language. Paradoxically, their rejection of linguistic distance and their need to protect this distance prevents them from making immediate contact with other human beings. Like the characters whose language evinces an "excess of representation," this second group also represents Bakhtin's monologic. Jimenez-Placer includes María Concepción of the story of the same title and Violeta of "Virgin Violeta" among those characters who exhibit a "defect of representation."

## Katherine Anne Porter School

By Yana Bland, Director

The Katherine Anne Porter School in Wimberley, Texas, celebrated Katherine Anne Porter's birthday in May 2004 with an Open Mike talent show of extraordinary variety and humor. Two student leaders, actress Remy Stephens and ballet dancer Michele Kitchen, organized the whole show. Comedy ruled the day, but musical talent was a close second. Many more parents and friends participated than expected.

KAPS's fourth year as an alternative high school situated in the beautiful hill country of Texas has been challenging. Federal funding was cut and costs are rising. In addition, more and more students are economically and educationally disadvantaged.

The pervasive social climate of violence, fear, and racism--exploited to mind-boggling extremes in TV shows, movies, and video games--affects young people more than most of us realize. Teenagers need to feel safe in their communities. As poverty increases and the social divide widens, it is hard for many to feel confident in progress and the benefits of life-long learning. It is not easy to contemplate the real possibility of being drafted to fight in foreign wars . . . . To think against the grain, to read between the lines, and to be open-minded, requires commitment and courage.

Katherine Anne Porter's writings revealed her acute sensitivity to the social climate. In her essay on the unjust conviction and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927, *The Never-Ending Wrong*, she takes a long look at class and race, and the deep injustices suffered by many people as a result. She also shows how difficult it is to take a meaningful stand for justice and equality, without being manipulated by others who have less admirable goals.

The high quality of the teachers at the Katherine Anne Porter School, the widespread support of parents and friends, and the ownership of the school by the students, all have created a very dynamic and diverse learning space.

We were thrilled to be able, for instance, to present three KAPS's students with our first ever KAPS Letter Jackets in May 2004. Derrick Hiebert-Flamm won first place in the UIL Current Events district competition; Lily Hill won second place in Ready Writing and was encouraged by the judge to pursue a writing career; and Luke Paireepinart won third place in Computer Science. Derrick is our 2004 valedictorian and was accepted by George Washington University with a \$37,000 scholarship. He plans to work for world peace. All thirty-four graduates of KAPS Class of 2004 are planning to continue their education!

You may visit the KAP School at 515 FM 2325, Wimberley, visit our website at [www.kapschool.org](http://www.kapschool.org), or call me, Yana Bland, Ph.D., Director, at 512 847-6867, fax 512 847-0737.



## Katherine Anne Porter Society Activities at the 2003 American Literature Association Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts

Darlene Harbour Unrue of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, chaired the Katherine Anne Porter Society's session, "Katherine Anne Porter and Other Writers: Parallels and Influence," held at the American Literature Association Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Saturday, May 24, 2003. The session began with "Our Cleopatra': Peter Taylor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Southern Identity" read by Professor Thomas Austenfeld, North Georgia College and State University. Charlotte Goodman of Skidmore College presented "Matrilineage: From Virginia Woolf to Katherine Anne Porter, from Katherine Anne Porter to Jean Stafford." "Performing Nothing: Grotesque Vaudeville and Landed Tragedy in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Katherine Anne Porter's *Hacienda*" was the subject of the paper of Shannon Baley, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Austin. As Ms. Baley was unable to attend, Beth Alvarez read her paper at the session.

The society's business meeting also took place on May 24. President Beth Alvarez reported that the balance in the Society's account in the UNLV Foundation in 2002 was \$1,699.46. In fiscal year 2002-2003, the society had no expenses and had revenue of \$520.00. The balance in the society's account in May 2003 was \$2,219.46. The English Department at UNLV underwrites all mailing costs, and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts funds the costs of printing the newsletter. The University of Maryland Libraries provides institutional support for the president/newsletter editor as well as hosting the society's Web site. Membership in May 2003 was forty-eight regular members and nine honorary members.



*Beth Alvarez, Charlotte Goodman, Thomas Austenfeld, and Darlene Unrue, participants in the KAP session at the ALA Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 24, 2003.*

Alvarez reported once again that, although the society's revised by-laws were passed by a vote of the members, elections have yet to be held. The by-laws call for the election of president; the executive committee must conduct nominations. The active members of the executive committee are Darlene Unrue, Janis Stout, Thomas Austenfeld, Christine Hait, and Beth Alvarez. Members were urged to submit articles, news items, and announcements for the newsletter. Future meetings of the Society will be held at forthcoming American Literature Association conferences. Alexandra Subramanian will chair the session to be held in San Francisco, California, May 27-30, 2004. The title of the session will be "International Influences on Katherine Anne Porter's Life and Writings," and those present were urged to submit paper proposals for the session. Thomas Austenfeld will chair the May 2005 session in Boston, Massachusetts.