

## On Katherine Anne Porter and the Commemorative Stamp

By Paul Porter

A few years after the death of Katherine Anne Porter I was seized by the idea of having a postage stamp issued in her honor. Blissfully ignorant of the requirements that had to be met, I composed a two-page letter to the United States Postal Service with glowing details of Miss Porter's contributions to literature, her university teaching and fellowship in the Library of Congress, her Fulbright fellowship and Guggenheim award, her lecture tours, and the numerous other honors she had received. I mailed off my letter and waited, confident that I would soon have in hand good news from an eager Postal Service staff.

Indeed news did arrive, but it wasn't the news I hoped for. I found that my naïve enthusiasm alone was not enough to achieve issue of a stamp, and my efforts had come to naught. I was immensely disappointed, and I stayed disappointed for years. So you can imagine how happy I am this morning, and how deeply I appreciate everything done by the Postal Service staff, especially their unfailing graciousness in answering my questions and soliciting comments concerning the stamp and plans for today's event. I thank them, one and all. I also wish to thank and compliment artist Michael Deas for his achievement in capturing so exactly my aunt's

*Continued on page 2*

## Porter Honored with Commemorative Stamp

On May 15, 2006, the U. S. Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp in honor of Katherine Anne Porter; this marks the twenty-second addition to the service's Literary Arts series. The Postal Service printed 30 million of the Porter stamp, which features her portrait with a ship in the background. The first-day-of-issue ceremony took place at the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center in Kyle, Texas. "We're proud to salute the life and extraordinary accomplishments of Katherine Anne Porter," said Carolyn L. Gallagher, a member of the U. S. Postal Service's Presidentially appointed Board of Governors, who dedicated the stamp. "Her literary style still inspires us to search for understanding from our own life experiences." Those joining Gallagher in the ceremony included Denise M. Trauth, President, Texas State University; Paul Porter, nephew of Katherine Anne Porter; and George Lopez, Vice President, U. S. Postal Service. Also attending the event were Charles Porter, Paul's brother, and his wife Peggy. Paul Porter performed the official unveiling, uncovering a large reproduction of the stamp, and presented brief remarks. The text of Paul Porter's remarks at the ceremony appear elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter.



*George Lopez, Vice President, U. S. Postal Service; Denise Trauth, President, Texas State University; Paul Porter; and Carolyn Gallagher, U. S. Postal Service Board of Governors; at the first-day-of-issue ceremony for the Porter commemorative stamp, May 15, 2006, Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center, Kyle, Texas. © 2006 USPS. Used with permission. All rights reserved.*



*Katherine Anne Porter commemorative stamp, twenty-second in the U. S. Postal Service Literary Arts series; design by Michael Deas based on a 1936 George Platt Lynes photograph. © 2006 USPS. Used with permission. All rights reserved.*

Michael J. Deas of Brooklyn Heights, New York, created the painting of Porter, which serves as the image on the stamp. The portrait is derived from a 1936 photograph made by George Platt Lynes. By including a ship in the design, Deas links Porter to the sea voyage that inspired her full-length novel, *Ship of Fools*, and to her assessment of life, which she called, "this brave voyage."

The Literary Arts series, which was inaugurated in 1979, has previously honored John Steinbeck (1979), Edith Wharton (1980), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1983), Herman Melville (1984), T. S. Eliot (1986), William Faulkner (1987), Ernest Hemingway (1989), Marianne Moore (1990), William Saroyan (1991), Dorothy Parker

(1992), James Thurber (1994), Tennessee Williams (1995), F. Scott Fitzgerald (1996), Thornton Wilder (1997), Stephen Vincent Benet (1998), Ayn Rand (1999), Thomas Wolfe (2000), Ogden Nash (2002), Zora Neale Hurston (2003), James Baldwin (2004), and Robert Penn Warren (2005).

Katherine Anne Porter commemorative postage stamps remain available through the online Postal Store at <http://www.usps.com/shop>; custom-framed prints of the original stamp art are available at <http://www.stampframing.com/index.html>.



## Katherine Anne Porter Society Newsletter

*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 Alexandra Subramanian, President, and Beth Alvarez, Newsletter Editor. Members of the Executive Committee are Beth Alvarez, Thomas Austenfeld (Université de Fribourg), Jerry Lee Findley (Indiana University), Christine Hait (Columbia College), Alexandra Subramanian, and Darlene Unrue (University of Nevada, Las Vegas).

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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.

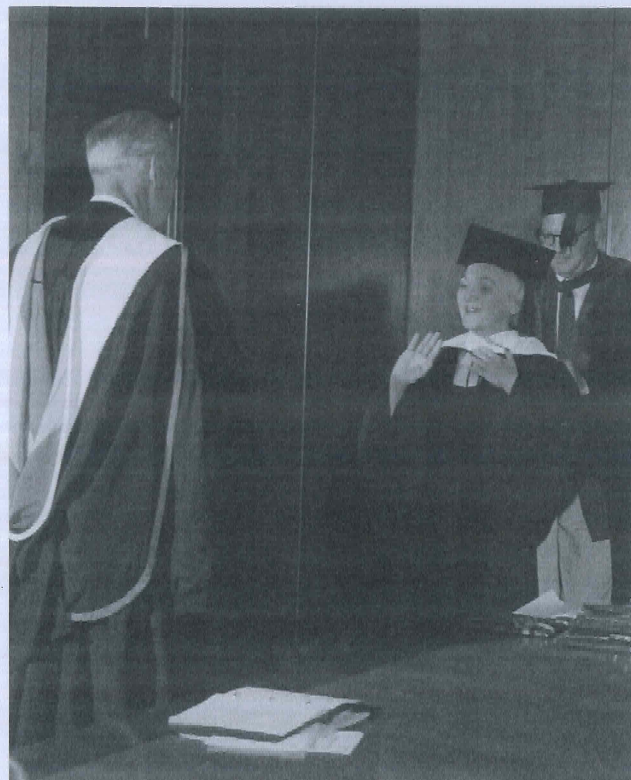
## Commemorative Stamp

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image and rare beauty.

Katherine Anne Porter adored ceremonies and rituals of all kinds: political, religious, academic, whatever. She was a born actress, and she enjoyed being on stage, preferably in a pink spotlight. In the Katherine Anne Porter archives at the University of Maryland is a photograph taken when she was awarded an honorary degree, one of many she received in her long life. In the photograph a beaming gentleman in robes stands behind Porter adjusting her cap and gown. The honoree herself stands with her left hand laid over her heart and her right hand raised before her in a dramatic gesture. But what catches and holds your eye in that photograph is her smile. It is a marvelous smile, luminous, radiant, expressing an access of joy very like rapture. The lady was ON and relishing every moment of the occasion.

I am certain were Katherine Anne Porter here this morning we would see the same radiant smile, the same transcendent joy and excitement shown in that photograph, as we celebrate her genius by the unveiling of this stamp on a most fitting day, the one hundred and sixteenth anniversary of her birth. Happy Birthday, Aunt Katherine!



*Katherine Anne Porter receiving an honorary degree at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, June 12, 1954. Photograph by the University of Michigan News Service, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

## KAP Fiction Prize at the University of Maryland

The winners of the annual graduate student poetry and fiction competitions sponsored by the Creative Writing Program in English at the University of Maryland read from their works on May 2, 2006, at Ulrich Recital Hall in the Tawes Fine Arts Building. Fred Leebron served as judge for the Katherine Anne Porter Fiction Prize. David K. Coley won the award with a piece entitled "The Strange Beauty of Lenci Kovacs." Honorable mention was awarded to "The Waiting Room" by Mark Lee Keats and to "Paterfamilias" by Emily Chiles. 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.

## Recent Production of "Passenger on the Ship of Fools"

Laura Furman and Lynn C. Miller's one-woman play centered on Katherine Anne Porter, "Passenger on the Ship of Fools," was performed at Schoolhouse Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, June 25 through July 9, 2006. Part of the summer season of CTEK Arts, "Evenings With" included plays about Gertrude Stein, painter Georgia O'Keeffe, theatrical director Margo Jones, autobiographer and arts patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, and playwright Lillian Hellman, in addition to the Porter play. Katherine Anne Porter was played by Equity actress Judith Partelow and directed by Jeff Spencer. Co-artistic producers were Margaret Van Sant and Priscilla Sample.



## Another Dimension of Meaning in the Title "Flowering Judas"

By Darlene Unrue, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

*[When I finished my biography of Katherine Anne Porter, having chosen to omit from it extensive critical analysis of her works, I was left with remnants that begged to be written up as either notes or longer articles. My short essay on Bermuda in the previous issue of the Newsletter and my long essay "Antonietta Rivas Mercado: Katherine Anne Porter's Horror and Inspiration" (published in the Journal of the Southwest) are two such pieces. What follows is a third. Darlene Harbour Unrue]*

Katherine Anne Porter's story "Flowering Judas"<sup>1</sup> has been interpreted and analyzed more than any other story she wrote. There's good reason for the attention: it was the title story of the 1930 collection that established her literary reputation, and the complexities and subtleties of the story's themes and symbols have been especially tantalizing.<sup>2</sup> Although there is variation in the focus of the criticism on the story, no one disagrees that the overriding subject of "Flowering Judas" is betrayal.

The title refers literally to the tree that blooms in the protagonist Laura's patio. It is the tree from which Eugenio, in Laura's dream at the conclusion, strips flowers that he offers her to eat in a parody of the Christian ritual of communion. Symbolically, of course, the title refers to the quintessential betrayer, Judas Iscariot, whose name, according to the legend that goes back to biblical times, was given to the redbud tree (*Cercis canadensis*) after Judas was said to have hanged himself from a tree of that species. The legend holds that redbud trees bloom in shades of red and purple in the spring as symbols of Judas's shame for his role in the crucifixion of Christ and of the tears of blood he wept over his own fate. The "scarlet blossoms" of Laura's tree are "dull purple," establishing the time of the story as springtime; and because Braggioni has been serenading Laura almost every night for "a long month" and because the story opens shortly before May Day, when Braggioni plans to be in Morelia for the "disturbances" between the Catholics and the Socialists, the setting can be more narrowly established within a month-long period from the end of March through late April. It is a span of time that covers the Easter season as well as most of Laura's experiences recounted in retrospect while she endures Braggioni's serenade.

Except for brief visits to Mexican border towns during her childhood, before Porter wrote "Flowering Judas" in 1929-1930 she was in Mexico twice during the Easter season and once more in the summer of 1923. Her first visit was ten months long, from November of 1920 until September of 1921. The second visit lasted from April 5 to June 15 in 1922. (In 1921, Good Friday fell on March 25 with Easter on March 27. In the spring of 1922, Good Friday fell on April

14 with Easter on April 16.) When Porter was completing "Flowering Judas," she no doubt was thinking first of the spring and Easter season of 1921, the period in which she approached her friend Mary Doherty's apartment and saw through an open window Mary being serenaded by the revolutionist Samuel Yúdice—later recalling the tableau as the starting point for the story.<sup>3</sup> She must also have been remembering the Easter season of 1922, when her arrival in Mexico City April 6 coincided with the conclusion of Lent and the beginning of Semana Santa—Holy Week—which comprises some of Mexico's most sacred and elaborate religious observances. In commemoration of the central premise in Christianity, worshippers reenact the Passion, from Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem (Domingo de Ramos or Palm Sunday) to the Last Supper and Jesus's betrayal by Judas (Jueves Santo or Holy

Thursday) to Jesus's crucifixion (Santo Viernes or Good Friday) to Jesus's day of rest in the grave (Sabado de Gloria or Holy Saturday) and finally to Jesus's resurrection (Domingo de Resurrección or Easter Sunday).

Good Friday in Mexico has been not only a day for solemn, silent, and massive processions but also the day for celebrants to gather large, papier mâché puppets filled with gunpowder to explode on Holy Saturday. The tradition began with sixteenth-century Spanish missionaries who in trying to convert the indigenous people of Mexico made little figures of Judas that they burned to illustrate dramatically the penalty for betraying Jesus. Over the centuries, skillful Mexican craftsmen began to make life-size effigies of Judas, and the observance was expanded to include images of the devil or anyone the artisans wanted to punish. By the time Porter witnessed (or participated in) Semana Santa in 1921, the papier mâché and tissue paper puppets had become almost exclusively vividly colored, grotesque caricatures of politicians superimposed on Judas-like figures. Either filled with gunpowder or decked out with firecrackers, the effigies, which were strung

on wire across city streets or hung from balconies, were exploded with fiery vengeance on Holy Saturday. They were called "Burning Judases" or "Exploding Judases," and their abrupt diffusion of colorful tissue paper shreds and papier mâché streamers even evoked "Flowering Judases."

In addition to her own observation in 1921 and 1922, Porter would have had other occasions to be reminded of the exploding, burning Judases. Diego Rivera, with whom Porter became well acquainted in 1922, produced a large fresco called "The Burning of the Judases" in 1924, and Porter almost certainly saw it in progress in the summer of 1923 in the Ministry of Education.<sup>4</sup> (See an image of it at [www.fbuch.com/murals.htm](http://www.fbuch.com/murals.htm).) The ritual festival, related to Mexico's fine art of caricature, which Porter expressly admired, is also described more than once in D. H. Lawrence's novel *The Plumed Serpent*, which Porter read and reviewed in 1926. Lawrence described Holy Week in Mexico City:

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Katherine Anne Porter "wearing the China Poblana, Mexican National Dress," Cuernavaca, Mexico, Summer 1923. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.



## "Flowering Judas"

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"Everywhere you see men carrying home in triumph [on Good Friday] the great, gaudily-varnished dolls of papier mâché." He called Judas the "fun of the fair" and the "big man of holy week." He said that all of Mexico City was "popping with Judases."<sup>5</sup>

If all of Mexico City was popping with Judases during Holy Week, Porter could hardly have missed them in 1921 and 1922, and she must eventually have become aware of the additional political symbolism inherent in the title she chose for her 1930 story. In an interview with Barbara Thompson in 1963, Porter confirmed that there was "a symbolic plan and pattern" in "Flowering Judas" that she had not consciously created but clearly saw in the completed story.<sup>6</sup> She named the story only at that point, she said, after she recognized the symbolism, and she borrowed the phrase from T. S. Eliot's 1920 poem "Gerontion": "In the juvenescence of the year/ Came Christ the tiger/ In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,/ To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk/ Among whispers...."

As Eliot used the image of the judas tree flowering in "depraved May," he was expressing the "sour irony" of his modernist contention that the pledge of May (the month of the Christian celebration of Jesus's ascension to heaven) has fallen short of the promise. Porter is repeating the modernist theme in her story but with a specific focus on the political landscape of Mexico in the Alvaro Obregón phase of the revolution, that Porter "ran smack into" in 1920, she told Thompson. In "Flowering Judas" the once quixotic and poetic Braggioni who dreamed of revolutionary paradise has become a corrupt and self-indulgent revolutionary leader who betrays the ideals he once cherished. Although many critics have pointed out that Laura, in her loss of faith in both revolution and religion and in her suppression of her natural female rôle of life-engenderer and nurturer, is herself a betrayer as much as Braggioni, it is the political betrayers who were at the forefront of Porter's mind when she wrote the story. The subject of political betrayal was apparent in her essays "The Mexican Trinity"<sup>7</sup> and "Where Presidents Have No Friends"<sup>8</sup> and in the satiric, working titles such as "Many Redeemers," "So Many Saviors," and "False Hopes" that she gave Mexican pieces-in-

progress and worked on through much of the 1920s. The burning Judases of Semana Santa represent the fusion of religion and politics in Mexico just as the title "Flowering Judas," in its association with the Easter-week revenge on corrupt politicians, underscores the conflation of religion and politics that lies at the heart of the story's theme of betrayal.

## Notes

1. "Flowering Judas," *Hound & Horn*, 3 (Spring 1930): 316-331.
2. The casebook study of "Flowering Judas" edited by Virginia Spencer Carr in the Series *Women Writers: Texts and Contexts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993) contains the text of the story, representative critical essays, and a selected bibliography. For a list of additional published comments on "Flowering Judas" see *Katherine Anne Porter: An Annotated Bibliography*, edited by Ruth M. Alvarez and Kathryn Hilt (New York: Garland, 1990) and the annotated bibliographies in each issue of the *Newsletter*.
3. For an account of the role Mary Doherty and Samuel Yúdice played in the composition of "Flowering Judas," see Thomas F. Walsh, *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).
4. Patrick Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open: A Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 186; color plate after p. 242.
5. D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (London: Martin Secker, 1926; reprinted New York: Vintage/Random House, 1992, p. 259 [Chapter XVII]). See Porter's review "Quetzalcoat!" (first published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on March 7, 1926) in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Delacorte, 1970; reprinted, Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1990), 421-425.
6. See Barbara Thompson, "Katherine Anne Porter: An Interview," *Paris Review*, 8 (Winter-Spring 1963): 87-114; reprinted in *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations*, edited by Joan Givner (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987).
7. "The Mexican Trinity," *Freeman*, 3 (3 August 1921): 493-95.
8. "Where Presidents Have No Friends," *Century*, 194 (July 1922): 273-84.

## Unrue Porter Biography Wins Awards

*Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist*, Darlene Harbour Unrue's biography of Porter, has been the recipient of two awards. During the seventeenth Eudora Welty Writers' Symposium held in October 2005, on the campus of Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, Mississippi, the work was awarded the Eudora Welty Prize for Excellence in Modern Letters, named annually to an outstanding work of literary scholarship. The Mississippi University for Women and the University Press of Mississippi jointly award the Eudora Welty Prize; the winner of this prize presents her or his work at the symposium. The Eudora Welty Writers' Symposium was established in 1989 to honor Welty. During the symposium, which is sponsored by the Humanities Division of the university, Southern writers and literary scholars read from and discuss their works.

The biography also won the Texas State Historical Association's Liz

Carpenter Award for Research in the History of Women. Recognized at the March 2006 annual meeting of the association in Austin, Texas, Unrue's biography was selected as the best scholarly book on the history of women and Texas published during 2005. The Liz Carpenter Award was established in 1992 by an anonymous donor who is committed to the publication of scholarly research on the history of women and Texas. The award honors Liz Carpenter, a fifth-generation Texan, for her commitment to the pursuit of the history of women in Texas and for a lifetime of achievements that qualify her as a maker of that history.

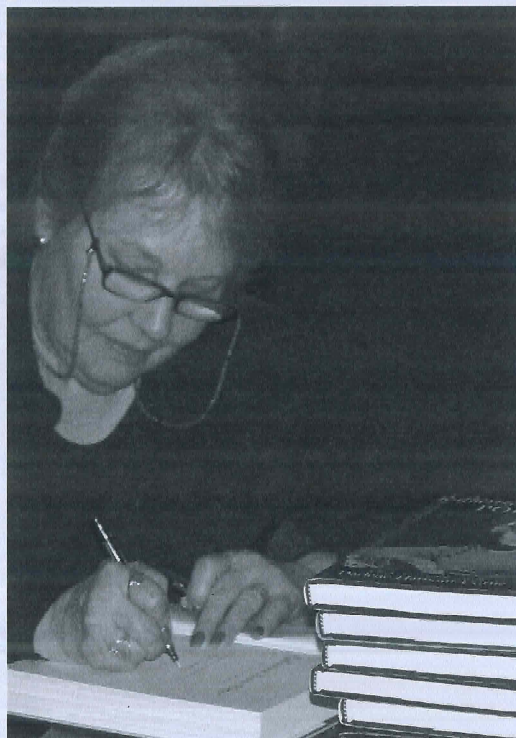
In addition to the events at the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center, the Katherine Anne Porter School, and the University of Maryland Libraries mentioned elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter, Professor Unrue was an invited participant at the Texas Book Festival in Austin, Texas, in October 2005 and the Oxford Conference for the Book at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi, in April 2006.



## Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center News

The Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center at 508 Center Street in Kyle, Texas, 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 book signings in the 2005-2006 academic year included Denis Johnson, Mary Powell, John Dufresne, Aimee Bender, Gerald Stern, Anne Marie Macari, Marjorie Perloff, and Adam Zagajewski. Of special interest to members of the KAP Society was the event held on February 7, 2006; Darlene Unrue read from her biography, *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of An Artist*. The schedule for readings and talks for the 2006-2007 academic year includes Ron Carlson, Charles Baxter, C. D. Wright, Forrest Gander, Eleanor Wilner, Percival Everett, Carole Maso, Yiyun Li, and Catherine Barnett. The visiting writers series is funded by the Burdine Johnson Foundation.

Michelle Detorie, who served as Writer-in-Residence at the KAP House in 2005-2006, was awarded a \$20,000 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for 2007 for the book of poems she was writing while in residence. The current incumbent, Michael Noll, is a graduate of Texas State University's MFA program.



*Darlene Unrue signing copies of her Porter biography at the KAP Literary Center, Kyle, Texas, February 7, 2006. Photograph by Roy Alvarez.*

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.

A new venture of Texas State's MFA program is an on-line literary journal, *Front Porch* ([frontporchjournal.com](http://frontporchjournal.com)). A collaborative effort of the MFA students, the journal includes fiction, poetry, reviews, and nonfiction by emerging and established authors. Its Executive Editor is Tom Grimes; the Founding Editors are Michael Wolfe, Evelyn Lauer, Michael Hart, and Toby Peterson. The debut issue also features audio: readings by Richard Ford, Heather McHugh, Charles Wright, and John Dufresne; talks by Denis Johnson, Tim O'Brien, and Aimee Bender. In the near future, the journal will make available video of all readings and Q&A sessions by distinguished writers who visit the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center.

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:16080/kap>. Inquiries concerning Texas State's MFA in Creative Writing can be made through the program's Web site (<http://mfa.english.txstate.edu/>), via email at [mfinearts@txstate.edu](mailto:mfinearts@txstate.edu), or by phone at (512) 245-7681.

## Open Letter to Members of the Society

Dear Members of the Katherine Anne Porter Society,

I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as President of the Katherine Anne Porter Society for the next three years. I follow in the footsteps of Beth Alvarez, who has worked brilliantly, diligently and effectively during her tenure. On behalf of all of us who appreciate Beth so deeply, I offer our heartfelt thanks for all she has done as President of the Society and for all she continues to do as a member of the Executive Committee. Thankfully, too, Beth will continue in her position as editor of the Katherine Anne Porter Society Newsletter.

I am pleased that the former members of the Executive Committee, including Beth Alvarez, Thomas Austenfeld, Christine Hait, and Darlene Unrue, have agreed to stay on. We welcome Jerry Lee Findley as the newest member of the committee. I am grateful to all the Members of the Executive Committee for their participation and support.

As Beth mentioned in her letter dated October 6, 2006, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, is phasing out their support of the newsletter. We are hoping to publish the next newsletter, Volume XIV (2007), online. Darlene Unrue points out that online publication will offer a new dimension to the newsletter, as we will be able to invite

contributions of notes and full articles.

I am using this opportunity to request that you fill out the form enclosed in the newsletter with your email address and, if necessary, your updated contact information. If you haven't yet sent in your \$10.00 dues, please include a check for that as well. We will try to accommodate those who still wish to receive a printed copy of the newsletter.

I include my address and contact information below. Please feel free to write or call me with any questions, concerns, or ideas you may have regarding the Katherine Anne Porter Society.

I hope to have the chance to meet or communicate with many of you during my tenure.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Subramanian

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## Katherine Anne Porter Society Activities at the 2006 American Literature Association Conference

On Friday, May 26, 2006, Christine Hait, Columbia College, chaired the Katherine Anne Porter session at the 2006 ALA Conference in San Francisco, California, that she organized for the society. Entitled "Katherine Anne Porter and the Artist," the session featured three papers. Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland, presented "Diego Rivera's *Creation* and the Mexican Art Scene in Katherine Anne Porter's 'The Martyr.'" "The Spinet and The Coffin: Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Music" was the subject of the paper of Thomas Austenfeld, North Georgia College and State University. The final paper by David Madden, Louisiana State University, was "The Charged Image in 'Flowering Judas.'"

The society's business meeting also took place on May 26. The balance in the society's account in the UNLV Foundation on May 26, 2006, was \$3,029.58; revenue for the fiscal year on that date was \$505.00. Membership in May 2006 was sixty regular members and ten honorary members. All of the Executive Committee members were present: Darlene Unrue, Thomas Austenfeld, Christine Hait, Alexandra Subramanian, and Beth Alvarez. President Beth



KAP Society members Jerry Lee Findley, Alexandra Subramanian, and Christine Hait at the ALA Conference in San Francisco, California, May 26, 2006. Photograph by Thomas Austenfeld.



Christine Hait, Thomas Austenfeld, Beth Alvarez, and David Madden, participants in the KAP session at the ALA Conference in San Francisco, California, May 26, 2006. Photograph by Roy Alvarez.

Alvarez announced that election for a new president would be conducted by a ballot to be mailed to members during the summer. She also announced that Alexandra Subramanian had agreed to run. Members were urged to submit articles, news items, and announcements for the newsletter, and several ideas for future articles were discussed. Beth Alvarez will chair the society's session at the American Literature Association meeting in Boston (May 2007). It was agreed that the society would not submit a proposal for the Special Symposium on American Fiction that the American Literature Association has planned for Autumn 2006 in San Diego. Announcements included information about events celebrating the publication of Darlene Unrue's *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of An Artist*, the biennial awarding of the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Prose at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Katherine Anne Porter commemorative stamp issued on May 15, 2006, by the U. S. Postal Service.

## 2007 American Literature Association Conference in Boston

The Katherine Anne Porter Session at the 2007 American Literature Association conference will be chaired by Beth Alvarez. The conference will be held at the Westin Copley Place, 10 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts, May 24-27, 2007. Details of the conference and information about hotel reservations will appear on the Web site of the American Literature Society: <http://www.americanliterature.org>.

The topic of the Katherine Anne Porter session at the conference

will be "Porter, War, and Politics." It will consider the ways in which Porter responded to her turbulent political times and especially to the various wars in which the United States fought during her lifetime. Proposals for papers were solicited on any aspect of Porter's political sense or ways in which war and political conflict had an impact on her mind and work. Janis Stout, Professor Emerita, Texas A & M University, and author of *Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times*, will present a paper focused on the disruptive impact of World War I as expressed in the work of Porter and Willa Cather. The deadline for the submission of additional proposals was December 15, 2006.



## 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 October 2005 and October 2006. During this period, telephone, mail, and e-mail inquiries were received from Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of

Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas,

Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. I also communicated with individuals from Australia, Austria, Great Britain, India, Japan, the Netherlands, and Norway. During this period, the Libraries supplied 578 Porter or Porter-related photocopies to meet researcher demand and provided eighteen reproductions of photographs. The Libraries also loaned one reel of the microfilm edition of the Porter papers.

Mike Yates, my graduate assistant for 2004-2006, completed the work necessary to make the guides to the papers of Paul Porter and Ann Heintze available online. ArchivesUM is the Libraries' portal to Special Collections holdings of archives and manuscripts that allows browsing and searching by collection descriptions and subject categories. The URL for ArchivesUM is <http://www.lib.umd.edu/archivesum/index.jsp>.

The Libraries' acquisitions in 2005-2006 included the purchase of a corrected typescript of "The Leaning Tower" and typescripts of two drafts of "At Sea," a portion of *Ship of Fools*. The Libraries also benefited from the generosity of Porter's nephew Paul Porter. He donated a copy of a 1998 PBS documentary about the pandemic in which KAP nearly died. In it, she is quoted, and a photograph of her appears.

There were 311 visitors to the Katherine Anne Porter Room, during which the room was open to the public on fifty-seven Monday and Thursday afternoons. Freddy Baer, Shirley Bauer, Beverly Lewoc, Joan Phelan, Betty Warner, and Maria Walsh all served as docents through October 2006. Visitors to the Porter Room from on-campus groups during the year included graduate

students from the College of Information Studies and first-year students of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. Outside groups included fellows of the Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance, the Bethesda Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, staff and volunteers of the Montgomery County Historical Society,

international visitors participating in the Leadership and Education Development seminar, and instructors from the U. S. Naval Academy.

About fifty individuals visited the Porter Room during our eighth all-campus open house on April 29, 2006. Activities were once again 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 Francisque Caroubel, Praetorius, and Antonio Vivaldi. Their program also included three pieces from *Katherine Anne Porter's French Song-Book*: "In Praise of Gabrielle Estrée," "Marion's Song," and "To Charlotte," performed a cappella by Zeynep Dilli accompanied by Breno Imbiriba. Later in the day, Matt Johnson, Alexandra Lloyd, Mandy Fraser, Sidney Pickett, and Dan Schwartz, students from the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, a University of Maryland Living-Learning Community, read from their work.

On March 30, 2006, the Libraries hosted "An Evening with Darlene Harbour Unrue" in Hornbake Library. Professor Unrue's presentation was entitled "Katherine Anne Porter and the Honest Biography"; she read from *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist*, took audience

questions, and signed copies of her book during the reception following the event. Both Dean of Libraries, Charles Lowry, and I made brief remarks. Attendees included Porter Literary Trustee Barbara Thompson Davis and her husband Ned, former University of Maryland President John Toll and his wife Debby, Miss Porter's friends Bill and Fern Wilkins, First Lady of the University of Maryland Patsy Mote, and a good contingent of members of the Katherine Anne Porter Society.

Highlights of my activities in the last year included participating in Jan Bloemendaal's oral defense of his dissertation, "Constructing Identities: Ethnicity and Race in Katherine Anne Porter," on October 5, 2005, at Leiden University, the Netherlands. On February 6, 2006, Darlene Unrue and I were featured at an open assembly at the Katherine Anne Porter School in Wimberly, TX. The next day Darlene, her husband John, my spouse, and I were given a tour of Halifax Ranch by owner Bill Johnson.

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*Beth Alvarez, Bill Johnson, Darlene Unrue, and John Unrue, next to the Blanco River, Halifax ranch, Kyle, Texas, February 2006. Photograph by Roy Alvarez.*



*The Saturday Morning Quartet, Zeynep Dilli, Breno Imbiriba, Freddy Baer, and Herb Baer, perform in the Porter Room, Hornbake Library, April 29, 2006. Photograph by Roy Alvarez.*



*Darlene Unrue greeting Susan Brynteson, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, March 30, 2006. Photograph by Michael Morgan.*



*Bill Wilkins, Barbara Thompson Davis, Marcia Lowry, Darlene Unrue, and Charles Lowry, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, March 30, 2006. Photograph by Michael Morgan.*



## The Year's Work on Katherine Anne Porter: 2005 and 2006

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

After a very active year that included the publication of a new Porter biography, 2006 has been a slow year for Porter scholarship. Discussed below are an article and two dissertations from 2005 that were not included in the previous bibliographical essay and a chapter from a book published in 2006.

### Chapters in Books

Porter played a small role in Fort Worth, Texas, theatre history, according to Jan Jones in *Renegades, Showmen & Angels: A Theatrical History of Fort Worth, 1873-2001*, published by Texas Christian University Press in 2006. In the chapter "The Rise of Celluloid and the Decline of Live Performance: 1920-1935," Jones discusses Porter's work as a theatre reviewer and an actor during her brief time in Fort Worth in 1921. According to Jones, Porter, living with her friends Kitty and Garfield Crawford, joined the Vagabond Players and was a featured actor during the troupe's initial season. Porter also wrote about the little theatre movement, of which the Vagabond Players was a part, for the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*. The chapter includes a photograph of Porter on stage performing in the role of Marie in *Poor Old Jim*. Porter returned to New York City in 1922.

### Articles

The tragic story of an aristocratic Mexican woman may have inspired Porter as she struggled to pull together her Mexican novel *Thieves Market* in 1931. Of course, Porter never completed the novel; however, according to Darlene Harbour Unrue, the suicide of Antonieta Rivas Mercado in February of 1931 gave Porter the "the leading thread" she needed to give her ideas for the novel structure. In "Antonieta Rivas Mercado: Katherine Anne Porter's Horror and Inspiration," *Journal of the Southwest* 47.4 (Winter 2005): 615-636, Unrue compares and contrasts Antonieta Rivas Mercado and Porter and argues for the likelihood of their having known each other. Using

Porter's statements in letters as evidence, Unrue asserts that Antonieta's doomed love affair with the Mexican political and intellectual leader José Vasconcelos and her subsequent suicide (in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris) struck Porter forcefully, illustrating for her the betrayal and disillusionment that were becoming central themes in her work.

### Dissertations

Lisa Kathleen Hollibaugh, in "Southern Crossroads: Science, Religion and Gender in Southern Women's Literature between the World Wars (Ellen Glasgow, Frances Newman, Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Anne Porter)," *DAI-A* 66/05 (2005): AAI3174812, completed at Columbia University, argues that Southern women after World War I integrated "the ostensibly opposed discourses of science and religion." Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, Frances Newman's *Dead Lovers Are Faithful Lovers*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" provide evidence for Hollibaugh's claim that "Darwinism, Freudianism, anthropology, and medicine" engaged the interest of Southern women writers because they provided alternatives to traditional religious doctrine. However, the authors "do not ultimately privilege science over religion."

Chandra Lee Wells places Porter's *The Old Order* stories in the context of other literary works that explore interracial female friendship in her dissertation, "Befriending the Other(ed) Woman: Fictions of Interracial Female Friendship," *DAI-A* 66/09 (2005): AAI3187765, completed at University of Connecticut. Other works discussed include Shirley Ann Grau's *The Keepers of the House*, Alice Walker's *Meridian* and other fiction, Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose*, Rosellen Brown's *Half a Heart*, Dori Sanders's *Clover*, and Kaye Gibbons's *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon*.

Readers can look forward in the new year to Gary Ciuba's *Desire, Violence, and Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy*, published by Louisiana State University Press. Please send information on any additions that need to be made to this essay to me at [chrishait@colacoll.edu](mailto:chrishait@colacoll.edu) so that I may include the information in next year's essay.

## Porter Activities

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Located outside Kyle, Texas, the ranch was beautiful on an unseasonably warm winter day. Especially memorable was viewing the Blanco River, which runs through the ranch (KAP called it "that dancing jewel of a river"), and being able to spot Halifax cave in the limestone cliffs across from the Johnsons' property. That evening, I introduced Darlene Unrue at the event celebrating her Porter biography at the KAP Literary Center in Kyle. During the February trip to Texas, my spouse and I dined with Paul Porter, his brother Charles, and Charles's wife Peggy in Houston. Finally, my spouse and I were able to attend the American Academy of Arts and Letters Ceremonial at which Arturo Vivante was awarded the biennial KAP prize.

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/ltmss/kap.html> and follow the appropriate links.



*Halifax cave, the probable setting for KAP's "The Hermit of Halifax Cave," appears at the upper left of this February 2006 photograph by Roy Alvarez.*

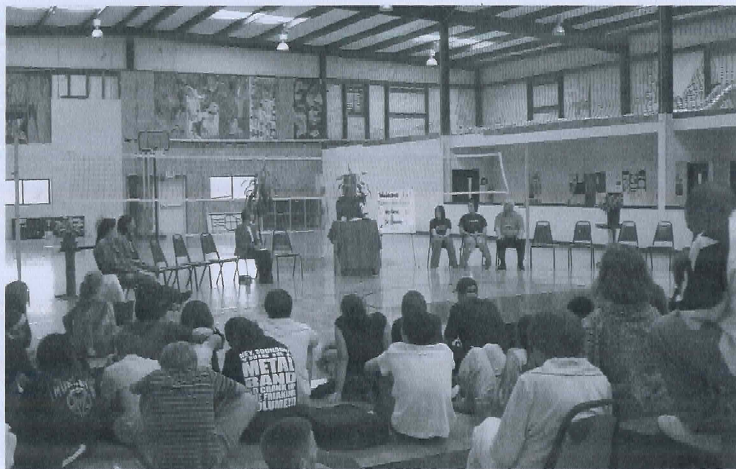


## Katherine Anne Porter School News

By Yana Bland, Ph. D., Superintendent/  
Principal, KAP School

The small learning community at the Katherine Anne Porter School is built on the skill and dedication of a highly qualified staff. As an open enrollment charter school, KAPS offers free, high quality, liberal education with the maximum participation of its eclectic student body. In addition to regular high school courses, students can choose from Philosophy, Creative Writing, Horticulture, Yoga, Latin, French, Spanish, Graphic Arts, Photography, Web Mastering, and Karate.

KAPS offers a wide range of choices while keeping the class size small enough to guarantee that each student has a chance to be heard and to develop creatively. The recent Texas Education Agency School Report Card shows an average class size of 6.7, compared to 14.9 for the state. KAPS also received two Gold Performance acknowledgements: Commended in Social Studies and Comparable Improvement in Mathematics. In addition, KAPS students did better than the Texas State Average in Science TAKS tests. Hispanics and economically disadvantaged students show vast improvements in their passing rates. KAPS SAT/ACT scores are 73%, at or above criterion, while the state average is just 27%.



*Darlene Unrue speaking at an open assembly of the Katherine Anne Porter School, Wimberley, Texas, February 6, 2006. Seated third from left is Yana Bland; Beth Alvarez is seated fourth from left. Photograph by Roy Alvarez.*

In January 2007, a health career strand of courses including Introduction to Health Science Technology and Nutritional Health will be offered. Criminal Justice will be taught by Dr. Bob Pierce, who has worked for many years in the prison system. Tai Chi will be offered as a dual enrollment (college/school) credit, sponsored by Austin Community College and taught by Barbara Clubb.

The Texas Education Agency provided \$6,228 per student in 2005-2006. Seventy percent went toward instruction and instruction-related services, eight percent to instructional and school leadership, four percent to support services, and eighteen percent to other campus costs such as meals, extra-curricular activities, and the purchase of our



*Editor Jeff Gessas and Layout Designer Grey Gibson proudly display an edition of the Katherine Anne Porter School newspaper, KAPpy Times. Photograph courtesy of the Katherine Anne Porter School.*

school building.

In 2007, through a USDA Rural Community Development Loan, there are plans to upgrade and expand the KAPS school building to include a theater, an outside amphitheater, a vocational arts complex, and an edible garden and greenhouse. Living Architecture has included a wind-vane and rain harvesting in the design.

This year KAPS won two important grants. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center provides federal financing for after-school enrichment activities. The Texas High School Completion and Success grant also provides valuable resources, such as a part-time instructional guidance counselor, Susan Powell, who has developed a comprehensive mentoring program providing every student at KAPS a caring mentor.

The Katherine Anne Porter School is a beacon of higher learning and critical understanding in the Texas Hill Country. Students learn to become activists and not fatalists and to find their true paths in life. Cooperation, honesty, and a love of learning characterize the Katherine Anne Porter School climate today. The school is

located at 515 FM 2325, Wimberley, Texas; the mailing address is PO Box 2053, Wimberley, TX 78676; telephone, 512-847-6867, fax, 512-847-0737; website, [www.kapschool.org](http://www.kapschool.org).



*Paloma Bermudez, accompanied by Curtis Clogston, performs at the Katherine Anne Porter School's annual Java Five fundraising event, November 12, 2006. Photograph courtesy of the Katherine Anne Porter School.*



## Arturo Vivante Awarded Katherine Anne Porter Prize

By Alexandra Subramanian

Arturo Vivante was awarded the Katherine Anne Porter Award in Literature by the Academy of Arts and Letters at the Academy's annual Ceremonial in New York City on May 17, 2006. The biennial award in the amount of \$20,000 was established by the Literary Trust of Katherine Anne Porter. Lynn Freed was the first recipient in 2002, followed by Nicholson Baker in 2004. The members of the 2006 Awards Committee were Edward Hoagland, John Hollander, Romulus Linney, Janet Malcolm, Grace Paley, Reynolds Price, and William Jay Smith.

Arturo Vivante is best known for his short stories. He has also written poems, novels, essays, and plays. The citation for the award praises Vivante's stories for bringing readers to the "common but often-hidden experiences of life":

Written with clarity and directness, they are as fresh and original as ever. They are filled with surprises, recognitions, and the honest emotions of a master of his difficult art. This year's Katherine Anne Porter Award joins a previous Academy Award in Literature to honor a creator of superb stories both short and profound.

Arturo Vivante was born in 1923 in Rome, Italy. He was raised in Tuscany until his part-Jewish family fled Fascist Italy to seek refuge in England in 1938. He studied medicine at McGill University and continued his studies at the University of Rome after the war, graduating as a medical doctor in 1949. Vivante practiced medicine in Rome for eight years. In this period, his stories began to appear in the *New Yorker*, and he decided to devote his life to writing. He moved to the United States with his American wife and children and served as a writer in residence at numerous American universities. He lives in retirement in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

In addition to the more than seventy short stories Vivante contributed to the *New Yorker*, he has published in *Vogue*, *London Magazine*, *Guardian*, and *Southern Review*. His books include *A Goodly Babe* (1966); *The French Girls of Killmi* (1967); *Doctor Giovanni* (1969); *English Stories* (1975); *Run to the Waterfall* (1979); *Writing Fiction* (1980); *The Tales of Arturo Vivante* (1990); *Solitude and other Stories* (2004); and *Italian Poetry: An Anthology: From the Beginnings to the Present* (2005). He has also received a Fulbright travel grant, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an NEA grant.

Though prolific, Vivante has not gained a reputation commensurate with his contributions. A practiced and accomplished writer, he is quoted in *Contemporary Authors* as saying writing is "mainly a study of life as I have known it. I write to know the mystery that even a small matter holds. Through my writing I have come on some of the calmest, clearest and brightest moments of my life."

Many of his stories are autobiographical. His collection *Run to the Waterfall*, for instance, takes place in Italy before and after World War II and includes portraits of an exacting philosopher father, who demands reverence, and a lively, artistic mother, who runs her household, paints, and holds guests captive with her brilliant conversation. His idyllic evocations of the rambling Tuscany home of his youth recall Colette's autobiographical works, *Sido* and *My Mother's House*, coming-of-age stories and reminiscences of village life in Burgundy that inspired Katherine Anne Porter.

Vivante evokes the tastes, smells, and personalities of his native country. In her introduction to *The Tales of Arturo Vivante*, Mary Kinzie notes that it was in exiling himself from the country he loved that he was able to return to "persons and things Italian" (xiii). Vivante also probes the inner terrain of the human heart, as when he explores the distance and animosities that can grow over time between loved ones, husbands and wives, fathers and sons. Vivante's stories also touch upon themes of dislocation, exile, and abandonment, influenced by his experiences during World War II and by his self-imposed exile. In Vivante's "At the Caffè Greco," the narrator writes letters, people watches, and sips ice tea at the celebrated Roman café. Vivante introduces Katherine Anne Porter into his story in a dialogue between the narrator and a well known poet in his seventies who also frequents the café. One day, the subject turns to Robert Lowell, whose death the eccentric poet refuses to acknowledge. Then the poet asks the narrator what he is reading:

"I bought it at the Lion bookshop this morning. *Old Mortality* by Katherine Anne Porter."

"Katherine Anne Porter," he said. "There is no one I am more fond of. Oh, I know her very well. Our Miranda. She is a lively lady. *Bellissima. Simpatissima.*"

I looked at him with astonishment. Did he think she was alive too? She had died in 1980. I knew the date without looking it up, because, as they say in colleges, "I taught her."

"I met her in Paris," he said. "I called her Miranda because of that charming character in the book you are reading, which is herself, of course. Talk about liberated women—she is the prototype, the independent woman *par excellence*. A *prima donna*, too, and something of a dragon. But what a delightful dragon!"

This time I had no intention or even temptation to say that the person he was speaking of was dead. I was no spoilsport. To have said it would have made me feel like a vulture, some bird interested only in the dead. I told him instead something I knew firsthand about her. "She was giving a reading at a Midwestern university I taught at, a very important reading, with lots of people, a huge audience, a multitude, a thousand or more, in a great big auditorium. Well, half way through the reading—after about thirty minutes—the dean, who had introduced her, fell asleep. Visibly, audibly asleep. Slowly she turned toward him, stared at him a moment and closed her manuscript. 'That'll be all,' she said."

"Fantastic," the poet said. "Memorable. Whatever they paid, they got their money's worth that day. Not just another reading. Something to talk about for years to come, as you just did. Oh yes, she's a no-nonsense woman, as they say in English. A dragon and a darling. I must remind her and congratulate her." (*The Tales of Arturo Vivante*, 236)

It is fitting that Arturo Vivante has been honored by an award established by Katherine Anne Porter, a writer to whom he paid homage in his fiction.