

# Newsletter

of the

Katherine Anne Porter

Society

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## “Such great crowds and so little company”: Katherine Anne Porter and Djuna Barnes in Paris

By Amber Kohl, University of Maryland

Special Collections at the University of Maryland is the home to the archives of two twentieth century American modernist writers—Texas-born Katherine Anne Porter, author of *Flowering Judas* (1930), *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), and *Ship of Fools* (1962), and New York-born Djuna Barnes, author of *Ryder* (1928), *Ladies Almanack* (1928), *Nightwood* (1939), and *The Antiphon* (1958).

Both were talented authors who drew on personal experience and trauma in their lives to create remarkable literature and art. Providing reference assistance to Barnes and Porter researchers over the years has sparked my own curiosity about the differences and similarities in the lives of these literary women. Examining biographical details and conducting close readings of their works could provide a fascinating comparison of two seemingly disparate artists.

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 2022, and the subsequent exhibitions and conversations that followed, turned my attention towards one parallel experience in particular, the time Djuna Barnes and Katherine Anne Porter spent living as expatriates in Paris.



Katherine Anne Porter, Paris, circa 1934-1935.  
Katherine Anne Porter papers. UMD Special Collections.



Djuna Barnes, Paris, circa 1921-1922.  
Djuna Barnes papers. UMD Special Collections.

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## *Newsletter of the Katherine Anne Porter Society*

Members are welcome to submit articles, announcements, and comments for the society's newsletter. Please send them to Amber Kohl, Newsletter Editor [amberk@umd.edu](mailto:amberk@umd.edu) and/or Beth Alvarez, Curator of Literary Manuscripts Emerita [alvarez@umd.edu](mailto:alvarez@umd.edu) University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD 20742,

Society membership inquiries should be directed to Beth Alvarez. Entries for the annual bibliographical essay on Porter should be addressed to Christine Grogan at [cgrogan@udel.edu](mailto:cgrogan@udel.edu).

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## **Letter from the President of the Katherine Anne Porter Society: Post Pandemic Porter Perspectives**

By Alice Cheylan  
Babel Research Laboratory, University of Toulon

As the new President of the Katherine Anne Porter Society I am very honored to follow in the footsteps of Jerry Findley as well as to pursue the train of thought he expressed in recent *Newsletters* concerning the covid pandemic. If anything positive has come from the last few difficult years, it is the renewed sense of hope and rekindled energy that is appearing little by little. We are hoping that this new vitality will provoke a new interest and impetus in Katherine Anne Porter studies and research.

The very successful Katherine Anne Porter session at the May 2023 American Literature Association Conference testified to the ever-evolving different perspectives on Porter's work. All three presentations on the Porter panel concerned her relationships with other artists. Beth Alvarez's presentation on Porter's relationship with George Platt Lynes revealed the significant connection between the two artists as well as presented a description and an analysis of many of Lynes's lesser known photographs of Porter. Amber Kohl concentrated on the individual experiences of Porter and Djuna Barnes in early twentieth century Paris, again comparing the similarities and differences between the two writers. Geneva Gano also focused on the mutual influence between Porter and other artists. Her study of the links between Porter and the Contemporaneos in Mexico developed yet another aspect of Porter studies.

We are already looking forward to another interesting panel at next year's ALA Conference in Chicago. If any of you would be interested in giving a presentation or having a paper read on Porter's work or something relating to it, please don't hesitate to contact us ! We are also looking forward to having more submissions for the graduate student award and hoping to help establish a research grant with the Porter Literary Trust. It promises to be an interesting and productive year!

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank all the contributors to this year's Newsletter who have participated in this team effort to make such a comprehensive and engaging publication. Beth Alvarez, as always, has given her time and limitless energy to keeping us all informed about the Katherine Anne Porter Society activities and the advances in the KAP Correspondance Project. Christine Grogan has

researched and commented on the current publications on Porter to establish this year's bibliography, and Amber Kohl has not only contributed the leading article this year, but has also made this publication possible with her editing skills and hard work. Many thanks to all of them! 🌸

## Update on the Katherine Anne Porter Correspondence Project

By Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland

Since last reported in 2022, some progress has been made, but no additional online resources have been uploaded to the project website. The available correspondence remains the roughly 3,800 items comprising Phase One and Phase Two of the project: Porter's family correspondence and that of her literary friends. The items digitized in Phase Three of the project documenting Porter's business dealings, relations with literary agents, and financial matters are still awaiting uploading to the website.

In the last year, I completed two tasks and began work on a third. I transcribed Porter's handwritten letters and notes digitized in Phase Three. Eventually the plan is for researchers to be able to search the texts of the digitized letters. The texts of Porter's typewritten letters will be searchable; Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software has and will convert the digitized paper documents into an accessible electronic version. As OCR software cannot convert handwritten documents, they must be transcribed manually.

For the second task, I completed additional preparatory work for Phase Four of the project that will include Porter's personal correspondence that was not included in Phase Two; her

correspondence relating to her professional activities, lectures, awards, and interviews; and correspondence in eleven additional smaller collections. These collections include the papers of Marcella Winslow, William and Fern Wilkins, Rhea Johnson, Edna Frederikson, John and Catherine Prince, Herbert Schaumann, Harry Perry, Robert Morris, Clark Dobson, George and Toni Willison, and Desmond Willson. This work included reviewing relevant files, assigning dates to undated Porter correspondence, recording the number of pages of her correspondence in each file. The project's graduate assistant, Mattie Lewis, has created metadata for this grouping of correspondence.

I have begun but have not completed the review and revision of the metadata for Phase Four. As I continue this task, I remove Porter's correspondence from the files, create folders into which they are placed, and house the folders in boxes that will eventually be sent to the digitization vendor. It is not clear when the materials of Phase Four will be digitized.

For more frequent updates on the Project's goings-on, follow the University of Maryland Special Collections and University Archives blog or follow the SCUA Twitter at @HornbakeLibrary. Feel free to contact Beth Alvarez, [alvarez@umd.edu](mailto:alvarez@umd.edu), or Amber Kohl, [amberk@umd.edu](mailto:amberk@umd.edu), if you have questions. 🌸

## The Year's Work on Katherine Anne Porter

By Christine Grogan, University of Delaware

It was another active year for Porter scholarship. Four articles, two notes, one book chapter, one essay, and two dissertations were published.

Additionally, the Porter bibliography Darlene Unrue wrote for the *Oxford Bibliographies in American Literature*, edited by Jackson Bryer, Oxford UP, was updated.

To compile this bibliography, I searched the MLA International Bibliography, ABELL, and the University of Delaware's online catalog, using the term "Katherine Anne Porter." To find dissertations, I searched ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, using the term "Katherine Anne Porter" and limiting the search to "abstract." I did not include material that contained only passing reference of Porter. My annotations summarize instead of evaluate. If I missed any publications, please email me at [cgrogan@udel.edu](mailto:cgrogan@udel.edu) so that I may include the source in next year's bibliography.

*Pale Horse, Pale Rider* continues to receive attention in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. A brief discussion of the story opens psychoanalyst Fred L. Griffin's "Writings and Readings of the Pandemic: The Shadows Left Behind," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 91.1 (2022): 5-38, an article that explores how works of literary modernism were shaped by the influenza pandemic of 1918-1920. Andre Ye's "The Wartime State and the Cigarette: Darkness and Temporality in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*," *The Explicator* 80.1-2 (2022): 33-36, hones in on the cigarette's three appearances in the story and argues for its symbolic value as a fleeting light during the dark days of war. In "Tortured City, Tortured Mind: The Continuous Interplay of Individual (Sub)consciousness and External Events in K. A. Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*," *Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 40 (2022): 121-142, Olivera Kusovac and Tjaša Mohar employ Wilfred Bion's theory of dreams to examine how Miranda's internal/subconscious states dramatically reveal her ambivalent feelings of the external, namely the war and pandemic.

Also published in the *Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, volume 40, Dijana Mirković's "The Conflict between Primitivism and Civilization in Katherine Anne Porter's Characters María Concepción and Violeta," 105-120, discusses the primitive tendencies of the protagonists in two of Porter's early Mexican stories. Mirković argues that María embraces her innate nature when murdering her husband's mistress instead of following the tenets of the Christianity foisted onto her community. She is supported by her village. The natural instincts of the young Violeta, however, are not accepted by the repressed, modernized society, which leaves her feeling confused.

Alice Bailey Cheylan also revisits the topic of Porter and Mexico. In "Katherine Anne Porter's Mexico," *Babel Littératures plurielles* collection, *De Madrid al cielo. Mélanges en hommage à Marie-Stéphane Bourjac* 45 (2022): 183-191, she argues that the narrative techniques Porter later developed in her short stories were evident in the short nonfiction articles and book reviews she wrote during her time in Mexico.

In "The Pitfalls of Moral Responsibility in Two Short Stories by Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Ann[e] Porter," *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies* 14.2 (2021): 9-23, Madhi Teimouri examines how caregiving can degenerate into an abuse of power as illustrated in the relationship between the disabled children and their caregiving mothers in Porter's "He" and O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own."

Heather Fox devotes chapter four of *Arranging Stories: Framing Social Commentary in Short Story Collections by Southern Women Writers*, UP of Mississippi, 2022, to exploring Porter's persistent reordering of the Old Order Stories.

“Reconstructing Memory in Katherine Anne Porter’s *The Old Order Stories* (1944, 1955, 1965)” is an expanded version of “Representations of Truth: The Significance of Order in Katherine Anne Porter’s *The Old Order Stories*,” *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts* 14.2 (2015): 201-25, and “(Re)Positioning through Remembering and Forgetting in Katherine Anne Porter’s ‘The Source,’ ‘The Journey,’ and ‘The Last Leaf,’” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* 21.2 (2014): 75-97. She argues that “If the initial chronological arrangement of the stories in ‘Legend and Memory’ writes Miranda’s indoctrination as future proprietor of the plantation myth, then Porter’s reordering of the tales revises this indoctrination and exposes the narrative structure that maintains and perpetuates the myth’s oppressiveness.”

Jolie A. Sheffer’s essay in *Asian American Literature in Transition: 1850-1930*, edited by Josephine Lee and Julia H. Lee, Cambridge UP, 2021, titled “Slave to Love: Racial Form in Early Asian American Miscegenation Plots,” illustrates how the progressive racial equality depicted in Mae Munro Watkins Franking’s *My Chinese Marriage*, ghost-written by Porter, and W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Dark Princess* shores up conventional gender hierarchies.

2022 saw the publication of two dissertations that included discussion of Porter’s work. Bailey Moorhead’s “Unearthing the Old South/West: Histories of Racial Capitalism in Modernist Border Narratives,” The University of Mississippi, 2022, studies four works of modernism (by Eudora Welty, Porter, John Joseph Matthews, and Américo Paredes) that illustrate the overlapping histories of slavery and frontier colonialism. She argues that the similarities between narratives of people of color and exploited laborers raise

## American Literature Association Conference 2024

Alice Cheylan will chair the Katherine Anne Porter Society session at the 35th American Literature Association Conference.

The conference will take place May 23-25, 2024, at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, IL. Conference details and information about hotel reservations are available through the web site of the American Literature Association, <https://americanliteratureassociation.org/>.

Send proposals on any topic related to Katherine Anne Porter to Alice Cheylan, [alicecheylan@yahoo.fr](mailto:alicecheylan@yahoo.fr), by December 1, 2023.

questions about the South and West as culturally distinct spaces. “American Women Writers and Mentorship, 1920-1995,” University of Georgia, 2022, by Michelle-Taylor Sherwin explores how Porter, along with Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Ann Petry, Dorothy Allison, and Lucille Clifton, “construct mentoring relationships within their narratives,” focusing specifically on the ancestral forces that “play a leading role in shaping characters’ future decisions and actions.” 🌀

## Katherine Anne Porter Activities 2023 American Literature Association Conference

By Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland

On May 27, 2023, at the 34th annual American Literature Association Conference in Boston, MA, Jerry Findley chaired the Katherine Anne Porter Society’s panel entitled “New Interests in the Life and Work of Katherine Anne Porter.”

The papers included “‘Between the truth and well-regulated fiction’: Katherine Anne Porter and George Platt Lynes in Letters and Photographs” by Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland; “Modernist Women in Paris: Exploring the Archives of Katherine Anne Porter and Djuna Barnes” by Amber Kohl, University of Maryland; “Mexican Romance: Katherine Anne Porter and los Contemporaneos” by Geneva Gano, Texas State University.

At the annual business meeting conducted by Society President Alice Cheylan, members discussed current membership, the treasury balance, plans for the 2024 and 2025 American Literature Association conferences, the graduate student paper award, the forthcoming newsletter issue, and a possible Katherine Anne Porter research award. 🍷

## KAP News From Special Collections at the University of Maryland

By Amber Kohl, University of Maryland Libraries

It has been a busy year for Katherine Anne Porter activities in Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Maryland Libraries! There was a total of 24 reference inquiries submitted remotely for the Katherine Anne Porter papers during the past year, including inquiries from both scholarly researchers and the general public. I took advantage of a busy instruction schedule to incorporate material from the Katherine Anne Porter holdings in several instruction sessions, including ENG 241: What the Novel Does; ARHU 320: Writers' House Second Year Colloquium: Writing for Publication; ENG 222: Invented Pasts: American Literature 1865 to Present; and a Catholic University English

Class focused on introducing graduate students to literary manuscripts. The Katherine Anne Porter Room has been requested several times to serve as a background for video interviews produced by the UMD communications office.

We received a significant donation to the Katherine Anne Porter holdings, the Darlene Harbour Unrue papers, generously donated by Katherine Anne Porter scholar (and KAP Society Executive Committee member) Darlene Unrue. The collection is now located in Hornbake Library and has been placed in queue to be processed. A finding aid will be created, and the collection made accessible to the public.

I want to congratulate KAP graduate student assistant Mattie Lewis, who graduated from the UMD iSchool in May 2023. During her time working with the Katherine Anne Porter collections, Mattie made impressive progress on a variety of projects. First, she completed the work of compiling metadata for material from the Katherine Anne Porter collections for phase 4 of the KAP Correspondence Project. She also surveyed over 700 books in the Katherine Anne Porter library (which totals over 3700 books) for a project inventorying annotated and inscribed books from Katherine Anne Porter's personal library. Once completed, this inventory will allow researchers to more easily identify titles in which Porter wrote notes and comments in the margins.

Mattie completed a successful social media campaign titled *The ABCs of Katherine Anne Porter*. This series of blog posts highlighted aspects of Porter's life and work, arranged alphabetically. From [A is for Abels](#) to [Z is for Zodiac](#), the series of blog posts discussed Porter's Buddha statue, her cats, Gertrude Stein, Sacco and Vanzetti, Virgin Violeta, Yaddo, and much more.

Mattie, along with literature and rare books student assistant Victoria Vera, helped curate a November 2022 reading room exhibit titled [\*The Joy of Cooking\*](#) in *Special Collections*. The exhibit featured cookbooks from Porter's library and annotated recipes from her archives. Special Collections staff also cooked recipes found in the archives. Amber Kohl made chocolate covered German pretzel cookies from a recipe appearing in a cookbook owned by Porter, *Recipes: The Cooking of Germany*, (1969). Victoria cooked apple pancakes and fresh pineapple continental, which appeared in another cookbook from Porter's library, *The Astrological Cookbook* (1968).

Maryland Day 2023 at the University of Maryland was a great success. On Saturday, April 29, over 30 visitors to the Katherine Anne Porter room were given guided tours by Beth Alvarez, Curator of Literary Manuscripts Emerita.

All inquiries about the Libraries' Katherine Anne Porter holdings should be directed to Amber Kohl, Curator of Literature & Rare Books collections, at [amberk@umd.edu](mailto:amberk@umd.edu), (301) 405-9214. Mailing address: 1202A Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. 📧

## Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center News

By Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland

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. During the 2022-2023 academic year, there were six public programs held at the house. The writers featured include Kevin Wilson, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Stacey Swann, Jane Wong, Jericho Brown, and Fernando A. Flores. Programs are sponsored by

## Katherine Anne Porter Society Graduate Student Paper Award

The Katherine Anne Porter Society is pleased to invite submissions for its biannual Graduate Student Paper Award. Interested applicants should submit an article-length (15-25 page) paper on any Katherine Anne Porter topic.

The winner, who will be announced on December 1, 2024, will be invited to present a shortened form of the paper at the annual Katherine Anne Porter Society Session at the 2025 American Literature Association Conference in Boston.

The award-winning paper will be featured in an article of the *Newsletter of the Katherine Anne Porter Society*. The award also brings a monetary prize of \$1000.

Please email submissions as Word attachments to Jerry Findley at [jerryfindley1@gmail.com](mailto:jerryfindley1@gmail.com) by June 30, 2024.

Texas State University's Department of English, the Lindsey Literary Series, the Burdine Johnson Foundation, and the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center. Poet Cecily Parks, who teaches in the MFA program at Texas State, has responsibility for these programs.

Texas State University's MFA program has published Porter House Review (<https://porterhousereview.org/>) since November 2018. The online review is produced in conjunction with Texas State University's MFA program in Creative Writing. The review publishes a range of literary forms and styles and pays for all published work. The Executive Editors are Doug Dorst and Cecily Parks, and its Advisory Board includes Jamel Brinkley, Charles D'Ambrosio, Erica Dawson, Ben Fountain, Cristina García,

Carmen Maria Machado, Tomás Q. Morín, Naomi Shihab Nye, Tim O'Brien, Luis Javier Rodriguez, Karen Russell, and Evie Shockley.

The Writers-in-Residence at the KAP House since 2008 include Michael Noll, Katie Angermeier, and Jeremy Garrett. Funded by the Burdine Johnson Foundation, the Writer-in-Residence lives in the house and acts as curator of the museum and as the coordinator of the visiting writers series. The Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center is open to visitors and school groups by appointment. To arrange a visit, e-mail [kapliterary@txstate.edu](mailto:kapliterary@txstate.edu).

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center will host authors Elizabeth Wetmore, Tomás Morín, Katie Gutierrez, Kaveh Akbar, Paige Lewis, and Alexander Chee. Updated information will appear on the Center's new website, <http://www.kapliterarycenter.txst.edu>. Inquiries concerning Texas State's MFA in Creative Writing can be made through the program's Web site (<http://www.english.txstate.edu/mfa/>), via email at [mfinearts@txstate.edu](mailto:mfinearts@txstate.edu), or by phone at (512) 245-7681. 🌀

## Katherine Anne Porter Literary Trust

By Daniel C. Mack, Associate Dean of Libraries,  
University of Maryland Libraries

On behalf of the Porter Literary Trust and the University of Maryland Libraries, greetings to all fans, readers, and scholars of Katherine Anne Porter! As the global pandemic continues to recede, we at the University of Maryland Libraries have resumed operations and are ready to support both the campus community and the general public. You can find the latest information about use of the Porter collection and other materials and

services from Special Collections and University Archives on-site, <https://www.lib.umd.edu/special>. For hours, location, services, and collections from the University of Maryland Libraries in general, please see <https://www.lib.umd.edu>.

The KAP Trust continues its ongoing efforts to publish, distribute, promote, and make accessible both Porter's writings and scholarship about her life and work. To this end during the past year the Trust has begun exploring the possibility of translations and adaptations of Porter's works with several publishers and other potential partners. We will promote these efforts as they are finalized. The Trust is interested in other opportunities for collaboration as well. Please reach out to us if you have any ideas!

Royalties from Porter's works continue to grow the Trust's resources. Open Roads Media has promoted the digital edition of *Ship of Fools* several times during the past year. Other Porter writings continue to sell well. These funds facilitate the work of the Trust to advance Porter studies. 🌀

## KAP and Djuna Barnes in Paris [Continued from page 1]

Exploring their archives in Special Collections at the University of Maryland (as well as other institutions) offers a glimpse into their lives in Paris. Pulling together what documents have survived, including correspondence, manuscripts, artwork, photographs, personal libraries, and ephemera—what connections can their archives reveal to us almost 100 years later?

### LIVING IN PARIS

Barnes was sent to Paris on assignment by *McCall's Magazine* in April 1921. She stayed at the Hotel

Jacob on rue Jacob, a hotspot for American writers, before taking up residence on boulevard Saint-Germain. Barnes continued to hop from hotel to hotel, until 1927 when she moved into an apartment at 9 rue Saint-Romain with her partner, artist Thelma Wood. Barnes's impressions of Paris were skeptical at first. Upon arriving, she checked into Hotel Jacob and took a stroll to see the Notre Dame Cathedral. In her 1922 article "Vagaries Malicieux," Barnes wrote, "But Notre Dame somehow leaves you comparatively untouched, you may not remember her for fear of intruding. She is a lonely creature by preference. She is not disturbed by those devotees who fall into two classes; those going toward, and those coming from, faith. She is in the centre condition, where there is no going and no coming. Perhaps this is why, for me, there was something more possible in the church of Saint Germain des Pres, the oldest church in Paris. It is a place for those who have 'only a little while to stay'—It too is aloof, but it has the aloofness of a woman loved by one dog and many men."<sup>1</sup> Phillip Herring remarked that Barnes was enthusiastic when meeting James Joyce, but soon after she "returns to her views of Paris as seen through the jaded eyes of an unimpressed outsider."<sup>2</sup>

Barnes joined an established expatriate literary and artist community in Paris. She did not acculturate to local Parisian life; she spoke little French and kept company mostly with other American and British writers. Emily Coleman wrote to Barnes in 1936, "your love of Paris is a romantic passion, having little connection with Paris's reality, i.e., as the French capital; you love it because it is the past, and your past.... You don't feel pressed upon in France because you are not in the least aware of French life that is going on around you."<sup>3</sup> This romanticized detachment is perhaps not surprising for artists in the Paris expatriate community. Soon enough Barnes became a well-known expatriate



Djuna Barnes, Paris, undated. Djuna Barnes papers. UMD Special Collections.

fixture due largely to her sharp wit, beauty, memorable personality, and style. She was bohemian, avant-garde, intellectual, charming, and opinionated. In Robert McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together*, he wrote "Djuna had gathered the idea that I disliked her, and that I was a very sarcastic individual. She was wrong about the first idea at least, for Djuna is far too good-looking and fundamentally likable for anything but fond admiration, if not a great deal more, even when she is rather overdoing the *grande dame* manner and talking souls and ideals. In conversation she is often great with her comedy, but in writing she appears to believe she must inject into her work metaphysics, mysticism, and her own strange version of a 'literary' quality."<sup>4</sup>

Barnes often sat alone in Paris cafes for hours, preferring solitude. She spent much of her time with Mina Loy and her young daughter. However,

Barnes also spent nights drinking and partaking in the European decadence and expatriate debauchery in Paris and Berlin, particularly in the 1920s. She became a staple in the expatriate nightlife and social scene. In her 1939 manuscript titled "Farewell to Paris," Barnes described a Paris bistro frequented by expatriates: "When the Petite Chaise in the rue de Petit Chaise had the best bar man in Paris, the best champagne cocktails and the best crab soufflee[sic]. But how everyone raised their eyes to the little chair suspended over the bar and murmured a prayer for a safe delivery from this place. It was unlucky, it brought trouble, lovers quarrelled, a big shot from Manhattan had tried to shoot up the place just to give the owners an idea how they did things in the states—it finally closed everyone feared it—it was taboo."<sup>5</sup>

Barnes became disillusioned at times in Paris, particularly towards the end of her stay as relationships soured and Europe breached a catastrophic war. She, like many expatriates including Katherine Anne Porter, traveled about Europe while living in Paris. In a 1933 letter to Robert McAlmon, she wrote "I left Paris on the first of April, at that time it was very dull, and everyone very broke. Saw Joyce and Nora for tea, he looks old and shrunken and sad, is having another operation on his eyes. Montparnasse I almost never saw, thank God, but when I did it was worse than ever, sort of Coney Island with the fun left out, and full of uncertain men all pawing each other about in an indifferent sort of way. Thelma came through in November, and is now studying painting in Florence, sounds very happy when she writes, and is getting along famously. As for me I feel quite ancient, possibly because I am tired, and everyone seems to be dying."<sup>6</sup> By 1940, Barnes returned permanently to the familiar bohemian community in Greenwich Village, New York. She lived at 5 Patchin Place until her death

in 1982, next to an apartment for a time occupied by poet E. E. Cummings.

Katherine Anne Porter arrived in Paris in February 1932, over a decade after Barnes. Porter traveled to Madrid shortly thereafter, returning to Paris a few days later. From June through November 1932, she resided in Basel, Switzerland. She settled in Paris for the remainder of her time in Europe from December 1932 to October 1936. During the initial period in Paris, Porter stayed at Hotel Malherbe on 11 rue Vaugirard, then at the Hotel Savoy on 30 rue Vaugirard, and finally sublet Ford Madox Ford's apartment at 32 rue Vaugirard. She wrote to McAlmon in 1932, "Ford Madox Ford turned over his apartment to me, when he went to Toulon. I am sitting now in perfectly clear blazing sunlight, I am told this so heavenly spring means maybe the end of the world, for Paris has not seen such a season since the days of the Romans...."<sup>7</sup>

After her marriage in March 1933, Porter moved to 166 boulevard Montparnasse near Luxembourg Gardens with husband Eugene Pressly before the couple settled, in April 1934, at 70 bis rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, in a house previously occupied by Ezra Pound. In a 1934 letter to Robert Penn Warren, Porter wrote, "But now, the above address is as permanent as anything can be in a world that slips pretty fast. Write me here, either as K.A.P. or Mrs. E.P. We have a delightful pavilion, with a little shrubby, gravelly garden, and a huge atelier.... You know enough about European ideas of convenience to forgive me for boasting that the hot water really runs hot, the chauffage central positively keeps the whole place warm day and night, the house has three stories so we each have our own little apartment to a floor, and there is plenty of beautiful space, which has always been my idea of luxury.... So if we don't stay here, it will be because Gene has been ordered to Peru or Constantinople suddenly. Its[sic] not a fine house,

but sweet and old fashioned, not really old, about a hundred and fifty years, but it looks like something brought in from the country and set down in the heart of Paris.”<sup>8</sup>

Like Barnes, Porter didn't speak much French. Porter's letters reveal her affinity for gardens, landscapes, buildings, and culture of Paris. Her love of Paris was partly due to the history and romanticism of the city itself, and also because of the vibrant literary and art community. The expatriate community of American writers that were first drawn to Paris in the 1920s continued to attract talented artists looking for inspiration and a sense of belonging. In a 1932 letter to her brother Paul, Porter wrote, “This doesn't give much idea of why I am so happy in Paris, though, does it! Well, its[sic] such a gorgeous dim old city, with remnants of all its history from medieval times still standing, still in use, still part of life. I have a feeling of continuity, of things beautifully done for their own sakes, a strong live source of belief in life, that goes on and will allow me to go with it. I can live and work here without question, see the people I like, arrange my life as I want it without the terrible drain on spirit and energy that it costs almost anywhere else... I do not have to explain anything or listen to explanation, and I do not have that feeling of being at odds with society because I am an artist. Here the artist is part of the scheme, he has his place, he seems to be a human being, and not pet, or pariah, or clown or prostitute; if he has anything to give, there are plenty of people with a critical sense who will take a genuine, living interest in him, because they really feel that good art is important.... That is somewhere near the reasons I feel happy here.... I'm going to stay as long as I possibly can.”<sup>9</sup>

Porter was more settled than Barnes, or at least seeking stability. She was plagued by frequent illness, financial strain, and the stress of marriage,



KAP, 70 bis rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs apartment, Paris, 1935. Katherine Anne Porter papers. UMD Special Collections.

which lead to her living a relatively quiet life in comparison. Porter experienced periods of creativity and inspiration in her writing while in Paris. She wrote to McAlmon in 1932, “There's been altogether too much hell-raising of late, all kinds. I have settled down, having seen Paris—or

was it just more human nature against an unfamiliar backdrop? and am getting to work by degrees. So there will be a story for the next Contact. I hope, in fact to give you a choice among three, but I mustn't promise rashly, as I always feel so lavish when I am just beginning to write again. All my time in Europe has been a dry season, and it is apparent that one could lead a busy life in Paris just moving from bar to bar with the crowd. This sort of thing is not for me, because I was two weeks getting over our siege of Berlin, and have been drunk twice here, entirely twice too many."<sup>10</sup>

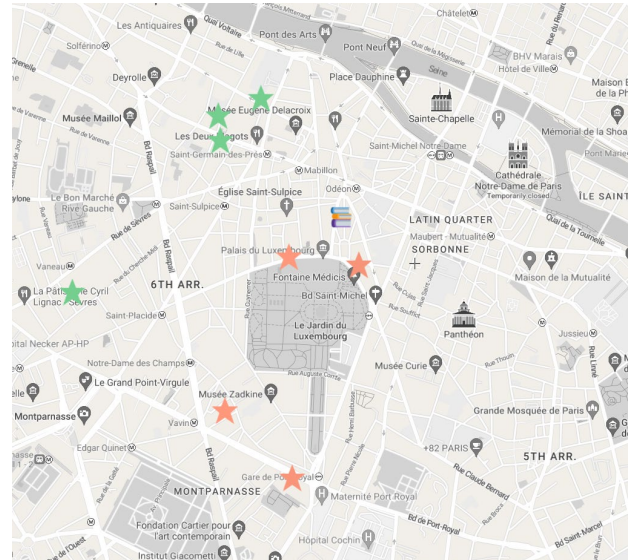
Similarly, in a 1934 letter to McAlmon, Porter wrote "There's this about Paris. Since I must live here, at least I like living here, just for the sake of the city alone, which for me is the pleasantest city I know. I had all my hell-raising, human entanglements, uproars, quarrels, first-and-last disillusionments, in another country, and besides, most of those people are dead..... so for me Paris is a fine looking place to take walks in, and I don't find this climate any more trying than I find climate anywhere. I consider this is positively an improvement over New Orleans, Denver, New York, Mexico City, Berlin, Madrid, Basle. I haven't been to London, Prague, Budapesth[sic], Constantinople, Pekin, Cairo, Alexandria, and at present I don't care...."<sup>11</sup>

Like Porter, Barnes emphasized the impact of death when she left Paris. There is a melancholy both women acknowledge in the loss of artists, captivating personalities, and friends. It also foreshadows the destructive world war approaching Europe in the 1930s.

Porter was in her forties during her stay in Paris, while Barnes was just approaching thirty. Porter survived a near fatal case of influenza during the 1918 pandemic, spent time in the Greenwich

Village literary scene, experienced the chaos of post-revolutionary Mexico, and traveled the United States and abroad discovering her voice as a writer. She was simply in a different place than Barnes, who was herself caught up in the turbulent, drama filled milieu of her own life and the artistic Paris expatriate scene.

A map of places Barnes and Porter lived in Paris illustrates their geographic space in the city, with the green stars marking Barnes's residences, and the pink marking Porter's. The book icon marks the location of Sylvia Beach's bookstore Shakespeare and Company on 12 rue de l'Odéon, an epicenter for the expatriate literary community.



Barnes's (green star) and Porter's (pink star) residences in Paris.

## SOCIAL CIRCLES

Barnes developed a close social circle in Paris, consisting largely of the women who frequented Natalie Clifford Barney's literary salon at 20 rue Jacob. Barnes spent much of her time with Mina Loy in particular, but also Jane Heap, Margaret Anderson, Nancy Cunard, Janet Flanner, Gertrude Stein, Peggy Guggenheim, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Sylvia Beach, and Barney.

These women were opinionated, artistic, dramatic, creative, and in several cases, their friendships provided Barnes with financial and literary support. Guggenheim and Barney were patrons of Barnes throughout her life, with Guggenheim continuing to provide her with a monthly stipend of \$300 until her death. Heap and Anderson frequently requested poems by Barnes to be published in their modernist literary magazine, *The Little Review*. Barney also sent Barnes money often, and the two corresponded until Barney's death in 1972.

Some of the friendships Barnes forged in Paris were to be lasting relationships, others simply faded away with death or distance. She also counted among her friends Mary Reynolds, Robert McAlmon, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot. The latter two friendships were especially important to her writing career and growth as an artist. She first met Joyce when she interviewed him in 1921 for a 1922 *Vanity Fair* article. The two shared a mutual admiration for each other and their writing. Eliot would champion the publication of *Nightwood*, serving as Barnes's editor for Faber and Faber.

Casual acquaintances and run-ins with established (and upcoming) artists were common in the expatriate community in Paris and Europe, and Barnes had no shortage of stories to tell. She was photographed by Man Ray, pursued by a drunk Sinclair Lewis, and spent many nights in expatriate bars.

Regarding romantic relationships, Barnes fell in love with artist Thelma Wood during her time in Paris, and the two shared a passionate and tumultuous eight-year relationship. This relationship was significant both personally and creatively for Barnes. It served as inspiration for her queer modernist masterpiece *Nightwood*, while



Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy, circa 1928-1930, Nice, France. Djuna Barnes papers. UMD Special Collections

it was rumored that *Ladies Almanack* was written to entertain Wood while she was hospitalized.

While letters between Barnes and Wood are full of endearments and cloying sentimentalism, their relationship was a rocky one. This was partly the result of Wood's drinking and infidelity, which caused constant stress for a jealous Barnes set on monogamy. In a 1936 letter to Barnes, Emily Coleman compared the relationship between Barnes and Wood to that of Catherine and Heathcliff in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>12</sup>

Barnes and Wood shared an apartment at 9 rue Saint-Romain with their cat, Dilly, who is frequently mentioned in their correspondence. Barnes was elusive about her sexuality, and there is much to dissect about her romantic relationships



Djuna Barnes and Thelma Wood, Cagnes-Sur-Mer, circa 1920s. Djuna Barnes papers. UMD Special Collections.

with women in Paris, both rumored and real, as well as statements she made later in life regarding her own sexuality. Nevertheless, there is no denying the importance of Barnes's relationship with Thelma Wood. The two broke up after fallout from the publication of *Nightwood* resulted in bitter feelings on both sides. Even so, they continued to affectionately correspond into the 1960s.

Porter also maintained a close group of friends in Paris, including Glenway Wescott, Barbara Harrison, Monroe Wheeler, George Platt Lynes, Ford Madox Ford, Robert McAlmon, Janice Biala, Kay Boyle, and Sylvia Beach. Lynes, Wescott, and Wheeler maintained long lasting friendships with Porter that she kept close to heart. She frequently mentioned social gatherings, literary parties, and trips with Wescott and Wheeler in particular.

In a 1933 letter to McAlmon, Porter wrote, "You may be missing a great deal in Paris, but I really would not know, if it were not for friends who drop in and tell me where they've been and what they've seen and done. I have for acquaintances bar-flies and ballet-hounds and music-maniacs and art-chasers, and they're just full of life and health and spirits and enthizzyoosm[sic], and among them they don't miss anything. But its all I can do to haul myself by the scruff out to an occasional evening gathering or have a half dozen people up here, and I begin to see that my hermit life has nothing to do with geography, I really do spend almost as much time alone as if I were in Basel.. with a whole townful of people I know who are always getting up expeditions here and there. I don't know why it is always nearly impossible for me to go: I can find more excuses in five minutes than I would have thought I would need in a life time... But when I roar around, I can't work, and there's the end of it." Porter referred to herself as a hermit several times in her correspondence, seemingly in a self-deprecating manner. She was



KAP and Barbara Harrison with Harrison's dog, Philippa/Felipa, Davos, Switzerland, 1934. Katherine Anne Porter papers. UMD Special Collections.

spending time with friends and at social gatherings in Paris, but not quite a recluse. In the same letter to McAlmon, after Porter described spending time with Wescott, Wheeler, Lincoln Kirstein and meeting Mark Chadurne and Gordon Craig, Porter wrote, "You see, don't you, that I really am a hermit? Think of all the people in Paris, and these are all I've seen for the past month...."<sup>13</sup>

Barnes and Porter's social circles overlapped, notably in their friendships with Kay Boyle, Sylvia Beach, and Robert McAlmon. Like Barnes, Porter made influential friends in the expatriate community and advantageous connections for a writer working in Paris. Two of her close friends, Barbara Harrison Wescott and Monroe Wheeler, founded Harrison of Paris, which published several works by Porter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Porter and Barnes experienced equally dismissive encounters in Paris with expatriate writer Ernest Hemingway. Sylvia Beach introduced Hemingway to Porter, who was visiting Beach at Shakespeare and Company bookstore. Porter described the encounter in "A Little Incident in the Rue de l'Odéon" (1964), "Still holding one of Hemingway's hands, she [Sylvia Beach] reached at arm's length for mine. 'Katherine Anne Porter,' she said, pronouncing the names in full, 'this is Ernest Hemingway... Ernest, this is Katherine Anne, and I want the two best modern American writers to know each other!' Our hands were not joined. 'Modern' was a talismanic word back then, but this time the magic failed. At that instant the telephone rang in the back room, Sylvia flew to answer, calling back to us merrily, merrily, 'Now you two just get acquainted, and I'll be right back.' Hemingway and I stood and gazed unwinkingly at each other with poker faces for all of ten seconds, in silence. Hemingway then turned in one wide swing and hurled himself into the rainy darkness as he had

hurled himself out of it, and that was all. I am sorry if you are disappointed. All personal lack of sympathy and attraction aside, and they were real in us both, it must have been galling to this most famous young man to have his name pronounced in the same breath as writer with someone he had never heard of, and a woman at that. I nearly felt sorry for him."<sup>14</sup>

Hemingway referred to Barnes in a 1924 editorial published in Ford Madox Ford's *The Transatlantic Review*. Hemingway wrote, "a legendary personality that has dominated the intellectual night-life in Europe for a century is in town. I have never met her, nor read her books, but she looks very nice."<sup>15</sup> There is no direct account from Barnes about crossing paths with Hemingway in person. Both Hemingway and Barnes stayed at the Hotel Jacob, but likely moved within different social circles. And it was not uncommon for expatriate artists/writers to comment on one another through editorials, essays, and reviews in literary magazines. Decades later, in a 1964 letter to Natalie Barney, Barnes wrote "Have you seen the new Hemingway book? I enclosed a clipping where he mentions you. It is also reprinted in the London 'Observer.' There's a boy who really got about to thinking that the Sun also Rose for Hemingway. I have not seen the book."<sup>16</sup> Likely referring to *A Moveable Feast* (1964), the quip suggests Barnes's not too favorable views on the author.

Barnes and Porter were both rising women authors in a crowded modernist expatriate scene in Paris, resulting in mutual connections, friendships, and professional acquaintances. A glance at the list of correspondents in their archives reveals some crossover, not only with the names listed above, but also Ezra Pound, Janet Flanner, Allen Tate, and others. Despite their common acquaintances, their social circles were distinct. In 1960, Porter

wrote to Victoria McAlmon, “I was never on really personal terms with any of the Left Bank Twenties crowd, though I met most of them at one time or another, and there was very little love lost between any of us....” She goes on, “My darlings were Sylvia Beach, with whom I had a delightful sort of sympathy, and Bob whom I loved dearly; and with the Jolases, and Bird, and Kay and most of the others it was a touch and go, hit or miss, thing of meeting here and there at parties but not often, and I was simply indifferent; most of those persons were simply not as interesting as they seemed to think they were—at least, not to me.”<sup>17</sup> Porter was particularly sharp in her criticisms of Gertrude Stein. Porter was disapproving of Stein’s self-centeredness and the blind praise given to her. Porter uneventfully met Gertrude Stein in 1933 and later wrote three reviews/essays on Stein’s work.

The most notable of Porter’s commentary on Stein was the 1947 *Harper’s Magazine* piece titled “Gertrude Stein: A Self Portrait,” more commonly referred to as “The Wooden Umbrella.” Although Porter was praised for her thoughtful critique of Stein, many regarded the piece as a virulent attack, particularly die-hard fans of Stein. Porter also commented on Hemingway’s writing. In a 1952 letter to Porter, McAlmon recalled, “You mention Joyce, Hemingway, Stein, Faulkner—of our time. I recall one of your letters when you said that Hemingway could not create character, his women just figures[sic] playing up to his eternal hero, himself.”<sup>18</sup>

Barnes and Porter are both mentioned in McAlmon’s *Being Geniuses Together*. Barnes was a regular drinking companion and friend to McAlmon while she was in Europe. Porter also spent time with McAlmon, and the two friends corresponded about literature and life. McAlmon valued Porter’s opinion on writing and sent her a

manuscript of *Being Geniuses Together* in 1934 while he was in the process of editing and rewriting the narrative. The two corresponded into the 1950s. After his death in 1956, Porter corresponded with McAlmon’s sister Victoria.

Housed in Porter’s Library in Special Collections at the University of Maryland is Porter’s annotated copy of McAlmon’s *Being Geniuses Together*. Porter, who frequently made comments in the books she owned, underlined the index marking references to Barnes, Beach, and herself (among others). Porter added commentary to McAlmon’s stories throughout the text, such as her comment “Come come now Bob! Get off your hobby-horse!” next to a passage describing James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as dull and pornographic. Porter also noted artists and writers who had died, simply listing “dead” or noting more specific details, such as a passage mentioning American journalist and feminist Louise Bryant, where Porter penned in the margin “dead in Paris in 1934?”<sup>19</sup> Porter was only off by two years, Bryant died in the suburbs of Paris in 1936.

As for romance, before arriving in Paris, Porter was involved with Eugene Pressly, who worked in the United States Foreign Service. Fourteen years her junior, the two met in Mexico in 1930. While in



KAP with Eugene Pressly and Barbara (Harrison) Wescott, Paris, 1934-1936. Katherine Anne Porter papers. UMD Special Collections.

Europe together, Porter refused Pressly's proposal when she initially left Paris for Madrid. They two eventually reunited and married in Paris in 1933, where they settled into domestic life.

By April 1934, the couple lived at 70 bis rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs with their cat Skipper. While perhaps not as dramatic as the relationship Barnes experienced with Woods, Porter's marriage to Pressly was an unhappy one. In his letters, Pressly wrote about Porter's difficulty at times to write in Paris. Porter herself was at times exhausted by married life. Her marriage did not serve as artistic inspiration in the way it did for Barnes's relationship with Wood. Porter and Pressly would separate in 1937. Porter moved on to husband number five, Albert Erskine, Jr., a year later.

Did Porter and Barnes ever cross paths in Paris?

When Porter first arrived in Paris, Robert McAlmon encouraged her to call on his dear friend Djuna Barnes. Porter replied in a 1932 letter to McAlmon, "I have not yet run into Djuna Barnes nor Mary Reynolds nor Kitty Cannell, and I firmly believe that all meetings, these maybe in particular, are better if they occur by accident, let us say... all happens in time and I am in no hurry..."<sup>20</sup> McAlmon agreed, writing Porter in a 1932 letter, "You're right; let your meetings with Djuna, Mary Reynolds, Kitty Cannell, etc. be casual. They are all good sorts, but bitten long ago with a sort of 1917 Greenwich Village-ness, that we who lived in other parts of our wild country didn't attain. But Djuna and Mina both live, in different apartments at 9 rue Saint-Romain, if you do want to look them up, and both are damned gracious and good friends of mine."<sup>21</sup> Barnes is often described as aloof and with a sharp wit that could intimidate people. She was by reputation an insider's outsider who could be difficult to pin down outside her immediate circle of friends. For her part, Porter

was hesitant to force relationships, something that would most certainly have repulsed the elusive Barnes.

When Porter and Barnes finally crossed paths, Porter described the brief encounter in a 1933 letter to McAlmon: "It was good of you to let Kay Boyle know I was here, for I had not an idea where to find her, and as it was we almost missed. I answered her note by telephone, and just had time to grab a taxi and get to a tea at Clothilde Vail's the evening before they were getting away back to the coast... So I saw gathered under one roof Laurence and Kay, Clothilde and her husband, Jaques Baron, Djuna Barnes, (who walked over me twice, in five seconds, once going, once coming, which should be a record, so that I felt I must complain, and said why must you wear iron shoes to a party like this! But she stormed away without even looking back.)"<sup>22</sup>

Porter did not naturally fall into Barnes's crowd. She found Dada artist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven obnoxious and simply didn't connect with Mina Loy when the two spoke at a party. Porter described in a 1932 letter to McAlmon, "somehow we went klunk!"<sup>23</sup> Despite the effort by McAlmon, neither a social nor professional connection materialized between Barnes and Porter. Porter wrote to McAlmon in 1933, "Paris of bars and bohemia is pretty deadly, I think. I begin to feel about bars as I do about moving pictures: I go back now and then just to remind myself that I really do not care for them and that my dislike is soundly based... Such great crowds and so little company."<sup>24</sup>

## WRITING IN PARIS

Barnes enjoyed a flurry of artistic creativity in Paris. She was busy writing and publishing poetry, articles, dramas, and novels, most notably *Ryder*

(1928), *Ladies Almanack* (1928), and *Nightwood* (1936.) Her works appeared in *The Transatlantic Review*, *The Little Review*, *Vanity Fair*, *Playboy*, and *The Dial*. The relationships in Paris served as inspiration for at least two works, *Ladies Almanack* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936). *Nightwood* is considered to be a fictionalization of the end of her relationship with Thelma Wood.

However, it is *Ladies Almanack* that most often ties Barnes and Paris together. *Ladies Almanack* was written as a satire of the lesbian social circles of Natalie Clifford Barney's literary salon, in the style of an early modern almanack. It was privately printed with financial help from Robert McAlmon, the author simply "a lady of fashion." Barnes not only wrote the story but provided remarkable illustrations in the style of Elizabethan era woodcuts. The origins of *Ladies Almanack* are debated. Barnes either wrote the story to entertain Thelma Wood when she was hospitalized, or to encourage the patronage of Natalie Clifford Barney. Barnes herself provided conflicting information later in her life, further adding to the mystique of *Ladies Almanack*.

Barnes herself never publicly revealed the secrets of *Ladies Almanack*. Critiques of the archaic Elizabethan language are comparable to those of the language of *Ulysses*. The story can be difficult to comprehend, but it remains a fascinating contribution to experimental modernist literature. Daniela Caselli, in her afterword to the 2006 edition of *Ladies Almanack* titled "The Unreadable Pleasures of Ladies Almanack" remarked, "The enigmatic character of the Forward and of the text can be read not just as a high modernist commitment to the ineffable, but also as a reference to an important chapter of women's history and literature, in which women were compilers, objects of scorn and satire, and active consumers, annotators, and contributors of almanacs."<sup>25</sup>

Readers have attempted to decode the perplexing text through the comments of others, most notably personal copies of *Ladies Almanack* annotated by Barney and Janet Flanner. Barney, in particular, loved to claim publicly that she was Dame Evangeline Musset, a main character in *Ladies Almanack*. The text of *Ladies Almanack* begins, "Now this be a Tale of as fine a Wench as ever wet Bed, she who was called Evangeline Musset and who was in her Heart one Grand Red Cross for the Pursuance, the Relief and the Distraction, of such Girls as in their Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most..."<sup>26</sup> This boasting by Barney was much to the chagrin of a fiercely private Barnes.

What *Ladies Almanack* does marvelously is provide a glimpse into an inner circle. This isn't Hemingway's *Moveable Feast* or McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together*, this is a cleverly veiled story that doesn't allow readers in on the joke. Almanacs are temporary, ephemeral, and so *Ladies Almanack*, referencing a time and place not meant to be understood, therefore, becomes quite the genuine reflection of its time.

For Porter, while the 1930s were productive years for her writing, Paris was not the direct artistic inspiration for her that it served for Barnes. Porter went through periods of frustration as well as creativity. In a 1933 letter to Ford Madox Ford and Janice Biala, Porter's husband Pressly wrote: "We must send for our stuff from Mexico, to get the papers she left there; but so far haven't ordered it started along because we must have freight expenses on hand when it arrives.... Byt[sic] the time it gets here, settled we must be. This business of trying to keep papers available for work in a place just big enough to do one thing at a time in is a little difficult. Katherine Anne sometimes gets desperate about it; there's time to eat and to sleep and to wash dishes and to clean up, but no time to

write, which is, after all, the only reason for eating and sleeping and all the rest.”<sup>27</sup> Financial stress and relationship troubles hounded both Porter and Barnes while in Paris, and, for Porter, it directly impacted her ability to work.

While in Paris, Porter worked on “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” and “Noon Wine,” and completed six of her Old Order stories. She also worked on research for her never-to-be-published book on Cotton Mather. Her writing was published in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Hound and Horn*, and *The Southern Review*, among others. A 1934 manuscript “Paris sketch” can be found in her archives, which begins “On a sunny day in December, when all Paris turns out to bask like cats over their goblets and cups and saucers on terraces, or walks in a complacent dream about the streets.”<sup>28</sup> Porter published *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1935) and the first collaboration with Harrison of Paris, *Katherine Anne Porter’s French Song-Book* (1933). A year later, the firm published *Hacienda* (1934).

For *Katherine Anne Porter’s French Song-Book*, Porter worked with rough translations of French texts provided to her. It was a project that initially gave her reservations. She wrote to Barbara Harrison Wescott in 1932, “I regret extremely to tell you that I am finding myself quite unable to translate the songs, since most of them are quite untranslatable, and since I am not a fluent poet, writing small poems suitable for the music is proving a very heavy task. The idea of the book is a beautiful one, and I hope you will be enabled to publish it by finding some one else.”<sup>29</sup>

In a 1935 speech given to the American Women’s Club in Paris, Porter spoke on identity among American authors. She wrote in the draft of the speech, “When I was in America, all my writing friends were here, sending me word that Paris, or

some city in Europe, was to be their final choice of a dwelling place; when I finally came here, it was only to begin receiving letters from them all, now back in America, telling me that I was wrong to expatriate myself.” She dismissed labels placed upon the artist “the less typical a writer is the less you are able to catalogue him, the more apt he is to be a writer worth your attention. We don’t need any more types. We need individuals. We always did need them.”<sup>30</sup>

Both Porter and Barnes were avid readers, taking inspiration and a critical eye to the works of their contemporaries. Porter owned at least two copies of *Nightwood*, that we know of. The copy currently housed in her archives contains annotations that are perhaps not all that shocking. Next to a particularly dramatic passage written by Barnes, Porter simply wrote “Oh Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> Barnes did not own works by Porter, at least none that survived in her archives.

## REMEMBERING PARIS

Identity, memory, trauma, and the past are themes that both Barnes and Porter confront in their writing. But what about their time in Paris? Neither created an autobiography. Barnes was adamant against talking about her past and denied several attempts to be interviewed about her Paris years. In a 1968 letter to Natalie Clifford Barney she wrote, “I can think of almost no one of my time who has not, in one way or another, approached me for something of the past. I’ve said no to all of them. I can’t do it.”<sup>32</sup> Around the same time, Michel Patient wrote to Barnes attempting to secure an interview for her impressions of Natalie Barney’s “Salon de l’Amazone.” Barnes wrote in response, “I have neither written nor spoken (for the public) of my contemporaries in over forty years, nor for that matter, about myself. Such material should be turned into art, (if one



Djuna Barnes, Paris, 1928. Djuna Barnes papers. UMD Special Collections.

can manage it, and wish to devote that much time to it) or such would, it seems to be, be better left unsaid, unwritten. I can hardly believe that Miss Barney... suggested me at all, as I have but shortly written to her about the horror of having tried to tell something of my life to a young man, who thought to write of it.”<sup>33</sup>

Barnes was critical of others writing about the expatriates in Paris, and, despite her affection for McAlmon and his 1938 edition of *Being Geniuses Together*, she assailed Kay Boyle’s 1968 edited version. In 1968 she wrote to Barney, “Depressed by reading Kay Boyle’s re-edited (? is that a thing permitted?) ‘Being Geniuses Together’ by Bob McAlmon. Re-hash of our twenties... all out of shape, it seems to me, and an egregious display of Miss Boyle herself. If you can’t make the passage of

time as it was, or better than it was (in the rough sense) by quality not much short of superb artistry, then why at all? It was first published in 1938, in London. Perhaps you saw the book then. Shadily vulgarized by time, with a pen in its teeth.”<sup>34</sup> Then again, in a 1969 letter to Thelma Wood, Barnes addressed the Boyle edited edition, “Boyle over does herself rather greedy and in bad taste.”<sup>35</sup> Reading through her correspondence later in life, Barnes was often suspicious of motives, egos, and held a deep concern for her own privacy and control over how to represent the past/memory in an authentic way.

In the archive is a manuscript titled “Farewell to Paris,” written by Barnes circa 1939. The draft includes anecdotes about a wide array of Paris artists and personalities, including James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, Glenway Wescott, Mary Reynolds, Natalie Barney, Marcel Duchamp, Alastair Crowley, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Sylvia Beach, and more. It reads as a stream of consciousness memory of Paris in the 1920s “when Gertrude Stein was less famous than her brother Leo” and “When James Joyce gave up teaching languages in a Berlitz school in Trieste because he knew he would never complete *Ulysses* unless he did.” There are colorful details and beauty in the text that can be seen in Barnes’s other work, albeit in an unpolished draft form. Ezra Pound is described, “with his red head and beard smocked in blue velvet, sashed in red and trousered in workingmans corduroys used to appear walking up the avenue de l’Opera in broad daylight carrying a basket of lonsters, aubergines and fruit pattees.”

In “Farewell to Paris,” Barnes recounted fragmented recollections of people and places. The draft is full of grammatical errors, run on sentences, and handwritten edits and notes on the typewritten text. Nevertheless, the writing is a

fascinating read. One paragraph begins “the ham bones of the couchon d’ore mingle with the bones of our body .. the lous racus shoutings of Mannhattans children are not cipied by the children who play about the statued in the luxembourg gardens, those granite queens who serve as a perch for the paris doves and the locks of hair rotting among the violins of the rue Jacob were cut from the head of courtesans who still ride through the svenue des acacias, for the wuaterite, those ‘debauched artists american’ did go to auteuil sometimes, and sometimes to the fairs outside the ports....” The paragraph continues on the topic of the expatriates “all went to Berlin, and some to Chelsea and some to Bloomsbury abd some on every train and every boat to somewhere, but always they returned to paris, to listen to the latest innovation in literature or dressmaking, painting as well as foods, antique shops habe changd minds as to periods to love, and books what songs to worshop.some to translate from the Tzchk the german, the russian, the polish, as in england arthur Whaley was still neck deep in China, so in Paris some unknown aspirant was struggling with sandskrit (as eliot did) others trying to learn french, and american french is universally abominable, a way of life.”<sup>36</sup>

Nothing appears to have come from Barnes’s manuscript. Decades later in 1969, she wrote to Barney, “Of course I think of the past and of Paris, what else is there to remember, except parts of other countries and other times. Here I simply struggle to still record what it has made. I can’t think what old people do, who simply sit and wait.”<sup>37</sup>

Porter also struggled with the idea of writing a genuine, factual account of the past. Like Barnes, memory and fiction were often blurred in her writing. Imagination and remembering don’t lend themselves to an accounting of the facts, and



KAP, 70 bis rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs apartment, Paris, 1935.  
Back inscription: “This is much more interesting upside down.” Katherine Anne Porter papers. UMD Special Collections.

both writers embraced experimentation and introspection, making it difficult to sit down and write about the past without taking a turn toward storytelling. Porter wrote short pieces here and there, including the above mentioned “A Little Incident in the Rue de l’Odeon” (1964). In a 1952 letter to McAlmon, Porter wrote, “Your book makes it look all so easy. You just go along putting events down in their proper order, and making your marginal notes and opinions as you go, expressing your ideas as they occur, or so it appears. It was that misled me. So I tried it... The entire past on its five hundred levels of consciousness piled up on my head, and in no time I was swamped, drowning, and barely scrambled out. I just don’t think I’ll ever be able to write about what happened to me, above all, what I happened to; for you know we have both acted

upon our lives quite as much as our lives have acted upon us. So much for autobiography.”<sup>38</sup>

In lieu of autobiography, the archives of Djuna Barnes and Katherine Anne Porter offer a unique lens to view their experiences as expatriates in Paris. This is by no means a comprehensive account, but a glimpse into the bounty of writings and correspondence the archives of Djuna Barnes and Katherine Anne Porter contain. Much more can be examined not only about their time in Paris, but also about their personal lives and writing styles as well. They both started their careers writing nonfiction; experienced the exceptional artistic communities in Paris, Greenwich Village, and beyond; and embraced the experimentation of modernist writing. Given the time, one can get swept up in their archives and the primary sources that reveal how these two women navigated one of the most famous literary and artistic epicenters for modernist writers.

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