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## Writing “Other Spaces”: Katherine Anne Porter’s Yaddo

**Kathryn S. Roberts**

In 1947, Katherine Anne Porter published an essay in *Harper’s Magazine* titled “Gertrude Stein: A Self-Portrait” in which she accused Stein of “avarice” for the celebrity and financial success Stein had found in the wake of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. However, the essay is interesting less for *what* it claims—Stein-bashing was a full-fledged genre in the U.S. media by the 1940s—than for *how* it punctures Stein’s aura. Porter’s counter-narrative of Stein’s life is also a counter-description of the space Stein made famous in her popular writings of the 1930s:

The pavilion atelier in rue de Fleurus was a catch-all of beings and created objects, and everything she looked upon was hers in more than the usual sense. Her weighty numerous divans and armchairs covered with dark, new-looking horsehair; her dogs, Basket and Pepe, conspicuous, special, afflicted as neurotic children; her clutter of small tables each with its own clutter of perhaps valuable but certainly treasured objects; her Alice B. Toklas; her visitors; and finally, ranging the walls from floor to ceiling, giving the impression that they were hung three deep, elbowing each other, canceling each other’s best effects in the jealous way of pictures, was her celebrated collection of paintings by her collection of celebrated painters.<sup>1</sup>

Porter focuses on the social and spatial configuration of the *atelier*: Stein is emphatically at its center, possessing, consecrating, and equating (morally suspect operations, we know from Porter’s irony) the persons, paintings, pets, and furniture that surround her.<sup>2</sup> It is an insightful description of how a domestic space can be converted—through the self-mythologizing practices of Stein’s popular autobiography—into a celebrity world. Persons, places,

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736 and things matter only insofar as they enhance and partake of the glamor of the star, or in Stein's own terms, "the genius." Porter, who is rarely mentioned in studies of Anglo-American modernism, here anticipates recent literary historians in their analyses of modernist celebrity culture.<sup>3</sup>

Porter's critique of Stein helps illuminate the larger project of Porter's late fiction, which culminated in the novel *Ship of Fools* (begun 1941, completed 1961). Provoked by the conspicuous cultivation of a wide audience by high modernists such as Stein, Porter's writings of this period revise the genre of expatriate autobiography and insist on an outsider status for authors, this against the tide of modernist integration into the literary marketplace. This stance was shaped by Porter's more than twenty-year involvement with Yaddo, the art colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. The colony has received curiously little attention from scholars of late modernism, despite its importance for "returning exiles" like Porter and Malcolm Cowley (who wrote one of the most famous modernist memoir-histories, *Exile's Return*, at Yaddo in the early 1930s).<sup>4</sup> Paris and Yaddo are connected in the imaginations of American writers, and this article traces that connection through literary history and literary form.

Why is it that U.S. writers' colonies such as Yaddo or MacDowell have rarely been considered integral to the story of American modernism? Part of the answer has to do with the colonies themselves, which tended to cultivate isolation and marginality, rather than celebrity or recognition. But Yaddo's neglect is also symptomatic of a larger difficulty in the field: despite major interventions by scholars such as Shari Benstock, Lawrence Rainey, and Michael Szalay, the institutional context of modernist literary production is most often seen as mere background, at best the subject of cultural history.<sup>5</sup> The real story for literary studies is still, if only implicitly, formal innovation, especially where innovation can be construed as responding to hegemonic ideological systems and capital flows. On one level, I identify and describe in formal terms a micro-genre—call it "colony modernism"—that emerged from a group of similar and understudied U.S. literary institutions in the early twentieth century. But my more ambitious goal is to shift our understanding of what modernism is and does. The textual spaces created by modernist writers and the "authorial" practices of modernist institution builders ought to be considered together as interpenetrating, and inextricable, elements of the modernist project.

Paris and Yaddo were important to many writers precisely because they were *other* spaces, and *authored* spaces. Porter's description of Stein's Paris *atelier* is a vivid example of a type of writing that was widespread in the transatlantic literary scene of the 1930s and 1940s, what we might call "heterotopography," or writing "other spaces." Michel Foucault coined the term "heterotopia" or "counter-site" to describe real places in a culture that function as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."<sup>6</sup> Modernism was a heterotopian movement, although this fact has garnered less attention than it deserves from critics interested in modernist literary form.<sup>7</sup> We are familiar with the argument that modernism found, in Fredric Jameson's terms, symbolic solutions to social crises.<sup>8</sup> Modernisms also reacted to each

other; Peter Nicholls argues that Stein's early experiments in de-centered writing gave birth to "Other Modernisms," a counter-tradition to the agonistic Anglo-American strain represented by Pound, Eliot, and Lewis.<sup>9</sup> But literary experimentation was accompanied, and often preceded, by social experimentation. Stein's language puzzles are unthinkable without her avant-garde household, which is both the enabling condition, and the subject, of texts as diverse as the nearly unintelligible "Tender Buttons" and the accessibly chatty *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Specifying the heterotopian nature of modernism—a movement that both made and wrote "other spaces"—helps map modernism's various literary-historical turns, but it also clarifies the terms in which those movements were contested on the page.

Late modernism was not just a contest over which styles or personalities would survive the 1920s; it was a contest over which spaces would be remembered, which versions of community would be celebrated and carried forward. Stein's *atelier* is perhaps the best-known modernist heterotopia: Stein and Toklas's lesbian *ménage* offers an uncanny mirror of bourgeois marriage, while the incessant sociability of the space—including its very public display in Stein's texts—transgresses decorous privacy. Here we need to modify Foucault slightly; unlike the hotel or the ship, two of Foucault's examples, the *atelier* is an intentional and singular heterotopia, a space designed to be socially other, what we might call an authored space in at least three senses: it has an author at its center, it is intended or authorized by that writer's imagination, and its myth, its productive otherness, is partially constituted through writing. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* invited future thousands of readers into the historically ephemeral *atelier*. Porter's essay is thus an exercise in demystification. It re-writes Stein's heterotopia in order to contest its very status as an "other space." According to Porter, the *atelier* is not sufficiently "other," but rather more of the same: a world of both "unadventurous middle-class domesticity" and celebrity worship (Porter, 520).

For Porter and other writers devoted to places like Yaddo, the noble obscurity of the writers' colony represented a retreat from what they considered to be the increasingly bureaucratized and celebrity-driven U.S. literary scene. I adhere closely to the terms late-modernist colony writers such as Porter used to describe the heterotopia of the writers' colony and to differentiate themselves from the dominant, metropolitan form of U.S. modernism, exemplified by celebrity authors such as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Stein. Michael Levenson has made the broad claim that modernists lived through "a crisis in social history and a crisis of expressive forms"; to extend the argument, late modernists responded to and critiqued the solutions—social and expressive—found by earlier modernists.<sup>10</sup> Yaddo dubbed its guests "creative workers," a term that previews the uneasy balance of individualistic striving and collective sharing that governed colony ideology. For those who lived there, describing Yaddo was often a game of substitutions. Founder Katrina Trask insisted it was not to be "an institution, a school, a charity"; nonetheless, its structural similarity to other institutions often led to a riot of analogy: Robert Lowell called Yaddo "a sort of Saint Elizabeth's without bars," and composer Ned Rorem, "a luxurious concentration camp where I can neither camp nor concentrate."<sup>11</sup> Porter called it "a real monastery," a place of "sylvan beauty" where

738 dozens of writers and artists lived “cloistered” away from the turmoil of the Depression and the Second World War.<sup>12</sup>

These comparisons make visible two features of Yaddo that will govern my discussion of the colony’s influence on modernist authorship and literary form. First, Yaddo’s value to writers was precisely its supposed separation from an “outside world,” variously construed as commercial, celebrity-crazed, politically reactionary, and hostile to female autonomy. Second, this separation led to its substitutability in the imagination. An intentional “other space,” Yaddo solicited comparisons with the culture’s various heterotopias. Katherine Anne Porter possessed intimate knowledge of these spaces, having spent most of her professional life shuttling among the hotels, salons, cafés, universities, and writers’ colonies that made up the transatlantic literary scene. She is thus both a representative figure of the late-modernist institutional experience, and a compelling guide to the spaces that fostered—and were shaped by—late-modernist imaginative acts. The fiction Porter composed while living at Yaddo is set among the hotels and cafés of Europe and aboard a ship destined for those spaces. While “The Leaning Tower” and *Ship of Fools* are often read as allegories for the failure of international community in the interwar period, they also offer insight into the more immediate context of their composition: they theorize the ethical, economic, and gendered implications of living and working in a heterotopia. Yaddo was a heterotopia of compensation, one that made up for the difficulties and dislocations of modern life by creating an ideal social order in microcosm.<sup>13</sup> As we will see, Porter’s “Alice B. Toklas” was a colony in Saratoga, and it was a truer marriage than any arrangement she had previously known.

### **“Wives of Geniuses I Have Sat With”: The Home Economics of Celebrity Modernism**

Before coming to Yaddo in 1940, Porter had lived for several years in Paris among the expatriate community of American writers and artists. But this was not Porter’s first experience of modernist community and the institutions that supported it. In the 1920s and 1930s, she lived in Greenwich Village, Mexico City, and Berlin. As a struggling writer in the early 1920s, she wrote for newspapers and a motion-picture publicity department; in the late 1930s, she lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, while Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks were launching *The Southern Review*, and was married, briefly, to Albert Erskine, the magazine’s business manager.<sup>14</sup> Porter’s life-long dependence on patronage, teaching, and what she called “hack work” made her a keen observer and critic of the social worlds of modernist literary production. It also caused her to idealize Yaddo and to reflect back on her expatriate years as a time of exploitation and misery. Although Porter’s letters from the 1940s occasionally satirized Hollywood, no community earned the level of public vitriol with which she blasted Stein’s corner of Paris. Her quarrel with Stein comprised both principled dissent and personal grudge. I steer a middle course between these registers, aiming for a thick

description of the interwar literary scene as experienced by an observer complexly entangled in its spaces and relationships.

Porter was inspired to write her essay on Stein after reading *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein's 1937 account of her successful American lecture tour. Although Porter had admired Stein's early work and praised the difficult, experimental text *The Making of Americans* in a 1927 review, she regarded later works such as *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945) as documents of self-promotion. Her extreme reaction to *Everybody's Autobiography* also suggests that she felt it as a personal blow. In assimilating "everybody" to Stein's own celebrity narrative, the text seemed to erase the experiences of the many writers like Porter, who proudly inhabited a social space somewhere between stardom and anonymity. Like *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which emphasized Stein's centrality by adopting the naïve narrative voice of her most intimate companion, these late works figured Stein as modernism's ultimate protagonist.

Porter's "Self-Portrait" drew directly on her own experience of visiting the *atelier* in the early 1930s, in the company of her friends Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, a prominent literary couple. In a 1937 letter to Albert Erskine, Porter recalled how she "sat in a corner with Alice B. Toklas (who has as fine a set of mustaches as I ever saw) and we swapped cooking recipes and mange-cures for dogs; she gave me her formula for making blackberry or raspberry cordial, and I told her what to use to make her hair shine." Across the room, Stein held forth, "surrounded by young men." Porter's letter is no doubt a motivated performance: writing to the man she is about to marry, she broadcasts her feminine "wifeliness" in contrast to Stein's masculine literary talk (and, snidely, Toklas's "mustaches"). But even the letter betrays envy at the intellectual leisure enabled by Stein's domestic arrangement: "One line struck me [from *Everybody's Autobiography*]: 'It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing.'" <sup>15</sup> Stein's jovial paradox was a barb to a writer like Porter, who would still be living on loans into her sixties. Written ten years later, Porter's essay reveals more clearly her resentment of Stein's household arrangements: "If there had not been a beautiful season in October and part of November 1932, permitting Miss Stein to spend that season quietly in her country house, the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* might never have been written" (Porter, 527).

Stein's texts emphasized the exclusion that Porter had experienced firsthand in Paris. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the narrating "Alice" jokes that she considered writing a memoir called "The wives of geniuses I have sat with."<sup>16</sup> Porter and Gordon (also a successful novelist), who had talked mange-cures in Toklas's corner while Tate and Stein did literary business, were reduced to unnamed "wives" among hundreds. Both of Stein's autobiographies contain what Porter refers to as a "parade of names"; geniuses (like Picasso and Stein) are distinguished from and set off by the crowd of non-genius artists and wives. As Mark Goble and others have noted, Stein's autobiographies describe a celebrity world: already famous names such as Picasso elicit readerly recognition due to extra-textual notoriety, like a cameo appearance in a Hollywood film.<sup>17</sup> Although feminist critics have celebrated the parodic "queerness"

740 of Stein's genius/wife textual pairing, Porter—relegated to an actual corner—felt the power dynamics acutely.<sup>18</sup> Genius/wife was a gendered arrangement that left no space for (heterosexual) women writers like Porter. Porter resented both Stein's luck (she had managed to find herself a wife “to do everything for her”) and the undemocratic ideology of “genius”—so amenable to the commercial logic of celebrity (Porter, 524).

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* makes it abundantly clear that genius/wife is both a personal arrangement and one that makes good business sense. Both of Stein's autobiographies revel in the everyday world of literary business and reputation management. It is here that Stein's self-fashioning contrasts most strongly with that of colony writers like Porter. *The Autobiography* describes Toklas cooking and dusting, but also taking the publication of Stein's work into her own hands with the Plain Edition.<sup>19</sup> The book ends with a revealing statement about Toklas's many roles: “I am a pretty good housekeeper and a pretty good gardener and a pretty good needlewoman and a pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor and a pretty good vet for dogs and I have to do them all at once and I found it difficult to add being a pretty good author” (*ABT*, 251–52). The text's central conceit—that Stein has penned Toklas's autobiography “as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe”—might be framed as a collaborative enterprise with a consensual division of labor: Stein saves the busy Toklas from the additional work of authorship, simultaneously touting the rigorous practicality of her household and insulating herself from tasks extraneous to the creative process (*ABT*, 252). Combining modernist integrity with sound business practices, the collaboration of Stein and Toklas signals “safe investment” for a more tentative art-buying public.

It is difficult to overstate the divergence between this conspicuous—if ironic—display of capitalist values (self-reliance, self-denial, and self-promotion), and the self-presentation of colony writers. Anti-materialism was one of the simplest ways for a colony writer to mark herself as an “other” of mainstream American culture. For some, anti-materialism made a virtue of necessity: when Porter does mention money in her letters, it is usually either to thank a friend for yet another loan or to lament her impecuniousness. Stein was at the vanguard of American writers who pursued the writer's life through expatriation, radical experimentation, and eventual rapprochement with the market.<sup>20</sup> During the same period, American writers' colonies supported a very different itinerary, exemplified by a poet like Edwin Arlington Robinson, who almost never left his native Northeast and summered for free at the MacDowell Colony for twenty-four years. Malcolm Cowley eulogized Robinson in *The New Republic* for his monk-like asceticism, for being a poet and nothing else: “[He] refused every opportunity to capitalize his reputation . . . never wrote magazine articles or mystery novels or memoirs, or edited anthologies, or went on lecture tours, or gave university courses in Creative Appreciation.”<sup>21</sup> Writers' colonies were institutions that helped democratize, and make practical in the twentieth century, a romantic view of the author as a social outsider and creative worker, where creativity was understood to be compromised—rather than stimulated—by commerce.

Porter was not the only colony writer, then, to attack celebrity authors for exemplifying everything that was wrong with literary culture. Cowley, who had been a famous



Left Banker in the 1920s, transferred his loyalties to Yaddo in the early 1930s, accepting its hospitality and serving on its literary admissions committee for decades. In a 1946 essay titled "Limousines on Grub Street," Cowley bewailed the newly "bureaucratic situation" of American letters in which the collectivized authorship practices of big magazines and Hollywood "script factories" were leading to a star system: a world of large cash payouts for the lucky few, and specialized, anonymous toil for the many. Anticipating Porter's conflation of sin and sales, Cowley resorts to hyperbole, contrasting "the most popular writers" who during the early 1940s "were earning money almost at the rate of war contractors," with the toiling majority:

Lacking the art of salesmanship, or regarding its use as a dangerous temptation, they lived very much as before, on crumbs from a dozen different tables: now an advance from a publisher (who was likely to be more generous in wartime), now a story sold to a magazine, now a literary prize or fellowship (there were more of these than in the past), now an invitation to deliver a lecture or teach in a writers' summer school . . . now an invitation to spend a month or two writing at Yaddo or the McDowell [*sic*] Colony—in general an irregular series of little windfalls that somehow kept them going.<sup>22</sup>

Including Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony in his sketch of the virtuous writer's life, Cowley suggests that artistic integrity has its signature institutional context. In the case of the colonies, integrity was more of a social and moral stance than a guarantee of literary distinction. Colonies differed from the universities that were quickly becoming the primary institution of highbrow literary production. Whereas in the latter, teacher-critics cultivated appreciation for "craft" and a well-curated tradition, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony tended to be agnostic on the specifics of technique and artistic lineage, welcoming a wide variety of highbrow, middlebrow, and pulp writers.<sup>23</sup> What mattered most at the colony was a writer's willingness to participate "harmoniously" in the community's habits of daily work. Modernist writers who joined the colonies thus articulated a distinctive form of autonomy: one that embraced communal life, as well as aesthetic and political pluralism, in exchange for temporary shelter from the market.<sup>24</sup>

For Porter, the colony offered an alternative not only to commercial writing, but also to marriage, an arrangement in which she found it impossible to work, and which seemed to her inescapable even in the lesbian artistic communities of Paris. Porter's ambivalent feminism, shaped by the colony experience, is visible in her almost obsessive attention to the (traditionally male) privilege enjoyed by Stein in her otherwise nontraditional household, where in Porter's assessment Alice Toklas gamely acted the wife's part. For many women writers, the colony was a collective solution to the problem Virginia Woolf articulated in *A Room of One's Own*. Yaddo offered not only an inviolable studio, but also the emotional support of the famously generous Executive Director, Elizabeth Ames.<sup>25</sup> Neither the "wife" nor the "room" was technically "one's own" at Yaddo. Nonetheless, the collectivized arrangement worked for many in Porter's time. Unlike short-lived literary utopias on the order of Brook Farm, Yaddo was—and continues to be today—a successful experiment in communal living and aesthetic production.



742 **Working Democracy in the “Swanky Monastery”**

Stein’s autobiographies present a story of Benjamin-Franklin-like self-making. Yaddo was a different genre. Spencer Trask, a Wall Street financier, originally built the secluded Saratoga estate to console his wife Katrina, an amateur poet who lost four children over the course of a decade. Like something out of *Howards End*, the Trasks’ was a marriage of capital and culture, symbolized by a country house: Forster’s 1910 novel is relevant here, for Katrina Trask’s vision of Yaddo’s social function is distinctly Forsterian. Michael Levenson reads the Schlegel-Wilcox marriage at the resolution of *Howards End* as “a party of embattled individuals [left] to assume the task of reconstructing a humane community.”<sup>26</sup> Margaret Schlegel declares that the old house belongs to “the future as well as the past”; her point of view, which insists on seeing *Howards End* as a symbol for a more humane England, is for Levenson a form of “literary activism,” for “to persuade others to share one’s mode is to change the life of a community.”<sup>27</sup> Forster’s novel symbolically converts a dilapidated country house into a heterotopia; Yaddo was an American *Howards End* in Saratoga Springs, founded in a vein of Victorian/Edwardian liberalism that would look increasingly problematic as the century progressed.

Writing in the 1920s, Katrina Trask assumed the inevitability of widespread economic changes (“The time will come when the distribution of wealth will be very different”), but insisted that “during the waiting for the coming of these economic changes great homes and great houses will still have their place,” and that Yaddo would be an incubator for the “new spiritual order.”<sup>28</sup> Yaddo upheld the humanizing function of the country house, a space that Lewis Mumford characterized as nurturing liberal conduct and stimulating conversation, the enjoyment of the arts for their own sake, and the preservation of the best in human life.<sup>29</sup> Although Mumford was an early supporter of Yaddo, he was also skeptical of the cultural role of large estates. In *The Story of Utopias*, Mumford’s first monograph, he described the country house as a pernicious “social myth” that promoted the values of consumerism and connoisseurship in addition to leisure, thus separating the enjoyment of art from the making of it.<sup>30</sup> The Trasks attempted to correct the parasitic quality of country house life by converting their estate from a space of consumption into a space of production, a workshop for creative people of all stripes. As Katrina put it in the same memoir, “Those who are city weary, who are thirsting for the country and for beauty, who are hemmed in by circumstances and have no opportunity to make for themselves an harmonious environment, shall seek it here.”<sup>31</sup>

Yaddo’s founders, and the team of directors that ran the institution after the death of the Trasks, insisted on the special quality of its environment to generate what Ben Alexander, in his history of the colony, terms “creative energy,” a combination of ascetic contemplation and collaborative exchange.<sup>32</sup> It was a very different model from contemporaneous institutions of cultural patronage such as the Guggenheim Foundation, which began offering travel grants to artists and intellectuals in 1926. Yaddo opened to artists in the same year, but in contrast to the Guggenheim grants—which effectively

subsidized artistic expatriation—the colony offered writers, artists, and composers a reason to stay put. If you could find a sponsor on the admissions committee and the bus fare from New York, you could be at Yaddo in a few hours, where you'd find free but luxurious housing, a private studio, and communal meals on a wooded and begardened estate.

Porter arrived at Yaddo in June of 1940 and lived there almost continuously until the fall of 1942, when she moved into a nearby farmhouse, intending to make the Saratoga area her permanent home. Although she sold "South Hill" after living there thirteen months, she returned to Yaddo several times during the 1940s and 1950s, maintained an intimate correspondence with Elizabeth Ames, and served on the Board of Directors until 1961. The personal warmth evident in Porter's early letters to Ames suggests the attraction of the colony was as much social as practical. She wrote in 1941, "I feel a great community of interest with you, as if now the work I have done in this year and three months as it will be, is a kind of partnership affair, at least on my side." Alluding to her plans to live at South Hill, Porter's optimism is striking:

I love you devotedly, and once in a while I would like to tell you so, for it seems to me that good words about our feelings are the living waters of friendship. . . . We will be near each other for the rest of our lives, and there are always going to be comparatively free and quiet winters for us.<sup>33</sup>

Porter's fourth and final marriage ended in 1942, and in her renunciation of that institution (she wrote in 1941 that marriage had meant "a strange cruel starvation of the heart"), she seems to have transferred her hopes for "home" to Ames and Yaddo, replacing romantic love with friendship and membership in a rotating community of artists.<sup>34</sup> For a time, Yaddo represented not only a temporary sanctuary, but also the prospect of a more permanent form of community that allowed full scope for Porter's creative powers..

Instead of a two-person household, which in the case of Stein's *atelier* doubled as a creative enterprise, Yaddo offered a diverse community entirely focused on individual aesthetic production. In a letter to Ames in the early 1930s, Cowley marveled at "the astounding success" Ames had found "in imposing order on these essential anarchists—not too much of it, but enough so that a dozen of them can live together in the collectivity of one household, and work there."<sup>35</sup> Yaddo followed the pattern set by the MacDowell Colony, which opened two decades earlier, "imposing order" by insisting that guests follow a short list of rules, which Ames referred to as "traditions." There were both written rules (no noise near the studios before four in the afternoon, no visiting studios without permission, no smoking in bed) and more informal strictures: being late to dinners or failing to attend evening musical gatherings would usually result in a chiding note from Ames. Combining the privacy of studios, the hospitality of a country estate, and the convivial (and alcoholic) atmosphere of a bar or café, Yaddo did its best to provide "ideal conditions for sustained work."<sup>36</sup> It was a powerful formula, and Sylvia Plath's letter of thanks for her two-month residency is typical: "I have never in my life

744 felt so peaceful and as if I can read and think and write for about seven hours a day.” Others became superstitious about the Yaddo “magic”; Alfred Kazin wrote, “So much of my real work forward in writing is associated with Yaddo that I . . . like to put a little bit of its earth inside each book I write.”<sup>37</sup>

Ames was partly a benevolent housemother, responsible for maintaining the harmony of everyday life inside the colony. But her position also meant negotiating the colony’s relationship to the wider economic realities, political tensions, and aesthetic debates of the period. Her correspondence with the literary admissions committee—which in this period included major writers and critics such as Archibald MacLeish, Morton Zabel, Granville Hicks, and Newton Arvin, in addition to Cowley—reveals their struggle to be both meritocratic and practical in doling out the coveted residencies.<sup>38</sup> Yaddo’s commitment to pluralism could produce strange—and strained—combinations of guests, and it was in moments of institutional crisis that Porter showed her loyalty to the colony. In 1939, writer Louis Adamic published an exposé of Yaddo in *Esquire*, ridiculing the “nonsensical and excited talk about The Revolution” around the dinner table.<sup>39</sup> *Time* picked up the story, branding Yaddo a “swanky monastery” and satirizing the colony’s contradictory combination of “left-wing” residents and “elegant capitalistic surroundings.”<sup>40</sup> Porter offered to write an article for *Harper’s Bazaar* to correct the colony’s image.<sup>41</sup>

A decade later, Robert Lowell, helped along by Elizabeth Hardwick and a young Flannery O’Connor, petitioned the board to fire Elizabeth Ames for her over-generous hospitality to Agnes Smedley, publicly accused of being a Soviet spy.<sup>42</sup> Although Lowell was unsuccessful in ousting Ames, the incident did lead the board to curtail Ames’s administrative power.<sup>43</sup> In a 1949 letter defending Ames from Lowell and company, Porter made the counter-charge that it was Lowell, not Ames, who was flirting with totalitarianism in his endeavor to police Yaddo’s community. Porter branded Lowell and his supporters, which included both Southern agrarians and New York intellectuals, a band of “literary dictators,” magnifying the conflict into an allegory of the postwar situation:

I learn that while I had the democratic good fortune to reside at Yaddo, I was actually living in a feudal state. I learn that a minimum of supervision for the sake of all concerned is not an adult necessity, but tyranny, pure and simple. It has also been forcibly brought to my attention that I am no less than an utter fool if I do not realize that every human act today represents a struggle for power, that the suppression of civil liberties, and the expression of political intolerance, is now the fashion, that, in short, I must conform to this iron heel of a “new look” which is transparently designed for the aggrandizement of a self-selected few, and the further trampling down of the as-always poor stupid many.<sup>44</sup>

Because Porter was in fact friendly with Lowell and the Southern agrarians, and wrote periodically for *Partisan Review*, her vehemence here is surprising: a testament to her partiality for Ames and Yaddo. The letter is also revealing for associating Yaddo with “democracy” and “the many”—not the obvious terms to use for an isolated community of artists. A letter in the aftermath of the scandal clarifies the association:

It is very important to remember that Elizabeth's prime article of faith on which she based her whole directorship of Yaddo, was that no one should be discriminated against because of race, color, religious or political beliefs. . . . That she is being assailed on the very grounds of her virtuous and serious attempt to direct a working democracy is, I think, much to her credit.<sup>45</sup>

That writers such as Porter and Cowley tended to associate Yaddo, an exclusive private institution, with a "democracy" of the many, only makes sense in relation to what they saw as an emerging system of bureaucratization and "star authorship" outside the colony. Both figure Yaddo as a heterotopia in which writers could maintain artistic independence and egalitarian relations with fellow "creative workers." The issue was particularly live for writers in the winter of 1940, Porter's first at Yaddo, which brought news of the death of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald's hasty stardom, public "crack up," and early death provoked extensive commentary from members of his generation, among them Porter's close friend, the novelist Glenway Wescott.<sup>46</sup> Writing to Wescott from Yaddo, Porter seconded his critique, blaming Fitzgerald's wasted talent on his doomed desire to ape the lifestyles of the rich and famous.<sup>47</sup> In the same letter, she reflected on her own integrity in terms that reveal the colony's practical role in preserving authorial independence.

Porter had just completed the novella "The Leaning Tower"; betting on its topical appeal (it is set in Berlin in 1931 and foreshadows the rise of Hitler), she had promised the story to *Harper's Bazaar*, in what would have been her first foray into wider circulation. (Like Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and other modernists, Porter's early work appeared in little magazines and luxury limited editions.) However, at the threat of editorial interference, she pulled the story from *Harper's Bazaar* and sent it to her friends at *The Southern Review*, forgoing the money and exposure the larger magazine would provide. Reflecting on the continued poverty to which such artistic scruples committed her, Porter described herself in terms meant to highlight her contrast with Fitzgerald: "I have taken money to live, and I have lived poorly, and there is no naming or describing what my life has been because of my one fixed desire: to be a good artist, responsible to the last comma for what I write."<sup>48</sup> Although hardly doomed to the poor house, Porter must have felt the irony of her situation: independence from the literary marketplace meant continued dependence on Yaddo's patronage.

### Expatriate Counternarratives

For sixteen years I lived . . . distrusting the rich, yet working for money with which to share their mobility and the grace that some of them brought into their lives.

Fitzgerald<sup>49</sup>

It is very nice being a celebrity a real celebrity who can decide who they want to meet and say so and they come or do not come as you want them.

Stein<sup>50</sup>

746 In Porter's (and Cowley's) terms, being a colony writer allowed for the cultivation of aesthetic autonomy (here in the very literal sense of freedom from being edited) at the price of accepting significant social and economic indebtedness. Fitzgerald's confessed longing for the "mobility and grace" of the rich, and Stein's report on the social powers granted to real celebrities, provoked what was perhaps excessive moralizing from writers who would have been equally delighted by the windfall of fame and riches, although publicly they disdained such trifles. (Porter's first purchases, when her novel became a bestseller in 1962, were a \$13,000 emerald ring, a designer wardrobe, and a long trip to Europe.)<sup>51</sup> The occasional pettiness of this literary bickering aside, Porter's attack on Stein contains two more serious accusations that are reproduced in the themes and stance of her late fiction, which revises the dominant narrative of modernist expatriation. Both accusations have to do with the limits of Stein's social imagination.

The first charge was that Stein never really saw the people in her crowded social world: "The air of deathly solitude surrounded her; yet the parade of names in her book would easily fill several printed pages, all with faces attached which she could see were quite different from each other, all talking, each taking his own name and person for granted—a thing she could never understand" (Porter, 524). The second charge, related to the first, was that Stein's social myopia prevented her from seeing the Second World War coming, despite (or perhaps because of) her position in the center of the fray. This idea is especially evident in Porter's sarcasm near the end of the "Gertrude Stein" essay, which describes the recent books *Paris France* (1940) and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945):

That was in 1938, and she could not be expected to know that war was near. They had only been sounding practice *alertes* in Paris against expected German bombers since 1935. . . . She was surprised again: as the nations of Europe fell, and the Germans came again over the frontiers of France for the third time in three generations, the earth shook under her own feet, and not somebody else's. It made an astonishing difference. (Porter, 528)

Parodying the language of *The Autobiography* ("It was an endless variety. And everybody came and no one made any difference"), Porter suggests that what is wrong with Stein's moral and aesthetic program might be a lack of distance.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to Stein's "surprise" at the German invasion, Porter's late fiction depends on an overarching historical irony for its meaning: although the characters do not know the Second World War is coming, the implied author and reader certainly do, and the pathos produced by this irony is fully intended in the text.

"The Leaning Tower" draws on Porter's experience of traveling to Europe for the first time on a Guggenheim fellowship in 1931, but it filters her personal confusion and depression—the likely emotions of a solitary writer in a new city, with little knowledge of the language—through present historical circumstances: the invasion of Paris by Hitler's army in 1940. Set far from Stein's *atelier* and Hemingway's cafés, scenes that evoke Europe's creative hospitality, Porter's pessimistic late-modernist fiction portrays the world outside America's borders as one hostile to artists—and to human flourish-

ing more generally. A young American painter named Charles Upton finds Berlin "mysteriously oppressive": his hotel room is "dark, cold, airless"; the accent sounds to his American ears like "a wooden kind of clucking and quacking and explosive hissing"; and "tiny white worms" crawl out of the sausage on his plate.<sup>53</sup> Like a despairing *flâneur*, Charles wanders through streets crowded with maimed and starving beggars, veterans of the previous war, and "thin streetwalkers" with "appraising" eyes (CS, 443).

The atmosphere of the story echoes Porter's mood during her first month at Yaddo. Just days after the guests had heard over the radio the news of the Nazi army's invasion of Paris, Porter composed a brief preface for the reissue of her first collection, *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*. She claimed that her purpose as an artist had always been "to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world."<sup>54</sup> The piece is slight but provocative, connecting concerns about the author's own output and legacy to world-historical events. The brief biographical note on the preceding page sums up the standard line on Katherine Anne Porter in the 1930s: she was an impeccable craftswoman with a short list of titles to her name. Her publishers at Random House sought to link the two traits: "Considered one of the foremost stylists among American writers, she has since childhood disciplined herself by prolific writing but only occasional publication." Random House pitched Porter's lack of output as an asset, implying that her stories were rare, precious objects—the note mentions the fact that the 1930 limited edition "became a collector's item."<sup>55</sup> Instead of recapitulating the standard modernist protocols of the limited edition, Porter blamed her meager body of work on history and circumstance: "To any speculations from interested sources as to why there were not more of them [the stories], I can answer simply and truthfully that I was not one of those who could flourish in the conditions of the past two decades." She goes on to call the era "a period of grotesque dislocations in a whole society when the world was heaving in the sickness of a millennial change": "We none of us flourished. . . . For art, like the human life of which it is the truest voice, thrives best by daylight in a green and growing world."<sup>56</sup> Although she does not mention Yaddo specifically, her juxtaposition of two worlds—the heaving sickness of interwar Europe, and the longed-for world of sylvan green—encapsulates the colony ethos as aptly as any publicity document. "The Leaning Tower" explores Porter's expatriate memories, figuring the Berlin boardinghouse as an anti-colony: a world of artistic cohabitation without solidarity or charity in the Christian sense.

As the story develops, Charles finds what he hopes to be a more livable environment and promising companions among the students and artists of Rosa Reichl's *pension*. However, most of his encounters with his landlady and fellow boarders are awkward and shameful, marred by lack of cultural understanding: his landlady rearranges his papers and bustles about the over-stuffed room while he attempts to work, and he is interrupted by a piano-playing neighbor. Gifts fail in this environment: when Charles tries to lend his coat to Herr Bussen, a poor student, he only offends. In the story's atmosphere of scarcity, suspicion, and alienation, charity and care have been engulfed in a web of transaction and debt. As Charles puts it, "Everybody seems too *crowded*, somehow, so worried, and they can't get their minds off of money for a second" (CS,

748 474). Unsurprisingly, Charles finds that his drawings, when he finally attempts them, are “absolutely all wrong.” After Charles spends New Year’s Eve drinking and arguing with his new companions in a cabaret, the story ends on a note of “infernal desolation of the spirit” (CS, 495).

Rather than offering a therapeutic release of emotion, the story asks its reader to add up its myriad ominous details—experiences Charles fails to understand in the moment—from across the intervening decade (the first line announces that the date is late December 1931). To cite only the most blatant example, a newspaper clipping that Charles sees in a barbershop shows “a little shouting politician, top lock on end, wide-stretched mouth adorned by a square mustache”—a detail legible in its full significance only from this historical distance (CS, 451). It is not only that Porter’s scenes of interwar Europe dramatize the unlivable nature of “the world” for the artist. The narrative perspective enlists the reader in its historical irony, even as it puts the characters through the confusing experience of living as history unfolds. A historical barometer of sorts, Charles senses the turmoil like a change in the air: “There is something wrong with the shapes, or the light, or something” (CS, 440). The other characters are too caught up in the business of living—“They can’t get their minds off money for a second”—to see that they’re cutting their hair like Hitler (CS, 474, 472). Porter’s 1947 essay accuses Stein of a parallel lapse: too caught up in the comings and goings of the Paris art life, Stein had failed to register the seriousness of the building political situation. The story makes an implicit argument for the value of the colony: separation from the world may grant the artist needed perspective on world events.

To be sure, Porter’s indictment of Stein was overblown, confusing hindsight with prophecy, and holding writers to an impossible standard of historical prescience that Porter herself achieved only through retroactive narrative legerdemain. Moreover, her essay fails to acknowledge the real danger Stein and Toklas faced during the war, as Jewish lesbians with many close friends on the political left. It is as tempting to fault Porter for the opportunism of her highly topical wartime fiction as it is to dismiss Yaddo for promoting a lazy romanticism of the artist: Porter could be painted as a quasi-religious figure, withdrawn from practical life and hypocritically railing against “worldliness” from her plush perch in Saratoga.<sup>57</sup> (In one of those too-perfect historical coincidences, Porter spent her first season at Yaddo ensconced in the “Tower Room,” Katrina Trask’s many-windowed study.) While these critiques resonate with “The Leaning Tower” and the Stein essay, they are less true of Porter’s only novel, which she began writing at Yaddo during the same year. *Ship of Fools* offers a self-reflexive meditation on the ethical, economic, and gendered complexities of participating in a heterotopia such as a writers’ colony.

Like “The Leaning Tower,” *Ship of Fools* is a revisionist expatriate narrative, recapitulating Porter’s own journey from Veracruz, Mexico, to Bremerhaven, Germany, on a German passenger ship in 1931.<sup>58</sup> However, the artists are comparatively minor characters, and the novel represents artistic travel only to attack the poses of expatriate modernism. Several passages in *Ship of Fools* read like direct assaults to Stein’s expatriate life as described in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. When the ship stops



briefly in Havana to pick up passengers, American painters Jenny and David decide to "be real tourists for once."<sup>59</sup> Jenny explains their ironic tourism as an appropriation of the middle class privilege usually unavailable to artists: "I have no prejudice against tourists. . . . I envy them savagely, lucky dogs with money to spend and time on their hands, all dressed up and on their way! I always have to work. If I wasn't on a job I wouldn't *be* there, wherever I am: I'm doing a job or running an errand for some editor" (*SF*, 52–53). The pair piles into a "crippled Ford car"—a dilapidated version of Stein's famous Ford—and are driven past the monuments at "appalling speed," such that the couple experiences the scene in "shapeless flashes," a travesty of cubist or Futurist painting (*SF*, 53, 54).<sup>60</sup> In the blur and clatter, they fail to catch the names of the monuments shouted by their guide, hearing only the repeated phrase, "erected for the view of strangers." Stein's refrain in *The Making of Americans*—"I write for myself and strangers"—is here twisted to gloss bad public art. Jenny and David's "tourism" travesties the bourgeois (and later celebrity) mobility of Stein's autobiographies.

As the scene continues, the conversation turns from tourism to audience and patronage. Reflecting on the guide's turn of phrase, David declares, "More and more I am convinced it is a great mistake to do anything or make anything for the view of strangers" (*SF*, 54). The couple subsequently argue about the possibility of living what Jenny calls "a wonderful private life that begins in our bones, or our souls even maybe, and works out." David's response is characteristically sarcastic: "Yes, of course; always that precious private life which winds up in galleries and magazines and art books if we have any luck at all—should we go on trying to fool ourselves?" (*SF*, 55). The conversation implies that in the interwar world, the artist must choose between accepting a state commission for a bad monument and prostituting herself to the publicity machine; Jenny's distaste for the former and determination "to paint for [her] self" is naïve and utopian, at least in David's cynical view. Later in the novel, Jenny will sketch a grotesque caricature of David, as if to prove the point that artists routinely cannibalize their private lives—and their loved ones—for creative "material" (*SF*, 339). Jenny's surreptitious drawing of David (which she thinks of as a "little murder") is a long way from Stein's word portraits of her friends and more elaborate exposure of her lesbian marriage in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Nonetheless, Porter's artist characters register the difficulty of navigating between the Scylla of patronage and the Charybdis of the market.

Immediately following their conversations about money, art, and personal ethics, Jenny and David return to the ship only to be confronted by a hoard of new passengers: "eight hundred and seventy-six souls," imported from Spain by the Cuban government to work in the cane fields, now being deported back to their homes by the same government because of falling sugar prices (*SF*, 57, 59). The steerage passengers' suffering transforms the atmosphere of the story world:

The air was not air any more, but a hot, clinging vapor of sweat, of dirt, of stale food and befouled litter, of rats and excrement: the reek of poverty. The people were not faceless: they were all Spanish, their heads had shape and meaning and breeding, their eyes looked out of beings who knew they were alive. Their skins were the skins of the starved who are

also overworked, a dark dirty pallor, with green copper overtones, as if their blood had not been sufficiently renewed for generations. Their bare feet were bruised, hardened, cracked, knotted in the joints, and their hands were swollen fists. (*SF*, 57)

The description highlights the workers' deep, historical, and systemic suffering, throwing into pitiful relief Jenny and David's carping about money. Meanwhile the artists sit in "a comfortable-looking silence" in their "cool-looking linen"—a juxtaposition that underlines Porter's sense of moral revulsion. The passage is both an ethical counterpoint to Stein's supposed bafflement at the subjectivity of others, and a Rorschach test for the prejudices of the novel's main characters. Quickly the perspective shifts from the American artists to the other first class passengers of the *Vera*, who ogle their new shipmates with various degrees of sympathy, fear, and disgust. (The right-wing German publisher Herr Rieber suggests the captain ought to "put them all in a big oven and turn on the gas"; *SF*, 59). Although conceding that it is "very nice" pretending to be a celebrity or a tourist when one is a middling businessman or a struggling artist, the social scale of the novel forces its characters into close quarters with the vast "many" excluded from the privileges of social play. It also suggests some ironic self-awareness about Porter's own tendency, as in the Lowell Affair letters, to confuse the harmony of an elite writers' colony with "democracy" and a poet's posturing with "tyranny."

One of the odd elisions of *Ship of Fools*, in which characters talk almost obsessively about money, is that we are never told how David and Jenny have obtained the funds for their trip to Europe. If we assume that Jenny, like Porter, is the beneficiary of a traveling fellowship, then the biographical subtext implies that it is the patronage of a private foundation that allows artists to act like leisure-class tourists and entertain the dream of "A wonderful private life that begins in our bones . . . and works out." Porter's reticence about artistic ways and means in her fiction contrasts with Stein's fiscal frankness. Although the novel is silent on the hard facts of patronage, its meditation on the social arrangement of the ship, that ultimate literary heterotopia, offers surprising insight into the social arrangement of the writers' colony, that lived fantasy of "ideal conditions" for literary work.

### Porter's Heterotopian Symphony

Combining realism and allegory, *Ship of Fools* depicts a world in turmoil that is both historical (the ship is a microcosm of the West on the brink of a Second World War) and metaphysical: the *Narrenschiff* that gives the book its title is "the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity," as Porter states in an explanatory headnote to the novel (*SF*, n.p.). While the historical themes and ethical claims of *Ship of Fools* have been well explored, few critics have dwelt on the novel's unusual formal elements.<sup>61</sup> It is here that the connection with Yaddo, as a heterotopia that sheltered a marginal mode of authorship, a mode self-consciously opposed to the metropolitan celebrity modernism of Stein, is most vivid. The character space of *Ship of Fools* mirrors the democratic flatness that Porter attributed to the writers' colony. Indeed, Porter admitted that the

novel had "about forty-five main characters."<sup>62</sup> It is as if each mind behind the "parade of names" in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* has been granted its moment of centrality. The novel operates through a dialogic structure that obsessively reiterates its theme, which Porter later specified as "Betrayal and treachery, but also self-betrayal and self-deception—the way that all human beings deceive themselves about the way they operate."<sup>63</sup> It is dialogism less of voices than of interiority: one character's inner monologue is immediately ironized through the presentation of another character's perspective. *Ship of Fools* not only subordinates plot to character interiority, a common feature of modernist novels after Joyce and Woolf, but also extends that interiority to the breaking point, leading Wayne Booth to ask, in a 1962 review, whether it counted as a novel at all.<sup>64</sup>

Porter's only novel takes to its natural conclusion what Alex Woloch defines as a tension implicit in the classic novel form: "The extension of psychological depth to ordinary persons creates a fundamental conflict, built into the very logic of the novel's development, between revitalizing and deploying the vehicle of a (now socially typical) protagonist and abolishing the centrality of the protagonist altogether."<sup>65</sup> Like Stein's own *The Making of Americans* or John Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy*, *Ship of Fools* is among the examples of modernist novels that do the latter, for a novel with more than forty protagonists surely renders "protagonism" absurd. If *Ship of Fools* was itself an occasion for Porter to reflect on how de-centered heterotopias shape human relations, its publication history also suggests the ways that textual artifact, authorial identity, and institutional context become strangely intertwined in the late-modernist context.

Porter later described the logistical challenges posed by her novel's character structure in terms that recall Elizabeth Ames's feats of human engineering at Yaddo: "It was all a matter of deciding which should come first, in order to keep the harmonious moving forward [*sic*]. A novel is really like a symphony, you know, where instrument after instrument has to come in at its own time, and no other."<sup>66</sup> What kind of symphony is *Ship of Fools*? Certainly it is one in a minor key, with its pessimistic theme and lurid plot. To trace only one line, William Denny, an uncouth Texan, spends most of the voyage aggressively chasing a Spanish prostitute; wildly drunk one evening, he mistakes Mrs. Treadwell, a prim forty-six year old divorcee, for his lusted-after Pastora, and tries to rape her; instead, she bludgeons him into a stupor with the heel of her gilt sandal. But Porter's "symphony" analogy is more precise than it at first appears, invoking the multiple meanings of "instrument." As Woloch notes, the question of the relationship between minor characters and protagonists is almost always one of instrumentality, both in the narrative sense (a minor character's function in terms of the plot and characterization of others) and in the human sense (minor characters—especially servants—are often instrumentalized in real life).<sup>67</sup> Porter's decentralized novel, lacking a strong protagonist, makes each character equally an instrument, singing the theme of universal complicity, her part integral to the whole.

The most important "instrument" in the novel is not, in fact, a character, but rather the setting: the ship serves in place of plot, offering a plausible scenario for the entanglement of hundreds of unconnected strangers. Both narrative site and crucible

752 of inner “truth,” the *Vera* has revealing and distorting properties. As one character observes, “Every smallest act shows up more clearly and looks worse, because it has lost its background. The train of events leading up to and explaining it is not there; you can’t refer it back and set it in its proper size and place” (*SF*, 132). It is here that the novel most closely tracks the social world of the writers’ colony, not by dramatizing artistic conviviality or independent silent work, but rather by echoing Yaddo’s structural elements: the separation from everyday life, the democratic pluralism, and the tension between managed harmony and inevitable explosion. Porter translates the structural elements of the cloistered writers’ colony into a modernist parable of international community on the brink of war.

While the character space of *Ship of Fools* suggests the de-centered social structure of the heterotopia, the novel is hardly optimistic about the power of this space to foster communal feeling or individual productivity. In Porter’s novel, formal “harmony” is in tension with the dissonant action and misanthropic theme; “community” on the ship is purely an accident of setting, with characters locked in close quarters for their dark comedy of errors. As the narrator says of the travelers in the early pages, “This common predicament did not by any means make of them fellow sufferers. On the contrary, each chose to maintain his pride and separateness within himself. . . . It was as if, looking forward to the long voyage before them, they had come to the common decision that one cannot be too careful of chance-met, haphazard acquaintances” (*SF*, 11). The failure of community in *Ship of Fools* is overdetermined by history (the passengers are a cross section of international strangers on the eve of the Second World War). We might also speculate that its pessimism reflects Porter’s waning belief, as the years passed and she failed to complete her novel at Yaddo, in the promise of the heterotopia of the colony to foster her own productivity. But the lack of fellow-feeling among the novel’s characters does not necessarily mean that the ship is a failed heterotopia. In *Ship of Fools*, characters, narration, and setting collaborate to show the burden that “community” places on women. Although Porter was only intermittently sympathetic with the feminist movement, her fiction is trenchant when it comes to exploring the gendered dynamics of social connection.<sup>68</sup>

Porter’s five-hundred-page novel is full of moments in which interpersonal sympathy fails. More specifically, female characters repeatedly reject their culturally assigned role of support staff to needy males: Jenny chafes under David’s jealous insecurity; Mrs. Treadwell shrinks repeatedly from “the threat of human nearness, of feeling” (*SF*, 142); and Frau Hutten, once “the ideal German wife,” suddenly resents the years of “interpos[ing] herself, literally, bodily, between her husband and the seamy, grimy, mean, sordid, tiresome side of life” (*SF*, 291). Porter’s women characters use the shipboard holiday as an excuse to shirk affective labor; meanwhile, the novel itself is a work of narrative sympathy on the scale of *Middlemarch*, unfolding the internal monologues of even its most despicable characters. Thus theme and form in *Ship of Fools* are ironically intertwined: the sympathy and care that might have been the job of the novel’s female characters instead floats “upwards,” to be exercised by its omniscient narrator. As if to complete the joke, the novel displaces domestic labor “downwards” into its setting:

The ship was none of those specialized carriers of rare goods, much less an elegant pleasure craft coming down from New York, all fresh paint and interior decoration, bringing crowds of prosperous dressed-up tourists with money in their pockets. No, the *Vera* was a mixed freighter and passenger ship, very steady and broad-bottomed in her style, wallowing from one remote port to another, year in year out, honest, reliable and homely as a German housewife. (*SF*, 19)

Aesthetic "harmony" in this novel is predicated on a double displacement of female labor, both sympathetic management and housewifery, that is the narrative equivalent of outsourcing. Translating the colony's conditions from the "green and growing world" of Saratoga to the blue and watery one of the Atlantic, Porter's novel reveals the source of Yaddo's magic: "working democracy" depended on an enormous expenditure of feminized affective labor, distributed throughout the institutional space. In other words, Yaddo was a surrogate wife of sorts, serving many of the same functions that Alice Toklas did in Stein's celebration of their literary marriage. Offering a temporary retreat from the (for Porter) irreconcilable identities of "writer" and "wife," Yaddo became both institutional site and, as I have argued here, the structural inspiration for Porter's exploration of a heterotopian modernism. In a 1965 interview, Porter said of *Ship of Fools*, "I finished the thing; but I think I sprained my soul."<sup>69</sup> The comment suggests that despite her long flight from the institutions of marriage and commercial literature, Porter's twenty-year effort to complete the novel culminated in its own species of alienation.

*Ship of Fools* meditated on the conditions of the writers' colony and attempted to export them, at least imaginatively, into a wider world. Although the novel ultimately enacts the failure of that project in its vision of dystopian community (and credits that failure to the fallenness of the war-torn twentieth century), its publication history is the kind of commercial success story that only a colony writer could mourn. Despite her longstanding quarrel with celebrity, Porter's career ultimately followed a trajectory similar to that of modernist authors such as Stein: her early, "difficult" work was appreciated by a tiny literary coterie, later promoted by publishing industry gatekeepers, and finally read by a wide audience, with all the accompanying publicity.<sup>70</sup> Porter's publishers had little trouble converting her writer's block into anticipation for a "long-awaited" novel, part of a \$50,000 marketing campaign.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the 1965 film adaptation of *Ship of Fools* (appropriately starring Vivian Leigh, of Scarlet O'Hara fame, as Mrs. Treadwell) guaranteed Porter financial security for the remainder of her life.

Yaddo was part of the larger movement of writers' colonies in the first half of the twentieth century that gave institutional support to the romantic ideal of the artist as outsider and social critic. It is ironic that the "post-romantic" phase of Porter's literary voyage included, if only very briefly, the celebrity status she had so long resisted. However, Porter's actions at the end of the journey suggest she was at least subconsciously aware of the connection between the novel and the colony that nursed it along. In a 1961 letter to Yaddo's president, Porter resigned from the Board of Directors, declaring she had never been "a joiner," and mentioning in passing that she was "reading the galley proofs" of the novel she had begun at Yaddo twenty years earlier.<sup>72</sup> The

754 symbolic severing of ties signals the end of Porter's long tenure as a colony writer, a period marked off from her earlier work by its exploration of non-familial spaces of communal living. *Ship of Fools* is one of the most compelling artifacts of the "other spaces" of late modernism, figuring not only the shape of the colony, but also its social ambitions and their limits.

## Notes

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1. Katherine Anne Porter, "Gertrude Stein: A Self-Portrait," *Harper's Magazine* (December 1947): 519; hereafter cited in text as "Porter."

2. For a contrasting reading of Stein's writing as radically "decentered," see Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 157–98.

3. For an overview of recent scholarship on celebrity modernism, see Timothy Galow, "Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity," *Modernism/modernity* 17, no. 2 (2010): 313–29.

4. For two divergent takes on the late-modernist project, see Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Elspeth Healey, "Writing Communities: Aesthetics, Politics, and Late Modernist Literary Consolidation" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008).

5. Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

6. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.

7. One exception is Cesare Casarino's thorough exploration of the ship as heterotopia in *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

8. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

9. Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 196–97.

10. Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 74.

11. Katrina Trask, *Yaddo* (Saratoga Springs, NY, 1923), 98; Robert Lowell, *The Letters of Robert Lowell* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 112; Richard K. Parker, *A Digest and Bibliography of Writings About Yaddo* (Saratoga Springs, NY, 2004), 268.

12. Katherine Anne Porter, *Letters of Katherine Anne Porter*, ed. Isabel Bayley (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 179, 182.

13. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

14. After her residency at Yaddo, Porter's tour through the institutions of literary patronage continued: she served as a Fellow of the Library of Congress, worked two stints as a screenwriter in Hollywood, and taught writing at more than a dozen universities. It was not until the commercial success of *Ship of Fools* in 1962 that Porter was able to make a living from her fiction—at age seventy-two. Joan Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); and Darlene Unrue, *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

15. Katherine Anne Porter, *Selected Letters of Katherine Anne Porter: Chronicles of a Modern Woman*, ed. Darlene Unrue (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 140–41.



16. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 14, 251; hereafter cited in the text as *ABT*.

17. Mark Goble, "Cameo Appearances: Or, When Gertrude Stein Checks into Grand Hotel," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2001): 117–63. See also Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880–1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 115–38; and Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 81–110.

18. Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), especially 143.

19. For affirmative accounts of Stein's celebrity and entrepreneurialism, see Lisi Schoenbach, "Peaceful and Exciting": Habit, Shock, and Gertrude Stein's Pragmatic Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 239–59; and Karen Leick, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

20. Rainey points out that expatriation also meant access to a rarified world of cosmopolitan art patrons. He uses the case of the poet H. D. to demonstrate the negative consequences for artistic practice of failing to find a public beyond the "coterie." Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, 148–49.

21. Malcolm Cowley, "This Week," *The New Republic* (17 April 1935): 268.

22. Malcolm Cowley, "Limousines on Grub Street," *The New Republic* (4 November 1946): 589.

23. See Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Writers of genre fiction such as Chester Himes, Patricia Highsmith, and Mario Puzo enjoyed multiple residencies at Yaddo. For a detailed consideration of the local politics of distinction at Yaddo, see Marcelle Clements, "Crème de la Crème: Highbrows, Lowbrows, Voracious Omnivores, High, Low, and Hi-Lo," in *Yaddo: Making American Culture*, ed. Micki McGee (New York: The New York Public Library, 2008), 103–18.

24. Andrew Goldstone has argued that modernism entails a set of what he calls, after Pierre Bourdieu, "autonomy practices." Writers' colonies construe autonomy not so much as a "practice," but rather as a function of place. See Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism From Wilde to De Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

25. See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929/1978), 6. Ames formed intense and sustaining friendships with many writers in this period, including Carson McCullers, Newton Arvin, and John Cheever. Philip Roth's 1972 novel *The Breast* is dedicated to Ames, making comically explicit Yaddo's role as wife/mother of American literature.

26. Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, 99.

27. Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, 98.

28. Trask, *Yaddo*, 93.

29. Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 207. Mumford, one of the most prominent American intellectuals of his time, was one of Ames' earliest "confidential advisers" for Yaddo invitations.

30. Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, 193.

31. Trask, *Yaddo*, 98.

32. Ben Alexander, "Yaddo: A Creative History" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005), 8. For a brief account of the rise of writers' colonies see the fourth chapter in D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

33. Katherine Anne Porter to Elizabeth Ames, 17 August 1941, The Yaddo Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, microfilm reel 2.

34. Porter, *Letters* (1990), 186.

35. Malcolm Cowley quoted in Alexander, "Creative History," 125–26.

36. Elizabeth Ames to Granville Hicks, 19 February 1930, Yaddo Records, reel 2.

37. Plath and Kazin quoted in Ben Alexander, "The Yaddo Records: How an Institutional Archive Reveals Creative Insights," *English Studies in Canada* (March 2004): 99.

38. In her annual reports, Ames often measured the colony's success in political terms. In the late 1930s, guests included Hermann Broch, Rudolph von Ripper, and four other "refugee workers . . . now outcast and almost penniless either because of their anti-Nazi activities or because of the



- 756 accident of race." In 1941, Ames convinced the Board to admit African-American guests, putting the colony, in her words, "in the good society of those who are fighting against racial discrimination." Yaddo Records, box 346.
39. Louis Adamic, "Ingrates at Yaddo," *Esquire* (July 1938): 183.
  40. "Books: Yaddo and Substance," *Time*, (5 September 1938): 56.
  41. Porter declared her intention to trace "in present customs and ways here—the survival of [Katrina Trask's] theories and feelings about class distinctions, the attitude towards her servants, her whole extremely good, right and very natural social beliefs." The essay was never published. Porter to Ames, 27 January 1941, Yaddo Records, reel 3.
  42. See Ben Alexander, "The Lowell Affair," *New England Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2007): 545–87.
  43. After 1949, guest residencies were limited to two months, and Ames was no longer allowed to grant extensions. This marked an end to the days of semi-permanent status enjoyed by writers like Porter, Smedley, and Carson McCullers throughout the 1940s.
  44. Porter to John Slade, n.d., Yaddo Records, reel 3.
  45. Porter, *Letters* (1990), 368–69.
  46. Glenway Wescott, "The Moral of F. Scott Fitzgerald," in *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson, (New York: New Directions, 1964), 326. Originally in *The New Republic* (17 February 1941): 213–17.
  47. See Porter's letter: "Poor Scott Fitzgerald. It makes me tremble to remember that really good talent, impoverished and finally destroyed by its own weakness for all the wrong things. The Beautiful and Damned, indeed; poor silly wretch, there was nothing at all beautiful in any aspect of his damnation—it was merely a little too cheap and nasty to bear inspection." Porter, *Letters* (1990), 189–90.
  48. Porter, *Letters* (1990), 189. The letter goes on to describe Porter's determination to buy a house near Yaddo, "But not at the price of letting Carmel Snow [editor of *Harper's Bazaar*] edit my stories. I can manage the affair without that" (191). She "managed the affair" in part with a large loan from Ames. See Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter*, 322–23.
  49. Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up," in *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson, (New York: New Directions, 1964), 77.
  50. Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1971), 3.
  51. Unrue, *Life of an Artist*, 253.
  52. In her study of Gertrude Stein's friendship with Bernard Fay, who served as an official in the Vichy regime and protected Stein and Toklas during the war years, Barbara Will notes that few contemporary writers were critical of *Wars I Have Seen*. Although many praised the "stoic tone" and "courage" of the book, Djuna Barnes's reaction was similar to Porter's: "You do not feel that she is ever really worried about the sorrows of the people; her concern at its highest pitch is well-fed apprehension." Quoted in Barbara Will, *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Fay, and the Vichy Dilemma* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 116, n. 26.
  53. Katherine Anne Porter, "The Leaning Tower," in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979), 439, 436; hereafter cited in text as *CS*.
  54. Katherine Anne Porter, preface to *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1940), n.p.
  55. Note to *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, n.p.
  56. Porter, preface, n.p.
  57. Gordon Hutner notes that Douglas Miller's *You Can't Do Business with Hitler*, a warning against U.S. isolationism, was a bestseller in 1941. Yaddo's romantic ideology of the artist is in line with 1940s literary criticism, from Wallace Stegner's call for contemporary writers to renew the "novelist's quarrel with the world," to Diana Trilling's lament that writers since the Depression were "suicidally determined to reform, to conform, or otherwise to find a place for themselves as anything but artists." Hutner, *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920–1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 203, 208–12.
  58. Perhaps in reaction to her distaste for Stein's self-promoting memoirs, Porter's fiction from 1940 onwards suppresses obvious biographical elements. This represents a departure from her earlier work, the series of stories featuring "Miranda," who is more recognizably an authorial surrogate.

59. Katherine Anne Porter, *Ship of Fools* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1984), 52; hereafter cited in text as *SF*.

60. Stein claims that on a trip to Spain with Toklas, she "first felt a desire to express the rhythm of the visible world," thus inaugurating the method of texts such as *Tender Buttons* and *Four Saints in Three Acts* (*ABT*, 119).

61. Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930–1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Thomas Austenfeld, *American Women Writers and the Nazis: Ethics and Politics in Boyle, Porter, Stafford, and Hellman* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). Some early critics considered the novel a technical failure for its overcrowding and lack of dramatic interest. See Theodore Solotaroff, "Ship of Fools and the Critics," in *Katherine Anne Porter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979), 134–49; and Wayne Booth, "Yes, But Are They Really Novels?" *The Yale Review* 2, no. 51 (1962): 632–34.

62. Porter, "Interview with Barbara Thompson, 1963," in Katherine Anne Porter, *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations*, ed. Darlene Unrue (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 97–98.

63. Porter, "Interview with Barbara Thompson, 1963," 97.

64. Booth, "Yes, But Are They Really Novels?" 632–34.

65. Woloch, "Minor Characters," in *The Novel: Forms and Themes*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 304.

66. Porter, *Conversations*, 98.

67. Woloch, "Minor Characters," 303–8.

68. See Janis P. Stout, "Sexual Politics and *Ship of Fools*," in *South by Southwest: Katherine Anne Porter and the Burden of Texas History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 178–201.

69. Roy Newquist, "An Interview with Katherine Anne Porter," in Porter, *Conversations*, 117.

70. See Timothy Galow, *Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xii–xiii.

71. Warren, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 6.

72. Porter to John Slade, 1961, Yaddo Records, reel 3.