

CELEBRITY REGISTER

by Cleveland Amory



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PORTER, KATHERINE

ANNE "It's a man's world, you know, and you men can have it. I'm glad I don't have to account to God for it on Judgment Day." So speaks one of America's great short-story writers ("Flowering Judas"; "Noon Wine"; "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"), a small, ultrafeminine woman who, in 1962, at the age of 72,

after 30 years of labor, published her first full-length novel ("And my last," she says. "What do you expect at my age?"), the controversial "Ship of Fools." "I wasn't working on it all that time," she says. "It was working on me. And I did publish other books in those years—stories, essays, and translations. But to hear people talk, you'd think I'd just been sitting around and counting my toes."

Although Miss Porter's reputation was built on an incredibly small number of works, she is bitter about the mixed reception for "Ship of Fools," which was called everything from "one of the great novels of the last hundred years" to "the longest short story in literary history." "Some critics said that none of my people were 'nice,'" she says. "Well, I'll tell you, I'm not writing about goody-goody people in goody-goody situations—I'm writing about real people in the real world, people who are either unable to see what's going on around them or unable

to face up to it, people who get in trouble and come through the best they can. And a lot of my people are nicer than some of the critics who reviewed the book."

Miss Porter was born in a predominantly German section of Texas (Indian Creek) in 1890 ("Do you realize," she says, "that I am both a cousin of O. Henry and a great-great-granddaughter of Daniel Boone? That makes me distantly related to Pat Boone, too") and grew up determined to be a writer. "But I knew it was a craft," she says, "and that it had to be learned. That's something people won't face up to today—the time it takes to learn. I played my scales' for fifteen years before I sent my first story to a publisher." While her literary conferees were settling in Paris in the twenties, she traveled to Mexico, instead, and lived through the perennial turmoil of the Mexican revolutions. "I didn't go to Paris, because I didn't feel—I didn't know anybody in Paris. I did feel a call to go to Mexico. And the revolutions were, in a strange sort of way, gentle when you compared them to all the other later things. Of course there was death in it; a lot of my very best friends and dancing partners and boys I rode horseback with were shot by firing squads, against walls. But their lives were in it, you know, and there was a kind of reality to it. So when I came back to New York and ran into bathtub gin and the F. Scott Fitzgerald crowd, I felt a bit out of place."

Married twice and divorced ("The only time men ever get a little tiresome is in love. Oh, they're okay at the beginning; but they do tend, don't they, to get a little bossy and theological about the whole business"), she now lives, with a cat named Béla Bartók, in Washington.

"There's a house near here that I'm thinking of buying," she says, "but every time I try to do something about it, friends jump up from every corner of the world saying, 'Don't!' and stamp the life out of my project. I love my friends—they just won't let me tie myself down."

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