

ANALYSIS

“Hacienda” (1932, 1934)

Katherine Anne Porter

(1890-1980)

“‘Hacienda’ is set on a Mexican *pulque* plantation, where a Soviet motion picture company with an international staff comes to make a film. The heroine and narrator is a young female American writer who has been invited to watch the filming as a guest. The other important characters are Kennerly, an eccentric American business-manager; Uspensky, the Russian producer, and Andreyev, evidently his assistant; Don Genaro, the master of the estate; Dona Julia, his young wife; and Betancourt, a Mexican advisor to Uspensky. The long story consists mainly of conversations: sophisticated, international, often cynical.

The central incident of the story, seen only obliquely through the comments of the characters, is the drama of a local Mexican boy, Justino, who accidentally kills his sister with a pistol and is arrested for manslaughter, thereby delaying the shooting of the film. The incident is presented by Miss Porter with great subtlety; the evident sympathy which the narrator of the story feels for Justino is ironically contrasted with the callousness of the others toward his predicament. Justino can be released through payment of a rather large bribe, but Don Genaro’s aristocratic pride is involved, and he refuses to let a mere country judge get the better of him; Justino stays in prison.

At the end of the story it is apparent that only the ‘American’ efficiency and aggressiveness of Kennerly holds together this motley and romantic assortment of Latins and Slavs so that the film somehow gets made in spite of all obstacles. The theme of ‘Hacienda’ is that of the contrast of racial types: the impulsive but cynical Slavic mentality of the Russian producers, the American character of Kennerly, the decadent Spanish aristocracy of Don Genaro and his wife, and the simple and elemental instinct of the Indian plantation workers, personified in the boy Justino.”

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron’s Educational Series 1958) 322-23

“Though it appears to stand alone, it is in fact an amalgam of all Miss Porter’s themes. The hacienda is a timeless embodiment of the past way of life in the present. It is presently peopled by a number of aliens to Mexican culture, who react to their surroundings in various revealing ways. The master of the hacienda and his wife are the principals in an unhappy and futile marriage, and the husband has just undergone an ill-fated love affair with an actress. The complication of the story centers on a crime of passion committed by a Mexican serf, now hopelessly caught in a tangle of legal procedure.... The important point is that...Miss Porter is working with a limited group of ideas which she presents with a uniformly superb style and a multiformly ingenious handling of symbols.”

James William Johnson
“Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter”
Virginia Quarterly Review (Autumn 1960)

“In Paris she wrote another Mexican tale... ‘Hacienda.’ It is a rarity in her lifework in that it is all a cleft; mainly a portrait of the great Russian film maker, Eisenstein, with others of note, helpers and hinderers of his work in Mexico, clustered around. It has a singularity of style also, somehow an outdoor style, leafy and tendrillous, seeming to weave itself into a fabric without her usual touch; soft breezy sentences, with a warmth and animation unlike her earlier writing.... It points toward *Ship of Fools*.”

Glenway Wescott
Images of Truth: Remembrances and Criticism
(Hamish Hamilton/London 1963) 32

“In ‘Hacienda,’ many social levels of modern Mexico are represented, ranging from the Indians who manufacture don Genaro’s pulque and the simple peasants of the village to the Russian film troupe and the American impresario from Hollywood. What is rendered, finally, is a complicated wasteland inhabited by a new order that has rejected the old values, but has discovered no common basis for the new. The result is a small comedy of no-manners, set in a land that still reflects, though dimly, its former mannered vitality.”

Ray B. West, Jr.
Katherine Anne Porter
(U Minnesota 1963) 8-9

“The work is loosely organized and employs several varieties of style, most of which have been seen in earlier works. Its only principle of unity, aside from the perceptive, ironic narrator, is the brief visit of a small group to a pulque hacienda which is a distillation of the spirit of Mexico. ‘Hacienda’ is a piece of local color, a study in atmosphere; the effect desired, and attained, is one of monotony, unreality, futility. It is the only one of Miss Porter’s stories told in the first person, and the narrator is certainly Miranda or even the author herself....

The one overwhelming quality of the hacienda is its oppressiveness. It is a place of corruption and death and hence calls attention to the last and greatest oppression. The life of the Mexican peasants is one of suffering, boredom, and defeat, made bearable only by the soothing ‘corpse-white liquor,’ pulque. The death-wish seems to hang in the air of Mexico, familiar to and respected by natives but terrifying to others. It is Kennerly, with his superficial awe at the ‘reality’ of death, who is shown to have no true sense of its meaning. When assured that there is no danger of a lawsuit resulting from a young man’s jealous murder of his sister, he comments, ‘Oh, I see.... If he wasn’t on the set, it doesn’t matter.’ Kennerly himself initiates the death theme at the beginning by his compulsive chatter about the poisons surrounding him in this primitive country.... The material decay which pervades the hacienda symbolizes and is subtly related to the moral corruption among the people there....

Sexual perversion is almost nonexistent in Miss Porter’s short fiction, but here there are suspicions of incest as the motive for the murder and suggestions of aberration in the unwholesome affection between Don Genaro’s foolish child-wife and his mistress, Lolita, who reveals male tones in her ‘deep throaty voice’ and on one occasion forgets her usual ‘role’ and ‘swings her leg over the saddle in a gesture unknown to ladies of 1898’ (the era of the costume she wears). Political corruption permits murderers to go free, yet coexists with moral formalism. Various characters embody animalism, decayed gentility, and diabolical malice.

The theme of appearance-reality seen in ‘The Cracked Looking Glass’ is also strong in ‘Hacienda,’ which was published in the same year. It is inherent in the very situation—the filming of a movie version of Mexican reality, falsified by the efforts of the government, represented by Betancourt, to exclude the harsh truths of peasant life. Betancourt himself personifies unreality with his hybrid background, his belief in fanciful mystiques, and his falsification of the life of Carlos Montana. The murder parallels a scene shot earlier for the movie, and there is a conspiracy to make the real crime seen as untrue as the acted one. Lolita’s acting seems to extend into real life, and Dona Julia, with her exotic costumes and doll-like painted face, seems an unreal wife to Don Genaro. The theme works both ways, further blurring the shape of reality: Dona Julia’s fur piece is a live dog; the judge offers Don Genaro live prisoners to be shot in the movie; Kennerly regrets that the real murder was not filmed. The last line of the story evokes the theme with subtle power. As the narrator leaves the hacienda her Indian driver says, ‘If you should come back in about ten days, you would see a different place. It is very sad here now. But then the green corn will be ready, and ah, there will be enough to eat again!’ But she has already seen ‘a different place’—an oasis of unreality in a desert of hunger and pain.

In this world of illusion, the most desirable of human qualities, in the scale of values by which the narrator judges all characters, are those of the true artist—insight, sensitivity, courage, humility. She gives her highest praise to the poet-musician, Carlos Montana: ‘He was full of humanity and good humor.’ As his name suggests, he has the nobility and earthy solidity of a mountain. At the bottom of the scale are Betancourt and Kennerly, and it is difficult to say which is greater, the author’s revulsion for the

cosmopolitan devil or her scorn for the American fool.... One aspect of artistic virtue is respect for the native culture and the elemental, often violent peasant life.... Scorn is heaped on Kennerly for his blindness to the value in the native life....

In this story of stagnation, no one progresses or develops—even the scenes shot must be repeated... The marriage of Don Genaro and Dona Julia is a bizarre variation on the oppressive union. The host seems hardly aware of his wife's existence and is constantly escaping by infidelity and by frequent departures at ever-increasing speeds. The Betancourt-Montana relationship is a destructive one from which Carlos does not seem to have the energy to escape. The movie makers only tolerate their association with Kennerly as a necessary evil. Even the escaped murderer is captured by a 'friend' and taken to jail, a development which everyone, including the same friend, seems later to consider unfortunate. Nowhere is there a strong, normal bond of love or friendship. The two unions which seem strongest reek of incest and homosexuality. The oppressiveness of the gathering, with its stifling tangle of antipathy, confusion, opposed purposes, unwholesome loves, boredom, futility, and murder, all permeated by the sickening odor of the deathly narcotic, steadily increases toward a climax....

Invitations to stay until the next day...only reinforce the sense of stagnation and futility. When the narrator escapes she does not even seem to be with her friend and host, Andreyev, but alone. As an artistic pilgrimage, the visit to the hacienda ends in disillusion. It seems in a general way symbolic of Miranda's whole experience in Mexico, one of the stages in her pattern of escape, disillusion, escape.”

William L. Nance
Katherine Anne Porter & the Art of Rejection
(U North Carolina 1963) 50-54

“The film was...released in 1933 under the title of *Thunder Over Mexico*.... Each character is, to one degree or another, hounded by a personal fate that is inescapable.... At times the chase-motif becomes a parody of fate, as when one of don Genaro's 'polite, expensive dogs' chases 'a little fat-bottomed soldier' back to his barracks.... Pulque is an admirable symbol for death, because it is a sleep-inducing liquor, a Lethe-like beverage that supplies the bonded peons with their only means besides Christian communion of escaping the wretchedness of their daily existence. Thus the drinking of pulque becomes for the Indian an expression of a profound death-wish. But in drinking pulque, the Indian satisfies not only his own wish but the government's wish that he remain wrapped in his ancient slumber, unheeding of the Agrarian call to revolt. As long as the peons have their pulque, they will never change....

Although the names are changed, the conditions are not; and...although the wealth of the country is no longer visibly controlled by the nobility, it is nonetheless in the hands of a 'successful revolutionist' named Velarde who strongly allies himself with the landed gentry. The same irony exists in the fact that the Russians are making a film which will show how the revolution has 'swept away' the feudal class structure of old Mexico, and yet they are filming it out of real life on don Genaro's estate. Such ironies occur throughout the story and illustrate its most basic theme, which might be called the illusion of change. It is helpful to think of 'Hacienda' as a dramatic rebuttal of Marx's theory of history and indeed of all theories which predicate revolutions and radical social change....

The extent to which the average Indian is trapped by his heritage is almost unbelievable.... These are, as Miss Porter says, 'figures under a doom imposed by the landscape.' Their only knowledge is suffering; their only wisdom is death'.... Most of the characters in 'Hacienda' are people like the young pugilist, people who have tried to throw off their heritage and become 'modern' by assuming some superficially modern pose. The one exception to this rule is the elder Genaro.... This man, the owner of one of the most venerable estates in Mexico, is the last of a vanishing species, the orthodox Spanish aristocrat. As such he is a man of firm, unalterable principle. Thus [his grandson] don Genaro's betrothal to a woman of common blood is to him more than a mere breach of propriety, it is a cataclysm signaling the imminent extinction of his way of life. For him there is only one alternative: to resist change, to stand fast like a stubborn mule while the world passes by. Like the professor in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, who in the face of a similar shock retreats to a solitary room in his attic, Grandfather Genaro moves to 'the very farthest patio in the old garden,' where he lives out his days in 'bleak dignity and loneliness.'

At first glance, don Genaro seems to be completely different from his grandfather. For the grandson is modern in that he is 'always going at top speed'... But despite his craving for speed, Genaro is actually quite as reactionary as his grandfather.... [He has] 'a set of ideas unchanged in essentials since 1650'.... There is something of don Quixote in don Genaro, some great longing to live in the style of a bygone age. He is forever sallying forth, amid a glory of chickens, accompanied by his mounted man, to joust with some small-time country judge who might as well be a windmill for all that is accomplished. Genaro is a dreamer trying to live up to some impossible romantic conception of himself, and speed is a part of that conception.... His great mistake was his failure to see that [dona Julia] was a product of a modern urban culture alien to his own.... He is not modern enough to cope with the problem; his scruples, for instance, would never permit divorce. In other words, he cannot change.... And so he turns to speed as his only escape, and in the time-honored American fashion, forever races into the future in order to forget the past. But in his case the future has been stripped of all meaning except change itself, or rather, the *illusion* of change produced by high speeds. His is an attempt to lose himself in the exhilaration of the moment, speed being for him a drug no less effective than the pulque of his peons. But no matter how fast he travels, he will never escape the mistakes of his youth, especially the awful realization that he hates his wife....

Born and raised a Spanish aristocrat, Betancourt changed his politics after the revolution in order to survive. In this respect he is directly opposite Grandfather Genaro, who refused to change at the price of surrendering his principles. For Betancourt has no principles worthy of the name... We can easily imagine Betancourt, an aesthete, pandering for the favor of Verlarde, who is doubtless a vulgar demagogue similar to Braggioni of 'Flowering Judas'.... He is foresighted enough...to pay homage to the Communists, who may, he feels, rise to power some day.... This fellow is everything that his name implies: he bets on the favorites and then courts their favor. To him political change is mere change of fashion; when governments change, one simply exchanges one set of platitudes for another. He has no qualms about dismissing the problems of the masses with one hand and praising Communist ideology with the other. His concern is to be punctual, to keep up with the times... He has abandoned the conservative attire of the Spanish aristocrat for the flashy dress of Hollywood... In matters of religion, he is conversant with a wide variety of dubious creeds, extending from Yoga to Nietzsche, including 'the latest American theories of personality development,' and from these has professedly fashioned a 'Way of Life' which will bring him happiness and success. But despite his superficial modernity, Betancourt still remains the effete aristocrat he was raised to be. In essentials, he has not changed.... He is still contemptuous of the lower classes... In his eagerness to keep up with worldly changes, Betancourt has neglected to superintend a more primary change: the growth of his own soul....

Kennerly...is the most perfect expression of modern technological culture....because he is a symbol of activity without purpose... Unlike Genaro's obsession with speed, which springs from some deep psychological need...Kennerly's is almost purely pathological, like a nervous tic.... Kennerly, in fact, has been conditioned by the frantic tempo of technological civilization just as surely as the drowsy peon has been conditioned by the lethargic tempo of his.... Kennerly's mistake is that he has confused change with motion.... He thinks that by perpetually rushing about he is changing into a better person, but although he considers himself a member of 'the ruling race at large,' a person vastly more civilized than the peons he distastefully avoids, he actually is far behind them on the road to spiritual beatitude. In his manners and habits, for instance, Kennerly is quite vulgar.... Furthermore, he is incapable of feeling compassion, and takes sadistic glee in the prospect of perfecting a murder scene in which Justino will act the part he has already performed in reality. But most revealing, and also most amusing, is Kennerly's provincialism.... Although he is supposedly sophisticated, he is haunted by absurd small-town fears that his brother-in-law, a militant prohibitionist, will discover that he is a beer-drinker. Also, he is blue-nosed enough to be shocked by a hint of lesbianism between Lolita and dona Julia. Despite all the outward signs of his modernity, he still bears the marks of a strict Puritan upbringing....

The idealistic Andreyev is...a doctrinaire Marxist who sincerely believes that the revolution has wrought great changes in Mexico, even though the facts deny this. He is blind to the facts because he induces in himself a 'voluntary forgetfulness of his surroundings,' by which he continually turns inward in homesick yearning for Russia. For all his ideals, he is essentially unchanged, essentially a young peasant boy torn from his homeland. But he is not a self-deceiver in the manner of Betancourt; his ballad-singing endears him to Miss Porter, for this shows that he is concerned with the truth of emotion and thus is not

beyond redemption. His problem, like Laura's in 'Flowering Judas,' is really one of immaturity. With him, as with her, there is the danger that an emotional reservoir may slowly evaporate in the desert of an alien culture. He must grow by understanding his Russian past.... Only by accepting what he is will he be able to change into what he wants to be.

This brings us to the character most closely associated with the theme, Carlos. He is a ballad-writer and a good one...because he sings the truths of the human heart as he finds them in his own experience.... Betancourt believes that Carlos is a failure, simply because he has not increased his income or been recognized for his ballads. But despite the continual busting about of 'successful' people like Betancourt, Kennerly, and Genaro, Carlos is the only person in the course of the story who gets anything done: he composes a ballad, and a good one at that. Carlos is a true artist, and like Sophocles, has the power to see life and see it whole. He sees through the appearance to reality, and is able to perceive that Justino's shooting of his sister was not accidental but rather the inevitable fruit of incest....

Miss Porter reveals the true nature of 'poetic license.' When Carlos makes his ballad of the shooting, he absent-mindedly changes a small detail, making Rosalita die of two bullets in her heart instead of one. When Betancourt points this out, Carlos laughs... The upshot is, of course, that the artist can lie about the little things but must tell the truth about the big things, and that a peevish concern for the accuracy of trivia is the mark of the second-rate mind. Carlos is the only character in the story who is aware of the true nature of change.... Although people and cultures do not change overnight, they do change gradually, in the process of organic growth. When Betancourt shows the narrator the frescos in the pulque vat-house, he remarks that similar frescos were found by the Spaniards in pre-Conquest pulquerias.... For, as a style of painting gradually changes, so does one's soul, for better or worse. Carlos, an artist, is a representative of all those who are interested in soul-change."

Robert L. Perry
"Porter's 'Hacienda' and the Theme of Change"
Midwest Quarterly 6 (Summer 1965) 403-15

"'Hacienda' (1934) continues the wasteland theme of Miss Porter's work and is a story which has often been misunderstood.... The feudal quality of Mexican society contributes much of the irony in 'Hacienda': Uspensky, the Communist director, has chosen a pulque estate as the site for the filming of a movie, using as actors peons still serving in a feudal system. In actuality, Uspensky bears a close resemblance to Sergei Eisenstein, who along with his two assistants, was given a leave from the Soviet Union in 1929. After a brief, unsatisfactory stay in Hollywood, they went to Mexico to make a film. Upton Sinclair [prominent Socialist muckraker] and his wife raised \$25,000 for the making of *Que Viva Mexico!*....

Much of the actual filming took place at Tetlapajac, a beautiful hacienda...eighty miles southeast of Mexico City... An army is present to prevent change.... 'Eisenstein wanted money, money, money, and never had the slightest idea of keeping any promise he made. When Kimbrough [Sinclair's brother-in-law, sent to oversee the production] obeying my orders [Sinclair], tried to limit the money and the subjects shot, there were furious rows.' The Kennerly of the novel corresponds in some respects to the picture drawn of Kimbrough... Using as background the actual hacienda, a slightly fictionalized version of Eisenstein's artificial plot, and the rather bizarre personalities of those gathered at the hacienda for the filming, Miss Porter transmuted these materials into fiction...

The story begins with a brilliant scene portraying Kennerly, the business manager of the movie, in contrast to the docile Mexicans whom he regards as inferior, filthy, disease-ridden nuisances. Always in the background is the 'true revolution of blessed memory' which had abolished third-class train travel, just as it had changed the names of many things 'nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures.' In spite of Kennerly's outrageous Anglo-Saxon superiority, he tellingly describes the graft and corruption of the government; but he is outraged only when affected by it....

The Russians had chosen the hacienda as a setting because the pulque-making process had not changed since the very beginning, and the hacienda itself had stayed the same.... [In] the still shots from the film: the unchanged land filled with figures 'under a doom imposed by the landscape'... Lolita, the one professional actress in the movie...becomes the mistress of Don Genaro, then the inseparable friend of

Dona Julia, Don Genaro's wife. The Dona Julia-Lolita relationship seems perverse and decadent, even in the jocularly narrated version of Andreyev.

Much of the story revolves around the various reactions to the tragedy at the hacienda that day: Justino's (the Just) shooting his sister. The Indian boy who plays one of the leads in the movie reports that Justino had shot her accidentally and that, after running away, he had been captured and returned by his friend Vicente (the Victor). One of the peons reported that this was the second time in Justino's family that a brother had killed a child. The song writer Montana insisted the boy incestuously loved his sister.... But Montana is perhaps more interested in his *corrido* than in the truth, and his theory appears no more valid than the others.

Kennerly is not concerned with motives but is fearful of a damage suit brought by the parents. Later Kennerly sees the bitter irony of Justino's playing the part in the movie of a boy who by accident kills a girl (played by his sister), attempts to escape, and is captured by the character played by Vicente. He complains that the dead girl should have been photographed to add more realism to the scene in the movie. When Justino returns, he must play the scene again since the light had not been right, but Kennerly's emotions are perverted, and he thinks of this prospect with glee.

The narrator is conscious of the spirit of the grandfather, who did not understand or approve of his grandson and wife and had retired to a remote section of the hacienda 'where he lived in bleak dignity and loneliness, without hope and without philosophy, perhaps contemptuous of both....' His grandson lived with even less purpose: women, fast cars, airplanes. His wife led the life of a pampered aristocrat, dressed in outlandish costumes by a Hollywood designer, and carried about a foolish lap dog. Don Genaro and his wife are Mexican copies of the lost generation [after WWI].

The great Uspensky is enigmatic, dressed in a monkey-suit, with a monkey face, and with 'a monkey attitude towards life.' He is unconcerned about the fate of Justino; Don Genaro is concerned because the judge wants a bribe to release the boy. He will not pay, because to do so would mean continual blackmail by judges. The emotions of Justino and Vicente are hidden from the narrator, but their emotions seem more intense in contrast with the insensitivity of those who at first talk endlessly of the affair but then put it out of their minds as 'far away and not worth talking about.' The fate of the victimized peon rests with Vicente, 'the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico. He owned two pulque haciendas which had fallen to his share when the great repartition of land had taken place. Don Genaro was appealing to him, but Vicente would also demand a bribe.

The heavy, rotting smell hovering over the hacienda from the pulqueria is symbolic of the spiritual and moral corruption within the compound and of the corruption in the society itself. All over Mexico the Indians partook of the products of the hacienda: they would 'swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; Don Genaro and his fellow haciendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and ambitious politicians in the capital would be stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas for themselves. It was all arranged.' The theme of inevitability seems an echo of the passage from *Ecclesiastes* used by Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*.

When the guests visit the pulqueria, which is enveloped in religious myths of its own, they see the figure of Maria Santisima standing in a niche, surrounded by 'fly blown paper flowers' and with a perpetual light at her feet. The walls of the room were covered with a fresco telling the story of this Indian girl who discovered the divine liquor and became a half goddess. Later that day the visitors do not enter the hacienda chapel; they pose for pictures in front of the closed doors, and Montana, the failure, plays a fat priest. The scene points out again the alienation of all those at the hacienda, except the peons.

Miss Porter skillfully interweaves the elements of the story—the satiric character sketches, the Mexican social and political scene, the tragic life of the peons, the theme of appearance-reality heightened by the film-making motif. The disengagement of the narrator is broken in an incident with dogs. The dogs at the hacienda kept chasing the soldiers to their accustomed place; the dogs also chased the pigs, but the pigs knew that they were not in danger and that the chase was actually a game. The narrator saw, just before arriving at the hacienda, hungry dogs chasing a rabbit, and cried out, 'Run, rabbit, run!' Her Indian driver

(unaware that he was symbolically a rabbit, not a dog) shouted encouragement to the dogs and offered to place a wager on the outcome. The fate of the rabbit is not given, just as Justino's fate is not known; but it is likely they both will not survive, a fate particularly meaningful in light of Miss Porter's concern for 'the terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world.' 'Hacienda' is not slight; it is not the mere notes for a novel. It is a brilliantly executed story of disengagement, of spiritual, physical, moral, and psychological isolation—a short novel of the lost generation." [Porter called "the lost generation" a myth.]

George Hendrick
Katherine Anne Porter
(Twayne 1965) 43-48

"In 'Hacienda,' the somber short novel in which Miss Porter records her total disenchantment with the revolution in Mexico, the method and attitude of *Ship of Fools* are clearly anticipated. The decadent Mexican aristocrat, don Genaro, at whose pulque hacienda a group of Soviet moviemakers are shooting a film about Mexico; his wife dona Julia, who is her husband's rival for the sexual favors of an actress in the company; the unlucky Indian peon, Justino, who is arrested and imprisoned for shooting his sister in an incident reminiscent of the part he plays in the film; the arrogant and venal American businessman, Kennerly, who is the emissary of the film's financial backers in California; the gentleman of ascetic elegance, Betancourt, who represents the Mexican government, the ruined, alcoholic musician, Carlos Montana, who composes a mocking *corrido* about poor Justino and his sister; the strange, monkeylike homosexual Uspensky, who directs the film company—all would be perfectly at home as passengers on the *Vera* [in *Ship of Fools*].

'The revolution of glorious memory' is accomplished; but nothing has essentially changed in Mexico. In some instances, the peons have exchanged one master for another; but on estates like don Genaro's, not even that has happened. In an atmosphere heavy with the putrescent smell from the *pulqueria*, where the maguey juice is fermented to make the 'corpse-white' liquor that is the source of don Genaro's wealth, family and servants and guests act out their doomed and futile, pointless life roles, which are ultimately indistinguishable from roles in the film. The film obviously will never be finished.

In 'Hacienda,' Miss Porter works from within the story, in the person of an unnamed American woman who serves as narrator. But with her all but total objectivity and moral disengagement, the internal narrator here is assigned an attitude very similar to that of the omniscient author of *Ship of Fools*.... Its peculiar 'inconclusiveness,' in actuality the necessary and deliberately constructed, dramatic vehicle of theme, was ascribed [by some obtuse critics] to a failure of artistic design. Almost thirty years before the appearance of *Ship of Fools*, the now distressingly familiar complaint was made about 'Hacienda,' that it seemed Miss Porter had wanted to write a novel but had succeeded only in assembling 'notes' for one....

Since there was virtually no precedent, either in Miss Porter's own previous writing or in that of other modern authors, for the formal design of 'Hacienda,' it is surely not difficult to understand why everyone failed to see at the time what she was aiming for in that story.... [Such critics] promptly expressed their disappointment with *Ship of Fools* soon after its appearance. For many critics, most if not all of Katherine Anne Porter's earlier works had been the very touchstone of [Realist] taste and principle. Now, she had written a [Modernist] book in which she violated, or worse, completely avoided, the fundamental tenets of the [Realist] school in which they had received their critical training. It is no wonder that they felt almost betrayed."

John Edward Hardy
Katherine Anne Porter
(Ungar 1973) 113-15

"[Porter] found a respite of three days when she visited the Hacienda Tetlapayac in the state of Hidalgo, where Eisenstein was working on his movie.... When the story appeared, it was a summation of all her feelings about Mexico.... The hacienda...is first of all a pulqueria, and the changeless basis of this primitive occupation is closely associated with Indian life.... The hacienda is permeated with the smell of the pulque, a nasty smell suggestive of rotting human products, a detail which intimates that the life of Mexico is being undermined by the oppression of the Indian, whose rich artistic heritage should be

assimilated. Instead, the Indian remains exploited, his willing refuge in superstition and narcotics making him an easy prey. For this reason the pulque has a menacing character and is described as 'corpse-white.... The fresco depicting the discovery of pulque is described in detail and shows the Indian's ability to transform his superstitious veneration of the liquor into a work of art....

For the Spanish overlords who are interested neither in the production of pulque nor in works of art, the hacienda is a feudal manor and as such represents the Spanish occupation, alien to Mexico in its origin, anachronistic in its present form, and surviving only by exploitation of the native. Each member of the Spanish family of the story is ineffectual in his attempt to adapt to the modern world. The old grandfather lives in retreat in the farthest patio, the son, devoted to speed and machines, lives in a constant frenzy of purposeless activity. The intellectual class is represented by Carlos and Betancourt, based on Castro Padilla and Adolpho Best-Maugard. Betancourt with his anomalous mixed background fits in nowhere; he takes refuge in cynicism and in a complicated esoteric 'Way of Life' drawn from a careful choice of the doctrines from several schools of oriental philosophies. Carlos is more human and the narrator defends him against Betancourt's charges of failure by saying that he has done a good day's work in his time and is not finished yet.

The use of the hacienda as a movie set makes it a microcosm of the Mexico on which various foreigners converge. The Russians, whose nation has been important to social change in Mexico, have no human involvement with the country. They are technicians interested only in producing a perfect movie. Kennerly, the representative of the worse kind of American, is interested only in making a lucrative movie. The hacienda in its capacity as a movie set also dramatizes the ineffectiveness of the revolution, which has changed the names of many things with a view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures. The movie is set in 1898, but as Andreyev points out, when he shows still shots of the film, nothing has changed, a fact which embarrasses those in charge of Mexican propaganda who are assigned to assist the movie makers.

The central event is the shooting of one of the actors and the characters all respond predictably, according to what they represent. The feudal overlord is outraged that one of the peons he owns is put in prison. Betancourt says cynically that the dead girl would have had no decent life anyway; the other artist composes a gently romantic song to her. The Russian technicians regret that they did not capture the killing on film and the American director regrets the loss of money. The story...is not simply a comprehensive picture of Mexico.... The emphasis is upon the narrator's relationship with the country, and her attempt to find a place where she can live and work. Her final word on the hacienda, 'I could not wait for tomorrow in this deathly air,' is also, in this last Mexican story, her final word on Mexico....

For all its air of disillusionment with Mexico, her story 'Hacienda' was one of her most substantial.... Her sense of its potential did nothing to alleviate the sense of despair she felt at the end of her seventeen months in Mexico. Later she spoke of this period in terms of the utmost horror, saying that for months afterward she felt as if she were convalescent from a nightmare.... She spent seventeen long months unable to write even a short story."

Joan Givner
Katherine Anne Porter: A Life
(Simon and Schuster 1982) 239-42

"The reasons why Porter's main persona, that Everywoman often called Miranda, arrives at that position of loneliness and survival are carefully and concretely documented in 'Hacienda'...a discursive and rambling story about a group of discrete personalities held together only by a momentary accident of geography: for a few days, at the hacienda, they find themselves isolated together... It is the link between the two segments of her career, a story that uses every detail...to create a complex metaphor for the psychic dilemma of the narrator protagonist in the story. When she succeeds in extricating herself from the oppressive atmosphere of the corrupt hacienda, she succeeds in reasserting a choice, for separation and the self.... 'Hacienda' is a complex story, although on the surface it might constitute a film of the absurd—a series of nonevents....

A woman writer, absent from Mexico for ten years, journeys to an ancient feudal estate which derives its wealth from producing pulque, a liquor drunk by the peons of the country. She makes the trip to witness the filming of a documentary of the Mexican Revolution by a trio of Russian cinematographers, but filming has been interrupted by the development of a sexual triangle involving the master and mistress of the hacienda and the leading actress in the film. Yet another disruption occurs when a young Indian woman is accidentally shot by her brother and he is jailed. The writer finds the inhabitants of the hacienda jaded, neither problem is resolved, and she departs without witnessing any of the filming she came to see.

In 'Hacienda,' Porter takes for her subject the psychology of a country, a whole people, a culture, which becomes an objective correlative for a psychosexual role the narrator has all but left behind her. 'Hacienda' is the story of her determining the truth about the role she has chosen and about the one she still might choose. Then, unlike Laura ["Flowering Judas"], she makes up her mind once and for all. The story is like a Chinese box: inside the biggest one there are smaller, more intricate and no less important issues, all of which are so interwoven as to defy logical analysis. Image clusters and symbols apply on more than one level to setting, character, and theme, all of which interact with each other. Such rich meaning does not progress in linear fashion, but evolves in concentric circles. The effect is the kind one expects of poetry rather than fiction; thus it is necessary to search out not just image, but deep image, and to examine each symbol in terms of all its simultaneous meanings.... 'Hacienda' is one of her most finely ironic stories; by showing that human beings are eminently corruptible, it prefigures *Ship of Fools*....

'Hacienda' is a story about distortion, corruption, and destruction perpetrated at every level of human experience: in the physical world, in politics, in art, in society, and especially in the realm of human love. A Gulliver-like figure, the narrator journeys into this ancient and complex country, one who has come out to see and to question.... She will gradually become aware that this perverse love of death is not tragic; it does not derive from an existential acceptance of the realities of a difficult life in a hard land, but rather hides a vacuousness of spirit which Mexicans seek to fill with the thrill of violence and the excitement of sex. Subterranean to this behavior in the Mexican psyche is an archetypal belief in the corruptness of female sexuality and its kinship to death. In such a culture, women can function only as playthings and victims, even though their appeal gives them apparent power....

The narrator must assess her own values and face the reasons she has made choices that put her outside the mainstream of Mexican culture and outside an even more pervasive cultural view of woman. An androgynous person who appears female but whose independent status as writer/intellectual is masculine, she is returning after ten years absence with something precious to Porter women: hindsight, that most valuable of visions, based on two perceptions—the memory of how things were, or seemed, and... immediate perception, whose reality clarifies the earlier experience.... No psychological penetration reveals the narrator's inner conflict. Instead, it is objectified through other characters, images, and symbols. Likewise, the physical landscape of Mexico symbolizes its psychology....

What she perceives are three planes of physical/psychic activity. The first is the microcosm, the hacienda itself, a small empire dedicated to self-delusion, decay and corruption, as evidenced in the people who inhabit and run the place, and as symbolized in the pulque which is its product. The hacienda...reflects the macrocosm, the ancient Mexican landscape with its conjunction of the 'solemn valley of the pyramids,' maguey fields, and proud peons, who best image their unbowed but nevertheless humbled culture.... In the Mexican mind, the protagonist finds, love, fertility, and doom are inextricably linked, an ourboros' necessarily paradoxical and unending....

The narrator of 'Hacienda' already knows pretty much where she stands. Feeling that the pursuit of love is fraught with the possibility of psychic death, she has already set herself apart from other women by virtue of her dress, her way of life, her occupation. But she still wishes for a real and viable womanhood. Thus, in 'Hacienda' is displayed the familiar Porter dichotomy: the intellectual woman, a loner, has chosen to be nonsexual and independent, in order to determine whether power and love can exist together... The story proceeds in a three-part movement, with each segment focusing on definition of the narrator, her need to separate distortion from the truth... It moves forward through vegetation and camera imagery and...is itself almost a verbal film: a series of cinematic scenes, on the train, at the hacienda, in the billiard room, in

the vat room. The narrator observes and pieces together these scenes, creating something the Russian filmmakers are incapable of doing: a piece of truth about Mexico....

Kennerly, the American business manager...and Andreyev, the Russian filmmaker...tell us what the narrator declines to tell us about herself, for they reflect the halves of her psyche. The image projected by Andreyev—the intellectual, the liberal, the cool and unruffled artist—is the one the narrator affects. She treats Kennerly ironically, suggesting that his nervous fretfulness and his incapacity for being at home among the Mexicans are characteristics she is separate from, when in actuality they are the ones from which she must practice detachment. In truth, there are as many correspondences between her and Kennerly as between her and Andreyev, and it is Kennerly who reveals the subconscious fears which will drive her from the hacienda a few days later.... Kennerly, like the Mexican government, is excessive. He exaggerates and deals in outrageous hyperbole. Nothing, nothing, says the narrator's ironic tone, should be taken at face value... It is Kennerly's alienation that is emphasized, and the ironic tone of his portrait makes him a preposterous, if pathetic, figure....a soulless mannequin...who mindlessly corrupts his own body.... [Yet] the standards he establishes for his work are unassailable and are similar to what the narrator must desire in her own writing.... She shares with Kennerly a deep need for control, no matter how successfully she masks it.... She identifies in him all her own worse tendencies: the need for security, nests, defenses, certainties....

The narrator...is only apparently as cool and collected as Andreyev. In actuality, she is insecure, and wants the control and a certain amount of protection that he asexuality does not afford her... By allying herself with Andreyev, she rejects in one emotional gesture what she feels to be the weakest part of her self and simultaneously asserts herself as the cool intellectual she chooses to be instead.... Andreyev's photos, the making of the film itself, and the camera imagery...ironically emphasize the degree of distortion possible in this society even in the face of the camera, an instrument which doesn't lie, according to considered wisdom.... Like the maguey and all that it represents, the Indians are, despite appearances, hollow and corrupt precisely because they are enthralled to the servile work of farming the cacti and enslaved by their passions for sex, for violence, for 'senseless excitement'.... Their proud posture is a 'mockery' not only because they have been in pain and subjection for so long that they have made their doom a god, but because they participate in the duplicity which keeps them subservient. They manufacture their own opiate, pulque, which keeps economic power in the hands of their masters....

The women crying their wares urge 'mournfully' the fresh maguey worms and the pulque they produce for sale.... The maguey, and the worms which penetrate the heart of the cactus, beginning the process of fertilization; the production of honey water which eventually becomes pulque, the drink of forgetfulness which deadens misery and pain—all are associated with woman and with the confused respect and fear man has for her essentially mysterious power to reproduce life. In the Mexican mind, woman is the maguey, and when she is penetrated in her core by the worm/penis, the mysterious process of fertilization and growth may begin. In any case, the 'honey water' of her vagina, her sexuality, produces such pleasure as to make a man forget himself entirely.... He loses his physical vitality and is thus, Samson-like, robbed of his strength by woman; even worse he may be so overcome with passion that he forgets his identity, his loyalties, and his honor. In these terms, certainly, woman is at best a necessary evil, an enemy to be used and held at bay because destruction is part of her office.... Those who become wives and mothers acquiesce in their own subservience, create their own economic dependence, and hand over power to the men who support and therefore control them....

Within the hacienda itself, another hollow and corrupted space, the Spanish ruling class lacks even the semblance of tragic pride the peons manage. Hubris here is reduced to grasp, greed, and power; the physical emptiness of the place is captured in the cold temperature, inadequate lighting, the 'chill gloom' of empty room after empty room, and the 'vast incurable boredom' which is the very air of the place. Attempting to assuage their own ennui, the people who inhabit the place chase thrills with fast cars, the 'excitement' of the film and sexual games which assert their real decadence. All of this is imaged in the effete, fragile, and theatrical appearance they affect.... Dona Julia, in spite of being the lady of the hacienda, behaves and looks like a lady of the theater (read whore)... 'a figure from a Hollywood comedy' ... Betancourt, the half-breed Mexican who is French-educated, affects 'the correct costume for a moving picture director'...

The Russians...are fellow artists, capable, as she is, of observing the duplicities in Mexican society. Their presence connotes a certain revolutionary idealism, although they are all obviously men of the world capable of accommodating Mexican censorship and falsehood to accomplish their own propaganda, and they are prepared not to quibble about truth along the way.... The Russian filmmakers essentially take the Mexicans as their bedfellows, acquiescing in the corruption of reality into falsehood. Although their dress reflects their proper personalities, they are capable of creating their own brand of illusion with camera, light, and film. All of this cultivation of distorting and falsehood, of course, corrupts in every visible way. Against the larger background of grand extortion, bribery, and exploitation practiced by Verlarde, the local courts demand payoffs from Don Genaro. Uspensky is visibly ill, and the air of the hacienda is rotten with the smell of pulque, which is being relentlessly produced, around the clock, in the vat room next to Dona Julia's bedroom, appropriately enough.

But the true level of deterioration in this society is shown in the sexual perversion it not only tolerates but accepts, and with which it even amuses itself. Within the walls of the hacienda, the narrator will encounter promiscuity, infidelity, lesbianism, and even incest.... The sexual games of the decadent and jaded Spanish ruling class are typified in the 'gay' story of Lolita and Dona Julia. Don Genaro is expected, of course, to make love to Lolita. Dona Julia feels abused by her husband's infidelity, not out of love or even pride, since she is very 'modern' and expects him to be promiscuous, but because he has abused her territorial rights by bringing Lolita into his wife's house. The hypocrisy in this attitude is lost on virtually everyone, and they are prepared to be entertained when Julia and Lolita seize control of the situation.... They join in complicity, thereby thwarting their common adversary, Don Genaro... Nor is it surprising that Don Genaro cannot 'get them separated'; they are essentially one and the same woman, alike in dress, attitudes, and values, both adept at playing roles and affecting theatrical images.... Lolita's masculinity in this pairing surfaces in the 'deep throaty voice' with which she woos Dona Julia, in the aggressive glances she throws her way, and in the masculine way she mounts her horse...

The story of Justino and his sister is sandwiched in between references to the tale of Julia, Lolita, and Genaro, implying its sexual nature.... If the pistol in the story is seen for the Freudian symbol that it is, then the sexual analogy in Justino's story becomes transparent.... Translated in terms of Mexican patriarchal mentality...the boy should not have touched his penis and given rein to his sexual appetite. But he did so in innocence, and of course it is not reasonable to expect a young male to control his sexuality, that is, to 'put [the pistol] back.' In addition, there was the added temptation of the girl, who, despite being his sister, was ripe—nineteen—and obviously so much a sex object that is superceded her being a blood relative.... Like woman in the primal sense, like Lolita, the primary sex object in the story, the girl creates too much excitement around the hacienda...

The hopeless position of women in the narrator's view is underscored by a seemingly inconsequential incident which follows the telling of Justino's story. On the road to the hacienda, the narrator spies a rabbit 'cracking the strings of its heart in flight' from 'lean hungry dogs,' and she, automatically identifying with the potential victim, screams at the rabbit to run. Just as quickly, the dogs are championed by the macho male Indian riding with her, who leaves no doubt about the sexual overtones to this metaphorical contest when he turns to the narrator with blazing eyes to demand, 'What will you bet, senorita?'... The senorita will bet nothing, because as long as she maintains her stance as an artist, she need not deal with men in obvious sexual terms.... Later, when it is time to retire, the narrator is taken by Dona Julia through her boudoir, a 'long shallow room' like a vaginal canal. It is located between the billiard room, site of male activities where the women can only watch, and the vat room, where the pulque is readied for shipment.... Dona's Julia's room...captures Julia's position as whore-priestess, who exists for and by the will of the men who surround her and who yet has some mysterious office to perform by virtue of her femaleness, for the ritualistic corruption that takes place in the hacienda....

Julia's perfume wars with the smell of pulque.... The narrator significantly moves to the stair to climb to her own room on the level where the male artists are staying. Up there, safe in her balcony, there is 'no longer any perfume to disturb the keen fine wind from the mountains, or the smell from the vat-room.' Separated from those female trappings and functions, the narrator can inhale the fresh air she needs to live and create.... Since these female functions are corrupting and death-dealing, it is no wonder that the narrator feels suffocated by them. Among her acquaintances and experiences at the hacienda only one

figure projects her values—simplicity, forthrightness, artistry, true vision. This is, of course, Carlos Montana.... Carlos accepts her at face value and greets her warmly and with truth, giving her the first straightforward assessment of Justino's story she has heard.... His language not only gives her a clear version of the story, but confirms several concepts the narrator has already begun to sense... The phrase 'heart's core' links the whole sexual story to the maguey, corrupted to its heart's core for its honey water; in Carlos's song, the sexual female lies dead with bullets in her heart, so love and sexuality are irrevocably linked to death; but, most important, Rosalita is a victim. Her 'impassioned brother,' guilty of the same sexuality, the same incest, lives—unhappily, to be sure, but nevertheless he lives. In Mexico, men fear loss of power, that is, death, through the mysterious sexuality of women, but in reality it is the women who die as a result of being sexual....

Amid the ritualistic chanting of the Indians who load the pulque barrels by night and the sounds of the inexorable procession of the workers to the maguey fields by morning, the narrator listens to Kennerly and Stepanov discuss Justino's part in a scene in the film that exactly parallels the shooting of his sister, his flight, and his capture by Vicente. It has been filmed, but badly; it has happened in reality; it will probably have to be filmed again. The repetitions here impose a sense of *deja vu* and, with that, a question: What is actually real—the event or the remembered event?... Over all, she is impressed by the relentless cycle of everything that transpires in this place: Things happen only to remain the same....

Carlos reappears to confirm what *is* real in the hacienda: the macho pursuit of excitement even if, and probably because, death is a possibility.... Carlos describes the excitement of the last Agrarian raid, during which 'every man on the place had a rifle and a pistol.' In metaphoric terms, asserting and using their sexuality is one of the few ways they can combine excitement with a sense of potency and power. What is also real is the absolute corruption necessary to the functioning of the hacienda, and its linkages to female fertility. The sharp imagery of the vat room...confirms her understanding of the male attitude toward women in this culture: 'We walked through the vat-room'... All is overseen by the prim statue of Maria Santisima and the fresco depicting the young girl, later a half-goddess, who supposedly discovered the corrupting liquor. Aztec or Christian, it has 'something to do with man's confused veneration for, and terror of, the fertility of women and vegetation....

That night, playing cards with a Mexican youth...the narrator is defeated when she plays the dagger, a phallic symbol. There is no room for her kind in Mexico. 'Now I shall play the crown, and there you are, defeated,' he tells her, and immediately begins to talk about Justino in a way that applies metaphorically to the narrator's psychic situation.... The whole conversation is a metaphoric reminder to the narrator that she must not take what she has learned lightly. This is death. If you mix in this, you may not return.... In the narrator's now clear vision, to invite it, to accept it, is like twining an adder about the neck. There is no harvest for her in the hacienda or in Mexico either; nor is there any respite. Quite simply, she cannot 'wait for tomorrow in this deathly air.' Seeing the face of death, she does what Laura cannot do. She runs.

By the end of 1934, Porter had published the stories which made her reputation... In them she repeatedly created women trapped by circumstances, divided against each other or within themselves, and always in conflict. Whether primitive Indians, farm women, or sophisticated New Yorkers, her women all struggle with their inability to integrate the virginal and sexual sides of their psyches. Their irreconcilable yearning for both personal independence and the love that necessitates dependence creates the dramatic tension in each of her stories."

Jane Krause DeMouy
Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction
(U Texas 1983) 94-111

"Laura subconsciously awakened to the revolution's impending death, which already has occurred at the beginning of 'Hacienda'.... Because most of the characters in 'Hacienda' are fictional counterparts of the real people present during Porter's visit (Eisenstein; his collaborator, Gregori Alexandrov; his Swedish-born cameraman, Eduard Tisse; the hacienda owner, don Julio Saldivar, and his wife; the business manager, Hunter Kimbrough; and the art director, Adolfo Best-Maugard), the story was taken to be almost a documentary. When Porter published the expanded version [1934], wanting readers to focus on the

artistic themes of the story, she attached a disclaiming note that 'all characters and situations in this story are entirely fictional and do not portray an actual person.'

'Hacienda' is Porter's most bitter comment on the Mexican revolution. Each of the previous Mexican stories represented Porter's views on the cultural revolution at a particular point in its unfolding, but 'Hacienda' is the depiction of the aftermath of what Porter considered the failed revolution. The detachment of the first-person narrator is the result of her despair and resignation. The story is made up of several plots: the background story of the making of the film; the triangle of don Genaro, his wife, dona Julia, and her love Lolita; and the story of Justino's killing his sister Rosalita. All the plots intertwine and develop the same large theme of appearance versus reality. The filmmaking is the perfect frame for the other plots, dealing as it does with the creating of illusion.

Within the appearance-versus-reality theme are woven other themes.... The Indians have been promised change, and now they can ride on trains instead of burros. But their quality of living and their relationship to the power structure have not changed at all. Andreyev, one of the filmmakers, explains ironically to the narrator during the opening train ride that the object of the film is to show that the earlier plight of the Indian had been swept away by the revolution. The most common form of change at the hacienda is death, represented by the pervasive smell of the decaying maguey used in the making of pulque. The traditional values of the past aristocracy have changed for the worse, as the grandfather's degradation illustrates; traditional roles of husbands and wives have changed, and, moreover, traditional roles of men and women have changed. Dona Julia is childlike, plays with dolls, dresses in Chinese dress or Hollywood costume, and develops a lesbian relationship with her husband's mistress. Don Genaro does not rule his hacienda; he rushes back and forth between the capital and the hacienda, 'always at top speed,' says art director Betancourt, 'and never on time anywhere.'

In place of traditional values of the past, there is weakness and perversion, not admirable substitutes for what is lost, and the blind force of unconscious savagery had asserted itself without the restraints of the aristocratic structure. The Indian boy Justino's killing of his sister Rosalita hints paradoxically at both incestuous and homosexual motives. Andreyev says, 'Imagine a man's friend betraying him so, and with a woman, and a sister!'.... Porter also explores what in 'St. Augustine and the Bullfight' (1955) she called the bloodlust, the enjoyment of death and the instinctual attraction humans have to it. The Indians' eyes dance with pleasure in retelling the story, and Kennerly, the film's American backer and Porter's representative Puritan, 'licked his chops.'

The symbols in 'Hacienda' are obvious. Aside from the filmmaking, symbolizing the creation of illusion ...the making of pulque is a symbol of the decay of the revolution. The smell of the fermenting maguey is pervasive, like rotting milk and blood. The hacienda itself, a pulqueria, with all its surface evidence of the changing of orders, continues to exist by a feudal system that depends on an ancient process. The 'modern' hacienda, a symbol of Mexico, continues to survive only by exploitation of the Indian, an abuse which the revolution promised to abolish. Machines symbolize the revolution, and they are valued particularly by don Genaro. A train ride opens the story, in the revised version, and automobiles, trains, and airplanes are discussed throughout; at the end of the story, the guests all depart by these means. The journeys that frame the story are ironic reminders that there has been no progress."

Darlene Harbour Unrue
Understanding Katherine Anne Porter
(U South Carolina 1988) 38-42

"'Hacienda' originally appeared in a shorter version in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. The 1934 version, subtly revised, thoroughly expanded, and completely rethought, deserves a better critical reception than it has thus far received. It belongs in the short story genre, though some critics...consider it a short novel.... Penetrating, pitiless observation and journalistic objectivity in reportage of scene characterize this major achievement.

The setting of 'Hacienda' is Mexico in 1929. The story is... 'a brilliantly complex portrayal of the generally negative results of the 1910 revolution seen at every level of Mexican society.... Similar conditions exist even today.... The betrayal of the common people (the Mexican Indians, in this case), their

aspirations and dreams, by the victors in the Revolution is ironically presented. The plot concerns Americans and Russians making a motion picture in a Mexican border town... It is, in its Jamesian way, a masterpiece of setting.... The 1987 anthology *Gringos in Mexico*, dealing with the American literary experience in Mexico from the years 1872 to 1983...included 'Hacienda' as the book's representative Porter text rather than the more famous examples of Porter's Mexican fiction.... There is in this story a powerful representation of the inability of foreigners to understand Mexican culture...

But if the story is Jamesian in its ironic detachment, it is Whitmanian in its celebration of Nature. Consider, for example, the Whitmanian catalogue of natural cleanliness, the narrator's silent rebuke of a gringo who prides himself on Anglo-Saxon cleanliness.... It is true that in conversation Porter often contrasted Whitmanian-minded writers and James-minded writers and was careful to include herself among the Jamesians...but a virtuoso artist can take aesthetic ideology only so far.... It may be that 'Hacienda' was the genesis for *Ship of Fools*.... In 'Hacienda' we see a great virtuoso exhibiting her impressive technical skills."

James T. F. Tanner
The Texas Legacy of Katherine Anne Porter
(U North Texas 1990) 146-50

"The misled hearts of the Indians are seldom, Porter says, moved to rebellion; they are too 'enslaved' for that, economically, too dependent on the owners of the great haciendas for their 'sixty centavos a day and a half pound of corn'.... Even more than the misery of the Indian, Porter emphasizes the injustice and the arrogance of the landed aristocracy and the imperceptiveness of foreigners who come to Mexico to exploit what they see as its picturesqueness and drama....

[Kennerly] is shown very much as the ugly American, the man with a 'loud voice and commanding stride.' This invading capitalist is leagued with the landowners and the Church (the 'chief enemies' of the Mexican people, as Porter called them in her essay 'Where Presidents Have No Friends') in exploitation of the Indian. Porter makes very clear her judgment of the wealthy few who oppress the many both through violence and through dependence and then refer to them derisively as 'animals'.... The peons going about their work are contrasted more directly with Genaro's impulsive joyriding in his car and on fast horses. After this well-dramatized series of contrasts between the exploited and the exploiting classes, the story ends with the message given the narrator directly by an impoverished Indian who looks forward, with a touching simplicity, to the time of year when there will be enough to eat....

Porter conveys her own political interpretations both through over commentary and satiric tone and through a series of symbolic actions. For example, seeing a jack rabbit pursued by dogs, she sides with the weaker, the oppressed, exhorting the rabbit to run; but when she later sees a dog chasing a 'little fat-bottomed soldier' she does not take sides. Another example is her objectification of her detachment from the decadent atmosphere of the hacienda by depicting herself wrapped in a blanket and sitting apart on the balcony.... 'Hacienda' betrays Porter's disillusionment with the Revolution."

Janis P. Stout
Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times
(U Virginia 1995) 82-85

"[This critic is interested in "potentially liberal gender-thinking" rather than the meanings of the story.] Everybody in the story is a performer. In their activities at the hacienda, the producer and his entourage play out parts in a life lived as spectacle.... Not only does the film crew constantly stage itself, but also all the residents at the haciendas employ costume to achieve identity. They form a chaotic group, for rather than sharing common bonds, each plays out a fantasy of identity imitated from another experiential context.... Dona Julia, wife of the hacienda's owner, is 'a figure from a Hollywood comedy, in black satin pajamas.' Her flirtation with Stepanov is entirely a theatrical experience.... As a sign of her authenticity, the narrator alone feels unsure of her clothing. Unlike her companions, she sought to dress for an external occasion, not an internal fantasy....

The characterization she developed suggests that Porter disapproved of Sergei Eisenstein, finding his experimental film another debased 1920s art form. In 'Hacienda,' she describes him as an imitator and a

fool, his clothing expressive of his superficial, inauthentic self. He wore 'his monkey-suit of striped overalls, his face like a superhumanly enlightened monkey's.... He had a monkey attitude towards life.' Resembling the self-proclaimed artists that she denigrates in her essays on the 1920s, Uspensky enjoys the 'bump-and-grind' burlesque of debased art; 'he amused himself at the low theaters in the capital, flattering the Mexicans by declaring they really were the most obscene....

As in her highly critical writing about the 1920s, Porter employs homosexuality in 'Hacienda' as a sign of social disorder, hinting at a homosexual relationship between Betancourt, an adviser from the Mexican government, and his 'sleek and slim-waisted' assistant. However, at the center of her revised version of the story is a more complexly imagined affair between an actress, Lolita, and Dona Julia, wife of the owner of the hacienda. Porter's depiction of this lesbian relationship is fascinating because she plays it from both sides. On the one hand, the relationship emphasizes the general corruption of these very modern filmmakers and their hangers-on. Like the incestuous relationship between the local actor Justino and his sister, also developed in her story, and the intermixing of art and life that severs human relations from human feeling among the filmmakers and the performers, Lolita and Dona Julia are one more example of things that, because they are much alike, should be kept apart. On the other hand, Porter uses the lesbian relationship to undermine and even mock the patriarchal assumptions that have governed women's lives at this hacienda for generations....

Every image in this passage [describing Dona Julia's apartment] suggests Dona Julia's superficiality and corruption, from the location of her bedroom near the vats of stinking, fermenting liquid to the room's ornaments, 'restless,' narcissistic, and perfumed. The apartment defines Dona Julia herself, her painted feminine surface and hidden corruption. Linked with the white liquor that keeps the Indians enslaved, drowning memory and desire in forgetfulness, Dona Julia's sexuality is one of Porter's symbols of modern Mexico. This costumed woman and her high-speed husband, alone with their shared actress lover, represent the complete breakdown of traditional human relations Porter had located at the core of the 1920s.... Don Genaro might rebel against social class constraints, but a break in heterosexual convention is far too unsettling.... In Porter's comic portrayal of male confusion, as well as the theatrical quality of the relationship between the costumed women, her gender-thinking comes the closest it ever does to that of her feminist contemporaries."

Mary Titus
The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter
(U Georgia 2005) 158-61

The hacienda is Mexico, the symbol of a country, just as the ship is a symbol of Germany in *Ship of Fools*. In only 35 pages, "Hacienda" poetically compresses enough content to develop into a sizable novel. In literature by outsiders Mexico has traditionally represented the primitive, the unconscious, the depths of the psyche, death, and Hell, as in *Under the Volcano* (1947) by Malcolm Lowry. Porter is one of the first writers to define Mexico literally and figuratively.

Trains had been popular symbols of progress for over a century and "Hacienda" opens on a train with the American businessman Kennerly acting dominant much as the United States has dominated Mexico economically and otherwise. That the destination of this train is the hacienda makes the notion of progress ironic. Kennerly comes from "God's country," specifically from "God's own Hollywood." His loud voice "brayed"—he's a jackass. The narrator watches Kennerly "take possession of the railway train" and make "gigantic progress" as he "strode mightily" through the crowd of impoverished Indian passengers. The recent Marxist revolution gave the illusion of social progress by eliminating third-class on trains, without eliminating the class system or capitalism.

Once in power, the leaders of the revolution betrayed the people and became the new aristocrats, just as greedy and oppressive as those they replaced. The allegorical personification of this betrayal is Velarde, "the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico." Velarde is Braggioni of "Flowering Judas" on a grander scale. "He owned two pulque haciendas which had fallen to his share when the great repartition of land had taken place." The "great repartition of land" was a seizure of land by the most powerful leaders of the revolution, who did not distribute the arable land to the people but kept it for themselves. Velarde's greed is also indicated by his near monopoly of dairy products and gouging of the people by "getting twice

the prices for them that any other dairy farm would have asked.” He also owns twenty newspapers, controls a powerful bank, controls the Mexican army, and dictates to the president of Mexico. Velarde can get Justino released from prison for a bribe of money, just as Braggioni can get Eugenio released from prison for a bribe of sex from Laura in “Flowering Judas.”

On the train the narrator sits in first-class between a Capitalist and a Communist who are making a documentary film at the hacienda celebrating the “true revolution”—a fraud evoking global history in the 1930s. The capitalist is an “ugly American,” a term that became popular later, directed especially at American tourists. “Kennerly spewed up his afflictions like a child being sick. ‘It’s these Mexicans,’ he said as if it were an outrage to find them in Mexico.... Kennerly hurled bags at the racks, jerked seat-backs about rudely” and arranges everything for the “three quite superior persons of the intellectual caste of the ruling race at large.” Everybody is racist by nature. “White men look all much alike to the Indians.”

The narrator, an American woman writer, has been invited to view the filming by Andreyev, the naive Communist assistant who “never asked questions, and [ironically] had no sense of social responsibility whatever...so it was hopeless to expect anything from him” or from Communism. The Communist Russian “voices murmured along quietly. Pigs grunted and rooted in the soft wallow near the washing fountain.” The Communists are depicted as like pigs and monkeys, animals just as greedy as any capitalist. The most illustrious Russian, Uspensky the director, “had a monkey attitude toward life.” As he is modeled on the real Russian film maker Eisenstein, Porter is mocking Hollywood’s disregard for character in its exaltation of Eisenstein as a great artist.

That the Communist Russian film is (1) funded by an American Socialist functioning as a capitalist and that (2) its business manager is a representative capitalist is a satirical indication that capitalism is natural and indispensable, contrary to hypocritical Marxist propaganda. The collaboration of rich Hollywood liberals—capitalists who posture as “progressive”—with Communists is also factual, especially during the 1930s. Kennerly is a nervous wreck because Mexico is so corrupt he has to pay bribes to everybody to get anything done: “It doesn’t pay to have a conscience, but if you’ve got one what can you do about it?” The corrupt Mexican government wants the Russians to film “a glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution.” To that end, the film makers are controlled by an “entire staff of professional propagandists,” but the Russians are accustomed to censorship and have no artistic integrity. The cameraman Stepanov says “Let them have their way.” And the naïve Andreyev exclaims, “It has been astonishing...to see how devoted all of them are to art.”

The film setting is a “feudal estate” with a hacienda described as “a monastery, a walled fortress.” This reference to a monastery evokes the Catholic Church, but the chapel door is “closed.” There is no evidence in the story of religion being practiced. The few references to God, when Kennerly exclaims “My God”—are ironic since he pays no attention to God. The clergy are significantly absent from the hacienda because religious faith is absent. Catholicism is commonly blamed for the stagnation of Mexico and the failure of its revolutions, because the conservative Church sides with the rich landowners, but in Porter’s analysis the Church actually has no influence and is not even Christian. The Church is built into the “walled fortress” of corrupt government and is itself corrupt. Rather than imitate Christ, the priests complacently separate themselves from the people like monks in a monastery, like the two priests in *Ship of Fools*. Jesus would be out ministering among the peons, not hiding behind walls or away in Mexico City.

The Indians live “under a doom imposed by the landscape” because their economy is based entirely on the liquor made from maguey plants that thrive on their land, called pulque. This hacienda is a pulqueria, essentially a booze factory, a secular monastery dedicated to faith in alcohol with “rooms marching by tens along the cloisters.” The terms “monastery” and “cloisters” imply that the Indians made a religion of their “divine liquor,” with its own legend of discovery (revelation) by a “half-goddess” named Maria, a pagan alternative to the Virgin Mary who “gave birth” to their doomed way of life. She is a false prophet, a pathetic substitute for Jesus. “Spaniards found wall paintings in the pre-Conquest pulquerias...always telling this legend.” These poor Indians are not Catholics at all, they are drunks who worship a drug. Their idol induces spiritual death—sloth and surrender. “In the Indian the love of death had become a habit of the spirit.” Pulque is a Devil’s brew. It stinks like hell.

Pulque sustains oppression: “All over Mexico the Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; don Genaro and his fellow-haciendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and ambitious politicians in the capital would be stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas for themselves. It was all arranged.” By pointing to a drug as the curse of Mexico, Porter in effect predicts its current domination by drug cartels. The three-year-old Indian boy leading a baby donkey carrying two miniature casks of pulque illustrates the ongoing continuity of a corrupt tradition: “The two small creatures imitated each in his own kind perfectly the gestures of their elders.”

The Spanish Conquest overlaid Catholicism on the native religion of the Indians. Here at the hacienda, “The Spanish overseer, who had been cast for the role of villain—one of them—in the film” embodies the Conquest. “There he sat nearly all day, as he had sat for years and might sit for years more.” Calling him an “overseer” evokes slavery. The conquerors literally enslaved some Indians and now exploit all Indians like slaves. The barracks of government soldiers is directly opposite the little huts of the Indians. By now the overseer is too big for his tight fancy pants: “He was miserable, entirely, for his trousers were all he had to live for, anyhow.” His boredom suggests that in the end Spain gained little from conquering what is now a population of besotted peons. “The pride of their bodily posture was the mere outward shade of passive, profound resistance; the lifted, arrogant features were a mockery of the servants who lived within.” Their pride divides them against themselves for submitting to oppression. They are inauthentic, ironically, since they are depicted in the film as the most authentic Mexicans. Pride is a deadly sin in Catholicism. If the Indians became true Catholics, they would subject themselves to the discipline of overcoming pride, which is expressed in machismo and the abusive subordination of women.

The soldiers and residents of the hacienda look forward to being raided by revolutionaries because they love excitement and violence. In the most recent Agrarian raid “They had the time of their lives.” Porter uses the term “Agrarian” rather than revolutionary as an ironic allusion to the American “Agrarians,” who were Southern conservatives, just the *opposite* of the Communists in Mexico. Since the 1930s in the United States, cultural power has been increasingly Leftist. The American Agrarians were conservative writers at Vanderbilt University in the 1930s known for a collection of essays arguing for the agrarian values of the South against the Leftist urban values of the North, *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930). One of these Agrarians, also called Fugitives, was the poet Allen Tate. Porter knew these writers well and even had an affair with Tate. Her allusion evokes a comical image of genteel writers attacking the New York literary establishment with inkpens, suggesting that the American agrarians were unlikely to fare any better than the Mexicans. It also implies that the far more numerous New York Leftists enjoy shooting back at the quixotic Southerners and routing them with overwhelming firepower from their lofty fortress of literary authority.

The theme that nothing basic ever really changes in Mexico is symbolized by the old hacienda. This theme was later elaborated by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his international bestseller *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Neither Catholicism nor Communism have changed the basic way of life in Mexico, whereas the movie company from Communist Russia and Hollywood, representing modern values, have devastating effects. The promiscuous actress Lolita seduces both Don Genaro and Dona Julia, disrupting their marriage and causing Don Genaro to avert his eyes by running away from managing the hacienda—at top speed. “Speed, he said, was ‘modern’ and it was everyone’s duty to be as modern as one’s means allowed.” As applied to lovemaking, his love of speed may partly explain why his wife is dissatisfied. “Don Genaro’s wealth allowed him to be at least twice as modern as Betancourt” the censor. The owner of the hacienda is a comic figure, as when he returns from a long horseback ride: “Don Genaro and his servant were back; they approached the hacienda at a reasonable pace, but once fairly in sight they whipped up their horses and charged into the corral”... “Nothing could move too fast for don Genaro, said Betancourt, whether a horse, a dog, a woman or something with metal machinery in it.”

Don Genaro’s infidelities are a corruption expected in his society and have not destroyed his marriage, whereas a lesbian affair by his wife is too much for him. He has become the classic befuddled cuckold. In Mexico “A wife’s first right is to be jealous and threaten to kill her husband’s mistress.” Unlike Maria Concepcion, Dona Julia does not kill her rival, she goes to bed with her. “She herself was modern, she said, very modern.” She “appeared to be an exotic speaking doll” wearing a Chinese outfit like a costume, like “a figure from a Hollywood comedy” with “the glittering eye of a femme fatale in any Hollywood film.”

Betancourt wears “the correct costume for a moving-picture director,” which he is not. Popular culture inspires imitation, artifice, pretense and faith in superficial appearances. Porter worked in the movie industry for awhile and is one of the first writers to use Hollywood film-making to epitomize the manufacture of illusions that corrupt modern society. When the cameraman Stepanov says “The light...it is always our enemy,” the light is a symbol of truth.

The destructive effects of modern values represented by the intrusion of the movie company is also symbolized by Justino’s accidental shooting of his sister while she is grinding corn. The girl is an innocent bystander who has nothing to do with the movie and is engaged in the most traditional and wholesome of activities, whereas her brother is acting in the propaganda movie. Influenced by all the reckless activity going on among the movie makers, Justino borrows one of the pistols being used in the filming and starts “throwing the pistol into the air and catching it.” In the movie, Justino kills a girl by accident, tries to escape, and Vicente is one of the men who runs him down on horseback. “Well, the same thing has happened to the same people in *reality!*” This coincidence is a metaphor of the fact that people imitate what they see in the movies, often unconsciously and against their wills, which can result in harm to the innocent—over and over again. Betancourt regrets that nobody thought of exploiting the accident: “We could have got a close-up of the girl, really dead.” Popular culture induces artificial consciousness, dissociation from reality, and a lack of true empathy.

The exemplar affirmed in the story is the artist Carlos Montana, who is spiritually elevated as implied by his last name, meaning mountain. He is the only religious character. In one of the snapshots taken “before the closed chapel door” Carlos plays the role of a “pious priest.” To Porter, true art is religious. Betancourt the critic belittles Carlos, rejects his art and calls him a failure because he is poor. Here Porter is satirizing critics and reviewers who worship commercial Success and censor writers they dislike. Betancourt has acquired power as a government censor and is dismissive to the poor and to others he sees as inferior to himself, like a callous pope “lifting a narrow, pontifical hand, waving away vulgar human pity.” Ironically, he claims to believe in “spiritual development.” The shallow poseur Betancourt is mocked for his attraction to whatever is chic and trendy (like the New York literary establishment and Hollywood), his dabbling in “numerology, astronomy, astrology, a formula of thought-transference and deep breathing, the practice of will-to-power combined with the latest American theories of personality development; certain complicated magical ceremonies; and a careful choice of doctrines from the several schools of Oriental philosophies which are, from time to time, so successfully introduced into California.”

A modern con-man who thinks he knows everything, Betancourt attributes his own success to “scientific intuition” and claims he can “communicate telepathically with anyone he chose.” He is so elevated above others in his self-esteem he once “levitated himself three feet from the ground by a simple act of the will.” The narrator remembers “all that Carlos had done for Betancourt” in the past and infers that the critic is taking revenge on the true artist because he resents carrying a “burden of gratitude.” Carlos is the opposite of Betancourt: a man of the common people, humble, productive, honest, and “full of humanity.” Carlos writes a sympathetic folk song about Justino and his sister, “Ah, poor little Rosalita,” whereas Betancourt says that, since the girl was just a poor Mexican, “it is much better that she is dead.”

Michael Hollister (2017)