

WIT & HUMOR



Katherine Anne Porter

(1890-1980)

Their smiles approved of each other.

He tugged at the leash of his stupor.

You could have put her mind in a peanut shell.

He bulged until he became strange even to himself.

“Name father son holygoat,” shouted [little] Stephen.

When I was little, I would sit on the arm of my father’s chair at the theater. I saw “Mary, Queen of Scots” and I was so disappointed to learn that it wasn’t really the queen up there on the stage, being beheaded.

A good southerner doesn’t kill anybody he doesn’t know.

I have no hidden marriages. They just escape my mind.

Kennerly spewed up his afflictions like a child being sick.

He looked like a parboiled sausage ready to burst from its skin.

It’s high time writers got their minds above their belly buttons.

Even Saint Teresa said, “I can pray better when I’m comfortable.”

I gave up wearing slacks because of the kind of woman I saw wearing them.

A wife’s first right is to be jealous and threaten to kill her husband’s mistress.

“It’s these Mexicans,” he said as if it were an outrage to find them in Mexico.

He always acted like a sensible man, to me. He never got married, for one thing.

[Gertrude Stein talking] Really sluggish, like something eating its way through a leaf.

He smiled like the tiger coming out of the Colosseum after a nice warm lunch of Christians.

He wanted to turn around and shove the fellow off the stump, but it wouldn’t look reasonable.

If all the men I’m supposed to have lived with were crammed into this room, we couldn’t turn around.

[Granny on her deathbed] I want you to find George. Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him.

She had a way of speaking about her children as if they were rather troublesome nephews on a prolonged visit.

He moved around the room aimlessly, holding his spread hand just beside his face as if he expected his head to drop and hoped to catch it as it fell.

The stranger opened his mouth and began to shout with merriment, and he shook hands with himself as if he hadn’t met himself for a long time.

Ruben said something in a hurried whisper, made rather an impressive gesture over his head with one arm, and, to say it as gently as possible, died.

“Even I, who am not a great artist, know how women can spoil a man’s work for him. Let me tell you, when Trinidad left me, I was good for nothing for a week.”

Denny unexpectedly showed logic and even dimly, remotely, some hint of a deep-buried sense of justice, even morals, even to strain a point, ethics. Or at least, common sense.

One of the generals got up suddenly, tugging at his pistol, which stuck, and the other three jumped and grabbed him, all without a word; everybody in the place saw it at once. So far there was nothing unusual.

[Mexican judge] He said he had heard we were making a picture over here with men shooting each other in it. He said he had a jailful of men waiting to be shot, and he’d be glad to send them over for us to shoot in the picture. He couldn’t see why, he said, we were pretending to kill people when we could have all we needed to kill really.

Miriam upset this theory as in time she upset most of his theories. His intention to play the role of a man of the world educating an innocent but interestingly teachable bride was nipped in the bud. She was not at all teachable and she took no trouble to make herself interesting.... The trouble was that Miriam was right, damn her.

It was like embracing a windmill. Lizzi uttered a curious tight squeal, and her long arms gathered him in around his heaving middle. Her thin wide mouth gaped alarmingly and her sharp teeth gleamed even in the dimness. She gave him a good push and they fell backward clutched together, her long active legs overwhelmed him, she rolled him over flat on his back and for a moment her sharp hipbones ground his belly cruelly.... Unless he recovered himself instantly, the situation would be irremediably out of his control. He braced himself to reverse the unnatural posture of affairs, and attempted to roll into the proper position of masculine supremacy, but Lizzi was spread upon him like a fallen tent full of poles... He fought to free himself.... Meanwhile she showed no signs of surrender, but gripped him with her knees as if he were an unmanageable horse... Never before had he encountered a woman who would not let herself be overcome properly.

The half-darkness showed a white blotch which proved to be the motionless form of Bebe, who had found the...cabin door ajar... Bebe, balanced on his bowed legs and wavering slightly with the roll of the ship, the folds of his nose twitching, regarded them with an expression of animal cunning that most embarrassingly resembled human knowledge of the seamy side of life. Plainly he could see what they were up to, their intentions were no secret from him, but because of their strange shapes, and the weird sounds they made, he was puzzled—puzzled, and somewhat repelled. Indeed he was not at all sympathetic. “Go away, get out,” commanded Herr Rieber, in as deep a growl as Bebe himself could have fetched up.... “Go away, there’s a good doggie,” he said, looking around hopefully for something weighty to throw at him.

Betancourt had spent his youth unlocking the stubborn secrets of Universal Harmony by means of 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.

At St. Elizabeth’s...I looked about the place as I left—a huge sort of plant, with thousands upon thousands of persons of all ages and kinds, in every degree of insanity. I inquired and it was as I suspected: Ezra Pound was the only poet in the place!... Either poets are more level-headed than other men—or are they just harder to catch?

[Granny delirious] A thousand birds were singing a Mass. She felt like singing too, but she put her hand in the bosom of her dress and pulled out a rosary, and Father Connolly murmured Latin in a very solemn voice and tickled her feet. My God, will you stop that nonsense? I’m a married woman.

The invention of every new weapon of war has always been greeted with horror and righteous indignation, especially by those who failed to invent it.

We may indeed reach the moon some day, and I dare predict that will happen before we have devised a decent system of city garbage disposal.

I don’t care what [the Feminists] do just so they don’t do it in the streets and scare the horses.

It was an unusually awful play, and therefore was unusually popular.

Tolstoy could look up, look down, but he could not look level.