

409 QUOTATIONS



Katherine Anne Porter

(1890-1980)

Katherine Anne Porter is one of the five greatest American short story writers—with Hawthorne, Hemingway, Faulkner, and O'Connor—as measured by the number of masterpieces written. Her three brilliantly compressed short novels are among the finest in world literature, featuring the transcendent *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939). Her long allegorical novel *Ship of Fools* (1962) is the last great masterpiece of Modernism—a landmark in literary history. Porter became a legend by establishing herself as obviously a major writer with her first stories, in particular “Flowering Judas” (1930), about an idealistic American girl caught up in a corrupt Communist revolution in Mexico, a complex analysis of social types and a resonant encapsulation of 20th century global politics. “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” (1929) is equally complex, allusive, and ironic, yet comic. “He” (1935) is symbolic holistic Realism that becomes a powerful religious allegory in the tradition of Hawthorne. Porter has been favorably compared with more great writers than any other American. She is arguably the most intelligent and reliable literary analyst of gender relations and the liberation of women in the 20th century—an egalitarian “feminist” in the best sense, whose consistently Christian vision is overlooked or ignored by most critics.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, education, reading, southern family, the South, race, marriage, love, sex, drugs, conformity, America, Hollywood, dies in 1918, Mexico, Communists, politics, the 1920s, Paris Left Bank, painting, Gertrude Stein, Germany, Nazis, Europe, writing, the artist, creative process, form, language, style, technique, symbolism, “Flowering Judas,” *Ship of Fools*, wit & humor, other writers, human nature, babies, Realism, Naturalism, Postmodernism, Political Correctness, Feminism, critics, vision, life, personality, religion, ghost, spirit of O'Connor appears, death, heaven:

YOUTH

I was naturally wild, naturally obstinate.

San Antonio. That's where I spent my childhood.

The menfolk often settled their differences in duels.

They used to say of that part of Texas that it was heaven for men and cattle but hell on women and horses.

I was an unhappy restless child, and have no pleasant memories.... But it certainly does not matter, for my unhappiness was not from my circumstances but from within myself.

When I was a little child I was always running away.

I never quarreled as a child. I just went somewhere else.

I wanted to dance, I wanted to play the piano, I sang, I drew.

When I was six, I wrote what I called a novel—I spelled it 'nobbel.'

When I was a very little girl I wrote a letter to my sister saying I wanted glory.

My family felt that if one had talents they should be cultivated for the decoration of life, but never professionally.

The head of our house was a grandmother, an old matriarch, you know, and a really lovely and beautiful woman, a good soul, and so she didn't do us any harm.

She was indeed a strong matriarchal type, a terribly typical Southern phenomenon, which I wouldn't want to be for anything in the world. I run like hell from that kind of woman.

We were told never to look a gentleman right in the eyes for more than a second.

When I left they were all certain I was going to live an immoral life.

I never was a blonde, you know. My hair was black, until I got the plague in 1918 when it all fell out and came back in again all white.

EDUCATION

We had this old-fashioned home education—the place was full of books and music and very literate grown-ups...and a young governess.... We had all of the classics.

I consider most of our published history available to children quite as legendary as the siege of Troy.

No legend is ever true, but I believe all of them are founded on some germ of truth.

I didn't attend college, I went to girls' schools, convents, that type of thing.

They dragged me through all stages of mathematics by the hair.

I never set foot in a university until I went there to teach.

Writing, in any sense that matters, cannot be taught. It can only be learned, and learned by each separate one of us in his own way, by the use of his own powers of imagination and perception.

I have spent—oh, heavens, 35 years, I think, traveling around the country to more than 200 universities and colleges, reading poetry and speaking about literature.

Teachers, apparently, are bored stiff with literature... They can't or don't want to answer the questions their students ask.

The colleges are already crowded with people who never in this world will absorb more than a rudimentary education, and we dilute everything to meet this low standard.

In very large colleges, where I've gone as guest writer or lecturer, they have enormous classes of little people who were going to learn to write, and it turned out that they had never read a good book.... It was like being in a house with a whole set of very bright baboons. You expected them to burst into human speech at any minute, but they never did.

I believe I can speak for a whole generation of writers who acknowledge that these five men were...the great educators of their time.... Henry James, James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

READING

I was incredibly influenced by Montaigne when I was very young.

I was reading Shakespeare's sonnets when I was thirteen years old, and I'm perfectly certain that they made the most profound impression upon me of anything I ever read. For a time I knew the whole sequence by heart... That was the turning point of my life, when I read the Shakespeare sonnets, and then all at one blow, all of Dante...

I read all kinds of poetry--Homer, Ronsard, all the old French poets in translation....the entire set of Voltaire's philosophical dictionary with notes by Smollett.... All the eighteenth-century novelists, through Jane Austen...

The person who influenced me most, the real revelation in my life as a writer—though I don't write in the least like him—was Laurence Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*.

And I discovered for myself *Wuthering Heights*; I think I read that book every year of my life for fifteen years. I simply adored it.

Henry James and Thomas Hardy were really my introduction to modern literature.

Like Ezra Pound, Joyce was one of my important experiences. *Dubliners* was a revelation to me—it showed what could be done with the short story. To my generation, Joyce was a tremendous influence. He gave us courage and confidence. I can't tell you what a breath of fresh air he was. It was time for a break, and he made it. I don't know what we would have done without *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*.

There are three novels that I reread with pleasure and delight—three almost perfect novels. If we're talking about form, you know. One is *A High Wind in Jamaica* by Richard Hughes, one is *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster, and the other is *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf was a great artist, one of the glories of our time, and she never published a line that was not worth reading.... Read everything of Virginia Woolf's now.

Go back to "Big Two-Hearted River." [Hemingway] All of his good things are right there.

Turgenev didn't really engage me until I was quite mature.

SOUTHERN FAMILY

My people came to Virginia in 1648.

My people started from Virginia and Pennsylvania toward the West in 1776 or 1777.

My father was a real old-fashioned conservative stubborn Jeffersonian Democrat.

One of my great great grandfathers was Jonathan Boone, the brother of Daniel.... On my father's side I'm descended from Colonel Andrew Porter...one of the circle of George Washington during the Revolution.

I'm a Southerner by tradition and inheritance, and I have a very profound feeling for the South. And, of course, I belong to the guilt-ridden white-pillar crowd myself, but it just didn't rub off on me.

You're brought up with the notion of feminine chastity and inaccessibility, yet with the curious idea of feminine availability in all spiritual ways, and in giving service to anyone who demands it. And I suppose that's why it has taken me twenty years to write this novel [*Ship of Fools*]; it's been interrupted by just anyone who could jimmy his way into my life.

THE SOUTH

A great many men committed suicide after the Civil War.

I am the grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation.

We are a conquered nation and abominably treated and we paid the greatest tribute perhaps ever paid by any conquered nation. Our history was miswritten and our children were taught lies and therefore the Northerners could not bear the image of us as we were and therefore the Northern publishers would publish only novels full of white columns and magnolias.

I had to leave the South because I didn't want to be regarded as a freak. That was how they regarded a woman who tried to write.

The past is never where you think you left it.

RACE

God does not know whether a skin is black or white. He sees only souls.

I dare say there is no man living who can with certainty name *all* the bloods that flow in his veins.

I was horrified at the Negro people in this country having to riot to gain something they should have had all along.

My grandmother, when she heard that Mr. Lincoln had abolished slavery and the Negroes were free, was heard to say "I hope it works both ways" and lived to realize that it did not.

The down-trodden minorities are organized into tight little cabals to run the country so that we will become the downtrodden vast majority.

MARRIAGE

Love is the only excuse for marriage.

At sixteen I ran away from New Orleans and got married.

He was rather a nice man—I know that now—but I didn't like him.

It still seems to me a charming work of the human imagination.

At that time I was too young for some of the troubles I was having.

I've always loved men like that, high-strung, moody, fickle—in a word, impossible.

[Marriage] works about as well as any other human institution, and rather better than a great many.

[Marriage] is the merciless revealer, the great white searchlight turned on the darkest places of human nature.

Marriage—a condition which...would tax the virtues and resources and staying powers of a regiment of angels.

It demands of all who enter it the two most difficult achievements possible: that each must be honest with himself, and faithful to another.

It is the kind of love that makes real marriage, and there is more of it in the world than you might think.

The less attention they paid to what they were expected to think and feel about marriage, and the more attention to each other as loved and loving, the better they did, for themselves and for everybody.

The Victorian marriage feather bed was in fact set upon the shaky foundation of the wavering human heart, the inconsistent human mind, and was the roiling hotbed of every dislocation and disorder not only in marriage but all society.

Though I am not one to say all change is progress, in this one thing, a kind of freedom and ease of mind between men and women in marriage—or at least the possibility of it, change has been all for the better. At least they are able now to fight out their differences on something nearer equal terms.

They had agreed in the beginning not to marry because they must be free, marriage was a bond cramping and humiliating to civilized beings: yet what was this tie between them but marriage, and marriage of the worst sort, with all the restraints and jealousies and burdens, but with none of its dignity, none of its warmth and protection, no honest acknowledgment of faith and intention.

They collapsed melted together into nerveless quivering and long moans of agonized pleasure; then lay joined for a pleasurable time in a triumphant glow of exhaustion, their marriage mended almost as good as new, their feelings fresh and purified.

Romantic Love crept into the marriage bed, very stealthily, by centuries, bringing its absurd notions about love as eternal springtime and marriage as a personal adventure meant to provide personal happiness.

They couldn't live with me because I was a writer and, now and then, writing took first place.... They felt neglected. I don't blame them.

I've been married to three [eventually four, possibly six] very passable men and couldn't make any of the marriages work. I suppose the contrary demands of career—my husbands' and mine—got in the way.

There are going to be a lot of other things much more interesting in my life than this man, or any other man.

Still it was a good marriage while it lasted. [Eugene Pressley]

I never used my husbands' names except for social purposes.

No marriage was worth giving up what I had.

I was just a little ahead of my time.

LOVE

Whoever loves has given himself away.

Only strong and secure men can be tender.

Love must be learned, and learned again; there is no end to it.

Love is...so remarkably educational it would be a great pity to miss it.

To most of the human race it never happens at all because they have not been able to imagine love.

And certainly love does create a rising of the spirit that makes everything you do seem easier and happier.

But there must come a time when you no longer depend upon it, when the mind—not the will, really, either—takes over.

The only time men get a little tiresome is in love—oh, they're OK at first, but they do tend, don't they, to get a little bossy and theological about the whole business.

A house is just like a man—you ought to live with it at least a year before deciding on anything permanent. And even then it's a big gamble.

It is a disaster to have a man fall in love with me. They aren't content to take what I can give; they want everything from me.

When I fall in love it's like a summer storm, when lightning transforms the most familiar landscape into something wild and strange and beautiful; and like some object catching fire, I burn right down to a little ember.... The meeting between us is like an exchange of signals with lightning—and when I've gotten over the shock and sorted out the damage, I can then remember what really happened.

Love, for me, has been rather more as if I were a bundle of wheat going through the threshing machine than anything else. When I came through, I was clean winnowed.

My one or two real love affairs were always something that dropped on me like a bolt in the midst of poverty, illness and the exact middle of a piece of work.

Love at first sight: [The male is] instantly transfigured with a light of such blinding brilliance all natural attributes disappear and are replaced by those usually associated with archangels at least.

If you ever treat a man as if he were an archangel, he can't ever consent to being treated like a human being again.

[Alexander/Adam, 1918] He was so patient with me, those nights when I was sick and delirious, getting me things and always just sitting there. Whenever I would wake up he would be there... He died.... And it was one of the most important and terrible things that ever happened to me.... I remember saying to a Spaniard in Mexico once that Alexander was the only man I could ever have spent my life with.

SEX

The flesh in real love is one of the many bridges to the spirit.

We kept holding back, which was totally against my nature.

Physical infidelity is the signal, the notice given, that all fidelities are undermined.

I have always felt that most men (in spite of all their dirty locker-room jokes) are essentially prudes about sex. I mean real honest-to-goodness sex, not the soiled furtive animalism which some people write about.

Sex to me has always been one of the duller things to read about in the world. I've always said there is only one sexual experience I am interested in and that is my own.

When I first read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [D. H. Lawrence], thirty years ago, I thought it a dreary, sad, performance with some passages of unintentional hilarious low comedy...beyond belief in a book written with such inflamed apostolic solemnity.

Today's children know so much about sex they can dance without touching each other—narcissistically by themselves.

DRUGS

I'm glad now that I had my experience with marijuana, especially under the care and auspices of such kind friends [two of them, according to the fixed rule of their group, would refrain from smoking in order to watch over the others]; but I would not care to do it again. I was simply not meant to fool around with drugs of any kind.

CONFORMITY

I think that TV and radio have been the twin curse because it does not require anyone to think.

What I find most dreadful among the young artists is this tendency toward middle-classness—this idea that they have to get married and have lots of children and live just like everybody else, you know?

I've never belonged to any group or huddle of any kind. You cannot be an artist and work collectively.

AMERICA

The native land of the heart.

My America has been a borderland of strange tongues and commingled races.

New York is the most foreign place I know, and I like it very much.

HOLLYWOOD

At twenty-one I bolted again, went to Chicago, got a newspaper job and went into the movies... The newspaper sent me over to the old S. and A. movie studio to do a story. But I got into the wrong line...and I found myself in a courtroom scene with Francis X. Bushman.

"We're moving to the coast." "Well, I'm not," I said. "Don't you want to be a movie actress?" "Oh, no!" I said. "I have more serious things to do." "Well, be a fool!" they said, and they left.

I just knew what it would do to me. I'm very luxury-loving. I have all the expensive tastes. I could fall into it like a cat into an empty pillow. I knew I was corruptible.

You can't hold yourself in contempt and do anything worthwhile.

That was 1914 and world war had broken out... I sang old Scottish ballads in costume—I made it myself—all around Texas and Louisiana. And then I was supposed to have TB, and spent about six weeks in a sanatorium.... I was in Denver, so I got a newspaper job.

DIES OF INFLUENZA IN 1918

It seems to me true that I died then. I died once, and I have never feared death since.

I shall write well someday—as well as anybody in America has ever written. [1919]

MEXICO

I just got up and bolted. I went running off on that wild escapade to Mexico, where I attended, you might say, and assisted at, in my own modest way, a revolution [the Obregon Revolution of 1921]...though actually I went to Mexico to study the Aztec and Mayan art designs.

I write about Mexico because that is my familiar country. I was born near San Antonio, Texas. My father lived part of his youth in Mexico, and told me enchanting stories of his life there; therefore the land did not seem strange to me even at my first sight of it.

I knew them all, including Obregon, who became the governor and was later assassinated, and Felipe Carillo, the governor of Yucatan, who was also assassinated. He was as civil and gentle a man as I ever saw, and a notorious killer. I used to go dancing with him, and boating on Lake Chapultepec.

I like best the quality of aesthetic magnificence, and, above all, the passion for individual expression without hypocrisy, which is the true genius of the race.

I stayed in Mexico to avoid that crowd in New York.

COMMUNISTS

Don't be betrayed into all the old outdated mistakes.

You cannot be a hostile critic of society and expect society to feed you regularly.

One does not change the nature of the individual by changing his economic or social status.

Why should I have rebelled against my early training in Jesuit Catholicism only to take another yoke now?

The Communist doctrine of the locomotive of history—you know, rounding the sharp bend and everybody who doesn't go with it falls off it—that history makes men instead of men making history, and it takes away the moral responsibility.

This whole effort for the past one hundred years has been to remove the moral responsibility from the individual and make him blame his own human wickedness on his society, but he helps to make his society, you see, and he will not take the responsibility for his part in it.

I met all those half-wits who came back from Russia in the '20s, poor old Lincoln Steffens saying, "I have seen the future and it works." And that parading John Reed... God, they were a sickening lot. I used to listen to all their yammer over bad beer in Greenwich Village.

I was inoculated against Communism down there [in Mexico]. I saw the way they worked, the way they behaved to each other, to say nothing of the way they behaved to me! They would not only steal all of my things, they would steal from each other.

Velarde...was the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico.... He operated also the largest dairy farm in the country...getting just twice the prices for them that any other dairy farm would have asked.... He controlled the army; he controlled a powerful bank [and owned] twenty newspapers...

Of course I had seen all that in Mexico, the revolutionaries...Zapata and Villa, they tore Mexico apart. The poor stayed poor. They redistributed the land and it's all back in the hands of the rich landowners. We don't learn anything. I have seen it all. Everything is promised and nothing is fulfilled.

You know the trouble with every movement, every revolution, is that the people who do the work and do the fighting and bloodshedding and the dying, quite simply are not the people who run the thing afterwards. It's a phenomenon that exists everywhere.

The formerly oppressed behave with criminal cruelty to those they gain power over. This seems to me to be no sort of step forward.

It is quite true that strategic positions are occupied methodically by Communists, not only in departments of government here and abroad, but in our schools and universities, the press, the publishing business, industry, the motion pictures. You find them everywhere; they mean business and they are dangerous. But judging by the present drive against the Communists, I should say there are even more fascists in public office, or at least more powerfully placed.

Both fascists and Communists have been strangely successful in persuading the liberals of this country that only a democracy has no right to defend itself from its enemies.... Why is it such a crime for a democracy in the United States to put fascist and Communist conspirators in jail, or at least to deprive them of their confidential posts in departments of our government? Does being a Democrat morally oblige a man to consent to his own murder?

The world itself had quite a few horrors in every country, but Russia was then as now considered the worst.

POLITICS

All political history is a vile mess.

I am always the Loyal Opposition.

There are only two possibilities for any real order: in art and in religion.

It's always been true that, in the strangest way, you tend to become the thing you fight.

In those days I was sometimes willing to march with the devil himself if the specific cause was a just and decent one.

No decent demonstration or mass meeting should be permitted to degenerate into a freak show for the benefit of misguided nitwits venting any perverse idea that happens along.

Everything the government takes on, it either turns rotten or destroys. We've had it that way now roughly since President McKinley.

The politicians...are taking words that have no meaning whatsoever and using them, making whole speeches out of them.... It's meant to deceive. It's meant so that you can talk in the presence of people and say anything and they can't understand you. That is what the politicians have been doing now for several generations in an effort to keep everything secret. That is really decay.

It is our highest moral duty to protest against the swineries of governments, and that should include our own.

THE 1920s

The so-called Hemingway period in Paris.

It was all this going into exile and being so romantic about it and turning their backs on this 'crass American civilization' and so on.

I was not one of those who could flourish in the conditions of the past two decades....a period of grotesque dislocations in a whole society when the world was heaving in the sickness of a millennial change. [1940]

Even now when I think of the twenties and the legend that has grown up about them, I think it was a horrible time: shallow and trivial and silly.

I was in New York at the time they were having those tea dances and Scott Fitzgerald's romantic dreams about all the collegiate boys and girls dancing in the afternoons of false romance and luxury, and the low sweet fever of love.... And I simply couldn't stand it because I couldn't stand the society of those people.

A life of dissipation sometimes gave to a face the look of gaunt suffering spirituality that a life of asceticism was supposed to give and quite often did not.

PARIS LEFT BANK

I was brought up in the generation that Miss Stein described as "lost."

I'll be damned if ever I was lost. I always knew where I was.

There never was a lost generation of artists—that is only a cheerful myth.

I don't think we were lost, straying off somewhere like witless children in the woods; we merely had to work at finding our own way.

We represented the real break with the nineteenth century.

I would have been completely smothered—completely disgusted and revolted—by the goings-on in Europe.

PAINTING

Picasso—he's an awful bore.

As he grew richer, more famous and noisier, I came to the conclusion that [Diego Rivera] was a dishonest, treacherous charlatan on a scale commensurate with the size of his biggest murals.

Painting doesn't exist any more. The gang has taken over. I never knew Jackson Pollock, but I've seen pictures of him dribbling paint, you know, like a little boy building very sloppy mud pies.

GERTRUDE STEIN

With the top of her brain she was a modern girl, a New Woman.

Next to James Joyce she is the great influence on the younger literary generation, who see in her the combination of tribal wise woman and arch-priestess of aesthetic.

She gave them a romantic name, the Lost Generation, and a remarkable number of them tried earnestly if unsuccessfully to live up to it.

Miss Stein herself sat there in full possession of herself, the scene, the spectators, wearing thick no-colored shapeless woolen clothes and honest woolen stockings knitted for her by Miss Toklas, looking extremely like a handsome old Jewish patriarch who had backslid and shaved off his beard.

It was not that she was opposed to ideas, but that she was not interested in anybody's ideas but her own, except as material to put down on her endless flood of pages.

She simply, quietly knew with a Messianic revelation that she was not only a genius, but *the* genius.

The duty of the world was to stand still so that she could move about in it comfortably.

Like all talkers, she thought other people talked too much.

GERMANY

The Germans have *marched first* in every instance for the past three European wars.

I resent from the bottom of my soul that twice in one generation we have sent our men to Europe on account of those god-damned Boches.

[*Ship of Fools*] is the story of my first voyage to Europe in 1931. We embarked on an old German ship at Vera Cruz and we landed in Bremerhaven twenty-eight days later.... It's a parable, if you like, of the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity.... Don't forget I am a passenger on that ship; it's not the other people altogether who are the fools!

The really shocking thing about the Germans is their insistence that they committed their crimes in the concentration camps (and elsewhere!) merely in obedience to orders. Of course we know what would have happened to them if they had not carried out orders.

I believe that they are just as dangerous as they were then, and the moment they get back their power they are going to do it again.

I knew what was going on and I couldn't get anybody to let me tell it.

NAZIS

This complacency about Germany is simply horrifying.

Nietzsche is dangerous because his mind has power without intelligence; he is all will without enlightenment. His phrases are inflated, full of violence, a gross kind of cruel poetry—like Wagner's music.... His diseased brain gave his style the brilliance of a rotting fish.

I had seen these criminals—these clowns—like Hitler, and was stricken by an idea: if people like this could take over the world! Of course there were all the good people who didn't believe in the clowns, but they still let the clowns commit the crimes good worthy people would commit only if they had the nerve. How else to account for the collusion in evil that enables a creature like Mussolini, or Hitler.

One time, in Berlin, I was probably the only American woman around, so I got invited to dinner by the correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, and the guests were Hitler, Goering and Goebbels. They all arrived late, about halfway through dinner, each with his beautiful blond Aryan bodyguard with a totally blank face, and each of them crippled. Goering always walked with a cane, and Goebbels had a club foot, and Hitler had sprained his foot I believe. I thought he was the most awful, insignificant, underbred, unhealthy-looking creature I had ever seen.

Goering sat across from me, and I particularly noticed the sweaty roll of fat that bulged over his tight shirt collar. He had that piggish look I've described in "The Leaning Tower," the passage where Charles is watching a group of middle-aged men and women who were gathered in silence before two adjoining windows, gazing at displays of toy pigs and sugar pigs. Goering was certainly a prototype of that swinish quality, especially while he was gobbling down the wonderful food.

The one I talked to the most was Goering. It was at this little party and we just sat by the fire and discussed Germany and he explained to me what they were going to do to the Jews and I said, "Well, you know, I wonder how you dare to do it because it's never done any good and it doesn't suppress them. It does do great damage to the country.... Nobody has ever prospered harassing the Jews... As a matter of fact, they help build up every country they ever live in.

We all seemed to be engaged in a sudden conspiracy to avoid that topic [Hitler], like people in a cancer ward not wanting to talk about death.

EUROPE

I had been in Mexico, Bermuda, Spain, Germany, Switzerland and, best of all, in Paris for five years.

I must have lived in 45 places.

WRITING

I wrote every day of my life.

I always write a story in one sitting.

I didn't show my work to anybody.

One of the marks of a gift is to have the courage of it.

I shall try to tell the truth, but the result will be fiction.

You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.

Writing is not an elegant pastime, it is a sober and hardworking trade, which gives great joy to the worker.

For many years I had to work up a story slowly, and with many revisions...but I've learned to be a first-draft writer.

A writer may be inspired occasionally: that's his good luck; but he doesn't learn to write by inspiration: he works at it.

I had spent fifteen years at least learning to write. I practiced writing in every possible way that I could. I wrote a pastiche of other people, imitating Dr. Johnson and Laurence Sterne, and Petrarch and Shakespeare's sonnets, and then I tried writing my own way.

Publishers always begin to harass me when I show signs of lagging, and, no matter what psychologists might be able to make of this, pressure of that sort simply throws me into a catatonic state, paralyzes my will, muddles my mind, and hurts my feelings.

[I] wrote *Noon Wine* in seven days and *Old Mortality* in another seven. Then I went to New Orleans, and wrote *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* in nine days.

If I didn't know the ending of my story, I wouldn't begin. I always write my last lines, my last paragraph first, and then I go back and work towards it. I know where I'm going. I know what my goal is. And how I get there is God's grace.

A story is like something you wind out of yourself. Like a spider, it is a web you weave, and you love your story like a child.

"Flowering Judas" (1930)

I started "Flowering Judas" at seven p.m. and at one-thirty I was standing on a snowy windy corner putting it in the mailbox. That story had been on my mind for years, growing out of this one little thing that happened in Mexico... Something I saw as I passed a window one evening. A girl I knew had asked me to come and sit with her, because a man was coming to see her, and she was a little afraid of him. And as I went through the courtyard, past the flowering judas tree, I glanced in the window and there she was sitting with an open book on her lap, and there was this great big fat man sitting beside her. Now Mary and I were friends, both American girls living in this revolutionary situation. She was teaching at an Indian school and I was teaching dancing at a girls' technical school in Mexico City. And we were having a very strange time of it. I was more skeptical, and so I had already begun to look with a skeptical eye on a great many of the

revolutionary leaders. Oh, the idea was all right, but a lot of men were misapplying it. And when I looked through that window that evening, I saw something in Mary's face, something in her pose, something in the whole situation, that set up a commotion in my mind. Because until that moment I hadn't really understood that she was not able to take care of herself, because she was not able to face her own nature and was afraid of everything.

THE ARTIST

Only the work of saints and artists give us any reason to believe that the human race is worth belonging to.

The good artist is first a good workman, and yet you may become a very good workman without ever becoming a master.

Practice an art for love and the happiness of your life—you will find it outlasts almost everything but breath.

First, have faith in your theme, then get so well acquainted with your characters that they live and grow in your imagination exactly as if you saw them in the flesh; and finally, tell their story with all the truth and tenderness and severity you are capable of.

In the arts, you simply cannot secure your bread and your freedom of action too.

There has never been a living in art, except by flukes of fortune.

It is not a means to fame and glory—it is a discipline of living.

Art is not a religion; it's not a substitute for religion.

CREATIVE PROCESS

No memory is really faithful.

My fiction is reportage, only I do something to it.

My work is done at a subterranean level and fragments of the work come to the surface. I record them as they come up.

My material consists of memory, legend, personal experience, and acquired knowledge. They combine in a constant process of re-creation.

All my experience seems to be simply memory, with continuity, marginal notes, constant revision and comparison of one thing with another. Now and again thousands of memories converge, harmonize, arrange themselves around a central idea in a coherent form, and I write a story.

By the time I write the story my people are up and alive and walking around and taking things into their own hands.

FORM

I never think about form at all [while writing].

Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning.

A novel is really like a symphony, you know, where instrument after instrument has to come in at its own time, and no other.

Any true work of art has got to give you the feeling of reconciliation—what the Greeks would call catharsis, the purification of your mind and imagination—through an ending that is enduring because it is right and true.

LANGUAGE

You have to speak clearly and simply and purely in a language that a six-year-old child can understand; and yet have the meanings and the overtones of language, and the implications, that appeal to the highest intelligence.

Every profession, every trade changes its vocabulary all of the time. But there is a basic pure human speech that exists in every language. And that is the language of the poet and the writer.

STYLE

The style is you.

Your style is an emanation from your own being.

You do not create a style. You work, and develop yourself.

If you have any character of your own, you will have a style of your own; it grows, as your ideas grow, and as your knowledge of your craft increases.

I've been called a stylist until I really could tear my hair out. And I simply don't believe in style.... Oh, you can cultivate a style, I suppose, if you like. But I should say it remains a cultivated style. It remains artificial and imposed.

Repetition can be extremely effective; it is useful as the pause, as the change of rhythm, but it must be used carefully. Certainly not more than once in a long story and at a given exact point would I try it.

Laurence Sterne was the first one who made me think I could write. That wonderful style with all the dashes! It looks easy, but it's terribly difficult.

TECHNIQUE

People very much dislike any revolution in technique. If any author uses a technique that has never been used before, everybody will dislike it.

The question is, how to convey a sense of whatever is there, as feeling, within you, to the reader; and that is a problem of technical expertness.

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism happens of its own self and it comes out of something so deep in your own consciousness and your own experience that I don't think that most writers are at all conscious of their use of symbols. I never am until I see them.

The dove begins by being a symbol of sensuality, it is the bird of Venus, you know, and then it goes on through the whole range of every kind of thing until it becomes the Holy Ghost. It's the same way with the rose which begins as a female sexual symbol and ends as the rose of fire in Highest Heaven. So you see the symbol would have the meaning of its context.

I never consciously took or adopted a symbol in my life. I certainly did not say, "This blooming tree upon which Judas is supposed to have hanged himself is going to be the center of my story." I named "Flowering Judas" after it was written, because when reading back over it I suddenly saw the whole symbolic plan and pattern of which I was totally unconscious while I was writing.

You don't say, "I'm going to have the flowering judas tree stand for betrayal," but of course it does.

Ship of Fools (1962)

Man...loves evil and cannot live without it.

My book is about the constant endless collusion between good and evil; I believe that human beings are capable of total evil, but no one has ever been totally good: and this gives the edge to evil. I don't offer any solution, I just want to show this principle at work, and why none of us has any real alibi in this world.

The story of the criminal collusion of good people—people who are harmless—with evil. It happens through inertia, lack of seeing what is going on before their eyes. I watched that happen in Germany and in Spain. I saw it with Mussolini. I wanted to write about people in these predicaments.

It took me twenty-one years to get that novel written, and I quit every chance I found. But it won.

WIT & HUMOR

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.

OTHER WRITERS

Pity and smut, like Mailer.

As for Sartre and de Beauvoir, what a silly pair!

I don't think I learned very much from my contemporaries.

Bellow is an awful writer—all that pity, pity, pity me—ugh!

The real masters of fiction were Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Conrad, Eudora Welty, and James Joyce.

Willa Cather...always reminded me of very good literary company, of the particularly admirable masters who formed her youthful tastes, her thinking and feeling.

I saw T. S. Eliot for the first time when he was here last... He is a charming, sweet-mannered man, with beautiful conversation. I have met only a very few real geniuses.

I think the influence of Whitman on certain American writers has been disastrous, for he encourages them in the vices of self-love (often disguised as love of humanity, or the working classes, or God), the assumption of prophetic powers, of romantic superiority to the limitations of craftsmanship, inflated feeling and slovenly expression.

As for Scott Fitzgerald, well, for a long time I couldn't read him because I knew the people he was writing about too well.... *Tender Is the Night* has some good passages, and so has *The Great Gatsby*. But poor Fitzgerald! An artist has no right to have such feelings about those cheap, nasty, rich people he was so afraid of.... I didn't like the people he wrote about. I thought they weren't worth thinking about... I just can't be interested in those perfectly stupid meaningless lives.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell you about the Flannery O'Connor I know. I loved and valued her dearly, her work and her strange unworldly radiance of spirit in a human being so intelligent and undeceived by the appearance of things.

Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back* is a masterpiece, out of print now, probably because her scene is the South during the Civil War, and she knows and tells things that are not acceptable now when Southern history is being rewritten.... The best novel I know set in the South during the Civil War. It is a grand book.... Glenway Wescott and Caroline Gordon...are both quietly geniuses, good working artists who have yet to publish a bad piece of work.

There is a crowd with headquarters in New York that is gulping down the wretched stuff spilled by William Burroughs and Norman Mailer and John Hawkes—the sort of upchuck that makes the old or Paris-days Henry Miller's work look like plain, rather tepid, but clean and well-boiled tripe.

Also it [the publishing establishment] is very hostile to the West and, above all, to the South. They read us out of the party every so often; they never tire of trying to prove that we don't really exist... Truly, the South and the West and other faraway places have made and are making American literature.

We are in the direct, legitimate line; we are people based in English as our mother tongue. These others have fallen into a curious kind of argot, more or less originating in New York, a deadly mixture of academic, guttersnipe, gangster, fake-Yiddish, and dull old wornout dirty words—an appalling bankruptcy in language, as if they hate English and are trying to destroy it along with all other living things they touch.

I went to visit Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's, where he held limited but lively open house for a parade of friends... I doubted then and do doubt that Ezra Pound was ever for a moment insane. He was just a complete, natural phenomenon of Unreason.

Pound was one of the most opinionated and unselfish men who ever lived, and he made friends and enemies everywhere by the simple exercise of...free speech. His speech was free to outrageous license. He was completely reckless about making enemies.

Poor Hart Crane. He came down here [Mexico]...and I tried to take care of him.

HUMAN NATURE

I have never known an uninteresting person.

People are all very much like the people in *Ship of Fools*.

People love the right to hate each other with moral sanction.

I have not found that being human is any great recommendation.

Misunderstanding and separation are the natural conditions of man.

I am sure that we are all naturally depraved but we are all naturally redeemable too.

There is no such thing as an exact synonym and no such thing as an unmixed motive.

Great numbers of people...are unwilling or unable to grow up, no matter what happens to them.

I love my friends. I'm not mad at them. They just make it impossible for me to live where they are.

Without knowing it, we are sometimes half in love with evil and don't stop it because it adds color and excitement to life.

We're all capable of doing virtually anything. We hurt each other and injure each other and are cruel to each other in small, cowardly ways.

The refusal to acknowledge the evils in ourselves which therefore are implicit in any human situation is as extreme and unworkable a proposition as the doctrine of total depravity.

The most dangerous people in the world are the illuminated ones through whom forces act when they themselves are unconscious of their own motives.

One of the most disturbing habits of the human mind is its willful and destructive forgetting of whatever in its past does not flatter or confirm its present point of view.

The real sin against life is to abuse and destroy beauty, even one's own—even more, one's own, for that has been put in one's care and we are responsible for its well-being.

I have not much interest in anyone's personal history after the tenth year, not even my own. Whatever one was going to be was all prepared before that.

The potentialities are so great that we never, any of us, are more than one-fourth fulfilled.

BABIES

They are human nature in essence, without conscience, without pity, without love, without a trace of consideration for others, just one seething cauldron of primitive appetites and needs; and what do they really need?... They need love, first; without it everything worth saving is lost or damaged in them; and they have to be taught love, pity, conscience, courage—everything.

I...describe as well as I am able what happens to a child when the bodily senses and the moral sense and that sense of charity are unfolding, and are touched once for all in that time when the soul is prepared for them.

REALISM

Everything I ever wrote in the way of fiction is based very securely on something real in life.

She is, her comrades tell her, full of romantic error, for what she defines as cynicism in them is merely "a developed sense of reality."

During the nineteenth century, when the perfectibility of man was an accepted doctrine, [Henry] James was one of the few who had this genuine knowledge of good and evil, and the courage to take it as his theme.

Its realism seems almost to have the quality of caricature, as complete realism so often does. Yet, as painters of the grotesque make only detailed reports of actual living types observed more keenly than the average eye is capable of observing, so Miss [Eudora] Welty's little human monsters are not really caricatures at all, but individuals exactly and clearly presented.

NATURALISM

The environment-trapped hero.

Stop, stop, you can always stop and choose, you know.

POSTMODERNISM

You can't write about people out of textbooks.

Nothing is meaningless if the artist will face it.

When virtuosity gets the upper hand of your theme, or is better than your idea, it is time to quit.

A lot of writers are much more occupied with showing off how well they can write instead of showing off the people and the meaning of the story they are telling.

They all lack depth, as if, instead of studying with Henry James, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and the great poets: as if instead of searching their own hearts and minds they had modeled their style on current saleable fiction.

She hesitated and then spoke the word “soul” very tentatively, for it was one of David’s taboos, along with God, spirit, spiritual, virtue—especially that one!—and love.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Great art is hardly ever agreeable.

I get so tired of moral bookkeeping.

When the artist loses his freedom it only means that everybody else has lost his.

We have such a marvelous, rich language, and I don’t know why we are so tolerant of the dull minds who try to destroy it.

Freedom is a dangerous intoxicant and very few people can tolerate it in any quantity; it brings out the old raiding, oppressing, murderous instincts; the rage for revenge, for power... The longing for freedom takes the form of crushing the enemy—there is always the *enemy!*

I surmise the...threat to freedom in a recently organized group of revolutionary artists who are out to fight and suppress if they can, all ‘reactionary’ artists—that is, all artists who do not subscribe to their particular political faith.

Am I hewing to the party line?... This is really the road by which the artist perishes.

Everybody knows it’s a mask, and sooner or later you must show yourself—or at least, you must show yourself as someone who could not afford to show himself, and so created something to hide behind.

[The propagandist] is like someone standing on your toes, between you and an open window, describing the view to you. All I ask of him to do is to open the window, stand out of the way, and let me look at the view for myself.

All working, practical political systems, even those professing to originate in moral grandeur, are based upon and operate by contempt of human life and the individual fate; in accepting any one of them and shaping his mind and work to that mold, the artist dehumanizes himself, unfits himself for the practice of any art.

We have a fearful, an unholy alliance between the professors, the universities, the faculties, the critics and the working artists.... Various funds and grants, foundations, prizes, fellowships... It results in a great neglect of very good and serious young artists and the encouragement of a great deal of perfectly second-rate talent.

Second-rate judges will not know how to pick first-rate writers.

American literature belongs to the great body of world literature, it should be varied and free to flow into what channels the future shall open; all attempts to limit and exclude...would be stupid.

FEMINISM

It's a man's world, and you men can have it.

Any man who ever did wrong to me got back better than he gave.

Why do some career women find it necessary to castrate all men in order to prove their equality?

I was born free. And I've always stayed free. I have nothing against women's lib, except that lunatic fringe that's making us all look ridiculous.

I've never felt that the fact of being a woman put me at a disadvantage, or that it's difficult being a woman in a 'man's world.'

The whole art of self-importance is to raise your personal likes and dislikes to the plane of moral or esthetic principle, and to apply on an international scale your smallest personal experience.

["Have you read any of the new feminist fiction? Erica Jong, for instance?"] Yes and I think it's perfectly disgusting.... Those awful creatures like her have been presumptuous enough to say they represent woman. They represent the lowest kind of woman there is.... Instead of making themselves equal with men, they have descended to the level of the vilest men we have.

Not that I think it's a bore being a woman. It's exciting, and I wouldn't know how to be anything else. But I just can't bear to read about it.

I thought *The Second Sex* [Simone de Beauvoir] was a stupid performance.

I don't agree with them. [Women's Liberation Movement] I told them, "I will not sit down with you and hear you tell me men have abused you."

I remember back in school, girls of 12 to 16 doing pole vaulting—enough to render every one of us infertile for life.

There are too many women with ambitions beyond their talents, with experiences beyond their capacity, with romantic daydreams of glory and fame as the center of attention.

CRITICS

People who say something can be "more perfect" I can do without.

You don't have to know everything about a work the first time you read it.

I will die before I will answer a critic. I don't care what they say short of actionable slander.

They stand over you in the United States, and breathe down your collar while you are working. They say, "Why don't you finish that book?"

They kept yanking at me from all sides, and I felt as if my flesh were being torn apart by a million hooks.

There is no record of any literary critic ever recognizing an innovation in technique. It has never happened. It is always recognized by another artist.

I place great value on certain kinds of perceptive criticism but neither praise nor blame affects my actual work, for I am under a compulsion to write as I do; when I am working I forget who approved and who dispraised, and why.

I received the first copies of the *New Yorker* ever put out and I just thought it looked like some kind of country boys bowled over by New York.... I heard that they practically rewrote everything there in the office, that no story ever pleased them.... Fight that battle with the editors. They'll destroy your work and you can't let them do it.

I will not allow anyone to change anything, and I will not change anything on anyone's advice.

The worker in an art is dyed in his own color, it is useless to ask him to change his faults or his virtues.

When I hit a million-dollar jackpot, as I have: the kind of people who hate my writing, and my reputation, are joined by the people who hate my having that money.

I felt as if I had tripped into a tankful of piranhas.

Such critics and artists as Glenway Wescott, V. S. Pritchett, Sybille Bedford, Cyril Connolly, Louis Auchincloss, Robert Penn Warren, Caroline Gordon, Jay Featherstone...oh a list of them—have written with intelligence and knowledge of my work and they do not perpetuate silly gossip about my personal life, and when they are not sure of their facts, they ask me... But there is a whole subnormal squirm of little people—the absurd Brother Nance, the more absurd Hendrick, and a dreadful little fellow whose name I cannot remember who wrote a nasty little pamphlet on my work [West].

VISION

All the conscious and recollected years of my life have been lived to this day under the heavy threat of world catastrophe, and most of the energies of my mind and spirit have been spent in the effort to grasp the meaning of those threats, to trace them to their sources and to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western world.

With the pride of Lucifer, the recklessness of Icarus, the boldness of Prometheus and the intellectual curiosity of Adam and Eve (yes, intellectual; the serpent promised them wisdom if...) man has obviously outreached himself, to the point where he cannot understand his own science or control his own inventions.

Fall 1952. The hydrogen bomb has just been exploded, very successfully, to the satisfaction of the criminals who caused it to be made.

Scientists are the most reckless, irresponsible, not to say suicidal, people on earth.... They do not remember that they will be destroyed too. Or do they just think it is worth it to have all the fun they do with their murderous experiments?

There seems to be a kind of order in the universe, in the movement of the stars and the turning of the earth and the changing of the seasons, and even in the cycle of human life. But human life itself is almost pure chaos. Everyone takes his stance, asserts his own rights and feelings, mistaking the motives of others, and his own.

My whole attempt has been to discover and understand human motives, human feelings, to make a distillation of what human relations and experiences my mind has been able to absorb.

We come together only at these pre-arranged meeting grounds; we are all passengers on that ship [*Ship of Fools*], yet at his destination, each one is alone.

LIFE

A refugee from Indian Creek forever searching for the right place to live.

I can live a solitary life for months at a time, and it does me good, because I'm working.

I think I've only spent about ten percent of my energies on writing. The other ninety percent went to keeping my head above water.

Late in my life, by total hazard, by no design of my own whatever, I wrote a novel that became a modest bestseller.

Until *Ship of Fools* I couldn't see any future for me except sleeping under bridges.

People get the idea I sat there mildewing over a desk writing *Ship of Fools* for 20 years. They don't seem to realize that at that time I brought out three other books and I spent most of my life traipsing around the country speaking.

I was not a worldly person, but I was of this world in the sense that I wanted to touch, smell, see and be. I didn't figure it out. I just did it.

I have come as near as anybody I know in the world to getting just where I wanted. I wanted to be a good artist and I wanted to be known as an honest artist.

It's astonishing how little I've changed: nothing in my point of view or my way of feeling.... We change, of course, every day...yet there is a basic and innate being that is unchanged.

I've had a very hard life, but it's not other people who have made it hard for me. I did that for myself.

We create our own sufferings; and out of these sufferings we salvage our fragments of happiness.

I have had very good luck, and very good friends.

PERSONALITY

I don't like gloomy sinners, but the merry ones charm me.

I say the most incendiary things, and everybody applauds.

I'm a great talker, probably too much. Once I get my teeth in your ear, you're done for.

Someone leaned over once and said please excuse me for interrupting you and I said honey I don't know how you'll ever get a word in if you don't.

I do not like the slaughtering of animals as sport.... [Yet] I loved the spectacle of the bullfights, I was drunk on it.... I was bitterly ashamed of this evil in me.... During those years I saw perhaps a hundred bullfights, all in Mexico City, with the finest bulls from Spain and the greatest bullfighters.

Twenty-five years ago I wrote a piece saying I was certain they were going to get to the moon in my lifetime, and I planned to stow away.

It was a Flying Saucer, my dear, a metal thing like the top of a garbage can, you know, and you sit in it and whizz down hill. It was wonderful. [age 72]

Even to this day, at the age of seventy-eight, I would greatly enjoy going to a downtown shooting gallery, but most of my gentle friends refuse to go with me.

I'm a fanatical cook. I'm proud of the fact that I could hire out and be a good cook.

I bake my own bread, always.

RELIGION

Hell-fire is just under the crust of the flowery meadow.

I strongly object to this recent modernization of church ritual.

Religion put claws on Aunt Sally and gave her a post to whet them on.

I was a Catholic and I loved the saints. Joan of Arc, I knew her history by heart by the time I was 10 years old.

I have a great deal of religious symbolism in my stories because I have a very deep sense of religion and also I have a religious training.

That was the plague of influenza at the end of the First World War... I almost died.... I had what the Christians call the 'beatific vision.'

I had seen my heavenly vision [1918] and the world was pretty dull after that. My mood for several years thereafter was that it was not a world worth living in. And yet one has faith, one has the inner core of strength that comes from somewhere, probably inherited from someone. Throughout my life there have been times during the day when I have both an intense wish to die and later an eagerness that can't wait to see the next day. In fact, if I hadn't been tough as an alley cat, I wouldn't be here today.

Though I don't profess to be a regular churchgoer, High Mass has always been a joy for me, and I am one of the best Easter and Christmas Catholics you can possibly find.

GHOST

Someone had entered that room. No one had opened the door, nor any of the windows, but I knew there was a new presence in that room. Almost at my elbow. And as palpable as my own hand. I couldn't see it, of course, because that kind of presence is never visible to the human eye. But it was certainly occupying a space just behind my right shoulder, standing there as motionless as a mummy, but giving off subtle but distinct vibrations.... Yet, for all my fear, I was determined not to give in to whatever it was. Determined not to leave that room. Not even my chair. I knew that if you run away from a thing like that, if you yield even an inch, that you will never be yourself again.... There are times when you've got to resist that kind of evil intrusion, and this was one of them.

SPIRIT OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR VISITS

It's Flannery. [deceased] It's Flannery O'Connor—she's come to visit. She must have known we were thinking about her.... Now that was a friendly visitation. [*Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter*, Enrique Hank Lopez, 1981: 139-40]

DEATH

The only thing that counts is my work.

The road to death is a long march beset with all evils.

I think I'll hang on till ninety and see how it goes.

Defeat in this world is no disgrace if you fought well and fought for the right thing.

Experience is what really happens to you in the long run; the truth that finally overtakes you.

There is no one I would call for in the hour of my death, and that I think is the final test of whether you are really alone or not.

I don't want to be buried in one of those garish overpriced caskets.... So I'd be much obliged if you'd get me a plain wooden box with some good strong rope for handles.

At nights, alone, when I feel the attacks come on, I take that little thing and put it under my tongue and I go on reading.

There's such a thing as staying on after the party's over.

HEAVEN

Moving towards her leisurely as clouds through the shimmering air came a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known. Their faces were transfigured, each in its own beauty.

