CHAPTER VI

SHIP OF FOOLS : THEMES AND TECHNIQUE
Ship of Fools is a product of Katherine Anne Porter's vision of the human predicament of alienation. It is a tragic satire. The title Ship of Fools is a translation of the German Das Narrenschiff. As Miss Porter states in the introductory page of Ship of Fools, it was in 1932 that she read Sebastian Brant's Das Narrenschiff. With the memory of her first European voyage still fresh in her mind, she decided to adopt it as allegorical form for her novel. It was completed after thirty years in August 1961.

The author has identified the ship with the world and as she stated in an interview to Rochelle Girson, "it is the sum of what I know about human nature, the fatalities of life and the perils of human relationships. Everything was I was able to express I put in it".¹

In this novel, the distinguishing marks of alienation are apathy, non-involvement, isolation, overt and covert rejection of human relationship. David Little-John

rightly observes:

"In each setting of Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools*, the conditions of isolation and intensification help to dramatize with clarity and conviction the author's bleak vision of human nature."  

As usual Miss Porter's subject of interest in this novel is human relationship. But human relations throughout the novel are never far removed from the political relations. The novel shows the author's understanding that the impulses which lead human beings to ill-treat one another in private relations are not generally different from the impulses which cause world war. It is obvious that the same social and psychological maladies which give rise to fascist political movements afflict the people of all faiths and nations.

*Ship of Fools* can be interpreted as a kind of prophecy in retrospect of the triumph of fascism in Europe. The year of the fictive voyage, 1931, was a time of severe economic and political unrest in Latin America, when many Europeans who had settled there were returning to their homelands. But the tragic irony of the German passenger's

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hope for a safe arrival of the Vera (the ship) in Bremerhaven is all too apparent. For, only two years later, in the real world, Hitler was to become Chancellor of Germany.¹ The world Miss Porter has created in Ship of Fools reflects her hatred for the Nazis and fascism.

Although at one level the book is about Fascism and the general folly of fascism, the absurd objective of enforcing by political means the national and racial standards for membership in the human community is revealed in Ship of Fools as only one manifestation of the supreme and timeless folly of man in his compulsion to set limits of any and all kinds, to human identity, to circumscribe his human potential.

The novel is Miss Porter's representation of the modern man and his situation. As Alfred Kazin observes:

"In Ship of Fools, Miss Porter wanted to make a declaration with the largest number of human illustrations about the disintegration of what a Southerner liked to call 'the established order'. She would show all human relationships

¹ John Edward Hardy, Katherine Anne Porter, p. 120.
corrupted in — possibly by — a general human badness typified by Germans even in 1931, all things and peoples slowly drowning in a sea of hatred and distrust that would leave nothing to believe in".  

It is obvious that the strong impression left by the book is one of general lovelessness in which communion is destructive and isolation miserable.

The whole action of Ship of Fools cannot be adequately summarized, because the book is a vast complex of many little episodes, and Miss Porter has managed a large number of characters with incomparable skill and economy. Only a handful of the eight hundred and seventy-six souls in steerage are distinguishable as individuals. But the fifty odd passengers of the upper decks, including the Ship's officers are clearly portrayed — at least as indelible caricature, if nothing more, and an astonishing number of them in deeper shading of thought and feeling. The omniscient author's point of view dominates the whole, but within the frame work, many of the characters are presented as they see themselves and one another.

J.E. Hardy observes aptly:

"In just under five hundred pages, Miss Porter enters the most private consciousness of more than twenty people — of both sexes, of several different ages and ethnic groups, of widely
varying personality types - with totally convincing mastery of attitude and sensibility, of mental idiom, in every case". ¹

The Vera is a German ship with a German crew and officers. Germans form the largest ethnic group among the cabin passengers. In the racist Captain Theile, Miss Porter clearly intended the readers to recognize the kind of position of authority which functioned with ferocity and insane efficiency, on which Hitler was principally to depend for his political success and almost all the Germans on the upper deck share his attitudes. ² Apart from the Germans, there are Americans, Swedes, Spanish and a Zarzuela company of singers and dancers calling themselves gypsies, returning to Spain at the expense of the Mexican government after being stranded in Mexico. Below the passenger deck in the steerage into which are crowded Spanish men, women, children—workers in the sugar fields of Cuba—being deported to the Canaries and to various parts of Spain after the failure of the sugar market. The majority of them are

¹ John Edward Hardy, Katherine Anne Porter, p. 139
² Ibid, p. 121
poor, crowded and hopeless. In this way various races and types are included among the travellers. Most of them are very poor and in a battered condition.

The dining room with its Captain's table is the one setting in which all the passengers of the upper deck gather, and the tension between them takes a visible form. At the Captain's table are Dr. Schumann, Herr Professor Hutten and his wife, Herr Rieber, Fraulein Lizzy Spockenkieker, Frau Schmidt, Frau Rittersdorf and Herr Freytag. This group, with the exception of Freytag, constitutes a self-adulatory society, chauvinistically devoted to all things German. At one lunch, when Freytag refuses ham, Hutten launches into a pseudo-philosophical discussion on Jewishness. The conversation deteriorates into anti-semitism, especially on the part of Rieber and Lizzy. Hutten remarks that Freytag and Schumann are sometimes considered Jewish names and asks Freytag whether he has ever been troubled by finding Jewish branches in his family. Freytag announces that he knows no Jew named Freytag except his wife, who does honour to that name. Lizzy squeaks that she had been so blind as to believe that Freytag was a Jew and is glad to know that it was only his wife.
After this discovery, Freytag is finally forced to give up his place at the Captain's table, but no one is prepared to make an effective protest. For most of the Germans, the episode is an occasion for a mean-spirited kind of solidarity. Until then, like all the non-German passengers, they had been preoccupied with their private griefs and resentments, suffering in isolation the discomforts and vexations of life aboard the miserably overcrowded ship. Now they welcome the opportunity to join any cause as long as it is safely German; that will provide the illusion of escape from themselves and give them a sort of malicious pleasure. Not quite everyone, to be sure, even among the Germans approves the ostracism of Freytag. The ship's physician, Dr. Schumann, sees with distressing clarity the irrational and ignoble quality of his compatriot's behaviour but Schumann's reaction is one of fastidious contempt for the whole affair rather than of moral outrage. And neither he nor anyone else, German or non-German, whether held back by fear, or by callousness, or by simple indifference — is willing able to speak decisively. Even Freytag, who thought that his love for his wife
was beyond question, is dismayed to find that his loyalty to her has been undermined rather than strengthened by the experience.

Another motif of oppression is also emphasized by the death of Echegaray, a Basque. This is the most significant episode in the development of the book's central theme, and is elaborated and carefully anticipated in earlier actions. No one can accurately guess the motives of Echegaray, who was a primitive artist, a wood carver, whose speciality was animal figures. After a fight breaks out between clericalists and anti-clericalists in the steerage, the Captain has the steerage passengers searched and all knives are confiscated. Echegaray was distressed after having given up his wood-carving knife. After his death in an attempt to rescue the Hutten's dog whom Ric and Rac had shoved overboard, Professor Hutten for apparent reasons would prefer to think that his leap into the water after his dog Bebe was a disguised suicide, and they resuscitate their precious Bebe and consider Echegaray a fool and a reward-seeker. Hutten's morally evasive and selfish reaction is:
"... I confess, my dear to being deeply puzzled as to the motives of the unlucky man. The hope of reward of course, but that is almost too simple. Did he wish to attract attention to himself, to be regarded as a hero? Did he unconsciously of course—long for death, and so took his way of committing suicide without being actually guilty of it? Did he ——"  

Not only Huttens, Father Garza also calls him a fool and sinner. This episode too magnifies the thematic motifs of cynicism, non-involvement and moral evasiveness.

Finally a Fiesta given near the end of the voyage by the Zarzuela company fulfills several purposes, the most important of which is to provide a climax in the development of the theme. The Fiesta is first mentioned about midway through the book, and it takes place just before the arrival at the first port. This episode embodies the identity theme. It involves the entire company of first class passengers and ship's officers — in a masked ball; funny paper hats are provided for

everyone, and some of the passengers attempt costume of their own devising. The traditional purpose of such affairs, of course, is to provide opportunity for everyone to escape his own identity for an evening, surrendering himself to the common festive spirit. But it is obvious from the beginning that this gathering will not achieve that purpose.

The Zarzuela troupe's activities have made it clear that their women dabble as whores and the men as pimps. At the ball, the Zarzuela troupe caricatures the dancing of the other passengers. Lizzy and Rieber wearing masks and fancy hats, quite intoxicated, dance wildly and Lizzy's dress repeatedly brushes against Hansen who becomes furious and hits Rieber. Riebers also hits Hansen in the midriff. Both of them are given medical treatment. David, drunk, goes in pursuit of Pastora (a woman from the Zarzuela troupe). Mrs. Treadwell paints her face in order to look like one of the Zarzuela women. Denny shouts obscenely at Pastora, and when Mrs. Treadwell steps out of her cabin, he mistakes her for Pastora and grabs her. She pushes him and he falls down. She beats him in the face until his face is a mass of contusions. After such a riotous
evening, the passengers spend the next day recuperating from the party.

This makes it clear that the Fiesta indirectly provides a climax to the novel. It reveals that many of the forces which have been building up are released in a burst of passion and violence. The social structure of the little world in the ship is upset and the forces of evil reign.

After the climax, a general sense of despair is experienced by the characters. Then all the passengers go ashore, each intent on his own business, as if they had never met. Contrary to the general experience the arrival at the destination is sad, dull, and anticlimactic. The book closes as Jenny and David, despite their unwillingness, land in a Germany of darkness, and cold and menacing evil. One may note that the inconclusive ending too reinforces the sense of emptiness and hopelessness.

These motifs bring to the fore the sense of alienation in the novel. Wescott very perceptively identifies the theme of Miss Porter's Ship of Fools:
"What fires and polarizes her mind are the themes, the elements, the universal characteristics: mutual unkindness of lovers, gluttony and alcoholism, snobbery and conformism, and political power, even that inevitably wielded by the captain of a ship at sea, and bourgeoisie versus destitution, and immaturity versus senility —with scarcely ever a word about any of these subjects in the abstract, not a bit of intellectuality per se; only intelligence, constantly arising afresh from observation".

Wescott is correct in noting that the book *Ship of Fools* stresses certain thematic motifs led by the oppressive relationships of the individuals, the union of Jenny and David, Herr Graf and Johann, the Huttens, the Baumgarteners, Schumann and La Condessa reveal oppression in varying ways. Snobbery and conformism are embodied in the Captain Theile and the Germans who share his attitudes. It is apparent that alcoholism which is habitual with Denny, Mrs. Treadwell, Baumgartener, functions principally as a method of escape from the boredom, pain and unpleasant human relations. It is also a habit which makes people unpleasant to each other, Mrs. Treadwell to Freytag, Denny to Mrs. Treadwell and Baumgartener to his family.

1 Glenway Wescott, *Images of Truth: Remembrances and Criticism*, pp. 54-55
The oppressive conditions also arise out of the nagging wives, fatuous husbands, dominating parents, sexual perversion, finally preoccupation with a sense of loss, odd age, and death. These motifs of alienation are also observed by the characters. Freytag in his imagination tells his wife:

"People on the boat, Mary, can't seem to find any middle ground, between stiffness, distrust, total rejection, a kind of invasive gnawing curiosity, sometimes sly and malicious, but you feel as if you were eaten alive by fishes".  

Herr Lowenthal, a German Jew, manufacturer of Catholic - religious objects, also suffers miserably. He is not permitted to eat with other Germans:

"He retired into the dark and airless ghetto of his soul and lamented with all the grieving wailing company he found there; for he was never alone in that place. He sat down there; head in hand and mourned in one voice with his fated people, wordlessly he bewailed their nameless eternal wrongs and sorrows; then feeling soothed, the inspired core of his being began to search for its ancient justification and its means of revenge".  

1 Ship of Fools, p. 133
2 Ibid., p. 106
When Professor Hutton's seriously initiates a pseudo-philosophical discussion on the nature of good and evil, Dr. Schumann's comment about the collusion of good and evil reveals the hollowness of such ideas and concepts:

"Most of us are too slack, half-hearted, or cowardly --- luckily, I suppose. Our collusion with evil is only negative, consent by default, you might say. I suppose in our hearts our sympathies are with the criminal because he really commits the deeds we only dream of doing! Imagine if the human race were really divided into embattled angels and invading devils --- no, it's bad enough as it is . . . with nine-tenths of us half asleep and refusing to be waked up".

And he finds in himself:

"A confusion so dark he could no longer tell the difference between the invader and the invaded, the violator and the violated, the betrayer and the betrayed, and the one who hated or jeered or was indifferent. The whole great structure built upon the twin pillars of justice and love, which reached from earth into eternity by which the human soul rose step by step from the most rudimentary concept of good and evil . . . this tower was now crumbling and falling around him". 2

1 Ibid., p. 308
2 Ibid., p. 469
Miss Porter has revealed her keen insight into the kind of unholy collusion of good and evil in people who lack all convictions, and who are full of passionate intensity which is responsible in permitting Hitler to form his alliance with other Fascist states for attempted world conquest and genocide. This novel reveals the author's awareness of the spiritual impoverishment of the age that has subsequently led to an intensely painful sense of isolation and despair. Kazin puts it very appropriately, "The older Miss Porter got in the writing of it, the more she fell into the thought that life is a voyage to nowhere, and that time makes monkeys, dwarfs, dupes of us all".¹

¹ Alfred Kazin, p. 171
In *Ship of Fools*, most of the action takes place on board the North German Lloyd S.A. Vera. Hence the passengers are separated from their natural surroundings and forced into new relationships with each other. The removal of characters from their concrete background makes them abstract types, capable of being used as representatives of qualities and attitudes. Finally, the constantly shifting focus of attention from character to character has the effect of distanc[ing] the reader himself from particular actions. Miss Porter's ironic presence is felt throughout the novel, either in direct comments on the more despicable characters or in indirect comments on them and on life in general. Besides this, the ironic presence of the author constricts the character's freedom to act and to change.

The novel is given unity by the convention of the sea voyage, but within that unity there is the simplest structure. There are three parts: *Embarkation*, *High Sea* and *The Harbors*. Each part possesses a distinctive
mood created by the concrete details related to that stage of the voyage. A fiesta given near the end of the voyage by the Zarzuela company provides the climax. The novel ends on a peculiar note of inconclusiveness, which makes the ending anticlimactic. J.E. Hardy writes about the structure of the novel: "The arrangement is a deliberate mockery of the conventional plot structure, with beginning, middle and end... there is no definite beginning, no dependable ending either in time or place." 1

Ship of Fools is different from the stories in the sense that the stories are more or less tightly plotted and organized and the focus of attention in them is centred on the fate of a single person. With Ship of Fools, Miss Porter moved on to something quite different.

Although the style of Ship of Fools is quite uniformly smooth, it conspicuously lacks depth and flexibility which is the major characteristic of most of her stories. However, Miss Porter's capacity for

1 John Edward Hardy, p. 120
vivid description reveals her power to evoke the setting, and the atmosphere in the novel and illustrate the general disorder in life. The description is very convincing, effective and almost picturesque, largely through the animal and animal-human imagery. The world of the steerage passengers is kept entirely separate from the world of the first class passengers, but the animal imagery brings them together. The obvious comparison of the people to animals in Miss Porter's description of the boarding is made explicit by the omnipresent Frau Rittersdorf from the upper deck who says, "We did not engage to travel on a cattle boat".¹ The animal-human imagery also expresses the general sense of corruption of the Mexican sea-port town. The following lines show that the line between human and animal is thin.

"The beggar who came to the terrace every morning in time for the early traffic appeared around the corner shambling and crawling, the stumps of his four limbs bound in leather and twine. He had been in early life so intricately maimed and deformed by a master of the art, in preparation for his calling, he had little resemblance to any human being. . . . The men at the table glanced at him as if he were a dog too.

¹ Ship of Fools, p. 45.
repulsive even to kick, and he waited patiently beside each one for the sound of the small copper coins dropped into the gaping leather bag around his neck. When one of the men held out to him the half of a squeezed lime, he sat back on his haunches, opened his dreadful mouth to receive the fruit, and dropped down again, his jaws working."

Miss Porter has also given the point of view of the natives of Mexico, which makes the characters appear even more odd, as the waiter observes the passengers. This observation emphasizes the general background of the story and externalizes the characters also:

"The waiter danging their greasy rags aimed spiteful stares meant to be noticed at the badly assorted lot of human beings who took silent possession of the terrace, slumping about the tables and sitting there aimlessly as if they were already shipwrecked. There again, was the unreasonably fat woman with legs like tree trunks, her fat husband in the dusty black suit and their fat white bull dog. . . . The ridiculous woman had kissed the beast on his wet nose before turning him over to the boy who tied him up in the kitchen patio for the night. . . . A tall thin young woman — a leggy "girl" with a tiny, close cropped head waving on her long neck, a limp green frock flapping about her calves — strode in screaming like a peahen in German at her companion, a little dumpling of a man, pink and pig-snouted." 2

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1 Ibid., pp. 14-15
2 Ibid., p. 22
Apart from the animal images, words like stuffy, stifling, smothered, appear frequently, creating an atmosphere of oppression. In the beginning the depiction of the arrival of the Spaniards is marked by this atmosphere:

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

This description emphasizes misery, squalor and hopelessness and isolates these passengers from those of the upper deck.

One may note that the first part particularly depicts the sharp visual imagery, and the second part focuses on the description of the characters and their psyche and their interaction with each other, which build up the theme of isolation.

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1 Ibid., p. 67
It appears that despite a traditional outer structure and episodic design, the characters are not free to act or to grow like the characters of traditional novels. It appears Miss Porter has deliberately bound the characters to the theme and imposed limits on their full dramatic development so that they could conform to her bleak vision of human nature.

In an interview to Rochelle Girson, Miss Porter comments on the characters of *Ship of Fools*:

"I am not trying to make anybody a saint or a sinner, but just showing human beings with failing and prejudices or with burdens a little more than they can bear, burdens that have made them what they are and through which they are trying to struggle."

Although Miss Porter presents all her characters dramatically, some of them appear to be more articulate than others. These are Mrs. Treadwell, Dr. Schumann, David and Jenny. La Condesa is also a very appealing character, but she is seen mostly from the point of view of Dr. Schumann and in relation to him. Soon after the voyage has begun, the major

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1 Rochelle Girson, p. 15
characters emerge, upon whose thoughts and actions attention is to be concentrated.

Freytag, Denny, Frau Rittersdorf, Hutten, *et al.*

Captain Theile, Herr Graf, Concha, Ric and Rac, Lizzy Spockenkisker, Herr Rieber, Herr Glocken and the fat man in the cherry coloured shirt belong to the second category of characters.

Mrs. Treadwell reveals the usual characteristics of the protagonists of Miss Porter's stories. Miss Porter has presented her in a sympathetic light. She is chic and poised, still very good looking at forty-five and is superficially attractive. She appears intelligent, well-educated and partially tolerant. Like the protagonists of her stories, she has an instinctive distaste for human contact. She has been described as "dressed in dark blue linen with a wide blue hat shading her black hair and small, rather pretty face and intent dark blue eyes, regarded the Spaniards with some distaste, while raising the short sleeve over her arm to glance again at the place, where the beggar woman had pinched her!"

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She has cultivated a habit of aloofness and isolation like the heroine of *Theft*. Quite a few passages in the novel are especially full of imagery which shows her sense of isolation and her grudge against life which has taught her a lesson of disillusionment. Mrs. Treadwell's feeling of disgust with people is so strong that even in her loneliness she is preoccupied with the morbid and sad realities of life and death:

"What am I to do... where am I to go? Life, death, she thought in cloudy fear, for she was not able to face the small immediate situations which might demand decision, action, settlement, no matter, how temporary. Her very vagueness frightened her, for life and death, rightly understood, were ominous, dreadful words, and she would never understand them. Life, as she has been taught in her youth, was meant to be pleasant, generous, and simple. The future was a clear space for pure, silvery blue, like the sky over Paris in good weather... all clean and crisp as the blue tissue paper in which all the white things of her childhood had been folded, to keep them white, to make them whiter, to give them icy blue whiteness."

It is obvious that the bitterness of her life has brought about the attitude of withdrawal in her nature. Since she cannot face the harsh realities

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of life, she prefers to be indifferent and aloof and the consequent loosening of her ties with people is the reason for her inability to consider the possible consequence of her words and actions.

Essentially she is a romantic woman with an aesthetic sense, and once when she loosens her guarded and calculated reserve before handsome and attractive Freytag, he immediately burdens her with his secret suffering, but she betrays his trust and as a result the racist German passengers humiliate and persecute him. The showdown between Mrs. Treadwell and Freytag reveals her retreat to her former self of indifference, lack of emotion and sentiment and non-involvement.

Miss Porter has also shown that Mrs. Treadwell's frigidity is more than sexual. It is combined with her hatred for men. The most powerfully dramatized and bizarre episode of the novel in this connection occurs when, one evening in her room, Mrs. Treadwell paints her face like Amparo, and the drunken Denny mistakes her for Amparo whom he had been pursuing all evening. By chance, he pounds on her door and, with her painted face, it becomes difficult for her to convince him that she is not Amparo. When he tries to drag her she beats him violently with the heel of her sandal. J.E. Hardy
shrewdly observes:

"Psychologically, the episode is an unmasking of Mrs. Treadwell to herself. She discovers in herself a capacity for violence, and for enjoyment of it, that she has never before suspected."

The contradiction and complexes in her personality are revealed in this episode and this also evidently gives expression to her suppressed passions and desires. However, ironically, this revelation has no permanent effect upon her. By the next day she has slipped into her usual attitude of cool, rather prim, sophisticated indifference till her departure from the ship. It appears that Miss Porter gives her no chance of further development or change. In her Miss Porter has brought out the instinctive defence mechanism, sense of loss, preoccupation with death, old age and physical and spiritual oppression.

Dr. Schumann is also a fully developed character, different from Miss Porter's usual protagonists. He

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Annotated by Katherine Anne Porter,

1 John Edward Hardy, p. 129
appears more complex and articulate than others. His character is presented in the most sympathetic light. His brief platonic love affair with La Condesa provides interesting variation on the theme. Schumann is a strong, mature man of wisdom and nobility. Like Mrs. Treadwell, he does not hold himself isolated from others. In his medical duties, he associates with even the poor passengers of the steerage. He is extremely religious and puritanical, and his sensitivity to human suffering exceeds the requirement of his professional duty. If his acts of kindness are not always purely motivated, they are however genuinely effective. After a bout of conscience over his feelings for La Condesa, he encounters the wretched Herr Glocken on deck one day, looking more than usually miserable, and invites him to the office for an unscheduled consultation. Herr Glocken is consoled and comforted by the doctor's attention, and none the worse off for not knowing that Schumann has offered them as much to clear his own mind of its guilty preoccupation as to relieve his patient's distress. Despite his aversion to certain unpleasant situations, Schumann is tolerant. But he is also a sober and scrupulously proper man who is careful of his professional dignity. He suffers from heart disease, and is more than
normally cautious not to risk excitement and over-exertion.

In his love affair with La Condesa, he has actually experienced his own unmasking. It is deeply disturbing to him. At a deeper personal level, the strong attraction that he feels for her is bewildering for him. She is beautiful but no longer young. Invariably expensively dressed, she occupies a cabin littered with garments and reeking perfume, stale cigarettes-smoke and ether. As Schumann thinks, she is not quite clean even in body or certainly not in mind. She is the exact opposite of Schumann. She even shamelessly tries to arouse him sexually the very first time they are alone in the cabin. She lies to him repeatedly and without conscience about drug taking. She is shocked at nothing. Even the incestual relationship of Ric and Rac leave her unruffled.

Despite her being poles apart from Dr. Schumann, she is the most appealing character with the capacity for witty appreciation of any human sentiment. In spite of himself Dr. Schumann discovers with growing despair that he loves her, though he knows that he lacks courage
and passion. The idealism he has inculcated through his religious training makes him a cruel person. After letting her go ashore at Santacruz without having fulfilled their mutual desire, he is overcome with self-contempt and grief:

"...he had refused to acknowledge the wrong he had done La Condesa his patient, he had taken advantage of her situation as a prisoner, he had tormented her with his guilty love and yet had refused her — and himself — any human joy in it. He had let her go in hopelessness without even the faintest promise of future help or deliverance, what a coward, what a swine, Dr. Schumann told himself."  

This self-condemnation brings him temporary relief but he has lost La Condesa, and he can not recover the faith in himself and in the value of his religion and his profession by which he lived before he met her. His emotional inadequacy has caused despair to both himself and La Condesa. Finally thinking of the passengers he has attended, his patients:

"...he rejected them all, everyone of them, all human kinship with them, all professional duty except the barest tokens... Let them..."

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1 Ship of Fools, p. 389
live their dirty deaths in their own way and their own time, so much carrion to fill graves. He crossed himself and folded his arms and lay still breathing carefully, turning his head slowly from side to side, denying his own bitter thoughts even as they rose and flowed again painfully all through him as though his blood were full of briers".1

Dr. Schumann's voyage ends with a profound experience of the evil he has found within and around him. The realization that all his faith and all his loyalties are really meaningless fill him with intense despair.

Jenny's character has close affinity with that of Miranda in Pale Horse, Pale Rider. She is travelling with her lover David Scott. From the very beginning of the novel, one becomes aware of their tense relationship which is marked by the absence of qualities which make satisfactory relationships. David and Jenny are presented to the readers through what they think of each other. They know that the quarrel between them was a "terrible treadmill they mounted together and tramped round and round until they were wearied out in despair."2 Their quarrel results from something more than mere temperamental

1 Ibid., p. 484
2 Ibid., p. 145
difference that Jenny is outgoing and David tries to keep off from people.

Despite having some marked features of Miranda, she is not as self-sufficient as Miranda. Her fault is that, unlike Miranda, she is spiritually and sexually dependent on a man with whom she is living without marriage. Neither Jenny nor David is strong enough to break free from each other. Although superficially she appears free, she knows the reality.

"They had agreed 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 honesty of faith and intention". 1

This passage makes it clear that Jenny and David are not married but experience emotions usually felt by a married couple and feel that their living together is not an act of freedom but of self-deception.

Miss Porter has treated Jenny with partial sympathy.

1 Ibid., p. 157
Her relationship with David and attraction for Freytag expose the inconsistency of her nature and make her aware of her superficial and strained life which is the cause of her unrelied tension. Freytag evaluates her as:

"a little nobody not worth a man's attention, just a shallow, neurotic American girl pretending to herself she was an artist to give herself false importance."

In David the tendency of isolation is the outcome of his terribly unhappy childhood. He appears to be gripped by a puritanical conscience, and he suffers from complexes concerning his sex relations. On the contrary Jenny is emotionally stronger than he is and her strength enables her to adopt sexual freedom more easily and without any guilty conscience.

At times Jenny shows the tendency of negation and non-involvement while on other occasions she appears pleasant and human; the result is that one may note in her a split personality, brought about by her basic sense of insecurity.

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1 Ibid., p. 498
There are several other characters too, who are targets of satire and barely escape caricature. Dramatically these characters represent the purest approach to evil. In the twin children Ric and Rac, Miss Porter has embodied an evil so natural and primitive that it usually defeats the more calculating and sophisticated approach of the other passengers of the ship.

Miss Porter's objects of satire are the grotesque characters, Lizzy Spockenkieker, Herr Rieber, Hutten, Wilibald Graf, Glocken and Lowenthal. Caricature is indeed a dominant device of her art. J.E. Hardy comments appropriately, "she has developed to near perfection the caricaturist's essential vision of the beast in man".\(^1\) One may note that Miss Porter has depicted Hutten as a bull dog, Lizzy Spockenkieker as a road-runner and an unmanageable mare and Rieber as a pig.

As caricatures Lizzy Spockenkieker and Rieber are most effective because their evil is absurdly grotesque, and because their capacity for hatred is projected to such immense proportions that it threatens to engulf

\(^1\) John Edward Hardy, p. 134
whatever rationality they may possess. Miss Porter's art of caricature shows her disgust with such characters. She treats them with mock-seriousness. Here is Lizzy described from the point of view of Mrs. Treadwell:

"Undressed, her ugliness was shocking. Yet she was possessed by the mysterious illusion that she was a beauty, as she sat before the spotty little looking-glass... looking deeply into her own eyes, the corners of her mouth twitching. She painted and powdered her face half a dozen times a day, putting on her mask as carefully and deliberately as an actress preparing to face her audience. Upon her head, as if in baptism, she poured her musky cologne out of a large square bottle, drenched her underarms until the liquid ran down her lean ribs, a flickering self-absorbed smile on her face, her nostrils working like a rabbit's."

Miss Porter's scorn for such characters takes the form of a parody. She described Herr Rieber's amorous campaign against Lizzy Spackenkieker:

"Herr Rieber had wound himself up in a state of decision regarding Fraulein Lizzy Spackenkieker. First, she was not a Fraulein at all, but a woman of worldly experience; and though Herr Rieber liked nothing better than a proper amount of feminine coquetry and playful resistance, still, carried beyond certain bounds, they became mockery and downright insolence which no man worthy of the name would endure from any woman, no, not if she were

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See "Ship of Fools", pp. 218 - 219
Helen of Troy herself. In this frame of mind he took her arm after dinner and guided her for their stroll. While listening to music, he drew her up the stairs to the boat deck, and led her, with the silent intentness of a man bent on crime, to the dark side of the ship's funnel. He gave his prey no warning, no moment in which to smack his face or flee, he seized Lizzi low around her shoulders, hoping to pin her arms to her ribs, and snatching her to him, he opened his mouth for a ravenous kiss! 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, Herr Rieber had one flash of amazed delight at the undreamed—of warmth of her response, then in panic realized that unless he recovered himself instantly... but Lizzi was spread upon him like a fallen tent full of poles, her teeth now set grimly in his jowl, just under his jawbone. Pain took precedence of all other sensations in Herr Rieber's being; silently with tears in his eyes he fought to free himself.  

In a slightly different way, Miss Porter's object of contemptuous satire are the members of the Zarzuela troupe who embody a perverted form of evil. Concha, Pepe, Amaro, Ric and Rac represent evil in the form of sexual perversion, promiscuity, unscrupulousness and mean spiritedness.

1 Ibid., p. 298
In this novel, Miss Porter's treatment of evil recalls the medieval tradition of mockery of evil, of presenting the devil himself as a comic character. Mark Schorer appreciates the human in the novel and detects at the same time an element of pathos underlying it.

"There is much that is comic, much even that is hilarious, and everything throughout is always flashing into brilliance through the illumination of this great ironic style. At the same time, almost everything that is comic, is simultaneously pathetic; what is funny is also sad, moving to the point of nearly heartbreak."

Mark Schorer's impression has not found general confirmation. The humour in the book is consistently harsh and bitter, sometimes even venomous. Glenway Wescott, for example remarks, "It occurs to me that there is a minimum of laughter of any kind in Ship of Fools".² The truth is perhaps somewhere between these extremes. There is humour certainly though it is of a somewhat 'black' kind. It is humorous on the surface with grim implications underlying it.


2 Glenway Wescott, Images of Truth : Remembrances and Criticism, p. 49
In its totality, *Ship of Fools* reveals a world of neutralism, distrust, corruption and sexual promiscuity. Miss Porter gives us here an anti-heroic point of view. She reveals a dichotomy in each major character which emphasizes the theme of alienation. The conflict in each character arises from a kind of destructive impulse. The character's monologues and ironic commentary too articulate the theme of isolation and alienation, which is a defect of the novel. It shows the author's overeager and nervous approach to the theme as if she is anxious that the point should not be missed. It is obvious that the themes dominate the characters. Kazin puts it precisely, "Rarely has a novel of such pretended scope with so many characters, been at the mercy of so few ideas". Miss Porter's characters are given no alternative to develop fully. Even Dr. Schumann who has certain redeeming features is not given any alternative. It appears that Miss Porter has been constantly watching and controlling her characters. However, one crucial point which justifies this aspect of the novel is that the characters do fulfill the essential demands of the

1 *American Novelists and Story-Tellers* from *Froth* to *Maier*.
theme and they do not go beyond the given scope and yet the novel has a quality of writing. Miss Porter has dramatized the interaction of the characters and probed the recesses of human psyche, showing a wide and complex range of human relationships.