CHAPTER - III

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One can perhaps achieve a sane and satisfactory relationship with others even in the face of mass insanity if one bases the relationship on something permanent in human nature which makes mass insanity a temporary aberration of norms. Relationship between the members of a family can be taken as an ideal test to find out whether this can be achieved. Most of Miss Porter’s "Miranda Stories" are an effort to analyse the relationship between Miranda and other individuals of the family. Barbara Thompson had asked Miss Porter during a conversation:

I remember that you once wrote of the ties of blood as the ‘absolute point of all departure and return’. And the central character in many of your stories is defined, is defining herself often, in relation to a family organisation. Even the measure of time is human-expressed in terms of the very old and the very young, and how much of human experience they have absorbed?

To this Miss Porter answered in the affirmative and elaborated: "In those days, you belonged together, you lived together, because you were a Family".1

Barbara Thompson, "Katherine Anne Porter : An Interview", Katherine Anne Porter : Conversations, p.81.
In her stories she has exhibited an almost obsessive preoccupation with family life. In this regard Hardy points out:

The theme appears, more or less prominently, in almost every one of her stories, early and late. The consistency of her concern with it overrides all ethnic, regional, religious and economic distinctions. Mexicans, Texans, White and Black; German and Irish immigrants; farmers in Texas and Connecticut; Southern and Middle-western school teachers and artists and journalists living in Mexico, Denver, New York, and Berlin; Protestants and Catholics and atheists - all, for good or ill, carry with them throughout their lives the burden of family consciousness.\(^2\)

This statement reveals Miss Porter's outlook on the institution of Family. She has deep faith in universally existing ethical values. Some conceptions about the family exist in all parts of the world. Unfortunately, she cannot see happy family life anywhere. It is Miss Porter's great concern for family that prompted her to set apart family from crowd and social stratification in her fiction.

In *Old Mortality*, Cousin Eva bitterly condemns the family as a "hideous institution", "one that is the root of all human wrongs" and that ought to be, "wiped from the face of the earth".\(^3\) In her short stories she expresses very complex opinions about the institution of family. If we observe the stories carefully, we can see that social and political institutions add to the evil nature of

John Edward Hardy, *Katherine Anne Porter*, p. 14

the family. The family situation either present or remembered is at least a secondary source of the protagonist's unhappiness in almost all the stories.

This is the situation in *Old Mortality* and the stories of Miranda's family in the sequence of 'The Old order'. In 'Holiday', the long story of an anonymous narrator's vacation in Texas where she befriends an afflicted daughter who functions as a menial servant is narrated. 'The Downward Path to Wisdom' is about an unwanted child whose emotionally retarded parents and relatives use him as a weapon in their neurotic conflicts. Even in the two stories that are unusual for their expression of triumphant joy 'The Fig Tree' and 'The Grave', Miranda's happy affection for some members of her family is bound at the expense of her alienation from others.

Miranda is actually a fictional counterpart of Miss Porter herself. Many critics have arrived at this conclusion after comparing the character of Miranda with the character of Miss Porter herself. Till the end of her life Miss Porter never agreed with any argument which did not convince her totally. The rebellious traits of Miss Porter are found in Miranda too.

"Though Shakespeare had used the name Miranda in the Latin sense, in which it means 'strange and wonderful', Miss Porter preferred its Spanish meaning - 'The seeing one' - for in all these stories, Miranda would have the ability to see through the shams of her quintessentially Southern society and particularly the adults in her own family. In the later stories, the narrative point of view would offer a wide range of perspectives; but in the
earlier ones the emotions and perceptions were those of a child and were therefore expressed in a vocabulary suited to that purpose."4

'The Fig Tree' is about a family preparing for their annual summer visit to the country. Miranda is readied by Nannie. She prefers to use the world "Halifax" for the grandmother's candour. "Grave Halifax" euphemistically means "hell", and Miranda is not aware of this. But she gets admonished for the use of the word "Halifax". Just before the departure Miranda finds a dead baby chick in the yard and wants to bury it with proper ceremony. But after the burial, she hears the sound 'weep' 'weep' and she thinks it is from the dead chick. Though she enters the carriage, this incident upsets the child who thinks she buried the chick alive. In the farm the child understands that her grandmother does not approve of the ways of her own sister, aunt Eliza. Sophia Jane tries to suppress her hostility to her sister, but it breaks briefly into the open now and again. She suggests to Eliza, who is climbing a ladder on to the henhouse to set up her telescope, that she should be more careful at her age. Eliza responds tartly: "So long as you can go bouncing on that horse of yours, Sophia Jane, I s'pose I can climb ladders. I am three years younger than you, and at your time of life that makes all the difference".5 This quarrel between the elders of the family upsets the young girl. "Miranda is obscurely disturbed by the spectacle of the two old women quarreling


like spiteful children; the solid and dependable front of adult authority is being broken".6

Walking back to the house in the darkness through the Fig Orchard, Miranda is suddenly frightened again by the second ‘weep’ ‘weep’. Aunt Eliza explains to her that this sound is produced by tree-toads. This relieves the child a little. The main point about this story is that most of the grown-up people fail to understand the exact state of mind of the young ones and hence their innocent lives become extremely unhappy. The parental generations and the succeeding generations reveal total lack of understanding.

As Miranda grows older, the gap only widens. In ‘The Grave’ Miranda is a nine year old girl and her brother Paul is twelve. The bodies of her grandfather and grandmother are buried nearby. One day the brother and sister go near the grave in a playful mood. They are more concerned with a dead rabbit. The rabbit had an oddly bloated belly and they realise, that the rabbit is pregnant. Out of curiosity he cuts the abdomen and sees the young one. Later he puts it back into the body of the mother to bury them together. This is a new experience which goes down to the mind of Miranda. In its totality and central image of the rabbit—the young buried in the tomb of their mother’s body—this story acknowledges the mysterious interdependence of life and death.

6 John Edward Hardy, Katherine Anne Porter, p.18.
Old Mortality shows Miranda growing up. Miranda as well as her sister Maria have some doubt about the truth of the family myth. Miranda in fact questions how it is possible for her father to say that there was not even a single fat woman in the family. She finds it difficult to appreciate the morbid character of the elders and their preoccupation with the dead past. Children are developing in various ways but the parents are not able to understand them. Cousin Eva, the chinless woman of the family is perhaps a caricature. Miranda wants to become independent and she chooses her own mate but fails in her married life. Family has never given her the type of happiness which is the essential ingredient in harmony. The result is the reticence she develops. Old Mortality neither fully vindicates nor fully repudiates Miranda's withdrawal to her own counsel. "... the fullest vision of the story fully affirmed is that it is at one with the voice of the narrator, is that of the older Miranda, looking back at her eighteen year old deluded self".  

Among her stories 'He' has certain unique features. 'He' is the idiot son of a poor family, the Whipples. Mrs. Whipple in and out of place declares that she loves the idiot boy better than anyone else. In fact, both the parents are exploiting the physical strength of the boy. Their real tenderness is only to the other children. On a hard winter night when her daughter falls sick, Mrs. Whipple without any

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hesitation takes the blanket from his bed as centre cover for the girl. But towards the end of the winter when he is ten years old he becomes ill. Though he seems to recover during the ensuing spring, a day before Christmas he slips and falls on the ice. After this accident he is unable to stand on his swollen legs. The doctor suggests to take him to the County Home where he can get proper daily care and will be off their hands. Mrs Whipple at first protests that she does not want charity. She does not want to hear her neighbours remark that she hastily allowed her child, an idiot child, to live among strangers. The husband also prevails upon her and the child is taken to the County Home.

On the way, she tries to convince herself that she is doing what is best for him as well as for herself and her husband and her normal children. Yet she cries out in her mind that it would have been better if he had never been born. The centre of interest is in the relationship of the mother and the child, and the brother and the sister. Even the father and the doctor and relatives and neighbours are of only incidental importance. Mrs Whipple has an obsession with her and is pleased to call this obsession love. Mrs Whipple is notably lacking in humility. She has great desire for material well-being. She sees him as only the most severe of many hindrances that unkind fate has thrown in the way of her progress to the good life. "In her attempt to vindicate herself she is doing the whole thing really at the expense of the children. ‘He’ is a particularly bleak story ... and the relentless
focussing of the readers' attention on "the hopeless creature" makes it a highly pessimistic study". 8

Since he cannot go to school any way, the money would otherwise be spent for other children. In the end, of course, her cruel folly is severely punished. Charity, the central Christian virtue is offensive to Mrs Whipple's pride, though she is a Christian herself. She is incapable of genuine charity or love. But there is a suggestion too that Mrs Whipple's incapacity is the common incapacity of the mankind. The view of Edmund Wilson that "what [Miss Porter] wants other people to know she imparts to them by creating an object" 9 is totally relevant in the case of 'He'.

Katherine Anne Porter has made Miranda a central character in many of her stories. Like her namesake in The Tempest Miranda marvels and is sometimes brave but always profoundly interested in the new world she observes around her. Miranda appears by name in four of the seven short stories that make up the 'Old order', and in two short novels Old Mortality and Pale Horse, Pale Rider. She is usually associated with Laura of 'Flowering judas' and the implicit Laura of 'Hacienda'.

8 Willene Hendrick and George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, p.67.

In ‘Old Order’ we see Miranda as a child who is peculiar and observant. In ‘The Witness’ she is identified as a sprightly little girl. In ‘Circus’ and ‘The Fig Tree’ we see the child Miranda’s inability to express the emotional turmoil with which she is beset as the encounters experienced are beyond her comprehension.

*Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, are the fullest exploration of the character of Miranda. In the early pages of Part II of *Old Mortality* a ten year old Miranda seems not reticent at all but highly demonstrative indicating her early image as a lively, even flighty child. She forthrightly complains to her father that he should have told her that he was coming, so she could enjoy looking forward to the visit. At the start of Part III the eighteen year old Miranda encounters cousin Eva Parrington in a train enroute to Gabriel’s funeral. "While Miranda talks guardedly with Eva her thoughts are busy which she cannot or will not say". 10 Miranda’s habit of keeping her own counsel is part of her essential character. Her relationship with her family is not very happy. The emphasis in the last section is on humanity, on the struggle between the young and the old rather than between the sexes. We see here the pathetic falsity of all Miranda’s brave "resolutions" to reject the myths of her family and seek the truth of her own existence without illusions.

In many of her stories, Miss Porter has portrayed childless couples and their miseries. Typically one or the other is frigid or impotent or otherwise sexually deficient. It is clear that some of these spouses sought in marriage a refuge from their families. The poet-Journalist and his wife in ‘That tree’ are a good example. In ‘Rope’ a city couple summering in the country fall into a bitter quarrel over the husband’s selfish absent-mindedness. On a shopping trip into town, he forgets to buy the coffee that his wife repeatedly reminded him to get, but, indulging in absurd whims, he buys a large coil of heavy rope, for which he has no definable use and tries himself carrying it on the walk home. The rope of course symbolises the inevitable bond of their destructive but probably, breakable union. Referred to only as ‘He’ and ‘She’ they have all but lost their personalities in the degrading continuous struggle that is their marriage. The middle aged New York Irish couple of ‘A Day’s Work’ do have a married daughter but she no longer lives with them. In most respects, the life of the Hallorans runs true to the type of the childless unions. Halloran is a study of the man who is hopelessly bound to his wife with soured love and enmity.

‘The Cracked Looking Glass’ carries this mood of disaffection further. Rosaleen O’ Toole is the disenchanted wife of the man 30 years her senior. Both are Irish immigrants. When they first met he was a head-waiter in a New York restaurant and she a domestic servant. They have been living for many years on a farm in Connecticut. Although exasperated, Dennis is not radically dissatisfied
with Rosaleen. He was married before as a very young man to an English woman who died shortly after their arrival in America. But they had never liked each other. He married Rosaleen after the death of his first wife. Farm life is much more intolerable for Dennis than for Rosaleen. Rosaleen endlessly converses with herself over all that she was deprived of in life but specially over Dennis’s sad decline from the figure of man he was when she met him. Early in their marriage she had given birth to a male child but the baby had died within two days of his birth. Apparently she had never conceived again. Now she treats her old impotent husband more as a child than as a man, chastising, scolding. Most of the time she has to talk either to herself of to farm animals. Unhappy family life creates psychological abnormalities in them.

Based on a dream she has of her sister dying at her home in Boston, she decides to go to Boston leaving her husband. The next morning, she makes herself ready, as best as she can before the cracked and wavering mirror that is the prime symbol of all the frustrations and disappointments of her life. But when she reaches Boston she understands that the sister had already moved out of Boston. Rosaleen wanders aimlessly and later on sits in a park on a bench helplessly weeping. She is joined by a thin, poorly dressed youth who strikes up a sympathetic conversation with her. His name is Hugh Sullivan. In Ireland he had worked as an ostler at the Dublin race tracks. But in America he is jobless and penniless. Rosaleen is so carried away by his pathetic predicament that she has not
only slipped him a ten dollar bill but also suggests that he come to Connecticut and live with her and Dennis. Sullivan feels that her interest in him is not entirely motherly at which she gets angry. She has altogether forgotten her intention of buying a new cot and a mirror. She returns home and lies to her husband that she saw her sister. She indulges in fine nostalgia of the broken dreams of her life time. Then she turns, at once protecting and appealing for protection to her old husband.

Rosaleen and Dennis in the imperfection of their union have much in common with other married couples in Miss Porter's fiction. But the quality of 'The Cracked Looking Glass' is mildly satiric and at the same time deeply moving. It is a tone that Miss Porter had struck before, but nowhere else so sustained.

The title is from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Stephen Dedalus recalls Buck Mulligan having a mirror, which he has stolen from a serving girl. But aside from the universal values of the mirror-symbol, recognizable without benefit of specific allusion, the echo of Joyce remains most immediately relevant. John Edward Hardy's view is very pertinent in this context: "In her stories, the family is always supported in its evil work by other institutions — social, political and religious. And in her treatment of evil in the family, just as in her treatment of corruption
in politics and religion, she always holds an implicit vision of an ideal that has been vitiated, betrayed or perverted.\footnote{Louis Auchincloss, "Bound for Bremerhaven - and Eternity", \textit{Katherine Anne Porter : A Collection of Critical Essays}, ed. Robert Penn Warren, p.160.}

In \textit{Ship of Fools} family consists of only two generations—parents and children. By restricting the generation to two, she achieves two very important results. The ship's smallness makes this reduction very appropriate. The responsibility for happiness or otherwise can be fixed accurately. This focussing of responsibility on individuals rather than on a social milieu accounts for the directness with which individual weaknesses are exposed.

The families with children on board the ship who are described in detail are the Baumgartners, and the Lutzes. Fairly elaborate details are given about the Tito family. Herr Willibald Graf, the dying religious zealot is accompanied by his nephew Johann and they can also be taken as one family. The bride and groom from Guadalajara who are on a honeymoon trip to Spain also give us some idea of the husband-wife relationship which they nurture. Senora Esperson, wife of the Mexican delegation in Paris travels with her newly born son in The S.S. \textit{Vera}. The Huttens do not have any children and their bulldog Bebe is a child to them. In the steerage there are families with children and a few are born during the voyage. Though she wants the reader to know about the unhealthy family relationships in the ship the method she adopts is indirect. "Miss Porter is a moralist but too good
a writer to be one except by implication... There is not an ounce of weighted sentiment in it". In dealing with family relationships she is neither dogmatic nor sentimental.

The Baumgartner family consists of two generations Herr Karl Baumgartner, the lawyer husband and a hopeless drunkard, Frau Baumgartner, his wife and Hans Baumgartner, their eight year old son. For achieving the effect of multiple view points Frau Baumgartner is introduced to the reader through some observations of Mrs. Treadwell the American divorcée. Mrs. Treadwell shuts the door of their cabin to avoid the noise coming from the next cabin. "The Woman Baumgartner was scolding vigorously a complaining weak voiced little boy". This makes Mrs. Treadwel exclaim "Ah! family life". Being a woman who had only bitter memories of a family life, it is only natural that she tries to find only the blackspots of the family life of others. But her comment on the Baumgartner family is very apt because the coming events bear testimony to its validity. It is a family where no one understands each other and lacks genuine sympathy.

The senior Baumgartners are most often strangers under one roof. Though there are occasional outbursts of fine sentiments, the relationship between them is a very disturbed one. Naturally Hans, their eight year old son quite often gets

12 John Edward Hardy, *Katherine Anne Porter*, p.120.

13 *Ship of Fools*, p.31.
emotionally upset. The frustration of Frau Baumgartner takes very unexpected turns. "The child in his prison of stitched and embroidered bikkin, a Mexican riding dress meant for the cold mountain country, writhed with its itching of heat, rash and sweat".\textsuperscript{14} The boy thinks that he is going to die and asks for permission from his mother to remove the jacket. She goes on scolding him though reluctantly she permits him to remove it. She enjoys the cruelty of hurting his pride even if he had won in the matter of the jacket.

Mrs Baumgartner has some of the qualities of Sophia Jane of the Miranda stories. The children feel acute discomfort in Sophia's presence. In Frau Baumgartner's case, the urge to control is in greater magnitude than in Mrs Sophia Jane's. It is because of the sadistic pleasure she enjoys even in illtreating her eight year old son that she becomes emotionally unpredictable. She does not understand that an order which is maintained by nothing more than a strong will and deference to the wishes of an old member of the family cannot hold a family together.

A very unacceptable quality of Frau Baumgartner's character is her unsteady emotions. Those emotional fluctuations which are highly unpredictable pose serious problems to the growing child. He is terribly confused by the changing responses of his mother. After severely scolding him for requesting her

\textsuperscript{14} Ship of Fools, p.32.
permission to remove the jacket she goes out in a hurry. But when she comes back, "as if she had never been cross, she smiles upon him most lovingly".  

If her behaviour to her son is not that of a reasonable and affectionate mother, her relationship with her husband is not that of a loving wife. Herr Baumgartner also is a failure as a responsible husband. Reckless drinking made him a failure in his profession and that failure in turn made him an alcoholic. Failure in the bar made him mentally ill; excessive drinking made him physically weak. Yet he thinks that only through liquor he can get some relief. Mrs Baumgartner had acquired some ideas from the adult world when she was a child. She tries to convince herself that her husband's illness is not real. "Whenever a marriage was unhappy or the husband failed in business, everybody knows it was the wife's fault". Her unpleasant attitude to her husband and the child springs from this unwarranted self-reproach.

It is very significant that the two revealing major incidents connected to Herr Baumgartner take place on two festive occasions. "On the Captain's Dinner Baumgartner quite outdid himself with fascinating devices and the children squeaked and giggled and peeped through their fingers most flatteringly". He

15 *Ship of Fools*, p.33.
16 Ibid., p.48.
17 Ibid., p.123.
encourages Hans also to participate in the fun. His wife does not like this at all. In her view he lacks a sense of propriety. Unwittingly he frightens a child in his attempt to amuse it and as the parents of the child do not know German he cannot apologize. The willingness to apologize is a fine quality in him but his wife cannot recognise it as a virtue in him. The unexpressed disapproval of his wife makes him turn to the eight year old son for support who says "with a manly air, comforting his father" that he laughed at the act. But the boy knows that any encouragement to his father is likely to irritate his mother. His father went on looking at him with his familiar face. To achieve stable relationship in a family one has to accept the other person fully and value the relationship. This incident is clearly indicative of the fact that family relationship of the Baumgartners can never be a stable one. The complication introduced into the life of Hans by the unthinking parents will only generate a feeling of homelessness in him. He cannot depend upon the family beyond a certain point. The most essential thing for a child, the warm affection of the parents, he cannot get from them.

The thoughtless violation of the boy’s privacies is described with particular force towards the end of the novel. The Baumgartners quarrel over Herr Baumgartner’s dressing himself as a clown during the fiesta. He reminds her that it is their tenth wedding anniversary. "What is there to remember?" she retorts "what has it been, a hell, a little hell on earth from the beginning".\textsuperscript{18} This makes

\textsuperscript{18} Ship of Fools, p.453.
him totally depressed and he bursts out-"That is the last straw. You think what you please; I am finished. I have lived too long already not another hour for this torment. I am going to kill myself".\textsuperscript{19}

Even his pathetic state does not move the wife and she walks off to her cabin. The contemplated suicide does not take place. With a weak and unconvincing defence that it is his concern for the welfare of Hans that he changes his mind, he returns to the cabin. A recollection of ten years of married life on the tenth wedding anniversary does not generate any feeling of happiness in Frau Baumgartner. She does not regret her words as spoken out of place, with undue emphasis at the wrong moment and to the wrong person. She creates situations where Hans can neither communicate his grief nor seek solace in the company of his parents. He is so young and though he has an awareness of emotions, he cannot understand them or relate them to the incidents and the situations. This makes him thoroughly helpless. Hans at this age, cannot comprehend the contradictions existing in his parents.

Herr Baumgartner, after indulging in self-pity, returns to the cabin and hits his wife in the presence of Hans. Then there is a temporary truce again. But here again the boy is exposed to emotional indecencies. The parents are at fault in neglecting the fact that Hans is also an individual in his own right and his complete

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ship of Fools}, p.453.
dependence on them should provide him with total sense of security. Though his mother realises that the boy should not witness such scenes, her recognition of normality is nullified by their subsequent love-making.

Sex among the upper deck passengers is viewed primarily in terms of attempts to seduce, to relieve the dullness of the voyage, or when it involves husbands and wives, as attempts to use sex to relieve non-physical stresses. The Baumgartners quarrel and the way they can think of to resolve it is to seek sex. So they can experience emotions like sorrow or joy only at a subhuman level, though not totally descending into bestiality. Both of them are unwilling to face uncomfortable facts. There is no indication in the book that they would understand each other and be a source of real strength to Hans.

If it is a male child in the family of the Baumgartners, in the family of the Lutzes it is a grown-up girl. Miss Porter wants to show us the problems faced by both male and female children in families. Elsa Lutz is eighteen and is with her parents who do not seem to understand her problems.

Herr Heinrich Lutz had been a hotel keeper in Mexico and is returning to Switzerland after fifteen years with his wife Frau Lutz and daughter Elsa Lutz. Even in the beginning, Miss Porter suggests that the three members have great temperamental difference. Frau Lutz is a highly self-willed person and believes that she is right and that she alone is right. The husband had to wind up the hotel
business in Mexico only out of compulsion from his wife. Though he had done it he is not yet convinced of the reasons for it. He asks her, "Answer me one thing, my poor wife, ... did we do badly in Mexico after all in any sense of the Word? Did we by any stretch of imagination fail? I think not". To these very reasonable questions his wife's blunt answer is "I no longer care what you think". This points to us the way they might have lived since their wedding. Elsa, their eighteen year old daughter is introduced to the readers in words which tend to isolate her from her parents. "The big girl Elsa Lutz and her parents Herr and Frau Heinrich Lutz were taking their first stroll in dull leisure around the deck. Elsa towered over her rather weedy elders but walked between them, their obedient child, holding each by a hand".

Throughout most of the novel Elsa is found only in the company of her parents. "The reference to her height and the adjective 'weedy' used to describe her parents make one think that she cannot expect to be led by her parents". The mother's disapproval of the father and the resultant tension will have adverse effect on the growth of Elsa Lutz.

20 *Ship of Fools*, p.37

21 Ibid., p.37.

22 Ibid., p.36.

Like Sophia Jane in the Miranda Stories and Frau Baumgartner, Frau Lutz also has strong opinions on most things. She has a feeling of superiority in judgement and sensibility to almost everyone around her. The most important element in her character is a tendency to impose her will on others. She wants to decide and define the relationship of her husband and daughter with other passengers in the ship. One of the very first warnings she gives her daughter concerns Elsa's relationship with Jenny.

Do not take her advice or follow her example in smallest thing. Treat her with perfect coldness, don't take up with her at all. Never be seen on the desk with her. Don't talk to her at all. Never be seen on the desk with her. Don't talk to her or listen when she talks. You are in very bad company, and I shall try to have your cabin changed. 24

Frau Lutz's mind is clouded with prejudices. There is no basis for her pronouncement that Jenny is a bad woman. She has neither talked to her nor got any information about her past. Once she forms an opinion, however baseless it be, she will never change it later. Till the end of the voyage Frau Lutz's opinion of Jenny remains unchanged. This hardness about Frau Lutz is connected with her disapproval of her husband and her disillusionment with marriage itself.

Inspite of her mother's stern warning to keep away from Jenny Elsa tries to be friendly with her. "Sometimes I wish I knew I love my mother, but it seems

24 *Ship of Fools*, p.38.
to me, my father knows more". 25 This shows that Elsa has interest in analysing situations. She has become aware that full human development is not possible under the guidance of these parents.

Frau Lutz's assessment of her husband is made known to the reader through some of her private musings. Once Herr Lutz was talking to his daughter about a love episode in the ship. This is not to the liking of Frau Lutz. "[She] never ceased to worry, night and day, at the unbelievable hardships a mother encountered in her efforts to preserve the innocence of a daughter". 26 And all that care has come to nought as she is fully convinced that his joking about love, of all to Elsa, has spoilt her innocence and it is an unpardonable crime. She has never taken him to be a reasonable husband. "She would find a very different kind of husband for Elsa". 27 This Private thought suggests to the reader, the depth of the disharmony existing in her family. Some of her inner compulsions are brought to the fore for the readers to reflect on.

The awareness that her parents with their dissimilar attitude cannot solve her problems prompts Elsa to turn to her cabin mate Jenny for some guidance. She looks on her as her mentor and talks to her of her hopes and anxieties. "I was


27 Ibid., p.15.
never at home in Mexico, and now may I shon’t be at home in Switzerland either". 28 This confession comes out of her conviction that her mother’s views are not acceptable to her though she does not express her disagreement straight to her mother.

The combination of spiritlessness and a lack of physical charm makes Elsa’s case hopeless though she hopes that she can attract men if her mother allows her to make herself more presentable. Frau Lutz feels that "young girls must be perfectly natural and pure in every way. No Curls, even. They must wait for everything until they get married, even to use perfume". 29 Elsa thinks that she is caught up in a vicious circle for she thinks that her only chance of attracting men to her is by making herself more fashionable. Her age and consciousness of plainness makes marriage one of her preoccupations. Her mother’s assurance that, she would get her a husband, instead of making her happy, only dampens her spirit because whenever she had yearned for the company of any young man, he had only ignored her. She likes the Cuban medical student, but he is the opposite of what her mother would want as her son-in-law. By liking the boy she is unconsciously expressing her protest against her rigid upbringing and the kind of life it promised her.

28 Ship of Fools, p.16.

29 Ibid., p.17.
Through yet another incident on the ship Miss Porter gives us a picture of how much the children will have to suffer if there is no smooth relationship among elders. Seeing the Cuban student dance with Pastora, Elsa thinks: "no body for Elsa—nobody, and there would never be; she would always sit and watch her lover dancing with some one like Pastora".\textsuperscript{30} As if to emphasise the lack of understanding of the parents, Miss Porter very suggestively depicts a scene. The parents return to Elsa convinced that she has had a good time, and her father jocularly tells her that she should get "her beauty sleep". Elsa is left groping without any hope of assistance from adults.

The Zarzuela company consists of grown-up singers and dancers. Lola and Tito, two senior members of the group are the parents of the six-year old Ric and Rac. They were christened Aurande and Dolores, but they had named themselves after the heroes of their favourite comic cartoons in a Mexican newspaper, Ric and Rac the two lawless wire-haired terriers whose adventures they followed day by day. According to M.M. Liberman, "Miss Porter's readers of all stripes agree that these two children, scarcely out of their swaddling clothes, are probably as thoroughly objectionable as any two fictional characters in all literature in English".\textsuperscript{31} They push the bull dog of the Huttens overboard and indirectly cause the death of Eschegaray. They outwit even their parents by throwing La Condesa's

\textsuperscript{30} *Ship of Fools*, p.18.

\textsuperscript{31} M.M.Libermann, *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction*, p.17
pearls overboard. They blackmail Herr Rieber and collect money from him. They even indulge in incestuous actions. Though they are loathed by every passenger in the ship, it is the elders to be found fault with for shaping them thus.

Their father is a pimp and the mother a prostitute. The other members of the Zarzuela company are also either pimps or whores. They are doomed to perpetual dehumanisation by the adult world that spawned and nurtured them. Even in punishing the children the parents exhibit only the qualities of villainous criminality.

Tito let go Rac and turned his fatherly discipline upon Ric. He seized his right arm by the wrist and twisted it very slowly and steadily until the shoulder was nearly turned in its socket and Ric went to his knees with a long howl that died away in a puppy like whisper, when the terrible hold was loosened. Rac huddled, on the ground nursing her bruises, cried again with him... on her way out Lola paused long enough to seize Rac by the hair and shake her head until she was silenced, afraid to cry. When they were gone Ric and Rac crawled into the upper berth looking for safety; they lay there half naked, entangled like some afflicted, misbegotten little monster in a cave, exhausted, mindless, soon asleep.32

Here it is the adult world that appears villainous, monstrous and cruel. In the case of Hans, it is a feeling of insecurity that torments him. The strained relationship of the parents makes him helpless. In the case of Elsa also the parents are unwilling to understand and solve her problems as a girl growing. The prime

32 *Ship of Fools*, p.360.
responsibility for the behaviour of Ric and Rac also can be fixed on their parents. The protective shield the children received from all the older members of the Zarzuela company for helping them in their nefarious deeds also can be attributed to be a reason for Ric and Rac to grow on these lines. If the new generation shows no hope of salvation, the parental generation has to share the responsibility for it.

Professor Hutten and his wife are a childless couple and the bull dog Bebe is like a child to them. Herr Hutten is very dignified in his ordinary conversation and to a third party their relationship will appear to be a smooth sailing one. But here and there the author gives us some hints that this appearance is far from reality. "The Huttens are in no way extraordinary. They are very much representatives of the milieu of the upper deck passengers all of whom reveal similar or equal inadequacies". 33 Professor Hutten feels that he is a part of the great universal movement towards the betterment of mankind. But his wife cannot catch up with his way of thinking. Though she is generally pictured as a very dutiful wife, when she is not feeling well and her husband demands some personal attention from her, she cries out in her mind: "Let somebody else wait on him hand and feet for a change. Let him do something for himself". 34

33 M.G.Krishnamurthy, Katherine Anne Porter: A Study, p.176
34 Ship of Fools, p.110.
Prof Hutten's principle that a wife's just duty is to be in complete agreement with her husband at all times, is not agreeable to his wife. But she is helpless and tries to believe that it is her duty to follow his advice. As they do not have a child their relationship in no way directly puts the next generation in any difficulty. The relationship between the Huttens is better when compared to many of the other husband-wife relationships. Though Herr Hutten always speaks about perfection in everything, his family life is only a shade better than the family life of many other married people in the ship.

For a better understanding of the family relationship in *Ship of Fools* we have to focus our attention on the people who are in the ship but whose spouses are not travelling with them. Freytag is married and his love for his wife is asserted again and again. He loves his Jewish wife. If occasionally he feels depressed for having married her, it is mainly because of the humiliations he has to undergo wherever he goes. His liking for Jenny is only to escape the boredom of the voyage. Similarly Mrs Treadwell's liking for the young officer of the ship is peculiar as she had secured a divorce. The legal separation is a clear evidence that when she was with her husband there was absolutely no happiness either to her or to him. In the ship she generally prefers to keep away from everything. Her family life was very miserable and her dancing with one or the other is only to keep her spirits alive to the possible extent. The human family which is the most ancient and natural of all societies is under strain.
As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, Doctor Shumann's Platonic affair with La Condesa points to a black spot in his family life. But when we think about the family relationship of La Condesa, there are certain points to remember. Her husband is dead and her affection to her children is unquestionable. "My husband is dead. My husband, thank God, is dead. But my two sons, my children, they are fugitives somewhere... where do they sleep at night, who befriends them, who gives them food, where are they, when shall I see them again? My house was burnt too". This is uttered in the presence of Dr. Schumann. She confesses to him that she was not innocent at any stage. Though her convictions about marriage and sex are very unconventional, "she alone could understand not condemn the incestuous relationship of Ric and Rac, an act which horrified the doctor and young ship's Officer. Lastly, she was capable of love; and the love affair with the doctor, though doomed, is one of the most admirable (which is to say, less animalistic) examples of love in the novel". Any common yardstick is bound to fail in judging the family relationship of La Condesa.

The real rays of hope as far as happy family life is concerned are the Mexican bride and bridegroom. They do not involve themselves in any of the unpleasant activities in the ship. They enjoy the company of each other. It may appear to be a running away from the society around them. If at all it is a running

35 *Ship of fools*, p119.

away, it is only to benefit them in the long run. The Mexican senora with her child also is less foolish than many of the other passengers. During the voyage seven women among the steerage passengers give birth to sons. The birth of children during the voyage contrasts with the sterile sexuality on the upper deck. The families on the steerage are definitely happier than the families on the upper deck. Though steerage families are poor, they probably observe an ancient system of ethics — an unanswerable, indispensable moral law which help them nurture strong family bonds. Miss Porter draws our attention to this fact in a subtle manner.