IN SEARCH OF HOME:
The Writings of Katherine Anne Porter, Martha Gellhorn, Elizabeth Bishop and Joan Didion

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Abstract

The thesis brings together four women writers linked by their American nationality, their gender and their subject matter, Latin America in its broadest definition: Katherine Anne Porter, Martha Gellhorn, Elizabeth Bishop and Joan Didion. The thesis uses recently published primary sources and rare additional material from American collections to site the women's writings on Latin America in a tradition of literary travellers. The introduction notes that no similar study exists for twentieth-century American women writers.

Each chapter is a self-contained, chronological examination of the writer using close textual analysis. The current understanding of Porter's gradual disillusionment with Mexico, where she lived intermittently through the 1920s, requires re-examination in the light of recently published early works. Her dichotomous attitude is shown to have varied according to her chosen genre and her emotional state.

The chapter on Gellhorn discusses the range of her prolific Latin American writings, from novels to war reporting. It links this range to Gellhorn's fundamental division of the world into war zones and elsewhere, a division paralleled by her obsession with swimming, which divides the world into above and below water realms.

Bishop's twenty year relationship with Brazil is studied in the light of her poems, recently published letters and little known prose and translations. The chapter considers how Bishop's attitude toward Brazil depends on the form in which she writes, a far deeper consideration being apparent in her poems. Bishop's bond with North America is also examined.

Didion sees Latin America in relation to her homeland. The chapter traces the evolution of her view of Latin America, from an object lesson to the United States of a continent gone astray to its position as the victim of the North's political posturing, which she increasingly identifies as the true source of the Americas' moral decline.
In memory of my beloved brother, Rohan, and my dear friend, Leslie.

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"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

T.S. Eliot *Four Quartets*

"Mrs Gould, accompanying her husband all over the province in the search for labour, had seen the land with a deeper glance than a trueborn Costaguana could have done."

Joseph Conrad *Nostromo*
Introduction

This thesis examines four twentieth-century writers who have travelled in and written about Latin America. Each writer is female, North American and an established literary figure. The writers' literariness is emphasised from the outset because this is not a thesis about "travel writers" in the accepted sense.¹

The four writers studied are Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980), Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998), Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) and Joan Didion (1934- ). Katherine Anne Porter, a Pulitzer-winning short-story writer and journalist, lived in Mexico intermittently between 1920 and 1931. Martha Gellhorn was a veteran war correspondent who covered every major war from the Spanish Civil War to the Central American wars of the 1980s. A prolific fiction writer, Gellhorn lived in Cuba from 1939 to 1944 and in Mexico in the 1950s; she travelled extensively throughout Latin America. Elizabeth Bishop, also a Pulitzer-prize winner, is recognised as one of North America's pre-eminent poets. She lived in Brazil for almost twenty years between 1951 and 1971. Joan Didion's writing has concentrated on her native North America; its hallmark is her penetrating critique of late-twentieth-century living in the United States. Didion has made increasingly prolonged literary forays south. The Latin American writings of all four writers form a substantial and significant part of their literary canon.

Porter's time in Mexico has been extensively studied by the late Thomas F Walsh, whose 1992 Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico is now the starting point for any scholar. There is little secondary literature on Gellhorn, although the significance of her contribution to war journalism is increasingly acknowledged.² Likewise, although study of Bishop's time in Brazil has expanded as the period is recognised as the catalyst for Bishop's most creative phase, no book-length monograph yet exists exclusively about Bishop and Brazil. Didion's writings on North America have been widely

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¹ The definition of a "travel writer" for the purposes of this thesis is a writer who travels to a destination in order to report back to a home audience. This definition places no emphasis on the literary qualities of the writer. Instead, value is placed on the unusualness of the journey; means of transport, strange food and disasters take pre-eminence.

² The detailed obituaries following Gellhorn's death on February 15, 1998, concentrated on her long career as a war correspondent and her significant contribution to the field. The obituaries noted how Gellhorn used her gender and her purported interest in reporting on the "female" angle of war - stories about the wounded and rationing - to gain access to classified stories.
commented upon, but her Latin American writings have received much less critical notice.

A chapter is devoted to each writer, and while the chapters are ordered chronologically, by date of birth, they remain self-contained units. The thesis makes no attempt to chart a chronological progression in the perception of Latin America by the four women. There is no evidence of any of the writers having paid particular attention to the others, beyond each writer being aware of her literary antecedents. Since they wrote about different countries: Porter about Mexico, Bishop about Brazil and Didion about Central America, there is no direct comparison of place to be made. Only Gellhorn, with her constant travel, overlaps with the other writers.

This introduction will sit the writers in a literary tradition. To date, no exact critical theory exists against which to measure the four writers. While they may broadly be described as literary travellers, three of them (the exception is Didion) did settle for extended periods abroad. Further, much of the critical theory of women travellers limits itself to the nineteenth century, the period of colonial expansionism, and to Europe. Similarly, existing anthologies of women travellers place no specific emphasis on either literary merit or North America. Jane Robinson's *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (1990) concentrates on travellers who are nearly all "of British extraction". Mary Morris's *Maiden Voyages* (1993), an anthology of women travellers from the seventeenth century to the present day, includes women from both North America and Europe chosen for the journeys they made and not their literary ability. Despite a lack of direct relevance, such theories of women's travel nevertheless help to define and to explore the unique position the four women occupy.

Before examining the women theorists' arguments it would be helpful to position the chosen writers in the broader literary tradition of travel writing, which despite its theoretical shortcomings remains the closest literary theory. The re-emergence of the travel genre in the late twentieth century can be attributed to two books: Paul Fussell's *Abroad* (1980) and *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia* (1975) by Paul Theroux, whom Fussell christened a "post-touristic traveler". *The Great Railway Bazaar* created a style of "travel writing" which has been aped exhaustively ever since. Theroux complained about everything on the journey while adopting a self-conscious attitude of Western superiority. "The worst trips make the best books," he claimed and Gellhorn, in her preface to her only book of travel stories,

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Travels with Myself and Another (1978), concurred: "The only aspect of our travels that is guaranteed to hold an audience is disaster." Theroux bridges two strands of travel writing. He belongs to the school of writer who travels to a destination with the express intent of reporting back to a home audience. For him, the value of the text lies in the unusualness and discomfort of the journey. However, Theroux is also acquainted with literary travellers. He reads their works as he travels and refers the reader to his reading about places he then visits. In his second travel train narrative, The Old Patagonian Express: By Train Through the Americas (1979), travelling through Guatemala, Theroux refers to Evelyn Waugh, Hart Crane and Charles Darwin, among others.

Fussell's Abroad is a critical examination of British, male literary travellers between the two world wars. Fussell brought together and examined the travel narratives of literary travel writers such as D H Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and Robert Byron. Fussell's effusive praise of Byron's The Road to Oxiana (1937) single-handedly resurrected the text from obscurity. The Road to Oxiana is a perfect example of a literary travel narrative. The text's extreme literariness is at odds with the plethora of adventure travel narratives which have since emerged. It is a highly constructed text which gives the impression of having been written both casually and spontaneously. Byron's diary entries, which read so fluently, were actually compiled from his multitude of notes after his return. The history of its creation places The Road to Oxiana in the realm of fiction rather than fact. Bruce Chatwin's In Patagonia (1977), which Fussell did not include in Abroad, sought to create the same impression: that the text was the personal diary of Chatwin's travels in Patagonia. In fact, the book was as much invention as experience, and blurred the distinction between travel narrative and fiction. This blurring between fiction and fact is probably the most interesting detail to emerge from the recent boom in "travel writing".

Latin America has a tradition of literary travellers who have written both novels and travel narratives, in the loosest sense of the word. D H Lawrence (1885-1930) is acknowledged by writers and critics alike as having created an image of Mexico which shaped the perception of subsequent writers who read him before making their own journeys to Mexico. For Lawrence, Mexico was one of the final stops on a restless world pilgrimage to find his spiritual home. During his three sojourns, between 1923 and 1925, Lawrence spent almost a year in Mexico; in Mexico City, Lake Chapala and

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4 Theroux is quoted in the introduction to Worst Journeys: The Picador Book of Travel (1992) edited by Keath Fraser: xvi. Gellhorn is also quoted in Fraser: xv and her own introduction to Travels with Myself and Another: 11.
finally Oaxaca. Lawrence set up a home base in each foreign country, however temporarily, from which to explore rather than travel continually. In this, his travel resembled women travellers rather than his male successors. Lawrence's Mexican period produced a short story, "The Woman Who Rode Away" (1925), a novel *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), and a short travel meditation, *Mornings in Mexico* (1927). His vision of Mexico was conditioned by readings about the Aztecs and ancient Mexico, and a fascination with the "otherness" of the present-day Indians. He came to see Mexico as a dark, menacing place. In the opening sequence of *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence's distaste for the bullfight, his symbol for a blood-thirsty culture, is palpable. However, as Hugh Thomas points out in an article about British writers in Mexico, Lawrence's attitude to Mexico was highly inconsistent: "Su inconsecuencia es patente en una serie de cartas que escribió en un sólo día de abril de 1923: en la mitad dice que está cansado del país y desea volver inmediatamente a Inglaterra; en la otra mitad piensa en quedarse todo el verano".

Lawrence's ambivalent perception of Mexico was overlooked by the writers who read him and then travelled there. The most celebrated Lawrence disciples were Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), Evelyn Waugh (1902-1966), Graham Greene (1904-1991) and Malcolm Lowry (1909-1957). Huxley's account of his trip around Mexico and Guatemala, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934), and the Mexican segment of his novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) owe much to Lawrence's view of Mexico. Evelyn Waugh's journeys in Latin America, to both Mexico and the Amazon region of Brazil and British Guiana, were undertaken having read *The Plumed Serpent*. Waugh's condemnation of Mexico, where he spent barely five weeks, in the hastily written *Robbery Under Law: The Mexican Object-Lesson* (1939) was a damning indictment of Mexico following the expropriation of foreign, including British, owned oil wells by President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938. Graham Greene spent slightly longer in Mexico - two months - and his stay produced one of his greatest novels, *The Power and The Glory* (1940) and a

5 See page 21 of this chapter for an analysis of Mary Louise Pratt's theory of the difference between male and female travel.
6 For Katherine Anne Porter's review of *The Plumed Serpent* see chapter two: 57.
7 This is a Spanish translation of Thomas's article which appeared in the Mexican magazine *Vuelta* 159 (Feb. 1990) entitled "Escriptores Británicos en México". Thomas's point is that Lawrence could not decide whether he wanted to stay in Mexico. In half of the letters he wrote in a single day he talked of wanting to return to England immediately, in the other half, of staying in Mexico all summer.
8 For a detailed account of the writers who travelled to Mexico, and the writers subsequently influenced by Lawrence see Drewey Wayne Gunn's definitive account - up until 1973 -, *American and British Writers in Mexico*, 1556-1973 (1974). In his chapter on Lawrence, Gunn claims that Waugh and Hart Crane, the American poet (1899-1932), knew *The Plumed Serpent* well. Crane helped to precipitate Porter's departure from Mexico. See chapter two: 74.
travel narrative, full of venom and anger, *The Lawless Roads* (1939). Greene was incensed at the effective ban on the Catholic Church by President Carranza's Mexican Constitution in 1917. Fuelled by fury, Greene portrayed Mexico as an evil, demonic country which he loathed on sight and which fulfilled his worst fears. The final Lawrentian disciple of this era was Malcolm Lowry whose novel, *Under the Volcano* (1947) describes the alcoholic degradation and death of Geoffrey Firmin, the British Consul in Quauhnahuac (the Aztec name for present-day Cuernavaca). Despite the Consul's positive attitude towards his adopted country, such is the power of Lowry's account of Firmin's descent into despair that Mexico, as the setting for his demise became synonymous with Firmin's misery.

These four major British literary figures all described Mexico in Lawrentian terms. Their Mexico was not an external reality but a filtered perception of Mexico as they wanted it to be seen. Reliance on literary forebears is self-evidently not an exclusively male preserve: the four female subjects of this thesis refer to other writers when they travel. They seek others' opinions and descriptions of journeys to be made, particularly in the case of Bishop, who filters much of Brazil through others' eyes. In their accounts, Didion and Gellhorn use factual reports to help explain the El Salvadoran civil war. It is a truism to say that most writers do not work in a cultural vacuum. However, the significant detail about the British literary travellers in Mexico is that, while all the men subscribed to Lawrence's emphasis on the demonic, the one writer who openly admitted that she went to Mexico having read *The Plumed Serpent* contradicted and dispelled much of Lawrence's dark creation.

Sybille Bedford (1911- ), the English novelist and Aldous Huxley's biographer, explained in *A Visit to Don Otavio: A Traveller's Tale from Mexico* (1960) how she first learnt about Mexico:

The writer who first made people of my generation aware of Mexico as a contemporary reality was D. H. Lawrence in his letters, *Mornings in Mexico and The Plumed Serpent*. *Mornings in Mexico* had a lyrical quality, spontaneous, warmed, like a long stroll in the sun. *The Plumed Serpent* was full of fear and violence, and Lawrence loudly kept the reader's nose to the grindstone: he had to loathe the crowds in the Bull Ring, he had to be awed by the native ritual. Perhaps the reality, for better or for worse, was Lawrence's rather than Mexico's (33).

Bedford realised something that none of the male writers seemed to understand: that the Mexico Lawrence wrote about was the Mexico he saw and not an objective reality. Bedford read *The Plumed Serpent* and rejected its vision of Mexico, though her trip to

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9 The book was originally published in 1953 in America as *The Sudden View: A Mexican Journey*. Page numbers refer to the 1982 edition of *A Visit to Don Otavio*. 

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Mexico instead of Peru, as originally planned, came about because she read another book: Fanny Calderón de la Barca's *Life in Mexico, during a Residence of Two Years in that Country* (1843).

Calderón de la Barca (1804-1882) moved to Mexico with her husband, the Spanish ambassador to Mexico, in 1839. Calderón de la Barca travelled throughout Mexico during her two year stay, witnessing two "revolutions". Robinson describes in *Wayward Women* how her description of Mexico's social, political and topographical situation was so detailed and clear that the American army used her book as a guide during their campaign against Mexico in 1847 (233). Calderón de la Barca's description of Mexico is a detailed account of daily Mexican life and her travels around the country; it is rooted in fact and observation in a way Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico* is not. Bedford's journey more readily replicates Calderón de la Barca's in its "amazed" reaction to Mexico. It is also a literary journey: Bedford does not read up thoroughly on the country before she leaves, although she thinks this is the way to learn about a country:

In happier days it used to be one's custom to read about a country before one went there. One made out a library list, consulted learned friends, then buckled down through the winter evenings. This time I did nothing of the sort. Yet there is a kind of jumbled residue; I find that at one time or another, here and there, I must have read a certain amount about Mexico (33).

Despite Bedford's claim to a haphazard literary knowledge of Mexico, *A Visit to Don Otavio* is the product of extensive reading. Bedford instructs the reader on aspects of Mexican history, mentioning Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Macomb Flandrau, Lawrence and Greene. Many of her chapter's epigraphs are from *Life in Mexico* and Bedford's text is woven around detailed historical essays. She and her female companion choose to go to Matzatlán because of a description of the coastal resort in an old travel book. After a prolonged and arduous train journey, they find themselves virtually marooned there. Yet both women take the disastrous detour in their stride, blaming themselves rather than Mexico, as Greene did in *The Lawless Roads*.

Bedford certainly travelled more widely around the country than her male

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10 For a discussion of Humboldt's description and perception of Latin America see pages 22-23. Charles Macomb Flandrau's (1871-1938) *Viva Mexico!* (1908) was considered by Bedford to be one of the funniest and most enchanting books written by a foreigner about Mexico. She included a substantial passage from *Viva Mexico!* in *A Visit to Don Otavio*: 259-261. Octavio Paz, thought it one of the best books by a foreigner about his country. His copy was given to him by Bishop. Flandrau based *Viva Mexico!* on a series of visits to his brother's coffee plantation near Misanita, Veracruz, also to Puebla, Mexico City and Cuernavaca between 1903-1908. He wrote about the difficulty of capturing the true essence of Mexico the longer he spent there.
contemporaries. Her trip took almost a year, accompanied by her female friend, Esther Murphy Arthur, referred to as "E." in the book. Bedford also, as Hugh Thomas noted, made acquaintance with a wider social group than the men. Bedford, by her own admission, took no notes when she was travelling around Mexico and wrote the book on her return to Europe. She subtitled the book "A Traveller's Tale" and subsequently described it as a "novel":

I wanted to make something light and poetic ... I didn't take a single note while I was in Mexico. If you clutter yourself with notes, it all goes away. Everything has to pass through you, as through a sausage machine ... I did, of course, send postcards to friends; and when I started writing, I called them back in....

A lightness of touch and a sense of joy permeate Bedford's experiences in *A Visit to Don Otavio*. She remains cheerful despite disappointments and irritations en route: Acapulco is not quite as they imagined but, nevertheless, both Bedford and E. make the most of their time there. Their journey starts out luxuriously with an extravagant picnic on the train from Grand Central Station; the nearer they travel towards Mexico the more uncomfortable the journey becomes. However, unlike male narratives, things improve once they arrive in Mexico City. They avoid the insalubrious pension they have been recommended and settle into a routine in the capital which is structured around eating (one of the book's main features is Bedford's descriptions of food), daily life in their hotel and sight-seeing. One of the first things Bedford does in Mexico City is to shop for food and flowers. She immediately wants to re-create a familiar domestic routine and thereby restore the sense of order temporarily destroyed by her initial contact with Mexico City:

The first impact of Mexico City is physical, immensely physical. Sun, Altitude, Movement, Smells, Noise. And it is inescapable. There is no use taking refuge in one more insulating shell, no use sitting in the hotel bedroom fumbling with guide books: it is here, one is in it.... Everything is agitated, crowded, spilling over...

Bedford went to Mexico as did Huxley and the other writers because they had read Lawrence. Here the parallels end. Unlike her male compatriots, Bedford adjusted quickly to the city by establishing a routine which would not have been dissimilar from her life in the United States or England. She travelled with the intention of absorbing a different culture, where her male antecedents travelled to study a particular facet of Mexican life of which they already disapproved.12 Bedford mirrors Porter, Bishop and Gellhorn in her desire to travel somewhere new: "I had a great

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11 Bedford quoted by Bruce Chatwin in his review of *A Visit to Don Otavio* in *Vogue*, March 1983.
12 Greene and Waugh travelled to Mexico expressly to report on persecution, as they saw it, of the Catholic Church and British oil interests.
longing to move, to hear another language, eat new food... I longed in short to travel" (16). Bedford accepts both the positive and negative aspects of her journey. Perhaps it is made easier by the presence of her companion, E. Their interaction forms an integral part of the book's structure in a way which is missing in, for example, Didion's *Salvador* (1983). Didion travelled to El Salvador with her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, for her two-week stay. Despite her husband's company on the trip to Gotera and the San Salvadoran morgue, he remains a shadowy figure and Didion portrays her terror as being compounded by her isolation. Her husband's presence does not alleviate her fear when she realises one evening they are being watched as they sit outside.

Bedford and E.'s journey around Mexico and their prolonged stay at Don Otavio's hacienda are distinguished by the hospitality and kindness of their various hosts. Thomas argues in his article, "Escrítores Británicos en México", that Bedford has been largely ignored by the critics because she wrote about well-to-do Mexicans in the tradition of Calderón de la Barca and Flandrau. Bedford's omission from critical studies of the Mexican travel narrative might also be because she desists from continuing the Lawrentian vision of a demonic Mexico. In Ronald G Walker's *Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel* (1978), Bedford merits only two mentions, both in her capacity as Huxley's biographer. Yet the book analyses, in detail, the Mexican works of Lawrence, Huxley, Greene and Lowry. Similarly, Douglas W Veitch, in *The Fictional Landscape of Mexico* (1978), studies Lawrence, Greene and Lowry but does not mention Bedford. Even Porter is given no more than a few cursory lines in Veitch's introduction.

In *Abroad*, Fussell wrote with great insight about literary British travellers between the two world wars but chose to exclude women writers from his analysis. Freya Stark (1893-1995) was a deliberate omission on Fussell's part which he explained unapologetically:

Someone is sure to ask why I've not dealt with the travel books of Freya Stark, and I will have to answer that to write a distinguished travel book you have to be equally interested in (1) the travel and (2) the writing. In Stark's works, admirable as the travel has been, the dimension of delight in language and disposition, in all the literary contrivances, isn't there.... She could never say, as Waugh does, "I regard writing ... as an exercise in the use of language, and with this I am obsessed" (197).

Stark's unliterariness disqualified her from Fussell's book and he found no other female candidates to include from his chosen period. Dennis Porter, in *Haunted* 13 For a detailed study of Didion's *Salvador* see chapter five.
Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing (1991), explained in his introduction why he had excluded women from his study. One reason was that, as a man, he felt qualified only to write about men. A second reason was: "To deal adequately with the complex motivations that drive women to travel or at least to write about it would, therefore, require a separate book that would have to be theorized differently" (17). Is this true? If so, what theory would be needed for women writers?

A superficial comparison of two recent travel narratives about Mexico and Central America suggests some of the differences which might underline men's and women's travel narratives. Patrick Marnham's So Far From God... A Journey To Central America was published in 1985 and Mary Morris's Nothing To Declare: Memoirs of a Woman Traveling Alone in 1988. The titles alone suggest an immediate difference. Morris wants the reader to know at once that she is a woman and alone. Marnham's title alludes to the saying of the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, "Poor Mexico! So far from God, so close to the United States", with its political allusion to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. The two narratives embellish and expand their titles. The Englishman, Marnham, examines the traumatic consequences of Central America's civil wars of the 1980s and North America's involvement. Built into the text's essential political reporting is an extensive knowledge of writers such as Lawrence, Lowry, Greene and Norman Lewis who had travelled to the region. The book is informed by Marnham's reading: he chooses to go to towns such as Cuernavaca because it is the setting of Lowry's Under the Volcano. Guatemala is filtered through Lewis's The Volcanoes Above Us (1957). Marnham's journey down the Pan-American highway is one of linear progression which gives the book its structure. He sets out with a pre-determined goal in mind: to travel the length of the highway.

Mary Morris's Nothing To Declare, however, is a much more personal account of a journey. She leaves her native United States because she has tired of it and wants to find somewhere new which might stimulate her into "finding herself". Morris's journey around Mexico and Central America becomes a metaphor for her journey into her inner self. The book concentrates on the pleasures and problems of being a lone woman traveller. Unlike Marnham, Morris makes a base for herself - in San Antonio, a poor part of San Miguel de Allende - from which she makes trips. The book details Morris's attempts at making a home from home and her friendships with her Mexican neighbours. Morris has some knowledge of ancient Aztec culture but the literary references with which Marnham so liberally sprinkles his text are largely absent from Morris's text.
Unlike Morris who concentrates on her gender in her writings, Bishop, in her lifetime, refused to be included in any all-women anthologies. She believed passionately that to be so included would be to draw attention primarily to her gender and not her writing. Porter equally despised feminine titles such as "authoress" and said "Criticize my work as severely as you like; but please don't expose yourself by putting it on the grounds that I am a woman." How then to excuse such a breach of confidence in this thesis? The explanation comes from Bishop herself: she claimed to have never made any distinction between the sexes or, rather, that the gender of the poet was not of interest. Just as Fussell thought little of including only male writers in Abroad, so this thesis has as its subject women who merit inclusion merely because of the value of their writing. It is also an attempt to redress the balance: to date there is a paucity of analyses of women's travel.

Three women critics nevertheless have recently attempted to define women's travel narratives and their conclusions are of some relevance here. Sara Mills analysed three nineteenth-century European women travellers in her 1991 Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism. In Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition (1994), Karen Lawrence continued Mills's attempt to redress the balance of literary criticism in favour of women travellers, studying eight women. Both books shed light on the reception of women's texts. Finally, but most significantly for the purposes of this thesis, Mary Louise Pratt's 1992 Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, examined both male and female travel writing from the era of colonial expansion to the 1980s and drew interesting conclusions as to the difference gender might make in the approach to travel. Pratt's concern was also to show how, in the light of Edward W. Said's ground-breaking Orientalism (1978), the "other" has been constructed by the West.

All cultural theorists acknowledge their debt to Said's Orientalism, which showed how: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable

14 See Bishop's interview with George Starbuck (1977) in Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art, edited by Schwartz & Estess: 322. Starbuck asked Bishop if she noticed what women poets, in particular, were doing. To which she replied: "No, I never made any distinction; I never make any distinction.... When I was in college and started publishing, even then, and in the following years, there were women's anthologies, and all-women issues of magazines, but I always refused to be in them. I didn't think about it very seriously, but I felt it was a lot of nonsense, separating the sexes. I suppose this feeling came from feminist principles, perhaps stronger than I was aware of."

experiences"(1). Said queried how the "other", the object of the journey, was represented and argued that, unlike other cultures, the Orient was "confined to the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of western percipients."16 In his subsequent Culture and Imperialism (1993), Said caused a rethink of major literary texts such as Jane Austen's Mansfield Park (1814) where colonial expansion was not only taken for granted but was the means by which the gracious living of Mansfield Park was achieved. The novel's sub-text, according to Said, was the Caribbean slave-trade, which allowed the profits from the Antiguan sugar plantations to return directly to England and the British empire.

Sara Mills's Discourses of Differences claims to be the first book to look at women in the Victorian age as part of the imperialist tradition. Following on from Said's argument, Mills discusses specifically how European women, in a period of colonial expansion, helped to reinforce the idea of European domination through their writing. Mills considers the political nature of travel narratives to be implicit. The analysis of her chosen women - Alexandra David-Neel, Mary Kingsley and Nina Mazuchelli - is complicated, in her mind, by the realisation that she has to use male theorists to construct a female theory. Mills is reluctant to draw a gender distinction between how men and women represent the "other", but she does consider that women are generally more tentative in their viewing of other cultures. This tentativeness has been misconstrued by male critics:

Because of the way that discourses of femininity circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did. The writing which they produced tended to be more tentative than male writing, less able to assert the "truths" of British rule without qualification. Because of their oppressive socialisation and marginal position in relation to imperialism, despite their generally privileged class position, women writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about the race as a whole. It is in their struggle with the discourse of imperialism and femininity, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt, and which pulled them in different textual directions, that their writing exposes the unsteady foundations on which it is based. Their textual unease is labelled as "bad writing"; for example Paul Fussell explicitly refuses to consider women travel writers within his account of literary travel... (3).

The major distinction Mills sees between male and female writing is in the reception of the text. She does not consider that women necessarily write differently from men, but that women's texts are judged differently. Nineteenth-century women travel narratives were assumed to be the product of eccentric women making the texts'
primary importance immediately the gender of the writer rather than the subject. More recently, the British feminist publishing house Virago has further exacerbated this by choosing to emphasise the biographical details of the women travel writers it republished from the last century rather than concentrating on the literary merits of their texts. For Mills it is the assumption that most nineteenth-century texts are autobiographical which is the problem in the reception of women's travel texts (36). She argues that we cannot know that the writer's self is the narrator's voice since the self is a multi-layered entity.

Mills further questions whether readers trust women's texts to be as factually accurate as men's. Women are seen to lack the authoritative voice of their male counterparts and Mills suggests that women's writing is seen as exaggerated and unbelievable (113). Mills considers that women's lack of authority is heightened by their concentration on the domestic when they travel. For British women, travelling in the last century meant the opportunity to escape the confines of Victorian life. But it also meant the reproduction abroad of the limited range of interests Victorian women were allowed to have. In order to counter the idea that they invented/ lied, women writers had to include factual evidence. The easiest to acquire was that which women were supposed to know most about: domestic issues. However, this is also to ignore the desire women can have to re-create the domestic. Bedford, and more recently both Bishop and Gellhorn, took pleasure in domesticity away from home. They sought to make abroad into home, however temporarily.

Karen Lawrence (1994) continues Mills's arguments in Penelope Voyages. In her introductory statements Lawrence describes woman's traditional role as staying at home, waiting for the man to return from his travels, as Penelope does in The Odyssey. Lawrence bases her ideas on Barthes's theories of travel in A Lover's Discourse: Fragments (1978). Barthes argued that the discourse of absence belongs to women since they are left behind while the man travels: "Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings...."17

Lawrence wonders what happens when a woman journeys - does she have an itinerary of her own? Her book examines a variety of women writers, including both travellers such as Mary Kingsley and writers such as Virginia Woolf, thereby bridging

the gap between literary travellers and explorers. Her introduction relies heavily on theorists, from Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* to Derrida's idea that place might have to be reconsidered in a female light, to construct her argument that gender is central to any theories of travel.\(^{18}\)

Lawrence notes that analysis of women's travel books has been largely absent. She sees existing travel studies such as Percy Adams's *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (1983) as accepting the idea of the man as the crosser of boundaries and the female as part of the itinerary of the male journey. She concludes that: "Theories of travel and those of narrative in which travel serves as central trope most vividly betray their politics of location through a certain blindness to the role of gender in their topographies" (11). Lawrence argues that if critical theory ignores women's texts their work remains unexamined; a theory of women's travel writing not only admits that the genre exists, but also that it merits study. Her point that gender has been accepted without question is valid, but to argue in the late twentieth century that men keep women from travelling has little merit.

Women's travel narratives have been undermined in different ways. Lawrence notes that the implication of sexual promiscuity in women's travel narratives has been one means of devaluing the text. The example of Mrs Trollope she quotes from *The Norton Book of Travel* (1987), edited by Fussell, perfectly illustrates this. Mrs Trollope's account of her three years in North America, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), was published when the author was more than fifty years old. It scandalised America and one American critic commented on the aptness of her surname in an attempt to discredit her book.\(^{19}\) In the twentieth century, women writers have played on this idea of women's travel as indicative of a sexual licentiousness. Jane Robinson's guide to women travellers is ironically entitled *Wayward Women*, and her anthology of women travellers she called *Unsuitable for Ladies* (1994), thereby continuing the pun. Mary Morris edited a collection of women travellers' writings entitled *Maiden Voyages* (1993) in reference to the Victorian spinsters who travelled.

In the introduction to *Wayward Women*, Robinson describes the essential difference between women's and men's travel:

\[^{18}\] Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny) has as its premise the idea of woman as *heimat* (home). To travel away is to leave the mother who symbolises all that is familiar. To then recognise the unfamiliar as familiar is to recognise the mother's body and the repression which has taken place in the subconscious attempt to distance oneself from the mother. The reason why the uncanny is so frightening, Lawrence argues, is because "it collapses the distance between the familiar and the foreign in a way that the traveler... does not anticipate" (4).

\[^{19}\] See *The Norton Book of Travel*: 295 and Lawrence: 16.
Throughout the centuries spanned by this book, men have been setting out for the world with some definite purpose in mind, with reputations to forge and patrons to please, and their written accounts have been dedicated to tangible results. Women, whether travelling by choice or default, had for the most part no such responsibilities: they left the facts and figures of foreign travel to the men, and dwelt instead on the personal practicalities of getting from A to B, and on impressions (ix-x).

In her introduction to *Unsuitable for Ladies* she repeats and synthesises her assertion: "... men's travel accounts are to do with What and Where, and women's with How and Why" (xiv). Mary Morris, in her introduction to *Maiden Voyages*, concludes that men concentrate on the external, ignoring their inner psyches, while women are more interested in their inner selves than the landscape around them: "Women, I have come to feel, move through the world differently than men. The constraints and perils, the perceptions and complex emotions women journey with are different from those of men" (xvii).

Lawrence, however, like Mills, is more circumspect than either Robinson or Morris. She avoids being drawn into a categorical distinction between male and female travel, despite the fact that "the gender of the viewer affects the ideology of seeing as well as the tropes projected onto the foreign landscape"(17). Lawrence backs up her assertion with research carried out by Annette Kolodny on the pioneer narratives of American women. 20 Kolodny argued that the male settlers saw uncharted territory as female which was to be possessed and tamed, while the women did not see the land in terms of possession. Lawrence does go so far as to suggest that "women writers of travel have tended to mistrust the rhetoric of mastery, conquest, and quest that has funded a good deal of male fictional and nonfictional travel"(20). Women travel for travel's own sake, often mistrusting both quest and destination.

"In making the reading and writing of culture their central concern, travel narratives allow for the demystification of both cultural and literary conventions for representing the self and the other"(26). According to Lawrence, the traveller is a sign to be deciphered and, at the same time, the reader and writer of signs. 21 Mary Louise Pratt aims to show in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*
(1992) how place has been both created and decoded by centuries of Western travellers. Pratt, following on from Said's representations of the "other", shows how since Humboldt's day Latin America has been constructed by travellers for the readers at home. Her book's subtitle suggests that the process has been a two-way street: the observing culture has absorbed the other's culture and taken it home and the observed culture has appropriated, as required, the observer's culture. A secondary theme of Pratt's book is the different approaches she notes between men and women travellers.

In a discussion of the nineteenth-century European women travellers Flora Tristan and Maria Callcott Graham, Pratt draws interesting conclusions. Tristan's *Peregrinations of a Pariah* was written after she had lived amongst Peru's elite for a year in 1833-4.22 Graham's accounts of life in Brazil and Chile appeared in 1824. Pratt draws attention to the two women's shared interest in political upheaval as each country struggled towards independence. Pratt further describes the difference between how the women and men (whom Pratt calls "capitalist vanguardists") depicted what they witnessed: "Contrary to stereotype, the political dramas of Spanish America show up far more fully in the writings of these women travelers than in those of either the capitalist vanguard or the disciples of Humboldt"(157). Apart from the women seeming more politically astute, Pratt notices one significant difference between their writing and that of the "capital vanguardists":

In structuring their travel books ... the capitalist vanguardists often relied on the goal-directed, linear employment of conquest narrative. Graham's and Tristan's accounts do not, though they might have. They are emplotted in a centripetal fashion around places of residence from which the protagonist sallies forth and to which she returns. Both women begin their accounts by taking up residence in an urban center.... Though both do make lengthy inland journeys into the country or across it to other cities, it is this initial fixed positioning that organizes the narrative. Urban-based rather than rural, the women's accounts follow a different descriptive agenda as well. Social and political life are centers of personal engagement; each shows a strong ethnographic interest. In the accounts of the capitalist vanguard, interventionist goals often produce a reactive, judgemental energy. Though they share many of those goals, Graham and Tristan have little immediate stake in the outcomes of what goes on around them and write along more interpretive, analytical lines. They reject sentimentality and

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22 Flora Tristan (1803-1844) was half-French and half-Peruvian. She was brought up in France, where she campaigned for equal rights for women. It was her trip to Peru in 1833 which awakened her political activism. Maria Graham (1785-1842) accompanied her first husband, Captain Graham, to Brazil and then round the Horn to Valparaiso in Chile. He died of fever on board ship and Graham settled in Chile alone, staying for a year. Graham travelled back through Brazil where she accepted the post of governess to Donna Maria, daughter of the Prince of Portugal (also the Emperor of Brazil). Her South American sojourn produced two books: *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil and Residence there During Part of the Years 1821, 1822, 1823.* (1824) and *Journal of a Residence in Chile, during the year 1822. And a voyage from Chile to Brazil in 1823.* (1824). Graham was one of the first Englishwomen to write about South America. However, her talents lay in the travel and not the writing.
It is worth quoting Pratt's analysis of the difference between men's and women's writing at such length because she introduces many of the differences and similarities she sees between the sexes. The most significant is her description of men's journeys as linear and goal-directed and women's as circular.\(^\text{23}\) Even in the late twentieth century, women continue to create circular journeys. Porter, Bishop and Gellhorn all took pleasure in describing, in personal letters and essays, the attention they lavished on their homes in their ex-patriate domiciles. From their homes, each writer journeyed into the local culture, returning to their base. Pratt sees women's desire for their own space as an articulation of freedom and self-determination which was perhaps more exceptional in the nineteenth century than today. What is noteworthy, even in the late twentieth century, is that Bishop and Porter, in particular, were still seeking a place they might call home, having rejected their native United States. In the case of Didion and Gellhorn, hotels serve equally well as bases from which to travel and then return.\(^\text{24}\) The circular journey is a defining trope of all four women.

Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) illustrates, figuratively, the different perceptions of place which exist between men and women. Mr and Mrs Gould's views of the silver mine in Costaguana, Conrad's fictional South American country, are diametrically opposed. The San Tomé silver mine, owned by the Englishman Charles Gould, is seen by him solely as a money-making venture. His attitude towards the mine extends to how he perceives the town of Sulaco, and ultimately Costaguana. In contrast, his wife Emily considers it their duty, as mine-owners, to help improve the dismal lot of the mine workers. Her perception runs much deeper than her husband's:

> And Mrs Gould, with each day's journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience (102).

The conflict in the Goulds' perception and interpretation of Sulaco and the mine destroys their relationship. Once Charles Gould frees himself from his wife's moral

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\(^\text{23}\) A notable exception to Pratt's theory is D H Lawrence who preferred to base himself in one place.

\(^\text{24}\) Men stay in hotels as well but they rarely describe them unless to draw attention to some horror.
guidance he is doomed. Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, notes how Gould perceives Costaguana as a Westerner whose paternal arrogance helps reinforce the idea of Western cultural and capitalist domination.

Pratt anticipated many of Said's theories in *Culture and Imperialism* in *Imperial Eyes*. The book is a brilliant study of how naturalists, explorers and, later, twentieth-century writers created place for domestic consumption. The main subject of *Imperial Eyes* is how European travel books about non-European parts of the world helped to domesticate the "other" so that the "other" became part of a European reality and, by extension, part of the growing European imperialism. Pratt's assertion is that the rest of the world was "produced" for the benefit of the metropolitan few. Travellers would select and adapt their discoveries to the tastes of the metropolis, so texts were written not as testimonies of what they discovered, but to fulfil the expectations of the domestic market.

Pratt's methodology in *Imperial Eyes* is to read texts within their historical context in order to better site the writer. Her examination of Alexander von Humboldt is an example of her major achievement: locating the travel writer in time and place. Humboldt arrived in South America in 1799 and travelled through the continent for the next five years. His descriptions of South America came to be seen as definitive, particularly when no foreigners were allowed in Brazil between 1823 and 1840. Humboldt's writings were the sole source of information about Brazil for a long time and he conditioned how nineteenth-century Europe viewed Latin America. Humboldt was, as Jason Wilson points out, "virtually the first European scientist - with notable exceptions like La Condamine - to scrutinize the interior of South America as if he was seeing it for the first time, suspicious of previous descriptions." Pratt argues that, on both sides of the Atlantic, Humboldt's view of South America acquired the authority of absolute fact. But, she notes, at the same time as he was fusing science with a romantic aesthetic, by representing South America as a natural paradise of mountains, volcanoes and pasture, most of the continent's countries were engaged in bloody battles for independence from Spain.

Pratt asserts that Humboldt's reinvention of South America as nature, where the

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25 Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) travelled in the New World between 1799-1804. He then settled in Paris and dedicated himself to writing up his observations, *Relation historique du voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent*, which he did not complete until 1834. In his lifetime, Humboldt was recognised as the great scientific traveller of his day. Darwin read him on board the *Beagle*.

human individual was diminished if not erased, meant that South America was recast to when the first explorers discovered the continent as a land to be claimed from plants and nature, not flourishing human social groups. Pratt shows how such texts are accepted into common currency. The repercussions in Europe were renewed attempts at capitalist expansion, but Humboldt's descriptions also found approval within Latin America. Bolivar claimed that Humboldt had allowed Latin Americans finally to view their continent as it was. Pratt writes: "Simón Bolivar, chief architect of Spanish American independence, paid homage to 'Baron Humboldt' as 'a great man who with his eyes pulled America out of her ignorance and with his pen painted her as beautiful as her own nature'.” 27

Latin America has always existed as a literary construct. The representation of place remains, even for the scientific traveller, a subjective activity. Humboldt prefigured a tradition of writing across different genres as a means of appropriating Latin America's chaotic reality. A way of "seeing" Latin America was created by whoever wrote about the place from the outside. These ways of seeing the "other" have become accepted, particularly in the representation of Mexico, because of the legacy of so many writers. Jeremy Treglown wondered what Mexico did to writers: "Somehow the nearer a writer gets to Mexico the more likely he is to be affected by the literary-perception scrambler which Malcolm Lowry helped to engineer and was ruined by...."28 In Loneliness and Time: British Travel Writing in the 20th Century (1992) Mark Cocker explains how Tibet was constructed entirely through travel narratives. With the country closed to the outside world by the invading Chinese, for a while the only information came from accounts such as Heinrich Harrer's Seven Years in Tibet (1953).29 The result of Tibet's geographical isolation and its political segregation meant that the West was free to create a Tibet for Western consumption which conformed to the exotic imaginings of travellers. Tibet became a blank canvas on which writers played out their fantasies: their only obligation was to consult previous travel narratives. Hence the untrue story about a Tibetan preference for rancid butter in their tea became an accepted detail in travel narratives, passed from one account to the next. As Cocker concludes: "It was possible to say anything because no one knew any better" (223).

Latin America exists as both empirical reality and construct. The countries which

27 Imperial Eyes: 112. Letter to Humboldt from Bolivar dated November 10, 1821, translated by Pratt.
28 Fussell quotes Treglown in Abroad: 158.
29 Harrer's book was recently turned into a Hollywood film of the same name. Harrer's reputation has subsequently been severely damaged by the discovery that he was an active Nazi who has never renounced his beliefs.
constitute Latin America share a legacy of conquest and colonialism, and self-evidently geographical proximity, but little else. While we use the term Latin America as an all-encompassing title it should be understood as little more than a reference point. The four subjects of the thesis travelled within many of the countries of South and Central America. Porter and Gellhorn overlapped in Mexico, and Gellhorn and Didion both travelled to El Salvador to witness the brutal effects of the civil war. Each country's individuality is reinforced by its separate and distinct representation by each writer.

However, some writers still view Latin America as nothing more than an homogenous mass. Paul Fussell, in a review of Theroux's *The Old Patagonian Express*, criticised the book:

If this sequel ... is not so delightful as *The Great Railway Bazaar*, the fault is as much geography's as Theroux's. Europe and Asia are a richer venue for this sort of thing than Latin America, which by contrast lacks character, deep literary and historical associations, and variety. For anyone experienced with Europe, it is desperately boring. Squalor in Mexico is identical to squalor in El Salvador: the ghastly Mexican town Papaloapan is too much like the horrible Costa Rican town Limón, 600 miles further south. Illiteracy here is like illiteracy there. 30

Fussell reiterates his sentiments about *The Old Patagonian Express* in *Abroad*:

"... [it] is merely the latest in a long series of failures to make literary travel sense of Mexico. The problem would seem to be the absence there of sufficient resonance and allusion and nuance. In their absence, the writer is left to descant on a hot sun which seems ignorant of Apollo, or to describe the bright colors which have no reference to Tyrian purple or the red of the flowers associated with traditional European elegy. The writer is left to survey the empty desert and, according to his emotional and ideological bias, to emphasize either the beatitude or the horrors of poverty and illiteracy (159)."

Fussell does not think to criticise Theroux for his reductionist description of his journey to Patagonia. Instead, the book's inadequacies are blamed on geography. Fussell blames Mexico and all of Latin America for successive writers' failure to capture their complexity. He considers Latin America as inferior to India or Europe as a subject for travel narratives. Fussell sees the Latin American landscapes as blank canvases which contain neither literary allusion nor historical association. In his review of *The Old Patagonian Express*, he reads the landscape through the text; the landscape only exists as its textual representation. Fussell's reading of Latin America might be seen as the inevitable conclusion of the Tibetan travel journals. Place has ceased to exist as a physical entity and exists only on the written page.

The thesis will examine how the four women, in turn, chose to portray Latin


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America. The introduction, thus far, has demonstrated the lack of a theoretical analysis which directly applies to four North American women literary travellers of this century. As has been noted, much has been written about male, British travellers of this century and the past. British women of the nineteenth century have also been extensively researched. However, the research on North American travellers is limited, particularly with regards to women. The specific chapter bibliographies show that individual monographs exist, and that the writers have been considered with other writers, both male and female, in their chief genre. So, Bishop's poetry is discussed next to that of Robert Lowell and Marianne Moore in David Kalstone's *Becoming A Poet* (1989), and Gellhorn's war reporting is sited in an emerging tradition of female war correspondents in Anne Sebba's *Battling For News: The Rise of the Woman Reporter* (1994). But no monograph exists which brings together these four writers and their travel writings.

Drewey Gunn's 1974 *American and British Writers in Mexico 1556-1973* discussed American writers up to 1973. He sited Porter's writings alongside D H Lawrence and was the only critic, until Thomas F Walsh in 1992, to consider Porter of equal if not greater importance than the British male writers. Gunn listed many American male writers who had travelled to and written about Mexico such as John Reed, Jack London, Hart Crane, Carleton Beals, Tennessee Williams, John Steinbeck and Jack Kerouac, to name but a few. Three women, other than Porter, feature in Gunn's study: Anita Brenner (1905-1974), Josefina Niggli (1910-?) and Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980).32 However, since Gunn's account stops in 1973 and is restricted to Mexico, it is of limited value to this thesis.33

Latin America has always been seen by North America as an accessible and convenient destination, whether for business or pleasure. Didion's first literary foray south was a short account of a road trip she and her husband made to Guaymas in Mexico, in 1965. In 1977, Didion and her contemporary, Robert Stone, both

32 For biographical details of Brenner see chapter two: 32. Niggli is a Mexican-born American who has written accounts of Mexican village life. Rukeyser was an American social activist who was also a writer and translator of Paz and Brecht.
33 Similarly, an article by Henry C Schmidt, "The American Intellectual Discovery of Mexico in the 1920's" (South Atlantic Quarterly Review: 1978) is of limited use. Schmidt briefly looks at writers such as Brenner and Chase (see Porter chapter) who went to Mexico following the Revolution because he says: "An aura of romance, informality, intellectuality, and sense of mission colored the American encounter with Mexico in the twenties..."(77).
published novels set in fictional Central American countries. *A Book of Common Prayer* had at its centre the naive American, Charlotte Douglas, and Stone's *A Flag for Sunrise* had a hard-bitten Vietnam veteran, Holliwell, as its central figure. However, in Didion's text the seemingly nightmarish Boca Grande ultimately redeems Charlotte while Stone's portrait of Tecan, an apocalyptic country, serves only to underline the trauma of life post-Vietnam. Richard Ford (1944- ), the Pulitzer-prize winning novelist, and Denis Johnson (1949- ) have subsequently both written novels with a Latin American locale which have drug-running and degradation as their themes. Ford's *The Ultimate Good Luck* (1986) and Johnson's *The Stars at Noon* (1986) are set in Mexico and Nicaragua, respectively. Ostensibly, Didion's novel shares much in common with the other three. John McClure, in an otherwise insightful article, "Battlelines: Joan Didion, Robert Stone, and the Imaginative Mapping of Central America" (1990) considers that by sending Charlotte south, Didion "participates in the construction of what is becoming a contemporary literary commonplace" (87).34 By this he means that North Americans were being sent south by authors to endure humiliation and dishonour. McClure wonders why Central America has been cast in the role of "demonic tormentor".

McClure is right to wonder why Central America, having been targeted by the United States' government, was once again being made the scapegoat, this time by North American writers. However, to accuse Didion of casting Central America in the role of tormentor would be to misunderstand her novel. McClure’s mistaken interpretation also draws attention to Didion’s unique voice and the difficulty of placing her in any tradition. The same point might be made for Porter, Bishop and Gellhorn. Neither Porter nor Bishop, despite winning many literary prizes, ever felt they "belonged", and it was of no interest to Gellhorn to belong to any group. Each writer is independent of the other, although there are interesting details of how their lives have overlapped.35 Bishop, who read Porter, professed to dislike Porter’s exaggerated femininity. In a letter to Lowell, dated July 27, 1960, Bishop criticised the confessional poet, Anne Sexton, and placed her alongside other female writers of whom she thought little:

That Anne Sexton I think still has a bit too much romanticism and what I think of as the "our beautiful old silver" school of female writing which is really boasting about how "nice" we were. V. Woolfe (sic), K. A. P. , Bowen. R. West, etc - they are full of it. They have to make quite sure that the reader is not going to mis-

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34 See chapter five for a fuller analysis of *A Book of Common Prayer* and McClure's interpretation of it.
35 Both Porter and Gellhorn met Eisenstein and Diego Rivera, for example. Bishop’s great friend, Robert Lowell, was married to the writer Elizabeth Hardwick, a founder of the *New York Review of Books* and a frequent reviewer of Didion.
Bishop refused to be seen as anything other than a "poet", her gender an irritating diversion. Despite enjoying the trappings of femininity, Porter was acutely aware of being a woman writer from male dominated Texas and wanted to be taken seriously as a "writer". Gellhorn considered herself, and proved herself, as able as men to enter war zones. Didion has created a literary world which is uniquely hers, which straddles topics from her personal neuroses to covert arms dealing, traditionally a male preserve.

Two common links do emerge from the study of each writer. The first link is their contemporaneity. Just as Pratt sited the travel writer in his time and place, so this thesis notes how each writer belongs to a specific moment in time. Each woman is politically aware and writes from deep roots in their individual present. Porter travelled to Mexico, in part, to witness the aftermath of the 1910 Mexican Revolution; its ultimate failure reconfirmed her pessimistic view of the world. Bishop escaped to Brazil and a life of domesticity, but the social position of her partner Lota de Macedo Soares, ensured an involvement with Brazilian politics. The 1964 military coup, which initiated eighteen years of military dictatorship, precipitated Bishop's final exit from her adopted country. Gellhorn, as a war correspondent, always rooted herself in the present as her reports from the Caribbean, Central and South America reflect. Finally, Didion carved a niche for herself as an observer of American daily life which she extended to Central America in the 1980s. The second link is the thesis's title, *In Search of Home*, which draws the reader inexorably back to the fact that while examining Latin America each writer examines both North America and themselves. That their examination of both self and country is unintentional provides a tension in each writer's work which makes their Latin American canon of great significance to their entire oeuvre.

36 The letter is quoted in Brett Millier's *Elizabeth Bishop* (1993): 332. It is also included in *One Art: The Selected Letters* (1994), edited by Robert Giroux. For some unknown reason, Giroux edited out the reference to Porter: "That Anne Sexton ... which is really boasting about how 'nice' we were. V. Woolf, E. Bowen, R. West, etc..." (387).
Katherine Anne Porter's Vision of Mexico

"All serious writing is based profoundly on the writer's experience, and this experience is no less real if it takes place only in the imagination than if based on an actual occurrence." - Katherine Anne Porter 1

"To the reviewer, Miss Porter is baffling because one cannot take hold of her work in any obvious way." - Edmund Wilson 2

Katherine Anne Porter was thirty years old when she arrived in Mexico City in November 1920 and had yet to publish any fiction. An insatiable traveller, once Porter left her native Texas in 1919 she avoided returning there for any length of time for the rest of her life. Instead, she lived in many countries and cities - Bermuda, Spain, Berlin, Paris - and in many parts of the continental United States, as well as Mexico. However, no other place has received the critical attention that Mexico has received because Mexico was the catalyst which changed Porter from a newspaper journalist to a published fiction writer.

It is generally thought that Porter arrived in Mexico full of happy anticipation at witnessing the implementation of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, and that her intermittent sojourns in the country between 1920 and 1931 left her disillusioned and despondent. A close study of Porter's Mexican writing, however, reveals a consistently ambivalent attitude towards Mexico from the beginning. How Porter perceived the country depended on her state of mind, whether she felt optimistic or depressed. Porter was consistent in one area: the compassion she felt towards the Mexican Indian never waivered. The revolution failed, in Porter's eyes, precisely because she saw no improvement in the Indian's social and economic position during her years in Mexico.

Mexico provided Porter with the long sought after subject matter which enabled her to write her first short story, "María Concepción", published in Century magazine in December 1922. Porter's Mexican legacy consists of nine short stories and sketches, ten essays and a number of book reviews. The opening sequence of her only novel, Ship of Fools (1962), which made Porter internationally famous, is set in Veracruz. In addition,

1 Porter to a student on March 31, 1951. Quoted in Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times by Janis Stout: 18.
recent scholarship has uncovered three unpublished short stories, poetry and early
types of later work; such as "Hacienda", Porter's last Mexican story. Joan Givner,
author of the first biography of Porter in 1982, explained why Mexico was of such
significance to Porter's literary development:

It seems that she lacked (or imagined she lacked) a body of material that she
considered worthy of being used in fiction.... She seemed to think that an exotic
setting, highborn characters, and exciting adventures were needed, and that so far
her untraveled, humdrum life had yielded her no such experiences. After all, she
had lived her entire life in Texas.3

In order to understand the relationship Porter created with Mexico her
relationship with her home state of Texas must first be examined. Born on May 15,
1890, at Indian Creek, Texas, Porter was the daughter of a subsistence farmer, but for
years she fostered the belief that she came from Southern plantation-owning stock. She
told her friends of an upbringing in a gracious Southern mansion, complete with a well-
stocked library and servants. She was, in fact, born in a log cabin in Indian Creek which,
in the 1890s, was a recently settled town comprising of log cabins and sod houses.

Porter's relationship with Texas was contradictory. She was desperate to escape the
provincialism of the state, yet she would later romanticise its appeal. Porter claimed she
turned against her native state partly because she did not think Texas had any artistic
tradition. But another compelling reason was her family. Her ambivalent attitude towards
Texas owes much to her equivocation towards her family. Texas represented a family past
she wished to disown. She never again lived near her family, though she kept in close
contact by letter. Porter's attitude to her regional and family origins remained a source of
tension for much of her life: as keen as she was to flee, she could never entirely break the
family ties and she never really sought to. In commentating on her Texas, Porter set a
tradition of fictionalising, inventing and changing her history which she would repeat in
Mexico.

Perhaps more crucially for Porter, the would-be writer, was her awareness of
Texas's lack of a literary reputation. In Katherine Anne Porter - A Sense of the Times
(1995), Janis Stout suggests why Porter wanted to ignore her roots:

To be from Texas and identified as a Texas writer was to be branded as a subliterary
story-teller, a practitioner in a genre of frontier tales that, at the time she was
establishing herself, had admitted little artistry. Moreover, the category "Texas

3 Katherine Anne Porter : A Life by Joan Givner: 146. Givner updated her biography in
1991 because of the numerous factual inaccuracies included in the 1982 version, some
of which originated from Porter.

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"writer" almost necessarily meant "male writer". Texas was identified, in the popular and the critical imagination alike, with the frontier West of cowboys and wide-open spaces, hard riding and shooting. That the state was by no means all of a piece culturally, but was rather a collection of distinct regional patterns, was simply not acknowledged in the literary world or, for the most part, in popular awareness.

To a woman who aspired to write literary stories and who wanted to belong to what Porter deemed "civilised" society, Texas, as she perceived it, was anathema. But Porter was unable to reject Texas completely. Discussing the different places she had lived in her 1956 essay, "'Noon Wine': The Sources", she wrote:

I did not feel exactly at home; I knew where home was ... while [I] was in Europe all the time, I was making notes on stories - stories of my own place, my South - for my part of Texas was peopled almost entirely by Southerners from Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas.... So my time in Mexico and Europe served me in a way I had not dreamed of, even, besides its own charm and goodness: it gave me back my past and my own house and my own people - the native land of my heart.

Throughout her life, when it suited Porter, Texas became a romanticised idyll and a place for which she had only warm recollections. Porter fictionalised many of her life experiences to continue her self-created myth of who she was and the life she had led. But just as she eulogised Texas in "'Noon Wine': The Sources" to convince the reader of a deep bond with the state as conveyed in her eponymous short story, so she was completely hostile about Texas to a fellow Texan writer in 1950: "I never had any real regional patriotism, in fact I got out of Texas like a bat out of hell at the earliest possible moment and stayed away cheerfully half a life-time." These contradictory attitudes towards Texas prefigure Porter's later highly ambivalent feelings towards Mexico. After Texas and Mexico, Porter lived intermittently for about five years in Paris in the 1930s, a time she considered the happiest of her life. As with other places she lived in, neither Texas nor Paris has received the same critical attention as Mexico.

Porter's literary success as a result of her first visit to Mexico led Porter scholars to focus increasingly on the country's influence on her creative development. Thomas F Walsh's Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico (1992) provides the most comprehensive and detailed study of the periods Porter spent in Mexico between 1920 and 1931. He examines the influence of Mexico on Porter's literary and emotional maturing, and has been joined by many other recent Porter scholars - Ruth Alvarez in particular - in

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4 In The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 470.
5 Letter to William Humphrey, October 8, 1950, quoted in Stout: 36.
6 There are two Texas monographs to date: The Texas Legacy of Katherine Anne Porter by James Tanner (1990) and a collection edited by Machann, Clinton & Clark: Katherine Anne Porter and Texas, also from 1990. Paris has only been studied as a part of Porter's life.
concentrating on Mexico. This is explained, in part, by the role of Mexico in Porter's creative genesis, but also by Porter's continual promotion of Mexico as "my second home".

For much of her life Porter invented a mythical past that she claimed to share with Mexico. Until Walsh this was used as the starting point of any analysis of Porter's relationship with the country. It was a long-lasting myth: as late as 1965 Porter was still dwelling, at length, on how Mexico formed a significant part of her psyche. More than thirty years after she had left Mexico for the last time, she told Enrique Hank Lopez: "I'll do anything for Mexico. I've always considered this my second home." Seminal to her bond with the country were experiences she claimed from her early life: a trip to Mexico with her father, and her childhood in San Antonio, Texas, with its Mexican immigrants. Her childhood experiences were cemented by a subsequent "return" to Mexico in 1920 on a train which, she said, had soldiers on the roof protecting the passengers through bandit country. Critics have since proved these details to have been invented, or at best, exaggerated.

Porter's invention of a "Mexican" past started early in her literary career. Some of these fictitious biographical details first appeared in a letter she wrote to the editor of Century as early as 1923 entitled, "Why I Write About Mexico". Porter started her letter: "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"(355). Porter claimed that Mexico was familiar because the country was a reference point from early childhood. For her, Mexico existed as a composite of her father's memories of the country, and her adolescent memories of the Mexicans transplanted to borderland Texas and their talk of the 1910 revolution. Porter went on to describe in vivid, theatrical detail how she witnessed fighting early in the revolution:

During the Madero Revolution I watched a street battle between Maderistas and Federal troops from the window of a cathedral; a grape-vine heavy with black grapes formed a screen, and a very old Indian woman stood near me, perfectly silent, holding my sleeve. Later she said to me, when the dead were being piled for burning in the public square, "It is all a great trouble now, but it is for the sake of happiness to come." She crossed herself, and I mistook her meaning.
"In heaven?" I asked. Her scorn was splendid.
"No, on earth. Happiness for men, not for angels!"(355).

7 In Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter (1981): Enrique Hank Lopez: xv.
8 It is reprinted in the Mexico section of The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 355-356.
Walsh in Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico claims that Porter invented this scene "to justify her presence in Mexico because she had 'been accused by Americans of a taste for the exotic, for foreign flavors!'" (5). The incident reads as drama. Porter described the scene as if she were watching a play performed: the dramatic events unfold in front of her, the old woman at her side is the chorus. Porter created a fictitious spectacle to illustrate dramatically why Mexico was special to her: "From that day I watched Mexico, and all the apparently unrelated events that grew out of that first struggle never seemed false or alien or aimless to me" (355).

In both interviews and on paper, Porter constructed a history she claimed to share with Mexico and to which she consistently clung over many years. Critics such as George Hendrick, Givner, Walsh and latterly Stout have all proved that she invented much of her Mexican past. The memories she told Lopez were false and the letter to Century a fiction. Givner discovered that Porter's father had indeed been to Mexico, not, however, to take his daughter on holiday as Porter claimed, but later on a railroad venture. Walsh proved that Porter's description to Lopez of taking the armed train to Mexico City was romanticised fiction: "The fact was that not even armed guards had accompanied trains from the border for months, as an acquaintance of Porter pointed out in 1921."9 Walsh suggests that Porter probably drew the description from Anita Brenner's book about the Mexican Revolution, The Wind That Swept Mexico (1943), which Porter reviewed the same year.10

Stout has now proved in Katherine Anne Porter - A Sense of the Times that Porter had never been to Mexico prior to 1920. Instead, she concludes that when Porter arrived in Mexico City in 1920 it was for the first time, and "essentially as a stranger" (70) who was desperate to leave the United States in search of adventure. As Stout says:

There is no evidence that she ever went to Mexico as a child, unless she "crossed the border for an afternoon as we all do," as Givner has guessed, when she was visiting her uncle in the El Paso area. She claimed, too, that the atmosphere of San Antonio (where she and her brother and sisters lived with their father for about a year)

10 Anita Brenner (1905-1974) was an American born in Mexico. She lived for much of her life in Mexico but returned to the United States after her father's land was expropriated following the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Jewish by religion, Brenner was shocked by the anti-Semitism she found in Texas. Brenner was also editor and publisher of Mexico This Month, a magazine for tourists published by Gráfica de México from 1955 to 1971. Brenner's 1929 Idols Behind Altars was one of the earliest systematic studies of Mexican art and followed on from Porter's catalogue on indigenous Mexican art, Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts (1922). It is unclear whether Porter and Brenner knew each other.
provided an early acquaintance with Mexican culture and scenes. But it does not seem plausible that this picturesque Texas city, Hispanic in culture though it was and is, could have been sufficiently Mexican to have done so. South and south-central Texas enjoyed a significant Mexican presence, but it was not Mexico (70).

Porter's fictionalising and appropriation of details blur her experience of Mexico to a confusing degree. One can assume that Porter invented a Mexican history because she wanted her reader to accept her authority as being born out of her knowledge of a close neighbour. But the fact that the Porter scholar can no longer take her word as true is problematical for different reasons. Firstly, until recently, Porter's autobiographical details in her writings were used as the starting point for any analysis of her work. Her autobiography is not of direct interest here, but autobiographical embellishment is, since what is significant is that Porter fictionalised her account of Mexico from the outset. Porter blurred the distinctions between fact and fiction as she required. Porter's autobiographical fictionalisation refers the reader back to this chapter's opening epigraph. For Porter as a writer, it was sufficient to have imagined an event for it to become reality. Her imagination was as real as her day-to-day living; her writing and perception of both Mexico and Texas became a product of imagined and actual experience. Porter created her own fiction about her Mexican past. This is significant because Porter failed to see what she was doing.

It is clear, however, that Porter very much wanted the reader to think that she was returning to Mexico in 1920 because of her long-standing bond with the country, which now manifested itself in a desire to support the revolution. Her reasons for going were, however, at once more prosaic and complex. Porter was desperate to get away from the United States but, following World War I, Europe was seen as intellectually and spiritually bankrupt. She refused to go to Paris in 1919, as many other writers and artists were doing. Porter thought Paris had already been colonised by a group of artists led by Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald: "I would have been completely smothered - completely disgusted and revolted - by the goings-on in Europe. 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."11

Porter's decision to go to Mexico was prompted primarily by the desire not to go to Europe. The Mexican artist, Adolfo Best-Maugard, stimulated Porter's imagination with

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11 Interview with Katherine Anne Porter by Barbara Thompson in Paris Review 29: 99.
his descriptions of Mayan art and the renaissance in the Mexican art scene. Porter worked with Best-Maugard in Greenwich Village on a Mexican ballet. He then arranged a job for Porter in Mexico City with a new publication, *Magazine of Mexico*, a promotional magazine aimed at American tourists. The opportunity to earn a living in a new country, which Porter hoped might encourage her to write fiction, was the deciding factor in Porter's move. Her imagination had been fired by the adventures Best-Maugard and the others described to her. It might be argued that she went to Mexico with certain expectations of excitement:

I had been in New York, and was getting ready to go to Europe. Now New York was full of Mexican artists at that time, all talking about the Renaissance as they called it, in Mexico. And they said, "Don't go to Europe, go to Mexico - that's where the exciting things are going to happen." And they were right! I ran smack into the Obregon Revolution, and had, in the midst of it, the most marvelous, natural, spontaneous experience of my life. It was a terribly exciting time. It was alive, but death was in it. But nobody seemed to think of that: life was in it, too.

The 1910 Mexican Revolution captivated some of Porter's literary contemporaries, such as Jack London, John Reed and B Traven. Like them, Porter was eager to see a social revolution in action, and for the opportunity to participate in history. For centuries Mexico had been run by a tiny elite, comprising local *hacendados* and foreign speculators, who owned more than 90 per cent of the land. The majority of Mexicans - including all the Indians - lived in a state of impoverishment, and the revolution aimed to redistribute land more equally. In *American and British Writers in Mexico, 1556 -1973* (1974), Wayne Drewey Gunn noted that, surprisingly, the Mexican Revolution had little influence on North American literature, despite Mexico's geographical proximity and North America's involvement in earlier wars with Mexico. Gunn found this lack of influence even more surprising given American writers' later fascination with wars such as the Spanish Civil War, in which the United States took no active role, yet which produced novels such as Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Gunn concluded: "A very few American writers championed the direction of the Revolution, but from the published evidence - or rather the lack of it - it would seem that the majority agreed with the rest of the nation that the movement was simply another Latin American riot calculated to annoy"(54).

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12 Adolfo Best-Maugard (1891-1964) was born in Mexico City and studied in Mexico, the United States and Europe. He was a painter, writer, poet and philosopher who held the post of Head of the Arts Education department in the Ministry for State Education between 1922-24. He was also responsible for creating a Mexican method of drawing in 1924 which used traditional decorative elements of popular arts to educate children in a new aesthetic vision.

13 The magazine, which was backed by American bankers, only published two issues in March and April 1921.

Keen to legitimatise her position as a commentator on Mexico, Porter further claimed in her 1923 letter to *Century* ("Why I Write About Mexico"), that Mexico was so familiar to her that it was not a foreign place, but rather an extension of the United States. Her argument was that, if anywhere was foreign, it was the United States, since North America was founded on immigration. She simultaneously argued for Mexico's homogeneity with the United States and the United States' essential foreignness. To declare that by going to Mexico she had never left the United States is problematical. She wrote in the same piece: "Literally speaking, I have never been out of America; but my America has been a borderland of strange tongues and conmingled races, and if they are not American, I am fearfully mistaken. The artist can do no more than deal with familiar and beloved things, from which he could not, and, above all, would not escape"(356).

But Porter's familiar world, in which she wished us to believe, belonged to other peoples' experiences - her father's stories, the tales of Mexican immigrants and those of her Greenwich Village Mexican friends. She reconstructed their narratives and appropriated them for her own use, thereby assuming them as her past memories. Then, having argued that Mexico represented familiarity to her, she nevertheless left the United States for Mexico because she wanted change and adventure.

In 1955, long after Porter had left Mexico for the last time in 1931, she wrote an essay entitled "St Augustine and the Bullfight" which was prompted by the plethora of travel "adventure" books then appearing with regularity.15 In the essay, she reflected on the essential difference between adventure and experience as motivating forces for life, and to a lesser degree, travel.16 As a book reviewer for many years, she wondered why this type of book was ever written by those who, in her opinion, could not write, and whose adventures were "too often ... the dull physical exploits of professional 'adventurers'"(91). Porter condemned this sort of travel narrative, produced in great haste with one eye on the anticipated sales, as dull because the author was invariably unreflective, failing to see beyond his particular adventure as to how it might form part of his life experience. This consideration led her to suggest the following distinction between adventure and experience: "Adventure is something you seek for pleasure, or even for profit, like a gold rush or invading a country; for the illusion of being more alive than ordinarily, the thing you will to occur; but experience is what really happens

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15 Darlene Harbour Unrue collected Porter's book reviews in *This Strange, Old World* and *Other Book Reviews by Katherine Anne Porter* (1991). Porter wrote reviews from the early 1920s and turned book reviews - such as those on Virginia Woolf and E M Forster - into essays.
16 "St Augustine and the Bullfight" is included in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*: 91-101.
to you in the long run; the truth that finally overtakes you"(92).

More than twenty years earlier, as she prepared to leave Mexico in 1931, she had written to her close friend, Josephine Herbst, expressing similar sentiments:

You are right, none of us live enough, and sometimes I think it is because we mistake hurrah and hullabaloo for experience, we get a sock in the eye and think it is a broken heart, something really important happens to us and we are in such uproar of movement we don't know anything about it until we find a quiet moment to realize it.17

In "St Augustine and the Bullfight" Porter concluded that experience was the shaping of the whole through reflection, whereas adventure comprised any number of individual events which may bear no relation to the other, either because they were random events or because the adventurer had not taken time to reflect over their significance. As a writer, Porter considered fiction's function to be the ordering and shaping of the unconnected:

My own habit of writing fiction has provided a wholesome exercise to my natural, incurable tendency to try to wangle the sprawling mess of our existence in this bloody world into some kind of shape.... But ... what utter confusion shall prevail if you cannot take hold firmly, and draw the exact line between what really happened, and what you have since imagined about it (93).

Porter makes a distinction between her life and her fiction: "Yet I intend to write something about my life, here and now, and so far as I am able without one touch of fiction, and I hope to keep it as shapeless and unforeseen as the events of life itself from day to day"(94). The essay illustrates how she learned the folly of adventure (not connecting) and the value of experience (connecting). But here is the essential paradox at the heart of Porter's work. She cannot make the distinction between what is fiction and what is fact; her need to invent and control all external aspects of her life extended, as we have seen, into her autobiography. In this essay we have perhaps one of the clearest examples of Porter's essential ambivalence, and perhaps self-deception. We do not know how aware she was of how much she contradicted herself. Perhaps she believed the fictional life she invented and could not distinguish where fact and fiction joined.

Here too is the key to Porter and her relationship with Mexico. She claimed familiarity with the country, yet sought exoticism and adventure; and by creating a fictional world she was able to glamorise retrospectively the Mexican world in which she participated. In "St Augustine and the Bullfight", having dismissed adventure-seeking as a lazy and unreflective pastime, Porter continued her essay by explaining how she came to

17 Letter dated February 11, 1931, in Letters of Katherine Anne Porter (1990), edited and selected by Isabel Bayley: 34.
be in Mexico. Unable to see the irony of her position - having criticised adventurers - she described her move to Mexico in the best tradition of glamorous adventure fiction. Consider how she perceived her move: she was, she says, "a fairly serious young woman who was in the country for the express purpose of attending a Revolution, and studying Mayan people art" (94). This set the tone for an adventure heightened by the friends she met: "a most lordly gang of fashionable international hoodlums" (94). Porter described her friends as "Revolutionist friends and artist friends" but also Europeans who "all had titles and good names" (94) and painted a picture of wild, reckless adventurers who lived glamorous lives. Porter created an exaggerated, dramatic world. She chose carefully the verb to describe her involvement: she "attended" the revolution. She constructed a theatrical account of her trip to Mexico and subsequent life there. For Porter, re-invention of actual experience was fundamental to her perception of reality. This becomes crucial in any analysis of how she portrays Mexico because of the likelihood that Mexico, as seen by Porter, becomes not a representation of physical actuality but of her mind.

In the last few years Porter scholarship has been greatly augmented by the publication of previously uncollected primary texts. In addition to Porter's Ship of Fools (1962), The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (1965), and The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (1970), her canon has been expanded with the 1990 publication of her letters, Letters of Katherine Anne Porter, selected and edited by Isabel Bayley. In 1991 "This Strange, Old World" and Other Book Reviews by Katherine Anne Porter, edited by Darlene Harbour Unrue, was published. Most recently, in 1996, Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry, also edited by Unrue, appeared. However, the most significant primary text to be published recently for scholars of Porter and her Mexican period is the 1993 Uncollected Early Prose Of Katherine Anne Porter, edited by Ruth Alvarez and Thomas F Walsh. This work publishes not only articles and book reviews which were previously printed in the newspapers and magazines to which Porter contributed, such as El Heraldo de México, the Christian Science Monitor, and the New York Call, but also previously unpublished short stories such as "The Dove of Chapacalco" (1922), which reconfirms Porter's anti-Catholicism. By using this book alongside Porter's better-known and well-established works, a fuller picture of her attitude towards and perception of Mexico emerges.

Critics have long maintained that Porter arrived in Mexico City in November 1920 full of enthusiasm and excitement for the revolution and that by the time of her fourth and

18 Porter's stories previously appeared in single volumes: Flowering Judas and Other Stories (1930), Pale Horse, Pale Rider: Three Short Novels (1939) and The Leaning Tower and Other Stories (1944).
final sojourn in the country in 1930-31, her ardour had been replaced by disillusionment and cynicism. This view of her descent into disappointment was arrived at by contrasting her seemingly optimistic portrait of the Indian in her first published story, "Maria Concepcion", with "Hacienda", the last Mexican story she wrote, with its bleak vision of the Indian. However, this view can now be dismissed. A study of Porter's first book review on Mexico, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's *Mexico in Revolution* (1920) and her last review, Stuart Chase's *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (1931), illustrates a consistent approach to Mexico. More significantly, two pieces written within weeks of Porter's arrival in Mexico, "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" and "Xochimilco", reveal a contradictory and opposing view of Mexico. This discovery leads one to conclude that Porter perceived and portrayed Mexico consistently, but differently, depending on how she felt about Mexico at a given moment.

In "The Mexican Trinity", a critical essay about the current state of Mexican politics first published in August 1921, Porter wrote about the difficulty of accurately reporting the revolution. To her, the revolution appeared to be made up of an endless seam of not necessarily connected events, which foreigners, in particular, must sift and understand before disseminating to a wider and less knowledgeable audience:

> It is impossible to write fully of the situation unless one belongs to that choice company of folk who can learn all about peoples and countries in a couple of weeks. We have had a constant procession of these strange people: they come dashing in, gather endless notes and dash out again and three weeks later their expert, definitive opinions are published. Marvelous! I have been here for seven months, and for quite six of these I have not been able to say what the excitement is all about. Indeed, I am not yet able to say whether my accumulated impression of Mexico is justly proportioned; or that if I write with profound conviction of what is going on I shall not be making a profoundly comical mistake.19

Porter was deeply scathing of the foreign critics who rushed into the country and formed opinions in a flash, as the caustic wit of her first book review revealed. *Mexico in Revolution* by the Spanish novelist, Blasco Ibáñez, was a series of newspaper articles about the revolution gathered into book form and written in English for an American audience. Porter reviewed the book for *El Heraldo de México* (November 22, 1920). Seen by some as the founding father of modern Spanish literature, Blasco Ibáñez was a highly political figure who enjoyed a world-wide reputation in the early part of the twentieth century.

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19 Republished in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*: 399-403.
century and whom Porter considered an authoritative author. Blasco Ibáñez travelled through Mexico for six weeks studying the impact of the revolution. Porter disliked his criticisms of the Mexican Revolution and accused him of writing to please his North American audience. She saw his portrait of the revolution as more a record of his prejudice and personality than a description of Mexico. The book showed, in Porter’s eyes, how his idealism had been corrupted by money and ego by his resorting to partial truths to make cheap jokes. Porter accused Blasco Ibáñez of using Mexicans he met as foils for his self aggrandisement: uninterested in them, "... [he] led them on to talk about themselves with humorous carelessness in order that he, the visiting third cousin, should be enabled to prove afterward in print what a clever, knowing sort of chap he was."

In Porter’s eyes, Blasco Ibáñez’s observations were of the worst kind because he was not interested in Mexico, but rather in himself and the titillation of his audience:

Blasco Ibanez (sic) brought with him to Mexico - Blasco Ibáñez. He carried with him his taste for scandal - his will to believe evil of all he saw.... For six whole weeks he sat at café tables or stood on street corners discovering the truth about Mexico in Revolution. Then he went away and wrote a delightful, an informing, a profoundly truthful mental autobiography of Blasco Ibáñez (30).

Porter argued that Blasco Ibáñez’s fluid, anecdotal text seduced the reader, who knew little of Mexican history, into accepting his biased views. At the start of her Mexican stays Porter, at a loss accurately to portray Mexico, was appalled by Blasco Ibáñez’s arrogance in summarising so inaccurately what she considered a confusing situation.

At the end of her last stay in Mexico, in 1931, Porter bitterly attacked Stuart Chase’s Mexico: A Study of Two Americas for being equally superficial. Porter considered the book a homily to the Mexican government and she lambasted Chase for his

20 Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) was a Spanish novelist, politician and adventurer. He was committed to overthrowing the Spanish monarchy and stopping the decline of the Spanish Empire. His early novels were set in his native Valencia and were distinguished by his use of description and his awareness of the social problems of the area. His later works were politically concerned with social realism, as he set out to denounce particular aspects of Spanish society.

21 Porter’s review is republished in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter: 28-31.

22 Stuart Chase (1888-1985) was not a literary writer, but nevertheless wrote more than thirty books on various subjects. He was an adviser to President Franklin D Roosevelt during the Great Depression who was believed to have invented the phrase "New Deal", which Roosevelt used to describe his economic and social programmes. Chase’s anti-machine and anti-technological beliefs meant that he disliked the United State’s modernisation.
obsequiousness towards the government and the book's lack of critical judgement.23 Within the confines of a travel narrative, Chase had written an account of what he saw in Mexico, what he liked and what he thought should be changed. Porter hated the arrogant assumption of superiority and said so in her review. Malcolm Cowley, editor of the New Republic, refused to print the review he had commissioned Porter to write in July 1931 because it was too negative. It was published for the first time in the Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter and is significant because it echoes the Blasco Ibáñez review of ten years earlier.

The opening sentence of the Chase review is unequivocal: "Mexico is not really a place to visit any more, or to live in."24 In Porter's eyes the country had been hijacked by well intentioned tourists who "swarm over the place and eat the heart of it like a plague of locusts"(253). The worst offenders, however, were the "travel writers" who went around Mexico, propelled by a sense of their own self-importance rather than the desire to look and learn:

In a published letter Kay Boyle has written that Americans are the best travellers.... In Mexico, I find, they are all prophets and experts, flustered and uneasy, nosing about in a crowd of other self-appointed prophets, trying to squeeze themselves into the esoteric skin of the Indian; their ears buzz with the altitude and the cross-currents of misinformation, and besides, often they are under contract to stuff it all down in a hurry and rush back with a book while the racket is still good (253).

Porter argued that these writers came to Mexico with a specific image of the country already formed in their mind. Too lazy to discover Mexico for themselves, they let the "resident authorities in Mexico" determine their images of the country. Speaking no Spanish, the Americans sought out English speakers to explain the tourist's Mexico as they undertook the well-worn route of pyramids and murals. Porter accused the writers of reinforcing a distorted image of Mexico through their lack of imagination and originality. In Mexico: A Study of Two Americas, Stuart Chase offended her on every level. Chase used other writers' books, specifically anthropological studies, (Tepoztlán by Robert Redfield and Middletown by Helen and Robert Lynd) as the backbone of his book to compare the United States and Mexico.25 Porter considered Chase's observations about Mexico to be superficial and inaccurate since they were based on two short stays in the country.

23 Chase's foreword is interesting for its acknowledgements to those who helped him while he was in Mexico. Porter's close friend, Mary Doherty, is mentioned, as are William Spratling and Carleton Beals - two men Porter disliked. Chase obviously moved in the same social circles as Porter but there is no mention of her.
24 "'Parvenu ...' Review of Mexico: A Study of Two Americas" by Stuart Chase : 252-255.
25 Middletown was the authors' invented name for Munchie, Indiana.
Porter concluded: "... there is not one shred of evidence that Mr Chase ever set foot in this country, except for some rather sketchy glances at the scenery. Everything else, he could, and did, I believe, read from books, and most of them very silly books recently published on Mexico"(254). Porter considered Chase's patronising tone symptomatic of his failure to understand the country. Her irritation stemmed from Chase's determination to see Mexico as a pre-industrial country where the Indian's condition was to be lauded rather than criticised. Porter failed to take into account Chase's avowed anti-machinist beliefs which necessarily led to his distorted portrait of Mexico as a romantic antidote to rampaging American industrialisation.

Porter became increasingly incensed as her review continued, and finished her article with a warning:

If you really love the way of life you find here, keep your hands off it. All this uproar of publicity helps to change, commercialize, falsify it.... The Indian arts are very beautiful, but so are the folk arts of other countries, and there is no special occult value to them. Their fiestas have about the same degree of meaning as popular fiestas in other countries.... Americans, travelling, seem to believe there is nothing so integral, so good of its kind, but can be improved by their pawing and fumbling it over a little. It is better, when you visit here, to leave your superiorities at home, and if possible, to shed your ignorances here, before you write a book interpreting Mexico (255).

In the wake of the revolution Mexico had become a fashionable subject to write about; Porter, having witnessed the appearance of an ever-increasing volume of poorly written books, felt they threatened to undermine the country. She saw a link between the influx of tourists and the inevitable destruction of the Mexico she knew. Porter, too, had contemplated writing a travel account, as she confirmed in 1925: "It is, it has been, my life-long hope to travel, and, of course I mean to write a travel book."26 However, Porter was ever sensitive to the difficulty of being a responsible recorder of place, as her response to Chase's book reveals. Porter never wrote a travel account.

Porter's vitriolic outburst at the start of the Chase review - "Mexico is not really a place to visit any more, or to live in" - her general discontent with Mexico, which was evident in letters to friends, and an increasingly and consistently pessimistic representation of Mexico in her fiction resulted in, as noted, the idea that by 1930-31 she had grown to loathe Mexico. However, these two book reviews, appearing at each end of her Mexican stay, succinctly reveal a consistency in her attitude towards the portrayal of Mexico.

Porter's disillusionment with the revolution dated from much earlier than 1930. She had misgivings from the outset of its potential and its failure to deliver the promised reforms disappointed rather than surprised her. In an unpublished letter to her friend, Mary Doherty, dated November 1, 1943, she confirmed how brief her belief in the revolution had been: "[my] childlike faith in the Revolution was well over in about six months".27 As Walsh and Alvarez say in their introduction to the Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter:

The assumption has been made that she entered the country idealistically committed to the political changes that the Revolution promised but eventually lost hope in the few dedicated idealists in government, who were hamstrung by implacable forces from without and within.... Her remarks are misleading because they suggest an all too simplistic version of her experience in Mexico. They suggest that the failure of the Revolution was the sole source of her disillusion, omitting Porter's own psychological state before she set foot in the country (6).

The reference to Porter's unstable and changing psychological state is significant because it affected how she viewed and then represented Mexico on paper. The clearest illustration of this is a comparison of "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" and the two versions of the sketch "Xochimilco". In The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter, Porter dated "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" as written in 1923. However, Walsh in Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico reveals that the essay was actually written on December 12, 1920, the feast day of the Virgin, and was based on Porter's visit that day to the basilica of Guadalupe. He speculates that she must have written the piece within several hours of her visit since it was published the following day in the English section of El Heraldo de México. 28 The implication of this is huge since it proves that Porter's disillusionment with Mexico did not happen at a later date but, rather, occurred almost immediately she arrived in Mexico. "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" is a bleak view of the submissive and downtrodden Indians. Only three months later (in March 1921) Porter wrote the sketch "Children of Xochitl" which was then rewritten and became "Xochimilco", published in May 1921 in the Christian Science Monitor. Both versions of the sketch are joyous accounts of the Indian village, Xochimilco, which Porter described in Edenic terms. The three articles show the inconsistency in Porter's approach to Mexico, an approach largely determined by her state of mind.

At the end of her final Mexican sojourn, Porter reflected on why Mexico no longer satisfied her in another letter to her friend, the writer Josephine Herbst, and concluded:

27 Letter quoted in the introduction to Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter: 6.
28 Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: 17.
I have a deep, incurable (apparently) painful melancholy, night and day, which just sits on my neck. It's nobody's fault except my own, if it is even that. I've had it for years without any alleviation. So now I sit in the sun as if I hoped that would cure me. I think maybe my work will cure me. Maybe not thinking about it will cure me. I cannot imagine what I am waiting for, or looking forward to.29

The battle within Porter's mind goes some way to explain the different moods of her Mexican writings, and to further discredit the accepted critical view that she became increasingly disillusioned in her portrayal of Mexico. Porter's view of Mexico, and more particularly, the Indian was often ambivalent. While she never waivered in her admiration for the Indian, marvelling at the Indian's bond with nature and the uniqueness of his culture, she despised at the submission into which he had been beaten. "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" and "Xochimilco" best illustrate this contradiction.

The sketch, "Xochimilco", was published on May 31, 1921. It is an account of a day trip Porter and her friends made to the town of the title. Xochimilco, an ancient town dating from the Aztec period, is in the suburbs of Mexico City and is a popular day excursion from the city, particularly on Sundays. Day-trippers hire colourful boats, which the Indians navigate, to ply the canals of the town. Porter paints a lyrical, paradisiacal scene where she delights in everything she sees. She creates a picture of complete harmony, where the Indians and nature co-exist in an agreeable state. Porter's original version of "Xochimilco", "Children of Xochitl", written a couple of months earlier, is a more critical and precise description of life in the floating gardens of Xochimilco. "Xochimilco" stresses the external. Porter describes the scenes in front of her - women washing by the water's edge, the freshly swept fronts of the Indian huts, girls selling flowers and vegetables - and paints a Rousseau-esque tableau. Indeed, she takes the bond between nature and the Indians so far as to describe one boatman as a tree: "He lives as a tree lives, rooted in earth, drinking in light and air"(76).30 Porter's mood is one of uncritical enchantment. She emphasises the Indians' autonomy:

These Xochimilco Indians are a splendid remnant of the Aztec race; they have maintained an almost unbroken independence of passing governments, and live their simple lives in a voluntary detachment from the ruling race of their country. They build their homes with maize stalks grown in their own fields.... They grow their own food...(75).

In the original sketch the Indians participate fully in the wider economy and are shrewd business people who nevertheless live in harmony with nature and their past.

29 Letter dated June 1, 1931, written from Mexico City. See Letters of Katherine Anne Porter: 44.
30 Both "Xochimilco" and "Children of Xochitl" are collected in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter. The page references to both articles refer to this book.
"Xochimilco" is a more idealised depiction of the Indian, whom Porter sets in a prelapsarian utopia, at which she hints at the beginning of "Children of Xochitl": "Xochimilco is an Indian village of formidable history, most of which I learned and have happily forgotten"(78). In "Xochimilco", she stresses the simplicity of the Indians' lives and their bond with the earth; how "they live in such close communion with [the earth], entirely removed from contact with the artificial world"(75). The adjectives Porter sprinkles liberally throughout the sketch reinforce the impression of a natural paradise: "abundantly", "profuse", "golden", "benign", "gentle" and "majestic". Yet, as "Children of Xochitl" and, to a lesser degree, "Xochimilco" suggest, there are many signs that this portrait is rooted more in Porter's imagination than in real life: the Indians not only conduct a highly successful tourist trade, but also trade their produce in Mexico City. Porter oversimplifies their lives. Choosing to ignore their daily participation in the market economy, she prefers to concentrate on what appeals to her: the Indians' bond with nature. But the reader knows that the young boatmen and the flower-seller who charge double to tourists are very much rooted in modern Mexico. The city has come to Xochimilco in the form of the day-trippers, and the Indians have learned fast. Porter refuses to see the level of business sophistication the boatmen possess. Instead, she prefers to eulogise Indians such as Juan Ortega, who, she imagines, has turned down the opportunity of being a servant in the city in order to live an independent life in Xochimilco. Porter sees the Indians as lying outside history, as Robert Brinkmeyer comments: "... the narrator's focus is on the village's traditional life, not its history, and as she tells us, this life is under threat of being overrun by modernism and Roman Catholicism." In this, Porter's portrait of the Indian is little different from Chases's in Mexico: A Study of Two Americas.

In "Xochimilco", Porter does not refer to the Indians' religious beliefs, having edited out any detail which goes beyond the superficial. But, in "Children of Xochitl", she dwells at some length on the Indians' worship of the legendary goddess of pulque, Xochitl. The Indians worship Xochitl in a Christian church; they consider Xochitl, rather than the Christian saints, to be the provider of all things in life. Porter emphasises the pagan over the Christian: "Xochitl sends rains. Xochitl makes the crops grow - the maguey and the maize and the sweet fruits and the pumpkins. Xochitl feeds us!"33

32 Pulque is a drink made out of fermented maguey, drunk by the Indians and known as the "wine of the earth". Xochitl was a literary invention of the seventeenth century, but was not one of the pagan goddesses that the Indians worshipped (in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter: 73). In "Identifying a Sketch by Katherine Anne Porter" (1979), Walsh gives a history of Xochitl. She was not the goddess of pulque and Walsh suggests that Xochitl was included here to communicate the Indians' bond with nature.
33 Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter. 79.
The tension between the primitive life of the Indian and the intrusion of Catholicism is a recurring theme in Porter's Mexican works. She seemingly delights in the Indians' preference for the non-Christian god, yet in her published version, "Xochimilco", all references to Xochitl and to religion are removed. In "Children of Xochitl" she celebrates the Indians' continuing bond with their religion. The fact that there are seventeen churches in the town, in varying degrees of decay, used for the non-Christian worship of Indian gods pleases Porter. It is significant that her most lyrical and optimistic depiction of how the Indians lived, "Xochimilco", excludes religion. Walsh, in his article "Identifying a Sketch by Katherine Anne Porter", speculates that Porter might have wanted "Xochimilco" to be a more limited account of her visit there, dealing only with the externals of what she saw while in "Children of Xochitl" her observations led Porter to consider how the Indians live.34 The published version is more utopian, and one wonders whether Porter felt that by including religion in "Xochimilco" she would dilute the utopia. Walsh and Alvarez suggest in the Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter that Porter removed the mythological framework of the goddess Xochitl so as not to offend her readers with her anti-Christian bias (73).

In "Children of Xochitl" the Indians dominate the landscape but the choice of the word "children" reinforces the idea of a state of prelapsarian innocence, and the Indians' non-participation in the economic fabric of modern-day Mexico. So calm are the lives of the women, in particular, compared to those of outsiders that: "There are no neurotics among them. No strained lines of sleeplessness or worry mar their faces"(82). Each woman seems incapable of thinking, let alone worrying: "There is a trance like quality in her motions, an unconsciousness in her sharpened profile, as if she had never awakened from a pre-natal dream"(83). This unthinking state starts early: the children, we learn, are "playing inconsequently, without toys or invention, as instinctively as little animals"(81). Porter's descriptions portray the Indian as an instinctive creature, bound to the earth. On one hand, they appear passive; yet all the details of their lives show a great deal of autonomy and control. "Children of Xochitl" is more ambivalent than the later text because it raises questions which are eliminated in "Xochimilco" by its relentlessly positive and unquestioning approach.

In both versions, however, Porter includes an anecdote about the Indian boatmen which serves as a metaphor for their harmonious lives. They avoid colliding under a low stone bridge: rather than rushing under the bridge first, each boatman gives way to his colleague with the utmost politeness: "'Have a care, comrade!' says one, when he is

34 Walsh in "Identifying a Sketch by Katherine Anne Porter": 557.
crowded a little too closely. 'Pardon me!' says the other, and somehow in the midst of the work he finds a hand with which to doff his shaggy hat, and to make a bow"(84). Porter reproduces this detail in "Xochimilco", only changing the "shaggy hat" into a "tattered sombrero". The portrait of the Indians, particularly in "Xochimilco", paints an Edenic tableau which prefigures the triumphant murals of the painters Diego Rivera (1886-1957), Josée Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) and David Siquieros (1898-1974), who all glorified the Mexican Indian's way of life. Walsh points out that Porter did antedate the muralists - Rivera did not return from Europe until July 1921. What is significant, however, is that Porter in these sketches, and in the earlier "The Fiesta of Guadalupe", creates in words the same idealised images the muralists would later paint. It is a bipolar world which shows the Indians' suffering and exploitation on the one hand, and on the other, their joyful celebration of life.35

Where "Xochimilco" contains no reference to religion, and "Children of Xochiti" shows how the Indian has appropriated the props of Catholicism and turned them successfully to his own use, "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" describes Indians whose acquiescence to Catholicism has stripped them of their dignity. Written barely a month after Porter arrived in Mexico for the first time in November 1920, it is her observation of the Feast of the Virgin held on December 12 each year. "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" is Porter's study of Indians who have been utterly repressed by the Catholic Church, and her profoundly bleak account of the fiesta is an indictment of the church rather than the Indians. Porter shared the revolution's hatred of the church.

Porter followed the Indians on their pilgrimage to the basilica: she watched the native dances outside, she accompanied the suppliants to the well where Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe, was last supposed to have appeared to Juan Diego, and then she went into the cathedral.36 Porter does not, however, share the Indians' faith. She is appalled by the degree of their physical sacrifice for such a meagre return: "I followed a great crowd of

35 ibid:556.
36 The Virgin of Guadalupe was Mexico's first indigenous saint and is still the most popular: her image occurs in churches all over Mexico. The legend of the Virgin's appearance to the christianised Indian, Juan Diego, in December 1531 is particularly potent. According to the legend, Juan Diego was walking over a hill - formerly dedicated to the Aztec earth goddess Tonantzin - on his way to a monastery when the Virgin appeared to him and told him to build a church on the hill. The Bishop, Juan de Zumarraga, was unimpressed until the Virgin reappeared on December 12, and told Juan Diego to gather roses from the intended site of the church and take them to the bishop. Juan Diego put the flowers inside his cape and when he opened it before the bishop the image of the Virgin was imprinted on the cape. The cape now hangs above the altar and is the pilgrims' goal. December 12, the anniversary of the second appearance, is the one celebrated by the pilgrims, who often complete the last miles on their knees as an act of particular penance or devotion.
tired burdened pilgrims, bowed under their burdens of potteries and food and babies and baskets, their clothes dusty and their faces stained with long-borne fatigue." 37 The fact that the pilgrims have walked for days, "for the privilege of kneeling on these flagged floors and raising their eyes to the Holy Tilma" (35), Porter considers degrading. This time she peppers her text with negative adjectives: "doleful", "awful", "tired", "burdened" and "reasonless". Even the colourful serapes of the Indian men, the women's distinctive costumes and the traditional dances they perform outside the church do not give her any joy. Nowhere in this description is there the enchantment Porter felt a few months later when she visited Xochimilco.

Critics have referred to Porter's description of the Indians' blind submission - "There is a rapt stillness, a terrible reasonless faith in their dark faces" (35) and "I see the awful hands of faith" (36) - to prove Porter's disillusionment with Mexico and the Indians. Her disillusionment is, however, with the organised religion of Roman Catholicism, which controls its followers and has subjugated the Indian:

It is not Mary Guadalupe nor her son with his bleeding heart that touches me. It is Juan Diego I remember, and his people I see, kneeling in scattered ranks on the cold floors of their churches, fixing their eyes on mystic, speechless things. It is their ragged hands I see, and their wounded hearts that I feel beating under their work-stained clothes like a grand volcano under the earth and I think to myself, hopefully, that men do not dream forever (37).

Porter sees the Indian under siege from all sides, but most significantly from the church, as she explained in "The Mexican Trinity". In an acutely accurate summation of the impossible task of the revolution, Porter concluded that Mexico was controlled by "the great triumvirate, Land, Oil and the Church" which, combined with external pressures, left the revolution with little room to manoeuvre. The church was the linchpin of the triumvirate as she explains:

If the oil companies are to get oil, they need land. If the Church is to have wealth, it needs land. The partition of land in Mexico, therefore, menaces not only the hacendados (sic) ... but foreign investors and the very foundation of the Church....

The recent encounters between Catholics and Socialists in different parts of Mexico have been followed by a spectacular activity on the part of the Catholic clergy. They are pulling their old familiar wires, and all the bedraggled puppets are dancing with a great clatter.... For the peons there is always the moldy, infallible device: a Virgin - this time of Guadalupe - has been seen to move, to shine miraculously in a darkened room!....

The peons are further assured by the priests that to accept the land given to them

37 "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter. 33. The piece first appeared in El Heraldo de México on December 13, 1920. It was also included in the The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 394-398. Page references here are to the Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter.
by the reform laws is to be guilty of simple stealing, and everyone taking such land will be excluded from holy communion - a very effective threat (402-3).

Porter was born into conservative Protestantism. She converted to Catholicism in 1906 when she married her first husband, John Henry Koontz, and remained a Catholic for the rest of her life. As she grew older, she seemed to embrace the church once again, but as with other things in her life, what she appeared to like about the Catholic Church was its trappings: wearing a crucifix, and home visits by the clergy when she was no longer well enough to leave her house. However, as "The Mexican Trinity" and "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" show, Porter was vehemently anticlerical while she was in Mexico and remained appalled by the Mexican church's cynical exploitation of the Indian.

The outrage Porter felt on behalf of the Indian cannot be overemphasised. Where critics have sought to explain her despair in Mexico solely as the result of her disillusionment with the revolution's progression, they should re-examine her works in the light of her repeated and continued attacks on the Catholic Church, which she consistently portrayed as corrupt and debased. Her description of the Indians in "The Mexican Trinity" is meant not to denigrate the Indian, but rather to explain how the Indian has become so submissive: "... this inert and slow-breathing mass, these lost people who move in the oblivion of sleepwalkers under their incredible burdens; these silent and reproachful figures in rags, bowed, face to face with the earth; it is these who bind together all the accumulated and hostile elements of Mexican life"(402).

Centuries of oppression have defeated the Indian, and the Catholic Church has played a crucial role. An uncompleted short story from 1922, "The Dove of Chapacalco", reinforces the idea that Porter was preoccupied with the corruption of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Porter worked on the story in Texas after she left Mexico for the first time in August 1921.38 The story illustrates the degeneracy of the church. Porter based her archbishop of Chapacalco on the conservative archbishop, Francisco Orozco y Jiménez of Jalisco, who was opposed to land distribution. She describes the archbishop in her plot outline as an "extorter of money from the Indians". The dove of the title, and a precursor to Marla Concepciôn, is Vicenta, a young Indian girl who has been forced to become the archbishop's mistress. In "The Dove of Chapacalco", Vicenta is aware that she owes her freedom from the convent to the archbishop, but she also realises that life with the archbishop is a different form of servitude. Vicenta wants complete freedom and once the revolutionary, Angel Gômez, helps her escape from the archbishop, she leaves him because he, too, will not grant her freedom. The story, ostensibly a "love" triangle, also chronicles the archbishop's attempts to hold on to his dwindling power by resorting to any

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38 It appears for the first time in print in *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter*: 107-130.
means of exploiting the Indians. Porter leaves the reader in no doubt as to the depth of corruption to which the archbishop has sunk:

In his way, the Archbishop was an esthete, who loved the subtle flavored essences of beauty a little decayed, mingled with the rancid taste of his powers and cruelties. It was this confusion of aromas that pleased him most in his love for Vicenta ... the soft handed Indian girl who could read Latin, who clawed him like a tiger kitten in her brief angers, who went to Mass fresh from his arms and said her rosary devoutly (121).

"The Dove of Chapacalco" is Porter's strongest fictional condemnation of the Catholic Church, but since it was neither completed nor published, its significance is much reduced. The archbishop is a cruel, decadent character whose exploitation of the Indians is sickening. In the strength Vicenta displays, she can be seen as an embryonic María Concepción.

"María Concepción" was written and published in 1922. As noted, the story was very important to Porter's development as an artist because it marked her move from journalism to fiction. It is also significant because it is the first time in American literature that a Mexican Indian was made the subject of a story. Walsh considered the story the most ambitious of all of Porter's fiction because: "As foreigner she attempted to penetrate the Indian psyche, a mystery to the average middle-class Mexican, and create an authentic Indian world of which her heroine is both typical product and exceptional member."39 The American in the story, the archaeologist Givens, is a minor character who elicits María's pity since he has no woman of his own to cook for him.40

"María Concepción" is the story of a woman who tries to define herself using an external and alien society's code of self-improvement. She fails, and having realised her failure, returns to her old Indian life. She is both a victim and a survivor. Critics, however, have invariably interpreted the story only as a celebration of both María's strength of character and the Indians' preservation of their way of life. Brinkmeyer, in Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development, summarises the story as celebrating: "the deep-seated powers of the instinctual self and the traditional community to resist the usurping force of modern civilization".41 But the story might equally be seen as a reflection on the impossibility of change. If a strong character such as María cannot

39 In Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: 73.
40 Givens is thought to have been based on the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio (1893-1960), who is now considered to be one of the intellectual heroes of the Mexican Revolution. Porter based the archaeological descriptions in "María Concepción" on her visits with Gamio to Teotihuacán. Gamio was an expert on Mexican Indian culture and his Forjando Patria (1916) is credited, according to Walsh, with launching social anthropology in Mexico.
41 Brinkmeyer:48.
succeed, what chance has the less determined Indian?

Baldly, "María Concepción" is the story of how an independent Indian woman loses her husband to another woman, stabs her rival to death, and gets her husband back. Interwoven into the plot is the theme of conflict between the Indians' traditional way of life and the imposition of Catholicism. At the start of the story, we see María as she "walked carefully, keeping to the middle of the white dusty road, where the maguey thorns and the treacherous curved spines of organ cactus had not gathered profusely"(3).42 Brinkmeyer argues that, by taking the middle of the road, María has struck a balance in her life between her Indian "primitive" self and her Catholic self (45). Critics generally have seen María as a strong, determined and independent woman who is prepared to forge her own path at the risk of alienating her community, and whose positive representation is at odds with Porter's portrait of submissive Indians. Undoubtedly, María is the controlling force in her marriage to Juan: she saved to buy a marriage licence which entitled them to marry in the church rather than behind the church which was the Indian custom. In Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico, Walsh explains the significance of María Concepción's church wedding: "75 percent of conjugal unions were blessed by a priest, but 17 percent were natural because even the simplest religious ceremony was too costly, explaining María Concepción's pride in being married in the church. Most of the population was intensely religious and Catholic..."(73).

Whilst others play (including her husband), María works hard to save for a future with Juan and her unborn baby. Walsh points out that, although María cannot change her race, sex or class, she can change her social position, particularly since she "was always as proud as if she owned a hacienda"(4). The means she has at her disposal is the Catholic Church. However, María Concepción remains, despite her Christian accoutrements, an Indian woman with Indian superstitions. Although she shuns the homoeopathic remedies of Lupe, preferring to buy over-the-counter modern prescriptions, María is superstitious enough to believe that if she does not eat some of the honey she smells her unborn child will be harmed. Once Juan has eloped with María Rosa and her baby has died, María Concepción turns with renewed fervour to the church rather than the village. The church cannot help her: "She was gaunt, as if something were gnawing her away inside, her eyes were sunken"(10). Her village peers assume that her suffering is a punishment for being so proud and trying to rise above her position. No-one in the village thinks to blame the church:

If she had not gone so regularly to church, lighting candles before the saints, kneeling with her arms spread in the form of a cross for hours at a time, and receiving holy communion every month, there might have been talk of her being

42 "María Concepción" in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter: 3-21.
devil-possessed, her face was so changed and blind-looking. But this was impossible when, after all, she had been married by the priest. It must be, they reasoned, that she was being punished for her pride (9).

María Concepción’s sole means of survival is to hope the village will protect her when the church has failed her. She is only readmitted into her group once she has murdered María Rosa. The group then closes ranks to protect her from the police, who have no evidence to charge her. The other Indian women - including María Rosa’s mother - pity her jealousy and suffering, for María Concepción is no longer the proud and independent woman of earlier. However, the irony of María Concepción’s position is that she could never be independent. The only chance she has to change her position is the narrow path of social elitism promoted by the Catholic Church. Porter is critical of a religion which takes an Indian woman’s money, but gives her no respite from her suffering. Instead, María’s suffering increases in proportion to her increased praying.

In Porter’s eyes, María Concepción is no better off than the pilgrims who crawl to the Virgin of Guadalupe’s shrine: she is still a victim of a belief system which has given her nothing except a misplaced sense of superiority. María Concepción is defeated by outside forces which compel her to return to the fold, but ironically it is a defeat which brings her back to herself and which re-establishes harmony in the village. Her "primitive" self is reborn: "The night, the earth under her, seemed to swell and recede together with a limitless, unhurried, benign breathing.... Even as she was falling asleep, head bowed over the child, she was still aware of a strange, wakeful happiness"(21). The lyricism of this description suggests that Porter approves of the Indian women’s behaviour. They have resolved the problem themselves, and the giving of María Rosa’s child to María Concepción to raise as her own by the women of the village is their symbol of forgiveness and acceptance of María Concepción.

Another story, "Virgin Violeta", published two years later in 1924, reveals how Porter’s contempt for the Catholic Church was not confined to its treatment of the Indians. The eponymous Violeta, second daughter of a wealthy upper-class Mexican family, is far removed from María Concepción and her daily struggle, but just as much a victim of the repressive paternalism of the Catholic Church. In "María Concepción", María Rosa is just fifteen when Juan seduces her and makes her pregnant. In "Virgin Violeta", the nearly fifteen-year-old Violeta is sexually uninitiated. Yet for her social class she is precocious: she possesses an inking of her sexuality, but since sex is a taboo subject among her class, she has nobody to educate her and so confuses sex and love. Violeta’s concept of love is romantic and idealised, gleaned from her imagination and the poems of her sister’s
suitor, Carlos. When Carlos kisses Violeta, he shatters her illusions of love. He also tries to make her feel guilty for his actions. In "Virgin Violeta", Porter indicts a social order which grooms upper-class women to be little more than ornaments for male pleasure. Violeta is supposed to grow up to be like her older sister, Blanca, who has been taught to look pretty and little else: "He [Carlos] seemed always to be condescending to Blanca a little. But Blanca could never see it, because she really didn't think of anything but the way she had her hair fixed or whether people thought she was pretty."44

Between the stifling atmosphere of her parents' house and the convent, Violeta is left no opportunity to learn about herself. Her convent teaches her what she needs to know to submit to a male-controlled world: "modesty, chastity, silence, obedience, with a little French and music and some arithmetic"(23). The "virtues" of female submission are placed first since they are of most importance to Violeta's future life. Violeta is sufficiently intelligent, unlike her sister, to recognise the limitations of her environment; she feels like a parrot stuffed into a too-small cage, and sees the church as "a terrible, huge cage, but it seemed too small"(26). Shamed by Carlos's secretive advances, Violeta tries to assuage her guilt by praying for mercy just as María Concepción prayed to win back Juan. Porter's anticlericalism is as strong in "Virgin Violeta" as in "María Concepción". Perhaps, Porter suggests, the only good that comes from Violeta's traumatic response to Carlos's behaviour is that Violeta realises that the Catholic Church cannot help her and she cannot learn anything from it: "In the early autumn she returned to school, weeping and complaining to her mother that she hated the convent. There was, she declared ... nothing to be learned there"(32).

Porter's description, at the start of the story, of the painting of the Virgin in the family's reception room echoes her pessimistic description of the Virgin in "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" and serves as a metaphor for the futility of praying. The painting is entitled "Pious Interview between the Most Holy Virgin Queen of Heaven and Her Faithful Servant St Ignatius Loyola". Porter describes the painting: "The Virgin, with enameled face set in a detached simper, forehead bald of eyebrows, extended one hand remotely over the tonsured head of the saint, who groveled in a wooden posture of ecstasy"(22-23). The incongruity of the painting's title and the painting itself neatly suggests Porter's distaste for the power of religion and the control it exerts.

43 Carlos was based on Porter's ex-lover, Salomón De la Selva, (1893-1959) a Nicaraguan poet whom Porter felt had treated her appallingly. De la Selva was educated and taught at North American universities. In 1918 he published Tropical Towns and Other Poems and in 1922, El Soldado Desconocido. According to Doherty, Porter's friend, Porter and de la Selva's affair ended in Porter having an abortion in 1921. The unflattering portrait of Carlos was Porter's means of revenge.

44 "Virgin Violeta" in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter. 27.
"Virgin Violeta" is Porter's only story to exclusively consider the world of wealthy Mexicans. It is another bleak view of women who have been controlled by men and offered little room for manoeuvre in the society into which they were born. Porter saw more freedom in the Indian's world. María Concepción was defeated by forces outside her control, but they did not include men. In "Virgin Violeta", the father's presence is a reminder of how institutionalised male dominance is, and Carlos's behaviour illustrates this control.

Porter preferred the world of the Indian. "María Concepción" is Porter's fictional attempt to get under the skin of the Indian, to site her in her village and then to try to understand the dynamics of that relationship. However, most of the Indians Porter knew had left their villages for economic reasons. They invariably ended up as servants in Mexico City, where their well-being depended on the whim of their employer. Porter writes fondly of her servants in a lengthy article entitled "In a Mexican Patio". The piece was published in the second (and last) issue of the *Magazine of Mexico* in April 1921.45

"In a Mexican Patio" recounts a day in Porter's pension from when she first wakes to the end of the day. Porter concentrates on the activities of the servants: their day starts long before the narrator's and continues after she has retired to bed. Her day is punctuated by the servants' activity. She awakens to the sound of servants working: María making tortillas and Manuel splashing water as he washes down the driveway. The servants are continually occupied, unlike the narrator, and Porter despairs that pretty Consuelo will soon look as haggard as her mother, worn out by constant work. The revolution, Porter reluctantly concludes, has changed nothing. There is little reason for the system of employing Indians as servants to change when: "One may have the complete use of a human being here for eight or ten pesos a month."46 Despite the burdens of the servants' day, they share a sense of community which the narrator envies, and which heightens her sense of loneliness and alienation. The tireless Indians in the sketch prefigure those in Porter's short story, "Hacienda", more than a decade later, and the alienated foreigner is very much a precursor of the foreigners and *hacendados* at the hacienda and, more particularly, Laura in "Flowering Judas".

None of Porter's later Indians, after "María Concepción", achieved the same degree of self-sufficiency and determination as the eponymous heroine. In a late sketch, "Leaving the Petate"(1931), included in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*, Porter was still preoccupied with embryonic Marias. The date of the sketch

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45 Porter later tried unsuccessfully to get the piece published in the United States in *Survey* magazine. The editor told her that the piece "does not exactly fit us".
is important because it shows that Porter still saw the Indian as potentially autonomous, even at the end of her Mexican sojourns when, by all accounts, she had grown so disillusioned. An edited segment from "Leaving the Petate" is included in the *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter.*

The edited text, which was originally published in the *New Republic* on February 4, 1931, is a study of three Indian women, all servants, whom Porter knew well. Using the metaphor of the petate, the mat the Indian traditionally uses for sleeping on, she explores how Indian women are turning their backs on some aspects of their Indian heritage. The edited-out segment, in contrast, shows how some Indians have not given up the petate, and nevertheless live contentedly. In *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings* text Porter considers the lives of her maid, Eufemia, Hilaria (Eufemia's aunt) and Consuelo, the maid of an American woman. Hilaria returns to her village and petate, while Eufemia cuts her hair, abandons her rebozo and finds a mestizo barber to be her husband. Eufemia belongs to a new generation of Indian women who cannot relinquish their Indian heritage but instead "modernise" it. For example, Eufemia administers Indian remedies while reciting Catholic blessings. Consuelo, on the other hand, although she has physically left the petate, emotionally trusts only traditional Indian remedies. She will, if necessary, make the arduous journey back to her village rather than be treated by modern medicine.

In "Leaving the Petate" we see Porter bemoan Eufemia's materialism, in contrast to the original segment's lyrical description of the Indians who still live in Xochimilco. Porter, however, does not "blame" Eufemia for wanting to improve her position in society. The shortness of the petate, which makes it rather too small to sleep on comfortably, symbolises, for Porter, how the Indian is restricted by his position in society. Porter thinks she understands how hard it is for the Indian to change his lot:

The petate, beautiful as it is, is also a little short, so the man curls down on his side, draws his knees up and tucks his head down in a prenatal posture, and sleeps like that. He can sleep like that anywhere: on street corners, by the roadside, in caves, in doorways, in his own hut, if he has one.... He makes such an attractive

47 Cowley edited the original article and wrote to Porter on November 30, 1930, "'Leaving the Petate' came, was read, was universally liked and universally adjudged to be longer than we could possibly use. I was assigned to, condemned to, perform the amputation - and out came all the nice pages about your little Indian boy friend. I'm enclosing them, thinking that they might be used by you some other way." *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter* 248.

48 Porter chose Xochimilco for the Indians' home, and her description of kind, generous people living in harmony recalls the Indians from her sketch, "Xochimilco", eleven years earlier.

49 A rebozo is the traditional shawl worn by Indian women. Mestizo is the term for a half-Indian, half-Spanish Mexican.
design as he sits thus: no wonder people go around painting pictures of him. But I think he sleeps there because he is numbed with tiredness and has no other place to go, and not in the least because he is a public decoration (389).50

Once the Indian has left the petate, he cannot entertain the thought of going back to it permanently. Hilaria's return to her village is forced on her by the loss of her cook's job, and will be temporary. Similarly, the little boy who spends a night back in Xochimilco with his cousins and has to sleep on a petate is appalled for a simple reason: "He was not far enough away from the petate not to fear going back to it, even for one night."51

Porter knows that the Indian is signified to outsiders by his or her possessions: his petate, serape or rebozo. His place of origin is easily identifiable by his dress. Similarly, his illiteracy means that he must rely on oral communication or pictorial representation to express what other Mexicans express in words. Everything about him is on the surface, especially for those who do not wish to delve deeper. A parallel exists between the perception of the Indian by non-Indians, and the perception of Mexico by foreigners, since both rely on superficial information and knowledge. Porter tries to go below the surface in her representation of the Indian. However, her understanding of the Indian's position is inevitably limited by her own perception. She understands why the Indian would want to leave the petate, but she cannot understand his devotion to the Catholic Church. Porter prided herself on a knowledge of Mexico which was the result of extended exposure to the country and to the selective groups of people she knew. As her damning book reviews of Chase's and Blasco Ibáñez's Mexican journeys showed, Porter was highly critical of those who made hasty judgements, based on flimsy knowledge, about Mexico.

For this reason, Porter greatly admired the writer Cunninghame Graham's travel pieces because, she felt, he wrote from a position of authority based on his own experiences.52 Porter considered his most significant gift was an ability to neither judge nor compare people, but simply to observe acutely:

He has ... that freedom which comes of having early got hold of the key of the world. He has been almost everywhere, and everything has had a meaning and an interest for him.... He has got acquainted with enough of each kind and color to discover their under-the-skin likenesses and differences, and he tells of them not as if they were shows put on for his special amusement, but as human creatures that need not be hated, or despised, or feared, or improved.... He has written short pieces ... but there is time to put in everything: sidelights and scraps of information most

50 "Leaving the Petate" in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 388-393.
51 From the edited segment in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter: 251.
52 Robert Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936) was half-Scottish and half-Spanish and went to South America when he was seventeen. Much of his writing is based on his adventures, which included driving horses, farming and buying beef in many different South American countries.
travelers forget to add, so that when you see their country for the first time you are amazed at all they left out. There is this about these stories: you feel that the writer was a participant, not a looker-on. He tells what he knows.53

Cunninghame Graham's gift was the ability to convey the complexity of a situation, which Porter felt many other travel writers failed to do. Porter reviewed many travel narratives about Mexico, particularly in the 1920s when she was back in the United States between visits to Mexico. In all her book reviews Porter was most critical of writers who did not penetrate beneath the surface for whatever reason: personal vanity or time constraints. In a review of a book of letters by Rosalie Evans, *The Rosalie Evans Letters From Mexico* (1926), Porter saw no evidence of the author possessing Cunninghame Graham’s ability to understand her situation by looking beyond the surface. To Porter’s mind, Evans contented herself with adventure rather than experience and, in so doing, misled the reader as to the nature of Mexico.

Rosalie Evans (187-1926) was an American-born British subject who lived with her husband in Mexico. Her refusal to give up her hacienda after his death as part of the Mexican constitution's land reforms of the revolution made her a national hero in the United States.54 Evans's struggle to keep her land and her lone fight against the revolutionaries did not inspire Porter's admiration. What Porter did recognise, however, was the same thirst for adventure as she described in "St Augustine and the Bullfight". Evans's letters were "a swift-moving account of a life as full of thrills and action as any novel of adventure you may find"(417) which prevented Evans from stopping and taking stock. Evans pursued a "grotesque cause" which inevitably killed her, but on the way, Porter says: "There is not a line in her letters to show that she had any grasp of the true inward situation, but her keen eye and ready wit missed no surface play of event"(419).

"The true inward situation" fascinated Porter. In her early political essays, "The Mexican Trinity" and "Where Presidents Have No Friends", Porter tried to convey something of the complexity of the Mexican political situation, which she scarcely understood as a foreigner newly arrived in Mexico City. She attempted to pierce the heart of an issue, unaware of how much her own sensibility and feeling affected her perception. In both "The Mexican Trinity" and "Where Presidents Have No Friends", Porter returned to the plight of the Indian, whom she saw as the inevitable victim of the complex political situation. She could, therefore, criticise D H Lawrence, in a review of *The Plumed...*

54 "La Conquistadora" published on April 11, 1926, is included in *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 416-420.*
Serpent (1926) entitled "Quetzalcoatl", for painting a damning picture of Mexico, without realising the irony of her position. Porter continued to think that her portrait of the Indian was more objective than that of writers such as Lawrence, whom she saw as overwhelmingly negative.

Mexico had proved to be another disappointment for Lawrence in his search for a spiritual home, and Porter felt that his despair was written into his portrayal of place. In Porter's opinion, this led to a distorted, bloody image of Mexico and rendered the novel more a philosophical treatise than a story:

The Plumed Serpent is a confession of faith, summing up the mystical philosophy of D. H. Lawrence. Mexico, the Indians, the cult of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl - the Plumed Serpent - all these are pretexts, symbols made to the measure of his preoccupations. It seems only incidentally a novel, in spite of the perfection of its form; it is a record of a pilgrimage that was, that must have been a devastating experience (421).

Mexico as a setting is irrelevant; Lawrence's interest lies in himself and his quasi-spiritual quest which could have taken him anywhere and transformed any place, not specifically Mexico, into a hellish nightmare. Yet, ironically, Porter thought Lawrence precisely captured the externals of Mexico. She considered his description of how Mexico appeared masterful:

All of Mexico that can be seen is here, evoked clearly with the fervor of things remembered out of impressions that filled the mind to bursting. There is no laborious building up of local color but an immense and prodigal feeling for the background, for every minute detail seen with the eyes of a poet. He makes you a radiant gift of place. It is no Rousseau-like jungle of patterned leaves and fruits half concealing impersonally savage beasts. The skies change, the lights and colors, the smells and feel of the air change with the time of day; the masses of Indians move with purpose against the shifting landscape...(423).

D H Lawrence and Rosalie Evans both captured the "surface detail" but, Porter maintained, they missed the crucial detail of Mexico: that which lies beneath the surface. Lawrence deluded himself and his readers into believing that he understood the Indian race. His heroine in The Plumed Serpent, Kate Leslie, is Irish but the two chief male protagonists, Ramon and Cipriano, are high caste Indians. The novel is Lawrence's homily to the ancient Aztec cult of Quetzalcoatl and his male protagonists revive the cult. That the story's plot seems pretentious and implausible was, Porter suggested, because Lawrence could never get into the mind of the Indian. He could not free himself from his Eurocentric prejudice and himself: "His Indians are merely what the Indian might be if they were all D H Lawrences" (425). Lawrence's attempt to get inside the Indian's psyche ensured the

55 The review was published on March 7, 1926, and is in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter: 421-425.
book's failure for Porter: "His artificial Western mysticism came in collision with the truly occult mind of the Indian, and he suffered an extraordinary shock. He turned soothsayer, and began to interpret by a formula: the result is a fresh myth of the Indian, a deeply emotional conception, but a myth none the less, and a debased one" (422). Porter's objection to *The Plumed Serpent* was its creation of a new myth of Mexico and the Indian which portrayed both of them as evil and menacing forces. 56

Porter further believed Lawrence's attempt to portray Mexico was destined to fail the moment he crossed the US/Mexican border because he brought too many prejudices with him: "He has confessed somewhere that he was in a raging temper from the moment he passed the line from the United States to Mexico. He blames this on the vibrations of cruelty and bloodshed in the country, the dark hopelessness that rises from the Indians..." (422). However, Porter was too irritated by the book to note the similarities between her situation and that of the fictitious Kate Leslie, Lawrence's mouthpiece. Leslie is drawn into the Indians' world just as Porter was entranced by it. And, both Lawrence and Porter were equally repelled by and drawn to Mexico. Just as Lawrence longed to find in Mexico his spiritual salvation and to see the Indian as his spiritual brother, so Porter hoped to find in Mexico the inspiration to write and to witness the implementation of the revolution which would alleviate the Indian's position. Both Lawrence and Porter went to Mexico to find in a place what neither could find within themselves. There is no record as to whether Porter read Lawrence's lyrical *Mornings in Mexico*, but it is evident in her review of *The Plumed Serpent* that she could see no parallels between their writing.

Unlike Lawrence, Porter wrote only one novel in which her ambivalent attitude toward Mexico was captured. So vitriolic is the opening sequence of *Ship of Fools*, it is unsurprising that Porter's later works have been seen as evidence of her growing disillusionment with Mexico. 57 Her description of Veracruz in the opening segment is a harsh and cynical examination of a port where the departing travellers are seen as easy prey by the exploitative residents. The opening sentence of the novel is unambiguous: "August, 1931 - The port town of Veracruz is a little purgatory between land and sea for the traveler, but the people who live there are very fond of themselves and the town they have helped to make" (3).

The Mexico of *Ship of Fools* failed to fulfil the expectations of Europeans such as Herr Lutz, who was promised tourists but got a revolution, and Herr Baumgarten, who has turned to alcohol to drown his disappointment, and so they are returning to Europe. 58

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56 Porter's critique of Lawrence shares many similarities with that of Sybille Bedford. See the introduction: 10.
57 Although the novel was published in 1962, Porter started thinking about it in 1931, when she left Mexico for the final time.
The great irony is that, disillusioned with Mexico, they are returning to the terrors of a Europe in the grip of Nazism on the eve of World War II. The Mexico Porter portrays is a microcosm of the country as she perceived it at the start of the 1930s. Revolutionary acts continue but the Indian is still the underdog: nobody much cares when an Indian boy is accidentally killed by a bomb. Everybody is more concerned about what the intended victim, the Swedish Consul, will think of them.

Veracruz is far removed from the idyllic portrait of Mexico in "Xochimilco", and much closer to "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" and Porter's other short stories of despair such as "Hacienda" and "Flowering Judas". Yet, even in the cynical description of Veracruz, the protagonist, Jenny Brown, retains happy memories of the city: "I used to walk about there at night, after a rain, with everything washed clean, and the sweet-by-night and jasmine in full bloom and the colors of the pastel walls very pure. I would come on those unexpected squares and corners and fountains, all of them composed, just waiting to be painted.... The people seemed so friendly and easy."58

When Jenny’s lover, David Scott, questions her memory, she insists, "You must let me remember it in my own way, as beautiful at least once" (ibid). By juxtaposing Jenny’s memories with the narrator’s chilling description of the same place ("little purgatory" and "pestilential jumping-off place into the sea"), Porter conveys the contradictory emotions that Mexico has aroused. Although her portrait of Veracruz is overwhelmingly bleak, Porter cannot condemn the city completely. Jenny’s reminiscences are so brief as to almost go unnoticed but they mitigate the despair that Porter injected into her description. Similarly, in "Hacienda", Porter’s joyless depiction of the Indian peons and their decadent masters, there is an occasional moment of sheer delight.

"Hacienda" exists in two versions. It was originally published in the Virginia Quarterly Review in October 1932, and then substantially expanded until it became the short story which was published on its own in 1934. It is now included in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter. Porter called the first version "only an article" and had intended it to be another sketch in which she looked at Mexican life from her perspective as an American outsider. The difference between this sketch and her previous ones is the subject matter. Here, Porter writes about not only the Indians, but also a

58 Ship of Fools: 42.
foreign film crew and the wealthy Mexican owners of the hacienda. Porter lengthened the second version from an article into a work of fiction, which is both more despairing and personal than the first. Porter was already making plans to leave Mexico when she visited the hacienda, and was looking for a subject which might accurately reflect how she felt about Mexico. It was a good moment to step back and reflect on what changes, if any, the revolution had brought.

Change, or more precisely the lack of change, is the theme of "Hacienda". "Hacienda" illuminates the many meanings of change, as the narrator explains at the beginning of the story: "Now that the true Revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico, the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures"(135). Darlene Harbour Unruh, in *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (1985), uses Porter's definition of change to suggest the themes of "Hacienda" where: "change sometimes is an illusion; mere motion is sometimes confused with change; immutability is impossible; and change itself does not ensure melioration. The appearance of change is mistaken for true change..."(87).

"Hacienda" continues the theme of the difficulty of change begun in "María Concepción". In "Hacienda" the renaming of the train classes illustrates the lack of real change and symbolises the hollowness of the revolution for Porter: "So you cannot ride third-class no matter how poor or humble-spirited or miserly you may be. You may go second in cheerful disorder and sociability, or first in sober ease." The train journey is one indication of how little Mexico has changed since the revolution.

"Hacienda" recalls "The Mexican Trinity". The changes Porter had hoped the revolution would instigate have not happened, and the triumvirate still controls Mexico: the foreign interests, the hacendados and the church continue their grip on the Indian. Porter's portrait of the Mexican oligarchy is as unremittingly negative as it was in "Virgin Violeta". The hacienda has survived since the time of the Spanish conquest and its hacendado, don Genaro, treats the tragedy of Justino as merely a discussion about property rights. Don Genaro considers the Indian peons to be his property, just as his Spanish ancestors did: "I told him, Justino is my peon, his family have lived for three hundred years on our hacienda, this is MY business"(155). The disintegration of the

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59 The article is based on a journey Porter made to the Hacienda Tetlapayac, north-east of Mexico City, where the Russian film director, Sergei Eisenstein, had gone with his crew and an entourage of Mexican government officials in May 1931. He was filming the second of four major stories based on the Mexican Revolution, *Que Viva Mexico!* The project was financed by the American writer Upton Sinclair, but the film was never completed.

60 "Hacienda" in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. 135-170.

61 Ibid.
hacienda because of don Genaro's refusal to modernise is symbolised by decadent sexual relationships. His affair with the actress, Lolita, is not unexpected. However, the affair of his bored wife, doña Julia with Lolita is not only unexpected but sterile: no heir can come from this liaison. Porter suggests that the old order is being usurped in a depraved manner.

The foreigners, with the exception of the narrator, are equally pernicious. Kennerly, the American with whom the narrator takes the train to the hacienda, has recently returned from "'God's country', meaning to say California"(138) and sits in the train carriage, "among a dark inferior people"(135). He complains continually about the Indians, the dirt and the heat: he brings his own oranges with him from California to avoid eating local produce. Kennerly cannot take pleasure in anything he sees. The narrator is able to observe the landscape whilst Kennerly rants, and her description of a miniature Eden is at odds with his perception of Mexico:

Some day I shall make a poem to kittens washing themselves in the mornings; to Indians scrubbing their clothes to rags and their bodies to sleekness, with great slabs of sweet-smelling strong soap and wisps of henequen fiber, in the shade of trees, along river banks at midday; to horses rolling sprawling snorting rubbing themselves against the grass to cleanse their healthy hides; to naked children shouting in pools; to hens singing in their dust baths; to sober fathers of families forgetting themselves in song under the discreet flood of tap-water; to birds on the boughs ruffling and oiling their feathers in delight; to girls and boys arranging themselves cleanly and comely to the greater glory of life (139).

The lyricism of Porter's description recalls the joyous portrait of the Indians in "Xochimilco". It also illustrates the subjectivity of perception: what the narrator delights in, Kennerly fails to see because he has decided Mexico has nothing to offer. However, it is not only the foreigners who cannot see Mexico. Betancourt, the cosmopolitan artist, is condemned to perpetually distort Mexico because: "Betancourt, Mexican by birth, French-Spanish by blood, French by education, was completely at the mercy of an ideal of elegance and detachment perpetually at war with a kind of Mexican nationalism which afflicted him like an inherited weakness of the nervous system"(152).

Betancourt is disabled by his internationalism. Further, his vision of Mexico is dominated not by a desire to see Mexico reflected accurately and truthfully to the outside world in the film, but by what he considers aesthetically attractive. His idea of elegance disallows any thing or person in the film he considers "hurtful to the national dignity". He cannot see the irony of his position: he forbids the camera to capture the very people who make up much of Mexico: "Beggars, the poor, the deformed, the old and ugly, trust

62 Givner discusses Porter's dislike of lesbians in her biography and describes how affronted Porter was by Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas (353).
Betancourt to wave them away"(152). Betancourt's failure to tell the truth, with its resultant misrepresentation of Mexico, symbolises the artist's corruption for Porter. Similarly, the poet and singer, Carlos, who has composed nothing new for a long time, invents a corrido about Justino and his sister.63 Carlos distorts the events to fit his composition and please his audience. Giving an accurate account of the tragic shooting and those involved does not interest him. Porter's damning portrait of the art adviser who performs a "pontifical" gesture while he offers "easy words" of insincere consolation on the death of Justino's sister marries, in Porter's eyes, the corruption of the church and the oligarchy.

Porter continued to believe it the duty of the artist to try to represent reality to the best of his ability. The irony of Porter's position was always her failure to understand that her writings were as imbued with her personality as those of the next writer. Porter never realised that the Mexico she represented in her articles and stories was limited. Her work concentrates on the Indian, the artist and the ex-patriate. The writer, Betram Wolfe, Rivera's biographer, in his review of the first version of "Hacienda" for the Worker's Age, criticised Porter for her omission of the worker:

Everyone seems to be there in this little essay - everyone, that is, except the new Mexican, the worker, the already half-awakened peasant types that are still a minority and were not easy for Katherine Anne Porter to meet up with or to comprehend or to catch in her silver-filigreed prose, but these are the ones who will end the Mexico of Eisenstein's film and Miss Porter's book.64

Porter's Mexico never embraced the "new Mexican". Instead, she was preoccupied with the Indian as the barometer of the revolution's successes and failures. In her mind, the victim of all of the abuses of power by those in authority was, as ever, the Indian. Porter's description of the Indian here is as despairing as that in "The Fiesta of Guadalupe". The Indians' lives on the pulque hacienda have barely changed since the seventeenth century. Their status is little better than that of the animals on the hacienda: "The closed dark figures were full of instinctive suffering, without individual memory, or only the kind of memory animals may have, when they feel the whip they suffer but do

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63 The corrido is a Mexican ballad. Porter wrote an article for Survey Graphic 5 (May 1924) about the corridos. Having read the ethnologist Dr Atl's chapter on corridos in his Artes Populares, (see footnote 70) and another book of corridos which Betram Wolfe (see the following footnote) lent her, Porter attempted to set on paper her love for the corrido. It was their every-day subject matter - love, life, death - which appealed to her most of all.

64 Bertram Wolfe (1896-1977) was an American who came to Mexico with his wife to teach English under Vasconcelos's education programme. He also wanted to help unify the Mexican Communist Party. Porter called him,"the only man in Mexico I ever trusted to tell me a straight story about political and social situations as they came." Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: 90.
not know why and cannot imagine a remedy”(142).

The Indians depend on the same pulque Porter eulogised in "Children of Xochitl", when it was "cold sweetened pulque flavored with strawberries"(80). Pulque has now become a symbol of the Indians' servitude. The liquor's manufacture remains unchanged and reinforces the Indians' lack of opportunity to modernise:

Pulque-making had not changed from the beginning, since the time the first Indian set up a rawhide vat to ferment the liquor and pierced and hollowed the first gourd to draw with his mouth the juice from the heart of the maguey. Nothing had happened since, nothing could happen. Apparently there was no better way to make pulque (142).

The Indians work to produce the pulque on the hacienda which they then drink to give them a brief respite from their suffering. They spend their few pesos on the "corpse-white liquor" in order to "swallow forgetfulness by the riverful"(168) and, in so doing, perpetuate their repression. The effect is temporary and serves only to swell the government's coffers. Pulque has become a symbol of the Indians' oppression which repulses the narrator:

From the vat-room came a continued muffled shouting.... The smell had not been out of my nostrils since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood; this sound and this smell belonged together, and both belonged to the intermittent rumble of barrels and the long chanting cry of the Indians (161).

Further, the legend of Xochitl has become sordid and debased: the frescoes which depict the legend on the walls of the vat room have faded. The Indians' sense of ancestry and history is no longer visible. The goddess Xochitl is no longer a giver of life as she was in the earlier sketch, "Children of Xochitl", but of death.

However, if the Indians on the hacienda in "Hacienda" still live in miserable feudal subjugation, the Indians the narrator saw on the train journey are a happier group. They do not mind which class they travel (unlike Kennedy), they are grateful not to have to make the journey on mule-back. These Indians are the happy recipients of technological advancements and treat the revolutionary details as being of less importance. The Indians on the train pay scant attention to Kennerly's histrionics: if he finds them dirty and smelly, they find him unremarkable. The Indians might travel in squalor but that is unimportant since they are contented and possess an equilibrium which has long since deserted Kennerly. Both the Indians on the train and the ones the narrator watches from the train window enjoy a freedom the peons on the hacienda have never known.

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Porter's theory of why the feudal hacienda still survived, and why the Indians in the hacienda and elsewhere had not been liberated by 1932, was that the Mexican Revolution never got beneath the surface of Mexican society. Porter's preoccupation with the need to permeate the surface to make a wholesale difference is reflected in her comment: "The Revolution has not yet entered into the souls of the Mexican people. There can be no doubt of that. What is going on here is not the resistless upheaval of a great mass leavened by teaching and thinking and suffering."65 Unlike the Russian Revolution, the Mexican Revolution did not produce a bond between the intelligentsia and the workers. Momentarily, Porter had hoped that artists such as Rivera would be to the Mexican cause what she thought writers had been to the Russian Revolution: "The Russian writers made the Russian Revolution, I verily believe, through a period of seventy-five years' preoccupation with the wrongs of the peasant, and the cruelties of life under the heel of the Tsar" (ibid).66

Instead, almost all the revolutionaries came from outside Mexico, especially the artists, which Porter found increasingly difficult to accept. In Porter's 1929 review of Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*, she pointed out the mixed heritage of all the artists and the lack of any Indian artistic involvement: "The great renascence of Indian art was a movement of mestizos and foreigners who found in Mexico, simultaneously, a direction they could take toward extended boundaries.... Those of us in Mexico at the time saw this happen: that not one pure-blooded Indian artist contributed his motivating force to initiate this movement."67

Porter's point was that the revolution could not succeed without a centre around which to build and, while so many disparate groups pulled the country in different directions. Porter had originally been attracted to Mexico because of its vibrant art renaissance, and when she returned for her second visit in 1922 it was at the height of the mural renaissance. She was invited by the Mexican government to be the American organiser of a Mexican art exhibition, originally intended to be shown in Washington.68

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65 "The Mexican Trinity": 401.
66 In "The Mexican Trinity", Porter refers to the Russian writers' involvement in the 1917 Revolution, but she does not specify which writers she is thinking about.
68 The exhibition assembled works by Indian native artists and reflected the surge of enthusiasm for a national culture. Unfortunately Mexican officials did not send enough money to cover the exhibition's travelling expenses and so it was held up in Los Angeles and never got to San Francisco as planned. Instead, works from the exhibition were sold off. Porter told Lopez in the 1965 interview that the exhibition had been banned by the United States government, but this is false. While it was in Los Angeles it was seen daily by three to four thousand people.
The exhibition was a celebration of Mexican popular arts and Porter wrote the accompanying catalogue, entitled *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts*. The exhibition was the first of its kind and captured the nationalistic spirit of the artistic renaissance taking place in Mexico. The catalogue was divided into three parts: pre-Hispanic, colonial art and the present. The emphasis of the whole was on the glorification of the Indian and his art. Porter concluded her introduction with a homily reminiscent of "Xochimilco" and Chase's *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas*: "The examples shown here were gathered from the little country villages, from the common shops and street markets, where the native brings his goods to sell them to his own people. They are personal, authentic creations, by the peasant craftsmen of a race that expresses itself simply and inevitably in terms of beauty"(139).

Porter worried that she might have difficulty convincing her American audience of both her authority and of the validity of the art on show. She therefore included a lengthy list of acknowledged non-Mexican authorities on Mexico, which included Alexander von Humboldt, William Hickling Prescott and Madame Calderón de la Barca. Porter also referred to Mexican experts on art, archaeology and ethnology such as Dr. Atl, a famous muralist and an authority on modern popular arts, and Manuel Gamio, whose theories on ethnology particularly interested her.

Porter was drawn to artists such as Rivera because they emphasised the Indian in their work. She recognised the profound impact of Rivera's work: he created a new vision of Mexico and succeeded in paint where the revolution failed in life. Rivera, by concentrating on the Indian and the worker, single-handedly shifted the focus of the representation of Mexico. In a review of *Portrait of Mexico*, a book of paintings by Rivera with an accompanying text by Wolfe, Porter saluted Rivera's contribution to the shift in perception:

No single man in his time has ever had more influence on the eye and the mind of the public who know his work than Diego Rivera; for he has made them see his Mexico, to accept his version of it, and often I think it better than their own.... For myself, and I believe I speak for great numbers, Mexico does not appear to me as it did before I saw Rivera's paintings of it. The mountains, the Indians, the horses, the flowers and children, have all subtly changed in outlines and colors. They are Rivera's Indians and flowers and all now, but I like looking at them.

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69 *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts* is reproduced in the *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter*: 138-187.

70 Dr. Atl was the pseudonym of the painter Gerardo Murillo (1874-1965), a nationalist and experimenter with different colour and perspective techniques. Dr. Atl's 1922 two volume study of folklore, *Las Artes Populares de México*, became a standard text of the revolution.

Rivera was the most important of all the artists Porter knew in Mexico because of his huge contribution to Mexican art's international reputation. Porter wrote articles about him over many years. In 1937, Porter was still acknowledging the contribution she thought Rivera had made to the Mexican Revolution but her admiration for him later diminished with the passage of time. She came to see him as a self-seeking individualist who was more concerned with personal glory than with the wider aims of the revolution. Porter told Roy Newquist in a 1965 interview that Rivera: "was the fraud of frauds, with his syndication of painters, and his false Communism, and his totally shameless pursuit of publicity."72 Although Porter's disillusionment with Rivera was only fully realised in the 1960s, her general disappointment translated itself into her fiction much earlier. In reviews and articles about Rivera, Porter was unfailingly complimentary; in her short story, "The Martyr", she was highly critical.

Porter turned to an alternative Mexican art form - caricature - for her portrait of Rivera. Porter's style of writing owed much to the Mexican caricaturists. Porter had met and befriended the young caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957) in 1920 when his caricatures had already been published in the Mexican and American press. Porter had taken some of Covarrubias's work back to the States in 1922; the same year, he drew a caricature of her. By 1923, he had become a sensation in New York when his work was published in *Vanity Fair*. His collection of satirical portraits, *The Prince of Wales and Other Famous Americans* (1925), was reviewed by Porter for *New Republic* magazine in 1925:

> In Mexico there is a well seasoned tradition of fine caricature: almost every one of the younger painters possesses this lacerating gift. It goes with the Mexican aptitude for deadly discernment of the comic in the other person, together with each man's grave regard for his own proper dignity.... They have a charming habit of disregarding the main point at issue long enough to call attention to some defect or weakness, preferably an irremediable one, in the opponent.73

Covarrubias epitomised the Mexican tradition of parody and satire and possessed "the social gift of malice". Porter, by her own admission, was a vengeful person who used her writing to vent her spleen: her anger at her lover Salomón de la Selva was channelled into the distasteful character of Carlos in "Virgin Violeta", and later Amado in the unfinished "The Lovely Legend". The caricaturists' influence is seen in many of Porter's Mexican stories. With the exception of "María Concepción", all of Porter's stories use caricature to portray the protagonists. Porter uses it most effectively to criticise the

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72 In *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations*: 113.
73 "Ay, Que Chamaco" *New Republic* (December 23, 1925):141-142, and reprinted in *This Strange, Old World* and other Book Reviews by Katherine Anne Porter.
artistic and foreign communities which have failed Mexico and the revolution. In "Ay, Que Chamaco", Porter concluded that the skill of the caricaturist lay in the ability to create a three-dimensional figure with a few strokes of the pen or paint-brush and then to expose what the victim had spent a lifetime hiding.

Porter's caricature of Rivera in "The Martyr" was motivated by her disillusionment with Rivera's obsessive behaviour towards his lover, who later became his wife, Lupe Marín, which left little time for commitment to the revolution. Porter planned to write a whole series of stories based on Rivera, or Rubén as he is called in the story. However, excepting "The Martyr", which was published in Century in July 1923, the only other story which Porter started was "The Lovely Legend", which she worked on intermittently between 1923-29.  

"The Martyr" was a light-hearted "in-joke" about Rivera and the art community. Porter satirised the tempestuous relationship between Rivera and Marín and poked fun at Rivera's indulgence towards his wife, since Porter believed that he loved Lupe's beauty more than the person. According to Walsh:

"The Martyr" is playful enough that Rivera would have appreciated it if he ever read it. After all, several years after their divorce, he illustrated La Unica, Lupe Marín's fictionalized biography that exposes her many grievances against him. When "The Martyr" appeared, Porter was busy collaborating with him on an article about the Mexican artists' guild.  

"The Martyr" remains an illustration of all that is wrong with the artistic community in Mexico. Rubén is "the most illustrious painter in Mexico"(33), yet all he wants to do is paint pictures of his lover, Isabel, and once she leaves him he stops painting completely. Porter is contemptuous of Rubén's dereliction of his civic duty, and by allowing him to eat himself to death, she signals his behaviour as decadent and self-indulgent. Rubén's friends indulge him still further: they can see his self-deception as to Isabel's possible return but, because they are too afraid to talk frankly to him, they perpetuate the deception. Ramon's intended hagiography of Rubén will glorify yet further a now corrupt figure whom his friends, nevertheless, continue to call Mexico's greatest painter.

In this story, Porter deconstructs, with great humour, the myth of the artist as a contributor to the greater good. She considers Rubén's love for Isabel as decadent because

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74 "The Lovely Legend" is published for the first time in Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter: 205-217.
75 See Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: 85.
76 "The Martyr" is in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter: 33-38.
he ignores noble and worthy subjects and concentrates his efforts instead on reproducing on canvas an unfaithful woman: "His friends agreed it was getting rather stupid. Isabel had been gone for nearly six months, and Rubén refused even to touch the nineteenth figure of her, much less to begin the twentieth, and the mural was getting nowhere"(35). Ramón tries to motivate Rubén to "finish your great mural for the world, for the future", but when Rubén refuses to listen to his advice, his friends give up and allow Rubén to gorge himself to death. While the artists concentrate on their petty, personal lives and ignore the opportunity to use their art to agitate for change, Porter believes Mexico cannot advance. Porter continued this theme in her fragmented and unfinished story, "The Lovely Legend", where Amado, a less talented artist than Rubén, also indulges in sentimentality while exploiting women. Amado is fixated with beautiful women, such as Rosita, whom he wants as a model for his Mayan fresco. After she is stabbed to death by a jealous woman, Amado is finally made to see that his love for Rosita was not for her as a person but as a suitable subject for his art.

"The Lovely Legend" lacks the humour of "The Martyr". In the former, the caricaturist, Ramón, is no longer merely uncovering the real nature of people, but destroying them through his "daily distilled synthetic venom"(210). Porter's acerbity increased, particularly in her fictional depiction of the foreigners she encountered in Mexico. Kennerly and Betancourt in "Hacienda" are just two examples of her satirical portrayal of foreigners. In "Flowering Judas" (1930) and "That Tree" (1934), Porter examined foreigners' reaction to and understanding of Mexico and drew depressing conclusions.

"Flowering Judas" is Porter's study of alienation. Porter first hinted at this sense of alienation in "In a Mexican Patio", when the narrator's boredom and inactivity contrasted with the servants' busy day. In "In a Mexican Patio" the narrator is surrounded by activity yet feels lonely, isolated and peripheral: she contemplates death as she eats her breakfast alone: "I think calmly of death as I butter a roll and examine the lilies"(64). The sketch ends with the narrator fearfully contemplating death alone ("the night is crowded with thoughts darker than the sunless world": 72) while she listens to another lonely woman playing Chopin. Similarly in "Flowering Judas", the American, Laura, is on the periphery of Mexican life despite her attempts to integrate.

Porter's depiction of Laura is her most detailed study of alienation in a foreigner. Laura has fled from her past, and despite her dissatisfaction with Mexico, she cannot imagine a life elsewhere: "Uninvited she had promised herself to this place; she can no
longer imagine herself as living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering life before she came here"(93). Whatever revolutionary ideal Laura had when she came to Mexico she has long since lost. Braggioni symbolises her disillusionment: "The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusions, for a Revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues. This is nonsense, she knows it now and is ashamed of it"(91).

Laura brings to Mexico her set of American principles and her Catholic faith which she can no more shed than she can stop wearing hand-made lace, in transgression of the spirit of the revolution. Laura would appear to be a committed participant in the new Mexico. She teaches children, visits imprisoned revolutionaries and even tolerates the amorous advances of the revolutionary, Braggioni, yet she does not feel she belongs. The children at school love her and heap affection on her, but Laura still sees them as strangers. Porter suggests that it is Laura's inability to commit herself to her new life which has created such a chasm in her: "But she cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be"(91).

For many years, Porter claimed that Laura was based on her friend, Mary Doherty. Porter drew from Doherty's life many of the externals she gave Laura, such as her teaching job. However, it has become increasingly apparent as we learn more about Porter and her fragile emotional state, that Laura owes more to Porter's own psychology than to Doherty's. Laura's insecurity and feelings of despair echo those of Porter during much of her time in Mexico. Laura's "notorious virginity"(97) recalls Porter's sexual problems. Porter's preoccupation with her sexual difficulties is signalled by the threat under which female virginity is placed in the stories "The Dove of Chapacalco", "María Concepción", "The Lovely Legend", "Virgin Violeta" and "Flowering Judas". To Laura, her virginity is a symbol of her resistance to the world's corruption while, to those around her, it is a mystery. Porter was sexually confused for much of her life: she feared men, yet sought their approbation; she was scared of being pregnant, yet claimed to have given birth to a still-born child.80

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79 The revolution glorified machines as they were seen as the means of stopping the exploitation of the worker. Machine-made lace was considered non-exploitative and hand-made lace a decadent left-over of pre-revolutionary times.
80 Porter's biographers are undecided as to whether her claims of giving birth to a still-born child in December 1924 are true. Stout in Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times: 33 thinks the evidence points to a fictitious loss which was prompted by Porter's need to grieve for her beloved niece, Mary Alice, who died in July 1919, aged six.
Porter was preoccupied with her appearance and kept herself rake-thin. Similarly, Laura is anorexically thin, which allows her to hide her sexuality in an androgynous body. Porter wanted to escape from and to Mexico each time she visited, and so Laura thinks of escape. Such is the depth of Laura's despair, however, that to escape means to flee from her self into death. Walsh reminds us that Porter too contemplated suicide in 1921 and that she struggled against melancholia throughout the 1920s. She wrote to her father in June 1931 that she had fought "against the very strong temptation just to ... quit the whole devilish nuisance of life."81

The physical alienation Laura feels is a symbol for the spiritual despair of the author. Since Laura is "not at home in the world"(97), she cannot make any kind of commitment either to have an affair with Braggioni or to stop seeing him. Laura lives in limbo and her lack of commitment is destroying not only herself, but the revolution. Laura inadvertently facilitates Eugenio's suicide when he takes an overdose of the pills she gave him. Porter shows the reader how Laura's inability to feel involved has such negative consequences; but she also gives us a sense of how Laura's alienation and despair have arisen. Braggioni tells Laura about a May-Day march which the Catholics and Socialists both celebrate: "There will be two independent processions, starting from either end of town, and they will march until they meet, and the rest depends"(99).82 It is the perfect metaphor for the incompatibility of the foreign and the Mexican perceptions of the revolution.

In "Flowering Judas", Laura's expectations of Mexico are inextricably woven with her own fears so that she can no longer distinguish the two: "Laura feels a slow chill, a purely physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death, wait for her with lessening patience. She has translated this fear into something homely, immediate, and sometimes hesitates before crossing the street"(93). The Mexico of Laura's world resonates with an expectancy which is realised in Eugenio's death. Porter, on her arrival in Mexico, immediately noted what she referred to as Mexico's deathly quality: "It was alive, but death was in it," she said of her first impressions of the country.83 Laura's Mexico is far removed from the frivolous Mexico sought by the protagonist of "That Tree".

"That Tree" was finally published in the Virginia Quarterly in 1934 after being

81 See Walsh: 132. He gives a great deal of detail about the biographical origins of "Flowering Judas".
82 Porter did not site her story at a specific moment in the revolution; rather, she took historical events and used them for her own ends. The two processions referred to here come from the Morelia clash of May 8, 1921.
83 See footnote 14.
rejected by other magazines. The story satirises two North Americans' wildly different expectations of Mexico. The protagonist recalling his life since he came to Mexico in a masterly piece of self-deception, remembers why he chose Mexico:

He had really wanted to be a cheerful bum lying under a tree in a good climate, writing poetry.... He would have enjoyed just that kind of life: no respectability, no responsibility, no money to speak of, wearing worn-out sandals and a becoming, if not ragged, blue shirt, lying under a tree writing poetry. That was why he had come to Mexico in the first place. He felt in his bones that it was the country for him.84

Compare his motives with Laura's, who is unsure as to why she is in Mexico. Laura's Mexico is one of death, fear and uncertainty. The nameless American protagonist in "That Tree" considers Mexico to be the perfect "drop-out" place where he can indulge in non-profit-orientated hobbies without a worry. To him, Mexico represents an escape from his dull, middle-class existence in the United States. He thinks it will be compatible with his creative desire to write poetry, the irony being that he has no discernible talent for the poetry form. What matters to him, however, is the appearance of creativity and to that end he socialises with Mexican artists. They appeal to him because, since they are poor, they fulfil "a sackful of romantic notions about artists"(76). He has a "mystical faith in these men who went ragged and hungry because they had chosen once for all between what he called in all seriousness their souls, and this world"(76). But as soon as the artists have the opportunity to make money, they do so, much to the protagonist's disdain. He cannot free himself from his upbringing and his conventional ideas both about Mexico and "artists".

Miriam, who comes to Mexico to be his wife, is not as gullible as her husband, and recognises that the artists prefer money above poverty. Her husband reluctantly admits that Miriam is right as he watches his Mexican artist friends settle into their newly comfortable lives. But Miriam, who echoes Kennerly in her contempt for the Mexicans and Laura in her inability to ditch her American upbringing, is as self-deceiving as her husband. While still in the United States, Miriam fantasises about escaping to somewhere more exotic: "She spent three mortal years writing him how dull and dreadful and commonplace her life was, how sick and tired she was of petty little conventions and amusements, how narrow-minded everybody around her was, how she longed to live in a beautiful dangerous place among interesting people who painted and wrote poetry"(73).

For Miriam, Mexico signifies removal from the boring world she inhabits of work and convention; she forgets that Mexico is a country like North America where people earn a living and buy groceries. Instead, in the correspondence Miriam and her husband conduct between North America and Mexico, they perpetuate the myth of Mexico as the

84 "That Tree": 66 in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter. 66-79.
antithesis of the Mid-West. Once Miriam arrives in Mexico, she is appalled by every sign the Mexicans give which confirms their difference. Her husband's friends scatter flowers around his apartment to welcome Miriam, but their gesture produces "a vague look of terror in her eyes"(74). Having longed for a different world, Miriam is devastated to realise that she will not be able to "settle down in a modern steam-heated flat and have nice artistic young couples from the American colony in for dinner Wednesday evenings"(74). Miriam's mid-Western values are too entrenched: she holds her nose in the market, refuses to have an Indian servant because "they were dirty" and cooks American food over a charcoal brazier.

The story is a relentless list of the American couple's prejudices and self-deceptions, and ends with no possibility of self-awareness. They cannot see any other Mexico than the one which is constructed through their cultural assumptions. Porter satirises the foreigners who take from Mexico what they want without giving anything in return. It is symptomatic that the protagonist becomes a highly successful journalist whose opinions and knowledge of Latin America are exactly what his North American readership wishes to hear: "He was a recognized authority on Revolutions in twenty-odd Latin-American countries, and his sympathies happened to fall in exactly right with the high-priced magazines of a liberal humanitarian slant which paid him well for telling the world about oppressed peoples"(78).85

Porter had met many journalists of this type in Mexico. The character recalls Blasco Ibáñez as much as Beals or Wolfe and, although Porter is extremely scathing in her comment about journalists writing to order, the story is suffused with an ironic sense of humour absent from "Hacienda", written around the same time. "That Tree" captures the foreigner's notion of an Edenic life of irresponsibility and freedom which is so at odds with the repressed and feudal life on the pulque hacienda. Porter had a very strong idea of who she was writing about in the story:

That Tree (sic) has for its hero something like ten thousand wistful American boys who have been brought up in dull ways and dull surroundings, and are infected with the notion that romance and glory lie in other places, and in a different occupation. To be a poet is the most romantic thing he can imagine. So he decides to be one, in a strange, fascinating country where he can forget his provincial beginnings. I didn't give this boy a name, because it should justly have been Legion. He is defeated, of course, he has a grudge, he blames it on all sorts of things, but mostly he blames it on his wife, who is the same kind of person he is, socially and economically, but who has stuck by her own training and her own beliefs. She is his Nemesis, the

85 The protagonist is variously said to be based on either Carleton Beals or Betram Wolfe. In a letter to Ernestine Evans, Porter wrote complaining about all the foreigners in Mexico: "the Carleton Bealses and all the other God-Awful mediocrities who swarm over the place eating the heart out of it like white ants" Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: 139.
instrument of his defeat, but the defeat was in him from the beginning. I laid the scene in Mexico because I felt at home there, and because so many persons of this sort were there then.86

In many respects Porter might have been talking about herself. She went to Mexico because she wanted to see a "strange, fascinating" country which might stimulate her. Porter, too, is defeated, although in her case by her constant depressions. However, the humorous irony directed at the nameless protagonist and Miriam in "That Tree" suggests that Porter does not hold Mexico responsible for his situation. It confirms the idea that Porter's response to Mexico was not one of increasing, but periodic, despair. Just as the protagonist in the story can never free himself from his cultural references and become the unmaterialistic artist he thinks he longs to be, so Porter could not free herself from her psychological make-up. The protagonist is finally able to see that he was a "lousy poet" and that Miriam was right about everything: "His old-fashioned respectable middle-class hard-working American ancestry and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam's side. He felt he had broken about every bone in him to get away from them and live them down, and here he had been overtaken at last and beaten into resignation that had nothing to do with his mind or heart."(77).

Porter's self-awareness took much longer. She finally quit Mexico for Europe in 1931. However, in a letter she wrote to Kenneth Burke on October 6, 1930, Porter already knew that she needed to leave Mexico soon, but she was prepared to wait until the moment was right: "I don't feel strange or exiled anywhere, and I began something here years ago that very evidently must be finished, in the long, laborious unbreakable line of personal experience that begins God knows when and ends only when the last vestiges of your existence have been demolished."87

Porter's leave-taking of Mexico was as complex and contradictory as every other aspect of her time living there. We know from biographical detail, particularly Porter's letters, that she was no longer enthusiastic about Mexico, but her disillusionment came from within, from her unsatisfactory relationships with other ex-patriates, rather than from Mexico as a country. However, Porter was not always able to see this clearly and, at times, she confused her disappointments in her personal life with how she felt about Mexico. Porter was depressed by the changes taking place in Mexico by the early 1930s; she felt the country had increasingly become a tourist destination and she could see that the revolution had stagnated. In the same letter to Burke, Porter tried to explain how Mexico had changed:

87 Letter to Burke dated October 6, 1930. Burke was a literary critic and sponsored Porter for the Guggenheim scholarship. In Letters of Katherine Anne Porter: 24.
Mexico is changing so rapidly one grows dizzy watching, and all towards Chamber of Commerce ideals. At least, the show-Mexico, that surface now being exposed carefully by organized Tourists' Bureaus, Airways Corporations, Hotel Associations, Cultural Relations societies of all kinds. The Indian is poorer than ever, his heels cracked as deeply, his face as despairing, he is more than ever a paintable object for the make-believe primitives (24).

Porter's cry was the familiar lament of a foreigner who had seen her adopted land change in ways she did not like and who saw the incipient commercialism as her cue to depart. What made this departure final was that Porter had lost the passion she once felt for Mexico. In another letter, she lamented that she no longer could feel the enthusiasm she saw exhibited by the poet, Hart Crane: "I would give a good deal to have again such ecstatic gayety and joy over Mexico as he has." 88 Much later in her life, Porter claimed that what had soured for her at this time was not Mexico but her personal life. The arrival in April 1931 of Crane, who stayed with her at her beloved home in Mixcoac, was the final straw. An open homosexual, his drunken behaviour caused Porter endless misery and their relationship deteriorated so sharply that, after he committed suicide in April 1932, jumping from a ship travelling from Mexico to the United States, Porter wrote to Doherty: "No, I do not regret his death. I think it was well done." 89

After Porter left Mexico she continued to blame her disillusionment with Mexico in 1931 on her personal life. On the eve of her first return to Mexico, in 1956, Porter wrote to Doherty:

It will be strange I don't doubt to see Mexico again after all these years. Nearly thirty years since I went to Europe from there, nearly forty since I went there the first time. My memories of the country itself and the people are very good and warm, but my personal life was a real shambles from first to last: I never met anywhere else in my life such destructive people.... I should hate to see any of these people again, or take up in any way any left over shreds of my life there, which could have been so pleasant if I hadn't got so many bloodsuckers at my arteries. If I hadn't this appointment to the University, I should not come back at all. 90

Stout points out that much of Porter's misery at the time of her last Mexican visit was caused by her lack of creative productivity. 91 Porter arrived in Mexico City in May 1930 hoping she would be stimulated once again, just as her initial stay had inspired "María Concepción". She planned to start work on a novel. Psychologically, however, she was preparing to leave Mexico almost as soon as she arrived. To facilitate the departure,
Porter successfully applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship, which paid for a year’s writing in Europe. Increasingly frustrated by her lack of output during her sixteen-month stay in Mexico, Porter looked for somebody or something to blame. Once she decided that Mexico was no longer a stimulant, she forced herself to move on, despite her awareness that the trouble lay within her and not in her external environment. In the letter to Josephine Herbst, dated June 1, 1931, in which Porter acknowledged her deep-seated melancholy, she went on to analyse herself with great perception:

The tussle to live has been idiotically, unreasonably hard, and I think this is a let-down when finally I came to the place where I could relax a while. Positively it would seem that I miss the desperate strain, and the muscles of my mind won’t let go.... Maybe Europe will be the change for me. But I know that journeys don’t change the traveller much. And I know there is no getting rid of any part of oneself. I have to learn to live with me, which is a tough job.92

Intellectually, Porter understood that her state of mind could not be altered by a change of country. Emotionally, however, the two were inextricably woven in Porter’s eyes. Her writing about Mexico reflected her moods: how else might the joy in “Xochimilco” and the despair in “The Fiesta of Guadalupe” be explained when both have as their centre the Indian? Porter’s work was often self-referential. She explored her personality and included experience from her personal life in much of her fiction and many of her observations on Mexican life. Porter is the narrator in “In a Mexican Patio” who is tempted by thoughts of suicide. Similarly, her feelings about her own sexuality and her unsuccessful relationships with men find their way into stories such as “Virgin Violeta” and “Flowering Judas”. In a moment of self-irony, Porter might be the nameless protagonist in “That Tree”, and she is the disillusioned narrator of “Hacienda”, who, in spite of the degradation and misery of the Indian, still sees the occasional moment of prelapsarian beauty in their life. Jenny speaks for Porter in Ship of Fools when she remembers, amidst the squalor of Veracruz, the odd oasis of tranquillity and beauty. It is only in “María Concepción” and “The Martyr” that Porter has no discernible role beyond that of author.

Nevertheless, all of Porter’s published Mexican fiction centres on the dual themes of sex and death. Porter was highly critical of Lawrence for emphasising the deathly quality he found in Mexico and concentrating on the bloodier aspects of the ancient Aztec religion. George Woodcock, in his essay, "Mexico and the English Novelist", makes the point that the Lawrentian school of English writers in Mexico - Malcolm Lowry, Aldous Huxley and Graham Greene - perpetuated the distortion of Mexico by leaving out any account of a gentle and hopeful place and, instead, concentrating on Mexico as a land of violence and

92 Letter dated June 1, 1931, written from Mexico City. Included in Letters of Katherine Anne Porter. 44. Quoted on page 34 of this chapter.
hatred. Woodcock suggests: "the curious exaggerations and distortions which appear in [their] accounts of Mexico in fact represent the imposition, over the true map, of [their individual] fears and hopes" (22). This is as true for Porter as for the English writers. However, Porter would have rejected any comparison. She thought *The Plumed Serpent* a failure because it was more Lawrence's "mental autobiography" than a novel, and Lawrence's quasi-philosophy "a mismash of confusion, misunderstanding, personal wish fulfillment, and prejudice". But Porter and Lawrence shared one obsession: the Indian.

Since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, foreigners, especially writers, have been coming to Mexico in search of stimulation as attested by Wayne Drewey Gunn's *American and British Writers in Mexico 1556-1973*. Porter was no exception. But in her search for new experiences, she brought with her cultural prejudices from her home life. Porter did not realise how much she was defined by her Texan upbringing, which manifested itself in Mexico in a continuation of the preoccupations she had in the United States. Porter's view of Mexico is limited. In her fiction she wrote about both the world she knew in Mexico and the world she had imagined for herself while still in Texas; a world of Indian servants, artists, ex-patriates and, to a lesser degree, upper-class Mexicans. In her articles, she covered the wider spectrum of the political situation and tried to make sense of a failing revolution. A crucial distinction between Porter's fiction and her factual articles was that her articles were written often at short notice for immediate publication. In "The Mexican Trinity", "Where Presidents Have No Friends" and "The Fiesta of Guadalupe", for example, Porter wrote with a spontaneous bafflement. She did not try to explain, but only to describe what she saw and what it might mean. Porter was aware of the difficulty of making snap assumptions and is loathe to do so. In Porter's fiction, on the other hand, time constraints were removed and, as such, her Mexican fiction became the written account of an interior landscape dominated by the themes of sex and death.

Sex directly causes death in "María Concepción", "The Martyr" and "Hacienda". The desire for sex leads to a living death in "That Tree", and Laura's frigidity and Eugenio's death are inextricably linked in "Flowering Judas". "Virgin Violeta" is a study in repressed sexuality. Porter's Mexico is a violent Lawrentian place: María Concepción murders her rival, María Rosa. Justino accidentally kills his sister in "Hacienda"; the painter, Rubén, gorges himself to death when Isabel leaves him. Eugenio commits suicide in "Flowering Judas". Sex and death predominate in the unpublished "Dove of Chapacalco".

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94 Stout in *Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times*: 230.
Why do the twin themes of sex and death appear so consistently in Porter's fiction? Porter had almost died of influenza in Denver, Colorado, in 1918 and her brush with death affected her profoundly. Throughout her many bouts of depression, Porter considered suicide. We also know that she considered Mexico to have a "deathly quality". Biographers and critics alike have dwelt on Porter's sexual problems precisely because they seemingly motivated some of her fiction. Porter used her short stories, "Virgin Violeta" and "The Lovely Legend", as a means of exacting revenge on her lover, Salomón de la Selva. Just as Porter invented much of her life, so she injected real events and personal experiences into her fiction. The nature of her articles precluded much personal information; in them Porter tried to be an objective and trustworthy recorder of place.

For much of her time in Mexico, Porter was at pains to point out the failings of writers such as D H Lawrence for their portraits of Mexico as a violent country. Porter wanted the complexity and variety of Mexico to reach a wide audience, but when her fiction is deconstructed it is reduced to the same themes as those of less knowledgeable writers. The omission of the worker and the industrialisation of Mexico is significant because it illustrates how far Porter's Mexico remained her invention. Her overriding concern was always the plight of the Indian. Porter's last thoughts on leaving Mexico for the final time were for the suffering she had seen the Indian endure and which she now realised would never be halted. She wrote a letter to Caroline Gordon, which she started on board the SS Werra and finished in Berlin, and which formed the basis for Ship of Fools. The letter concluded with Porter expressing relief at having left Mexico: "... it is all a great relief after the harshness and nasty public manners, the shrillness and meanness of Mexico, where only the Indian gives any charm of being, and even that is the saddening courtesy and humbleness of a beaten creature who bows his way through life...."96

Mexico for Porter was the Indian. Her championing of the revolution and her interest in the muralists' work both stem from a love of the Indian. Porter was the first American writer to take the Indian from the periphery in "María Concepción" and make her the subject of a story. Porter's disenchantment with Mexico was not chronological but episodic, and it appears that she spent her time vacillating between despair and elation, which are reflected in all her Mexican writings. She projected her own despair onto the plight of the Indian and into her portrait of Mexico.

Yet Porter never freed herself from the bond she had initially fabricated between

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95 It also suggests that her work shared more similarities with writers such as Stuart Chase than Porter would have realised or appreciated.
96 In Letters of Katherine Anne Porter: 60.
herself and the country, and which then grew into a real bond. Evelyn Waugh, in his Mexican travelogue *Robbery Under Law* (1939), suggested an explanation for the hold Mexico has on writers:

> The fascination of Mexico lies in the stimulus it gives to the imagination. Anything may happen there; almost everything has happened there; it has seen every extreme of human nature, good, bad and ridiculous. It has, in a way, the position towards Europe that Africa had to the Romans; a source of novelty ... but also a distorting mirror in which objects are reflected in perverse and threatening forms.\(^97\)

Mexico was bound up in Porter’s psyche, yet she failed to realise that her Mexico was a product of her perception and not the objective work she thought. As late as February 1, 1964, Porter was still thinking about Mexico. She wrote to Robert Penn Warren: "I think of Mexico because I no longer feel at home here anywhere, there is nowhere I wish to go and Mexico is not so far away now."\(^98\)


\(^{98}\) In *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico.* 229-230.
Swimming on the Surface: Martha Gellhorn's View of Latin America

"I had been a traveller all my life, beginning in childhood on the streetcars of my native city which transported me to Samarkand, Peking, Tahiti, Constantinople. Place names were the most powerful magic I knew. Still are." - Martha Gellhorn 1

"I decided that it would be a good plan to see everywhere and everything and everyone and write about it." - Martha Gellhorn 2

Martha Gellhorn filed her last report on Sunday July 27, 1997, concluding a career as a war correspondent, journalist and novelist which had spanned seven decades. During those decades a parallel career as a traveller emerged. In many respects, travelling was Gellhorn's life's work. Born in St Louis, Missouri, in 1908, Gellhorn left North America at the age of twenty-one for France and subsequently lived and travelled all over the world. In her capacity as a war correspondent Gellhorn reported from Spain, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, France, Vietnam and most recently, during the 1980s, from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama. In her only work of travel writing, Travels with Myself and Another (1978), Gellhorn listed at least fifty-five countries she could remember visiting (17). She also lived for extended periods of time in Cuba, Mexico, Italy, Kenya and Great Britain, and was resident outside her native United States from 1930 until her death in February 1998.3

It was reporting from war zones that gave Gellhorn a structure for her life, and a means of earning a living. Ironically, given Gellhorn's reputation as a war journalist, her war career began more by chance than design. In the 1985 afterword to her novel, A Stricken Field, first published in 1940, Gellhorn explained how she became a war journalist:

In 1937 I had become a war correspondent in Spain because I was there and mailed an unsolicited article to Collier's in New York. Collier's published it and put me on their masthead. I had no qualification except eyes and ears; I learned as I went. In 1938, I became a foreign correspondent as well, again because I was on the spot. My qualification was that I had spent most of my life since 1930 in Europe, involved in its politics the way a tadpole is involved in a pond. Collier's was a weekly magazine with a colossal circulation, nine million, thirteen million; I don't remember. This huge audience gave me the brief illusion that I could affect how people thought by making them see what I had seen (303).

Motivated by a desire for the reader to see what she has seen, and thereby agitate

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1 Travels with Myself and Another: 15.
2 Ibid.
3 Gellhorn did try to live in the United States in 1947 but the "communist" witch-hunts and the growth of McCarthyism so appalled her that she left after less than a year.
for change, Gellhorn made war her beat just as Joan Didion would make California hers in the 1960s. The world split into two zones for Gellhorn: war and elsewhere. Her view of the world was conditioned by the numerous wars she witnessed since she first covered the Spanish Civil War. By her own admission, Gellhorn was never an impartial war reporter. In an interview for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* she repeated her belief that the reporter's duty was to let the world know when she had witnessed suffering. Asked by the interviewer, Jenni Murray, whether she thought objective reporting desirable, Gellhorn replied:

This objective stuff is rubbish, boring. A news agency is objective. But if you are seeing something happen the idea that you're so brain-dead and stony-hearted that you have no reaction to it strikes me as absolute nonsense. And you see appalling things happen to people ... how could you not describe what you see ... and what you see is awful.

Impartiality did not exist for Gellhorn. Every time, she sided with those who were made to suffer and whom she saw as the victims. James Fox, in a posthumous appreciation of Gellhorn, recalled her saying: "The Big Picture always exists, and I seem to have spent my life observing how desperately the Big Picture affects the 'little people' who did not devise it and have no control over it." The reporter's job was to convey the impact of the "Big Picture". Gellhorn defined the job as: "To limit yourself to what you see and hear and not suppress and invent. I can't do an abstract piece about industrial relations. I can only go see a bunch of people, listen to what they have to say, look at how they are living and report that exactly."

This is precisely what Gellhorn did in her final report. At the age of eighty-eight she returned to Newbridge, a small mining village in South Wales, for BBC Radio 4's *A View From Abroad*. Gellhorn wanted to describe the changes which had taken place in the mining village since her first visit there in 1984 at the height of the miners' strike. Gellhorn viewed the fight of the miners against the Conservative government as

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4 Gellhorn went with Ernest Hemingway to Spain, where they eventually became lovers. They married in 1940 and once their marriage started to deteriorate Gellhorn and Hemingway competed as to who had attended more wars. Hemingway grew so annoyed by Gellhorn's prolonged absences from Cuba that he cabled her in Italy in 1944, "ARE YOU A WAR CORRESPONDENT OR WIFE IN BED?" See Ker: *The Hemingway Women*: 391 and *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters*, edited by Carlos Baker: 623.
5 *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4: April 7, 1993.
8 The brief of *A View From Abroad* was to allow non-Britons to comment on any aspect of British life which interested them.
9 *A View From Abroad* (1/6). First broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on July 27, 1997. Gellhorn's original report on the miners was published in the *Guardian* in December 1984, entitled "The Enemy Within". It is reprinted in *The View from the Ground*: 404-408.
another war, this time for control of the miners' union. On her return, she was again captivated by Newbridge's community spirit and struck by how the pit's closure had destroyed the village since her first visit. In two separate reports Gellhorn described Newbridge at two different points in its history. She had also used this technique to describe Cuba, Haiti, Poland and Spain, to name but a few. The temporal quality of place is a major theme in Gellhorn's writings. One expects Gellhorn, as a reporter, to have dealt only with the immediacy of reportage. However, her writings reflect both place as she captured it at a precise moment and then its development when she revisited it at a later date. With the benefit of hindsight, Gellhorn compared what she saw originally to what followed. This style of commentary depends on continual travel and revisiting of places, something journalists rarely do.

Being a journalist, Gellhorn realised, was a passport to history in the making. It was also the only way for Gellhorn to finance her ambition of seeing and going everywhere. Gellhorn wrote for a number of publications including Collier's (1937-1946), the Saturday Evening Post (1946-1957), New Republic intermittently between 1929 and 1957, and the Atlantic Monthly (1947-1966). In later life she free-lanced, concentrating on writing for British newspapers and journals such as the Guardian, the Times, the New Statesman and Granta. A selection of her writings since the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War has been collected in The View from the Ground (1989) and The Face of War, (1959, updated in 1993). However, most of Gellhorn's journalism remains uncollected.

In contrast, many of Gellhorn's short stories and all the novels she offered for publication were published. Gellhorn often said that her first love was fiction and that her war journalism was the means of funding the time needed to devote to fiction writing. In her afterword to A Stricken Field she said "journalism paid for the time to write fiction"(311). Gellhorn also wrote short stories for magazines (which she labelled "bilge") in order to pay for the longer periods of time needed to write full-length fiction. Much of Gellhorn's time and energy, therefore, were channelled into the production of her six novels: What Mad Pursuit (1933), A Stricken Field (1940), Liana (1944), Point of No Return (1948), His Own Man (1961) and The Lowest Trees

10 Gellhorn ceased to write for Collier's as their war correspondent and started to write for the Saturday Evening Post because, as her marriage to Hemingway deteriorated, she and Hemingway were in direct competition to cover the D-Day landings in Normandy. Gellhorn had goaded Hemingway for his lack of interest in World War II, when he finally decided to cover the war he made sure of getting the job of correspondent for Collier's. This deprived Gellhorn of her long-standing association with the magazine since only one correspondent was allowed to be accredited from each publication.
Within Gellhorn's extensive writings there are two distinct Latin American phases. The first phase concentrated on fiction. Gellhorn had written all her fiction, including that set in Latin America, by 1967. Her Latin American fiction consists of two short stories set in Cuba, a short story set in Mexico and the novel *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*, which is set in the fictitious Mexican town of Tule, based on Cuernavaca. The second phase of her Latin American oeuvre concentrated on factual reportage, either war reporting or investigative journalism. Gellhorn covered the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s and went to Panama after the United States' invasion of 1989. In the early 1980s, she also travelled back to Cuba where she had lived with Hemingway between 1939 and 1944, and wrote about a trip to Haiti thirty years after making the visit in 1952. Her last foray was to South America and Brazil, which resulted in a travel piece for the *Independent on Sunday* and an investigative article for the *London Review of Books* on the street children of Salvador, Bahia, in 1996.

The shift from fiction to non-fiction in Gellhorn's Latin American writings is significant because, despite her innate politicisation, it indicates her move from viewing Latin America as a personal, apolitical world to a politicised area which was frequently the victim of an aggressive United States. Gellhorn made this transition with the benefit of temporal hindsight and physical displacement. Being in possession of an American passport allowed her to move freely around the world and to leave trouble-spots when they became too dangerous. However, it is evident in her journalism that, as she grew older, Gellhorn became increasingly aware of the negative side of being an American. Her distress at America's behaviour during the McCarthy era in the 1950s, and then during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, was heightened further during the 1980s in Central America. Gellhorn wrote to James Fox when the American administration gave a billion dollars to the Panamanian dictator, General Noriega, to keep him in power: "We hold shameful passports ... I can hardly stand the idiocy and mindless cruelty done in my name as a citizen." She considered herself an "internationalist": a member of the human race who is at home anywhere. Gellhorn's third husband, Tom S Matthews, wrote an account of a trip they made back to the United States in 1959 while both were resident in London. At the end of their journey Matthews asks Gellhorn:

11 Gellhorn disowned her first novel, *What Mad Pursuit*, and never included it in any lists of her published works. *Point of No Return* was originally published in the United States as *The Wine of Astonishment*. In an afterword to the 1989 paperback re-issue, Gellhorn explained how her publisher would not let her use *Point of No Return* as the title since he thought it too bleak. Gellhorn, for her part, hated the title *The Wine of Astonishment*: "I did not feel it was mine with this makeshift title" (322).

"How do you feel about being an American, M?"
"That's your kind of worry, not mine."
"Why not?"
"I'm an internationalist type, old boy; you'll have to ask me how I feel about being a member of the human race."
"How do you feel about that one?"
"Worried. Scared about the whole lot. Scared for some and scared of some. Trying to hope it's all better than it seems. Also that it will last."
"Americans are part of the human race."
"Yup."

Gellhorn's internationalism was partly inherited, but she also had a seemingly innate sense of the world's injustice which was compounded by the horrors of nationalism she witnessed during years of war correspondence. In later life, her internationalism grew in parallel with her disenchantment with North America.

In 1996, Gellhorn maintained that her memory was so poor that she could not remember the order of past travels or what happened when she made them. Her memory was composed of images (as is Didion's) which left Gellhorn with no control, as she tried to explain in an article for the *London Review of Books*:

> Memory must be structured on dates. There can be no coherence or sequence to it unless it is anchored in time. But I have no grasp of time and no control over my memory. I cannot order it to deliver. Unexpectedly, it flings up pictures, disconnected with no before or after. It makes me feel a fool. What is the use of having lived so long, travelled so widely, listened and looked so hard, if at the end you don't know what you know?

Gellhorn was being somewhat disingenuous. As a journalist she committed a lifetime's observations to paper and, since her death, friends have told of evenings during which Gellhorn recollected, in vivid detail, much of her life. Nevertheless, the observation that her memory functioned outside linear time and that her experience was reduced to a series of disconnected experiences is crucial to understanding Gellhorn's writing. One of the reasons Gellhorn never became a "travel writer", despite her continued and constant travelling, was that she did not keep notes about her journeys;

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13 T S Matthews: *O My America!* : 202. Matthews also said in his account: "I saw one St. Louis, M. saw another." Gellhorn's opinion of the United States on this trip was relentlessly negative and critical, where Matthews found much less to criticise.
14 In an interview for *American Vogue* (April 1988) Gellhorn explained, at some length, the influence her mother's community work had on her: "She started out by getting a pure milk law passed in Missouri. She got the Civil Service law changed nationally, from entrance through nepotism to entrance by examination. When it was discovered that cesium 137 from bomb tests was affecting babies' teeth, the experts came to her, Edna Gellhorn, for advice. She did everything as a private person; she never ran for office" (359).
when she tried to look back, too often her memory failed her. Instead Gellhorn relied partly on photographs and letters, written mainly to her mother, to help rekindle memories. In *Travels with Myself and Another* Gellhorn explained further her lack of memory:

The trouble is that experience is useless without memory. Serious travel writers not only see and understand everything around them but command erudite cross references to history, literature and related travels. I couldn't even remember where I'd been. I think I was born with a weak memory as one can be born with a weak heart or weak ankles. I forget places, people, events, and books as fast as I read them. All the magnificent scenery, the greatest joy of travel, blurs. As to dates - what year? what month? - the situation is hopeless.... the past is veiled in cloud with gleams of light (15-16).

Gellhorn remembered places as a series of images, often unconnected, which allowed her no recall as to the detail of the tableaux. Often she travelled to places with the express purpose of swimming or snorkelling, and her love of both these pursuits is significant. Gellhorn was an obsessive swimmer and her quest for the perfect beach became a life-long pursuit, paralleling her career as a war correspondent. She would set off for a destination with little prior knowledge and with an apparently casual reason for going. A trip to Hungary was planned around a swim: "I went to Hungary because I wanted to swim in Lake Balaton. My compulsive travels are often based on siren place names and often land me in hell holes."

17 Gellhorn's fascination with place names and her passion for swimming and snorkelling often led her to "hell holes" which became a diversion in their own right.

Both swimming and snorkelling allowed Gellhorn to escape into a different world. Charles Sprawson's seminal account about swimming, *Haunts Of The Black Masseur: The Swimmer as Hero* (1992), makes the following observation about the swimmer:

Though very young, I began to form a vague conception of the swimmer as someone rather remote and divorced from everyday life, devoted to a mode of exercise where most of the body remains submerged and self-absorbed. It seemed to me that it appealed to the introverted and eccentric, individualists involved in a mental world of their own (5).

Gellhorn escaped into a different world when she put on her snorkelling mask. Both swimming and snorkelling gave Gellhorn a different perspective and expanded her ways of viewing the world. From the water the shore diminished as she swam away. In the water another parallel universe emerged; as she observed things which could not be seen from the shoreline. Swimming and snorkelling clearly demonstrated how empirical

16 Gellhorn lived in Wales for many years and swam twice daily in her garden swimming pool.

17 *The View from the Ground*: 457.
reality relied on observation both to view and to learn about it. Gellhorn observed life on
land in much the same way that she studied under-water marine life. The sea allowed her
to slip into a different world, which might be seen to symbolise her holiday destinations
where land signifies war and political journalism. Swimming - the above and below
surface reality - can be seen as a metaphor for Gellhorn's dichotomous view of place.

The vacation/war-zone dichotomy underpinned Gellhorn's writings. She also made
an additional link between memory and travel. To travel was to remember and the means
of validating her travel experience was by recollection. All the travel accounts in
Travels with Myself and Another are told from recollection. Where possible, Gellhorn
consulted contemporary diaries and letters but, since such material was sketchy and, by
her own admission, her memory poor, she presumably fictionalised much of her travel
narrative. The desire to avoid fictionalisation might explain Gellhorn's readiness to
return to a place many years after her initial contact to rekindle her memory. This
approach seems at odds with journalism, which relies on immediate commentary on
current events. Gellhorn's war correspondence and journalism depended for their effect
on her ability to describe events and convey an impression of what appeared to be
happening, a skill which requires neither historical recall nor reference to anywhere
other than the present. As such, her war journalism shared with her travel narrative
the desire to convey the "here and now".

A study of Gellhorn's presentation of Cuba bears out much of this argument.
Gellhorn originally went to Cuba in March 1939 with Ernest Hemingway after they had
left Spain. They married in November 1940 and Cuba remained Gellhorn's base for the
next few years and Hemingway's for the next twenty. The country is closely associated
with Gellhorn and Hemingway's marriage and its subsequent disintegration. Initially
Gellhorn was thrilled to be there and wrote to a friend, Clara Spiegel: "It is wondrously
beautiful and I look about the house and the land and cannot figure out how I happened to
be so lucky in my life with such a place to live and such a one to live with." However,
her happiness was soon marred not only by marital difficulties but also by her
frustration at being so far from Europe and World War II. When Gellhorn revisited Cuba
in 1985 she recalled how her initial pleasure had turned to disdain: "I remembered with
what gaiety I had come to this country and how I had left, frozen in distaste of a life that
seemed to me hollow and boring to die.... Then Cuba became worth nothing, a waste of
time." Gellhorn actually spent much of World War II in Europe: she reported from
Finland, France, Czechoslovakia and England between Cuban sojourns; as soon as she was

18 She wrote to Spiegel at the start of 1940. The letter is quoted in Kert: 390.
19 "Cuba Revisited" in In Trouble Again: A Special Issue of Travel Writing, Granta 20:
131.
removed from the war she wanted to return. Gellhorn's war career was curtailed by Hemingway's anger at her repeated absences from the marital home. In Gellhorn's mind Cuba came to represent a place of inaction and repression and so she dismissed the island from her memory. Forty-five years later she remembered how she felt: "I didn't think about Cuba at all. Everything I cared about with passion was happening in Europe. I listened to the radio, bought American newspapers in Havana, waited anxiously for letters from abroad. I wrote books, and the minute I could break free, I went back to the real world, the world at war." 20

"I went back to the real world": for Gellhorn Cuba was not the real world but a sun-baked holiday retreat where she could swim. Yet, while Gellhorn lived in Cuba, it was ruled by Fulgencio Batista, whose regime became an increasingly brutal dictatorship which spanned three decades. Batista was finally overthrown by Fidel Castro and fled to the Dominican Republic on December 31, 1958. But in Gellhorn's two stories set in Cuba, "Night Before Easter" (The Heart of Another, 1946) and "The German" (The Honeyed Peace, 1954), she portrayed a Cuba which was home to Spanish exiles, American residents, business men, geographically isolated from the war in Europe. Her stories reflect the decadent Cuba of the Batista regime as an international playground seen through a North American perspective, and do not touch on the wider issues of Cuban life.

In "Night Before Easter" Gellhorn paints a world of drinking, night clubs and prostitution. The story describes an evening spent by a group of people, some of whom are meeting for the first time. The atmosphere is charged with loss: of youth, homeland, family and friends. Onto this backcloth the narrator (Gellhorn) adds personal memories. The café reminds her of a Spanish café: "I loved this café because it was friendly, no one ever hurried you to pay, the food was fine ... it was like a café in Spain..." 21 The narrator and her Basque friends sing the Basque national anthem and in their nostalgia for the Basques' homeland attempt to re-create the atmosphere of Republican solidarity from the Spanish Civil War. Cuba is a staging-post for them all; it is especially temporary for Walter Thomas, the depressed American businessman whose birthday it is. He is the outsider; the narrator feels a bond with the Basques because of their shared experience of the Civil War: "... we have the war in Spain between us, the memory and the understanding of the war, and that makes me their friend"(44).

Havana buildings remind the narrator of places outside Cuba she has visited: the nightclub reminds her of Tunis, the Cuban cabaret show is a pale imitation of a French

21 "Night Before Easter": 40.
Her references to other places and lives serve to reinforce Cuba's lack of cultural identity and the idea of the island as an anonymous international playground serving North Americans' appetite for sex, drinking and gambling. Graham Greene visited Cuba for the first time in 1954 and described the appeal to the foreigner of Batista's Cuba, "where every vice was permissible and every trade possible." Greene continued, describing "the brothel life, the roulette in every hotel, the fruit machines spilling out jackpots of silver dollars, the Shanghai theatre where for one dollar twenty-five cents one could see a nude cabaret of extreme obscenity with the bluest films in the interval." In Greene's novel *Our Man in Havana* (1958), he painted a picture of a tawdry city where sex was the local currency: "... the great Havana subject; the sexual exchange was not only the chief commerce of the city, but the whole raison d'être of a man's life. One sold sex or one bought it - immaterial which, but it was never given away"(56).

Gellhorn, in her short story, suggests a similar world: Walter Thomas thinks he wants a prostitute but, once he engages one, is ambivalent and turns his attention to the narrator, thereby prompting the prostitute to ask: "Is he with me or with her?"(46). Thomas's liaison suggests a spiritual desperation rather than a sexual experience: "We left him though, standing on the pavement under a street lamp, the woman's arm through his, her body pressed determinedly against him and he looked surprised, lonely, and a little afraid"(47).

"Night Before Easter" captures the experience of the foreigner's Cuba of the day. Its inconsequential lifestyle has no lasting appeal for Gellhorn and the writing reflects this. Gellhorn does not give Cuba any weight because she sees it as frivolous and decadent, and, more importantly, because it is not Europe and the theatre of war. At this point in her life, Gellhorn never considered using her journalistic skills to uncover the native Cuba of the non-privileged inhabitants. Other journalists did look at Cuba later as a political entity: Herbert Matthews, the veteran war correspondent who covered the Spanish Civil War for the *New York Times*, a friend of both Gellhorn and Hemingway from Spain, brought Fidel Castro to the United States' attention in February 1957 in a series of stories written from Castro's mountain hideout. Until this point Batista had mounted a successful propaganda campaign maintaining that Castro was dead. Matthews succeeded in visiting the guerrilla base and proving that the revolutionary was very much alive.

23 "Matthews was smuggled up to Fidel's mountain hide-out and from there wrote a series of stories which exploded on the front page of the most prestigious newspaper in the U.S. Matthews' dramatic dispatches, which extolled the discipline, bravery, and commitment of the rebels, gave Fidel international status overnight." *Modern Latin America*: 259, edited by Thomas E Skidmore and Peter H Smith.
Gellhorn, in the early 1940s, dismissed Cuba as a frivolous diversion from the war. In her two page story, "The German", the incident in Havana is motivated by the German invasion of Paris. The allegory describes how a much-hated German businessman taunts a Basque about the war in Europe; the Basque retaliates by hitting the German. A few days later the Basque is beaten by unknown assailants. The Basques then plot to avenge the attack at a future point. As Gellhorn's metaphor for the greater evil the Germans were committing in Europe, the story shows her state of mind:

When the German Army entered Paris there was a stillness and sorrow in the cafés along the Havana water-front. No one had ever been to Paris, but you could imagine it to be a larger, grander Havana, and the people there seemed lost now and hurt beyond healing. One could not feel that the French, any more than the Cubans, would be people to start a war (131).

War intrudes into Gellhorn's playground. But it is not only the narrator who is thinking about events in Europe: the Basques reflect on the loss of their homeland and the German on the incipient Nazi domination he hopes for:

The German, seeing these men from the street, came in noisily, as was his habit. The Basque Jai-Alai players turned their backs to him. He circled the table so he could see their faces. They were nothing but exiles from a war they had lost, and they gave themselves an air of pride as if they were the true conquerors. Also they spoke freely and on all occasions against the Nazis, which would not be forgotten when the time came (131).

The violence in Havana is understood only in relation to Europe. It is a microcosm of the world war in which the Havana characters assume their national characteristics. The Basques are Gellhorn's reminder of the victims of the threat of Fascism, the German is the embodiment of Fascism and the explanation of why Europe is at war. However, Gellhorn's final paragraph suggests that this miniature European battle is carried out against the back-cloth of an indifferent Cuba: "Meanwhile the cruise ships came in, the Mayor got re-elected as arranged, someone started a shark-oil factory, in the pouring sun-light the streets were full of comfortable people, the price of sugar was going up." Gellhorn criticises the Cubans for their insularity, yet her two stories illustrate that Cuba remained merely a canvas on which she painted her global concerns. Decades later she realised her mistake.

Gellhorn returned to Cuba in the mid 1980s and wrote a lengthy piece about her trip for Granta entitled "Cuba Revisited". On her first return trip, she still saw Cuba as a playground. The island was meant to be a holiday destination:

I had not come to Cuba to study communism but to snorkel.... I was going to Nicaragua, serious business, and meant to treat myself en route to two weeks
mainly in the lovely turquoise shallows off the Cuban coast. A couple of days in Havana, to retrace my distant past; then sun, snorkelling, thrillers, rum drinks: my winter holiday.24

Just as forty-one years earlier Gellhorn's thoughts were on a distant war zone, so on this second trip her real destination is another war zone, Nicaragua and "serious business". Gellhorn, at the outset of her trip, remained unable to see Cuba as anything but a non-political country despite the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Although Gellhorn had given little thought to Cuba in the intervening years she nevertheless wanted the opportunity to look at it again. Her journalistic experience and, more significantly, her travel knowledge reminded Gellhorn of the temporality of place. She knew Cuba would have changed; what surprised her was that she could barely remember how it was: "I left Cuba forty-one years ago, never missed it and barely remembered it. A long amnesia, forgetting the light, the colour of the sea and sky, the people, the charm of the place"(107).25 Her return journey becomes a litany of things she failed to notice the first time. The world Gellhorn and Hemingway inhabited between 1939 and 1944 excluded the majority of Cubans. In 1985, Gellhorn realised that she had not known that Cubans could be black, had not considered whether elections (free or otherwise) were held, and that she had never ventured beyond her home, the Finca Vigia, and Havana and therefore had no idea of the island's size. Further, Gellhorn never realised that segregation was practised in Havana. She failed to connect the name of the expensive white neighbourhood Vedado with its meaning in English, "prohibited": "I had never thought of Cubans as blacks, and could only remember Juan, our pale mulatto chauffeur. Eventually I got that sorted out. A form of apartheid prevailed in central Havana, I don't know whether by edict or by landlords' decision not to rent to blacks. Presumably they could not get work either, unless as servants"(108).

Gellhorn's Cuban re-education was forced on her by bad weather which made snorkelling impossible. She took the opportunity to travel around the island: "I was cold and slumped into travel despair, an acute form of boredom. With no enthusiasm, I arranged to fill time, meeting people and seeing sights, until the storm ended"(111). Rafael, who drove Gellhorn to the Cuban hinterland, asks her: "When you lived here, how did the campesinos look?" Gellhorn thought the answer obvious: "They looked abjectly poor or just everyday poor. Except for us, the narrow top layer. You could live in princely comfort on very little money in Cuba"(124). However, more importantly, Gellhorn considers that Rafael had asked her the wrong question: "The right question would be: who looked at the campesinos? Who cared? Nobody, as far as I knew; including

25 On a biographical note, the reason Gellhorn obliterated Cuba from her mind was probably because of the acrimonious break-up with Hemingway, who remained in Cuba until the end of the 1950s.
Gellhorn acknowledges the narrow social bands she then moved in and which she never questioned: "Being Cuban meant being somebody else's underling, a subordinate people. I knew a few upper-class Cuban sportsmen; they spoke perfect English, had been educated abroad, and were considered honorary Americans or Europeans, not in words, nor even in thought, but instinctively: they were felt to be superior to Cubans"(118).

Gellhorn's return to the island, with its unseasonable weather, allowed her to discover not only post-revolutionary Cuba but also many facets of pre-revolutionary Cuba and herself. The political awareness she had developed in the interim meant that the Cuba of the past now interested Gellhorn. With hindsight, she realised that Cuba, though an autonomous place, had been used by the United States when she lived there as a playground for gambling and prostitution. In spite of the American presence and the Batista dictatorship, however, the revolution had happened and been sustained. A place Gellhorn considered only as a holiday destination had provided the most enduring revolution of the modern era. The older Gellhorn is dismayed at her younger self's lack of political interest in a place which was home for almost five years, and in "Cuba Revisited" she attempts to redress the balance. Just as the Cubans, post-revolution, spent time in their many museums trying to learn about their past, so did Gellhorn in a parallel attempt to educate herself:

"Cuba is awash with museums. Museums for everything, past and present. The museums are scantily furnished - no great art treasures - and are visited with interest by all kinds of Cubans, young and old. I don't think I've ever raced through so many anywhere and I think I understand them. This is consciousness-raising on a national scale.... Cubans are being shown their history, how their ruling class lived and how the people lived, the revolts against Spanish "domination", and everything about the Revolución. They are being told that they have been here a long time: they are a nation and they can be proud to be Cubans (119).

Both the Cubans and Gellhorn learn about their past. Time has given Gellhorn the perspective to reconsider and re-define the Cuba of her marriage. Cuba was also a mirror in which Gellhorn was able to view the changes in herself and her increased political awareness. On her second trip she noticed everything: the clothed, well-fed children, the working women who laud their new-found equality with men, the well-supplied and free-of-charge hospitals. Gellhorn concluded: "Cuba now is immeasurably better than the mindless feudal Cuba I knew"(131). With the benefit of hindsight, she recasts the Cuba of her marriage.

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26 Even the presence of "political" prisoners in Havana's gaol did not diminish Gellhorn's pleasure at seeing the revolution in action.
Batista with Geilhorn's from her 1985 visit shows how the depressing, tawdry Cuba of pre-revolutionary days had been replaced by a mood of optimism. Greene's description captures the run-down, abandoned quality of the city:

The long city lay spread along the open Atlantic; waves broke over the Avenida de Maceo and misted the windscreen of cars. The pink, grey, yellow pillars of what had once been the aristocratic quarter were eroded like rocks; an ancient coat of arms, smudged and featureless, was set over the doorway of a shabby hotel, and the shutters of a night-club were varnished in bright crude colours to protect them from the wet and salt of the sea. In the west the steel skyscrapers of the new town rose higher than lighthouses into the clear sky.27

Gellhorn's later portrait of Havana suggests care and a lavish beauty despite the faded opulence:

The Malecon is a nineteenth-century jewel and joke. Above their arcade, the mini-mansions rise three storeys, each house exuberantly different from the next: windows garlanded with plaster roses, Moorish pointy windows of stained glass, caryatids, ornate ironwork balconies, huge nail-studded carved doors. The paint on the stone buildings is faded to pastel, blue with yellow, green with cobalt. Whoever lived here, when Cuba was my home from 1939 to May 1944, had departed: fluttering laundry suggested that their rich private houses were now multiple dwellings (107).

The houses of the rich in Greene's description have pillars which "were eroded like rocks", suggesting a heavy, dead quality. The same houses, with their laundry flapping, Gellhorn shows as full of life. Greene portrays Havana as a shabby place where "crude" colours dominate. For Gellhorn, the buildings have faded to a pretty "pastel" which is easy on the eye. Greene shows how Havana is fatally wounded by the corruption and decadence which has eaten away at the city's fabric. Gellhorn celebrates the triumph of the revolution, which has created a new society by taking existing structures and adapting them for its new use. When Gellhorn lived in Cuba with Hemingway she did not see the Cuba of Greene's description because it held no interest for her. Belatedly, she attempted to understand the Cuba of her past by visiting her old home, Finca Vigia, and talking to Hemingway's boatman, Gregorio. By the act of writing "Cuba Revisited" Gellhorn then ordered and made sense of her memories.

The double time perspective, which allowed Gellhorn to view the changes in both Cuba and herself, is used in a different way in her writings on Mexico. She published two stories with Mexico as their setting. The first is a slight short story, "Strange Daughter", which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post on August 23, 1952. The second is the novel, The Lowest Trees Have Tops, which Gellhorn used as a vehicle to criticise the United States. Written in 1967, long after Gellhorn ceased living in Mexico, it is her

27 Our Man in Havana: 53.
reaction to the trauma of the Vietnam War and her means of escaping into a happier past:

America disgusted me, killing poor people called commies in Vietnam, maltreating poor people called niggers at home. I wrote to a friend that I felt like a displaced person and all I wanted to do was get out.... I could escape from the world by moving from one unspoiled off-the-track Caribbean island to another but could only escape my Vietnam obsession by replacing it with another obsession. I withdrew in my mind to memories of Mexico and in five solitary months wrote a happy novel, living entirely in an invented village among enjoyable odd characters.... When the novel was finished, I was back at square one, obsessed by the distant war.28

The Mexico of Gellhorn's "happier past" is the setting for her novel, but it is not the novel's central point. Gellhorn's desire to escape what she saw as the barbarity of the Vietnam War was her motivating force for writing *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*. Appalled by the horrors of the war, and shocked by the brutality of North America towards a peasant population, Gellhorn wrote a homily to tolerance. She dedicated the novel to her mother, "in memory of the golden Mexican years".29 In *The View from the Ground*, Gellhorn describes how she came to settle in Mexico in 1948: "... my mother and I drove across America and Mexico to Acapulco.... As I wanted to sit still for a bit and grind on my war novel, we rented a house in Cuernavaca, a gentle village with dirt roads and flowers and superb trees and few foreigners, which enchanted us both."30 This reference to the time she spent in Cuernavaca between 1948 and 1953, where her mother was a frequent visitor, and the close relationship Gellhorn's fiction shares with her own experiences suggest that the novel's setting, Tule, is a fictional Cuernavaca, despite Gellhorn's claim that it was an invented village.31

The short story "Strange Daughter", written in 1952 when Gellhorn was still resident in Mexico, falls into the category of "bilge", Gellhorn's name for her lightweight stories written for money. The story is significant because Gellhorn sets a descriptive tone in "Strange Daughter" which she picks up again fifteen years later in

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28 *The View from the Ground*: 321-322.
29 Gellhorn has often said that the person she most loved in the world was her mother. Gellhorn wrote to her several times a week no matter where she was in the world, and while Edna Gellhorn was healthy she accompanied her daughter on trips. Gellhorn returned to the United States always with her mother as her priority. Edna Gellhorn's death on September 24, 1970, coincided with the trauma of the Vietnam War and the two events sent Gellhorn into a depression which lasted five years, until the war finally ended.
30 *The View from the Ground*: 117. Gellhorn's war novel, *The Point of No Return*, was published in 1948. Gellhorn did not publish another novel until 1961 and wrote no serious fiction while she lived in Mexico, concentrating instead on short stories, journalism and travel features.
31 Gellhorn's other five novels are also all set in places she had, at the very least, visited, but usually lived in: *What Mad Pursuit* is set on an American university campus, *A Stricken Field* is set in Luxembourg, *Liana* in the Caribbean, *Point of No Return* in Czechoslovakia and *His Own Man* in Paris.
The Lowest Trees Have Tops and which is motivated by her happiness at living in Mexico. Looking back in 1987 to her time in Cuernavaca, Gellhorn wrote in The View from the Ground: "The four sweet years in Mexico were my private golden age. I lived in one of the most beautiful places on earth before it was spoiled - and this is a permanent good fortune, in my life, to have reached the wonder places in time"(121). This reinforces the temporal, transient quality of place which was central to Gellhorn's writing. The Mexico which she writes about in "Strange Daughter" is taken from her contemporary, daily experience.

Briefly, "Strange Daughter" is the story of a famous American movie star, Lorraine Landon, who has escaped to "the little Mexican town of Tetela" with her daughter, Isabelle. Mother and daughter have long been estranged. But Mexican domestic life proves restorative and the twelve-year-old girl discovers love and affection among the Mexicans and, much to her mother's joy, eventually re-bonds with her mother. Gellhorn sets the scene of the Mexican village in her opening paragraph:

The little Mexican town of Tetela went about its business, unaware of a live, famous movie star on a pavement. An Indian bearing a huge bed spring on his back trotted by, muttering, "With your permission - with your permission," and people made way for him and his superhuman burden. Another Indian, with a glass tray strung from his neck, ambled along selling small poison-colored jellies.... There were beggars and shoeshine boys; burros loaded with charcoal; ancient busses of tattered tin, making hysterical explosive noises and sprouting heads from every glassless window.

It was the usual morning activity of Tetela; everybody seemed to be extremely busy and getting nowhere.32

The description of Tetela is later echoed in Gellhorn's description of Tule in The Lowest Trees Have Tops. The idyllic weather which is a leit-motif in the novel is introduced in the short story: "The sky was china blue. The trees in the square shone dark emerald, each leaf polished, after the night's rain. Every day would be like this, she had been reliably informed; faultless and sparkling"(21). Lorraine Landon takes simple pleasure in her Mexican surroundings. Susanna, the narrator of The Lowest Trees Have Tops, is similarly enamoured. "Strange Daughter" illuminates Gellhorn's enduring love not of Mexico, but of the routine of daily life in a small Mexican village.

Gellhorn had visited Mexico much earlier than her stay in Cuernavaca, in the summer of 1931. During her stay she met both Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian film maker, and Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist. Gellhorn wrote an article, "Mexico's History in a Film Epic", about Eisenstein's film on the Mexican Revolution, Que Viva

Mexico!. In *The View from the Ground* Gellhorn includes an amusing account of meeting Eisenstein at the pulque hacienda which she describes as "a gloomy ruin set in oppressive fields of giant cactus" (414). Gellhorn also met Rivera in Mexico City where he was at work on his murals:

Mexico City is now one of the outstanding disasters of the world but in 1931 it was more magical than any European city I had seen. I wandered the streets in a daze of joy, admiring the strange old handsome buildings and the dignified brown-skinned people. The volcanoes shone in that clear light and the air smelled of flowers.... I wandered through a noble doorway into a great hall with a ceremonial staircase. Sitting on a plank, high up the wall by the stairway, a fat man in overalls was painting a mural. He saw me and asked if I wanted to come up and presently, beside him on the plank, I was asking how he knew what to do next, while he went on painting as easily as he breathed.... That plank in the Palacio Nacional was a meeting place for painter friends of the fat man with curly black hair and round happy face whose name, I learned, was Diego Rivera.

Gellhorn’s meeting with Rivera typified her travelling style. A consistent metaphor of her travels was their random quality. Gellhorn would set off for a destination with little prior knowledge of the place and with an apparently casual reason for going, as in her trip to Lake Balaton in Hungary. Gellhorn’s curiosity generally led her to discover more about a country than the best snorkelling waters. However, there is little evidence in Gellhorn’s Mexican writings of any interest in the country: her stories are local, concerned with the bond between the North American women and their adopted Mexican lifestyles.

The Mexico of *The Lowest Trees Have Tops* is re-created by Gellhorn almost fifteen years after she left it: this Mexico is a remembered world which is reconstructed as an idyll. *The Lowest Trees Have Tops* is ostensibly about a community of people, from all over the Western world, who live harmoniously in a small Mexican town, San Ignacio del Tule. The colony includes foreigners from North America, Spain, Poland, England and Sweden, drawn to Tule by its climate, and also native Mexicans. The day-to-day minutiae

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33 The article was published in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* on August 9, 1931. This was the same hacienda as Porter’s pulque hacienda in her eponymous story. Whether Porter met Gellhorn is not recorded by either writer.

34 Gellhorn wrote an article, "Chez Rockefeller" for the French magazine *La Lutte des Jeunes* which was published by her first husband, Bertrand de Jouvenel. The article about Rivera’s controversial mural was published on May 31, 1933. Rockefeller commissioned Rivera to paint a mural at the Rockefeller Center in New York, entitled "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future". When Rivera painted a portrait of Lenin into the mural Rockefeller was so incensed that he had the uncompleted fresco destroyed. Rivera returned to Mexico City where he repainted a smaller version of the mural in the National Palace. He took his revenge on Rockefeller by placing Rockefeller’s grandfather next to an illustration of syphilis bacteria.

35 *The View from the Ground*: 413-414.
of ex-patriate Tule life are documented by the American narrator, Susanna: the morning trip to collect mail and catch up on gossip, problems with servants, her house being decorated, inhabitants coming and going to their home countries and new arrivals. Against the backdrop of this village life, several momentous events upset the status-quo of Tule and show that "real life" cannot be completely excluded. On different occasions, contingents of North Americans threaten to divide and destroy the town's carefully constructed international group.

Gellhorn is concerned in her novel to show an idyllic community where people live in harmony because they understand the collective rules which govern them. Her depiction of Tule is close to the sixties' ex-patriate communities which sprang up in places as diverse as San Miguel de Allende in Mexico and Goa in India. In her novel, Gellhorn uses humour to suggest how a disparate group can live together so easily. However, Gellhorn treads a dangerous path. From the outset, she stresses Tule's absence from "the real world" with her emphasis on its non-participation in the capitalist world. All the foreigners bring their wealth with them to Tule. Gellhorn suggests that it is sufficient for Tule and its inhabitants "to be". However, her description of the town in the opening pages is double-edged: "The chief commodity of San Ignacio del Tule is time, and the people of Tule passionately enjoy wasting it. Tule exports nothing to the outside; its economics are a mystery. No one works enough to be tired, but everyone seems busy in a babbling sort of way. Tule is an ideal place for wasting time because it is so beautiful"(9).

Tule is supposedly a happy, carefree place, but this emphasis on its lack of production is dangerously close to the stereotyped archetypal Mexican village: a sleepy, hot, mañana place. Gellhorn describes exclusively the ex-patriate community: the Indians, as in "Strange Daughter", are employed by the foreigners precisely so the expatriates can spend their days idly. The residents pass their days discussing each other, and they participate in local events only if they require minimum effort: "The residents always took a great interest in Indian fiestas, providing they were not too hard to get to, or too uncomfortable"(168).

Gellhorn portrays her characters as devotees of the "laissez-faire" school of existence where nobody seeks power or domination over another, and where all live harmoniously side by side. Gellhorn, the war-weary journalist, argues that, if Tule can exist like this, then why not the whole world: "No one had absolute power around here, or even medium power, or wasted it. Yet most of the world was like Tule, if less beautiful. Most of the world was still villages where no one lusted for power but only
wished to live, laugh, love, eat, get drunk, buy things and have fun with their neighbours on occasion"(91). This drastic over-simplification in Gellhorn's call for global peace is explained by the events taking place as she was writing *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*. In 1966, Gellhorn, obsessed by the injustice of the Vietnam War and frustrated by not being there, used her memories of Mexico to try to block out the rage and impotence she felt. Gellhorn tried to suggest a different way for people to live, in line with her internationalist credentials. However, she undermined Mexico by giving the novel a moral message; there is an implication that unique Tule could, in fact, be anywhere where ex-patriates gather in the sun.

Further, Gellhorn's invented village is one of the last outposts of colonialism: the ex-patriates continue with their native rituals. The foreigners in Tule celebrate Christmas and Easter as if they were still at home, and they escape the town and return home when the Mexican weather becomes too hot. All the ex-patriates have Indian servants, and, although Susanna tries to paint a sweet picture of the foreigners and Indians living side by side, there is an implied social order to be observed. All the Indians featured in the novel are servants, with the exception of Bartolo, Raquel's Indian lover. Born the son of a peon, Bartolo is now a silver designer. The Indians add local colour to Gellhorn's narrative: "Tule swarms with beautiful lean Indians whose cheekbones shake the heart"(14). Gellhorn's description of Indian life in the main square concentrates on its more colourful details:

A little Indian boy, owner of one roller skate, hurtled around the benches followed by an equally agile pack of buddies. The salesmen of fly-ridden pineapple slices and poison-green jelloes strolled about with trays on their heads. Indian mothers, behind barricades of baskets, nursed babies on the fountain rim. The legless beggar was pushing himself along on his small wheeled platform accompanied by his comrade, the beggar with twisted polio limbs. There were also pigeons and dogs (50).

At times, Gellhorn's description of the Indians veers close to patronising caricature. Gellhorn describes Concepción, Susanna's maid, as given to hysterical outbursts and Pedro Jesús, Freddy's servant, will only talk when he has been drinking. When Bartolo disappears for days at a time it is assumed he has gone on a drinking binge. In fact, he has gone back to his native village to visit his mother. In her treatment of the Indians, Gellhorn follows literary antecedents such as D H Lawrence and Malcolm Lowry. In *Under the Volcano* (1947), Lowry's Indians also provide background detail against

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36 Gellhorn went to Vietnam once in 1966 for the *Guardian*. As a result of her article, the South Vietnamese Government refused to issue her with a return visa and Gellhorn found herself banned from the country. She said of her visit, "That brief stay in Vietnam, in August-September 1966, churned up my life until 30 April 1975, when the war finally ended." See *The View from the Ground*: 322.
which the Consul's decline is delineated. In Gellhorn's novel the Tacopatli Indians who threaten Zaza, the Polish woman, during the Holy Week Parade hint at the darker side of Mexico Lawrence portrayed in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). Gellhorn tells us that "the Tacopatli Indians were known to hate foreigners"(182) and when, in a drunken stupor, they accost Zaza in an attempt to extort money from her, a potential show-down threatens. The foreigners panic at the confrontation, and it is left to Bartolo to get rid of the Indians.

Nevertheless, the barrier between Indian and foreigner is broken down by the developing love affair between Raquel, the aristocratic Spanish exile, and Bartolo. Their relationship, from Raquel's initial unrequited love to their eventual baby and marriage, forms the novel's narrative backbone. Despite the unusual situation of a European falling in love with an Indian - "It was not however usual for a European to become lovesick for an Indian. Race and class barriers sprang up like fortifications"(16) - the community acts as the go-between in bringing together the unlikely pair. Gellhorn views the relationship as a symbol of the internationalism she eagerly promotes, where race and class are irrelevant since everybody tolerates each other:

The residents talk of themselves and each other with a lack of shame that is unnerving to visitors. They are safe in their candour because, while everyone knows everything about everyone else, no one cares. Slander and libel are daily pleasures. Interference with freedom of thought, word and deed is against the ground rules. This tolerance is another result of Tule weather, which weakens the memory. A feeble memory is a sound basis for tolerance and laziness helps too (10).

However, from within the group there are signs that the harmony Gellhorn wishes to convey is more imagined than real. Her utopia is undermined from the beginning. At the start of the novel, Gellhorn tells us that "the system, in Tule, was to talk without listening"(11), and also, "in Tule, togetherness did not exist"(22). This well-heeled group of foreigners live and let live only up to a point. When Freddy's imminent death, which is causing the community such misery, is found to be stage-managed, Susanna's retribution on their behalf is both swift and harsh. Despite Gellhorn's insistence that the foreigners in Tule live in a permanent state of "laissez-faire", a code of behaviour does apply and adherence is expected.

The group is confronted on four separate occasions by the prejudices of North Americans who invade their town and threaten to undermine its stability. The anti-Semitism of the Engelbachs causes the ex-patriate residents to squabble between themselves. But such is their sense of self-preservation that the group transcends local disagreements in order to expel an outside threat. More threatening still are the
Americans whose arrival in Tule upsets the status-quo. The first arrivals are three families, refugees from McCarthyism, who are bemused by their enforced expulsion from the country they love. The refugees refuse to assimilate into the residents' lifestyle, creating instead a parallel existence. They create a surrogate America with their Parent-Teacher Association and soft-ball games. The refugees live on the outskirts of Tule in the German quarter of town and their insularity, conformity and persistent belief in the supremacy of the United States prohibits them from joining a disparate group of ex-patriates with no clear national identity. Having been exiled from their beloved country, the refugees are almost ostracized for a second time by Mrs Hatfield's influence.

Mrs Hatfield is Tule's McCarthy. A rich American, she moves into the town and wastes no time in transmitting her poison. Mrs Hatfield buys loyalty, curries favour and stirs up prejudice and discrimination towards homosexuals, communists, tradespeople and the poor, threatening to split the community into two warring factions. Mrs Hatfield's victimization of any dissenter or non-conformist is a metaphor both for the danger Gellhorn found inherent in the McCarthy era and also for North America's increasingly bullying tactics towards other countries. Reviewing the legacy of the McCarthy era from the perspective of the 1980s, Gellhorn explained the damage McCarthyism inflicted on the American psyche:

McCarthy discovered imaginary communists everywhere or, as an extra frill, homosexuals, ipso facto, security risks.... He had only to hold up a piece of paper for the TV cameras and announce in his flat nasal voice, "I have a list here," and lives were truly destroyed.... McCarthy's purges were an American mirror image of Stalin's purges, an unnoticed similarity.... He derived his power from the American fear neurosis. McCarthyism did not begin or end with the malignant Senator nor the House Un-American Activities Committee. McCarthyism is rooted in this national neurosis.... Americans did not acquire their fear neurosis as the result of a traumatic experience - war devastating their country, pestilence sweeping the land, famine wiping out helpless millions. Americans had to be taught to hate and fear an unseen enemy.... Neurotic fear of an unseen and unknown enemy translated into fear of the stranger - and the stranger was anyone who differed from the surrounding majority.... No real enemy could damage America as badly as it damages itself by its innate McCarthyism.

Just as many Americans were unable to resist the insidious nature of McCarthy's accusations, so Tule's foreign residents find themselves impotent in the face of Mrs Hatfield's attack. When she decrees that the American refugees' children should be

37 Gellhorn's dislike of the Germans, following World War II, was no secret. She refused to travel to Germany and her description of the German colony in the novel is an implicit criticism of them.

38 The View from the Ground: 171-173.
excluded from the International School because of their parents' supposed communism, her supporters agree. Those, including Susanna, who are opposed to Mrs Hatfield find themselves unable to combat her poison. Instead it is left to Bartolo, who takes Mrs Hatfield's presence as an insult to Mexican sovereignty, to threaten to humiliate her in front of the whole town by exposing her relationship with her chauffeur. Yet Bartolo's nationalism is at odds with the internationalism of the ex-patriate community:

Bartolo had worked up a patriotism of his own; he conceived the notion that Mrs Hatfield was an infringement of Mexican sovereignty. What did this gringa mean by coming to Mexico and behaving as if she were the Mayor of Tule, with the right to push people around?
"I am Mexican", Bartolo said. "This is my country, not Atfeel's" [Hatfield's] (36).

The narrator teases Bartolo for his patriotism, which runs counter to her plea for an international outlook, but it is only through Bartolo's resourcefulness that Tule is rid of Mrs Hatfield's bigotry and prejudice. A further irony is that Gellhorn set her homily to international tolerance in Mexico, a country which has always valued its liberty and nationalism, as shown by the 1910 Revolution. Bartolo will defend Mexico's right to sovereignty to the end. The Americans and the Europeans, fractured by World War II and internal calamities such as McCarthyism, do not share that sense of purpose and nor does the internationalist Gellhorn. Gellhorn's depiction of the American war-veteran artist, Abe Amadeo, demonstrate the differences between an American and Mexican sensibility. Abe Amadeo is a poor artist, disabled in Italy in World War II, who comes to Tule because he wants to live somewhere "warm and cheap".39 He offers the greatest threat to the status-quo of ex-patriate Tule life. He falls in love with the widowed Sarah Kent and all the residents hope that they might marry and settle down together. However, after a prolonged stay, Abe leaves Tule to return to the United States and the "real world". He complains that Tule is too comfortable an environment for him and that it inhibits his creativity: "I don't know how to paint anymore. This place is too rich for my blood. Everything I see is beautiful, everyone is happy. It's not right" (93). Susanna tries to tell Abe, as an artist, to look beneath the surface because people are not as happy as they appear. And both she and Sarah reject the idea that to create one must suffer. As Sarah recounts an argument she and Abe had about the artistic process, both she and Susanna offer examples of great artists who both travelled and stayed at home:

"Great art grows from the history and culture of a people. Artists must live in the idiom of their time in their own country; I quote. Expatriates are lost souls, their inspiration is thin, unnourished by the richness of their heritage; I quote again. Expatriates become dilettantes and pea-brains...."

39 Abe is reminiscent of the protagonist in Porter's story "That Tree" who wants to drop out somewhere warm and cheap and become a poet.
"What about Leonardo and Rembrandt and Matisse?"
"Oh balls. Le voyage forme la jeunesse too. Where do they get all this damned nationalism?" (163-164).

Abe's argument that to be a great artist you must stay in your home environment contradicts the life Gellhorn chose for herself. It also contradicts the experience of Mexico's greatest muralist. Stimulated by his nationalism, Rivera created outstanding murals which extolled Mexico's glory but he, too, went abroad for many years (initially to Spain, then France and Italy and, later, the United States). Gellhorn's life's work was based on the tenet that travel liberates, educates and informs. While Abe suggests that Tule cannot produce great art because its life is too undemanding, Sarah and Susanna refer to writers and artists who are hallowed giants of the creative world. By extension, Gellhorn defends place as part of the creative process. Paradoxically, however, she has chosen to emphasise the non-productivity of Tule, and to describe it as a town which does not create anything except a state of lethargy and a desire to simply "be". The removal of Tule from the "real world" Abe seeks is emphasised by the ex-patriates' pleasure in their non-participation in the capitalist world. Susanna passes her time sunbathing and day-dreaming, lost in a fantasy world:

In the afternoons, I lay on a mat on the lawn, watched the clouds and daydreamed. Like whipped cream Alps they floated across the pale blue sky while I led a botanical expedition to the upper Amazon, discovered a cure for cancer, and was elected lifelong First of the Ten Best Dressed Women. Somewhere beyond our plateau, in the real world, people suffered and contended; the human race was up to its incurable tricks of destruction. Here in this glowing air, time seemed to be standing still, which was my favourite way for time to act (55-56).

Gellhorn's Mexico shares some common details - such as her depiction of the Indians - with other writers, but her Mexico also differs from that of most other writers. Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) prefigures *The Lowest Trees Have Tops* in its Mexican part of the novel. Augie March follows his latest, rich girlfriend, Thea, to Mexico as she attempts to train an eagle. They settle in Acatla (Taxco) amidst a colony of foreigners "from a dozen countries" who are drawn to Mexico because it is a cheap place to live. The foreigners pass their time amusing themselves and each other: "Moulton liked to show that ill, miserable things and rubbish supplied the unity of the world. Only amusement supposedly made this tolerable, and so he specialized in amusement. All these people, the whole colony, did that." Although Tule is superficially similar to Acatla, Gellhorn's Mexico is not the crazy, adventure-seeking world Bellow creates.

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40 Rivera left Mexico in 1907 for Europe, where he stayed for the next twelve years. Having spent the 1920s in Mexico, Rivera then lived in the United States between 1930-34.
Likewise, although both Lowry and Gellhorn set their novels in Cuernavaca, using native Indians for local colour, the similarities end there. Lowry's novel tells of the decline and death of the tortured, alcoholic British Consul, Geoffrey Firmin, who has failed in love. *Under the Volcano* is set on the Day of the Dead, 1938. Note the opening description of Lowry's novel, and then Gellhorn's:

> The walls of the town, which is built on a hill, are high, the streets and lanes tortuous and broken, the roads winding. A fine American-style highway leads in from the north but is lost in its narrow streets and comes out a goat track. Quauhnahuac possesses eighteen churches and fifty-seven cantinas. It also boasts a golf course and no less than four hundred swimming pools, public and private, filled with the water that ceaselessly pours down from the mountains, and many splendid hotels (3).

> The village sits on an uneven golden plateau, a mile high, ringed by mountains. The surrounding land is vast, empty and awesome whereas Tule snuggles under tile roofs and trees, is overgrown with flowers, and noisy with talk, dogs, roosters, burros, hammering, fireworks and church bells (9).

Gellhorn's description is Mexico as nostalgic folk-art, a romantic picture of a fairy-tale place, lush and full of joyful sounds. Lowry, on the other hand, deals in the pragmatic reality of a town with more bars than churches. Lowry's description is based on precise numbers where Gellhorn's is vague and, at the same time, lyrical. Gellhorn's Mexico recalls more closely Sybille Bedford's in *A Visit to Don Otavio* (1953). Bedford's travel narrative is an amusing account of the trip she and "E." made around Mexico. The narrative tone is light-hearted as Bedford, unlike her male counterparts, delights in everything she sees. Bedford travels because she wants to be immersed in another culture and to be stimulated by others' ways of living. Bedford, however, lacking Gellhorn's retrospective romanticising of the country, describes Cuernavaca without any embellishment: "The town is not as lovely as the countryside; but it is small and the country is all about it. The plaza looks improvised. There are some booths about to be put up or pulled down; perhaps they are always there. As a resort the place seems unconvincing; for a Cathedral town, unsettled."43

Gellhorn's Mexico is a complex creation: Tule, its representative, is both a lyrical paradise, far removed from the horrors of the outside world, and a place where the status quo is continually threatened. The town is based on Cuernavaca yet Gellhorn would have us believe it is a literary invention. The town is a remembered world Gellhorn conjured up to obliterate the pain of the present and the Vietnam War. The story is set in Mexico but is about America. The narrative pleads for tolerance and understanding, but

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42 For a detailed account of *A Visit to Don Otavio* see the introduction.
43 *A Visit to Don Otavio*: 73.
the overriding impression the ex-patriate community gives is of apathy and indifference until their way of life is seriously threatened.

Mexico is the only destination in Gellhorn's fiction where the characters live permanently on holiday, with the result that the reader is shown a country at its most superficial and inconsequential. This is particularly true if we compare the world Gellhorn creates in Tule with that in The Weather in Africa (1978). In two of the three African stories, "On the Mountain" and "In the Highland", Gellhorn shows Europeans working hard to create a new life in Africa. Ian Paynter in "In the Highland" works tirelessly to plant new roots for himself, transforming his farm and its workers into a financial success story which brings him happiness at last. Similarly, the Jenkins in "On the Mountain" work constantly to give their daughters an inheritance and a secure future. The importance of the work theme in this book contrasts with its insignificance in The Lowest Trees Have Tops and adds weight to the impression of Mexico as an impermanent holiday idyll which is both ephemeral and insubstantial.44

While Gellhorn was still resident in Mexico in 1952 she made a return trip to Haiti. Just as memory was central to her presentation of Mexico in the translation of fond reminiscences of place into a nostalgic novel, so memory was also a primary impulse for the journey to Haiti. Gellhorn's account of her 1952 trip to Haiti, "White into Black", was written more than thirty years after her visit, appearing in the January 1984 edition of Granta. Gellhorn revisited Haiti prompted by vague and brief memories: "I had seen Haiti in passing, years earlier, and remembered high green mountains, cobalt sea and Port-au-Prince, a climbing white city festooned in flowering vines and bougainvillaea."45 While writing her account of the trip, Gellhorn remembered how Haiti first appeared to her when she was sailing through the Caribbean in 1942, looking for German submarines during World War II.46 Haiti's landscape and pretty surface lodged in Gellhorn's mind: she saw nothing beyond its facade. Her memories of Haiti illustrate the different perspective Gellhorn gained from the water, which was later contradicted by her view of Haiti, close up, on land. "White into Black" is the narrative of a remembered trip, itself prompted by a memory, which in the retelling becomes a morality tale about the negative side of travel.

Gellhorn travelled to Haiti hoping that a change of scenery would stimulate her

44 From 1962 Gellhorn lived in East Africa for part of each year for thirteen years.
45 "White into Black": Granta 10: Travel Writing: 95.
46 The story of Gellhorn's boat trip, island hopping to see whether ships were being sunk by the Germans, is told in "Messing About in Boats" in Travels with Myself and Another. Gellhorn found out subsequently that 251 merchant ships were sunk in 1942 in the Caribbean.

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literary imagination, since Mexico had failed to do so. She set off for Haiti optimistically, finding out nothing about her destination because the reason for going and not the place was important:

I knew nothing about Haiti except the splendid name Toussaint l'Ouverture, but Haiti as such was not the point. The point was scenery, weather, sea to swim in as background for sitting still and solitary and starting a novel. Resident travel. When you can't write at home, go somewhere else.... Any Caribbean island would have suited; Haiti was a careless choice (95).

With a life-time's travel behind her, and with thirty years' hindsight, Gellhorn deconstructs her reasons and motivation for travel in "White into Black". The opportunity to swim and snorkel was, as noted, often sufficient reason for Gellhorn to visit a new destination: she visited Cuba again only because it afforded good snorkelling. Once in Haiti Gellhorn disliked the capital, Port-au-Prince, and left as soon as was practicable for Jacmel, a name which attracted her on the map:

It rained; unheard of. I took against Port-au-Prince and bought a map. South over the mountains, on a bay, was a tiny dot marked Jacmel. The manageress at the pension had never heard of the place. This sort of information cheers me instead of sensibly putting me off. I imagined Jacmel as unspoiled, unexcited, a sleepy fishing village where I would find a simple room with sea views and breezes (95).

Gellhorn travelled to Jacmel with a preconceived idea of a fishing village in her mind. At first sight, Jacmel appeared to be exactly what Gellhorn imagined she was searching for: pretty houses overlooking the sea with an attractive village green. However, the experience soon sours. Gellhorn is made to feel unwelcome in the Pension Croft, and she gradually realises that the cold reception she receives is because of her colour. She is white and everyone in Jacmel is black: inverse racism. Gellhorn is stoned by a group of school children, again, she presumes, because of her colour. Such is the hostility of the local people, with the exception of the librarian, that Gellhorn becomes desperate to leave. Every experience Gellhorn has, outside the sanctuary of the library, confirms that she is discriminated against because of her colour. For perhaps the first time, Gellhorn acknowledges that place is not a blank canvas onto which a traveller can project her imagination. Haiti taught Gellhorn, as Cuba in the early 1940s and Mexico in the 1950s could not, that place is not passive.

In "White into Black" Gellhorn acknowledged the lesson Haiti taught her and concluded that "politics is everything"(103). The Haitians had taken an interest too late in their leaders' behaviour and consequently were suffering from centuries of corrupt dictatorship. Until Haiti, Gellhorn had understood the relationship between politics and war but ignored the political life of her holiday destinations. Her holidays were to relax,
write fiction and not think about the wars she made her work. In Gellhorn's explanation of why she went to Haiti she reveals that Haiti's appeal was its unknown quantity: "Why didn't I ... spare myself Haiti? Because Haiti was the unknown, that's all, and that's enough. I haven't yet learnt to be careful in travel" (105). When Gellhorn finally quit Haiti and arrived in St Martin, the half-French and half-Dutch island, she found exactly what she was looking for in her Caribbean retreat: a pretty island with hospitable people. Even after her Haitian experience, she continued to look for the perfect island get-away.

Gellhorn's assumption that Haiti was just another Caribbean destination was immediately challenged by her experience. Her instincts told her to leave, but Gellhorn was seduced by her natural surroundings: "The bad vibes came back as I groped my way along the path. Uneasy, unlivable country. But the night air was soft on my skin ... and I told myself to buck up, nothing could be wrong in such a beautiful place" (96). Gellhorn tried to rationalise the gulf which emerged between the Haiti of her imagination and the real Haiti. The empirical signs of Haiti were inauspicious but the power of Gellhorn's imagination and her vividly held memory of the fleeting glimpse of Port-au-Prince meant she ignored the evidence of the present. Gellhorn's reliance on memory backfired: her trip to Haiti served to undermine her brief but long-held memories of the island. In contrast, her memories of Mexico in The Lowest Trees Have Tops were translated into a happy nostalgia. Inadvertently, Gellhorn illustrates a different way of seeing. From a distance (the water), Haiti appeared idyllic: close-up (on land) she realised its dangers. Gellhorn's memory misled her. In her fiction, she allowed her Mexican memories to be upgraded to blissful recollections of a happy past. In her report on Haiti, Gellhorn downgraded her earlier memory of the island to a damning account of prejudice and ignorance. Ironically, she failed to see that her trip to Haiti was the result of her own ignorance - in her assumption that Haiti will be as it appeared -, and her arrogant refusal to learn about it before travelling there.

"White into Black" is ostensibly Gellhorn's account of her experience as a victim of racism but its real theme is the deception of memory and expectation. Gellhorn seemingly travelled with little, if any, knowledge of her destination but always with preconceptions. Inevitably she was disappointed and repeatedly concluded that travel failed to live up to expectation, citing reasons as mundane (although crucial to the sun-seeker) as poor weather. The real reason, however, was the gulf between expectation and reality. Paradoxically, Gellhorn claimed to travel, more often than not, with no prior knowledge of her destination. She relied on neither travel guides nor narratives, only her mind's idea of how a place might be. In an article about Belize, "Too Good For
Tourists", published in the *Independent Magazine* on November 3, 1990, Gellhorn tells the reader: "I needed local advice as I knew nothing about Belize except that it has a reef, which is why I was there." Once again, Gellhorn relied on her obsession with water to guide her to a new holiday destination and a winter break of snorkelling, reading and writing.

"Too Good For Tourists" is one of only two newspaper travel pieces Gellhorn wrote about Latin America. It follows a typical Gellhorn travel narrative: her intended goal in Belize failed to live up to its billing: "... I minded Caulker Cay. It had been recommended as picturesque and non-touristy; in my opinion a rural slum, just bearable if sloshed on inexpensive Belize rum". Undeterred, Gellhorn moved on to her next choice, which proved even more unsuitable:

Wild with impatience but hope intact I got the first available boat to Ambergris Cay, touted as the upmarket resort. The sky immediately turned gunmetal grey and an unseasoned norther roared over the island. Weather is now unseasonal everywhere, as we know, but this was hell. After the cold slicing rain, the wind blew hard and steadily day and night, like a cosmic fingernail on a blackboard. Tourists, not natives, wandered barefoot around the tacky village where the residents, expatriate and Belizean alike, were fully occupied in overcharging them. Tourism, even this minor, modest tourism, corrupts.

On this occasion, Gellhorn began to suspect her luck had finally run out. The planned snorkelling was impossible because the reef was a thirty-minute boat ride away. "I never saw the famous reef and thought I had done it at last, travelled myself into a no-exit dead end" Gellhorn tells the reader. That she did not, and instead managed to turn adversity into prosperity, restored Gellhorn's faith in her type of travel which Haiti had undermined. Gellhorn rented a house on the bank of the Belize River and stayed there for five weeks. In so doing, she re-created her stays in Mexico and Cuba.

Gellhorn was happy to make a home and set down roots, however temporary, for the duration of any stay abroad. In this respect she illustrated Mary Louise Pratt's theory of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century women travellers in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Gellhorn's travel demonstrated Pratt's theory of female travel as concerned with the domestic. Pratt categorised female travel as essentially a circular action in that women make a base in a foreign place from which

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48 "In Search of Safe Waters" is about Brazil and also published by the *Independent*. It is discussed later in the chapter.
49 In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt examines how European travellers' accounts of non-European culture created a Euro-imperialist view of their world produced with the home reader in mind. See the introduction for a fuller discussion of Pratt's book.
they travel and to which they return (169-170). Gellhorn was fearless wherever she travelled and able temporarily to withstand the harshest of conditions, but once she arrived at a destination she spent a great deal of time domesticating her surroundings as quickly as possible. In Gellhorn's essay "Into Africa", an account of her west-to-east cross-Africa trek, she describes how by the journey's end she had fallen in love with Africa sufficiently to return on an annual basis for the next thirteen years. Each year she returned to her base of a "two-room tenth permanent residence", which neatly illustrates Pratt's theory of circular travel.

In Belize, off the beaten track, Gellhorn delighted in the Mayan ruins, amazing bird and animal life, flora and few tourists. Gellhorn described the British colonial outpost in glowing terms for two reasons. First, as a British dependency Belize is outside the grasp of the United States: "These self confident people are loyal subjects of the Queen.... They don't know how lucky they are, past and present; they are also safe from the evil meddling of Washington elsewhere in Central America"(70). Second, Belize is a neighbour of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, countries which had all suffered recent United-States-backed oppression:

... Nobody in Belize ... is afraid to say anything he likes; simply, nobody is afraid. Belize is in Central America where you breathe fear in the air. Tucked between Yucatan and Guatemala, this little country, fractionally larger than Wales, has been spared the horrors that have afflicted the region from the Spanish conquest up to this minute. I look at Belize as Belizeans do not, thinking of murderous El Salvador, the regular manhunts for Indians and intellectuals in Guatemala, the poverty and unsafety of Honduras, thinking of lawless armies, death squads, torture (70).

Gellhorn's view of Belize was essentially romantic, just as her view of post-revolutionary Cuba was romantic. She admired both countries because they eluded North American control, albeit in different ways. By the time Gellhorn published "Too Good For Tourists", her anti-American stand was well established. Her disillusionment with her home country steadily increased over the decades. In 1936 she published The Trouble I've Seen, a fictionalised account of some of the people she met during 1934-35, when she spent a year travelling around the United States for the Roosevelt administration, reporting on the effects of the 1929 Great Depression and the efficacy of the
government's welfare programme. The plight of the characters in *The Trouble I've Seen* shocked America and brought Gellhorn much critical acclaim. Despite her success, however, Gellhorn chose not to write directly about her country again, instead, concentrating her attention on the countries which have been at the receiving end of the United States' far-reaching power.

Gellhorn's opinions of and comments about the United States were recorded in T S Matthew's *O My America!*, her husband's account of a joint trip around the country in 1959. Matthews reported Gellhorn's horror at practically everything she saw. Gellhorn was particularly critical of the American woman, whom she saw as having no role beyond serving her husband and children. Gellhorn found "society" in her home city of St Louis parochial, American cities formless and the people boastful. She considered the landscape deformed by symbols of American progress: marketing signs and ugly housing developments. On a plane to Seattle, Gellhorn scribbled notes which Matthews reproduced in his text: "Olive-drab land - where scarred, rusty red.... Right angles of streets, and a hint of this new thing, colored roofs. No center to a town, unlike Europe or Mexico; no meeting place. Land looks like a relief map, un-lived-in and unlivable"(68).

Looking down on America from the sky in 1959 reinforced Gellhorn's dismissive disdain for the country she had chosen not to live in for almost thirty years. However, Gellhorn remained quintessentially American. She had a life-long awareness of being American: "I had not lived in my homeland since 1930. I took my self for granted as a writer and an American, something that never changed." Everything Gellhorn saw, whether in war zones or on holiday, was filtered through American eyes. Gellhorn was continually grateful to fate which allowed her the luxury of choice: "I owned an invaluable green American passport.... By geographical chance, the piece of the map where I was born, I could walk away. I had the great unfair advantage of choice." In *A Stricken Field* (1940), set in Czechoslovakia, the American war correspondent Mary Douglas, Gellhorn's alter-ego, reflects on the difference between herself and her Czech friends: "They're just like us.... They love each other the same way. Only they are smaller and with no luck. We have the jobs and the passports. We can always get a train

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50 *The Trouble I've Seen*, with its introduction by H G Wells, turned Gellhorn into a celebrity. Gellhorn divided the book into four parts, with each part representing a different geographical part of the United States and a different age group. What unified the book was the degradation of the people and the dignity with which they bore their circumstances. During the course of her year's journey around the country, Gellhorn was invited by Mrs Roosevelt to the White House to tell the President some of what she had seen. It was the beginning of a long friendship between Gellhorn and the Roosevelts, particularly Mrs Roosevelt, who became a close friend.

51 *The View from the Ground*: 117.

52 Ibid: 79.
to meet each other, we can talk about how it will be when we’re old and we can make plans for next year.”\(^5^3\) Gellhorn’s American passport and comparative wealth granted her the freedom to live an international lifestyle, but she never escaped America’s influence. In the political sphere, the United States’ increasingly combative stance across the world meant that Gellhorn, as a war correspondent, was kept busy. As a journalist, Gellhorn could always walk away, leaving suffering behind, but the sense of duty her nationality gave her increasingly signified a moral responsibility.

Gellhorn did try, after the 1949 Israeli War of Independence, to quit war zones. She explained her rationale:

After Israel, which was the briefest visit to a war, I declared a separate private peace. The world’s woes seemed perverse and self-inflicted. I gave up reading newspapers as a matter of principle, listened to music instead of news bulletins, and was healthy and happy in Mexico.... I had seen enough dead bodies, and enough refugees, and enough destroyed villages and could not bear to see any more. It was useless to go on telling people what war was like since they went on obediently accepting war.\(^5^4\)

Wearied by death and destruction, Gellhorn responded by withdrawing from daily contact with the “real” world into the Mexico she described in *The Lowest Trees Have Tops*. However, more than fifteen years later, Gellhorn was drawn back to war because of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam: “I would never have chosen to go near a war again if my own country had not, mysteriously, begun to wage an undeclared war. Around February 1965, Vietnam became the urgent business of every American citizen”\(^2^4^7\).

Gellhorn witnessed what she considered America’s progressive moral decline since the heady days of the Roosevelt presidency and Franklin D Roosevelt’s claim that “America has nothing to fear except fear itself”.\(^5^5\) McCarthyism, the Korean War (which Gellhorn tried to avoid by living in Mexico) and the Vietnam War destroyed Gellhorn’s belief in the United States. As Gellhorn grew older, she was increasingly damning about North America’s behaviour in the world arena. Her condemnation perhaps reached its zenith in her outrage at American involvement in Vietnam: “I would have loathed that war under any circumstances, but it was directed by the American government, administered and fought by Americans in Vietnam and all the time I thought: in the name of the American people. This unforgivable evil is committed in the name of the American people, in my name as an American.”\(^5^6\)

\(^{5^3}\) *A Stricken Field*: 80.
\(^{5^4}\) *The Face of War*: 247.
\(^{5^5}\) Franklin D Roosevelt’s first inaugural address in 1933.
\(^{5^6}\) *The View from the Ground*: 357.
Gellhorn blamed America unequivocally: "There is no way that I will ever forgive the American governments - from Eisenhower through Nixon - who led America, first sneakily then arrogantly, into the Vietnam War. They are responsible for disgracing America in history."  

Gellhorn learnt not to trust the principle of government much earlier. She never forgave the British Prime Minister Chamberlain for what she considered the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at the start of World War II. Gellhorn said of Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler on September 29, 1938, when the Sudeteland was effectively presented to Germany in exchange for "peace" in Europe: "... the moral of that moment in history had lasted for me permanently; never believe governments, not any of them, not a word they say; keep an untrusting eye on what they do." The distrust and disillusionment Gellhorn felt towards her government during the protracted Vietnam War was rekindled in the 1980s by the Republican administration's policy towards Central America.

During the 1980s, particularly during President Reagan's two terms in office (1982-88), the North American government systematically waged war against what it called the communist threat presented by Nicaragua and El Salvador. The decade was marked by American support of groups whose aims were to destabilise the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and destroy the El Salvadoran rebel force, FMLN, who were waging a guerrilla war against the right-wing government. The Reagan administration considered the potential communist threat in Central America so serious that it entered into illegal arms trade with Iran to fund the Nicaraguan Contras, or "freedom fighters" as Reagan called them. Gellhorn's reports on the different wars in Central America and her account of the invasion of Panama ("Rule by Terror", "We Are Not Little Mice", and "The Invasion of Panama") illustrate how she saw the moral decline of the American administration. For Gellhorn, Reagan's presidency embodied all that was wrong with late-twentieth-century America: far from being the land of the free, the country had become the land of the permanently enslaved. Driven by a manufactured fear of communism, Americans, she maintained, were largely indifferent to American-sponsored massacres of Central Americans.

Once Gellhorn began covering wars with the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) her reporting concentrated on the effects of war on the civilian population. Gellhorn, with writers such as George Orwell, Stephen Spender, John Dos Passos, André Malraux,

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57 Ibid: 324.
58 Gellhorn's afterword to *A Stricken Field*.
59 FMLN is the acronym for the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional.
60 See Didion's *The Last Thing He Wanted* (1996) for her narrative of the repercussions on a personal level of Contra activity.
Arthur Koestler and Hemingway, travelled to Spain to help the Republican cause.61 "We knew, we just knew that Spain was the place to stop Fascism. This was it. It was one of those moments in history when there was no doubt" Gellhorn told Phillip Knightley.62 Such was the strength of her passionate commitment to the Republican cause that Gellhorn wanted to translate her moral belief into something more effective and tangible:

I did nothing except learn a little Spanish and a little about war, and visit the wounded, trying to amuse or distract them. It was a poor effort and one day, weeks after I had come to Madrid, a journalist friend observed that I ought to write; it was the only way I could serve the Causa, as the Spaniards solemnly and we lovingly called the war in the Spanish Republic. After all, I was a writer, was I not? But how could I write about war, what did I know, and for whom would I write? My journalist friend suggested that I write about Madrid. Why would that interest anyone, I asked. It was daily life. He pointed out that it was not everybody's daily life.63

In The First Casualty (1975), Phillip Knightley's study of war correspondents, the author questions whether a war writer should be objective or subjective:

What is the war correspondent's duty? Is it, as Drew Middleton of the New York Times says, "to get the facts and write them with his interpretation of what they mean to the war, without allowing personal feelings about the war to enter into the story. No one can be completely objective but objectivity is the goal?" Or is Matthews closer: "I would always opt for honest, open bias. A newspaperman should work with his heart as well as his mind?"64

Hemingway was the most famous of the American writers in Spain. His war style was to report, in graphic detail, from the front-line, where his own proximity to danger was emphasised. Knightley heavily criticises Hemingway - "his performance as a war correspondent was abysmally bad"(212) - because Hemingway was too self-interested. Knightley saw in correspondents such as Hemingway, as passionate defenders of the Republican side, a tendency to view the Republican cause through uncritical rose-tinted spectacles, with the result that they reported not the war they witnessed but the war they wished were happening. Knightley does not level this criticism at Gellhorn, who never disguised her partisan approach. Gellhorn, unlike Hemingway, limited her ambitions in an attempt to convey the war.

Despite Knightley's criticism of Hemingway and his posturing, the writer is still considered an archetypal war correspondent, as Nora Ephron noted:

61 Phillip Knightley: The First Casualty (1975) lists the authors who were committed to the fight against Fascism in Spain:193.
63 The Face of War: 16.
It is impossible to realize how much of Ernest Hemingway still lives in the hearts of men until you spend some time with the professional war correspondents. Most of the Americans... tend to romanticize war, just as he did. Which is not surprising: unlike fighting in the war itself, unlike big game hunting, working as a war correspondent is almost the only classic male endeavor left that provides physical danger and personal risk without public disapproval and the awful truth is that for correspondents, war is not hell. It is fun.\textsuperscript{65}

Ephron's comments on Hemingway are significant because they highlight how Hemingway's tough image, coupled with the implicit dangers of war journalism, have tended to connect inextricably the words "male" and "war correspondent". Such a connection is ironic when one considers that, during their marriage, it was Gellhorn who left Hemingway at home in Cuba, because she wanted to cover World War II; Hemingway was reluctant, to say the least, to go into another war arena.

Anne Sebba's book about female war correspondents, \textit{Battling For News: The Rise of the Woman Reporter} (1994), is the first account which attempts to demonstrate the increasingly significant contribution women have made to the field of war journalism in the twentieth century. Sebba considers, at some length, the difference gender makes in the approach to writing about war. There are, according to Sebba, two recurring opinions about women war correspondents: that they are more emotionally biased than men, and that women in war zones report "soft" news about people rather than "hard" facts. Sebba counters both criticisms. She argues that a more emotional approach is not necessarily negative; she quotes Gellhorn as an example of a writer whose partisan attitude enhances their writing. In Sebba's opinion, reporting on war's impact on a civilian population is often more harrowing than writing about the technology of frontline combat:

The soft versus hard news argument is complicated in that more women reporters than men do concentrate on writing about the hospitals, orphanages and dislocation to the population in wartime; but many would argue that this is the real and, therefore, the hard news. Nothing else really matters. Writing about numbers of aeroplanes shot down and military hardware, they say, is the soft option male journalists often go for because it is easier and less taxing to one's emotional being. This argument was particularly well aired at the time of Vietnam during which more women reporters were given freer access than in any previous world conflict (5).

Sebba's book goes on to examine the rise of the woman war reporter and since she includes women for every major war of this century, it is apparent that their contribution to war correspondence is of major importance. The impact of female war correspondents was accelerated by journalists such as Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles.

\textsuperscript{65} Nora Ephron is quoted in \textit{The First Casualty}: 408, from an article which originally appeared in \textit{New York Magazine}. 111
Gellhorn and Cowles, an American war correspondent, became friends during the Spanish Civil War and, like Gellhorn, Cowles also covered World War II. She was the first journalist to interview Mussolini face-to-face after his invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Unlike Gellhorn however, Cowles saw her job as an opportunity to try and understand the world's political situation from an impartial standpoint. Gellhorn and Cowles make an interesting study in the objective-versus-subjective war correspondence debate, since Cowles tried to be as non-partisan as Gellhorn was biased.

Gellhorn's war journalism relied on her reaction to events, which she often recorded through the eyes of ordinary people. Unlike Cowles, Gellhorn never wanted to be impartial. Interviewed in the Times in 1991, Gellhorn spelt out her philosophy to Janine Di Giovanni: "... when it comes to war, one either stays to the end, or one gets killed. When it comes to reporting, one either has passion for the subject or one does not." Gellhorn then added: "All I need to like is the people in the country.... The people you deal with. What is important is to like the shopkeepers and the postman, that sort of thing." Gellhorn's war journalism was motivated by the need to expose the plight of the underdog, made to suffer by the action of governments. At the heart of Gellhorn's thinking was the belief that governments are responsible for people's suffering. She did not consider the political intricacy of civil war, for example. As Gellhorn told Victoria Glendinning in an interview for American Vogue in April 1988: "I'm not a think-writer, I'm a reporter. I never interviewed the big shots; they didn't interest me. What interests me is the effects the big shots have on everyone else" (359).

Gellhorn's reports from Central America in the 1980s continued the approach she started in Spain. She interviewed strangers and recorded what she saw and heard. Gellhorn's bias is always evident: She was vehemently against Reagan's Central American policies. She appeals to her readers' compassion and incites their anger with her descriptions of the destruction and bloodshed wrought on the civilians of Nicaragua and El Salvador by American attempts to stop the perceived advancement of communism. To this end, Gellhorn's reports from the region can be read as treatises on the folly of American

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66 Gellhorn and Cowles were very close for many years, even collaborating on a play about the love affairs of two female war correspondents, Love Goes to Press (1945), which ran on the London stage. However, at some point the two women must have fallen out because Gellhorn was very dismissive of Cowles's journalism when asked about it in the 1980s.


68 Cowles, on the other hand, delighted in interviewing powerful people. However, her article about her interview with Mussolini concentrated not on what he had said to her but how his aggressive tone and behaviour made her feel.
foreign policy in the 1980s. Gellhorn was anxious to show the devastating effect of what she considered misdirected American policy. She achieved this by describing, in painfully close detail, the torture, murder and disappearances which were the currency of war in America's back-yard. In her account of the war in El Salvador, "Rule by Terror" (July 1983), Gellhorn describes an encounter with a woman who tells Gellhorn how her family was "disappeared". The woman then shows Gellhorn the scars she bears for daring to ask the police about her family's whereabouts:

For instance: I stopped a scrawny woman who was carrying a plastic bag of flour on her head. For her family? She has no family left except her mother and three of her brother's children. She is forty-seven years old and two years ago she had three brothers and an only child, exceptional here, a pregnant girl of twenty-five. She took me behind the shack to show me what had been done to her because she dared ask the police about her oldest brother, then her daughter. Her left breast was sliced down to the nipple, she had a deep stab wound on her shoulder and her head. "They all raped me. Afterwards they pushed a flashlight up me. I am broken inside. I walk badly." That was for her eldest brother. She lifted her dress quickly to reveal a long cut straight down her belly, other scars.... It was a chance encounter; she was no different from any of the other women collecting flour (325).

Having shocked the reader with an example of the brutality carried out daily in El Salvador, Gellhorn goes onto explain in her article who does the killing at America's behest. Finally she tells us how many people have been killed. The sequence is crucial, because Gellhorn has established that behind every death statistic is an implication that another innocent person was tortured to save America from "Communism".

Gellhorn started her trip to El Salvador, by her own admission, "in stupefying ignorance", just as she began many of her vacations. In Gellhorn's introduction to the section entitled "Wars In Central America" in The Face of War, she explained the circumstances of her trip to El Salvador and Nicaragua. In what became archetypal Gellhorn travel behaviour, her trip to El Salvador was a spontaneous detour from a nostalgia-filled trip to Mexico. In Mexico, Gellhorn was: "... looking for remembered sun and sky, enchanted to see again the Mexican Indians who were a happy part of my life years ago"(314). Until Gellhorn set foot in Central America, her knowledge of the isthmus was limited to news bulletins about a war she did not understand. At the start of her introduction, Gellhorn explained why Americans were so unknowledgeable about Central America:

Most Americans, including me, knew little or nothing about Central America. It is well off the tourist beat, which stops at Mexico. The countries were known as banana republics, a contemptuous description of their economy and their governments. That has now changed, thanks to the President of the United States,

69 "Rule by Terror" is included in The Face of War. 323-332.
who appears obsessed with the area and makes dramatic statements on El Salvador and Nicaragua that bear no relation to facts (313).

Gellhorn might have been uninformed about Central America, but she was very knowledgeable about North American foreign policy. Her curiosity, piqued by Reagan's exaggerated claims of "reds under the bed", led her to travel to Central America to see with her own eyes what her government was doing. She was appalled by what she found: "As citizens, I think we have an exhausting duty to know what our governments are up to, and it is cowardice or laziness to ask: what can I do about it anyway? Every squeak counts, if only in self-respect. Gloomily, because otherwise I would be ashamed of myself, I made the small effort of a detour to El Salvador"(314).

Unlike her vacations, Gellhorn was in El Salvador to observe and to learn. She was not escaping from the world but facing up to its most brutal horrors, now that she was back in a war zone. However, Gellhorn took with her the same prejudices and assumptions she had taken to Haiti and Cuba. She chose to stay in an American hotel, the Sheraton, because its name was "familiar". The irony of the choice was not lost on Gellhorn when she learnt more about El Salvador: "In this hotel's garden restaurant at breakfast, two American AID advisers and their Salvadoran colleague had been shot dead by Death Squad assassins"(314-315). Despite the risk of staying at the hotel, Gellhorn stayed put because of her whimsical like of the chamber maids and the attractive view.

At the start of her stay, Gellhorn was unable to give the country its own identity. She had assumed that the capital, San Salvador, would resemble a Mexican city. Driving around the capital, Gellhorn looked for the Mexican plaza:

I ... asked a taxi driver to take me to the center of the city, wherever people met. "Dondo (sic) hay el paseo," I said, thinking of a Mexican square and the people ambling about, or chatting over drinks at sidewalk cafés. He stared at me as if I were mad and drove me to the Cathedral Square where Archbishop Romero had been killed by a government sniper at the altar during Mass, and later the mourning crowds were fired on by the police. Not that I knew this. The driver told me not to stay long. Only minutes, he said. The square was poorly lit.... People were crowding into ramshackle buses to go home as darkness fell.... No one was talking or smiling. That was the first sign I had, and the first glimmer of understanding (315).

Gellhorn's taxi ride is significant because it forced her to expel any preconceived ideas of El Salvador and to see the country in its own right. She juxtaposes the image of people enjoying themselves in the square with the brutal actuality of murder, thereby heightening the shock of the square's past. Comparing Cathedral Square to the Mexican plazas of her memory, Gellhorn gives El Salvador its own identity: fear. San Salvador frightened Gellhorn just as it would frighten Didion in Salvador (1983). Gellhorn's
description of her fear at the sound of "fast footsteps" behind her in an empty street compares to Didion's description of characters loitering in the shadows. It is worth quoting first Gellhorn's and then Didion's description of how fear manifests itself in San Salvador:

When the square was almost empty I started walking up a long street in a direction I thought led back to my hotel. The houses were stone, with doors and shutters closed, not a light showing, not a sound. The street lamps were scarce and dim. The street was empty. I heard fast footsteps behind me and two young men passed, almost running. Suddenly I was afraid, as if I had breathed fear from the air (315-316).

Whenever I had occasion to visit the Sheraton I was apprehensive, and this apprehension came to color the entire Escalón district for me, even its lower reaches, where there were people and movies and restaurants. I recall being struck by it on the canopied porch of a restaurant near the Mexican embassy, on an evening when rain or sabotage or habit had blacked out the city and I became acutely aware, in the light cast by a passing car, of two human shadows, silhouettes illuminated by the headlights and then invisible again.... Nothing came of this, but I did not forget the sensation of having been in a single instant demoralized, undone, humiliated by fear, which is what I meant when I said that I came to understand in El Salvador the mechanism of terror.70

Both Gellhorn and Didion are driven from San Salvador by an intangible sense of fear. Neither of them stays in the country for longer than is absolutely necessary. Didion stays for two weeks, while it seems only a matter of days before Gellhorn decides to leave: "Suddenly I decided to get out; I could not stand another day in this fearful city"(319). Gellhorn recognises the irony of her position as an American citizen: she is able to leave when she becomes too afraid because she possesses an American passport. Yet from what she has learnt from an American embassy briefing in San Salvador, America's involvement in El Salvador is much of the cause of the fear. Gellhorn's visit to El Salvador is confirmation once again of America's aggression towards a peasant nation.

North American involvement in Central America has been assumed a right by the United States since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.71 Gellhorn found the barbarity of the Salvadoran government forces particularly unpalatable because it was approved of by the Americans. In The View from the Ground, Gellhorn included an article, "On Torture", in her collection of pieces from the 1980s. Originally published in Granta in April 1984, the article centres on a translated account of the torture of a young man by the Salvadoran Security Forces. What makes the account remarkable, Gellhorn wryly tells the reader, is not that the young man was tortured, but that he survived: "In 1982, the

71 "In 1823, the Monroe Document established the claim that the US had a backyard and the right to supervise it" (The Face of War: 337). This is Gellhorn's explanation of how such invasive American action in Central America has been permitted.
Human Rights Commission recorded the fate of 6,952 Salvadorans, men, women, boys, girls, who were seized (capturados), disappeared or assassinated. Torture is not recorded as a separate violation of human rights because it is automatic.72 The uncensored account of torture, when read next to Gellhorn's impressions of El Salvador, gives the reader an acute sense of the terror into which the tiny Central American country was plunged by the United States.

From El Salvador Gellhorn travelled to Nicaragua, where her visit prompted her to call for American withdrawal from Central America. In Nicaragua, she saw the fledgling Sandinista government being strangled at birth by the United States, and Nicaragua being forced down the same path as Cuba. Gellhorn was unequivocal in her anger with the United States: "The Contras' war on Nicaragua's northern frontier should be called Reagan's war, though it is organized terror raids, not war. Fomented and paid for by the CIA, evidently very dear to Mr Reagan's heart, it mainly kills peasants - old men, women, children - and destroys the modest wood shacks that were new kindergartens and clinics."73

In a short, two-and-a-half page, introduction to her trip to Nicaragua in "Wars in Central America", Gellhorn voiced her concern that Reagan's speeches about Nicaragua were misleading the American people. She stressed Nicaragua's fragility, poverty and domestic difficulties, greatly augmented by the American-sponsored Contra forces, and could see only one solution: "Oh Yank, let's go home. Leave Central America to decide its own destiny. Americans should not be expected to quake in terror for the nation's safety because of two small under-developed countries south of the border. It is a ridiculous posture, like standing on a table and screaming with fear of a mouse"(322).

In Gellhorn's article about her trip to Nicaragua, "We are Not Little Mice" (1985), she eschewed the travel narrative in favour of political comment.74 Everything Gellhorn saw in Nicaragua was political. The poverty of the majority of Nicaraguans, the squalor of their surroundings and the inequality of rich and poor were the legacy of decades of American-sponsored dictatorship, finally broken by the election of the left-wing Sandinista government. Gellhorn gave a snapshot of what she found:

It is a forlorn country; Managua, the capital, a sprawling mess, scruffy little towns, worse villages, thin brown-skinned people in worn-out clothes, mountains peeled bare of forest never replanted, great empty spaces for a few cattle. Nicaragua looks battered, misused. Yet everything grows here; there is enough land

72 "On Torture" in The View from the Ground: 387.
73 "Wars in Central America" in The Face of War: 319.
for everyone, even the rich.... All Nicaraguans needed for a decent prosperity was decent government. At long last, they have a chance (333).

She travelled round the country, talking to strangers, most of whom were poor. Yet despite their poverty, the shortages and rising prices, she found them optimistic because at long last they had a democratically elected government. Already, however, Gellhorn could see the hand of the United States at work, trying to destabilize Nicaragua's attempts at autonomy and, once again, she was unreserved in her condemnation of her country. Gellhorn used statistics to illustrate the desperate plight of the Haitians in "White into Black" and in "We Are Not Little Mice" she included the number of murders American taxes had paid for in Nicaragua to the end of 1984 (3,954 men and women and 3,346 children) to reinforce the point.

Gellhorn concluded her trip around Nicaragua with the observation (which proved incorrect) that the Sandinistas would only be overthrown by "direct US military intervention"(337). She then asked: "And what would be the fine moral difference between the Soviet Union invading Hungary and Czechoslovakia, to teach those people obedience, and the US invading Nicaragua?"(ibid). The United States did not invade Nicaragua but Panama in December 1989.

Gellhorn's final report from Central America was "The Invasion of Panama", which first appeared in Granta in August 1990. Deliberately arriving almost three months after the invasion allowed Gellhorn the freedom to report, uncensored, on the destruction of everyday life in Panama. Gellhorn called her article "post-war reporting" because, for the first time, she travelled to a war zone to report on the conflict after it had finished. She explained why:

Vietnam taught the governments of Britain and America, at least those two, that it is dangerous to allow correspondents, photographers, TV crews to roam freely around a war. The grisly stuff they send back upsets the home folks. It raises doubts, moral questions, it is apt to promote hostile reactions to the war. In the Falklands, Grenada, Panama and the Gulf War, our governments have shown a fine skill in controlling and manipulating the press.... The press is shown what the government thinks fit when the government ordains. The press is treated to military briefings instead of finding out for itself.... But when the pride and power of our governments is invested, post-war reporting is now the only way we can learn what really happened.75

The ostensible reason for the United States' invasion of Panama on December 20, 1989, (Operation Just Cause) was to oust General Manuel Noriega. Gellhorn discovered that the invasion was known about in advance by Panamanian forces, implying that

75 "Panama": The Face of War: 340-341.
America invaded Panama, not to rid the country of Noriega, but so that American interests in the control of the Panama Ship Canal might be assured. "The Invasion of Panama" is a fitting finale to Gellhorn's six decades of war reporting, because it describes the embodiment of her greatest fear. The United States, as aggressor, invaded a small country on a false pretext to further its own ends. The article is archetypal Gellhorn reportage which, as she pointed out, had moved into the late twentieth century since a major preoccupation of the war correspondent was now how to avoid government censorship.

In Gellhorn's summary, written after her visit, she opens her reflections on the invasion with the conclusion that it was "an act of war".  

Gellhorn explained why: "It killed and wounded thousands of civilians (poor people), flattened their homes (tenements) and caused wide-spread commercial ruin from three days of unhampered looting" (ibid). American casualties were twenty-three dead and 322 injured out of a force of 24,000 men. The net result of this misery, Gellhorn tells the reader, was the soaring popularity of President George Bush in the American opinion polls.

In Panama City, Gellhorn set about trying to discover the causes and the events leading up to the invasion. She found a city in ruins. Gellhorn examined Panama City as she performed her daily domestic tasks: getting her hair fixed, her watch-strap mended, changing traveller's cheques, and buying a plane ticket. As Gellhorn set off on foot to the bank she noticed that nobody else was walking. Locals tell her it is not safe to walk the streets at any time for fear of being robbed (the local currency is the American dollar), and there is a nightly curfew. It becomes apparent that the country is now ruled by the United States Southern Guard, with Panamanian officers serving under their American counterparts. Gellhorn's attempts to work as a journalist were blocked. She tried to gain access to a refugee barracks, sited on an unused American airstrip. Lacking official press accreditation, she was refused entry, not by the Panamanian official, but by an American soldier. Instead, to get information Gellhorn talked to the strangers she met in her daily life: taxi drivers, shop keepers and the travel agent. From Pedro, her favourite taxi driver, Gellhorn discovered that civilian housing had been bombed, with inevitable loss of life, despite American government reports to the contrary.

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76 Ibid: 338.
77 All the Central American wars Gellhorn covered initially helped to bolster the incumbent American president's popularity rating.
78 This is another example of Mary Louise Pratt's theory of women travellers' domestication of their foreign destination. Gellhorn sets out each day and returns to her hotel each night - a circular trip.
79 In Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) Boca Grande's common currency is also the US dollar.

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When Gellhorn visited the Casa de Periodistas, she introduced herself as a "periodista inglesa". She was aware of the Panamanians' deep resentment towards the American presence and the unlikelihood of their talking to an American journalist. More significantly, she was ashamed of her country. Despite her emphatic assertion that she was always an American, in Panama Gellhorn appeared to want to disassociate herself from the country. Gellhorn's visits to Central America raised questions about the moral worth of the United States that drew negative conclusions:

US Presidents, who formulate US foreign policy, never worried about social justice in Central America. The White House tolerates any Central American government if it is loyal to the ideology of capitalism and knows its place, subservience to the national interests of the United States as defined in Washington. Washington likes dictators because they are easier to deal with. US Presidents regularly clamp down on popular rebellions. The demand of cruelly deprived people for a decent life is seen as dangerous to US interests; quite simply, the poor are dangerous.80

Gellhorn's trips to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama were journeys to the heart of American foreign policy in the 1980s. In Central America she saw the impact of North America’s paranoia about incipient communism in its backyard. The victims of American fear were the poor peasants, the majority in each of the three countries. Gellhorn's condemnation of America was unequivocal, her reports weighted heavily in favour of the faceless masses whose lives were destroyed by Washington. Her reports include facts, figures, descriptions, testimonials and eyewitness accounts which give credence to what she saw and allow her passionate outrage to fill every page. Central America, as Vietnam previously, tested Gellhorn's belief in the United States. Summing up the 1980s in The View from the Ground, Gellhorn asked: "Will Washington never learn anything about real people and real life? When American anti-communism, in action, is simply anti-human, what does America stand for?"(453).

Gellhorn did not publish any war journalism after 1990. Instead, she wrote the odd travel account and comment such as the piece entitled "Memory" for the London Review of Books (December 12, 1996).81 But she remained politically active: one of her longest pieces, written in 1996, was an account of the murder of street children in the city of Salvador in Bahia, Brazil. Gellhorn's writing on Brazil is of particular interest for a number of reasons. Her long career concentrated on Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America since Gellhorn spoke Spanish; this was her first foray in Latin America

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80 "The Invasion of Panama": The Face of War: 357.
81 Once apartheid was dismantled in South Africa, Gellhorn travelled there and wrote an article which was published in the Evening Standard, June 21, 1995.
into a non-Spanish speaking country. Somewhat naively, Gellhorn imagined that she would be able to travel around Brazil with Spanish as her means of communication: "These dear people speak Brazilian Portuguese and that's it.... I thought I'd get by with Spanish and I was wrong."82 The resulting articles from the trip were published several months apart. "Mean Streets of Salvador" appeared in the London Review of Books on August 22, 1996, and Gellhorn's travel narrative, "In Search of Safe Waters" was published in the Independent on Sunday on November 3, 1996. The pieces' chief contribution to the published works of Gellhorn is that they clearly articulate two views of Salvador which depend on their brief for very different presentations of place.

"In Search of Safe Waters" is an account of a three-week holiday travelling in Brazil which was combined with Gellhorn's three-week stay in Salvador. As always, Gellhorn travelled with the intention of swimming and snorkelling: "I made a delicious plan. Three weeks soaking up sun, snorkelling and feasting on speciality seafood; three weeks in Salvador to learn something of Brazilian daily life"(77). Gellhorn was better prepared for this trip than earlier journeys, having studied the Rough Guide to Brazil. However, the guide book misled her; it described unbroken, white sandy beaches in Bahia but failed to mention that the sea is too dangerous to swim in. Gellhorn's journey around Bahia, and then the rest of Brazil, was typical of her previous travel adventures. Nothing went to plan and places were rarely what Gellhorn expected. But each experience was enlivened by Gellhorn's encounters with Brazilians who: "... are weak on facts but optimistically full of misinformation"(77).

The eighty-seven-year-old Gellhorn took a trip to see the River Amazon and followed a local hotel recommendation. After more than sixty years of travelling, she still possessed the naivety of a first-time traveller. She had imagined the Hotel Tropicale, situated in the heart of the rain forest by a tributary of the Amazon river, the River Negro, to be small. Instead, it was a modern hotel with more than 600 bedrooms and a lake-size swimming pool: Gellhorn hated it on sight. The gulf between expectation and reality continued to be a recurring theme in Gellhorn's travel narrative which neither diminished nor altered throughout her long career. Disappointed by the beaches, Gellhorn resorted to travelling around Brazil by air, visiting as much of the country as she could. Her summary of Salvador in the travel account is noteworthy when compared to the impression of the city Gellhorn gives in "Mean Streets of Salvador". Here is her travel description:

If you ... had plenty of time and money, Salvador would be a good city, like Rome or Copenhagen for instance, to dawdle enjoyably, discovering old churches and streets, views, parks, shops. Thanks to Amanda Shakespeare, my sole contact in Brazil, I

82 "In Search of Safe Waters": 77.
did get some notion of Brazilian daily life. Alone, she has created a small, happy refuge for street children, an endangered species. They are black sprites, undersized, underfed, undaunted (79).

The hint at the darker side of Brazilian life is placed towards the end of Gellhorn's narrative, which has concentrated on the traditional image of Brazil: beaches, rain forest and the River Amazon. Gellhorn does slip in mention of the poor of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the boom state Minas Gerais, comparing their slum dwellings on one ridge of the city to those of the wealthy on the other side of the city. However, the overriding impression of Brazil in "In Search of Safe Waters" is of a chaotic country, both beautiful and vast, with inhabitants who are delightful and stoical in the face of hardship. It is hard to reconcile this superficial image of Brazil with the dark portrait Gellhorn draws in "Mean Streets of Salvador".

The by-line to "Mean Streets of Salvador" is "Martha Gellhorn writes about the murder of children in Brazil". Gellhorn's article is an account of her attempts to find out the truth behind the murders of four minors in Lobato, a slum district of Salvador. The narrative is detailed but strangely confusing. The facts are obfuscated as Gellhorn tries to draw together the different strands of the case. "I felt that I had been collecting fog", Gellhorn tells the reader at one point.83 Gellhorn takes as her starting point the fact that the murder of children on the streets of Brazil is of no real importance or interest to most Brazilians: "The murder of a homeless child or a child from a poor family who was on the streets for much of the time was not news: children had been killed at random on the streets of Brazil's cities since 1985"(3). However, it mattered to Gellhorn. By bringing to the public's attention the evidence, as far as she could uncover it, Gellhorn continued her life-long commitment to champion the underprivileged. In Brazil, she considers, a war has been waged by those in authority against street children who are seen as legitimate targets for extermination. "Street cleaning by murder" was Gellhorn's description for an activity which originated in Brazil but also spread to Guatemala and Colombia.

Under normal circumstances, Gellhorn tells us, the murder of four black male youths at the Lobato railway station would have been ignored. But its timing - a month after the notorious Candelaria murders in Rio de Janeiro in July 1993 when fifty sleeping street children, eight of whom were killed, were attacked by three armed men while they slept in the porch of the Candelaria cathedral - guaranteed publicity for the Lobato murders. In Rio, under the weight of public outrage, three policemen were accused and found guilty; it is common knowledge in Brazil, Gellhorn tells us, that the

83 "Mean Streets of Salvador": 6.
police kill street children. The Salvadoran authorities wanted an arrest, according to Gellhorn, so that they would not appear inefficient next to their Rio counterparts. Gellhorn doubts the guilt of Franco, the chief suspect in the Lobato killings, and her article suggests that he is as much a victim of Brazil's inefficient judicial system and corruption as the children who were murdered. The fact that the four murdered boys were not street children, and that no motive was established for their murders, added to the cruel absurdity of the situation.

Gellhorn's pursuit of truth led her to the poorest parts of Salvador, where she saw squalor unlike any she had previously experienced. Alec, her affluent Brazilian translator, was appalled: "I have never been in such a place in my life"(7), he told Gellhorn after their trip to the homes of the murdered boys. Gellhorn, too, was shocked:

Crossroads, the worst black township outside Cape Town, was luxurious compared to this.... In Lobato only footpaths led between the rows of hovels that leaned against each other. An open sewer lined part of the path and there was a large stagnant puddle, covered by half-submerged planks. The sun must have absorbed the stench of all this dark watery sludge. We passed a faded blue-painted shack, made of irregular bits of board with rusty screening instead of windows. Thin rags were drawn behind the screens. It seemed unsteady, about to collapse. This was the home of José Jorge da Silva, aged 19, the oldest of the murdered boys...(7).

Gellhorn's description of the slums of Salvador is far removed from her superficial description of the city in "In Search of Safe Waters". In "Mean Streets of Salvador" she is aware of the city's dichotomous nature. Salvador is known in Brazil as the country's cultural centre. The bijou quarter that attracts writers, artists, poets and musicians could not be more diametrically opposed to the Lobato slum: "Remnants of the colonial past, now restored, stand in the upper town, especially the section known as the Pelourinho (the Pillory), named after the whipping-post for slaves. Here the poor have been evicted and the delightful small colonial houses painted and prettified; there are restaurants, cafés and boutiques"(3).

The slums of Salvador epitomise Brazil's problems: a country with such an image of conviviality is rotten to the core. "Mean Streets of Salvador" continued Gellhorn's tradition of investigative reporting on Latin America. For once, the United States was not involved and Gellhorn's criticism focused exclusively on Brazil. The extermination of young, vulnerable children by the police is reminiscent of the war atrocities Gellhorn painstakingly documented, but Brazil is not at war. Gellhorn's account indicts the corrupt system of Brazil, which uses the weakest members of its society as pawns for political posturing. Only the very rich are shielded from Brazil's problems behind their fortress apartment blocks. Everybody else is seemingly held hostage to a bureaucracy
that does not function. In "In Search of Safe Waters" Gellhorn hints at some of Brazil's problems; the disorganisation and misinformation which dog her trip around the country are symptomatic. But writing a travel guide for a newspaper does not allow for much comment on a country's political and social ills. Instead, Brazil is reduced to a vast nature reserve with the country's natural assets to tempt the traveller.

Nowhere in Gellhorn's work was the dichotomy of genre better revealed than in her two articles on Brazil. They clearly demonstrated how the same country can be shown from two different perspectives, depending on the audience and the brief. The travel piece is Brazil for tourists; it dips into and out of different parts of the country and presents a surface reality. "Mean Streets of Salvador" has one subject which is discussed in great depth and which confuses as much as it clarifies because, as Gellhorn discovered, Brazil is a contradictory country. Gellhorn had long understood that countries could be inconsistent. In August 1949, Gellhorn published "The Children Pay" in the Saturday Evening Post, revealing two faces of Italy.\textsuperscript{84} The article described how post-war Italy had become a boom country as tourists flocked to it, charmed by the beauty of Italian cities and the \textit{joie de vivre} of its inhabitants. Beneath the optimistic surface, however, lay the legacy of World War II: orphaned and abandoned children. Some of these children, scavenging on the streets, were the forerunners of their Brazilian counterparts, and Gellhorn's description of Italy in the 1940s might apply to Brazil in the 1990s:

The Italians, undaunted, struggle hard along the road to recovery and have strength left over to love life as they go. The foreigners, unanimously, admire a people who can make such a good thing of peace, and, unanimously, love Italy. It is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and, all things considered, one of the happiest. The sorrow and hardship of a few million children scarcely show (113-114).

Gellhorn's long career concentrated on two major themes, war and travel. Her aim remained "to see everywhere and everything and everyone and write about it." Gellhorn covered wars all over the world for six decades, and her reputation continued to depend on her work as a war correspondent, despite her stated preference for fiction. Gellhorn's war journalism was distinguished by a partisan view of the world which invariably sided with ordinary people against the government. As Glendinning wrote about Gellhorn: "She has always talked to ordinary people rather than the big shots; it is the wreckage war makes of the lives of the powerless that fuels her outrage."\textsuperscript{85} Her journalism was structured by her critical stance towards America. Gellhorn's war reporting from Central America in the 1980s was marked by an openly scathing attitude towards the

\textsuperscript{84} "The Children Pay" is reprinted in The View from the Ground: 102-114.
United States: "President Reagan has made America stand tall. Apart from shuddering embarrassment, I cannot decipher this phrase. Was America supine until 1980?" 86

Hemingway, when asked what was the best experience a man (sic) could have for writing fiction, said: "A war. Wars have made many great writers.... Almost anything that is bad for other people is good for a writer." 87 War provided Gellhorn with an endless supply of good copy over the decades. The reason she received such recognition for her war journalism is because hers was a unique and constant voice which helped bring to the attention of the world the suffering of civilians in countless wars and the pointless waste war produces on every level. Gellhorn extended her brief to study "humanity". She considered she had a moral obligation as a responsible citizen to observe and comment where necessary. The release from her self-imposed moral duty was writing fiction:

I wrote fiction because I love to, and journalism from curiosity which has, I think, no limits and ends only with death. Though I have long lost the innocent faith that journalism is a guiding light, I still believe it is a lot better than total darkness. Somebody has to bring the news as we cannot all see for ourselves. Sometimes journalism was pure delight - weeks in the Serengeti; sometimes it was pure torment - Auschwitz and the Eichmann Trial. 88

Where this straightforward divide between fiction and journalism becomes complicated in Gellhorn's writing is in her distinction between the "real world" (war zones) and the "unreal world" of vacations. Gellhorn's war journalism is an account of what she witnessed in all its brutality. Gellhorn admitted to one episode of self-censorship in Vietnam because what she saw was so shocking that she knew it would never be published. This, however, was exceptional: Gellhorn's war style is direct, honest and horrific. It is also mundane and compassionate, as she chronicles the lives being destroyed by war.

Once Gellhorn was on holiday, however, she did not want to be reminded of the "real world". Swimming and snorkelling became metaphors for her need to escape. But escape was never easy. In Haiti, Gellhorn's holiday turned into a lesson in racism. The "real world" broke into Gellhorn's fiction. The Lowest Trees Have Tops was Gellhorn's fictitious eulogy to peace, but that peace was continually threatened by a sequence of people who represented evils of the day such as McCarthyism. Gellhorn was not, despite her best intentions, an imaginative writer. Much of her fiction was derived from personal experience; the Mexican novel is a roman à clef, based on Gellhorn's time in

86 The View from the Ground: 447.
88 The Face of War: 247.
Cuernavaca. Gellhorn remained a journalist, who perhaps only stopped recording the world when she slipped on a snorkelling mask.

Place was essential to Gellhorn, whatever her reason for going. The memory of place, the revisiting of place and the discovery of place were at the heart of Gellhorn's writing. The reason her novels were based on personal experience and places she knew was because it mattered to her to convincingly convey the sense of place. For much of her life Gellhorn considered place in the light of America. Despite being an ex-patriate for her entire adult life, she never shed her nationality. The essential paradox of Gellhorn was that, as an internationalist who lived all over the world, she remained an American whose preoccupation was America's often shameful performance on the world's stage. Latin America provided Gellhorn with both the venue and the stimulus to observe and comment on her binary world.
Elizabeth Bishop's Map of Brazil

"She is too powerful for mismanaged fire and too civilised for idiosyncratic incoherence. When we read Elizabeth Bishop, we enter the classical serenity of a new country." - Robert Lowell 1

"I think geography comes first in my work ... and then animals. But I like people, too ...." - Elizabeth Bishop 2

Elizabeth Bishop's opening poem in her first volume of poetry, North & South (1946), is entitled "The Map". Written in New York City on New Year's Eve, 1934, the poem was placed by Bishop not only at the start of North & South, but also at the start of The Complete Poems (1969). "The Map" established the theme of place to which Bishop returned constantly, and signalled her perception of the world. The poem appears to be a literal examination of a map of the world. The first line reads: "Land lies in water; it is shadowed green". However, Bishop's subjective viewing of the world becomes apparent in the second line, as she questions what she sees before her: "Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges". She illustrates her view of the world by anthropomorphizing the physical landscape while describing its actual form:

The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
    the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
- the printer here experiencing the same excitement
    as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.
  These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger
    like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods. (14 -19)3

"The Map" introduces the dichotomy of abstract and actual travel which runs through all of Bishop's poetry. As Bishop looks at the map, she sees it as both suggesting and prohibiting the possibilities of travel. In the poem Bishop's travel is simultaneously imagined and infinite, and contained by the limited world the map represents.

As the poem Bishop chose to place at the beginning of North & South, "The Map" established the theme of geography to which she returned in each of her volumes of poetry. In her lifetime, Bishop published four, slight volumes of poetry: North & South (1946), North & South - A Cold Spring (1955), Questions of Travel (1965) and

2 "Book and Author: Elizabeth Bishop" by Anna Quindlen from the New York Post, April 3, 1976. Reprinted in Monteiro: 58.
Each title suggests that Bishop’s poetry is concerned consistently with the idea of travel and place. Bishop herself did not realise that a single theme echoed throughout her poetry: "In my first book, I was worried that none of the poems went together, that there was no discernible theme. I feel this about everything I've ever done. But apparently there is a consistent voice. I am grateful but astounded to hear this." In fact, Bishop’s interest in place extended beyond her poetry into her prose and personal letters.

Bishop's output of four volumes of poetry and a single volume of her collected prose, published posthumously, constitute her creative legacy. In addition, her non-fiction work includes Brazil (1962) with the editors of Time-Life; One Art: The Selected Letters of Elizabeth Bishop (1994); and a collection of Bishop's paintings, Exchanging Hats, which was published in 1996. Bishop also translated from Portuguese into English while she lived in Brazil, initially as a means of learning the language. Two translated works exist: The Diary of "Helena Morley" (1957) and An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry (1972), which she translated and edited with Emanuel Brasil. It has also become increasingly apparent that Bishop's unpublished work, filed in university archives, forms a large part of her legacy.

Bishop lived outside her native United States for more than twenty years and was most closely associated with Brazil, where she lived from November 1951 until she finally left the country in 1971. Travel held an important role for Bishop and she travelled widely in the Americas, Europe and North Africa. By necessity she became a traveller soon after she was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1911. The premature death of her father when Bishop was only eight months old, and her mother's subsequent madness and incarceration in an asylum, resulted in her relocating to her maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia, Canada. Her childhood was then split between two sets of grandparents in two countries: her wealthy, paternal grandparents lived in a big house with servants in Worcester and her poorer, maternal grandparents in a tiny village, incongruously named Great Village, in Nova Scotia. Despite Bishop's preference for Great Village, from the age of six she spent much of her time in Worcester. In one of the last

4 The Complete Poems (1969) was published before Geography III and contained the first three volumes of poetry as well as new poems and five poems translated from the Portuguese. The 1969 volume is self-evidently different from The Complete Poems 1927-1979. "The Burglar of Babylon", originally included in Questions of Travel was published separately as The Ballad of the Burgar of Babylon in 1968.
6 The catalogue of the Bishop archives held at Vassar College currently runs to 76 pages. Other North American libraries - University of Washington, Harvard University, and the University of Texas at Austin - also hold her work.
interviews she gave, in 1978, Bishop claimed she never felt at home with her extended family: "My relatives, I think, they all felt so sorry for this child that they tried to do their very best. And I think they did.... But my relationship with my relatives - I was always a sort of guest, and I think I've always felt like that."7

Bishop's biographers and critics alike have seized on these details of her life to portray her as a rootless woman whose writings are an account of a search for a home. Even Bishop explained her seemingly restless movement through the world as a direct result of becoming an orphan so early. In a letter to her close friend, the American poet Robert Lowell, she said: "I guess I have liked to travel as much as I have because I have always felt isolated and have known so few of my 'contemporaries' and nothing of 'intellectual' life in New York or anywhere."8 Places did become home for a while but there was often no sense of permanence about them, with perhaps the exception of Brazil and, to a lesser degree, Key West, where Bishop lived for almost nine years. Great Village, Nova Scotia, most nearly fulfilled the concept of "home", but was equally impermanent, since Bishop was at boarding school in the United States, returning only to Great Village for some of her vacations.

After Vassar College Bishop lived briefly in New York and Paris, in Key West between 1938 and 1947, which included nine months in Mexico in 1942, and for a year in Washington (1949-50), where she was consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress, before going to Brazil in 1951. After Bishop left Brazil in 1971, she moved to Boston, where she taught at Harvard, after periods in San Francisco and Seattle. Although she considered herself poorly travelled, Bishop visited Morocco, Haiti, Italy and the Galápagos Islands, to name only a few countries. It is generally agreed that Bishop's chief reason for moving frequently was to escape her unhappy domestic situation. However, it is also true that when she was young Bishop moved to new cities and countries in order to savour new experiences. As she grew older her choice of domicile was determined by the need to earn a living. She was lured south by her love of the tropics, yet she maintained that:

I really haven't traveled that much.... But the biographical sketch in the first anthology I was in said, "Oh, she's been to Morocco, Spain, etc.," and this has been repeated for years even though I haven't been back to any of these places. But I never traveled the way students travel now. Compared to my students, who seem to go to Nepal every Easter vacation, I haven't been anywhere at all.9

In her own estimation, Bishop's travelling scarcely compared to that of the students.

7 Interview with Elizabeth Spires in Paris Review 80: 75.
9 See Paris Review: 60.
she taught at Harvard University in the 1970s. She did not consider her travel "exotic"; rather, it was a means of survival. For Bishop, geographical travel was the outward manifestation of an inner journey to self-knowledge. Living in Brazil gave her the necessary perspective to understand her early life in Nova Scotia as reflected in the order of her poems in *Questions of Travel* (1965). The first section is about Brazil and her present life while the second, entitled "Elsewhere", contains some of her poems about Nova Scotia and her childhood. The two sections were linked in the original edition by the short story, "In the Village", which set down Bishop's painful memories of her early life and her mother's descent into madness.

Bishop's literary reputation has largely been created by her reflections about travel, place and home. Bishop lived in Brazil at the height of her powers as a poet, and it is for this reason that her association with the country has been examined. As is well documented, Bishop never intended to stay. Rio de Janeiro was the first stop in a boat trip Bishop planned to take around the South American coast. Having decided to stay in Rio de Janeiro, Bishop at last found a secure environment which inspired her to write some of her finest work. Critics have analysed how Brazil influenced her work. However, to date, no comprehensive study has been made of Bishop's portrayal of Brazil. This chapter will concentrate on Bishop's published pieces on Brazil. These include Bishop's poetry in *Questions of Travel*, contained in the section entitled "Brazil", and two short prose pieces, "A Trip to Vigia" (1967) and "To the Botequim & Back" (1970), which are included in *The Collected Prose*. Bishop's introduction to the translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley", Brazil* (1962) for Time-Life and a less well-known article published in the *New York Times Magazine*, "On the Railroad named Delight" (1965), merit examination as do some of her private letters, written from Brazil and now collected in *One Art*.

While Bishop was still living in Brazil, and even after she left, she frequently referred, in personal letters and interviews, to a book she planned to write of travel prose on Brazil. She told Ashley Brown in a 1966 interview:

> I'm planning a book of prose about Brazil. It is tentatively called *Black Beans and Diamonds*. It's to be a combination of a travel book, a memoir, and a picture book.... I'd like to make Brazil seem less remote and less an object of picturesque fancy. It's not really so far from New York. I think that since the great naturalists (Darwin, Wallace, Bruce, and so on) there hasn't been much close observation (at least by foreigners) of Brazil. Except perhaps for Lévi-Strauss.11

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10 She suffered a severe allergic reaction to eating a cashew nut which resulted in her missing her boat and staying in Rio de Janeiro to recuperate.

11 Interview with Ashley Brown, a long time American friend who also lived in Rio. In Schwartz & Estess: *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art* (1983): 302.
Bishop's book was never completed, let alone submitted for publication, although it was to have included essays such as "The Trip to Vigia" and "To the Botequim & Back". From her earliest days in Brazil, Bishop wanted to translate her experience of the country into a text and contain her ideas in book form. Bishop's idea for a travel prose book about Brazil was preceded by her desire to write a travel book about South America as a whole. It is evident in many of her comments about Brazil that paramount in her mind were the questions which the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss had raised in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) about the representation of place.

In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss's study of Brazilian Indians, he lamented a bygone age of travel. Lévi-Strauss began his narrative with the admission that it had taken him fifteen years to write the book. He needed that time to overcome the shame and disgust he felt about the way his narrative would unavoidably misrepresent what he saw in Brazil. Lévi-Strauss argued that his book delivered only one personal and transient version of Brazil. He further believed that his reader wanted Lévi-Strauss, as a travel writer and anthropologist, to confirm the idea (or illusion) the reader already had of a place: "I understand how it is that people delight in travel-books and ask only to be misled by them. Such books preserve the illusion of something that no longer exists." 12

Similarly, Bishop's poetry tries to convey the complexity of mediating place through narrative. In the poem "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" (*North & South - A Cold Spring*), Bishop considers the disillusionment of both experienced and imagined travel, and realises that the journeys we make nearly always disappoint. Looking at a Bible, with its centuries' old assumption of authority, Bishop laments:

Thus should have been our travels:  
serious, engravable.  
The Seven Wonders of the World are tired  
and a touch familiar, but the other scenes,  
innumerable, though equally sad and still,  
are foreign.... (1-6)

The narrator realises, nevertheless, that actual travel or tourism is equally unsatisfactory and temporary. No matter where in the world Bishop has travelled, and here she lists seven journeys, which include Mexico, Dingle harbour, Morocco and St Peter's, she finds the experiences alienating. However, the frustrations are off-set by the odd and unexpected rewards that only actual experience can offer: travel as experienced passively through a book is more limited. Thomas Travisano, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (1994):161.

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Artistic Development (1988), notes how, as the poem progresses, the poet and the reader discover the emptiness of past culture, both read and experienced (114). The poem suggests that the past was supposed to supply our present time with a coherence and continuum but has failed to do so. Travisano points out that Bishop’s poem shows us that travel as experienced in a book, and also in life, may have no connection with the next experience. Bishop starts her third and final stanza: "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and'"(65). The grammatical conjunction "and" is sometimes the only link between disparate experiences. Bishop ends the poem with a solution to the disappointments of vicarious and actual travel: if travel is mediated through imagination it might become something new and more rewarding while still remaining a construct.

Lévi-Strauss despaired in Tristes Tropiques that no culture remained intact and authentic and that, in order to reproduce what he had observed, he was "trying in vain to repiece together the idea of the exotic with the help of a particle here and a fragment of debris there".13 He concluded that we cannot comprehend what we see in our search for a vanished reality which no longer exists. Lévi-Strauss further concluded that we cannot understand a culture without changing it and adjusting it to fit our own image. In Bishop’s work, according to Susan McCabe, this translates into the realisation that "truth" and "presence" are elusive.14 McCabe links together Lévi-Strauss and Bishop because they both understand the impossibility of observing another’s culture. If one is too much of a distant outsider, one risks becoming a condescending tourist; as too much of an insider, one loses the outsider’s objectivity.

Bishop did not publish poetry about places she visited as a tourist; she saved her poems for the places she settled in and got to know well. She was conscious that there came a point when a place might appear too familiar, and therefore she needed to capture it immediately prior to that moment. In a letter dated 1956 to her friends the Barkers, Bishop mentioned the need to get on with her travel prose project: "- before I know too much about the country and get afraid to say anything. It is rather hectic and surrealist -

13 Quoted in McCabe: 162.
14 McCabe’s definition of "presence" comes from Tzvetan Todorov’s The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other (1984). Todorov argues about the representation of the "other" in the instance of the Spanish and the native Indians in North America. He thinks that it is impossible to understand the "other" and so they are reduced to nothing more than a "presence" (McCabe 160-163).
but so is Brazil - and fun to write."\(^{15}\) Asked by Beatriz Schiller in a 1977 interview about her impressions of Brazil when she lived there, Bishop replied: "I have no theories about Brazil, unlike so many people. Immediately upon arriving I did have theories and they were sharp ones. Little by little those theories evaporated. Brazil became my home."\(^{16}\)

"Home is where one starts from," said T S Eliot in the "Four Quartets".\(^{17}\) Home is supposedly the constant knowable part of a person's existence which helps define the individual, while travel, in this context, is the movement into the unknown and towards new experiences. What we see in Bishop's poetry and prose is that home is a far more ambiguous construct. Home ceases to be a physical place, but becomes more a mental state. Bishop herself said that, for her, home was something she carried around with her, more a state of mind. Alexandra Johnson asked Bishop in a 1978 interview, "Geography of the Imagination" (for the Christian Science Monitor), whether poetry was her way of finding or having a home. Bishop replied: "I've never felt particularly at home. I guess that's a pretty good description of a poet's sense of home. He carries it within him."\(^{18}\)

Home constituted a sense of unquestioning belonging, where travel signified the removal to the outside. Travel was a permanent condition for Bishop, both in good and bad times. Bishop travelled to see the world, but she also used the opportunity to travel as a means of escape from any difficult situation. When Bishop left the United States in 1951, after an unhappy year at the Library of Congress in Washington, she was finally able to acknowledge how miserable she had been only once she was on the ship to South America. "The trip is a 'shakedown' trip for me...." Bishop wrote in her journal: with the benefit of physical distance, she admitted she already felt better by being away.\(^{19}\)

\(^{15}\) Letter dated January 26, 1956, in Victoria Harrison: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy (1993): 171. Harrison published an interesting article about Bishop's lengthy correspondence with the Barkers, whom she first met at Yaddo in 1950. "Recording a Life: Elizabeth Bishop's Letters to Ilse and Kit Barker" (in Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender (1993), edited by Marilyn May Lombardi) is an account of the friendship, conducted largely through letters between Bishop and Ilse Barker, a German exile who lived in England. Harrison considers Bishop's letters to Ilse Barker more wide-ranging and intimate than those Bishop wrote to her mentor, Marianne Moore, and her literary peer, Robert Lowell.


\(^{18}\) "Geography of the Imagination" was first published on March 23, 1978, and is reprinted in Monteiro: 102.

\(^{19}\) See the diary entry in Lorrie Goldensohn: Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry (1992): 194.
Before she embarked on her ship voyage to Brazil in 1951, Bishop had long dreamed of making such a trip. When Bishop was looking for an alternative to her Key West home, she wrote to Marianne Moore in 1941: "I haven't given up the idea of South America."20 Aged seventeen, Bishop read W H Hudson's *Green Mansions* (1904), a novel set in Venezuela, and subtitled *A Romance of the Tropical Forest*. 21 In a teenage review Bishop wrote:

I wished that the book had been twice as long when I put it down, and I was filled with longing to leave for South America immediately and search for those forgotten bird-people. It seemed still unfinished, even more than that delightful region in my mind I told about, and I felt sure that if I could only find the right spot, the right sun-lighted arches of the trees, and wait patiently, I would see a bright-haired figure slipping away among the moving shadows, and hear the sweet, light music of Rima's voice. 22

Rima, the book's Indian heroine, made a significant impact on Bishop. Bishop compared her friend and mentor, the poet Marianne Moore, to her: "Her face paled and flushed so quickly she reminded me of Rima in W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*," Bishop wrote in her tribute to Moore, "Efforts of Affection".23 Lorrie Goldensohn argues that part of Bishop's reason for going to Latin America initially was to find Rima. It also seems that, more than a simple quest for the fictional heroine, Bishop had absorbed a constructed image of Venezuela as jungle which she amplified to signify all of South America and which she carried with her to Brazil. On her ship to South America, the SS *Bowplate*, she and Miss Breen, who is included in the poem "Arrival at Santos", discuss how they had been drawn south in part by the lure of romantic images that W H Hudson created for them.

Bishop had a mixture of ideas and preconceptions of "the south" which had been stimulated by both her reading and her travels. In 1942, she went to Mexico for a two-week stay, but enjoyed the indigenous culture so much that she stayed for nine months. There is no record of her having read any specific travel narratives about Mexico either before or during her stay. Bishop did, however, plan to write about her Mexican experiences. She mentioned, as early as 1946, her plans for a book which would include Mexican stories. Mexican culture, however, was not to Bishop's taste. Bishop claimed to loathe Mexican painting: she stayed in a pension in Mexico City which had once been the home of David Siqueiros. She found Siqueiros's paintings and others which hung in the

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21 W H Hudson (1841-1922) never visited Venezuela, although he lived for 32 years in Argentina.
22 In Goldensohn: 204.
23 "Efforts of Affection" is included in *The Collected Prose*: 133. It was first published in *Vanity Fair*, May 1983.

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house "gloomy". 24 Years later, when she taught at Harvard in the 1970s, she became good friends with Octavio Paz and they translated some of each other's poetry. However, Bishop showed no interest in Mexican literature at this time. Instead, she loved the Mexican Indians' primitive, folkloric culture. When Bishop moved to Brazil she fell in love with indigenous Brazilian culture such as the samba, macumba and the African-imported shamanism to an even greater degree. Bishop's love of the Brazilian samba was so great that she included a translation of the 1965 Carnival sambas in the 1969 edition of The Complete Poems.

In a letter to Moore from Mexico dated May 14, 1942, Bishop described a day out to the beach at Progreso near Mérida. Everything Bishop saw was miniaturised; the train she and her friends travelled on was "a little wooden train", they then took "the tiniest trolley car I have ever seen", and the house they visited "was also very small". Everything enchanted Bishop: she marvelled at the produce in the market and at the practicality of hammocks to sleep in a small house. Bishop's description of her journey around Progreso resembles a children's miniature theme park of an idealised toy town:

Then we got on the tiniest trolley car I have ever seen, smaller than the Toonerville, and went round and round the town, so close to all the little buildings you could touch them. The trolley car had a small engine inside that kept boiling over, and the wind blew, and the waves ... splashed, and the band played in the park, and the church bells rang - it is really very nice (109).

Bishop's diminution of her surroundings finds a parallel in her painting of Mérida, entitled "Mérida From The Roof" (1942). In Bishop's painting the houses and streets are dominated by a large date palm which is out of scale with everything else in the picture's background. Dwarfing the roofs behind the date palm are masses of oil rigs which seem to have overtaken the town. The town's cathedral has to compete to be noticed, since it is outnumbered by the prolific oil rigs.

Bishop continued to view Mexico in the diminutive some twenty years after her initial visit. By 1963, Bishop had been in Brazil for twelve years and considered that

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24 Bishop found out about Siquieros's house from the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), whom she met while they were climbing a pyramid at Chichén Itzá. Bishop was initially dismissive of Neruda's poetry, but later acknowledged its influence on her work. In a letter to Moore (May 14, 1942) Bishop said: "I bought Pablo Neruda's poetry ... and I am reading it, with the dictionary, but I'm afraid it is not the kind I - nor you - like, very very loose, surrealist imagery, etc." In the interview with Brown in 1966, Bishop said: "... I lived in Mexico for a time twenty years ago and I knew Pablo Neruda there. I think I was influenced to some extent by him (as in my 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore'), but he is still a rather 'advanced' poet, compared with other South American poets." In Schwartz: 290.

25 The painting was used for the cover illustration of the paperback version of The Complete Poems 1927-1979.
Mexico no longer had any attraction for her, suggesting that she viewed the two countries as being essentially similar. She wrote to Robert Lowell asking advice about where to vacation, exclaiming: "I don't WANT to go back to Mexico! Unless to Yucatán or the southern parts, way off the beaten path. I imagine even Oaxaca is spoiled now, and it was so beautiful. It's a much sadder country than Brazil, and all those Indians are so awful, poor things, except the little Mayas in Yucatán." Bishop imbued Mexico with a lyrical, prelapsarian and non-human quality as she compared the Mayan Indians to birds: "They're nice, gentler, cleaner, don't carry guns, big hooked noses, quiet and almost gay - like little parakeets. But I've had ten years of a backward, corrupt country ... and I yearn for civilization." In a later poem about the discovery of Brazil, "Brazil, January 1, 1502", Bishop compares the Brazilian Indian women to birds: "those maddening little women who kept calling, / calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)

In her letter, Brazil and Mexico were interchangeable concepts for Bishop, and neither signified "civilisation". As an American, she lumped together the "south". Despite Bishop's love of Mexican indigenous culture, she pitied the Indians whom she now viewed, in 1963, as down-trodden victims in an uncivilised country. When Bishop finally did return to Mexico, in 1975, she was shocked by the changes she found, and complained that only Tepotzotlán was as she remembered (Mexico City's population had increased from one million to eleven million in the intervening years). Bishop did concede to some improvements: the Aztec pyramids of Teotihuacán, north of Mexico City, were much better excavated and restored than the last time she had visited them, but nothing else was as she remembered. Bishop expected Mexico to be as she remembered, despite the thirty-two year interval.

Bishop's changing attitude to Mexico over the years gives some indication of what she expected from a place. Rationally Bishop knew no place remained immune to change, but emotionally she wanted Mexico to be as she first saw it. Since it was not, she decided that any change was for the worse. Bishop's most damning comment was not that Mexico was uncivilised, but that its Indians reminded her of birds. Whilst this is a lyrical and poetic metaphor, it can also be read as reducing the Indians to part of nature's backdrop, further suggesting that Mexico existed outside the twentieth century. Bishop's private comments on Mexico are significant because in their raw, unedited letter form we glimpse Bishop as a tourist with her own prejudices unguided by any mediating force. In

26 Letter dated August 26, 1963, in One Art: 418.
27 Ibid.
28 Letter to Frani Blough Muser dated July 9, 1975, in One Art: 598.
29 Bishop's complaints about change are reminiscent of Porter's complaints about Mexico at the start of the 1930s and Gellhorn's repeated assertions that she felt she was born at the right moment, before travel became a mass-tourist industry.
her letters she reacts instinctively, lacking the reflective quality of the poet.

Since Bishop did not write poems about many of the places she visited, the only record of them is often to be found in her letters. Bishop was a prolific letter writer who wrote several thousand letters in her lifetime. In his introduction to the collection of her selected letters, *One Art*, Robert Giroux said: "In a sense the letters constitute her autobiography, though they were not intended as such; she was not recording her life but was simply keeping in touch with her friends and correspondents"(vii). The only recorded impression of Bishop's ten-day trip to Haiti in February 1949 is a letter to Lowell. Bishop was impressed by her short visit and wrote: "... - nothing could be more of a change than this unlikely country & I think it is much more interesting than I'd ever dreamed any of the West Indies, etc., could be." Bishop's comment to Lowell suggests that she arrived in a new country, much like Gellhorn, with a tourist's pre-conceived notion of place which was then destroyed by what she actually saw. Often, Bishop's idea of a place was created by her reading.

Literary influences helped to shape Bishop's idea of Latin America before and while she lived there. Charles Darwin was the writer who probably most influenced Bishop's perception and reception of the world. A trip to the Galápagos Islands in 1974 was a homage to him and was inspired purely by Darwin's accounts of his travels. The landscape of the islands and Darwin's description of it informed Bishop's poem "Crusoe in England" (*Geography III*). In Brazil, Bishop read Darwin and wrote to Moore in 1953:

I've just finished Darwin's Diary on the *Beagle* - not the Journal, although I guess it's mostly the same - and I thought it was wonderful. I think I'll begin right away on all his other books. The pages about Rio de Janeiro are so true even today, and he's such a hardworking young man, and so good. (Do you know the story about him and one of his little boys?- much later, of course. He took the little boy to the London Zoo and the little boy looked into a cage where a huge rhinoceros was lying asleep, and said, "Papa, that bird is dead").

Bishop's technique as a poet mirrored Darwin's as a naturalist: she created a world by closely observing it and allowed the detail to speak for the greater whole. Darwin's study of the finches on the Galápagos Islands in *Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), demonstrates his attention to detail. He noticed that the finch had evolved a slightly different beak on each island. Each finch's beak was perfectly adapted to its environment, and it was this detail which gave Darwin his theory of evolution.

Darwin inspired Bishop for the rest of her life. As she explained to Anne Stevenson

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31 Letter dated April 11, 1953, in *One Art*: 257.
in 1966, what attracted her was his ability to create a whole from a myriad of detail:

But reading Darwin one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic - and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels that strangeness of undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown. What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration.32

Before Bishop set sail for South America in 1951 she read about it. Her observations of Brazil were often at least second-hand. Because she was a literary person she derived much of her information about the world from the written word. The writers she admired had filtered the world through their text, Bishop then filtered their perceptions through her observations. She was quick to note similarities between their and her impressions and she trusted both the writers' authority and knowledge. E Lucas Bridges' *Uttermost Part of the Earth* (1948), which told of the destruction of a race of people at the end of the nineteenth century in Tierra del Fuego, impressed her. She praised the book which: "although it is factual and not a fact of the imagination, should be classed with *Robinson Crusoe* for a suspense of strangeness and ingenuity and courage and loneliness".33 Crucially, the book combined history with characteristics such as loneliness and courage which Bishop readily identified with travel. When Bishop set sail for South America in 1951, she wrote to Lowell from the ship about her plan to sail through the Straits of Magellan to see for herself the world Bridges described, perhaps writing an article about Puntas Arenas before heading up to Peru or Ecuador.

Bishop finally visited Peru and Ecuador twenty years later, but she never made it to the tip of the continent. Instead, once established in Brazil, she continued to read other travellers and explorers who had visited the continent and to compare their views with hers. Bishop was amazed by Sir Richard Burton's erudition in *The Highlands of Brazil* (1869).34 Impressed by Burton's knowledge about the origin of words, she wrote to the Barkers in 1953: "On the same trip that we took - to Ouro Prêto - he explains all the place-names, Indian names, etc. - things we had tried and tried to find out about and failed."35

Bishop later read Charles Wagley's *Amazon Town* (1953) and incorporated his

32 Letter to Anne Stevenson quoted in Schwartz: 288.
33 Kalstone: 149.
34 Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890) was a pre-eminent nineteenth-century traveller who was also a noted linguist, translator, explorer and anthropologist. He travelled the world, including lengthy stays in India and Central Africa, before going to Brazil in 1865.
35 Letter to Kit & Ilse Barker dated July 13, 1953, in *One Art*: 266.
anthropological account of shamanism into her poem "The Riverman", which forms part of the "Brazil" section of Questions of Travel. Bishop acknowledged his book as her source and prefaced the poem with an explanation of the poem's subject. However, such was Bishop's interest in the mythical side of Brazilian life that she had written a draft of the poem even before she read Amazon Town. By the time Bishop wrote "The Riverman" she had been in Brazil for nine years, but she only visited the Amazon after writing the poem, which is an imaginative reworking of the anthropological text, focusing on the primitive. Bishop was most at her ease in her travel pieces when she was able to rely on the perceptions of others to help her filter her ideas. In "The Riverman" she uses Wagley's ideas as a springboard for her own fantasy and writes in the first person. This involvement is missing from all her other Brazilian poems, which so carefully construct an unbridgeable distance between subject and observer. Bishop took many details from Wagley's text - including the spirit of the dolphin which calls to the riverman, the giving of the magical cigars and the drinking of cachaça - and imbued them with her own voice. Travisano considers that Bishop transformed Wagley's text by giving back the overman's sense of dignity and pride which he thought the American anthropologist had stripped from him. More importantly, the poem represents Bishop's foray into Brazilian otherness.

Once established in Brazil, Bishop wanted to see the metaphorical interior of the country. "The Riverman" comes closest to illustrating the construction of place through not only a series of imaginings but also the use of Wagley's Amazon Town. When Bishop finally travelled to the Amazon in February 1960, the river and the region made a huge impression on her, as she wrote to Lowell: "... I want to go back to the Amazon. I dream dreams every night - I don't know quite why I found it so affecting." Bishop reviewed "The Riverman" in the light of her trip and added: "You don't have to like the 'Riverman' poem. Lota hates it, and I don't approve of it myself, but once it was written I couldn't seem to get rid of it. Now I am doing an authentic, post-Amazon one that I trust will be better." Lota de Macedo Soares, Bishop's Brazilian companion, was an activist for a modern Brazil who saw Bishop's interest in the primitive as North American regressive fantasy; "The Riverman" epitomised this attitude. Lowell inadvertently agreed with Macedo Soares when he praised the poem, saying it was the best fairy story he knew.

36 Charles Wagley (1913-1991) was a social anthropologist, university professor and writer who was a recognised authority on the native cultures of Brazilian Amazonia.
37 Cachaça is an indigenous alcoholic drink made from raw sugar cane and is the traditional drink of the poor.
38 Travisano: 159.
40 Goldensohn: 209.
Bishop's experience of the Amazon stayed with her, and at the end of her life she considered it and the Galápagos Islands vacation the best trips of her life. The common link between the two places is an over-abundance of nature set in an almost primeval setting. The essential part of the riverman's spirituality is his relationship with nature:

Look, it stands to reason
that everything we need
can be obtained from the river.
It drains the jungle; it draws
from trees and plants and rocks
from half around the world,
it draws from the very heart
of the earth the remedy
for each of the diseases -
one just has to know how to find it. (108-117)

In the riverman's eulogy, Bishop is not merely praising nature but showing how fundamental is the relationship between man and the elements on a local and national level. Bishop's preference for the indigenous Indian culture of Brazil led her in "The Riverman" to offer advice to city dwellers such as Macedo Soares. Instead of dismissing the riverman and his spiritual beliefs as marginal concerns, Bishop thinks urban Brazil would be wiser to realise that the ancient rituals of the interior are still significant to urban dwellers.

Bishop's use of others' texts to mediate her own experiences extended to her translation work. She started to translate as a means of learning Portuguese, but claimed that she never mastered an oral fluency in the language: "After all these years, I'm like a dog: I understand everything that's said to me, but I don't speak it very well." Nevertheless, Bishop acquired a reputation as a good translator. Bishop translated quite freely in order to preserve the spirit of a poem: its rhyme, meter and poetic intention should, she believed, remain faithful to the poet's original intention. Brown, in his essay "Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil", gives examples of how this worked in practice. Bishop's translation of Vinicius de Moraes' "Sonnet of Intimacy" illustrates perfectly her translation style. The poem's last two lines in Portuguese read:

Nós todos, animais, sem comoção nenhuma
Mijamos em comum numa festa de espuma. (13-14)

Brown gives a literal translation and then how Bishop chose to translate:

We all, animals without any commotion
Urinate together in a festival of spray.

41 Letter to Dorothee Bowie, dated May 7, 1979, in One Art: 633.
42 Interview with Brown in Schwartz: 291.
Brown notes how much more graceful Bishop's translation sounds than the literal interpretation of the Portuguese. Bishop's efforts at translation were an attempt to merge two voices and cultural perspectives. She thought translation sufficiently important to include it with her own poetry, and she was committed to widening the audience for Brazilian poets. In 1972 Bishop edited, with Emanuel Brasil, and wrote the introduction to *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*. Bishop translated five Brazilian poets: Manuel Bandeira, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Joaquim Cardoza, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Vinicius de Moraes. As noted earlier, she also translated four sambas from the 1965 Rio Carnival. Bishop's poetry was also translated into Portuguese, particularly as she became more famous and Brazil became increasingly proud of its adopted poet. A translation of her ballad, "The Burglar of Babylon", appeared in the literary review *Cadernos Brasileiros* in Rio de Janeiro simultaneously with the original publication in the *New Yorker* in November 1964. Bishop, however, was uncertain as to whether English-American poetry could be translated. She told Brown that no word existed in Portuguese for "understatement" and, since Marianne Moore's poetry, for example, was nearly all understatement, how could her work be translated?

The apotheosis of Bishop's translation was *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, a three-year project to translate the diary of a young girl who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century about her life in the town of Diamantina in north-eastern Brazil. The book was written by Alice Brant, who assumed the pseudonym "Helena Morley". Although the diary was written in the 1890s it was not published until 1942, when Brant's husband, the president of the Bank of Brazil, suggested she publish it. Written for private consumption, the book became a classic on publication. Bishop started the translation as a

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44 Vinicius de Moraes went on to write lyrics for *bossa nova* and is probably most famous for writing "The Girl from Ipanema" (Garota de Ipanema), a song which brought him world-wide reknown.
45 Bishop also translated French and Spanish poetry. Her knowledge of both languages had been acquired on lengthy stays in France and Mexico. Bishop and her friend, Octavio Paz, translated a few of each other's poems. Her version of Paz's "Objects & Apparitions" was mistaken by George Starbuck for a new poem by Bishop about the box-maker Joseph Cornell. Cornell (1904-1972) was one of the first American artists to come into contact with surrealism. The boxes he made fascinated Bishop, who attempted some of her own. They are reproduced in *Exchanging Hats*.
46 Alice Brant was an Anglo-Brazilian girl. Her grandfather had left England and remained in Diamantina, where he worked as a doctor for a mining company. Brant was brought up as a Brazilian. Both names, "Helena" and "Morley", come from the English side of the family.
means of improving her Portuguese, but as she translated Helena's life she began to reflect on her own Nova Scotian childhood, seeing echoes of her childhood. Bishop's maternal grandmother was very important to her and when Bishop went to Diamantina to research the diary, she was keen to find Helena's grandmother's house. Bishop's friend May Swenson remarked on the parallels when she wrote to the poet: "Keeping within the mind of this youngster so consistently in order to choose the right expressions in another language - making it build in interest to the end - that proves great power on your part.... You can feel in the book that the translator had great fun doing it, too - that's a big part of the reader's enjoyment." 47

The blurring of two worlds - the writer's and translator's - is emphasised by Marianne Moore's review of the book; she inadvertently ascribed one of the writer's comments to the translator. Dona Alice/Helena says in the book's preface: "... happiness does not consist in worldly goods but in a peaceful home, in family affection..." (xxxvi). Moore attributed the comment to Bishop, confusing not only writer and translator but the histories of two young girls. In translating the book, Bishop allowed the author's experience of Diamantina to merge with hers as she detailed her trips to the town in her introduction.

Bishop's lengthy introduction to her translation discusses the genesis of the project and gives a detailed account of the week-long trip she made to Diamantina. Bishop's enthusiasm for the project is palpable in her description of the town where Helena Morley lived. The diary fulfilled two functions for Bishop. It was an introduction to Brazilian life and literature, read on the recommendation of her Brazilian friends early in her stay; it also became the means by which she rediscovered her own childhood. Bishop's letter to her Aunt Grace after the book was published reveals the parallel: "I was hoping you'd go into detail about "Helena Morley" - don't you think she was funny? And didn't a lot of it remind you of G V?"48

Bishop's portrayal of Diamantina combined three levels of perception: the town as described by Helena at the end of the last century, Bishop's account of how she found the town more than fifty years later and the perceptions of one of her favourite explorers, Burton, in *The Highlands of Brazil*. She wrote to the Barkers about the trouble she had getting the book right. One assumes the task was made more difficult because she had read and absorbed Burton's account: "Then I started the introduction and fussed and fuzzed over it, trying to get everything just right. Burton went to Diamantina in 1861, and as usually he is endlessly talkative, and absolutely accurate about everything ... he is amazing, and I

48 Letter dated April 9, 1958, in Harrison: 177.
bet his passion for exactitude and information drove his Brazilian friends mad!"49

The description of the town is filtered through the eyes of Bishop, who also sees it through both Morley's and Burton's accounts; at the same time, it is infused with a great eagerness to impress her American audience so that too they might love Helena. So keen was Bishop to give the diary a literary credential that she compared it to Chaucer and Wordsworth and added: "Occasionally entries referring to slavery seemed like notes for an unwritten, Brazilian, feminine version of Tom Sawyer and Nigger Jim"(viii).50

Before Bishop travelled to Diamantina, she met the now-aged Alice in Rio de Janeiro. Bishop describes going to her Rio home on a couple of occasions; interestingly, this is the only time she describes rich people.51 Bishop became entwined with Morley's life and story: Bishop met the author and saw the same things. The translation's introduction describes Bishop's trip to Diamantina and her reactions to the diary before the reader can read the account. Her trip to Diamantina uses another double perspective: it fuses the past of Helena Morley with the present of Bishop. The pleasure Bishop finds in the text she projects onto her description of the town. Diamantina fulfils Bishop's preference for the provincial, colonial town with its discernible Brazilian architecture and idiosyncratic details. She mentions the crucifix, which has a tree growing out of it, and describes "strawberry-pink" and "mustard-colored houses"(xix); even the jail is painted "baby-pink".52 The buildings have Oriental facades, an influence of the Portuguese colony of Macâo, with details such as funnels which flare like "trumpets". The surreal atmosphere is emphasised further by the description of the bleak landscape as a seascape as Bishop's plane comes into land: "A high sea of waves and crests of steely-gray rock, eroded and fragmented, appears"(xiv). Diamantina is known for two things: it is the highest town in Brazil and, as the name suggests, a source of diamonds and gold. These two facts encourage Bishop to emphasise the town's more dramatic features. Because of its inaccessibility it exists in a pre-industrial time warp. The local industry of weaving cotton is described in prelapsarian terms: "The factory ... is still there, but nothing could look less like industrialization. One descends to a fair-sized river and the landscape is green and lush; there are many trees, and fruit trees around the blue- or white-washed stone houses along the one unpaved street"(xxiv).

49 Letter dated June 5, 1956, ibid: 175. Bishop is mistaken in the date. Burton did not arrive in Brazil until 1865.
50 Page references refer to the 1957 edition of The Diary of "Helena Morley".
51 When Macedo Soares was introduced to Dona Alice's daughter they compared genealogical notes, as the elite of a country often do.
52 Bishop's interest in colour in her writing is paralleled by her use of colour in her paintings.
After Bishop builds up an image of a quaint town it is a shock to learn that Helena Morley lived in a world of "bitter poverty and isolation" (xxvi). However, Bishop is trying to demonstrate, not how Diamantina is in its physical form, but how she finds the spirit of the diary captured in the town. She wants to find the same innocence, enthusiasm and frivolity in the town years after Helena Morley left and became rich. The 1957 first edition contains photographs of Diamantina on its inside covers, and Bishop had hoped to include one of Helena/Dona Alice's old home. "I said I would like to get a copy of it for the book, but Dona Alice ... said Oh no, not that house, suggesting that I use a picture of Dona Alice's present house on the Lagoa in Rio" (xi). This anecdote captures perfectly Bishop's perception of Brazil. Wherever possible she would return to what the Brazilians considered old-fashioned or primitive. Why, Dona Alice wonders, show the poor house she grew up in, when she ended up rich and living in an elegant house?

Part of the reason Bishop liked to dwell on the primitive side of Brazilian culture was that, once she was resident in Brazil, most of her cultural references continued to come from the United States. Intellectually she never left the North. Above everything, Bishop was first and foremost an American. She worried that her connection with Brazil might stop people from taking her seriously as an American poet, and she was keen to emphasise where her loyalty lay. She told Brown: "... I just happened to come here, and I am influenced by Brazil certainly, but I am a completely American poet, nevertheless." Similarly, she wrote to Lowell, worried that she was typecasting herself and her work by living in Brazil. Bishop was equally aware that she bore a responsibility to represent what she knew of Brazil as "objectively" as possible:

But I worry a great deal about what to do with all this accumulation of exotic or picturesque or charming detail, and I don't want to become a poet who can only write about South America. It is one of my greatest worries now - how to use everything and keep on living here, most of the time, probably - and yet be a New Englander herring-choker blueenoser at the same time.

Bishop's dilemma was precisely how she should reproduce her Brazilian experiences faithfully without turning them into stereotypical pieces of superficial tourism (Lévi-Strauss's concern) and, simultaneously, how she remained true to her North American roots. Bishop's comments can be read in different ways. It might be argued that, since Bishop was aware of a contradiction, she was part way to addressing it; or that she was using the adjectives - "exotic", "picturesque" and "charming" - ironically, knowing the general northern view of the south; or, even, that she had a northern view and was never more than a superficial tourist.

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53 Despite having a Canadian mother and spending much of her childhood in Nova Scotia.
54 Brown interview in Schwartz: 290.
Having happily established herself in self-imposed exile in Brazil, Bishop quickly saw to it that she was not disconnected from the world she had left behind. She subscribed to magazines and journals which kept her abreast of the latest events in the literary world, and she regularly bought books from New York and even London bookshops. More significantly, she wrote and received vast amounts of letters. Much of Bishop's emotional and intellectual life was absorbed by her correspondence with her friends and family outside Brazil.56 The double perspective that pervades her letters - being an American in a foreign country who wrote about America and Brazil - is also present in much of her published work, such as Brazil and her New York Times article, "On the Railroad Named Delight", both of which were written expressly for an American audience. Bishop had an insider's perspective because she lived in Brazil on a daily basis, but she also hoped for the outsider's objectivity. The balance, as Lévi-Strauss observed, is almost impossible to maintain.

Once Bishop moved to Petrôpolis and set up home with Maria Carlota Costellat (Lota) de Macedo Soares, she revelled in a life that concerned itself with servants' problems, the building of a new house and the daily routine of domesticity.57 It was an experience of life Bishop had never had before, and which she loved and which came closest to her idea of "home". Some critics have erroneously concluded that her love of the domestic precluded other interests, since many of the poems in the "Brazil" section of Questions of Travel have nature and the servants at Petrôpolis as their subject. However, while Bishop might have liked to ignore the vagaries of Brazilian political life, living with Macedo Soares made that impossible. A member of the Brazilian elite, Macedo Soares was very politically active.58 When their friend Carlos Lacerda became governor of the new state of Guanabara in 1960, which included Rio de Janeiro, he gave Macedo Soares the job of transforming an urban landfill site in Rio into a public park. Such was the nature

56 The maid, Joanna Dos Santos Da Costa, recalled: "Elizabeth would write a lot when she was alone. She received a lot of mail, and she wrote a lot of letters. Sometimes Elizabeth would forget them in the drawer of the desk and I would remind her that they were there, and she would take them out. (It is my) impression (that she wrote) more letters (than poetry)." In Fountain & Brazeau Remembering Elizabeth Bishop (1994): 169-170.
57 Petrôpolis was Bishop and Macedo Soares's main residence. Towards the end of their relationship Macedo Soares spent increasingly long periods in their apartment in Rio de Janeiro due to her work commitments and Bishop's biographers have suggested that these lengthy periods apart hastened the decline of the relationship.
58 Bishop described Macedo Soares's aristocratic and political background in a letter to Ilse Barker in August 1953: "Until Vargas, her father was always in politics - he was exiled several times; they have the straw hat with a bullet hole through the brim he was wearing one day when shot at; Lota says at the convent for a few years the girls whose fathers were in prison - hers was - didn't speak to the socially inferior girls whose fathers were out etc ... all in the best South American tradition." In Goldensohn: 76.
of Macedo Soares's job that Bishop could not have avoided political life. Indeed, in many of her letters home Bishop is at pains to explain the latest crises in Brazil's chequered political history. 59

Equally, Bishop liked, in her letters, to comment on and criticise the American political situation, with its scandals and traumas. Victoria Harrison, in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy (1993), details Bishop's many letters concerned with the political situation in both countries. Harrison notes that, by 1960, Bishop had become increasingly politicised, especially with Lacerda's appointment. Bishop's inside knowledge of Brazilian politics was necessarily biased because of her connections; she filtered her knowledge of Brazilian politics through Macedo Soares. Bishop misread the 1964 revolution, praising it at the time, unable to foresee that the military dictatorship would terrorise Brazil for more than twenty years. As the political situation became increasingly precarious, Bishop, aware that she could leave at any moment, found her position as an exile ever more complex:

Oh God - poor Brazil - my feelings are so mixed. I read in an Eng. review of Fellini's '8 ½' that it was about someone - artist - who "was stuck because he was feeling too many things at once" - and realized that describes my state of the last two years exactly. The necessary elimination, sequestration, concentration, etc. have been harder & harder.60

Just as Bishop's view of Brazil was mediated through books, so her understanding of Brazilian politics was mediated through Macedo Soares, and Bishop's view of American politics was gleaned from what she read and learned from friends' letters.

Bishop's politicisation developed the longer she lived in Brazil: she started with a tourist's view of the place and increasingly became an insider. She signified the progression of her thinking about Brazil in her specific ordering of the first three poems in the 1965 collection Questions of Travel. As David Kalstone first noticed, she is guiding the reader as to how her perception of Brazil transforms from that of a self-conscious tourist in "Arrival at Santos", via a centuries' old view of Brazil as a land to be conquered in "Brazil, January 1, 1502", to a reflection on one's expectations not only of travel but place in "Questions of Travel". The order is very specific and non-chronological since the poems were written in 1952, 1960 and 1956 respectively.

59 Bishop referred to the political situation often. Letters collected in One Art and dated November 20, 1955; May 28, 1958; October 5, 1960; January 5 and August 26, 1961; August 26 and October 11, 1963; April 7, October 22 and November 17, 1964 and February 8, 1965 all contain specific references to the increasingly unstable Brazilian political situation. More letters are dated 1964 because of the military coup in April of that year.

60 Letter to the Barkers dated October 14, 1963, in Harrison: 145.
In "Arrival at Santos", Bishop asks whether reality can ever live up to expectation. The tourist arrives with preconceptions of what an exotic location is to offer her, and judges immediately from what she can see. But her observations are vague and imprecise: "Here is a coast; here is a harbor; / here, after a meagre diet of horizon, is some scenery." The tourist could be anywhere, and the place could be any place, but already it disappoints because its vegetation and landscape are not sufficiently dramatic. Bishop's use of adjectives - "little" for the church, "feeble pink, or blue" for the painted warehouses, "uncertain" for the palms - anthropomorphizes the landscape, diminishing its significance in the eye of the tourist. The tourist had expected her destination to be "exotic" not only in terms of the landscape but as an "other". She is shocked to find that the country is just like the one she left behind:

I somehow never thought of there being a flag,
but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen. (16-18)

The narrator's reaction is like that of many tourists who travel. Later in the poem, she hopes they speak English at the port, just as many tourists would prefer to be understood in their native tongue when they travel. Bishop's tourist realises that she wants all the comforts of home with all the exoticism of travel, and mocks herself for her unreasonable demands that the exotic should be prosaic. The tourist's blindness is suggested by Miss Breen's backward descent down the ladder. She cannot see what awaits her as she carefully gets off the boat.

"Arrival at Santos" presents a double perspective of place as seen by tourist and poet. The tourist has the usual gripes that the destination has not lived up to an imagined concept of the south as "exotic": where there should be lush palm trees there are warehouses and commerce. Stamps will not stick to the letters she has written and she worries that the customs officials might make off with her liquor. Her only consolation as they leave Santos is knowing that she still has the opportunity to discover a "real" place by driving to the interior. The interior symbolises both a physical interior which exists beyond the coastline and the tourist's mind, which contains the freedom to choose where to go after the initial disappointment. The tourist has learned that if one place fails to meet expectation there is always an alternative. The poet realises almost at once that the tourist is setting herself up for inevitable disillusionment because of the gulf that exists between expectation and reality. The poet asks:

61 In The Complete Poems: 89.
Oh tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you
and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension? (7-12)

As Bishop asks the questions, she signals her recognition of the hopelessness of the tourist's position. To want everything to be different but the same is an impossible and unrealistic goal.

The impatience that the twentieth-century tourist feels after an eighteen-day boat journey to Brazil was matched, Bishop suggests, by that of the early explorers who first discovered Brazil in the sixteenth century. Bishop ends "Arrival at Santos" with a date, "January, 1952". The title of the next poem in the sequence includes another date: "Brazil, January 1, 1502". The date commemorates the first sighting by the Portuguese of Guanabara Bay, which they mistook for a river, as recalled in the name of the future city, Rio de Janeiro (River of January). This poem is more complex than "Arrival at Santos" since it seeks to capture not only how the Portuguese might have felt when they first spotted the Brazilian coastline, but also how their perception of the landscape and the native people created the concept "Brazil". Bishop wants to suggest how history and geography fused at that moment. Lowell wrote to her praising the poem: "Your poem is one of your most beautiful, I think - wonderful description, the jungle turning into a picture, then into history and the jungle again, with a practical, absurd, sad, amused and frightened tone for the Christians."

Bishop replied that she found the poem too artificial but she had wanted to write about of the idea of nature as tapestry. Every spring in Brazil, as Bishop watched the trees start to bloom, she was struck by the idea of how the density of the leaves formed a natural tapestry. Lowell's comments about the Christians misses the point Bishop is trying to make about the Portuguese discoverers. What they found centuries ago in the Brazilian landscape was different but, she suggests, "not unfamiliar" from Portugal. Their diversions were not the same as at home since there were "no lovers' walks, no bowers, / no cherries to be picked, no lute music". However, the mariners carried an idea of what they might hope to find, " an old dream of wealth and luxury / already out of style when they left home - / wealth, plus a brand new pleasure". As European conquerors of new territory, not only was any wealth to be theirs, but also, they

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62 Elizabeth Bishop never dated the poetry which appeared in her separate volumes and so the inclusion of a date here is crucial.
assumed, the local women. The Indian women were, however, too clever for the invaders: they knew how to use the landscape to hide and protect themselves from attack. "Brazil, January 1, 1502" is an appreciation of the lush quality of the Brazilian landscape which has remained largely undiminished by man's hand and an acknowledgement of the women's shrewd behaviour.

The poem's epigraph, from Landscape into Art by Kenneth Clark, is "embroidered nature ... tapestried landscape". Bishop underlines the force of nature by opening her poem with the line: "Januaries, Nature greets our eyes/ exactly as she must have greeted theirs." Geography has triumphed over history. The conquerors read into the landscape what they wanted, and appropriated it for their use. Yet, for all their civilising attempts, nature is still as abundant today as it was four hundred years ago. Travisano points out how the Christian conquerors can only see the Brazilian landscape in terms of what is familiar to them: "The Christian conquerors view the lush Brazilian landscape in terms of the familiar enclosed gardens so often celebrated in tapestries back home. Here is a wilderness to explore and command, to enclose as art ... the viewpoint is complex because the landscape is actually seen through 'our' modern eyes, while 'their' experience is imagined"(138).

The Portuguese discover a landscape which corresponds not to any reality they have seen but to "embroidered nature", constructed but never experienced. Bishop once again filters the perception of place through another's eyes: on this occasion, as Travisano says, the landscape as the Portuguese saw it is mediated through the twentieth-century reader's eyes. Karen Lawrence in Penelope Voyages(1992), compares the Portuguese perception of the New World in Bishop's poetry to that of the British travellers in Virginia Woolf's first novel The Voyage Out (1920). When they arrived three hundred years ago in Santa Marina, Woolf's fictional South American country, it "was still a virgin land behind a veil", a metaphor which anticipates Bishop's description of Brazil (158). As Lawrence says: "Woolf's narrative telescopes colonial and sexual aggression, reminding us that Europe's 'voyages out' to the New World were male penetrations of virgin spaces"(158).

Nature is decked out for man's pleasure whichever century he belongs to. Bishop creates a myriad of tiny detail in the first stanza to show how the foliage multiplies in all its diversity to create a whole: she compares nature to a tapestry which, when taken off the frame appears almost too perfect. The irony is that nature is the dominant force. The men appear as tiny as nails against the vast tropical jungle, and nature hides the Indian women when they need to be hidden. More significantly, nature continues to absorb new arrivals from whichever century. The only advantage the twentieth-century traveller
has is that he can push into the interior more easily, using the roads built by the
descendants of the first Portuguese settlers. However, both centuries' men remain "nail
sized" in comparison to nature.

The strong Indian women who evade the male invaders in "Brazil, January 1, 1502"
have a counterpart in a short story by the Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, "The
Smallest Woman in the World".64 While Bishop was working on "Brazil, January 1,
1502", Lispector was writing the short story. The two women had become friends and, in
the winter of 1962, Bishop translated five of Lispector's short stories, including "The
Smallest Woman in the World".65 Bishop wrote to Lowell about her friendship with
Lispector, marvelling at what she considered Lispector's nonliterariness: "I suppose we
are getting to be 'friends' - but she's the most non-literary writer I've ever known....
She's never read anything, that I can discover - I think she's a 'self-taught' writer, like a
primitive painter."66

"Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "The Smallest Woman in the World" share much in
common since Lispector's story is also a meditation on the appropriation of the "other". In
Lispector's story, a French explorer discovers the world's smallest woman in Africa; he
tries to catalogue her according to his classification system and then offers her as a
specimen in a Sunday newspaper article. Just as the women in Bishop's poem manage to
elude the invaders, so the "little flower" does not succumb to the explorer's attempts to
reduce her to a scientific classification, but rather asserts her autonomy by falling in
love with the very man who could destroy her freedom.

The final poem in Bishop's opening trilogy is the eponymous "Questions of Travel".
This poem is central to her work on and in Brazil, since it marries the two themes of
imagined and actual travel, introduced in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete
Concordance", and her double-edged vision as insider and outsider. The poem is an
internal debate about the merits of a particular journey, probably to Brazil. One part of
the poet grumbles about the scenery, just as the newly arrived tourist in Santos did. This
time there is an over-abundance of nature. The narrator complains:

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,

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64 Lispector (1925-1977) was a Ukrainian immigrant whose work is characterised by
its experimental, stream of consciousness and poetic prose. Lispector was obsessed with
language, capturing the exact word and expanding the possibilities of language through
paradox despite Bishop characterising her as "un-literary".
65 Three of the five stories, including "The Smallest Woman in the World", were
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
turning to waterfalls under our very eyes. (1-5)

There is too much water rushing to the sea, too many clouds and a frenzy of activity, with
water everywhere which the narrator finds overwhelming. Her other, more reflective
self is less concerned with the scenery and concerned more with the moral significance of
travel. She agonises:

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres? (14-17)

In these four lines Bishop addresses three "traveller" issues: can imagined travel
ever substitute for real travel? Can the pressure to be constantly on the move and see
new things ever be justified? And can it be morally right to dip in and out of strangers' lives? While Bishop cannot answer her questions, she acknowledges the human spirit that
keeps us endlessly curious and determined to see and do as much as is possible. So, she
concludes, people will travel to the ends of the earth to see a rare species or a ruin and, in
doing so, expect never to be disappointed. Travel is in part dream fulfilment:

Oh, must we dream our dreams
and have them, too?
And have we room
for one more folded sunset, still quite warm? (26-29)

Is there a limit to our travels, Bishop asks, and how many times we are prepared to be
disappointed?

Bishop's answer is that one travels, in part, because one does not know until one
sees it what it is one might have missed. As Dr Johnson said: "The use of travelling is to
regulate the imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see
them as they are."67 Brazil, in "Questions of Travel", fulfils Bishop's most extravagant imagining, not just because of its spectacular natural beauty, but also because of its unique culture. Details that charm her are the "disparate wooden clogs / carelessly clacking over / a grease-stained filling-station floor". Bishop knows that, back home in the United States, the clogs would all be mass produced so that: "Each pair there would have identical pitch". The idiosyncratic detail of the ornate bird cage is precisely what could not have been imagined from afar. She delights in a Brazil which is not based on

67 Quoted in Goldensohn: 8.
technology and modernisation, but on century-old skills and workmanship. It was this side of Brazil that Bishop intended to celebrate in Brazil and which would bring her into conflict with the Time-Life editors, who wanted more emphasis on the country's economic and political situation. In "Questions of Travel", Bishop's catalogue of souvenirs is tied to the domestic and the everyday. Even while buying petrol it is possible to experience a completely different life from the United States. Bishop ends her poem musing on why we travel, and why we leave home:

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right
about just sitting quietly in one's room?

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there ... No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?" (60–67)

Unlike Pascal, Bishop has never been able to stay in one place and rely on her imagination alone for stimulation. She wonders whether her constant desire to see and travel is indicative of a personal failing. And then, having made the decision to travel, how does one decide where to go? Instead of answers Bishop serves up yet more questions and returns to her perennial query: where is home?

For some of the time she lived in Brazil Bishop was able to answer this question. The life she had in Petrópolis and, to a lesser extent, in Rio de Janeiro was the family life she had so far never experienced. In a 1965 letter to Anne Stevenson, Bishop sketched her daily life: "I rarely seem to finish even a thought, or a good long look through binoculars, without something interrupting: the maid's problems, or the telephone ringing, or a political upheaval, or a dressmaker's appointment, or someone coming to dinner and I have to make the soup - since our maid isn't a very good cook."

It is interesting to note how Bishop gives equal weight to political events and domestic concerns. Bishop's poems about Brazil from this time reflect her interest in her immediate surroundings. Her subject matter is either nature and landscape, the servants, or the ubiquitous poor of the favelas whom she could see from her eleventh-floor apartment in Rio de Janeiro. Bishop lived among two extremes of the class system: the tiny elite who ruled the country, of whom Macedo Soares was a member, and the servants

68 Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French mathematician, physicist, theologian and man-of-letters dedicated himself to thought and prayer when he experienced a religious conversion in 1654, removing himself from the society life he had led so far.
69 Letter to Anne Stevenson, August 15, 1965, in Harrison: 27.
who worked for them. To be wealthy in a city such as Rio de Janeiro was to be confronted continually by evidence of the less fortunate. Built onto the hills which surround the expensive, beach-front apartments of Rio are the favelas. The flimsy, haphazard dwellings are a constant reminder of Brazil's poor underclass.

Bishop's interest in the unsophisticated and naive quality of Brazil was signalled by her earliest descriptions of Rio, written when she had only been in the country for a couple of years. Delighted by the city's beauty, she wrote about the view from a hospital window:

And it did look like a child's drawing! Four or five unreal peaks; two cable cars dangling on wires; planes landing and taking off; lights coming on all around the bay and a huge signboard giving the hours and the news.... Goats lounging on a little footbridge, looking down enthralled by the hour of the "roosh" - all the elements were there to delight the heart of a child - and yet altogether a delicate and slightly mad beauty.70

Bishop describes the view precisely as she might have drawn it. It is not that the scene resembles a child's painting, but rather that Bishop interprets it as having a childlike innocence. There is a feeling of liberation and frivolity in her portrait of Rio.

Bishop's description also prefigures the way she will view Brazil. Goldensohn interprets Bishop's view as being both primitive and distanced, and suggests that this perspective works because it is filtered through the child's eye. Goldensohn adds:

Bishop maintains the miniaturizing wide-angle lens in countless ... poems treating landscape from the river Seine to the Florida coast to the northern Brazilian highlands. It is a consistent feature of her approach to the world; but what enters the Brazilian description is Bishop's marriage of the distancing and miniaturizing to the joyfulness of a child's eye or child's experience, as the traveling wide-angle is wedded to the wide eye, with all its effervescent possibilities.71

What makes Bishop's Brazilian writings distinctive is the use of the double-perspective, not only in her style but also in her content. Bishop merges the spatial and temporal; objects are viewed both from a distance and close proximity; she over-simplifies whilst attempting to convey some of the complexity of Brazil.72 The whole binary opposition is underwritten by the Lévi-Straussian idea of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Once Bishop left Brazil permanently in the 1970s, she began to understand how

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70 Quoted in Goldensohn: 3-4.
71 Ibid.
72 Bishop's paintings parallel her literary perspective. She paints both interiors and details of landscape, such as a building or a grave stone. Few of her paintings are general landscapes.
her experience had been two-sided: "I was lucky to spend most of these years in the company of Brazilians and to see society from a double point of view - perhaps in that way with more three dimensionally than a travelr (sic) or tourist would have seen it, or the Brazilians themselves."73 However, seeing things from both the outside and the inside engenders difficulties that manifest themselves in her two significant pieces of journalism.

Bishop was commissioned to write a book about Brazil for the Time-Life Corporation which was researched and written in 1961 and published the following year. Three years later she wrote an article, "On the Railroad Named Delight", for the New York Times Magazine to celebrate Rio de Janeiro's quatercentenary in 1965.74 Time-Life wanted a 35,000 word book on Brazil to form part of the World Library series. The series had a strict format of ten chapters on different aspects of the chosen country which were illustrated by photographs and pictures. It was Time-Life policy to edit the text closely so that it fitted their house style, and they maintained complete editorial control over the choice of photographs. For writing the text they paid Bishop $9,000 plus travelling expenses, to travel both within Brazil and to the United States for the final edit.75 The commission gave Bishop the opportunity, if she wanted, to travel, all expenses paid, around Brazil. She explained the commission to her Aunt Grace:

Well, now I've taken on a job, too - and almost wish I hadn't, it's such a headache. Life magazine asked me to write the text of a small book on Brazil. They have a series of them - each a different country. Probably no one reads the text, anyway, just looks at the photographs, which are wonderful, usually - colored ones, and black & white. But that kind of writing is hard for me to do and I have to cover the whole country - history, economics, geography, arts, sports - everything, even if superficially... I am doing it for the money - and I do know a lot about Brazil by now, of course, willy-nilly.76

Bishop claimed to have accepted the commission largely for the money, but also, as she wrote to Lowell in 1961: "I have plenty of material and I think Lota and I can have quite a lot of fun using up our favorite jokes, putting in our favorite people, etc."77 Bishop naively envisaged a personal account of Brazil, and optimistically assumed that she might write her Black Beans and Diamonds under the guise of a Time-Life book.

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73 Introductory note she drafted for prose book in Harrison:172. The words "with more three dimensionally" have a line typed through them.
74 Flamengo Park was commissioned for the same celebrations.
75 Some accounts claim that she was paid $10,000 but Bishop mentions the lower sum in her letter of August 13, 1961, to Pearl Kazin in One Art: 399.
76 Letter dated July 26, 1961, in One Art: 399.
From Bishop's initial comments about the book, it is clear that she intended to base her text on what she had learned of Brazil and that she would rely on Macedo Soares for input. Bishop did not intend to approach the text as a journalistic enterprise, systematically travelling around Brazil interviewing people and, perhaps, thereby challenging some of her preconceived ideas. In a 1966 interview Bishop was asked whether she had benefitted from anything more than a study of appearances by living in Brazil. Bishop's reply was categorical:

Living in the way I have happened to live here, knowing Brazilians, has made a great difference. The general life I have known here has of course had an impact on me. I think I have learned a great deal. Most New York intellectuals' ideas about "underdeveloped countries" are partly mistaken, and living among people of a completely different culture has changed a lot of my stereotyped ideas.78

There is little evidence in the Brazil text of this. Bishop did not go further than Rio or Petrópolis to research the book. Instead, there is a bibliography for each chapter which suggests that her research was book-based. More significantly, it included authors she read for personal pleasure such as Darwin, Lévi-Strauss and Wagley. There are also significantly more books listed for the chapters which Bishop obviously enjoyed writing. For example, she lists sixteen books for the chapter on geography, travel and early history but only three for the chapter on Brazil's capital cities and two books for the last two chapters, which concentrated on recent politics. Although we cannot read too much into this breakdown of the bibliography because the Time editors' contribution is unclear, the distribution of reading indicates the areas Bishop was keen to research. One anomaly, given Bishop's involvement with local politics, is her lack of a bibliography on Brazil's politics, which might suggest that the information came not from books but from other sources such as Macedo Soares.

In his interview with Bishop, George Starbuck asked her about the Brazil book: "I did some research. I got out the travel book you wrote on commission for Time-Life Books.... You tell such wonderful bright clear stories from the history of Brazil." Bishop replied: "I can't remember too much of that book; rather, I choose not to. It was edited by Time-Life Books and they changed a lot of it. I wanted to use different, and more, pictures." Starbuck then added: "You take a set task, like that Time-Life book, and make it wholly your own," and Bishop interjected: "Not wholly, say two-thirds."79 Here lies the inherent difficulty with Brazil. It was never commissioned to be wholly Bishop's version of Brazil, but Time-Life's version.

78 Interview with Brown in Schwartz: 290.
In Bishop's letters of the period her anger and bitterness at Time-Life's editorial involvement and ultimate control are evident. She accused the corporation repeatedly of over-simplifying a complex, contradictory country and, increasingly, distanced herself from the text's authorship. Again she wrote to Lowell:

The Brazil book is awful; some sentences just don't make sense at all. And at least the pictures could have been good. Maybe, if you can read it at all, you will find a trace here & there of what I originally meant to say.... They love those false, let's-face-it, summing-up cracks. They have sneaked some into Brazil, too. "But to say they are the best is not to say much," etc. And they seem to quote the secondary of everybody - or poorer than that.80

In another letter to friends in October of that year Bishop wrote: "In fact I find Brazil itself rather big and exhausting ... much, much more complicated than that Life-slicked book might lead you to believe."81 The difficulty for the student of Bishop is that, without reference to her original pre-edited text, it is dangerous to draw too many conclusions from what is written. By referring to her letters and comments when she was writing the book, we can, however, trace in the published version some of her original intentions.82

After much wrangling, Bishop allowed her name to stay as author and was happy to admit authorship of the first three chapters, which were about the Brazilian people ("A Warm and Reasonable People"), geography, history and early travel ("Undeveloped Land of Legend") and the nineteenth century ("Century of Honor and Pride"). The rest of the book, she wrote to her Aunt Grace, had been saved by her from the ignorance and arrogance of the editors and "it does tell the truth, more or less - and some of the pictures are pretty - but not nearly enough".83

Bishop's main fear for her book was that the Time-Life editors would not only remove her authorial voice but would also introduce their clichés and smooth over all the contradictions she wanted to draw out about Brazil. Deliberately, she opens the book with an anecdote about a kidnapped baby in Rio, the hunt to find her and the public's hysterical reaction to the kidnapping: "Conceiçãozinha hit the headlines for a week, and while she did it is safe to say that the country's current inflation, the soaring cost of living, the shifts of power in the government - perhaps even the football results - took second place for most readers"(9). Slowly Bishop shows how this was a uniquely Brazilian event. It was not just that a nurse had stolen the baby to satisfy her lover's desire for a child and

80 Letter dated April 4, 1962, in One Art: 405-6.
82 Time-Life Books has lost the original manuscript. The Bishop archive at Vassar College holds both drafts and proofs of most chapters, but not all.
83 Letter dated December 12, 1961, in One Art: 403.
thereby guarantee herself a comfortable roof over her head. What made the story Brazilian in Bishop's eyes was that, amidst all the outpourings of grief at the baby's disappearance, Brazil retained one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. It is this paradox which Bishop saw repeated in every walk of Brazilian life and which she wanted to include in Brazil. She wrote:

An exploding birth rate and infant mortality, great wealth and degrading poverty - these are the two big paradoxes. But along with them come many smaller ones repeating the pattern, overlapping and interacting; passionate and touching patriotism combined with constant self-criticism and denigration; luxury and idleness (or admiration of them) combined with bursts of energy; extravagance and pride, with sobriety and humility. The same contrasts even appear in Brazilian history, periods of waste and corruption alternating with periods of retrenchment and reform (11).

By the time Bishop was commissioned to write the text, she had started to weary of Brazil: "The novelty has worn off" she wrote to friends in 1958.84 She had also begun to see the inherent contradictions in her own life: "Are other writers as confused & 'contradictory'? Or do they stick to one thing at a time?" she asked Lowell in a letter dated April 4, 1962, after she had finished writing the book. Bishop's uncertainties about her Brazilian life are threaded through her Brazil text. She wrote from the inside, instructing an American audience on how Brazil's historical development was shaped from within Brazil as much as by external forces. But the reader also learned about Bishop - her interest in African influences on Brazilian culture, her knowledge of Brazilian modernist architecture and her prejudice against Brazilian literature, which she generally considered inferior ("Too many genuine Brazilian talents seem to take to their beds too early - or to their hammocks") (104). The reader further discovered that Bishop was little concerned about Brazil's natural resources and football, a Brazilian passion was given short shrift in her text.

The book is illustrated by a series of photographs and pictures which are supposed to complement the text, but some critics have suggested that they undermine and directly contradict the written word. Goldensohn discusses how the juxtaposition of a photograph of Orlando Villas Boas, a champion of Indians' rights, next to a headline which reads: "Protector of Indians, a white man tries to keep their tribal customs intact", contradicts rather than confirms the written word, since Villas Boas is photographed fingering the skull of a white victim of the Indians (38-39).85 The inclusion of a photograph of a white man's skull detracts from the text, which asks for the Indians' way of life to be

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84 Undated letter quoted in Schwartz's article "Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" in New Yorker. 94.
85 Goldensohn: 206.
preserved; instead the photograph argues for the white man to be suspicious of the Indians' motives. Goldensohn's point underlines the danger of taking this book at face value and the ambiguity of Bishop's position as author of a book with such strict editorial rules. In fact, the photographs tell another version of Brazil at times. Since Time-Life favoured the picture-story, often above the written word, pictures rather than text tell the reader about Catholicism and education. It is probable that, much as she wanted to control which photographs went into the text, Bishop would have been allowed little editorial input. She complained to Starbuck about her failure to include more photographs of Dom Pedro II (the last emperor) in Brazil. Bishop wanted to point out the irony of the Emperor travelling around the States when he had seen little of his own country, but the Time-Life editors refused. As a writer, editorial control was an implicit necessity for Bishop. She quarrelled not only with the Time-Life editors, but also with those at the New York Times about her Rio article. She disagreed with the New York Times editors over the opening, the choice of photographs and the title of "On the Railroad Named Delight", which was inaccurate since, as she told them, no railroad bore the name. The title, in fact, came from one of the 1965 Carnival samba titles quoted later in the article.

The dispute with the Time-Life editors arose because their idea of Brazil clashed with Bishop's own idea of the country. Just as she accused them of having preconceptions of place, so she carried her own predilections for the old world of craftsmen, folk culture and customs. In her fury with Time-Life Bishop failed to see this. She wrote to her friend May Swenson on May 10, 1962, with an assessment of why the working relationship had gone so sour:

They welcomed many of my ideas enthusiastically and then did nothing about them whatever...... Yes - imagine a Brazil without a bird, beast or flower in it. And there are marvellous Indian pictures - their houses, costumes, dances, etc, - not a one.... Their idea is to present their own undisturbed pre-conceptions of a country. I insisted on at least one page of animal pictures every day. - I wrote 2 or 3 nice pages about NATURE - the (effect) on the language - pets - caged birds, etc - all cut out. And yet - the day before I left they had started in briskly on half of AFRICA and they were all looking with rapture at color photographs of lions, zebras etc - because they already know lions live in Africa. - They are not interested in sloths, boa constrictors, (one attacked a child in the city of Belem yesterday) ant-eaters, morfo butterflies, orchids - 4,000 varieties of fish, and so on ... parasol ants, jaguars. 89

86 Starbuck in Schwartz: 312.
87 The editor of the Life World Library, Oliver E Allen, wrote to her, "I have never before felt compelled to try to prove that I or my staff was honest or fair or dispassionate, and I hope I will never have to do it again," in Elizabeth Bishop (1993) by Brett Millier: 327. Letter dated January 19, 1962.
88 Millier recounts the problems Bishop had with the New York Times editors: 361.
89 Quoted in Millier: 327-8.
Bishop accused the Time-Life editors of operating from preconceived ideas of place: they included animals in a book about Africa but excluded them from the book about Brazil. What Bishop could not see was that her own idea of Brazil was equally stereotyped. Macedo Soares recognised Bishop's tendency to favour the primitive and natural above the modern aspects of Brazil, hence her dislike of Bishop's poem, "The Riverman". Macedo Soares was trying to turn Brazil into a twentieth-century country through her work while Bishop dwelt on Brazil's primitive past.

In "On the Railroad Named Delight" Bishop lamented the modernising of Brazilian traditions. The article, however, was commissioned by the *New York Times Magazine* to celebrate Rio de Janeiro's longevity and modernity as it marked its quatercentenary. In "On the Railroad Named Delight", Bishop bemoaned the technological advances of television and radio, which she blamed for the decline of the sambas. She disliked the fact that sambas were now broadcast through loudspeaker systems and had broadened their subjects to include topics Bishop considered unsuitable. She disapproved of the sambas' removal from the provenance of the poor into mainstream acceptance. For her, the sambas were "the living poetry of the poor":

Ironically, what may prove to be the real kiss of death to the spontaneity of the samba is that the young rich, after years of devotion to North American jazz, have discovered it. A few years ago only the very few Brazilians, mostly intellectuals, who cared for their own folk-culture took the samba seriously, or went to the rehearsals of the big schools up on the morros, the hills. This year, crowds of young people went, one of the symptoms, possibly, of a new social awareness since the "revolution". And some of this year's crop of songs show a self-consciousness, even a self-pity, that is far removed from the old samba spirit.90

The samba form allows anything to be a subject and Bishop mentioned some of the most recent: "Love - light love and serious love - infidelity, prostitution, police raids and line-ups (the subject of a very pretty one this year), moonlight, beaches, kisses, heartbreak and love again"(31). She interpreted the samba's highjacking by the middle class as another sign of the death of local culture. It was an idea which had preoccupied Bishop since writing *Brazil*. Again, she wrote to Lowell:

The dying out of local cultures seems to me one of the most tragic things in this century - and it's true everywhere, I suppose - in Brazil, at any rate. Small towns far inland on the rivers were real centers; they had teachers of music and dancing and languages - they made beautiful furniture and built beautiful churches. And now they're all dead as doornails, and broken down trucks arrive bringing powdered milk and Japanese jewelry and *Time* magazine.91

91 Letter dated April 4, 1962, in *One Art*: 408.
In *Brazil* Bishop wanted to celebrate the folk culture of the people and chose the titles "The Unselfconscious Arts" for her chapter on folk arts, the Macumba religion, and Carnival, and "The Selfconscious Arts" for the chapter on architecture, art and literature. The Time-Life editors re-titled both. Bishop's choice of the adjectives "unselfconscious" and "selfconscious" reveal that, for her, unselfconsciousness equalled unpretentiousness and was more to be admired than sophisticated culture. Much as she expressed her admiration for the young generation of modern Brazilian architects and how they were transforming their country, Bishop preferred the purely native art which came out of the unsophisticated interior.

In the first chapter of *Brazil* Bishop described how the country has developed: "Men from two, three or more eras of European history live simultaneously in Brazil today"(12). It is an oversimplified, romantic idea of how Brazil is structured which fits in with her concept of the interior in "Arrival at Santos" and the first sighting of the country in "Brazil, January 1, 1502":

The coastal cities, from Belem at the mouth of the Amazon to Porto Alegre in the south, are filled with twentieth-century men with twentieth-century problems on their minds: getting on in the world and rising in it socially; how to pay for schools and doctors and clothes. Then in the surrounding countryside is a rural or semi-rural population which is at least half a century behind the times, both agriculturally and socially. And for the people of the fishing villages, for those living on the banks of the great rivers, for cowboys and miners - all the people of the interior - time seems to have stopped in the seventeenth century. Then, if one ventures even a little farther on, one enters the really timeless, prehistoric world of the Indians (12).

As McCabe points out in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss*, Bishop presents Brazil as living synchronically. Bishop turns geography into history so that time becomes place and one defines the other in her description of Brazil (177-178). More crucially, Bishop has reduced Brazil to a layered geographical chronology. She recovers a cultural past and makes it into the present, and in so doing, romanticises the Indians who live in the deepest interior of Brazil. They become anthropological studies; where the heart of Brazil is the Indians and the further away one moves from them, the more distilled and un-Brazilian is the country.

Bishop's *New York Times Magazine* article, "On the Railroad Named Delight", ends with an anecdote which emphasised her naively simplistic interpretation of Brazil's social situation. A billboard advertisement in Rio de Janeiro showed a black servant hugging her white mistress because the mistress had bought a new gas stove. Bishop delighted in this image because she admired what she considered to be Brazil's racial
harmony. For her, this image captured the racial tolerance which was absent in the United States at the time (1965). Bishop added: "Granted that the situation is not utopian, socially speaking, and that the advertisement is silly - but could it have appeared on billboards or in the newspapers, in Atlanta, Ga., or even in New York? In Rio, it went absolutely unremarked on, one way or the other"(86). Bishop failed to recognise that Brazil's society functioned on deeply embedded racial inequality where, by and large, coloured Brazilians worked for those of European descent in a servant/master relationship. The American civil rights movement, in Bishop's eyes, had no relevance in Brazil. By assuming that colour was not a social issue Bishop unequivocally accepted the social order. As Harrison noted in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (1993), Bishop had read and seemingly approved of the Brazilian historian Gilberto Freyre's theories of Brazilian racial miscegenation in his 1946 study of nineteenth-century Brazilian social order, *The Masters and the Slaves*.

Freyre believed that, since the Portuguese and their slaves had interbred since the earliest days, making distinct racial groups hard to separate by the twentieth century, race was not an issue in Brazil. Harrison states that in Bishop's notes for *Brazil* she had found Freyre's arguments "persuasive"(167). In Chapter Eight of *Brazil*, "A Changing Social Scene" Bishop gives the following explanation of Brazil's racial situation:

Brazilians take great pride in their fine record in race relations. Their attitude can best be described by saying that the upper-class Brazilian is usually proud of his racial tolerance, while the lower-class Brazilian is not aware of his - he just practises it.... It is true that the Negro or mulatto in Brazil is usually a second-class citizen, rarely found in important positions or even good jobs and almost always poor. But since most of the population is in exactly the same situation and suffers the same deprivations, the Negro's sufferings do not mark him out as being very different from anyone else.... Such an attitude was not planned; it just happened. But Brazil is now realizing that its history of racial assimilation is one of the country's greatest assets (114).

Bishop repeated these theories in the anecdote in "On the Railroad Named Delight" and was stunned and upset when this comment, and her article in general, incensed the local media. The columnist Fernando de Castro of the Brazilian national newspaper, *Correio da Manha*, accused Bishop of racism. Another journalist, Carlos Swan, more subtly criticised Bishop's anecdote for implying that Brazil's racial tolerance was somehow unconscious. Naively, Bishop had portrayed Brazil's so-called racial harmony as being an unconscious act, which in her eyes equalled a good act, since she thought it signalled an absence of conflict. In her defence, she wrote to the newspaper quoting an old poem of hers, "Songs for a Colored Singer", to prove that she was no racist. Because of the life Bishop led in Brazil, however, she unquestioningly accepted black servants as a
permanent fixture and did not equate their position with that of black people further north, fighting for their civil rights. Part of her mistake came from the fact that Bishop was writing from a very narrow breadth of experience, and was translating her knowledge for a specific New York audience and amplifying the particular into the general.

Bishop perhaps did not realise that by the time the article was commissioned her attitude towards Brazil had grown increasingly bitter, particularly toward Carlos Lacerda. Bishop's disillusionment was written into the text by her use of irony and understatement: "Visitors to Rio de Janeiro usually exclaim: 'What a beautiful city'. But sooner or later, the more thoughtful are likely to say: 'No it's not a beautiful city; it's just the world's most beautiful setting for a city'"(30). In the article, Bishop lamented the difficulty of town planning because of the city's location, the inexorable growth of the favelas and the rampant inflation which added to the city's ills. Juxtaposed to these criticisms was an awed appreciation of the city's beauty, of the good social programmes such as the construction of Flamengo Park on reclaimed waste land and of the creativity of the sambas. However, these positives were all personal interests: the park was Macedo Soares's creation, and Bishop loved Brazil's natural beauty and indigenous culture; she constructed her journalistic image of Brazil around her preferences.

Where Bishop's poetry is able to be critically distant and analytical, her journalism does not develop beyond explaining the complexities of the country with reference to her interests. For example, she criticises the Rio theatre in "On the Railroad Named Delight" as being unimaginative, inauthentic and derivative of American theatre:

What is depressing about Opinion to North Americans in the audience is not its vague "message" (considered daringly left in Rio) or its amateurishness (that is rather endearing). It is the sudden, sad, uncanny feeling of déjà vu: It is all so reminiscent of college plays in the early thirties with Kentucky miners, clenched fists and awkward stances (86).

Somewhat patronizingly, Bishop overlooks the fact that Brazilian audiences love the show, rendering American or any foreign opinions irrelevant. At the same time, Bishop wants to dispel the American perception of the Brazilians as being lazy. She is keen to show how Rio is a hard-working city just like New York, even if people do things differently:

Although the pace of city life increases constantly, there is still time to stand and stare in Rio. Men linger in groups in downtown cafes or at newsstands to discuss the latest political moves or look at the passing girls. Visitors are always surprised at how many men who would be - in Henry James's word - "downtown" in New York
are on the beaches at 10 o'clock on weekday mornings. This does not mean that Cariocans do not work hard when they work. They just go about it differently (84).

The article reveals the inherent contradictions in Bishop's feelings towards Brazil and illustrates how her portrait of Rio is, like her view of the country, highly idiosyncratic.

Despite editorial interference, Bishop's two pieces of journalism leave little doubt about her overriding interest in a specific, constructed view of Brazil which is concerned with nature and its unsophisticated people, who either live in the interior or work as servants in the cities. Her journalistic approach won her admirers, including Ashley Brown, who said of Brazil:

Her text was no doubt "edited" to some extent in New York, but I can still detect scarcely a trace of Time-style, and in fact, the book is still the best introduction to the subject. This is because the author is very close to the rich popular life around her; unlike so many of her compatriots, she is not blinkered by statistics and theories about economic "take-off".92

Brown then goes on to praise Bishop for including in her book the following judgement: "In the field of popular culture, however, undoubtedly the greatest achievement is the creation of the figureheads used on the boats on the Rio São Francisco" and suggests that not many North Americans could have noticed such a fact, let alone written such a sentence. It is the attention to quirky detail of Bishop the poet which gives her journalism a distinctive voice.

Brazil is the subject of three pieces of Bishop's published prose. The introduction to The Diary of "Helena Morley" was included by Bishop's editor, Robert Giroux, in her posthumous collection of prose, The Collected Prose, along with two short pieces on Brazil, "A Trip to Vigia"(1967) and "To the Botequim & Back"(1970). Giroux found "A Trip to Vigia" and "To the Botequim & Back" in the collection of Bishop's unpublished papers at Vassar College. The latter piece is obviously unfinished, yet it still captures something of Bishop's daily life when she moved to Ouro Prêto in 1968, especially when read next to her poem "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto".

Bishop was enchanted by Ouro Prêto, a small town in the mountains of Minas Gerais about three hundred miles north-east of Rio. The town's name means "black gold" and until 1900 it had been the state capital, after which it was abandoned because of its inaccessibility until it was rediscovered in the 1950s. Bishop visited the town many times before finally purchasing her own home in 1965. She wrote to the Barkers that Ouro Prêto was "18th century pure and simple"; the house she bought dated from

92 "Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil" by Brown in Schwartz: 228.
With thirteen baroque churches and its old tile-roofed houses and steep cobbled streets, Ouro Prêto was Bishop's version of Diamantina. At an emotionally troubled period in her life, the town allowed Bishop temporarily to escape her worries. Later, when personal reasons made it untenable for Bishop to live in Rio de Janeiro or Petrópolis any longer, she made her home in Ouro Prêto.

"To the Botequim & Back" is written for an unspecified American audience: in the opening sentence Bishop explains what a Merenda drink is (similar to the American Orange Crooshy) and refers to the local speech habits. The piece captures Bishop's relationship with Brazil in the twilight of her stay. Her love of nature remained undiminished throughout the years. Here she describes the beauty of a summer's day, with a profusion of flowers, birds and big white clouds. Against the backdrop of nature she describes a segment of her day. Bishop describes with ironic humour her conversation with her servant, Palmyra, who wants to leave work early in order to be in time for the throat blessing ceremony at the cathedral. Palmyra, Bishop tells the reader, thinks this the best way to avoid a sore throat. As she walks to the botequim, Bishop is simultaneously touched and repulsed by the sight of two brothers helping their third, handicapped, brother walk to the barber's shop.

Bishop stays long enough in the botequim to hear the owner, João Pica Pau (or John Woodpecker as Bishop translates his name), recount the story of the knife-fight he witnessed the previous night. At the botequim, people gather and gossip just as they do in "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto". The essential difference, however, is that in the poem the narrator overhears much of the conversation and does not participate in daily life as she does on her trip to the botequim. Instead the narrator has the luxury of being able to eavesdrop at will and feel a part of the community as she wishes. The poem describes an essentially happy place. Schwartz captures the mood:

"Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" narrates with aching sympathy the constant babble of earthy conversation - about food, family, money, love - that Bishop could overhear from her room in Lilli's house, two stories above the fountain.... Ouro Prêto represented seclusion, but it was also the world. When she wanted privacy, she could keep an eavesdropping distance, and still have an intimate, secret communion with the life around her.

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94 Bishop herself says that Ouro Prêto has thirteen baroque churches in Brazil (100). Brett Millier in Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It mentions only eleven (368).
95 A "botequim" is a local general store.
96 New Yorker: 88. Lilli Correia de Araújo, a good friend of Bishop, was the Danish widow of the Brazilian artist Pedro Luiz Correia de Araújo.
The local people irritate Bishop in "To the Botequim & Back"; the antique dealer is "dishonest" and the only pleasure she derives is from the landscape and the irony of the derelict house, half-house and half-bus, which has the most spectacular view in the whole town. In "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" Bishop opens the poem with a cheerful description of mundane conversations: "The conversations are simple: about food / or, 'When my mother combs my hair it hurts'"(1-2). In the prose piece Bishop lacks the protection of distance which she assumes in "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" and most of her other Brazilian poetry: the first-person narrative of "The Riverman" makes it a notable exception. In her poetry she cultivates the perspective of a distant observer who watches but does not necessarily participate in the scene. In "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" her physical proximity to the fountain allows her a double perspective which is absent in "To the Botequim & Back". Since the poem was written before the prose, the transition from outsider/insider to an insider suggests the change which had happened in Bishop's personal life.

Bishop's account of a day trip to see the famous church at Vigia in "A Trip to Vigia" is constructed on the double perspective of tourist and guide. Bishop and her companion have their reactions to the church and the sights they see on the journey formed by the observations of Ruy, their guide. As Harrison points out, the theme of the text is the local and tourist each meeting the culture of the other.97 Built into their incipient relationship is the fear of offending the other. Bishop is looking at her host and the journey as an American, but with the sensitivity of an insider who knows something of Brazilian manners. Thus she begins her account, "The shy poet, so soiled, so poor, so polite, insisted on taking us in his own car ... The car was on its last legs; it had broken down twice just getting us around Belem the day before. But what could we do? I couldn't very well flaunt my dollars in his face and hire a better one."98 As nervous as she is of offending their host, she realises that he is equally ill-at-ease: "He kept telling us we probably wouldn't like the famous church at Vigia"(111). As the journey progresses and they look at the passing countryside from the car, Ruy's comments steer Bishop's viewing in one direction. However, when they arrive at the store, Bishop's instinctive reaction to the store's poverty and squalor kicks in before her guide can say anything: "The store had been raided, sacked. Oh, that was its normal state"(114). However, Bishop allows her reaction to be filtered through Ruy once more when they stop at the house by the river to see his friends. She recognises that the reason they have been brought to the house is not to see it but the river behind, and that it is important to Ruy and their hosts that Bishop and her companion approve. Bishop is able to absorb Ruy's affection into her description

97 Harrison: 172.

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of the river's beauty: "It really was a beautiful river. It was four yards across, dark, clear, running rapidly, with white cascades and deep pools edged with backed-up foam, and its banks were a dream of the tropics. It splashed, it sang, it glittered over white pebbles" (117) which, she says, "made up for a lot". When they finally get to the church, they like it. Ruy is very relieved, and Bishop is relieved at his relief.

The journey is also a way into friendship with Ruy signified by the moment when Bishop might address him in the informal second person. The text operates on a number of levels. It is a dialogue not only between tourist and guide, but also between Ruy's affection for a place and Bishop's initial response to it. Just as Bishop tried to guide the reader in the introduction to *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, so Ruy is anxious that she sees beyond a tourist's initial impression.

In *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* Harrison studies some of Bishop's unpublished travel prose from her 1967 trip down the Rio São Francisco. What she finds is that when Bishop has others to guide her, be they travel guides or other people's opinions of place, then her comments are often profound and acutely observed. During the trip Bishop translated passages from *Quatro Rodas*, a Brazilian travel guide, which covered the towns, people and sights with which Bishop also came into contact. In her notes Bishop combines what she sees with what she has read, and she mediates her response through the read text. However, when Bishop is left to form an opinion on her own she reverts to the position of the tourist in "Arrival at Santos". She is shocked and disgusted by the poverty she finds on the river banks. Harrison quotes a lengthy description of a little beggar girl whose helplessness so appals Bishop that she reacts by recording her pity and shock as any tourist might, but then excludes the passage from her revised version. Perhaps more telling is Bishop's re-working of her response to the lack of hygiene she sees on the river. Her original notes read:

> Everyone dabbling in the Rio constantly - washing clothes (how they get them clean is beyond me) ... I watched one tiny boy - 6 or 7 - washing a whole wooden dish-pan of dishes - plates, cups, frying pans, all - one after the other - half way through washed himself, then went on. - And the water is filthy Lots of fish - some of the crew have lines over the side all the time - I have lost all interest - in fact it was after the fish on the 2nd day that I developed this dysentery. (170)

When Bishop came to revise her notes, according to Harrison, she focused rather on the Brazilians' obsession with cleanliness, omitted the boy from her account and started the revised account much more innocuously: "Like any cleanly travelling American citizen, the morning after I got to Salvador, State of Bahia, Brazil, I did a bit of drip-dry laundering in my hotel room and hung it about on coat-hangers, shower-curtain rods, and
window-fastenings" (171). The travel account was never finished by Bishop. Harrison concludes:

The conflicted nature of her position amid but outside a culture, reading it and at the same time filling in the gaps with tropes of her own making, gave her poetry incisive power. The same conflicts, however, left much of her travel prose aimlessly descriptive, and at its worst, narrow-minded and judgmental. When she set out with the intent to describe the poor and primitive cultures she met traveling through the jungles and on the rivers of Brazil, the vast distance between her and her subject overwhelmed her (169).

Certainly, in this example of Bishop's unpublished travel narrative, the poet seems ill at ease with what she witnessed. Bishop is much happier observing nature without the human element, as her trip to the Galápagos Islands in 1974 testifies. In a letter to her childhood friend, Frani Blough Muser, Bishop recounts how depressing she found the human activity on the islands. Nevertheless, she is full of praise and admiration for the natural wonders of the Galápagos: the sight of the mating seals she declares "was an extraordinary sight and really beautiful".99

Since Bishop was above all else a poet, the uncertainty often present in her prose writing was absent from her poetry. In her poems about Brazil she switches from one perspective to another or mediates her ideas through a third person. Another time, she uses the "I" to narrate as she registers her protest at the poverty and inhumanity of Rio with a sureness of touch which does not rely on any other's interpretations of the place. Further, as Goldensohn suggests, it is in Bishop's letters rather than her poetry that "... Brazil confronts Bishop with unworkable binaries and the provocative social and psychological paradigms in which her own relationships are confusingly set in broader contexts, in which personal urgencies undoubtedly distort her exile's reading of Brazilian realities."100 Letters allowed Bishop the physical space to explore the contradictions in her life while her poetry remains free of any of this ambiguity.

There are eleven poems in the "Brazil" section of Questions of Travel. The first three, "Arrival at Santos", "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "Questions of Travel" explore the concept of travel and Bishop's arrival in Brazil. The remaining eight fall into two broad categories: the natural world and, loosely, the indigenous Brazilians. "Twelfth Morning; or What You Will" describes the Cariocans' beach retreat, Cabo Frio, some hundred miles from the city, where Bishop and Macedo Soares spent some of their Christmas vacations. In poems such as "Electrical Storm", "The Armadillo" and "Song for the Rainy Season", Bishop pays homage to the natural beauty of the location of Macedo

99 Letter dated December 14, 1974, in One Art: 590.
100 Goldensohn: 76.
Soares's house high up in Petrópolis, still marvelling at the exuberance of nature and how it impinges on their every-day life. Both "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season" were written in 1960, when Bishop was still largely content to live in Petrópolis. Both poems are written from the perspective of being inside, protected from the harsh natural elements. Bishop's joy at the dramatic weather is heightened by knowing she can stay inside with the ones she loves. After the dramatic electrical storm in the eponymous poem:

We got up to find the wiring fused,  
no lights, a smell of saltpetre,  
and the telephone dead.

The cat stayed in the warm sheets. (16-19)

Similarly, in "Song for the Rainy Season", Bishop delights in the moment when the house at Petrópolis is inundated with rain and imagines a future without water. Bishop describes the house as open to the elements to such a degree that decay is inevitable as mildew spreads: it is her recognition of the inevitable process of the passage of time. Bishop sites the poem exactly by giving the house's location at the end of the poem, and in so doing, signals her desire for the world to know where she was at the precise moment of the poem's writing (Sítio da Alcobaçinha, Fazenda Samambaia, Petrópolis). An earlier poem, "The Armadillo", was first published in the New Yorker on June 22, 1957. The poem is written from the perspective of an observer of Brazilian life and nature: Bishop watches from a distance how the armadillo, baby rabbit and owl react to the illegal fire balloons being let off to celebrate St John's Day (June 24), which is the shortest day of the year in the southern hemisphere. Bishop builds the poem by describing for the first six stanzas how the balloons look in the sky. The final stanzas show the consequences for the different animals of one of the fire balloons falling from the sky. The last stanza sees Bishop stand back from her poetic description of the events and berate her inability to precisely convey the events she witnessed:

Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!  
O falling fire and a piercing cry  
and panic, and a weak mailed fist  
clenched ignorant against the sky! (37-40)

101 Bishop dedicated the poem to Robert Lowell. His poem "Skunk Hour" was indebted to "The Armadillo" and, in recognition of his debt to Bishop, Lowell dedicated "Skunk Hour" to her. Critics see "Skunk Hour" as marking a pivotal change in his poetry and Bishop's poetic influence as exerting a liberating force on Lowell's writing. David Kalstone, in Becoming A Poet, defined the change as "... a way of confirming his historical - as distinct from descriptive - vantage point, and also a way of renouncing grandiosity. In that sense 'Skunk Hour' is ... the poem that launched him into his true subject, investigation of the debilitated historical and personal forces that had shaped his life" (188).
Millier suggests that Bishop through the animals "presents another image of an ignorant, victimized lower class"(277). The animals are precursors of the group of people on whom Bishop concentrates in her other Brazilian poems.

Poems from Questions of Travel such as "Manuelzinho", "Squatter's Children" and "The Burglar of Babylon", and the later "Going to the Bakery" and "Pink Dog", are increasingly political statements about the Brazilian underclasses. Bishop's daily contact in Brazil was with the servants, and she celebrates the servant/master relationship in "Manuelzinho". The epigraph reads "Brazil. A friend of the writer is speaking." "Manuelzinho" was, Bishop said, her first attempt to write about Brazil.102 The poem was written in 1956 and, to avoid any charge that Bishop did not know enough about Brazil, the poem is supposed to be Macedo Soares addressing her gardener, filtered through Bishop's narrative. Bishop further removes herself from any accusation of belonging to a relationship of coloniser/colonised by allowing her friend to talk. The poem is a study of the relationship between tenant and landowner, since Bishop owned no land herself, she could not, technically, be the narrator. The poem quickly establishes the social distinction between the servant and his master. The strength of the bond between Manuelzinho and Macedo Soares is drawn, but Bishop does not think to question the social order. The paternalism expressed in "Manuelzinho" probably draws on Freyre's ideas.

The entire poem is an eulogy to Manuelzinho, but we only see Manuelzinho as represented by his mistress, which thus confirms the idea not only of the servant/master relationship, but more significantly, of the coloniser speaking for the colonised. Manuelzinho's incompetence in the garden extends to his account books, and even to not believing the evidence of his own eyes when his father dies. We are told of his failings in a light-hearted, bantering tone, yet he cannot reply. Since Manuelzinho is not allowed to speak, the idea of one class speaking for the other is reinforced. After the poem was published in the New Yorker, Bishop wrote to the Barkers: "I've earned so much money off the poor little man now I feel guilty every time he comes to the kitchen door with a bunch of monster radishes."103

In Bishop's other poems about the less fortunate of Brazil, she concentrates on the disenfranchised dwellers of the favelas and the streets. The humorous tone she used in "Manuelzinho" is replaced by an increasingly angry and outspoken criticism of how Rio treats its underclass. In "Squatter's Children", which was written within months of "Manuelzinho", Bishop watches the children, presumably Manuelzinho's, from a

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103 Harrison: 152.
distance. Bishop's position is almost that of an ethnographer watching her subjects, she recognises that the physical distance symbolises the cultural and economic gulf which lies between them. Her viewing from a distance also symbolises her position as an outsider who, as the poem progresses, finds herself increasingly emotionally drawn into the hopelessness of the children's situation, until in the final stanza she calls out to the children to try and see beyond their immediate poverty:

Children, the threshold of the storm
has slid beneath your muddy shoe;
wat and beguiled, you stand among
the mansions you may choose
out of a bigger house than yours,
whose lawfulness endures.
Its soggy documents retain
your rights in rooms of falling rain. (25-32)

Bishop's perspective zooms in and out on the children, suggesting the uncertainty of their position. At the start of the poem they are "specklike", by the final stanza they have grown in stature as their house becomes the outside world. Bishop suggests that if the children's parents cannot take care of them, then maybe Mother Nature will. She once more asserts the primacy of nature over land ownership, which is to blame for the poverty of people such as Manuelzinho. Bishop hints at the inequity of a feudal system which condemns children to the same lives of poverty their parents have experienced. Yet "Manuelzinho", in its acceptance of a rigid social structure, unwittingly dooms the children to a future of tilling soil with broken tools.

The idea that society is to blame for producing an underclass gathers momentum in "The Burglar of Babylon". Again, Bishop is viewing events from a distance. This time, instead of being a foreigner who is observing Brazil, Bishop belongs to the tiny elite who watch through their binoculars the drama of Micuçu unfold in the slums on the hills behind their sea-front, luxury high-rise apartments. In April 1963 Bishop had watched the Rio police pursue a thief through the slums behind her apartment block. Bishop explained the genesis of the story in her introduction to the 1968 edition of The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon:

The story of Micuçu is true. It happened in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. I have changed only one or two minor details, and, of course, translated the names of the slums....

I was one of those who watched the pursuit through binoculars, although really we could see very little of it: just a few of the soldiers silhouetted against the skyline of the hill of Babylon. The rest of the story is taken, often word for word,

104 According to Millier, "Squatter's Children" was first published in Portuguese in March 1956: 268.
105 In The Complete Poems: 95.
Bishop's metaphorical journey into the interior takes her into the world of Rio's robbers and beggars. Written in ballad form, with forty-nine verses, "The Burglar of Babylon" paints a vibrant picture of Rio's society. Ostensibly the poem relates the story of the life and death of Micuçú, a killer from the slums. On closer inspection, it is apparent that the subject of the ballad is the slums themselves, and the society which has spawned such a killer. Bishop opens with a description of the fragility and impermanence of the slums which have grown up on Rio's hills to house those who come to the city to find work and cannot go home. The poem does not end with the death of Micuçú, but with the slums which have condemned him to such a tragic life:

On the fair green hills of Rio  
There grows a fearful stain:  
The poor who come to Rio  
And can't go home again.

There's the hill of Kerosene,  
And the hill of the Skeleton,  
The hill of Astonishment,  
And the hill of Babylon. (188-196)

McCabe suggests that the pursuit of Micuçú is an allegory of the state oppression of the poor (182). Bishop realises that the death of Micuçú will not stop others from trying to beat the oppressive poverty of slum life. The police are, she knows, already pursuing other criminals.

In her later poem "Going to the Bakery", which was published in the 1969 edition of The Complete Poems, Bishop continues to describe the ills which affect Brazil and, specifically, Rio. The poem's subtitle is Rio de Janeiro. On an evening trip to the bakery, the third-person protagonist has a choice of where she might look:

Instead of gazing at the sea  
the way she does on other nights,  
the moon looks down the Avenida  
Copacabana at the sights,  

new to her but ordinary.  
She leans on the slack trolley wires.  
Below, the tracks slither between  
lines of head-to-tail parked cars. (1-8)

The binary oppositions which have always existed in Bishop's perception of Brazil are neatly captured. On one side of her is the natural beauty of the ocean and Rio's setting; on
the other, the chaos of daily life Cariocan style. Linking the two is Bishop's recognition that what is new and perhaps exotic to her is ordinary to the permanent residents. However, any pleasure at the city's beautiful setting is quickly diminished by the difficulty of living in a country with rampant inflation and a scarcity of basic goods. The trip to the bakery shocks her back into the "real" world: in the dim lighting of the shop (electricity is rationed) she has to make her choice between an unappetising array of cakes and bread; flour is adulterated with cornmeal to make it go further. Back at her apartment she finds a drunk, injured beggar and gives him some money. The irony of her parting "good night" is not lost on her after her short excursion:

I give him seven cents in my
terrific money, say "Good night"
from force of habit. Oh, mean habit!
Not one word more apt or bright? (40-44)

Just as in "To the Botequim & Back", a short trip to buy food again brings Bishop into unavoidable contact with the real Brazil. "Pink Dog", the last poem Bishop finished before her death in October 1979, several years after she finally left Brazil for the last time, is perhaps her sharpest condemnation of the cruelty of urban Brazilian life and demonstrates how the inequities of Brazilian life continued to concern her. Bishop began the poem during the 1963 carnival season, already disaffected with Brazil's poverty. The scabby-looking, hairless dog is a metaphor for the poor and defenceless of Brazilian society who are threatened with extermination by the Rio authorities:

Didn't you know? It's been in all the papers,
to solve this problem, how they deal with beggars?
They take and throw them in the tidal rivers.

Yes, idiots, paralytics, parasites
go bobbing in the ebbing sewage, nights
out in the suburbs, where there are no lights.

If they do this to anyone who begs,
drugged, drunk, or sober, with or without legs,
what would they do to sick, four-legged dogs? (13-21)\(^{107}\)

Bishop knows from personal experience that the middle classes approve such behaviour, and pictures them in the cafés and at sidewalk corners, joking about the beggars' plight. Ever the naive optimist, Bishop can offer only a temporary solution, that the poor try and forget the threat and enjoy what, in her eyes, belongs to them: Carnival.

\(^{107}\) *The Complete Poems*: 190. This is, in fact, what the authorities started to do in the 1980s, with the systematic rounding-up and killing of the street children in Rio. See the previous chapter for Gellhorn's investigation into the killing of children in Salvador, Bahia.
But Bishop's tone is bitter and she knows that the problems of the city and the country are too profound to be more than momentarily assuaged by the annual event. It is significant that the dog is female: her hanging teats suggest a further vulnerability and sense of despair. The dog is ill and alone, her babies are missing. Travisano in "The Flicker of Impudence": Delicacy and Indelicacy in the Art of Elizabeth Bishop", makes the following observation:

The perfectly rhymed "rabies / scabies / babies" is surely one triplet that has never before appeared in the history of the language; the discomfort it causes is essential to its effect. Bishop plays with both one's sympathies and one's instinctive abhorrence. She knows that she can get a reader to accept a poem in which she speaks directly to a similarly bereft human. But she also knows that a dog denuded by a skin disease is less likely to evoke a sympathetic response than an impoverished man or woman who is somehow picturesque and hopeful....

Bishop commented on the poem in a letter to Brown in 1979: "I have a rather ghastly Carnival poem that will be in the New Yorker at Carnival time. It may turn out to be one of a group about Brazil." In a subsequent letter she added the qualifier: "Well, I meant my Carnival poem was 'ghastly' as to subject matter - not such a bad poem! - at least I hope not. I have two or three more equally 'ghastly' I feel I must publish sometime."

Bishop did not write any more Brazilian poems after "Pink Dog", but more radical and political poems have been discovered amongst her unpublished papers. Harrison, in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy, discusses some of the unpublished poems, which include a verse and prose poem about President Vargas's suicide in 1954. Another, entitled "A Trip to the Mines - Brasil", was about the appalling conditions the slaves worked in the mines. The poem's second draft started:

The slaves, the slaves have disappeared in all their thousands, millions, even. That came, in black and broken waves, from Angola, from have they hid Where could they hide so many graves? Where can their graves be (hidden)

Harrison mentions another poem, "Brasil, 1959", (c. 1959) which was about inflation and the extravagance of building Brasilia. In the register of Bishop's work at Vassar College other poems are listed: "Establishment of a Community in Brazil" (1949-

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108 In Lombardi: 123.
110 Letter dated March 1, 1979, in One Art: 632. It is unclear to which poems Bishop refers.
111 Harrison: 165.
50), "Apartment in Copacabana" (1960s?) and many undated poems, which include titles such as "The Monument to Don Pedro II, Petrópolis" and "On the Amazon". It is clear from the lists of poetry in the register that many of Bishop's poems were never completed, and that those which were but were overtly political were never published. The political commentary that Bishop carried on in her letters to the States found its way into her poetry but, for whatever reason, they were never published.113

The published poems do however, confirm that along with social criticism, Bishop was primarily concerned with the questions of viewing and constructing place. First published in the New Yorker on February 20, 1978, "Santarém" is Bishop's penultimate poem about Brazil, written with the benefit of hindsight. It is another final meditation on what Brazil meant to her and, late in life, the realisation that maybe her life-long restless journeying had come to an end. In "Santarém" Bishop remembers the trip she made down the Amazon in 1960, and admits that her memory may be shaky:

Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
 after, after - how many years?

That golden evening I really wanted to go no further;
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east. (1-6)

Time has distilled her memory of the trip into "that golden evening", with its suggestion not only of the end of the day but of the twilight of her life. In Santarém, where the River Tapajós meets the Amazon, Bishop remembers wanting to stay and not travel any further - for the first time. In "Santarém" time and place are fused. Bishop allows herself to be nostalgic, while reminding herself that memory distorts reality. Place, she now understands, is as much about the idea of it as about its reality: "I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place". Bishop's work has hinted at this and demonstrated it without her realisation, but now she is able to see it for herself. Bishop can also recognise that life is more fluid and indeterminate than perhaps she realised, and that its glory is to be found in the dissolving of boundaries and the blurring of distinctions:

Even if one were tempted
to literary interpretations
such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female
- such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight off

112 There is no indication as to whether "On the Amazon" is the poem Bishop referred to as the follow-up to "The Riverman".
113 In recent books on Bishop, such as Goldensohn's, much has also been made of the discovery of unpublished love poems which confirm her lesbianism. Bishop was a private person and did not encourage discussion about her personal life.
Bishop is still tempted by the idea of Brazil as an embodiment of the Garden of Eden, which underlined "Brazil, January 1, 1502", but here she dismisses the comparison for two reasons. First, it would be inaccurate to compare the Garden of Eden's four divergent rivers with Santarém's two convergent rivers. Second, the Garden of Eden was a "paradise" and, much as Bishop is charmed by Santarém, she remembers it as "mongrel" and "casual". Despite her acknowledgement that memory can fictionalise and glorify past experiences, she remembers the rivers and their banks in seemingly unromanticised detail.

Where much of Bishop's earlier work has glorified nature to the exclusion of people, here she is drawn by the intimacy and confusion of daily life as lived by those on the rivers and their banks. She realises that things can no longer be black and white, noticing the local people, who as descendants of North Americans, with their blonde hair and blue eyes, look un-Brazilian. There will always be external influences which mix with the local to create the unpredictable. Bishop captures the frenetic, chaotic life of the river through the people who live there. Nature plays its part when unexpected lightning strikes, but it takes a secondary role to the human. It is the impact of the lightning on the priest which concerns her now, whereas in the poem "Electrical Storm" she was more interested in describing the appearance of the storm.

Bishop now understands that what made Brazil special for so long was not nature and the landscape which she revelled in, but the people she knew who brought the country to life for her. In the final verse she describes an empty wasps' nest she has acquired. The nest might be seen as a metaphor for Bishop's Brazilian life - something that had once held life, albeit full of potential sting, was now hollow and empty but remained beautiful. Yet beauty is in the eye of the beholder: in the final line her fellow traveller, Mr Swan, asks "What's that ugly thing?" She realises one more thing, that her perception is very different from that of her fellow travellers.114

"Santarém" is a metaphor for the contradictory nature of Bishop's life. Bishop struggled for years with the need to find a place where she might be at "home". Brazil, she recognised, or "abroad" was, for a long time, where Bishop most felt at home. The two rivers joining in Santarém symbolised the binary division which ruled Bishop's life: her quest to be an insider when she lived as an outsider. In her poem, she further realised that place could be something which was carried in the mind as an idea rather than any

114 She wrote to Jerome Mazzaro on April 27, 1978: '"Santarém' happened, just like that, a real evening & a real place, and a real Mr. Swan who said that - it is not a composite at all." In One Art: 621.
actuality. Goldensohn makes the point: "What apparently frames the evening for Bishop is the initial reading of the geography of Santarém and its two great rivers as emblem of division, or dialectic, in Bishop's own life." The poem acts as a fitting end to her work on Brazil; disparate, and at odds much of the time, Bishop's conflicts have resolved themselves with the passage of time in "Santarém". However, since "Pink Dog" and not "Santarém" was Bishop's final statement on Brazil it is clear that any personal understanding she had reached about place had not diminished the disillusionment she increasingly felt about Brazilian life.

Elizabeth Bishop was an American who travelled south to Brazil at one of the lowest points in her life. With hindsight, she recognised that the journey was a successful attempt at self-salvation. In journeying south Bishop found a new source of material. The three poems - "Arrival at Santos", "Brazil, January 1, 1502", and "Questions of Travel" - were a conscious attempt to chart her intellectual and emotional progress, and her entire output of Brazilian prose and poetry was an unconscious emotional record of her long period spent in Brazil.

Lévi-Strauss concluded in *Tristes Tropiques* that by travelling in space you could go back in time. Bishop went back to two different times; one personal, the other public. She was able to reflect on and write about her childhood in Nova Scotia: the second part of *Questions of Travel* contained poems about her early life in Great Village. Bishop's other metaphorical destination was the primitive Brazil of the interior which belonged to the indigenous people. As a writer she possessed a further double perspective: she could see herself observing Brazil. This is the key to her work.
From North to South: Joan Didion's Latin America

"When I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest." - Georgia O'Keeffe

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live.... We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience." - Joan Didion

Since the 1960s Joan Didion has established herself as one of the pre-eminent chroniclers, along with writers such as Norman Mailer, John Updike and Gore Vidal, of life in North America. Her idiosyncratic and highly individual voice has been heard on subjects as diverse as the cult rock group, The Doors, and the problem of water supply in California. Didion has made California her beat. Her other forays into American life send her directly to the East Coast, be it to cover Washington politics or attempted murder in New York. Although Didion has lived all her life on either the West or East coasts of the United States, in New York City and California, she has shown in her writings a secondary, and at times parallel, interest in Latin America. This interest has grown over the years, despite the fact that Didion has visited the region relatively little.

Didion's journalism, which first appeared in publications such as the Saturday Evening Post, the New York Review of Books and the New Yorker, has been assembled into a trilogy of collected essays: Slouching Towards Bethlehem (1968), The White Album (1979) and Sentimental Journeys (1993), which first appeared in the United States as After Henry in 1992. She has written two extended essays, originally as articles for the New York Review of Books, which are concerned with the particularly Latin American: Salvador (1983), based on a two-week trip Didion made to El Salvador in 1982 with her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, and Miami (1987). Although Miami is within the continental United States it is, by general consensus, the starting point of and gateway to Latin America. As Didion says: "At the gate for such flights the preferred language was already Spanish. Delays were explained by weather in Panama."
In addition to her essays, Didion has published five novels: *Run River* (1963), *Play It As It Lays* (1970), *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977), *Democracy* (1984), and, most recently, *The Last Thing He Wanted* (1996). She set the first two of her novels in the United States, specifically California. *Democracy* is set primarily in Hawaii, but with extended excursions into south-east Asia at the fall of Saigon in the Vietnam War, and the other two novels are set south of the continental United States. *A Book of Common Prayer* takes place in Boca Grande, a fictitious Central American state supposedly on the equator, and *The Last Thing He Wanted* on an unnamed Caribbean island suggestive of Cuba.

The concept of place is a crucial element in Didion's writing. Didion's interest transcends purely descriptive physical landscapes, despite an apparent concentration in her writing on the surface detail of place. Her obsession is with the internalisation of geographical space into the landscape of the mind. Physical landscapes are imbued with history, memory, loss, nostalgia and sentiment in Didion's written world. This process started with Didion's recollections of her childhood. She admits to being "one of those children who tended to perceive the world in terms of things read about it. I began with a literary idea of experience, and I still don't know where all the lies are." In her work, Didion gives the reader different possibilities of how not only California but every place she writes about might be understood. Place can be constructed from her imagination, from literature, and from observation.

It is worth considering in some detail how Didion presents Sacramento, her childhood home, because it gives a clearer understanding of the significance place assumes for her. Central to her concept of place is the idea of the frontier. Didion was born in Sacramento, the state capital of California, on December 5, 1934. Having graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, she won *Vogue's* Prix de Paris award in 1956 with its first prize of employment on the staff of the magazine. Didion relocated to New York City, thereby beginning a painful exile from California which lasted eight years.

By her own admission, Didion was brought up to think of California as the final frontier, where the possibility of new opportunities ran out. Her remembering of Sacramento is filtered not only through family reminiscences and the physical evidence of rapid change, but more significantly, through the myth of the founding of California.

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6 Interview with Linda Kuehl for the *Paris Review* "Writers at Work" 5th series: 356.
7 She moved back to New York in 1988, after living in Los Angeles for twenty-four years.
and the Donner-Reed party. The story of the ill-fated Donner-Reed party, which included some of her ancestors for part of its journey, fascinated Didion. Her ancestors were pioneers who kept moving west in pursuit of an Edenic paradise they hoped existed and away from the burden of history of an Europeanised East Coast in the years leading up to the American Civil War. Travelling from Illinois to California in 1846, the Donner-Reed party was caught up in a snowstorm in the Californian Sierras, where in order to survive, the survivors were forced to break society's final taboo and eat their dead. Their behaviour became a metaphor for the paradoxical aspects of northern California. The state was founded on both courage and transgression. The moral dilemma of the Donner-Reed party weighed so heavily on California's consciousness that Didion, generations later, continued to assume the burden of living up to the settlers' sacrifice:

Later, when I was living in New York, I would make the trip back to Sacramento four and five times a year (the more comfortable the flight, the more obscurely miserable I would be, for it weighs heavily on my kind that we could perhaps not make it by wagon), trying to prove that I had not meant to leave at all, because in at least one respect California - the California we are talking about - resembles Eden: it is assumed that those who absent themselves from its blessings have been banished, exiled by some perversity of heart. Did not the Donner-Reed Party, after all, eat its own dead to reach Sacramento?8

The act of crossing the last physical frontier, the Sierras, and transgressing the final frontier of morality allowed the fulfilment of the frontier dream: of a place where enterprise and hard work would be rewarded. The Eden Didion's ancestors established was based on the possession of land which provided not only the Californian Gold Rush of 1849 but highly valuable arable land.9 In Didion's first novel, Run River (1963), which has as its central theme the changes in the Sacramento Valley after World War II, Martha McClellan's favourite childhood game is a re-enactment of the events of the Donner party crossing. On her bedroom walls, instead of the expected Degas ballet dancers or scenes from Alice in Wonderland, Martha has:

... a framed deed signed by John Sutter in 1847, a matted list of the provisions carried on an obscure crossing in 1852, a detailed relief map of the Humboldt Sink, and a large lithograph of Donner Pass on which Martha had printed, in two neat columns, the names of the casualties and the survivors of the Donner-Reed crossing.10

Martha's favourite childhood game is to pretend to be Tamsen Donner, whose refusal to leave her dying husband spelt her own death. As Jennifer Brady points out: "The

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8 "Notes from a Native Daughter" in Slouching Towards Bethlehem : 176.
9 The native Indians and Mexicans who were part of the Spanish territories prior to the settling of California are never mentioned by Didion. Her writings suggest that California was a blank canvas before settlement.
10 Run River: 93.
cautionary story of the pioneers' collapse into mutual betrayal and final descent into cannibalism in the Sierra snows is metamorphosed, in Martha's selective version, into romantic suicide pacts and heroic death wishes."11

Martha McClellan finds it hard to accept that her ancestors survived as far as California, and is depressed by the news that ancestors of her sister-in-law, Lily, died en route. Martha's neurotic sensibility is heightened by her creation of a new myth of the past: by transforming Tamsen Donner's behaviour into an act of romantic sacrifice, she re-creates the violent nature of California's early development. The act of having survived places Martha, just as it does with Didion, under an enormous burden of responsibility and moral obligation which turns Martha to madness.12

In Run River, the narrator depicts Sacramento's rapid changes since World War II. The agricultural base previously controlled by a few families such as the Knights and the McClellans is disappearing as outsiders arrive to transform the landscape both literally and physically. Ryder Channing, the property speculator, wants to convert agricultural land into housing and brings in "new" money which changes the landscape for ever. Didion's unflattering portrait of Channing suggests her disapproval: the havoc he causes destroys both the Knight and the McClellan families. His affair with Martha and subsequent abandonment of her for marriage to an heiress leads to Martha's suicide, which is a hollow echo of Tamsen Donner's sacrifice. Channing's affair with Lily leads both to his murder and to the suicide of Lily's husband, Everett:

He smiled. She had thought before that he must calculate the effect of his smile; its peculiar intimacy was a study in timing. It was something like the way John Wayne said "Hell-o there" when he first met the girl, on a train or in a construction camp or riding past on a horse. There was no mistaking John Wayne and there was, in a limited way, no mistaking Ryder Channing.13

It is not only characters such as Ryder Channing who undermine the California Didion knew ("All that is constant about the California of my childhood is the rate at which it disappears"), but also the changes wrought in America in the 1960s with the advent of rapid commercialism.14 In part Didion is wary of Channing because he

12 Michiko Kakutani, in an interview with Didion, writes of a small framed photograph of the Sierras near Donner Pass on Didion's dressing table. Didion's great-great-great grandmother, Nancy Hardin Cornwall, was a member of the original party travelling west, but she had left the group in Nevada to travel through Oregon before the ill-fated group was hit by the blizzard. Of the eighty-seven settlers who set off, only forty survived. "Joan Didion: Staking Out California" in Friedman: 29-40.
13 Run River: 115.
14 Quotation appears in "Notes from a Native Daughter": 176.
represents a shift from the California of her childhood. Paradoxically, however, even her childhood might not be as she remembers. Didion recognises a tendency to sentimentalise the past and eulogise happy childhoods. She wonders at the accuracy of her memories of childhood Sacramento: "It is hard to find California now, unsettling to wonder how much of it was merely imagined or improvised; melancholy to realize how much of anyone's memory is no true memory at all but only the traces of someone else's memory, stories handed down on the family network."15

Just as Porter's invented Mexican memories were a composite of others' recollections, so Didion realises that place is imbued not only with her memory but also that of earlier generations. If one's memory is isolated from one's family's history then the individual is necessarily limited and, she suggests, alienated. In both Didion's fiction and non-fiction written about America she sets out this message; she then shows the repercussions and consequences in her writings on Latin America. In the closing part of Didion's essay "Notes from a Native Daughter", which was written in 1965, she offers two insights as to how she views Sacramento: "It should be clear by now that the truth about the place is elusive, and must be tracked with caution"(178), and "The Sacramento papers, however, simply mirror the Sacramento peculiarity, the Valley fate, which is to be paralyzed by a past no longer relevant"(183-4).

Didion offers a Sacramento which is an amalgam of history, memory, nostalgia and, largely, regret. Perhaps her regret is most keenly revealed in an anecdote which recounts the story of a well-known Sacramento mansion. Over the years, successive fires have reduced the house to charred ruins. Its heir lives in a trailer on the site of the once great house where only the house's chimneys remain. Everyone of Didion's generation knows the story, but the day is imminent, she realises, when there will be no native residents left who can explain Sacramento's past. Instead, the current residents will invent one: "They will have lost the real past, and gained a manufactured one, and there will be no way for them to know, no way at all, why a house trailer should stand alone on seven thousand acres outside town"(186). It is not the manufacturing of the past which troubles Didion, but the realisation that the falsified past will be taken as the truth.

California is the point where North America runs out of land and for Didion this gives the state a unique status. It is the "golden state", the last-chance saloon where consequently anything is possible. Yet the sacrifice of the founding fathers implies a moral obligation. In "Notes from a Native Daughter", Didion tries to explain what it means to be a Californian native:

15 Ibid: 177.
...it is characteristic of Californians to speak grandly of the past as if it had simultaneously begun, *tabula rasa*, and reached a happy ending on the day the wagons started west. *Eureka* - "I Have Found It" - as the state motto has it. Such a view of history casts a certain melancholia over those who participate in it; my own childhood was suffused with the conviction that we had long outlived our finest hour. In fact that is what I want to tell you about: what it is like to come from a place like Sacramento. If I could make you understand that, I could make you understand California and perhaps something else besides, for Sacramento *is* California, and California is a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension; in which the mind is troubled by some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent (172).

This passage is key to understanding how Didion perceives place. For her, California is specifically the political and agricultural area of Sacramento, not the rest of California. Place signifies moral obligation. And, perhaps more significantly, California as the furthest point west and the edge of the continent is a metaphor for how Didion sees life:

I have a theatrical temperament ... I'm not interested in the middle road - maybe because everyone's on it. Rationality, reasonableness bewilder me. I think it comes out of being a "daughter of the Golden West." A lot of the stories I was brought up on had to do with extreme actions - leaving everything behind, crossing the trackless wastes, and in those stories the people who stayed behind and had their settled ways - those people were not the people who got the prize. The prize was California. 16

California, with its myriad opportunities, is the base from which Didion judges everything else. If California represents a final opportunity for personal redemption, and one fails there, what happens to the rest of America? In "Girl of the Golden West", an essay about Patty Hearst, the quintessential California girl turned terrorist, Didion reflects some thirty years later on how landscape is more than the merely glimpsed. In the landscape of northern California she sees reminders of her obligation:

The extent to which certain places dominate the California imagination is apprehended, even by Californians, only dimly. Deriving not only from the landscape but from the claiming of it, from the romance of emigration, the radical abandonment of established attachments, this imagination remains obdurately symbolic, tending to locate lessons in what the rest of the country perceives only as scenery. 17

The emotional attachment to a landscape creates a bond, but Didion's thesis in the eponymous article of her first collection of essays, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), is that Americans are disconnected from their past and their roots, which inevitably leaves them without any anchor. Their sense of alienation is exacerbated by

16 Kakutani interview in Friedman: 33.
17 "Girl of the Golden West" is in *Sentimental Journeys* (1993), which Didion subdivides into three sections, "Washington", "California" and "New York", thereby summarising the major subjects of her journalistic career.
the moral decline Didion felt she witnessed in the 1960s. Her epigraph to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* is W B Yeats's poem "The Second Coming". The first verse contains the message at the heart of Didion's writing:

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Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity (1-8).
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Didion's point is that "the centre cannot hold" and, in her work, she demonstrates the effect of anarchy "loosed" upon the world she knows, and then on the world she knows less well, for example, El Salvador. Sacramento provides a useful starting point for her contention precisely because it is somewhere she once knew intimately, and where she can understand the mechanism of change better than elsewhere (despite her worries about her memory's reliability). Sacramento also reveals another paradox at the heart of Didion's work. In numerous interviews she discusses her belief in right and wrong, but also her inability to pass moral judgement on others, since she belongs to the West Coast with its ethic of "live and let live":

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I am a moralist, but I grew up in such a strong West Coast ethic that I tend not to impose my own sense of what is wrong and what is right on other people. If I do impose it, I feel very guilty about it, because it is entirely against the ethic in which I was brought up, which was strictly laissez-faire.... I can't make a judgment because they are other people. They are not me. I just want to tell you the story.18
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In "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", written at the height of the hippy movement, Didion visits the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco to study, at first hand, "disorder". It was, she tells us, "the first time I had dealt directly and flatly with the evidence of atomization, the proof that things fall apart": what she saw in Haight-Ashbury was confirmation of the Yeats poem.19 In her essay, Didion recounts the days she spent with aimless, drug-influenced youths who no longer listened to their elders and, instead, created a new social order of apathy and lethargy in the United States:

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It was not a country in open revolution. It was not a country under enemy siege. It was the United States of America in the cold late spring of 1967, and the market
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19 Didion's preface to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* recalls how she had begun to see writing as an irrelevant act amidst the chaos of the 1960s, when the world seemed unrecognisable to her.
was steady and the G.N.P. high and a great many articulate people seemed to have a sense of high social purpose and it might have been a spring of brave hopes and national promise, but it was not, and more and more people had the uneasy apprehension that it was not. All that seemed clear was that at some point we had aborted ourselves and butchered the job, and because nothing else seemed relevant I decided to go to San Francisco. San Francisco was where the social hemorrhaging was showing up. San Francisco was where the missing children were gathering and calling themselves "hippies" (84-85).

Didion's shock at being confronted with an image of the United States, and more specifically her own state, which is unrecognisable is illustrated by the aggressiveness of her vocabulary: she chooses "aborted", "butchered" and "social hemorrhaging" to convey the trauma of the experience. Haight-Ashbury in the late 1960s bears no relation to the Sacramento of Didion's childhood, yet both cities are within California. Didion's description of America in the essay's opening paragraph illustrates how the present generation has squandered the gifts bequeathed by the courageous settlers. She alludes to Yeats immediately:

The center was not holding. It was a country of bankruptcy notices and public-auction announcements and commonplace reports of casual killings and misplaced children and abandoned homes and vandals who misspelled even the four-letter words they scrawled. It was a country in which families routinely disappeared, trailing bad checks and repossession papers. Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that had held the society together. People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing. Those left behind filed desultory missing-persons reports, then moved on themselves (84).

The picture of desolation and disintegration is vivid. But the crucial point is that Didion does not tell you where she is talking about. We only learn that this is the United States in the second paragraph. Didion presents an apocalyptic vision of the United States as a country of random killings, abandonment and poverty where the family has ceased to exist. Is this an accurate depiction of the United States at that moment, or a projection of Didion's worries? Didion tells us in the Preface to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* that "The Second Coming" had been in her mind for several years, tolling like a warning bell. In Haight-Ashbury the poem's warning becomes flesh. Didion concludes that if the golden land is now falling apart, what does this signify for less privileged places?

"Slouching Towards Bethlehem" was largely misunderstood when it first appeared. Didion was applauded for having the prescience to write about the hippy movement at its apex. That was not Didion's intention, as she said in the Preface: "it seemed to me then (perhaps because the piece was so important to me) that I had never gotten a feedback so universally beside the point". The main reason the article was misunderstood was because of Didion's prose style. To tell a story, she has evolved a technique of writing
about how things appear. Didion's concern is to show the reader the "surface reality". From the evidence of vandalism, graffiti and missing children notices in Haight-Ashbury, it is clear to Didion that the "center was not holding". Explicit judgements about what this may mean strike Didion as superfluous. Similarly, in her writings on Latin America, she repeatedly uses the same stylistic device. She tells the reader how things appeared, the reader then draws the conclusion. It is a risky technique. For a writer to allow a reader such power leaves room for misunderstanding, as demonstrated by the reception of "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", taken as a homily to the hippy movement, and later Salvador.

It is clear that Didion's sensibility is deeply conservative. Where others saw the hippy movement of the 1960s as an expression of revolt and free-will to be welcomed, Didion was appalled at the squandering of an American inheritance. Yet, at the same time, her contradictory nature means that she is also drawn to that which is dark, to the edge. The idea of a literary edge seems to be born out of her own experience of the physical edge of California. She told Linda Kuehl in an interview: "I can recall disapproving of the golden mean, always thinking there was more to be learned from the dark journey. The dark journey engaged me more."20

In the essay "On Going Home", Didion defines what she means by the "dark journey". She writes about watching a girl strip in a San Francisco bar: "There was no particular sense of moment about this, none of the effect of romantic degradation, of 'dark journey', for which my generation strived so assiduously."21 Didion's concept of degradation, of America and, more precisely, California, as a place of salvation belongs to the 1960s, according to the critic John McClure. He describes American fiction in terms of: "three reigning romances of the sixties - the national romance of America as a redeemer nation, the modernist romance of degradation and the dark journey, and the sixties' romance of collective struggle and a journey into the light."22

During Didion's examination of the health of the United States in the 1960s, she started to venture outside the continental boundaries of the East and West coasts to Hawaii and Mexico. Hawaii, a vacation destination for Didion in the 1970s and the furthest western frontier of the country, presented an image of stability she recognised as absent from the continental United States. During repeated visits to the same hotel, the Royal Hawaiian, continuity and stability were confirmed by seeing the same families each year. She revelled in the routine:

20 Paris Review: 357.
21 "On Going Home" in Slouching Towards Bethlehem: 166.
22 John McClure: "Battlelines: Joan Didion, Robert Stone, and the Imaginative Mapping of Central America": 84. See the introduction for more comment on McClure's article.
I had been an occasional visitor to Honolulu for several years before I entirely perceived that the roped beach was central to the essence of the Royal Hawaiian, that the point of sitting there was not at all exclusivity, as is commonly supposed on Waikiki, but inclusivity. Anyone behind the rope is presumed to be, by tacit definition, "our kind".23

A 1965 trip south to Mexico Didion treated quite differently. It would be easy to regard Didion's journeys south, first to "Guaymas, Sonora" and then to Colombia in 1974, described in "In Bogotá", and later in her novels, as undertaking a journey into darkness. However, what has become increasingly apparent is that Didion's United States became a symbol of the "dark journey" in its failure to be a redeemer nation. McClure argues in his article that for Didion, as for Robert Stone, Central America is seen as a place to be saved and a destination for those in search of romantic degradation. In some instances, it could easily be argued that Didion uses Latin America for that purpose. However, an examination of the entirety of her Latin American writings, particularly in light of her 1996 novel, The Last Thing He Wanted, makes this argument less convincing. Nevertheless, there remains a gulf between Didion's intention in her various Latin American writings and what appears on the page. Again, it is her reliance on the surface impressions, without apparent comment, which leaves her open to (mis)interpretation.

"Guaymas, Sonora" appears in Slouching Towards Bethlehem and is a short account of a trip south Didion and Dunne made in 1965. Her reason for travelling is straightforward: the weather in Los Angeles is wet and Guaymas is hot.24 Guaymas is a typical holiday destination, in so far as everyday rules need not apply ("I did not feel like getting dressed in the morning") and time may be spent lazing in hammocks, reading, fishing and sunbathing. However, the couple's reason for travelling south is not to participate in holiday activities - although they do - but "to get away from ourselves"(214). Didion explains that the way to do this: "... is to drive, down through Nogales some day when the pretty green places pall and all that will move the imagination is some place difficult, some desert. The desert, any desert, is indeed the valley of the shadow of death; come back from the desert and you feel like Alcestis, reborn"(214).

Didion wants to escape from her daily existence and go on holiday but, paradoxically, her holiday destination involves a figurative death and rebirth. In Didion's world, place is

23 "In the Islands" in The White Album: 136.
24 Didion and her husband returned to California in 1964 from New York. They worked as successful scriptwriters in Hollywood in addition to their more literary writing careers.

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weighted with more than holiday brochure images: the surface images are imbued with Didion's literary knowledge. Her trip south contains not only an allusion to The Bible, but also to Greek mythology.25 "The valley of the shadow of death", taken from Psalm 23, reinforces the idea of spiritual salvation.26 The reference to the martyrdom of Alcestis in Greek mythology further heightens the sense of salvation the holiday is supposed to bring.27 This is not a vacation in the accepted sense of the word. Didion leaves "the pretty green places" of California for somewhere more demanding, where nature (the desert) is in control and where, somewhat dramatically, she might be reborn like Alcestis. Her description of the drive through the desert reinforces the idea of a biblical transformation: "The point is to become disoriented, shriven, by the heat and the deceptive perspectives and the oppressive sense of carrion. The road shimmers. The eyes want to close"(215).

To survive the journey through the desert and then arrive at the coast is to intensify the pleasure of arrival. However, before they can reach their final destination, Didion and her husband must travel through one more literary landscape. The town of Guaymas belongs to a Greene novel: "As far as the town goes, Graham Greene might have written it"(215), Didion tells us. Her description of the town and the adjectives she chooses belong to Greeneland. The square is "shadowy", the cathedral is in "bad repair", with "a turkey buzzard on the cross". The freighters docked in the wharfs with their "Panamanian and Liberian flags" hint at unsavoury, distant places, compounded by the description of their crews who "stare sullenly at the grotesque and claustrophobic hills, at the still town, a curious limbo at which to call"(215). This is hardly a typical tourist destination. Didion seems to have read Greene's The Lawless Roads (1939) and The Power and the Glory (1940) before embarking on her road trip.

In Greene's books Mexico is a place of foreboding and danger, where survival becomes paramount and not always likely. McClure sees Didion as absorbing a literary construct of Mexico which she takes one step further by using the country to help her commercial creativity:

Mexico and Central America are sites of sought-after but risky disorientation and reengagement, places of possible redemption, where the soul may be "shriven" and

25 There is an echo of Tennyson's poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854), with its line: "Into the valley of death rode the six hundred". The poem is about the loss of six hundred men during the Crimea War who were sent to their deaths because of a mix-up in orders.
26 Verse 4 of "The Lord is my Shepherd" (Psalm 23): "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me".
27 Alcestis was the wife of Admetus, the king of Thessaly, who gave her life to save her husband's but was rescued from Hades by Hercules.
emerge renewed, but also places of potential degradation and disintegration. Didion's version of the story is interesting because it combines the sense of spiritual search with hints of a more commercial motive: the writer goes South so that her imagination, stupefied by ease in the pretty green places of the North, can be jolted back to life. Mexico is mapped as a stimulant - like coffee, or alcohol, or drugs - which can give the artist the kick she needs to get on with her work.28

In one sense, McClure is right to argue that Mexico is a stimulant. But, rather than see this entirely as a negative or a shortcoming it might be argued that, for Didion, Mexico is stimulating where Los Angeles is merely boring. What is significant about "Guaymas, Sonora" is how Didion constructs her trip through her literary and cultural associations. Didion and her husband choose to stay outside the town in a hotel which more readily corresponds to a preconceived idea of a tourist resort, and which might give them the sense of isolation and escape they crave. They do not consider staying at the other hotel in the town. It is too much part of Greeneland, "where faded and broken turquoise-blue shutters open onto the courtyard, where old men sit in the doorways and nothing moves"(215). In her hotel choice, Didion moves from a literary construct of the town to a tourist-brochure image. The pair's preferred hotel is on the beach. They seek the quintessential holiday break with sun, sea and little else but, by the end of the week, these diversions have lost their appeal: "At the end of the week we wanted to do something, but all there was to do was visit the tracking station for an old space program or go see John Wayne and Claudia Cardinale in Circus World, and we knew it was time to go home"(216).

Just as Didion began to understand that the Sacramento of her childhood was a fiction, so this short article about a holiday in Mexico becomes another form of fiction. But where she trusted her own knowledge of Sacramento and California, because their history formed part of her heritage, it is significant that in Mexico she relies on others to direct her means of seeing. And, as she does so, Mexico assumes the redemptive quality which California, and by extension, the United States, was supposed to possess.

Didion wants the reader to realise that Guaymas is unlike anywhere north of the border and so it becomes a quasi-fictional place, belonging more to the pages of a novel than real life. She presents the reader with a series of images which capture her trip. She wants the reader to understand the vast emptiness of the desert, emphasised by the rarity with which an occasional Pemex truck passes on the highway. Didion also wants the reader to sense what the heat might feel like. Heat is a constant and recurring theme in Didion's writing. Her husband once commented: "Joan never writes about a place that's not hot. The day she writes about a Boston winter will be a day it's all over."29

28 McClure: 85.
29 "A Visit with Joan Didion" by Sara Davidson in Friedman: 13.
Didion's next published piece about Latin America, "In Bogotá", heat symbolises the difference between North and South.

Didion wrote "In Bogotá" in 1974 following a trip to Colombia with Dunne the previous year. The article is included in The White Album. The trip to Cartagena provided Didion with one of the images which prompted her novel A Book of Common Prayer, set in the fictitious Boca Grande. In "Why I Write" Didion explains, in some detail, the circumstances of her stay in Cartagena and what she remembered most vividly from the experience. These were surface impressions such as the view from her hotel room at night:

Another [picture] was the night view from a room in which I once spent a week with paratyphoid, a hotel room on the Colombian coast. My husband and I seemed to be on the Colombian coast representing the United States of America at a film festival (I recall invoking the name "Jack Valenti" a lot, as if its reiteration could make me well), and it was a bad place to have fever, not only because my indisposition offended our hosts but because every night in this hotel the generator failed. The lights went out. The elevator stopped. My husband would go to the event of the evening and make excuses for me and I would stay alone in this hotel room, in the dark. I remember standing at the window trying to call Bogotá (the telephone seemed to work on the same principle as the generator) and watching the night wind come up and wondering what I was doing eleven degrees off the equator with a fever of 103. The view from the window definitely figures in A Book of Common Prayer. 30

Didion gives us three versions of her trip to Cartagena; the essay "Why I Write", the published article "In Bogotá" and an interview. The detail she includes depends in each case on the medium. The opening of "In Bogotá" is the shortest and most stylized. In "Why I Write" Didion tries to explain the creative process in which a remembered image is central to her imagination and, finally, in her interview, she speculates on the meaning of what she has seen. Apart from giving an insight into Didion's methodology, the three versions reveal how she views Latin America.

In the opening sentence of "In Bogotá", Didion recasts her experience of Cartagena and condenses it: "On the Colombian coast it was hot, fevered, eleven degrees off the equator with evening trades that did not relieve but blew hot and dusty."31 Didion wants to convey the relentless tropical intensity of the coastal heat which contrasts with "cool" Bogotá. She sets the scene not only by using adjectives such as "hot" (used twice) and "fevered" to capture the feeling of heat, but by giving the longitude position. Didion considers the detail of her proximity to the equator to be sufficient explanation for her

30 "Why I Write" in Friedman: 8. The essay is adapted from a Regents' Lecture given by Didion at the University of California at Berkeley.
lethargy. In an interview with Sara Davidson, Didion talks about the trip south from another angle:

"In the spring of '73, John and I went to Cartagena, Colombia, and the entire trip was like a hallucination, partly because I had a fever. It seemed to me extraordinary that North America had gone one way and South America had gone another, and I couldn't understand why. I kept reading that they had more resources than we had, they had more of everything and yet they had gone another way."

"How would you define the other way?"

"In North America, social tensions that arise tend to be undercut and co-opted quite soon, but in Latin America there does not seem to be any political machinery for delaying the revolution. Everything is thrown into bold relief. There is a collapsing of time. Everything is both older than you could ever know, and it started this morning."32

The interview with Davidson is the only time Didion directly compares North America with South. In "In Bogotá" her comparisons of North and South American democracy are made obliquely. Her comments in the Davidson interview reveal that she holds an accepted, conservative North American view of Latin America. Didion lumps the countries together, seemingly assuming that everywhere on the continent is as politically volatile as Colombia. She sees North and South America as having taken divergent paths which, she suggests, show that South America has somehow failed. She tells the reader South America had so many more natural resources yet "had gone another way". Her argument suggests that South America's failure to capitalise on its assets would be unthinkable for the United States. Didion adopts, instinctively, the cliché of Latin America relying on revolution to solve political difficulties, while North America is capable of diffusing dissent within the political system.

However, Didion's most interesting remark is about the collapsing of time. She sees Latin America as being simultaneously both old and young. She has understood North America very much in linear terms: the present generation responds to its past, and each generation builds on the advances of the previous one. By making Latin America both old and young, Didion deprives the continent of a linear historical progression and re-casts it in a circular continuum from which it is unable to advance. Didion does not understand Latin America in the same way that she has learnt to dissect North America. However, by applying her technique of examining the surface realities, Didion shows the reader how Latin America appeared to her.

"In Bogotá" (1974) prefigures both A Book of Common Prayer (1977) and Salvador (1983) in its emphasis on a surface reality and how things appear. Didion did not attempt to puzzle out the meaning of all the things she noted in "In Bogotá" as she had

32 Davidson interview in Friedman: 14.
done in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem". Mark Muggli suggests that the difference between Didion's first and second collection of essays is: "The difference between emblem and image".33 He argues that, in The White Album, Didion reports on things which have evaded her understanding, but which, nevertheless, she knows must have a meaning. Didion explains the change in her approach in The White Album's eponymous essay:

I was supposed to have a script, and had mislaid it. I was supposed to hear cues, and no longer did. I was meant to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no "meaning" beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting-room experience. In what would probably be the middle of my life I wanted still to believe in the narrative and in the narrative's intelligibility, but to know that one could change the sense with every cut was to begin to perceive the experience as rather more electrical than ethical (13).

Didion now considers that narrative has become sentimental, and "In Bogotá" reflects this change. She has made the transition from moral analyst to aesthete, from trying to understand what is beneath the surface to writing what is on the surface. Didion begins to understand the duplicity of narrative and the ease with which its meaning can be altered. She does not explain why she wants to leave Cartagena (her illness), but reduces Cartagena and Bogotá to a series of contrasting oppositions. Bogotá is cool where Cartagena is steamy. In Bogotá she might indulge herself in longed-for pleasures such as chicken sandwiches from room service, direct-dial telephones and two-day-old copies of the New York Times and Miami Herald. The Bogotá Didion presents us with is composed of a series of episodes and images which she remains uncertain how to connect: "Of the time I spent in Bogotá I remember mainly images, indelible but difficult to connect"(193). The one thing which makes sense to her is the landscape and the dominant Andes which, she writes, "loom behind every image I remember, and perhaps are themselves the connection"(193). Didion cannot connect the disparate images Bogotá presents to her but her text is connected, once again, by the literary references which she weaves into the text and then filters through her memory.

The inclusion of a Gabriel García Márquez sentence, a line of poetry by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and a Robert Lowell poem, along with an anthropological account of the crowning of the Chibcha Indian king, heighten the sense of Colombia as a constructed fiction. Didion sandwiches a critique of the self-deceiving Spanish descendants between the account of the Chibcha Indian king's coronation and the opening sentence of García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1970) and tells us "They were all stories a child might invent"(189).34 The fiction the conquistadors' descendants adopt is their continued belief in a false sense of superiority and a manufactured history. Didion

33 Mark Muggli: "The Poetics of Joan Didion's Journalism" in Felton: 150.
34 Cien años de soledad was published in 1967.
dismisses the Colombians' vision of their past as a naive, child-like version of history in a place which has no history: "When Colombians spoke about the past I often had the sense of being in a place where history tended to sink, even as it happened, into the traceless solitude of autosuggestion"(189). Didion suggests that from what she witnesses Colombia is handicapped not only by its inability to shed its colonial past, but by its adherence to the myths of the conquest. Didion, however, fails to make a connection between her obsession with the myth of the founding of California and the pursuit of Eden and the Colombians' belief that they are all descendants of Spanish nobility.

Didion includes, in its entirety, Lowell's poem "Caracas" which begins "Through another of our cities without a center, as hideous/ as Los Angeles...". Didion thinks the negative images of the poem are equally relevant to Bogotá. The inclusion of a poem about Caracas is problematical since it suggests both that Venezuela and Colombia are interchangeable and each country's identity is unimportant to Didion. Further, the very fact that the poem is quoted in full, with its references to Latin American gun-democracy, prostitution, corruption and poverty, re-emphasises Didion's view of Colombia and, by extension, the rest of Latin America.

Didion recognises Bogotá as a composite of three cultures: the ancient indigenous Indians, the Spanish conquistadors and, latterly, a North American influence. She sees all three present but unconnected in modern Bogotá. At a party she attends, Didion expects people to be talking about the latest news story: the possibility of the ex-dictator, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, launching a new bid for power. Instead, the talk is of non-Colombian matters: "Why had the American film industry not made films of the Vietnam War, was what the Colombian stringer for the Caribbean newspaper wanted to talk about"(192). Americans are everywhere in Bogotá. They view their embassy as "the emotional center" of the city but are careful not to offend the local people. This is not because of any concern for the Colombians. It is the weight of responsibility of being American which disallows ill-manners: a sense of duty to "the eagles on our passports" means that: "We would prefer the sweet local Roman-Cola to the Coca-Cola the Colombians liked. We would think of Standard Oil as Esso Colombiano. We would not speak of fever except to one another"(191-2).

American culture fills the city's movie halls and bookstands. The local newspapers are full of stories about Jackie Onassis, the American "princess". Americans are different: a man at the airport tells Didion he knew she was American because her bags smelled American. The newspaper, *El Espectador*, mentions Didion's arrival, "Parece una turista norteamericana", which Didion seemingly mistranslates as "She resembles
an American tourist" (191), thereby introducing an element of doubt as to her identity. The Colombians make veiled references to the CIA's presence in Bogotá and a fellow American re-casts the CIA to Didion as the "information" department. In her collection of images, Didion suggests that what is important to the Americans is how they are seen to behave and that their manners are one means of creating a certain impression. It is a theme Didion returns to in her latest novel, *The Last Thing He Wanted*.

The second dominant cultural influence in Bogotá is that of the Spanish. The tangible evidence of Spanish culture, from the time of the conquistadors, helps to reinforce the idea that those of Spanish descent still live in the past. The out-dated decadence of colonial Spain is captured in Didion's closing anecdote about a child waiter. Didion lunches in the restaurant, Hostería del Libertador, where all the symbols of ancient Spain are preserved: the heavy drapes, formal place settings and waiters in tailcoats and white gloves who look as if they belong to a European court. The image of grandeur is undermined as Didion tells the reader that the drapes smell musty and the linen is darned. Didion then describes a child waiter returning an empty wine bottle in its holder to the kitchen. To put the empty bottle back into the wine holder symbolises perfectly the meaningless rituals which have been adopted, without thought, in Colombia:

One of the little boys in white gloves picked up an empty wine bottle from a table, fitted it precisely into a wine holder, and marched toward the kitchen holding it stiffly before him, glancing covertly at the maître d'hôtel for approval. It seemed to me later that I had never before seen and would perhaps never again see the residuum of European custom so movingly and pointlessly observed (197).

The third culture in Bogotá is that of the ancient world which existed before the Spanish arrival. The Gold Museum of the Banco de la República Didion visits is witness to the greed of the Spanish and the destruction of that ancient civilisation. By focusing on the three separate cultures, which at different points in history have all dominated Colombia, Didion asserts that Bogotá has no history or sense of continuation because the domination by a series of disconnected cultures has not allowed a connection to be made from one generation to the next. Didion's misunderstanding of the salt cathedral at Zipaquirá can be explained by her confusion at the degree of separation between the three dominant cultures in Bogotá. The massive cathedral is carved into the salt mountain, 450 feet below the surface, and gives the appearance of being centuries old. Didion assumes the structure to be ancient and to have been built by the Chibcha Indians. In fact, much to Didion's surprise, she learns that the cathedral was not the site where the conquistador

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35 "Parecer" has many more meanings than simply "to look like". Its first meanings are "to seem" or "to look". It can also mean "to appear". There is no evidence in Didion's writings that she has more than a rudimentary fluency in Spanish.
priests indoctrinated the Indians because it was only constructed in 1954 during La Violencia. It is a symbol of yet another brutal ideology stamped into Colombian history. Didion cannot understand the timing of the construction. She views it from a North American perspective, failing to understand the reasoning behind the building of the cathedral:

In 1954 people were fleeing the terrorized countryside to squat in shacks in the comparative safety of Bogotá. In 1954 Colombia still had few public works projects, no transportation to speak of: Bogotá would not be connected by rail with the Caribbean until 1961. As I stood in the dim mountain reading the Banco de la República's dedicatory plaque, 1954 seemed to me an extraordinary year to have hit on the notion of building a cathedral of salt, but the Colombians to whom I mentioned it only shrugged (196).

Didion's failure to understand the timing epitomises the gap between the Colombia she sees and the one she imagines. Didion fails to register that, as a Catholic country, the building of a cathedral in Colombia carries potential political propaganda. She also overlooks the fact that things do not happen in Colombia with the same logic that might be applied in North America. She cannot, in any coherent way, connect the images she has absorbed of the place and work out what they might mean. The disconnected images, a result of centuries of cultural domination, are captured from the (American) hotel: "On the fourth floor of the glossy new Bogotá Hilton one could lunch in an orchid-filled gallery that overlooked a shantytown of packing-crate and tin-can shacks where a small boy, his body hideously scarred and his face obscured by a knitted mask, played listlessly with a yo-yo"(190).

In both "Guaymas, Sonora" and "In Bogotá", Didion visits real places and, in the reporting of them, imbues them with her own perception. She creates a place which is neither wholly imagined nor wholly real but more a literary construct. "In Bogotá" shows North Americans in a Latin American city where the fragmentary nature of Colombia's violent history has allowed recent North American culture to dominate. In "Guaymas, Sonora" Latin America is seen as both a potential redeemer and destroyer. Didion takes all of these themes into her next novel and develops them more roundly.

In A Book of Common Prayer (1977) Didion invents a Central American republic which she calls Boca Grande and which, on first reading, is the physical manifestation of the moral abyss into which Charlotte Douglas, the story's protagonist, has fallen. The novel continues the theme of disintegration begun in Didion's previous novel about the Hollywood film industry, Play It As It Lays (1970). The apocalyptic vision of Californian decadence, where none of the characters has any sense of a shared history,
and where Maria Wyeth's alienation almost destroys her, is picked up again in *A Book of Common Prayer*. Charlotte Douglas has fled her life in California and travelled south to Boca Grande, leaving behind Marin, her terrorist daughter, her current husband, Leonard, and her dying ex-husband Warren Bogart. As Leonard Wilcox says: "Like Maria, Charlotte Douglas reenacts the frontier pattern of cutting clean and moving on, again with consequent crimes of betrayed family loyalties."36

Boca Grande is presented by Didion as a final frontier which, Wilcox suggests, is an extension of the West which "assumes the essential traits of California with its postapocalyptic ambience and its collapsed sense of history"(ibid). *In Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album* Didion documents the advent of the decline of California; now, by moving the action south, she shows what happens when the final frontier is crossed. Didion never explains why she moved the abyss south. She does, however, go into great detail about how she arrived at the idea of Boca Grande. Boca Grande was born out of three remembered images which Didion brought together: a hijacked Boeing 707 burning on a runway in the Middle East, the night view from her Cartagena hotel room, as already noted, and Panama airport at 6 a.m. It was this final image which gave Didion the sense of place she was looking for:

The picture that did, the picture that shimmered and made these other images coalesce, was the Panama airport at 6 A.M. I was in the airport only once, on a plane to Bogotá that stopped for an hour to refuel, but the way it looked that morning remained superimposed on everything I saw until the day I finished *A Book of Common Prayer*. I lived in that airport for several years. I can still feel the hot air when I step off the plane, can see the heat already rising off the tarmac at 6 A.M. I can feel my skirt damp and wrinkled on my legs. I can feel the asphalt stick to my sandals.37

The weather, more specifically the destructive tropical heat, is central to the impression Didion wants to convey in her portrait of Boca Grande. In her interview with Davidson, Didion explained the significance of the weather:

I worked at the faculty club in Berkeley for a month, and it was very hard to work there because I didn't have the map of Central America. Not that Boca Grande is on the map, but the map took on a real life in my mind. I mean that very narrow isthmus. One of the things that worried me about this book was that there were several kinds of weather. It took place in San Francisco, the American South, and Central America. This sounds silly, but I was afraid that the narrative wouldn't carry if the weather changed. You wouldn't walk away from the book remembering one thing. The thing I wanted you to walk away remembering was the Central American weather.38

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36 "Narrative Technique and the Theme of Historical Continuity in the Novels of Joan Didion" in Friedman: 75.
37 "Why I Write": 8. In *The Last Thing He Wanted* airports are also featured heavily.
38 Davidson interview in Friedman: 17.
Following Hemingway, Didion's insistence that the reader remember the different weather is significant because it reminds us that we are concerned with how things are on the surface. Further, Didion uses the weather to draw attention to the book's various locations. Much of the novel's action takes place outside Boca Grande, back in the United States, as Charlotte's story is told in a series of flashbacks. Charlotte's descent into degradation happens outside Boca Grande, yet critics have incorrectly concentrated their attention on Boca Grande as the only site of Charlotte's humiliation. Boca Grande is read by them as a metaphor of Charlotte's despair. This is a consequence of the narrator's relentlessly negative portrait of the place, Boca Grande. McClure is perhaps the only critic to question why Boca Grande is so negatively portrayed. He points out that Didion is not the only North American writer to have used Central America as a metaphor for North America's decline: he cites Robert Stone, Margaret Atwood and Denis Johnson as all having written novels in which women go to Central America and are, at the very least, humiliated.

Grace Strasser-Mendana, the North American narrator of Charlotte's story who has married into the ruling family, has a controlling interest in Boca Grande, but this does not prevent her from seeing the country's failings. Indeed, it is Grace who describes Boca Grande negatively throughout the book:

Boca Grande is not a land of contrasts. On the contrary Boca Grande is relentlessly "the same": the cathedral is not Spanish Colonial but corrugated aluminium. There is a local currency but the American dollar is legal tender. The politics of the country at first appear to offer contrast, involving as they do the "colorful" Latin juxtaposition of guerrilleros and colonels, but when the tanks are put away and the airport reopens nothing has actually changed in Boca Grande. There are no waterfalls of note, no ruins of interest, no chic boutiques ... to provide dramatic cultural foil to the voodoo in the hills.

In fact there is no voodoo in the hills.
In fact there are no hills, only the flat bush and the lifeless sea.

Grace, a North American, bases her description of Boca Grande's lack on the stereotyped images of Latin American countries en masse. Mary Louise Pratt criticises Didion's later Salvador for building a narrative of place on absence: "Didion seems to reject the estheticizing project of travel writing altogether. She erects nothing, paints nothing, masters nothing." This criticism might be applied to Grace's opening description of Boca Grande. Boca Grande is a non-place with no distinguishing

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39 Weather was a major concern of Hemingway as well, and he was probably the first American novelist to elevate weather to a subject in its own right.
41 A Book of Common Prayer: 11.
geographical features. Its cathedral is not a permanent reminder of opulent Spanish rule, but made out of cheap, unimpressive building material. Even the country's revolutions, which might differentiate it, are stage-managed so that they effect no change. Boca Grande's failings go deeper than the surface, however:

Boca Grande is the name of the country and Boca Grande is also the name of the city, as if the place defeated the imagination of even its first settler.... Information is missing here. Evidence goes unrecorded. Every time the sun falls on a day in Boca Grande that day appears to vanish from local memory, to be reinvented if necessary but never recalled (11).

Boca Grande is condemned because it has no written memory of itself.43 "Boca Grande has no history," the librarian tells Grace: here is the key. Didion has worried endlessly in her essays about the disjunctive quality of contemporary Californian life; her biggest fear is the realisation that there might not be a continuum. In "On Going Home"(1967) Didion considered her daughter's future and what, as a mother, she would like her daughter to have:

I would like to promise her that she will grow up with a sense of her cousins and of rivers and of her great-grandmother's teacups, would like to pledge her a picnic on a river with fried chicken and her hair uncombed, would like to give her a home for her birthday, but we live differently now and I can promise her nothing like that.44

In Boca Grande no one has bothered to record life for future generations, with the result that they will know nothing about their ancestors. It is the void which terrifies Didion.

Charlotte Douglas, however, refuses to believe that Boca Grande has no history. Instead, in a series of "Letters from Central America" which she tries unsuccessfully to sell to the New Yorker, she writes about Boca Grande as a "land of contrasts"(11). Grace dismisses Charlotte's view of her new home as romantic and wrong. However, after the degradation of Charlotte's last months in the United States, Boca Grande appears as a respite. Before she arrives in Boca Grande, Charlotte's life has fallen apart. Played out against a backdrop of rain and constant movement from California (from a Hollywood party to the desert) to the south, Charlotte moves aimlessly. When Charlotte finally leaves Leonard to go back to Warren, her first husband, she is so disorientated that she cannot remember either time or place. Time has ceased to have any meaning for Charlotte: she remembers the places Warren and she stayed, but not the time sequences:

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43 Boca Grande resembles García Márquez's fictitious Macondo where the weather, geography and politics all combine to reduce the local people to inactivity with the result that Macondo is destined to oblivion.

44 In Slouching Towards Bethlehem: 167-168.
She could remember the New Orleans airport and she could remember the Mountain Brook Country Club in Birmingham but she could not remember too much in between. There must have been about five months in between, about twenty weeks, about 140 days, simple arithmetic told her how many days.... She remembered darkened rooms with the light cracking through where the curtains were skimpy and all she could not remember was where those rooms were, or why she and Warren had been in them (131).

Charlotte learns about her movements as she reads about herself in the society pages of the newspapers. Such is the depth of her alienation that the printed word seems more authentic than reality to her and she questions whether she really is travelling with Warren and not the friends mentioned in the story:

Charlotte read another Associated Press story in which Leonard was again quoted as saying that Charlotte was "traveling with friends". This time Charlotte read the story several times and memorized the phrase. It occurred to her that possibly she had misunderstood the situation. Possibly Leonard and Warren and the Associated Press were right. She was simply traveling with friends.... Soothed by this construction Charlotte had another cup of coffee... (150).

Before Charlotte arrives in Boca Grande she has left the United States, travelled through the Caribbean and Mexico. In Mérida, Mexico, Charlotte's premature and handicapped baby daughter dies, having already lived longer than expected. Charlotte buries her, travels to Antigua, and then to the French island of Guadeloupe. She is the only guest at her hotel that year following the murder of tourists by terrorists. It rains in both places. The idea of a Caribbean tourist idyll is sabotaged not only by the weather and the lack of other tourists, but by modern tourism's greatest fears: a plane crash and ongoing terrorist activity. When Charlotte arrives in Boca Grande, it is at the end of six months of humiliating and traumatic travel. Charlotte's experiences travelling around the southern United States have been completely at odds with her North American upbringing and how she envisioned life would be for her in America:

As a child of comfortable family in the temperate zone she had been as a matter of course provided with clean sheets, orthodontia, lamb chops, living grandparents, attentive godparents, one brother named Dickie, ballet lessons.... As a child of the western United States she had been provided as well with faith in the value of certain frontiers on which her family had lived, in the virtues of cleared and irrigated land, of high-yield crops, of thrift, industry and the judicial system, of progress and education, and in the generally upward spiral of history. She was a norteamericana (46).

Critics have argued that it is Boca Grande which is at odds with Charlotte's expectations but it would seem to be her adult experience of the United States which has most betrayed her. In Boca Grande, despite its manifold failings, Charlotte regains some of the hope of her childhood and tries, however futilely, to capture some of its virtues.
Charlotte has spent much of her adult life in the United States avoiding looking back to her past: as Grace says, Charlotte is "a woman so convinced of the danger that lies in the backward glance"(85). She does try to engage her brother Dickie, in remembering their shared past, but he tells her, "That's no good for you, Char, remembering. Remembering is shit"(108). When Charlotte arrives in Boca Grande she has "lost one daughter to 'history' and another to 'complications'"(9); she has left both her husbands, and her future as a child of the West has failed to materialise. The residents of Boca Grande note that Charlotte talks "as if she had no specific history of her own"(36): they glean information about her past from the little tit-bits and throw-away comments she gives them. Charlotte tells Grace that she and Marin are inseparable, yet we never see them together. She recounts to Grace stories of mother and daughter making trips together to see the lights in the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and the Banyan Tree in Calcutta, but their veracity remains uncertain. Charlotte's second husband, Leonard Douglas, is as reasonable as her first husband is not, but she leaves Leonard to go back to Warren, whom she leaves for a second time when she can bear the humiliation of his behaviour no longer.

Having abandoned her dysfunctional family, Charlotte turns up in Boca Grande at the end of her own dark journey.45 However, critics such as Jennifer Brady see Boca Grande, rather than the United States, as sharing "the darkest traits of the original frontier: the blood betrayals, the sudden and pointless violence, and the paralysis of spiritual resignation."46 Without doubt, the ruling family of Boca Grande, the Strasser-Mendana family, is as dysfunctional as Charlotte's own family. The family is riven by jealousies, rivalries, boredom and unhappiness. The women are caricatures of bored, rich Latin Americans who look to Europe and North America as their reference points for shopping and beauty treatments. The men are relentlessly macho, with mistresses and revolutions to entertain them. However distasteful they are, however, the Strasser-Mendanas are not that dissimilar to Warren Bogart and his daughter, Marin. Warren hits Charlotte, sleeps around at will and tells her he only came to find her again so that he might "fuck" her. Marin despises her mother and has no interest in the past, as Grace discovers when she visits Marin after Charlotte's death. Marin is also a terrorist, who blows up a 747 and is on the run from the FBI. The family Charlotte leaves behind in the United States is as loosely connected to one another as the residents of Boca Grande. And Grace's comment that Charlotte "appeared to locate the marriage bed as the true topic of fever and disquiet"(67) seems perhaps more relevant than any number of descriptions

45 Charlotte's journey mirrors the dark journey which was a feature of her generation and which appealed to Didion in "On Going Home": 166
46 Brady in Friedman: 55.
of the physical horror of Boca Grande, with its golf courses which have reverted to swamp land and its freeways which go nowhere and end abruptly. Sexual passion only seems to exist outside the marriage bed: Leonard and Charlotte's marriage appears sexless next to the mutually consuming physical appetite of Warren and Charlotte. Dickie and Linda's marriage is sexless, and Grace and the late Edgar Strasser-Mendana's marriage was one of economic arrangement.

"Everything here changes and nothing appears to"(127) Grace tells us. Charlotte, once installed, appears to change quite dramatically. Charlotte's time in the United States was characterised by passivity and non-action. In Boca Grande, she discovers the North American work ethic and occupies herself by trying, however inappropriately, to help people. Charlotte tries to advise women at the birth control clinic on how to use a diaphragm, and reasons that, since she has used one successfully, they ought to be able to. She ignores the fact that diaphragms are not available at the clinic. Gerardo, Grace's son and Charlotte's lover, thinks Charlotte's behaviour ridiculous: "I think this was perhaps Gerardo's first exposure not to the norteamericana in Charlotte but to the westerner in Charlotte, the Hollister ranch child in Charlotte, the strain in Charlotte which insisted that the world was peopled with others exactly like her"(188).

Charlotte continues to assume that people are like her. Her existence prior to Boca Grande has been that of a privileged and detached woman, alienated from the world around her, who knows little of it from personal experience. Charlotte's time in San Francisco was spent in her house alone when possible to avoid people. Grace tells us repeatedly that both she and Charlotte are "de afuera". They are not simply foreigners but "norteamericanas" in Boca Grande. But Charlotte is also a foreigner in her own country. Boca Grande is where she becomes "engaged".47 In Graham Greene's The Quiet American (1955), the British foreign correspondent, Fowler, has spent his career reporting on places without allowing himself to get involved. Certain that death is the only thing in life of which he is sure, Fowler finds himself increasingly unable to stand aside and observe the destruction of Saigon and his direct involvement in events leads to the death of the American, Pyle. Charlotte's behaviour mirrors Fowler's in so far as they both find a place where they can no longer remain detached, and where the well-being of the local community becomes of concern to them. Prior to the birth-control clinic, Charlotte administered cholera injections during the epidemic until they were taken away from her by Colonel Higuera. Charlotte possesses unusual skills, such as the ability to wring a chicken's neck cleanly or to perform an emergency tracheotomy which she suddenly finds an asset. She has "found herself": "As a matter of fact Charlotte saw everything

47 To be engaged in the "existential" world means to realise the absurdity of one's position in the world but to decide to take part nevertheless.
about the actual geographical location of Boca Grande as 'real', and crucial to her: in a
certain dim way Charlotte believed that she had located herself at the very cervix of the
world, the place through which a child lost to history must eventually pass"(160).

Grace assumes that Marin is the lost child for whom Charlotte waits in Boca
Grande. Marin never comes. But Charlotte is also "lost to history" and, by coming south
to "the very cervix of the world", Charlotte discovers who she is. Despite the revolution
she will not leave. "I walked away from places all my life and I'm not going to walk away
from here"(210) Charlotte tells Leonard when he comes to rescue her. Charlotte's
earlier life has mirrored that of the hippies of whom Didion despaired in "Slouching
Towards Bethlehem". Charlotte has not been able to find her centre, her reason for
existing, and so her life has been reduced to a catalogue of sexual adventures and to
waiting. At this point in her life, Charlotte is in control for the first time and, as
Davidson says, "Charlotte finds her center in Boca Grande. She finds her life by leaving
it."48 Charlotte, by ceasing to flee, accepts that the frontier has finally closed and
thereby finds the peace which had eluded her. Didion told an interviewer: "I've never
analyzed it, but one line of poetry I always have in mind is the line from 'Four Quartets':
'at the still point of the turning world.' I tend to move toward still points. I think of the
equator as a still point. I suppose that's why I put Boca Grande on the equator."49

For Charlotte, Boca Grande, despite its apparent failings, represents a still point
and salvation. Charlotte never castigates the place as Grace does. Victor Strandberg
argues in his article, "Passion and Delusion in A Book of Common Prayer", that Grace's
role is the same as Nick Carraway's in F Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925).50
Grace and Carraway both convey the impact the mysterious stranger makes on their new
neighbourhood, and they both try to understand Charlotte and Gatsby. Just as Carraway's
attitude to Gatsby changes throughout the novel, so Grace's attitude to Charlotte waivers.
She calls Charlotte deluded at the beginning, dismisses Charlotte's attempts to write
positively about Boca Grande and watches in a state of scientific, amazed detachment as
Charlotte's behaviour becomes ever more unpredictable. What they observe transforms

48 Davidson in Friedman: 21.
49 Paris Review: 355. Didion is referring to T S Eliot's "Four Quartets". The line is
taken from Burnt Norton II: "At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is;/ But neither
arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity;/ Where past and future are gathered.
Neither movement from nor towards;/ Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point,
the still point." (In The Complete Poems and Plays of T S Eliot: 173.)
50 Strandberg notes references to F Scott Fitzgerald in "On Keeping a Notebook", "On
Self-Respect" and "I Can't Get that Monster Out of My Mind" in Slouching Towards
Bethlehem, and in The White Album in the essays, "In Hollywood", "Sojourns" and
"James Pike, American", where Didion compares Bishop Pike to Gatsby. Friedman:
147-163.
both Nick and Grace. By the end of her story, Grace is forced to concede that she has perhaps not understood Charlotte as well as she thought: "I am less and less certain that this story has been one of delusion. Unless the delusion was mine" (223). Facts have not always been reliable: "It was reported. Apparently" (224). Grace realises too late that to rely on other's accounts is foolish. Thus she concludes in the book's last line: "I have not been the witness I wanted to be" (224).

_A Book of Common Prayer_ is about finding the centre. Charlotte remains deluded, as her stint at the clinic illustrates, but in Boca Grande her delusions are irrelevant. She blocks out as much of her experience as she can, whether it is the revolutionaries sitting around her table in the apartment in the Avenida del Mar, or the bomb which explodes in the birth control clinic, killing four people. What matters is that Charlotte finds a role for herself and that she learns to stop running away. Grace finds her centre by being a witness and writing down Charlotte's history. The act of remembering saves her. Why then does the physical landscape of Boca Grande not illustrate the redemptive quality of place? Didion seems to have sent her characters south to the final stop on their journey into degradation and, in so doing, to have given the reader an allegory of despair. But Didion told Davidson that her intention was to "do a deceptive surface that appeared to be one thing and turned color as you looked through it."51 Boca Grande can be viewed as more than a hell-hole. The only descriptions of the horror of the place come from Grace, and Grace has admitted that, as a witness, she is unreliable. Charlotte, on the other hand, is optimistic about Boca Grande, be it in her letters to the _New Yorker_, or her plans for an international film festival or to open an expensive boutique. Grace remains critical of Boca Grande but stays, she tells us, because of the light: "I continue to live here only because I like the light" (16).

By the end of Charlotte's stay, Boca Grande seems to have freed itself from its cycle of pseudo-revolution. Charlotte is killed in the "October Violence", the first revolution to break free of the prescribed pattern of insurgency and to confound Grace and the other leading players to such a degree that they leave the country temporarily. Boca Grande can no longer be described as being relentlessly the same. Just as Charlotte is transformed by her experience, so is Boca Grande.

In _A Book of Common Prayer_, Charlotte spends much of her time not seeing. She is present at events but their significance does not register either because they are of no interest or because they are too painful to absorb. In Didion's next excursion into Latin America, _Salvador_, seeing is the only way of bearing testimony to the horrors of civil

51 Davidson in Friedman: 14.
war. Salvador was originally written as three articles for the New York Review of Books in October 1982. On its publication in 1983 the book was largely poorly received by the critics. McClure called it a "profoundly pernicious little book"(87) and James Dunkerley, author of Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America (1988), decided that: "It is not a political study of the country and will not appeal to specialists. At the same time, it is not a general book, as it assumes much more background information than the general reader can be expected to have."53

John Pilger argued that Didion had missed the opportunity to show how the Salvadoran people were bravely resisting the government and that Didion should have come out in favour of one side or the other. Pilger also thought that her "stylish prose" obscured her basic message.54 As already noted, Didion's technique of staying on the surface allows her to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Likewise, Pratt criticised Didion for having produced an anti-travel book since Didion has abdicated her authority:

She writes a travel book of barely a hundred pages that reads above all like an attempt to finally dismantle the genre, to crumple it under the weight of realities grown grimmer than Paul Theroux found or even wished for. In a discourse generated neither by beauty and plenitude nor by ugliness and lack, Didion seems to reject the estheticizing project of travel writing altogether.55

Pratt, whose interest is in travel narratives, ignores the fact that Salvador, despite being about a journey to El Salvador, is not about travel. Indeed, Pratt neatly summarises the circumstances of the book's production, but then dismisses them as a subject worth discussing:

An account of a trip to El Salvador motivated by the Central American political crises of the 1980s, Didion's book hinges not on the category of "underdevelopment", but on terror, a key ideological matrix of the 1980s. Didion goes to El Salvador to see terror in its officially recognized forms: state terror, paramilitary death squad terror, and terrorist insurrection (225).

Salvador was written after Didion and Dunne spent two weeks in El Salvador in 1982. One of the criticisms levelled at Didion was that she had spent insufficient time in El Salvador to comment accurately. Her husband told the New York Times Magazine:

"Joan got a big rap," Dunne says forcefully, "because she was only in El Salvador for two weeks. Two weeks is plenty of time if you know what you're looking for...." "I could have stayed in Salvador longer, and it wouldn't have done any good, Didion

52 The three segments were subtitled "In El Salvador", "In El Salvador: Soluciones" and "El Salvador: Illusions".  
55 Mary Louise Pratt: Imperial Eyes: 225.
Dunne's comments are bullish, but Didion's assertion that she could not have spent any longer in El Salvador and written the book is significant. Salvador is a book about how things appeared to her during that time and then how she was able to fit what she witnessed into what is known of El Salvador's recent past. Didion, as always, is concerned with the surface reality, with how things are seen to be and how they are made to be seen. That to concentrate on the surface might be construed as a guiding tenet of President Reagan's North American policy towards Latin America is ignored by the critics of Salvador. Didion shows us how violence manifests itself, how that violence becomes intangible fear which permeates every aspect of life in the country. And then she shows how the North American government has participated in upholding the murderous regime in El Salvador by concerning itself with how things will appear to Washington.

In 1982, El Salvador, the smallest of the Central American countries, was in the middle of its bloodiest civil war. El Salvadoran peasants had seen their land holdings diminish over the century to the point where, by 1975, 40 per cent had no land at all. Peasant rebellions such as the 1932 La Matanza had traditionally been harshly dealt with in El Salvador. By the late 1970s, Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries were openly fighting government forces and government repression was widespread and brutal. Under President Reagan, with his fear of incipient communism, United States' funding to the government forces increased dramatically and American involvement was extended to sending military "trainers" to aid government forces with their search-and-destroy missions. The role of these trainers was the same as that in Vietnam, only a decade earlier, which had caused such public outrage in the United States. The American administration had to convince its public, still shocked by the Vietnam War, that their involvement in a tiny Central American republic was crucial to the protection of the United States from the communist threat.


57 In 1960 only 12 per cent were landless. See Modern Latin America, edited by Skidmore & Smith: 326.

58 In response to the military overthrow of the idealistic President Arturo Araujo, who had promised that the Salvadoran Communist Party could take part in the municipal elections of December 1931, the peasants revolted. In the 1932 La Matanza between 10,000 and 20,000 peasants out of a national population of 1.4 million were killed in revenge for the peasants' murder of some landlords (ibid: 325).
Didion's visit to El Salvador followed the murder of four North American women (three nuns and a lay worker) in December 1980 and the elections in March 1982. The elections were a condition of continued American funding. It was only with hindsight that Didion began to understand the depth of American involvement, firstly during lunch at the American Embassy with the ambassador, Deane Hinton, which she describes in some detail towards the end of Salvador and secondly, years later, in a review she wrote for the New York Review of Books in 1994. In a review entitled "'Something Horrible' in El Salvador", Didion reviewed The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War by Mark Danner. Twelve years had elapsed since Didion was in El Salvador and, with the information that had since been made available, she was better able to understand the mechanism of American involvement. It was now clear that the government exerted control over the American press and was anxious that evidence of the El Mozote massacre in December 1981, in which 143 people died (of whom 136 were children and adolescents), be covered up. The American government tried to maintain that the evidence of skeletal remains did not constitute proof that a massacre by government forces had taken place, despite eyewitness accounts at the time to the contrary. Didion concludes her article with an outright damnation of the American government which she had initiated in Salvador:

Just six years after Vietnam and in the face of what was beginning to seem a markedly similar American engagement, Mozote, by which we have come to mean not exactly the massacre itself but this systematic obfuscation and prevarication that followed the disclosure of the massacre, was the first evidence that we had emerged a people again so yearning to accept the government version as to buy into a revision of history in which those Americans who differed, those Americans who for reasons of their "political orientation" would "fabricate" reports of a massacre carried out by a unit noted for its "humane treatment of the people," were once again our true, and only truly sinister, enemy.

The terror and fear Didion sensed in 1982 and the manifestation of that terror, which was everywhere in El Salvador at that time, reached an inevitable conclusion in the details which have since emerged. In Salvador Didion had already begun to understand how the American government was deceiving not only the American people but itself as to its role as the "redeemer nation":

That we had been drawn, both by a misapprehension of the local rhetoric and by the manipulation of our own rhetorical weaknesses, into a game we did not understand, a play of power in a political tropic alien to us, seemed apparent, and yet there we remained.... At the heart of the American effort there was something of the familiar ineffable, as if it were taking place not in El Salvador but in a mirage of El Salvador, the mirage of a society not unlike our own but "sick", a temporarily fevered republic in which the antibodies of democracy needed only to be

60 "'Something Horrible' in El Salvador": 13.
encouraged, in which words had stable meanings north and south ("election", say, and "Marxist") and in which there existed, waiting to be tapped by our support, some latent good will.61

Didion might have been talking about Vietnam. To talk of El Salvador as a "mirage" of the United States suggests the degree of self-delusion operating in Washington, where the solution to El Salvador's problems is seen to be in the application of the American version of democracy.62

There is much that happens in El Salvador which Didion does not understand; there are, however, two things which she understands clearly. The first is that she must trust what she sees, and the second is that narrative obscures: supposed facts written about El Salvador are often lies. Didion's hallmark of constraint, in restricting her comment to showing how things appear on the surface, rather than confuse the reader helps to explain what is going on in El Salvador. As Juan Corradi says:

She refuses both analysis and synthesis, she rejects abstractions and eschews conclusions. Instead, she reports on these as discursive operations performed by near and distant actors while they seek to mask, or neutralize, or routinize a truth that is everywhere in evidence but impossible to face: objective and abject, like a corpse.63

_Salvador_ is composed of a series of recorded impressions and images of how a civil war is conducted. Didion's eyes are the only reliable witness she has, and she wants us to understand the "mechanism of terror" (26). We learn about the tangible evidence of government repression: the bodies, the vultures, and what Corradi calls "the paraphernalia of terror": the death squads, their cars and weapons. In a parody of a travel narrative, Didion tells the reader what the traveller to El Salvador learns:

There is a special kind of practical information that the visitor to El Salvador acquires immediately, the way visitors to other places acquire information about the currency rates, the hours for the museums. In El Salvador one learns that vultures go first for the soft tissue, for the eyes, the exposed genitalia, the open mouth. One learns that an open mouth can be used to make a specific point, can be stuffed with something emblematic; stuffed, say, with a penis, or, if the point has to do with land title, stuffed with some of the dirt in question. One learns that hair deteriorates less rapidly than flesh, and that a skull surrounded by a perfect corona of hair is a not uncommon sight in the body dumps (17).

61_Salvador_: 96.
62 Didion's next novel, _Democracy_, published in 1984, shows what American democracy has come to mean. Against a backdrop of Hawaii and South-east Asia, Didion explores how the ambitions of an American senator and would-be president, Harry Victor, and the political intrigues which end in the fall of Saigon impact on the lives of his wife, Inez, and those most closely associated with him.
The terror which is manifested in the detail of the bodies, dumped on road sides, in ravines, at bus stations and public lavatories, becomes clear as Didion's plane comes into land at the San Salvador airport. Just as a tourist industry had been envisaged for Boca Grande, and a tourist infrastructure started and then abandoned, so El Salvador's leaders had planned to create a tourist industry. In a country so poor that "the leading natural cause of death is gastrointestinal infection"(13), Didion brands the idea of a luxury tourist destination a hallucination. And she tells us: "In the general absence of tourists these hotels have since been abandoned, ghost resorts on the empty Pacific beaches, and to land at this airport built to service them is to plunge directly into a state in which no ground is solid, no depth of field reliable, no perception so definite that it might not dissolve into its reverse"(13).

Didion resorts to her reporter's instinct: to trust what she sees and hears. It tells her that people are being murdered continually, that thousands have been "disappeared" and that the Americans say they are fighting for freedom. At her lunch with the American ambassador Didion notes the incongruity of the elegant tableware and the peaceful garden when she knows that beyond its walls murder continues. For a moment she is almost taken in:

The sheep dog and the crystal and the American eagle together had on me a certain anesthetic effect, temporarily deadening that receptivity to the sinister that afflicts everyone in Salvador, and I experienced for a moment the official American delusion, the illusion of plausibility, the sense that the American undertaking in El Salvador might turn out to be, from the right angle, in the right light, just another difficult but possible mission in another troubled but possible country (87-88).

Thinking about the situation and the lunch still further, Didion suddenly realises that what she has witnessed in El Salvador is America's concern with the surface:

It was not until late in the lunch, at a point between the salad and the profiteroles, that it occurred to me that we were talking exclusively about the appearances of things, about how the situation might be made to look better, about trying to get the Salvadoran government to "appear" to do what the American government needed done in order to make it "appear" that the American aid was justified (93).

Contrary to the critics' condemnation, Didion's stylistic device of using the surface to speak for itself, by careful juxtaposition and organisation, effects a more direct and brutal criticism of the American policy in El Salvador than if she had spelt out her disgust.64 Didion's technique is highly contrived because she realises that it is only by describing as many different scenes as possible that the reader might understand "the exact mechanism of terror"(21). Her description of the Nahuizalco Indian folk dance is

64 Her review "'Something Horrible' in El Salvador", while informative, does not carry the same weight as Salvador for this very reason.
significant because she captures the cruel irony of the Indians' position. Government policy in the country had meant the systematic extermination of the indigenous population. To wear Indian dress or speak Nahuatl, the Indian language, was to risk being killed, especially during the 1932 Matanza. Fifty years later, the Indians of Nahuizalco, overseen by armed guardia, gathered in their plaza to perform at the opening of the sixth annual Feria Artesanal de Nahuizalco. This event was sponsored by the Casa de la Cultura programme of the Ministry of Education to encourage indigenous culture. Didion captures the pathetic irony of the event:

The provenance of the dances was more complicated. They were Indian, but they were less remembered than recreated, and as such derived not from local culture but from a learned idea of local culture, an official imposition made particularly ugly by the cultural impotence of the participants. The women, awkward and uncomfortable in an approximation of native costume, moved with difficulty into the dusty street and performed a listless and unpracticed dance with baskets. Whatever men could be found (mainly little boys and old men, since those young men still alive in places like Nahuizalco try not to be noticed) had been dressed in "warrior" costume: headdresses of crinkled foil, swords of cardboard and wood. Their hair was lank, their walk furtive. Some of them wore sunglasses. The others averted their eyes. Their role in the fair involved stamping and lunging and brandishing their cardboard weapons, a display of warrior machismo, and the extent to which each of them had been unmanned - unmanned not only by history but by a factor less abstract, unmanned by the real weapons in the schoolyard, by the G-3 assault rifles with which the guardia played while they drank their beer with the Queen of the Fair - rendered this display deeply obscene (75-76).

It is the forced loss of heritage which Didion finds most offensive and cruel. The systematic destruction of a people's culture and then its forced resurrection epitomises the brutality of the El Salvadoran regime. The dance is a metaphor for the situation in the country, where the impression an event conveys matters and where the actual meaning of an action is obfuscated in any number of ways. The dance is supposed to represent the ancient culture of the Indians but it is actually a proof of their continued repression by government forces and shows that "facts" can be interpreted in different ways. Didion cannot rely on the facts she is given to explain the situation in El Salvador. In all Didion's journalism she weighs facts heavily: they authenticate her argument or illuminate a point where necessary.65 But in a country where "no ground is solid", Didion cannot rely on the figures which the Salvadoran or American governments give out. Her assessment of the sums involved in the election on March 28 reveals ballot rigging at the very least:

There were said to be 1.3 million people eligible to vote on March 28, but 1.5 million people were said to have voted. These 1.5 million people were said, in turn,

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65 In an essay such as "Sentimental Journeys", for example, Didion weights the text with facts and figures and details to show how the Central Park rape was symptomatic of the general degeneration of New York City.
to represent not 115 percent of the 1.3 million eligible voters but 80 percent ... of
the eligible voters, who accordingly no longer numbered 1.3 million, but a larger
number. In any case no one really knew how many eligible voters there were in El
Salvador, or even how many people. In any case it had seemed necessary to provide
a number. In any case the election was over, a success, *la solución pacífica* (62).

Number-fiddling is only one of the many crimes of the El Salvadoran regime. In El
Salvador, Didion learns that language can be used to deceive and, as a writer, it helps her
to understand the depths of danger. Chris Anderson suggests that Didion's "essays do not
illustrate a 'ready-made truth'", but rather "tell the story of the making of the
truth".66 In *Salvador*, Didion is in pursuit of "la verdad". But she soon realises that, in a
country where the language of rhetoric bears closer resemblance to advertising jingles
than the truth, and where the United States is compliant in the deceit, "la verdad" will be
impossible to come by:

Language as it is now used in El Salvador is the language of advertising, of
persuasion, the product being one or another of the soluciones crafted in
Washington or Panama or Mexico, which is part of the place's pervasive obscenity.
This language is shared by Salvadorans and Americans, as if a linguistic deal had
been cut (65).

On her first night in San Salvador, Didion is asked by a Salvadoran woman at an
embassy party what she hopes to find in El Salvador. When the woman approves of
Didion's response "la verdad", Didion realises that she has stumbled upon a coded
language where one person's truth is another's lie and where language is propaganda.
Lynne Hanley draws parallels between how El Salvador is created by its language and
Charlotte's attempts to create Boca Grande on a blank page.67 Grace criticises Charlotte's
sentence structure, adding: "It occurred to me that I had never before had so graphic an
illustration of how the consciousness of the human organism is carried in its
grammar"(191). Likewise, in El Salvador language is used not to clarify but to obscure.
When Didion cannot find out whether the colonel she has gone to interview in San
Francisco Gotera had been killed in the helicopter crash, she concludes, "the crash of
this particular helicopter became, like everything else in Salvador, an occasion of
rumor, doubt, suspicion, conflicting reports, and finally a kind of listless
uneasiness"(68).

In El Salvador, language is the means by which actual events are turned not into
truthful accounts but into fiction. Didion's study is a study in fear precisely because all
the reliable markers of a civilisation are systematically removed. Where reports are
allowed to be made of deaths, they are used by the government propaganda machine to

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justify its actions. Despite Didion's evolving distrust of narrative, what she finds even more sinister is when deaths are not recorded because then they do not exist. The choice in El Salvador is between textual distortion or oblivion. Hanley considers that, for the reader coming to Salvador after A Book of Common Prayer, "the effect of an awakening not from but into terror, of a shocking encounter with the actual in the apparently fictitious, is intensified by the repeated discovery that the fictions of Boca Grande are the facts, even the facts 'improved' of El Salvador" (182).

This mixing of fact and fiction in the two books is taken still further, as Hanley points out. The coloured lights in Boca Grande, which remind Charlotte of the Tivoli Gardens, are taken by Didion from the history of El Salvador. In Salvador Didion repeats an anecdote she found in the Area Handbook of El Salvador. The dictator, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, devised a bizarre way to stop an epidemic: "During an epidemic of smallpox in the capital, he attempted to halt its spread by stringing the city with a web of colored lights" (54). So eccentric is this detail that yet another blurring of fact and fiction takes place. The history of El Salvador assumes a fictive quality which Didion illuminates and magnifies by her literary references. Just as Warren quoted poets including, W H Auden and Alexander Pope in A Book of Common Prayer, and "In Bogotá" was built around literary references, so Didion turns Salvador into a literary experience. The book's lengthy epigraph is from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902). As Hanley says, Didion's "exploration of El Salvador has its literary analogue in Conrad's exploration of the Congo" (182). Hanley claims that, whereas Conrad, when confronted by the horrors of which Kurtz and the white man are capable, turns his language into that of abstraction, Didion does the reverse. Didion gives detail to the most unspeakable crimes which, Hanley concludes, focuses the reader's attention on the horrors they are witnessing. By quoting Heart of Darkness, Didion further sets the context within which she wants her account to be judged.69

Through literature, Didion is able to consider further what is true and what is not. She quotes from Theroux's The Old Patagonian Express (1979), in which he has little to report on the time he spent in San Salvador except to describe a soccer match he watched between El Salvador and Mexico. Yet what Theroux does say strikes Didion as extraordinary, given the historical context of El Salvador and with the benefit of historical hindsight. At the time of Theroux's visit El Salvador was in the throes of its civil war. Theroux casually mentions giving a lecture at the university, a university

68 He was also responsible for La Matanza.
69 Heart of Darkness stands as an indictment of the colonialist expansion which dominated most of the nineteenth century. Kurtz embodies all that was wrong with the white European expansionists who destroyed Africa, and Conrad sees the white man's behaviour in Africa to be a symbol of the failure of Europe.
which the government forces hardly allowed to open during that period:

I had nothing more to do in San Salvador. I had given a lecture on the topic that had occurred to me on the train to Tapachula: Little known Books by Famous American Authors - *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, *The Devil's Dictionary*, *The Wild Palms*. I had looked at the university (and no one could explain why there was a mural, in the university of this right-wing dictatorship, of Marx, Engels and Lenin) (159).

Theroux's nonchalant comments reveal nothing about what was happening on the ground. In contrast, the work of García Márquez strikes Didion as more fact than fiction. She compares García Márquez's fictitious General Rodrigo de Aguilar, in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1983), with General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and comments, "I began to see Gabriel García Márquez in a new light, as a social realist" (59). Such was the uncertainty in El Salvador at that time that its revolutionary poet, Roque Dalton, was murdered not by the opposition, but by his own side. Didion's trip to El Salvador is the realisation of the literary journey into darkness which had fascinated her in the 1960s. Having made that journey, she now realises that America is not the redeemer nation. Instead, America has debased itself and disgraced itself in the pursuit of a democratic ideal Didion realises never existed. America's duplicity haunts her and she continues to study it in *Democracy* (1984) and, most acutely, in *The Last Thing He Wanted*.

*The Last Thing He Wanted*, published in 1996, refers back to events in 1984, more specifically to the events surrounding the Iran-Contra scandal: the supply of illegally obtained weapons from Iran by the Americans to the Nicaraguan government Contra forces. The story is told by a non-omniscient narrator whom Didion uses to introduce a new stylistic technique which crystallises all her earlier thoughts on the unreliability of the written word and the ease with which language obfuscates meaning. It is a novel in which things happen with no explanation, where the narrator is piecing together the story simultaneously with the reader. The only things we are ever certain of are the weather and how Elena McMahon is dressed; the rest is "unconfirmable".

To this end, Didion sets much of the novel's action in an unnamed Caribbean island. The story is of Elena McMahon, a Californian, working as a Washington stringer during the 1984 American presidential campaign, who quits reporting when she can no longer bear to be part of the aggressive media circus which, she feels, is complicit in the government propaganda machine. She then, in order to help her sick father, takes over the organisation of his final business deal and travels south. What Elena is actually doing is smuggling arms, unbeknownst to her, and she ends up being the target of American covert activity which costs her life. The novel contains many of the elements seen in

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70 *El otoño del patriarca* was published in 1975.
Didion's earlier fiction: a glamorous, neurotic woman who, having left her husband, daughter and an affluent home, is struggling to keep her sanity before she unexpectedly embarks on a new undertaking somewhere tropical. Where Democracy was about the public world of Harry Victor and the private world of Inez Victor colliding, this book is about the impact of clandestine American action on Elena's life. For the book's historical setting, Didion swopped the aftermath of Vietnam in Democracy for the Reagan administration's cynical abuse of its position. It is now known that the administration supplied arms to the Nicaraguan government Contra forces which it had obtained from Iran, a country on which the United States had officially imposed a total trade blockade.

The political backdrop of the novel is outrageous enough to be fiction. As Elizabeth Hardwick says: "If you can believe that Robert 'Bud' McFarlane, Reagan's national security adviser, could fly off to Iran, carrying with him a cake and a Bible in order to make a deal for the shipment of arms to the Contras, you can believe the less bizarre happenings in The Last Thing He Wanted...."71 Despite its Central American setting, the true subject of this novel, as in all Didion's works on Latin America, is North America. Didion has become increasingly politicised in her novels and her non-fiction. Her latest collection of essays, Sentimental Journeys, is about "the political" in Washington, California and New York. The essays are not about political life but, more precisely, how life has increasingly become political. Miami (1987) is Didion's study of the clash of political ideology between the whites of southern Florida and the immigrants from post-revolutionary Cuba. In an interview on the publication of The Last Thing He Wanted, Didion acknowledged that she has moved away from the purely personal: "I don't miss writing personal essays. I've sometimes wondered if the kind of piece I once did was a response to a cultural expectation."72 Didion's message, however, remains the same: by concentrating on the political, she is still the moralist who, as Hardwick suggests, does not think that the West was won so that future American administrations could lie to and cheat their people.

In The Last Thing He Wanted the identity of the island is not revealed. To do so would be to introduce topics to the reader other than the political and that is not the narrator's intention. By naming the island the narrator risks distracting the reader, as she explains:

You will have noticed that I am not giving you the name of this island.
This is deliberate, a decision on my part, and not a decision (other writers have in fact named the island, for example, the authors of the Rand study) based on

72 Interview with Linda Hall in New York Magazine: 33 (September 2, 1996).
classification.

The name would get in the way.

If you knew the name you might recall days or nights spent on this island en route to or in lieu of more desirable islands, the metallic taste of tinned juice in rum punches, the mosquitoes under the net at night, the rented villa where the septic tank backed up, the unpleasantness over the Jet Ski misunderstanding....

The determined resistance to gravity, the uneasy reduction of the postcolonial dilemma to the Jet Ski misunderstanding.

The guilty pleasure of buckling in and clearing the ground and knowing that you will step off this plane in the developed world.

.... You did not during your sojourns on this island, want to know its history.... You did not, if you had planned well, have reason to frequent its major city.... You had no need to venture beyond the rust-stained but still daunting ... facade of our embassy there. Had you discovered such need ... you would have found it a larger embassy than extant American interests on the island would seem to require, a relic of the period when Washington had been gripped by the notion that the emergence of independent nations on single-crop islands with annual per capita incomes in three digits offered the exact optimum conditions under which private capital could be siphoned off the Asian rim and into *mare nostrum* (89-90).

It is worth quoting the above passage at such length because it contains many of Didion's preoccupations. Didion has visited islands as a tourist. She understands that one views holiday destinations very differently from sites of political intrigue. On holiday one is concerned with mosquitoes, food, drink and cultural sights which do not involve much effort. History matters only in so far as it provides sites worth visiting with a handbook. The world that belongs to covert government activity is, by necessity, a place of deception and facades behind which the real business is hidden. The difference between these two is in the expectation of the visitor. To name the island would blur the two. Elena might try and appear to be a tourist but those watching her are not fooled. Elena, as Charlotte had done in *A Book of Common Prayer*, sets up a routine for herself, in the guise of an American tourist, while she awaits instruction. Elena's days are spent watching CNN in her hotel room, walking, shopping and reading by the pool. She studies the same items each day in the shops and reads the same books in a parody of the tourist abroad. But the world onto which Elena tries to impose order is increasingly chaotic and absurd, as the disappearance of her passport symbolises.

Elena is holed up in an hotel room in San Jose, Costa Rica, when she receives notice of her next move. When the concierge returns her passport, Elena discovers it has been replaced with a new one which, while bearing her photograph, is issued in the name of Elise Meyer. That Elena travels with the false passport to a place she had not planned to go shows how her life is beyond her control. That Elena is able to fly to the island and gain entry on a false passport suggests the control of powerful outside forces. That the American embassy admits to having no record of a passport having been issued in the name of Elise Meyer means that Elena exists in a twilight world where she has "no
history", and where she is a pawn in a much larger game. Elena is condemned not because she becomes an arm dealer, which she does out of filial obligation, but by her lack of history. Once the external forces have reinvented her as Elise Meyer, Elena becomes a non-person whose only possible chance of salvation lies with the trouble-shooting ambassador-at-large, Treat Morrison.

Didion does not want us to know the name of the island but she peppers her text with references to the political situation of the region which date back to before the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Elena's father, Dick McMahon, reminisces about his time in Cuba in the late 1950s with, among others, Fidel Castro: "The Floridita in Havana, he would specify each time. Havana was the Floridita your mother and I knew, goddam but we had some fun there..."(35). History and the past are fun for Dick to remember, but for Elena remembering the life she walked out on is more problematic. It is equally hard for the non-omniscient narrator, an acquaintance of Elena's in California, who has difficulty looking back from 1994, when she decided to tell Elena's story, to 1984. The narrator's decision to tell Elena's story is made more difficult because of the deliberate obfuscation of the key details at that time. The narrator tells us why it was so difficult to accurately remember those days: "It is hard now to call up the particular luridity of 1984. I read back over the clips and want only to give you the period verbatim, the fever of it, the counterfeit machismo of it, the extent to which it was about striking and maintaining a certain kind of sentimental pose"(54).

This is the clearest example Didion gives us of the surface being clouded, primarily by the government, in order that another story might appear. The American government's behaviour in the novel echoes its response to the 1981 massacre in El Mozote in El Salvador. The publication of the report on the massacre also marked the time when Didion began to understand how much a government will distort and lie for its own benefit. How can the narrator tell Elena's story truthfully if the facts she needs to tell the story have been obscured by her own government? Didion uses the narrator's inability to give the details of time and place, because everything is subject to official denial, to show how she (Didion) has come to mistrust time and place, the traditional bulwarks of fiction. John Weir, in his review of The Last Thing He Wanted in the New Yorker, summarises Didion's position:

Ernest Hemingway once said that he wanted to write so that you knew on every page what time it was and where the characters were. In Didion's journalism, the sense of time and place is so acute that it's impossible to get off an airplane in any of the cities she has written about - especially New York, Los Angeles, or Miami - without wondering if the flush of nostalgia you feel is for something you've done
there or for something you've read about Didion doing. In her fiction, however, she's increasingly suspicious of place, and worried that time, like history, is impossible to fix. Things like climate and accessories seem more reliable. You don't always know where Elena is or why, but you do know how hot it is and what she's wearing.73

Didion concentrates on surface details, such as the weather, of which she is certain. We learn that Elena arrives in what she assumes is Costa Rica wearing a black shift dress and a cap with the letters NBC SPORTS on it. We know how she is dressed, but neither she nor the reader is entirely sure that she is in Costa Rica. Instead, we are told, "This should be Costa Rica"(79). In the concrete hut by the airstrip Elena sees a map of Costa Rica on the wall, "reinforcing the impression that this was Costa Rica but offering no clue as to where in Costa Rica"(83). In The Last Thing He Wanted, Didion takes the reader one step further on from A Book of Common Prayer. In the earlier work we learnt how things appeared; now Didion's concern is for how things are made to appear. Elena is purposefully kept in the dark about where she is, and this helps add to the conspiratorial mood of the book. But it also reinforces the idea that we might be anywhere where America is involved in covert deals, and that this "anywhere" covers much of the earth's surface. By Didion's not naming the island she makes the specific become the general. She also tells us that place is not the key to this story: American involvement in illegal and underhand practices is.

As Hardwick says: "Elena McMahon is a fiction as an unwitting conveyor of illegal arms to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, but we are to remember the actual players."74 Interwoven with the fictitious Elena are references to those who were involved in real life. Didion lists congressional reports about the events, written in 1987, which prove "the principle that self-perpetuation depended on the ability not to elucidate but to obscure"(169). The narrator, closing Elena's story, asks Mark Berquist, now a United States senator but then a senior foreign policy aide, to explain what had happened in 1984. He not only denies any American involvement with the re-supplying of arms to the Contras, but questions the terms used by the narrator in spite of evidence of both American involvement and the existence of the Contras:


By weaving real government reports with her fictional characters, Didion reminds

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us that the sinister dealings in her novel actually took place. At the start of the novel, characters are named who were, "all swimming together in the glare off the C-123 that fell from the sky into Nicaragua"(9). Despite the mounds of congressional reports and published transcripts of the select committee hearings, much remains uncertain and unknowable because of the manner in which the American government conducted itself "on the far frontiers of the Monroe Document"(10). The narrator concludes that what she is trying to do is reconstruct recent history: "You could call this a reconstruction. A corrective, if you will, to the Rand study. A revisionist view of a time and a place and an incident about which, ultimately, most people preferred not to know. Real world"(13).

What the narrator/Didion gives the reader is an oblique view of history in which the sensory impressions dominate. This is the narrator's memory of an account of a political meeting:

I remembered a piece by J Anthony Lukas in the New York Times about a conference, sponsored by the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, at which eight members of the Kennedy administration gathered at an old resort hotel in the Florida Keys to reassess the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

The hotel was pink.

There was a winter storm off the Caribbean (225).

Didion is being ironic - the officials were not allowed to know any more - but the recollection neatly captures Didion's interest in the surface reality and what is knowable. Elena has had nothing to attach herself to beyond the surface, as she travelled south, hence her inability to prevent her collapse. Wayne Koestenbaum argues that The Last Thing He Wanted has as its theme the disintegration of self. Elena's lack of a permanent address and living in different hotels symbolises the break-up of her life. Koestenbaum refers us back to the novel's opening and suggests a name for this hotel sensibility: "Weightlessness seemed at the time the safer mode. Weightlessness seemed at the time the mode in which we could beat both the clock and the affect itself"(3). In Miami Didion also experiences the same sensation whenever she travels to Miami:

I never passed through security for a flight to Miami without experiencing a certain weightlessness, the heightened wariness of having left the developed world for a more fluid atmosphere, one in which the native distrust of extreme possibilities that tended to ground the temperate United States in an obeisance to democratic institutions seemed rooted, if at all, only shallowly (23).

Once she heads south, Elena's weightlessness (or disintegration of self) is

75 In Miami Didion refers to the incident of the crashed Southern Air Transport C-123K in some detail. The plane was the first evidence that America was involved in Nicaragua. The crash happened two days after Ronald Reagan's first inauguration in January 1981. See Miami: 150.

augmented by going to an unnamed place with a bogus passport. To history she has ceased to exist and, once again, we are in the realm of fear. This time, however, fear is caused by the American governmental forces, whose duplicitous manipulation of Elena encourages the appearance that Elena is supplying weapons to the Sandinistas. The unnamed island exacerbates the feeling of fear and uncertainty, and does not allow the reader to be distracted from the characters' behaviour. Significantly, none of the main players in the novel is non-American. Instead, Didion has transported North Americans south and shown to what degradation many of them have sunk.

In all Didion's works considered so far, the behaviour of Americans on non-American soil has been one of her major themes. Her writings have ranged from named places to a fictitious location and, finally, an unnamed island. In Miami (1987) Latin America moved from the backyard into the house. Ostensibly Didion's book-length report on Miami documents the impact of the Cubans' arrival on the city since the Castro Revolution of 1959. However, its true concern is the Washington/Miami power struggle and, by extension, that between the United States and Cuba.

Miami is the only American city Didion writes about at such length. Her essays on cities such as New York and Los Angeles, and to a lesser degree, Honolulu, never approach book length and, although increasingly political, cover any number of city topics and interests. The book's form is unique in Didion's repertoire: Miami contains both an index and detailed notes. Originally published as a series of three articles in the New York Review of Books, Miami was expanded by Didion from the articles into a book. Where Salvador had the distinction of being criticised by virtually every reviewer, so Miami had that of being virtually ignored by scholars. Of the few critics to look at Miami, Sandra K. Hinchman, notes that the book was greeted with "bewilderment or even embarrassment". Mark Winchell criticised the book as "cut-rate Henry James", and Didion for failing to sustain her "elegant, precise, witty and cadenced language".

However uneven Miami is as a narrative, it is a detailed portrait of how America

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77 Didion has covered subjects such as the Charles Manson murders in Hollywood, orchid growing and hotels in Honolulu.
78 The articles were published June 11, 25 and July 16, 1987. (Vol: 34:10,11,12).
79 Sandra K. Hinchman: "Didion's Political Tropics: Miami and the Basis for Community". Hinchman says that: "Commentators were often offended by what they regarded as a nativist streak in Didion's thinking, by her tendency to paint Dade County's Cubans in overly broad strokes, by her willingness to lend credence to conspiracy theories, and by the 'Death in Venice' quality of her dichotomy between the sober, rational, but dull temperate zone versus the sensuous, chaotic tropics." Felton: 234.
80 Mark Winchell: Joan Didion: Revised Edition: 120.
has become increasingly fractured as ethnic groups fail to interact. Didion characterises
the city as: "a sense of crossed purposes, crossed wires, of cultures not exactly colliding
but glancing off one another, at unpromising angles" (104). The Cuban immigrants are
in the majority (56 per cent) in Miami and yet the Anglos in the city treat them as an
invisible presence, whilst the black minority is virtually ignored, at the city's peril.
The book is more proof of Didion's politicisation: it serves as a warning of what might
happen to the whole country if it allows itself to splinter apart as Miami has done. The
city is yet more proof that "the center was not holding". Didion resumes the argument
first mooted in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" twenty years earlier on the other side of
the country.

Didion's book is a series of narratives, stories of people who have made Miami
their home after leaving Cuba. What is common to all of them is the idea that Miami is
only a temporary staging post until they can return to Cuba. While they remain in Miami
they maintain their customs and cultural heritage, much to the disgust of the Anglo
minority. Didion gives numerous examples of how the Cubans are rendered a non-
presence by the Miami Anglos. Despite their evident business success, no Cubans feature
on the list "The Most Influential People in Dade's History". The arrival of the Cubans is,
however, included on another list, "The Most Important Events in Dade's History", in
much the same way a hurricane or the opening of the new airport is mentioned.81 Cuban
cuisine is conspicuously absent from the cookery pages of the Miami Herald; the Cubans
are even criticized for speaking Spanish:

This set of mind, in which the local Cuban community was seen as a civic challenge
determinedly met, was not uncommon among Anglos to whom I talked in Miami,
many of whom persisted in the related illusions that the city was small,
mangeable, prosperous in a predictable broad-based way, southern in a
progressive sunbelt way, American, and belonged to them (51).

The Anglos enjoy the more "colourful" aspects of Cuban culture such as the
"quince", but have no interest in Cuban history or culture in the broader sense.82
Instead, they prefer to reduce centuries of cultural development to manageable
stereotypes:

... the list was also a fantasy, and a particularly gringo fantasy, one in which Miami
Cubans, who came from a culture which had represented western civilization in
this hemisphere since before there was a United States of America, appeared
exclusively as vendors of plantains, their native music "pulsing" behind them. There was in any such view of Miami Cubans an extraordinary element of
condescension, and it was the very condescension shared by Miami Anglos, who

81 The lists appeared in the Miami Herald on February 3, 1986.
82 The "quince" is the coming-of-age celebration for Latin American girls when they
turn fifteen.
were inclined to reduce the particular liveliness and sophistication of local Cuban life to a matter of shrines on the lawn and love potions in the botánicas, the primitive exotica of the tourist's Caribbean (61).83

The attitude of Washington towards the Cuban immigrants is similarly condescending. The American government has taken the Cubans' exile and used it for their own propaganda. When it suits the American administration, the Cubans are portrayed as brave refugees from Castro's communist dictatorship. At other times, they are seen as terrorists and held responsible by the American government for numerous acts of terrorism:

This was not, then, the general exile complaint about a government which might have taken up their struggle but had not. This was something more specific, a complaint that the government in question had in fact taken up la lucha, but for its own purposes, and, in what these exiles saw as a pattern of deceit stretching back through six administrations, to its own ends. The pattern as they saw it, was one in which the government of the United States had repeatedly encouraged or supported exile action and then, when policy shifted and such action became an embarrassment, a discordant note in whatever message Washington was sending that month or that year, had discarded the exiles involved, had sometimes not only discarded them but, since the nature of la lucha was essentially illegal, turned them in, set them up for prosecution; positioned them, as it were, for a fall (161).

The result of both the American administration's and the white residents' attitude to the Cuban immigrants is to isolate them and reconfirm their status as non-Americans. Yet the contradiction at the heart of the city is that Miami is more Latin American than it is Anglo-Saxon. Didion litters her text with references to Latin America and its tropical qualities. The tropical is implied as a negative quality: "A tropical entropy seemed to prevail, defeating grand schemes even as they were realized"(27). Miami strikes her as a particularly Hispanic town which looks south rather than north, where people read news in the Colombian newspaper, El Tiempo, rather than the Miami Herald or the New York Times. Miami could, under different circumstances, be a perfect marriage of two cultures where "any possibility could and would be accommodated"(33). Instead, Miami becomes a dichotomous construct: it has the appearance and behaviour of a Latin American city but this fact is denied by revisionist Miami Anglos, who ignore the evidence of their eyes and refuse to acknowledge or accommodate the Hispanisation of the city. The white minority's refusal to acknowledge the facts is seen by Didion as a fatal flaw which shows the degeneration of the United States, a country founded by immigrants. Miami is concerned not with the Cubans' arrival but with the American response.

What scares Didion further is that the Miami Cubans, and by extension all of

83 Both these quotations come from the 1987 edition of Miami.
Central America, are seen by the Reagan administration, in 1987, to be an "issue" to be used as a political pawn as and when required. She understands the bitterness of the Cuban exiles who realise that they have been used by the American government when it suits them:

Let me tell you about Cuban terrorists, another of the exiles at dinner that night, a prominent Miami architect named Raúl Rodríguez, was saying at the end of the table. Cuba never grew plastique. Cuba grew tobacco. Cuba grew sugarcane. Cuba never grew C-4... C-4, Raúl Rodríguez said, and he slammed his palm down on the white tablecloth as he said it, grew here (163).

The American government has moved its covert operations north into its own territory in a cynical play for popularity among the country's electorate. It has allowed the exiles to take the blame for crimes they have not committed, just as Elena McMahon is set up by the government in *The Last Thing He Wanted*. *Miami* is an earlier study of how American government works:

...the government of the United States was in this view one for which other parts of the world, in this instance Central America, existed only as "issues". In some seasons, during some administrations and in the course of some campaigns, Central America had seemed a useful issue, one to which "focus" and "attention" could profitably be drawn. In other seasons it had seemed a "negative" issue, one which failed to meet, for whatever reason, the test of "looking good".

In all seasons, however, it remained a potentially valuable asset in this business of the art of the possible, and not just an ordinary special-interest, domestic asset, but a national security card, a jeopardy chip, a marker that carried with it the glamour of possible military action, the ultimate interesting setting (179).

Didion's interest in Latin America can be said to be rooted in her examination of how the United States has used the region. The significance of *Miami* is that by 1987 Didion is beginning to understand how this manipulation has happened. By concentrating on Miami, with its close physical and cultural proximity to Havana, Didion shows how the American government is ready to manipulate its own people for its own ends. Her depiction of the tension between the Cubans and the Anglos symbolises the inherent imbalance of the relationship America shares with its southern neighbours. Miami exists as a bridge between the two worlds both within the city and within the continent: "Many Havana epilogues have been played in Florida, and some prologues. Florida is that part of the Cuban stage where declamatory exits are made, and side deals. Florida is where the chorus waits to comment on the action and sometimes to join it"(12).

Occupying a unique position, which is not shared by other American cities such as Los Angeles despite its high Hispanic population, Miami's separation from the rest of the United States is emphasised by Didion. Thus, Miami is "not exactly an American city as American cities have until recently been understood but a tropical capital"(13-14). But
Miami, in 1987, also has much in common with the rest of the United States. Much of the city is a wasteland: full of unoccupied, prestige office space, houses which resemble fortresses, empty luxury hotels and a public metrorail service which nobody uses. The racial tension between Hispanic, white and black is repeated all over the United States. Indeed, Didion’s account of the brutal beating up by white police officers, of a black motorcyclist, Arthur McDuffie, his subsequent death, their acquittal for his murder which sparked riots, prefigures the 1993 Rodney King incident in Los Angeles. Drug-dealing is endemic in the United States. Perhaps gun-running is more particular to Miami than Denver, for example, but there are as many parallels between Miami and the northern cities as between it and the south. Yet Didion concentrates on the southern connection.

The distinguishing feature of Miami, apart from the leitmotif of the weather, is that the city is the embodiment of an illusion and deception for which the American government is responsible and which proves that the centre has not held. Miami is a complicated text because Didion is trying to convey a sense of the multitude of Miamis she finds, which are often at odds with each other. She stresses the tropical quality of the city, where the heat and humidity can deaden ambition, yet she narrates numerous biographies which contradict this. Many of the Cuban exiles have been very successful in business. Didion recognises, all too readily, that Miami as a city means entirely different things to each ethnic community. But perhaps her most damning suggestion is that Miami exists as a satellite of the Washington power brokers who, because of the city’s geographical position, use it as a staging post for incursions to Latin America. As such, it fulfils the image it gives out to the rest of the world as being more connected to the south than the north. Miami demonstrates how Latin and North America have finally merged. The city is an invention and Didion highlights this with her metaphor of Florida as a stage set, which runs throughout the book. Since the country is governed by an ex-actor, Ronald Reagan, the metaphor is all the more appropriate. Washington, we learn, conducts its business with the evening news in mind: "Almost everything we do is determined by whether we think it will get on the network news shows in the evening"(174). Didion includes many references to the theatre: to Greek tragedy, an Aristotelian end, to characters taking centre stage, or waiting in the wings. In doing so, she shows that Miami has ceased to exist as a city but has become a theatre stage on which others’ parts are played.

Miami illustrates the gulf which has been created between the narrative of a city and the actual, lived experience of that same place. The link between the Miami which exists and the one which is part of American common currency is politics. Didion’s
writings have increasingly focused less on the personal and more on the political as her last book of essays, *Sentimental Journeys* (1992), encapsulates. Most of the essays in this collection are concerned with things political. "Insider Baseball" perhaps captures most effectively the "invented narrative" which is American politics. Using the event of the baseball game held on airport runways by the 1988 Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis, Didion cleverly suggests how much of politics now is showmanship which is staged purely for the benefit of politicians and reporters. The baseball on the tarmac was supposed to show Dukakis as "a regular guy" (62) yet nobody thought to question what this brief attempt at "tarmac exercise" was supposed to show:

American reporters "like" covering a presidential campaign (it gets them out on the road, it has balloons, it has music, it is viewed as a big story, one that leads to the respect of one's peers, to the Sunday shows, to lecture fees and often to Washington), which is one reason why there has developed among those who do it so arresting an enthusiasm for overlooking the contradictions inherent in reporting that which occurs only in order to be reported.84

America has reached a point where it exists as a constructed narrative, and Latin America, by association, has been made part of that narrative. The danger of reducing anything of complexity to a linear story is self-evident. In the eponymous title essay about the New York Central Park rape, Didion's thoughts on how place is made to exist through narrative are concisely spelt out: "The imposition of a sentimental, or false, narrative on the disparate and often random experience that constitutes the life of a city or a country means, necessarily, that much of what happens in that city or country will be rendered merely illustrative, a series of set pieces, or performance opportunities."85

The story of the professional, white, female jogger who was raped in Central Park by a group of black and Hispanic youths becomes, temporarily, the narrative of New York City. The media and others take the victim, and her survival, as a metaphor for the city's ability to survive. Equally, her attackers are understood to represent all that is wrong with New York. The victim was, we learn:

... the personification of "what makes this city so vibrant and so great", now "struck down by a side of our city that is as awful and terrifying as the creative side is wonderful". It was precisely in this conflation of victim and city, this confusion of personal woe with public distress, that the crime's "story" would be found, its lesson, its encouraging promise of narrative resolution (260).

With the representation of the rape in Central Park, the city is being reduced to a single narrative of good versus evil, where the circumstances and preceding events which have

84 "Insider Baseball": 58.
85 "Sentimental Journeys": 296-297.
led to the rape are of no interest. The media has turned the rape into a symbol of the city's decline. Other rapes, happening daily, are routinely ignored, emphasising the distortion Didion knows is created by an imposed narrative. Further, Didion suggests that the rape might be read as an indictment of American politics where an underclass, created by years of neglect, resorts to violent and senseless criminality. Somewhat perversely, the media coverage of the rape is also made into an opportunity to boast about New York City's myriad failings: "It was only within the transforming narrative of 'contrasts' that both the essential criminality of the city and its related absence of civility could become points of pride, evidence of 'energy': if you could make it here you could make it anywhere, hello sucker, get smart"(289). The Californian frontier which so obsessed Didion in the 1960s has moved to the East Coast and New York in the 1990s.

In "Sentimental Journeys", Didion suggests that the Central Park rape remains an inevitable consequence of a city which has prided itself on the principle of the survival of the fittest. And yet, since this can never be admitted publicly, the creation and broadcast of a different narrative is unavoidable. "Sentimental Journeys" is Didion's bleakest study of American society in decline because society, as Didion has understood it, no longer exists. Instead, society has been replaced by a manufactured narrative which falsifies all the players in the drama. Similarly, in Salvador, the official narrative peddled to Didion was at odds with what she saw. Laura Julier suggests that in El Salvador the gulf that exists between what is said to exist and what does exist is potentially fatal:

There are risks in noticing the dissonance between narrative and experience. One risks personal or psychic crisis (for some readers, much of "The White Album" is an account of just this sort of psychological breakdown). One risks alienation and exclusion from social institutions. One risks, sometimes, something far more serious: in Salvador, for instance, there is repeated evidence that Didion's own personal safety as well as that of almost everyone she meets depends on not dissenting from the narrative, on not noticing or questioning the disjunction between preferred narrative and observable data.86

"Sentimental Journeys" and Salvador are both significant in Didion's canon because they illustrate how place has been eradicated and replaced by a narrative fiction. Didion is acutely aware of the implications of the creation of a false construct of place, and in both texts she tries to show how such a narrative has evolved. This helps to explain why her writing is so complex. As she tells us how narrative is constructed Didion simultaneously creates her own multi-faceted narrative. By her own admission, Didion deals with an idea of place: "I dealt only with an idea I had of the world, not with the

86 "Actual Experience, Preferred Narratives: Didion's After Henry " in Felton: 249.
world as it was," she told Susan Stamberg in 1977.87 Didion's attempt to understand the world around her led her to become a writer. In an unimaginatively entitled essay, "Why I Write", she explained: "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.... When I talk about pictures in my mind I am talking, quite specifically, about images that shimmer around the edges."88 Didion continues by explaining how her writing is constructed out of a deep respect for the power of language and the recognition that language is her only means of giving life to the images she carries in her head:

All I know about grammar is its infinite power. To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed.... The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you want can be found in the picture in your mind. The picture dictates the arrangement. (7)

Didion's literary reputation is founded on her unique style, which not only verbalises images but also exposes the gap which lies between how things appear and how they seem to appear. It is a style which was born out of the discomfort Didion felt earlier in her life as she tried to reconcile how she viewed a world which appeared so different to others: "I have always had trouble distinguishing between what happened and what merely might have happened, but I remain unconvinced that the distinction, for my purposes, matters."89 At the same time, Didion has tried to avoid the "sentimentalization of experience" in her writing because she sees it as leading inevitably to distortion, as in the Central Park rape case. In order to define a reality that she recognises, Didion has chosen, more often than not, to restrict her observation to the surface and what she can concretely observe. By judiciously selecting her detail Didion constructs an argument without seeming to, but in so doing, paradoxically renders the surface as subjectively as if she had set out to delineate her viewpoint. Her capturing of the surface is not quite as free of association as Didion might have hoped. Instead, into the "surface reality" she weaves memory, morality, nostalgia and other non-objective qualities.

In the essay, "In the Islands", Didion reflected on how she saw Honolulu. She realised that some places exist only because they have been written about. And it is the writer's relationship to place which the reader identifies with when they see a place, thereby removing any idea of objectivity:

Certain places seem to exist mainly because someone has written about them. Kilimanjaro belongs to Ernest Hemingway. Oxford, Mississippi, belongs to William Faulkner.... A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it

87 Didion was interviewed by Stamberg. See footnote 18.
88 "Why I Write" in Joan Didion: Essays and Conversations. 6-7.
89 "On Keeping a Notebook" in Slouching Towards Bethlehem. 134.
most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image, and ... a great deal of Honolulu itself has always belonged for me to James Jones...

It is hard to see one of these places claimed by fiction without a sudden blurring, a slippage, a certain vertiginous occlusion of the imagined and the real...90

However, it is not merely describing a place which allows an author to claim ownership. Instead, the sense of place must be imbued with an obsessive marking which incorporates a deep bond between the writer and place. Once that happens, it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish between the place as it exists and, as the writer describes it. Didion has created her own version of the United States which means, as Weir said in the New Yorker, that to travel through Miami airport, or to New York or Los Angeles is to be assaulted by a perception of each place which you can no longer be sure belongs to you and not to Didion. To that list we might now add Central America.

Didion's Latin America exists as a place she has visited as both a tourist and a reporter. She writes about places individually, but when describing the "south" Didion tends to use stereotyped generalisations: the south is "weightless", "tropical" and "lawless". Often, as "In Bogotá" showed, she does not understand what she sees, and then she relies on her literary antecedents to help interpret what is around her. Didion's Latin America becomes a literary idea of place, created by merging fact and fiction. As noted, she readily sees a place through another writer's eyes. Her essays are littered with literary references: "Guaymas, Sonora" is a patch of Greenland for Didion, and once she has spent time in Colombia she begins to understand that Gabriel García Márquez writes not as a magic realist, as some would have us believe, but as "a social realist". The title of A Book of Common Prayer refers the reader not only to the Christian faith, but to one of the fundamental texts of Christianity. When asked where she got the title she replied:

It just seemed right. "A Book of Common Prayer" was very important to this book. Why, I have no idea.... You could say this was Grace's prayer for Charlotte's soul. If you have a narrator, which suddenly I was stuck with, the narrator can't just be telling you a story, something that happened, to entertain you. The narrator has got to be telling you the story for a reason. I think the title probably helped me with that.91

Didion's writing springs from literary and cultural references which the reader uses as signposts to decode her work. Over the last three decades, she has moved from the personal to the political to the point where, with the publication of Sentimental Journeys and The Last Thing He Wanted, Didion can be considered a political

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90 "In the Islands" in The White Album: 146-147.
91 Davidson interview in Friedman: 17-18.
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Her developed political awareness is born out of years of studying the United States at close hand, and the realisation that the country has failed not only its own but those immediately around it. Didion's interest in Latin American affairs has increased with her politicisation. But she presents the reader with a dichotomous picture: she sees Latin America as both a victim of the United States and as a warning to the United States of what it might become if it does not change. She writes about the United States from the evidence around her. Latin America, on the other hand, is both a real and imaginary construct for Didion, an area to escape to ("Guaymas, Sonora" and *A Book of Common Prayer*) or from (*Salvador* and *The Last Thing He Wanted*). Latin America is fluid where the United States is solid.

Place and the significance place holds for the individual is a major theme in Didion's writing. Her work has delineated the decline in the United States throughout the last thirty years. In the 1960s, her carefully chosen images of San Francisco in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" showed how California had failed its ancestors and how already the centre was not holding. By the 1990s and *Sentimental Journeys*, Didion has taken herself and the reader on a dark journey of degradation which, perhaps much to the surprise of her 1960s sensibility, has taken place not in Latin America but in the continental United States. In "Sentimental Journeys", Didion showed how New York City was invented as a sentimental narrative and thereby ceased to exist as a city. In her latest published work, *The Last Thing He Wanted*, place is deconstructed to the point where it has ceased to exist in reality and becomes an imagined narrative. At the same time, Didion tells us in *The Last Thing He Wanted* that narrative can no longer be trusted, with the result that places can no longer be named. To do so is to burden them with the weight of expectation. At the end of the twentieth century, Didion has succeeded in nullifying place and, more precisely, Latin America.

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92 Didion reviews political books from time to time for the *New York Review of Books*. Her most recent review was on Ronald Reagan: *How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* by Dinesh D'Souza on December 18, 1997.
Conclusion

The thesis has made no claim to be a comparative study nor to having proved an explicit intertextuality. Instead, connections between its four subjects are implicit. The thesis has shown the different way in which each writer responded to Latin America and how they framed their various responses. It has also demonstrated, by considering the four different writers together, the creation of a tradition of literary women travellers’ writing, which stands distinct from the better-defined genre of women's travel writing.

As the title of this thesis reflects, the search for home has proved a significant link between the four writers considered. The thesis has shown how their respective journeys read as a search for home which contains a different meaning for each writer. For Porter and Bishop, the search was an emotional escape from the restrictions of the United States to a place which stimulated their creativity; for Gellhorn and Didion, it was a political commitment to examine the workings of the American government.

Place exists as an invention for each writer. Porter invented both her Texan past and her early relationship with Mexico. Gellhorn relied on her unreliable memory to re-visit and re-create place: she understood Haiti but not Mexico to be an invention. Bishop imagined the Amazon before she visited the region and invested Brazil with a longing for the primitive, idealised world of the Indians. Didion wonders whether Sacramento ever existed as she remembers, her writing has recently arrived at the point where place exists only as narrative.

The end of the twentieth century is a significant moment at which to examine each writer's canon. In 1996 new works published by all four writers might be seen both to summarise each career and, by demonstrating the reception of their works at the end of the century, to provide a useful stand-point from which to reassess their literary reputation.

Bishop's posthumous *Exchanging Hats* is a collection of the poet's paintings, the significance of which lies in their miniaturized, particular detail, with its stress on colour, both of which Bishop emphasised in her Brazilian poetry. The paintings are the poems visualised. Similarly, Porter's posthumous book of poetry, *Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry*, includes several poems written in Mexico which reinforce the dichotomy of her Mexican writings. What turned out to be Gellhorn's final work on Latin
America, written about Brazil for the London Review of Books, clarified her approach to investigative reporting and travel narrative. Finally, Didion's latest novel, The Last Thing He Wanted, clearly illustrated her current thinking as to the impact America's moral decline has had on Latin America.
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