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THE "CLOSED" AND "OPEN" STRUCTURE IN A "CYCLIC"  
STORY EXEMPLIFIED BY KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S  
"THE GRAVE"

The present analysis of K. A. Porter's short story *The Grave* refers to Forrest L. Ingram's proposal to distinguish the short story cycle as a genre distinct from the mere collection of stories and from the novel. Ingram defines the short story cycle as

a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts.<sup>1</sup>

"The pattern of the whole" is determined—according to the critic—by "the dynamic pattern of recurrent development" which operates on every level of the text. Ingram's handling of the pattern coincides with his limited examination of "the double tendency"—which, as he maintains, every story cycle displays—of asserting the individuality of the components and of highlighting the bonds of unity which join them into a single whole. The tension between the components of a cycle as self-contained entities and as parts of a larger whole is left unexamined.

The present interpretation of *The Grave* will trace the unifying links between the story and the remaining pieces of *The Old Order*.<sup>2</sup> It will

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*, The Hague—Paris 1971, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *The Grave* is published either in isolation or as an element of a larger whole. As a separate entity the story appeared in its original edition in the "Virginia Quarterly Review" of 1935, in *The Best Short Stories of 1936* ed. by E. J. O'Brien, Cf. E. Schwartz, *Katherine Anne Porter. A Critical Bibliography*, "Bulletin of the New York Public Library", May 1953, vol. LVII, No. 5, p. 220. It is frequently anthologized, e.g. by M. Schorer, *The Story. A Critical Anthology*, New York 1963, or R. B. West, Jr. (ed.), *American Short Stories*, New York 1959. *The Grave* comes out also as the last component of *The Old Order* comprising: *The Source*, *The Journey*, *The Witness*, *The Circus*, *The Last Leaf*, *The Fig Tree*. Cf. *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, New York 1965, or K. A. Porter, *Biały koń, biały jeździec*, transl.



illustrate William L. Nance's unsubstantiated thesis that "the sketches" "function fully only when seen as parts of a whole."<sup>3</sup> The isolation of *The Grave* from the broader context—made here only for the sake of analysis—serves to depict the workings of "the double tendency" in a "cyclic" story.

The opening paragraph of *The Grave* tells the life-story of the Grandmother who, settling down in Louisiana and then in Texas, twice changed her husband's burial place. After her death a part of the farm in Texas, together with the family burial ground, was sold, and the bodies of her husband and other members of the family were removed to the public cemetery. The last sentence of the paragraph: "At last her husband was to lie beside her for eternity, as she had planned"<sup>4</sup> ends the story of the Grandmother's life. The introductory part—the *Vorgeschichte* of the story—introduces the scenery of the main event—the family cemetery in Texas.

Here the nine-year-old granddaughter Miranda with her elder brother Paul hunt rabbits and doves. One burning day they come across empty graves in the cemetery. The girl jumps into one of them, scoops up a lump of earth and picks up a silver dove which is an ornamental screw head for a coffin. In a nearby grave Paul finds a gold ring. Miranda sees her brother smiling from the grave and presently they exchange their treasures. She likes the ring better and puts it on her thumb. Soon they begin to hunt. Miranda has often seen how furious Paul is when he misses. What she likes most about shooting is just pulling the trigger and the resulting report. Paul will not let her waste the shots. He reserves for himself the right to shoot at the first rabbit or dove they see. Miranda rather indifferently asks if she can have the first snake. Her attention is distracted by the glittering ring which directs her thoughts to her boyish clothes. She saved her school dresses in this way, as her father demanded. She remembers people say that her motherless family began to fall into pieces, especially after the death of the Grandmother. Looking at the gold ring she wants to return home, take a bath, use her sister's fragrant powder and put on her best dress. Her longings for a luxurious life, based on family legends, are disturbed by the appearance of a rabbit. Paul kills it with one shot and Miranda admires the way her brother skins it. She thinks about Uncle Jimbilly who knew how to prepare skins which she later used as furs for her dolls. Kneeling over the dead rabbit

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K. Tarnowska, Warszawa 1971. The method of publication determines the reader's reception of *The Grave*: it shows the "closed" structure when the story is isolated or "open"—in the broader context.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. L. Nance, *Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection*, Chapel Hill 1964, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from *The Old Order* are taken from *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*.



she sees its bare, sleek body. Paul lifts the strangely bloated belly of the rabbit and slits it open:

There lay a bundle of tiny rabbits, each wrapped in a thin scarlet veil. The brother pulled these off and there they were, dark gray, their sleek wet down lying in minute even ripples, like a baby's head just washed, their unbelievably small delicate ears folded close, their little blind faces almost featureless.

Staring at the dead little animals the girl notices blood and starts trembling. She realizes that they were about to be born, just like babies. Moved by the sight, she does not want the rabbit's skin any more. Paul buries the unborn rabbits in their mother's body, hides them in a clump of sage bushes and tells his sister not to mention what she has seen to anybody. He does not want Dad to find out that he is introducing her into things she ought not to know about yet.

For a couple of days Miranda thought about the incident, but as she grew older it faded from her memory and "was heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions, for nearly twenty years." One day, in a strange city of a strange country, walking along a market street, muddy and full of trampled waste, she sees clearly that remote hunting episode. She is horrified. In front of her an Indian vendor is holding "a tray of dyed sugar sweets, in the shapes of all kinds of small creatures." The scent of withered flowers and raw meat sold in the market reminds her of that unpleasant smell of the graveyard soil on the Texas farm. She realizes that she vaguely remembers that day, and that only because she and her brother found treasures then. Gradually her terror vanishes:

Instantly upon this thought the dreadful vision faded, and she saw clearly her brother, whose childhood face she had forgotten, standing again in the blazing sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands.

Looking at the elements of the plot of *The Grave* as a totality of events and processes one notices a certain lack of cohesion among those elements. This incoherence seems to result from the fact that the body of the story, culminating in the protagonist's moment of initiation, is preceded by an account of the last years of Grandmother's life, loosely connected with the main plot. It also stems from the time-jump into the future by nearly two decades. The final epiphanic moment provides the culmination point, which, in the plot, is combined with the central event of the story. The incoherence should not be approached axiologically because in the thematic interpretation (the meanings evoked by the entirety of the plot) these elements appear almost perfectly cohesive, which compensates for their temporal dispersal. Moreover, the structure of the plot (the whole of time and space relationships among the elements of the story<sup>5</sup>) supplies cohesion to the elements of the content. The differen-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Ingarden, *O formie i treści dzieła sztuki literackiej*, [in:] *Studia z estetyki*, vol. II, Warszawa 1966.



tiation of the plot's content from the plot's structure shows the groundlessness of Nance's speculative remark that the story "describes events which might easily have occurred within the space of an hour."<sup>6</sup>

This distinction points to the superficiality of Daniel Curley's division of the story into three parts,<sup>7</sup> paralleled by the three stages of the plot. Curley isolates the first and the last paragraphs, calls them the "prologue" and the "epilogue," but he fails to analyze an important aspect of the structure of the plot—its time compression. The time compression serves to create a unity between the elements of the plot's content and its structure. It is accomplished by bringing closer the events of the past and the future—the initial and the final paragraphs respectively—toward the dramatically delineated present—the bulk of the story—and by employing the preterite throughout the narration, which embeds the events in the past.

The temporal spacing of the events is endowed with a broader meaning, one that the heroine is not aware of, viz. the transience of human life. It also brings to the fore those crucial moments of life which counterbalance the objective time but which nevertheless are subject to its impact.

Miranda's discovery attains a universal meaning also thanks to the symbolic compression of the story's spatial setting which, analogously to the time aspect, unifies—on the thematic level—the seemingly disconnected elements of the setting. The image of the world as a cemetery is created by the thematic similarity of the sceneries in all three parts of the story. There exists a parallelism not only between the images of death in the cemetery and in the market but also between the market and the graves in Louisiana and Texas. The establishment of the analogy between the setting of the cemetery and the episode in the market is justified, among other things, by the contrast between the detailed route of the grandfather's "journey" and the absence of any specific location of the event in the epilogue of the story. Some critics place it in Mexico,<sup>8</sup> but the symbolic indefiniteness of this episode (the market becomes the world<sup>9</sup>)—in the light of the grandfather's original burial place being symbolically unknown as well—seems more relevant.

The moments of illumination acquire universal meaning in view of Miranda's discovery taking place "one burning day" (analogously to the scene in the market: "It was a very hot day..."), which—together

<sup>6</sup> Nance, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> D. Curley, *Treasure in "The Grave"*, "Modern Fiction Studies", Winter 1963/64, vol. IX, p. 377.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. Brooks, *On "The Grave"*, "Yale Review", Winter 1966, vol. LV, No. 2, p. 278; G. Hendrick, *Katherine Anne Porter*, New Haven, Conn., 1965, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrick, *l.c.*



with the "sage bushes" where the rabbits were buried—constitutes an indirect allusion<sup>10</sup> to the biblical Moses and "the burning bush."<sup>11</sup>

The plot of *The Grave*, in the same way as its temporal/spatial setting has a symbolic character, and justifies the classification of the piece as a story of initiation. According to Mordecai Marcus

an initiation story may be said to show its young protagonist experiencing a significant change of knowledge about the world or himself, or a change of character, or of both, and this change must point or lead him towards an adult world. It may or may not contain some form of ritual, but it should give some evidence that the change is at least likely to have permanent effects.<sup>12</sup>

The author of the definition maintains that the scene of the nine-year-old girl's confrontation with the mystery of birth and death as she bends over the pregnant dead rabbit crystallizes its meaning only twenty years later.<sup>13</sup> It is only then that she makes a discovery which reveals growth of her consciousness. The critic argues controversially that the story is not so much a presentation of actual initiation as a portrait of a mature person recalling a moment from her childhood that is the basis of her future knowledge. The main part of the story is a dramatic presentation of the moment of initiation, whose import in the process of interpretation<sup>14</sup> is no less relevant than the import of the epiphanic moment. The dramatic delineation of the girl's childhood experiences is achieved not through retrospection, which is what Marcus implies, but through a chronological development of the plot, which is stressed by Curley.<sup>15</sup>

Although the narrator depicts the world from Miranda's viewpoint, the growth of her consciousness is subordinated to the projection of meanings from a higher, auctorial narrative perspective. These meanings, alien to Miranda, are reflected in the composition of the story and on the stylistic level.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. K. Górski, *Aluzja literacka. Istota zjawiska i jego typologia*, „Twórczość”, 1961, vol. XVII, No. 8, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Schorer, *op. cit.*, p. 252, points out the connection of the words "burning" and "bush" without underscoring, however, the ambiguous meaning of the cluster "sage bushes."

<sup>12</sup> M. Marcus, *What is an Initiation Story?*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Winter 1966, vol. XIX, No. 2, p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. E. Balcerzan, *Zagadnienie „ważności” elementów świata przedstawionego*, [in:] *Styl i kompozycja. Konferencje teoretyczno-literackie w Toruniu i Ustroniu*, ed. J. Trzynadłowski, Wrocław 1965, p. 296. According to the critic, interpretation consists in the reader's attributing a proper degree of "importance" to the elements of the world presented.

<sup>15</sup> "Instead of analyzing the situation from the vantage point of the mature writer (flashback approach) we are experiencing it from the point of view of the awakening child" (Curley, *op. cit.*, p. 380).



The tension between these two modes of looking at the world—the innocence of a child and the “artistic organizing consciousness”<sup>16</sup>—is the source of aesthetic experience for the reader. It is illustrated by the following scene:

After he had got the dove in his hand, Paul said, “Don’t you know what this is? This is a screw head for a *coffin*!... I’ll bet nobody else in the world has one like this!”

Here Miranda learns that the “dove” is a screw head for a coffin, whereas the reader notices the poetic identity of the three meanings denoted by one object (dove-screw head-man). The analogy implies the existence of an opposition between the “durability” of the inanimate world (the screw head) and the transience of the world of the living (the dove and man). In the broader context it constitutes an antithesis between the noble inanimate objects (the silver screw head, the gold ring) and the fragile human being. This meaning is emphasized by the flowers and leaves engraved on the ring, which symbolize fertility.<sup>17</sup>

The gold wedding ring has the traditional symbolic value for the growing Miranda.<sup>18</sup> It awakens in her some vague awareness of sex and her future role as a woman: “It was said the motherless family was running down, with the Grandmother no longer there to hold it together.” The sense of this discovery is underscored by the preceding allusion to the snake (“Can I have the first snake?”), which evokes the biblical image of “Eve-slaying-evil” and the “Freudian sexual image.”<sup>19</sup>

Miranda’s musing is accompanied by a subtle irony from the narrator, which results from the simultaneous development of the themes of death and the passing of human life. The description of the girl’s grubby hands and of her ruined clothes stands for the slow decay of the human body. The personification of the worn-out clothes is simultaneously a reification of the human body:

Now the ring, shining with the serene purity of fine gold on her rather grubby thumb, turned her feelings against her overalls and sockless feet, toes sticking through the thick brown leather straps.

The “leather straps” are no longer called “sandals” with good reason. This peculiar identification of living and inanimate objects is intensified by the parallelism drawn between the processes of wearing out clothes

<sup>16</sup> V. Vinogradov’s term used after: H. Brzoza, *Pogranicze poezji. Interpretacja semantyczna tekstu opowiadania Iwana Bunina „Porażenie słoneczne”, [in:] Litteraria VII, Wrocław 1975, p. 28–29.*

<sup>17</sup> Hendrick, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> Marginally, it can be remarked that silver and gold in the nomenclature of alchemy symbolize feminine and masculine elements. Cf. A. Moreno, *Jung, bogowie i człowiek współczesny*, Warszawa 1973, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Hendrick, *op. cit.*, p. 70.



and killing rabbits. The excerpt of the interior monologue showing Miranda remembering her father's remarks as to the necessity of saving her dresses is linked by the narrator with the short episode of killing the rabbit. Both fragments end two adjoining paragraphs:

She had been brought up in rigorous economy. Wastefulness was vulgar. It was also a sin. These were truths; she had heard them repeated many times and never once disputed. [and]

When a rabbit leaped, she let Paul have it without dispute. He killed it with one shot.

The word "dispute" used in both contexts is their poetical binder. It seems to play metalinguistic function,<sup>20</sup> as it directs the reader to an additional, superior code of the message carrying the thematic meanings of the story.

Likewise, the symbolic innocence of the "dove"<sup>21</sup> is connected with the innocence lost by Miranda the moment she gains the knowledge of birth and death. This thematic/aesthetic association is reflected in the sentences:

...she saw a silver dove no larger than a hazel nut... [and]

Her brother had the same outfit except his was a sober hickory-nut color.

The above analogy is established by comparing the "dove's" size to a hazel nut and by marking the hickory-nut color of Paul's clothes.

The higher perspective of the narration is maintained even when the narrator ostensibly identifies with the protagonist. His commentaries introducing a delicate dramatic irony are conspicuous in the description of the girl's emotional state aroused by the sight of the dead rabbits:

She looked and looked—excited but not frightened, for she was accustomed to the sight of animals killed in hunting—filled with pity and astonishment and a kind of shocked delight in the wonderful little creatures for their own sakes, they were so pretty. [or]

She was quietly and terribly agitated, standing again with her rifle under her arm, looking down at the bloody heap [the emphasis supplied — M. H.].

The dramatic irony reaches the peak of subtlety in the final epiphany. In the moment of illumination Miranda notices the connection between the scene in the market and the episode with the rabbit; terrified, she discovers the omnipresence of Thanatos. She perceives more profoundly the meaning of the experience from her remote childhood, but the image of the smiling Paul ousts the former image of death. Miranda's both final visions reverse the order of the main events inherent in the essential part of the story: the finding of the "treasures" symbolizing innocence, and the confrontation with the mystery of conception and death, which depicts

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. Guiraud, *Semiologia*, Warszawa 1974, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Hendrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 71.



the loss of the girl's innocence. The change of her psychic state that she herself remains unaware of highlights the objective meanings of the story. It proves the mature Miranda's unconscious acceptance of death. This state is in keeping with the analogy established between the grave and her mind: in the latter, paradoxically, the awareness of death is buried. The story pictures the processes of acquiring and losing this awareness. One may frame a hypothesis that the phase of "affirmation" of death by Miranda precedes her Grandmother's attitude towards death (reflected in the almost grotesque transfer of her husband's body), since in the epilogue of the story Miranda reaches her Grandmother's age at the time of her husband's death.<sup>22</sup>

When *The Grave* is set against the extensive panorama of the collection some elements of the world presented in it undergo relevant semantic and aesthetic modifications.

The initial paragraph, setting the scene of the story and establishing the thematic analogy between Miranda's experiences and those of her Grandmother, constitutes in the expanded context an epilogue to the Grandmother's conjugal life, depicted in the second story of the cycle, *The Journey*. Her "constancy and possessiveness" from *The Grave* take on another meaning when juxtaposed with the fragment illustrative of her different attitude towards her husband:

Her husband's ghost persisted in her, she was bitterly outraged by his death almost as if he had willfully deserted her. She mourned for him at first with dry eyes, angrily. Twenty years later, seeing after a long absence the eldest son of her favorite daughter, who had died early, she recognized the very features and look of the husband of her youth, and she wept (p. 338).

This passage from *The Journey* and the static opening of *The Grave* —both semantically "closed" as it were—interact and create a new whole, superior in semantic and aesthetic effects. The dynamic, ambivalent love of the Grandmother for her husband is perceived when the two fragments are associated by the reader, which can only happen on the level of the collection. Both excerpts constitute components of a superior entity and as such they might be called "cyclic."

The quote from *The Journey* is cyclic too as it provides an ironic contrast to Miranda's total adventure delineated in *The Grave*. It highlights her Grandmother's revelation when she associates her dead grandson's countenance with that of her dead husband and becomes aware —after twenty years—of the meaning of his death. This glimpse of epiphany seems to anticipate the moments of epiphany which Miranda

<sup>22</sup> The sentence in the last paragraph: "Then it sank quietly into her mind and was heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions, for nearly twenty years," alludes to the first sentence of the story: "The grandfather, dead for more than thirty years, had been twice disturbed in his long repose by the constancy and possessiveness of his widow."



experiences in *The Grave*. Both revelations, the Grandmother's and her granddaughter's, are concerned with death and both cover an identical time-span of a score of years. It is only in juxtaposition that they complement each other. The intensity of the girl's feelings and emotions, as well as their meticulous delineation, compatible with her youth, are subtly opposed to the episodic—in the context of *The Journey*—laconic depiction of the old woman's revelation. The above analogies and contrasts discernible in their psychic reactions support the hypothesis that Miranda is following in the footsteps of her Grandmother, which the hypothesis was framed earlier.

Another cyclic passage will illustrate the thesis according to which the semantic and aesthetic enrichment of some elements in a cyclic story stems from their assuming new functions in the process of broadening the horizon of the story. The dynamic functioning of such elements—indicative of the "open" structure in that literary genre—is exemplified by the expansion of the perspective of the seemingly irrelevant sentence:

Uncle Jimbilly knew how to prepare the skins so that Miranda always had fur coats for her dolls, for though she never cared much for her dolls she liked seeing them in fur coats (p. 366).

Uncle Jimbilly, mentioned only once within *The Grave*, is a neutral character, deprived of any semantic connotations, but in connection with *The Witness*, being its titular protagonist endowed with certain features, he arouses understandable interest. The fact that he is a Negro, an ex-slave, and some indirect allusions from *The Witness* (e.g. "to skin somebody alive and nail the hide on the barn door," p. 342) are associated with the rabbits whose fur Miranda uses as coats for her dolls. The signalling of this parallel by Hendrick<sup>23</sup> could only result from a juxtaposition of both pieces.

The dynamic functioning of cyclic elements is similarly exemplified by the following snatch from Miranda's meditation:

It was said the motherless family was running down, with the Grandmother no longer there to hold it together (p. 364—365).

Within *The Grave* this sentence points to the young girl's awakening realization of her role as a potential mother. The piece of information concerning her mother's "absence," for all its concern to the reader, lies hidden in the web of her thoughts. The lines from *The Journey*, however, quoted below, illuminate that apparently marginal remark as indispensable for tracking down an important analogy existing between both stories:

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<sup>23</sup> Hendrick, *op. cit.*, p. 70: "Miranda was then too innocent to see the connection between the destruction of the fur-bearing rabbit and the coat, between slavery and the *ante bellum* plantations..."



When Harry's wife died—she [i.e. Miranda's Grandmother] had never approved of Harry's wife, who was delicate and hopelessly inadequate at house-keeping, and who could not even bear children successfully, since she died when her third was born—the Grandmother took the children and began life again (p. 339).

The death of Harry's wife, Miranda's mother, during the birth of her third child, Miranda,<sup>24</sup> evokes the image of the pregnant rabbit shot dead by her brother, Paul, while they were out hunting. In a subtle way the excerpt introduces an element of objective reality into *The Grave*, which imparts to the young girl's subjective moments of psychic crisis a new dimension: she is ignorant of the circumstances of her mother's decease. That is the source of a deep though unobtrusive irony. The Grandmother's attitude reflected in the quote from *The Journey*, running counter to her granddaughter's sensitivity, undergoes—according to the principle of feedback—a modification as well. It becomes endowed with an additional load of irony expressing implicitly the narrator's judgment of the Grandmother's detachment.

By and large, the cyclic elements in *The Grave*—ranging from a brief allusion (e.g., the mention of Uncle Jimbilly) to the story in its entirety (the subjectivity of Miranda's total experience)—display a compatibility, however different in each case, between their functioning within the story and on the level of the cycle. Should those cyclic elements function in the larger context rather than within the story, its semantic and aesthetic unity would most likely be undermined.<sup>25</sup>

There is in *The Grave* a longish paragraph presenting Miranda's awareness of the community she is living in and of the changing social order. This subject-matter—illustrated by the girl's dressing like a boy, and her "careering around astride barebacked horses,"<sup>26</sup> shocking to her old neighbours—is fitted into the story thematically: the departure of "the old order" and the coming of the new one, may and should be interpreted in terms of death and birth.

Brooks, accounting for the insertion of that material into the story (interpreted by him as a self-contained unit), points out its extraneity:

This matter of clothes, and the social sense, and the role of women in the society are brought into the story unobtrusively, but they powerfully influence its meaning. For if the story is about a rite of initiation, an initiation into the meaning of sex, the subject is not treated in a doctrinaire polemical way. In this story sex is considered in a much larger context, in a social and even a philosophical context.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> It can be inferred from *The Grave* that Miranda is a third child, but this fact is supported by the remaining components of the cycle.

<sup>25</sup> The cyclic passages examined so far have not been shown as acting upon the structure of the artistic unity of the story.

<sup>26</sup> That moment constitutes a cyclic digression to the Grandmother's riding side-saddle, Cf. *The Source*, p. 325.

<sup>27</sup> Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 278.



The paragraph discussed by Brooks, properly integrated in the story, attains a richer meaning in the perspective of the family history unfolded throughout the collection. In that cyclic passage—perhaps too expanded within the story—the principle of dynamization operates: the confrontation of the past and the present lurks in the background of *The Grave*, while as a part of *The Old Order* it comes to the fore. This historical aspect is one of the unifying principles in *The Old Order*: each story juxtaposes, to a varying degree, the past with the present. The role of the title as the first external link joining the pieces into a new entity is considerable.

The cyclic passages dealt with here do not exhaust the cyclicity of *The Grave*, which might be fully accounted for by an analysis of the entire collection. It would raise, however, the problem of the function of the story in the cycle. Only then could one trace Miranda's growth to maturity—through the stories of initiation (*The Circus* and *The Fig Tree*)—and the waning of the feudal past.

In the interpretation of *The Grave* an attempt was made to reveal its "closed/open" structure as typical of a cyclic story. The fact that the "closed" structure can coexist with the "open" one points to the complexity and subtlety of the architecture of a story cycle. Any element of a cyclic story is potentially open: it undergoes the process of semantic and aesthetic modification. A detailed description of the structure of the successive components of *The Old Order* as one type of a short story cycle, would point out that the degree of their "openness" varies as each component possesses cyclic elements differing in quantity as well as quality. *The Grave* for that matter seems to be more self-contained than *The Source* or *The Last Leaf*, which in turn are more dependent for their artistic effects on the larger design.

In an analysis of a short story cycle it will not suffice to get at "the pattern of the whole" (Ingram's procedure) without scanning the "closed" character of each component. In view of publishing individual units of a story cycle as separate entities a plea can be made that they should be closely investigated for their artistic harmony.

#### STRUKTURA „OTWARTA” I „ZAMKNIĘTA” W NOWELI „CYKLICZNEJ” NA PRZYKŁADZIE „GROBU” KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

##### STRESZCZENIE

Analiza *Grobu* nawiązuje do próby wyodrębnienia cyklu nowelistycznego dokonanej przez Forresta L. Ingrama w *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. Zdaniem krytyka kryterium wyróżniające ów gatunek od „zwykłego” zbioru nowel oraz od powieści stanowi jego „podwójna tendencja” do zachowania jedności poszczególnych nowel oraz jedności cyklu. Ingram nie bada jednakże harmonii artystycznej i semantycznej pojedynczego komponentu cyklu na tle znaczenia całościowego. Pozostawia w sferze implikacji „napiecie” istniejące między składnikami cyklu jako całościami „zamkniętymi” i jako częstkami większej całości.



W pierwszym etapie analizy śledzi się sensy struktury „zamkniętej” *Grobu*, występującej przy pominięciu szerszego kontekstu, następnie zaś poszukuje się powiązań semantyczno-estetycznych noweli — dowodzących „otwartości” jej struktury — z pozostałymi składnikami *Dawnego porządku*.

Artystyczną „równowagę” między „zamkniętym” a komplementarnym charakterem utworu osiąga K. A. Porter dzięki dynamicznemu funkcjonowaniu elementów „cyklicznych”, działających na rozmaitych płaszczyznach tekstu — od krótkiej aluzji do noweli jako całości.

Fakt, iż stopień „otwarcia”/„zamknięcia” struktury poszczególnych nowel cyklu jest niejednakowy, gdyż różnią się jakościowo i ilościowo ich elementy „cykliczne”, wskazuje, że w analizie cyklu nowelistycznego nie zadowala wyszukanie samego „wzorca całości” (metoda Ingrama) bez zbadania „jedności”, harmonii estetycznej jego kolejnych komponentów.

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