

The Short Story: Prestigious and Beyond Containment salwa elshazli Badr university in Cairo

الملخص باللغة العربية

يمنح الطول المختصر للقصة القصيرة سحرها. ذلك السحر الذي يجذب القارئ إلى الانخراط في دوافع الشخصيات وصراعاتها. سيخلق هذا الانخراط رابطة عاطفية بين القارئ والشخصيات. تتطلب الطبيعة السردية المركزية للقصة القصيرة وجود كاتب ماهر على دراية كاملة بالأنواع الأدبية والتقنيات والحيل الفنية. تهدف هذه الورقة أولاً إلى فحص الأفكار الأساسية في مقالتي سوزان فيرجسون "تعريف القصة القصيرة: الانطباعية والشكل" (1982) و"ارتقاء القصة القصيرة في التدرج الهرمي للأنواع الأدبية" (1988). وهذا لتفسير تجربة فيرجسون مع مفهومي "الانطباعية" و"الشكل" في كتابة القصة القصيرة وكيف تتحدى التدرج الهرمي الجامد للأنواع الأدبية. علاوة على ذلك، لتطبيق بعض أفكار فيرجسون على قصة كاثرين مانسفيلد القصيرة "النعميم". ثانياً، تقديم عرض موجز لنظرية نظر إدجر آلان بو في "الرواية القصيرة" من خلال "تصميم" قصته "القلب الواشي" والتحقيق في مدى تأثير الكتابة ضمن إطار نظري على إبداع الكاتب. ثالثاً، شرح مدى اختلاف و/أو تشابه أفكار فيرجسون مع وجهات نظر إدجر آلان بو ووجهات نظر براندر ماثيوز، مع الإشارة إلى النقاط المشتركة بين رؤية فيرجسون ورؤية آلان باسكو (1991). رابعاً: مناقشة مقالة روبرت م. لوشر "سلسلة القصة القصيرة: كتاب مفتوح" وتطبيقها على سلسلة كاثلين آن بورتر "النظام القديم" مع التركيز بشكل مختصر على قصتها القصيرة "القبر".

كلمات مفتاحية: الانطباعية - الشكل - القصة القصيرة - التدرج الهرمي

Abstract in English:

The concise length of a short story endows it with its magic. The magic that draws the reader to be engaged with the characters' motivations and conflicts. This engagement will create an emotional bond between the reader and the characters. The focused storytelling nature of the short story necessitates a skillful writer who is very familiar with all literary genres, techniques, and artistic devices. This paper aims first to examine the main premises in Suzanne Ferguson's two articles "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form" (1982) and "The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres" (1988). The goal is to explain Ferguson's experimentation with the concepts of "impressionism" and "form" in short story writing and how she challenges the dogmatic genre hierarchy. Moreover, to apply some of Ferguson's premises on Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss". Second, provide a brief demonstration of Edgar Allan Poe's theory on "Short Fiction" (1994) in the "design" of his tale "The Tell-Tale-Heart" and to investigate how writing within the design of theories can affect the writer's creativity. Third, explain how far Ferguson's ideas are different and/or similar both to the views of Poe and those of Brander Matthews, with reference to the common points between Ferguson's vision and that of Allan H. Pasco (1991). Fourth, discuss Robert M. Luscher's

article “The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book” and applying some of its concepts on Kathleen Anne Porter’s sequence “The Old Order” with a brief focus on her short story “The Grave”.

Key words: Impressionism-form-short story -hierarchy

Introduction:

The grandeur of the short story lies in its power to allure the reader into a whole compact journey within a brief period. Without feeling it, the reader finds himself engaged and captivated by the intensity and precision of the storytelling. In a single sitting the reader will live the experiences and the emotions of the characters in a story with the sudden plot turns and the shocking surprises. The focus of the short story on one main plot forces the reader to be fully indulged in all the details to grasp the main theme presented in the story. That is why each word matters and each image has a message. The short story writer is a unique artist because he must be both gifted and skillful. The short story writer should master various narrative writing techniques, genres, and styles. In addition, he should know how to capture the reader’s attention and attract his senses into varied emotions of anger, wonder, love, hate, fear and more at the same sitting. This paper seeks to show how the short story is an intriguing prestigious genre that is beyond containment and beyond being exhausted for further investigation.

This paper will first explain concisely the main premises in Suzanne Ferguson’s two articles “Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form” (1982) and “The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres” (1988) and apply some of these premises on Katherine Mansfield’s short story “Bliss”. Second, provide a brief demonstration of Edgar Allan Poe’s theory of “Short Fiction” (1994) in the “design” of his tale “The Tell-Tale-Heart”. Third, explain how far Ferguson’s ideas are different and/or similar both to the views of Edgar Allan Poe and those of Brander Matthews, with reference to the common points between Ferguson’s vision and that of Allan H. Pasco (1991). Fourth, discuss Robert M. Luscher’s article “The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book” and its application on Kathleen Anne Porter’s sequence “The Old Order” with a brief focus on “The Grave”.

The rationale behind choosing those critics: each of the above-mentioned critic presents an innovative idea in short story writing and consequently affects a queue of other writers. Each critic adds a new angle that will enrich the argument of this paper of how far the short story goes beyond any attempt to limit it to an exact definition and specific features. Suzanne’s Ferguson’s premises of “impressionism” and “Form” change the way of reading short story. In addition, it will answer one of the research questions about how far reading a short story within a theoretical frame will enrich the reading experience. Moreover, Ferguson’s views on the hierarchy

of the short story genre challenge and unsettle the notion of a fixed genre hierarchy. The choice of Edgar Allan Poe is because his exceptional storytelling techniques and the psychological depth in his narratives pave the ground for skilled generations of writers as W.H. Auden and George Bernard Shaw. The utilization of Poe's theory on "Short Fiction" into his literary works will answer one of the paper's inquiries about the influence on writers' creativity employing theoretical concepts. In addition to the previous bards in short story theories, Robert Luscher's perceptive idea about the interconnection among short stories within a sequence will be extended to discuss with an example the applicable possibility of individual stories to stand as distinctive complete whole within the sequence and how this will not harm the fluency of the sequence itself. So, the choice of those critics will help answer the paper's given questions.

The questions this paper seeks to answer are: will the study of the short story theories help to enrich the short story reading experience? In other words, what are the benefits of reading a short story within a theoretical framework? Will this spoil our enjoyment of the story or not? Does following theoretical premises negatively influence writers' creativity? Do the interconnected patterns in the short stories sequence prevent the individual stories from standing by themselves in full, distinguished wholeness? What are the advantages of comparing the premises of different critics of short story theories? How far does reading short story theories help us reach its exact definition and features? What is the possibility of containing a short story within an exact definition or certain features?

Main premises in Suzanne Ferguson's articles about short story theories:

Suzanne Ferguson's "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form" (1982) and "The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres" (1988) are two perceptive articles that significantly illuminate both the position of the short story genre and the developmental stages that the short story has gone through over time until it reached its well-grounded "prestige" ("The Rise of the Short Story" 189)

In her first article, Ferguson initially makes the premises that "the short story does not exist as a discrete and independent genre" and that the process of "defining has proven surprisingly resistant to critical effort." In support of this premise, Ferguson openly asserts that "there is no single characteristic or cluster of characteristics that the critics agree absolutely distinguishes the short story from other fictions" (13). By such a premise, Ferguson opposes what she calls "the persistent notion" which claims that "the 'modern' short story is a genre, something different from the tale and sketch that preceded it." Rather, Ferguson believes that the modern short story is nothing different

because it “shows all the same shifts in sensibility and technique that affected the novel and the long story (or nouvelle) around the end of the nineteenth century” (14), a belief that she thoroughly adopts and persuasively supplements throughout the whole article.

Ferguson speaks about the effects of “impressionism” on short story writing. To start with before summarizing Ferguson’s ideas, we should inquire what is “Impressionism”? It is an art movement that was born in France during the 19th century, it stressed the usage of light and color to trigger the visual painting impression. In short story writing “impressionism” will be employed through evocative images, sensory attributes, and subjective inner passions. Moreover, the usage of the stream of consciousness in the narrative technique can be taken as another element of impressionism. In addition to be equally influenced by elements of “impressionism,” “the main formal characteristics of the modern novel and the modern short story are the same” (14). According to Ferguson’s point of view, the below mentioned features of “impressionism” as she points out “dominate the mainstream” of both the novel and the short story in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

- (1) limitation and foregrounding of point of view, (2) emphasis on presentation of sensation and inner experience, (3) the deletion or transformation of several elements of the traditional plot, (4) increasing reliance on metaphor and metonymy in the presentation of events and existents, (5) rejection of chronological time ordering, (6) formal and stylistic economy, and (7) the foregrounding of style (14-15).

Ferguson even further argues that because the short story “has fewer ‘optional’ narrative elements in its structural ‘slots,’ it manifests its formal allegiance to impressionism even more radically than does the novel and, consequently seems more radically different from earlier short fiction than the impressionistic novel seems different from the realistic novel that preceded it” (15). Her insights stressed how writers utilize form to illuminate the impressionistic elements within their stories. Through the discussion of the relationship between form and impressionistic elements, Ferguson offers the complicated structure of the short story writing.

Moreover, Ferguson maintains the view that “the modern short story is a manifestation of impressionism rather than a discrete genre”. While conceding to the idea that “the short story seems different from the novel in its plot, in the proportions of action to setting and character, or in the

prominence of the other vicarious experience,” Ferguson unwaveringly asserts that “the context of impressionism seems...a more comprehensive vantage point from which to interpret these differences than that of a genre” (24). For her, the elements of impressionism seem to be the decisive factors that mold the creation of a short story.

In her second article “The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres,” (1989) Ferguson presents a complete and well-detailed analysis of the various developmental stages of the short story, the stages that finally brought short story to the forefront of modern readership. Ferguson amazingly relates the modern short story to its earlier forerunners “romance story,” “comic story,” and “ghost and horror story;” she then proves that all, as a continuous flow of development, have significantly “contributed to the rise of highbrow, ‘mainstream’ short story in the twentieth century.” Add to this, Ferguson argues that the “two essentially new forms of short fiction, the local-color and the detective story” (187), are also not without their forerunners in earlier ages; the former is a variation of the romance, with other antecedents in earlier travel literature, whereas the latter is an outgrowth of the horror stories of Poe and Doyle and their followers. As Ferguson acknowledges, while it was the earlier types of short story that have helped the modern short story to become ready for modern readership, it was the “aesthetic” story, which appeared in the last two decades of the 19th century, that “put the finishing touches on the restyling of the English short story for modern tastes.” The “aesthetic,” or what is sometimes called the “decadent” story, “utilized the descriptive techniques and gradual heightening of psychological tension of the sensation story and the concealment of meaning associated with the detective story, along with ‘fine writing’ to make an over bid for high prestige” (189).

The “self-consciousness of aesthetic artistry in short story,” Ferguson explains, was highly “encouraged by Flaubertian novelist critics” like Henry James, Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford. It has then consequently influenced the next generations, especially, that of Joyce, Mansfield, and Lawrence, who “invented for England the modern, prestige short story”, and also the one of Elizabeth Bowen, A.E. Coppard, and Sean O’Faolain concludes by asserting that “beyond the changes simply deriving from the short story’s imitation of twentieth rather than nineteenth-century behavior, speech, and details of everyday life, the preeminence of the short story ...grew out of the modern, highbrow audience’s acceptance of fragmentation as an accurate model of the world, with a concomitant focus on ‘being’...rather than on ‘becoming’” (191). Ferguson's article aims to figure out the short story's posture within the literary landscape. Through analyzing its historical stages, distinctive

attributes, and beyond containment potential, she defies the dogmatic genre hierarchy and acknowledges the short story's strength and vitality.

Applying Ferguson's Ideas of "impressionism and form" to "Bliss" by Katherine Mansfield:

"Bliss" by Katherine Mansfield is a short story that was first published in 1918. It highlights the fluctuation of a female's emotions and both falsehood and the deception of the elite's circle of relations. The story revolves around Bertha Young, a youthful female in her thirties who belongs to the elite upper class and believes that she enjoys the "bliss" in all angels of her life. Her "bliss" is because of the existence of a loving husband, an adorable baby, a stable financial status, and an elite circle of friends. The events begin with Bertha preparing for a dinner party where she invites a group of elite friends to her luxurious house to enjoy their company and to brag about her advantages of owning almost everything. Pearl Fulton, a mysterious female, is one of the guests that Bertha considers very special and near to her. Ironically, Bertha discovers at the end of the story that her assumed to be faithful husband is having an affair with her close friend Pearl. The following section will attempt to read "Bliss" through the perspective of Suzanne Ferguson's ideas on "impressionism" and "form" to comprehend both the artistic and content depth of the story.

The impressionistic attributes are intertwined cleverly with the narrative to generate a vibrant portrait of Bertha's confused emotions and inner thoughts. One indicative example of that is Mansfield's clever usage of the **vivid image** of the "pear tree" in the garden as an evocative symbol of Bertha's subjective experience. That tree "stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky...with its wide-open blossoms as a symbol of her own life" (4). The isolated uniqueness of the "pear tree" in the mid of the dark garden stands for Bertha herself. Like the tree, Bertha is unique and special in an isolated manner where she keeps convincing herself that she is blessed and full of happiness. The tree "Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in, the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed-almost to touch the rim of the round silver moon" (9) **The sensory details** about the "pear tree" that looks like a "flame" and reaches the sky evoke a resemblance to Bertha's inner feelings of profound anxiousness and freedom. The word "flame" is a metonymy of Bertha's wild vitality that is forced to be tamed under social restrictions. The power of the tree to "stretch" and "quiver" even "touch" the "silver moon" allows the reader to be indulged in Bertha's inner state of mind. Despite her outer stillness, Bertha has flammable, volcanic inner emotions that may "stretch" beyond societal boundaries. The kinesthetic imagery of the "pear tree" stretching up there to touch the "rime of the round moon" indicates

Bertha's strong yearning to flee the hypocritical surroundings. Mansfield captures Bertha's feelings in alliance with the elements of impressionism. The narrative is told about Bertha's fluid subjective experience, allowing the reader to live through her emotional instability and inner struggles.

In terms of form and structure, Mansfield utilizes various techniques in her form to deliver the story's theme and the impressionistic features. **First**, the sudden shift from the (outer) house chores to the (inner) disturbed the psyche of Bertha. When Bertha starts to arrange the cushions in the drawing room (an outer chore) she holds the last one and "she surprised herself by suddenly hugging it to her, passionately, passionately. But it did not put out the fire in her bosom. Oh, on the contrary" (4). These lines intensify the inner suppressed sexuality of Bertha who turns the routine house chore into an emotional moment to display her hidden, obstructed emotions. The choice of the word "hugging" indicates emotional starvation, and the repetition of the word "passionately" refers to Bertha's persistent, dire need. Here we can see that Bertha fakes happiness in her marriage while she internally struggles with her sexuality. So, the sudden shift in the form reinforces Bertha's subjective experience. **Second**, The contrast between social obligations and personal emotions. In other words, between appearance and reality. Apparently and according to social dictates, Bertha excels as a loving wife, a caring mother, and a perfect host. She does everything with the intention of perfection. She takes care of her husband, making sure he enjoys his time, she always checks on her baby's food and health, and she is superb in throwing dinner parties (she arranges the colors of the fruits to match the hues in the carpet, fluffs the cushions, chooses the suitable music, and prepares the dinner menu meticulously to ensure that everything is perfect for her guests). This apparent scene shows order and control to meet societal obligations. But the reality of her inner self is utterly different. While reading we get some clues of her real confusion and her emotional disturbance. Despite her pretension to be happy she says, "why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?" (1). The usage of "shut up" to describe her body highlights her entrapment in a marriage that does not satisfy her sexually. Though Bertha has abundance of everything she is "waiting for something divine to happen" (1), that thing may free her imprisoned body and calm her emotional disturbance. In contrast to the outer, apparent, energetic perfection, the fragmented and sometimes irrelevant sentences intensify Bertha's sexual stagnation and emotional chaos. In the mid of her happiness when she says, "I'm too happy-too happy!" (4), Bertha says "I'm absurd. Absurd!", "she was so tired" (5) and "she wanted to cry" (6). That is her reality, there is an inner fire that eats her up. **Third**, the ending of the story with Bertha's question "Oh, what is going to happen

now?” (12) stresses the endless confusion and uncertainty Bertha has. After knowing about her husband’s affair with her friend, Bertha needs to decide if she will complete her fake happy life, pretending that nothing happened, or will she confront her husband and destroy her apparently perfect kingdom?.

To conclude, employing Ferguson's concepts of impressionism and form show how Mansfield weaves the content of her story into the fabric of the story's form. And how the elements of impressionism take the short story into limitless, vivid interpretations. **First**, reading “Bliss” in the light of Suzanne Ferguson’s concepts of impressionism and form enriches our understanding of the text’s message. It helps the reader to pay attention to subtle details and patterns that provide genuine evaluation of the author's crafting skill. **Second**, it triggers critical thinking, motivating readers to evaluate the text within Ferguson’s theoretical framework, questioning its themes, techniques, and literary devices. Finally, this in turn, encourages the reader to actively interact with the text and not just passively read the words. This interaction will lead to different interpretations depending on the sensory images the reader chooses to select.

Applying Poe’s theory on “Short Fiction” to “The Tell-Tale Heart”:

In his article “Poe on Short Fiction,” Edgar Allan Poe awards primary importance to what he calls, “the unity of effect or impression” that the short tale must create. (“Poe on Short Fiction” 60). To Poe, “effect” is the axis around which a tale’s events should be invented and arranged. As he states, “having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, [the artist] then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect” (61). For the “effect” to become “enduring.” The tale must be brief because “brevity,” is the means through which the writer can “carry out the fullness of his intention.” By “brevity,” Poe does not refer to “extreme” or “undue” brevity, but rather the reasonable shortness that can ensure the “totality of the effect”: “*In medio tutissimus ibis.*” The tale, therefore, “should be read in just one sitting” (one or two hours) thus allowing “no external or extrinsic influences” that normally result from “weariness or interruption” (61). Also “every word” in the tale should “tell” (64) and, as Poe insists, “there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be the one pre-established design” (61). With Poe’s theoretical assumptions in mind, I will try to figure out how Poe’s tale, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” is a demonstration of his theory of “Short Fiction,” the theory that looks like a “design” which, according to Poe’s belief, can eventually result in “a sense of the fullest satisfaction” (61). And to decide if Poe’s following of theoretical premises in writing his story negatively influences his creativity or not.

To start with, what is the effect that Poe means to achieve through his “The Tell-Tale Heart”? In his quick evaluation of some of Hawthorne’s tales, Poe, soon after praising “The Minister’s Black Veil” as a masterpiece composition,” criticizes it because its “obvious meaning ...will be found to smother its insinuated one” (63). This reveals that Poe is reluctant to have things look “obvious”. The single “effect” that Poe’s short tale means to deliver is confusion that stands as a metaphor for the bigger confusion which dominates man’s life.

According to Poe, the “very initial sentence” in a tale should “outbring” the writer’s intended effect (61). The narrator’s first sentence in the story is highly confusing: “True-nervous-very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am but why *will* you say that I am mad?” (413). Not only does this sentence reflect the confusion in the speaker’s mind but it also sets the reader in a state of uncertainty about the speaker’s sanity. This sentence also makes the basis of a pattern that, like “the dropping of the water upon the rock” (61), will continue throughout the tale. In such short tale, the narrator makes seven direct assertions about his sanity, not to mention the many indirect references implied in his description of how “cautious,” “cunning,” and “wise” he was while both preparing for and carrying out his crime (413). By repeating such assertions of sanity and exactness of action on the part of the narrator, Poe is skillfully certain that an adverse effect will be created in the reader’s mind- the reader, as well, gets confused and remains as such till the last word in the tale. By so doing, Poe succeeds, to quote his very words, in having “the soul of the reader...at the writer’s control” (“Poe on short Fiction” 61).

To solidify the unity of his intended effect, Poe resorts to one more technique, that is, making affinity between the murderer and the murdered. The narrator fully understands and minutely describes the old man’s feelings at a specific moment of terror. Like the old man, he seems to have experienced the same feeling and so he knows where the old man’s “groan of mortal terror” arises: “I say I knew it well...it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me.” He, therefore, tells us about both the exact feelings and thoughts in the old man’s heart and mind: “I knew what the old man felt...he had been trying to fancy them [his fears] causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself- ‘It is nothing but the wind in the chimney- it is only a mouse crossing the floor,’ or ‘it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp’” (414). While both men are “hearkening to the death watches in the wall,” the “groan of mortal terror” that is heard, no matter from it arises, comes to put the two in one common fate marked by the imminence of death and the fear of it.

In addition, the fear that the old man's "vulture eye" (413) projects over the narrator is skillfully counterbalanced by the horrifying dim light that the narrator's dark lantern projects over the old man. Again, in asserting the affinity between the killer and the killed, Poe makes it difficult for his reader to be sure from whom (the killer or the killed) the final "shriek" (415) does come—is it the old man's shriek of death? Or is it a scream of relief and "triumph" (414) that the narrator emits after putting an end to the source of his fear? Lastly, to accentuate the sense of affinity between the two, Poe makes us feel that each of the two men is a kind of prey for the other: the old man's eye is a "vulture eye" that used to "chill the very marrow" in the narrator's "bones" (414), whereas the "leap" (415) the narrator takes over the old man in the dark is like that of a vicious owl that falls mercilessly in one dreadful swoop over its victim.

The last technique that Poe uses to keep his designed effect running is his use of a "peculiar tone" and a "peculiar event." As Poe explains, "Having chosen...a vivid effect, I consider whether it can best be wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone" ("Poe on Short Fiction" 67). According to X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, "the tone of the story...implies the feelings of the author, so far as we can sense them. Those feelings may be like feelings expressed by the narrator of the story" (An introduction to Fiction 154). What Poe chooses for his tale is, in fact, a peculiar tone and a peculiar event. Poe's peculiarity of tone is a product of the confusion that he wanted to show throughout the whole story. On the other hand, if "style," as Kennedy and Gioia point out, is "one of the clearest indications of the tone of a story" (154), Poe's style proves to be a "clear indication" of how immensely peculiar is the confusion that humanity leads. Poe's brief tale implies a long line of contraries: disease vs health, madness vs sanity, loving the old man vs taking his life, light vs dark, silence vs noise, uncontrollable terror and fear vs audacity, hastiness vs heavy strides, shrieking vs quietness, and life vs death.

The peculiarity of Poe's event, on the other hand, is that the tale does not give a sufficiently convincing reason for the murder of the old man. What adds to the peculiarity of the event is that Poe never mentions what kind of relationship there is between the narrator and the old man! Overall, as Kennedy and Gioia explain: "To understand the tone of a story is to understand some attitude more fundamental to the story than whatever attitude the characters explicitly declare" (154). Based on this, what is fundamental to the story is the confusion that fully envelops the narrator's life. Contrary to what he "explicitly declares" about his own sanity, love of the old man, precision of action, caution, cunningness, audacity, and wisdom,

the narrator is a confused person, who is filled with hatred, fear, and self-division.

Eventually, Poe skillfully succeeds to produce a tale that demonstrates his views about writing of “Short Fiction.” He keeps his intended effect running till the very last word and so manages, to quote his words, to have the “design intended be accomplished, to the fullest extent, by the means most advantageously applicable” (62). So, Poe achieves creativity while writing within the design of specific rules.

Ferguson versus Poe with reference to Brander Matthews and Allan H. Pasco:

Ferguson’s views on the development of the short story, and the high position it occupies reflect her full awareness of the socio-political circumstances of different times and how the powers in society and prestige battle among literary genres have mutually affected and still affecting each other. Her belief in the short story’s power to adapt new styles, challenges the fixed genre hierarchy. Comprehensive, clear, and well argued, Ferguson’s vision of the short story may stand as a touchstone against which some earlier visions like those of Edgar Allan Poe or Brander Matthews may be compared.

Poe believes that a work of art that has been read in more than one sitting (or one hour) is a work that cannot “thoroughly” preserve its “unity of effect” (60). On the same line of thought Matthews in his article “The Philosophy of The Short Story” sees that a novel “cannot” have this unity: “a Short-story has unity as a Novel cannot have it” (73). Unlike either, Ferguson believes that the novel, like the short story can wholly preserve the unity of effect, but it is only the “compactness and focus of the short stories” that makes the effect “more readily apparent” (“Defining the short story” 16).

While both Poe and Matthews focus on the inevitability of each word that, according to Matthews, allows no word or part to be “elaborated” or “expanded” because it is not a novel (75), Ferguson, conversely, sees that “all stories can be reduced to minimal statements of the required elements or expanded by the inclusion of optional developments in the narrative chain, as long as they maintain a discoverable coherence in their interrelationships.” She less dogmatically, illustrates that “like the sentence, the story has ‘slots’ where various elements may be inserted... both the sentence and the story may be almost infinitely expanded.” Moreover, as Ferguson stresses, “we might remove one or more sentences...or add a few...without altering its theme or quality for most readers” (“Defining the Short Story” 14). In her vision, Ferguson awards more trust and wider expectations to the skills of the reader, whereas Poe simply believes that the reader must remain “at the writer’s control” (61). To Ferguson, readers are expected to be like

“detectives, piercing together the main elements” (18) because “the moral is no longer an easily abstractable truism verified by an implied author, but rather a complex and hardly won proposition” (23).

Ferguson, through a reasoned argument, refrains from defining the short story or seeing it as a separate genre; but Matthews, without stated reasons, claims that the short story “is one of the few sharply defined literary forms. It is a genre...as the Epic, as Tragedy, as Comedy.” He also claims that “the Novel is not form of the same sharply defined individuality” that the short story has. Matthews, in this way, sees the short story as a pure breed of “distinct identity” (78). Ferguson, on the other hand, sees the short story as a hybrid that “by marrying characteristics of several subgenres of the short story with characteristics of poetry, drama, and... novel, came into its own ‘social’ success, producing a highbrow heir to lowbrow and middlebrow kin” (The Hierarchy 192)

Ferguson’s vision about the short story attributes is reasoned and persuasive. As much as her premises can be considered as replies to many of Poe’s and Matthew’s opinions on the short story, they can also be considered as a source of guidance for latter critic like Allan H. Pasco. Ferguson’s belief that “aesthetic artistry” made the core from which “the modern, prestige short story” sprang and got its position “pitched” (190) is a belief that Pasco some years later adopted. In his article “On Defining Short Stories,” Pasco believes that “the deciding factor” in the making of a modern short story is “the artistry.” To him, “there must be artistry for the short story to exist” (121). Again, like Ferguson, Pasco stresses that there is no “cluster of traits agreed upon among critics to define short story; “cluster” is even the very word that Ferguson uses in the first page of her first article. To him, “definitions in aesthetic matters are never definitive” because everything may shift over time (123).

More like Ferguson and unlike Matthews, Pasco confirms that the “short story is open to any topic, any material” (121). Pasco does not think that a “discussion of the constituent elements of a short story” is a harmful process. To him, while such “discussion” may be “falling far short of a touchstone good in all cases and for all time,” it may “help readers have productive rather than destructive representations when they pick up a representative example” (127).

Applying Luscher’s ideas to Porter’s sequence “The Old Order” with focus on “The Grave”

In his article “The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book,” Robert M. Luscher claims that, within the context of a short story sequence, “the individual stories don’t lose their distinctiveness but rather expand and elaborate the contexts, characters, symbols, or themes developed by the

others. Like “an open Book,” the sequence of short stories, can “invite the reader to construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them cumulative thematic impact” (149). Luscher further explains that “while each story probes a select and seemingly isolated episode in some depth from a particular standpoint, it may still be part of some larger conceptual whole, one indication of a wider truth or thematic current that a single story cannot chart completely” (152).

The pleasure emanating from this process of finding and understanding the “connections” between the various stories of one sequence, depends, in the first place, on the reader’s “subjective activity [of] supplying what the author leaves out” (152). As Luscher states, “the artist may set forth even less of the whole picture and rely on the reader’s pattern-making faculties to formulate the variable connections and build textual consistency” (155). What Luscher recommends in this respect as a way of reading is mostly reminiscent of Suzanne Ferguson’s idea about the reader being a “detective, piecing together” the various parts of a story or stories to reach the real implications of what is told and what is left (“Defining the short story” 223).

With Luscher’s views in mind, this segment of the paper seeks to locate some of the strings of connection existing in the seven stories of Kathleen Anne Porter’s sequence “The Old Order” and , to briefly discuss her story “The Grave” as an independent story that , despite its place in the organic unity with the other stories, can fully stand by itself to bring about an effect that may even be different from that of the sequence as a whole.

Porter’s primary device of connecting the seven stories of “The Old Order” is her ultimate use of the past of Miranda’s family as the sole repertoire of narration. Within the multi-layers of this past, we encounter similar as well as dissimilar characters and patterns of life- all are skillfully intertwined to eventually help Miranda start her journey of maturation. There are also many sorts of contrast even between the apparently similar characters, like, for instance, the case of Grandmother and old Nannie. Both women “shared a passion for...fitting things together,” nursing and caring for the children of the other and following a very tight “domestic strategy” from which “very little escaped them.” And with “the perpetual round of events...they did not feel defeated nor that their strategy was a failure” (“The Old Order” 326-27). They, however, are far different as to what concerns their own social status: unlike Grandmother who knows her unshakeable place in society, “Old Nannie had no ideas at all as to her place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she had all her life obeyed the authority nearest to her” (“The Old Order” 328).

“Counterpoint” (150) is identified by Luscher as one of the devices that a reader may use to connect the various stories in a sequence. It seems that

Porter intentionally uses this same device to lead her protagonist Miranda into the realm of knowing the world, and so she skillfully portrays the character of Great- Aunt Eliza to represent the main “counterpoint” in the whole sequence. Aunt Eliza functionally acts to subvert the stable vision of the world that people like Grandmother and Old Nannie (the two women among whom Miranda is mostly sandwiched) adamantly hold. Through Grandmother, for example, Miranda knows that life has just one “way and no other” and so “it must be done this way, and no other” (“The Fig Tree” 354). As a new pattern needed to connect Miranda with other sphere of looking at the world, Great-Aunt Eliza is imaged both as a scientific woman and a rebel against society’s traditions. She uses her telescope to look at plants, planets, and creatures, the thing that makes her so knowledgeable about other worlds that are certainly different from the only world of Grandmother. As she lets Miranda see the moon through the telescope and gives her answer, “Nobody knows,” (“The Fig Tree” 361) in response to Miranda’s question if the other worlds seen by the telescope are like this world, Miranda then realizes that her grandmother’s world of certainty is not the only world-there is now another one of uncertainty. Such a brief, dialogic experience in the farm comes not only to outweigh all the previous monologic ones under Grandmother’s command but also to make the beginning of the end for Miranda’s childhood innocence. Living with Grandmother is, however, not without its benefits for Miranda’s own growth. Without knowing her grandmother’s view of the world, she could not have known that Aunt Eliza’s vision is different.

Before going to Cedar Grove where Aunt Eliza lives, Miranda makes a brief “framing story” (another device of connection identified by Luscher) of almost all the outcome of her life with Grandmother: “Miranda never got over being surprised at the way grown- up people [Grandmother, Old Nannie, and father] simply did not seem able to give anyone a straight answer to any question, unless the answer was ‘No’” (“The Fig Tree” 354) . By carrying this perspective with her to Cedar Grove, Miranda is both functioning as a thread that binds the different locales of the sequence and as a quester for the scattered pieces of experience she personally needs to develop her own view of the world. On reaching Cedar Grove, she knows that not all grown- ups are the same, as Aunt Eliza can give direct answers even to the mysterious sound “Weep, weep,” that Miranda earlier failed to recognize where it seemed to come from after burying the dead chicken. Aunt Eliza diligently explains to her that this is the sound of tree frogs. And unlike Grandmother’s language of asking everybody just to listen and carry out what he/she listens to, Aunt Eliza uses a different language “Just think...can you imagine?”-

words that uttered not authoritatively but in a “scientific voice” (“The Fig Tree” 361).

Through such “counterpoints,” Porter is consciously pointing to the collision between the “old order” of Miranda’s first world and the soon-to-come new one: many references in the sequence are made to the “new woman” as the image Grandmother recognizes in the character of one of her daughters-in-law. In rejection of “The old order,” Aunt Eliza “dips snuff” exactly like the “women of the lower classes” (“The Fig Tree” 359). The result of this collision is that “times were changing” and “the old world was sliding,” and so Miranda “lays hold of the new one” (“The Last Leaf” 349) as is conveyed in the last story “The Grave.” It can, therefore, be safely said that “The Fig Tree” story and the character of Aunt Eliza are two connecting bridges in Porter’s short story sequence: “The Fig Tree” marks the beginning of Miranda’s understanding of some of the clues of the world, an act that is initiated by the difference that the character of Aunt Eliza exposes to her.

Many other patterns of connection exist in Porter’s sequence: for example, “Fiddler” as the name of every horse that Grandmother rides, Grandmother’s farm as the central setting of most of the events, the recurrent theme of Grandmother’s insistence to have everything in order, and the recurrent theme of death as represented in the frequent removal of the bones of Grandmother’s dead husband and in the burial of dead animals and birds. In addition to the previous connections, there is Grandmother’s collective view of the world (to her animals and humans are “friends”, and both have “duties” to perform. (“The Source” 324) “All the sounds of life...seemed to converge in [her]household” (“The Source” 327). Furthermore, there are Grandmother’s continuous dispraising of the second generation, the stability of the black characters’ situation even after the end of slavery, memories of every aspect like those of Uncle Jimbilly about the horrors of slavery, and stories (by Jimbilly and old Nannie) that are intertextualized within “the main current” of the family’s past. These stories look like “the bubble on the stream, is part yet distinguished from the main current” as Luscher explains (151).

The existence of such interconnected patterns inside Porter’s sequence does not, in any way, prevent the individual stories from standing by themselves in full, distinguished wholeness. “The Grave,” for instance, can simply be read as a separate short story that exposes something totally “new”. The story circles around Miranda and her brother Paul, who are out hunting, where they came across their family’s graveyard. looking inside the graves gives Paul and Miranda “an agreeable thrill of wonder: they were seeing a new sight, doing something they had not done before.” Even when they both “tried by words to shape a special, suitable emotion” related to the

past of the family, “they felt nothing” of this kind (“The Grave” 362). To them, when “the coffin was gone, a grave was just a hole in the ground” (363).

The newness of the experience signifies that the story is intended, besides its organic integration into the sequence, to raise and maintain a new effect- a new experience in the life of the nine-year-old Miranda and her brother, the twelve-year-old Paul. Like any modern and independent short story, “The Grave,” to quote Suzanne Ferguson, handles “the theme of quest for reliable transpersonal knowledge about the world” (“Defining the Short Story”221). Miranda is curious to know and grow and this happens with the help of her brother, Paul. Corinne Andersen stresses that Miranda “wants to look and act like Paul” (4). For Miranda, Paul is the leader and the teacher, that is why she “always followed at Paul's heels along the path, obeying instructions” (363). Miranda’s overall outfit refers to her revolutionary desire to escape her society’s assigned gender role as a young girl, submissively staying home, playing with her doll. She loves to wonder with Paul to explore and enjoy. Digging graves with her brother participates in Miranda’s personal growth and transformation. It is a process of digging into her own deep emotions to recognize and confront mortality, and to find answers for absurd questions, especially about death. The act of digging graves teaches Miranda to be responsible for her actions and decisions in life. She makes a choice to trade the “silver dove” she found with the “gold ring” her brother found with no hesitation (363). And this is how she begins to grow and mature. She learns how to be disciplined, patient, and courageous enough to face difficult situations.

Overall, the adventure in the family graveyard serves as a transformative experience for Miranda, from innocence to experience, from ignorance to knowledge and from childhood to adulthood. Miranda, in complete independence and without the restrictions of grown-ups, is beginning the course of her real knowledge of the world: looking attentively at Paul while taking the rabbit’s skin away and slitting the thin flesh from the center ribs to the flanks, Miranda “wanted most deeply to see and to know. Having seen, she felt at once as if she had known all along...No One had even told her anything outright...she was learning what she had to know. (366-367). From that moment Miranda changes where “The very memory of her former ignorance faded” (366). “The Grave” can stand as a distinctive whole story about a young girl’s process of maturation, though it is located within a sequence.

To conclude, this paper reaches the following findings: **first** the study of the short story theories enriches the short story reading experience because of the different angles that will be opened in front of the reader according to

each theorist's premises. In other words, the benefits of reading a short story within a theoretical framework are limitless, including the blossoming of critical thinking, seeing behind the explicit meaning, and producing unfamiliar alternative analyses. That is seen through reading Mansfield's story "Bliss" where applying "impressionism" and "form" adds valuable dimensions that enable readers to indulge in the intense beauty of the story. So, it is a plus deed that won't spoil the enjoyment of the reading process because it is a breakthrough to the dogmatic, traditional way of reading. Reading with the purpose of applying theoretical concepts will add more asset to the short story and will never spoil the fun. On the contrary, it doubles the fun. Applying Ferguson's ideas of "impressionism" and "form" brings Bertha to life as a person you know, and you feel all the throbs of agony she lives through. **Second**, following theoretical premises positively influences writers' creativity. Reading Edgar Allan Poe's fabulous masterpiece "The Tell-Tale Heart" within the design of his theory of the "effect" that runs through the whole piece, shows his utmost creativity. In Poe's tale each word is meaningfully used with a purpose to attain and an "effect" to keep. The stream of a consistent effect throughout the story uplifts Poe into a dignified position because the design of his short story proves the practicality and the adaptability of his theoretical premises. The "effect" of confusion and ambiguity that wraps the story from the beginning till the end made Poe's short story a precious gem that increases its value every time you read it, because of the marvelous grip that Poe has on the story's effect. **Third**, reading about short story theories and comparing critics' theoretical premises generate new, vivid insights for further investigations and explorations. Also, it gives a thorough strong examination of the various perspectives. Moreover, it stresses the fact that any attempt to reach exact, fixed definitions and specific features for that genre will be met with failure, because of its elasticity, vastness, and adaptability to include various genres and features. Discussing and applying some of Ferguson's ideas, Poe's concepts and Luscher's tenants prove that the short story has a unique "prestige" that keeps it beyond any trial to restrict its dimensions. That is why the short story will remain prestigious and beyond any attempt of containment.

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