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Sweetness and Corruption

The restrictive setting of the early 1900’s on a south Texas farm and cemetery of Katharine Anne Porter’s short story “The Grave” requires a young tomboy to embrace her feminine role in society in order to mature. As an innocent girl at the beginning of the story, “Miranda preferred her overalls to any other dress, though it was making a rather scandal in the countryside …” (Porter 327). It doesn’t take long for Miranda to realize she has outgrown denim overalls and prefers fancy, luxurious dresses—the more appropriate dress for the time. Finding the ring seems to bring her to this awareness. When Paul shoots the pregnant rabbit, Miranda “began to tremble without knowing why” (329). She begins to realize that she, too, could be pregnant someday — the secret not spoken of, but obvious because she lives on a farm with animals. Miranda little understands her beginning maturation, but it happens nonetheless. Finally, twenty years later, the Indian vendor holds up the candied creatures, and she smells “…mingled sweetness and corruption…” (329). Miranda’s coming of age playing in the graves that day was both sweet and corrupt. She realizes the cycle of life and death then, and her place in the world as a young woman is no longer one of a tomboy. In 1903 the United States’ society was rigid and conservative for a young lady, but Miranda embraces her femininity and matures, remembering especially fondly the day she and Paul found their treasures in the grave.

Works Cited

Porter, Katherine Anne. “The Grave.” *American Short Stories*. Ed. Eugene Current-Garcia and Bert Hitchcock. 6th ed. New York: Longman, 1997. 325-329. Print.