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# The Female Bildung; Embodying the Story Cycle Novel from Jewett to Porter

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## Abstract

Sarah Orne Jewett's young women of her 1877 story cycle *Deephaven* are described as being like the famed lesbian "ladies of Llangollen" while her mature women establish a *Bildung* of relationship through a series of delicate and related sketches in her 1897 *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Here, the character of the woman writer and the sibylline object of her increasing intimacies are ultimately joined as they eat words in sketches that feature a gingerbread home place and an inscribed pie. Through its funerals, reunions, female couplings, and the obsession with a distanced mother, Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* establishes the patterns for this genre of alternate identity that models the story-based female, as well as race and ethnic, *Bildung*. This alternate canon of the story-cycle novel hinges on female couplings, including the dynamic tension proposed in the joining and violent division of mothers and daughters. These novels grow through features of embodiment in which even Faulkner's entries (the cycles deepest in his female stream) feature pregnant middles and close with scenes of reunion even as these endings themselves narrate exclusions and a strong vector of exile. Often, literally in reflection, these female and feminized figures are alone or isolated in an untoward couple who occupy an announced boundary. These protagonists are unmoored and facing not being home or no longer having a home. Porter's work, forming an alternate, albeit still story-based branch of the Southern literary stream, follows Jewett's junctures of female identity while raising major questions about genre. Her failed story cycle, *The Old Order*, is arguably a successful plantation novel and a frightening female *Bildung*. Here, as the stories themselves become increasingly complex, they conclude in a story that is about female embodiment: the carnal site of birth and death. The structure is not just thematic, but formal as the preceding stories give birth to the work's only stand-alone story, "The Grave." This analysis concludes with the problem posed by Porter's 1939 publication of what she in her subtitle designated as "Three Short Novels." This volume called *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (sharing the name of the final novel) is pregnant with a strange middle, a seemingly foreign interiority of masculine crisis called *Noon Wine*. By putting these two authors together, this presentation charts a tradition, its successes as well as its failures and false starts, to argue that the female *Bildung* is a story- and community- based alternative, which allows women writers and writers of color to claim the wholeness of identity that comes from being read in relationship, being read as stories comprising a novel.

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