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ENG 874

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Reflection

A Marxist Perspective on the *Bildungsroman* Stories of William Faulkner and Katherine

Anne Porter

I can clearly recall being a little girl, eyes wide with joy and wonder, listening to my mother reading bedtime stories, sending me off to sleep with dreams of far away lands and untold treasures waiting to be discovered in the recesses of my imagination. Now in my thirties, I still make the time to explore these many worlds within the scope of literature, so it came as no surprise to those who know me when I returned to school to delve into the realm of the Master of Liberal Studies program with a concentration in English. I have always felt that life was a journey. In our life journey, we must all choose the path that best suits us, but along the way we can share universal experiences and learn from others, even if they are on a totally different course. Education is a big part of a life journey, as I believe knowledge is power.

I first had a chance to connect with fellow MLS students taking their own journeys in the form of the blackboard discussion group during the fall of 2005. I took classes a bit out of order, so my initial foray into the world of MLS involved the class “Origins and Implications of the Knowledge Society.” I knew that technology was becoming a major player in education—having taken all my college (undergraduate and

graduate) classes online, I was a living testament to the role technology occupied in modern society. Technology has influenced my life, both professionally and personally, through its enabling of me to earn my degrees with the aim of finding suitable employment, as well as allowing me the means to meet my husband through a screenwriter's chat room. Moreover, having co-written a book of poetry and prose, being responsible for the editing of said book, and self-publishing it has taught me a great deal about the technological experience needed to get by in today's seemingly automaton-run world. Our modern world, with its ubiquitous machinery, makes me wonder sometimes what things would be like if we did not rely so much on technology and rather employed knowledge and old fashioned hard work to get by in this twenty-first century. I am brought back to one of the first readings in this class, Peter Drucker's Post-Capitalist Society, where I found innovative ideas describing how knowledge will be the most sought after commodity in the job market economy, challenging the views of the Marxist political-economic connection. In fact, Drucker denounced Marxism, stating it was a failure. He says, "But surely the collapse of Marxism as a creed signifies the end of the belief in salvation by society" (13). Drucker's hope was that there would be "renewed emphasis on the individual" (13) and with that emphasis, "a return to individual responsibility" (13). To be honest, I had never thought much about Marxist views on anything. It was a term I heard bandied about; however, before I had taken this course it was like an abstract painting to me, elusive, something I would think about for a few minutes but not really comprehend its meaning in one sitting. Drucker's book gave me a good starting point with which to understand Marxism and I later studied more on the theory. Maybe Drucker was right that the theory did not work for society on a political or

economic level, but perhaps the Marxist view as a literary theory had some merit to it and could add a fascinating dimension to the ways of analyzing literature. Furthermore, was Drucker right in thinking that full responsibility should always lie with an individual, or were there cases where society as a whole did have a hand in either ruining or supporting a person? During my research of Marxist theories as applied to the *Bildungsroman* stories of William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter I will uncover which scenario seems to be more truthful.

Taking another angle on Post-Capitalist Society, I notice that Drucker defends his knowledge-is-the-future theory by pointing out that “Plato’s spokesman, the wise Socrates” (26) told about Protagoras and his theories on knowledge—that is “For Protagoras, knowledge meant logic, grammar, rhetoric—later to become trivium, the core of learning in the Middle Ages, and still very much what we mean by a ‘liberal education’ or what Germans mean by ‘Allgemeine Bildung’” (26-27). I hadn’t expected a book mostly concerned with politics, economics, and philosophy to relate so much to literature—this discovery made me realize the true meaning of the word “interdisciplinary.” As I progressed in my studies I would again come across this “Bildung” concept, in the variety of literary works.

Thinking back to another of my earlier classes, a novel I read in the “Introduction to Graduate Studies” course sticks in my mind. The novel, Man’s Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl, details a Holocaust survivor’s ordeals and demonstrates how he found meaning in his own life, despite the horrors he has witnessed. It is a very inspirational book and gave me the sense that if someone who had experienced such misery could survive and thrive, surely I could do the same. Relating this book to my main topic, I see

how characters in particular *Bildungsroman* stories utilize concepts espoused by Frankl, such as the existential vacuum theory and attitudinal values. Frankl has said that “The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century” (128). His claim was that boredom is a precursor to this condition because people are so busy nowadays that when they are not busy it results in a sense of distress. When this occurs, people tend to compensate for it by engaging in unhealthy behavior such as sexual promiscuity or gambling. This notion makes me think of Madame Bovary, a book I read in the class “The Classics and You,” where the main character gets entangled in affairs because she is never satisfied. One way of finding meaning, according to Frankl, is all in the attitude. Developing attitudinal values such as bravery, compassion, and a sense of humor can get us by tough times. This attitude adjustment theory reminds me of another great work of literature I read in “The Classics and You,” Candide. Candide became caught up in many adventures during the course of the novel, following the advice of those around him, but in the end, he learned that although there is evil and wrongdoing in the world, having the attitudinal value of suffering in dignity shows that if we spend time working on making our own life better it can help negate the destructive forces pulling us down into that existential vacuum. Voltaire’s garden metaphor, “but let us cultivate our garden” (Candide 87; ch. 30) brings this point home. Frankl says that even suffering can give meaning. In the *Bildungsroman* stories of Faulkner and Porter I will analyze whether the characters indeed cultivate their own gardens or if they tend to fall into the category of people prone to become sucked into the existential vacuum.

Part of the class grade for “Introduction to Graduate Studies” was based on the assignments we posted on Blackboard where other students would read and comment on

them and we were to reciprocate. I found this a very helpful way of learning because some online classes do not involve much interaction, but this course made it possible to communicate with other students on a continual basis during the semester, allowing the constant give and take of feedback pertaining to our writing. The free-flowing, weekly exchange of ideas provided each of us with a chance to grow and expand our knowledge base, which then helped us make better, if not more-educated, choices as far as what options we would choose to next explore in our college careers. Getting to know people, at least to a degree, opened my eyes to how so many diverse types of people, in all stages of life, could come together for brief periods of time and agree on a number of issues, even if each person had a different reason for reaching a certain conclusion. I found it interesting that of the individuals posting messages on Blackboard, the females tended to speak of taking classes as a way of enriching their lives, while the males mostly mentioned taking classes because it would help them get further in their career. The differences in the female and male views on “getting ahead” in life would greet me again later in my MLS career when I would take my English concentration classes.

A third core class I enrolled in that reminds me of an aspect of the *Bildungsroman* story is “Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspectives.” This course had us read Plato’s “Meno.” The key concept I learned from this reading is that virtue is taught; therefore it is knowledge. Humility is important to have because one cannot learn if pride gets in the way. These ideas from “Meno” apply to my topic since the characters in *Bildungsroman* stories need humility in order to learn, for it is only through knowledge that they are able to discover who they truly are inside.

In addition, this course let us take a look at ways of knowing in the arts and humanities, which was of most interest to me. We studied videotapes discussing various subcategories, such as literature and philosophy. The arts, unlike the sciences, deal with appreciation, aesthetics, opinions, and feelings. One key phrase I remember from watching the videotape on art says “Bad art never killed anyone, but bad medicine might” (Videotape C-21). This amusing saying stays with me because we can learn lessons from those artistic and creative things we do not like as well as those we do admire. I recall one student who did not think Poe’s macabre works should be considered “literature,” yet there was still something she could take from his stories (with prodding and suggestions from fellow students) despite her lack of admiration for them. We also learned that when it comes to the arts and humanities, these disciplines can define culture or culture can define them. In a sense, the universal can be conveyed through the particular, as in a particular piece of literature can present universal ideas. *Bildungsroman* stories often are universally appealing, since just about everyone, regardless of gender, race, location, etc., experiences that pivotal moment where he must decide what direction to take in his life journey. As we read in this interdisciplinary class, Socrates claimed that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” All of the *Bildungsroman* stories I have read share that perception.

Dr. Stephen Tramel wrote the WKCP Companion, which we consulted throughout the semester in the “Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspectives” class. One component covered in the Companion was morality and its connection to ethics and reasoning. After all, to *know* something is to be able to reason about it and apply ethical standards to it. According to the WKCP Companion, the three main ethical theories are

deontological, consequentialist, and arctic (78). It is not always easy to know which type of ethical theory is best, but Dr. Tramel suggests using the values of honesty, fairness, courage, and humility, and to also be serious about what is truth. Chances are, if we apply these standards to a subject, we can find an agreeable definition of what is truth and what is considered moral. This concept goes back to the things Frankl mentioned in his book, as well as morality issues discussed by Plato and Socrates.

During my time with FHSU I have taken a few courses taught by Dr. Michael Meade. Dr. Meade encouraged me to dig deeper into a literary work to find layers of meaning instead of merely focusing on one simple aspect. Two readings from the class “The British Novel” come to mind because they are prime examples of the essence of the *Bildungsroman*. Tom Jones was the first novel I read in this class and I also watched the movie version of it starring Albert Finney. It was a daunting book, with over seven-hundred pages, but it revealed to me a new type of literature—a type that explored human nature, with all of its virtues and foibles. The author, Henry Fielding, wanted to make the point that no one was perfect, but that didn’t mean we should look down at others. To assert that point, one of the quotes from the novel states, “not to condemn a character as a bad one because it is not perfectly a good one” (Tom Jones 364; bk. X; ch. I).

The second *Bildungsroman* I read in this class was Jane Eyre. This novel showed me that although coming-of-age stories were typically confined to the realm of males, a female protagonist could offer new views on the lessons learned growing up under difficult circumstances. As a female, I sympathized with Jane’s plight and felt I could relate to her story more than the adventures of the fledgling males I read. Reading Tom Jones and Jane Eyre in succession allowed me to better discern the differences between

tales from the female and male perspectives. Whilst the male-centered story has a more sardonic tone and often features sexual exploits (besides Tom Jones, also think of Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy), the female-centered tale deals more with emotions—such as love and guilt—and finding one’s own self-worth (A Room With a View and The Awakening, in addition to Jane Eyre). Both male and female driven works in this genre, I have found, do contain some mention of spirituality and, in conclusion, whether they take a sarcastic or serious tone, submit a glimpse of how to (or how not to) mature and grow and make the most of what life has to offer.

In the English course “Religion, Heresy, Magic, and Myth” we explored the worlds of gods and goddesses, vampires and monsters, and the mythical teachings of Joseph Campbell. A philosopher, Carl Jung, told of the *collective unconscious*, or in basic terms, a group of memories and ideas shared by everyone. He noted that there are many similarities that occur in various religions, including “archetypes” like the virgin, stories about floods, and certain rituals. Another one of Jung’s major theories involves what is known as the *shadow*, which, according to Jung, is not necessarily a negative entity; rather, it is the representation of an opposite personality that someone would normally have most of the time. For instance, if someone is usually shy, it would be his shadow that causes him to scream obscenities at someone for cutting him off on the road. Jung’s theories form the heart of the archetypal literary theory, which I would go on to learn more about in another class during the same semester.

James C. Frazer took the concept of the *collected unconscious* and related it to various myths, developing a twelve-volume work titled The Golden Bough. The mythologist Joseph Campbell later extended the myths and legends developed in The

Golden Bough and wrote a book called The Hero with a Thousand Faces. In this book, Campbell outlined something he labeled a “Hero’s Journey.” He felt there were universal goals a person had to achieve in order to feel a fulfilled life. This book, as well as others written by Joseph Campbell, has inspired numerous authors and filmmakers, with George Lucas and his Star Wars saga being the most prominent example.

The “Hero’s Journey” can be found in the classic story of Gilgamesh, written well before Campbell’s time. Gilgamesh has a divine mother and human father and must learn to accept that he is not immortal. The major goals for Gilgamesh, following the “Hero’s Journey” format, include the primary call to adventure, the subsequent trials, achieving the goal or boon, and the final application of the boon. The “Hero’s Journey” and the *Bildungsroman* share similar attributes, such as a person going through a spiritual rebirth, learning about love and loss, and developing a sense of self and a moral education.

While taking the course “Literary Visions” I became acquainted with William Faulkner’s short story “Barn Burning.” It appealed to me due to its engaging story and realistic characters. Even though we did not read Katherine Anne Porter’s stories in this class, she was frequently mentioned by students posting on Blackboard, and I was familiar with some of her works through my undergraduate studies. There are several similarities shared by these authors that prompted me to look into their works beyond what we were required to read for our studies. First, both authors lived and wrote around the same period. Second, both explored aspects of southern living in their works. Third, both authors’ stories featured elements that I found could be analyzed by a Marxist literary theory to better bring to the forefront the characters’ struggles relating to class and economic situations.

My last class prior to this culminating experience, “Theory and Techniques of Literary Criticism,” taught me how to analyze a text using a plethora of theories, ranging from psychological to deconstructive. This knowledge helps me to dissect the *Bildungsroman* tale even further because I can distinguish the road to self-discovery that these stories illuminate in copious ways. If I want to concentrate on a character’s thoughts and actions as related to those of the author, for example, I can apply the biographical literary criticism theory. Looking at the story from another angle, if I want to focus on the role that socio-economics play in the development of character, such as in “Barn Burning,” I can apply a Marxist literary theory to the text. The Marxist theory appeals to me the most, specifically when choosing a theory to apply to the *Bildungsroman* story, because I am interested in the way society, economics, and politics affect the way we are treated or the way we think about ourselves in relation to others (though, ironically, I did not write about this theory for the class!).

The search for self-identity is important, I feel, because without a sense of self-identity we cannot experience a “Hero’s Journey.” Only through knowledge, which leads to virtue, can we understand what our purpose is on this earth. I agree with Peter Drucker’s statement that “The ablest students appreciate the liberal arts” (213) because if I had only concentrated on English classes I would not be able to make the ostensibly incongruous connection from Post-Capitalist Society to “Meno” to Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung to Tom Jones to “Barn Burning” to Marxism and on and on. It is thanks to my own “Allgemeine Bildung” that I see how the world is interconnected. Upon receiving my degree in these interdisciplinary studies I hope to show others how an appreciation and understanding of the humanities can enrich their own lives.

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Research

A Marxist Perspective on the *Bildungsroman* Stories of William Faulkner and Katherine

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Step inside any typical classroom where there are students reading literature and chances are you will hear the gripe: “But what does this have to do with me?” A question like this is not an anomaly; many students find themselves wondering exactly how literature can have an impact on their lives. Some of the most accessible parts of classic tales have always been realistic, relatable characters, as well as relevant, timeless plots and themes. The best representation of these valuable assets in literature can be found in the *Bildungsroman*, since it tells of the journey from impressionable child, to conflicted teenager, to seasoned adult. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* is therefore almost universally appealing, due to its portrayal of human maturation, and as such has the greatest chance of lingering in the mind of the reader than does a standard work within such genres as science fiction (how many of us actually have been abducted by aliens?), mysteries (how many times does an average person stumble on to a crime scene?), romance (how many knights on white horses are running around these days?) and others. That is not to diminish the important, pioneering works that do exist in other genres, but think about it—which do you remember most clearly (even after just one reading): a work like Jane Eyre or the latest book by Michael Crichton? The *Bildungsroman* gives us

more bang for the buck because we have all faced a moment or moments where we had to decide what to do with our lives and deal with any consequences of such decisions.

History of the Word

The *Bildungsroman* originated in Germany, towards the later half of the eighteenth-century, though it is up to contention as to precisely when the unique word first appeared. Scholars ascribe the word as potentially being devised to signify a specific type of German novel, most notably that of Wieland's Agathon (1766-67) and Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795), which epitomized the "general education" or "formative development" tales. These German stories were male-centered, generally ended on a positive note, involved what Pin-Chia Feng describes as a "moral and psychological transcendence" (6), and more often than not relied on a bourgeois-oriented viewpoint. From Germany, the concept of the *Bildungsroman* spread across the world. As the critic James Hardin admits, "Certainly no one these days would characterize the *Bildungsroman* as an exclusively German genre" (qtd. In Vanderwerkin 6). That may be true, but if it is no longer a uniquely German concept, what exactly is it?

During the 1800s, the term began being applied to the numerous coming-of-age novels that were emerging from England. Typical of many English *Bildungsroman* is having an orphan as the main character, most likely a poor boy, who travels to many undesirable locations, and contends with outside conflicts (particularly of class) more so than inner conflicts. As Pin-Chia Feng puts it: "Like the eighteenth-century novels of manners, Victorian English *Bildungsromane* instruct the middle class that finding a proper vocation is the path to upward mobility"(4). Many of the works of Charles Dickens fit this category.

America, a young nation with a strong sense of independence, developed its own spin on the *Bildungsroman*, sometimes using irony and humor, and sometimes drawing on psychological elements to help illuminate a particular aspect of the developmental journey. Moreover, the American *Bildungsroman* did not always end on an upbeat note, though the main character did experience an epiphany of sorts. Yet another major difference found in the American *Bildungsroman* not generally seen in the genre originating from other countries is the prevalence of female journey tales. Some prominent examples of this type of genre written by Americans include Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Little is written about the American *Bildungsroman* and its transformation of the form from its original German version, but Vanderwerken reminds us that Mordecai Marcus's 1960 essay called "What is an Initiation Story?" comes closest to being "the most systematic attempt at defining one" (12). Another attempt to define the American *Bildungsroman* is given to us by William Coyle, in his *The Young Man in American Literature: The Initiation Theme* (1969), which is now out of print. Coyle relates that "English has no term equivalent to the German *Bildungsroman* or *Erziehungsroman* (education novel) for a story of a young man's encounter with the adult world" (qtd. In Vanderwerken 13). Coyle goes on to say that the "*threshold* story might do, since the young man usually is poised to enter a new phase of his life" (qtd. In Vanderwerken 13). Coyle's choice of the word "threshold" is intriguing, as mythologist Joseph Campbell, for part of his outline for the "Hero's Journey," also uses the word to describe a component of the initiation ritual one must go through in order to become a fulfilled, enlightened individual. Campbell's "crossing of the threshold" is equivalent to participating in a rite

of passage—rites of passage being the mainstay of the *Bildungsroman*. The following quote from Campbell's The Hero with A Thousand Faces illustrates the importance of growing and learning:

... consider the numerous strange rituals that have been reported from the primitive tribes and great civilizations of the past, it becomes apparent that the purpose and actual effect of these was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage (10)

Perhaps it is so hard to formulate a cogent explanation for the American *Bildungsroman* because the country is a melting pot and, as such, is inhabited by many types of people who define themselves in various ways instead of sharing one common experience. Although there are several characteristics of the American *Bildungsroman* that set it apart from those developed in other countries, the American take on the genre still continues to uphold the traditional elements of this unique type of story while adding new dimensions to it, in such areas as race relations and political agendas. It should also be noted that while the *Bildungsroman* continues to flourish in the form of novels, more writers in the twentieth century began experimenting with abbreviated versions of the genre and created equally effective coming-of-age tales in the short story category. Two American masters of the *Bildungsroman* in short story form include William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter. These writers have provided us with many variations on the unique story model that is the *Bildungsroman*.

The Male *Bildungsroman*: Boys will be Boys

This genre started out focusing on a male child who makes his way in the world, earning an education containing scholarly and moral lessons. Beyond that, the child—and later, man—also becomes skilled at learning how to use his wits to get out of tricky situations. In the male-centered *Bildungsroman*, the boy in the story usually winds up breaking free of the father so that he can learn on his own what it means to be a “man,” as opposed to receiving help from a relative of the same gender who has “been there before.” The male *Bildungsroman* oftentimes follows a standard blueprint, starting with childhood and progressing over milestone stages in life in an orderly timeline. The adherence to a formula like this demonstrates the male need for structure and stability.

The traditional male *Bildungsroman* focuses on a sole protagonist and often he only develops two relationships; one intimate relationship with a woman (he may have many sexual encounters, but these are not attachments—there is typically only one “true” love, if any at all), and one bond of friendship with another male. The friendship with the other male sometimes is the main relationship in the story, as the protagonist’s dealings with women are usually violent to a degree. In the classic male *Bildungsroman*, men often use women, discarding them once they no longer fit into their plans. If they do marry, the men tend to isolate the women, confining them to the home with domestic chores and childcare. It is through the perceived inherent rights of the male within the institute of marriage that allows them to act in such a way, continuing the patriarchal conditions established by the protagonist’s father, and grandfather, and so on. It is a given, then, that the male *Bildungsroman*, whether comical or grave in nature, abides by a precedent that puts forward the man as the dominant, ruling force in society, no matter in which country or time period.

The Female *Bildungsroman*: It's Different for Girls

As detailed above, from its origins, the *Bildungsroman* has been a male-oriented genre, and with schools concentrating English programs of study on male writers more so than female authors, it is not hard to see why, as Ian Wojcik-Andrews adequately puts it: “A student of literary genres ... might plausibly be forgiven for thinking that only men went on journeys in search of their true identity” (4). We know this is not true, as females experience just as many trials and tribulations as their male counterparts. For centuries, in literature and pop culture mass media images, women have been assumed to be more internal creatures, capable of displaying a wide range of emotions, and since they are expected to be the nurturers of a family it makes sense that women “lose” themselves more frequently than do men and need reminders of their authentic selves, separate from those imposed on them by society. Women often contend with guilt more so than men as well, because they are made to be seen as trouble makers if they reject the notions of what culture proposes they ought to do and say.

The female *Bildungsroman* deals with issues not found in the male-oriented version of the genre. For starters, women have an inner struggle in the form of the virgin/whore model, wherein a woman must learn to accept and embrace her own sexuality without fear of labels by the general society. It is possible to be sexually aggressive and not be a “whore” as well as it is plausible to be “pure” yet not be a virgin. In the female *Bildungsroman*, a woman’s sexuality is often pertinent to the overall theme of self-discovery.

Another angle covered by the female *Bildungsroman* is one of the mother/daughter dynamic. This type of relationship is given more attention in the female

journey story because the mother is the first influence on a girl's perception of who or what she can be in the world. The childhood ties of the female protagonist are a bigger part of the story than they are in the male adventure because men are seen as less masculine if they establish too many deep bonds. The female, on the other hand, is characterized as cold and indifferent if she does not develop emotional ties, mostly with other women. Women tend to rely on other women to help guide them in growing experiences. Take, for instance, the way in which women bond over child-rearing experiences. Another difference for the female in her journey of self-discovery is that she has a deeper attachment to community than does the traditional male.

Marriage is seen as a big part of a female's life, as is motherhood. As is suggested by Wojcik-Andrews, a distinction between the male and female *Bildungsroman* is that for the female "domestic journeys" (44) are integral to her development of self. Cooking and cleaning, from a male perspective, gives the woman a sense of purpose in the union. From the female viewpoint, accomplishing domestic duties brings into play a sense of control, since the woman knows the man probably cannot complete these tasks correctly (many male bachelors rely on mainstays like macaroni and cheese and microwave dinners), hence, he is reliant upon her for certain needs and must give in to some demands (such as allowing her spending money). Of course, modern *Bildungsroman* tales may have the woman eschewing marriage and childbirth all together, but these types of feminist stances are still not a majority in literary works.

As far as format goes, the female *Bildungsroman* shakes things up in some cases, imbedding childhood memories within the middle or near the end of the story. This preconceived lack of structure is not actually a weakness; it is a mere reflection on the

female ability to interweave herself within several places and thought patterns at once. It is akin to the multi-tasking an average woman does every day. Just as a woman can cook dinner, assist her children in washing their hands, listen to her husband complain about a boss, and make a shopping list in her head all at the same time, so too can a female writer vacillate seamlessly betwixt times and places.

The Marxist Perspective on the *Bildungsroman*

Karl Marx, born in Germany in the year 1818, was an influential thinker who viewed history and society as an intertwined entity and made predictions about the failure of a capitalist society. Capitalism, at least in the United States, is still going strong, but that doesn't negate the many ground-breaking theories Marx wrote about during his lifetime. One of his crowning achievements, co-written with Friedrich Engels, was his book The Communist Manifesto (1848), which described the concepts of classes known as the bourgeois (the oppressors) and the proletariat (the workers). Marx asserts that there will always be class struggle in one way or another, stating "The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (51).

We know that "Marx and Engels achieved a revolution in philosophy, in political economy, and in political theory" (Slaughter 22), but they were not students of literature, though they did appreciate the arts. Marx, however, followed along with other German Enlightenment thinkers in the conviction that "capitalist society was fundamentally hostile to art" (Slaughter 23). How then, do Marx's ideas about history, class, philosophy,

economics, and politics lend themselves to a unique literary criticism model? Further, why is this literary theory relevant to works of the *Bildungsroman* genre?

Marxist literary theory, in a nutshell, looks to the form, style, and deeper meaning of a text. In addition, Marxists theory concerns itself with the particular significance of a product (book, short story, poem, etc.) in relation to its place in history. According to Eagleton, the German idealist philosopher G.W.F. Hegel was one of the influences on Karl Marx when it came to the subject of placing meaning on literary works based on historical dates that produced them (3). Moreover, Marx followed Hegel's idea of dialectical philosophy. Paul M. Schafer, editor of the book The First Writings of Karl Marx, explains this idea in the following manner: "The dialectical approach to philosophical thought strives to reveal the invisible lattice-work of reality by articulating the conceptual development of the ideas utilized to grasp it" (25). While Hegel devised the dialectical approach in relation to philosophy, from a Marxist view, it can also be applied to literature, especially the *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* involves a transformation from naïve youngster to wise self-aware, mature adult. Part of growing up requires the processing of information to discern what in life is real (our economic level, for example) and what is only an illusion (that we are all equals despite our financial situation, for instance). When it comes to literature, the dialectical approach applies in a way "For those who are willing to master its rigorous precision, dialectical reasoning offers a concept-world that expresses the structure of reality from the inside out" (25). A "concept-world" and "structure of reality" are important facets in a character's development in the *Bildungsroman*.

The link between German philosophy and the German origin of the *Bildungsroman* is indubitable. The elucidation of a clear answer as to the way Marx's theories apply to literature, nevertheless, is as elusive as finding an agreed on definition for the *Bildungsroman*. It is not unusual for critics of a particular literary theory to argue amongst themselves in search of an exact meaning of a work, but those who consider themselves Marxists are especially vehement in defending personal views of this theory as it pertains to literature. That may be because Marxism was not specifically developed to evaluate literature, so it is wide open to interpretive explorations.

Literature is a form that inherently expresses an ideology, whether intended or accidental. Christopher A. Lalonde says that "For Marx and Engels, ideology has a pejorative meaning; it is that which produces false consciousness and prohibits a person from seeing the real conditions of his existence" (10-11). Modern Marxists are not so narrow in judgments of meaning of particular ideologies; they prefer to view them as both necessary thoughtful reflections of the times *and* completely independent products of the perceived reality of the moment. Regardless of how the ideology is viewed, Slaughter asserts: "The historical study of the ideological influences upon and ideological content of literary works is of course essential to any Marxist analysis" (212).

An ideology relates to the society as a whole from which it arises, although that is not to say it is easy to define. On the contrary, as Eagleton describes "an ideology is never a simple reflection of a ruling class's ideas ... it is always a complex phenomenon, which may incorporate conflicting, even contradictory, views of the world" (6). It is the job of the literary critic, then, to synthesize a coherent explication of a given text and a

Marxist observation about the work in relation to world politics and financial structures, which in turn, provides a cohesive meaning.

As hinted earlier, the Marxist literary theory is especially useful when evaluating *Bildungsromane*. This form of novel or short story centers on a character's upbringing, and his financial situation frequently dictates what type of adventure the protagonist embarks on, as well as how they treat others at a lower or higher class of living. A Marxist perspective can be applied to both the male and female *Bildungsroman*, albeit, in distinctive ways. A Marxist, as well as feminist view, naturally fit hand-in-hand with the female *Bildungsroman*. At its core, these exploration stories focus on identity, and women's identities are traditionally associated with marriage and motherhood. Often women, despite the fact that they make up over half the population, are seen as a minority class, oppressed by men and society. Wojcik-Andrews reminds us that "Under patriarchal capitalism, the only universal is the oppressive contradictions in which women are universally placed" (29).

From a Marxist standpoint, the domestic work a woman is given—i.e. housework—relegates her to the role of servant. As Wojcik-Andrews explains: "Marriage, housework, and community relations represent the important stages in the formation of the identity of the journeying heroine largely because the bourgeois family has become the social, political, economic, and moral place that most emotionally interpellates the heroine to behave in normative ways" (21). The wife, in essence, can be seen as the proletariat in the household, governed by the husband through his dictating of appropriate behaviors and attire, control of the money brought into the home, and demands for intimate relations. While this idea of the wife as nothing more than a poor

slave at the mercy of her master's whims has seen a decline in recent years, some women (in countries throughout the world) are still beholden to the patriarchal structure of the household. Even women who work outside the home and earn a majority of the household income are not immune to the judging of society concerning their place in the hierarchy of the family unit.

A Marxist view would point out that for a man writing is a solitary event, to be seen as a job where interference would be cause for an upset of the balance of creativity. On the other hand, women, as proletariats, are chiefly confined to writing domestically—that is, carving out spaces to let out creativity on paper in between doing laundry, cooking dinner, rearing kids, and sometimes even holding down an outside job. Women generally write within the walls of the home, so that they can be ready to switch to the main mother/wife role when they are called, while men frequently travel outside the home to let themselves be free to contemplate ideas for writing.

A Marxist perspective on literature examines the role of the protagonist in relation to those around him, according to a socio-economic structure. After all, “Even those only slightly acquainted with Marxist criticism know that it calls on the writer to commit his art to the cause of the proletariat” (Eagleton 35). Marx uses the terms “Base” and “Superstructure” to define a society's starting point. For example, the base is the economic level of a society. The superstructure is anything that comes from that base—i.e. the type of art a society produces, the current philosophy a society shares based on the economic situation, etc. The American *Bildungsroman* literature written during the early nineteen-hundreds, for instance, would be the superstructure emerging from the capitalist economic base. When analyzing texts from the Marxist view, it is important to remember

that “Literature must therefore be understood as a product which contains an absolute within the relative (the ideological)” (Slaughter 212).

Although Marxism may not have been initially established to help English students disseminate ideas about the struggles of lower class characters they encounter in stories, today it is surely an important theory that forces us to look at different angles of a work. “For a Marxist this means proceeding with the understanding that defending mankind’s literary heritage depends upon success in the struggle to free humanity from the oppressive, historically outplayed society of which sociology constitutes one of the ideological defences” (Slaughter 6). A Marxist perspective on literature, ultimately, assists readers in bringing to light some chief, enduring facets of classic texts.

William Faulkner’s *Bildungsroman*

An excellent representation of the American *Bildungsroman* is presented in many short stories written by William Faulkner. While growing up middle class during the 1920s (and on) in the heart of the South, Faulkner witnessed the racial tensions of the time. He felt conflicted about his roles as both a socially conscious writer and a native Southerner. Cheryl Lester sums up this dilemma in her observation that “Like the migrant in “Sunset,” he might have wished to leave the South and its predicaments behind, yet he could neither find a hospitable home outside the South nor escape his attachment to it” (135). This is a problem many people face, regardless of where they reside. It is human nature to feel a connection to a particular group or place that helped to shape our conceptions about the world around us, but part of maturing involves realizing that not all is right in our little section of the globe.

What makes Faulkner's stories so relatable to various types of people, despite the fact that he is classified as a Southern writer? Philip Weinstein, editor of The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner, offers the following suggestion based on an analysis of Faulkner by the literary critic Andre Bleikasten: "Faulkner's work possesses an aesthetic power that survives translation and crosses cultural borders with impunity" (6).

Weinstein's reason demonstrates the power of good writing and, equally, the power of the *Bildungsroman*. Bleikasten himself says "Faulkner ... had an unfailing instinct for the 'irrational roots' of man's behavior, he, too, often pushed explorations to what Kafka called 'the limits of the human'" (94).

Another reason Faulkner's works appeal to a wide audience is the way in which he keenly describes everyday customs and ceremonies. It did not matter that he was specifically relating Southern habits; certain rituals are universal and easily recognizable. While this fact is certainly a bonus in that his stories could strike a chord of oneness with people of assorted cultures, Faulkner also presented these depictions with a purpose to reproduce a unique landscape and bring a verisimilitude of the Southern way of living to the readers. According to Lalonde, Faulkner *had* to examine rites in contexts in his texts in order to show how these rites reflected the modern Southern society he so often portrayed (10). By focusing on rites and rituals in his stories, Faulkner was creating an ideology that was responsible for molding the characters and actions he developed.

Some modern literary critics, even those who call themselves Marxists, de-emphasize the interplay of economics and the effect on development. There is still merit to the original Marxist view, though, that class status is the key determination in analyzing and critiquing an existing social order in relation to a product of work. Indeed,

Faulkner's short stories direct us to dissect the ideologies held by characters of high and low rank. A classic example is the story "Barn Burning," in which a boy learns the hard way that family bonds are not always unbreakable.

The opening of "Barn Burning" tells us that Abner Snopes is accused of burning down a barn. His son is asked to testify as to what he knows, but is stopped before he can indicate his father's guilt. The family is basically run out of town, resulting in their being forced to take work as sharecroppers. Before long, the boy comes to the realization that his father—his first male role model—is headed for a path of destruction; this is not a road the boy wants to follow, so he runs away in order to avoid a life of bitterness.

On an economic scale we can discern that the boy and his family are poor. At the start of the story, sitting in store that functions as a court, the boy speaks of the smell of cheese and more:

... from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves closed-pack with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish—this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled ... (3)

The description of the nearby food, taunting the boy, indicates that the boy is used to being hungry. His father is facing serious charges but the boy, Sarty, can't help focusing on more immediate needs.

Another glimpse into the Snopes family's low class status is portrayed in the huge difference in their new abode—"In the early afternoon the wagon stopped before a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others it had stopped before

even in the boy's ten years" (8)—from the mansion where their boss lives—"Hits big as a courthouse" (10). This disparity in living conditions enforces the notion that the poor are all alike and do not deserve anything more than basic accommodations. The rich, though, are entitled to individuality, as reflected in their furnishings and décor.

Abner Snopes is resentful because he is a poor sharecropper, basically a slave to the Southern aristocracy that ruled after the Civil War. He feels that, having served in the war, he deserves better treatment. He burns barns because they hold livestock and crops (sources of income) and this is his only means of distributing what he feels is justice. In the same way that Abner is enslaved to the rich, he treats black people like they are beneath him because it is the only way he can feel any superiority. When Abner pays a visit to his boss's—Major de Spain's—home he asserts his last modicum of control (over the black servant) by announcing "Get out of my way, nigger" (12). Learning that the "master" is not home, Abner leaves a smudge on the rug, never once looking down at the rug. As they leave, Abner looks back at the house and says to his son: "Pretty and white, ain't it? That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it" (13). While Abner mistreats black people, at the same time, he identifies with them because he is being oppressed by "the white men" as well.

According to a Marxist reading of the text, it is at first the court, then De Spain's mansion, that represents the bourgeois ruling class. Abner Snopes is the proletariat in this case, revolting against the dominant rulers in the only way he knows how. His methods may be misguided, as his son discovers, but his motives coincide with Marxists views that there should be more equality in society.

“Barn Burning” is a powerful embodiment of the short story form of the *Bildungsroman*. Sarty has a threshold to cross in that he must defy his father and stand up for truth. When Sarty realizes that his father will not change his ways, he knows it is time to make a break and find his own path in the confusing world. Sarty must face his inner turmoil and learn to make his own choices. At the end of the story, Sarty feels his sense of morality is compelling him to leave what will possibly be a life of crime, and when he does finally go he does not look back.

Another of Faulkner’s tales centering on a boy’s journey is “Two Soldiers” (1942). This story takes place during WWII, when Americans are invading Pearl Harbor. The setting is typical Faulkner territory, that being the rural South, Yoknapatawpha County. The protagonist of the story is the eight-year-old narrator. One evening he and his older brother are listening to the neighbor’s radio when they hear news of an attack on Pearl Harbor. The older brother is troubled by what he hears, while the young boy does not comprehend what it means. He tries to learn more about the subject by asking his brother questions, to which, at first, the brother tries to give answers, but after awhile Pete (the older brother) becomes introspective and stops trying to explain things to the younger sibling. The younger brother begins to notice the change in Pete and comments: “... he would lay there, a heap stiller than if he was asleep, and it would be something, I could feel it coming out of him, like he was mad at me only I knowed he wasn't thinking about me” (82). When Pete announces that he must join the Army, replying, “I got to go I jest ain't going to put up with no folks treating the Unity States that way,” (83) his family doesn’t understand. His mother cries and says, “You got to go, and so I want you to go. But I don't understand it, and I wont never, so don't expect me to” (85) and his

father tells him “I was drafted and sent clean to Texas and was held there nigh eight months until they finally quit fighting. It seems to me that, along with your Uncle Marsh who received an actual wound on the battlefields of France, is enough for me and mine to protect the country, at least in my lifetime” (85). The narrator, however, finds Pete’s calling a noble one. He tries to go along with his brother to Memphis but is told he is too young to join the Army. In his innocent youth, the boy associates serving time overseas with gathering wood for fires—it is something that just has to be done. The boy idolizes his brother and has a hard time separating, as evidenced by his running away to catch a bus to Memphis so that he can join his brother in the Army, despite being told several times that he is too young to serve. This particular incident provides the narrator with a sense of loyalty and patriotism that he will carry with him throughout his lifetime. We can say that the boy has been educated in the areas of courage and also knowing when to let something or someone go for a greater purpose. This story is a representation of the *Bildungsroman* because it features a separation from the father (similar to that found in “Barn Burning,” although in this instance the boy returns home), a male bonding (between the two brothers), and a moment of epiphany (for Pete, his epiphany is to go to war; the narrator’s epiphany is that he is needed to serve at home).

Written during a tumultuous time in U.S. history, this story appealed to those both for and against the war, since characters express differing viewpoints on whether or not to fight the Japanese. A Marxist view on war does not generally include promoting violence for the sake of violence. Most Marxists would say that the U.S. involvement in WWII was not entirely due to the overwhelming want to eradicate crazy, evil people from the world; rather, there were economic reasons to get involved as well. A Marxist

analysis on wars would show that when Capitalist get involved in war it does not help to further the cause of the workers. This story may be seen as a heartwarming commentary on patriotism, and the characters may have noble ideals, but from a Marxist reading of the text we are forced to dig more deeply into the motivations and actions of the characters during this historical moment mentioned in the tale.

Similar to a situation in “Barn Burning,” the young boy, after running away from home to search for his brother, winds up being taken in by a Colonel’s wife, and visits her big house, complete with the requisite negro servant. The boy refers to the servant in the standard derogatory way of the period. The boy makes mention of the various other servants—the boy who brings in food and the driver—in the same belittling manner, oblivious to his compliance in degrading the working class society, even though he is most likely going to grow up to become part of this working class. The boy’s mention of the food being rolled in on a “kind of wheelbarrow” shows that he does not belong to the upper class, like the Colonel and his wife. Economic and racial status determines where these varied people rank on the class scale as well as how they are treated by society. The lady is wealthy and white, putting her near the top, just below her husband. The boy, being white, despite not being wealthy, still ranks above the black servants, since they are the poorest of the group in addition to being non-white. This scale illustrates the problems and oppressions of the capitalist society.

A teenager finds himself wrestling with concepts of right and wrong after the death of someone close to him in Faulkner’s story “Uncle Willy” (1935). In the beginning of the tale, the unnamed narrator reflects on his younger years and his association with a man that everyone calls Uncle Willy, despite the fact that he is not a

blood relative. Willy does not have any kin except one sister who lives in Texas with her millionaire husband. Willy lives alone, perhaps because of his self-destructive behavior and want to carry on a family business, and runs a drugstore with the help only of a now elder colored man named Job. Job had worked for Willy's father and continued to work at the drugstore even though his eyesight was starting to fail him. The narrator and other neighborhood children enjoy going to Willy's because the ice cream is cool and tastes good after playing ball games in the heat. Willy also attends Sunday school alongside the youngsters. The children often see Willy "light the little alcohol stove and fill the needle and roll his sleeve up over the little blue myriad punctures starting at his elbow and going right on up into his shirt" (226). Given their innocence, the children do not understand that Willy has a major problem with drugs. Sometimes one of the children would ask him if the needle hurt and he would tell them, "No, I like it" (227). One day the grown-ups conduct what can be considered an intervention and take him to Memphis to get "cured." When he returns to town, he convinces the boys to help him break into the store (which had been closed during his absence) and then break into the cabinet so he can get his fix again. Willy gets a car and a driver (a big black man named Secretary) and they go out every Saturday, returning on Monday with, as the teenaged narrator describes, Willy's "clothes smelling of the smell whose source I was not to discover at first hand for some years yet" (236). One time Willy returns from one of these trips with a wife, surprising everyone in town. His new wife is informed that Willy is now bankrupt, so she leaves. Willy's sister is upset with him and says that she will never forgive him for going bankrupt. She has her brother declared incompetent and appoints him a guardian and trustee who takes him away to Memphis. The narrator thinks that will be the last time he

hears from him, figuring maybe this time Willy would die. It turns out that Willy runs away and sends a letter to the narrator, asking him to take a Memphis bus and meet him at a particular spot. The narrator decides to run away from home and join Willy because “he was the finest man I ever knew, because he had had fun all his life in spite of what they had tried to do to him or with him” (225). Everyone thinks that Willy forced him to run away, but the narrator was the one who made his own choice, whether it was the right thing to do or not. In the end, Willy dies and the youth is left to deal with his role in all that has transpired. Facing death and learning to make moral choices are themes found in the *Bildungsroman*.

After Willy gets away from the center where he was committed, he sells his home and uses the money to buy a plane, which he wants to learn to fly but he cannot because he will need a doctor’s note to do that, and he can’t get one because it will mean possibly getting sent back to the center or having his guardian sent after him. Frustrated, Willy tells the narrator, “damn if these Republicans and Democrats and XYZ’s ain’t going to have it soon where a man can’t even flush the toilet in his own bathroom” (241). The government and its political systems are oppressors in that they limit personal freedoms by imposing an ever increasing number of laws and rules on society, and in Willy’s case, dictate whether he can be considered sane.

In this story, religious oppression blankets the town. It is the “religious” people who try to “cure” Willy instead of merely trying to help him get over an addiction. The religious people hold him down, literally, and make him read the Bible and use it as a guide for his life. He is not given a choice in the matter. It is this type of religious ideology that Marxists oppose, seeing it as yet another way the reigning elitist class

controls the working class. Religion is one of the false consciousnesses that Marx rejected, claiming it was a distraction from real world concerns. Marxists believe in a philosophical materialism, so, the concept of a God and life after death is in contradiction to this belief because they are not material things. Promising the poor, sick, and those with addictions the glory of a Heavenly afterlife if they do as they are told is tantamount to bribery and, if nothing else, oppresses certain classes of people because they are the ones who have the greatest need to believe; henceforth, they comply with the bullying of the religious group. This is not a modern development, either. History shows that the Egyptians used religion to rule the slaves and workers. The ancient Chinese reserved life after death for the wealthy class, again, using religion as a divider more so than a uniting force in society.

The two black men in the story, Job and Secretary, are the ones who try to prevent Willy from flying the plane because they know what will happen. They know Willy does not have the proper training and will likely kill himself. Given the time of the story, people of color were not allowed many rights. The narrator even knows that his Papa and others will say that he was “the white one, almost a man” and should have been the one to prevent Willy from flying. He knows the townspeople think of Job and Secretary as “irresponsible niggers” (245). Job and Secretary also know their place in society, for Secretary tells the narrator that although he would not fly anymore that night, the airplane still belonged to Willy and he “reckoned he belonged to Uncle Willy too” (243). It can be assumed that the author did not write about the black characters based on personal feelings, but he was expressing the sentiments of the time. A Marxist view on the cultural

attitudes of the decade would uncover the inadequacies blacks faced, and these issues would then be reflected in the period's literature.

These three Faulkner stories showcase the male *Bildungsroman* format of boys going through an emotional transcendence, learning to think for themselves, and disengaging from the father figure's rules and constrictions. Faulkner's tales illustrate what it is to become a "man" during times of turmoil. Turning to a Marxist look at these particular stories adds to our understanding of the conditions the characters faced while searching for their purpose in the world.

Katherine Anne Porter and the Female *Bildungsroman*

Katherine Anne Porter is one of the best female short story writers of our time, always demonstrating that she is capable of providing us with a dense, emotional roller-coaster of a ride. Many of her stories fit in with the overall initiation-into-adulthood premise because, as Darlene Hurbrom Unrue reveals, "The general theme of her work has been all along the search for truth, which is knowledge, to be sure, but finally life itself" (219).

Porter, disillusioned with a capitalist-run country, dabbled in Marxism and even thought for awhile that Communism was a good idea, but around 1926 she first started criticizing systematic Communism (Unrue 82). One thought on why Porter may have been attracted to these movements is offered by Unrue: "Revolution that aims at correcting authoritarian abuses originated in the left of the political spectrum, and the left in theory was attractive to Porter in the twenties and thirties, as it was to many intellectuals and artists of the times" (82). Although Porter may have changed her mind on Communist and Marxist ways, her stories often reflect views held by such political

positions, for instance, that women and people of color are often oppressed. Other than her political views, and perhaps a few intimate details of her life (like her miscarrying), Katherine Anne Porter is rather a mysterious figure in the literary world. She preferred to let her work speak for itself, once saying: “There is no describing what my life has been because of my one fixed desire: to be a good artist, responsible to the last comma for what I write” (qtd. in Glenway 48).

One of the shortest examples of the quintessence of form that is the *Bildungsroman* is Porter’s “The Grave” (1944). This story, in its compact seven pages, is a perfect representation of the impact a single moment or event can have on a young person, which, in turn, has a profound effect on the coming-of-age process. In the case of “The Grave,” Miranda’s experience digging through family graves and hunting with her brother changes her outlook on life and maturity.

While Miranda and her brother are digging through their grandparent’s grave, they unearth a ring and a dove-head screw. Miranda asks to trade treasures with her brother, since she wants the ring. At this point in the story, Miranda is nine years old. She is a tomboy, preferring to wear overalls and sandals instead of dresses and fancy shoes, which in 1903, raises an uproar with the women of the traditional southern town. She also likes to hunt and shoot. Miranda is motherless and without clear direction in how to become a woman. When she puts on the ring, however, for the first time she gets a stirring feeling in her that she would like to take a long bath, put on her older sister’s powder, and wear a “most becoming” dress. This feeling is fleeting, for she is still on the fine line between childhood and womanhood, and soon her brother turns her attentions again to hunting. Her brother complains that she is not a good shot. This does not bother

her, as she simply likes going along for the walk. Her brother kills a rabbit and begins skinning it. Miranda reflects on the fact that she doesn't care for her dolls, but she does enjoy the fur coats her uncle makes for them out of animal skins. After killing the rabbit, her brother discovers that it was going to have babies. Miranda is both curious to see the babies (she calls them "pretty"), and unexplainably horrified when she touches the blood coming from the now eviscerated reproductive parts. It is at this time Miranda feels "the very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this" (366). Her brother urges her not to tell anyone about the incident. Miranda suppresses memories of the sight, as over the years she is bombarded by "thousands of impressions" (367) of what womanhood encompasses. Twenty years afterward, she is at a market in India where she espies a tray of dried fruit in the shapes of baby animals, including rabbits. The smell of the market—a mix of "sweetness and corruption" (367)—takes her mind back to that pivotal day in her life. Thus, "The Grave" is a short overview of the female *Bildungsroman*: a girl goes through a loss of innocence, struggles with sexual identity, embarks on a journey away from humble beginnings, and experiences the initiation into womanhood. The story is also semi-autobiographical, as many *Bildungsroman* tales are to a degree.

A Marxist literary critic would first approach this story from a historical time period angle. In 1903, the South was in an era of reconstruction after the Civil War. The South was very rigid in its laws and ways and the abolishment of slavery had a major impact on the South. Many people found it hard to adapt to the changes imposed by Congress. The Ku Klux Klan existed at this time and tried to thwart efforts of reconstruction. Although there is little mention of blacks in this story, it can be inferred

from the fact that Miranda's family had consisted of wealthy landowners that they were slave owners at one point. When Miranda and her brother are digging up the graves, she mentions that perhaps they should leave before they are caught by "the niggers," suggesting that blacks are seen as the enemy.

During this time in the South, besides some hostility towards the emancipated blacks, there was a lack of rights for women. Miranda knows her place in society and does not try to fight her fate. She lets her brother and father tell her what to do and say, giving the males greater power. She sees that females are valued for their looks (she can tell this from the way her sister acts—wearing cosmetics and not participating in hunting), as well as their ability to reproduce. Miranda may experience conflict of these values, but ultimately she complies with the standards set before her.

A Marxist perspective also sheds light on the economic factors at work in the story. Although Miranda's ancestors may have been rich, we can tell from clues in the story that her immediate family is poor. While she prefers wearing overalls to dresses, her father doesn't have a problem with it, because the way he sees it, wearing overalls on the weekends saves her dresses for the weekdays. We learn that Miranda has been raised to be frugal and "She had been brought up in rigorous economy. Wasteful was vulgar. It was a sin. These were truths; she has heard them repeated many times and never once disputed" (365). When Miranda thinks of comforts, she thinks of basic things, like baths and simple powder. Just as Miranda knows that her place in society is based on her gender, so too does she realize where she stands on the class scale.

The audience for this story was fellow southerners who shared many of the values the characters held. Many readers of the time would agree with the women of the town

that Miranda was not very ladylike and that the male characters were in charge. It is not to dismiss the perspicacious readers capable of extrapolating Porter's point about oppression, or the feminists that embraced the thoughtful reflections on womanhood, but for the most part, Porter was writing a slice of life tale that appealed to the masses. Porter was experienced with writing about the South, but since she traveled a lot she was able to write about a variety of places, from the northeast to Mexico. While she is mainly categorized as a Southern writer, she did not create a myth like that of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.

In the end, "The Grave" is a tale that asks us to think about the relations between males and females and the pecking order of people based on monetary values. On another level, however, the story offers one more aspect to consider. As Cleanth Brooks elucidates: "It is thus the story of the discovery of truth" (117-118). In this particular case, Brooks points out "Truth wears a double face—it is not simple but complex" (118).

Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1930) is a further fine example of the American female *Bildungsroman*. This story follows a more stream-of-consciousness style rather than the usual chronological structure of a coming-of-age tale because that type of writing adds to the overall effect of a dying woman recalling memories, both good and bad. During the story, "Granny" speaks of being ready for death, but her constant procrastination in accomplishing tasks shows that she tends to put off things, including confronting her own immortality. She thinks things like, "... there were a great many things left undone on this place. She would start tomorrow and do them" (84). "Granny's" thoughts show us how she was influenced by events in her life, such as being jilted at the altar and dealing with a child's death. The fact that she brings to mind these

specific thoughts during the last moments of her life illustrate what is important to her and what experiences shaped her outlook on life while growing up. The finality of death is something many characters in the *Bildungsroman* have a hard time facing. This is also true for Granny Weatherall. Besides the literal jilting on her wedding day, she also feels a figurative jilting by God. She thinks: “Again, no bridegroom ... ” (89). She feels He has abandoned her and as she searches for a sign from God she does not receive one before she dies. In the *Bildungsroman* a search for spirituality is part of the character’s development. That is not to say that all of them find God or take solace in one faith or another, as some may completely reject the ideology of religion, but the search for a higher calling, or lack of one, is still an essential component in the growth process. The larger lesson here is that if we do not learn to let go of painful memories in life, we will never find transcendence, causing our soul to remain uneasy, while we never fully achieve progress in our quest for enlightenment.

We can infer that Ellen (“Granny”) comes from an underprivileged background from clues in the story. Ellen, as a young woman, sews the family clothing, tends to the garden, and cooks food that she does not let go to waste. She holds down several jobs to help in supporting the five children after her husband John passes away. She tells the children “Don’t let good things rot for want of using” (85). Her economic situation dictates her place in life. She is proud of all that she has done, even though she feels she should have done more. Perhaps if George had not left her at the altar she would have been better off financially. His jilting her resulted in her assuming more control of her own life and learning to depend on her own strengths, but from a Marxist view it is the men that hold her back. George holds her back from seeing a dream realized and John’s

dying holds her back from moving up in society, as in that time period it was near impossible for a woman with five children to become wealthy. Women were, and still are, paid less for the same amount of work, and it was not easy for a woman to find a job in the 1930s. In fact, with the big stock market crash in 1929, it was exceedingly hard for men to find work, let alone women. The story is ambiguous in some places, including one spot involving the paternity of the child who died, Hapsy. We are lead to assume that the child was born out of wedlock with George, the man who jilted her, because this sin is coming back to haunt her in dreams as she nears death. If we do presuppose that the child was born out of wedlock, this is another factor that contributes to Ellen's being held back by society—the shame of such an incident forces her to keep private or risk being scorned by others. It is through economics and possibly the breaking of social norms that Ellen is forced to just get by, never really getting anywhere.

In the story she mentions how she once fenced in a hundred acres “digging the postholes herself and clamping the wires with just a negro boy to help” (83). Her use of the phrase “just a negro boy” suggests an attitude of prejudice, as if the negro boy was less of a worker than a white person. The way in which she refers to him, by skin color only, puts forward a indication that she also holds a notion of negroes as slaves and not full human beings, keeping with a traditional Southern mind-set.

The psychological themes of this work correlate with Marxist views. The Marxist idea of the base and superstructure can be seen as related to the psychological ideas put forth by Freud regarding the conscious and unconscious. Just as you can't have a specific society without specific products of that society—i.e. books, movies, art—you can't have particular ideas and ideals without underlying influences—i.e. dreams, distorted

memories, hallucinations. Marxist and psychological viewpoints blend together in this character study.

A Marxist view also applies to Porter's compelling story of inequity, "Holiday" (1960). This tale opens with a woman reflecting on her younger years, and specifically, one month where she needed to get away from her unnamed troubles, so she visits the Muller family farm recommended to her by a former schoolmate. While staying on this farm, she witnesses many things, including a wedding, a birth, and the ugly face of discrimination. This short period in her life has a profound influence on her and her personal growth in the quest to find meaning in life.

The nameless narrator takes in the Muller family routine, gradually assimilating to their simple, yet planned, way of life. The disabled, disfigured servant girl catches her attention but the narrator notices that she is not really acknowledged by the family. It takes awhile before the narrator even learns the woman's name. Though this story was published in the 1960s, Porter started working on it during the 1920s, a time when the disabled did not have many rights. During this period it was not uncommon for eugenicists to force disabled people to become sterilized so that they could not have children. Marxists would attribute the oppression of the disabled to the emergence of the capitalist society, wherein the production of goods and industrialization would limit the amount of participation certain individuals could provide, thereby causing others to view the disabled as non-contributors and, as such, push them to the far corners of society, hidden away from the mainstream ideology. When the narrator learns that the servant, Otilie, is really the Muller's eldest daughter, she is horrified by the way the family treats her. They make no attempt to communicate with her, except to give her orders. They do not even

acknowledge her grief when Mother Muller dies. She is not invited to the funeral, either. The narrator, seeing the despair in Otilie, takes it upon herself to take the woman away, just for a short time, so that she can experience a sense of freedom for the first time in her hard, lonely life.

Father Muller reads Das Kapital like it is his Bible. He is an atheist, so in a way, it is his only guiding scripture. The narrator, upon seeing the head of the family reading such a text, notes: “I cannot say at that time of my life I had never heard of *Das Kapital*, but I had certainly never known anyone who read it, though if anyone mentioned it, it was always with profound disapproval. It was not a book one had to read in order to reject it” (422). Although he would seem to be a Marxist, Father Muller reading Marxist literature is ironic because he is in actuality a capitalist. He maintains that he buys land to sell to his neighbors for cheap so that the “Bank” does not claim the land, which sounds like a good thing, but Father Muller “was the richest man in the community” (422), showing that he is earning a living off other people, placing him in the capitalist sphere. While Father Muller may think he is working for the proletariat causes by preventing the bourgeois bank from owning the land, the idea that he is making money off the workers goes along with a capitalist view. As the narrator observes: “its [Das Kapital] legendary inapplicable percepts were just, right, proper, one must believe in them, of course, but life, everyday living, was another and unrelated thing” (422).

All three of Porter’s stories highlight characters searching for meaning in life, as well as death. These stories offer a distinctive spin on the traditional *Bildungsroman* and they give us a chance to utilize the Marxist literary theory to analyze certain elements that

provide fodder for discussion. It is possible, then, to say that these tales are relevant to our own lives, because we can relate to some of the characters and life experiences.

The End of the Journey: The *Bildungsroman* and its Greater Meaning to You and Me

As we have revealed, the *Bildungsroman* genre as a whole has a lot to offer the reader. Whether one is reading a male-centered work focusing on brothers learning to let go set in 1930s Tennessee or a female-centric tale detailing the struggles of women in a repressive patriarchal society, each piece of literature can be understood and related to by males and females of all ages and in all stages.

In recent times, with the phrase “it’s a man’s world” not holding as much validity as it used to, women in America having the right to vote, making a presence on the work-front, and carving out more time for themselves, women have begun searching for literary works they can relate to—the *Bildungsroman* fits the bill. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin explains the causes of the increased interest in the *Bildungsroman* by American women:

The emphasis of a *Bildungsroman* on repressive environmental factors, on the process of disillusionment necessary for personality change and maturity, and on the possibilities for transformation offered by individual choices makes it an attractive genre to modern women intent on expressing female awakening and consciousness-raising and on proclaiming new, self-defined identities. (qtd. In Feng 6)

Women respond to first-person female *Bildungsroman* stories because they rarely get to put themselves first, as the nurturers of the family, so feeling that a strong character is speaking directly to them sparks a connection between reader and author.

Males, on the other hand, typically look for the adventure in the *Bildungsroman*, however, that does not mean they do not seek out relatable stories or characters. Many men, for instance, feel a book is more relevant to their own experiences if it features a strong father/son dynamic. The saying goes that “big boys don’t cry”—at least not in public. They may do so in private, though, since men need to find cathartic ways to explore emotions. The *Bildungsroman* is a source of reflection for many males who have gone through difficult times and grew stronger for it.

Regardless of gender, we all look to the *Bildungsroman* to show us where we have gone and where we are now. It is possible to reply to the opening “But what does it have to do with me?” complaint with a catalog of enlightening answers. Someone familiar with life’s hardships, Concentration Camp survivor Dr. Viktor Frankl, managed to find hope amidst darkness, and his observation that “Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual” (98) is a perfect summation of the instructional purpose of the *Bildungsroman*.

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Reaction

A Marxist Perspective on the *Bildungsroman* Stories of William Faulkner and Katherine

Anne Porter

When we teach our children to read, we are not doing so merely to guide them to identify letters on a page; rather, we want to furnish them with the tools to proficiently interpret literature on their own so that they can experience thrilling adventures, dramatic romances, and suspenseful mysteries. Even more to the point, we aspire to instruct them on how to identify with an assortment of people and situations, and develop a sense of self-identity. Unlike television, where interaction is nil and one sits by languorously staring at people moving on a screen, reading involves envisioning scenes in one's head, often placing one's self into that scene. Literature, therefore, is an important part of life, from the time we are born until the time we leave the world. The *Bildungsroman*, as I have studied, is an especially relevant genre to correspond with moments in our lives. Just as we—living people—grow, overcome obstacles, and make major life decisions, so, too, do the myriad characters found in the pages of *Bildungsroman* stories and novels. Reading about fictional characters might not change our own situations, but by understanding how others deal with particular circumstances we can then take that information and use it as a mirror to reflect on ourselves, allowing the opportunity to ask

ourselves if we would have acted the same way or if we see why we should not act in a manner with which we have been behaving for a long time. In this way, literature remains germane to modern life, even if we happen to be reading about people living in the 1800s. Great literature, moving and emotional in its extensiveness, transcends time and place.

Although I often read for enjoyment, sometimes I like to draw deeper meaning from works and I have found that utilizing the Marxist literary criticism theory helps me extract hidden ideas in a text. The Marxist literary criticism theory is complementary to other theories, notably that of the Feminist, New Historian, Cultural, and Psychological. At the heart of all of these theories is trying to discern the underlying structure of power in a given piece of literature, whether that struggle comes from rich oppressing poor, men subjugating women, or the government tyrannizing society. I agree with Terry Eagleton's statement on the functionality and importance of Marxist literary criticism, that contends:

... it is a mistake to confine Marxist criticism to the academic archives, ... it has its significant, if not central, role to play in the transformation of human societies. Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand *ideologies*—the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times. (XII)

This type of literary theory goes particularly well with the *Bildungsroman* tale because the ideology of a character (and in some cases, by extension, the author) dictates the way he acts and responds to the world around him. If Faulkner's Abner Snopes had lived in a big city perhaps he would have been represented by high-class lawyers; therefore, he would not have been forced out of town, continuing his cycle of bitterness and "barn-burning" tendencies as a way to get back at the people who looked down on

him because of his economic level. Obviously, his son's life would have been different then, and he would have made alternate decisions that would determine his adult character. The ideology of a story is what makes it unique in its time. Applying a Marxist literary critique to a *Bildungsroman* story provides us with a total outlook on the political, social, and economic climate of the given work, which in turn, influences our thoughts about characters and situations. It is not always possible to use the Marxist theory on all types of literature, as some works lend themselves better to a theory that focuses on one specific area, such as gender studies, but when it is applicable, the Marxist view encompasses a greater scope of ideas to analyze within the text.

In today's world, with its continuing expansion of information technology and numerous avenues of interconnectivity, a Marxist literary theory of literature holds up because we can see instantly how the areas of politics, social status, and monetary scales work together to form a whole picture of the future. In the span of a few minutes, we can turn on CNN and see how government officials manipulate information to try to confuse the mass public; then we can read on an internet news site that white cops are acquitted of killing a black man; next we can hear on a radio news program that low income residents of a hurricane ravaged city are being ignored. While these may be separate stories, all these occurrences are related in that they show how a power structure, on many levels, dominates our culture. That is not to say that other literary theories are irrelevant and should be neglected by teachers, but it is clear that our current trend towards globalization makes the Marxist theory especially relevant. I know that when I read a text from this point of view I glean new ways of looking at how the decisions of one group (rich people, for example) affects another one (poor immigrants, for instance).

Reading the works of Southern American writers from a Marxist literary criticism theory, my initial reaction is that the South faced a lot of change after the Civil War. This forced new way of living, for some Southerners, created tension and resentment between the races. In fact, to this day, there remains a band of Southerners who feel that one day the South will “rise again” and life will go back to the old ways, even if the old ways oppressed citizens. Both Faulkner and Porter detail incidences in their stories where blacks are treated as second class citizens, still not equal to whites even after they were freed from slavery. In addition, since many people of color were poor, this was another hardship against them as they tried to find decent work and lucrative opportunities. The South, as portrayed in some Faulkner and Porter stories, also relegated women to the traditional roles as wives and mothers and homemakers. Any woman trying to stand up against such oppression and express her own opinion was seen as odd or a troublemaker. On the whole, I learned that many classic American stories touch on subject matter dealing with a certain individual or faction exerting pressure on another person or group of people. The American *Bildungsroman* is a genre that concentrates on how a person comes of age while under this pressure to conform or to change.

When I think about it, even today, some American literature, *Bildungsroman* or otherwise, focuses on the issues facing people of varying races, genders, and economical classes. Hierarchies continue to exist in our society, whether we choose to acknowledge that fact or not. The only way to overcome the potentially destructive chains of command controlling large segments of the population is to bring to public attention the need to make changes in ideologies. In his “Theses on Feuerbach,” Marx commented “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”

(13-15). Analyzing works with a Marxist literary criticism theory has given me greater appreciation for what it is like to be in someone else's shoes. Using this theory gives people the opportunity to view the world through the eyes of someone who is nothing like them, or perhaps through the eyes of someone who is exactly like them. An important reason to use this literary criticism is that it opens up discussion on a number of weighty matters pertinent to our current society, which sometimes repeats mistakes of the past. Having the ability to analyze what went wrong in the past, even through the scope of literature, can provide an unambiguous perspective on what human nature often compels us to do, and how we can stop ourselves from acting on certain impulses, such as the need to amass control at the expense of others, when necessary.

I foresee the Marxist literary criticism theory being taught in English literary theory classes for a long time to come due to its ability to help students extrapolate meaning and substance from a work. By teaching the merits of the Marxist theory, educators will be affording their students the chance to debate the problems of any particular society being analyzed and be able to juxtapose those interpretations of said society with any other society to determine the differences and similarities of cultures. Being aware of cultural clashes is a valuable asset in today's world because if we can recognize points of friction before they occur, we stand a better chance of working towards a common goal in a peaceful way. Once learned, the Marxist theory is not something that will be used only in a classroom.

Turning to the mechanics of writing the paper, I experienced both disappointments and joys while conducting research. While I did not expect everyone to know the meaning of the *Bildungsroman* or be able to cite examples of such stories, I was

surprised that many people were not familiar with the authors I researched for my paper. As described in my prospectus, during the research process, I had planned to distribute surveys to local college students asking about their reactions to works by Porter and Faulkner. I first wanted to assess emotional responses to various *Bildungsroman* stories; and, second, see if there were any differences in answers provided by male and female students. Unfortunately, I ran into an unexpected stumbling block. It didn't occur to me that maybe not many people, including college students, had read short stories of Faulkner and Porter. The most common response I received after asking people if they had read any Faulkner short stories was "I've heard of him, I may have read one of his novels, but I'm not familiar with his short stories." Likewise, when I asked people if they had read any short stories by Katherine Anne Porter, I was mainly greeted with blank stares and the question "Who is that?" Sure, some literature majors knew of the authors and a few may have read several of their short stories, but this was not a big enough group to provide me with an adequate representation for my research purposes.

Ultimately, I was disheartened to learn that while Faulkner is considered a literary giant, numerous individuals know him only by reputation or by one or two of his novels. I was also disappointed to find out that Katherine Anne Porter is unknown to a large portion of people. My reaction to this failed research experiment is that now I feel even stronger that *Bildungsroman* short stories should be emphasized more in schools because people are missing out on some masterful explorations of the human condition, with William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter being two experts in this field.

On a more positive note, I found the overall experience of writing the specialized research paper very informative—I learned of Katherine Anne Porter's Marxist leanings

in her younger years, as well as William Faulkner's Southern upbringing and its effects on his writings. The project was even fun at times because I had the chance to feel like a detective searching for clues to fit in with my theories on the subject. I unearthed exciting details about literary genres, as well. By the time I had completed the paper, I did feel as if I had "mastered" my topic. When I meet with friends and family I now can confidently relate to them fascinating information about the *Bildungsroman*, Marxist literary theory, and Faulkner and Porter. In fact, my pastor even asked to read my final paper.

With all the knowledge I have gained from delving into the research paper, I now feel inspired to tell people about my literary discoveries. I am also considering how this research project may one day be part of a career goal. Although I am still undecided as to whether I want to try to make a living as a writer, find an editing job, or teach at a community college, I figure having the comprehension of literature I have now, from being in this Master's program, is a good background for whichever endeavor I choose to pursue.

If I were to become a teacher, I would develop a plan for instructing a course based on this paper, though it would be expanded a bit. In class, we would discuss this unique form of literature and the many variations on it. The course would be titled "The Marxist Perspective on the *Bildungsroman* Stories of William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter" (See Appendices).

If I decide to focus on writing instead of teaching, I will continue to conduct academic research so that I may undertake the task of writing for literary journals. Sharing ideas and knowledge with other literary devotees is very appealing to me. As detailed above, my first attempt to conduct a survey did not go so well, so if I were to

pursue this topic I would not confine my survey to a small area instead I would give them out to students on multiple campuses, allowing a better chance of getting enough viable responses to analyze for a paper. In addition, I would look for experts in the field of literature, mainly in the areas of literary theories, literary genres, and the works of William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter.

One big conclusion I have after working on this long research paper is that it takes much discipline and perseverance to be a writer. It also takes a lot of time and patience to edit during and after the writing process. I think that my experience of taking online courses—the reliance on one’s self to complete the work as opposed to having teachers and other students there constantly reminding me of due dates and what I needed to do next—has prepared me for whatever the future may hold in regards to a writing career. I set out to obtain my Master’s degree in Liberal Arts with a Concentration in English with two main purposes in mind. The first reason revolves around an inner goal of wanting to acquire as much knowledge as possible about the art of literature. When I speak of the art of literature I do not simply mean the grammatical or stylistic facets of the novels or stories, or what is known as the “tactical definition” (Stevick 11); the emotional content is another essential angle to take into consideration when studying literature. A person with absolutely no training in art might go to a museum and find himself moved by a painting, or a person with no understanding of tempos and melodies might become enraptured with a certain song. For me, when I had only a minor grasp of all the intricacies that mesh together to form a product considered literature, I mostly relied on my emotional reaction to gauge the quality of a work. Now, with my newfound command of literary devices and writing methods, I have a full sense of what makes literature

special—that perfect mix of writing skills and emotional content. A work of literature may still move me, just as it would move a non-English major, but now I can better figure out why it moves me. The second reason obtaining my degree is important to me centers on wanting to have the skills I need to teach others how to appreciate literature. In today’s culture, many people prefer to watch their HD TVs or listen to iPods or look at the latest YouTube video rather than pick up a book. I want to try to excite people, young and old, to read. I will show them how reading can provide them with hours of entertainment as well as teach them something about themselves, by the way they relate to the characters or situations in the stories. I believe teaching people about the personal stories that comprise the *Bildungsroman* genre, reacquainting them with the great and underappreciated works of William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter, and getting them to look at how a Marxist perspective on this literature points out interesting dimensions of texts will give them the impetus needed to get a larger portion of the population reading again. As a bonus side effect of this increase in reading, students’ test scores will improve, making our educational system a competitive one worldwide.

In the end, through the work I have completed for this paper, I have discovered that I am a more knowledgeable person because I read many books and stories on wide-ranging topics. Reading stories in the field of the *Bildungsroman*, specifically, has helped me get a better grasp of my own self-identity, as I contemplate how I would react in given scenarios, and through the way I identify with individual characters and life choices. For instance, I may not be a poor Southerner, but I can relate to Miranda of “The Grave” and how she struggles with femininity. I also may not be a Southern boy during WWII, but I can understand the feelings of the young boy in “Two Soldiers” as he learns

to let go of his brother for the greater good, although his thoughts on war may cause inner conflict.

Literature can be acquired in several forms: the traditional book, viewed on a computer screen through an online library source, or through some handheld device. In the future there are sure to be even more ways to obtain literature. That is a good thing. It proves, no matter the debate about paper versus digital, that literature will be around for a long time.

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Appendices

Lesson Plans

Part 1:

- Study the definition of the word *Bildungsroman*. Use various dictionaries, thesauruses, and scholarly books.
- Study the history of the genre, beginning with German and British Literature examples.
- Follow the history of the genre as it makes its way into the American literature scene.
- Research differences found within the male *Bildungsroman* and female *Bildungsroman*.
- Research similarities found within the male *Bildungsroman* and female *Bildungsroman*.

The goal of this portion of the course is to instill a sense of understanding and appreciation of the unique genre that is the *Bildungsroman*. I will attempt to show students how they can extract parts of stories, regardless of when they were written, and find relevancy in the text, in so much that the students today can relate to feelings and situations that were described in such pieces of fiction. We would also debate the various accepted vs. non-accepted actions and emotions portrayed by men and women in these types of stories, highlighting how society expects males to act or not act and its view of expectations of females.

Part 2:

- Read author biography of William Faulkner.
- Read short stories by William Faulkner and discuss how they fit into the *Bildungsroman* genre.
- Read author biography of Katherine Anne Porter.
- Read short stories by Katherine Anne Porter and discuss how they fit into the *Bildungsroman* genre.
- Discuss differences as well as similarities in short stories by Faulkner and Porter.

During this second part of the course, I will try to impress on students the style used by each author to get across a particular point, whether it be a political commentary, a personal dilemma, or an observation of the unspoken rules of society. Again, the class would discuss how these stories still hold relevancy in modern times. The traditions of Southern authors will also be analyzed, focusing on how the authors used specific words and scenes to get across the feel of the South, with its slower pace, Civil War history, and sometimes poorer members of the population. I will instruct the class to think about why the main character in each story we have read is going through a personal journey of growth and try to point out correlations between the character's life and their own—in essence, showing that humans are all emotional creatures with many of the same basic needs.

Part 3:

- Review literary theories and give brief definitions of each type.
- Focus on Marxist theory and define its main parts.
- Read books by Karl Marx.
- Research how Marxist theory and the *Bildungsroman* work together to provide unique perspective on literature.
- Apply Marxist theory to short stories of William Faulkner.
- Apply Marxist theory to short stories of Katherine Anne Porter.
- Write final paper showcasing significant findings.

This third segment of the course will be spent teaching students the importance of knowing a variety of literary theories, as well as learning how to apply those theories to stories. We will read examples of stories that have been analyzed by a Marxist literary theory, then, using those as a guide, apply this theory to stories by William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter. Students will also read about Karl Marx to provide them with some background on his ideas, to help them better comprehend how those ideas formed into a new theory of interpreting literature. The final paper the students must write will demonstrate their knowledge of all that was taught during the course. After completing these three parts of the course, a student has the skills to pursue further exploration of the topic, or similar studies, focusing on either the specific authors, or the specific genre, or the specific literary theory.

