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A Shared Resilience in Contemporary Southern Literature: Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Robin Boylorn's *Sweetwater: Black Women and Tales of Resilience*

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A SHARED RESILIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN LITERATURE:
DOROTHY ALLISON'S *BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA* AND
ROBIN BOYLORN'S *SWEETWATER*:
BLACK WOMEN AND TALES OF RESILIENCE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
English

by
Laurie Pfister Epps
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Accepted by:
Dr. Megan Eatman, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

As literary scholars, Southern Literature as we know it today needs to be all-inclusive of its people—all genders and all races. The South offers a most unique blend of colorful people that share a deep scar of a past full of injustices, however, it is through the richness in women writers' descriptions of the South and phenomenal characters with very realistic lives and circumstances that we can recognize many similarities of resilience and struggles with that identity and its daily attributes.

In exploring the idea of a intercultural or intersection of Southern women and their lives, I want to examine two Southern works from contemporary female authors--the auto/ethnography of women in her North Carolina community, Robyn Boylorn's *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resistance* and the award-winning autobiographical novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, by Dorothy Allison, situated in upstate South Carolina. Each work exemplifies heroic written efforts to show a resistance against societal norms, female oppression and violence, and the struggles of identity for women of all races in the South. Each writer has a certain "otherness" that they identify with. For Boylorn, it might be the African American oppression and for Allison, an Appalachian or "White-Trash" stereotype.

Groups that are regularly seen as "others" or as "different" are not as well represented or scholarly appreciated in the humanities. If we explore the written words of women that have been traditionally oppressed, lived in poverty, and typically seen as outcasts or "others" in our Southern history, we might find similar threads of resilience and strengths in the female characters that would benefit the telling of a history.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Norman Epps, III, and to my five most beautiful children, Molly, Wils, Grey, Halle Cate, and Anders, who show me a world I never knew existed but only through the love of being a wife and mother. Each has supported my scholarly efforts greatly, with time, care, and compassion, and patted my back gently, assuring the confidence I needed to succeed--each believed in me.

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All of which have taught me along the way to trust my voice and construct it in a scholarly way without losing the heart of what I am trying to convey.

I would like to express my appreciate for both the women writers, Dorothy Allison and Robin Boylorn, for offering up such unfailing tales, full of Southern circumstances that were begging to be written down. Without stories like these, how would we ever understand who we truly are.

And finally to the small town of Anderson, South Carolina, in which I was raised around people as those in these stories, which still are very much a reality in my Southern living space today.

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INTRODUCTION

“When I found Zora Neale Hurston, it was like getting kicked in the butt.

It was a voice—the voice I heard in my head. That I was familiar with.

*The speech, the rhythms of my family, the kind of language that I grew up
with resounded for me in the books written by those African American women.*

It didn’t read to me black. It read to me working class.”

(Dorothy Allison, Duvall 130)

Since the turn of the century, Southern literature’s validity in the humanities has been discussed, even the battle of which disciplines are better fit to study the South. Where does the South fit and is it still relevant? I argue that it most certainly does. The contemporary narrative works of Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Robin Boylorn’s *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resilience*, although different accounts of the Appalachian region of the South and from women writers of different race, are remarkably similar in instances of female resilience in communities that are streamlined in age-old traditions of patriarchy, domestic violence, and recurrent generational poverty. I recognize that different races have very different experiences and I am considerate and recognize that; however, for the purposes of this paper, I would only like to focus on the everyday resiliences I see they share. I argue that there are everyday resiliences in Southern culture unlike resiliences in communities elsewhere because of the South’s history of violence, social injustices and

social structures. Author Barbara Bennett clarifies this regionality of resilience, recognizing Joan Schultz's term "orphaning", describing it as a "common technique in the contemporary southern novel . . . they signal themselves as resisting, refusing, or rejecting the kind of family identity, family roles . . . considered so vital to the Southern way of life" (Bennett 25). Like the "orphaning" in Southern novels, we are apt to witness resistance in narratives like Allison's and Boylorn's as well; true tales of a South that still exists today and very different from the canonized Southern stories that sit on shelves. In the South today and the South of yesterday, I see an existence of a shared culture in the lives of oppressed Southern females. And "[b]ecause these women challenge societal authority, their victories are often secret and personal, but heroic nonetheless" (Bennett 26).

Evaluating life experiences or "the ordinary" through narratives offers new perspectives to literary scholars as to what qualifies itself as *Southern* today. Professor of English at Fisk University, Katharine Burnett shares an interesting contribution by one of her students in discussing the present existence of Southern Literature. She shares this idea of the South being merely a relative form—a space considered rural, typically agricultural, Protestant, etc, which certainly filters into our stereotypical South. She argues for the "continued importance of regional distinctions . . . the importance of southern studies" and sees the South as a genre used to "describe conditions that produce certain cultural, social, and artistic tropes, characteristics or patterns" (Burnett 162). To erase or not acknowledge regional differences would have a profound "effect on history," and I believe to lose regional distinctions would be detrimental to Southern studies as well (Burnett 162). Narrative explorations expand the study of such narratives using much of the basic underpinnings like that of anthropologists, autoethnographers, historians and even sociologists. Anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston set the stage for narratives of people in a place with her famed tales of black people

of Eatonville, Florida. Zora's "humor was 'a way to bridge the distances between rural and urban, black and white, rich and poor, man and woman, author and reader'" (Bennett 19). The works of Hurston laid the foundations for examining what seemed so "ordinary", along with others progressing in this movement of documenting lives, including writer Eudora Welty and the Works Progress Association, who aimed to interview and document people living in poverty during the Great Depression. This work introduced new ideas and new conceptions of what might be important to document, including explorations of various contemporary theories, such as that of Kathleen Stewart, who constructed *Ordinary Affects*. Through the narrative pieces of Allison and Boylorn, we see magnification of the ordinary and mundane, except it is doing something profound—showing cultural differences of the South. Through ordinary voices, we can acknowledge some extraordinary personalities and think about their contributions to history. These "voices . . . [are] a way to achieve authority and autonomy, and it is a way to make peace with the past," which seems much of what we have tried to do in the South for generations (Bennett 16).

As with Allison and Boylorn, there are threads of everyday resiliences that might be obvious in other voices in the South that have not been heard or acknowledged, quite possibly even written. Simple but profound resiliences in daily activities, such as the strength to fulfill motherly duties when you are exhausted and poor as can be, the courage to speak aloud and share something to a group at church, the bravery to get up and work yet another hard day in the diner or make kids' lunches—these simple acts in the face of struggle are my ideas of resilience. Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire* was one of the first literary constructions to recognize the need for discussion of this specific intersection of women who are typically underrepresented and not seen as similar at all because of skin color, stating it as "an intellectual field that needs to be reopened, one that does not mitigate the

differences between black and white women” (xv). Female narratives of the South, both past and present, who were otherwise skipped over historically, might contribute significantly to what we know and study of the South today. Examining these commonalities and intersections of people in the small Southern communities would also offer up potential in finding global connections that would appeal to scholars of many nontraditional disciplines interested in the New Southern Studies, most recently reaching for geographic expansion into the postcolonial. Studying narratives in Southern histories may make Southern literature more interdisciplinary, stretching its boundaries on its own accord.

SOUTH IN THE PRESENT

Scholars are bridging boundaries to help sustain the New Southern Studies (NSS), which makes absolute sense, but in doing so, are we losing important details the genre gets from the localities in the US South? The “new Southern studies” as defined by Houston Baker and Dana Nelson in *Global Contexts, Local Literatures . . .* “welcome intellectual, multiparticipant, and revisionary complexity that welcomes the complication of old borders and terrains, [and] wishes to construct . . . a new scholarly map of ‘The South’” (McKee 678). McKee questions “what happens when we unmoor the South from its national harbor, when it becomes a floating signifier in a sea of globalism . . . How have the South’s culture and history always already been global?” (678). I believe so and believe the South’s globalism is especially evident in narrative texts such as Allison’s and Boylorn’s, where we see an emergence of blended culture stemming from generational interconnection.

David Gleeson of Northumbrian University says that “NSS has forced Southern literary studies away from the traditional canon to look at other sources offering alternative views of the South, but

can it help us look in the most uncomfortable places rather than just the progressive ones” (Journal of American Studies 701)? Gleeson’s statement is precisely what I aim to do with showing resilience in the works of Allison and Boylorn. If we look at the ugly, the uncomfortable, the reality of the South that has historically been omitted, rather than looking for more material and exploring roots that we know originate off our immediate coast, we might gather some deep perspectives into how the South functions presently in its communities. In other words, we might see why we are where we are today and who we are today through the authentic voices sharing the ordinary of the Southern people. Academic Raymond William’s book *Marxism and Literature* explores the structures of feelings and experiences which can easily be applied to our search for definition today. Williams wisely explains that “We are also defining a social experience which is still in the process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private . . . even isolating, but which in analysis . . . has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics” (132). In examining the voices of resilience to social structures that support patriarchy, violence and allow vast generational poverty, like those of Allison and Boylorn, studies might expose the very sacred details in the deemed ordinary of a South that we seem to struggle to understand and define. One writer white and one black but both from rural Appalachian south and each raised in small communities that uphold a tradition of patriarchy, a reoccurring problem of domestic violence and generational poverty, their narratives share a world of female oppression. For once we see a solidarity or intersection of the female south and can witness resilient characteristics instead of a separation because of skin color simply by analyzing the language used to express social situations and individual explorations of southern identity.

In looking at contemporary narratives and tales of resilience, scholars can gain insight to add to the NSS, but also explore the global heritage that feeds into the stories of the characters in the narratives and the authors themselves. It is no secret that the South is quite a collage of cultural heritage from the southeast that after generations seems to blend into one. This is one reason why the South has been defined as so “other” or different than the rest of the nation. But Louisiana State professor Michael Bibler acknowledges our “many souths” and our “southern exceptionalism . . . [where] recent studies bring the South’s distinctive features into sharper focus without losing sight of the places where the South blurs into other parts of the nation, the hemisphere, and the globe” (154). This seems all a part of the process of revisiting a past that still haunts us; that we still yearn to make sense of, and that filters into who we are today—it is our resilience in making sense of a social space. Anthropologist Stewart can again be applied to examine these texts and how they narrate a small, social space through defining “traces . . . people are collecting found objects scratched off the literal or metaphorical side[s] of the road” (23), which is exactly what feeds the voices in the texts, these seemingly minute and insignificant details. Stewart also is quick to recognize “collective identities” where she describes them as “scar tissue[s] on the back[s] of everyone’s hands” (43). The South is without a doubt a most collaborative space where the communities are building upon a past that cannot be forgotten, even orally passed down through generations—it’s social histories are what feed this confusion of defining a South.

Scholars question what characteristics make up Southern literature—what makes it so different from other pieces of American literature? I am going to argue, undeniably, that yes—Southern Literature does still exist and it does very much matter. It has and is a changing art, one of fantastic fluidity and new growth, but birthed from very deep scars and far-reaching roots of old that will never

dissipate, only haunt the living. The roots are its most defining attribute, as it is the spirit of humankind that floods the narrative and creates this infamous space that inspires so many storytellers. This is, in fact, its absolute commonality of resilience in a people and a place. It is the ability to overcome. I believe the defining of Southern Literature is so off-balance today because so many writers of the South are reaching back, as they very well should be, to the origins of our peoples. With growth, comes reflection into how we have been defined for so many decades in the humanities and what better way to explore self-reflection than through narratives?

SHARED CULTURES THROUGH NARRATIVE CONVERSATIONS

Southern literature is created through an overlapping and intersections of cultures, “a porous space,” in a specific lived sacredness—through generations of adapting, conjugating, intermingling, conversing, interbreeding and existing in a shared community (McKee 679). In history, we have been witness to a South so divided by color and gender, we forget that those previously not writing a story have a story to be told. Scholar Coleman Hutchison states that much of the aim in NSS is to simply “find ways of linking place, culture, and identity” (694). The struggle with identity is present in both works I explore. I hope to bring together narrative texts from these two women writers of the South to show the great resilience they share, as well as a place of great beauty, a rich history, and mixed culture, filtered into the familial communities where they are raised and all of which help form their very identities of Southernness.

As a contemporary reader and writer of the American South, I realize and am passionate about the importance of storytelling of the history of a people, the Southern people, specifically women, all races, of the contemporary South that do not necessarily adhere to a prescribed historically

stereotypical South. The South that readers are accustomed to visiting in many classical Southern pieces of literature recite many truthful tales of a region with an abundant history filled with deep scars, blood and spit buried in the dirt, and above all, a racial and social separatism that still simmers at the surface. But how inclusive of the Southern people are these classics? What might they be missing or seemingly leaving amiss between lines of text? I ask what commonalities can we find and examine. Because, “[y]ou can’t leave something out that really matters—that would alter our fundamental understanding,” and conveniently passing over groups of people of all color is all too frequent in storytelling (Pyne 19). And as Williams stated, “to look into its centre and if possible, past its edges, we can understand, in new ways, that separation of the social from the personal which is so powerful and directive a cultural mode” (128). Many stories written about the South are told from the perspective of others, whether it be writers from other regions, those in power, male-dominated, or written by those who have experienced it but with someone looking over the shoulder to edit. Some might say that the Southern people, “especially women, [have been] denied access to the complexity of their own experience” (Henninger 92). These experiences are essential to understanding the region as it is and not as seen through the eyes of another and most importantly, give identity and ownership to these females and their stories that do, in fact, rightly belong to them. Yaeger tells us that “southern women’s literature carries a double burden: it focuses on the mechanical, the expected, the everyday, and yet it represents this world in terms that are fantastic, unexpected, and perpetually uncanny” (13). To recognize the Southern narrative to be told by those who live it might alleviate the presumption of certain classifications given to Southern literature that portray its being as ‘other’ or ‘queer’ comparatively. Freedom to narrate a life lived is huge to understanding a culture and “storytelling .

. . [is] the primary strategy for resistance, survival, and hope” (Henninger 95). And as author Dorothy Allison confirms, “[t]he story becomes the thing needed” (Allison *Two* 3).

In recognizing the power of these narratives, observant readers will recognize a common threaded presence of resilience in white and black women writers from this region, particularly those living in grave poverty. So instead of seeing a South separated by race and class, we might find similarities in the simplicity of being a Southern female, most especially the Southern female’s resilience to circumstances beyond their control or a theory of resilience. Stewart recognizes the acts of resilience as becoming almost habitual, “the hard, resilient need to react has become a changed habit” (18). Taking this viewpoint and applying it to women writers of narrative as Allison, Boylorn, and others can be identified as a means of survival in a society that continuously offers struggle.

These two Southern women writers explore the struggle with their Southern identities through the tenacity of narrative voice evidenced through writing: Robin Boylorn is an experienced and educated autoethnographer originally from a small town in North Carolina, and an Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama, and Dorothy Allison, author of award-nominated autobiographical novel *Bastard* and several other real-life collections of short stories, originally from Greenville, South Carolina, offer narrative texts to be explored, appreciated, and most certainly, to contribute to the canon of what is considered to be truly “Southern” literature, narratives of truth, resilience, and experience. As an example, Zora Neale Hurston’s work spread across decades before being deemed significant, even questioned her literary skill by other black contemporaries. Her success precedes the success of writers like Allison and Boylorn who also yearn to tell tales of a humanist South where accentuating the ordinary becomes somewhat extraordinary. Both Allison and Boylorn illuminate the struggles of growing up as an adolescent in

a Southern region where men seem to be in charge, violence is tolerable, and the expectation that they are only there to fill the shoes of the women who die before them in subservient roles. Allison's young character Bone Boatwright narrates the autobiographical novel and gives us a detailed, firsthand account of the most horrific violent scenes and a life drenched in poverty, but at the same time voices a most intimate, innocent perspective of a young white girl in the Appalachian South. Boylorn's story resounds with Bird Boylorn, a young black girl of North Carolina Appalachia, one of the newest generation, in a black, small town community that we learn about through the discourse of the women characters who have lived there for generations, then later through Bird's interpretation of this world. Boylorn uses the familial chatting of stories and dialogue to guide us to Bird and her background, full of multigenerational stories in Sweetwater that allow us to see how she struggles with identity, as Bone does, in her Southern space as well. In both, we are left wishing the very best for each of these young southern girls striving to make a way out of the circumstances they are only born into. To say that texts like these do not matter or are not up to par per canon standards is nonsensical and it is quite saddening that it seems we have to validate them. Omitting any narrative text created from any original Southern experience and voice seems unnatural to exclude. Allison says, "Poor people in the South do not make the historical registers unless we knock some rich man off his horse" (Guinn 5), and continues,

Our true stories may be violent, distasteful, painful, stunning, and haunting, I do not doubt, but our stories will be literature. No one will be able to forget them, and though it will not always make us happy to read of the dark and dangerous . . . our reality is the best we

can ask of our literature. (Bouson 119)

In researching these two Southern women writers that create in this voice can offer an existence of resilience in females living in the South in their daily realities, just as much of Hurston's work. Beginning a discussion on these narrative texts will expand on the Southern literature we have under our noses and include writers such as Boylorn and Allison, who are not typically as well-known but are examples of authentic voice that are often unheard. Most importantly, instead of seeing a South separated, through text we may recognize a commonality of resilience in the Southern females as their literature portrays. These stories of resilience add to a Southern history consistently written by mostly males—female perspectives that can only enrich the Southern experience or what we read of it, instead of being side-shows to a hugely male dominated literary arena. Offering a “resistance to the patriarchal narrative provides . . . a strategy for making female experience visible, audible” (Ladd 60). Examining texts from white and black female authors alike will expand the conversation to a sharing of resilience and add to the concept of a “new” South to dig into.

“[N]othing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history . . .”

and the recovery of what has “fallen by the wayside” in the construction of History

is fundamentally a powerful act of resistance from within History.

(Walter Benjamin's “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, Ladd 53)

There is an intersection of black and white women in parts of the South that remains invisible to most, dare I say unmentionable, in Southern literature. This intersection of culture is especially

evident through the conversation within female narratives—both old and new, and often in common mannerisms and characteristics of females in the South which continue to exert themselves in new generations as traditional, whether each acknowledge it or not. These bits of dialogue and demeanors, with infectious detail, share an undeniable strife of social resilience in a horrifically oppressive, male-dominated Southern society that many females were and many are still trapped by. Both Allison and Boylorn are authors raised in this Southern Appalachian region whose works offer up prime examples of this intersection or shared resilience through an autoethnographical text that constructs a web of these common female struggles of oppression in the South or a shared resilience, each including relatable circumstances such as reoccurring violence, patriarchy, and poverty stemming from the infamous narrative world of communities that decorate the Southern space. Autoethnographers, like Boylorn, attempt to “represent cultural experiences” as a way of exploring families through ethnographical practices, such as field work, as well as autobiographical techniques. Allison’s work is defined as an autobiography, a firsthand account of life—personal narratives, diaries, and memoirs; autoethnographies were not clearly defined or recognized when *Bastard* was published. I define it as an autoethnography because it does, in fact, represent a literary piece of Southern culture and aims to showcase the oppression of social classes in the South. Each author speaks an authority of two lives lived, each a narrator of her experience, born of an often misshapen and confusing Southern environment, yet one writer white and the other black. Intersecting the two might be one of the “theoretical gaps that need[s] filling” in the Southern Studies’ queries of today (*Journal of American Studies* 696).

THIS SOUTHERN SPACE

The South is only defined and constructed by the life that inhabits it. Understanding place is essential to tying these various traits of a shared resilience together. This Southern place has a tradition of writing its story through the male point of view. In fact, Eudora Welty was one of the first women to recognize this and buck the literary system into seeing something different than the Faulknerian life or her “obstruction of the patriarchal plot” (Ladd 60). Welty’s black character, Phoenix Jackson, in “A Worn Path,” is a “most resonant representation of the woman storyteller or artist in a patriarchal order . . . Welty’s counternarrative speaks as much to the question of women and authorship as it does to the experience of girls growing into women” (Ladd 56-57). Welty also explores the stereotypical “white trash,” that Allison identifies with in Welty’s story, “Why I Live at the P.O.” This short story is narrated through Sister and offers up circumstances common in stereotypes of rural, white-trash in the South. Like Welty, Allison and Boylorn, though looking through different lenses, allow the necessary adding of details to a history of place otherwise unknown:

Giving the South a name defines it, the plantation story seems sufficient and comprehensive. But there are always other ways to name what we see: perspectives that take into account, for example, the undersides and backsides or the insides of the mansion itself or the trees and fields beyond and around it. (Ewell 161-162)

The literary work of Hurston, namely *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was recognized for its contribution to literature for its inclusion of writings of everyday lives lived—the value of a human

experience, just as Allison and Boylorn do. Both Welty and Hurston laid the foundations to the future success and validity women authors like Boylorn and Allison, however, as scholars we should recognize all as contributors to the history of the American South. But examining intimate details in this shared Southern space—the very physicality, the interactions, the common grounds and idioms—become essential to fully translating a world seen as so other to the rest of our nation or a means to a better understanding, which is needed in both the growth and the known history of Southern studies. For change to take place, literary scholars must allow recognition of those previously unheard and unseen.

Physical descriptions are fundamental to connecting readers to place in a most intimate way, as well as hugely contributing to the identity of the writers themselves and most especially so notable in much canonized Southern literature. Again, Mississippi author, Eudora Welty:

We in the South have grown up being narrators. We have lived in a place—that's the word, Place—where storytelling is a way of life . . .

Our concept of Place isn't just history or philosophy; it's a sensory thing of sights and smells and season and earth and water and sky as well.

(1984, 95) (Yaeger 13)

This described physicality of place defines so much of the narrative style that it must be discussed. The environment in which the writers find themselves holds its own power in shaping the stories that come out of it. Uniquely hot and humid landscapes surround a South that is home to much horrific historical trauma and violence, personal upheavals or familial dilemmas—memories

of a past that is often better left behind. There is no other region that has such an extensive backbone of history as the South. Sharon Hollard's "Hum/Animal All Together" essay explains it as, "Southern people are saturated with a history that cannot be overcome" (168). Many Southern writers do not confront a reality of their homeland until they have had the opportunity or option to leave it behind, an ability to both see it in hindsight and compare it to somewhere else. On that note, Southern place is very much a mental state of being as well. Burnett stresses "personal identity is tied less to physical space and more to a sense of place based on human interactions" (162). This relationship between space and human relationships that inhabit it validates Allison and Boylorn even more; each relocating from their native communities, from where their stories began, but their written accounts hit home regardless of how far away they travel. But no matter if writers are outside looking in, the place identifies much of the person they are, the roots they come from, and the words they string together. "[A]uthors deliberately make it clear from the start that their narrative is to be read as the story/history of a place, the South, before being the story of the individual . . . [P]lace is fundamental. Identity profoundly implicates and is implicated by, family, community, and history" (Stephani 26). Southern people are only products of the environment and the communities that produce them. The Southern space is often sacred and inescapable for all beings in the South; it becomes a large part of who they are and to ignore it seems impossible. There is undoubtedly a most spiritual connection between a human soul and their surroundings. Stewart is one theorist that would best understand this spiritual connection. She says that these "seamless encounters . . . however fleeting or insignificant [they] seem to be . . . [are] one of the many little somethings worth noting in the direct composition of the ordinary" (50).

The familial ties of a physical community are most influential to the growing human child; this recognition and importance of community is accentuated in both narratives. And it is important to recognize that familial is not defined by merely blood relatives; familial is the congregation or fellowship created through the arms of community. In fact, when we put race and class aside, we have the interactions and a blending of the daily lives of all people who reside and interact intimately in that area—this is community. Place and people are intertwined through stories. Scholar Louis D. Rubin Jr. contributed to the conversation of place and its people:

[T]o consider writers and their writings as Southern still involves considerably more than a geographical grouping. History, as a mode for viewing one's experiences and one's identity, remains a striking characteristic of the Southern literary imagination, black and white. (Jones 37)

The roots of who they identify with are in the buried bones below, whispered in the air they breathe, and in the narratives they overhear—this interior dialogue and communication is imperative when discussing the overflow between place and narrative. The voices emerge almost hauntingly from the ground itself, from one generation to the next, just as bad habits and traditions often do. Only to the growing spirits of *Bird and Bone*, they recognize the “bad”, the idea that something might actually be broken or not working in their communities. Narratives as Allison's and Boylorn's of this shared southern space give rise to a forced conversation, social communication and the possibility of change for those inquisitive enough to question it. Yaeger's book *Dirt and Desire* made hallmark progress at suggesting taking a different look: “[A]n intellectual field that needs to be reopened, one that does not mitigate the differences between black and white women . . . By

placing black and white writers side by side, I do not want to insist on a continuum but to shake up a narrow and male-defined southern ‘tradition’” (xi) (xv). What better way to explore these ideals than to examine the mundane, everyday life experiences of the ordinary people in their natural spaces? And what better place to look than the stories of female characters who have so often been overlooked in making contributions to the canon of Southern literature, helping to substantiate its place in academia?

“‘[S]ome strange mixture of continuity and discontinuity’ at the heart of southern writing. It may prove that an overdeveloped eschatological sense is one of the more enduring characteristics of the southern literary tradition: the Southernness of place, it seems, is always in danger of expiring.”

(Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate’s Renaissance thesis)

For Boylorn, her strength in place is quick to surface. Boylorn gives meticulous details of the small town of Sweetwater to place readers into the physicality of her story, “landscape is surrounded by decaying buildings, weed-overgrown homes, and unkempt yards with wood and trash (19) . . . broken or unfixed windows, covered with sheets and duct tape” (Boylorn, *Sweetwater* 21). Readers are aware that there is an intimacy among residents, that all they have and know is each other. She tells us that the people just have a “Sweetwater look to them . . . [and] women have hard features” (Boylorn, *Sweetwater* 20) In her foreword, Boylorn sets the stage for the town of Sweetwater as:

[o]ne of many small African American communities that you’ve driven through—usually by mistake—windows up and doors locked, eyes closed

to everyone and everything in it, your only thought focused on how to find the quickest way back to the Interstate. . . [but also] [t]o be fair . . . you might also feel much the same general unease if you find yourself in a poor “white trash” neighborhood in the rural south. (Boylorn, *Sweetwater* xi)

LIFE STORIES OF SOUTHERN SPACE

If place is so indicative of who you are, supplying the narrative in a way, showing a resilience to the stigmas attached to these traditional Southern spaces is hugely important in how we look at Southern literature. This resilience might outweigh the stereotypes—these more supple voices that offer up different versions of the South other than what constitutes our understanding of the more mythical or romanticized ideals found in most canonized Southern literature. There is comfort in home, of course, but if there is trauma or oppression in the creases and cracks, to resist that defined place of home is to show a strength of self, the idea of something different. This assertion can be defined as resilience theory, the study of an individual’s ability to adapt to life in the face of social disadvantage or otherwise, a cultural resilience. Writing in a narrative style is certainly a shared commonality into the female acts of resilience. Although a relatively new concept, usually sociological rather than literary, resilience theory can certainly be applicable to the works of Boylorn and Allison and other pieces of narrative literature regardless of race or class. In the beginning, this:

psychology-based resilience research tended to focus primarily on the personality characteristics or ‘traits’ of the individuals that enable them

to survive hardship. More recently . . . has expanded to explore the processes of adaptation . . . by greater consideration of the role of environmental factors . . . characterized as a process of ‘person-environment’ interaction. (Wild 138)

This movement of culture studies is shifting into the humanities “as life stories attract us curious, social beings who are ever alert to uncovering the ‘story behind the story’” (Prenshaw 3). Scholar Prenshaw continues that this “current interest in autobiography owes to many influences—to a society that prizes individualism and the individual’s right to define and explain the self in writing . . . many of whom have heretofore been largely invisible in the literary culture” (3). Although female narratives are not unfamiliar to the study of Southern Literature, names such as Hurston, Welty, or Lillian Smith, maybe they should be re-examined for their likenesses to each other instead of differences. They all evolve from a southern space—surely there are strands of commonality as there are in the contemporary works of Allison and Boylorn.

Autoethnographies accept this interaction of culture and self, “leav[ing] the self as a sociocultural rather than an autonomous phenomenon” (Grant, Church 2). Allison shows her resilience in survival of childhood trauma, sexual abuse and poverty by escaping and using literary expression to assert herself. Boylorn shows us a resilience by moving out of a small town, also filled with commonplace violence and poverty to achieve higher education and credentials in academia, completely opposite to the aspirations of most of the women in Sweetwater. The communities that have fostered these characters have no doubt contributed to their individual resilience. It is also important to recognize the resilience of the other women present in each work -the mothers, the grandmothers, the aunts--all show resilience in the face of social oppression by

surviving on a daily basis and taking care of what needs to be taken care of when no one else steps up. Each work creates this literary space where resilience is evident, thus change is a possibility. I believe both writers are sharing their voices to have readers experience and learn from the inequalities and turbulence evident in their social situations. In “Five Lessons from My Mentor,” Boylorn explains that “stories are inherent to experience . . . We tell and listen to stories as a way of ‘knowing’ and making sense of ourselves in the context of other lives and experiences” (45).

“I broke every barrier I could to see things as they are.” (Lillian Smith)

Narratives provide an intimate window into the lives of living people. “[W]e have found that a certain kind of reporting—long-form narrative reporting—has proved to be enormous value in making sense of a complicated and factious world” says *The Atlantic* editor, Cullen Murphy (Pyne 12). Examining the narrative styles, both presently considered as autoethnographic, and familial details of these two authors bring attention to a shared existence often hidden and ignored by both white and black. Frankly, it seems Southern literature as we know it has done everything it could to separate the two, instead of recognizing this thread of persistent resilience they share. Without powerful female narratives such as Boylorn’s and Allison’s, we are missing out on recognizing the “inescapable femaleness” as a hopeless condition in their communities (Fox-Genovese 23). This “inescapable femaleness” only reaffirms the real struggle with finding a place for themselves, as females, in their communities and often going beyond any communal expectations. Yet, as scholars, we must recognize individual experiences, of course; however, we “must underst[an]d the individual as grounded in ties of [their] community—ties of class and race, of kinship and culture” (Fox-Genovese 26). Boylorn and Allison share their initial dilemmas and recognitions of societal ills noticeable in their childhoods. It is this realization that becomes a struggle to self-identify and

that affects their growth and understanding of the world they live in—that often bewildered Southern space.

THE ENDURING SOUTHERN FEMALE

“Women have been taught to interpret certain differences between women—such as race, class, and sexuality—as threats and insurmountable division, and the culturally mandated silence about these issues ensures their perpetration.” (Audre Lord, Reames 74)

Women in the South were overly challenged by seemingly immovable circumstances or trapped, with many struggles simply accepted or *swept under the rug*. Lifting this metaphorical rug to see the dust beneath tells a history of the ordinary living in the South of all skins, shades, and social classes. This storytelling style “aims for . . . a kind of justifiable violence of the narrative kind . . . In other words, we want to be changed by what we read. If there is a little blood on the page, so be it” (Boylorn xiv).

What makes the works of Allison and Boylorn most effective in showing this resilience is the inclusion of the central figures of innocent girls, coming of age in this Southern region and inquiring how this world around them works, how the people act and what is and is not acceptable. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, Southern scholar at Louisiana State, explains that “the ‘southerner’ is a creature of culture one ‘made,’ not ‘born’” (185). This adolescent connection or bildungsroman literary style is the prime outlet for exploring the growth of young females in these Southern societies and how they identify themselves in prescribed social roles or, as Bird and Bone, question

those roles. It is the resilience in most of the other female characters in each work that have substantial impact on the growth of both *Bird* and *Bone*, a resilience that seems to continue through generations. Both narratives show each girl struggling to find their own identity in a society that seems complicated and restrictive. For *Bird*, it is being a young black girl in the small town of Sweetwater with expectations of forever staying there and “being the fourth generation to live in this pitiful ass house,” as her drunken aunts laugh aloud at her mention of being a writer and living in a house with stairs (Boylorn, *Sweetwater* 92). For the women in *Bone*’s society in Greenville, exactly as in *Bird*’s, the idea of anything other than life on the “other” side of the tracks or beyond seems utterly ridiculous. Females of *Bone*’s poor white class cannot possibly elevate themselves above the societal norms already in place in this Southern space. Societal norms are built from the communities that create them. These expectations, or confines rather, placed on females in the South were detrimental to their visions of any kind of a future outside the realm of poverty in which they lived—add birthing a few children out of wedlock and your chances of anything other than life right where you were planted is surely unreachable. Narratives provide an intimacy with this reality by providing readers true life experiences through the art of storytelling.

“Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die,

we can't remember who we are or why we're here.”

(Southern novelist, Sue Monk Kidd, The Secret Life of Bees)

GROW WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED: SOCIAL CLASS IN SMALL SPACES

Societal placement is also important inside Southern spaces and to the personal narrative as well. The way one is viewed and placed in society is hugely impactful in who the people of a place

become and how they see themselves as individuals, their own worthiness. “In 1999, Fred Hobson, in *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative*, stated that class was the ‘least openly and honestly addressed’ aspect of southern culture” (Cash 101). In regards to social separation, Boylorn explains that “Sweetwater land is not divided into the haves and have nots, or strictly by race, because mostly everyone who lives there has always lived there and understands the unseen lines” (Boylorn, 21). The fact that the mothers of both Bird and Bone had them out of wedlock assures their illegitimacy and social placement from birth. In Bone’s case, her illegitimacy is stamped on her birth certificate for all to see and to the constant disappointment of her mother, who wants nothing less than to see her children as above the white ‘trash’ she identifies with. Regardless of race, in both communities, females seem to only strive to survive the oppressive circumstances they find themselves in.

Dorothy Allison’s locale in Greenville, South Carolina, holds onto the unstated truth that the class to which you are born will forever have a hold on you. Bone Boatwright was born illegitimate, not a rarity in the South, and quite possibly a result of a patriarch controlled society. It seems Bone’s life was already laid out as it was going to be, just as her mama’s was, her aunts and her grandma. Aunt Ruth explains to Bone: “‘Nothing else will ever hit you this hard,’ she promised . . . ‘Now you look like a Boatwright . . . you got the look. You’re as old as you’re ever gonna get, girl. This is the way you’ll look till you die” (Allison *Bastard* 8). Bone understood exactly what her aunt was saying, all their kind of people were good for was working and then dying—the poverty she was born into would never go away; it was in her bloodline. She felt destined to be just like the women she encountered in childhood, just as Bird probably did—keeping house, staying pregnant, working for nothing. “Bone is acutely aware of her family’s position in the social hierarchy. She

says, ‘We knew what the neighbors called us . . . We knew who we were’ (Allison *Bastard* 82). Her family, as she described them, fit the stereotypes of ‘white trash’ (Guinn 23). Bone understands her position clearly as “this body, like my aunts’ bodies, was born to be worked to death, used up and thrown away . . . born to shame and death” (Allison *Bastard* 206).

Using the narrative works of Boylorn and Allison, there are at least three similar community components that factor into their individual stories of resilience in this shared place which include living among social class divisions and restrictions, as discussed above, a patriarchal-dominated society infiltrated with everyday domestic violence, and a reoccurring generational poverty. All these components have a circular effect in their Southern communities in that they often continue to occur in generation after generation. To find scholarly input on Allison is not a difficult feat, as her novel *Bastard* was up for the National Book Award and she has written numerous short story compilations, many of which have won awards. Literary commentary, however, on Boylorn is lacking—a prime example of why I chose her work in comparison to Allison. Boylorn’s work is lesser known and full of literary possibility. Each narrative exploring the often complex growth of young females in the same Southern region, with similar societal norms and divisions of class, accustomed to poverty and yet, different in race. Boylorn explores a quite extensive look into her familial background of her protagonist, Bird, first to show a history of these societal norms, whereas, Allison drops us right into the life of Bone Boatwright with only flashbacks to familial history—yet in both, we are witness to an overwhelming hopelessness in all the female characters of both narratives.

VIOLENCE, MALES, AND THE SOUTH

In both narratives, it is obvious that male characters infiltrate the living environments, as they are more transient. The idea of having no or limited mobility is certainly a factor in the class struggles of women of these stories and even in the world today. Minrose Gwin, author and professor states “these southern women’s stories trace the workings of patriarchal power within the father’s house and explore the ideological construction of ‘home’ . . . as a space of female entrapment” (Guinn 29). In Boylorn’s and in Allison’s, men are present, necessary to supplying the next generation, but not always worthy and sometimes dangerous. The men only offer the idealized hope of stability, fatherhood, and everlasting love. In each, the men fail women profusely.

In *Sweetwater*, Boylorn begins with the chaotic love story of Bird’s grandparents, Twiggy and Cake, who long before Bird is conceived, spent years beating on one another and drinking to escape their sorrows. Her descriptions of the repeated violence in relationships become relatable to the community of Sweetwater and at times, even excusable. Boylorn also includes the story of wife, Patience, and husband, Walter, who beats her with a passion one last time before we see Patience take action. Walter, as the man of the house, demands respect from his wife Patience and his last horrific beating of Patience has fatal consequences. After explicit details of the abuse, “beating loud as empty bottles hitting floors,” (22) and Patience’s “eyes were swollen nearly shut,” Boylorn states matter-of-factly what Patience declares, “Walt dead . . . He beat me so I shot him.” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 27). What we learn from this is that Patience saw no other way out and Twiggy’s, Bird’s grandmother’s, response in defending Patience’s actions. We begin to see a strength in the females, showing signs of resilience in circumstances that are unacceptable. Twiggy believes that Patience didn’t go crazy at all, “She got sense. Got his ass back for beating her half to death” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 29). So early on in Boylorn’s narrative, we see a female resistance to this

societal norm of violence and how it progresses through generations of females. And yet, some seem to accept domestic beatings as normal. Mae, another Sweetwater female states that “[Patience] done been married enough years to be able to take a good beating without going crazy” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 29). This acceptance of situation is recognized in Allison’s novel as well and quite frankly, there are women who resist and those who would rather close up or look the other way rather than stir up trouble, as does Bone’s mother, Annie.

Twiggy is a fighter herself, yet she and Cake’s disputes start with an overload of alcohol. Boylorn states: “Girls learned that if a boy threatened to kill them or throw them in a ditch, that meant he loved them. . . [F]ighting you learned to live with” (Boylorn *Sweetwater*, 34). But for Twiggy, she resists and fights back. Like her children understood, “[the violence] came every weekend like Sunday” and when Bread, Bird’s mother, peeked in the front room she saw “empty liquor bottles on the floor, broken glasses on the table, a lit cigarette still burning in the ashtray, and swollen fists and messy clothes” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 36). But Cake gave up on his marriage with Twiggy after a violent altercation at a local bar and left for good soon after, leaving Twiggy alone with a house full of young children to care for and feed. Cake had the mobility to go, Twiggy did not. But what is so powerful about the writing of Boylorn is that she “offer[s] a thick description of the everyday values, practices, and experiences of these women and [does] not explicitly advocate for culture change” (Ellis 354). She offers up a lesson but we, as readers, take the bait and think about the consequences of these living circumstances. Resilience theory is an opportunity for us to do the same, as it is “forward-looking and opens up a fresh perspective on today’s challenges of global change” (keck 6). If resilience is a commonality of Southern females,

we need to acknowledge this to “engage in integrative research” in literature from this region (keck 7).

Bread’s girls, Bird and Cali, learn for themselves the flight men often quickly take instead of sticking around and taking care of their own. Each of their fathers, promising a life of love and stability to mother Bread, abandoned her and she walks back into Twiggy’s home, children in tow, to live her days and raise her girls. Bird tells us that “Sweetwater was hard on a man . . . few opportunities for advancement or escape . . . the boys chased any opportunity for escape, be that the bottom of a liquor bottle, between some pretty woman’s legs, or smoking dope” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 83). For Bird as a young girl, she quickly understands that “[men] will make you act a plum fool. . . They are wonderful and terrible at the same time” (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 90).

The patriarchal dominance is also clearly defined in the community that Bone lives in in Greenville, South Carolina. Bone is surrounded by loveable, playful, though often drunken uncles, brothers of her mother, Annie, yet it is the hand of step-father Daddy Glen who ultimately takes control over Bone and her mother. The vial actions of Daddy Glen show readers just how devil-like and powerful a male figure can be behind the closed doors of a home life. Annie’s luck with men didn’t begin well with Bone’s father supposedly fathering many children from “Spartanburg to Greer” (Allison *Bastard* 54) Then came Reese, Annie’s second born daughter from a marriage to Lyle Parsons, before he died in a car accident. When Annie’s brother, Earle, brought in Glen Waddell to meet her at the diner where she waited tables, Glen tells himself that he would have her, as if she were a possession to be had. Up to the horrific and unforgettable rape of young Bone by Daddy Glen, Allison details suggestions of the powerful hold the male, father figure of Daddy Glen had in their household, and yet it all began with a dream and a promise of something better. All

single mother Annie convinces herself of is that “[h]e’d make a good daddy, a steady man” (Allison *Bastard* 13). Glen quickly convinces her that he is the prince she’s been waiting on. He comes from a reputable middle-class family, whereas all Annie and the Boatwrights have been classified as is “white trash”. He demands, “Call me Daddy. . . Call me Daddy ‘cause I love your mama, ‘cause I love you. I’m gonna treat you right. You’ll see. You’re mine, all of you, mine” (Allison *Bastard* 36). But as the marriage takes place and Annie realizes trouble, she refuses to give into failure yet again. Her family’s comments hint at this ominous character of Glen; her brothers insisting that he’s just not quite right and they don’t quite trust him. All along, after financial woes and a bruised ego, Glen Waddell true colors are coming to the surface in the midst of moving Annie and her girls away from her family and then from house to house because they couldn’t make rent. All Bone wanted was “to be like the families in the books in the library . . . wanted Daddy Glen to love me like the father in Robinson Crusoe” (Allison *Bastard* 209) Yet, it isn’t long before Daddy Glen’s inner frustrations turn into the physical abuse of young Bone, who tries to imagine a family life like those she’s only read in books. He even takes advantage of her in the family car while her mother is in the hospital giving birth to the son Glen Jr. who doesn’t survive, which causes even more trauma. When Bone awakens in the family Pontiac, she’s confused about what happened. “I kept squeezing my thighs together, feeling the soreness, and trying to imagine how I could have bruised myself if it had been a dream” (Allison *Bastard* 48). Little did she know that this was only the beginning of a childhood full of patriarchal power, violence and abuse, much of which her mother turned away from instead of protecting her.

Daddy Glen was careful not to hit me when one of the aunts was visiting,
and never much when Mama would see, except those times he could justify

as discipline, dragging me into the bathroom while she waited on the other side of the locked door . . . If I ran from him, he would come after me. He shook me so hard my head wobbled loosely. . . Sometimes when I looked up into his red features and blazing eyes, I knew that it was nothing I had done that made him beat me. (Allison *Bastard* 110-111)

For Bone to realize the danger in her step-father's behavior at such an early age is nothing less of showing whatever resilience she could to situations clearly beyond her control. All the while, Annie recognizing the abuse of her daughter and yet not facing the reality of it—she represents a different female perspective, one of a victim, unable to move past a life that has swallowed her. She turns a blind eye and continues on.

The ultimate abhorrent act any man can carry out is when he sexually and physically assaults a child, which the rage of Glen Waddell escalates to and onto young Bone. The rape scene in *Bastard* is horrific and most difficult to read. It is nearly unbearable to read through a scene when a child is crying for help and we witness Bone beg to God to help her kill him like she has wanted to do for so long. “I would dream of cutting his heart out, his evil raging pit-black heart” (Allison *Bastard* 209). It is Bone's mother, Annie, who walks in to witness the rape and we see her, for once, seem to come to Bone's rescue. He begs to her to wait, but “she wasn't listening. That's good, don't stop. Keep moving, Mama. Get us out of here” (Allison *Bastard* 287). The real trauma, even after such a violent act, is when Bone's mother shows sympathy for Glen and even later, leaves Bone in the care of her sister. Bone sees this before they even make it to the hospital as Annie grips Glen's

shoulder, “I said I could never hate her, but I hated her now for the way she held him, the way she stood there crying over him. Could she love me and still hold him like that” (Allison *Bastard* 291)

This is one perspective of being in a community that thrives off the power of a patriarch and how having a man defines a woman. It is a community that sweeps domestic violence under the rug and in a way, accepts it as normal. “Violence is often rooted in the land the characters inhabit. ‘Place is never simply place in southern writing,’ Patricia Yaeger writes . . . It is also ‘always a site where trauma has been absorbed into the landscape” (Cash 103). Annie Boatwright Waddell leaves her child with her child’s abuser for fear of being alone, the ultimate betrayal for Bone Boatwright. And although we are not witness to any sexual violence in Boylorn’s *Sweetwater*, we see the violence between males and females and the same normalcy or expectancy of it. This is a shameful aspect of Southern society, but we are also able to witness several female characters rise above this societal acceptance of female oppression and violence with strands of resilience. In the midst of tragedy, we see threads of hope and possibility.

GENERATIONAL POVERTY

Poverty has no color and does not discriminate, as social classes tend to do. Poverty is a beast all its own.. The final commonality I would like to explore is the poor South and its implications in the writings of Allison and Boylorn, as it is a circular cycle and becomes what is normal or acceptable in spaces. Scholar Katherine Henninger believes Dorothy Allison’s “mantle of ‘white trash’ [is] a ‘potent symbolic gesture of defiance, a refusal of shame and invisibility that come with being poor,’ and as ‘a way to call attention to a form of injustice which is often ignored’.” (86)

Likewise, for Boylorn, poverty limits the power of voice of a people, as well as limits their mobility. Both communities such as Boylorn's and Allison's are idle and only rotate within their limited areas. For Allison, the poverty defined their very existence. There was great shame in having nothing. Bone says, "Mama hated to be called trash, hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground" (*Bastard* 3). This poverty in Bone's neighborhood was quite obvious to others—in fact, her whole family of Boatwrights had always been known as such.

Poverty in Bone's family, as in Bird's, is generational. Mary E. Corcoran's *The Dynamics of Childhood Poverty* helps us understand the realm of such poverty like Bone's and Bird's: "The effects of poverty are most severe when childhood poverty is long-term . . . changes in family structure mean that child poverty is becoming increasingly feminized" (41-43). This femaleness of poverty is particularly interesting because it makes complete sense—the females, the leaders of resilience in this southern region, are left to care and support the children being raised in these environments. The persistence of poverty is what Corcovan calls being "chronically poor" (45). This persistence in condition only makes it hard to escape, obvious still in generational traps of poverty even today. This continuation might stem from the fact that "[p]overty also affects how parents interact with their children . . . less nurturing and more authoritarian . . . administer more inconsistent and harsher physical discipline [resulting in] the frequency and severity of domestic violence" (Seccombe 5). Most of the factors that both girls struggle with are attributes of being poor, where they "are more likely to experience violence, hunger, poor health, stress and abuse," obvious in both literary pieces (Seccome 2). And for Bone, "home becomes that which must be escaped" for her safety after being horribly abused (Duvall 2). Interestingly, it is the strong females

in her family, not her own mother, who rescue her and gives her the means to get out. But Bone's self worth is horribly jagged from her traumatic experiences, "I was ashamed of myself. It was like sliding down an endless hole, seeing myself at the bottom, dirty, ragged, poor, stupid" (Allison *Bastard* 209). These realizations of who they are and where they come from are powerful to the identities of Bird and Bone, especially in the daydreams of fairy tales.

Bird dreams of the love of a man, but her community reality proves that fairy tales like those don't exist. The tales of the old women in her life convince her of such. They tell her: "Some nappy-headed boy is gon' make you love him so much and so fast . . . Then, once he uses you up for all you're worth, he gon' leave you so broken that the only thing that will comfort you will be this dingy assed town" (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 93). They break her down and all she can feel is shame and worthlessness, "You ain't gon' be nothin' no way" (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 92). When you are poor, opportunities to do better, make better and be better are bleak, if not nonexistent. And just like the uncles in Bone's life, Bird's uncles were practically the only male figures in her life. But they, like in *Bastard*, were absorbed in poverty as well, where they "played sports, drank liquor, made love, picked fights . . . and tried to forget they were the worst things to be at the time—poor and black" (Boylorn *Sweetwater* 83).

Struggles of poverty in the South is commonly illuminated in Southern literature, however, exploring *Sweetwater* and *Bastard*, the female characters, two of which are also the narrators, are examples of this shared resilience or survival in patriarchal societies that devalue the possibility of independence and self worth. There is a strength in the descriptions and the dialogues of the females in these stories, a most spiritual yearning for something more, something better. It is characters like Bone and Bird's "[s]urvival [that] makes changes in the political and social

possible” (Jones 73). Their commonalities alongside one another strengthen their stories of resilience. Telling stories and sharing experiences is one way to escape a life of poverty, but more importantly, recognizing this intersection in Southern female characters allows a closer look at the South already seen in the bookshelves. We begin to see threads of similarity in the people not fully identified, the stories that were not acknowledged. Examining the literary works of the South in a different way might lend new chapters to an already rich history. This inclusion is essential to a fuller understanding of Southern literature, both past and present, and offers up a new conversation about what defines conventional Southern literature. So we return to the distinction of this place. It is this “experience of place [that] remains dynamic and vital,” to our flexibility of growth and change—the recognition of our experiences and one example is examining the Southern women’s shared characteristic of resilience and an innate will to survive difficult circumstances.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Plunging into the realms of the literary expanse, it seems Southern literary scholars should ask what exactly is the storyline of the people in the South? Is the South still considered “the South” that we have read and revered so deeply about in the canon of great literature? Is the genre of studying Southern Literature justified and inclusive of all its people? Is the South still distinctly relevant as holding its own space or region in the contemporary humanities? Has the conversation shifted or boundaries blurred of what is mapped as the Southern region? Or are there still existing societal expectations or stereotypes, especially those repeatedly trademarked in canonized Southern literature? Are Southerners presently molded and categorized into readers’ presumptuous ideals? It cannot be indefinitely any of these things.

Barbara Ladd's "Dismantling the Monolith" suggests that we might "reconceptualize place [the South] as a site of cultural dynamism . . . [which] enables us to shift our focus from moments or sites of narrative stability to moments/sites of narrative and historiographical process" (Jones 49). This suggests movement, which I believe is monumental in studying the South of today. We are an ever-changing place. I am suggesting that we alleviate the stereotypes of all southern females and explore their similarities of daily struggles as women in a shared Southern space, whether that resonates from a more expansive genetic history is not essential for my purposes. What is essential is the recognition of a shared cultural resistance southern women to make more of themselves than what society allows them to ever dream of becoming and to narrate it, let their voices and experiences be heard for the record. Acknowledging the authentic voices of the South gives scholars a direct connection into the culture of the South that seems in limbo in our literary studies. Ladd continues:

The *experience* of place remains dynamic and vital. . . To be useful in literary studies, [Kowalewski] writes, place 'must be reimagined' ("Writing in Place") . . . it must be imagined more like the way that Eudora Welty imagines it; and literary critics need to develop a vocabulary for the discussion of the way place animates a text, governs movement, and makes change possible. (Jones 51)

For Southern studies to continue to be studied, as it currently finds itself in somewhat of a lull, we need to keep all doors open and be open-minded to the variety of experiences in the present

South. Examining dialogues and experiences of the Southern past and their commonalities, such as Allison's and Boylorn's narratives, might lead us to places we never knew existed.

“People pay for what they do, and still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it simply: by the lives they lead.”

(James Baldwin's epigraph, Bastard Out of Carolina by Dorothy Allison)

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