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“A Southern Expendable”: Cultural Patriarchy, Maternal Abandonment, and Narrativization in  
Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Natalie Carter

In a 1992 review of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, George Garrett raves that Dorothy Allison's semiautobiographical text “is simply stunning, about as close to flawless as any reader could ask for and any writer, at any age or stage, could hope to aspire to” (145). Although Garrett borders on gushing, he does not overstate the power of Allison's heartbreaking tale of incest and poverty in the Old South. Set in the mid-1950s in Allison's own hometown of Greenville, South Carolina, *Bastard Out of Carolina* is the story of young Ruth Anne Boatwright, nicknamed “Bone” after her rowdy, beloved Uncle Earle proclaims her “no bigger than a knucklebone” (2). Despite the fact that she is born illegitimately to fifteen-year-old Anney Boatwright, and into a family described as “appallingly poor” (Megan 584), Bone is a precocious, happy, and carefree child. Anney, however, is plagued by the stigma of illegitimacy that haunts her daughter in their small Southern community, and is determined to ensure Bone's legal legitimacy via an unblemished birth certificate. After a brief, happy marriage which leaves her both a widow and another daughter, Reese, Anney meets Glen Waddell at the diner where she is waitressing in an effort to make ends meet for her small family. Although she is initially reluctant to marry him, Anney eventually acquiesces—at least partially because Glen hails from a wealthy local family—and she imagines his ties to prosperity will lead to a better life for her girls. After they wed, Anney quickly becomes pregnant again, despite growing evidence of Glen's unpredictable temper and increasing level of malevolence toward her eldest daughter. Two tragedies take place the night Anney goes into labor: she delivers a stillborn son, and “Daddy Glen” sexually assaults Bone for the first time. Over the next few years, as Daddy Glen has increasing trouble holding down a job, his reign of terror over his stepdaughter escalates in brutality, and despite the frequency with which Bone is “mysteriously” injured, Anney alternately ignores the abuse, or absolves her husband of it. The novel culminates in a graphic sexual assault, during which Anney actually witnesses Glen rape her daughter. However, in the end, she relinquishes custody of Bone to her Aunt Raylene, and Anney returns to Glen.

Indeed, *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a remarkable text for many reasons: Allison's unsentimental portrayal of profound poverty in the Old South; her unflinching depiction of incest; and the conclusion—devastating for character and reader alike—all contribute to the “flawless” nature of this novel. Perhaps most remarkable, though, is Allison's ability to seamlessly weave a particularly Southern tradition of masculinity and violence into this heartbreaking tale of a daughter's trauma and a mother's abandonment. In this article, I will investigate Allison's multifaceted portrayals of trauma in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, which—when combined with an analysis of social and economic traditions in the Old South, as well as an examination of the complex process of narrativization—leads the critical reader to conclude that the trauma ultimately most injurious to Bone is psychological, not sexual. Sadly, this investigation makes apparent that because patriarchal violence is so intrinsic to Southern culture—and particularly to

the culture of this text's era—Daddy Glen's abuse of Bone may be horrifying and repulsive, but it is not entirely unexpected. What is unexpected, however, is Anney's abandonment of her daughter, both symbolic and literal. As a theoretical framework layered in trauma, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories proves, it is ultimately Anney's abandonment, and not Glen's prolonged physical and sexual abuse, that is the source of this narrator's most grievous trauma.

In order to gain a richer understanding of what Carolyn E. Megan refers to as Dorothy Allison's "relationship between storytelling and survival" (586), one should consider Laurie Vickroy's uniquely literary contributions to the field of trauma theory. Vickroy's 2002 text, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, provides a lucid examination of the process of narrativization, as well as an extensive discussion of *scriptotherapy*, a technique almost tailor-made for an analysis of *Bastard Out of Carolina*.<sup>1</sup> Scriptotherapy is Suzette Henke's concept that "writing about trauma can lead toward individual and collective healing and alleviation of symptoms" (qtd. in Vickroy 8), which Vickroy then adapts to the study of contemporary literature. Because childhood sexual abuse is a trauma which will almost unquestionably destroy the victim's entire sense of identity, scriptotherapy is particularly useful because it offers the possibility of reinventing the self, reconstructing the subject ideologically, and reassessing the past; this pertains well to many fictional narratives that focus on protagonists, like Bone, who attempt to survive domestic abuse by creating enabling stories and self-concepts, thereby recovering a sense of self and agency in the face of devastating losses (8). The ability to recognize Bone's attempts at scriptotherapy in this novel is necessary to recognizing the myriad manifestation of her traumas. As will be established, Bone's scriptotherapy is an intricate element of her attempts at narrativization, the crucial first step in the healing process. Without narrativization, the victim cannot recover from her trauma.

*Bastard Out of Carolina* begins with the narrator's proclamation: "I've been called Bone all my life, but my name's Ruth Anne. I was named for and by my oldest aunt—Aunt Ruth. My mama didn't have much to say about it, since strictly speaking, she wasn't there" (1). Anney is not, "strictly speaking," at Bone's birth because she is unconscious due to an injury she sustains in a car accident three days earlier. This symbolic absence is clearly a metaphor for the emotional absence that ensues throughout the course of the novel, because "'strictly speaking,' her mother isn't fully present for most of Bone's life" (Town 88). At this point, it should be clarified that Anney's symbolic absence—as well as her subsequent abandonment—is not to be confused with a lack of love for Bone. The fact that Anney loves her daughter is never in dispute; for example, the critical reader should consider that she verbally assaults a preacher to defend Bone's honor (14); she sends Bone to live with her aunt Ruth in an effort to protect her (121); and, of course,

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<sup>1</sup> It could (and has) been argued that the entirety of *Bastard Out of Carolina* is an act of scriptotherapy for Allison, largely due to the fact that the author herself claims that the novel is a work of fictional autobiography. The autobiographical nature of this text has been scrutinized exhaustively by scholars; for examples, see Vickroy; Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001); or "Surviving the Family Romance? Southern Realism and the Labor of Incest," by Gillian Harkins [*Southern Literary Journal* XL.I (2007): 114–139].

there is her ongoing quest to erase the mark of illegitimacy on Bone's birth certificate.<sup>2</sup> Anney very clearly loves her daughter, and in a thoughtful analysis of this text, Vickroy posits that perhaps it is because the author "anticipates powerful reactions [to Anney, that she takes] great pains to create sympathy for Anney's life and establish her as a loving, financially struggling mother, so that when she abandons Bone at the end of the novel, the loss seems even greater because she does seem to love her daughter" (161). Thus, I will not argue that Anney does not love her daughters, *especially* Bone, for it is very clear that she does. Unfortunately, however, all of that love does not equate into Anney knowing how to protect or provide for them.

Throughout the course of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Anney strenuously endeavors to provide for her daughters. However, because she is still "intensely aware of being viewed as poor white trash" (Giles 84), Anney's primary concern is providing for Bone and Reese economically, not emotionally. This is indicative of a particularly Southern element of this text: the "poor white trash motif." In a 1993 article about Allison, David Reynolds draws a firm distinction between "white trash" and "poor whites." According to Reynolds, "whereas 'poor' implies a solely economic designation, 'trash' is more general, implying debasement in all categories whether economic, sexual, moral, or intellectual" (365). Allison herself chimes in on this distinction in her suggestively-titled collection, *Trash*, writing:

There was this concept of the "good" poor, and that fantasy had little to do with the everyday lives my family had survived. The good poor were hard- working, ragged but clean, and intrinsically honorable. We were the bad poor. We were men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours and bearing too many children; and children with runny noses, watery eyes, and the wrong attitudes. (vii)

Trauma theorists should note that Allison invokes the language of survival as the status quo when she recalls the everyday existence of her adolescence in the Old South, thus evoking Judith Lewis Herman's claim in *Trauma & Recovery* that traumatic events are not extraordinary because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm ordinary human adaptations to one's daily life. Allison, like her alter ego, Bone, is not just traumatized by the extraordinary experience of her stepfather's abuse, but also by the socioeconomic stigma that is attached to her literally from birth. Bone is traumatized in small ways, every day, because she is never given a chance to be anything but "trash," and is therefore considered a dispensable constituent of the Southern society into which she was born. Part of Allison's project, then, in *Bastard Out of Carolina*—indeed, perhaps in all of her writing—is to "challenge the region's own social structures" (Guinn 4), and to resist the "initiation into the prescribed social roles of 'white trash' adulthood that makes no room for individual development but instead demands compliance or impotent defiance" (xv). Therefore, the product of Allison's struggle against the societal confines

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars have written extensively on the connection between the birth certificate and Bone's identity, or lack thereof. For further edification, see Juhasz, Vickroy, or Town.

of her birthright—*Bastard Out of Carolina*—is “a new conception of a tragic South, illuminated . . . by the story of a Southerner expendable to the region’s established cultural narrative” (30).

Fundamentally, it is the flawless replication of this established cultural narrative that serves as the greatest testament to Allison’s text as such a uniquely “Southern” achievement. In her introduction to *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*, Doris Betts explains that “generalizations about Southern writing are that it...cares about time and place; explores the past, often within families...and develops, among other themes, a sense of human limitation—that philosophical limitation within which [characters] may learn to live...without delight” (2). Certainly, these categorizations are applicable to *Bastard Out of Carolina*; for example, place is so intricately woven into this text that Allison puts it in the very title. Additionally, the notorious Boatwright family legend pervades the text, and her abuse obviously leads Bone to recognize human limitations (her own, her abuser’s, and those of the numerous adults who fail to protect her). However, although Betts’ analysis is useful, it is ultimately incomplete because she fails to address the complex relationship between Southern writing and masculinity, an examination necessitated by the fact that a “Southern” identity is predicated upon concepts of hyper-masculinity and violence.

As a result of this era’s intensely misogynistic cultural mentality toward women, and especially toward poor women, Anney is ensnared in a constant struggle to prove that she and her daughters are not expendable. Her primary method of doing so is to ensure economic stability for them, and so Anney “waitresses but barely makes enough to keep her family fed” (Town 84), and it is insinuated that she even prostitutes herself at one point so that she can buy dinner for the girls. Her efforts to provide sustenance for Bone and Reese, at least (admittedly, perhaps not the actions themselves), are admirable. However, this admirable nature only serves to increase the irony that Anney’s most dramatic gesture to ensure her daughters’ economic security, her marriage to Glen, is what ultimately destroys the very family she is trying to protect.

Anney’s economic-based marriage to Glen is problematic from the start. Try as she might to overcome her “disgraceful white trash family origins” (Bouson 108), Anney is still painfully aware of her identity as “a woman from the notoriously trashy Boatwright clan” (Miller 146). When she meets Glen Waddell, the youngest son born into an upper-middle-class family, she sees something far more important than a chance at love. In Glen, she sees an escape from the ceaseless poverty into which she was born—an escape which until now has been virtually unimaginable for Anney. In *The Spaces of Violence*, James R. Giles makes a persuasive claim that in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Allison is definitively “repudiating the assumption that ‘poor white’ status is either biological or chosen” (82), because for generations, the Boatwright family has been “trapped in a relentless and grinding poverty that, by the 1950s and 1960s in which the novel is set, has become an integral part of the socioeconomic structure in the American South” (82). Despite her struggle against the cultural narrative prescribed upon her, Anney nonetheless becomes pregnant at fifteen and gives birth to an illegitimate daughter, thereby reinforcing the dominant opinion that this is just what Southern White trash women naturally

*did*. As a result, when Anney sees Glen, she doesn't just see a chance at love—she sees a chance to escape from a life she previously thought inescapable.

The Boatwright men are obviously able to avoid the component of the white trash stereotype in which they give birth out of wedlock (though they unquestionably contribute to their fair share of teen pregnancies); nonetheless, Anney's kinsmen still do plenty to perpetuate the social stigma surrounding their family. Giles explicates:

The destructive and self-destructive nature of the male Boatwrights' response to their economic entrapment makes their situation doubly hopeless. ...Poor and economically powerless, the Boatwright men construct and perpetuate a myth of their heroic exploits, which are in fact violent and self-destructive and thus reinforce the dominant society's stereotypes about them. Intensely misogynistic, the myth assumes a view of women as inferior, as beings created to serve them and to celebrate their adventures. (82)

Considering this characterization of the Boatwright men as inherently violent and misogynistic, it is not surprising that Anney is drawn to Glen, a man who is “an exaggeration of, not another species from, the other men in the novel” (Juhasz 46). However, although the Boatwright men are alcoholic, irrational, and often violent, one should not dismiss or ignore that they *do* have redeeming qualities—they are warm, funny, and genuinely love their family, especially Bone, whom they treasure for her uninhibited moxie. Glen “lacks the positive qualities that the men of the family do possess, such as a capacity for loyalty or genuine concern for children” (Giles 86), and this lack is the primary reason that “no one would ever mistake Glen for a real Boatwright” (86), a certainty obvious even to Glen himself. Even though Glen claims Uncle Earle is everything he ever wanted to be, he still “knows that he is not, and never will be, a real Boatwright male. Uncle Earle gets into drunken fights with other men, whereas Glen, while quite sober, assaults a child” (87). Therefore, Anney's attempt to escape her “white trash identity” (Bouson 101) by marrying Glen, a man of higher social standing than she, is ultimately a futile attempt because she is blinding herself to the possibility that “white trash men may be mean and vicious, but it is the terrifying aggression of white middle-class men directed toward those weaker that is cruelest” (Doane and Hodges 117). Unfortunately, Glen does not have to look any further than his own home to find someone weaker upon whom to project his aggression.

At this point, it is advantageous for the critical reader to pause and consider how ideological constructs of *home* function in a text about domestic violence. In her essay, “Nonfelicitous Space and Survivor Discourse: Reading the Incest Story in Southern Women's Fiction,” Minrose Gwin argues that “for the Southern daughter in the patriarchal house, place and identity become compounded and conflicted because place/identity equals powerlessness” (419). Thus, the literary Southern daughter is uniquely situated to reveal what Gwin labels an *ideology of dominance*—that is, “how the father's power in the Southern patriarchal family is produced within and itself reproduces a cultural space that has historically emphasized property ownership and built up an institutionalized system of the containment and usage of women's bodies to that

end” (417). *Bastard Out of Carolina* is especially ripe for Gwin’s reading of this cultural patriarchy because “Southern women’s stories trace the workings of patriarchal power with the father’s house,” and “explore the ideological constructions of ‘home’ (both as the material space of the house and the cultural space of the patriarchal family) as a space of female entrapment” (419). Building upon Gwin’s theme, Caren J. Town argues that it is because of this culturally-induced powerlessness that Bone “belongs” to Glen, the patriarchal head of household; moreover, this is also the reason Anney is powerless to defend her daughter. Gwin’s and Towne’s valuable input allows the feminist reader to recognize that Bone’s entrapment in Daddy Glen’s house is concomitantly her entrapment in a distinctly Southern form of patriarchal oppression.

Although an analysis of social and economic traditions in the hyper-masculine Old South may lead the empathetic reader to greater insight into why Anney marries Glen, many readers will find any justification as to why she would stay with a man who “abuses and violates Bone in every possible way” (Garrett 145) both inadequate and incomprehensible.<sup>3</sup> Why any person remains in a situation of domestic violence is a complicated and intensely personal issue, but one might find the beginnings of an answer for Anney’s unique situation in an analysis of captivity in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. In her discussion of the traumas associated with captivity—or instances of prolonged, repeated trauma—Judith Lewis Herman argues that “domestic captivity of women and children is often unseen. A man’s home is his castle; rarely is it understood that the same home may be a prison for women and children. In domestic captivity, physical barriers to escape are rare . . . [and] are generally invisible” (74). The prolonged cycle of abuse distinguishes captivity from other traumatic circumstances because it creates a distinct dynamic between the victim and her captor, one in which the victim is rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and/or legal subordination. Herman claims “captivity, which brings the victim into prolonged contact with the perpetrator, creates a special type of relationship, one of coercive control. . . [s/he] becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator” (74–75).

Glen Waddell is a near-textbook definition of a captor. His physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of Bone as she ages from six to twelve years old certainly constitutes an environment of prolonged, repeated trauma, and Herman’s home/castle metaphor echoes Gwin’s analysis of cultural patriarchy in the South. Additionally, Glen’s insistence that the family move so often—to go where the work is, as he claims—is indicative of a desire to isolate his victims and thus prevent them from forming friendships or bonds which would then tempt the revelation of his abuse. Furthermore, this persistent demand on relocation also illustrates Herman’s claim that there are not generally actual physical barriers to one’s escape, but instead that a specific *person* holds one captive, not a specific structure. Therefore, if the critical reader identifies Glen not just as an abusive stepfather, but as a captor, and Anney as a woman who “is economically

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this line of inquiry opens up a discussion for another kind of essay, one related to the tendency to blame the victim for crimes committed against her. That essay would have to include an acknowledgment of what many feminist scholars refer to as “asking the wrong question.” That is: instead of asking, “Why does Anney stay with Glen?,” why *aren’t* we asking, “What is the mentality of patriarchal dominance that drives his abuse?”

disenfranchised, a mother struggling to survive in a patriarchal social and economic structure with no real place to go if she does leave Glen” (Giles 93), her decision to stay with him becomes slightly more justifiable. However, even the sympathetic feminist reader must acknowledge that staying with him is one thing—but abandoning your traumatized child in order to stay with him is a different beast entirely.

In her 2003 text, *A Desire for Women: Relational Psychoanalysis, Writing, and Relationships Between Women*, Suzann Juhasz argues that it is “Bone’s pain from Anney’s abandonment [which] orchestrates the novel” (45). Anney’s symbolic abandonment of her daughter coincides almost precisely with Glen’s arrival in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, a fact evidenced by her nearly immediate refusal to admit to his true nature. His initial appearance is followed by Anney audibly repeating to herself, “he’s a good man” (33), a rather transparent effort to persuade herself of the mantra’s validity. Moreover, the fact that she dates Glen for two years before she agrees to marry him is clearly indicative of her (albeit perhaps subconscious) reluctance to bind herself to this “boy [who] could turn like whiskey in a bad barrel” (45). This two-year deferment is quite out of character for the impetuous, strong-willed Anney, the woman who once said “jackshit” to a preacher who dared to suggest that she feel shame at Bone’s illegitimacy (14), and it does not seem presumptuous to assume that she spent much of those two years trying first and foremost to convince herself that “he’d make a good daddy . . . a steady man” (13). More than anything, Anney “wanted someone strong to love her like she loved her girls” (10), and indeed, in Glen, she gets a man who loves her “more than his soul” (246). However, she also gets “virtually a casebook example of a man so desperately insecure about his masculinity and indeed his human worth that he requires a scapegoat on whom to enact senseless cruelty” (Giles 86). For Glen, this scapegoat is the stepdaughter he perceives as his main competitor for Anney’s time, love, and attention. Thus, in Glen, Anney gets her wish for a man who loves her desperately—even though this desperate love is acquired at the expense of her eldest child.

The mother/child dynamic lends itself particularly well to an analysis of trauma in literature because “these intimate relationships bear the effects of social, cultural, and economic mediations [and] reflect the impact of more generalized social situations but also have the potential to reconfigure them” (Vickroy 5). Furthermore, these relationships also “provide a sympathetic focus for readers (particularly women), but not an idealized one, as many of the writers . . . lay out the fissures and conflicts that develop in these relationships under extreme stress” (5). To be sure, the fissures between Anney and Bone develop slowly; for instance, after Anney delivers their stillborn son, and immediately after Glen has molested Bone for the first time, “Glen put his arms around Mama and glared at Aunt Alma. ‘We don’t need nobody else,’ he whispered. ‘We’ll do just fine on our own’” (50). It is important to note that Glen’s proclamation that he and Anney will be fine on their own is the conclusion of the text’s Chapter Four—tellingly, Anney makes no effort to correct him that the two of them are not, in fact, on their own. She makes no move to correct Glen because her abandonment of Bone has already begun.



In the aftermath of her initial molestation, Bone's naïve confusion naturally gives way to agonizing dread, calling to mind Herman's assertion that "trauma is an affliction of the powerless" (33). Allison writes:

I remembered those moments in the hospital parking lot like a bad dream, hazy and shadowed. When Daddy Glen looked at me, I saw no sign that he ever thought about it at all. Maybe it had not happened. Maybe he really did love us. I wanted him to love us. I wanted to be able to love him. I wanted him to pick me up gently and tell Mama again how much he loved us all. I wanted to be locked with Reese in the safe circle of their arms.

I stood still and let my eyes fill with tears. Mama pulled away from Daddy Glen and gathered me up. Over her shoulder I saw Daddy Glen's icy blue eyes watching us, his mouth a set straight line. He shook himself and looked away. I held on to Mama with fingers as hard and cold as iron. (51–52)

In a remarkable illustration of the descriptive power of this text, Allison gives several examples of Bone's manifesting trauma in this one passage, as the girl is confronted with an event—being molested by her stepfather—which has unquestionably "[overwhelmed] the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (Herman 33). For example, it is immediately apparent that time now has a distorted quality for her; Bone is confused by her abuser/captor's nonchalance following the attack; she is entering a stage of doubt and denial; and yet, heartbreakingly, she still desires her abuser's approval. Perhaps most striking, though, is that Bone "held on to Mama with fingers as hard and cold as iron" (52). The critical reader of trauma literature should note how both the sequence of events and Bone's gaze add to the traumatic elements of this scene, and recognize that it is at the exact moment she sees Glen turn away from them that Bone locks on to Anney. This is a telling indication of Bone's crushing realization that if her mother sees Glen leave, she will inevitably abandon her daughter to follow him.

It is after this incident in the parking lot that Bone says, "Something happened to me, something I had never felt before and did not know how to fight. Anger hit me like a baseball coming hard and fast off a new bat" (66). Anger is a predictable symptom of trauma; however, the process by which it manifests itself is exponentially more complicated in a child victim who is still developing her own identity, largely because, as Bessel van der Kolk points out in "Developmental Trauma Disorder," children do not respond to trauma the same way that adults do. Herman elucidates this point, explaining that children trapped in situations of abuse almost universally develop the belief that they are the sole person responsible for what is happening to them. Furthermore, the abused child "perceives daily, not only that the most powerful adult in her intimate world is dangerous to her, but also that the other adults who are responsible for her care do not protect her" (Herman 101). Thus, it is quite logical that the confusion Bone feels after being molested yields intense anger; it is also quite logical that because she is being abused/neglected in her own home by the adults obligated to protect her, she has no obvious outlet for that anger. However, one of the primary objectives of trauma theory is to "attempt to enlarge

readers' sensitivities to the subtleties of how trauma can be communicated" (Vickroy 10), and thoughtful examination of these subtleties in *Bastard Out of Carolina* leads the critical reader to conclude that at no other location in Allison's text is Bone's rage so implicitly tied to her abuse as in her masturbatory fantasies.

The ability to recognize Bone's attempts at scriptotherapy through her masturbatory fantasies adds an additional layer of complexity to an investigation of the spiraling manifestations of her traumas. Bone's fantasies often feature fire: "I would imagine being tied up and put in a haystack while someone set the dry stale straw ablaze. I would picture it perfectly while rocking on my hand. The daydream was about struggling to get free while the fire burned hotter and closer...I came. I orgasmed on my hand to the dream of fire" (63). While the lamentable equation of the destruction of fire to her budding sexuality is a conclusive indicator as to the level of Bone's trauma, it should also be noted that this is her first attempt at scriptotherapy. Attempting to cope with her abuse through a fantasy of fire is "an apocalyptic, destructive symbolic vehicle that conveys both her own terrible anger at the abuse and lack of protection from those who should love her, as well as her triumphant escape" (Doane and Hodges 118), but this is also Bone's first attempt to apply the process of narrativization to her trauma. The use of fire in her fantasies allows her to bear witness, to borrow Cathy Caruth's phrase, to the now-inextricable association of sex and violence that Glen's abuse has forced her to internalize. Because Bone feels she cannot communicate her victimization to her mother—whom she now psychologically identifies as one of the aforementioned adults who are responsible for her care and yet fails to protect her—Bone's fantasies, instead, become her primary mode of scriptotherapy, and thus of her attempts at narrativization.

As the brutality of Glen's abuse escalates, so does Bone's alienation from Anney ("I was always getting hurt, it seemed, in ways Mama could not understand and I could not explain" [111]). Although it is true that Bone does not explicitly tell Anney that Glen is abusing her, it is apparent to both reader and narrator that it is now willful ignorance driving Anney's blindness to her daughter's worsening condition ("Mama worried about how careless I was, how prone to accident I had become. 'Maybe you're thin-boned,' she guessed, and started buying me vitamins. I didn't know what to say to her" [111]). It is at this point in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, when Bone realizes that Anney "has turned her once-loving gaze away" (Juhasz 44), and that she is now making a conscious choice to ignore and/or deny her daughter's nonverbal cues, that Bone's literal silence on the subject of her trauma becomes definitive. Allison writes:

*I didn't know what to say to her. To say anything would mean trying to tell her everything, to describe those times when he held me tight to his belly and called me sweet names I did not want to hear. I remained silent, stubborn, resentful, and collected my bruises as if they were unavoidable. There were lumps at the back of my head, not swelling of flesh and tissue bit a rumped ridge of bone. My big toes went flat and wide, broken within a few months of each other when I smashed into doorjambs, running while looking back over my shoulder.*

“*How could you do that?*” Mama asked me. *It was my fault*, I wasn’t supposed to run in the house. (111, emphasis added)

Anney’s increasing unwillingness to see the real origin of her daughter’s trauma is in direct correlation to Bone’s unwillingness to speak it. As a result, Bone cannot give a voice to her trauma, and is unable to tell “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). Anney’s willful ignorance to her daughter’s abuse makes it painfully clear that although she is there with Bone physically, she has already effectively abandoned her daughter.

Immediately preceding the horrifying climax of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the brutal rape at the hands of her stepfather, Bone prophetically tells Anney: “I’m waiting for you to go home...I’m waiting for you to go back to Daddy Glen” (275). It is worth noting that in this statement, Allison is illustrating Gwin’s concept of the patriarchal dominance of domesticity in Southern culture, for it is Daddy Glen’s home that Anney will return to—not Bone’s. The most heartbreaking element of this passage, though, is Bone’s obvious realization that although Anney may not have physically abandoned her yet, it is just a matter of time before she does. Tragically, it is the most egregious of all Glen’s attacks on her that proves to be the breaking point for this fragile mother/daughter connection.

Bone provides a running internal monologue during and immediately after the novel’s climactic rape scene, which provides much insight into the mind of a girl who is unspeakably traumatized. For example, she flatly relates to the reader: “Pain. My shoulder, my knees, my thighs, my face—everything hurt but none of it mattered. It was all far off” (286–87). Revealingly, even as Bone disassociates from the physical trauma of her rape, she is still primarily preoccupied with her psychic trauma—that is, how her mother will react to the attack. She wonders, “Would she think I wanted him to do that? Would she think I asked for it? What would he tell her? I had to tell her that I had fought him, that I had never wanted him to touch me, never...I could not talk, could not think. For a moment then I wanted to be dead already, not to have to look into Mama’s face ever again, and not his” (287). Caruth’s metaphor of a “moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is released...through the wound” (2) as an indicator of one’s trauma is readily apparent here, as Bone invokes the language of literal silence and thinks to herself, “I had to tell her,” and “I could not talk” (287). Sadly, though, this is not the most dramatic marker of her trauma. Despite the fact that Glen has just brutally raped her—and is, in fact, still on top of her when Anney enters the room—Bone immediately ascertains that even though Anney might not blame her for the rape, she will not fully blame Glen, either. In a heart-wrenching testimony to which adult’s betrayal she finds more injurious, Bone never wants to “look into Mama’s face ever again, and not his.” By putting Anney first in this sequence—and *not* her captor/rapist—Allison is ingenuously directing the reader’s attention to the betrayal which is most traumatizing for Bone.

As Anney carries her broken and bloodied daughter away from her husband, Glen pursues her, pleading Anney to listen to him, to forgive him, to kill him (287–90). In one of the most pitiful

moments of this already enormously draining scene, Bone “grinned to feel the blood trickling down my neck. Look how hurt I was! Thank you, God” (289). Bone erroneously assumes that the overwhelming injuries Glen has inflicted upon her will finally be enough to keep Anney away from him, and this, of course, is the traumatic climax of *Bastard Out of Carolina*. The feminist reader of trauma literature should note not only the frequency with which the language of abandonment is invoked throughout this scene, but also how explicitly intertwined Bone’s physical and emotional pain is at this moment. For example, Allison writes, “I pulled myself across the seat, trying to reach her . . . but it was back to being hard to move” (289); “Mama was so close I could have touched her, but her head was turned away, turned to Glen. I could not reach her” (290); and “I tried to reach her with my right hand but the pain made me gasp. ‘Mama,’ I pleaded, but she still wasn’t looking at me” (290). Truly, Anney is not looking at her, just as she has not—“strictly speaking”—been aware of her traumatized, abused child since she married Glen Waddell. In case there is any doubt as to the totality of Anney’s abandonment at this point, Bone tells the reader: “I could see her fingers on Glen’s shoulder, see the white knuckles holding him tight” (291). This visceral image echoes the way that Bone “held on to Mama with fingers as hard and cold as iron” (52) after Glen molests her the first time. However, there is one tragic difference in these two scenes. After *that* sexual assault, Anney still has an impulse to protect her child; after *this* one, there is no doubt as to with whom her loyalties now lie.

In the hospital after her rape, Bone “kept wondering where Mama had gone . . . Where was Mama, and why wasn’t she with me” (295). Even though she will return once more, to drop off Bone’s newly unblemished birth certificate, Anney’s abandonment is now complete. This is evidenced by the fact that it is Aunt Raylene who insists that she be allowed to stay at the girl’s side at the hospital (“The double doors swung open. I turned eagerly, but the struggling angry figure there wasn’t Mama. Raylene was wrestling with a nurse” [297]), as well as in the possessive language Raylene uses to refer to Bone (“Oh, my girl, what’d they do to you?” [297]; “My girl . . . oh, my poor little girl” [298]). In Raylene, Bone finally has a guardian who actively protects her.<sup>4</sup> The maternal difference in Anney and Raylene is cemented when her aunt tells her, “Bone, no woman can stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband” (300). Tragically, however, it seems that Anney can choose. In *Historical Nightmares and Imaginative Violence in American Women’s Writings*, Amy S. Gottfried writes, “The shock of the text’s conclusion is not that Anney Boatwright cannot choose between her husband and her child but that she can” (131). Bone has been chronically abused, emotionally scarred, and brutally raped by Daddy Glen, but when she says, “My mama had abandoned me, and that was the only thing that mattered” (302), she is testifying to her most grievous trauma.

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<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about the influence that Raylene has on Bone, specifically on the fact that she is a lesbian (see Caren Town, Doane and Hodges, or Carolyn Perry’s “Introduction to Part IV,” in *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*). While I agree with the proposal that Raylene presents an alternate model of sexuality for her niece, I am uncomfortable with the conclusion that it is because of this sexual identity that she is a positive influence on Bone. Her influence, I would argue, has less to do with the fact that she is a lesbian, and more to do with the fact that she is just a good *person*.

An examination of the traumas Bone suffers in Allison's text, as well as how those traumas are aggravated by this era's traditions of hyper-masculinity, leads one to conclude that George Garrett was correct in his assessment: *Bastard Out of Carolina* is, indeed, about as close to flawless as a critical reader could ask for. This quality of flawlessness is directly attributable to Allison's unflinching reproduction of the injuries, both physical and psychological, that Bone suffers at the hands of those adults most obligated to protect her. Although much of the text is heartbreaking, perhaps most disturbing is her own mother's willful blindness to Bone's abuse, and despite the fact that Anney's symbolic desertion builds throughout the course of the novel, her final act of literally abandoning Bone is still unexpected—especially to the heartbroken daughter that she leaves behind. In her collection of essays, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature*, Allison states: "I knew there was only one story that would haunt me until I understood how to tell it—the complicated, painful story of how my mama had, and had not, saved me as a girl" (34). Unquestionably, the novel's brutally honest depictions of domestic violence, sexual assault, and abject poverty make for uncomfortable reading, but it is that very quality of discomfort which makes undeniable that in her semi- autobiographical masterpiece, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison has finally realized exactly how to tell her painful, haunting story.

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