Trauma and Recovery in Dorothy Allison's Novels *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Cavedweller*

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the trauma produced by Southern patriarchal societal rules on female characters from Dorothy Allison's novels *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Cavedweller* and the recovery that each character finds through relationships, storytelling, and safe environments. Using both of Allison's novels along with theoretical texts from Judith Herman, Laura Brown, Allan G. Johnson, and Kathlene McDonald, the thesis analyzes how Bone Boatwright from *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Delia and Cissy Byrd from *Cavedweller* experience trauma caused by Southern patriarchal societal expectations. The thesis examines how each of these characters finds recovery at the end of her respective story.

Dedication

This thesis is for anyone who has faced trauma in his or her life and is still standing.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I want to thank my Grandmother, because without her I would not be here to even write a thesis. She stayed up with me late into the wee hours of the morning helping me revise, edit, and to make sure I never gave up even when I thought I could not do this. Without her love and support I do not know if I would have had the strength to see this thesis to the end.

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Lastly, I would like to thank Dorothy Allison for writing such thought provoking novels that not only helped me understand the world around me better, but her words also helped me find healing for my own traumatic past. Through Bone Boatwright, Delia Byrd, and Cissy Byrd I was able to find the strength to let go of the trauma and heartache that has plagued me since I was a small child. She gave me the courage to realize that

even though I do not come from a conventional family with a father, mother, and a picket fence, that is okay. It is okay to be different, because that makes me special.

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Introduction

Southern literature and its criticism have long recognized the roles that memory, trauma, and history play in the development of culture, but criticism about 'the mind of the South' has historically been problematic: riddled by Oedipal anxieties and fascinations, much of this work has served to replay and reinforce the notion that, as Faulkner put it, 'The past is never dead, it's not even past.' (Hinrichsen 605)

Dorothy Allison is a writer, scholar, and critic. She is most famous for her first novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* published in 1992, which is semiautobiographical. In 1998 she published her second novel, *Cavedweller*. Using both of these novels, this thesis focuses on the themes of trauma and recovery. Chapter 1 focuses on Bone Boatwright, the main character of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina.* Chapter 2 focuses on Delia and Cissy Byrd from *Cavedweller*. In both novels the thesis explores victimization that is created by the dominant Southern patriarchal cultural system. After examining the causes and consequences of trauma in the characters' lives, each chapter explores the process they go through to achieve recovery from trauma. This thesis considers how Allison uses these three characters to illuminate the problems that Southern patriarchal culture causes in the lives of women.

This thesis is theoretically grounded in Lisa Hinrichsen's definition of trauma:

> While the term "trauma" originally had a physical meaning – it comes from the ancient Greek word for "wound" and its primary denotation is invasive bodily… it accrued mental as well as physical meanings and came to refer to both individual and collective processes. (605)

Hinrichsen's definition incorporates both physical and mental injury into the definition of trauma. The idea of both physical and mental injury is important because Cissy Byrd, from *Cavedweller*, does not go through physical trauma but experiences trauma nonetheless.

Allison employs the characters of Bone Boatwright, Delia Byrd, and Cissy Byrd to examine how Southern patriarchal culture inflicts trauma through its class systems, pervasive violence, and arbitrary rules that regulate women's lives. Using these characters and their different experiences, Allison guides readers through a critique of ideas that remain entrenched in Southern patriarchal discourse even though it ignores, vilifies, and mistreats individuals belonging to marginalized groups in the South more often than it does any good at all.

Chapter 1 discusses how Allison's first novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, is a trauma narrative by examining the traumatic experiences of the main character, Bone, as well as the causes of the trauma. Three main causes for Bone's trauma are the abuse she suffers mentally, emotionally, and physically from Glen; the backlash from being labeled a "bastard" and "white trash"; and the neglect by her mother, who does not protect her from Glen.

Chapter 2 dissects the traumatic events experienced by Delia and Cissy Byrd. Delia receives trauma from being beaten by her first husband, is mentally abused by her second husband, and deals with the traumatic guilt from leaving her children. Cissy suffers trauma imposed on her by the community for her mother's transgression. In addition to analyzing the main characters of *Cavedweller,* the chapter also examines how

some of the minor characters experience trauma produced by the dominant patriarchal society as well as their response to the trauma.

The theoretical lens used in this thesis is primarily the theory of trauma and healing developed by psychiatrist Judith Herman in her work *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman goes into detail about how trauma affects victims. She also explains the importance of victims' learning to live with their trauma instead of allowing their trauma to rule them. Herman's three steps to recovery also help further the discussion of Allison's characters.

Feminist theory also provides the theoretical grounding for the analysis of patriarchy in the thesis; specifically, psychiatrist Laura Brown's revisionist analysis of trauma accounts for the "insidious trauma" caused by persistent threats to one's sense of well-being caused by racism, class discrimination, and domestic violence within an abusive patriarchal household. Also, in Allan Johnson's *The Gender Knot*, Johnson defines the term 'patriarchy' and how it is infused in culture.

Chapter 1: Reading Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* as a Trauma Narrative

My childhood was not the easiest time of my life. I bounced around from school to school. My mother disliked me because I represented failure in her life. I had to deal with a stepfather who made it his life's work to find new ways to laugh and make fun of me. I lived with my mother between the ages of three to nine, and at nine, I decided to move in with my grandparents. That decision produced whispered comments from my extended family about how outrageous it was that my mother allowed me to choose where I wanted to live; that implied she could not control her child. They also condemned me because I will always be a child born out of wedlock. My mother's marital status somehow classified me as "other." Through these particular life experiences, I understand some of the experiences Dorothy Allison's protagonist, Bone Boatwright, goes through as a child and the toll it takes on her life.

In 1992, Dorothy Allison published her first full-length novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*. This story follows the birth, life, and hardships of Ruth Anne Boatwright. To her family Ruth Anne is referred to as Bone because at birth she was no bigger than a knucklebone (2). Allison uses Bone's narration as a tool to examine the trauma inflicted by Southern patriarchal culture as well the different methods used by Bone on her journey through trauma to recovery. Even though Bone and her family are poor and labeled as rednecks, hillbillies, or "white trash" by the society surrounding them, Bone's life is rather happy. However, that happiness is short-lived due to the class system and the

dominant patriarchal[1] Southern culture. Bone is forced to endure trauma at the hands of her mother, stepfather, and society.

The Boatwright family is part of Southern, poor white culture that mainstream culture believes to be invalid or polluted. Bone and her family identify themselves as "white trash" by the standards set forth by the dominant discourse of American social class in the 1950s and '60s. Bone has family members who drink heavily, have numerous children, and make it their job to start trouble. Scholar J. Brooks Bouson defines "white trash" as "whites who live in poverty—classically in rural poverty; the term also invokes long-standing stereotypes of poor whites as incestuous and sexually promiscuous, violent, alcoholic, lazy, and stupid" (101). Even though Bone's family members do exhibit some of the qualities that Bouson says are associated with "white trash" by an elitist, discriminatory society, her family is happy and tight knit. The "white trash" label binds them together since they have only each other to depend on because the rest of society does not want to deal with them. The Boatwrights know that mainstream society does not approve of them, causing the family to cling to one another for support.

The Boatwright family represents the stereotypical Southern "white trash" family in various ways. Bone is the bastard child of Anney Boatwright, a fifteen-year-old unwed mother. The other adults in the family are heavy drinkers, hot-tempered, and foul-mouthed. However, even with the Boatwright clan's propensity to get into trouble and to attract drama, the family is still able to function. They protect their family and are willing to do whatever they can to help one another (McDonald 18).

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[1] Allan Johnson defines patriarchy as follows: "Patriarchy is male dominated, in that positions of authority—political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic—are reserved for men" (*The Gender Knot* 5).

Mainstream capitalist and patriarchal culture believes people belonging to "white trash culture" are nothing more than drunkards who copulate with their own family members. It is a capitalist society that values men based on their capacity to succeed financially and assumes that any man who doesn't succeed fails, not because the system is unfair, but because he is lazy, worthless, or somehow personally flawed. This sort of reputation can cause self-loathing and fosters the internalized belief in these individuals that they can be nothing more than what society identifies them as. Scholar Kathlene McDonald suggests that "like most judgments made from the outside, generally accepted stereotypes ignore the material conditions that make them right, focusing instead on the humorous or pitiable aspects of white-trash culture" (18). Mainstream culture uses the "white-trash" label as a tool for three purposes: to create amusement, to judge, or to establish proper protocol, but most of Bone's family beat mainstream society to the punch. Bone's Uncle Earl, fits society's stereotypes of "white trash". Earl fits this model because he is rowdy, has multiple run-ins with the law, and is known for running around on his wife, yet he is one of the kinder male characters in the novel who cares for Bone as though she is his own daughter.

According to Southern patriarchal culture, women's roles are structured and absolute; they prevent women from having too much flexibility in the system. Historians William Kenkel and Sarah Shoffner explain, "patriarchy is full of cultural traditions and prescriptions regarding the roles of women. Social historians and others agree that there was something distinct about the roles of Southern women" (Kenkel and Shoffner 163). Kenkel and Shoffner explain that women in the South were predominantly raised to be submissive to their male counterparts. Allison establishes Bone's story in Greenville,

South Carolina, during the 1950s and '60s. In the world Allison creates, mainstream society dictates that women have essential roles. They are to be dutiful daughters, faithful wives, diligent mothers, and happy homemakers. Allison presents readers with numerous examples of women in the Boatwright family staying by their men. One example of these types of relationships is with Bone's Uncle Wade and Aunt Alma. Those two have a very volatile relationship where Wade drinks and cheats on Alma. Even through all the hurt, Alma loves Wade, and she stays by Wade's side even when he is verbally abusive to her (270). The main example, though, is how Anney Boatwright is shaped to be dependent and subordinate to Glen and to "stand by" him, therefore allowing the whole situation in which Bone's abuse can occur.

In the character of Anney Boatwright, readers see her need to be a part of mainstream culture. Anney wants inclusion in this society where women are required to be subordinate to their fathers, brothers, and husbands. According to scholar Kathlene McDonald, "fully understanding the women in the book necessitates an equal understanding of the men in the story. … In many ways, the women depend on their men for protection, economic survival, and love. 'Being pregnant' proves that their men love them, and a man's love proves that they are 'worth something.' They do not value love from other women, such as their sisters, in the same way" (19-20). McDonald suggests that the Boatwright women are taught that they need a male in their life to give it meaning, with the exception of Raylene. Bone's Grandmother finds validation through her sons: "'My three boys worship me,' she'd tell everybody, 'but my girls, Lord! I've got five girls and they never seem to appreciate me'" (18). Bone's Grandmother seems to care less about what her girls think and seems to only care about what her sons think. The

Boatwright women seek validation through their male significant others or male family members.

Allison demonstrates Anney's need for acceptance by the white Southern middle class from the very beginning of the novel:

> Four days before my first birthday and a month past her sixteenth, she wrapped me in a blanket and took me to the courthouse. The clerk was polite but bored. He had her fill out the form and pay a two-dollar fee. Across the bottom in oversized red-inked block letters it read, "ILLEGITIMATE." (4)

Anney repeats this process of going down to the courthouse for a few years and each time she is humiliated, and her daughter is once again publicly branded as illegitimate. Anney realizes her attempts to gain acceptance by outsmarting the establishment that declares Bone as illegitimate are pointless. She realizes that in order to legitimize her daughter and herself, she needs a man in her life, thus reinforcing the idea that women need men in their lives to validate not only their existence, but their children's as well, and also to add stability to their lives.

Bone's birth does not bother the rest of the Boatwright clan, and thus they accept her for who she is, alluding to the fact that their acceptance of her circumstances leaves the door open for her own recovery. Only Anney and members of mainstream society are disturbed by the fact that Bone does not have a named father. Her grandmother even attempts to help Anney realize it is okay that Bone is a bastard, but as long as Bone is considered a bastard by the dominant culture in Greenville, Anney is also deemed illegitimate (3). She is identified as an illegitimate mother because she was unable to live

up to two of the tasks afforded to women in the American South: marriage and then motherhood. Anney's need to conform to the values espoused by the dominant class takes over her whole life because of this. She does not want to belong to the upper class, but she does feel a need to conform to their social norms.

Southern patriarchal culture states that a family has to have a husband, wife, and a child or children. Once Anney realizes she cannot outsmart the state of South Carolina and its patriarchal value system, she attempts to play by their rules by getting married. Anney believes by marrying, she can finally find a father for Bone and legitimize herself as well as her daughter. Unfortunately for Anney, the first man she marries passes away and the second man she agrees to marry, Glen Waddell, opens her and her daughters up to a world of heartache. By marrying and actively taking part in patriarchal rule, Anney becomes emotionally unavailable to her daughters and devotes her energy to caring for her emotionally unstable and manipulative husband, Glen.

Scholar Helen McLaren suggests that sexual predators seek out women who: "will love, honor, obey and become blinded to his clandestine activities" (McLaren 439). These vulnerabilities make her the perfect target for Glen to have an ultimate goal of control. Glen selects Anney as a target for his affection because of her ignorance. She is young and even though she has been married before and has two children, she is still very inexperienced when it comes to love. This goal is what makes Glen so willing to take the time to woo Anney, get her family to like him, and act like he is interested in her girls. Glen uses Anney's societal programming to his advantage.

In the world that Anney lives in, she realizes she can lose everything in an instant. During the 1950s and '60s, when *Bastard Out of Carolina* is set, women did not have a

variety of opportunities after divorce like women have today. During the era where Anney lives, if women divorced or left their husbands they would have to deal with the scrutiny of mainstream culture, the loss of safety, and the loss of a support system. By staying in the relationship, though, they think they can fix the problem and make their family act "normal" again (McLaren 443-444).

While the trauma Bone experiences from her mother's unavailability is not physical and not intentional, it is still detrimental to Bone's development. Scholar Lisa Hinrichsen states that trauma does not always have to be physical, it can be mental and emotional as well, which can be just as detrimental (605). Anney's unavailability, and the fact she does not have enough of a sense of herself, leaves Bone feeling alone, rejected, and unprotected from Glen's beatings and sexual assaults. In one scene, Anney ignores her daughter's cry for help and chooses to side with the patriarchal villain: "'Baby,' she called me. 'Oh, girl. Oh, honey. Baby, what did you do? What did you do?' What had I done…I wanted her to go on talking and understand without me saying anything" (107). She questions Bone's legitimate cry for help because, according to Glen, Bone is guilty of not obeying the arbitrary rules he lays out for her. One example of an arbitrary rule is that Bone is not supposed to talk back to Glen. Even though she does not talk back to him, Glen claims she does which gives him an excuse to beat her. Ultimately, Anney's physical and emotional abandonment of Bone and her acceptance of the expectations placed on her in a patriarchal culture to support her "man," whether willingly or unwillingly, cause Anney to fail herself and her daughter.

Readers may want to blame Anney for not doing more to help protect Bone from her abusive husband, but readers need to consider that Anney is also a victim of abuse,

specifically mental abuse, because of Glen's manipulation, and she refuses to leave her husband after she supposedly legitimized herself and Bone under Southern patriarchal norms. Glen moved her away from her support system and made her believe that she did not have anyone but her girls and him. Glen plays to Anney's strength of being a mother. He acts like a child that Anney feels she has to care for and protect. Bone's aunt, Ruth, tells Bone that Glen is jealous of Anney's attention to her children and plays a child's role to get her sympathy (122). Glen knows that Anney is the best mother she can be to her girls, but he does not like when she pays more attention to them than to him, which causes big problems and makes Anney want to coddle him. Anney's fear of being alone makes her reluctant to stand up to him even if it is to protect her daughter.

Anney's desire to be accepted by mainstream society also factors into why she does not leave Glen. Kathlene McDonald notes "even though Anney does not depend on Glen financially, she believes she needs a man to survive. She cannot leave him, despite the intensifying violence toward Bone. Her final decision to remain with Glen thus has less to do with her love for him than her fear of being without a man" (McDonald 20). Anney experienced life at the other end of society where she dealt with the embarrassment of having a baby out of wedlock. She knows that the world she lives in does not accept her fatherless family model. In her mind she justifies staying with Glen because of the security he affords her to pass as a member of mainstream culture.

Michael P. Johnson explores this idea of "patriarchal terrorism," which is "a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women" (284). Johnson notes that individuals who practice these traditions control their women through violence, economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other various examples of control tactics

(284). Glen uses everything Johnson notes to keep Anney, Reese, and Bone in check except economic subordination, since Anney is the one who financially supports the family, and Glen cannot keep a job. Further, Glen isolates Anney from her family: "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'" (49). Glen does not make it a secret that he is pulling Anney away from her family.

Unfortunately for Anney and her girls, even though Glen wants to be a part of "white trash" society, he has problems letting go of how the upper class takes control. The beatings, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse Bone experiences at the hands of her stepfather is life-altering for her. When Anney Boatwright lets her guard down with Glen she becomes someone Glen can manipulate and force to do what he wants: "Glen Waddell turned Mama from a harried, worried mother into a giggling, hopeful girl" (35). Due to Glen's ability to blend in with "white trash" society and fool Anney into marrying him, he lays the stage to begin his reign of "patriarchal terrorism."

Patriarchal terrorism comes directly from a male in authority who wants to control others. Due to Glen's inability to be financially sound like his father and brothers, he seeks out other means through which he can assert his patriarchal dominance, including violence and abuse. Once Anney marries Glen, he exerts his power over people that are weaker than he is just as he was taught to do by Southern patriarchal culture in his middle-class family. For example, he separates Anney and her girls away from her family, sexually and physically abuses Bone, and manipulates Anney into staying with him by acting like a vulnerable child. Glen also threatens to harm himself when Anney

wants to leave him and feels like he is losing control: “He bowed his head and whispered, ‘Kill me, Anney. Go on. I can’t live without you. I won’t. Kill me! Kill me!’”(289).

Throughout the novel, Bone stays quiet while Glen abuses her physically and mentally as well as mentally abusing Anney. According to Herman, self-blaming is “congruent with the thought process of traumatized people of all ages, who search for faults in their own behavior in an effort to make sense out of what has happened to them (103). Another cause for Bone’s silence is attributed to her belief that she deserves to be punished. She believes she has done something wrong. Glen claims the reason for his actions towards Bone is that he loves her, and he wants her to be a good girl. Readers see this every time Glen beats Bone because he repeats it over and over. Since this is what Bone hears consistently, she starts to believe that she is a delinquent.

Bone keeps her trauma quiet, even when she is given ample opportunities to free herself from the painful secret. Bone is presented with an opportunity to speak out when she goes to stay with her Aunt Ruth, who asks, “‘Bone, has Daddy Glen ever … well… touched you?’ Her gray cheeks developed matching streaks of pink. ‘Has he ever hurt you, messed with you?’ Her hand dropped down, patted between my legs. ‘Down here, honey. Has he ever hurt you down there?’” (124). Allison suggests Bone’s silence is due to her fear that she may risk taking away her mother’s happiness.

According to Sandra Bloom, children who live under the same circumstances as Bone tend to develop “coping skills, a developed sense of self, or self in relation to others. Their schemas for meaning, hope, faith, and purpose are not yet fully formed. They are in the process of developing a sense of right and wrong, of mercy balanced against justice” (Bloom 8). During the time when Bone starts to believe that she is as bad

as Daddy Glen and her community thinks she is, she takes part in breaking into the local convenient store. We see Bone deal with problems when it comes to trying to figure out why the world is the way it is and explore religions in order to find her identity. The trauma she goes through makes her question why this is happening to her. It is not until the end of the novel when she is in the care of her aunt Raylene that she is able to start forming who she is to herself and to others. Raylene gives her a place to learn coping skills, a sense of self, and her place in the world. These were life skills that she was not allowed to learn because of her abuse.

Laura Brown coins a term for the type of trauma that is called insidious trauma. Brown asserts: "[T]he private, secret, insidious traumas to which feminist analysis draws attention are more often than not those events in which the dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated" (102). Throughout the novel, Bone's trauma is not given the attention it needs and Bone does not talk about it. Her mother does not tell anyone about Glen hurting Bone, and the Boatwrights accept how upper-class society treats them. Bone experiences insidious trauma at the hands of a discriminatory class system that defines her as "white trash" and as a "bastard." This is insidious trauma because it is repetitive, long-term, largely unacknowledged and produced by one of society's institutions—the class system. Bone's sexual abuse is also insidious trauma for the same reasons, although it is produced by the patriarchal family system—one of society's institutions—rather than by the class system.

Academic Hilary Schor discusses bastardizing and legitimacy, explaining how the theme of being a bastard helps to reinforce the laws of Southern patriarchy. Bone' s illegitimacy is a problem from the very start of the novel. Even though she has no control

of the circumstances of her birth, just by being born, Bone is marked as an "other" by society. In Bone's case, her being a bastard reinforces the treatment she receives from mainstream culture. Bone's internalized trauma comes from mainstream culture's saying that bastards are second-class citizens. They are not whole because they are missing their fathers. Since so much of a person's identity in the South is embedded in their lineage, Bone and other bastards like her seem to be missing a part of themselves.

Due to Bone's identification as a bastard and the fact that she belongs to "white trash" society, she is considered even more contaminated or perverted by mainstream society's standards. The fact that Bone is a girl makes it even worse. Near the end of the novel, we see this in play when Bone is at the hospital after Glen attacks her for the final time. During her interview, the deputy treats her as if her claims are invalid. "'You're not hurt too bad,' he told me. 'Doctor says you'll be fine.' I lifted my head, knowing fear showed in my face. 'No concussion, the doctor says.'" (295-296). The deputy who interviews Bone after her attack treats her as if her trauma was insignificant.

Bone deals with violence, abuse, and social stigma, yet there is still a possibility that Bone can recover from these traumas. According to psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman, victims of trauma have to work through three different steps in order to heal from their ordeals. While victims of psychological trauma will never be able to forget what happened to them, according to Herman, one day they may be able to function in the world while successfully dealing with what happened to them. Herman's three stages of recovery are: 1) to establish safety, 2) to reconstruct the trauma story, and 3) to restore the lost connection between survivors and their community (Herman 3). The end of the novel represents Bone's healing process. After the last time Daddy Glen attacks and rapes

Bone, and she has to go to the hospital, she leaves her mother's home to go live with her Aunt Raylene. Under Raylene's supervision Bone establishes her safe place. She shares her story through the narration of this book and finally she connects back to her familial community that Glen took her away from.

At the end of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Allison suggests that Bone's time with Raylene affords the opportunity to begin a process of recovery from trauma. Even though Anney leaves Bone, her stepfather abused her, and she is deemed as subhuman by the society her mother gave birth to her in, Bone finds solace with her Aunt Raylene. According to Herman, "the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new relationships" (Herman 133). Glen separates Bone, her mother, and sister as well as from the other members of the Boatwright clan by moving them around and convincing Anney they do not need any help from her family. While Bone and Raylene remain close throughout the whole novel, it is through this relationship that Bone begins moving through the steps of the healing process.

Herman explains that in order for trauma survivors to begin their therapeutic work, they must first establish safety and then introduce power back in their lives. This process has no time limit and can take anywhere from a matter of days to years (Herman 159-160). *Bastard Out of Carolina* concludes with Bone being released into the custody of her Aunt Raylene. While Raylene may not be the conventional mother figure, she is what Bone needs to feel safe again.

Raylene Boatwright, one of the most influential people in Bone's life, is different. She does not adhere to patriarchal standards. Raylene is who she wants to be. She cuts her hair short, wears men's clothes, and Allison even addresses Raylene's lesbian love life by telling readers about her relationship with a woman where she made her partner choose between her and her child (178-179). What makes Raylene special is the fact that she lives her life in resistance to mainstream culture and class. Raylene takes on specific roles that she feels correlate with the way she wants to live her life. For example, she is a woman, but she chooses to wear masculine clothing, she is not Bone's biological mother but she chooses to be Bone's mother figure, and lastly she is no one's wife and is independent.

Under the care of Raylene, Bone has stability and someone who will protect her (299). Judith Herman suggests that "once basic medical attention has been provided, control of the body focuses on the restoration of the biological rhythms of eating and sleeping, and reduction of hyperarousal and intrusive symptoms" (Herman 161). Raylene also steps into Bone's life to help her understand what is going on with her:

> "Ruth Anne," Aunt Raylene whispered. "Girl, look at me. Stop thinking about what happened. Don't think about it. Don't try to think about nothing. You can't understand it yet. You don't have to. It doesn't make sense. And I can't explain it to you. You can't explain it to yourself. Your mama…" She stopped, and I looked at her. "Your mama loves you. Just hang on, girl. Just hang on. It'll be better in time. I promise you." (301)

Raylene has no answers for what happened to Bone, but she can give Bone the guidance to help her get through her ordeal. Raylene can be there for Bone. She can be there for

Bone as someone to listen to her, to help heal her outward wounds, and to help Bone slowly put the pieces of her life back together.

Bastard Out of Carolina is a first-person narrative from the point of view of Bone. Due to Bone's telling her story to readers, she fulfills step two of the recovery process as Judith Herman analyzes it; Bone reconstructs the trauma story. She tells others about her experience; she knows and understands it well enough to put it into narrative form. Bone's narration of her abuse helps her understand what happened to her and how she can move on and not allow her trauma to dictate who she is. According to Herman, "in the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail." (175). Herman also requires that victims include the traumatic event in their story, their reaction, and the reaction from people around them. Bone does this in her story. She gets very detailed about the abuse that she suffers from Glen, she tells the audience to whom she speaks how she felt after the instances, and it is not until the end of the story that we find out what people think about her trauma, because that is when everyone finds out what happened to Bone.

For example Bone goes into details about the sexual abuse that she endured at the hands of her stepfather. "His sweat running down his arms to my skin smelled strong and nasty. He grunted, squeezed my thighs between his arm and his legs. His chin pressed down on my head and his hips pushed up at the same time. He was hurting me, hurting me!" (47). Bone acknowledges to her audience she did not understand why this happened to her, how she felt used, and why her mother never protected her from her stepfather's violence. By the end of the novel, when Raylene discovers what happened to Bone, she is angry and decides to remove Bone from that environment.

Bone's ability to tell her story also correlates with Deborah Horvitz's idea that recovery is found in narrating a trauma. Horvitz's theory centers around this idea that "each time trauma survivors tell their stories, they can find a new way to understand what happened to them and get one step closer to recovery" (Horvitz 239). Just as Allison uses her writing as a way to tell her story, to understand what happened to her, and to heal, Bone does the same in narrating *Bastard Out of Carolina,* according to Horvitz's claim.

Trauma is not something that is forgotten. A trauma victim's recovery is not measured by the ability to forget what happened; instead recovery is based on how one is able to understand the trauma without allowing it to take over her or his life. Herman explains recovery as:

> The survivor no longer feels possessed by her traumatic past; she is in possession of herself. She has some understanding of the person she used to be and of the damage done to that person by the traumatic event. Her task now is to become the person she wants to be. (Herman 202)

The traumatic event is in the past. There is no going back for survivors of trauma. They cannot go back to the life they had before they were traumatized, but according to Herman and as seen in *Bastard Out of Carolina,* victims of trauma can decide how they want to proceed and move on from the experience of trauma to become a survivor.

Like Bone, Allison talks about the shame that she felt about her family and their station in life. Despite their experiences of guilt and abuse, Allison and Bone are still able to move on. In "A Question of Class", Allison sums up the importance of every individual. She proclaims that no matter someone's class or gender, everyone is important:

> To resist destruction, self-hatred, or lifelong hopelessness, we have to throw off the conditioning of being despised, the fear of becoming the they that is talked about so dismissively, to refuse lying myths and easy moralities, to see ourselves as human, flawed, and extraordinary. All of us--extraordinary. ("A Question of Class" 36)

At the end of the novel, Bone accepts the titles she is given through her chance of birth, but she lives with them on her terms. She does not allow patriarchy to say who she is and what she can do. Readers see this through Bone's declaration at the end of the novel: "I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman. I wrapped my fingers in Raylene's and watched the night close in around us" (309). Bone realizes her mother and everyone in her family may not be perfect, but there is strength in their imperfect lives. She understands she is a part of that legacy and her acceptance of being "white trash" and being a Boatwright gives her the ability to let go of social norms, allowing her to open up and move forward in the recovery process. Her acceptance proves that Bone can now move on to her future.

Judith Herman talks about the idea of moving on and acceptance for a survivor once she has come to terms with her traumatic past. She has accepted her traumatic past and is now ready to move on to a future that is not living in the shadow of her trauma. She is now ready to move on and create her new self (Herman 196). Herman stresses how important it is for trauma victims to acknowledge their trauma and accept that it is a part of their past, yet it should not rule their lives. Under the roof of her aunt Raylene, and after her trauma story is told, Bone has the capacity to move on from her shattered past to a brighter future.

In the final scene of the novel, Bone realizes that in order to grow and recover from what she has experienced, she has to take traits from everyone in her family. As McDonald suggests, Bone accepts herself and gains strength by accepting her family: "Bone learns that she needs both her uncles' violent rage and quest for vengeance and her aunts' support and strength in order to survive the ordeal" (McDonald 20). Allison suggests that even though the Boatwrights are labeled as "white trash" and even though they act differently than mainstream culture dictates, they are still good people who have the ability to make it through anything, and for Bone's recovery to be successful she has to draw on all of these strengths and weaknesses.

Allison uses *Bastard Out Carolina* as a way to illuminate the problems in the American class system and Southern patriarchal culture. Specifically, she uses Bone and her childhood trauma to show how the bourgeois class system and Southern patriarchy hurt the people they categorize and control. The rules these two systems set keep women subservient to men and make working poor white people out to be stupid and incestuous. Even though the conventional class system and Southern patriarchy cause trauma in Bone's life, she learns how to resist mainstream culture, accept who she is, tell her story, and recover, because she does not allow others to decide who she is.

Chapter 2: Reading Dorothy Allison's *Cavedweller* as a Trauma and Recovery Narrative

Growing up, I was taught three things: never leave the house without your make-up on, the bigger the hair the closer to God you are, and always listen to your mother. To say I am not one for following the rules would be an understatement. I could blame these ridiculous rules on some very backwards thinking in my family; instead, I like to blame the society they were raised in. That society told men and women in my family that a woman's place was in the home and she was supposed to be submissive, quiet, and dutiful; the man of the household had to work, but other than that he could do what he pleased; and the children were to be seen and not heard. These rules caused a lot of problems in my family, much like the societal rules set by the community that surrounds Delia Byrd and her family in Dorothy Allison's novel *Cavedweller*. For my second chapter, I explain how the main characters in Allison's second novel go through trauma brought on by oppressive patriarchal Southern society and how they recover. Along with Delia and Cissy I examine how secondary characters like Clint, Dede, and Amanda either conform to or reject Southern patriarchal norms.

In Dorothy Allison's 1998 novel, *Cavedweller*, the main characters, Delia and Cissy Byrd, have to deal with oppressive societal rules. One could say these rules are pushed hard enough on these two that they suffer from trauma. Delia is a recovering alcoholic who is treated like a pariah in her hometown because she abandoned her children to escape her first husband's physical and mental abuse. Cissy Byrd is the youngest daughter of Delia Byrd and a half-sister to Amanda and Dede, Delia's two older daughters. Cissy makes an easy target for the population of Cayro, Georgia to torment

because of her mother's transgressions of Southern patriarchal rules and because Cissy does not follow the Southern rules herself.

Allan G. Johnson defines patriarchy as a society that "promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the possession of women" (5). Southern culture is based on these principles. The man is the head of the household. He makes all of the important decisions while the wife is there to help make his life run smoothly and to watch over her children. Due to male privilege and authority in the South, the husband sometimes feels he can beat his wife and she is supposed to take it because that is her job as a good Southern woman. However, Delia did not stay with Clint and accept the abuse he dealt out to her.

Delia plans to return to her hometown where patriarchal rule runs deep, yet when she returns home she is not going to allow patriarchal rule to manipulate her life. When the novel begins, Delia is lost. Her second marriage has failed due to her second husband, Randall's, rock star lifestyle of drinking and womanizing, she struggles with her alcohol addiction, and her ten-year old daughter, Cissy, cannot stand to talk to her mother let alone live with her. After Randall's death, she decides to make the cross-country odyssey from Venice Beach, California, to her hometown of Cayro, Georgia, to put her broken family back together (1-19). There is one problem with this plan. Delia left her first family that consisted of an abusive husband and two little girls back in Georgia. The life she left behind for the rock n' roll scene was one of abuse and trauma. Delia abandoned her first family so she could survive, and the people of Cayro, Georgia, do not approve of her lifestyle choices.

Delia left her husband and abandoned her children—two behaviors the citizens of Cayro will not accept; they are actions not acceptable under patriarchal norms. When Delia and Cissy arrive, Delia has a rather rough homecoming in a local diner. The diner's cook, a rough looking woman, accosts Delia:

> "You that bitch ran off and left her babies." The cook's voice was loud and definite. …"You took off with that rock band. Did all right for yourself, did you? Had yourself a good time? Well, don't think people don't remember. We remember. You the kind we remember." (39)

Even though Delia's first husband, Clint, beat her, she stayed with him despite the fact that he could have killed her because her job was to stand behind her man.

There are other women in the novel who do follow the cultural rules set by Southern patriarchy. Clint's mother, Louise Windsor, endured Clint's father's brutal beatings on many occasions during their marriage. Many of those attacks put her in the hospital, yet after every incident of abuse she stayed with him out of cultural obligation (115). She obeyed her Southern female duties and in the end she was granted a reprieve with Old Man Windsor's death. She was finally free. She did not have to answer to anyone but herself.

Due to Delia's rebellious nature, the community of Cayro, Georgia, sees her as a villain because she does not follow the Southern patriarchal norms of being submissive to her abusive husband (Kenkel and Shoffner 163). When she first returns to Cayro most people in town have it out for her. No one takes into account what Delia dealt with at the hands of her first husband. While Delia was with Clint she had to endure daily occurrences of physical and mental abuse. Ultimately, Delia's running away from Clint

was a traumatic response. According to Judith Herman in her work on trauma and recovery, this type of response is similar to fight or flight (34). Before Delia left, she tried multiple times to make it work with Clint. The night she ran away, though, she realized if she did not leave in that instance it would be the end of her, and her little girls would never have a chance. Delia could not physically fight Clint off nor could she get help from the people around her, so the only thing she could do was run, and she did, right onto Randall's tour bus.

Scholar Sandra L. Bloom looks at the idea of restoring control in trauma victims' lives through coping mechanisms. Seen previously in *Bastard Out of Carolina,* Bone is depicted as breaking into a convenience store and dabbles in Christianity in order to cope with her circumstances. After leaving Cayro, Delia turns to alcohol to deal with the trauma of domestic abuse and her guilt over leaving her two older daughters with their father. Bloom suggests that when trauma victims do not receive the help they need for the trauma they have experienced, they resort to other methods for control like drugs, alcohol, behaviors like over eating, or even violent tendencies (4). In Delia's case, to deal with the trauma she experienced at the hands of her first husband and of leaving her two oldest girls, she turned to drinking because in some way it gives her the ability to control her feelings and forget.

According to Bloom, trauma victims turn to coping mechanisms to try to overcome a sense of helplessness (4). Eventually Delia gives up drinking. By giving up her coping mechanism, Delia has to find some new way to deal with the trauma of her past. Now she is faced with having to deal with the mental and physical anguish from her experiences with her first husband, along with the heartache that she feels because she

left her little girls. Delia finds newfound control in her decision to return home where she hopes to find solace and to deal with her past. By returning, Delia is not making herself numb, via alcohol, to her feelings; she is actually taking physical control of her situation. Just as in *Bastard Out of Carolina* when Bone seeks refuge with Raylene, Delia seeks her own refuge by going back to her hometown.

The first thing Herman requires for trauma victims to recover is a safe place in which to do so. Herman goes on to say that a victim "should be encouraged to turn to others for support, but considerable care must be taken to ensure that she chooses people whom she can trust. Family members, lovers, and close friends may be immeasurable help" (Herman 162). Even though the community of Cayro is rather hostile to Delia when she returns from California, there are a few women who take Delia and Cissy under their wings to provide her with a safe place to live and some very healing relationships so she can begin to rebuild her life.

Once Delia is sober and no longer relying on her coping mechanism, she makes the decision to go home to reclaim Amanda and Dede. By doing this, she begins her recovery process. Her recovery is not an easy one. While she has forgiven herself and has decided to reclaim her life, she still has to deal with reconnecting to the relationships she lost due to her trauma. To counteract her trauma, Delia attempts to reconnect with her two oldest daughters, much as Bone reconnects with her family. There is one problem, though, with Delia's wanting to reconnect with her daughters, Amanda and Dede. Her ex-mother-in-law, Louise Windsor, is standing in the way. A very strict old woman, she dealt with an abusive husband, like Delia's husband, Clint. She stayed with her abusive husband, so that makes her unsympathetic to Delia for leaving Clint.

When Delia comes back to reclaim her lost daughters, she is met with contention by Louise:

> "Mother!" Louise's mouth twisted. "I've been more a mother to these girls than she will ever be." She shook her head. "You're wasting your time, Reverend. Delia an't no mother. She comes around here, she'll just get the girls all upset. First little trouble comes along, she'll take off again. Then what, huh? She goes away another few years and comes back, you gonna come speak for her all over again?" (93)

Because Delia did not follow proper Southern patriarchal cultural protocol, people identify her as a useless mother. From Mrs. Windsor's perspective, Delia is downright evil. If anyone should understand the plight that Delia has to face at the hands of Clint, it would be Mrs. Windsor, since she suffered the same way Delia did at the hands of Clint's father.

As Herman suggests in her study of trauma and recovery, in order for Delia to recover from her trauma, she has to go about reconnecting with people she lost touch with. The first person Delia connects with when she returns to Cayro is her friend M.T., who is newly divorced from her good-for-nothing husband. As soon as M.T. discovers Delia is back in town, she provides Cissy and Delia a place to stay, which removes them from the hostile environment that wants to judge Delia for leaving. The second person who provides Delia with a restorative relationship is Mrs. Pearlman. While Mrs. Pearlman is rather harsh with Delia at times, she helps her find a career she is good at and that she can take pride in to help her start her new life. The last woman who provides

Delia with a therapeutic relationship is her best friend from L.A., Rosemary, who comes all the way from California to Georgia to help Delia take care of Clint and her girls.

Delia's friend M.T. helps her find the resources within herself to be her own person and to live a life that resists smothering Southern social norms. Marjolene Thomasina or M.T. is a very different woman from Delia: "M.T. was a big woman, muscular under soft pads of flesh … 'Man got twelve years of me. Thinks he got the best of me. Stupid son of a bitch'" (53). While Delia is very small and, for the most part, allows men to dictate her life, M.T. is the opposite. She refuses to be defined by a man. For example, like Raylene in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, M.T. is just as content being independent and on her own as she is being a typical southern wife. She divorced her husband and is living on her own without the assistance of any male influence. This is one reason why M.T. makes such a good person to guide and help Delia.

M.T. is not like the other people of Cayro who want to see Delia crash and burn. No one in Delia's hometown takes the time to listen to why she left or to understand the logic of her choice. M.T. does not ask questions; she just helps Delia. She gives Delia the space to let go, for the moment, of her practical obligations so that she can focus on herself: "Maybe if M.T. had not been there, Delia would not have fallen so completely apart. It was a kind of permission, having M.T. to cook them country friend steak, enroll Cissy in school. … It was M.T. who found them the house out by the river" (59). She is like a mother with her child. M.T. does not ask Delia questions, and she does not expect anything in return.

Herman requires survivors to be able to separate their trauma from their life. The relationship between Mrs. Pearlman and Delia helps Delia establish herself away from

her trauma by giving her a career to build from. While she will not be able to forget whatever happened to her, the survivor needs to "no longer feel possessed by her traumatic past; she is in possession of herself. She has some understanding of the person she used to be and of the damage done to that person by the traumatic event" (Herman 202). Mrs. Pearlman helps Delia find an option for her life that is not determined by the trauma from her husbands or from the community around her.

Mrs. Nadine Pearlman prevents Delia from falling back under Southern patriarchal rule. She is a cranky old lady in Cayro who does not have the best opinion of Delia. However, after having a debilitating stroke and seeing Delia's work ethic, she does something surprising:

> Mrs. Perlman sighed. … "You can make me some money."… "You got talent. I let you run my shop. You make me some money." … "Lease it to you." … "If I run the show people might not come." "Who comes now?" Mrs. Perlman shrugged weakly. "You're good. Time passes. They'll come. You'll make me the money I need." (84)

While some could argue that Nadine Perlman is only looking out for herself, in reality, she is presenting Delia with an opportunity to be self-sufficient. Even if she does insult Delia every opportunity she gets, she is still helping her on the road of self-discovery and change. Paralleled in both of Allison's novels, the mother characters, Anney and Delia, both have self-sustaining jobs, however, whereas Delia's job keeps her from falling back into Southern patriarchy by finding a man, Anney stays with the abusive man she has instead of standing on her own.

Rosemary, Delia's best friend from L.A., also plays an important role in her recovery. According to Delia, Rosemary kept her alive back in California through tough times with Randall and her own alcoholism. Like M.T., Rosemary helps Delia without asking questions. She defends Delia to everyone, even her own daughters when they try to tear her down: "'I'm staying. You know I'm staying. You are about ready to fall out. Don't you think I can see that? You think I am going to leave you alone with these cranky teenagers and that horrible man?'" (434). Rosemary puts her life on hold to help Delia because she knows this is what she needs. Just like M.T. and Mrs. Pearlman are good influences on Delia, Rosemary is an outsider to Southern patriarchy, having come from California, and can keep Delia from falling back under patriarchal rule.

Delia attempts to put her life together by resisting Southern norms when she comes back to Cayro, Georgia, by getting a job, reconnecting with old friends, and trying to find a way to survive in Cayro's community. Whereas Bone in *Bastard Out of Carolina* stays in her hometown to discover her own identity within harmful Southern patriarchy, Delia had to leave her Southern community and come back before she could make herself anew. She returns initially to save herself from certain death and later in the hope that she can get her girls back and have her family again if she returns. Delia finds her way into her two eldest daughters' lives not by their grandmother, but by their father, Clint.

Psychiatrist Janet Lewis claims that if trauma victims can forgive their abusers, a certain amount of recovery can be found in that (76). When Delia returns to Cayro, Clint is dying from cancer. His aliment has put him in a very interesting predicament. Delia goes to see Clint after realizing that if Clint dies and Mrs. Windsor still has custody of the

girls, she will never see them and will never be able to reunite her family. This leads Delia to go visit Clint and they settle on the arrangement of Delia's caring for him while he dies so she can have the girls after his death (113).

Lewis acknowledges that not all victims can achieve forgiveness (76). Delia resides somewhere on the spectrum between forgiveness and hatred for Clint. Delia's relationship with Clint is full of turmoil. She feels sorry for him. That is evident by how well she takes care of him by cleaning his home and making food that he can eat with his sensitive stomach. She even tells her kids that the two of them reconciled (118). However, there are times that readers can tell she still holds hatred towards him (150).

According to Herman, acceptance is being able to live knowing that a traumatic event happened, understanding it, and knowing the memory of it will not go away, but not letting it rule Delia's life (196). At the end of the novel Delia is happy. She has her family pieced together in the best way she can. She finally has a permanent home and she is finally ready to live her life without guilt. Readers see this in Delia's final line: "Yes, it's time for some new songs." (434). Allison suggests that Delia has finished living in the past. She has finished being weak. Now she is ready to go on with her life, suggesting that she is on the way to recovery according to Judith Herman's idea of acceptance.

Cavedweller is not just a story about Delia Byrd's trauma and recovery. The novel also deals with the trauma that her youngest daughter has to deal with because of her relationship with her mother and the society that her mother has dragged her into. The loss of Cissy's father along with the initial upheaval of her world is Cissy's first interaction with trauma. She loses her father, gets ripped away from everything familiar, and lives in a town where everyone seems to hate her because of her mother's reputation.

According to Debra Jackson and Judy Mannix, Cissy is practicing mother blaming. The term describes mothers who take on the blame for their children's actions, behavior, and health. Jackson and Mannix also define this concept as any instance where a mother is blamed for predicaments or situations that happen to them or their children (Jackson and Mannix 150). Instead of blaming people in the Cayro community who are under the influence of Southern patriarchy, Cissy blames her mother directly for the backlash she receives from the community for her mother's reputation.[2] Mother blaming is a part of Southern patriarchy, because mothers are expected to protect, to raise, and to cater to their children and when they do not follow these guidelines mother blaming can occur. Mother blaming is a form of nonviolent of trauma.

Due to these events, Cissy begins to blame Delia for everything bad in her life. The first example of this readers see is when Delia leaves Randall. Cissy blames her mother for her father's leaving, even though Delia left because the life she had with Randal was tumultuous. When Randal dies, Cissy even blames Delia for that. Instead of placing the blame on the person who causes her trauma and heartache, she blames her mother.

The trauma that does the most damage to Cissy is associated with the society that she is in. She is odd, she does not fit into her new community, and everyone thinks poorly of her because of her mother. Sandra Bloom explains that these sorts of

[2] We see mother blaming again when Delia goes back to Cayro. Jackson and Mannix claim, "many women carry the burden of societal (and professional) disapproval, either because they do not fit society's idealized view of motherhood or because they behave in ways that are not considered appropriate for mothers" (Jackson and Mannix 151). Because Delia does not behave in a way that society thinks she should, people blame her for every bad thing that happens to her and her children.

experiences impact “the entire person--the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world” (2). Cissy tries to make sense of what is going on around her so she blames the one person she is the closest to, even if she does not want to be near her, her mother. In her mind she really thinks that all her problems with the judgmental community are Delia’s fault. She continues to believe this until the end of the novel.

When Delia and Cissy finally make it to Cayro and Cissy realizes that not everyone likes her mother, she finds out that the sins of the mother also fall on her. Due to Cissy being the child of the man that Delia left her first husband for, in the eyes of the Cayro community Cissy becomes a target. Cissy’s first two tormenters go by the name of Ruby and Pearl. They are the twin daughters of Delia’s good friend, M.T. Even though M.T. is willing to help Delia and Cissy, her daughters are a little less welcoming: “‘You are a bitch,’ Ruby said. ‘Worse than your mam,’ Pearl added. ‘Stuck up.’ Ruby flopped back on the bed. ‘Full of herself,’ Pearl agreed.” (58). Pearl and Ruby do not intentionally know they are picking at Cissy because that is what the patriarchal society dictates that they do, but they effectively act as policing agents to shame Cissy because her mother has violated patriarchal standards. They just see her as a new person who is encroaching on their territory, and her mother is being treated badly by others around them so they use that behavior as an example, and they terrorize Cissy.

Cissy goes on to deal even more with this treatment when she starts going to school. Fellow students torment her and claim that her sisters are coming for her. This

causes Cissy to live in fear of her sisters. When Cissy finally meets her sisters they do treat her with anger. Amanda even goes to tell Cissy that she hates her (133).

According to Graham Collier, escapism is a term to describe detachment from everyday reality and a way for people to get through life (para.2). To deal with her new surroundings, Cissy finds a way to block out the trauma in her life, as does Delia, but through books, not alcohol. Through reading her books, Cissy escapes from the new world that her mother has put her in. She would rather spend time alone with a good book than talking to people. By separating herself from the world around her, Cissy can act like nothing is wrong or that what is going on around her is not hurting her. This is her way of controlling her life. Until Cissy stops separating herself from the world around her, there is no hope that she has a chance of healing because she is not dealing with reality.

As Nolan Reitower and Cissy bond over books, they advance the process of Cissy's recovery from trauma. He is Cissy's first real friend and the first person in the town of Cayro who does not pick on her or treat her like an outcast despite who her mother is, even though his own mother does not like Delia. The two of them swap books back and forth and eventually the two of them become very close. This enables Cissy to trust someone and to form a relationship to aid with her healing process. Nolan's presence in Cissy's life acts as a catalyst to her recovery from trauma. Just as Bone reconnects with people for her recovery, Cissy connects with Nolan; the only difference is that Cissy connects with someone new instead of someone from her past. The effect is still the same. As the novel continues, she is able to open herself up to make connections

with Nolan Reitower, Clint, Rosemary, and finally her Mother; connections that are crucial to her recovery.

Clint plays an important role in Cissy's recovery from trauma in the novel. While he has no familial connection to Cissy, on occasion the two of them sit in his room and just talk. "It scared Delia how much time Cissy was spending with Clint." (175). Most of their conversations are about Delia, trying to help Cissy understand her mother more. He tries to provide her with guidance and an explanation as to why things are the way they are with Delia. Clint tries to help Cissy see past her immature feelings towards her mother in hopes to repair what is broken between them.

Rosemary, Cissy's surrogate aunt, provides a relationship like Raylene's with Bone in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. The relationship that Cissy has with Rosemary gives Cissy insight into her mother's life and the environment around her. Rosemary refuses to allow Cissy to give up and to blame her mother as the Cayro community does and acts as a compass for Cissy. She gives Cissy another perspective on her mother, which in turn gives her a newfound understanding. She does not take any of Cissy's complaining and is willing to instruct the young girl whenever she needs to be called to account.

If readers measure Cissy's development through the whole novel, the improvement is quite evident. Halfway through Allison's novel, Cissy seems rudderless and headed for self-induced hardship. Readers start to see her maturation when she can move beyond her past and make a better future for herself in the conclusion of the novel. Her journey involves caring for Clint as he is dying, but it also involves recognizing her mother's intuitive wisdom and gritty stamina. Cissy spends most of the novel hating her

mother and blaming her mother, yet as she learns the truth and begins to understand her mom, she is able to recover as well.

Herman explains that in order for trauma survivors to live their life after trauma they have to learn to fight, and she explains different methods survivors can use to fight. She talks about survivors' learning to fight in self-defense classes or taking part in wilderness survivor programs (Herman 197-198). In the cave scene where Cissy saves her two friends, Mim and Jean, for the first time in her life she fights. While Cissy does not purposely go into the caves in hopes that she will get stuck to feel danger, she does venture in the caves as an escape. This time going down into the caves, she does realize that she can fight to survive and that is one thing that leads her to her new self.

The turning point when Cissy realizes that her mother is her saving grace comes when she is in a life-threatening situation. She is spelunking with two good friends, and they realize they are lost, but then they notice they are in the uncharted cave they had been looking for. When one of her friends becomes hypothermic, and they are still lost in an uncharted tunnel, Cissy is the one who takes charge, coating the freezing woman with insulating mud and tenaciously driving onward until they are all delivered. Cissy remembers her mother's strength when she reflects on saving Mim and Jean: "'Like flirting with God', Cissy thought. 'If Delia could drag me so far, I can damn sure pull these bitches up out of a hole in the ground.' When they finally found the Day-Glo paint splashes three hours later, Cissy was shaking with exhaustion, but her head was clear and her thoughts as smooth as ball bearings on greased surface" (419). By safely delivering her friends back into life, she has emerged from the limitations of Southern social norms leftover from her own childhood, and she has become a new being, gazing at a much

wider horizon. Cissy realizes that she had to muster the strength of her own mother to push through the exhaustion and pain to drag her friends through the dark cave to safety.

The cave rescue scene is the final push that leads to Cissy's recovery. With that feat, she finally concludes that everything that her mother put her through and everything in her life, the good and the bad, were not mistakes. The problems Cissy dealt with because of her mother gave birth to the new, stronger, Cissy who can face the world on her own. In the cave she heard her mother's gospel song, and "God was Delia's voice in the darkness when Cissy was tired, so soft and clear she almost believed the voice to be real" (275). Through the darkness comes the light. This idea is further cemented when Cissy freely tells her mother that she loves her near the conclusion of the novel: "She looked up at Delia's worn face, the sad brown eyes looking back at her. "I love you," she said. Delia's eyes softened, the corners crinkling though she did not smile. "I know," she whispered and took her girl's hand" (429). This passage proves that Cissy has let go of the anger she held towards her mother and knows the truth of why her mother did what she did. Once Cissy is able to forgive her mother, her life seems to become much clearer to herself.

The guidance Cissy receives from people in her life and her own fight lead to Cissy's realization that she is a very strong and capable person. Like Bone at the end of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Cissy makes a declaration about her life. This declaration represents her ability to let go of her trauma and to embrace her recovery:

> Venice Beach, she thought, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, UCLA California, and all those places I don't even remember anymore. I can go there if I want. "Daddy," Cissy whispered when the morning sunlight fell

on her face. “Daddy, I’m going to go back. I’m not going to die here. I’m going to find out what I can do.” (419-420)

Cissy is ready to move on from the life people around her think she should have. Through the whole novel, characters try to classify Cissy as someone like her mother, someone related to her father, and so on. In this instance, though, Cissy realizes she can be anyone she wants to be and no one is going to tell her any different.[3]

Scholar Burton-Hardee follows Joseph Campbell’s mythic hero guidelines to explain to readers how her acceptance of herself makes her a heroine. Those guidelines for Burton-Hardee’s mythical hero are as follows: they have to endure something, have teachers to guide them, have a life altering experience, and in the end they are rewarded (244). The first two guidelines that Burton-Hardee examines are Cissy’s trauma and her group of teachers who are her support system that help reconnect her to the world around her, and guide her to her recovery. Cissy’s near death experience and her declaration fulfills Burton-Hardee’s last two steps. These four steps as listed by Burton-Hardee allow Cissy to achieve the motivation that Herman calls for in order for trauma victims to move on with their lives (196).

There are other characters besides Delia and Cissy in this novel that deal with the oppressive Southern patriarchal rule in Cayro, Georgia. Clint Windsor, Dede Windsor, and Amanda Windsor each deals differently with the rules forced upon them. While

[3] It is interesting how Allison gives Cissy a direct way out of Southern patriarchal culture, yet she leaves Bone in that environment to live in resistance to it. “I pay a lot of attention to time and conditions and what's really possible. An extraordinary thing was happening, not just to Cissy but to her sisters. Her sister wants to drive fast; there's just so much more possibility for what a girl could do in the 1980s. It's much freer. It was exhilarating to write those girls, and to write those girls at that particular moment when the world was cracking open. It was wonderful” (“An Interview with Dorothy Allison” 671).

Allison does not go into depth with these characters as she does with Delia and Cissy, readers can tell that these characters do deal with an oppressive patriarchal Southern society too.

Clint was both a perpetrator and a victim of patriarchal culture because he was just doing what he knew and what had been inflicted upon him when he turned into an abusive husband. He saw physical abuse in the marriage of his mother and father, so he continued the cycle of violence until he got sick. Clint is not a character that most people would think suffered by being under a patriarchal rule because he is a man. He was raised in an environment where he was taught to be assertive and to make females be submissive. Once Clint found out he had cancer, a lot of things were put into perspective for him. For example, he and Cissy have a conversation one afternoon where he explains that he knows that he wronged Delia and that he does not blame her for leaving:

> "What I didn't do. What I said. What I was ready to do. You know, I think I might have killed Delia if we'd gone on. I was working up to it. So full of rage, you can't imagine. I wonder at it now, how I let myself get that far into it. A craziness. A literal, dry-eyed madness. I tell you, I was as ready to cut my own throat as hers. Every time Delia looked at me." (179)

Unlike most of the men in this novel and in Allison's first novel, Clint realizes that he was wrong for hurting Delia and that she was right in leaving. He even explains to Cissy why he was so mean to Delia. He wanted to break her so she would fit his needs (179-180). However, in telling all this to Cissy, Clint allows himself to recover as well. Herman states that one of the steps to recovery is telling the story of the trauma. By telling Cissy his side of things, about how he grew up and was taught to control the

women by way of abuse, Clint tells his story, and he acknowledges that he was wrong—even mad—to abuse his wife in these ways.

Amanda and Dede deal with their societal oppression in very different ways. While Amanda is off trying to follow God to the extreme, Dede is off with boys, smoking cigarettes, and drinking. Amanda tries to play the stereotypical Southern female role. She goes to church, eventually marries an aspiring pastor, and has two little boys. According to society's standards, she should be living the Southern patriarchal dream. However, at the end of the novel Amanda is very unhappy with her life. She contemplates taking up alcoholism and attempts to get arrested. She has no clear path to take at the end of the novel.

On the other hand, Dede throws caution to the wind and refuses to play by the rules of Southern patriarchy. She lives in resistance as does Raylene Boatwright in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. She ends up getting pregnant by Nolan, shoots him, and even gets put in jail for shooting him. At the end of the novel Dede seems happy. She did not follow the rules, she is pregnant out of wedlock and she wants to keep the baby, Nolan forgives her for shooting him, and the two of them seem very happy together.

Together Delia and Cissy fulfill Herman's second stage of recovery. Herman explains that in order for a trauma victim to recover she must tell "the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). While *Bastard out of Carolina* was told from Bone's point of view and readers were able to get her account of what happened to her, Allison tells Delia and Cissy's story in third person. Herman requires that in reconstructing the narrative, one

must include in detail the traumatic event, the victim's response to the event, and the response they received from the important people in their life (Herman 176). Readers get to see Delia's and Cissy's trauma in great detail and see their response to it along with the response to people around them. Herman does not require that the trauma narrative be in first person, just that the story is told and that it is told in detail.

Whether the story is told in first person or third person does not matter. It is just the fact that the story is told in detail by the person who received the trauma, how they felt about the trauma, and what others thought about their story. In *Cavedweller,* Allison uses free indirect discourse; even though the story is told through third person point of view by the person who received the trauma, there is still has a narrative aspect. The narrative aspect comes from the fact the person telling the story is in fact telling their own personal story.

Dorothy Allison uses her writing as a way to explain to people how harsh Southern societal rules can be on people. In her novel *Cavedweller,* she tells the story of Delia and Cissy Byrd. These characters are a mother-daughter duo that is put down and abused by Southern patriarchal rules. Delia has to deal with societal rules that say she is a bad mother for leaving an abusive relationship, and Cissy has to deal with the backlash of being her mother's child in Cayro, Georgia. By the conclusion of this novel, Allison presents readers with an ending in which Delia and Cissy have their family, have forgiven one another, and are ready to move on from the abuse and trauma in their lives. They fulfill Judith Herman's requirements of recovery by finding a safe place, by creating a group of people they can trust and reconnect with, and by telling their story of

trauma in order to integrate it into their life's story so that it no longer dominates their lives.

Conclusion

Dorothy Allison reinforces the idea of trauma in the South and its long-standing precedence in her two novels, *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Cavedweller*. In both novels, characters are marginalized by the culture they live in. Allison uses both novels as a way to illustrate the problems of her Southern community under the control of a dominant patriarchal social system.

Bone Boatwright, Delia Byrd, and Cissy Byrd all share experiences of trauma and recovery. Allison uses their stories to help people realize that in today's world we still have restrictions based on gender and social class. It is important to note that these two novels are set during different decades, yet explore some of the same ideas of trauma. Allison also uses these characters and their stories to help others realize that society is flawed when it refuses to embrace human differences. To be "different" is okay. In her essay "A Question of Class," Allison asserts:

> to resist destruction, self-hatred, or lifelong hopelessness, we have to throw off the conditioning of being despised, the fear of becoming the they that is talked about so dismissively, to refuse lying myths and easy moralities, to see ourselves as human, flawed, and extraordinary. All of us--extraordinary. (36)

The first time I read anything by Dorothy Allison was during my senior year of college. I had the privilege of reading *Cavedweller* for a directed study. I was able to connect to that book on many levels. I related to Cissy, Delia Byrd's youngest daughter. I understood the anger she felt towards her mother and why she thought she had ruined everything in her life, since I had a similar relationship with my mother. Their

relationship made me realize my mother's decisions when I was younger, even though they were difficult for me to deal with at the time, made me stronger in the end. That summer I read *Bastard Out of Carolina.* Again, I connected with Bone Boatwright and the struggle she endured at such a young age. I also connected with the relationship Bone shared with her mother, Anney, because it helped me realize that my own mother was trapped in an abusive relationship and could not be held responsible for all of her decisions, since she was a victim of abuse caused by Southern patriarchal norms.

After reading, writing, connecting, and thinking about each of the characters I wrote about in this thesis, I realized three very important things. Like Bone, I realized that even though I was a bastard, my mother was not married when she had me, and my family was not conventional in the slightest, that was okay. I could take the good out of each bad label society wanted to place on me and I could wear it with pride, because my imperfections made me unique. Like Delia, I realized that I deserved better in my life. If someone did not treat me well, I had the right to leave. Lastly, like Cissy, I realized that the world was mine and no dream I had was unreachable, no matter what society tried to dictate to me. Overall through Bone's, Delia's, and Cissy's journeys through trauma and recovery, I found the healing from my past I so longed for when I was younger. I just hope in the end I did justice to Allison's stories, since her stories worked in such a profound way in my life.

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