8-16-2024

Eco-Domestic Femininity: The Collapse of Domestic and Wild in Southern Women's Writing

Christina Xan
University of South Carolina

ECO-DOMESTIC FEMININITY: THE COLLAPSE OF DOMESTIC AND WILD IN SOUTHERN WOMEN'S WRITING

By

Christina Xan

Bachelor of Arts
Francis Marion University, 2017

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2019

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2024

Accepted by:

Tara Powell, Major Professor

Catherine Keyser, Committee Member

Qiana Whitted, Committee Member

Lauren Sklaroff, Committee Member

Ann Vail, Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

For Pepper (2015-2024), lover of sunlight, snail-shaped crinkle toys, and rotisserie chicken. You were here to celebrate this project's beginning, and through the stars, were here for its end.

Acknowledgements

How to start this. How to list all to be grateful for when overwhelmed with gratitude. I am grateful to Dr. Tara Powell for graciously and passionately directing this project. I am grateful to Drs. Lauren Sklaroff, Qiana Whitted, and Cat Keyser for forming such a wonderful committee, and to the latter for also serving on my thesis five years ago. Though not an explicit part of this project, I am unbelievably grateful to now-retired Dr. Bob Brinkmeyer, who directed my thesis, through who I first learned about *Ecology*, and who has been a supporter of mine since I started graduate school.

I am ever-grateful for my family and friends. I have been so fortunate to craft so many valuable friendships in my time here, and the network of their love and care has been a continuous net which I have always been able to fall back on. If I named them all, it would turn this space into a small phonebook. I am grateful to my little sister, who always sets me straight and whose love and loyalty is unlike anything I have ever known. I am grateful to my dad for putting me to bed with self-spun stories every night for years. Those "Princess and Chip the Wolf" stories instilled in me a continuous love of storytelling. And, of course, I am grateful for my mom, my best friend, for whom no words are good enough. She taught me to be courageous and tenacious, gracious and compassionate. She is the wind beneath my wings yet also guides the string to my kite.

Most importantly, my cats—Pepper, Fitzgerald, Sesame, and Thoreau—who napped on each book I attempted to hurriedly leaf through, contributed text through

persistent pressing of laptop keys, and fastidiously stayed near for each and every late-night cuddle session.

Finally—this is a project by, of, and for women. May the threads that tie us to one another never sever.

Abstract

When the Agrarians set out to assert their definition of southern in *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), they planted roots deep in the ground of the south that slowly wrapped its tendrils around its descendants. In the years that have followed, southern women have had to push back against these limiting boundaries. Their individual stories are linked by the communal lineage of the south, specifically the binary of domestic and wild. Traditionally, southern women have had to stay in the boundaries of the home, cultivating domesticity, ordering the space, and warming the hearth. The land itself, posed as opposite from home, is feminine, as in it is something for men to toil and conquer. In response to these harmful norms, this project asks: what happens when women collapse these boundaries in order to restore a new image of southern femininity? In Janisse Ray's *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999), she explores what it means to belong to home different from one's expectations and to dwell in natural landscape being infringed upon—one that "owns her body." Ultimately, Ray collapses boundaries domestic and wild and establishes three tendrils: those who order in the wilderness, those who order within the home, and those who order through storytelling and form. These tendrils become the thread through which the quilt of southern femininity is restitched. This eco-domestic southern project traces Ray's work and then examines nine of her contemporaries and inheritors from 1997–2019 to explore the ways they collapse and stitch, both as individuals and as a community of southern women. Ultimately, by looking at the memoirs, novels, poetry, and graphic novels from southern women who collapse

boundaries of limiting southern identity, I will establish a framework through which a truer crafting of southern femininity is possible. Ultimately, I argue that, as women, we can use homemaking not just in the domestic space but in the ordering of wild and of story to perform excavation of our own histories and locate place within our present bodies.

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Introduction: Women and Boundaries in the Contemporary South

"We're so bored until we're buried

Just like dust, we settle in this town

On this broken merry go 'round"

— *Kacey Musgraves*

In the opening poem of her first poetry collection, Janisse Ray asks, "what to do / with the wild pain?" (27-28) and concludes her own answer with "go home" (40). What images do you conjure in your head when you imagine the "wild" and "wilderness"? Perhaps Amazon rainforests with brush so thick you cannot see feet away or untamed Sahara deserts rife with animals stalking pray. What about "home" or "domestic"? Perhaps you envision hours spent wiping down smooth countertops, running yet another laundry cycle, or swiping dust off windowsills. It is easy to see domestic and wild as having both literal and metaphorical distance between them. Domesticity is what happens within the home; wilderness is what happens out there, beyond our safe spaces. What would happen, though, if these two were not actually that different at all? Domestic and wild—along with adjacent ideas like home, space, or place—are a collection of often contradictory, nebulous concepts that people attempt to make sense of with boundaries—boundaries that affect and define those living within them. We tend to place these images and ideas in contrast with one another. Even if wilderness is a significant part of the planet that we call home, the wilderness is not where we *make* home.

within the physical space of a house and making place for oneself within the expansive space of the wild seems separate. However, this project challenges this binary and explores what happens when the language used to differentiate the two is challenged. Specifically, this project explores the "eco-domestic," actions wherein the lines between ecological work and homemaking are collapsed, and is particularly interested in what this means for southern women—women for whom the definition of domestic and wild have had very real and historic consequences.

Examination of women's labor in the home emerged in the mid-20th century, led largely by Gloria Steinem and her contemporaries. Together, they studied the negative effects of domesticity on women, specifically how it limits their freedom, movement, and performed identities. This work was at times less specific, more so tracing limits of femininity throughout history and seeing how they resulted in present boundaries, emphasized by groundbreaking scholars like Simone de Beauvoir. Pat Mainari directly explores gender and domesticity in her 1970 text "The Politics of Housework," where she details her personal attempts to split housework equally with her husband. She ultimately situates this fight for equality—and her husband's attempts and resistance—within the historical subjugation that led to the politicization of housework. In the following years, further feminist studies would explore the problems with these initial explorations that, while crucial, centered white women in the home—women who have historically had the most privilege. Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa critiqued white women for their erasure of Latina and Hispanic women, those who so often were pushed into the background as they were essentially forced to care for white families' homes. At the same time black feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, in their exploration of

intersectionality, began detailing how the legacy of a country built on enslaved black people's labor affected black women's roles in modern homes. Ideas of what it means to make home—and the roles allowed within the four walls of the house—have been continuously rooted in patriarchy and whiteness. To challenge traditions of homemaking, then, is a rebellion, and it is one exists still today in our culture, not simply in scholarly work but in contemporary media. 2019's *Why Women Kill* follows women from traditional roles in the home to those in the modern workforce to explore what rooted in patriarchy affects women's work across time. *Kevin Can F**k Himself's* (2021) darkly comedic nature follows a miserable 21st century housewife whose husband repeatedly pushes her to the breaking point. Today, scholars and creatives alike still work through what it means for women to exist within the boundaries of home.

Parallel to the emergence of women's labor studies was the emergence of ecofeminism. In the late 20th century, feminist scholars began analyzing the ways ecology was inherently tied to women's issues due to women's relationship with nature and also how a view of the natural world as feminine has led to the ease with which we mistreat it. Specifically, coined by French activist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, ecofeminism emerged as a way to connect the mistreatment of women (and other marginalized groups) to the mistreatment of the natural world (both animals and plants/air/water alike). Ecofeminism has grown and shifted dramatically over the past handful of decades, examining not just the similarities between these actions but how women's bodies are tied to the natural world itself and what these repercussions are. Like domestic imagery, this tension has continued to the present, and though not as common as how contemporary media examines women's role in the home, women's

relationship to nature still is a thread that runs through our storytelling. Cheryl Strayed's memoir on her journey into the wilderness was transformed into the multi-Oscar-nominated film *Wild* (2014), and recently the series *Wilderness* (2023) explored traverses into the wild alongside the wildness in a young woman's marriage. In contemporary scholarly scenes, activists and scholars like Nicole Seymour and Stacy Alaimo explore what it means for women's bodies to be affected by environmentalism and how assumptions for how a marginalized group "should" relate to nature overrides their actual relationships. Like labor in the home, relationships to the wilderness are only allowed for certain individuals, and both are rooted in the desire to control and shape the marginalized. This project will explore the intersection of studies of domestic labor and ecofeminism., and work from these scholars will continue to appear throughout the project. What is important in this moment is this: women are meant to be in the home, a space where they are tamed, performing domestic actions; in contrast, the land, where women are not supposed to dwell, is perpetuated as feminine space to be tamed by masculine forces. In both these spaces, women's identities are tamed, and for decades, scholars, activists, and creatives have had to reckon with this legacy as they fight to tell these women's stories.

Though there have always been parallels between domestic and wild, the fields of domestic labor feminism and ecofeminism have remained largely separate. However, the work of women situating body and history to make place among false prescriptions of femininity and the work of women pushing back against unfair ideas of who needs to be tamed are both performing near identical work: they are both attempting to understand the limitations of womanhood and free women from it. This project demonstrates the

ways women's actions collapse domestic and wild in literary representation, thus inherently challenging the boundaries each holds. Throughout this project, then, the language of domestic and wild, nature/natural, and place and space will grow and shift. This discourse seems natural for a feminist project, seeing as feminist arguments about language itself and the degree to which language's inherent meaning further restricts bodies and is wielded by those in power has been foundational. Judith Butler, for instance, budling on Derrida, sees language as a form of rebellion in writing; she believes that in feminist work, specifically, one must work through the surface of complex language to the meaning underneath. This project does not aim to use language to obfuscate or complicate but instead to show how various forms shift when central boundaries, like domestic and wild, are collapsed. Individual words and ideas in this project take on various meaning—the domestic refers to the home as in traditional home space, but it also refers to the ability to find place even in one's own body. Wild refers to the natural world, but it also refers to inherent and agential rebellious femininity. These shifts are also a reason why genre and various modes of storytelling emerge as crucial ways of self-situating throughout the project, as the women writers begin to use the structure of language and narrative to challenge boundaries and ideas of the natural. In tandem, language emerges in this project as a way to parse the, at times inherent at times explicit, rebellion of southern women writers. When it comes to homemaking or placemaking, I utilize these terms as a goal or success that only happens through a re-understanding of domestic and wild and a self-situating in one's body and history.

Much of the situating women must do is through physical and metaphorical spaces and places; it is thus vital to understand the nuanced distinction between these two

as I use them frequently and with individual intent. Though it may not seem it, "place" and "space" are vastly different. They each are words that stand in for a plethora of ideas of what identity and belonging should look like. I draw my understandings of place and space from Michel de Certeau, Wallace Stegner, and Susan Fraiman—the latter will be key to discussions of home in Chapter 3. Discussing and defining place, whether inside the home or not, and delineating it from space is one of the main goals of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Certeau defines place as "order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" and space as "vectors of direction, velocities, and time…intersections of mobile elements" (117). This is in line with Fraiman's assertion that space is "defined by operations and itineraries" (*Extreme Domesticity* 127). Places have identity and are lived within, whereas spaces are moved through more so than they are lived in; spaces can teach us about making place, and place can be created in space, but space itself does not provide dwelling. Certeau's city-based ideas of identity and Fraiman's home-based ideas of identity triangulate with Wallace Stegner's perceptions of regional identity. In Stegner's book *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, he argues that space becomes place once it establishes an identity, has a history, and grows a sense of community, which is why the American west is so restless—it is harder to build place in the vast, inhospitable space of the arid desert. Essentially: place is a region (city, state, country) or home (a physical dwelling place) in which there is history and community that allows for safety in which a person can have a sense of dwelling and belonging.

Place can be a specific region of any size, like the U.S. south or Georgia or Atlanta—all of which hold their own identities built into the very land—but place can

also be a less tangible way of being and belonging that occurs, often in homes, but not limited to four-walled shelters. Having place or a sense of belonging occurs when an individual's identity parallels or exists within the history of said place without erasure or othering. Space, in contrast, can be empty and unsettled, it can be a mobile space in which there is only ever movement, or it can be a location within a place where a person or group of people cannot find belonging within said "established" place. Space is empty, but it is not just unnamed region, like a piece of land in the west. Anything without defined identity is space, or anything with defined identity that is exclusive to a certain dweller. We can perform many actions to make something place—tell stories, create history, cultivate community, etc.—but even after something becomes place to someone, it can be space to someone else or be reverted back to space. While this creates a sense of emptiness, it is it more like a palimpsest where the writing-over obscures, making the place feel as if it is space because nothing is identifiable; thus, it is perceptibly the same as not having anything. Making place can then be a way to exert one's power but can also be a way to wield it as harmful to others. For instance, Stegner's assertion that the west is mostly space rhetorically assumes that there is no identity there; however, the American west was place for indigenous tribes far before white Americans moved westward. Thus, what is place for one can be space for another and vice versa, and it is crucial that in a making of place and collapsing of boundaries, one does not further perpetuate harm for another under the guise of freedom for the self. Being able to wield patriarchy is not freedom from it.

These ideas of making place and challenging boundaries can occur anywhere, but they have their own history within the region of the U.S. south. Regionalism has always

had to reckon with limiting histories, which is part of what leads Stegner to write about the west, another American region haunted by mythos. The American south, however, uniquely deals with the binary of domestic and wild, particularly because of the region's history, its emphasis on wild and home, its limiting of women, and its imagined identity. Thus, a project that intends to break down this binary through literary studies almost naturally finds its start located in this region—it is the belly of the country that first created the norms to begin with. Although southern literature has long claimed to be a genre rooted in both the land and perceptions of home, there have been those who have had to feel not at home—namely women. Women have been forced to dwell within the home spaces, manning the hearth, while men go out and journey and harvest directly on land that they have coded as feminine. Wendell Berry published a handful of books from the perspective of various characters in his fictional town of Port William, and his book on Hannah Coulter (2004) does indeed give her power and shape, but Hannah's place is still clearly in the home; Berry's characters who have the chance to leave and return are men. Male-written women who do get to go on adventures, like Ree in Daniel Woodrell's *Winter's Bone* (2006), are driven by a male-oriented impetus—in this case the need to find her father. Even in very recent southern texts where women have intelligence and agency they have not had before, they are limited by their own bodies. Cormac McCarthy's final novel, *Stella Maris* (2022), features his first central woman character, Alicia Western, who is posed as almost otherworldly intelligent and powerful; yet she is trapped in the confines of her own lunacy and eventually takes her own life. Not limited to linguistic texts, contemporary genres like video games also perpetuate this issue. The intelligent mathematician Weaver, who serves as a heart of the southern video game

Kentucky Route Zero (2013) moves in and out of perceivable space, but she is a ghost, doomed to wander without agency. Thus, when women decide to rebel within the home or they venture for themselves on this land, they must reckon with not only a history created by men to oppress them but spaces, places, and objects that hold a reflection of femininity that pushes women away instead of including them. In this, then, we must ask what it means for women to find place on a land and in a home that is used to control them and explore how they bear the task of recultivating their identities.

The legacy of the south as we know it today has been reckoned with for over a century, since the Agrarians and the Fugitive Poets began asserting their version of what it meant to be southern post-Civil War. These authors came together to attempt to salvage some pride in an identity that had been formed over centuries and now was being accused of being unintelligent and backwards. Southern writers like Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren led this charge that not only explored southern wrongs but emphasized what they say as quintessentially southern: legacy, family, the past, a tie to the home space, and an intimate relationship with the land. Over the century that has followed, a plethora of scholars have emerged to examine exactly what it means to be southern within this established legacy. Leigh Anne Duck, specifically, explores how southern customs emerge as representative of the nation as a whole. As Duck asserts in *The Nation's Region* (2009), the south emerges as the "othered" region of America, where its fears were/are projected. The south has begun to represent a fear of not just what we have been but what we could be again. This tenuous relationship between nation and region only emphasizes the south's importance as a place in which to explore this domestic/wild binary in relation to women's bodies. Martyn Bone's *The Postsouthern*

Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction (2014) builds off Duck's analysis of south and region and explores the degree to which the south even still exists in the 21st century. Ultimately, he argues that a southern "sense of place" does still exist today, even though it is ultimately often contradictory to what the Agrarians originally envisioned, thus both challenging and upholding the assertion of the south's realness. In his desire to look at how historical contexts of the south (like the relationship to the natural world) work in a modern context, Bone discusses how female bodies often become paralleled with the land. As Bone says, Faulkner's Mississippi Delta is a "gendered icon," and Faulkner's Eula Varner Snopes is "a gendered figure of southern virgin land" (7). In his conclusion, he explores the binary of southern urban space with remaining rural spaces and discusses what still exists of the south today; this project asserts that at least one binary clearly does remain: women's relationship to land and home. Today, women writers directly place themselves in conversation with The Fugitives; Natasha Trethewey, in her poem "Southern Pastoral," dreams of them offering her a drink, learning of her mixed racial heritage and repeatedly asking her the Quentin question: "You don't hate the south…You don't hate it?" (14). Her work is central to this project's final chapter.

Ultimately, the south is a representative space of the country's fears and its hidden desires; that plus its historical relationship to house and wild makes it the necessary space in which to explore this divide and eventual collapse. The project's first chapter will explore additional authors who attempted to navigate not just the realness of the south but the effects of this imagined realness. What emerges as vital in this moment, however, is that the south has materialized as an imagined space that had—and has—very real consequences for those who call themselves southern, and yet it is not separate from the

nation; in fact, it is perhaps the clearest product of a national identity that lingers. This tension—and understandings of the home and the wilderness—have been tendrils that have rooted works of the south and their authors for a century and beyond. Tate's exploration of the south's Civil War history, for example, is intertwined natural imagery. Tate spoke of this past as "immoderate" (55) and soldier's bones as "unclean" (77) in his "Ode to the Confederate Dead," while also seeing the soldiers as "demons out of the earth" (57) whose "blood / stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea" (71-72). In trying to balance this understanding of the south's deeds with natural imagery, the Agrarians crafted a culture that defined the south still to this day. Their appreciation of the land was elegiac, emphasizing both its beauty and innate power, but only within the haunting themes of the south. Between A and B of *Audubon Part VII*, Robert Penn Warren writes of "great geese" (3) in the "season before the elderberry / bloom…going north. / The sound was passing northward" (8-11). The speaker's pause to appreciate the natural world is a precursor to one of the poem's great questions; the speaker asks to be told a story "in this century, and moment, of mania" (13), a "story of great distances" (15), the name of which "will be Time" (17). Here, Penn Warren ties the natural world to a desire for identity and a sense of place and situates it within southern traditions, namely of being haunted by the past.

Amongst the male authors of The Fugitive Poets, one woman's voice emerges: Laura Riding. Though she writes of nature and challenges form alongside her contemporaries, she is able to interweave concerns of women's bodies that male Fugitives were not exploring. In poems like "Virgin of the Hills" and "Starved" she presciently explores the struggle women have as they fight for agency over their own

bodies; once more, this occurs amidst imagery of the natural world. She opens the former poem with the statement "My flesh is at a distance from me" (1), emphasizing the struggle women have to be in their own bodies even as compared to her male counterparts, and yet she also is able to find protection within this, since "it is as near as anyone can come" (3). She also finds a power in this distance from the body, seeing her body as a "premature relic" (8) others can accept as she "recline[s] remotely on these hills" (13). There is a tangibility to Riding's connection with nature, one that is beyond the body and yet in which physical flesh is brought to the forefront. Here, however, the binary between domestic and wild is enforced—she can exist in the wilderness but only if she cannot be at home in her own body. It is this tense tangibility that will be picked up by authors that appear later in this project, particularly Karen Russell and Delia Owens. This claim to the body is only solidified in "Starved" where Riding explicitly asks, "Who owns this body of mine?" (1), and though she does not come to a conclusion, she is confident that it does not belong to any man "to whom [she] gave it for a moment" (2). She is able to assert that her body is not something to be owned by men, but she is also not able to lay claim to it herself, and she feels a sense of hunger and a lack of fullness in this unknowing space. Again, she is able to embrace a sense of wild through the un-ownability of her body, but she is not allowed that same place or ownership. Later women would find answers to these claims in their own agency, like the gothic women of graphic novel series *Wet Moon* who use body modifications as a form of expression and self-love.

Riding was not the only one looking at women's bodies and the land, but when not in women's hands, their bodies became prey to manipulation. In John Crowe

Ransom's "Antique Harvesters," women are made out to be both keeper of the hearth and are paralleled to the land as something to control. Throughout the poem, Ransom describes the act of harvesting, ultimately claiming it will be "garner[ed] for the Lady" (22) who is "of the heart of fire" (32). In these moments, he emphasizes women's place in home—keeper of the fire or hearth—while also emphasizing the woman as needing to be cared for by men. At the same time, however, there is an inherent paralleling of the feminine and the natural world. The "Lady" takes on a more esoteric role, an "image" that is, like the harvest itself, "as by a grey, as by a green" (28) and someone/something "the sons of the fathers shall keep" (34). Though Ransom sees women as figures to be cared for and to find treasure both for, he is emphasizing the harmful binary that would continue to limit southern women. This rhetoric will follow into the literature of prominent southern literary figureheads; William Faulkner, for instance, is one of the most influential actors in crafting southern literature as we know it today, and in his fictional town of Yoknapatawpha, women's bodies and their traditional relationship with home and land both pervade. Bone makes mention the Snopes trilogy's use of the strange-bodied Eula Varner being akin to land for southern men to tame, but Varner's inherent feminine rebellion extends into this traditional home space. Bone mentions the Mississippi Delta and its parallels to women's bodies in Faulkner's linked story collection *Go Down, Moses*, and in this same collection, domestic parallels emerge that compound the natural ones; namely, in "The Fire and the Hearth," young Lucas must contend with what freedom is, with his one limitation—yet eventually what he returns to—being his wife Molly who not only mans the hearth of their home but emerges symbolic of the hearth itself. Even in these texts, hints of this collapse exist.

In these works, women are restricted by men literally and in metaphors. Soon after, however, men began to see the roles they created for women as restricting—not to women but to themselves. Particularly, men's protection of woman/hearth began to be seen as a limitation that kept men stuck within the confines of the home space at large, creating a desire to embark on a journey to embrace their "real" or "authentic" masculinity, which they saw as being tied to braving and taming the wilderness. As the cracks began appearing in the structures they created, they needed to shore them back up. A clear figurehead of this is James Dickey, South Carolina poet and professor, best known for his 1970 novel *Deliverance* wherein four men attempt to seek their freedom and reassert their masculinity through a weekend trip in the Georgia wilderness. At the end of the trip, one is dead, one has been sexually assaulted, and one is majorly injured. The main character, Ed, has to reflect on the romanticization of the wilderness and of the masculinity involved. A moment close to the end, when Ed leaps off the cliff in an attempt to save his life and lands in the water, is particularly violent. The water enters his ear and punctures his eardrum as well as penetrates him from behind, sexually paralleling what happened to Bobby as well as Ed's own possessive intercourse with his wife. Dickey both enforces the binary of women in these moments, as well as opens room for the eventual collapse women writers will inherit. The natural world is at times masculine in image and action in *Deliverance*: the phallic rock Ed must climb to escape his attackers and the penetrative water. However, this shows the dangers of masculinity; further, the inheritance of the land as something to conquer and tame pervades the novel, and in the novel, nature fights back. This, coupled with the golden eye Ed sees on the prostitute's back that follows him into the wilderness, serves to make the feminine and

nature inextricable. To a degree, then, when the natural world fights Ed back, existing within it is a push-back from the women long forced into the position of conquered.

Southern women, of course, were consistently navigating these spaces—they were never not writing. Riding's name was included with the Fugitives, and a plethora of southern women after her wrote about women's struggles across the entire 20th century—even if they were often pushed to the background. Lillian Smith and Ellen Glasgow each worked to explore inherent contradictions in the south's boundaries and beliefs, with the former interested in exploring the complexities of interracial relationships and the latter keenly interested in the role of woman in the family unit. Willa Cather sketched southern sensibilities but traced how they shift and stretch as one moves westward across the nation, and, with visions of war and ocean crossings, Katherine Anne Porter emphasized the potential for a global south years before it began being studied. Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House* delves deep into the walls of a failing home—as in both becoming decrepit but also housing a dysfunctional family—to show the limiting natures of the south and to challenge the image of the southern belle. Caroline Gordon would reckon with home and wild, retelling myths for southern women—both as ancient and global as Orpheus and Eurydice in *The Women on the Porch* and as American as the Western frontier in *Green Centuries*. Black southern women like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, all so tied to the south and yet explicitly connected to national legacies, explored black women's lives both in the south and away from it; their work has been crucial in understanding how southern legacies haunt those who dwelled within the south even if they no longer live within its regional boundaries. Of all 20th century southern writers, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings most clearly sets the foundation for

authors like Janisse Ray, whose connection to personal wilderness is the focal point of Chapter 1, to come into vision; her works like *The Yearling* dive into man's relationship with nature while *Cross Creek* serves as a clear tie to *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, both memoirs that explore the ways the women grow and learn on their patch of land in Florida and Georgia respectively. Essentially, across the 19th and 20th century, southern women were just as invested as their male counterparts in what it meant to be southern and particularly in what it meant to be a southern woman. By exploring not just southern norms in relation to family, legacy, the past, and the land but exploring how southern women relate to those norms from the spaces they were forced into, southern women writers become the foundation for a project interested in how domestic-feminism and ecofeminism parallel each other.

Flannery O' Connor and Eudora Welty, particularly, were major female figures in southern literature in the 20th century. These southern women were clearly interested in women and clearly carried the torch other southern women were passing to one another; however, their explicit interest lay more within the south's tropes as a whole, such as religion, justice, family, and power. Many of O'Connor's women are rebellious; however, they often suffer the consequences for this; Hulga in "Good Country People" is agentially rebellious in her intelligence and inherently so in her disability. However, this othered femininity leaves her stranded and scorned in a barn attic. Even those women who seem to substantiate southern norms fail; the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" attempts to reason with the serial killer's goodness and religion, but it does not save her. For O'Connor, women rarely seem to find success, though this is not particularly gendered—all her characters must reckon with the south's haunting dangers. Welty's

women at times do reckon with the south in ways that reveal their femininity with more power, like Virgie Rainey in *The Golden Apples;* however, the tie to a masculine figure—King MacLain—appears as a major origin of her power, and regardless, Virgie seems doomed to wander versus being allowed to find place. Welty's women, even in books with women as central figures, like *The Optimist's Daughter*, have a tie to the home that limits them in their movement or that forces them to be placeless. A throughline connecting these women characters written by female figures of the south is that they all face consequences for what is or is not natural. The women who succeed in being powerful are the wanderers without place, and the women who succeed at finding place do not necessarily have power. One key southern female figure who is successful at finding a sense of place, however, is Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie embarks on a journey across the south through three individual suitors, but at the end of the novel, who she really finds is herself. Key markers of home—like the houses she dwells in with her first two husbands—and key markers of wild—like the storm she survives that indirectly takes the life of her final husband—ultimately allow Janie a sense of peace that emerges from an understanding of her femininity, sensuality, southernness, and blackness. Her navigation of identity and place echoes throughout this project, particularly in the works of Sarah M. Broom and Jesmyn Ward.

What Janie finds throughout Hurston's novel is her fullest, truest self. This finding of true self is the goal for the women of this project; however, I push against the term of authenticity, specifically. Even if someone is acting in a way that seems "inauthentic" to themselves, how can anyone truly claim those actions are not reflective of a true desire? The idea of authenticity is used to further erase stories of the marginalized by those in

power. Pushing back against the belief women are truest to their sex upon working solely in the home and rearing children, for instance, is central to Steinem and her contemporaries' scholarly work and activism. Those who write history and create norms do so to positively shore up their own beliefs, thus obfuscating the lived truths of others who have not had the privilege to tell their own stories or have those stories taken seriously. In Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, for instance, she discusses the very real concerns with white authors creating truth for black individuals. When it comes to writing about blackness, white authors have long been given more credibility than actual black authors. As she asserts, "There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States" (22). This does not mean that each and every white scholar who works on behalf of the marginalized is wielding oppression, no, but it does mean that there must be acute awareness of actions, motivations, and language. For a white author to write about blackness is to create an image of blackness that has more power to be lauded as "right" or "authentic," even if it does not fully represent a black experience, so the onus is on those in power to continuously reflect on what we deem to be authentic to ensure our work uncovers and does not re-cover. This further puts black authors and black storytellers "in the dark" as they not only have to continue the fight to be taken seriously but now have to push back against misconstrued ideas of how blackness surely must look. This is a struggle for all marginalized groups—anyone who has ever had to fight for their own voice. For southern women writers, specifically, they are pushing back against

decades of southern literature that shored up an image of femininity that is restrictive—which only compounds for southern women of color and queer southern women. This project, thus, refuses the term authenticity, seeing all southern women's actions as authentic as they work towards a reflection that feels true of their full experience. I opt instead to use language in the following vein: women must locate a reflection of themselves they believe appears real and true to their history, identity, and desires—without obfuscating their fellow women. Ultimately, contemporary southern women must untangle accepted-as-true falsehoods before restitching their own truths.

Arguing for a truer south, particularly one not defined just by the magnolias and mansions of Faulkner's literature, emerged at the end of the 20th century. In the final decade of the 1900s, southern authors began to challenge the elegiac, romanticized imagery and depictions of southern homes and wild. This subgenre of southern literature became known as Grit Lit or Rough South literature—led mainly by the Harry (Crews), Larry (Brown), Barry (Hannah) trio. Though this genre is populated by white male writers, they do crucial work in challenging traditional Agrarianism, through showing that it is crucial to have a relationship to the land but that that relationship is violent and dirty and gritty. It is this exploration of these gritty areas—places where necessity trumps almost all and yet southern desires still haunt—where the boundaries between domestic and wild and between feminine and masculine begin to blur. Ron Rash's *Serena*, for instance, features a titular character who is almost godlike in her connection to the land—a tamed eagle perched on her arm—and who is beautiful yet almost androgynous. However, Serena is punished for her power, unable to have a child, and her husband's bastard child is the one who eventually kills her. Though Serena has power, she never

really has place, and she uses that power to wield patriarchy instead of dismantling it. When female writers begin using this tradition, however, something shifts. In one of the most prominent female writers of this subgenre, Dorothy Allison's, novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), she crafts a story around a partially autobiographically young girl named Bone as she reckons with what it means to be so masculine and different from her mother and sister. Bone, displaced and likely queer, dredges up her image of femininity from the natural world—playing in the dirt and masturbating with lake hooks to discover her identity. Though she is alone at the end of the novel, there is a lingering hope that now that she knows who she is, she will be able to make place. However, home is never a reality for Bone within the book's pages. Continuously, southern women seem to be able to challenge home or wild but rarely find rootedness. The women who do seem to find a sense of place do so through challenging both domestic *and* wild without further perpetuating harm to their fellow women.

This is the temporal and thematic space where Janisse Ray enters in 1999 when she releases her first book, a memoir titled *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*. In this text, Ray explores her past growing up in a junkyard in southern Georgia in order to reckon with a certain placelessness within her present. Within this exploration emerges a distinctly feminine legacy and a world wherein domestic and wild begin to parallel each other in action and identity, no longer existing as binary. Though not the first to explore both domestic and wild spaces, Ray performs unique work in her explicit paralleling of the two and her creation of language that she uses to navigate her past. By exploring first Ray and then nine southern women authors who inherit her actions, I will explore what it means for southern women to collapse domesticity and wilderness. Through this collapse,

they are then able to un-weave and restitch what their femininity has meant in conjunction with these concepts; ultimately, this allows them to assert a new rootedness within their own feminine forms. The women who write alongside and after Ray all further this collapse through both the female characters they craft and the structure of the stories they tell. Ray is a memoirist, nature writer, poet, and, most recently, novelist, and *Ecology* emerges as a text explicitly experimenting with form. This project explores multiple genres including memoir, novel, poetry, and graphic novel, following Ray's challenging of form and exploring the ways women challenge structures that limit them through the very way their stories are told. Ray is sitting in this crux, but she is not the only one there. Importantly, the women explored in this project are not writing in Ray's shadow. Ray is not meant to be posited as the sole creator of these themes or ideas, instead meant to be the exemplary woman and writer through which this kind of stitching of identity takes place. Ray has written about a plethora of landscapes, the home, women's roles, and the blurring of domestic and wild, and thus she creates not the sole foundation through which other women grow but instead models a collapse through which we can better understand what other southern women did and continue to do. Essentially, by looking at Ray and her contemporaries, we can find the threads used to ultimately stitch together a better understanding of southern feminine resistance and identity.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how Ray twists and blurs the boundaries of domestic and wild, ultimately collapsing the two and proving how an eventual restitching is possible. This chapter dives deeper into the southern critics who first began challenging southern identity and southern femininity around the turn of the century, like Scott Romine,

Michael Kreyling, and Tara McPherson. Further, beyond setting the stakes for the project, this chapter illuminates the language and terminology utilized throughout the project. In the opening of *Ecology*, Ray explicitly states the land "owns [her] body," immediately setting the stakes for her book and this project as a whole. Ray's goal in the memoir is to explore her personal and collective history in order to understand more about her present identity and the world around her that she navigates every day. In doing so, she begins to examine her father's role with the natural world and her mother's role within the home, referring to them as bricoleurs who curate identity and thus making home and wild blur within the space of the junkyard. The way this space effectively becomes a place is reliant on the breaking of boundaries like domestic and wild, masculine and feminine, and personal and collective. While this chapter predominantly focuses on *Ecology*, supporting collapses and stitches are gleaned from Ray's expanding bibliography. Specifically, Ray's works *Wild Cart Quilt* and *Pinhook* display the type of stitching and restoration the women in the remaining chapters will begin to pick up, and an analysis of Ray's own poetry examines collapse amidst southern identity formation that will be used by the project's women—particularly Natasha Trethewey. Ultimately, three tendrils of curation and collapse emerge from Ray: those who make home in the wilderness, those who perform wilderness in the home, and those who use form not only as collapse but as navigation of these two performances. Each of the following chapters picks up one of these tendrils and traces it in their own triptych of texts.

Chapter 2 examines the ways women perform acts of domesticity while in the wilderness and use forays into the wilderness to learn how to create home. This chapter is grounded in contemporary ecofeminist work from Nicole Seymour and Stacy Alaimo

who explore the precarious relationship between women and the natural world. I use these theorists to discuss further variances of wilderness, establishing what making place looks like for women in a modern natural landscape. The chapter will then delve into close readings of three novels: *Swamplandia!* (2011) by Karen Russell, *Sharp Teeth of Love* (1997) by Doris Betts, and *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) by Delia Owens. All three novels feature female protagonists who either live in homes that exist within/adjacent to wilderness or seek solace from their homes in the wilderness. In one, two girls leave their swamp-surrounded theme park to enter the wilderness; in another, a young woman recovering from a mental health crisis flees from her soon-to-be husband into the desert; and in the final text, a young girl raises herself in Carolina marshes until domestic and wild are indistinguishable. At some point, each of the female protagonists—Ava, Osceola, Luna, and Kya—learn how to make home in the wilderness before they can craft any sense of rootedness for themselves where they have belonging. These women wrestle wild animals through keen understanding of them, hallucinate companion ghosts in the mountains, and dwell in marshes where they trace animal and plant origin with ease. Their domestic actions in the wilderness—centered around the ordering of objects and situating of self—challenge the idea of women's bodies as being a wild space for men to make their own and instead show women who work through to the embrace of inherent wildness in themselves. Thus, a further discussion of what is or is not natural/wild for women becomes a crucial part of this chapter, crafting foundations for the next two chapters' work with internal wildness.

Chapter 3 looks at three texts where women must reckon with what is natural to perform within the home and where the wilderness itself infiltrates and destroys the

home. This chapter owes much of its structure to domestic feminist scholar Susan Fraiman, feminist trauma scholars Lauren Berlant and Rita Felski, and black femininity scholars Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman. The three texts analyzed in this chapter all explore one central element—a hurricane—which physically destroys a house and thus forces the book's women to restructure their sense of home. Specifically, the three texts are Pam Durban's *So Far Back* (2000), Sarah M. Broom's *The Yellow House* (2019), and Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011). The first of these texts follows a middle-aged white woman as she explores her former plantation home in Charleston, South Carolina, where a storm seems to give her an option to attempt to correct the past. Broom and Ward's texts both follow black families affected by Hurricane Katrina. Broom's text is a memoir that traces her family's relationship to a single house in New Orleans, one that has had a continual relationship between its female inhabitants and perceptions of home. Finally, Ward's novel is a coming-of-age story in the days leading up to and immediately following Katrina. Seeing how young Esch learns to embrace her own femininity—particularly the role as mother—through the destruction of a traditionally feminine space is crucial to seeing the ways in which the collapse of these boundaries can mean freedom. All of these texts together use the wilderness to uncover an inherent wild that exists within boundaries of houses. It is no surprise, then, that black women's bodies are central to each of the stories in the chapter as the south is haunted by its plantations and the irrevocable harm they caused. Durban presents a complicated tension between a white woman attempting to restore a home steeped in the legacy of enslavement, and her characters often wield patriarchy instead of dismantling it. Broom and Ward, in contrast, follow Durban's modeling of restoration post-hurricane but reckon with inherently racist

climates and perpetuations of black woman as wild to show women that create order within chaos; these women accept the past but work to move forward versus returning to the past. Seeing how these women find themselves and find ways to belong as well as seeing how the natural world helps them process sordid histories reveals another collapse of the domestic/wild binary.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores form as its own method of placemaking that occurs when domestic and wild have been fully collapsed and women begin stitching their identities anew. Stemming from the unique forms Ray uses in her own bibliography, this chapter explores varied understandings of form through scholars like Caroline Levine before examining three texts. Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010) explores a woman othered in various ways—she is an adopted Vietnamese girl living in North Carolina with synesthesia; specifically, she can taste words. Her othered body causes her to have a pervasive sense of placelessness, and Linh-Dao must arrange her own stories in order to find place in homes that have become so unnatural, belonging is no longer an option; this is paralleled by form that follows the structure of memory. Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* (2007) is a poetry collection keenly southern, in which the former Poet Laureate embarks on a journey similar to Ray's—one to find herself within her own southern history. Within each poem, Trethewey uses form and language to explore her varied background and how she fits into a history that has both defined and rejected her. Beyond the individual poems, the curated order of the collection itself emerges as an additional attempt to find a semblance of place within a region contradictorily both so shifting and stagnant. Finally, Sophie Campbell's graphic novel series *Wet Moon* (2004-present) features an "unusually usual day-to-day story" in the

deep south. The series follows a group of young women as they face routine feminine struggles; however, the parallel of women's bodies and wilderness challenges ideas of traditional, limiting femininity. Alongside this, the use of comics as form challenges ideas of what is and is not natural. In this text, women's embraced rebellion and treatment of body as home shows a possibility for contemporary southern women; it is not a utopia, instead a re-imagined reality. The work of this project as a whole comes to fruition in this series—of which this project focuses on the first three—where women are able to find a place where they can both be themselves and consistently reinvent themselves, finding agency within the collapsed domestic and wild.

The conclusion of this project will make a final nod to the women who pick up the needle and thread today in their contemporary genres, rooting the pertinence of this collapse and emphasizing how existent this boundary breaking is as the genre of southern literature shifts across time. Though traditional paradigms of southern womanhood pervade the authors of this project, southern female figureheads have shifted greatly in the 21st century as they find more power in what makes them southern and what makes them women. This constant reinvention constantly moves towards empowerment, as does it the need to make place in our own wildness. The southern woman's attempt to find home is indeed stitched within our everyday lives. Their words, their stories, pervade our culture—even the songs we hum along to casually on our car radios penned by southern women vibrate to this desire, this orienting, this homing. Perhaps this is not a surprise, seeing how central the banjo-strumming, porch-sitting individual's image is to southernness, how vital music and lyricism has been to southern women, and how narrative-oriented country music tends to be. How often The Chicks yearn for wild

spaces, Loretta Lynn and Taylor Swift croon for lost love, Martina McBride and Carrie Underwood pen images of destroyed houses, or Kacey Musgraves returns us to trailer parks steeped in southern tradition. Dolly Parton herself speaks of men as "let[ting] you dream just a watch 'em shatter," but she also emphasizes that "you got dreams he'll never take away." The women in this project both dream for their new futures and work to create those new futures for themselves and the women who come after them. Though genre is, of course, a throughline to the project itself, the return to music at the start of each chapter and the conclusion's final nod to contemporary genres points to the presence of southern women's collapse and identity formation in our ever-changing contemporary landscape. The fact these stories continue to emerge in new genres and forms (like video games) ultimately displays how pervasive the everyday southern woman's desire for true placemaking is. I also offer some next paths that this collapse can be explored on—further directions that fellow women scholars can use to find their own needle and thread and continue stitching themselves.

All-in-all, this project serves to challenge domestic and wild as a binary, with the ultimate goal of asserting that the major differences in performing these methods of being lies within the ties to women's bodies and the limiting boundaries that stem from them. For women to be able to parallel each binary's sides simultaneously in their actions, they can then challenge the images of femininity that have been so limiting and sever the ties to damaging ideas of women in relation to home and to wilderness. Domesticity will emerge as a way to understand all the complex nuances in the act of making home as a southern woman, and wilderness itself becomes an arc that grows and shifts. Wilderness starts purely tangible, rooted in the natural world, and though this continues, it also

emerges to be anything unruly and untamed; it parallels and intertwines with the wildness in these own women's hearts—a very wildness they will begin to find home within. This making of home and reckoning with a land that is forced to own women by collapsing its boundaries and living amongst it has keenly maternal undertones, which emerge the most clearly in Chapter 3. However, throughout the project, as women both settle in their bones of embracing traditional femininity and creating a truer femininity anew, the choice to refuse or espouse images of maternity and the creation or caring of life permeates, ultimately becoming a point of agency instead of a limitation.

By exploring this within the regional subset of southern literature, I will be able to dive deep into the national consciousness that helped create and still perpetuates these boundaries, thus most directly teasing apart the performances in our everyday stories. This project has major implications for southern studies, which continues to be in near constant upheaval as southern scholars attempt to discover what is and is not real about the south. This project seeks to shift the conversation from attempting to discover what is proven to be infallibly real, to uncovering and reckoning with the very real, tangible consequences of an imagined south that has been performed as real. Conversations continue about what is left of the rural south, but what is undeniably left are the bodies of the south that still move and breathe today and for whom the past has not ceased to exist regardless of a changing climate—both literally and metaphorically. Beyond southern studies, this project hopes to serve as a foundation for future exploration of the eco-domestic; it is crucial to understand what it means for women's labor to have been defined just as much by wilderness as by home as well as what it means for the treatment of land and woman to be so parallel when actions on the land are shaped directly by

domesticity. The women in this project—both the writers and characters—work to break this cycle from continuing. Though there is much to set the stage for, the goal of the project is this: through an eco-domestic lens, to stitch together the many voices of contemporary southern women fighting against a limiting legacy into a singular quilt—a "beautiful net" as Ray will call it—so that they, like Janie at the end of Hurston's novel, can "[pull] it from around the waist of the world and [drape] it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see."

Chapter 1: Wilderness and Homemaking in the Works of Janisse Ray

"And I can go anywhere I want, anywhere I want—just not home."

— *Taylor Swift*

In my final semester of my PhD coursework, I was sitting down to read through the pages I had decided needed to be completed that day for the nature writing seminar I was in. Though I was supposed to be focusing on the regional imagination—the course's title—my imagination was far more focused on what I believed were the two paths in front of me for my future work in southern studies: I could look at women in the home and explore how domesticity often functions as prison instead of a safe space—how ghosts are not necessary for a haunting. Or I could look at the natural world, how the wilderness—though full of inanimate objects and inhuman creatures—has a life of its own that is inextricable from the human. Then, I entered my first junkyard, a space I had only ever passed in my red Honda Civic (rest in peace, Rosalind). Here, old cars littered the lot, discarded coins pressed deeper into the soil under my feet, and weeds ran free across the edges of the property. Walking further in, I noticed a house amidst the scraps and, walking ever closer, began eavesdropping on a mother telling a young girl with tangled hair a story about how her and her husband found the girl as a baby in a clump of palmettos on this very property. I go to lean against the frame of the house, but there is nothing there—this junkyard is not real, or at least, not for me. This is Janisse Ray's junkyard, which I traverse as I read through her memoir *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999). In the beginning of this text, Ray refers to this land as one that "owns [her] body,"

and, as I lingered in the aftermath of her memoir, I began to feel a similar emotional tie to the book itself. I could not quite extricate myself from the way this family lived wild and made home in this liminal space of the junkyard. It was if each binary I had perceived in relation to home and wild when I stepped into the book vanished when I left, and now I had to order the pieces—I am ordering the pieces.

Though her first book, this would not be Ray's sole foray into exploring the ways her family and those around them make home and embrace the wilderness. Ray's bibliography consistently explores how humans should interact with the land in a world that often cares little for it, and vice versa, how various landscapes affect human beings. Although Ray does not explicitly center her work on examining women's roles on the land, in discussing her own history on the land that owns her body, Ray asserts that her interweaving of personal and collective histories of and in various landscapes are necessary for navigating the meeting of feminine body and land. Further, in how she discusses her and her family's history with the land and how she discusses the need for the understanding and restoration of wild spaces, Ray interweaves domestic and wild, displaying the kind of boundary blurring this project hinges on. Further, Ray's works are where much of the terminology I will be using in this project (collapse, curating, domestic, wild) come from. While most of this chapter focuses on *Ecology,* different ideas, concepts, and examples are supplemented from her growing bibliography, namely *Wild Card Quilt* (2003), *Pinhook* (2005), *House of Branches* (2010), and *Red Lanterns* (2021). All-in-all, understanding Ray is crucial to understanding where the women who wrote around and after her are modeling their collapse from—and why they do so.

As anticipated in the introduction, domestic refers to any actions typically tied to homemaking, such as crafting daily routine, ordering/organizing items to create place, and becoming intimate with one's surroundings; this includes actions like cooking and cleaning and similar actions of ordering. In contrast, wilderness refers to the untamed, and, as this project begins, specifically, the natural world, whether it be wide-open spaces, mountainous landscapes, lush forests, or swampy marshes. However, wilderness can also be about wildness, what is unnatural or what pushes against norms, such as rebellious femininity. Curation is an action that occurs whenever something is ordered: objects, ideas, stories, bodies. The ability to locate items—a bricoleur as Ray coins—and to arrange them to make sense—to curate—is a form of identity mining and a way to navigate the shifting boundaries around domestic and wild. Finally, I use collapse in this project as a positive term and form of power. To collapse is to take two things that are viewed in opposition and remove their boundaries so that they exist on top of one another instead. Collapsing boundaries is the first step to restructure, for there is nothing to put together without having pieces to begin with; though it is to a degree destructive, it is not positive or negative, simply necessary. Essentially, Ray herself—and eventually the women in this project—navigate domestic and wild spaces and then learn how to make home or to be wild themselves. Domestic and wild are ideas that must be reckoned with, while curation and collapse are actions in response to the boundaries of these ideas. Domestic and wild are collapsed into one another and then curation is used to restructure performances of a new domestic and wild. Finally, restitching emerges as the method through which southern women craft their identities anew.

Though Ray does not explicitly reference this collapse in such words, she has been publishing work that implicitly does so since the late 1990s, exploring, as she notes on her website "the borderland of nature & culture" ("About"). She is an author and a naturalist who writes and lectures on her own experience growing up in a junkyard on land her family has dwelled on since the 1800s, on sustainable practices of eating and tending the land, on restoration of landscapes that are losing their identity, and on the individual balance for home and wild. This sought balance pervades Ray's existence. Ray dwells in several interstitial spaces: home and wild, naturalist and storyteller, woman and human. She also dwells in a space between centuries, publishing her first book in 1999. It is in this turning point of time and culture that Ray begins questioning boundaries, and she is clearly doing something new in *Ecology*. Here is what on the surface could appear another a southern memoir about what it is like to grow up in a rural place in gritty circumstances. What makes this book so unique, however, is how it refuses existing boundaries while placing its own. Southern literature has long been concerned with belonging and place and reckoning with a prescribed identity versus a lived one. Around the turn of the 21st century, scholars began questioning what identities were erased in the main assertions of a singular southern identity. Around this turn (within a decade on each side), southernists like Scott Romine, Michael Kreyling, and Tara McPherson started critiquing the traditions of the south in its literature, seeing them as imagined and even damaging. On the creation of this image, Romine in his book *The Real South* (2008), explores the possibility that, as the south has moved into modernity, it has not only become an illusion but perhaps has been an illusion all along. The boundaries of what we see as southern were already built on biased, slippery slopes, and as Romine says, "The

fake South…becomes the real South through the intervention of narrative" (9). This statement both gives storytelling the power to make the imagined real but also emphasizes the lack of actual record and the ability for those who have the power to perpetuate narrative to create what is real.

In Michael Kreyling's *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998), he traces the origins of these narratives, arguing the Agrarians implemented a myth to support the south post-Civil War with a partial conscious intent to uphold white male power. In his chapter focusing specifically on how southern women writers deal with this mythology, he argues they have to reckon with the "Quentin Thesis," or the idea that Quentin Thompson is the end-goal for the white southern male—which only makes it all the more tenuous that Ray begins the chapter in *Ecology* titled "Shame" with Quentin's infamous "I don't hate it" quote. Regardless of how real or imagined these narratives are, the truth in them is derived from the lived experience of southerners who must reckon with the narratives that make the south real, and this is especially true for southern women and women of color. In her seminal 2003 text *Reconstructing Dixie,* Tara McPherson breaks down exactly what these consequences look like, examining the mythos of the South as one in which women and people of color cannot have an existence true to their lived histories, arguing specifically that "the imaginary force of southern femininity is an ideal that influences these women's understandings and narrativizations of their own lives" (77). Specifically, she dismantles the stereotype of the southern belle by looking at its falsehoods—many of which are tied not only to femininity but to domestic roles such as that of mother and wife—and how damaging it is for southern women, the vast majority of whom cannot find their true reflection in its image. While these scholars were explicit

in their eschewal and challenging of southern inventions, and while a memoir debut by a new southern author with the work "cracker" in the title barely screams 'I'm challenging southern norms,' Ray's critique of the south comes from her situating herself within these shifting times through referencing her predecessors while simultaneously moving away from them in her balance between myth and reality and through collapsing boundaries between domestic and wild.

As her academic background suggests (an MFA from the University of Montana) and the allusive nature of her memoir demonstrates, Ray is steeped in the history of her southern predecessors. For example, the specific and impassioned natural imagery rooted in collective history of the Agrarians is pervasive in Ray's memoir, which includes detailed, poetic descriptions of the longleaf pines and grassy fields of Baxley, Georgia, where she grew up. However, in contrast, she also treats man-made structures like homes and junkyards with similar regard to nature itself, and her personal history, as well as myths, are interwoven with little signaling, showing both an inheriting of and straying from her predecessors. Further, southern figureheads like James Dickey are referenced by name in the text—in fact, Ray met Dickey, a man whose exploration of the tension between civilization and nature (and its eventual violence) certainly seeps into Ray's work. However, while Dickey explores masculinity and leaves his characters in the ruins of collapse, Ray lays a foundation for women to take fragments and use them for curation and recreation. At many turns in the memoir, Ray directly references the forebearers whose shoulders she stands on as she subtly critiques them, most strongly evidenced by the aforementioned inclusion of Quentin's attempted self-convincing that he does not hate the south. Ray aptly uses this quote to initiate her journey to fully embracing not just

her shame but love for the Georgia junkyard she grew up on. Through this reference and mix of embrace and refusal, Ray is able to not simply push back on southern traditions but to bring what is relevant within them into the future, thus both becoming a fresh voice within a timely conversation and laying the groundwork for following literary explorations.

Beyond southern identities, when Ray comes onto the scene in 1999 questioning what it means to be a human (southern woman) on a land that owns her, she is entering a confluence of upheavals of which the south is only one portion. The mid-90s is recognized among feminist scholars as the point of emergence for its third wave. While second wave feminism was defined by methods in which women could redefine femininity and power within the present system, third wave feminism began focusing on the need to define femininity outside of the system and to break and restructure the systems themselves. Parallel to this restructuring, by placing her mother's traditional homemaking in direct conversation with her father's power and control over his environment, as this chapter will explore, Ray is implicitly queering the systems that attempt to define and divide feminine and masculine tasks. This redefinition also comes at a time in which ecofeminism, the subset of ecological studies coined in 1974, came under fire for being essentialist and for potentially enforcing parallels of women and nature instead of tearing them down (Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*). Though Ray never claims to be an ecofeminist, by referring to her book as an ecology, she is explicitly tying herself to this tradition, one that is not just rooted in the land itself but in its connotations, particularly surrounding gender.

These three upheavals—southern, feminist, ecological—are not disparate. In a literature so rooted both in patriarchy and in representations of nature, these additional questionings of structure and system naturally intertwine. Thus, even without intent, any author writing in any of these fields at this time would be speaking to these upheavals; however, Janisse Ray explicitly tackles the intersections of the three. *Ecology*'s aim is not to offer a singular solution, though. *Ecology* is a journey, an exploration. However, in this exploration, Ray holds up many perceived binaries in order to understand herself and the place she was raised: individual and collective; feminine and masculine; myth and real; domestic and wild. This line of questioning, while reckoning with several intertwined subject matters, is consistent, which lends way to a text that lurches and sways while continuously asserting for a collapse of binaries within present structures. In order to keep these tendrils from being disparate, she collects them with the image and actions of the bricoleur—a crucial image to understanding *Ecology*. She will use this to define both her father and mother's individual methods of collection, as well as her own in creating such a text. Specifically, this chapter asserts that Ray posits her father as a bricoleur of nature and discarded object and her mother as a bricoleur of home and collected object. Then, through the use of the junkyard, which is conflated as both nature with its own ecosystem and domestic as a home for the Ray family, Ray is able to collapse her father's and mother's modes of collecting in addition to positing herself as a bricoleur curating elements of her past to weave together into the text that emerges. This argument is the collapse this project roots itself in, and exploring Ray's initial collapse in *Ecology* and how she emulates it in her further work is the key to unlocking how future women inherit these actions—and to understanding what we do with it.

The Confluence of Nature and Body

The book opens with a vivid description of the land Ray grew up on—South Georgia—before making a claim that she is trying to "find [herself] among what has been" (4) in the "landscape…that owns [her] body" (13). This concept permeates the text, and throughout the different portions of the book, whether myth or memory or meditation, this search for self continually emerges. Though it may seem a simple statement, it is rife with complexity; even "landscape," which could be read as interchangeable with the physical land itself, contains more under its surface. Landscapes emerge as not simply the structure of the physical land but the structure and inherent nature of our own bodies and stories. Though the land on which Ray grew up, both South Georgia itself and the junkyard specifically, are a major part of this landscape, the landscape of Ray's past is also made up of the domestic, manmade spaces in which she dwelled and in which the stories of her family were passed down, and the landscape also contains this intangibility—the aesthetics and narratives that resulted in Janisse Ray. In this text, the binary of domestic and wild begin to breakdown, and Ray will ultimately assert that the junkyard on which her family lived and the wilderness itself are near interchangeable on the level of ecology—of systems of order and identity. Before coming to this assertion, Ray will trace through the history of the land and the history of her home individually, collapsing them through using the form of the text to weave in and out of personal and collective.

Scholars have explored Ray's writing before, and when doing so typically look at *Ecology*. Jane Haladay and Scott Hicks do less literary analysis, opting to use the memoir alongside the works of Jeannette Armstrong and Ann Petry to explore methods of

teaching environmental literature in the classroom. Jay Watson works through *Ecology* alongside Larry Brown's novel *Joe* to examine how southern poverty creates the relationship to wild seen in the texts. Class certainly undergirds the ability for one to have a relationship with the wilderness and is an important element to southern identity, and this project indeed is concerned with southern traditions; however, this project is centered in southern femininity at its forefront, understanding that it is one element of an intersectional southern identity. More related to this project, Adele Bealer uses *Ecology* as one of a handful of texts that explore ecocriticism's relationship to practicing wilderness. Specifically, she is interested in how personal narratives of ecocriticism are a form of performance, ultimately arguing that "performative writing, by virtue of its nervous darting across temporal boundaries and its recirculation of sequentially disparate narratives, allows multiple voices from different eras to speak in one 'place'" (14). Indeed, this project interests itself in how Ray us able to explore various narratives, of her own history and the collective history of the land around her, to mine her identity. While this is explicitly tied to ecocriticism, I see it as equally domestic as well. Most relevant to this work is Emily Bowles' examination with a text that I will explore later in this chapter, *Wild Card Quilt*. Bowels asserts that Ray takes the tradition of nature writing associated with the new agrarians and situates it instead within traditions of domestic fiction. However, Bowels continuously sees *Wild Card Quilt* and *Ecology* as in contrast with each other, while I see the former as a natural extension of the latter. Further, Bowels is concerned mainly with the genre conventions in *Wild Card Quilt* and the degree to which they challenge or shore up gendered productions of storytelling, and while form

will emerge as crucial to this project, I assert that it parallels an actual structuring of southern femininity that directly reckons with the body as both content and form.

Ray's goal of finding herself begins to emerge through a rumination on childhood in an attempt to work back in her own memory to find herself, some part of her that is missing, but it is not that simple. Her body and the land are inherently entwined to the point where history of the land becomes history of her body, history of her family becomes history of the land, etc. These personal and collective spaces all become "land" to be explored, in order to come away with some concrete understanding of identity—of place and of self. Thus, Ray has to tease these threads apart before she can weave them back together, staging the collapse and curation this project hinges on. She looks at the history of the physical landscape where her family would eventually plant their own literal and metaphorical roots, and she looks at the ways her family made their mark by creating a home and creating domestic places. What will emerge in these tracings, though, is that even when Ray extricates domestic and wild into their own sections, the ruminations begin to leak into one another, seeming never completely inseparable. In the chapter "Built by Fire," Ray explores a myth that resulted in the birth of the longleaf pines, stating at the end the "longleaf became known as the pine that fire built" (38). However, this image of fire pervades the text. In his history, her grandfather sets the woods ablaze when a coon disappears into a tree, trying to smoke it out. These trees, "purged by fire," allow her to "walk shoulder to shoulder with history—[her] history…in the presence…perhaps of time itself" (70). In terms of the land, Ray does include facts that are wholly separate from myth, but even as this muddies, she is able to keep her focus specific by pulling out one element of the land that she feels is representative to

serve as a throughline: the longleaf pines. The longleaf pines are an endangered species native to and indicative of the Southeastern United States, and they become a symbol, almost a tether which Ray uses to work towards home.

The sections that discuss these trees and the land in general at times do have a methodical, scientific style that differs from the writing style she uses in reflecting on personal history, discussing years and percentages, and listing scientific names. However, Ray does not let these descriptions of the wild stay distant for long, nearly always leading into some grander images and metaphors. For example, in describing the long leaf pines, Ray says, "The limbs of the longleaf are gray and scaly and drape as the tree matures, and its needles are very long, up to seventeen inches, like a piano player's fingers, and held upright at the ends of the limbs, like a bride holds her bouquet" (66). Without the two similes, the text is purely fact, a fair and apt exposition on the longleaf's appearance. However, Ray supplements this with two images that evoke personal, human moments: musicality and marriage. There is a femininity imbued within this otherwise neutral image, and with the latter image, specifically, a tinge of the domestic and of a starting of family and home. Regardless of how Ray discusses the land—the trees or the animals—the exploration does not remain impartial for long. Though Ray certainly is interested and concerned in how people are affecting nature overtime, another desire emerges here: what makes nature a home where its dwellers sing and marry and tell stories. This is why Ray inserts entire sections of pure myth about the creation of the trees. In order to find out about her own identity and where she comes from, she must also discover stories of where the people and places that created her came from. Notably, she does not move between various native species in Georgia, and even without the metaphors, the repeated

image of one species that continues to fight for its identity and that is steeped in its own myth and in a violence perpetrated by those who 'shared' the land with it stands in for how Ray also sees her own identity.

When Ray discusses her personal history, then, the mirroring continues; the exploration of her parents and her lineage becomes reminiscent of how she discusses the land. She retells the myths of her grandfather who "knew the woods by heart…a wild man" (39) and grandmother who "kept milch cows and grew a big garden and enjoyed milking and planting because those things meant food for people she loved and plenty for her table" (146). She remembers in detail her father's illness, one that left her, her mother, and her siblings locked in a room for days. She tells of playing among the junked cars with her siblings and shares the shame she felt living with junk. These are all distinctly domestic threads, all part of what made the Ray home, home, and yet the parallels to the land remain, for Ray herself is a species native to this land who grew among it. The pines are part of her myth and also have myth—have place—which she must tease apart to fully explore her own. Some events that she teases apart, in relation to her own life and to the pines, she has born witness to, while others are merely retellings. Even though for the most part it seems that Ray knows what is 'truth' and what is not, even the fables are real in a way—they are part of the believed landscape and thus of the ecological framework that begets more into its way of life; in this way, they are parallel to southern literature and identity as a whole. For instance, early on in the text, Ray recalls the creation story her parents told her, about how she was found in "sharp-needled [palmetto] fronds," her sister "in a big cabbage," and her brothers "under a grapevine" and "beside a huckleberry bush" (6). Ray knows where she came from, but she chooses this myth to retell in the

first pages of the book, this image of her as a wild thing screaming in the weeds. Just like how the origins of the pines are steeped in domesticity, the origins of her domestic life are steeped in the wild, with it being more natural to recall her and her siblings being born from the wildlife than from her own parents. No wonder, then, that the two sides must be interwoven—they were never separate.

Ray continues this collapse by not only challenging the edges of these boundaries but by inserting entire sections of myth directly in the narrative. For example, she creates a narrative where the longleaf pines emerge through a longstanding fight with lightning, and this knowledge of the land, she claims, was "endowed to [her] through genes" (65). Though trees and lightning fighting may not sound like the home front, there is a domestic edge to this tale. One family had to fight to keep its roots in its home and refused to move or die out when threatened from its place, and, of course, this origin story only comes two sections after her own origin story. Storytelling surrounding a past identity, rooted in present truths, leads to greater understanding, meaning myth can be a form of reality. Her relationship with nature in the memoir is one of raw honesty and deep longing. She does not know when the book begins why this land is so special, but she knows it *is*, that she "carr[ies] the landscape inside like an ache. The story of who [she is] cannot be severed from the story of the flatwoods" (4). Thus, she must trace its real present loss and also make mythical its beginnings to know how her very real yet intangible longing is rooted in a history that reaches so far back and is passed so often through stories. To further conflate her and land is the only way forward, regardless of the danger of trying to define or own nature—and she has already said the landscape owns her. Though humans may be guilty of trying to define nature, nature does in fact define

us—there is a porosity in these barriers, whether the tangible barriers where road meets forest or the imagined ones where domestic becomes wild; either way, they inform each other. If they are mutually constitutive, then they can be mutually destructive. By conflating myth and reality, she is making a claim that one is not any more real than the other, and in this way, she is directly collapsing and placing on top of one another the personal and the natural world and dismantling the set structures of both.

In this collapse of the two, emerges a pattern throughout the text where the people who most represent one of these sides begin to challenge that side. Franklin and Lee Ada Ray, Ray's parents, began to each take form as a figure that represents the domestic and wild to Janisse Ray, and as the text continues, these two figures will challenge and shore up domesticity and wilderness in ways Ray herself will later model. Towards the end of the book, Ray asserts that "The line divided the world as surely as the desire to control our world divides us from the wild, and Mama and Daddy stood on one side of the line" (195). Franklin Ray was a lover of animals, nature, and discarded objects. He was a fixer, who did not believe in trash. Lee Ada, in her own way, was also a fixer, maintaining her home for her family with tenacity and grit. The two of them emerge as those who first curated domestic and wild in order to create an ecology, a place, for the Ray family. This need to understand and preserve identity in order to restore and create place is central to the memoir. The descriptions of Ray's own family and her own work, past and present, emulate the collapse needed for the discovery of self and in doing so continuously parallel the stories and realities of the longleaf pines that surround the flatlands of South Georgia. Ray does not allow any ease of separation between the two, though, placing cracks in the idea one needs to leave home for a wild journey or the idea one leaves

domestic and the personal when leaving the home. She creates a possibility of return through movement into the future. In fact, it is only through a collapse of the domestic and wild, which is envisioned in the junkyard, where the method for being in control of collapse emerges: the ordering of object. This collecting, making sense of, and ordering permeates young Ray's life on the junkyard, in two particular ways: her father's ordering of wild object and her mother's ordering of domestic object. In delineating and detailing these two, Ray continues this refusal of the distancing of nature from home and additionally collapses masculine and feminine southern tradition.

Collapsing Domestic and Wild

The junkyard in *Ecology* becomes the literal and metaphorical place of Ray and her parents' collapse, being both the place where the Ray family made their home and also a place of random, wild-adjacent objects with its own ecology. A junkyard is somewhere few people would consider a comfortable home or an ideal place to raise a family. Ray, at one point, would have agreed, saying as a young girl she felt shame about living in the junkyard. This was a place in which other people "threw perfectly good things" (29) away, a space of miscellaneous discarded identities. However, this collection of discarded objects is what ends up turning the junkyard into a home, and the necessity to make place out of objects one normally would not have to use reveals a distinct process of placemaking that collapses domestic and wild. As a whole, the junkyard defined the Ray family; from the outside, it held an identity that made the Ray children think "[others] were better than [they] were" (29). Inside the junkyard, however, the family defines the place. The discarded cars become mythical adventures for the children, where they find coins and scraps for play. Here emerges the joy of jumping from hood to

hood, the pungent smell of motor oil, and the tangible fear of slicing one's feet on discarded metal parts. Here is an ecosystem, a habitat where the Ray family makes its home. The junkyard can be a home, not simply because of the fact a family dwells in it but because of what objects exist, how they are arranged, and what meaning they take on for those existing there. It is true that all these little pieces within the junkyard are not objects that the Ray family went out and selected in order to craft a certain sense of place, like one would do in decorating a house; however, curating of found objects is key to curation, and in creating new meaning from the discarded, they are able to make them their own and tell their own story.

There are several instances of this creation of meaning through curation and identification in the memoir. Ray gives it shape through language, specifically in relation to her father, who explicitly takes objects and makes them into something greater as the head of the junkyard. Ray refers to her father's actions as that of a "bricoleur." In the chapter titled "Native Genius," she states: "I know now my father's occupation has an actual title; he is a bricoleur, a term given by French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss to folk recyclers, people of creativity, vision, and skill who use castaways for purposes other than those originally intended" (89). For Lévi-Strauss, and thus for Ray, a bricoleur is someone who reuses an object and gives it new, relevant meaning. The bricoleur must first locate an "existent set made up of tools and materials" and then curate; specifically, "the elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth…the decision as to what to put on each place also depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made will involve a complete reorganization of the structure" (Lévi-Strauss). Franklin

Ray is always tinkering around the junkyard, and it is this desire to tinker and restore that Ray believes made him care so deeply for animals and nature. Specifically, he was a man who was "intrigued by the secret lives of animals" and who wanted "to repair the things of the world and make them fly and hop and operate again" (139). When Ray found a gopher turtle being mistreated by a fruit seller who had found it on the side of the road, the person she turns to in order to save it is her father, who knows not only how to convince the man to give him the turtle but how to dig a cool hole for the turtle to rest and recover before moving on. This inherent tie to the natural world is almost patriarchal in its origins, harkening back to the landscape owning Ray herself; it is a complication that seems tied to Charlie Ray, Franklin's father, who is portrayed by Ray as a wild man. Her was a man the home could not tie down, who hunted raccoons, challenged people to orange picking, and brought home food for cooking from wild of the swamp.

This understanding and ordering of the natural world follows the male Rays until Janisse Ray reclaims it; her father's ordering does lean domestic at times, though. While grandfather Charlie Ray is a real-life character plucked from a Dickey or Faulkner novel—a wanderer—Franklin Ray is rooted. Ray interweaves his operating on pigs and helping of ewes with their lambing with his continuous renewal of the objects that are strewn around his junkyard. Through remaking, reselling, removing, Franklin Ray in turn gave not only these objects new meaning but meaning to the home itself. His tinkering of the natural world and his curiosity of the way the world worked led to his desire to order and restore not just living objects but inanimate ones, almost creating life by giving them new one. Ray intimates that her father could "spin gold out of straw" (74), insinuating that not only could he reorder to create new meaning but that this is often more valuable.

Whether animal or car part, her father had one lesson to teach: “if you are going to tinker with the earth, at least keep all the pieces” (139). It is this cultivation of meaning and objects—one that challenges structure and creates new value—that Ray explicitly models in her search to understand the land and her body. However, Ray cannot mimic her father and patrilineal figures purely. Franklin Ray’s curation had his limits. Ray claims her father’s “canon” was one that “restricted daughters to the household and made them mistresses of domesticity” (64). Thus, though her father was a bricoleur who gave new meaning to the wild objects in the junkyard in a recovering way, a way that made it home, he perpetuated limiting norms of femininity and domesticity. This domestic space did indeed belong to Ray’s mother: “the house was her [mother’s] domain” (197). However, this domain does not exist purely as a restriction, and Ray places her mother in a position of power in the domestic sphere, and though she never explicitly uses the word, Ray holds her up as a bricoleur who also tinkers and arranges and understands in order to maintain her family’s identity.

Spotlessly clean, but also filled with “knickknacks and other pretty things” (201), Lee Ada Branch Ray’s home becomes a controlled wild space. What her father did on the outside, her mother did on the inside, and Ray directly connects this accumulation. Her mother may have acquiesced to the feminine boundaries of her husband and domesticity, but she did not acquiesce to all feminine boundaries of the home and used object making in that space to rebel against it, even if it was a silent rebellion. Lee Ada Ray asserted her own place by making home through the curation of her husband’s items, a sort of meta-object placemaking and restoration through mimicry. The knickknacks that Franklin Ray restored in the junkyard, Lee Ada Ray used to define her home. She used the role of

domesticity to further transform meaning and create new identity in subtle ways. In fact, Ray states that she used to believe her mother "[refused] to assert herself" but later "appreciate[d] her wisdom, her steadfastness" (197) as itself a power. Once, when her father was ill and had trapped the family in a room, her mother convinced him to allow her to grab one food item to feed the children. Ray remembers her mother reaching into the freezer, without looking, and on the first try, pulling out the frozen peaches. She says that, years later, she would reach in and attempt the same, without any luck. She never knew if pulling out the peaches was skill of touch or memory or "was it utter luck? (94), but there appears an almost inhuman power given to Lee Ada Ray in this moment where she has crafted her home with such precision and care that, even in these wild moments when domesticity is interrupted, she is familiar enough with both the domestic and the wild fracturing of it to navigate and protect what is hers.

Ray clarifies that her mother's work was not "confined to the house" (199), but her work outside with her husband did not include any ordering or creation—this happened inside the house with her knickknacks and her traditional cooking, and yet by explicitly stating that this home "replicated the accumulation of the junkyard" (202), her father's domain, Ray parallels their work, collapsing the curating of wild and home together as processes done with identical actions. Further, while the ordering Franklin Ray did emerge as patriarchal, the ordering Lee Ada did appears as distinctly matriarchal. In line with this binary, just as Charlie Ray receives his own chapter, so does his wife, Ray's grandmother, Clyo. In Clyo Ray's chapter, Ray not only parallels her mother's home in terms of object and food but includes Clyo's moonshining operation she ran out of her house. Clyo was someone who "did the telling, not the following of orders" (147),

and she directed what happened to her home, from who ran her alcohol to who cut her grass. Ray refers to her as an intelligent, quick-witted, and in-control woman, who dictated who came into her home for moonshine and who knew how to hide it from the law. In fact, much of Clyo's chapter is dedicated to ways she kept home that are othered and rebellious—she performed wilderness in the home by challenging traditions of domesticity while still keeping house. This follows her daughter-in-law whose domesticity is one made not just for a family but for her own personal identity. By both ordering found objects among the discarded in the home and in the bringing forward of tradition for her family, these women represent how even the "long-suffering" women with "no thoughts of [their] own ambitions" (193) can find agency and create and control their own ecologies, like their male counterparts. The main distinction is that one is rooted in the land and one in the home, but they both blur without clear marks of demarcation and with a similar goal of placemaking and identity formation, helping collapse even this binary of masculine and feminine.

Neither side here is presented as better than the other, and both are necessary in Ray's exploration. Though the image of the bricoleur emerges in her father and the definition comes originally from Levi-Strauss, the act of ordering, which harkens images of domestic action and cleanliness, is distinctly feminine. In Kathleen M. Brown's text *Foul Bodies* (2009), she analyzes the distinctly feminine labor aligned with keeping bodies and spaces clean. She claims that desires for purity and privacy that increased over the 18th and 19th centuries are, in part, rooted in the "allocation of domestic labor" (3). Cleanliness emerged—and remains—as crucial to bodily care due to the way it allows us to distinguish privilege, ultimately looking down on those who are not "clean" – those in

lower classes for instance. Those expected to uphold this paradigm are women, for whom "domestic life presents only a grim record of endless repetition: the daily preparations of bodies for their interactions with others; the birthing, clothing, feeding, healing, sexual pleasuring, and coercion that occurs in the decentralized venues of particular households" (4). Certainly, Ray's blue-collar family had to deal with being looked down upon by others; as stated earlier, Ray used to feel shame for being from the junkyard. However, as she gets older, she learns to have a sense of pride for the unique tidying and ordering that occurred there, thus challenging the ideas that order must always be aligned with cleanliness and instead can be about redefining and mining meaning. The ordering done by her father and mother is done not to meet expectation or change their identities but to express their own identities and desires. Further, this feminine, domestic origin means there is also a unique onus on women to find power and agency within this routine, which can be seen in how Clyo controls her moonshining operation. In the junkyard, where space becomes place, the action of the bricoleur challenges traditions of tidiness and cleanliness that is used merely to oppress class and/or women.

All comes together in the junkyard, which is both home and wild. The junkyard is made up of weeds and animals; discarded, untamed objects; and the Ray household. The junkyard, though a place with only perceived boundaries, is effectively a home with an ecology that the order within can only be understood by those who dwell within it. The actions done by the bricolage of mother and father on each side of their line come together to create a place where a family can dwell and see themselves reflected. This idea of a space being a place through knowing there is an order to the perceived chaos and developing an understanding of the objects and processes that make it up is exactly

what connects the junkyard and the wilderness. *Ecology* moves in and out between personal reflections and ruminations on the land, from stories of Ray's childhood and lineage to statistics about the land, serving as the two sides of her own family tree. The junkyard, then, becomes a merging of two sides of a family tree: maternal and paternal. This interweaving is made direct at the end of the book when Ray conflates their ecologies: "a junkyard is a wilderness. Both are devotees of decay. The nature of both is random order, the odd occurrence and juxtaposition of miscellany, backed by a semblance of method…a brief logic of ecology can be found" (268-69). Just like the junkyard, and the homes of objects, nature is in many ways an accumulation of *things* as well, rife with trees and animals and plants and insects. While these are not objects in the way objects in a home are, they are not inanimate—they are still a multitude of often seemingly random things that co-exist and that have a sense of place and home until challenged. The junkyard emerges, then, as a symbol for when the discarded and misunderstood are embraced and used for placemaking.

While neither this masculine-originated nor feminine-originated side is privileged, there is a powerful emphasis on the feminine. Ray honors both her parents, and she admires both types of bricolage while not stating either is explicitly feminine, but the implicitly feminine work holds its own inherent argument. By critiquing her father's perception of domesticity—lauding his accumulation and curation—and then paralleling her mother's routines with his, Ray is arguing that the work done inside the home is just as valuable as the work done outside it, but it does not stop there. She is also asserting that the work done to curate the land and the work done to curate the home is near-identical in practice. When it comes to understanding the natural and repairing the

natural—whether that is nature itself or one's own history and identity—it is a task uniquely feminine, and Ray will go on to put the onus directly on women. When Ray opens the book by saying she will "find herself," she specifically states she will go where her "grandmother's name is inscribed on a clay hill beside [her] grandfather" (4), and though she mentions both, it is her grandmother's name she goes to; her grandfather's merely helps mark the location. And men typically do—they are the markers by which women are found, but women are the markers by which they find themselves and through which they create a future for themselves. Ray parallels this in the conclusion of the book in which she claims she will speak to her "granddaughter's granddaughter," and after being able to witness her searching for peace among the pine warblers as she once did, "will lay to rest this implacable longing" (273). It is not up to her son, who was already born at the time, but up to women—her imaginary daughters and granddaughters—to break boundaries, become bricoleurs, and create a place where the rest of their mothers becomes possible. Ray explores her full history in *Ecology*, but it is her matrilineal ties in which she must return to explicitly and what she relies on to continue the search. Not only is she offering up this task of mining self and place but is offering a methodology for doing it: collapsing domestic and wild and using curation to find meaning that is reflective of one's identity.

Curation and Restoration

The collapse of domestic and wild breaks boundaries and allows for a restructuring, each a mode of curation to pick up and order pieces. However, within this individual reordering and breaking of boundaries emerges fragments that must be restructured, and thus, emerges another curator: the bricoleur of narrative and story,

which is modeled by Ray herself as she enacts this journey of discovery and which most clearly emerges in the form of the work itself. *Ecology* is its own landform, both a place and a text with form. Thus, form itself becomes something that is challenged by Ray not only in terms of resituating herself as a literary artist but in creating space to perform her work of blurring these boundaries and thus crafting place. Ray has mined her past and discovered or remembered stories of the land, myths of nature, tales of her family, and memories she experienced. It then becomes her responsibility to order them in a way that makes sense for the mining and restitching of self she states she desires in the opening pages. Ray collects form and theme and uses it as her stories and perceptions of the land and of home require. Like her father, Ray refers to herself explicitly as a bricoleur in relation to object and nature, and as a writer, her identity echoes this with her taking the pieces of the history haunting her and blurring their boundaries, wielding them as needed. By moving in and out of different myths and memories, Ray is able to emulate the impossibility in fully extricating any one part of herself and her past from another.

This curation on a grand scale occurs in the very organization of the book, but also in specific passages. Ray intertwines myths of lightning, trees, and fire with recollections of childhood and conversations had long ago, thus collapsing the natural world and the personal one but speaking to what the work of a bricoleur looks like. Her language is inherently poetic—rhythmic and lyrical—and she often speaks of her own life as a sort of myth. She recalls the experiencing of an old-growth forest as such:

> I can see my place as human in a natural order more grand, whole, and functional than I've ever witnessed, and I am humbled, not frightened, by it. Comforted. It is as if a round table springs up in the cathedral of pines and God graciously pulls

> out a chair for me, and I no longer have to worry about what happens to souls (*Ecology* 69).

In content we see Ray enact this collapse of personal and natural, taking the pieces surrounding her and curating them. The pieces are her, the pines, God, and souls. In placing herself as a natural living being with order currently experiencing the natural of the pines, she is able to be comforted about existence itself. Even in her tracing of her own creation myths, she can see the universe as an energy with purpose that allows the chaos to have an unperceived but trusted reasoning that provides comfort. The form itself then echoes this. Ray moves from a distant, detail-oriented description of long-leaf pines to this grandiose, ethereal, mythical telling of experiencing the forest—she is situating herself among the natural and reflecting on her place while also challenging perceptions that this smallness and anonymity is something to fear. It is in light of these experiences that she can perform her work; it is in the shadow of the wild that she can be at home. The language in this passage furthers this. Comforted is separated from the rest of the text by periods, a jolting and unexpected rhythm for a word with an opposite meaning, just like the tension between the grand tree and small human. Assonance permeates the passage, especially towards the end. The closing line uses sounds to parallel the letting go of fear of the future, being structured with elongated "oh/ooh" sounds that put the reader at ease. This attempt to find comfort in nature in order to feel less overwhelmed by the vast universe emerges as one of the types of curating enacted by southern women to restructure southern femininity. In being able to visualize the process of picking up pieces, holding them up to the light, and creating reflective meaning with them, we can better understand the methodology Ray is naming and passing on. In preparing for the

women who will come next in her lineage, she models picking up the pieces of fragmentation, curating and order these individual threads, and stitching them together to create this reflective image in which one can see themselves.

What emerges the most clearly in Ray's forms is the way she lets images cascade into one another with what could be seen as no regard for form but is in actually a masterful hand curating it. After *Ecology*, throughout her future memoirs and nature writings, she would only get bolder with form. *Wild Cart Quilt*, her follow-up memoir to *Ecology*, sees staccato paragraphs that riff off the other, separated with small symbols, and photos inserted into the text with captions printed in a written font, not the normal typeface of the book. Her next book *Pinhook* would be a piece of nature writing stemming from firsthand experience yet has a chapter of only a sentence or one of just the words "the end," chapters of only poem, and italicized sections of reflective ruminations inserted throughout regular text. Ray's breaking of traditional form and narrative and her intermixing of different forms allows her to use the forms to echo the action in the book, or even resist it, which is something we will see the novelists and poets within this project utilize as well. Ray and these later women use form to push back against what is considered "natural" in writing genres and literary movements (often defined by white, cis-het men). In this way, there is a meta-rebellion in which the authors not only create women who blur boundaries between home and wild in their spaces of dwelling but the women writing do so as well—situating themselves within the home of writing and performing acts of wild in its pages. They are reclaiming the boundaries of the page and learning to make place within form. While the curation of domestic and wild can be done by the woman or be done to the women, the curation of form is one in which the woman

is fully agent and in which she explicitly ties the pieces of broken boundaries from collapse together. In other words, this type of curation is able to show the past like a quilt, where each thread is necessary in looping around another to result in a singular pattern that often only becomes visible at the very end. Not only is this a final thread of curation, but it exists as the final step for the southern women in this project. Post the three threads of collapse in domestic, wild, and narrative, there is a restitching that must occur, a restoration in which the southern woman can step back and look at the work she has done for herself and her fellow woman.

Though this stitching is more implicit in *Ecology*, it becomes explicit in her later works, and she begins to unveil even further what necessitates it. Collapse results in a fragmentation, but these fragments can, as T.S. Eliot emphasizes in his close to *The Waste Land*, be "shored against [our] ruins." Ray—and the women in this project—not only support themselves with the tendrils they tease apart, however, but weave them together to craft a new image of southern femininity. For Ray, this stitching and restoration not only bring together collapses but still host collapse of domestic and wild within them. This act is implicit in the curation of narrative Ray performs in *Ecology* but is most explicit in *Wild Card Quilt,* where Ray traces the way different aspects of the various places she has lived formed her identity, seeking ultimately to live a "less fragmented" (3) life. She recognizes that she is lacking a sense of "wholeness" and asserts that it is only through not just returning to her land but laying out and working through the meaning of each story surrounding her individual and collective histories that she can move towards this sense of being whole—this is exactly the work the women of this project will enact. Ray asserts that some human intervention affected her ability to be

whole, and she must now undergo the work of mining, collecting, and ordering to find her identity—an identity that most accurately reflects her entire being. Thus, ordering of object becomes necessary when there is no longer an identity that fits one's original, and herein emerges the image of the quilt. Keenly domestic, Ray parallels quilts with wild in the very title of the memoir in an assertion that curation must include both domestic and wild to be successful.

While *Ecology* traced Ray's history in the south, *Wild Card Quilt* follows Ray's return to the south after living in Montana. It picks up the legacy from *Ecology* and puts it in Ray's hands, the entire exploration of what it means to embrace her legacy and move with it into the future following an extended metaphor of the quilt she is making alongside her mother—another matrilineal bond. Even before the book itself starts, on the inner cover and first page, lies a hand drawn map that emulates the collapse set up so far in this chapter. Maps themselves are an inherent collapse, used to navigate wild spaces only once they have been at least partially tamed and domesticated. A map in a book would typically gather together common locations in a text with the purpose of guiding the reader to visualize how certain named places are tied together. However, this map presents a series of unmarked buildings, houses, and barns with only the top left corner (hidden under the book cover's flap) being marked, and amongst these few markings are the homeplace and two locations of longleaf pines. Though this map feels almost fully personal, not necessarily usable to an outsider, she includes details she would not need to know—like the farm being established in the 1800s—or fully unexpected information—like every water-based connection from Little Ten Mile Creek to the Atlantic. In this space, the mix of domestic and wild from *Ecology* is implicit and explicit, and Ray's own

curation utilizes expectations of genre and maps to instill in the reader a subtle reminder that she is emerging having already done the work of collapse and curation conducted in *Ecology*. This memoir continues, then, where her first ended by creating this new metaphor of the quilt that permeates the text's pages.

The form itself almost parallels the meditative, process-oriented structure of quilting: "The road from the highway is dirt, shaded by threes until it makes a ninety-degree turn around the corner of a field. Along the fencerow, Chickasaw plums and wild cherries grow among a hodgepodge of oak and sweet gum" (27). This parallels Emily Bowles' argument that Ray "foregrounds storied aspects of characters and objects, thereby creating a carefully elaborated pattern of symbols through which she constructs the 'beautiful net' of family, community, and self" (3). The images included in this text, and Ray's further exploration of domestic and wild, all come together in a physical and metaphorical quilt: "It represented all I could offer — mostly a dream, a dream of a life pieced from scraps, imitating a fragmented world, stitched back together with ghosts and sapling trees" (298). For Ray to move forward after *Ecology*, she needed not only to orient herself to her past but to her present, and now that she has done this present stitching, she has a sense of place. Though Ray is exploring her own history, she continually emphasizes that this work can and must be emulated at large, and she emphasizes that this cannot be an individual process—not in storytelling, not in situating, not in stitching. She asserts that everyone must "furnish for yourself and your community what you can" before slipping into a dream where she "[dug] a splinter out of [her] foot" that became a metal placard (109-110). Underneath is a photo of a Georgia store that says, "Fancy Honey," and Ray remarks in the written caption that tupelo honey is a

regional product. These tendrils feel fragmented; there are images of domesticity, parts of the natural world stuck in the body, locally made product sourced from communion with wild, and personal handwritten text. By curating them together, Ray posits them as individual threads of a quilt that comes together to craft an image of her history, body, and identity. This is an image that altogether does not erase any one element but pulls all elements together to reflect and then move into the future.

Ray brings this stitching together—a form of restoration—as she works on the natural world, not just as a memoirist but a nature writer. Seeing how fragmentation and restoration echo into the tangible wild is crucial to understanding the work of authors in this project as well as to understand the very real consequences of attempts at restoration—or the lack thereof. Ray never does let fragmentation and lack of identity stray too far from her parallels to the wild world, and she extends the fragmentation she mentions first in relation to her personal history in *Wild Card* to southern swamps in her third text *Pinhook,* where she takes the fragmentation she explicitly discussed in *Wild Card* and defines it here as such: "fragmentation is the separation of habitat in a landscape…chopping a wild place into pieces" (7). Fragmentation, thus, comes not just from having multiple parts of identity and history to mine but in the forced removal of something from where it is natural—for this project, the forced removal is women from their own bodies, their own sense of self. Though this text is mostly about the endangered Pinhook Swamp, it is no accident that she continues the verbiage of fragmentation from *Wild Card* to *Pinhook*, and, just like the collapse in *Ecology*, we can begin to see Ray as an image of what happens when a person or place is separated from their history and sense of identity—their natural habitat, so to speak. As Ray continues to understand what

creates this fragmenting, she asserts that when those in power (humans) create their own places that shift or erase identity of those who do not have agency (i.e., logging), it results in fragmentation. Ray traces the only possible solution to this fragmentation, which is to preserve what can be and to restore what is lost—excavating histories that have been obfuscated in some way and restitching them anew. Though Ray is explicitly referring to how human intervention has irrevocably altered the wetlands of the south, she is creating a framework through which to set the stakes for the irrevocably altered southern femininity that the women of this project aim to restore—through collapse and restitching.

In *Pinhook*, as Ray explores how to save this land, she continues to collapse herself within the swamp through italicized ruminations that break through the regular text, and thus her analysis of what is happening to the land also reflects on her own mining of identity, extending her work in *Ecology*. In this, the very idea of reclaiming the past and remaking identity potentially becomes troublesome. When humans change something on the land, it results in fragmentation, or, in short, when those in power create their own places that shift or erase identity in its margins, it results in fragmentation. For example, when we tear down trees or drive animals out of a territory, animals that are like the "objects" defining a landscape, we are erasing that piece of nature's sense of place. As Ray states in *Pinhook*, "as humans arrived they dictated their patterns onto a landscape that had been designed by natural forces" (2). This is how women and the land are conflated. Women, especially southern women, have been paralleled, by men, to be a wild thing in need of taming and control, and thus, like the land, women have become fragmented—a percentage of what they once were—and in need of restoration. However,

restoration is, beyond no assurance of it even being possible, sticky. In tearing down trees to build houses, for example, there is a successful placemaking but a destruction of the swamps and a potential severing of our identity to nature in the process. Since Ray says our identity is in part inherently tied to land, that poses the possibility that the ways we make home actually obfuscate the ability to fully understand what it means to be home. Further, if we restore something to what it was, there is a potential fear that we may erase the important history that happened in the gap. The marks we leave upon the land might change it and do unfair damage, but that then becomes part of its history, so in restoring the land to what it was, there a risk of losing its history. These fears permeate *Pinhook*, but eventually, Ray comes to the conclusion that there is no way to "restore" the swamp; instead, restoration is about bringing back into the space what can best remedy the damage done and allow it to thrive and have its own future. However, that future's promise can be broken. At the end of *Pinhook*, Ray emphasizes this idea of forever for the wilderness, saying that "without end, beyond any death, the landscape will remain" (135). She worries, though, that "when we proclaim that a wild land has been saved" (137) we do not truly mean forever. Restitching and restoration must leave a torch—as Ray has done in her own work—to be continued by community. For this project, that community is women, who work on the land and in the home, not only to save themselves and their fellow women, but to create a "perpetuity" that is not fearful but instead does emerge as a promise.

In Ray's nonfiction, then, it appears that restoration and quilting emerge not as a bringing *back* but a bringing *forward*. It is not about reversal but about finding things that are lost, and putting what can be back into the space as well as best preparing the space to

move forward in time—literally how scrap fabric is brought together with thread to form a quilt. It is, once again, about gathering objects and ideas and items, identifying their meaning, and curating them in a way that aids in the reassertion of identity. It is not a restoring to what was, it is a restoring what *isn't* and cultivating a truer identity. For women taking on the mantle to create their identities, there must be a balance between picking up the shards and threads surrounding us and mitigating the damage done as we break through existing boundaries to seek wholeness. The onus is on women to be mindful bricoleurs, to recover these identities and create meaning. If home can be a wild place, our sense of wild can be torn down and ruined; if ecologies of a landscape can be altered to the point of lack of recognition, so can the home one dwells within no longer support oneself. When homemaking happens on the margins, it is because the ecologies of home have suffered, as Ray says in reference to the pines—an "apocalyptic" loss—and re-creations become necessary. When a box is built around one's body, not allowing it to move, the box must be broken—this is why collapse emerges in this project as a necessary force. Land must face additional human intervention in its restoration even though human intervention is what harmed it, and thus intervention from southern writers must take place for the harmful narratives of southern literature to be restructured. Ray refers to Pinhook Swamp as "a place that holds the world together" (x); as these southern women confront their histories and mine their agency, they craft this new sense of place that holds their worlds together. Women are not moving back in time to take themselves where they already were—they are weaving back through the fabric of time to see where they were left out and both taking and creating fabric anew to restitch these objects and stories—these "wild cards"—into a reflection of their actual identities. In doing so, the

very definitions about what makes someplace home and what makes something natural will be re-defined, and they will exist alongside their originals—not in their stead.

Finally, though Ray does set the stage for both collapse and restitching in her nonfiction, her poetry begins to emulate it in ways that will echo throughout the women writers who inherit her. On her own website, Ray emphasizes her belief in using the "power of stories to change the world" ("About"), and in her poetry, specifically, she interweaves form and storytelling to show her own stitching of domestic and wild and to attempt to seek restoration. In her poem "Across the Wilderness," the speaker recalls a night camping in the wild amongst the deer and pine. In the second line of the poem, she notes that they camp "in an apron of meadow." While the meadow is wild and emphasized as such by Ray as being full of "wildflowers whose bones / we wish we knew" (17-18), the apron evokes domestic imagery, particularly the feminine imagery of a woman in the kitchen—the literal location of the hearth and a signal back to her mother. Here the land is domesticated but not through harmful resonances of conquering of the feminine or harming the land—instead, it is done through imagery and through care. Nature becomes a space in which a hearth can be created—the setting up of a campfire—and it also becomes a space that can function as hearth through the temporary placemaking. Here domesticity emerges directly through exploration of similarities between us and the land and through familiarizing ourselves with the world around us. Further it becomes this unexpected space for creating home through taxonomizing—deer, grizzly, mountain lion, meadow, pine, creek. Though these flora and fauna are not lined up back-to-back, the short line length and staccato nature of the lines leads to a sensation of listing. Working to craft this familiarity and utilizing it to create a bearing where we

feel a sense of belonging leads to a symbiotic relationship where wilderness itself is personified, able to "change its mind" and become "familiar with our faces" (32, 35). This familiarity and ability to coexist with the land stems from a collapse of wild and domestic imagery. It is this familiarity that allows her to root her own body in nature, a situating one must do for restitching to occur. In her poem "Wilderness," Ray herself is almost paralleled with the land instead of simply dwelling in it. Again, she is curating through taxonomy, "counting trees" but noting that this "gives them a number / they resist" (10-12). As she does this, she keeps light by tending another fire as if it were "a child," insinuating this act of dwelling in the wilderness is almost keenly maternal and thus emphasizing the domestic and feminine nature of coexisting with and understanding the wild. Even though the trees resist being numbered and ordered, the process of doing so still provides Ray with an understanding that almost makes her wild: "only you / and a bird are shocked to discern / the nature of our remove" (13-15). Her use of "nature" further parallels explorations from *Ecology*, where nature is used to refer to the natural world—the wilderness—and also extends it to what is natural, normal, or expected; here it is the idea of what makes one leave.

Ray's reflection on the role of women's bodies in restoring images of the south is emphasized in "Justice," where she directly contrasts two feminine figures. She speaks of a woman "kneeling for the fifth time to pray" (4), using imagery of oil, mosques, and holy books to create an explicitly religious scene. Ray then directly compares this to her own farm, a place where she "rise[s] / from patchwork quilts" (17-18) to use "fallen maple for firewood" (19). Ray's farm becomes a space of this collapse, where the domestic and wild imagery come together into the home. Further, through this

comparison to holiness, Ray is explicitly referring to her everyday acts as religious and asserting that there is something sacred about women enacting this collapse. Further, by repeating the refrain "let her have" and "let me have" throughout the poem, Ray is asserting the importance of providing space for women's bodies and actions to craft collapse in their daily routine. Ray connects this exploration of women's bodies back to collapse and bring it into the future with "Earth, Our Lodging Place," where she, using images, conflates the breakdown of the natural world to a particularly domestic act—painting walls. Domestic acts are often interwoven with nurturing acts, and the earlier maternal imagery is moved forward but also challenged in a sobering moment: this is a child who Ray will unfortunately miscarry. The death of this child makes even the domestic ritual become tragedy, in that it both no longer can be used for its original function and yet serves as a constant reminder. This loss of not just life but possibility exists simultaneously in the boundaries of the house and in the natural world, rife these days with overturned oil tankers and unstoppable fires. As she ends the poem, she says that the angry world will come together in a "holy fire" (17) that will "shoot through the poignant house" (18), collapsing domestic and wild in the violence of lost possibility. Where the two sides collapse and intersect, particularly, is Ray's own body—her thoughts, beliefs, and actions of narrative curator. Though this is not explicit, by having the imaginings occur within her own mind and connecting these ruminations to the loss suffered within her own body, it centers Ray's body as mode of collapse—both domestic and wild. When she asks at the end of this poem "is there no other way to redeem ourselves?" (19) she is again offering a torch for future women to carry in their own

bodies as they continue this collapse in a way that saves the wild and the ways we make home.

A final emphasis on moving into the future and restoration emerges in the way Ray herself chooses to end her creative works; the end of both Ray's collections, like the end of this project, culminate in poems that tie together their projects thematically. The final poem in *House of Branches*, a collection that through not only its poems but its very title explores domestic space made from residual wilderness, ends with a poem titled "Courage." In this poem, Ray comes across a recently deceased softshell turtle with a heart that pumps long after it is dead. This wild animal, which she brought into her home and watched as its heart pounded with no signs of life, is the image that grounds her final point of the poem: "let it not be said that in passing through this world / you turned your face and left its wounds unattended" (21-22). Though Ray speaks of the natural world here, this image expands beyond to include the fireside ruminations and sacred farm dwellings from earlier in the collection. Part of what we turn our faces to is the harmful perpetuation of past boundaries, and the courage to collapse those boundaries and to set out a torch for women to carry is the most vital of all. Ray makes this glowing torch—both hers and the world's—clear in *Red Lanterns*, with the final poem exploring the North Carolina native fish the "Sicklefin Redhorse." This poem emphasizes a moving forward, tracing these fish that for centuries have "plunged upward / toward the future" (5-6). Beyond this parallel courage of a heart beating even after its time, Ray uses the poem to explore actions in which we once again do not turn away but bear witness. She asserts that, when the fish pass, she "will not stand in sorrow" (9) but will "climb onto the bridge at Reliance / and watch them as they pass" (11-12). As she observes them moving

to their future, though, there is also a return. Ray sees the past, her dead brother, her grandmother, uncles, aunts all beside her, restored together, "as the world crumbles to pieces" (52). Even as the world collapses around us, there is still the chance for this collapse, this challenging, this restoration. Just as the swamps of pinhook, as the quilt of her own history, as the ecology of her body, Ray can find a sense of home in the wilderness, a space where past and future exist together. She ends her poem with "soon the dancing will begin" (60) – soon enough, the women of the contemporary south will situate their bodies within their histories to locate a sense of self and a rootedness that allows them to move freely and confidently. The red lanterns of her verse—in flora, in fauna, in torch—are a light that shine for the women of this project to pick up as they navigate their way to their freeing, triumphant dance.

Conclusion

In the end, in the works of Janisse Ray, we see emerge a necessity to understand oneself in relation to one's history—a history that cannot ever be extricated from the physical land it was formed on. Further, it is only through understanding where one has come from that they can then move forward into a future that is less fragmented and restored not in a bringing back but a bringing forward—one where the land and its inhabitants are whole and dwelling in a place that reflects them and yet embraces the haunting past versus attempting to flee it. Instead of fully embracing or rejecting these places, women must push the boundaries around them by collapsing home and wild. For this collapsing and blurring to take place, though, there must be one, a unifying thread, and two, something to give these places identity. Placemaking—the ordering/curation of objects, ideas, and actions to carve place—is this unifying piece. When performing

domesticity in the wild, one studies and navigates the land, cataloguing plants and animals and ultimately making the world recognizable and familiar in a way that directly impacts their home. When performing wilderness in the home, one conducts typical housekeeping duties in a way that actually challenges it: by refusing to perpetuate feminine tasks, collecting "strange" items that do not seem to have place, or making order amongst domestic chaos. By performing their antithesis in either space, women are able to make it so that there is no clear way to differentiate between home and wild, effectively collapsing the boundaries around them. Because southern women have been so often defined by their relationship to the home and housekeeping and their juxtaposition to the wilderness, by collapsing the two through their rebellion and curation, they can then redefine the spaces, which in turn redefines the rules that had dictated those spaces originally. Each of these pieces is then stitched together as the women reorder their own narratives and histories in order to create a quilt that they can don to show the truth of their structures, places, and identities.

The purpose of making home on the margins is to rebel against traditional homemaking that limits gender, race, and sexual identity. Thus, breaking the boundaries of home is essential to making and finding place. Similarly, just as homemaking does not only exist within the boundaries of normativity, it also does not only exist within the physical boundaries of a house. If the wilderness is a home, and home is defined by curation, then it means the wilderness, the forest, has its own identity already within its objects, and human beings build on that identity with our own movements. Further, if home is a wilderness, it means place is not a guarantee. For a woman's body to be owned by the land sounds like a negative claim—women are already inextricably tied to the

land, a land that is feminine and taken for granted. However, being owned by the land is not a limiting position when the land is reformed to reject negative feminine stereotypes. By making this statement in the opening of her first book, Ray is acknowledging her roots while also finding agency for herself, for the land, and for women. Just as one can use objects as a bricoleur, so does Ray use objects of memory to craft a historiography where she has agency. She is making an assemblage, and she is using that assemblage to break boundaries, for home, for nature, and for the woman's body. For if these places' restrictions are all in some way tied to the boundaries of femininity, is it not the restructuring of the feminine that can undo them? Ray, and this project, answer yes.

In *Ecology*, Janisse Ray refers to her home in South Georgia to be a "land of few surprises. A land of routine, of cycle, of constancy" (3). However, it is this perpetuated norm, this acceptance of damaging, limiting normalization that lays the foundation Ray must break and re-lay in this memoir, and, as we see, many surprises do litter her history and its land. The land may not be wont to change, but that change is possible, and as Ray says in the opening pages of *Ecology*, it must be found through the untold stories that wrap around her very bones. Sometimes, we must splinter our own bones in excavation, continually unraveling, undoing, in hopes "we find all the replacement parts for this piece of wasted earth" and the bodies that lie among it (*Ecology* 268). This very action is proof that identity constantly shifts and is in need of being deconstructed, reconstructed, and shored up, and that in saving oneself, so can something greater be saved. It is each individual's job to mine their own histories in order to craft a self and to do what we can in situating this larger self to see what else we can recover. In her works, Ray shows that we can take the pieces of nature that others feel is a junkyard and mine its pieces to

[re]member an identity, both for it and for ourselves. We can be bricoleurs of nature, of our own natural, of false ideas of natural, and of our bodies. It is not simply about stitching together other people's narratives, but our own within them. If we are defined both by the way others tear down our objects and by the way we use objects, curation and re-signifying of objects is the primary method to challenge these boundaries. As women, we can use not just homemaking within the domestic space but in the stitching and preservation of nature's objects and identities, and, in reaffirming the identities tangential to us and breaking and restitching boundaries, we can do the same excavation and recreation for our very own bodies.

In the works of Janisse Ray, we see emerge a necessity to understand oneself in relation to one's history—a history that cannot ever be extricated from the physical land it was formed on. Though this necessity affects all living beings, Ray's position is distinctly feminine, as a woman, mother, and daughter growing and working in the south. Further, it is only through understanding where one has come from that they can then move forward into a future that is restored and less fragmented—one where the land and its inhabitants are whole and dwelling in a place that reflects them. Ultimately, there are three tendrils that emerge from Ray that become foundational to this project. Stemming from the father is the bricoleur of nature, the one who looks to the natural world and the landscape and creates place through bringing these pieces home or creating a sense of home from them. Stemming from the mother is the bricoleur of the domestic, the one who looks at the fragmentation in the home and gathers those pieces together in order to create a new meaning of belonging. And, finally, stemming from Ray herself is the bricoleur of story, the one who takes narratives inclusive of their relationship to domestic and wild and

rearranges them. All three are necessary for placemaking and the ultimate stitching of the quilt. Ray is foundational to tracing this collapse and recreation in southern women's writing; she a lens we can gaze through that clarifies a possibility for the exploration of the way Ray's contemporaries fight to make new identities in similar veins. It is the first touchstone to analyzing women bricoleurs of nature, women bricoleurs of domesticity, and women bricoleurs of story throughout the south to come to individual conclusions about their distinct purposes, successes, and failures, and to then come to an understanding of what it means when the domestic and wild collapse on top of one another in the south and what stories are created in their wake. These women will not always get it right and will rarely do this work the same way, but through tracing their patterns and their attempts to assert southern femininity—within the framework of Ray's curation and collapse—we can begin to see how prescriptions of nature and home smother voices and what it looks like when these voices refuse to be silenced and inherit southern mythology to not simply go home and but create it anew.

Chapter 2: Acts of Domesticity in Shifting Southern Wildernesses

"I said, I wanna touch the earth

I wanna break it in my hands

I wanna grow something wild and unruly"

— *The Chicks*

In Janisse Ray's memoir, in addition to her poetry and other autobiographical work, she situates herself within her own southern history through three distinct forms of curation: wildness, domesticity, and storytelling. Each type of curation becomes a way for her, her readers, and the writers who come after her to explore the breakdown between domestic and wild and to practice eventual restitching. Though this happens principally through Ray's own ordering of story and reflections on ordering of object, other women writers invite us to think about the curation of wild and domestic through the re-arrangement of their own bodies in regional spaces. These women do indeed practice some of the object-oriented rituals that are exemplified in Ray, but they also find agency by taking control of the narrative of being seen as objects through this curation of the body itself. In order to do this work, one must understand the identity of—and what is natural about—the female body. Thus, the women in this chapter primarily make home in the natural world—or learn about placemaking from these wild spaces—as this exploration of wilderness is necessary to understanding southern feminine selfhood. Further, while Ray's signature text is a memoir, this chapter explores three novels. By examining novels, I am able to look at how women writers push the boundaries of

arrangement of body through invented female characters that hold within them legacies all southern women must inherit; additionally, as these writers work through longstanding ideas of feminine, natural, and wild, they reference several origins of these ideas, from southern figureheads to existential philosophy to Christian theology. The depth of allusion allowed in the novel as form provides space for these southern women writers to dive deep into these boundaries and their origins—and to then do the work of restitching.

Specifically, in this chapter, I will examine three southern women novelists across three decades who all explore the multifaceted nature of the term wilderness and who all create female protagonists who inherit Ray's models of curation: Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* (2011), Doris Betts' *Sharp Teeth of Love* (1997), and Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018). In these novels, we see women who curate predominantly by living on the land, exploring the land, or studying the land. They get to know nature, the trees and land, and living beings and animals in order to ultimately either dwell on the land itself or to bring this knowledge back to the house or into new foreign spaces to make home and to further their understanding of self. Throughout this exploration of new knowledge, they also begin to learn what is natural and unnatural within their own bodies and how to make place with their inherent, physical femininity; they often must do so directly against men or masculine forces that are looking to tame, control, or harm them. These authors and the women they create redefine what makes somewhere home and what is considered dwellable, which is a crucial part to the puzzle of exploring belonging in southern feminine identity. Particularly, these women create a series of collapses of domestic and wild, starting with reckoning with assumptions of this binary before moving to structuring that belonging through temporary dwelling in the wilderness,

which ultimately results in a full collapse of domestic and wild, permanent dwelling, and an eventual successful situating of self.

The wilderness has long been a contested space, a juxtaposition to civilization where tearing down the wilderness to create cities and homes is made out to be a necessary evil. Though there are various nuances in what leads to the taming of wilderness, the very act of conquering and settling wild spaces has emerged as inherently patriarchal and rooted in a desire for both experiencing and eliminating the feminine. In Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land*, she argues that as far back as initial exploration of the New World, the "initial impulse to experience" was "not merely an object of domination and exploitation, but as a maternal 'garden,' receiving and nurturing human children" (5). This further speaks to the inherent conflict and tension in the way patriarchy defines women's roles. Kolodny asserts that women and land are paralleled, being "Mother," "Virgin," "Temptress," and "Ravished." In seeing the land as feminine, there is the desire to experience some kind of femininity as necessity; however, instead of embracing this, those settling the land embrace the desire to dominate, tame, and make their own. By the time moving goals of westward and ideals of the American Dream materialized in the 18th century, two functions of wilderness and the land emerged: "incorporating mother and sweetheart… compounding the sexuality of 'an uncommon ravishment' with the 'majesty' or a maternally plentiful and 'fecundated earth'" (72). This taking and taming of the land being parallel to the taming of women's bodies becomes perpetuated to the point of accepted norms—it becomes natural. It also results in the tension of men oppressing women through perceptions of the land and then not realizing they have laid a trap for themselves as well. This is much of what has led contemporary

ecofeminists to believe that the mistreatment of the land today is still related to the fact it is viewed as feminine, and vice versa, the broad acceptance of women as a wild force that needs to be tamed.

Stacy Alaimo and Nicole Seymour are two contemporary ecofeminists who both work with what it means for the land to have gendered (and racial) codes and for certain individuals to have their bodies treated as land—as something to be owned and bought and conquered. In Alaimo's work, she reflects on how conversations of environmentalism are rooted in a desire to understand place and space, how human beings relate to those concepts, and vice versa, how they affect humans. Further, Alaimo focuses on the consequences of culture on nature, arguing that nature itself is reversed "in order that it become a mere empty space, an 'uncontested ground', for 'human development'" (*Bodily Natures* 2). She highlights an important element here beyond Kolodny: the identity of the wild—and thus of women—is carved out for a new identity to be filled. In this, however, there is a chance for women to return to the definitions of natural to mine identity. By analyzing the processes people go through to make meaning on the land, Alaimo is more or less establishing an ecofeminist lens for the bricoleur—someone who goes to the origins of a socially constructed place to then reconstruct it in a meaningful and freeing way. A place with identity must be redefined for this restructuring to take place, and mining must then be done of both individual and collective pasts, but in this mining, a complete erasure of place cannot exist, lest an ecologist fall into the same failures as those who do not care about the land. This balance is harder for women, who, as Alaimo says, must already balance power and vulnerability and then must learn to do it in a fair way (*Exposed* 91). Women have been made vulnerable and that vulnerability has, and

continues to, hurt them, and thus to lean into that vulnerability is to risk further othering and control, to "reinforce, even essentialize, gender dualisms" (*Exposed* 103).

Seymour dives into this tension, looking specifically at how those who have had nature weaponized against them have a particular struggle in then relating to the wild. In her book *Bad Environmentalism,* she looks at the relationship between historical representations of the relationship between human beings and nature and the actualization of those representations, and their harms, in literature. Seymour works in this chapter with race and culture more than gender, though her argument surrounding using one's historical relationship to the land against them is key to understanding gender relations in both her book as a whole and in this project. Seymour works directly with the poetry of Sherman Alexie and the novels and short stories of Percival Everett. Traditionally, indigenous peoples were seen by white individuals to have a positive, spiritual relationship with nature, but this limiting scope creates harmful boundaries; specifically, the perpetuated assumption is that the indigenous "have always been uniquely in tune with nature, possessed of special ecological knowledge, and dedicated to sustainability" (152). While it is true that many indigenous peoples had, and have, a close and reverent relationship to nature and the land, the assumption that indigenous peoples can *only* be reverent of the land—and in contingency can only have a certain affect (i.e., stoic, calm)—limits the genuine experiences of indigenous people, who must be allowed to be angry, righteous, and mournful, and who must be allowed to fight with nature, to wrong nature—to be human. In contrast, black individuals are rarely allowed a relationship with nature, "assumed to be alienated from 'the environment'" (155). Once black Americans migrated north following the Civil War, they located themselves within populous cities.

However, just as with the indigenous, these perceptions do not allow for a full range of emotions and experiences for black men and women who care for the land and who attempt to be part of a larger American mythos so connected to physical land. Further, both black indigenous bodies alike were seen as othered and savage—there is a wildness posited there to then be tamed. In this vein, women, having been repeatedly forced into the domestic space and assumed to not know about the wild—and being paralleled with the land and seen as something to conquer—are limited by not just reality but the literature and stories of reality, further emphasizing these falsehoods. Women of intersectional identities, then, have additional labor in processing their relationship to wild, which will continue to be revealed throughout later chapters. Writing that contrasts these depictions is, thus, inherently an ecofeminist rebellion.

This tension has an affective undergirding as well, and Seymour looks at the bodily sensations that occur in attempting to shift ecological traditions and in the aftermath of major ecological moments. Seymour emphasizes the way some creatures can thrive after ecological change; she turns specifically to the wolves in Chernobyl, who have been thriving, probably not due to some strange relation to radioactivity but due to the lack of human involvement. They are thriving but also radioactive. This push and pull of optimism and pessimism results in a strange mix of absurdity and irony, one that must be worked through, as Seymour argues, with more absurdity and irony, specifically in working through not just a relation to nature but a forced representation of nature. Like the wolves, women have had to reckon with involvement from the patriarchy that has limited their ability to thrive and reach their full potential in relation to identity and belonging. However, there is often some toxicity or some harm that comes to them at the

same time—fighting for freedom is not easy and rarely leaves one without scars. The women in this chapter often misunderstand parts of the natural world or fail to take care of themselves and their bodies or have harm come to their bodies that seems to infringe on their freedom and sense of belonging, but it is a natural result of tearing themselves from the jaws of present projections of identity and wilderness—a wilderness that is most obviously tied to the natural world but will continue to shift in definition over the course of this chapter.

This ecocritical affect and its boundaries does not just affect the south but emerges uniquely within it. Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt makes tracing the overlaps of women and wild her goal in her book *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* (2003). While Engelhardt is attempting to seek out, untangle, and examine these roots specifically in Appalachia, many of her assertions are applicable across the subregions of the south as she is specifically interested in the "strong sense of community" (7) that exists within wild spaces of the south—defined as wild both because of the wilderness and because of the ostracization from the rest of the country. Women are even further removed from this as ostracized and limited within their own communities, and due to their parallel with the natural world, have an important positionality. Engelhardt emphasizes that humans—particularly women—are not "separate from and superior to the world around them…rather, humans and nonhumans together are part of the total ecology" (3). While much of this overlaps with ecofeminist writings, Engelhardt asserts that she actually sees herself as differing from ecofeminism because she does not want to downplay the connections to the material world. Her goal is to emphasize this materiality, and she asserts that female southern writers reckon directly

with the material wild as well and that, "by bringing animals, meteorology, and geography into the story as autonomous, fully participating 'self-another' subjects…[blur] the distinctions between people who are insiders and people who are outsiders" (7). Much of the reason why women have this ability to blur boundaries is because they have been given the burden of outsider, and thus even the natural world, which is not supposed to be owned by any, is controlled—there are "structures of power that make the 'space—air, earth and sky' unavailable to certain community members." Women, thus, have to [re]experience and [re]define wilderness in order to access it and become part of a, or create their own, community. This wilderness exists in the natural world and within women's own bodies.

In Ray's writing, the wilderness and ecology she is most directly reckoning with is the wild that surrounds us physically—animals, plants, etc. However, even in her book, she connects this wild with other wilds, specifically things that feel foreign to her or ways she has been made to feel foreign to others—this is foundational to her eventual ability to collapse domestic and wild into its own ecology. If bodies and the wilderness are inherently intertwined, then the feeling one's own body is foreign can amplify their lack of home. In this chapter, then, while foreign and wild are not interchangeable, what is foreign to someone can often act as a form of wilderness in that it is unexplored space one must navigate and reckon with. Women exploring the wilderness in the natural world to in turn explore the wilderness in themselves, then, emerges as key to redefining home and belonging. This adds a unique element into considering what is and is not able to be defined as wild: what is normal or natural for one person can be strange, foreign, and wild for another. In this chapter, while the wilderness itself is always the main wild being

explored (especially physically and spatially), there is typically another foreign space the women must come to terms with in order to reach their collapse of domestic and wild, one that is often tied to civilization. Beyond the wild taking different forms, there are also various perceptions of "wilderness." Wilderness can be wildness as in it can be danger, opportunity, rebellion, loneliness, connectivity. In a pastoral sense, wilderness can be a space of peace and self-discovery. In biblical backgrounds, the natural world represents spirituality—a place where human beings are most likely to be able to convene with the creator—as well as judgment, where one may be doomed to wander by said creator. These same religions, however, are the ones that perpetuate the ideas of women's bodies as objects or spaces of shame—something to be controlled, tamed, and hidden. All these complexities emerge in this chapter. Regardless, the wilds in this chapter are always posited in relation to the natural wilderness, and the navigation of them always following similar actions from the female protagonists. In these novels the authors are able to flip the script on what waits for women in the wilderness and where they can find themselves, what reflects them, and how to find a truer sense of home and belonging.

Navigating the Wild to Understand Home

Russell's *Swamplandia!* shows the successes and failures of moving into the wild and navigating it to understand oneself, one's family, and one's home. In this novel, we follow the Bigtree family, who owns the book's eponymous theme park in the Florida Everglades. The park's main attraction is the family matriarch, who dives into a bay of alligators while onlookers stare in horror and awe. To the family, she is an effervescent light and a pillar—but Russell quickly reminds both us and them how human she is, with the mother dying of ovarian cancer only a few pages into the book. Without her, the park

begins to fail, and soon after, so does the family unit; it is this breakdown that necessitates the eventual wandering in the wild. For Janisse Ray, the wilderness is a space to be understood and respected, and one must both explore their own identity and the wild that surrounds them in order to enter into a symbiotic relationship with the wild. The Bigtree family has a very specific perception of what is wild. They dwell in the center of a literal wilderness, a swamp rife with untamed animals and a treacherous landscape that you have to be familiar with to navigate safely. While they recognize this as the wilderness, it is not necessarily what they see as wild. What occurs on the mainland, everything from public school to other amusement parks, is foreign to them, and they spend much of the novel trying to convince themselves that they know and are part of the wilderness. Upon Hilola Bigtree's death, though, the family has to reckon anew with traditional and non-traditional wilderness alike. The girls of the family, specifically, go out into the wild for a promise of belonging and to locate a new sense of home. Much of what they face will have to be curated amongst the original understanding of and a dwelling in the wild of/around their family's park.

A handful of scholars have written about *Swamplandia!,* looking at the natural world and even a sense of home. Robert Ziegler traces and explores the structure of the journey Ava embarks on throughout the novel, while Marc Jason Harris includes the novel in his discussion of escape narratives and journeys in the swamps and suburbs of Florida, and Christopher Rieger traces Ava's journey to understand how Russell uses Native American iconography in the novel. Though this chapter is similarly interested in Ava and Osceola's journeys, it is less concerned with the role of journey itself and more with the actions that take place before and during the marked start to the journey. I see the

entire novel, even before anyone leaves for mainland or theme parks or Underworld, as a journey in which the young women of the novel learn about feminine identity and place through the collapse of domestic and wild. A few authors – namely Michael K. Walonen and Sarah Graham – concern themselves specifically with the use of theme parks in contemporary fiction, discussing spatiality and girlhood, respectively. The concept of a theme park is not crucial to this chapter's work with the novel; instead, I find interest with what this book's parks teach us about perceived wilderness. Finally, ideas of home are tangentially discussed by authors like Alison Graham-Bertolini who reimagines the Gothic in the novel, which contains an inherent collapse in that it "transposes the action of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic from crumbling mansion to the contemporary locale of the Florida Everglades" (8). Though this is idea of a wild Gothic is at work here, it is foundational to the final text of Chapter 4, *Wet Moon*. This chapter's interest in homemaking is distinct, however; I explore how ideas of curation often associated with routine and making house are both challenged by the loss of matriarch and brought forward into new femininity through a collapse into wild spaces.

Swamplandia! the theme park's whole premise operates as a co-existing with the wild. Though the park does make a show of the wildlife through its many spectacles, respect for the animals is inherent in making the theme park itself work—you cannot dive into alligator infested waters or wrestle with them daily if there is not a sense of respect and understanding. While the entire family must work together to make this happen—the male characters are the ones who create the acts—the women are the ones having to redefine their bodies. Before her death, Hilola takes the same dive every day, moving her body throughout the alligators in the enclosure. In order for this to take place, she must

inherently situate her body amongst these creatures, respecting that, at any time, they could end her life; it becomes an act in which convening with the wild allows her to exert control over her body with such power her feminine roles can actually shift. As Ava says, when her mom jumps, "she cease[s] to be our mother" (4), and becomes a "Swamp Centaur" (5), who upon emerging, becomes their mother again. This situation is a type of curation or ordering, wherein the different ideas of wild in the woman's body and in the wild gators are consistently intermingled. For the brief moments in which she is jumping and underwater, she is collecting and curating the movements of her body among those of the gators, having "to hit the water with perfect precision, making incremental adjustments midair to avoid the gators" (5). This is what people come to see. It seems a bit odd that so many tourists, even long-term supporters, would simply stop coming to the park just because Hilola is dead. Though the main attraction, the park still has a plethora of attractions that tease this tension between human and wilderness, but when Hilola Bigtree can no longer swim with the gators, the park's demise is initiated. Hilola's relationship to femininity and wild was the lynchpin for the park and her family. When this collapse is gone, the foundation of the family's worldview shatters. Without this feminine power, they cannot understand either wilderness or domestic. The wild, a space in which the Bigtrees have been able to become "island species" (35) starts to become inhabitable with each family member slowly leaving in the months following Hilola's death. Nor can the family navigate domesticity, their daily tasks no longer being accomplished: "nobody was really doing laundry anymore" (37). In fact, this detritus of domestic becomes an unnavigable collapse, with the "balls of socks and underwear banked like snow around the corners of our bedrooms" (37-38). Though the domestic

takes a natural image here—snow—without a compass of femininity to navigate the collapse, it becomes a failed dwelling space. The Bigtrees can no longer navigate the place they called home as the entire inherent collapse of domestic and wild rooted in having a gator-themed theme park was predicated on an act and identity that no longer exists.

There are other attractions in the park and other ways the family challenges control over the wild, such as alligator wrestling, which requires a similar level of knowledge and respect. These become the skills our protagonist Ava is able to use to begin practicing the curation of body her mother did before her death. The father, Chief Bigtree, has perfected the act of gator wrestling and teaches Ava how to hold the gator down or press on a certain part of the snout to give a show while remaining safe. He says that it is essentially performance in the end, being able to maintain a sense of control while convincing the audience that the alligator has the upper hand; they must "[peacock] weakness…weakness was the feather with which you tricked your tourists" (18). However, he intimates that the truth of it all is that the gators *do* have the upper hand—there is no full control over the wild: "I can tell you what the Chief told us: that it was never a fair fight… the alligator had all the real advantages" (18). There is an inherent difference between the Chief and his wife, though. His task is rooted in at least temporary control of the wild around him whereas Hilola only seeks to control her own body and navigate the wild with it. Ava, navigating the world as a thirteen-year-old girl, struggles with this tension between curation and control, particularly as someone who wants to have an intimate reciprocal relationship with the wild and the gators. While her father constantly reminds Ava "a Seth can't love you back, "[she] loved them" (16). Though she

cares for the wild, there is a degree of control in the desire for companionship she seeks with the Seths, which is what the Bigtrees call their gators.

While the family respect the wilderness and the ways it often has victory over people, they have also constructed a façade of the wild, and thus Hilola's death makes them have to reckon with these performances made as they attempt to keep a way of life alive that is not sustainable. Up to this point, they have formulated how to use the wild for their advantage and to create an image they believe necessary. For instance, the family all embrace an indigenous external identity, though they do not have "a drop of Seminole or Miccosukee" blood in them, asserting instead they are "[their] own Indians" (6). The family patriarch, grandfather Sawtooth Bigtree, believed this persona fit best with the alligator wrestlers and divers that their theme park/home contained. This pantomime perpetuates the harmful narrative of the ever-wise, connected-to-the-land indigenous person that Nicole Seymour discusses and that has existed throughout southern literature (like Sam Fathers in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*). Wilderness has long been associated with savagery, imagery and actions that are often defined by those in power in order to further shore up beliefs of eurocentrism as proper and good. For these Ohioans to co-opt indigenous identity and have the potential to be acceptably savage is a problematic tension that pervades the book and follows the Bigtrees as they have to reckon with what wilderness and domesticity actually looks like. The Bigtrees genuinely care for the land and the wild, but they only experience selected parts of the wild, and this continuing of limiting or false boundaries of wild end up pushing them away from both wild and home alike. Essentially, they have curated parts of the wild and their life and arranged them in

an inauthentic way, and this failure of bricolage drags them under when the only successful one—the mother—is gone.

Ideas of home itself that once seemed stable even in their strange dwelling place are now out of reach. Ava once thought that "'home' and 'family' meant…our four faces, our walls" (69), but now struggles to feel at place. The objects within the home—within these walls—begin to fail now as well, with the girls attempting to spritz their clothes with an old perfume of their mothers in order to replace the domestic action of washing and to attempt to bring Hilola with them into the future. As Alison Graham-Bertolini argues, in the novel "objects function as representations of Hilola for her daughters, enabling them to cling to the temporary fantasy that she is still alive" (10). As actions that before sustained them begin to fail, the Bigtrees are forced to redefine what wilderness and home actually is. The swamp is part of the natural world, and due to it being the wilderness paralleled with women's bodies in this text, it is what must be navigated by these women and girls to move forward. This experience is what allows them to continue to navigate parallel wilds in the future. Domesticity becomes a way to tame the wild or to live among it but that fails when curated by men. Objects get used, instead as defining pieces, as taken out of their context in ways that makes identity almost empty. The family's belongings are put by the Chief into the Bigtree Family Museum that combines objects from the house and surrounding wild into an "ever-changing carousel" (31). When Hilola was alive, she could give meaning to these spaces, taking the girls into the museum to discuss femininity by leading the girls to the exhibit made of Hilola's dress where she "made [them] each promise to wait until [they] were thirty years old to marry" (56). Inside the house—the traditional feminine space—a this collapse continues and

lingers. Remnants of their wild make their way in, like the kitchen clock that is housed inside a "real alligator's pale stomach" (23).

After Hilola is gone, Ava and Osceola—13 and 16 respectively—have to understand how to curate their own bodies in the wild and how to make place. Osceola does this by believing in ghosts, specifically in the ghost of a dredger, Louis, whose ship seemingly disappeared in the waters surrounding the island. The adjacent waters from which their mother dove over and over are the same ones in which Osceola "dredges" up her escape both from and into the wild. She opens up another layer of wilderness in the book, another foreign space that her family finds strange—the land of the dead. Upon finding an occult book, *The Spiritist's Telegraph*, Osceola believes she can commune with the dead and begins to search for her mother in seances. Though she does not find her, she believes she ends up finding love in Louis and soon runs away from home to move to the Underworld to marry and live with him. In her journey to/with Louis, Osceola sails a boat through the swamps and islands of Florida, ultimately crashing on the island where her and Louis are to be married; her marriage vows are set to end with her death, seemingly the only way the two can be together. Fortunately, Louis leaves Ossie at the altar, and she must fend for herself on the island until her brother finds her in a stroke of luck. The reader does not get to sit in Ossie's head as we do Kiwi and Ava's. She does not narrate her own chapters; however, it is still clear that Osceola had to navigate the wilderness both to get to the island and to survive on it. When Kiwi finally finds her, she is described as having "long vertical scratches skidded from shin to ankle" and her "hair was a muddy yellow from the mangrove tannins and her eyes were hollows" (376). She did not go to the Underworld—she went deeper into the wilderness than she had before,

and though the reader does not see the details of her struggle, it is clear that, like her mother, she had to navigate her body amongst the land and waters to survive.

Ava arrives at a similar place, though her journey is more convoluted and detailed. Ava may have grown up with gators, but she has never actually lived in the wild before or navigated its harsh realities. Her journey, however, starts before her wandering. In fact, the first place that becomes foreign to Ava is her own home: the theme park. In the time after her mother's death, Ava has to begin to understand new "animals" – types of tourists, like complaining old ladies and sleazy drunk men looking for cheap beer. She also has to reckon with parts of the park that appear different, like the museum with its missing pieces and the surrounding swamps with its wrecked boats. The areas closest to Ava have started to become wild, and the boundaries between home and wild that she thought were stable have started to blur. In her first attempt to try to express some control and agency over these shifting boundaries, she raises a red alligator. Ava's special red gator begins a new act that becomes vital to her in the book—collecting. When she finds this one red alligator among the eggs she is incubating, she can scarcely believe it is real, and though all the other babies die, her rare red gator survives. She starts to treat it almost like a talisman, and while Osceola is the one communing with ghosts, Ava is quite superstitious over her gator: "I felt a terrible hope begin to grow inside me, at pace with the alligator. Two more weeks, and then I'll tell, I thought. Three … If you tell him now, she will die" (60). If she can have sole agency over it by having the only knowledge of it, then she can keep it safe. This red gator begins to emerge as a symbol for the rare but invented wilderness the Bigtree family has experienced—and that Ava wants to hold on to—as well as what we can keep versus what we must let go of to move into the future. It

is a creature that she has formed a keenly maternal bond over; she raised it in her home on Swamplandia! and yet it will always be a wild thing, with her having to keep its mouth taped shut. She will eventually have to make the decision to let the alligator go, though, in order to save herself as she comes to final conclusions about what of the wild can and cannot be controlled.

Ava knows enough of the wilderness to take it seriously, but not enough of the world to know the Underworld Osceola has run off to is not a real place. The task to save her sister—to maintain or restore some wholeness—parallels her need for place that continues throughout the book. For Ava, who believes she has been one with the wild her entire life, when the Bird Man claims to be able to take her to the Underworld to save her sister, she believes that is where they are going. However, the Bird Man is able to manipulate Ava based on the gaps in her knowledge, ultimately assaulting her before she runs away from him, with him perpetuating the harmful notions that a young girl's body—like the wild—is something he has the right to. After being raped by the Bird Man, Ava decides she has to run, and so she throws her precious gator at him to distract him while she makes a run for it, "pull[ing] her out and untap[ing] her small jaws and [flinging] her at him in one fluid motion" (332). What saves Ava is her ability to fully recognize wild as wild. She sees the gator for what it is, a wild animal, and takes advantage of this truth to save her from the cruelty of this man—who as she hears her mother's voice say is simply "just a man, honey" (332). It is this recognition of wild as wild alongside her domestic desire to collect and order that compounds and results in Ava's eventual baptism and survival. Ava clearly believes objects—whether wild or domestic—have meaning, particularly in light of her mother's death, saying that "Every

swaying tree branch or dirty dish in our house was like a word in a sentence that I could read about my mother" (71). Ava slowly begins to keep scraps of and full items of clothing from those she is somehow related to over her journey: a piece of her mother's dress, Ossie's ribbon, and Louis' jacket. As Ava has to reckon with what the world around her really means and what is and is not really wilderness, she collects items that represent what she does know and understands and curates them. Ava is familiar with the wild, but she has become too engrained in her perception of it, and now she must relearn her surroundings. She begins to practice it with these objects—curating the domestic and bringing them into the wild.

In her final escape from the Bird Man, she begins drowning as the clothing she has collected—pieces of her personal and collective history—weighs her down, but still she holds onto them, scared to let these pieces of place go. However, she soon realizes that it is what she has curated within her own body, and the arranging of the body itself, that holds the truest key to her identity. She lets the clothes go, and even with a gator's jaw around her leg, she is able to escape upon recalling her mother's ability to maneuver her body around the gators: "Something entered me then and began to swell. My mother, before she died, really was training me to be her understudy… There is a way to still your body and then slingshot forward in a surprise frog-legged stroke" (383). This moment in the water is a major transformation for Ava as she experiences what Hilola experienced each time she dove. Like her mother, she becomes a different form of herself when in the natural world, and only after emerging from the lake do "[her] own thoughts cre[ep] back in around its edges" (384). Like the end of Ray's "Sicklefin Redhorse," past and future bodies join together for a freedom in a shifting world. At this point, near the very end of

the book, Ava has been able to parse what can be considered wilderness in the actual wild, in other humans, and in her own body. It is only then that she can do what her mother once did and curate her positionality as a domestic-wild being amongst the gators—and soon after be discovered and taken to safety.

This collapse of women's bodies and the swamps is not only existent in the Bigtrees, though; importantly, alongside a family who co-opts identity, Russell portrays a black woman paralleled with the swamp. Ava shares the story of Mama Weeds, who, despite all odds, made her home in the swamp and made a living sewing the clothes of others. She is, as others refer to her, "A lady, a laundress—or a ghost, or a female monster" (359). The story of Mama Weeds has been passed down for generations, seemingly ending when she was killed for killing an alligator and "wasting" its parts. She knows nature well enough that she can use the river to get out any stain, but she refuses to use up the gator. The hatred for Mama Weeds seems to be in her perception of the land and how she dwells on it and how it contrasts from how others believe she should dwell on the land, once again harkening back to Nicole Seymour. But even if Mama Weeds relationship with domestic and wild is not what is expected, it does not mean it is not real or powerful. She is able to collapse and balance domestic and wild by building her home with the gators and doing the domestic work of scores of people. Though she kills a wild animal to protect her dog, she does not treat the wild the same way as others and the way they believe is right, and so they retaliate. White southerners retaliating against black individuals for escaping plantations and dwelling in swamps and being "wild" or "savage" is a key part of southern history, and Ava encountering Mama Weeds and her true southern legacy is a final shattering of the image her family created of faux

indigenous natives. Ava encounters what she believes is Mama Weeds' home when she sees all the clothes on the clotheslines, seeing what she believes are clothing items of her own family members. A woman, who may or may not exist but who Ava believes is Mama Weeds exits the home wearing Hilola's dress, enraging but scaring Ava and causing her to run off. At this point, it is not clear what all of what Ava is seeing is reality and what she is imagining, but regardless of whether Mama Weeds was actually there in the moment is irrelevant—just how it is irrelevant if Hilola Bigtree's ghost was actually in the swamps with Ava when she hears her voice. What is relevant is that both women show a merging of the swamp and feminine.

Throughout Ava's journey, she both sees the swamps in Mama Weeds' eyes—"what I saw inside them was all landscape: no pupil or colored hoop of iris but the great swamp" (363), and she believes "Mom was with me when I battled the Seth" in the swamp (392). The nature inside and alongside Mama Weeds and Hilola is distinct; it is in contrast to a dream Ava has of the Chief, where "a great tree had swallowed him (391)—a dream that, upon telling him of it, makes him so "frightened, pained" (391) she cannot finish it. His relationship with the wilderness is one in which he either controls the wilderness or it consumes him. For the women, however, like Mama Weeds and Hilola, they can co-exist with the wilderness, even in death. Regardless of what has been done to them, they found peace with the way they curated their bodies within the wild. This distinction between how women's bodies parallel the land and how a young girl's journey into the wild contrasts with a man's is crucial to a southern story. Returning once more to James Dickey—who so clearly exemplifies this in *Deliverance*—we see how he encapsulates this essential southern experience. Even writer Robert Ziegler directly

connects Dickey to Russell, seeing them both as "telling stories of a descent into an atavistic underworld, they describe a death-rebirth sequence that their heroes undergo and from which they emerge, transformed, from the heart of instinctual violence" (para. 1). Dickey shows four men who leave their repressive homes in a southern city to brave the wilderness and embrace the essence of their masculinity—in this tradition, men are the ones expected to explore and tame the wilderness, and their journeys often end in failure. For Russell, however, women are not the ones who simply represent the home and man the hearth but are the ones who go out challenge the traditionally masculine stereotypes and journeys of the south, not only asserting femininity in a typically masculine journey but, often, wielding more success within and after their experience. This is due to the fact they take the domestic with them and bring the wild back to the domestic, and their success comes due to women's re-identification with the land as object or wild thing to be tamed. While men think of women and the household as being oppressors to the ideas of masculinity they desire, they do not realize that they are their own oppressors, since the women's relegation to the household was created and enforced by them. On the other side of this coin, then, women are both pseudo-oppressor and oppressed, and thus have a unique opportunity to take advantage of their role and begin to use it to craft a new role for women even under the constraints of the patriarchy.

By leaving the home but still taking ideas of home with them, and by being motivated by ideas of homemaking in their journeys into the wild, women are doing what men could not while also redefining their feminine identity and asserting a greater sense of place and belonging. This acknowledgment of women's relationship to wild that Mama Weeds and Hilola have and that Osceola and Ava have to learn is not foreign,

either. The women in *Swamplandia!* create their own community through a placemaking rooted in embracing and taking advantage of their relationship with the wild as well as collapsing that into perceptions of domesticity—curating of objects and of body. Ava and Osceola learned to survive in the wild, and now they can learn to live in their own bodies, and they are able to go into the future. Though the books ends with a disdain for the brown and tan apartment and school, it still emphasizes that the swamps will always live inside of them, and they will always carry them within their bodies. The wild will always have a home within them, and their ability to move forward into this livable future is made possible by their interactions with the wilderness that forces them to have a realistic view of what the wild is. Even though that period in time ends, Ava says "sometimes the memory of that summer feels like a spore in me, a seed falling through me" (395). She struggles to feel in full control over this feeling inside of her, but it is a part of her, something home within her, for better or worse, that will continue to grow even as she makes her way through the new wild spaces of the urban world. This urban space will in many ways serve as a wilderness for these women, but their communion with the natural world and embrace of the seed of it inside them keeps them rooted to a wilderness they understand. It is key that she learned this navigation from the natural world, as even though she will continue to explore spaces wild to her, no foreign space substitutes the natural wild women have for so long been paralleled with. Specifically, though her curation of items she collects, the alligator she raises, and the lessons of the wild passed to her, Ava is able to eventually navigate both domestic and wild spaces, bringing what happened in the swampy isles of Florida into the rest of her life without getting lost. Inherited specifically from her mother, who, like all maternal figures "[burn] inside the

risen suns of their children" (394) her identity may have fractures in it, but she can see all of it, can trace each line, and like her hope for the red gator who could still find its way back to Swamplandia!, she is still able to find ways to be home. Like the Seths "still thrashing around [them] in an endless loop" (398), the girls in the book are able to "occult [their] own deep weirdness" (396) and find a sense of belonging.

A Path to Home Through Wilderness

Russell's female protagonists journey into the wild to garner a better understanding of themselves that they can bring into the future. Osceola and Ava's time in the wild does not necessarily give them space to create home, but it does let them illuminate what can be home and what can be wild. In Doris Betts' *Sharp Teeth of Love*, her female protagonist—Luna—actually makes home in the wild, and, though temporary, this dwelling in the wilderness builds on Osceola and Ava's and becomes a necessary precursor to her ability to embrace herself and create home for her and her found family at the end of the book. This novel follows Luna Stone as she is brought from her job and home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to California by her fiancé, Steven, who has procured a job there. Luna is consistently under pressure from others who believe they know how her life should look better than her, which is partially due to her having just recently emerged from a mental breakdown that landed her in an institution. Already learning how to feel comfortable in her own skin, Luna also has to learn what treatment she is willing to take from others; more specifically, she has to push back against those trying to tame her and decide what is natural in her life. This crucial moment comes when, on their journey westward, they stop to marry in Reno. Last minute, Luna walks out on this life, fleeing into the deserts of Nevada where she ruminates on Waco and

religion, encounters a ghost from the Donner Party, finds a boy on the run from a sex trafficking ring, and falls in love with a newly deafened religious wanderer. Her journey to herself is one with many loops and oddities; however, her ability to create a home with her, Sam, and Paul comes directly from this journey in the harshness of the Nevada desert.

Though Betts oeuvre of novels and short stories explore southern identity across four decades, she is not a commonly explored in academic work. Very few solely discuss *The Sharp Teeth of Love*, with Martha Greene Eads exploration of sensuality, carnality, and religion emerging as a central study of the novel. Indeed, Luna's relationship to religion and to her own body is key to this chapter; however, Eads does not get into detail about the relationship between natural desires and the natural world, and it is this relationship and situating of body that is at the forefront in my project. Much of those who explore Betts explore her novels at large, and many of them position her with additional authors. Some of these authors, like David Marion Holman continue the exploration of religion throughout Betts' fiction, though the majority are interested in how Betts treats the south and the concept of regionalism. Though some of this is more general, like the work of Michael McFee who explores her in tandem with Clyde Edgerton, scholars like Tara Powell and Ashley Sufflé Robinson take particular interest in Betts' treatment of women in relation to regionalism, the former in relation to fellow southern woman writer Gail Godwin and the latter in relation to Betts' continued movement from the American south to the American west. This project is clearly concerned with a southern feminine identity specifically, and Robinson sees Betts's desire to move westward as indicative of a desire to take the limiting roles for women in the

south and invent them anew. Betts "does not believe achieving selfhood means completely abandoning femininity," and thus, for Robinson, Betts creates women-driven journeys in the American west with the goal of seeing how women can inherit a male-driven legacy of creating the self. At the start of her work, she mentions that the wild spaces of the west both have the "mountains of Appalachia" as well as wide-open plains of freedom, but Robinson is much more concerned with how women navigate the west in a rejection of southernness, while this project is interested in how women make home in the wild—regardless of where—because of southern definitions of home.

While the book takes place predominantly in the west, Luna's past is clearly foregrounded in her southern identity—she is a southern woman, written by a southern author. Though the southern wilderness has its own nuances, what is important more so than the location of the wild space is the southern sensibilities that are following these women into the wilderness. Further, the idea of the global south is growing more pervasive as the years go by, and as scholars like Martyn Bone and Leigh Anne Duck emphasize, much of the south's identity is formed in direct relation to a nation that fears seeing itself in it. Further, the south is haunted by global histories at the same time as it haunts outward as well. As Robert Brinkmeyer says in the opening of *The Fourth Ghost*, one way to view the global south is "that rather than being turned incestuously inward, white southern writers…were actually turned fearfully outward" (2). While Brinkmeyer is specifically concerned in the haunting nature of fascism, what his arguments emphasize is how much the south does not exist in a vacuum—it both is affected by the regions and nations around it and effects them in turn. Just as the south haunts the nation, spreading its tendrils across landscapes, so does Luna's haunted southern past follow her into the

western wilderness. More specifically, in his work *Remapping Southern Literature*, Brinkmeyer crafts a framework for these southern writers who turn westward. He asserts not that these writers are abandoning southern culture but that southernness is extending its boundaries and influence, moving further into a national consciousness and intertwining with the invented mythos of the west. Both of these regions are rooted in inventions that must be challenged by daily lived experiences, and it is these experiences that reveal individual meaning. Luna's movement westward, then, does not show a rejection of her southern femininity but a larger reckoning of it through regionally shifting wilderness.

There are many layers of wilderness in this book beyond the landscape itself; in some way, though, all images of wild in the book are tied to the physical body. From the opening pages of the book, Luna's internal wilderness is evident, with her thoughts at time "turn[ing] into so deep a betrayal that Luna got an ugly wrench deep inside her body, as if her chest had received some blow" (12). Having been institutionalized for depression and anorexia, she has been someone who has had to rely on what those around her deem best and has been made to believe that her normal is unnatural, or that her natural is abnormal; she does not have a sense of home inside her own body. She follows Steven with a perpetual need to convince herself she is experiencing what she desires, but right under the surface is "vague anxiety…something undone, something done badly, something missed" (14). This experience has followed Luna since a child; she has never had a sense of rootedness as an 'army brat' who has always moved around. Believing that "children who don't have a home base can't think the same way as people with real roots" (46), she has developed a pervasive placelessness. Before running into the wild,

though, she attempts to make sense of her own placelessness through collecting and curating. Luna is an artist who makes a living, specifically through replication. She pens diagrams of human body parts and other living things like plants, claiming that she has a "role as nature's copyist" (19). Instead of venturing into the wild, Luna experiences a tension between actually experiencing wild through her replication of it, running into similar territory as the Bigtrees. She gets right up to the margins of the wild without actually experiencing it. When she describes her style of making art, she thinks of her use of outlines versus more general shapes—her fiancé does not like her watercolors that he believes do not have enough detail—and she wonders if she has a "willful avoidance of the world" (16).

Due to her lack of roots in any one place and her lack of place in her body, Luna has to decipher what her relationship with the world and with her own body looks like. She continuously has to remind herself, "*I am a body, I don't just have a body. I am a soul, I don't just have a soul*" (17). Like Janisse Ray, Luna's body and the landscape of her past have become so collapsed that she no longer knows how to navigate them or delineate between them, and replicating the world through drawing—her own curation of the natural world—is the only kind of navigation of wild and personal she can commit when still in the confines of her relationship with Steven. Alongside these drawings, she records her experiences in a diary and seeks out connections to others through stories, images, and dates, asserting that she "had a superstitious yearning for any kind of pattern" (15). The world has plenty of patterns, but Luna has yet to find any to root herself within. For her, the discovered world and its cities and parks are "a trip to somebody's mind…something unnatural. Invented" (46). Luna's lack of a sense of home

then is directly tied to her yearning—her hunger—for something wild and true, and the way she is first able to experience this and become closer to understanding her identity and desire is in the first decision she really makes for herself: to run away from Steven in an attempt to finally find the person she needs to most—herself. Spurred on by learning of the final person to die in the Donner Party, who like Luna had "come to this place the long way around" (74), she drives into the Nevada desert. Unlike Ava and Ossie, there is no proof Luna has engrained the natural wilderness in her day-to-day life up to this point, but she does have a more realistic understanding of what it takes to live in/on the natural world. Like Ava and Ossie, though, Luna has to reckon with the way home and wild coexist in her own body and history.

Luna's ability to collapse boundaries is rooted in her desire to find patterns and make sense of the world around her, which ultimately leads her to connect herself both to present-day events from elsewhere in the country and events in the exact same location as her a century prior: Waco and the Donner Party. The events in Waco occurred because a group of people believed in the teachings of a singular man. Koresh's belief in his religion was so staunch and so pervasive that it, coupled with decisions made by the government, resulted in a massacre. When Luna records Waco, she presents it as a list of facts and dates—"Day 39, Day 42, Day 48" (6)— which parallels her own dated diary entries—"*Left Chapel Hill, Friday April 16, 1991. Arrived Reno, Wednesday April 22* (79). Clearly, Luna feels a parallel between her and what is happening in Texas. In a way, the body/structure of the inhabited space reminds Luna of her own inhabited space in which she is not sure who is an invader and who belongs. This idea of the body being foreign and wild—especially a woman's—has roots in religious imagery and beliefs, just

like the Branch Davidians. What emerges as important is not just a sensation of being trapped that Luna identifies with, however, but a sense of community where one can be assured of their collective and individual identity. In James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher's book on Waco, they assert that Koresh and "such groups are threatening because they offer…another way of seeing and being," a way in which we "forge an identity, make our place in the world" (176). Though Luna's journey into the wild could be seen as aimless, it is not. Luna does not *wander* in the wild; she *dwells* in it as she mines her personal wild. She explores herself with intention, an intentionality and decisiveness that is clear when she leaves a note for Steven; there are no minced words or wariness in "*let's don't get married after all…some things* don't *like to happen together*" (74). Luna's intention in the wilderness is to forge an identity that reflects her, and her curation of self amongst various histories is one of the main ways she practices domesticity when in the wild.

This tension between wandering and dwelling and between community and identity is why Luna has such a strong connection to Tamsen Donner. Like Osceola, Luna encounters a ghost, with both the girls' ghosts coming from the land they dwell on. Luna's ghost is the final member of the Donner Party: the group of pioneers migrating to California, made infamous by their tragic end where most of their party perished due to the elements and lack of resources and where members survived as long as possible through eating their dead. Though Ava does not see ghosts, she believes that perhaps what she or Osceola experienced may have been some projection of themselves, and Luna makes this claim about Tamsen, thinking perhaps that some part of her own energy has allowed Tamsen's "ghost" to materialize: "maybe my own mental energy could

transmit one picture five feet tall" (96). Luna begins to find the patterns she often yearns for in Tamsen: her arrival in the Donner Party's last known location is only a day off from Tamsen Donner's proposed death; Tamsen once lived in North Carolina and eventually moved westward. However, what ties them the closest together is their journey. It is a failure of surviving in the wild, traveling over it, and temporarily dwelling on it that causes the death of the Donners, and thus, Tamsen's ghost serves as a foil to Luna—they both are lost women in the desert trying to survive the elements of their individual wildernesses. Both Tamsen and Luna have lost a part of their identity and are not just searching but holding onto what they have left. Tamsen likely could have survived the Donner Party if she had left her husband dying of gangrene, but her decision to stay with him so that he would not die lonely led to her own death. Luna wonders if this "stay[ing] behind for love" is "self-sacrifice? Stupidity?" (74). This sense of loyalty and this holding true to a sense of connection and a domestic bond even in the dangers of the wilderness, especially in the face of prior loss, is something Luna keeps trying to find an answer to. By searching for an answer to Tamsen's relationship to her feminine roles as mother and wife and how they stood unbreakable in the wild, Luna may be able to learn about her own femininity and what roles to embraces versus eschew.

Luna does in fact begin to understand her femininity when in the wild, particularly as lover and mother, though this time with agency. In the desert, Luna meets two people: Sam and Paul. In meeting these two, Luna begins to find a sense of purpose because she begins to find a way to dwell, not just in her body but in the ways her body and identity interacts with other people. While she has been curating elements of the world around her into drawings and elements of herself into journals, she has not yet

curated or situated her body into the everyday. Though she has always felt a desire to flee even at places she is meant to feel at home, when with Sam and Paul in the middle of the wilderness, she begins to learn a desire to stay. They begin sharing food and then stories, sitting around the campfire like a makeshift family; even just shortly after knowing them, "the mere sight of them—the three of us, really; damaged goods—cheered [her] up completely (137). Her dwelling in the wilderness allows her to experience freeness while also creating opportunity for self-reflection: "As I rushed down the trail, I forced myself to slow down, to breathe deep this thin dry air with its strange, spicy smells (85); it is during this slowing down she ruminates on her past as well as her parents'. Beyond this recognition of what the wilderness can allow, the wild spaces do allow her to situate herself within ideas of self-making (Waco) and femininity (Tamsen). This is what ultimately allows her to be comfortable being a mother figure to Sam. Shortly after going to a camp titled "Desolation Wilderness," Sam's sarcastic comment about her acting like his mom fills her with a "surprising warmth" (128), which is in direct contrast to the faceless children she imagined with Steven, ones that are "nothing but dollbabies" (9). It also allows her to open herself up to Paul, a partner with whom she can relate and express herself as a woman with her own wildness. Steven is someone who has formed Luna into his own idea of who she should be, making light of her struggles with the nickname "Mad Lunatic"; he is a man who does not convene with the wild but who takes on "a scornful look at the scenery" (23). Paul is on a similar journey as Luna in that he is searching for himself. He is someone who has lost his traditional ability to communicate and is reckoning with whether or not he will lose his faith, and he allows Luna to embrace her wild. He expresses concern if she is "all right" and not "break[ing] in the

same old places" and takes the time to listen to her and to see the rootedness among the wild, the "deliberation and…earnest determination" that makes her, her (180). These are the people Luna will eventually be willing to leave the desert, to navigate the wilderness of sex trafficking and casinos, and to finally make her own home for.

Luna has to navigate adjacent wildernesses, like the casino, in which she feels "blinded" by the "crowded, carnival" spaces where "here was a booth, brightly lighted, selling souvenirs here two rows of flashing slot machines you had to edge between" (70). However, these spaces only serve to further drive Luna into the natural wilderness—the one with which women have so long been paralleled, and it is the natural wild that teaches Luna how to leave it and make home, not this invented one. One of the important distinctions about the wilderness of the natural world and those of cities and casinos is its historical significance in religion. In fact, in the Nevada desert, Luna learns about how to convene with her own femininity in a way that continues to be both inherently and explicitly religious. Between Luna's Catholicism, Paul's Lutheranism, and the Branch Davidians, the book is rife with religious imagery. A central image for all these images, and for Luna's major connection to wild in her own body, is the Donner Party's cannibalism. Tamsen refused to partake in the eating of human flesh and thus died from some mix of starvation and exposure, which is parallel to Luna's relationship with anorexia nervosa and her hunger for some fulfillment that seems just out of reach at the beginning of the novel. This image of cannibalism and hunger is inherently tied to religious imagery: to take communion and be in communion with God, one must eat the metaphorical body of Christ. Luna even emphasizes her previously idolized Catholic figure Catherine of Siena, who starved herself as she "yearned to live off the Host alone"

(157). Like her forebearers, Betts' text is haunted—not just by her southern predecessors who in their own right explored a region Flannery O'Connor herself said is "hardly Christ-centered" but "most certainly Christ-haunted"—but by theology in a larger sense. Extending this religious imagery, scholar Martha Greene Eads argues that Betts uses religion in the text "to reveal the material world's theological significance" (32). Christian theological imagery and allusions pervade the text, from the biblically named Sam[uel] and Paul to the very act of wandering the wilderness. Samuel and Paul appear as distant relatives to their biblical counterparts—Sam may not be a prophet, but his circumstance and way of being certainly directs Luna onto a new path; Paul's wandering deafness to P/Saul's blindness finds new purpose, not in god, but in his life with Luna and Sam.

Perhaps these parallels without exact matches are because, as Eads says, Betts is revealing theological threads already existent among us, not fully recreating and positing the theological where it is not already. This parallels the way Luna does not create new wild in herself or the world but reveals and embraces the wilderness and domestic already present that she could not embrace or see before. The wilderness itself emerges as a strong parallel, harkening back to a biblical space to wander. Christian theological scholar Wesley Nottingham explores Old Testament wilderness, asserting that "wilderness is to be understood as a place of both divine provision and national formation but also a place of rebellion and judgment" (14). In contrast to the doomed forty years of desert wandering delivered to the Israelites, though, the wilderness does not serve as a punishment for Luna and her peers. Betts pics up this torch in an almost philosophically existential manner that emerges as acutely feminist. The wilderness and wandering within it emerges as a formative space that provides the opportunity for one to re-invent

themselves, where one can create and locate meaning in one's own life. As Luna, specifically, explores the Nevada deserts, she is able to reestablish her feminine identity by crafting a new identity of womanhood. Her formation is one in which she escapes from the judgement; unlike the Branch Davidians whose sense of community is rooted in a forced individual identity, Luna is able to form a self that is rooted in her identity and in which she can find truer community and place, one in which her hunger is satiated.

Luna's access to femininity is granted once she is able to swallow it—in a way almost consuming herself—and challenge the force-feeding that came from Steven and her parents. For Eads, this carnality and hunger is inexplicable from religion, arguing that Betts uses "the triad of sex, money, and food to suggest that physical and spiritual wholeness are all of a piece" (32). Luna's anorexia symbolizes a hunger beyond a physical one, one that is connected to and representative of her desire for belonging and community, which is her central tie to Tamsen Donner. Because Tamsen is both her own figure and an extension of Luna, she must curate or order her body among Tamsen's to eventually move forward—it is, in fact, the final thing she needs to do. Even though Luna is anxiously waiting to follow Erika and Sam to Stockholm, she tells Paul she has "to say good-bye to Tamsen" (303). In her final talk to Tamsen, after all their similarities and differences, Luna's final comparative note is "*We all eat the dead*" (316). Luna learns that control over one's body is not about starving or isolating it but about being true to oneself and to having a full affective experience. This is where fulfillment lies, and like Tamsen, Luna is able to choose family once she is also assured of her feminine identity—one she has curated. Tamsen only leaves when Luna is able to accept her fate—and thus can have more agency over her own. "*Things are different now*" (317), she says, and now she can

curate her own family, one where she will marry Paul and adopt Sam and create a home where the wild is stitched within it through her very dwelling.

Ultimately, Luna is able to navigate domestic and wild. She does not consume the natural world but dwells within it, and in communing with the wild and the ghosts of her and the land, she is able to extricate her own identity and move forward to plant roots with Sam and Paul, consuming and holding within her this new empowered femininity. She does not stay in the wilderness or in Nevada, instead moving north to Wisconsin with Paul and Sam, but this is the first movement that she has agency over, and she was only able to learn it from her experience performing domestic acts in the wild. She cooked and created safe place in the space of the wilderness for herself, Sam, and Paul. Once she began performing these acts of homemaking in the wild, she was able to take her earlier collecting and curating of replications and stories and begin placing her body and narrative into a blurring of home and wild. Materiality and women's relationships to the material, especially in southern literature, have been so long intertwined with domestic spaces that Luna has to move as far away from domesticity as possible. However, what she ends up finding is that dwelling is a quality not binary from wilderness but that can be located within it. By reckoning with her body's relationship to herself, other humans, and the world around her, she is able to find dwelling in wild spaces and confidently move forward to create a home with Paul and Sam that is truer because it reflects her full self, wild included. Like the Bigtrees, Luna's ideas of wild were skewed, and it is only after dwelling in the wilderness that Luna is able to learn how to marry one's domestic and one's wild. Though we do not see Luna actually create her domestic place, Betts leaves her audience with a sense of confidence that Luna can in fact now plant roots

somewhere and have an stronger, mote agential sense of self—ending the book with a genuine laugh. What Luna learns is not about placing boundaries between or around wild but instead redefining what one considers wild. In stripping down to the barest version of herself, Luna finds herself, and in being able to curate what she consumes, she is able to start re-orienting her body and take agency over her bodily experience as she moves towards a wild-infused home. Here, her future does not need to be copied, instead able to be envisioned with ease and clear as a "fixed picture in her mind" (335).

Dwelling Within Wildernesses

Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing* completes this chapter's saga, showing the final collapse of domestic and wild and providing an image of the wild truly becoming a home. While Ava and Osceola learn to navigate wilderness and carry the wild and its traditions with them, and while Luna is able to use the wild to create home in her body and future, none of these young women/girls actually call the wild their home. Owens' protagonist, however, does exactly this. Kya grows up in a small shack in the bogs and marshes of North Carolina. This landscape is inhospitable, and yet the family has made a home here. Kya's relationship with wild, thus, originates from outside her control, being born in the marshes of North Carolina. This wild land is not dwellable in the way farmland is; the range of crops one can grow is limited—it is not "serious land" per se but is rife with "layers of life" (7). However, when Kya's mother leaves, the family members all start to follow suit, and soon enough, Kya is left alone to keep herself safe in this strange habitat; in this moment, her agency with the wild begins. In order to survive, she must become keenly aware of all the dangers and sustainability the land offers—and she does. She learns to navigate this space in a way that the boundaries between the shack

and the wilderness emerge as merely physical. As she grows, her ability to find home and to be herself is continually rooted in the wilderness; home and wild are inextricable for Kya. Throughout her life, Kya has to encounter fairly natural or everyday experiences—from buying groceries to falling in love—but these all are situated within the frame of a young woman who dwells in wilderness. Her inherent intertwining with the wild defines and determines her daily actions, and as she learns to curate her body amongst a wilderness that acts like home and a modern world that acts like wild, she ultimately finds peace in the life she has created for herself.

Being published in 2018 as Owens' debut novel—a quick bestseller and ultimately Hollywood film— *Where the Crawdads Sing* has received plenty of popular attention but not nearly the same degree of academic attention. John Gruesser uses the novel to examine facets of mystery writing from Poe to contemporary fiction, while Brittany Hirth uses the novel alongside *American Dirt* to explore trauma in women's writing in her book chapter. The majority of other explorations—most of which are still at the thesis stage—emphasize the ecocritical nature of the book. Namely, Corin Kraft explores the identity of the marsh itself. The book states that people did not just end up in the marsh and stay there or seek out the marsh for its particular qualities. People come to the marsh if "on the run from somebody or at the end of [their] own road" (7). Those who do stay have to learn to have this symbiotic relationship with the land, knowing it fundamentally without ever trying to control it. Further, the narration describes the marsh as a space with shifting identity; it "is not a swamp. [it] is a space of light" that "links the land to the sea, both needing the other" (365). In her article, Kraft refers to this as liminality, the marsh is "an ecosystem located between water and land…literally a liminal

place between the two elements" (133). Kraft emphasizes that, due to this, many binaries are able to exist simultaneously in the marsh, such as "humans and non-humans," "life and death," and "offer[ing] safety and a home to Kya, and at the same time, pos[ing] risks and threats to the established social order of Barkley Cove" (133). It is true that many of these opposing binaries both exist in the marsh and that Kya finds haven in a space so few find safety within. However, liminal often insinuates a shifting nature or a temporary, transitional space. While the wilderness has existed as this space for previous characters like Luna, Ava, and Ossie, for Kya, there is nothing temporary about the Carolina marshes she calls home, instead using it as a space of continuous growth and permanence. Further, the binary I add to this list of co-existence within the wetlands—domestic and wild—does not collapse due to simply marsh itself, but due to Kya's knowledge and agency. Kya "kn[ows] the time of the tides in her heart, could find her way home by the stars, knew every feather of an eagle" (97). It is her drive and intuition—inherently and explicitly tied to the marsh's identity—that creates this collapse, one that is not temporary but instead so permanent it continuously provides the aforementioned safety to her even when the danger from the town tries to come in.

Most of what must be done to stay alive comes from intimate knowledge of the wild. When Kya's mother and siblings leave her behind with her abusive drunkard father, she must take the knowledge given to her by her parents and brother, Jodie, and explore the land. She must work on the land itself in order to sustain the home by going to fish and gather mussels, take them to get sold, and bring them back to cook; "When the tide was low," Kya "pulled on her overalls…squatting in mud, she collected mussels along the sloughs like Ma had taught her, and in four hours of crouching and kneeling had two

croker sacks full" (75). This way of surviving and creating place and identity, while safe and constant for her, results in her being seen by outsiders as not a young girl and eventually young woman but an untouchable, dirty thing—"swamp trash" (18)—or she becomes a thing to be tamed like the wild itself: "some people whispered that she was part wolf or the missing link between ape and man" (340). Kya finds agency in this, however, creating an entire ecosystem of her own rooted in necessity and survival. Further, while she learns to live on the land to survive, similar to Luna and Ava, her need to keep house is also survival. The narrator says that "when cornered, desperate, or isolated, man reverts to those instincts that aim straight at survival" (8), but for Kya to live on the marsh, survival is just as much about house as wilderness. She must start ordering and curating the house doing traditionally domestic tasks such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning. She has to understand to cook just as much as gather food itself, to learn to fix grits so they do not end up "lumped up all together in one big ball that burned on the bottom and stayed raw in the middle" (17). Typically, the wild is a space in which to survive and the domestic is a space in which to live; in this shack, Kya's relationship with the two is collapsed and almost reversed, giving her a unique relationship to place.

However, creating place to live is not the same thing as *having* place, and Kya begins to fail to understand herself and how to navigate her body in the world, much like Ava, Osceola, and Luna. Like Luna, Kya begins to look for patterns and ways of belonging. When her family leaves, she becomes fiercely lonely. At first, she finds connection through telling herself stories of her personal past, like recalling experiences with her mother and Jodie, as well as mirroring herself in rhymes and poems, like the "little piggy" rhyme her mother used to tell her. As she gets older, not only will she

continue to find herself in other's words but will use the curation of words in order to tell her own stories. This ordering that starts with words and images and eventually moves to physical objects parallels the act of keeping house. In order to better understand how to curate her own body amongst the different natural spheres around her, Kya begins to collect objects. The narrator describes, even as a young girl, "a row of bird nests Kya had lined up along the boards" (27). Kya will keep up this form of housekeeping even when traditional domestic acts falter. Even though she is out in the wild exploring "while dishes piled up in the sink" and wondering "why wash overalls that got muddied up again?", she "still collect[s] feathers and shells" (79). Kya creates her own taxonomy and system of understanding the land (and her own ecosystem) by taking elements from the wilderness and using them to decorate and define her domestic space. As she starts to curate these elements, she goes a step further in her attempt to understand them by studying them and painting them in detail—shells, feathers, and plants—all using her mother's discarded watercolors. Though this starts as a hobby and a way to fill the time, her collections of objects and paintings become a "natural history museum of the marsh" (199). Like Luna, she replicates the natural world through drawing, but for Kya, these replications only come after she has born witness to them herself.

Kya's collections emerge from her lack of tangibility in her own life; she does not have objects or heirlooms from her biological family, but she can have that communion with the wild. Her father burns all her mother's belongings—"paintings, dresses, and books" (15)—soon after she leaves, and this initiates Kya holding onto any scraps of identity she can find, even keeping ashes from a burnt letter from her mother her entire life. Her jarring displacement spatially but forced rootedness in place leads to become a

bricoleur, like Ray, of wild and familiar. She starts with the familiar—the wild—and then brings them into the home space. While she begins keeping house in order to please her father, her truer sense of housekeeping is the ordering she does of the wilderness among her own identity. As she does this more and more, she becomes more talented, and her eye becomes keener; the watercolors she makes to label her own findings and surroundings emerge as "wonderful, beautifully detailed" with "notations, technical data, and splendid drawings" (200). Her drawings of the land are so specific and detailed that she begins publishing entire reference books on the shells and living beings that dwell in the marshes; her intuitive relationship with the land eventually becomes what allows her to protect home and wild. Even after her death, her work during her life means "this fragment of the marsh would always be wild" (366). It is this very agency over collapse that will lead to Kya eventually being able to express the same control and to have the same knowledge over her own body.

Kya's exploration of the wilderness is an exploration of her own femininity. After her family leaves, the marsh becomes more than a place to live but begins to replace her actual family. She claims that "the marsh is all the family I got" (74) and "whenever she stumbled, it was the land that caught her…the marsh became her *mother*" (34; emphasis added). If she is a daughter of the marsh, it makes her at least partially marsh, so the more intimate she becomes with the wild she does with herself and her body. Further, this parallels the matrilineal path that originates in Ray's *Ecology* and that is picked up by both Russell and Betts. Ava and Osceola convene with their own forms of girlhood in the aftermath of their mother's loss, and embracing a maternal nature alongside a sexual feminine one is a key part of Luna's story. The land as mother, then, teaches Kya about

her own body, and Kya begins to explicitly parallel her own body and the land when she discusses her feelings. When Tate leaves her, she compares the feelings to "a tide she knew well" (143). Her feelings become a form of nature, and the wild and her emotions become tied together. She begins, then, to not just explore her feelings through the wild but actual sensations. Kya does not know much about sex and pleasure, and when Tate begins to touch her, she realizes there are parts of her body wild and foreign to her that she wants to know more intimately. When she decides to explore these feelings on her own, she takes to the marsh and lays just beyond the edge of the water. As she waits for the ocean to touch her and ruminates on the anticipation of being touched, it parallels the thoughts she had / will have for Tate and Chase and her yearning to be touched by another: "*I am close, very close. It is coming. When will I feel it*?" (151). When the water finally does touch her, the experience is clearly sexual and nearly orgasmic; the water "rushes beneath her, fondles her thighs, between her legs, flows along her back…she is grasped, held. Not alone" (152). The one entity that Kya first allows to know every inch of her is the natural world. This communion with the land juxtaposes traditional scenes from southern literature with male figures. Returning again to Dickey's *Deliverance*, Ed's jump into the river is violent, and the penetrative sexual imagery is more akin to rape than intercourse. Kya's identification with the wild as mother and as freeing in sexual nature both challenges and enforces her identity as a southern woman who has been forced to have limiting relationships with wild.

Kya, as a woman living on the land, must learn who she is, and it is only through navigating the wild and ideas of home that she is able to do so. While Ava and Luna's main concerns are protecting their family, which they are able to do through the

wilderness, Kya's main concern is protecting the wilderness-as-family. Kya is left by nearly everyone in her life, at one point or another, but Chase Andrews is the person she chooses to kill. With Kya as part of the wilderness and part-wild herself, she must naturally have predators, which come in the form of those trying to tame her—namely Chase. While Tate is someone who respects the wild for what it is and loves it for what it is—clear by his doctorate in ecology, history fishing with Jodie, and his relationship with Kya—Chase sees Kya as a beast to tame, or some foreign creature he is fascinated with. He is less interested in understanding her and more interested in how she reflects onto his identity. In their first time together, Kya believes that he sees her as "a piece of beach art, a curiosity to be turned over in his hands, then tossed back on the sand" (159). He is the one who tries to manipulate her and tame her, whose betrayal was directly rooted in her wilderness, and the attempted rape—the ultimate proof that he believes he owns her body—cements Kya's decision to kill him. He is a predator, a flaw in the ecosystem, a threat that must be eliminated. Kya ruminates once that nature and "biology sees right and wrong as the same color in different light" (143). Killing Chase is less about right or wrong and more about how she cannot maintain her sense of home while he is alive. She rids their wild of him, and the marsh protects her and her secrets.

At the end of the book, after Kya's death, Tate finds hidden possessions, letters, and poems written by Kya under the floorboards, one of which reveals that she did in fact kill Chase all those years ago. Though these are in Tate's possession in the present, the novel ends before we see what he does with them, because what he does with them matters less than the legacy already established by Kya and the marsh, for whom the moniker Marsh Girl became a sense of pride instead of shame. A descendant of the wild

itself, the two entered a constitutive relationship: “Most of what she knew, she learned from the wild. Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would” (363). This formative experience cannot be taken away. Throughout her life, many people tried to perpetuate an identity for Kya, but in the end, her curations crafted the lasting identity of her as author of wild and part of the wild itself. Now is the final collapse of domestic and wild as Kya’s wild history sits in the floorboards of the house she made home. Importantly, this house is clearly not Tate’s, and it is not his identity that lingers. In this space “the walls [are] exhaling her breath, the floors [are] whispering her steps” even after she is gone (365). Not only did the marsh protect Kya and vice versa, but the identity of the marsh and the shack become so intertwined that the structure of the house parallels it in identity, “keep[ing] her secrets deep” (368). Owens ends the book on this note, not the note that Tate burns this evidence. It is not Tate who keeps her secrets but the marsh itself, the very marsh that beget the Kya who built home and haven on it.

In the end, the reader is left with a sense of peace that has grown in each ending of the three novels. Ava and Osceola will be okay, though there will always be a sense of longing. Luna’s future seems bright, though we will not be able to see it. However, we see Kya to the very end of her life, following her from 6 to 64, where she passes peacefully from a heart attack—though not that old—without pain and while still dwelling on and collecting on the marsh. Before her death, Kya expresses that she is able to feel connections to the people around her and feel something akin to happiness for the first time. Much of this is simply from the way Owens chooses to tell the story: Kya ends up with Tate; Kya is found not guilty; Kya’s brother comes back and has a family. But what truly matters, what leads to Kya’s peace, is her understanding of her own body and

her identity, which is made possible through her collections and curation of domestic and wild as seen through her drawings, object-curation, and poetry. She is able to learn what is natural and unnatural in her own ecosystem and situate her ecosystem within the other existing systems of her realm of being. Towards the end of the book, Kya reflects that "It was enough to be part of this natural sequence as sure as the tides. She was bonded to her planet and its life in a way few people are. Rooted solid in this earth. Born of this mother" (363). While she is speaking of the wild, the natural world, she is also connected to the natural sequence of her life. By being able to live in a way more truly reflective of her own desire and femininity, she is able to establish connections with those she loves and have agency over her future, continuing to exist in the very nature of the marsh's tides. "Some parts of us all will always be what we were, what we had to be to survive" even for those who made home "in nature—out yonder where the crawdads sing" (237, 238).

Conclusion

In Ray's *Ecology*, the image of the bricoleur is explicit when connected to her father but almost only gestured towards with her mother, and we as the reader have to do some of our own work to decipher what can and cannot be acts of bricolage. The women in these three novels all participate in traditional bricolage through collecting objects and/or curating the essence of objects through drawing, which emerges more in each novel as the chapter progresses. More importantly though, all of the girls and women in this chapter reckon with their body as object and body as wild through the arrangement of their body in regional space and personal history. The physical items that they collect and replicate are ways of tangibly exploring and understanding their personal histories and

ways of dwelling in their own bodies as well as how they are situated within the wild ecosystems they are present in. These three books represent an arc that begins with Ava and Osceola's adolescent journey from their domestic-wild theme park of a home to the wilderness and out to a new home; to Luna's forced journey away from the south into the cities of Nevada where the wilderness becomes her haven and teacher before her new agential move to home; and finally to Kya's created belonging situated in a full collapse of domestic and wild where she is able to dwell within the wild of the world and her own body. All four of these women are directly dealing with the inherited identity of being a woman in the south. Wilderness has many definitions, resonances, and images; however, wilderness is continuously perpetuated as something to be experienced by men, or in the few instances it is ungendered, to be rooted in punishment and exile. Women are both kept from the wild, and in strict definitions of femininity, kept from their own inherent, inner wild. These conflicts of understanding one's own body and the natural world—and knowing what even is natural versus unnatural—leads both Ray and these inherited authors to slowly tease apart and eventually collapse boundaries.

Our women have different levels of success, and they each have distinct overlaps. Osceola and Luna see ghosts and reckon with mental illness. Luna and Kya draw the landscape and seek out patterns in images and words. Kya and Ava have to experience a near or actual taking advantage of their bodies from male predators. All of these elements have one thing in common: something foreign is fracturing their perceived idea of natural, which forces them to reckon with what the wilderness actually is for them—the precursor to dwelling in or learning about dwelling from the land—that then gives them the ability to have a greater sense of feminine identity as women in the south. Osceola

and Ava attempt to navigate the land, but Osceola's communion with the dead takes her too far from reality, extending the already troublesome ideas of wilderness she held, and ending her journey short, with us having really no clear idea how she ended up alive. It is clearer how Ava survives in the wild, and her relationship with the natural world and inheriting of her mother's relationship with wild is what allows her to have a clearer collapse of domestic and wild. She begins to collect objects that are signs of domesticity and that belonged to her family members. By bringing these into the wilderness with her on her journey with the Bird Man to find Osceola, she is inherently bringing the domestic into the wild. Ava knows enough about the natural world to save herself, but she does not know enough of the wilderness within people to be safe from the man who wishes to tame her. However, her bringing of her collection into the wilderness is ultimately what saves her life, and then the wilderness within her soul that she has accepted comes back with her into the domestic space on the mainland.

Luna is also interested in collecting, but her curation comes through replication of present wild and communion with past failures of wild dwelling. As someone who has been forced to not trust her own mind and who has been made to feel as a trespasser on her own wilderness, she must explore and embrace the wilderness in order to move forward. Her collapse of her identity and Tamsen Donner's posits her as a figure who dwells in the wild to find herself or to assert her identity even if it means risking her life. While she does not stay in the wilderness, her ability to be at home in her own wild and her ability to make home is only made possible through her moments of bricolage in the desert. Finally, Kya shows the clearest collapse, and though she is placed in her position due to necessity and not from her own original agency, she is able to eventually become

agent over her identity through taking acts from the three prior girls/women in the chapter; she fully becomes a bricoleur, collapsing both domestic and wild alongside herself and the land. Not only does Kya curate her body and objects but in a way curates the ways of homemaking from the chapter. She takes Ava's penchant for collecting objects, Osceola's desire to be touched and find communion with another body, and Luna's replication of the wild world and reckoning with the "real wild" to find her own sense of place and peace. Ultimately, Kya's ability to continue to be free and be in communion as well as her ability to have a domestic place while dwelling in the wilderness is made possible through her reckoning with what makes a body wild.

Further, there is a distinct feminine energy that comes from all of the characters, particularly in relation to maternity. Ava, Osceola, and Kya's mothers have died, and Luna's relationship with her mother is strained. They each, then, whether they have father figures or not, have to reckon with a sense of being orphaned, and many of them find the land itself or images in the land become their maternal figures. This harkens back to the matrilineal ties Ray emphasizes, and it is no surprise these girls and women who have had their ties to history severed also feel severed from their own biological foremothers. It is up to them, now, to create legacy—just like Ray. While male characters like Kiwi, Paul, and Jodie all have their own struggles with making home and finding place, their attempts to find connection are easier and come to them more naturally, as being in wild spaces in not meant to be a threat to them. Their sisters and lovers, however, do have to fight to embrace their wild and hold onto what their accepted, desired natural is. This dwelling in the wild, regardless of how temporary, is a vital precursor to rooted dwelling and successful homemaking. Due to the south's limited perspective of women's

relationship to wilderness and placemaking, each of these women are in some way placeless and unrooted. The ordering they each do of object, then, within the wilderness, becomes a parallel for the ordering they must do of their own identities and histories.

Overall, all three of these women reckon with the failure to have place or feel to at home through taking upon them a traditionally male journey into the wilderness and instead using it to wield their femininity as power. This ultimately allows them to create a truer sense of home and self where they can dwell confidently with a stronger sense of how to move into the future. Ava, Luna, and Kya each have a relationship with the land, all driven by a level of necessity. As southern women with the legacy of the southern patriarchy haunting them, they each have to decide what it means to make and keep a home and what it means to be wild or exist in wildness. Ava's embodied experience, facing the navigation of man and animal, is rooted in understanding the wild versus the natural and what a sense of home really means. Like her mother, she must order her body within the natural world around her. Luna's desperate journey to find herself can only happen by embracing the wild – both inside herself and of the natural world. She must navigate a landscape both for herself and others, and she must reckon with the city's stark contrast to the natural wilderness she has learned to seek refuge in. Finally, Kya is left alone in the marsh, but this results in the greatest blending of boundaries in the chapter as a whole. She is able to defend her home and her body by using the way of life this land has taught her as well as the physical land's inherent qualities. For each woman, the wild becomes slightly less wild –more natural – as they navigate it and come to an understanding about their individual purpose.

Interestingly, none of the women have biological children, either because we simply do not see it or because they tried and failed. However, there is a sense that part of them still exists in the natural world after they are gone from it and that the natural world exists in them. Still, a biological and human lineage, like the one mentioned in Ray's epilogue, seems missing from these stories. Is it enough to have found oneself in the world and re-posited ideals of southern femininity if there is no one to pass it onto? In some ways, the fact these female authors can continually collapse these spaces and pass them to another, creating new women and showing their continued victors, is lineage enough. While the following chapter will explore women for whom either motherhood or a matrilineal line is key to identity, this chapter emphasizes that even when roles of mother, daughter, sister shift that women can still find home in their femininity. These authors—Russell, Betts, Owens—are not redefining wilderness, per se, but instead are creating a new possibility for dwelling and homemaking that does not exist within the confines of four walls and instead allows their southern women characters to take on similar journeys to those their male counterparts have been able to for decades. For once, the characters leaving the hearth to explore and live in the wild are the women, but this time, they are not leaving the hearth behind. They are taking it with them to craft a symbiotic relationship in the wilderness rooted in ideas of homemaking that parallel the role of the bricoleur, and it is this very role that allows them to not only challenge men's journeys but to then challenge and redefine their possibilities as southern women. This creates a legacy of self-making and self-situating that southern daughters can continue to pick up—a key thread of inner acceptance for the eventual quilt of southern femininity.

Chapter 3: Nature as Mother and Women's Re-Domestication of Home

"Shatter every window till it's all blown away

Every brick, every board, every slamming door blown away

Till there's nothing left standing, nothing left of yesterday"

— *Carrie Underwood*

Chapter 2 took interest in the ways women explore wilderness and use this exploration to learn about making home and finding place. The chapter also challenged the definitions of wilderness and the multitude of ways it can be considered, particularly around a southern woman's body. What is wild is not simply the natural world but a challenging of what is natural in the world one dwells in, particularly the spaces women dwell in, which can be tangible place, history, and their own bodies. In that chapter, I examined the ways women embrace non-traditional parts of their femininity, and this chapter serves as the other side of the same coin, interested in how southern women actually perform domesticity in traditional houses, slowly collapsing that tradition through rebellion. The wilderness in this chapter is both the rebellion, whether forced or agent, that women use to push against traditional domesticity as well as the natural world, specifically the natural world as it destroys these physical structures of house/home. Natural disasters both take the form of women's rebellion and create the possibility for their moving forward. Post-collapse, women are able to embrace more traditional parts of their femininity by redefining them. Just as chapter 2 was not all wilderness, neither is chapter 3 all houses. This chapter moves throughout a collection of domestic spaces that

have in some way been framed and/or defined by wilderness and wild, thus working through the ways in which women refuse a traditional sense of making home. These women do so through breaking unspoken rules within the confines of a house, being unable to belong within domestic structures, and/or reckoning with the collapse of house and wild. The wilderness is prevalent throughout the texts, most often through hurricanes and storms, but also through the history inherent in the south's natural world. This materializes, specifically, through the analysis of a white writer who works through white women's culpability, alongside a black memoirist and black fiction writer processing black families' relationship to home in the south.

Further, this chapter builds off of the complexities of women's bodies and wilderness that began in the previous chapter. Nicole Seymour discusses the unfair relationships between people of color and the natural world that are perpetuated by those in power. Chapter 2 used this to explore how southern women reclaim their femininity in relation to various wildernesses and thus understand how to make home. This discussion of femininity at large is foundational to understanding further nuances of the wild; this chapter dives further into southern women's intersectionality by prioritizing the position of black southern women and their reclaiming of identity in southern homes and the southern wild. Black individuals—particularly black women—have been continuously imagined as an extension of wildness that compounded the already problematic desire to tame women's bodies. Seen as having an innate savagery, not unlike the harmful beliefs about indigenous peoples, white southerners used these beliefs to support their enslavement of black peoples and gross mistreatment of black bodies. While all women work in near identical ways to collapse domestic and wild, the ways black women create

home and embrace fullness emerges as unique alongside the general collapse. For black southern women, specifically, to be able to convene with both home spaces and wilderness in a way that provides them power and placemaking is crucial to understanding the possibility that this project's collapse provides. In this chapter's texts, white women work through the harmful pasts they are culpable in perpetuating, and black women reclaim the wild and the home to push back against white supremacist thought that has so long dehumanized them. When they convene with wild in this chapter, though paralleled with the natural world, it only emphasizes their humanity versus further positing them as inhuman; the role as mother begins to emerge as the chapter progresses as the women embrace not only their humanity but their ability to create and host human within them.

It makes sense that there would be maternal imagery arising here, since so much of this chapter takes place in houses, and in southern houses, there is a contentious role for mothers and daughters. In Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff's *Southern Mothers*, they outline additional roles southern women had within the home that differed from the average American ideal. Though there are nuances, they argue that there is a foundational shift for women in the south. Business-like relationships—stemming from the transactional nature of the south—between mother and child "set in motion an unhealthy cycle of mutual dependency, disrespect, and conflict" (17). This coupled with the fact southern men began to see women's role as wife as one that kept men from exploring the wilderness and their true natures, complicates the women's place in the house. This transactional nature is only further emphasized when looking at the manipulation of black women's bodies, forcing them to house and nurse white-borne children. Patricia Hill

Collins examines the limiting perspectives of black motherhood perpetuated by white masculine lenses. As she asserts, “The controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress. In contrast, motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment” (“Black Women and Motherhood” 152). For black women to embrace matrilineal power and, eventually, the role of mother itself gives them a power tied to the south and the nation as a whole. Upon looking at Riche Richardson’s *Emancipation’s Daughters*, it is clear that black women have borne specific struggles in relation to the figure of mother, not only literally but metaphorically for the nation as a whole. In Richardson’s book, she examines the role of motherhood in African American history. Black women have shaped American selfhood, and America would not have developed without black bodies, particularly black mothers. Black women had their own children ripped away and then were forced to be mothers for white women’s children to the point that, even today, “maternal motifs have so significantly inflected black women’s representations in the public sphere and scripts linking them to notions of national identity” (4). Reckoning with maternal lineage and roles, then, is crucial to parsing a history where one can emerge to create selfhood and place within the present south.

The specific texts analyzed in this framework are Pam Durban’s *So Far Back* (2000), Sarah M. Broom’s *The Yellow House* (2019), and Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones* (2011). I establish an arc that first examines southern domesticity and the way it fails to actually provide a home for women, specifically women of color. The initial

shattering of the placemaking expected to be present in domesticity is stitched throughout Durban's book, in which 65-year-old Louisa Hilliard attempts to clean and restore order to her family home after Hurricane Hugo and the death of her mother. As she interacts with the home and its objects, like her ancestor's diary from the plantation's slavery days, she is continually reminded of the ghosts that haunt this space—the spirits of the same black enslaved Americans who once were forced into a twisted idea of "home" on that very soil. This section illuminates the sordid history of domesticity in the south and sets the stakes, showing initial collapse and providing a space where the women in future works come in to learn about themselves through their own wild homemaking. It is in this section, where Durban, as a white writer, attempts to work through white women's culpability in perpetuating patriarchy for black women while they also push against it for their own benefit. Durban uses two white women—Louisa and Eliza—as figures who attempt to order the racialized south's past and present but too often for solely their own benefit. When the project shifts to black authors, we see women who work to make home within disorder through a full embrace of past and identity. Specifically, the chapter moves to follow storms in Ward and Broom's books, both of which reckon with the inherent struggle for homemaking when Hurricane Katrina tears through the Gulf. Broom's book, a memoir, traces her family's history in and around the titular yellow house and challenges what it means to have place when your home—your past and your stories—has been continually reclaimed by the wild. Broom has to fight to learn to make home after home has been lost. Then, in the same storm, Ward crafts Esch, a young girl coming of age and trying to learn to be a woman, reckoning with domesticity and femininity. As she processes her own new pregnancy and what it means to be mother and

woman alongside her family and the incoming storm, Esch represents how this collapse of domestic and wild, one in which the physical house itself is what is destroyed and has to be recreated in some way, elucidates southern feminine placemaking. Hers is the journey that explicitly pulls out a thread that has run throughout the chapter as a whole: the role of mother. This is a final emphasis on not just the feminine but the human that is emphasized in this collapse.

It is no accident that the specific physical wilderness that emerges in a project about trauma, history, and placemaking—all elements that keep one from making home—is that of storms and of weather. In her 2016 book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe examines what occurs in echoes—the ripples—of a particular moment in time; specifically, she traces how Atlantic chattel slavery's ripples cause, over-and-over, a continual re-situating of self, a constant "in the wake." Her final chapter, "The Weather," refers to it as such: "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack" (104). Throughout the project, Sharpe takes example and imagery from the ships that forcefully brought African men, women, and children to America—ships on which numerous black persons would perish due to their treatment as nothing more than cargo. Here, free air did not touch the black bodies trapped in the ship, and even the water that seemed to offer possibility became death and disaster for those who leapt off slave ships (those who could even "choose" to leap). This compounds into an "atmospheric density" that is both of air and state and would only pervade as "slavery undeniable became the total environment" (104). Essentially, black bodies have a tenuous relationship with weather and climate in a literal sense due to how their bodies were forced into spaces, and this exists in the intangible but paralleled

atmosphere and environment of the places where they were mistreated. Sharpe asserts that memory, experience, material, and people and places all "circulate, like weather" (105), which shores up her initial claim that weather and climate are antiblack. Compounded with black women's bodies being seen as wild and savage and southern women's bodies being land to tame and control, wild weather (hurricanes) is a particularly traditionally limiting sphere for black women. For the black writers and women in this chapter, then, to be able to make home among the disorder caused by hurricanes is a crucial reclaiming of identity in southern literature.

By looking at these three texts specifically, I examine how women make home when they cannot follow traditional paths of domesticity, and how they must perform a type of wilderness in the home or embrace actual wilderness and its effects in/on their homes in order to craft place. Two of these texts are novels, though one mimics non-fiction through its partially epistolary nature. The following chapter will directly tease apart form as collapse, and this chapter serves as a transition: not all formally different but still formally diverse. This allows me to begin conversations about form as resistance that started in Ray and will be key to my final chapter. Further, by adding a memoir, this chapter is able to connect directly and explicitly to Ray's *Ecology*, emphasizing once more how everyday and lived-in this collapse is. The women authors in this chapter create characters where women re-write themselves—or attempt to; even in the most traditional novel, Esch's name, like "etch," insinuates a writing of self, which will emerge as explicitly tied to the restitching foundational to this project. The south is haunted by its history on the land, often domesticating the wilderness through the labor of enslaved men and women and upholding the home through this same manipulation of black body. All

women have had to process the boundaries men have placed around domesticity, and white women, specifically, have been able to weaponize these boundaries and wield them directly against women of color. What is seen as foundational to southern homemaking—its "natural" origins, so to speak—is particularly unnatural to many of those hurt by that homemaking, forcing their bodies into positions with no agency. Thus, a new wild must come in and breakdown these boundaries for a new homemaking to be crafted. The natural world in this chapter, though destructive, becomes the catalyst for this recreation and also becomes a metaphor for the inherent power of femininity. Thus, by analyzing what this homemaking looks like, I further challenge the idea of home and wild as separate and continue to explore how women in the south reject norms and embrace their own wild to become at home not just in space but in their own bodies and ultimately find a satisfactory sense of place and belonging through community and storytelling.

Susan Fraiman is a scholar keenly interested in these failures of traditional home and how people make home outside of the house. In her 2017 book *Extreme Domesticity*, she defines the multitude of ways that individuals create homes on the margins or in times of crisis, looking mainly at queer individuals, people of color, and those without traditional homes. For Fraiman, home is not simply about desire but necessity, a way to assert one's validity, presence, and identity. This necessity can either come from a figurative or actual being pushed out of a place; one way or another, there is a lack of ability to exist within the framework of that place. These places — which Fraiman asserts are "defined less by actions than by objects," versus space, which is "defined by operations and itineraries" (127) — create boundaries that only allow specific individuals to operate within. Essentially, while anyone can perform action and craft plans in almost

any location, the privilege to have objects, to have materiality one has control over and can manipulate to reflect identity and make a space one's own, is indicative of having belonging. She expands upon this by arguing that domestic actions, particularly those of routine and housekeeping, can create ideas of home even outside of a traditional physical house. These ideas of home, the being defined by objects within, parallel the curation and ordering that Ray and her parents perform in *Ecology*. These actions do not only occur within the confines of a house, and they do not only occur *when* 'keeping house'. Instead, they become everyday necessities wherein the individual needing to make home in or after a failed home is in a continual state of reordering or crafting new routine. After experiencing an acute or long-term, continual trauma that keeps one from having place in the traditional home, the individual and/or their immediate community must take these actions and perform them elsewhere, finding a new norm that lets them preserve, dwell, and persevere.

This failure to make home or find place to inhabit is compounded for black Americans who must reckon with the history of slavery and the legacy of plantations. In Katherine McKittrick's *Plantation Futures,* she examines the time-space through which the formerly enslaved bodies still buried in our lands today permanently affect modes of dwelling. Building off of the 1991 unveiling of the present New York African Burial Ground, McKittrick explores "the interlocking workings of modernity and blackness, which culminate in long-standing, uneven racial geographies while also centralizing that the *idea* of the plantation is migratory" (3). This shifting existence and ever-changing survival is tied directly by McKittrick to cities and urban spaces; however, their emergence in the natural world and in rural geographical locales is not only inextricable

from the south—it originated there. It is this plantation past that causes, today, a plantation future that emphasizes uninhabitableness, which "still holds currency in the present and continues to organize contemporary geographic arrangements" (6). For black Americans, then, this action of making home on the margins that Fraiman emphasizes is pervasive. All sense of home and rootedness are in some way already collapsed due to the dehumanization of black humans in physical homes during their lives and in natural ground in death. Black women, then, must reckon with a palimpsest of uninhabitability to find a sense of home, and this is one that must occur through convening with the natural world before actions of housekeeping can take place. As McKittrick states:

> the geographies of the racial other are emptied out of life precisely because the historical constitution of these geographies has cast them as the lands of no one…to live in the unlivable condemns the geographies of marginalized to death over and over again. Life, then, is extracted from particular regions, transforming some places into inhuman rather than human geographies…we can collectively think of several places that are considered lifeless…what is referred to as 'the global South' (7).

For these geographies to maintain humanity and to provide home for not just southern women but black southern women, specifically, there must be a breaking of the cycle. For the south to be considered full of life and to have the capability to house life, there must be new everyday actions and routine that challenge the uninhabitability it has so long perpetuated.

This everyday need to make place and make home on the margins post-trauma portrays a form of crisis ordinary, a term Lauren Berlant coins in her book *Cruel*

Optimism (2011), where the ordinariness of the everyday begins to include the living memory of trauma and experience. Berlant attempts to trace what it means to want or desire an object, feeling, or state of being where either the thing itself or the journey to the thing actually hinders one's movement and freedom. This is pertinent as the everyday experience of home for women in the south, especially women of color, is one of trauma whose memory follows them. This ordinary, everyday trauma demands an everyday response in which there must be a kind of collapse, one wherein this daily crisis of living and the making of place occur together instead of pushing against each other. Berlant claims that "the ordinary becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to 'have a life' that adjustment seems like an accomplishment" (3). Since the ordinary, everyday experience is imbued with trauma, the reckoning with this trauma also becomes everyday. This need to create routine and to be in a constant state of upkeep parallels traditional domestic acts of keeping house—they both require routine to keep place dwellable, and they require a full embrace of all parts of one's history (that often comes with a need to first mine that covered past). This is only further emphasized for women of color whose everyday existence is othered, for whom simply moving through routine is rebellion. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), Saidiya Hartman explores various black women's everyday in the early 20th century to examine the "everyday anarchy of ordinary colored girls, which has not only been overlooked, but is nearly unimaginable" (xiv). This everyday, ordinary experience is one in which empowerment is located and where, even in the face of trauma, black women emerge as creators of self and culture. Though Hartman traces this across a variety of black women, in "Manual for General

Housework," she examines tools and objects and how in this everyday domestic sphere black women are "to be handled with no regard…to be handled as tool or instrument" literally and metaphorically "to manage, conduct, direct, control" (79). For black women specifically, then, to use their everyday embodied rebellion to make home through curation of objects and self is a recreation of possibility.

This inextricability between place/home and trauma is compounded by Rita Felski, who in her book *Doing Time* (2000), echoes Berlant, asserting that "everyday life and its spatial anchoring are closely connected. Both repetition and home speak to an essential feature of everyday life: its familiarity" (89). Essentially, one needs to find some familiarity in the world around them in order to find the possibility for dwelling. Beyond this further assertion that repetition and routine are crucial to forming home, Felski specifically traces what happens when routine and everyday activity are interrupted and how that affects an individual's identity, specifically in relation to the collective history through which their persona evolves. She states that "the temporality of everyday life…combines repetition and linearity, recurrence with forward movement. The everyday cannot be opposed to the realm of history but is rather the very means by which history is actualized and made real" (84 – 85). In all the books that follow, the history of the individuals and communities focused on have in some way been obscured and written over, like a palimpsest. By performing routine and new everyday homemaking, not only are these women then finding a new sense of place but actually retelling their lost history; these two are inextricable. Through performing this homemaking and creating routine within home spaces that have been destroyed by the wilderness is to not only perform but embrace collapse. This intimacy with collapse is vital to the restitching that comes after.

Essentially, home is not just a space in which traditionally domestic work happens; it is any space in which the ordinary, the everyday experience, is made sense of—in fact, this parsing is foundational to creating home after trauma. The perception of home as traditionally domestic is reserved only for those in certain positions of power who use it as a form of oppression that limits the actions of the women within. Thus, to create home in alternate ways is inherently a rebellion—is inherently wild—and is a form of reckoning with past trauma. Housekeeping is a way to keep women within the confines of home, to keep them from wandering. While there is an agency in being the one who gets to order and curate the house, this routine is a façade meant to placate the woman and fool her into being complacent in her position. Further, these women can then use these routines as a tool to further police other women, particularly women of color and, in the south, particularly enslaved women and their descendants. The maintenance of home, then, becomes a kind of homemaking that perpetuates trauma and keeps women locked in the same repeating history. In order to break this cycle, there needs to be a new everyday, a new routine, where housekeeping begins to craft new place that reflects the needs of southern women and allows room for full femininity. For this reordering to make place, there must first be a shattering, which is the function of the wild. Women's forced or chosen rebellion as well as the wilderness itself is the catalyst for this shifting everyday and complex femininity. This allows for a dwelling in one's own body and history, that then opens up the ability to make home in a house and outside of it. In the following works, the women process the trauma of home being used to constrain them by performing a wild domesticity in their everyday lives, starting from situating the

individual within the communal to situating the communal within the individual. This situatedness—an internal rootedness and dwelling—is a method to perform domesticity.

Failure of Traditional Southern Domesticity

Understanding how women attempt to make home is the foundation of this chapter, but specifically exploring the undercurrent of trauma that seeps within the soil southern plantations is necessary to comprehending the collapse of domestic and wild. In Durban's novel, an older white woman named Louisa Hilliard returns to her ancestral home after it has been ravaged by Hurricane Hugo. A woman directly connected to the history of Charleston both through lineage and her everyday work, Louisa has led her life by mimicking domesticity, always ordering objects and making lists—both of places and of her own life. She keeps her "kitchen calendar stacked with lists and appointments" (12) and has a "list of flags she'd kept in the same notebook for thirty years" (15). She looks on her lists with a sense of pride, "something a person shows to children, wealth one hoards to give to them" (15). This connection to listing and to ordering objects is rooted in her lineage; she recalls her mother suddenly wanting "to see the silver stand that help the cut-crystal cruets or another piece of their china or silver" and Louisa "rummaged in drawers and sideboard cabinets until she'd found the item" (6). As she explores the home in the present, with the new goal of restoring it, her perception of home changes, and she must directly reckon with the oppressive domesticity that occurred here. Going through the home's ruined and tossed objects, she finds a diary of her ancestor, Eliza Hilliard, that details not just her life but the life of the enslaved peoples who lived on the plantation over a century before. From this, the reader sees emerge the sense of home—or more accurately the lack thereof—available for enslaved

peoples, particularly enslaved women, in this very house. In this novel, the wilderness challenging domesticity is not just the natural world but a breaking down of the perceived form of dwelling perpetuated in the south and its history. By having a white woman reckon with the failure of home in the past while simultaneously showing the ways black women were refused home, Durban is able to show the haunting pervasive throughout southern homes and the inherent failure of it that exists for not just all women but particularly women of color. This displacement sets the foundation for these, then, to be unique in their ability to create home by taking advantage of the wild—whether this wild truly is wilderness or breaking of boundaries and expectations through bodily rebellion—and reclaiming housekeeping for their own identity and place.

There is a dearth of scholarly work on this novel—and even on Durban a whole. Rachel Wall briefly examines the concept of heritage in the *So Far Back* alongside Andrea Lee's *Sarah Phillips* whereas Jan Nordby Gretlund explores how past and present are interwoven throughout the novel and Durban's short stories. Conceptualizations of the past moving into the future to affect present identity is at the core of *So Far Back* and its discussions of making place and southern femininity—particularly when discussing race. While Marcella C. Clinard has conducted a critical race reading of Durban's *Soon*—a collection of short stories—for the purpose of pedagogy, the exploration of race, femininity, and placemaking in this novel has been underexplored. Heritage, time, and race become key markers to the attempts and failures of placemaking in the novel. Protagonist Louisa is the remaining survivor in her direct maternal line, and though this book shifts back and forth between plots and narrative directions, her role and her desires—and the echoes of them across the family—are the throughline in the book. A

caretaker for monuments and houses, she feels a strong desire to uphold history through the stories she has been told, ones she believes reflect truth. For her, “the important facts were settled,” and “everything that mattered here had been going on since time was” (7). She critiques even her goddaughter’s accent while she acts as tour guide. Louisa does not make even minute changes, known for “her refusal to accept less than sober accuracy with facts” (11). In this vein, when her own historical home is threatened shortly after the death of her mother, she is motivated to ensure the family home, in which her recently deceased mother dwelled, is returned to the order it was before Hurricane Hugo. Louisa’s inclination for order and curation leads the book, and hers is the most traditional domesticity in the text and this chapter. In many ways, she treats homes the same way she treats her family’s history or her own lists, simply as something to uphold in a pristine state or to record as is. Louisa is a woman who wants to keep houses neat and orderly, particularly aware of her own position in relation to the world, to house and wild alike, with the narrator asserting “it was not curiosity that moved her but the feel of her body through space” (54). Putting the house back together, then, just like her ordering of the world, is an ability to understand and situate her own body. However, in doing so, Louisa also forces the stories within her mother’s house to be neat and tidy—which they are not. These histories are wild, push against the boundaries of domesticity, and struggle to release the sordid history of enslavement on the grounds of the home. However, Louisa attempts to keep this history from seeping out, partially because of the image of her family she intends to uphold and also because of the role routine and ordering has served in her own personal life.

Louisa performs acts of domesticity not only in physical houses but in her own personal history. She needs to take the pieces of her life and put them into categories in order to control them. She has a deep fear "to be lost, to look and not to recognize, to lose her bearings" (29). By putting everything in its imagined place, Louisa can pretend that it was how it always was meant to be, and she does not have to fully reckon with not just untidy objects but untidy emotions, like grief or anger. When she first recalls her lost relationship, a "possible future" (15) now gone, she feels a "particular kind of regret" but immediately distracts herself with her carefully penned lists of flags and quoting of Shakespeare; only after this can she "[walk] away from it" (15). The structure of the book begins to emulate this need for order, with certain chapters being titled with the elements in her sewing box (like photos or letters) that detail a part of her life (like love). Even though this gives her a sense of control and placates her troubling emotions in relation to, say, losing a loved one, it also results in an emotional separation that hurts her. While this affects her ability to see truth, this lack of individualization controls her feminine identity; as a southern woman, Louisa, and her maternal ancestors before her, have always bent to the rule of the men in the house. Though they were in charge of the domestic sphere, the house itself was led by fathers, husbands, and brothers. Thus, the women's keeping of home upheld a history that they both benefited from and were controlled by. This pattern most clearly emerges in Eliza's diary—the object Louisa has been attempting for years to locate. Eliza's diaries show how indebted she was to her father's will and then her brother's, in determining who she should marry and how she should treat the enslaved people on the land. Eliza pens that she "must bow to Thomas's judgment" (109) and that if it is [her] brother's will, and thus it is [hers], as well" (131).

She even lets her brother justify her own emotions, calling him "right about the store of [her] worries" (107). Though she is often alone in the house and clearly has power over the space and those who serve her, her femininity is no power against her brother's masculinity.

By maintaining the domestic sphere, women were given a pseudo-control wherein they delegated and worked but did not actually get to make final decisions. However, both Eliza and Louisa are aware of and speak on the limiting natures of womanhood. One Sunday the preacher preaches about Eve, describing her as originally full of "modesty, retirement, meekness, and purity;" however, Eve was not "content" with these qualities, thus dooming the entirety of mankind (140). Eliza ponders this, unsure how to feel about the fact Eve's desire for more led directly to her temptation and failure. However, she continually returns to a traditional idea of womanhood, particularly after losing a male figure or her domestic authority being challenged. After her brother's death and her sending of Diana to the workhouse, Eliza sees herself as a "failure as mistress, as sister, as frail woman" due to the "willful pride" from Eve (182). Femininity continues to restrict the women in this book, and thus the ordering and routine used to uphold feminine values begins to fail, and it must be reclaimed in order for a sense of place to be found. However, this new reordering cannot only be achieved through taking control of one's own narrative but in situating it within larger narratives and not erasing the past. If the false past upholds the false present, then in order to reverse the current limiting present, a truer past must be discovered. Louisa once reflects on the process of getting distracted during knitting and having to start over; she claims even this is "satisfying," that "by knitting, then unraveling a square, she was making visible some hidden truth

about the world, giving it shape and form" (56). Louisa must apply this process to her own present by resituating her feminine identity within what she has learned about her ancestry; like the quilts Ray mentions, crafted from the various wild cards of her family, so must Louisa's sense of place include each thread of her past—even the sordid parts—and her active femininity—even the rebellious parts.

The book continuously emphasizes control as a way to understand self and make sense of the world. However, while this domesticity makes sense of spaces, it is also obscuring certain histories and existences that then refuses the dwelling of some. Eliza failed to reckon with the perceived threats enslaved people made to her traditional idea of domesticity—this is Louisa's role—and as Louisa dives deeper into restoring her family home, so must she also dive deeper into what took place on this land; she must find place for these new pieces of history that do not have easy locations. It is no surprise, then, that the first things to become strange or to fail in this book are objects; as Louisa reads Eliza's diary and traces parallels to her own life, she begins to notice that objects in the Hilliard home are turning up broken. After feeling angry over Diana's lasting desires, Louisa goes down to the kitchen house to find "Iron tongs with the hinges sprung…The arm on the heavy iron stand in the fireplace from which pots had hung is bent…The hinges of the bread oven's door are sprung…only a person for whom those tools had been like the extension of a hand could have done this" (174). The fact these objects are breaking at the same time as 'objects' of the past are being revealed is not accidental—routine, and the control that comes from it, is inherently tied to not just tangible objects but an upholding of the past, the opening passages of the book stating that "control is the key to preservation, always" (4). Preserving and ordering the past is a way to ensure the

past is not only upheld but that the present is determined and secure. In fact, there is almost an alleviation of guilt or responsibility in this—the routines are already determined. Louisa comments on things (people, objects, ideas) actually or figuratively existing since "time was"; when something has been since time was, it only ever existed, which means less control rests on the individual: "lacking cause or beginning, it was also innocent, entirely neutral…it simply was, and always had been" (7). Just as Louisa has used ordering to preserve her own life and sense of self, so have the white families and individuals in the novel used this forced balance to control stories. If there is no beginning, something is timeless, and it is pure and without culpability. Ordering the past upholds a present sense of self, thus protecting the privileged individual from the pain of lost futures—negating the lack of a truly reflective future for both the women who cannot uphold the past and the ones who do.

For Louisa and Eliza, who have struggled to process their own emotions and reactions, ordering becomes a way to move into the future in a way they believe works best for them, and rejection of ordering becomes a way to resist traditional femininity that does not allow one to fully feel her emotions or move through time and place. They believe that putting their emotions into everyday place and routine eschews trauma, but they do not realize this need to craft a new everyday—as Berlant argues—is already stemming from trauma. They are continuously being harmed by the patriarchy, continually experiencing trauma as they cut off and hide parts of themselves in the way they order and situate their homes and lives. Blinded to the fact they are merely puppets of the patriarchy, they are only made aware of their lack of agency when an external force causes their image to falter. When this happens, the only choices are to double down or to

recreate oneself, but there can be no in-between. Eliza, specifically, enforces an everyday that upholds the trauma beget against black women, and Louisa now must decide if her everyday will follow suit. For Eliza, this happens when she cannot control Diana, her "rebellious" enslaved girl; it throws a crack in the image she has so long believed in and upheld. Once this crack emerges, more begin to spider out, and the mirror as a whole threatens to shatter. Diana is a new enslaved girl, who does not appear to act like the others and who is "disruptive of [the] household" (151). She does everything she is asked well and in full, but she has a calm, bright demeanor, always doing her work with a smile. This is disconcerting to Eliza, who sees it as some strange wildness, something out of place and outside the norm. Then, Diana begins to push against her boundaries, lingering too long after being called to Eliza's side, for example. She cannot be found every time she is needed, sneaks away to attend parties, and takes time donning extravagant garments and "preening before a household mirror" (133). Even when not directly disobeying, this confidence in her body, this knowing of herself, is inherently disruptive, and the white women in the homes begin to notice it. Eliza sends Diana to other women's homes to do sewing work for them, but instead she sows seeds of discord, with multiple households stating that the other enslaved people become rebellious after interacting with Diana. Interestingly, while Diana causes this tension and rebellion in the household, she is particularly good at acts of domesticity, though even this challenges Eliza. Eliza believes treating enslaved people—the "wretches in [her] charge"—"well" is key to ensuring the "domestic sphere remain unpolluted" (127). When she, as a white woman, controls the black enslaved woman's actions, the domestic sphere is upheld; however, when the black woman individually expresses excellence at domesticity, it does the

opposite. For Eliza to maintain control of her possessions (as object and as feeling), she must be able to control her possession as human: Diana. When Diana runs away, Eliza's idea of control shatters, and she begins to lose herself and she becomes overwhelmed by the need to reclaim Diana. The main symbol in this book is of the baby gown Eliza begins to sew and never finishes and that Diana takes it upon herself to finish. While Eliza has created the general shape, it is Diana who gives it life through intricate design, and it is Diana's work that the Hilliard family babies wear and that hangs in the museum as an image of white feminine history. In a final attempt to own the runaway slave, Eliza sews her own name into the baby gown Diana finished; she "takes out needle and thread and begins to sew that series of careful stitches that form letter into words and words into claim" (210). With this, she forever changes the known narrative.

This is the inherited history that Louisa enters into, and it becomes her who has to make decisions about whether to uphold this past or try to set it right. To do so, however, she must be willing to queer the way she currently uses homemaking—if the way she has used domesticity has been to uphold the way things and ideas have been since "time was," then she must directly push against this to craft a new narrative; this is why it is no surprise that the objects are the first to show something in the home is amiss, which Louisa eventually attributes to a ghost. Louisa's greatest fear is "to be lost, to look and not to recognize, to lose her bearings" (29). The ability to perform domesticity in a way that embraces full femininity and the full past is paved by its counterpart: the wilderness. Though the vast majority of this novel takes place inside—in buildings and in objects—wilderness is the catalyst for the story. What initially ruins the Hilliard house and paves the way for the challenging the past is a hurricane. Hurricane Hugo moves through

Charleston, damaging and destroying large parts of the property and the objects inside it. However, while objects like the elements of Louisa's sewing box are damaged or missing altogether, the storm actually reveals pertinent objects in the novel, namely the diary. In this relationship between domestic object and storm, a collapse is already present, with the narrator saying that "when the ocean comes into your house, your house becomes the shore; your possessions and your treasures are the sand" (86). The natural world—and what is and is not considered wild—has the ability to change the meaning of the objects used to make place, to both destroy and create. The hurricane has modeled how to destroy and laid the groundwork for new creation, and now Louisa is not only reordering objects, but she, too, has had a relationship with the wild in her own past. She is a painter and a birdwatcher, who explores marshes with an intimate knowledge of dwellers on the land. She even has theories about the natural world, saying that "the rhythm of tides got into people's blood and made them look at time differently" (44). This imagery is particularly feminine as it brings about images of the moon, its lunar verbiage posited onto the female body in relation to menstruation. However, Louisa's role with nature is one mostly on the surface level. She is an observer, not one who puts herself hands-first into the ground; she rarely goes past her theories.

However, when this storm makes Louisa face a new wild—a disrupting of history—she starts to see the ways her past—and thus her present—has been a lie. She allows herself to explore more deeply the rage that accompanies the way women are forced to uphold false truths, saying, "my own time spent steeping in the particular womanly darkness that grows and spreads when a woman begins to meditate on life as a broken promise and herself as the one betrayed" (205). As she navigates these emotions,

she is left with the same choice as Eliza, in whether or not to conceal the maker of the dress, and she is constantly feeling this pull between maintaining the current history and revealing the new one. She does indeed try to edit the past, but she is ultimately unable to get history rewritten. She seems to have been dedicated to the task, with the museum refusing to change the name without greater proof, but the reader never actually gets to see how much she did or did not try. What the reader does see is Louisa commit to telling Evelyn, Diana's descendant, passing the story to its rightful owners. Louisa ends the book dying in her own home; whether the spirit of Diana coming to take revenge and/or the ghost of Louisa's mother complimenting her sewing, the past eventually comes to reclaim Louisa. Even though Louisa seems to have the power in this book, as she is the protagonist who finds the diary and practices making home, she is only a part of women collapsing domestic and wild, and she is not the one through who the remedied past continues. In this book, it is the enslaved women and their descendants that in fact show the greatest collapse, namely Diana, Mamie, and Evelyn. Notably, these women, particularly Diana, do not have choice in this matter. She does not get to decide whether she does or does not work on the land. However, these women's position as outsider gives them an inherent power—a rebellion and a reclaimed wilderness—that breaks the southern patriarchy's borders.

There is a distinctly southern struggle here. Louisa directly contrasts the south to Vermont, saying that New England people are so "sure of themselves" with "clear and sure" judgements as definite as their seasons (56). While you can exert control over how to move between house and wild, in the south, "you could never forget that you were flesh, and flesh rotted" (56). Here in the south, the people are forced into a bodily

experience that makes them less sure of self versus more. For southern women, at least, much of this has to do with inherent rebellion, one that harkens back to Monica Carol Miller's *Being Ugly*, where she argues that women who are othered and alienated from a community may not have a traditional sense of place, but that placelessness also gives them the power of rebellion against harmful Southern traditions. Miller is particularly interested in this materialization and the very physical and tangible ways southern women reckon with, and rebel against, the histories of place and space, both metaphorical and literal, that they are related to and represent. "Ugly" women are women who perform or naturally embody a sense of ugliness in that they do not fit into the norms of femininity—they may be disabled, a woman of color, queer, fat, too masculine, overly feminine, too sexual, etc. Enslaved women have an inherent wild due to their otherness; their bodies have been forced into domestic roles in ways that have already made domesticity wild. They already, then, have a power due to their different dwelling. Eliza notes in her diaries that Diana and her fellow enslaved people seem to be able to "see through walls" and "hear around corners" (125). When kitchen items are found broken by Louisa, she believes it was Diana because they were broken in a way only someone with intimate knowledge would know how to do. As stated previously, Diana has a relationship with domesticity that has an almost supernatural power—she makes everyday tasks of homemaking seem unordinary. In this, Diana mimics the way white women made home unnatural for the enslaved, reversing it to instead give power to the enslaved and make displaced the white women. Sewing, and the imagery of a needle and thread itself, is a metaphor throughout the book that is directly connected to time and identity. Louisa herself is a seamstress and comments on how life is like a thread moving in and out of the

eye of a needle, stitching out one's story: "the weather and light and the feeling of those times came back to her, as though the colors of the times themselves had been stitched into the cloth" (66). This thread carries within it the stories that are told, and this picture ultimately defines the land and everything on it. However, since the action itself is domestic, it can be reclaimed. Eliza may have tried to claim Diana's dress as her own, but Diana does not let her have the last word. She uses her skills as a seamstress to sew her identity into the dress and to return to the home in which it was created.

As objects continue to turn up where they should not, Louisa actually begins to believe the house is haunted by the presence of Diana who is moving and destroying objects. Durban does not confirm if there is a corporeal ghost roaming the halls, but she does not have to as that does not particularly matter. What matters is that Louisa *believes* Diana is still in the house, and this belief makes the effects as real as an actual ghost. As Louisa works and uncovers more objects and stories, she can no longer ignore the sordid history, and the sprouting tendrils cannot be evenly ordered. As Diana comes back into the house, Louisa refers to the place "…as though this house were some ancient landscape – or time itself…in which things appeared when the surface was broken, the way arrowheads, bullets, and bones turn up in a plowed field" (87). As history spills out around her, the living near tangible nature of it leaks into the space around her, making the home of her family inhabitable and paralleling the shattering of home experienced by the Jones and their counterparts centuries before. Louisa thinks she needs to appease these ghosts by returning things to how they were, believing that "she could put the house back in order. Maybe then her own house would settle down to its usual rhythms" (93). However, the domesticity she wants to enact, the routine she wants to continue, is the

overwritten palimpsest, not the truth underneath—which directly contrasts with a desire to tell the truth. The Hilliards have continuously believed they hold no culpability for the pain of the past and have created a dwelling space that only allows dwelling for some. They believed that the enslaved Americans who lived on their property experienced a sense of home, while they forced them to tame nature outside and then experience a limited domesticity. As Louisa notes, there is a difference between *occupying* and *having* place (92).

Diana eventually is fully pushed out of the house and her relationship with domesticity, forced to work on the land after being tortured and disfigured in the workhouse. Eventually, she runs away, and though no one knows what happens to her, she does successfully flee the place where she was able to practice rebellion and collapse, leaving the potential open that she took that collapse elsewhere. As far as the reader knows, though, she never has a place that is her own, but her spirit in some ways has a place in the garment she finished. By doing this, she is able to get her story told, though Louisa, to at least her descendants. When she had to save herself, Diana also had to reject part of her femininity, being forced to leave her children behind when she flees. However, she is able to find a way to be given back to her children's children through her collapse of domestic action. Further, though Louisa and Evelyn are unable to get Diana's name officially on the historical exhibit, Evelyn carries the story and the truth with her. At the end of the book, even though she could go to Texas with her daughter and grandchildren, she decides to stay in Charleston/Edisto where she continues to tell stories and carry history with her. The book ends both hopeful and haunted. The Hilliard house has become a tourist attraction—there is no more dwelling in it. The leader of the tour is a

member of the family and uses it for her own peace of mind and to teach people about women in the past—and she must reckon with the fact the stories she tells are embellished and only partial truths. However, while the book leaves her ruminating, it also leaves with the sense nothing has tangibly changed. History still shines on and highlights the white families. At the same time, though, something has shifted. Knowledge has been given to the people in the present, and we can see as they work over how to arrange it to move forward. Evelyn, particularly, represents a hope that, even if the stories are not shared widely or accepted as historical fact, it is true for her and her family, and this knowledge will be stored in their bones, dwelled in their bodies, forever. In Eliza's diary she indicates that language can be a place to dwell saying that "we also find words and house things there" (189). By continuing to practice domesticity of her own accord and talent in a home where domesticity was a wild space, Diana is able to pass her legacy onto her descendants, and they are able to begin to find a place, though not within the Hilliard house, within their stories.

In Durban's novel, the house and its ability to be a home is destroyed and recreated by nature, both because of the storm that comes through the Hilliard house and surrounding towns, and because of the rebellion against traditional domesticity that presents as wild femininity inside the house's borders. Dwelling then emerges, though performance of wild and rebellion, as something that can exist within history, storytelling, and lineage. None of the women in the book are fully able to find a sense of place that is fully reflective of their truth. Eliza and Louisa create and recreate home, but they are too indebted to traditional norms of feminine domesticity to fully craft change. Nature itself takes the reins and at least is able to pass Diana's story from Louisa to

Evelyn. Though Diana's fate is unknown, and though we never see into the physical dwelling places of the contemporary Jones family, the collapse Diana crafted in the past, coupled with Louisa's pushing against boundaries in the present, allows future women like Evelyn to orchestrate a new performance of dwelling that is to some degree reflective of their experience. Emerging from this, however, is a distinctly maternal tie, a familial-feminine legacy. Stories and ways of being in home and with nature are passed from Eliza to Louisa and from Diana to Evelyn. Each keep their own secrets and work to find their own place, and the following generations of women each inherit these modes from those who directly came before. However, while this passing of modes of being is challenged by collapse, the women stay trapped in their own ways and own bodies without a prominent success of placemaking. Though there are nuances to the storm—its location in the Carolinas or its masculine name—that could impact this placemaking, I do not see the type of storm as particularly impacting placemaking and more so the reactions to how wild breaks down home. Whether through refusal of culpability or desire for protection post-storm, home is more so restored as *was* instead of restored as *new*—and this is due to the "natural" perceptions of southern identity.

Though there is never a particularly successful placemaking in this book, Durban emphasizes the kind of homemaking post-collapse that results in the identity-mining necessary for restitching feminine identity and finding home. This collapse's implications throughout Durban's book are picked up on and expanded in Broom and Ward. This dwelling is one that takes place in an actual house, but it can also take place in one's own body and in the telling of history. Louisa says to imagine "this house like a big ship sailing through time. Or time itself like a cloth and our lives flying in and out like needle

and thread, leaving a design for others to trace and know" (187). The home space can indeed become a reflection of self, an actual tendril for the restitching this project deems so necessary. Whether or not these women have a house to dwell in or not, Diana has left a design that now her descendants will continue to trace and know and be able to find place within. Sarah Broom and Ward's Esch will directly pick up on this lineage as they navigate southern feminine identity. Regardless of the woman, it becomes clear that when wilderness and domesticity collapse in the home, there becomes the possibility to create new place through homemaking actions that embrace the fullness of history and the wilderness of femininity. These women are stitching together a new way of being, creating "all those images we make in order to bring what is distant close and to make the invisible vivid" (187). By having a white woman reckon with the failure of home in the past, Durban is able to show the haunting pervasive throughout southern homes and the inherent failure of it that exists for women of color. The everyday trauma begets an everyday relationship with objects, upset by the wilderness, to be reimagined by women's descendants. This displacement sets the foundation for women of color, then, to be unique in their ability to create home by taking advantage of the wild—whether this wild truly is wilderness and nature or breaking of boundaries and expectations through bodily rebellion.

Redefining Home After Natural Disaster

The natural world rips through the Hilliard house in a challenge to the unnatural domesticity refraining women from finding place in southern homes. Following the trend of a hurricane being the key that initiates collapse and allows women to find place, both Sarah Broom and Jesmyn Ward trace how young women come of age in a house

reclaimed by the land and rife with destruction. Particularly, these women are able to trace a maternal lineage in a house that they then embody, and they embrace what it means to be a woman and to have bodies. While Durban's text provides a foundation to understanding a collapse of domestic and wild through curation, these texts extend that exploration to an everyday practice of living in a home constantly in turmoil with the wild, with Broom's text exploring specifically where Durban's left off: the role of lineage and stories in mimicking home and providing dwelling. Understanding of place once destruction comes in is foundational to *The Yellow House*, its titular home being built by matriarch Ivory Mae Broom and destroyed by nature over time. The Yellow House was the first house anyone in the family ever owned, and Ivory Mae tried over years to make it a home. However, it seems that every attempt to make this house a home fails, yet at the end of the memoir, there is a sense of peace and hope that this family will continue, that the stories, which the family forever can dwell within, will move on throughout time. In the memoir as a whole, it is shown that natural disaster allows for the family's stories to be mined and passed along, which is particularly important when harkening back to the enslaved family from Durban's text and the racial discrimination that still exists in housing today. Home is not remade physically in this text, but femininity and motherhood are. Through a reordering of self and identity within a young black woman, Broom crafts a type of domesticity and placemaking that stems from the body in the light of wild and domestic becoming one.

Little work has been done on Broom's memoir, with much of the title's inclusions being in brief mentions to it for the way Broom describes New Orleans (Andy Horowitz) or as a recommended text to explore in relation to tools that aid us in life-threatening

experiences (Jacquelyn Litt). Leigh Gilmore uses Broom amongst a plethora of women and texts to explore feminine rage in the Trump era, while Parker C. Krieg features the memoir as one of several texts—memoir, fiction, and speculative fiction—that represent how contemporary environmental narratives represent responses to material precarity. He emphasizes an archival nature to this affective response—archives that provide future opportunity. Indeed, Broom's text does emerge as a way to understand contemporary fears and a potential for moving into the future, but importantly, it does so through a feminine lens and one that works with materials through domestic action—not against them. Cultural fears pervade this memoir—the fear of loss is always on the horizon. However, the Broom family learns how to make place within their own identities and through the inherent collapse of domestic and wild. Just as how Janisse Ray sees the landscape and her body as inextricably intertwined, so does Broom see her family's history/identity and the house they grew up in (and the land around it) as inextricable. As Krieg argues in his exploration of the memoir, "The premise of Broom's narrative is that the house is an archeological palimpsest of family history which mediates the narrator's interiority; the destruction of the house is the destruction of the memory support for the autobiographical subject" (346-347). Tied to this inextricability is the necessity to find place in a present moment, post and also within a continuous destruction. In order to reckon with this unrootedness her and her family are experiencing in the present, she must work backwards through her family's history—both document and story—in order to come back to the present with a new sense of place.

Like Louisa says, the upholding of the past supports the present, but in order to have this support, an honest past must be traced. For the Broom family, specifically,

lineage is crucial. They are a family that has deeply relied on one another for their rootedness, often rooting in each other more than actual physical place. This requirement to seek other methods of place came from a failure of domesticity, a failure of home. Originally, the Yellow House represented hope and a new beginning. When Ivory Mae bought the house in 1961, she became the first homeowner in her entire family. Something about this specific shotgun house in New Orleans East spoke to Ivory Mae, even with her initial desire to move to the city. It offered a new path, a starting over with new homemaking. No one knew what to call the place where the Yellow House was, in the midst of cypress swamp even trees could not grow on. The space itself was advertised as a "new frontier" ready to be tamed and domesticated (55); "the land was almost wild, with grass between the houses…where kids could run and play…a rural village" (57). This is appealing to Ivory Mae, who wants a house but is drawn to an open future for her children. Though this wilderness is already present at the Yellow House, domesticity and its actions were not foreign to the family, with Ivory Mae's mother Amelia liking to collect and curate beautiful objects. Amelia "[found] the numinous in the everyday" and "learned to dress the body and dress a house like you would the body" and "cooking was a protected ritual, a séance" (16), and she painted the walls of any rental home, "as if doing so granted them permanence, which was the thing she craved" (22). The Brooms longed for a sense of belonging, particularly the rootedness that comes from the ritual of making home.

This domesticity is passed down to Ivory Mae who in the Yellow House would merge Amelia's "beautiful, lasting objects" with her own "fragments of beloved possessions." In her home, she bought brand-new furniture, "collecting" (59) pieces from

a local store, and she sewed curtains to match the seasons; “maintaining a house, she felt, was just like cooking: detail mattered” (77). She extended this dressing of home into a dressing of her family, believing that “sewing was making a self, and this Ivory Mae especially loved” (34). Ivory Mae is also able to explore elements of domesticity in nature on her own terms. For example, as a child, Ivory Mae attempted to refuse boundaries around her, “resist[ing] working in the garden because only the girls were required to do so” (26) But when she is able to own a place and express her own agency, she plants a garden full of camellias and magnolias—and “the land did not refuse her advances” (58). Though she enacts these elements of housekeeping, the house would never achieve her vision as she saw it. Though the house did provide shelter, it is not easy to dwell within. The house is built on a swamp that results in it slowly sinking into its foundation, losing parts of itself more and more over time and becoming less and less habitable. Then, the house is partially destroyed by Hurricane Betsy, and though it is left standing, it is never full again, especially since her husband Simon dies before all renovations can be completed and Ivory Mae is unable to do them on her own. The wilderness begins creeping in more and more to the point, “where instead of floor there is green grass trying to grow” (3)—this leads to the family attempting to fill in patches of the home with scraps from other homes. Due to this, there is significant shame associated with the house, with Broom not wanting to let people know she lived there, specifically due to the failure of domesticity and the wilderness breaking into the house. “Shame is a slow creeping,” she says, “no one outside our family was ever to come inside the Yellow House” (146). Ivory Mae justified this rule by arguing that “this house not all that comfortable for other people,” so Broom and her siblings could never bring friends into

their own home. Broom is sure to emphasize that this refusal of people into their home was strange: “My mother was raised by my grandmother Lolo to make a beautiful home; I love to make beauty out of ordinary spaces… By not inviting people in, we were going against our natures.” (147). As the natural world’s wild comes more and more into the house, so do the people within the home begin to have to reckon with their own wilderness, the ways they are and are not natural.

The Yellow House, then, begins to emerge as a patchwork. It is part the Broom home, part reclaimed house. It is part manmade, part nature. It is part shame/rejection of self and part embrace of family. These collapses and blurrings make it seem impossible to find stable footing; it appears as if the collapse is happening to the individual. However, as seen previously, having a traditional home is not necessarily allowed for black families regardless. The location of this home itself perpetuates the refusal of domestic place and rootedness allowed for black peoples. Broom details that New Orleans East is akin to the slums, an area that is not spoken of in the same breath as New Orleans major. She avoids telling people exactly where she is from. As she says, “If the French Quarter is mythologized as new-world sophistication, New Orleans East is the encroaching wilderness” (313), which often causes her to feel like a “tourist in [her] native place” (319). When the wilderness itself comes in, then, it only serves to emphasize the otherness society has placed on the place thousands of black people call home. While this pushes these families farther from physical home, it also provides a path through which to embrace the wild and find new dwelling situated in their history. Hurricane Katrina comes in, then, as a way to shatter expectations of what a house can do and make the Broom family realize that they have an ability to dwell in their bodies and to make place

differently. As the wilderness begins to seep into the Yellow House, it becomes a reminder of how far removed the women and their lineages are from a sense of rootedness and belonging, but this collapse also becomes their freedom.

The second movement opens with a quote from LeAlan Jones: "Whatever nature do, this house do" (100). As the hurricanes come in, there begins to be a paralleling of domestic and wild—and of the women who enact collapse. Broom notes that both Betsy and Katrina were able to cause such destruction due to the failure of manmade structures, and after this failure, it continues to tear through houses, with Katrina destroying it beyond repair. While Betsy caused damage that would beget attempts for domesticity and eventual failure and shame, Katrina splits the house in two: "The house looked as though a force, furious and mighty, crouching underneath, had lifted it from its foundation and thrown it…once having done that it had gone inside…and extended both arms to press outward until the walls expanded, buckled, and then folded back on themselves" (224). When the family returns to the house post-Katrina, they have to face a loss, and Broom has to reckon with a grief she in part desired: "I did want the Yellow House gone, but mostly from mind, wanted to be free from its lock and chain of memory, but did not, could not, foresee water bum-rushing it. I still imagined, standing there, that it would one day be rebuilt" (225). Though the house was rarely the home the Broom family desired, it was still their house, the space that held all their histories; "The Yellow House was witness to [their] lives" (9). This same house now dies, alone, its role shifting. The family disperses, with only Carl returning to cut the grass at a house no one dwells within. Up until this point, the house had become a nuisance, and it is only in its loss that Broom realizes the importance of a physical dwelling place:

> I had no home. Mine had fallen all the way down. I understood, then, that the place I never wanted to claim had, in fact, been containing me. We own what belongs to us whether we claim it or not. When the house fell down, it can be said, something in me opened up. Cracks help a house resolve internally its pressures and stresses, my engineer friend had said. Houses provide a frame that bears us up. Without that physical structure, we are the house that bears itself up. I was now the house (232).

This collapsing of house with woman leads Broom to recognize that there is an onus on her and the descendants and dwellers of the Yellow House to enact housekeeping in her own life, particularly one that embraces all qualities and aspects versus only the ones that make us comfortable or that look pretty and neat.

This leads Broom to begin to think of not just the house but of making home differently. She spends quite some time displaced, traveling across the country and the globe, searching for place before returning to New Orleans. She claims that she "still could not, however, fully imagine a house of my own. I believed then, and to some degree still believe now, that even at their best, houses were perpetually in a state of entropy" (287). However, she begins to imagine homemaking in other ways, for instance, "she had grown to believe that the objects contained within a house spoke loudest about the person to whom the things belonged. More than that, she believed that the individual belonged to the things inside the house, to the house itself." In this vein, once she moves back to New Orleans, in her new apartment, Broom "compose[s] a container garden on the balcony" with bougainvillea plants, hibiscus from her grandmother's yard, and a jasmine vine from her brother, Michael. She "made [her] rituals" (307), which then

allows her to see that the historicized past is everywhere [she] walk[s] in [her] daily rituals" (326). As she begins learning how to dwell and place roots in the aftermath of wilderness, she begins to learn more about the routine that stems from trauma. When she decides to help her brother cut the grass of the shattered old home, she comes to the conclusion that cutting is "ritual; it was order" (366) that specifically pushes back against the knowledge that "the land could be taken away from [them] for any and no reason" (361). It is only after she begins to practice her own domesticity after physical trauma from the wilderness that she is able to face the grief that resonates from the gaps in her own history, asserting finally that, after all the searching for meaning, she "want[s] to collect the story of [her] and [her] father." Here, she takes a matrilineal ritual to restore stories for the masculine people in her life. The ability to perform housekeeping among forms of wild is a keenly feminine power that can restore even stories of male counterparts within the framework of their connection to women; this is in direct contrast with the problematic nature of putting men in the position to tell women's stories.

This collection Broom decides to dedicate her life to brings us full circle—it is the impetus that has given us this memoir. She orders these stories, rife with both historical truths and memories from interviews with her family, interspliced with photographs both found and taken by Broom. Her photos are a method of homemaking, an ordering of object performed to create a sense of rootedness and safety: "We take photos because we do not want to remember wrong" (136); "I photographed his every movement as if to save him from disappearance" (227). This intermixing of fixed moments in time is crucial to a memoir, a recording of personal history, as "fixed details [are] important to stories…even if you [can't] prove them" (14). Like Ray, Broom's text emerges as a form

of curation itself; she carries her history forward, her the house that no longer physically stands. Ray and Broom both look backward for meaning, with Broom's serving also as a talisman for those in her family who have yet to come. Throughout the course of the book, Broom learns that what provides us home are stories and family. Being able to have a sense of place and find a place to plant roots is what provides home and something permanent to dwell within. Being able to enact this domesticity and see it enacted within a house provides a blueprint for how to mimic it, but it must be mimicked in a way that embraces the fullness of one's history. One must be willing to seek out her past before moving into the future, and this is what the storm catalyzes for Broom and her family. Even though the house itself is gone, it "was the only thing that belonged to all of [them]," (366) and thus its legacy lingers. Broom comes to the conclusion that forgetfulness and oblivion, the kind that "erase[s] the landscape of former life" is "the only way to properly leave home" (208). While she tries to leave, she refuses to forget, and thus she comes back home; she does not want to erase this landscape and instead seeks to move forward taking home with her. At the beginning of the final section of the book, she quotes Sam Hamill: "But there is no conclusion. The journey itself is home." Particularly, this journey is supported through a collapse—and eventual embrace—of domestic and wild. The Yellow House becomes, then, an image of this collapse and also the central location that continues to bring family together, accelerated by Katrina. With traditional order failing, new ordering is allowed. In this emerges the housekeeping throughout the novel; the family has still performed rituals and curation on this land to make it their own, and in the end, they are able to let go of it—even though it is bittersweet; the stories remain with the belief that they can be a place of dwelling.

Though the wild, natural world—the hurricane—did not single out the Broom family or seemingly have a special connection with them on the surface, it is not just a storm. In fact, the uniquely feminist relationship between natural disaster—phenomenon emerging from the wilderness—and women, race, etc. has been explored through the lens of Katrina specifically. In Nancy Tuana's chapter of the book *Material Feminisms*, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina", she describes the relationship between nature and culture and the boundary between, which she refers to as a kind of mutually constitutive viscous porosity—nature and culture build each other up and leak into each other. In her analysis of Hurricane Katrina, she reflects on the way people were affected by the hurricane differently and how they have been, and will continue to be, by natural disasters. Women, the poor, people of color, and other individuals on the margins were, and are, more likely to lose their lives or their way of life. The systems enforced by people in power, of course, perpetuate the suffering and loss of those who are not in power. A storm or earthquake (nature) might not be seen as related to these systems (culture); we, as human beings, do not call weather to hit a certain location or put hands up and make storms cease. However, as Tuana rightly puts, humans are the main cause of climate change. While human beings do not create storms, our carbon sent into the atmosphere, our oil dumped in waters, our chemicals seeping in cracks of land—these worsen the storms. If people in power use their power to increase the chance of storms and the risk of those affected, and then the marginalized are affected by these storms at an increased degree, is culture not responsible for using nature to harm culture? And if there is no clear boundary between nature and culture, then how do we trace where the tendrils from one reach into the other in past and present? While there are no easy answers to

where these boundaries lie, we can trace how the boundaries shift. Just as nature and culture have a viscous porosity, so do domestic and wild. As the wilderness comes in, so does it challenge what one perceives as natural. As the Broom family try to make home in the Yellow House, Katrina comes to take down this material structure and make the family seek out new materiality in their own stories and identities; Katrina forces these people, particularly these women, to mine themselves.

In the end, Hurricane Katrina finally fully collapses the wilderness and natural world and destroys the Yellow House, but the family continues to return to it. Unlike in Durban's characters, the women in Broom's family are able to inherit the destruction of house from wilderness and use it to find place within their own bodies and histories. The only thing that makes the house eventually disappear is Ivory Mae's signing away of the land, with the only part left to own being the memories: "The story of our house was the only thing left" (372). However, this story is the most vital part. As seen in Durban, even a material, physical object from the past does not represent truth. The truth inside one's body and in one's stories, and the way women use that knowledge to create place, is what is most vital. Inherited by black bodies who have for so long been seen as wild in harmful limiting ways, this storytelling finds purchase through an empowered convening of women's bodies, houses, and wilderness. As Broom says, "calling places by what they originally were, especially when the landscape is marred, is one way to fight erasure" (354). Broom emphasizes the feminine and maternal nature of this, with the women, specifically, finding success within destroyed homes where Durban's women could not. The failure of traditional domesticity through the intrusion of wilderness forces one to question one's placemaking, as Broom eventually does, asking "Why do I feel that I do

not have the right to the story of the city I come from…Who has the rights to the story of a place?...Does the act of leaving relinquish one's rights to a story of a place? Who stays gone? Who can afford to return?" (329). In the end, though, she concludes that she does have the right to tell the story of her family, specifically, of "these women, who lived in close proximity, composed a home. They were the real place" (15). In this way the natural world, even in its destruction, allows for the dwelling inside self and body to occur. Home may no longer exist inside the physical Yellow House, but it will exist in the houses Ivory Mae, Sarah Broom, and those in their family dwell in, due to the objects they have mined and reordered and the stories they have curated and told—and continue to tell.

Wilderness as Mother and the Embrace of Femininity

Broom's memoir shows us how women put into action the collapse and recreation rooted in homemaking that is first emulated in Durban. There is an inherent femininity to the work the women in these books do; however, Jesmyn Ward pens a narrative that takes this one step further. Here, the intrusion of wilderness and embrace of new domesticity actually teaches a girl how to embrace her femininity. Ward's novel presents a bildungsroman for Esch Batiste who, over the 10 days before and day after Katrina, has to reckon with her own femininity. While Durban portrayed women who were trapped by the past and only found moments of freedom through collapse, and while Broom showed the possibility of holding place in one's own feminine body, Ward fully embraces the destructive and cleansing nature of the hurricane to collapse limiting boundaries of southern femininity. A National Book Award winner, *Salvage the Bones* has no shortage of critical work penned on it. Many scholars are interested in the way the book fits into

southern literature with Paula Eckard interested in southern childhoods, John Matthews exploring post-plantation souths, and Terrell Tebbetts researching dysfunctional families. This book does emerge as explicitly southern, through not just its location but its pervasive rurality and legacies of familial bonds—and for this project, most keenly, its perception of femininity. Several scholars explore the role of the environment and the hurricane, specifically, in the book. Cameron Crawford examines politics of food, while Christopher Clark examines bodies and community. Clark's examination of the relationship between Esch's body and the hurricane parallels much of what is in this chapter, but I see what happens to the house and ideas of home as the key to understanding bodies and identity in the novel. Joanna Wilson-Scott does emphasize the role of the home in climate fiction, specifically asserting that "homes are of ecological importance, serving as a useful method of comprehending the effects and lived experiences of climate change" (8). While she emphasizes this importance among three novels, she represents domestic and wild as a binary—elements that only affect one another versus exist alongside each other. I assert that Esch's survival in Katrina is achieved through performance of domestic and wild and through a mutual constituency, not through a single-direction cause and effect.

Like the Broom family, the Batistes are having to find a way to survive through a storm, but the Batistes are surrounded by a specific image that pervades their collapse: motherhood. In the opening pages of the novel, we come upon an Esch who has not yet explored or accepted her femininity. In fact, her everyday life is one in which she follows a masculine voice. With her mother passing when Esch was a young child, she does not have a model of motherhood beyond memory. Instead, she must learn from her father and

brothers, thus making her not confident in her femininity and sexuality—she is not at home in her own body. She is always overanalyzing her body in the mirror and looking at the places she is not woman enough: "I looked in the mirror and knew the rest of me wasn't so remarkable: wide nose…all the curves folded in so that I looked square" (7). Once she gets pregnant, however, Esch is forced to reckon with her explicitly feminine elements, and, initially, her body continues to feel like wilderness it has been made out to be. One place where she attempts to exert her feminine power is over men. Esch compares sex to swimming—she is naturally good at both—and she uses Greek mythology to locate female role models. However, she is willing to be whatever she needs to be to impress Manny, who has a girlfriend but wants to treat Esch as an object he can have whenever she pleases, and her experiences with sex more so resemble assault than agency: "It was easier to let him keep on touching me than ask him to stop…easier to keep quiet and take it than to give him an answer" (23). Continuously, Esch prioritizes other bodies over her own and values approval from others, particularly male figures, over her own safety and comfort.

Esch does have lessons she has learned from the men in her life; they just have not been what she needs to understand what it means to be a woman. Her father, Claude, does not have strong parental instincts; however, he takes on almost a similar role as Janisse Ray's father, salvaging and selling scrap metal for extra cash to provide for the family. While in Ray's memoir, the father represents curating in the wild versus within the house where the mother serves as counterpart, there is no such role here. Salvaging, however, does becomes a task many mirror throughout the novel. Further, while we rarely see a connection between him and the land, Esch's father is the one who most

deeply believes—accurately so—that a dangerous hurricane is coming. However, his attempts to help his children prepare for the hurricane only result in him losing several of his fingers, and his knowledge of the land does not seem to come from any actual care about the land, as evidenced in his relationship—or lack thereof—with China and his mistreatment of the family land, the henhouse "full of empty cars with their hoods open, the engines stripped, and the bodies sitting there like picked-over animal bones" (22). Similarly, for much of the book, the mothering that seems to happen comes from a male figure: Skeetah. Skeetah is in many ways a mother to China, understanding her beyond a physical level. He cares for her in ways Esch directly ties to how her mother treated them. This is true; Skeetah and China have a special connection, one wherein she only trusts him. However, his role is not stable but ever shifting, from owner to friend and "from lover to father" (98).

Though Esch's mother dies when she is only seven, she does remember her mother, and nearly still sees her. "The last time [they'd] had a bad storm hit head-on, Mama was still alive" (6), cooking and watching over the family. As Esch recalls her mother's traditional feminine roles, it becomes evident she had an intuitive relationship with nature. Esch remembers watching her mother search for chicken eggs and seemingly blend in with the natural world around her: "she moved and it looked like the woods moved, like a wind was running past the trees" (22). Even her brothers recall her advice with the eggs, telling them "look but don't look…they'll find you. You gotta wander then they'll come" (199). This extended to live animals as well, always knowing which chicken to select to cook: "She used to watch them, like she knew every one, knew which one had eggs to hatch, which one hadn't lain in a while, which one was just getting fat

and old" (51). The mother continues to embrace wilderness in the name of domesticity, particularly cooking. In a story Esch recalls being told to her, when out with Claude and friends, her mother catches a shark. She does not have the strength to pull it in, but instead of passing it to one of the men to reel it in, she uses a more gentle approach for her success: "his friends laughed, tried to get her to give it to them, but she held it in both hands and walked the shark up and down the oyster-shelled sand…she walked it tired, her arms big and round, strong under the woman fat. She coaxed it to death," and when she cooked it she, "soaked it in butter milk to take the wild out of it" (85). In the glimpses we get of a maternal figure in Esch's life, we see a woman who had a keen awareness and understanding of the natural world; we see a woman who seemed to have been able to perform the collapse so crucial to this project. Beyond performing it, Esch seemed to be able to sense it even inside of her mother, listening to her pregnant belly and hearing "the watery swish of Junior inside her, as outside the wind pulled, branch by root, until it uprooted a tree ten feet from the house" (217). Though the mother seemed agent over her feminine identity and her relationship to domestic and wild, the land the Batistes dwell on has a collapse that emerges from outside their control.

The Esch household exists on a plot of land bought decades ago by Esch's grandparents, who created life on it with two houses and a plethora of plants and animals alike. However, as the grandfather continued to sell parts of the land, the family's space dwindled. The grandfather let white men dig for clay until they took too much of the land, worried "the earth would give under the water, that the pond would spread and gobble up the property and make it a swamp, so he stopped selling the earth for money" (14). This area, now referred to as The Pit, will eventually flood and precipitate the final

moments of the story. The land as a whole, led by an often-drunk Claude, hosts the family house and its members, a barn, Mother Lizbeth's "rotting house" (10), a yard with few chickens, and fields "overgrown with shrubs, with saw palmetto, with pine trees reaching up like the bristles on a brush" (14). They burn trash right there on the land, in The Pit, sometimes catching part of the land on fire. The grandparents' house harkens back to the Yellow House, with its porch "like an abandoned pier sinking below storm-rising water, the tide of the earth rolling in to cover them;" "the house is a drying animal skeleton, everything inside that was evidence of living salvaged over the years" (58). On this land, both domestic and wild start to fail. While nature is often aligned with the wilderness, there is a part of the natural world that is domestic, particularly in southern spheres. Farms, where animals are raised and flowers, fruits, and vegetables are planted in gardens, blur the lines between domestic and wild, existing as a cultivated wilderness. The boundaries here are particularly feminine as women are often responsible for caring for spaces, such as tending gardens or gathering eggs from chicken coops. However, on this land that no longer has a matriarch of any kind, weeds and shrubbery overtake the land, and cars and scraps take over the chicken coops and surrounding areas. It is not so much that nature has come to reclaim this domestic space, per se, as it is that the lack of domestic care has altered the landscape of the home. When the mother died within the walls of the home, a certain femininity and mothering left, and the place faced its consequences. Just as in Broom's memoir, the family is trying to make this place a home and the leaking of domestic and wild into one another is something they try to push away, not embrace.

Domestic and wild alike have started to fail in the Batiste household, leaving destruction the only path for creation. The house becomes a space wherein growth can no longer happen, and as the storm comes in, the house becomes more oppressive, a "closed fist" (191). Though Esch does not know it when the family starts preparing for the hurricane, she is growing alongside its forming. As she becomes more aware of the hurricane, so does she become more aware of herself. Her comparisons to female figures in Greek mythology are often those of power, particularly Medea, but as the story progresses, she starts to see gaps in that power, in the femininity: "[Medea] has magic, could bend the natural to the unnatural. But even with all her power, Jason bends her like a young pine in a hard wind; he makes her double in two. I know her" (38). Esch has seen the feminine magic of collapsing domestic and wild, but she is still allowing masculinity to lead her and shape her. She simultaneously begins to become aware of the limits put of femininity around her, and she tries to hold back the budding womanhood inside her, particularly in relation to her pregnancy, saying that she "can't say it…[hasn't] said it to [herself] yet, out loud" (86). It is unsurprising she would feel different, though, with how the men in her life treat womanhood. When her father refers to the hurricane's name, he says, "like the worst, she's a woman. Katrina" (124). Esch feels a tug against this that she cannot place. The femininity of Katrina, specifically, has not come up before, even in Broom's text, nor does Durban explicitly discuss Hugo's storm as male. Katrina, as woman, could be seen in one of two limiting ways: since women are considered a force to tame and keep, a female-named storm could be perceived as weaker; in contrast, like Claude asserts, due to the wilderness associated with untamed women, a female-named storm can be perceived as stronger. Regardless, however, it matters less if one thinks a

specific hurricane will be easier or harder and matters more how these parallel of the natural world and wilderness at large interact with the feminine body. In this moment, by bringing up the storm's name, Claude serves to make this interaction more explicit and evident.

Simultaneously, Esch witnesses the family dog, China, reckon with a new body after becoming a mother herself. At the dog fight, Manny voices his opinion that being a mother makes a woman weak, saying "Any dog give birth like that is less strong after…Take a lot out of an animal to nurse and nurture like that. Price of being female" (96). Esch's brother Skeetah counters by saying "That's when they come into they strength. They got something to protect…that's power…to give life…is to know what's worth fighting for" (96). As the Batiste's get closer and closer to the storm touching down, Esch becomes witness to varying femininity, though her own growing pregnancy and China's puppies. China proves Skeetah right, winning her fight right after he says, "make them know;" what he really means is "make them know they can't live without you" (175). By watching China embrace both her violence and her care post-birth, Esch is able to learn a new side of motherhood. This book is continuously interested in mother, and Esch and China are not the only parallels. While China's wildness teaches Esch about motherhood and femininity, so does the storm itself, with the natural world being paralleled with China and Esch as mother. While China is giving birth, the puppies coming out of her are described as "blooming," (4) giving natural, plant-like imagery. Esch's own pregnancy "flares like a dry fall fire in [her] stomach, eating all the fallen pine needles." (36). This emphasis on the natural world connects to the storm that pervades the book, which connects back full circle to Esch. This collapsing of all types of

mother coalesces in the final hurricane, in itself a kind of mother: Hurricane Katrina is a model of destruction, but she also births life anew. What these shifting boundaries reveal is that both home and wild can be a kind of mother that teaches, and both can create and destroy. Like the curation in Durban's novel, there is not always a neat place for everything. The actual mothers in this book are the ones who give birth in some way, even if not in actuality. A hurricane may not birth a baby, but her life and destruction comes directly through her, unlike Skeetah who merely helps China deliver her puppies. Birth is messy—there is blood and sinew and death. After China eats her own puppy, Esch wants to ask her: "Is this what motherhood is?" (130). Creating a new life, a new way of being, does not come without destruction and loss. It is the destruction that paves way for there to be new life, and there is a change in the woman herself. When Esch sees Katrina coming, she has a feeling the storm is saying "I have been waiting for you" (230).

Esch begins to recognize the power in being able to carry history in her own body and begins to see the carrying of fetus as domestic rebellion. Just as wild and domestic are collapsed, so are the binary sides of motherhood. This is finally realized when Katrina touches down in Bois Sauvage and on the Batiste property. Right as Katrina is closing in, Esch is finally able to confront Manny. This is the first time she says out loud that she is pregnant, and the first time Manny looks her in the eye—he does not love her, but this is not about love but respect. Esch respects herself, forcing Manny to make eye contact with her. When he is cruel to her, rejects their child, she is "on him like China" (203) and makes him know her worth as woman and mother. As Katrina encloses the home, this paralleling and strengthening continues when China suddenly barks at the ceiling and runs away moments before a tree comes crashing through the ceiling. Esch says "she

knew" that the tree was coming, sensed it somehow, but Skeetah says "she didn't know nothing." (224). Esch believes, though, that somehow China's connection to motherhood has also made her more connected to nature and thus more powerful. What is particularly powerful about Katrina, specifically, is that in her destruction she initiates a type of collapse herself of domestic and wild—everything is even under her hand:

> It is the flailing wind that lashes like an extension cord used as a beating belt…It is the water, swirling and gathering and spreading on all sides, brown with an undercurrent of red to it, the clay of the Pit like a cut that won't stop leaking. It is the remains of the yard, the refrigerators and lawnmowers and the RV and mattresses, floating like a fleet…It is everywhere. Daddy kneels behind us, tries to gather all of us to him (230-231).

In this passage, objects from the Batiste home and elements of the natural world swirl together. Not only is the wind like an extension cord comparatively, but the man-made objects only given meaning by those humans that made and use them simply become elements of a "fleet" as they are taken by the water. Though the water homogenizes these objects' identities, it brings out the identities of the humans themselves. It is in this moment that the patriarch who usually shows little to no care for keeping his children together suddenly being urged to do just that. Esch witnesses, again, this balance of creation and destruction—"tomorrow…everything will be washed clean" (205)—this storm that is taking everything is also birthing new opportunity. This ability for the natural world to both alter and reveal identity is crucial for Esch's ability to move forward and find understanding and place in her own body.

Katrina has an "uncompromising strength, her forcefulness, the way she lingered" in a way that makes Esch wonder what she "has stirred up from the bottom of the bay, and what it has dragged in and left." (249). What it drags in for Esch, though, is power and femininity; as the storm comes in, so does Esch to herself. When she is drowning in the water, she wonders, "who will deliver me?" (235), and the young Batiste woman is baptized in the waters of Katrina. When she tells her father of the water entering the attic, she is "surprised at how clear [her] voice is, how solid, how sure, like a hand that can be held in the dark" (229). After they are safe in the grandparents' old house and she hugs her brother, Esch notes it is similar to the way she hugged the boys she slept with, but this time she does not do it to "let them get what they wanted…instead of making them see [her];" now, "[her] arms had never been so strong" (238). Esch is becoming more aware of her body and more confident within it, and as the hurricane fades, she notes that "suddenly there is a great split between now and then, and I wonder where the world where that day happened has gone, because we are not in it." (251). The physical world itself was forever changed due to Katrina, but for Esch it is something beyond the surface—the girl she was before and the woman she is now are two different people. It is the embrace of woman as whole, of all her parts, that is the success of Esch and this book. Like the Broom family and the Jones family, she learns that identity is housed in the body. She must experience the natural world and witness that her dwelling exists from within her own body; place comes from an embracing of her own femininity and maternity and allowing of them to dwell within her frame. This knowledge is derived from a physical collapse with the natural world, from the moments where Esch and the water are near indistinguishable.

Women making themselves inseparable from the natural world is foundational to Patricia Yaeger's book *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing*, where she explores the relationship women have frequently had with the land in southern fiction and the way women writers have used othered women to challenge the function of women's bodies, femininity, and their relationship with the land. Yeager is more concerned about dirt than water—but they function quite similarly. Both are an element of the natural world that, through a tangible diving and digging into, southern women can use to learn more about their femininity. In her prologue, Yeager analyzes of the function of the natural world, of dirt; for enslaved individuals, particularly, dirt was related to exploited labor and even sustainment, while white women were expected the complete opposite: expected to not touch, to have clean palms with no granules caked under nails. The ability to have agency, then, over one's relationship with wilderness and mess, whether a lack of tradition/order or the actual natural world, "shake[s] up a narrow and male-defined southern 'tradition'" (xi). Yeager specifically explores Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel Ward's book is clearly inspired by from its empowered young black female protagonist to a storm that changes everything. Yeager uses Hurston's work to analyze black women who reckon with natural disaster from a writer who "excavate[s] a series of everyday that describes life in the twentieth-century South" (256). This excavation, in which tropes posited onto black women are both challenged and reinforced, thus posits a new identity back onto the south's concept of blackness and femininity. Specifically, in relation to the earth, Yeager sees Janie, the novel's protagonist, as a woman who is able to use the land to achieve what she desires. In southern literature, "dirt obsession can disrupt southern culture's dominant idols", and

the black woman disrupts this specifically by wearing dirt in a way that "represents the endless power of formlessness" (262, 267). Janie's relationship with a hurricane explicitly ties her to Esch, fitting her within Yaeger's an image of a southern woman changed by a storm who, by being able to put her hands into the wild and cultivate her identity and use nature imagery for her own femininity, is able to challenge southern stereotypes of race and gender and reposit a new southern framework in which she can situate herself. This embrace of the natural world, of the actual elements of water, earth, air inherently pose as a form of rebellion for the southern woman, particularly the black southern woman, as she re-navigates place.

It is only after Esch is tossed in water, it filling her crevices like dirt under fingernails that she appears stronger, surer. After the storm, Esch travels with Randall and Big Henry to see adjacent towns, and as she witnesses them, she decides she has the responsibility to pass on these stories. Esch notes that she will tell Skeetah what happened to the world, she will carry the world's story. Early on in the book, she notes that "bodies tell stories" (83), and at the end of the book, she finally realizes the weight of what this means. The maternal line that has only become more evident as this chapter continues comes to fruition in Esch; not only does she carry stories to pass on within her body affectively, but she carries it within her physically as mother. Her embrace of mother ultimately solidifies her identity as human. In *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe asserts that "the word *mother* never took hold for Black women in and then out of slavery in the 'New World'" (7); thus, "*Motherhood…cannot possibly remain unmodified*" (qtd. in Sharpe 7). Though paralleled with the natural world and with China, Esch's pregnancy and her agency over curation refuse dehumanization through reclamation and restoration.

Women have a unique power to both destroy the systems set up against them by using the same actions that support them and also to continue to restitch truth through their ability to carry life within them. Her unborn child will come to life, "what [she] carr[ies] in [her] stomach is relentless; like each unbearable day, it will dawn" (205), and when it does come, "the baby will tell…it'll tell" (219). It will tell because it heard and learned, from Esch, how to be one with nature, one with the wild, and recreate home through feminine action and being. As Esch goes through remnants of the storm, she begins to gather and curate: "I will tie the glass and stone with string, hang that shards above my bed, so that they will flash in the dark and tell the story of Katrina, the mother that swept into the Gulf and slaughtered…she was the murderous mother who cut us to the bone but left us alive, left us naked and bewildered as wrinkled newborn babies…she left us to learn to crawl. She left us to salvage" (255). Now, it is up to Esch to salvage the bones of the women that came before her, storms and mothers alike, and to find a new dwelling, within house, land, body, and stories alike. Esch has etched—has stitched her name—into the quilt of southern femininity. Like China, she has collapsed a binary of motherhood, and Esch knows that, when China returns, she "will bark and call me sister. In the star-suffocated sky, there is a great waiting silence. She will know that I am a mother" (258). We may not see Esch's new everyday, but we do see her new day dawn after her growth into herself, after trauma, and this finality of femininity holds within it a rootedness that can only come when one's full identity has been embraced—and once this comes, the new everyday will follow naturally.

Conclusion

Traditional domesticity presents a failure for women as they are given control that emerges as a ruse and can never actually realized. The only time it is actualized is the perpetuating of power and maintaining of systems white women hold against women of color in the household. In order to combat this, all women must learn the failure of traditional home, not just through exploring wilderness but by embracing the wild that seeps into their homes and/or performing wild so that they no longer experience the limits of restrained domesticity and can move beyond it. Women, women of color specifically, reclaim domesticity through practicing its elements like curation and ordering, crafting a new everyday routine wherein wild is stitched throughout the body and used to then plant roots. These women dwell in not simply the wild but in their own wilderness and in the aftermath of wilderness' destruction of home. They are not bringing the wild into their home or dwelling in the wilderness—they are reckoning with the wild in the home in order to dwell in home once again. This new dwelling teaches them how to find belonging even when not in house or region but in words, in stories, and in bodies. These shifts between restriction and empowerment directly impact and redefine femininity and motherhood thus also shifting ideas of how to be at home and make place. Southern women have been traumatized by the patriarchal expectations for them, and in response to this trauma, have had to create a new everyday. However, routine has already been defined for these women since housekeeping itself is so misogynist already. Thus, wilderness is required (at times a wild already present internally) in order to reveal the insufficiencies of one's present housekeeping and dwelling. In having to create new routine through new curation of object and story and body, the women then craft new

forms of housekeeping, making home on the margins in a way that imbues their trauma that is stitched throughout their actual, full femininity.

This femininity emerges as particularly maternal. As the stories continue so does this element of femininity emerge more clearly. Eliza and Louisa do not have children, but the passing of stories from Eliza to Louisa is maternal in nature, and of course, the bodies that hold the past are Diana and her descendants. There is a matrilineal path running throughout Broom's text, moving from Amelia to Ivory Mae to [Sarah] Broom herself, and finally, Esch's embrace of her own motherhood and of the role of mother is crucial to her coming of age in the collapse around her. All women have been excluded from the ideal American woman, but black women specifically have been eschewed from the very norm they helped foster, with materiality and possession of objects being a mark by which to enforce that difference. This has very real consequences in Durban's novel when Diana is forced to leave behind her children to save herself; Esch's location of power in her own pregnancy works to reclaim her literary mother. Here, these women are able to tease apart these images of motherhood as they reckon with companion southern women to navigate a new coming of age for southern femininity. The figures of not just the southern housewife but the southern mother—in all its forms regardless of attempts to bury certain histories—must come to light for the reclaiming post-collapse to be possible. In the previous chapter, maternity served as an absence as the role of daughter was highlighted. Out in the wilderness, the young women were allowed to see nature as a mother as they found home within it. Here, within the home, these women fill that absence with their own bodies through the embodiment of story and history and literal

pregnancy. They reclaim the role of not just southern woman but southern mother, and even beyond this, of human.

The chapter presents a series of traumas, some personal, but the majority of which rooted in a collective, repeating, and lasting trauma. For the women in this chapter to be mothers, daughters, humans they must find a way to move forward. This moving forward, however, can only happen when a full embrace of the past occurs and one finds a way to live with it in the present. This crisis ordinary, as Berlant calls it, emerges in the new routines these women find—in their new forms of housekeeping. As Fraiman intimates, making home can occur far outside of the four walls of a traditional house, and what the women in this chapter learn is that their dwelling can take place in their very bodies. The girls and women of Chapter 2 continually had to re-assess their bodies and continually had their bodies challenged. In Chapter 3, we see women begin to understand the degree to which history, time, and place is stitched within their very being. Rebellion for southern women is both inherent and agential, but regardless, these women grab their rebellion with both hands and use it to craft a new sense of place. Here housekeeping emerges as not simply rooted in ordering actual physical objects but in ordering and curating one's own experiences, histories, and femininity. Once this curation becomes norm and this domestic action becomes as natural as the natural landscapes that constantly occur in these novels, the women within their pages can feel a sense of peace and assuredness towards the future.

The collapsing of domestic and wild in this chapter compounds on the previous chapter, wherein women were able to learn about their own wild through the world's wilderness, by showing how this wild becomes an actual dwelling place to domesticate

through embracing the full spectrum of femininity. For women to find belonging in the south, then, there must be both an exploration of the wilderness in which women take practices from the wild into their homes/make home in the natural world or a breaking down of the home wherein one can recreate and re-domesticate home through an embrace of a new maternal. Essentially, while Chapter 2 looked at a wild femininity and embrace of the wild parts of oneself, Chapter 3 has looked at the ways in which women embrace their domesticity, namely their maternal natures. Now understanding that women have both control over how they interact with the world and how they see themselves, they are able to see a full spectrum of motherhood. Embracing mother as destructive and creative, and seeing the ways they can give birth to stories and continue legacy, collapses together with their navigation of wild, which ultimately gives them the ability to be one with nature and themselves. The women in this chapter continue to learn about the fullness of femininity available to them. These are the two sides of the coin from Ray's memoir: the women whose bodies are tied to the land, and the women who dwell within the home—and the ways they combat and collapse each. The final piece to this puzzle, however, is to look at the final restitching, just as Ray did in her creation of *Ecology*. We must look at women who use the landscape of storytelling, the dwelling of words, to arrange unruly feminine narratives and identities in othered souths, poetry collections, and graphic novels in order to fully understand what these women ultimately find when they set down the needle and thread to step back and gaze upon the quilt they have created.

Chapter 4: Restitching Southern Femininity: Form as Narrative, Region, and Body

"Got my angels and my demons and I think we all agree

If you're gonna go for something, better make it everything

I believe in the end I'll see that it's alright, alright"

— *Cam*

Chapters 2 and 3 presented two sides of the same coin of collapse. In Chapter 2, women and girls ventured into the wilderness for various periods of time, and the wilderness taught them not only about domesticity but about what is and is not perceived as natural for women and their own bodies. This same line of thought continued into Chapter 3, where women upheld domesticity or refused traditional methods of making home, at times freeing themselves at the expense of others. In these novels, women became intimate with their own bodies as form of collapse, and this situating of body is crucial to this final chapter. Chapter 4 unfurls a final tendril in Ray: what to do with the natural and the domestic in one's past and one's body and how to process it through the telling of story and structure of narrative. Specifically, in *Ecology*, Ray uses the memoir itself to challenge form and further the collapse of her wild history into a single text that can be reckoned with and where home can be found. This chapter is centered around texts that also use a unique form or genre to make sense of the protagonist's or the author's past. Not only do the forms of the text themselves emerge, though, but alongside them forms themselves that have echoed throughout this chapter: form of body, woman, history, and south. Additionally, the texts in this chapter are further complicated by the

more esoteric elements of nature and domestic that have lingered throughout the project. In these texts, there is not always a clear wilderness or a physical house, furthering the need for using form and structure itself as a physical thread to be stitched into the quilt of southern femininity.

Form itself is a sticky term—nearly everything whether tangible or intangible has some shape, structure, or form. In Caroline Levine's critical text *Forms* (2015), she explores the imagined gap between formalism and historicism. She argues that form is inherently paradoxical, both material and immaterial, and yet comes together to share one "common definition: 'form' always indicates *an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping*" (Levine 3). This ordering parallels the routines that have become so familiar to southern women in this project thus far. Further, forms are their own sort of politics, of "distributions and arrangements" that involve boundaries including "bounded subjects, and domestic walls" (3). Foundational to this statement is the idea that form is not only used by agent powers but has its own agency. In this also emerges another dichotomous ability of form—it can both create boundaries and be used to push back against boundaries. Thus, form can be used to make sense of wild around and within us; additionally, if form has a natural arrangement, form can also be unruly or wild itself. At the same time, due to the domestic nature of these walls that Levine points to, form can also be something one dwells within. Ultimately, forms have five actions for Levine; they constrain, differ, overlap and intersect, travel, and do political work in particular historical contexts. Two of these goals, in particular, are of interest to this chapter: constraint and political work. Much of this project is concerned with the inherently political nature of constraints around women's bodies. From the earliest pages of this

project, it has emerged that the very prescriptions of nature/the wilderness and home/the domestic has been created to limit women's bodies or to parallel the action of limiting their bodies. Thus, the act of creating these boundaries is a form of constraint, and thus, in return, to push back against these boundaries via collapsing them is a form of resistance. Beyond this being more abstractly or immaterially a form of resistance, as seen in this project in Chapters 2 and 3, the literary form and structure of these same texts is another form of the collapse seen so far. Essentially, the literary form of these women's storytelling is the final form of resistance.

Beyond this, form itself is its own landscape—landforms are various forms of land, and structures of texts have individual and varying landscapes with their own ridges, hills, and valleys. In Autumn 2008, *National Geographic* put together a series entitled "poetry and place" where authors explored this relationship. Two excerpts from this stand out, one aptly entitled "The Shape of Words" by geographer Hayden Lorimer, who asserts that "having a 'sense of place' is a way of apprehending the world about us" (182). This place is often a wilderness or landscape that begins to resemble the land it comes from, which in turn then begs the question of it being dwellable. Further, poetry often serves as a "site" or home itself—it is a site for resistance and power, harkening back to Audre Lorde. As Lorimer says, poetry is "psychic weather…a crackling charge of connection. Or…earth-growth, an expressive form that coils info, and out of, places…formed or fabricated not so much of words but of the very things or phenomena it describes" (181). Though discussing poetry specifically, Lorimer touches on a vital idea: the form of literature and written storytelling becomes natural world in its unruliness and yet also provides a sense of place wherein one can be situated. Perhaps

this is why fellow contributor Owen Sheers finds poetry provides him a similar sense of belonging as the landscapes of his Pembrokeshire childhood, with him evoking poems that "didn't so much write *about* landscape as from *within* it" (172). Beyond the ideas of domestic and wild that take place in literature, the act of writing itself and the structure in which a text is written becomes in itself a kind of collapse as it both parallels landscapes and creates dwelling. Sheers continues to assert that, "One of the most significant shared qualities of a landscape and a poem that works (in both senses of the word) on us is their ability to 'situate' us by translating the abstract world of thought and feeling into a physical language" (173). As Ray uses form to stitch together the domestic and wild in her own history, so do the female authors of this chapter use form to look at specific instances where the domestic and wild—as in previous chapters—intersect, but also it comes in as a sort of necessity. In these texts, the women characters do have a domestic and a wild, but the existence of each is far less tangible, and the form is used to concretize the shifting boundaries.

The texts in Chapter 4 both explore this progression of nature and home while also analyzing this third tendril that Ray herself introduces in *Ecology*: where the form of the text, the form of memory, and form of the south become boundary and collapse. Chapter 4 presents three new, final texts where blurred lines between domestic and wild run throughout and where form takes the front stage. In Monique Truong's novel *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010), Linda (Linh-Dao) Hammerick, an adopted Vietnamese girl with synesthesia, traces the yarn of her memory in an attempt to find her own sense of place and identity. In the small town of Boiling Springs, North Carolina, she attempts to make home through bodily rebellion and through ordering of objects and events, taking the

actions of domesticity and the qualities that keep one from domesticity and curating them in a way that can provide belonging. This book is keenly domestic, and most of the navigating of self and learning of placemaking happens in domestic spaces. However, this book is missing a literal wilderness—Linh-Dao does not enter the wild, nor does it (physically) encroach into her own household(s). Instead, the wilderness challenging her is her own othered body, both being Vietnamese and having a disability (synesthesia). As she begins to navigate this otherness through ordering and curation, the form of the novel itself changes to become more of a museum of Linh-Dao's history. Continuing from this is Natasha Trethewey's poetry collection *Native Guard* (2007), where she reckons with what it means to be a woman—particularly a black woman—in the south. Specifically, Trethewey is working through her mixed ancestry and its rootedness in a sordid personal and communal history. Houses rarely exist here, outside of the occasional photograph, but wilderness and dirt continue to appear, and the forms of the poems and order of the collections further the work of Ray and Truong. This novel and these two poetry collections illuminate the way form collapses in on itself and is restructured in the journey to find oneself through wilderness and domesticity when, particularly, traditional envisioning of one or the other are lacking.

Finally, Sophie Campbell's graphic novel series *Wet Moon* (2004–present) begins the inquiry of a potential future post-collapse. In the text, which is described as an "unusually usual day-to-day story in the deep south," Cleo Lovedrop sits amidst a cast of othered friends in her college town of the eponymous Wet Moon. Within this group are women with fat bodies, body modifications, and queer women who all do not fit but who learn to do so through their ordinary actions. The collapse is already evident throughout

the text, a town of houses and dorms—places of dwelling—all built around a central swamp. Further, the graphic novel, unique in its form already, is further different in Campbell's curation of maps and written text (diary entries) woven throughout the typical frames of image and text. The story is punctuated by a near monstrous slightly androgynous female character with a missing limb and extreme body modification who seems to emerge from the swamp itself. This grotesque figure's emergence from amidst such continual, paralleled collapse—one that is explicitly southern—becomes the final embrace of self and of southern femininity that this project has been moving towards. This final text—specifically issues 1-3 of the series—shows what happens in the ordinary contemporary southern woman's life upon having stitched their quilt and presented their story among an empowered collapse. Though the south does not have one single narrative form it presents itself through, it itself is a regional form with prescriptions and limitations that the women of this project thus far have proven the existence of. It is up to the women of this final chapter, then, to explicitly use form to interweave their femininity within the form of south and reclaim it within their own everyday narratives.

Making Home When Home Is Wild

Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* follows a Vietnamese girl raised by a white Carolina family, a girl for whom dwelling consistently fails until she is able to take control of it versus it controlling her. The dwelling that limits her is one directly influenced by southern femininity and by the identity of the U.S. south as a region versus other global souths, particularly South Vietnam. By seeing how Linh-Dao, the protagonist, makes place, we can see how the constraints of region are pertinent to this collapse, understand the role of collapse for an Asian-American woman, and set the stage

for the final chapter's exploration of genre, structure, and story. This novel takes place in the small town of Boiling Springs, North Carolina. However, the places that most define Linh-Dao, and in which her identity is both shaped and thus must be explored, are places of dwelling: her childhood home, her biological parents' trailer, her Uncle Harper's home, and her lovers' homes. These places illuminate the performances that happen, both behind closed doors and not, that affect a person's ability to have a sense of belonging. Particularly, though, because Linh-Dao never had an idea of what place and home looked like, her biological family's trailer burning down at such a young age, she had to learn about place from her adopted family. Unfortunately, Linh-Dao always found herself in a queering of dwellings that was often negative in their formations. Her childhood homes did not keep her safe, she was surrounded by nostalgia and histories that were not her own, and the majority of the people in her life had already been displaced. Essentially, in this novel, the home has become a wild space where Linh-Dao has to go on a journey, not into the wilderness but in the unnatural domestic. What Linh-Dao needs is the ability to be true to herself, to have the right person *see* her, and to therefore be able to choose where to lay down her roots, and the way she learns to do that is through curation and routine. The dwellings the Burches and Hammericks lived in, and the histories that defined them, obfuscated the acts of homemaking this chapter has situated.

Several scholars have worked with the novel before, with a common theme being a discussion of how Linh-Dao's two main bodily markers—her synesthesia and Asian American identity—function in the book, with scholars like Begoña Simal-González and Michele Janette exploring the latter and scholars like Rachael Price, Jennifer Brandt, and Amanda Dykema exploring the former. This bodily identity is foundational to Truong's

work, and echoes of their work moves throughout this chapter. However, while they each discuss alienation to a degree, none of these authors discuss ways of making home or center the failure of homemaking in the novel. Much scholars' work intertwines with each other as they discuss body, race, and the form of the novel, which Janette in a later article refers to as a palimpsest. Indeed, this project is also interested in the treatment of identities and how they are overlapped, constantly shifting, and at times obfuscated. While this is not a new way into the book, explicitly tying the form of the novel to the form of body has not been explored. The most common conversations surrounding the novel, however, are distinctly southern ones. Denise Cruz, Alaina Kaus, and Justin Mellette all explore what it means for this novel to be considered southern, particularly when reckoning with similar ideas as their colleagues. Kaus and Mellette both work through the idea of a global south in contemporary literature, with ideas of how Linh-Dao's Vietnamese identity features as a third major "other" in the south and how Gothic structures are adapted to a multi-ethnic framework. Cruz is more so interested in parsing what is southern about Linh-Dao's experiences, ultimately asserting that the novel "plants itself squarely in southern US soil, yet also maps links to other Souths…to make the familiar strange and to imagine a vision that is new" (735-736). My analysis emerges the most clearly from this point, looking at how, specifically, the collapse of domestic and wild are defined by southern forms and are challenged by Linh-Dao's othered forms.

Southern ideas of homemaking pervaded the Hammerick home – both in terms of the mother's tangible actions and the father's intangible ideas. Though southern legacies have been consistent in this project, in this novel, the south emerges as a form itself that, in its shape, becomes constricting and in which Linh-Dao's global southern origins cause

direct tension. As situated in this chapter already, homemaking and domesticity are perpetuated as feminine, particularly maternal, acts. While this is not always the case, and can often be a harmful stereotype, it is this failure to protect as a mother that leaves Linh-Dao with a lack of home and safety. By failing to even create a sense of home, the mothers in this novel—Iris and DeAnne Burch—all but doom their daughters' ability to find place, often struggling to even find place and identity themselves. Like many southern daughters, the Burches can trace their lineage in Boiling Springs for decades. In this way, DeAnne Burch Hammerick has seemingly always had a place to belong; however, she never seems to be comfortable in the many spaces we see her. In flashbacks, the reader sees DeAnne fail to enter relationships, and her family begins to worry her "'window' was about to close" (58). It is never clear if DeAnne did in fact fail to become a wife and mother when she wanted to be or if she simply did not want to take part in these roles, but regardless, she would eventually settle with Thomas Hammerick. Linh-Dao remarks that, perhaps, her love for Thomas was rooted less in desire but in a need to fulfill her role: "On her days off, DeAnne went to visit these new mothers in their houses and hold their babies. When she looked at Thomas, that must have been what she saw" (59). Southernness emerges as a form that restricts DeAnne into role as wife and mother. She never seems to have agency—things happen *to* DeAnne.

While DeAnne often seems devoid of action, the little agency she has is in a domestic act: cooking casseroles. Seemingly innocuous bad cooking, DeAnne swivels between a collection of 3 heinous casserole dishes—"chicken à la king, tuna noodle, beefy macaroni" (34)—that she serves her family in order to rebel against a home that has excluded her from orienting herself within it. One of the traditions of feminine

homemaking is cooking, and DeAnne both allows herself to experiment and refuses boundaries by serving up these casseroles. Interestingly, though, DeAnne also brings things disparate together, hiding their identity in a way by covering them in the homogenizing cream of mushroom soup—in what Linh-Dao calls the "Great Assimilator" (35)—in perhaps an attempt to make the 'other' fit. This is the kind of homemaking she ends up sharing with Linh-Dao, not one that creates belonging but that yells, "I do not belong" in both action and objects. However, similar to how Eliza and Louisa's modes of making home alienate the enslaved peoples in their homes, DeAnne's reckoning with southern homemaking alienates her othered daughter. DeAnne resists southern motherhood to such a degree, her lack of care directly contributes to Linh-Dao's sexual assault. It will be this event that fully fractures Linh-Dao and DeAnne's relationship, as "a mother would have known better" (37). This failure in creating identity within a home emerges from DeAnne's own mother. Iris, in a conflicting manner, has an intense desire to please only herself and yet appear exactly as she believes other people want her to be. She keeps up with her figure throughout her life, but when her husband dies, Iris exercises control over her own body through the unlimited consumption of food. This very act of eating, a rebellion through taste, is what is passed to DeAnne in casseroles, and even appears in Linh-Dao in a way, through her synesthesia. Iris always "lusted" for sugar, even when her husband was alive, but her figure, the external performance, was more important. Upon his death, she cuts her hair and eats/drinks such an excess sugar her doctor is not sure how she even stays alive. As long as Iris was in a traditional home, she could not be herself, and her desire to be herself is what makes Linh-Dao, usually emotionally severed from the women in her adopted family, believe

there was “the beginning of something great” between her and her grandmother (9). Iris’ rebellion is so strong, upon her death, her body could not find its place in the southern ground without an alternate south coming in, her funeral delayed a week for magnolias to be shipped from South America since “there weren’t any magnolias to be had in Boiling Springs” (7). Essentially, while the Burches have always been rooted in a specific town, the women fail to feel a sense of belonging within southern boundaries of femininity. They find ways to rebel, but they never find or create a sense of place, which is passed onto Linh-Dao.

Her adopted father Thomas is not spared from the restrictions of southern form, with a sense of nostalgia for the past repeatedly haunting him until his death. This is the fate of many a southerner; as Scott Romine says, the south has “a long history of cultural nostalgia” (*The Real South*, 9). Thomas is continuously bringing the past into the present, and, often, an imagined past at that. When he speaks to Linh-Dao of New York, it is in “failed fairy tales,” “fantastical” descriptions of a city full of yellow cars that took you anywhere you desired (175). Everything Thomas discusses, remembers, and does is directly related to a need to have place; however, because he is stuck in a place he no longer fully connects to—having returned to the south out of duty not desire—it is as effective as spiraling in space. He imbues Linh-Dao with his perception of history, one that sees unclearly. Even the way he decorated her bedroom eschewed a sense of place. It was decorated in the colors of the places he fantasized. Ships lined the walls, ships that “got you places” and caused Linh-Dao to “live on the very edge” of the world (151). Even within her own bedroom, where an identity is supposed to be created and rooted, Linh-Dao is raised with the idea that place cannot be found within your own home, or

within your own history. Even the limited factual teaching Thomas does bestow to the young girl is of her inherited southern history, not of her Vietnamese history. Instead of teaching Linh-Dao about her family history, Thomas purchases her a book about the history of North Carolina, and while there was a comfort in that limited and digestible amount of history, Linh-Dao notes that "history was in the missing details" (53) not the few provided in neat pages. Every understanding of history Linh-Dao had growing up came from what was told, but the real history always lied within what she was not told. This led her to be caught between two southern identities—her biological South Vietnamese one which she holds in her own body but does not actually know about, and her inherited American southern identity that she hosts in her emotion/affect but does not provide her with understanding.

These mixed identities, as well as the failure to make home or be at home perpetuated by her adopted family, leads to the home essentially becoming a wilderness wherein Linh-Dao has to learn to make place. Further, beyond the domesticity perpetuated by her white southern family, Linh-Dao has to reckon with the domesticity inherent to Asian Americans. Due to the patriarchy, there are many overlaps between these two forms of homemaking, but Erin Khuê Ninh explores Asian American women's relationship to home explicitly in her book *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (2011). Domesticity is distinctly tied to imperialism, and there is a specific idea of what the Asian maternal body is meant to be in America. Post-WW2, there emerged a community of brides who were all but forced into marriage by the white male soldiers who took advantage of wartime and language barriers to displace these women under promise of a better life. Asian female bodies have long been seen as

merchandise to be consumed by the Western man, and because wife and mother was the Asian woman's only role allowed to her once she came to America, she had to fulfill it perfectly. The daughter is in an awkward position of having to reclaim the mother, undermining maternal authority, and further loosening her only sense of place. The more a woman makes place, the further she gets from having place; specifically, "In these terms, a girl who 'runs' wild is literally one who is not domestically confined, but has (unsupervised) mobility in the geography outside the home. Furthermore, such a girl acquires, it would seem, a familiarity with uses of her body which are themselves regarded with suspicion" (Ninh 182). Thus, in this novel, Linh-Dao, by being a Vietnamese immigrant adopted by a white family, is already alienated from body and home, and within her body is a forcibly warped sensibility of mother and daughter that the situations her Carolina family put her in only compound. Linh-Dao never knew her own mother, other than limited memories from her toddler age, and yet the affective legacy of being an Asian American daughter who is not domestically confined yet who must also save the mother haunts her. Simultaneously, the mother figures around her are haunted by their own southern ideas of femininity, homemaking, and motherhood, severing almost all relationships with placemaking Linh-Dao could have.

Linh-Dao, thus, has many forms, weaving throughout one another to craft a web she is stuck within: form of mother, form of American south, form of South Vietnam, form of disabled. In order to make place, she must be able to order and organize these elements of her persona, and this cannot happen just within the confines of a house. In fact, in the novel, nearly all her attempts to be home in houses completely fail, beyond the previous failures in her own home. The safety of her own bed is where she is raped by

the young man her mother has hired to mow their lawn. Her teenage boyfriend's bedroom offers a sense of potential belonging, with Linh-Dao saying that when they were at the home, "it was [theirs]" (91). Further, they only kiss at his home, making Wade's home the first place of dwelling Linh-Dao can explore a sense of private performance. However, the identity she believed she was creating crashes when she realizes she is not Wade's first kiss and refuses to sleep with him. Linh-Dao's very first home outside of Carolina, where she lives with her fiancé Leo also cannot provide her dwelling. Even though he seems adept at acts of homemaking, with "homemade pancakes [being] the ace up his sleeve," Linh-Dao does not feel safe enough with him to reveal her synesthesia, saying "he just never would understand why" (76). It is within this space that Leo will eventually reject Linh-Dao for the inability to house life within her. A doctor, Leo sends Linh-Dao to have tests run in which doctors find a life-threatening issue, thus leading to an operation that results in her infertility. Upon finding out Linh-Dao cannot have children, Leo leaves her. The inability to be able to create a legacy, to birth children that will grow to have their own history, makes her incomplete to Leo, thus "equat[ing] her body with what others have projected onto it" (173). Leo thus ostracizes Linh-Dao from her own body, making her not be able to be at home within her own skin, something she has had to already deal with for years. Continuously, homes, houses, and familial places are the spaces in which Linh-Dao is most frequently alienated from her own body or in which she experiences actual bodily harm.

Instead, Linh-Dao must learn to make place more intangibly, by working through her history and memory to eventually find place in her own physical body. It is only through another othered body—her queer Uncle Harper's—orientation to place that Linh-

Dao is able to orient herself to place. Though Linh-Dao has learned how to be excluded from place from her maternal figures and how to be displaced by a false perception of history from her father, seeing Harper's successful queer placemaking is the catalyst for her own. Harper had been told to fit within a certain orientation by his family, and while he has adhered in a public space, in the private space of his home, he flourishes. Specifically, Harper uses the arrangement of objects in his home—books, clothes, and photographs—to create place. It is through understanding Harper's queering of place and placemaking even in other countries that Linh-Dao is able to take the foreign concept of home, reckon with her past, and create place within the one space she has always desired to. Harper's library, for example, is organized by ideas and feelings and desires—words like "Acerbic" and "Foreign" and "The End" define his catalogue (8). Harper's bedroom, which is not revealed until the end of the novel, is home to his secreted identity, with Linh-Dao referring to it as not just a dwelling space but a museum that records his life. Within those four walls are the artifacts of Harper's life—bright walls, fitted dresses, and photographs—artifacts that by visiting can inform Linh-Dao of her own history and identity. Further, the place where Harper is able to fully be himself—be out with his queer lover in public dressed in the feminine attire he identifies with—is not in the American south but South America. Interestingly, what led to this visit was the South American magnolias imported for Iris' coffin, flowers that "made him think about places in the world ever more southern than where he was born and raised" (8). Here, again, not only the ideas of house but the south as form becomes one that must be reckoned with where moving to other souths helps one navigate and understand the south they are actively in.

Seeing her parents fail to navigate southern forms of legacy and home, seeing her Vietnamese history get lost within her southern one, and seeing her Uncle Harper successfully navigate southern home all results in Linh-Dao's eventual successful form of homemaking—one that takes place in her own body. The main action Linh-Dao must reckon with to orient herself, both to her own body and to the world around her, is her synesthesia. Linh-Dao's synesthesia is one related to verbal sounds and taste; when she hears a word, she tastes a corresponding flavor. These incomings, as she calls them, can "disrupt, dismay, or delight" (29). Each word spoken to her, emanating from a television or overheard in a restaurant, overwhelms Linh-Dao with sensations that threaten to push her out of her own body. Jennifer Brandt claims that "synesthesia is an apt metaphor not only for the ways in which the body can serve as an alienating experience, but also for the powerful ways in which language shapes emotion" (52). Similar to how DeAnne covers her emotions in running water, throughout the majority of the book, we see Linh-Dao try to numb her incomings, and their corresponding feelings, with cigarettes, tobacco, and alcohol. However, she also has times where she uses them to assert her identity, and they become the key to her rebellion. When DeAnne chastises Linh-Dao, she uses her own words against her: "I began to throw her words back at her in the form of a question. "No*grapejelly* dessert for the selfish*cornonthecob*?...The act of repeating her words, of course, served multiple purposes" (35). One of these purposes is an explicit pushing back against DeAnne and an implicit acceptance of difference. When she is in college, she lays in bed at night cataloguing all the words and tastes she learned that day, much like her uncle's library: "I whispered them to myself. I placed them in order, from sour to sweet. I organized them in descending gradation of saltiness. I saved the bitter ones for last,

hoping as I always do to find a match for my first memory" (103). Not only does this curation and routine create a sense of familiarity and place within her own body, but it becomes a method through which she can explore her memory and history. Before Linh-Dao can situate herself within the twisted and hidden stories of her past, she must become comfortable with herself, must accept her own identity. If she cannot be at home within her own body, she cannot create place in home or region—she must accept she does not belong in order to belong.

This bodily experience, embracing it, and using it in a way that she learns from her fellow othered bodies is such a strong form of rebellion and collapse that it alters the very form of the novel. The form of the novel itself begins to parallel the actions Linh-Dao learns from Uncle Harper with it emerging as a type of curation itself. Throughout the book, Linh-Dao as narrator moves from one idea to the next, not simply stream of consciousness narratives, but almost overfilling the book with images and metaphors. The book begins to take the form of Linh-Dao's own memory and history, rife with contrasting identities and missing parts. Perhaps the most apt way to describe the book and Linh-Dao's identity is through her own opening metaphor of her experiences as a deck of playing cards. The cards each hold truths—"My name is Linda Hammerick. I grew up in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. My parents were Thomas and DeAnne" (4)—however, these are only partial truths. This is why, "once these cards have been thrown down, there are bound to be distorting overlaps" that still hold truths to them: "I grew up in (Thomas and Kelly). My parents were (valedictorian and baton twirler)…I miss Linda Hammerick" (4-5). Linh-Dao's own narrative cannot be made sense of through putting them in an expected order but through a curation in which she "pick[s] up

the cards again, slowly, examining each one" (5). Though there are a plethora of moments in the novel that exemplify this movement, perhaps one of the strangest ones is the insertion of bits of North Carolina history—including the Roanoke Colony and the Wright Brothers; however, Linh-Dao uses these moments as methods of navigation; though they are not her own history, by finding resonances of herself within them, she can curate identity.

Like Luna and Tamsen Donner, Linh-Dao also finds a tragic woman in history to connect to: Virginia Dare. Virginia Dare was the first child to be born in the New World, disappearing with the entire colony of Roanoke. Linh-Dao connects to Dare from the opening of the book her father bought for her, going to the point of saying she "was being shown the world through Dare's barely opened eyes. History always had a point of view" (52). This point of view is one Linh-Dao criticizes, saying that "Virginia Dare was taken from the arms of history and placed on legend's lap. Unfortunately for her, legend was a man" (68). Dare's identity as a young girl born to North Carolina and being co-opted by patriarchal legend is a form through which Linh-Dao understands herself. Linh-Dao has also been made a new presence in North Carolina with no choice in the matter, and southern mythologies become ways to limit her. By arranging their hidden histories within the archive of her own self, she is able to trace a new identity. Even the language she begins using in her everyday life follows this historical parallel; for her "I dare you. I double dare you. I Virginia Dare you" all mean something individual, and "A Virginia Dare meant different things to us at different times in our girlhood, but it was always an invocation of a danger that mystified us" (69). By identifying with Virginia Dare's mythologization that does not actually reflect who she was as a person, Linh-Dao is able

to finally see a reflection of herself. By using it as language in her everyday life, she is creating an agency akin to how she uses words with her synesthesia to assert her identity. And by regularly but inconsistently inserting Dare into her own narrative, she is challenging the structure of form to parallel the spiraled structure of her own memory and history.

The novel is just that, a novel, but by having a narrative that jarringly moves between ideas, both Truong as Asian American and southern is able to find agency in a non-normative narrative structure that represents the non-linearity of her own existence. It is Linh-Dao's bodily homemaking—her ordering of words related to taste and history—that allows her to finally find place. In the final moments of the book, Linh-Dao does have the sense that she has successfully navigated her own wild in a way she can find peace within. She has dinner with Cecil's nephews and Kelly at Harper's home. She comes to terms with her mother at the kitchen table where they once ate—the domestic spaces that once failed her being reclaimed. It is only after this reclaiming that Linh-Dao can have her final reckoning with her past. Though she is never able to remember the word the triggered her first bitter taste, this becomes unimportant. Linh-Dao learns that finding place is not about restoring lost memory but curating existing ones, so she is not worried about whether DeAnne's story about Linh-Dao's past is true or not, only that it is a story, since "we all need a story of where we came from and how we got here" (282). Linh-Dao must work through her memories and through the stories she has been told in order to start telling new ones that can create place. Being able to order and curate her past and her experiences—those that she remembers and those she does not—will not unlock the key to all existence, the answers to all questions. However, these domestic acts

allow her to create home on the margins, navigating the form of the south and narrative form to ultimately domesticate the wilderness of home that is made of physical house, body, and words. It is impossible to remove this mode of curation from southern placemaking. Regardless of what south is being focused on, what is pertinent is that region is always going to inform the identity of who lives within its boundaries. Once a truth is defined, it is hard to reverse it, and truth is not always about what is *provable* to be true but about what we *believe* is true. As Romine says early in his book, "The fake South…becomes the real South through the intervention of narrative" (9). This is what Linh-Dao does. She traces back through her history and uses those stories, the narrative of her own past, to make the future provide place for her. The south is rife with people who are desperate to perform in order to belong inside it, to be southern enough. To cut off excess. To *fit* into spaces and hope they are places. Instead, to keep our excess—this is a rebellion.

In this novel, Truong indeed asks us what it means to be southern, and in this is masked: what does it mean to have place? The triptych of souths in this novel in which Linh-Dao sits at the crux serves as a way to envision the south as form. Romine reflects on the concept of the "real south" as "a set of anxious, transient, even artificial intersections, sutures, or common surfaces between two concepts that are themselves remarkably fluid" (2-3). In the intermixing of different souths, Truong is able to highlight the anxieties unique to the American south that are made real through perpetuations of its existence, like the ties to nostalgia Thomas holds to or the relationship to food and home of DeAnne and Iris. Like Denise Cruz, I believe that the novel's multiple souths do not serve to minimize the identity of the American south but to amplify it, "imagin[ing] a

literary South to contest the more visible - or usual, prominent, and normative - constructs of race and region" (717). Linh-Dao has many histories to navigate, but it is the inherited southern legacy that she most directly has to challenge the boundaries of. Linh-Dao says, "the past is an affliction for which there is no cure" (10). This may be true—the past is inescapable. However, the idea of the past not being navigable and not being able to orient oneself within place is an affliction *with* a cure. This novel shows the consequences of an inability to have place as a result of the failures to see someone for who they really are. While familial identity and homemaking are constantly shifting in their identities, what stays the same is the need for acknowledgement and identity, particularly in a shifting south. What emerges as a central identity to southern femininity, however, is once more the need to find place for—and within—the female body, and once again, a collapse of domestic and wild makes this possible. Thus, in order to "put down our tender roots and stay" (282), we must find place, not necessarily in physical ground, but in the memory and history we see, understand, and create. Both Linh-Dao, through her self-discovery, and Truong, through presenting Linh-Dao's structure of memory as inherently fractured, serve as bricoleurs of southern and feminine identity. It is only through this arranging of self that placing roots in self can occur. While Linh-Dao is othered in her region, her family, and her places of dwelling, by exploring her own stories and curating them into a narrative that is reflective of her experience, she is able to finally find the place she is willing to plant her roots. In the end, "we all want a way to know where we should be in the world" (108), and we can know this if we are willing to challenge and manipulate the very forms that constrict us.

Navigating the Intangible Wild

The ability for Linh-Dao to place roots is reliant on her ability to navigate the wilderness present in her own dwelling spaces and her own body, one that has been shaped and formed by the form of the south as region. This is the same vein that Natasha Trethewey enters with her collection, *Native Guard*, such an acute exploration of personage and place within the southern US that it took home the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2007. For Trethewey, the south itself, not just as physical landscape but as concept, is a wilderness in which she must work to make home. Specifically, she must navigate being a racial other in the American south. The landscapes that are supposed to provide her place instead eschew her, and it is only through segmenting and arranging that she is able to re-locate and situate. While Truong's novel begins to challenge narrative form, Trethewey's reckoning with her history is just as reliant on form as it is content. Trethewey uses language and verse—curating and ordering words themselves—to parse an externally collapsed domestic and wild and, upon navigation of this space, find herself within it. Like Ray, this navigation must take place alongside her own personal reckonings with her family history just as much as the land, such as her mother's murder at the hands of her stepfather. Formally, Trethewey breaks her collection into three sections: in the first she works through her mother's death, in the second she works through the history of the south, and in the third she weaves personal and collective together for a final exploration of self. She opens the collection, however, with a single poem titled "Theories of Time and Space," which sets the foundation and almost functions as a second epigraph for the collection as a whole. In it, she starts with a particularly southern perspective: "there's no going home" (2). Though this sentiment

opens the collection, this action of working towards a sense of place, of working through ideas of home, is the very goal of the poetry here. Perhaps this is why the remainder of the poem's imagery harkens back to various parts of this project so far. Trethewey's south sees the "shrimp boats" and "mangrove swamp[s]" of Chapter 2, the "tome[s] of memory" and "sky threatening rain" of Chapter 3, and the photographs of "who you were…waiting when you return" from Truong. The south, in its inherent domestic and wild parts permeates this collection, and though the women must embark on new journeys where "Everywhere you go will be somewhere you've never been" (3-4), "who you were" waits for them on the dock (20). Regardless of the idea of home allowed for southern women amongst the south's ideas of place and body, someone is waiting at the end of this self-exploration through collapse.

Having won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2007, this collection is no stranger to academic exploration. The vast majority of scholarly work focuses on Trethewey's discussions of blackness and of southernness. Much of this work looks at the intersections of the two as they cross in the physical body, specifically, the oft-forgotten bodies left to time. Jill Goad specifically looks at Patricia Yeager's concept of "throwaway bodies" to explore the figures Trethewey tries to reinstate, like those of the soldiers of the Native Guard, while Jeremy Patterson connects the collection to M. NoubeSe Philip's *Zong!,* which attempts to bring back the voices of the enslaved peoples drowned when thrown from slave ships crossing the Atlantic. What they both emphasize is how foundational restoration is to Trethewey's project. None of them use the language of stitching or of curation, yet much of how they discuss her fight to bring personal and collective experiences to the forefront is rooted in aligned images. For what Trethewey is

claiming and restoring is not only people to history but history itself, as explored by Giorgia De Cenzo who asserts in just her title that Trethewey "[claims] the property of history" and by Jee Eun Kim who explores how she turns sordid, collective acts like miscegenation into its own personal history. This personal nature is analyzed as well, with Destiny O. Birdsong analyzing how matrilineal trauma, specifically, runs through the book—even after the first section concludes. Indeed, though not the focus of this section, the images of motherhood continue, whether to beget trauma or offer fulfillment. Regardless of purpose, most scholars seem to laud Trethewey as a native guard herself of southern history (Giorgia De Cenzo) and a chronicler of the imagined south (William M. Ramsey). I am similarly interested in how Trethewey records the south's history and pushes back against southern imagination but specifically through the lens of her own body and how south as form emerges through the form of the collection as well as the form of Trethewey's identity.

The first section immediately brings the reader into Trethewey's own identity and experience as she traces her mother's life and untimely death and explores her own grief. Though this section appears on the surface to be less tied to the south, Trethewey's explorations of interactions with her mother before and after her death mimic southern traditions. De Cenzo describes the first third of Native Guard as "episodes of [Trethewey's] childhood, and painful memories, which seemed appeased at first, re-emerge violently and haunt her present" (24). Even her grief is inherited, not dead and not past. Further, she mimics the southern collapse of domestic and wild as established so far in this project. In the opening and closing poems of the section, specifically, Trethewey mentions the act of stitching directly. In "The Southern Crescent," she crafts

an image of her mother in the past, a collection of "homemade dresses, whisper / of crinoline and lace, her name stitched / inside each one" (3-5). In this poem, Trethewey begins her examination of what lasts, of what of our identity holds permanence. In this poem her mother is attempting a journey to connect either herself or her daughter to a paternal figure. Though the journey to meet her own failed, the mother is still willing to attempt certainty anew in introducing Trethewey to her father. However, the destination is not reached in this poem, with it ending while the journey is still underway. Since this uncertainty pervades, we must look to other images in the poem to ground us, and one image of permanence is her mother's name stitched into her own dresses. Here, unlike in Durban, this stitching from a black woman's hand is a legacy that is able to continue through her daughter. This name, this making and marking of self through domestic action, becomes the one thing that follows her from "the very idea of home" (9). In the wilderness, the unknown, in which we are "bound only / for whatever awaits us" (28-29), domestic action becomes a root that plants us in place.

In the final poem of the section, "At Dusk," Trethewey mentions stitching again, but this time it is less literal. In the poem, she listens to a neighbor call for her cat to come home, and she wonders if she could do the same for the ones she has lost. Specifically, she wonders if she "might lift / [her] voice, sure of someone out there, / send it over the lines stitching here / to there, certain the sounds I make / are enough to call someone home (25-29). Here, the stitching emerges as the vessel or the path that would bring this person, assumedly her mother, back home. In the coming back there is a "luminous possibility" (17-18), one that "would keep [the cat] away from home" (18-19). Throughout the first section, Trethewey ruminates on all she is unable to know and

restore about her mother, but soon she will move to what she can restore about her history. Here she is on a precipice, and the structure and form of the poem itself reflects this. This closing poem is 29 lines all in one stanza; for the most part, all the lines are of a similar length, giving an image of it being a cohesive block, or a collection of threads evenly stitched together. This assuredness in shape is juxtaposed with the uncertainty in the poem's content, where the speaker mistakes calling a cat for a child, ponders the meaning of words, and wonders about the impact of her own sounds. The italicized "*here here*" (7) both represents the speech—the literal calling for the animal—but also emphasizes the presence of the poem and the need to situate within this specific location of the south. As the final poem before she begins her section on the south, Trethewey uses these italics as a double entendre, both beckoning for the past to come to her and grounding herself in the present where she will soon restore pieces of the past. This domestic action of stitching, then, becomes one that can mark something permanently in a way that brings home forward and can potentially be used for the reverse, to bring someone back to home. It is a throughline that, like the Sicklefin Redhorses in Ray's closing poem to *Red Lanterns*, will guide Trethewey forward into the rest of her history—and into her restoration. These two poems with images of stitching show both domestic imagery amongst the south as wild form and show the restitching of feminine identity Trethewey is enacting.

Before Trethewey can reckon with this restoration, though, she must exact the collapse of wilderness and domesticity. Trethewey directly calls out houses for their false perpetuations of being a place of safety and belonging in "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971" where she examines a photo of her family outside of their home during a winter storm.

Photographs are a tether, as Trethewey intimates in her opening poem, and this photo shows, to the unaware viewer, a home that houses a family whose names are scrawled on its back. However, what matters is what is inside this house, what keeps it from being a home. In this photo there is "nothing / of what's inside – mother, stepfather's fist" (17-18). For Trethewey's mother, like Linh-Dao, the house cannot be a space in which she finds home and is its own wilderness for her to navigate. Domesticity continues to fail in this space, further emphasized by the "food rotting / in the refrigerator" (4-5) as the power goes out during the storm. Like with Broom and Ward, the natural world's destruction comes in and destroys part of the inner workings of the house. However, this causing of the inner failures illuminates and emphasizes the failures in the family itself, thus providing a record for Trethewey to challenge and stitch within her narrative. Further, in the poem "My Mother Dreams Another Country" her mother is reckoning with how meaning shifts to no longer accurately reflect oneself within the home. In the poem, her mother has to return to her childhood house—where "her room unchanged since she's been gone…every day she is flanked by the rituals of superstition" (8, 11). However, though it is unchanged, she is, and she no longer can sit with the same words. Instead, they tell her to eat dirt to quiet the voice in her head, to put the landscape in her body, which is, in fact, conflated with her body: "the landscape's green tangle; the molehill / of her own swelling" (24-25). This collapse becomes more evident in the way this grave becomes one with the landscape in the poem "Monument." It is almost oxymoronic, monuments mark something—they stand out and we expect them to be easy to find. However, in this poem, the landscape obscures her mother's grave: "In the cemetery / last June, I circled, lost— / weeds and grass grown up all around— / the

landscape blurred and weaving" (7-10). Though the landscape obscures, it also creates a sort of shame in her, as if they are doing something she cannot successfully do. In these two poems, we see the home fail in addition to the landscape for the mother—this is because the mother is not the one doing the collapse of domestic and wild; she is reckoning with prescriptions of these. Instead, now, Trethewey, through the form of poetry and the stitching together of the poems, is working through the failed performance of home and nature in her mother's life to make it make sense for her own personal and collective history.

Alongside this, attempts to bring the wild into the domestic, to domesticate the wild, result in a form of death. While wilderness becomes in many ways symbolic in this text, the physical natural world still moves throughout and becomes symbol throughout Trethewey's life that has been in direct tension and contrast with how to be home or to belong. In "Genus Narcissus," she recalls the nature that ran wild adjacent to her walk home from school in childhood. Once, though she "[knew] they grew wild" (5), young Trethewey took a handful of flowers for her mother, who put them on the windowsill within the house. This domestic action is impermanent, however; this wild could not continue to grow within the domestic confines of the house, not in the condition where they had been torn from their roots. Neither wild nor domestic, not only do the flowers die but foreshadow the death of the mother herself. Though domestic and wild did not collapse successfully in the present, now this moment can become one that it threaded through the collection as Trethewey crafts her identity and place. Trethewey furthers this idea of landscape as evidence, as she collapses the female's body and the land. In her poem "What is Evidence?" about her mother's death at the hands of her stepfather, she

traces what is left after someone's death. Though her mother was abused, and there were semblances of it when she was alive—"fleeting bruises she'd cover" and "teeth she wore in place of her own" (1, 7)—none of it can still count as evidence. There is nothing now to bear witness of. The only evidence of the life of the woman is her decaying body, specifically "the landscape of her body—splintered clavicle, pierced temporal—her thin bones settling a bit each day, the way all things do" (14). This image of the body is not only collapsed with the land but emerges as "a spiritual manifestation of history" (27), according to De Cenzo, where her mother is a symbol of the lost histories of enslaved peoples who died in the dirt of the south and would never be recovered. Over a century after slavery ends, her mother's legacy remains as tenuous, and like Ray, Trethewey's working through her mother's life and legacy while stitching it within southern history allows her to eventually locate herself. What continues to emerge as vital is not simply to parse but to order and reflect—to see. Though these two poems are vastly different, one being about a woman watching a storm and one being about a woman's abuse disappearing with time, both use nature/wilderness as a form of testimony, a form of bearing witness.

Similar to how Ray collapses domestic and wild through her breaking down of form and intertwining of various types of storytelling, so does Trethewey. Her collection contains plenty of free verse poems, inter-stitched with a villanelle, a pantoum, a ghazal, and poems of her own invented form. Specifically, "Miscegenation" is a ghazal, where Trethewey repeats a phrase ending in "Mississippi." This final section of the collection merges her exploration of personal and collective history together, as she works through what it means to be southern alongside what it means to be her mother's daughter, and

this form's inherent repetition roots the section's goals—and its connected affects—to the function and power of narrative structure. In this poem, Trethewey reckons with her mixed lineage. Her parents, mother black and father white, left the south to marry before returning, and this refrain continues. Regardless of where Trethewey moves in her life, she cannot separate herself from this one place. However, this inability to separate does not necessarily bring comfort or belonging, and this lack of comfort is also evident in the repeated return in the ghazal, with it becoming both frustrating and haunting. The paralleling of "Mississippi" against the shifting rhyme of "name" and "same" also furthers the way it becomes monotonous and constricting, which a successful home should not force. Names, which identify, here limit as much as give freedom, which is emphasized even in the content of the poem as she traces the resonant meanings of Natasha. Natasha, regardless of where the name exists, must fall prey to this sameness, which even in its meaning ties her to her southern history: Christmas child, like Faulkner's Joe Christmas. Throughout the poem, the content interweaves her personal history with southern literature, but the form is what creates the feelings of constriction and in which Trethewey is able to emphasize her conclusions: she is able to make Mississippi more familiar to her. She cannot change the past, but she can make her relationship to it in the present more agential. Her use of form to craft this and embrace the energy of Mississippi, then, offers a sense of belonging. By working through her lack of clear identity and placing it within the framework of the south, both in its history and literature, and by using a repetitive form to do so, she is able to come to a conclusion about her identity she would not otherwise.

Though Trethewey's exploration of the south is done through the form of her poetry, the south emerges as its own form just as constricting as it is for Linh-Dao. The south pervades the collection, but Trethewey dedicates the entire central section of the collection to the south's history and identity—allowing her relationship to it to be inherent before it is explicit. She establishes the main qualities she associates with the south in the section's opening poem "Pilgrimage." Here, rivers themselves turn away from the south, "forgetting, from the past" (6). This is a place in which "the dead stand" (10), "the whole city is a grave" (19), and there is "living history" (33). She emphasizes the south's rootedness in nostalgia and inability to move beyond the past as a particular restricting form that women, specifically, have to reckon with. It is a woman (Mary Webster Loughborough), she highlights in the poem, who "[writes] herself / into history" (16-17). This is the figure Trethewey becomes in this section, and she rewrites southern history through poetry. The clearest image of this emerges in the titular poem, "Native Guard," which is located in this second section. The Native Guard, as Trethewey states in her Notes at the end of the collection, was "the first officially sanctioned regiment of black soldiers in the Union Army," with two regiments "made up of men who had been slaves only months before enlisting" (47). The mere inclusion of this group of black soldiers in the section about southern history is on its own a rewriting of southern history and push back against its boundaries, but Trethewey continues her challenging through the form of storytelling. First, this poem blurs the lines between diary and verse, with each stanza serving as a journal entry from a former slave turned soldier. This blurring permeates into the actions of the solider himself, using a former Confederate soldier's journal to tell his story, "on every page, / his story intersecting with my own" (27-28).

This collapsing of boundaries parallels the conflicting identities of black soldiers having to risk their lives to fight against those they already fought to escape from—only to be all but erased from common history.

This poem serves as a lynchpin for the collection, with the soldier's thoughts about the south echoing Trethewey's thoughts about her mother and foreshadowing her processing of personal southernness. Like Trethewey's witnessing of her own mother's life, the soldier seeks to bear witness of not just his own life but those he aids to capture, "put[ting] down in ink what I know / they labor to say between silences" (71-72). The soldier's inclusion of a soldier dying, falling "knees-first as in prayer, then / another, his arms outstretched" (93-94), parallels Trethewey and the statue she observes in "What the Body Can Say." This tying of southern identity to statue is pertinent; as William M. Ramsey argues Trethewey "resists a monumentalizing type of history that reveres the sacred past by permanently freezing social order into granite" (130-131). Instead, what Trethewey freezes are moments of affect, personal experience and emotion that enforces the idea "history is not merely an objectivistic enterprise of collecting facts" (Ramsey 130). In this poem, the south's identity of being defined by living graves and lasting pasts continues, but Trethewey is also able to take agency of its form through paralleling herself implicitly and explicitly with this past figure. In this, she is able to bend and manipulate the form of the south instead of it doing the same to her. She is able to push this further back into time as well as pulling it forward to her. With the June 1863 entry of the poem, the soldier compares the unclaimed dead black men to creatures in water, with "the eyes of fish washed ashore" (106). This image reverses a harkening back to the image of the countless drowned black men, women, and children thrown overboard from

slave ships crossing the Atlantic, whose stories, like that of the Native Guard, "time will render / mute" (137-138). By establishing a connective thread throughout black southern history and ensuring the "truth be told" (140), Trethewey is asserting not only that the south's haunting past harmfully rejects those who built its very structures but changes the structure itself in order to weave them back into southern history. This act is foundational to her ability to parse her own southern identity and for her to find home within a legacy that has made traditional senses of home so wild to her and those who came before her.

Importantly, Trethewey selects poetry as the literary form in which she will conduct this self-exploration, and the fact this form is being used to navigate a racial southern identity cannot be taken for granted. In Audre Lorde's seminal essay "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" (1985), she explores how crucial poetry is for not just telling stories but for survival—specifically for black women. As she states, "The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep" (1), and this power and sense of self can be reached through the curating of words, ideas, experiences, and feelings into verse. Particularly, Lorde references a white, male, and almost sterile idea of form. Seeing form in a way that puts her in conversation directly with Levine, Lorde asserts that "within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive" (1). However, with poetry, women and black women specifically can re-contextualize the boundaries of storytelling and worldmaking, stitching affective experiences back into form itself. Further, when Lorde emphasizes the heart of her argument, she harkens back to the geographers from earlier in this chapter who see poetry as landscape: "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the

light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (1). What Trethewey is doing is tapping into the new tradition of imbuing feeling into poetry and crafting a landscape wherein she is able to plant new roots amidst self-exploration and discovery and within a particularly southern tradition that so limited her ancestors.

At the end of her collection, one which has been a journey into finding what it means to be from the south, Trethewey titles her final poem "South." This poem encapsulates portions of the entire collection; she gathers together images and themes from throughout the collection, curating them into this final order of words. Here are the "bone-thin phalanxes" (2) reminiscent of the final evidence of her mother's body within the ground. Here is the "dialectic of dark / and light" (4-5), the natural world itself, the complex history of the south, and her own physical identity. Here is the nature the Fugitives so loved and emphasized with the ghosts of her enslaved forebearers. Here are the bodies, laying in the ground shared by her mother. Here the history is "sewn into [her] clothes" (22) the way her own mother's name was stitched into her clothes decades before. Here is the Confederacy lingering on in the future she, a black woman, sits within. Throughout this poem, Trethewey takes each individual thread that she has brought up, connected to her personal history and the collective history of the south, and stitched them into a net that she casts around herself, something to catch and reflect her. This is what allows Trethewey to, like the speaker of "Pilgrimage," complete her journey in a way that she "write[s] herself / into history" (16-17). Here, Trethewey reflects on three key points: domestic action, the land itself, and the idea of being marked. Ultimately, though, regardless of how much she does or does not feel like part of this

place, this place is in her, and its wilderness is the place in which, like her mother, she will eventually return. Now, she can fully call this her "native land, this place they'll bury me" ("South" 34). This line, one past the thirty-three mark that permeates the book, is representative of her ability to now move forward. There is no telling what will be marking this eventual resting place, whether or not there will be a monument with signs to tell anyone her story, to signal to anyone how to feel. However, through the very act of writing this collection and situating herself amongst her history, she works to actually create a dwelling place that serves as a signal, a monument, a lasting being that reflects her own. Like Linh-Dao, through the curation of personal and collective history, she has found a place for her roots in her own southern femininity.

The Feminine Body as Home

While Truong presents us with a girl for whom homes themselves become wilderness and Trethewey shows how the imagination of region itself can be a wilderness, Sophie Campbell presents a town where the wild and the unnatural push new boundaries and become collapsed within the form of the female body. This graphic novel series features college drama, love sagas, body modifications, and borderline fantasy characters, and while swamps may seem the only strikingly southern part of this series, Campbell's opening line in the description of the first book explicitly calls *Wet Moon* "an unusually usual day-to-day story in the Deep South." And she is right; while on the surface this book is the largest outlier of the project, its protagonists struggle with a similar sense of belonging within a town where what is natural—and the natural world—is constantly being challenged and where the places we are meant to feel at home—spaces of dwelling and our own bodies—redefine the hearth. Further, this book

culminates in the peak of seeing how form becomes a way to collapse domestic and wild, and even beyond this, collapse women's experiences into one another to craft the very reflection of southern femininity this project has been so interested in. This project follows Volumes 1–3 of the 7–volume series that hosts a large cast of recurring characters but primarily follows Cleopatra (Cleo) Lovedrop, a college freshman in the eponymous swampy southern town of Wet Moon, who is running from her past and walking wearily into her future. Though Cleo is the anchor of the series, the books almost equally follow a cast of female-identifying characters whose dwelling spaces include southern mansions, old family homes, and trashy dorm rooms, while surrounded by the swamps that run throughout the town.

Though not a character, Campbell as creator has grown across the creation of the series, having started writing it under a cis-male identity; over the course of the series, however, Campbell came out as trans, and when the books published under her deadname were re-issued under Sophie Campbell, they featured new cover art and material. The books, then, not only shift with their own genre's form but shift alongside the gendered forms Campbell is exploring. In an interview Campbell shares her awareness of the politicization of bodies, saying in her interview with Alex Dueben, "Some decisions–just to have a fat character for example–are inherently political and you can't avoid it and I think there's some responsibility to be aware of it." These othered bodies, while not all othered in the exact way Campbell herself is as a queer woman, reflect a specific southern experience, which Campbell would have experienced when she studied comics in the US south at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Ultimately, her experiences as a trans woman living in the south culminates in a work that reflects reality of herself

and those around her, recalling writing *Wet Moon* and thinking, "my friends are different and have different bodies and different backgrounds and different races, so that's what my work is going to be like." Though Campbell has discussed the intersectional feminist nature of her work—consistently creating, for example, large-bodied characters even when working on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Jem*—essentially no scholarly work has been done on her or on *Wet Moon* specifically. Monica Carol Miller, however, extremely briefly mentions the series as proof that, even in contemporary works, "ugly women are everywhere in south culture" (*Being Ugly* 191). The contemporariness of this form, and the fact southern woman can pervade even in a genre that does not typically house them, is a foundational element to my final exploration of southern women's rebellious femininity—and a key way to visualize the "ugly," different, or othered southern woman.

Though a graphic novel is a new text for this project, it is not foreign to southern studies; southern comics are the center of Qiana Whitted and Brannon Costello's collection *Comics in the US South*. They attempt to fill a gap in contemporary comics studies by exploring both the way the south is represented in mainstream comics and how southern comics reckon uniquely with the traditions of the south. The south is not seen as an important space to the heroes of comic books; it is simply not a space where things happen—the supervillains are headed for New York City. As the pair pen, "Southern locales, generally reserved for folktales and local color peculiarities, are often subject to limiting assumptions about the region's aesthetic complexity, storytelling potential, and modern relevance, making the South a provincial enclave on the comics landscape" (loc. 58). The few superhero/villain stories that take place in the south do so because of terrain

only located in the south like Marvel Comics' *Swamp Thing*, which takes place in Louisiana. A multitude of the other comics and graphic novels that take place in the south reckon instead with its sordid, racist history. As Whitted and Costello note, in a world of southern studies post-Romine, Kreyling, and McPherson where southern writers are constantly having to re-assess the south's identity as real or imagined, understanding contemporary southern storytelling, such as that which takes place in modern media like comics, and seeing what it holds true to versus what it changes is vital to understanding the temporary versus permanent nature the south. "The comics form itself offers enormous potential for revising conventional understandings of the South" (loc. 106), due to the genre's ability to embrace fracturing and display visual affect among written text. In Whitted's chapter in the collection, she focuses on *Swamp Thing* to analyze how this southern comic uses traditions of comics to emphasize southernness, not simply to use it as backdrop—even if that was not the author's intent. For example, Whitted argues that Swamp Thing has a "focused engagement with United States southern history and its landscape of horrors, including storylines that grapple with the region's legacy of slavery" (188). In this vein, *Wet Moon* also enters this legacy by using or breaking traditions of graphic novels and comic books to respond directly to southern legacy while also furthering the collapse of domestic and wild as seen so far in this chapter.

The swamp in *Wet Moon* directly picks up on the legacy of swamps from comics like *Swamp Thing* while also perpetuating the collapse this project is interested in, with Campbell taking traditions of the southern gothic and placing them within this nontraditional dwelling space. With names like Shadowmoor Swamp, Ghostwood Swamp, and Forest of Doom, the wilderness inherits the legacy of gothic mansions. In

their 2013 collection *Ecogothic,* Andrew Smith and William Hughes explore how Gothicism works in the natural world. Smith and Hughes assert there is an inherent fragmentation to Gothicism, which is often rooted in its relationship to "nature" as in what is and is not natural. As Wet Moon's swamp begins to both exist as its own wild and parallel women's bodies, it emerges as a gothic space challenging the idea of natural. Further, in traditionally gothic texts, nature as wilderness "fails to signify as anything other than a type of blankness, which also demonstrates a crisis of representation" (12). For the wilderness to be gothic, then, there in an inherent redefining. Placing gothic tropes—names rooted in images of shadows hiding the unknown and ghosts haunting the helpless present—into the "blank" wilderness, explicitly asserts that the swamps of Wet Moon exist as a collapsed southern space of wild and dwelling. Thus, even though Campbell at times goes long distances in the collection without explicitly referring to the swamp, it permeates the series' pages. Not just the town but many of its establishments carry the damp, "wet" nature of the swamp in their very names, and by having a town so defined by a swamp that has been collapsed into ideas of gothic southern domesticity, its legacy seeps through the town and affects the identities of the girls who live within it.

The collapsing of the natural world provides ground for the feminine-presenting characters in the series to embrace the same collapse in their own bodies, and it is these women who embrace tangible, bodily wilderness more explicitly than any of the girls and women in the project thus far. The first book in this series—*Feeble Wanderings*—introduces the reader to a plethora of characters, mostly women, whose bodies are all othered in some way: women of color, disabled women, fat women, and women with various body modifications. Some of these othered bodies are inherent rebellions, while

some are decisions the girls make—all, however, involve some level of agency. Though the girls make their bodies wild in appearance, they do so in a way that provides them home within. This bodily othering does not result in the series' women failing to have a sense of place—in fact, it is never explicitly a detriment. For instance, women not only experience attraction but are seen taking control over their sexual experience, with Trilby directing Martin to "do something with" his hands when they have sex (*Unseen Feet* 101). Audrey may struggle to decide whether to pursue a relationship with Kinzoku or Beth, but her queerness and her sexuality are not posited as a hindrance to this; she cultivates a desire so strong the latter two women are willing to physically fight over her. The one physical identity that repeats as a point of tension for the main character, Cleo, is her fatness. However, like Linh-Dao, what Cleo truly has a tumultuous relationship with is consumption. One of the series' greatest early mysteries is who is leaving behind notes that say, "Cleo eats it." What Cleo begins to learn is how to embrace—consume and become at home within—her own body. She is often at the edge of these moments, stepping on the scale with a look of disdain before reaching her hands into the hem of her underwear to explore her sensuality (*Feeble Wanderings* 117-118). Cleo spends much of the series understanding who she is, learning how to express what she sees as an excess of body and affect through modeling the women around her. She slowly begins expressing agency over her physical form, exploring what is natural and what provides comfort through becoming intimate with herself.

Cleo begins, for instance, to make sense of her body through modifications, a way the majority of the women in the book express themselves. Miller's work on southern feminine rebellion, emphasizes the act of making the body "ugly" or acting "ugly" as

inherently southern for women who live in the south; their ability to challenge perceptions of southern femininity allows them to "reject, subvert, and rebel against the narrow strictures of retrogressive southern gender expectations of marriage and motherhood" (*Being Ugly* 2). In tandem, nearly every girl has an effeminate haircut, such as shaved heads, pixie cuts, and mohawks. Book 2, *Unseen Feet*, opens with Cleo's best friend Trilby—who has a shaved head save for her hot pink bangs and rat tail—bleaching Cleo's hair in the bathroom, and whether or not Cleo should keep the color remains a main throughline of the book (19). This focus on hair color emerges from how much Campbell emphasizes the southern woman's body as home. Cleo's identity mining, formation, and curation occurs on her own body, so repeating images and conversations in how she styles and dyes her hair is just as much a form of self-making for a woman in the south as ordering objects in the wilderness; both are ways to rebel by body. Some of the women challenge even their own image as human with varying degrees of modification. A striking example of this is Kinzoku, who is introduced in the opening pages of the second book, and who has particularly odd tattoos. Marking one's body with ink is a curated ritual many of the girls in the series partake in; however, Kinzoku seemingly blocks out parts of her entire body with large black-out sections of ink on her arms, interspliced with question marks (*Unseen Feet* 16-17). This image is resonant of an unpatched video game whose character who did not fully load into the game; it looks as if parts of Kinzoku's body are still waiting to glitch back into reality. However, Kinzoku always seems confident in her sexuality and femininity, and these marks were not placed on her, per se—she requested these be inked onto her. It is her agency that she uses to

curate parts of her body as fundamentally knowable or unknowable: her body is a story only she can tell.

Though this collapse may not seem explicitly southern, Campbell removes doubt by adding an explicit collapse between the actual wild and women's bodies. Halfway through the first book, a female form is shown at the edge of the swamp; naked, she steps into the swamp, slowly sinking onto her hands and knees like an animal; as she slips in, the water not only surrounds her but is inside her, dripping out of her mouth (*Feeble Wanderings* 98-99). This girl, who we later learn is named Fern, has a particularly unnatural body: she is missing the bottom half of her left arm, and she has a corset modification in which hoop piercings line each side of her spine so her back can be laced up. Disabled bodies are seen throughout the comics; however, Fern's missing limb does not end cleanly like the girl who works at the coffee shop. Potentially a birth defect, Campbell uses Fern to challenge the perception of human form, further emphasized by Fern's complete lack of body hair. Not only does she partially dwell in swamps, but she has one of the greatest southern legacies, dwelling in a mansion passed down from her "great-great-great-grandfather, who owned much of the surrounding land" and "was one of the richest plantation owners in the state" (*Unseen Feet* 161). In this way, then, her body has inherited a sordid legacy that makes her have to reckon with domesticity and wilderness more acutely than some of the other girls. She is at once both the most traditional southern woman and least perceptibly human character in the series. In this, though, Fern finds success, using her agency to challenge traditional southern ideas, like the assumptions of Gothicism in her home. Though Fern's inherited mansion is rife with strange figurines, when Cleo and Trilby explore the house to attempt to find "anything

weird," like hidden passageways or tucked-away secrets, they find none (*Unseen Feet* 155). Though there is a "head room" with a plethora of busts, Trilby remarks that she "sorta 'spected this place to be like…I guess a lot weirder…it's…almost kinda…normal (156). Fern has successfully embraced history and collapse in her physical body, so no secrets need line the walls of the house she dwells in. These women are proof that the southern women of the novel feel at home by making their own bodies wild and then taming that wild by stitching their identity through it. By stamping their name onto their changing, shifting images, they are collapsing domestic and wild through using the form of physical, feminine body.

Though the women in the graphic novel are constantly resisting femininity, and thus monstrosity in less explicit ways, they are also paralleled with literal monsters. Though it is unclear how real these moments are, characters like Fern and Myrtle are presented in not just othered in body but actually as monsters. Other than moments where she is literally walking into and out of the swamp, paralleling Marvel's *Swamp Thing*, Fern is also seen in her own home sleeping upside down from the ceiling like a vampire (*Unseen Feet* 154). Myrtle is continuously seen as a Freddy Kreuger-type monster where her fingernails transition into talons. In the third book, *Further Realms of Fright*, she envisions herself going into Nat's apartment, ripping out her intestines, and continuing to tear into her even after she is dead (69-71), and later, she does this to Fall at the park (180-181). While this is always revealed to be either a dream or fantasy, Myrtle is also portrayed with a kitchen knife, watching women as they walk home, and Campbell does not show Myrtle awakening from these images, making it unclear whether this is Myrtle nearly acting on her fantasies or simply another vision. Regardless of how real or unreal

the moments are, women in the story envision themselves, often in times of extreme affect, as inhuman. Jess Zimmerman explores the role of monstruous women in her book *Women and Other Monsters*, as she attempts to move away from the stories about monstrous woman told by men that seem to always portray women "who are who are too gross, too angry, too devious, too grasping, too smart for their own good" (3). Two important ideas continuously emerge from Zimmerman's book: the idea of embracing monstrous femininity as creating a "wild" feminism, and the idea that "stepping outside the boundaries makes you monstrous, that means monsters are no longer bound" (9). By envisioning themselves as monstrous, the women of the novel push even beyond traditional southern rebellion and grotesque to witness their existence as not limited by existing within a male gaze. Though the women are not always processing easy or logical emotions—they are, still, human—the ways in which they process their experiences is an empowered one that directly rejects the quiet, stoic keeper of the hearth. Instead of rejecting parts of female experiences or of human experiences that women are not supposed to show, these women find ways to embrace the grotesque, rebellious nature of femininity and make it natural to them.

What ties together all these forms—women bodies as wild, as home, as south, as inhuman, as monster—is the form of the graphic novel itself. Campbell utilizes elements inherent to the genres—like panels and gutters—as well as less common elements—like maps and handwritten notes—to challenge reader's expectations and create both discord and connection throughout the series. Much like many southern novels that open with maps or family trees—and specifically like Ray's *Wild Card Quilt*—each book of *Wet Moon* opens with a map of the town. With this, Campbell is able to show how the

swamps frame the town and how a swamp is central to a handful of the text's main residences, both situating the reader but also enforcing the idea of even this graphic novel as southern. Further, by inserting handwritten and digital diary entries into the book, Campbell emphasizes the young women's ability to turn form into curation and archive—a space where they can become bricoleurs of themselves. Most strikingly, Cleo's personal thoughts are shared through the inclusion of actual handwritten diary pages. At the end of the first book, Cleo attempts to process her past and her future, penning "maybe my undoing is already in progress" (144) or reflecting on her anxieties, "she's sick or me…maybe she thinks I'm too clingy" (145). These are spaces where she shares the ideas she is not willing to share with others verbally, and though it could resonate like a weakness, her voice shatters the form itself, overlaid across panels and gutters. Additionally, in Volume 3, Mara starts a digital blog. Though this form seems less personal, not hand-written but typed, Mara uses this online space in a deeply private way. Cleo's notes are often presented completely, with the multiple notebook pages necessary to display them in full laid edge-to-edge across a page. Mara's entries do not get this same luxury. Throughout the third volume, her entries are divided into three sections, where some of the posts, October 13th specifically, are cut-off, making the reader have to flip back to read it in full. Further, a blog is meant to be a public space, so while Cleo is specifically selecting a private form, there is an implicit desire from Mara to be seen and heard. However, all her posts have zero comments, and her profile photo is of a roach, which she considers herself among; though the site is "mara's journal," her email is "friendtoroaches" (163). Thus, there is an inherent juxtaposition and tension pervasive in Mara's entries and Campbell's presentation of them.

This form-challenging curation, coming from a body where domestic and wild is collapsed, is so strong that it breaks through the boundaries of the comic itself—the body as form literally changes the comic as form. Cleo's break through the panels, almost becoming their own singular panels floating in the black, and Mara's webpage becomes the entire respective page of the book, with the graphic novel almost becoming e-blog. For both of them, their journal entries interrupt the graphic novel to the degree that page numbers do not exist on these pages. This work recalls Ann Cvetkovich's work with handwritten notes and similar interventions in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, where Cvetkovich asserts that the insertion of these elements function like an archive within the text. Expanding on this use of archive she states, "Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics. It thus demands an unusual archive" (*An Archive of Feelings* 7). Southern women have reckoned with a legacy that has beget trauma, one wherein they can only exist a certain way in the home or alongside the wild, and thus, as they curate their identities and create these archives of belonging, it will emerge through the comics' form; in other words, the challenging of form emerges as proof of the women's success. However, this success is made far easier for Cleo than for Mara. Later in the series, Mara's journal entries will expand as she processes her experience as a black woman. The legacy of being quieted, then, is one inherited by Mara as she attempts the same boundary breaking as Cleo. Mara is equally able to break through the graphic novel as form; however, she is unable to have the continuity or the clear control over private/public. This could be seen as simply a failure,

though, the ways Mara is not seen becomes an interrupting force. As audience, we must be willing to connect Mara's entries and to be her reader; while Mara's fight to be seen is not fully solved, it does become such a powerful force that it challenges even the use of archive as interruption—transforming it into her own boundary collapse and making the reader liable in her recognition or lack thereof.

Beyond this imagery, Campbell uses the size of the panels and gutters (the space between the panels) to draw inherent parallels that stitch the women of the text together to tell a final story. Long before Cleo and Myrtle meet, their relationship is foreshadowed by Campbell presenting them as mirror images. Early in the very first book, the panels turn into a spread, with each panel framing a different part of Cleo's body as she examines herself, scanning over stomach, breasts, and hair (24-27). Jarringly, Cleo is then presented in a panel across from a similar-bodied woman, who we later learn is Myrtle, while she examines, particularly, her pointed upper canine, further emphasizing her monstruous imagery and putting it directly in conversation with Cleo's own body (28). Further, the two are separated by a straight line, similar to the framing of previous pages' panels; however, this line is a brick wall. This brick wall serves multiple purposes. For one, it is visually used to make it seem as if each girl is not looking at a mirror but looking at each other, collapsing their bodies, identities, and experiences. Further, the stylization of the brick wall—being a straight line dividing the two women—makes the wall not just take the place of but appear as a gutter. The place of dwelling, then, becomes collapsed with the form of the graphic novel itself, showing that the women are able to find home not just in their dorm rooms but within the narrative's form. Additionally, Fern, Fall, and Nat, who present a triptych of southern femininity, are

presented across the first three books in similarly structured positions like Cleo and Myrtle. Fern is further paralleled with Fall, through their southern histories. Fall represents the rough south, referred to as a "redneck" by Trilby. With the last name Swayer, Fall she is posited as another side of Fern's southern coin. While Fern inherits the traditional south, dwelling in her plantation house and adjacent swamps, Fall inherits the rural south, covered in dirt and drinking orange juice out of the carton (23). Finally, Fall is paralleled with Nat through not just imagery but Myrtle's visions. Nat becomes the final piece of this imagined trio, inheriting the contemporary south. She has to reckon with finding her place amongst men who do not treat her with respect, and her very attempts to normalize and perform girlhood become methods through which she legitimizes girlhood as a southern experience. The fact that being southern or being of the south runs the gambit from being overt to being so quiet and understated in this text is not a loss or distance from the south as form but instead an embrace of how everyday, how ingrained southern ideals of family, belonging, legacy, haunting, and home are. These parallels serve to prove that, though there are distinct differences in all these girls, they are all tied together by their otherness and their performance of femininity—specifically their resistance of traditional southern feminine norms.

Finally, Campbell utilizes the section/chapter breaks, the covers of the graphic novels themselves, and the back matter to further flesh out the girls' bodies and personalities. The covers of all the book's new editions feature a close-up of a single girl's face or body in a single monochromatic scheme. Volumes 1, 2, and 3 feature Cleo, Kinzoku, and Audrey, respectively. None of these three girls are the sole protagonist of their respective volumes, and other than Cleo, neither of the other girls are even the

characters with the most pages dedicated to them; by pulling out certain figures, Campbell challenges the idea that this story belongs to any one girl; it is all of their stories, and, at the same time, while they all share similar struggles and victories, they are not interchangeable either. They each have shifting identities situated within similar landscapes. Campbell emphasizes power over these individual feminine forms through her play on pin-up/pin-up-adjacent portraits throughout the collection, typically between chapters. Like the covers, these girls' bodies are not indicators that each section is about them, further enforcing how each individual identity is inextricable from the rest. For instance, Volume 1's first chapter opens with a sketch of Fern, emphasizing her shape and form literally but also, through her ripped clothes, stringy hair, and stained shirt, her gritty southern identity. By placing her image first, Campbell shores up this book and these women as southern. Additional chapter heads, like that of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, show almost boudoir-style drawn photographs of first Cleo's and then Myrtle's body, emphasizing the rolls and curves of Cleo's stomach and the self-harm scars of Myrtle; Chapter 5's portrait of Malady shows her baring her teeth as she embraces the beauty in her blackness—beautiful without having to be soft. By using imagery associated with sensuality and women's bodies, Campbell is making the argument that these girls' attitudes and both the inherited and agential scars on their body—their everyday bodies—are a thing to be revered. Finally, in the back matter of each series, Campbell includes what are essentially profile pages for each of the characters, with a different handful in each volume. The first entry in the first volume is Cleo; the profile shows Cleo's photo, her full name (Cleo Christina Lovedrop), her height (4' 10"), her hair dye (Lagoon Mist Blue, Midnight Black), her major (English & Literature), and her birthday and sun sign

(Pisces) among what music she is listening to, what she is reading, what she is watching, and her likes/dislikes. By providing this material to readers, Campbell is providing further shape to their forms, but by making that information available to solely readers, she is using form to bring audience into the text. We become collapsed into the world of Wet Moon, and to a degree, we become both responsible and culpable for the judgement or understanding we parse these young women's lives and bodies with.

These women's embrace of their body as domestic and wild and their internal and external bodily curating shows an acceptance of the south—not a refusal of it. They are rejecting very ideas of beauty and therefore pushing off any landscapes that own their bodies. To be clear, these women do face turmoil and strife. Myrtle's self-harm scars cover her body (and she envisions brutally murdering fellow women), Cleo (who already struggles with her body image), will in later volumes have to process an abortion, and Mara's strife as she attempts to fit in with her friends compounds as her blog evolves to reckon with her blackness directly. The collapse of domestic and wild and use of form works to not erase negative experiences but to emphasize southern women's everyday experiences as powerful so that, in their everyday, they can embrace rebellion both inherent and explicit. In a patriarchal landscape, there will always be a fight, but through stitching of the quilt of southern feminine identity, there is a reflection that crafts recognition and power that stabilizes these women in their femininity, identity, and humanity that they would not otherwise have. They are not seeking to recreate home and are already one with—or paralleled with one who is one with—nature and the natural world. These women have a unique ability to be able to change their very bodies or use their bodies as resistance and rebellion for what is considered natural for women, and

they reckon with place by navigating these new norms they have set for themselves. The form then stitches these women's bodies together like Frankenstein's monster—a novel mentioned several times throughout book two and read by Fern herself (164)—and as such, their personalities. They are cobbled together from a history of themselves in their interiors and exteriors with varying hair colors, piercings, and tattoos. This monstrosity is a binary, then, that by rejecting it and being both monstruous and fully feminine they also are rejecting the binary of domestic and wild—embracing the wild in their body and making home in it: mining, curating, and bringing themselves back to life. While they are all individual women with their own stories and preferences, all have within them a relationship to the natural world of the south and ideas of southern femininity, yet from the first page of the series, the women have an agency over their body while surrounded by a southern collapse that emphasizes not just their collective southernness but their collective femininity, performed as a rebellion within a distinctly southern story.

Essentially, through using repetition; similar framing between different panels; mirror images; varying sizes and breaking into of gutters; and the insertion of handwritten notes, maps and realistic photographs into the series, Sophie Campbell is taking advantage of the form of graphic novels to further emphasize the feminine identity of these women but also to reckon with a perpetually fragmented southern history that seems doomed to repeat itself. Though a perceived outlier, it is a necessary end to focusing on what happens when the boundaries this project has been so interested in are not only pushed back against but re-situated. It is thus a distinctly southern text—a distinctly southern form—in which the women use their bodies as form for a final collapse and a grasping of domestic and wild that allows for everyday movement and

self-making that is almost like an ouroboros, where roots stems from and grow back within the feminine self. Of course, these women have not fully freed themselves from society—this is impossible. Cleo struggles with her body image and her past relationship with her ex-boyfriend, but much of this is what makes her of such interest to Fern and so central to the series as a whole—Cleo is coming into her power. She is surrounded by girls who reject relationships, who are queer, who accept their bodies, and she is actively working to find a way to accept the wild growing in and through her body. However, while Cleo doubts her feminine power, getting physically ill whenever she runs into her ex-boyfriend, it is her handwriting that breaks through the norms of the novel's pages. This is not separate from the domestic and wild seen so far in this project; in fact, it is the direct result of it. The more women work directly with houses and wilderness and collapse them, the more internal the process becomes, and the more they are able to put into practice various shades of being. Then, not only does the form work to organize, but the characters themselves have agency to order the form.

In the end, *Wet Moon*'s distinctly southern nature makes it a crucial final text for a project that is consistently, directly reckoning with what southern femininity is and that is constantly operating under the assumption that a southern identity does still exist. It is imperative to emphasize that Campbell refers to this as an everyday tale of the south. While one might see the lack of clear southern tropes in a southern story as proof southern identity does not have a strong foothold in contemporary literature, I assert otherwise. This permeating into the ordinary, everyday of these contemporary women's lives is proof of how real the south's effects are regardless of how "real" it ever was. Further, this comic shows form as structure, form as south, and form as body altogether.

By seeing what resides within the body and ordinary feminine affective experience, we can see the effects of a restricting, southern femininity, and we can see the ways in which women begin to move into an everyday within the contemporary south where they have comfort in their agency to collapse domestic and wild continuously. Here, the form of their own bodies and the manipulation of the body itself shows not a failure to understand the self, but in opposite, a full embrace of one's own femininity and a sense of belonging. A woman being able to perform various rebellious, wild, and monstruous shades of self while still being herself is the truest form of placemaking. Here are the women who stitched and continue to stitch their identities together as they found power and agency in the form of their own bodies. Throughout this chapter so far, our texts have ended with two women placing roots: Linh-Dao felt she could place her routes after the final conversation with her adopted mother, and Trethewey emphasizes that this is the land she will one day be buried in. In *Wet Moon*, we see the flowers that have bloomed from this rooting. Be not mistaken—there is no utopia here; we still live in a society that is patriarchal at its core and in which personal and collective trauma may never be fully overcome, but the ability to be firm in our varying femininity and in using it to make home and to make wild can only be achieved for the southern woman through the complete breakdown and reassertion of its very initial forms. This is the everyday power that can be passed to future southern women.

Conclusion

Though this chapter focuses on something as tangible as form and structure, it has often become the most immaterial and esoteric. The nature of form is inherently complex, and the ability to interweave narrative and form to have a final assertion of identity is

inherently multilayered. However, what stays true throughout the chapter is this: all of the women in this chapter have to deal with the domestic and wild of the women in the chapters before them, even if the domestic and wild have shifted in meaning, and all must make home in their own bodies and stories. This final tendril both looks at existing collapses and how women reckon with this and looks at how form itself becomes the final key to restitching what remains post-collapse. Looking back to Ray and *Ecology*, this is the most tenuous tendril of them all because it is the one not just operating as collapse but also serving as the organizing, situating tool through which the southern women parses and navigates the collapse around her. Just as Ray had to operate under both formal conventions and affective desire to order and organize her varied sections in *Ecology*, so do the women of this chapter. At this stage, the women are not simply shattering boundaries but having to re/place them. Caroline Levine herself said forms is a slippery word. It is abstract, it is specific; it is immaterial, it is material. Domestic and wild may stray further from their traditional definitions that started in chapter 1; however, that is the nature of how language evolves, especially when one is using that language to tear down and restructure the very boundaries that same language was used to enforce.

For Linh-Dao, her relationship to South Vietnam and South America only serves to amplify the constraints of the inherited American south. Her only method to find the place to plant her roots is through embracing the acts of domesticity she can do within her own body, a body made wild through her Asian identity and synesthesia. By embracing her birth family's past—what she does and does not know alike—as well as using her words as power, Linh-Dao is able to find her place in Carolina. For Trethewey this same south's form has wrapped its fist tight around her, this daughter of a black mother and

white father. Like Ray, for Trethewey to understand her personal history, she must tease out her collective one, and that can only be done through explicit mining of southern history and the challenging of narrative not just through re-telling but telling through verse in which she can consistently use and break form. To accept the place she will once be buried, she must be able to situate her body within the stories she weaves. Finally, the women *of Wet Moon* push the very boundaries of being human. Their southernness comes not from a drawl or an ancestor but from a specific embrace of "ugliness" that is rooted in their comfort with their own sexuality and sensuality. By paralleling her women with the natural world, a natural world explicitly southern, Campbell does not let her readers forget how defined by southern conventions these women are. However, these women are not having to process southern history as explicitly, per se, instead using their southern femininity as an innate power to navigate their everyday modern experiences. For these women, they have done the work to stitch their identities to the point they can navigate southern spaces and places with a new sense of selfhood.

This chapter shows women who often are not collapsing domestic and wild, but who are living or dwelling or moving through spaces where that collapse has already happened or where their relationship to that collapse is perpetually altered by them being in an othered state. Chapter 2 presented women who dwell in the wilderness, chapter 3 presented women who learn from a wild coming into their home, and chapter 4 shows women existing in a collapse but finding their agency in this collapse through their physical bodies, through ordering of history and story, and through structure of the text itself. The women in these texts do not always come away with singular conclusions, but that is not the goal. Throughout this project, women have learned more and more about

making home and about wilderness, and in this chapter, they must start to put their learning into practice, which comes to fruition in the final text where southern women experience their everyday lives, not haunted by the south, but dwelling among and within it in such a way that their unnatural bodies become natural. This is the restitching Ray enacted in *Wild Card Quilt*, and in this, the project comes full circle. Chapter 4 closes on a group of women navigating their swampy southern town with their embraced wild feminine bodies, reaching back to young Ava deep within her swamps and lost not knowing what all she can truly see herself reflected in, her own body being made alien to her. Instead, these women make their body alien to other by making them familiar to themselves—they physically make their bodies home, the very same bodies that emerge from southern swamps.

Each of the women across the project have reckoned with the form of the south, as in the shape the south as region and as legacy takes. As the project has progressed, women's bodies have become a form that can shift in definition. As women continue to collapse domestic and wild, they become more aware of the forms around them, and they are able to manipulate them further. This is foundational to an eventual restitching; they must be able to see the shape the quilt has taken and can take before their patchwork continues. As this final tendril as originally set up in Ray comes into view, it becomes a tangible way for women to tell their stories and to present their bodies as domestic wilderness. Ideas may emerge throughout the chapter that do not feel "southern enough," but even the idea of being southern enough is weaponized to limit identity. Through having women who have to tease apart what American southern truly means, to women fully southern who struggle to embrace that southernness, to women explicitly southern

who are not overtly southern, this chapter's authors and characters display the agency southern women must mine and stitch regardless of the degree to which southernness is explicitly forced onto them. The south being made both overt and nuanced within the same breath is proof of its pervasive nature, and to see women not just collapsing domestic and wild within that but already existing within that collapse, within a body that is eco-domestic, is an unparalleled power—and it is inextricable from the south that defined that ecology and domesticity in the first place.

There is not a singular conclusion to make about southern femininity. It is complex and ever shifting. What is important is not, however, that southern women have a singular identity to hold onto, but that they have the freedom to craft the identities they wish, ones that they feel truly reflect them. Janisse Ray never comes to one singular conclusion, though she has a very singular desire; instead, what she knows is how to move forward. She knows that there is something to pass down to her daughters and granddaughters—and she knows this rite of passage is crucial. She has passed the quilting needle down to the women authors of these nine texts, with Campbell's stitch showing the power of a form made home through making it wild. Ray's storytelling is the final key to unlocking this final step forward, unlocking the ability to be close enough to one's own body to have something to pass down. Just as heirlooms become a domestic ritual, so can this collapse and restructuring be passed throughout the women in these three triptychs of chapters 2 to 4. Overall, this final chapter emphasizes the importance of form as region, structure, and body in both the esoteric as well as the material. These threads of femininity are what these women stitch together into the quilt of southern femininity, what they wrap around themselves, and what they pass down. For the contemporary

southern woman who must reckon with the history of south behind her to leave a torch for her future daughters, home in the body and in stories is crucial. Regardless of how real the south has ever been in imagination, these women's bodies and stories are real enough. With their hands, they will carry this quilt behind them as a flag, "lay[ing] to rest this implacable longing" (*Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* 273).

Conclusion: Southern Femininity and Freedom: A Future

"If we knew what we had before it was gone

If every road led back home

This would be the very last country song."

— *Sugarland*

I remember the exact place I was when the Supreme Court struck down Roe v. Wade. I was sitting with a group of women I was visiting in Chicago when we saw the news. One spoke up to read the headline on her phone, and the tone around the room became somber. The 19th floor window of the room we sat in overlooked a tall tower with 5 large letters: T R U M P. We sat there together, across from the Trump Tower, attempting to form words to process a loss so beyond us and yet of us—of our very own bodies. On that same day, in a random skyscraper on Michigan Avenue's Cultural Mile, I began penning this project. I suppose it should be a positive, being able to say my project became more and more relevant as I continued to write it, though, in truth, I almost wish that were not the case. Language certainly continues to fail to accurately describe this feeling of watching us slide backwards in time—and yet, language, storytelling, is all we have. In the past quarter century, the 10 women authors of this project took up their pens and found ways to make home or create women who make home in changing climates and landscapes, who challenge what is "natural" and harmful even when their resources were near zero. We need them now more than ever. Around us, people continuously fail to take care of the land, women's rights are pulled away, more and more people fail to

find or lose homes. Though this project's ideas may at times seem intangible in the exploration of stories, we cannot forget how reflective our literature is of reality. An analysis of these women writers is at the same time an exploration of the very real lives that women live every day today in the south, in our nation. Our literature, regardless of the degree of fictionality, is a mirror.

Our mistreatment of the natural world has for so long reflected a need to control and center the self—a particularly masculine desire—that limits, first, women's agency and movement and, second, all our belonging. For southern women to inherit this history and directly challenge it through the collapse of wild and domestic offers a new possibility of agency for the southern woman and women at large. For southern studies, seeing these women reckon with southern legacies reveals an important reality about the south and our studies of it. Scholars spend so much time debating if a belief or a way of living is real or not real that—pun intended—they fail to see the forest for the trees. The assertions of what is southern were once very real, and thus, those who have dwelled in, written about, and experienced the south have experienced it as real. It matters less about how real it is today versus a century ago and more about what we do with the realities that befall those haunted by southernness. Sarah Broom published her memoir in 2019—only shortly before the dawn of the 2020s did Ivory Mae sign away her final rights to the Yellow House. Being a southern woman is a real experience; it is tangible and concrete in its realness, even as it shifts and changes. Is there actually a difference in southern domesticity versus domesticity? Is there actually a distinction between southern wilderness and wilderness? Yes, due to the south's forcing of its inhabitants to find belonging and home in disappearing landscapes and haunted homes; however, those

questions are not nearly as important as this: what does it mean for women to have lived with southern norms of domestic and wild and collapsed their boundaries? It is so important to challenge ideas of the south in order to mine experiences and lives and histories of southerners whose experiences have been buried under singular ideas of southern legacy, and yet we must also be so cautious to not further bury real experiences because we are so concerned with limiting what can be considered real.

This project assumes that there is such a thing as southern womanhood. The women authors in this project establish a lineage. They have discovered agency in inheriting a southern history meant to take that agency away, one that perpetuates prescriptions of domesticity and wilderness that both serve men and limit women's movements. It is vital to emphasize that these women are not rejecting southern history, per se. Instead, they are embracing it, putting their hands directly into the threads of southern identity to restitch this new one. In fact, many of the journeys southern men embark on are paralleled in the previous chapter: young Ava leaves for the "Underworld," Luna moves into western wilds, and Linh-Dao flees northward before returning to Carolina. So often does the southern man leave home, sometimes for the wilderness or sometimes for the big city to locate a new sense of self and to escape from the restricting south, only to learn that the legacy of the south can never be escaped, but they almost always realize this too late, and, after facing tragedy along the road, if they ever make it back home, realize home is no longer there. Young Billy in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy attempts to go back to his parents' home after his journey to Mexico, just to find his parents long gone. Like the snowflake in *The Crossing* Billy wants to catch but which can never materialize in his palms, southern men continue to seek a freedom from their

own confines. In contrast, the women of this project also go on journeys in and outside the home, but when they leave home for the wilderness, they are able to bring home with them, and they are able to cohabitate with the wilderness when it comes into their home. It is not that there is never a loss, just that this loss does not mark an ending or a placelessness but instead a moving forward and moving home. When southern women encounter the wild, they learn to live symbiotically among it versus destroying it, and when the wilderness destroys their home, it does not leave them as a powerless wanderer, but instead leaves them with the ability to create a home that more accurately reflects and represents them. Instead of seeking failed homes and places, like Linh-Dao in her final conversation with DeAnne at her childhood kitchen table, these women bring the past forward with them anew as they craft new home and find new places to lay roots. It is only when Esch emerges from the waters of the hurricane that have collapsed her rural southern home that she comes into her final power as a black woman on that very same land. This imagined south becomes the very form they use to make home, finally resulting in the use of southern storytelling as their own landscape in a meta-collapse that initiates a new sense of placemaking and internal domesticity through narrative curation.

By understanding how southern women find new ways to embrace their southern identities and histories, there serves greater implications for national and international women's identities. Though the south has its own unique identity, as does every region, Leigh Anne Duck remarks the south as a marker of the nation as a whole, and Scott Romine—among other global scholars—explore the ever-growing ties between the American south and other global regions with shared traits. Thus, as seen in Monique Truong's creation of a Vietnamese girl in North Carolina, understanding how these

southern women have collapsed these boundaries and found a truer self among collapsed domestic and wild opens new possibilities for adjacent landscapes. To further trace ties between the south and west, one could examine Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, where she traces a scattered young woman's attempts to make home for her nieces amidst her wild and wildernesses of water and fire. Expanding further, Ghanaian author Yaa Gyasi grew up in Alabama, and her novel *Homegoing* explores femininity in both Ghana and the American south. British author Helen Oyeyemi's *White Is for Witching* traces a cast of women in a home of bodily hauntings where the house itself becomes an agent character. Kai Miller's *Augustown* traces a woman's bodily wilderness in her Jamaican home as she navigates her role as mother and daughter. Silvia Moreno Garcia's *The Daughter of Doctor Moreau* retells *The Island of Doctor Moreau* to explore wilderness and science fiction from a Mexican, feminine perspective. There is a torch to carry for parallel souths and beyond, to examine how future intersectionality compounds what has originated in these American southern texts. Further, feminist scholars have long been interested in the intersections of various feminine identity as they explore different spaces and places—regional, global, domestic. What would it look like to see how women in various contexts and locations have picked up these threads? To analyze how women today in their everyday lives enact this collapse in our own inherent routines and in our explicit activism and rebellion? Scholars in fields outside of literary studies can thus use this framework to explore the ways in which women have fought and currently fight for reflections of themselves.

Within literary studies, this project reckoned solely with texts in contemporary, southern literature, ranging from 1997-2019. This is not accidental; as stated in the

opening of this project, there a confluence of shifts and upheavals at the turn of the century, both in southern studies and women's studies. It is no coincidence Janisse Ray published her memoir within the eve of the new century. This project could have started no place else, and to study her inheritors has been crucial in understanding how to move forward through another quarter century and beyond. Another project, however, may concern itself with the centuries before, attempting to discover the first peeks of light from southern women and writers, places where we can see reverse echoes of the collapse this project is so interested. Mid-20th century texts like Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker* or Lee Smith's *Oral History* feel particularly prescient in light of this project. Arnow paints a portrait of shifting domesticity as protagonist Gertie moves from Kentucky to Michigan and yet continuously tries to bring her natural land to her city home through the creation of dolls. The stitching and ordering present here show the degree to which southern forms of place follow even those who leave it. Smith's women struggle to survive in the home as they hold onto the traditions rooted in Appalachian land and wilderness; it is the borderline outsiders to home, like Ora Mae, who are given the privilege of storyteller. Even beyond this, though, one could look as far back as the pre-Civil War writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe or Mary Chestnut's Civil War diary—women who look at the home when it is being made wild and unfamiliar—to examine where women began spinning thread for the stitching Ray would eventually craft and pass down.

Even now, the seeds planted by Ray continue to sprout in ways she surely could not have imagined upon first penning her intimate experience in a South Georgia junkyard. Perhaps it is no surprise that swamp literature has become so popular in recent

years, due to the subgenre's rootedness in finding home amongst the wild. Beyond *Swamplandia!* and *Where the Crawdads Sing* that are featured in this project, recent texts like Ashleigh Bell Pedersen's *The Crocodile Bride,* Kristen Arnett's *Mostly Dead Things,* Virginia Hartman's *The Marsh Queen,* or even Jeremy Love's webcomic turned graphic novel *Bayou* continue the stories of young girls or women coming of age in and around swamps, bogs, bayous, and marshes. In Pedersen's text, specifically, Sunshine attempts to escape generations of familial abuse in the home by convening with the swamps—near anthropomorphized in their eventual setting free of the young girl. In Love's *Bayou*, young Lee dives into the swamps in order to prove her father's innocence and finds a whole parallel south—Southern Neverland—teeming under the waters. Seeing as these swamps are spaces that often remain, even today, wild, and yet still are taken by history and trauma, it seems natural that these narratives would emerge into their own genre. Swamp literature has the ability to show women making home in the wilderness in a way that is clearly tied to Ray but can expand even beyond this project to define a key aspect of contemporary wilderness. The marsh was defined as a liminal space in Owens' criticism, but further examination of this genre could explore it as its own home to individual identity formation. More and more, we watch women navigate these places and find themselves within it, action that is crucial to all of our finding of self and moving forward.

Just as authors continue to locate women within existing wild spaces, however, so do they reckon with the loss of traditional wilderness. Martyn Bone's own conclusion looks forward to the still-existing natural spaces in a post-southern world, and in an opposite take on this, I assert future studies could explore southern texts that are far less

rural, seeing how urban southern landscapes fit into the collapse my project establishes. When there is no natural wilderness, but instead skyscrapers, bumper-to-bumper traffic, and balcony terrariums, what emerges as the wild, and how does this affect contemporary collapse? Of course, by exploring how Sarah Broom processes her family's history in New Orleans alongside her dwelling in modern spaces and how the protagonists of *Wet Moon* find wild in their own bodies even when not physically in the town's swamps, this project has explored the ability for this collapsed binary to exist even when not in the presence of physical traditional nature. Future work, though, may examine texts that take place solely in suburban or urban areas in the south, like Atlanta or Washington D.C. How do women collapse domestic and wild in the racialized urban spaces—trailer parks and prisons—of Ward's follow-up to *Salvage the Bones*, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*? Or in Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* where Ethiopian immigrant Sepha learns to make home in the bustling D.C. area? What about the novels of Tayari Jones that explore the new south through failing marriages in the modern hub of Atlanta where she herself was born? And in Tara M. Stringfellow's novel *Memphis* where a legacy of women is tied together by history in this now so modern city? Being able to explore how home and wilderness themselves shift in a modern landscape is a natural next step to understanding this collapse in our everyday lives.

Further, due to this project's inherent relationship to form, it would be pertinent to see how southern women continue this legacy outside of written literature. This project has worked through the written forms that Ray herself chose to challenge form within, pushing the boundaries at the very end with a graphic novel. This project has been interested in the written word and how these words are stitched together to tell stories,

and, in line with this, every chapter has started with an epigraph from a southern woman's song. Dolly Parton has become such a pervasive figure for the south, even emerging as the central image for Monica Carol Miller's newest collection *The Tacky South*. Future work could push this even further, exploring the lyric storytelling of music, a genre of private thoughts crafted for a public audience, and beyond lyrics, begin to examine how the songs themselves musically and orally compound understandings of this challenging of wild and of making home. Pop culture itself has become a frontier for new forms and storytelling. Beyond music, how do southern women appear in television, film, podcasts, video games? One could surely explore the way "Moonshine Matriarch" Mags Bennett brings the southern image of Ray's own grandmother into season two of *Justified* as she rules her small town in modern day Kentucky with an iron fist. What about the *Say It Southern* podcast where two southern mothers interview working southern women across the American south to explore the "intersection of womanhood, work, and creativity"? These modern, oral memoirs offer a unique perspective into how women are, even without knowing it, putting the work done by the women of this project into place each day. Video games have only recently become topics for scholarly study, but one might examine the role of a female FBI detective investigating a missing boy in the rural south in *Virginia* or the role of young Hazel, a magic-wielding monster hunter in *South of Midnight*, a "Southern Gothic love letter," as the game's director calls it. These latter points of study offer a new path of analysis as video games provide an opportunity for women within and outside the south to actually put their own hands into this experience and operate as part of the collapse—another form of meta-curation and homemaking.

As a feminist scholar, I am of course interested in the stakes this project has for those for whom the identity of female or woman is not so direct. Ray's lineage is explicitly feminine, and the legacy of southern womanhood is where this divide, these limits, and thus this collapse and remining must have occurred. Now that the wheel has begun rolling, however, future work may be interested in reckoning with the additional binary—the gender binary—that comes along with teasing apart the boundaries men have put around women. *Wet Moon*—itself is penned by a trans woman—does explore queer and nonbinary women, which this project sees as an embrace of the agency that comes along with shattering the boundaries around femininity. A following project might explore queerness itself throughout southern literature in relationship to domestic and wild, looking at the inability to make home associated with being queer sexually or being genderqueer. Within the graphic novel genre, Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* explores a queer woman's coming of age as she processes, specifically, how her sense of home and of self was made wild by a queer father, forced into the closet until his death. Maps of the rural Pennsylvania town she grew up in repeat throughout the novel along hand-drawn images of the house her father relentlessly decorated. Further, non-binary and trans bodies are so often made out to be wild spaces in need of some form of taming, and in looking at both of these sides, additional forms of collapse emerge. What does it mean for someone who rejects femininity to perform similar boundary collapsing as ones who so dearly embrace it? Further texts from the south like Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* or Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* seem a natural place to start to look at young queer women coming of age in the south—and choosing whether to leave or stay—while also reckoning with different sexualities and ideas of home that are

clearly defined by the region's relationship to the land. Alongside southern poets like Trethewey, contemporary South Carolina poet Evelyn Berry pens verse about her experience as a trans woman in the south, with her first collection *Grief Slut* providing an "examination of the queer lineage of pleasure, grief, and resilience in the American South." Exploring these bodies made to refuse sense of place through the gendered boundaries of those in power is a crucial next step to this project's collapse.

There are many places this project can go next, but right now, this project is here. It is here with its collapsed boundaries and its assertion that domestic and wild are not really all that different. Here with its implications for southern studies and what it means to be a southern woman; though as stated in the very beginning of this project, the southern imagination is inextricable from our nation's identity and consciousness. The fact that this project has so many places it can go next seems like a natural outcome of what it has sought to accomplish. When something breaks, so many shards remain. Traditional boundaries of domestic and wild, and thus of femininity, cannot constrain us. It matters now less which is picked up next and taken forward and more so that something is in fact taken and continued so that previous cycles do not continue. Southern womanhood, contemporary femininity, our relationship to home and to wild—these are all real and changing around us. The onus is on all of us to shift and grow along with the boundaries the women in this project have shifted and restructured. Though these women come together to stitch a new quilt, this product is never finished, and the stitching of new patches and patterns continues. Our placemaking must be inclusive of all and must not be harmful; our mining of identity and stitching of this quilt must—and can—include us all. We must pick up this needle and thread for ourselves and those who

come after us. Like Ray, we must ask: what do we want our daughters to inherit? What work will we do for them? What stories will they write of home and of wild? What about their bodies will be natural to them in another quarter century of writers? We must embrace this collapse and restructuring and continue to craft new threads for our southern daughters to pick up. Each day, all of us women have the responsibility to stitch our names on the clothes of history, to put our hands deep within whatever nature owns our body, and to find for us, for those that came before us, and those that will come after us a place to lay our tender roots—within this land where they will one day bury us.

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