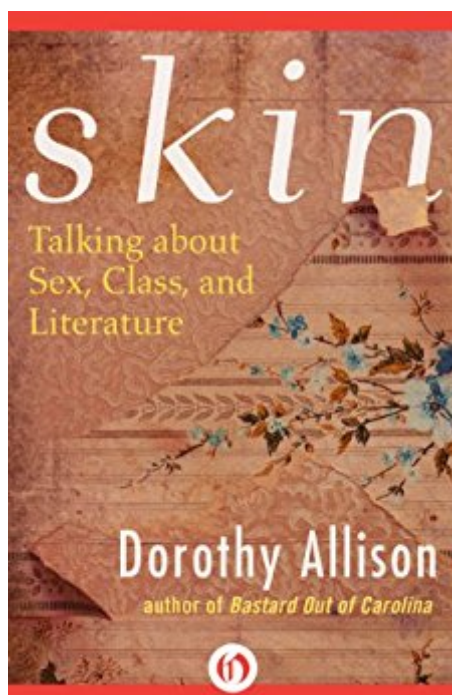


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Skin: Talking About Sex, Class, And Literature



Synopsis

A collection of critical essays from award-winning author Dorothy Allison about identity, gender politics, and queer theory, now with a new preface Lambda Award and American Library Association-winning author Dorothy Allison is known for her bold and insightful writing on issues of class and sexuality. In *Skin*, she approaches these topics through twenty-three impassioned essays that explore her identity from her childhood in a poor family in South Carolina to her adult life as a lesbian in the suburbs of New York and her sexuality. In "Gun Crazy," Allison delves into what guns meant to the men and women around her when she was growing up. She gives insight into the importance of speaking professionally about sexuality in "Talking to Straight People," and articulates the danger women feel about revealing their personal desires, even within feminist communities, in "Public Silence, Private Terror." Allison is fearless in her discussion of many social and political taboos. Compelling and raw, *Skin* is an honest and intimate work perfect for Dorothy Allison fans and new readers alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An opportunity to get thinking about a few "difficult" subjects, while enjoying a few refreshing lines of thought as well as a no-nonsense yet witty style. Being a woman, gay or poor not a requisite, although it might help. If you're neither of the three, buy the book anyway, you might learn something (I did).

"Skin" is a book of essays by the amazingly talented writer and activist, Dorothy Allison. I remember reading [...] *Out of Carolina* many years ago and thinking I might not get through it because of its gruesome and hideous portrayal of a poverty-stricken, incestuous family living in the South. Turns out that book was Allison's fictionalized account of her childhood. *Skin*, however, is a finely crafted series of essays with titles ranging from "Gun Crazy" to "The Theory and Practice of the Strap-on Dildo" to "Believing in Literature". She likes to talk about everything people aren't supposed to talk about, including masturbating to science fiction novels, the pain of catching a venereal disease from her stepfather when she was a child (a disease that went untreated, rendering her sterile), the thrill of S & M, butch/femme strap-on sex, and much more just as juicy. Allison's style is fearlessly intimate and unashamed. Her long struggle to escape poverty and find a voice is evident in every page, and in every page her voice is beautiful, loud, and resilient.

Allison (*Bastard out of Carolina*) has been deep in the women's rights and gay rights movements for her entire career, and the thoughtful essays collected in *Skin* provide an interesting history of our times.

Book Review *The Forgotten Masterwork: Dorothy Allison's Skin in light of Two of Three Things I Know for Sure* Tamara M. Powell *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. Dorothy Allison. New York: Dutton Books, 1995. 94 pp. *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature*. Dorothy Allison. Ithaca: Firebrand, 1994. 261 pp. *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* has been widely hailed as the newest offering from recent Showtime special *Bastard Out of Carolina* author Dorothy Allison. The slim novel can be seen as a coming together of the anger Allison poured into *Bastard* and *Trash* and the growth she has experienced as she has matured and become a parent herself. *Trash* reveals the struggles behind her decision to live, while *Two or Three Things* elucidates the wisdom she has gained along the way. However, between *Trash* and *Two or Three Things*, Allison created another work, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature*. And while *Two or Three Things* has gained much attention, *Skin* has been all but ignored. But it is *Skin* that reveals the growth and

thought that took place between *Trash* and *Two or Three Things*, and instead of looking inward, as Allison's other works do, *Skin* looks outward, allowing Allison to analyze, contemplate, and theorize upon how she sees the world. Allison is known as a writer who tells her stories over and over. She is conscious of this--and opens *Two or Three Things* with the line "Let me tell you a story" (1). "Two or three things I know for sure" she closes the first chapter, "and one of them is what it means to have no loved version of your life but the one you make" (3). Allison makes version after version of many events of her life, from scaring her sisters with her stories, to being raped by her stepfather, to receiving glasses from the Lions Club, one of Allison's many talents is that she can make the reader listen to the same story over and over, awestruck, mesmerized. Allison creates herself and re-creates herself in all her works. "Behind the story I tell is the one I don't" she writes, "Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear" (*Two or Three* 39); "The story I do not tell is the only one that is a lie" (71). But before these stories, before these pictures in *Two or Three*, there was *Skin*. Often ignored, it is *Skin* that pierces below the stories and draws to stress the importance of addressing the emotions in writing. If *Bastard*, *Trash*, and *Two or Three* are Allison in practice, then *Skin* is Allison in theory. And it's no ordinary theory. In *Skin* Allison stresses the importance of addressing emotions in writing. Her quest to divulge her own fear, confusion, shame, lust and love spans twenty-three loosely related essays which discuss what prompted her to read, what prompted her to write, and what her writing is and means to her. However, this is not just a work on understanding Dorothy Allison; she includes large amounts of herstory, both social and political. Like many other of her works, *Skin* describes how active Allison was in the lesbian feminist movements of the 60, 70s and 80s. Also like many of her other works, it describes her journey from her childhood in a backwater South Carolina shack to her home in the suburbs of New York, through poverty, child abuse, finding herself as a lesbian and joining the feminist and lesbian communities around her. Like her other works, *Skin* is a description of a very determined woman's life. And her candor draws the reader in, giving the reader points of reference and view so clearly that the reader can position himself or herself in relation to Allison. Unlike in *Two or Three*, where the reader must take Allison's perspective for herself in order to take the story in, *Skin* makes it possible for the reader to almost debate with Allison on issues. In a sense, this ignored novel might tell more about Allison, make her more human, than all of her other works combined. All twenty-three of these easily accessible--if you don't mind a lot of graphic sex--essays foster critical thinking on a very deep level.

Noted as "extraordinary" by the author Tee A. Corinne in her book *Courting Pleasure* and as

“...exquisite, memorable erotic work...”. This was the most intense reading I have done in a long time. This should be recommended reading in all colleges and universities. Tremendous titles from the author are - *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *Trash*, and *The Women Who Hate Me*. More information can be found at the author’s web page [dorothyallison dot net](http://dorothyallison.net). From the back of the book - A compelling collection of essays, autobiographical narratives, and performance pieces combines updated versions of earlier groundbreaking material with provocative new work. The author probes her experience of being a lifelong feminist activist, controversial sex radical, and a Southern expatriate writer with an attitude.. With humor, passion and enormous conviction, she addresses what it means to be queer and happy about it in a world that is still arguing about what it means to be queer.

"Skin" is one of those books I keep reading over and over, for it's a funny, inspiring, rational and intensely moving collection of essays which focus on the issues she encountered in her "post-South Carolina" life from the mid-70s to mid-80s. But the issues she grapples with affect us all, in particular the way people of all sorts -- women, the working class, the queer, the queerest of the queer, etc. -- are marginalized and even dehumanized. What sets this collection apart from other works dealing with the above is the role writing plays in Allison's life to both focus and clarify the above issues, and to act as a mode of catharsis, whereupon so much is reborn. It's an amazing collection as jaw-droppingly powerful as her fiction; that she wrings this power in a completely different format confirms her as one of our more essential -- and I mean *necessary* -- writers.

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