FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary Collections

Grit Lit: A Rough South Reader
Brian Carpenter, editor
Tom Franklin, editor
University of South Carolina Press
978-1-61117-083-2
(September 17, 2012)

There are versions of the South that sell glossy magazines. And then there's the South itself: a little bit grittier, a little less polite. More fighting and less showering, more guzzling and less sipping

As editor Tom Franklin (*Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*) writes in the introduction to *Grit Lit: a Rough South Reader*, this anthology represents the "dirty South seen without the romanticism or false nostalgia of *Gone with the Wind* fans."

Franklin's co-editor, Brian Carpenter, goes on to set the stage, explaining that Grit Lit can come from anywhere, though it's "typically blue collar or working class, mostly small town, sometimes rural." The Rough South genre revolves around those "mostly poor, white, rural, and unquestionably violent—Grit Lit's wilder kin—Grit Lit with its back against the wall and somebody's going to get hurt."

Grit Lit is a collection of work by hardscrabble Southern familiars like Harry Crews and William Gay and lesser-known talents like the late Breece D'J Pancake and Alex Taylor. With excerpts from memoirs by Dorothy Allison and Rick Bragg among others, and novel excerpts as well as short stories by folks like Barry Hannah and Chris Offutt, this is collective storytelling at its finest, though it's certainly not always pretty.

In Louisiana native Tim Gautreaux's "Sorry Blood," an old man is put to backbreaking work by a younger one. Larry Brown's "Samaritans" has a man trying to do right for the wrong person. Within the first sentence of Pinckney Benedict's "Pit" one man kills another with a fillet knife.

At times the language within these pages is tender: "She has her bare feet drawn up under her, and not just for warmth. To be all of a piece like that, pulled together, makes her feel safe from herself" (Ann Pancake's "Redneck Boys"). At other times, it's painfully sharp: "She

felt the snake between her breasts, felt him there, and loved him there, coiled, the deep tumescent S held rigid, ready to strike" (Harry Crews, *A Feast of Snakes*).

For those looking for a primer in Rough South writing, this is the ultimate source. For those wanting to get lost in a good story or two, prepare to lose a few hours. And for those needing a punch in the gut, this collection is the fist.

Hope Mills