CHAPTER-III

“I WANT TO MAKE MYSELF”: SEARCH FOR SELF

I do not wish women to have power over man; but over themselves

Mary Wollstonecraft

In the late 1970s, White-dominated feminist theory has found its focus on gender issues. Drawing on their own understanding, Harriet Jacobs tells the story of Linda Brent, a slave girl harassed under the dehumanizing slavery system, in her book *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl*, written in 1861, when the African Americans have often imagined freedom as an act of fleeing to the North, frantically seeking refuge. For Jacobs, maintaining emotional attachments is more important than the act of physical separation, while seeking personal empowerment. Women of color is pointed out that it is necessary to understand how race and class are interconnected with gender in order to comprehend the reality of their lives. This extended focus is battled by many white and class privileged feminists who have thought that a shift in focus will weaken the movement.

Although patriarchal society tends to overturn all women, in a dominantly white culture, the traps used to defuse African American women and white women are not the same. Black women are faced with the complicated task of dealing with racial oppression at the same time; they have dealt with gender conflicts in the black community. The problem that white women have confronted is “the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretence of sharing power” (Lorde 118). Lorde claimed that being physically attractive, “hating the right people and marrying the right man were often required for white women, who wanted to “co-exist” with patriarchy in relative peace” (119). Moreover, Kline expresses that: “women were becoming masculine just as men were becoming increasingly weak and effeminate” (11). This process is challenging the moral order of the American society. Keeping with the polygenetic approach towards racial roles and the resulting mores, especially those pertaining to the white middle class, eugenics targeted women, both white and non-white, in trying to solve this double-edged menacing turn of events.
One of the main aspects of the criticism of *Seraph on the Suwanee* is the fact that the main characters are white, as opposed to the remainder of Hurston’s work which focuses primarily on black rural folk. In terms of the framework of this thesis, this whiteness does not diminish the novel, but rather gives a certain twist to what has been argued so far. Instead of focusing on the black female, Hurston puts a white female in the forefront. Notwithstanding its whiteness, it is still a female who is striving to attain identity and autonomy in the middle-class and is thus policed in a similar fashion to black women. Moreover, marriage is still seen as the means of controlling the potentially oversexed body, and repression of the body and the mind of the middle-class female is an omnipresent process in the novel. As Ann DuCille points out that:

The focus on white men and women allows Hurston to take up in explicit detail the sexual subject matter (and) allows her to scrutinize with unmatched intimacy the passions and problems of heterosexual coupling – including the previously unexamined issues of courtship and marital rape – without subjecting herself and her fiction to charges of pandering to white stereotypes of black sexuality (115).

Hurston’s quest for liberating the female in her art thus continues in *Seraph on the Suwanee*: Hurston makes it universal and more pressing, veiling her critique of the institution of marriage and the middle-class mores in an ambiguous narrative, which, as is often the case with the author, allows numerous pathways of interpretation. Hurston takes as her subject the southern working-class white, another group which stood low in the hierarchy of the society. As mentioned in the overview section dealing with sexual discourse, the working-class whites were one of the targets of the eugenic movement, much like the non-white people. As Chuck Jackson notices, “there is evidence that Hurston’s interest in the Florida crackers stems from her anthropological work, so-called FWP papers, passages from which were placed by Hurston “in the mouths of her novel’s characters” (643). The condition of cracker white women is similar to that of the black women, though with a different and distinct history; their bodies were policed and labeled impure, their procreation is
termed dangerous and undesirable. Hurston takes up this cause in \textit{Seraph} and attempts to liberate the poor white woman’s body from middle-class oppression as well.

Hurston, typically of her prose, hints at the hidden power residing in the female body – because of the oppression and limitations imposed on the female by the middle-class mores and by Jim’s concept of marriage, however, it is difficult for Arvay to wake up to the realization that she is powerful. This is the case of Arvay as much as Delia and Janie; the very opposite is the case of Emma in Color Struck, who never attains this power and never claims her body. Jim, aware of Arvay’s power, does not let her know, but rather lets her succumb to his love – he is holding the reins of this mule. “Knowing more, she might not have been so contented where she was. Twenty to twenty-five years later on, he could afford to let her know (SS 695)”. Alice Walker, Hurston’s greatest champion writes, “It is reactionary, static, shockingly misguided and timid…. especially true of Seraph on the Suwanee, which is not even about black people, which is no crime, but is about white people for whom it is impossible to care”(xvi). Critics have often been puzzled by this work of Hurston. Going by Hurston’s past literary trend of imbuing her novels with black folk culture, this comes as a shock for the majority of critics and readers. To quote Carla Kaplan:

Why, for example, would she go from depicting the black community she knew so well, portrayed so lovingly, and criticized so handily to a story about southern crackers and their difficult rise to financial success? Why would she go from using rape as a central metaphor for exploitation in \textit{Their Eyes} to a story in which rape is merely misunderstanding--a —pain remorseless sweet and a —memory inexpressibly sweet? Why does she paint a positive and comic image of the very —pet negro system-- —Every Southern white man has his pet Negro -- which she decried elsewhere as a —residue of feudalism.(443)

The color of skin of her characters is never important for Hurston, what is most important to her is the feelings, emotions that she endowed her characters with. Lillie P. Howard aptly writes in this regard:
As early as *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934) Hurston had paved the way for such a novel as *Seraph on the Suwanee*. By insisting upon writing her story about —a man instead of one about the —traditional lay figures‖ found in protest fiction about the —Negro Problem. (134).

Though in *Seraph on the Suwanee*, the main characters are white, while African American characters are minor and occurring on the periphery of the plot, but thematic issues are more or less the same. The major themes such as marriage, religion, search for self-identity, love, all are undoubtedly, present in this novel too. These unifying themes connect *Seraph on the Suwanee* to Hurston’s other well-known novels and short stories. Most importantly, Hurston proves to be a versatile literary artist with her use of complex plot and intriguing characterization in a sustained narrative. With dexterity, Hurston uses local color captures the rural setting of the state of Florida. Nature is one of the themes in the novel. Hurston uses nature as a mode to depict her identity and autonomy for Arvay, the protagonist of the novel. In the very opening lines of the novel, Hurston gives a description of the town of Sawley, situated in West Florida. Hurston writes:

> Sawley, the town is in west Florida, on the famous Suwanee River. It is flanked on the South by the curving course of the river which Stephen Foster made famous without ever having looked upon its waters, running swift and deep through the primitive forests, and reddened by the chemicals leech out of drinking roots. On the north, the town is flanked by cultivated field planted to corn, cane potatoes, tobacco and small patches of cotton (599).

Throughout the novel, nature plays an important role in the plot. It also affects the characters in varied ways. Hurston manifests malign as well as benign aspects of nature. Sharon L. Jones writes in this regard:

> Characters who manage to accept their connection to the natural world ultimately emerge stronger than those whose identities are marked by estrangement from nature. Hurston captures a culture in transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, documenting the effects that economics would have, on nature and ultimately on
people. (158)

It is something she can use if Jim ever returns to his abusive and rapist manners for “the more self-assured Arvay who chooses to actively submit to Jim Meserve in the final pages of Seraph is not the same insecure Arvay Henson who has passively resisted his domination throughout the novel” (duCille 141). Given the “Trickster” tradition that is evolved as a rhetorical tactic in African-American literature, it is not difficult to believe that Hurston imagined her novel as some sort of artifice. In fact, her use of irony and contradiction throughout the novel fits the definition of the trickster as a comical figure who causes laughter by profaning central social beliefs while focusing attention “precisely on the nature of such beliefs” (Hynes 1-2). Another way to understand Hurston’s methodology is to consider Elaine Showalter’s concept of gyno critics, the idea that “women’s fiction can be read as a double-voice discourse, containing a ‘dominant’ and a ‘muted’ story.

This “object or field problem” requires that the reader “keep two alternative oscillating texts simultaneously in view” (Feminist Criticism 34). While Showalter’s comments refer to women writers in general, the idea of the muted story has worked especially well for black women writers who have been socially marginalized not only by gender but also by race. This idea of a dominant versus muted story is essential to understanding Seraph on the Suwanee. When the book is first published, readers fails to grasp its muted message and the extent to which Hurston’s socio-political stance is embodied in the structure and subject matter of her novel. What appears to be an amiable story about a white couple at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hurston’s first effort at writing a novel about white people) is in fact an incriminating commentary on Anglo-Saxon culture. An important element of her muted story is the extensive use of irony, “an important linguistic tool for those writing from positions of marginality because it is inherently disruptive and is usually not recognized as such by many who experience it”(Stover105). Feminism, as a social movement with a political agenda, requires new systems of knowledge that challenge mainstream assumptions and practices. This knowledge is most likely to emerge as the result of innovative methods of inquiry that go against the traditional grain. As Mary Maynard observes:
it is commonly believed by feminists themselves that a feminist method of social inquiry does exist, but a precise description that all feminists can agree on, is hard to find. A part of the problem of definition can be traced to a misunderstanding of three major terms of the debate: method, methodology, and epistemology. (10)

Seraph on the Suwannee also serves to suggest an oppositional, muted or female voice that continually breaks through the patriarchal surface of her text. That muted female voice, Hurston’s undeniably black voice, makes use of a gender and racial inflection that reveals a surprisingly intuitive understanding of the different social spaces inhabited by men and women in Anglo-Saxon culture.

Hurston uses the white woman’s role of wife and mother, a role that constitutes an essential element of the traditional foundation upon which Anglo-Saxon culture rests, as a means by which to study what she increasingly came to understand as the “pathos” of that culture. Hurston’s works reveal a similar idea: those dominant forms of social oppression represent a “legacy of conquest, reinforced through the continuing negative identification of certain groups of people with nature” (Stein 17). Hurston’s Seraph follows the tale of a young cracker woman, Arvay Henson and her marriage to Jim Meserve, a descendant of southern aristocracy. It is a tale of love, sex, humiliation, oppression, and finding oneself – in this manner, it does not differ from other works by the author. However, unlike “Sweat,” Color Struck, or TE, this novel “is a story about female desire gratified, [it] is a veritable treatise on heterosexual love,” says Claudia Tate (149-50). This gratification, however, takes a long time coming, and it materializes in the form of a subversive feminist tale.

In her seminal essay, “The Courageous Undertow of Zora Neale Hurston’s Seraph on the Suwanee,” Janet St.Clair argues that there is a “narrative of resistance and self-discovery that exists not between the lines but solidly on every page” of Seraph on the Suwanee. In sum, “this submerged narrative concerns an oppressed woman who ferociously conceals and protects an embryonic sense of self until she gains the space and safety to nurture it and bring it to light and life” (St.Clair 38). However, in the novel “every character and incident is rent by dualities; every narrative assertion self-destructs. Nothing is as it seems; nothing retains its shape”
Arvay’s quest for finding the self is imbued with natural imagery the same way Janie’s quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is. There is the marriage to a possessive and often tyrannical husband, and the struggle of the main character to break free of the husband’s hold on her body and soul. Arvay’s tale is, similarly to Delia, Emma, and Janie’s tale, an often violent struggle to claim her own body and voice, and to emerge as a full-fledged female character, on par with the male counterpart. In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, this quest takes a long time because of the multilayered narrative which offers various possible interpretations of events, characters’ actions, and motivations. Looking at the imagery surrounding Arvay’s body, however, provides one possible pathway of analysis of the novel.

The protagonist Arvay Henson has an intriguing relationship with nature. Arvay’s father works in a turpentine camp. It is in this turpentine farm, that Jim Meserve, Arvay’s prospective husband comes to work. Turpentine becomes a natural remedy for Arvay’s hysterical fits. The Mulberry tree is one of the most important symbols in the novel. Morris observes that: “The mulberry tree is an intrinsic part of Arvay’s character just as the blossoming pear tree is to Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Arvay’s ‘image of herself centers around a tree, in this case a mulberry tree, that grows behind her home is Sawley’”(9). For Arvay, the mulberry tree in her backyard is her “—sacred place and —a cool green temple of peace” (SS 632). It is a place where Arvay secretly fantasizes about her brother-in-law Carl Middleton. She brings Jim to the tree as a gesture of atonement and to purge herself of all the fantasies about Carl Middleton. Hurston writes:

> She wanted Carl and all her thoughts about him to be gone from under that mulberry tree. She wanted to feel that the temple was cleansed, and that she herself was clean and worthy of what she was about to receive. (632)

In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, Jim Meserve emerges as the prototypical agent of conquest, narcissistically positioning himself as somehow apart from nature and that which has been culturally identified with the natural environment. In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, Hurston places her black characters in the background as a part of the nature-identified support system which needs to the male-dominated agenda of white society. To understand how whiteness has come to be a social norm in America, it is
necessary to look at what Malcomson refers to as the “Psychologically covert fashion” (280), in which that occurred. Beginning of the seventeenth century, the idea of race, as indicated by a skin color, is used increasingly by whites to indicate someone different from them. Seeing themselves as a norm, they have seen no need to give themselves a specific label. When social distinctions required a label, whites describe themselves in positive terms, as those associated with nationality or religion.

The sense of something going on below the “white” surface has encouraged the use of psychoanalysis as a means to investigate Hurston’s text. Both John Lowe and Claudia Tate use their knowledge of psychoanalytical theories to investigate and explain the text, although each has a different aim. Lowe focuses on Hurston’s use of humor and the way it structures and (in Lowe’s view) explains the psychological disharmony that exists between Arvay and Jim. Lowe believes that Arvay’s inability to understand and appreciate “Jim’s joking, cross-racial fellowship” (260), is at the heart of their difficult relationship. What Lowe seems to ignore is that a great deal of Jim’s humor, presented often as affectionate teasing, is frequently revealed to be mean-spirited bullying, not only when it is aimed at Arvay, but also at others who do not possess his level of social status.

Freudian themes are perhaps one of the most important theories in Seraph on the Suwanee, both the main characters, that of Arvay Henson and Jim Meserve suffer from certain personality disorders and Hurston aptly uses Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories in her story. During the period of Harlem Renaissance, Sigmund Freud’s works and his various theories have become immensely popular with African American literary artists and Hurston is no exception. According to Lowe, “Freud was a favorite topic during the Harlem Renaissance and in New York intellectual society in general during the twenties and thirties” (271). Hurston is aware of Freud’s works before her tenure in Barnard College in the early 1920s and the story of Seraph on the Suwanee have come as an opportunity for Hurston to blend this knowledge with literature. Commenting on Arvay’s characterization as a neurotic, Carl Milton Hughes writes:

Seraph on the Suwanee places Hurston at once among the many
American writers who have paid homage to Sigmund Freud. One has only to recall the Freud vogue of the twenties and thirties in American literature. Freud at this time was accepted as the modus vivendi of uninhibited sex. Hurston deals with a different phase of Freudian psychology although sex appears. Her point of departure subscribes to the more recent Freudian treatments in literature which popularizes the neurotic character. In the particular case in point, Hurston gives a study of the hysterical woman (172).

Hurston most aptly uses Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of dreams in the story of Seraph. Dreams have always been an important theme in African American literature. Leading Harlem Renaissance writers have used the theme of dream to build upon their stories. Hurston too uses dreams in the exposition of theme of the story of Seraph on the Suwanee. Arvay dreams of Carl and her sexual escapades with him as well as her sister’s death. Lowe writes in this regard:

Dreams have traditionally played a large role in black sermons and in the —travels|| of recent converts who have —come through. Dreams play key role in conjuring and root work and in the widespread habit in black urban neighborhoods of poring over dreams for destined numbers to play in neighborhood rackets. Hurston’s mentor no doubt introduced her to Freud as early as the twenties, but other friends like Van Vachten were affecionados as well. Whatever, the source, Hurston certainly saw the immense potential of Freud’s theories for Seraph, where they would work in tandem with backwood religions. Arvay’s dreams are for instance, both typological and Freudian (272).

Arvay also throws hysterical fits to refrain any suitor from approaching her as revealed by Jim later. While creating the character of Arvay, Hurston had Freud’s psychoanalytic theories on her mind. Hurston writes:

Arvay’s part, the venture invariably ended in an hysterical display as soon as the young man got inside the Henson parlor. Hardly did she get her hat off before she was sprawled out on the horse-hair sofa clenching hands and teeth and bobbling around, and up and down,
and with her mother running in with a small vial of spirits of turpentine and the sugar dish with a teaspoon in it to administer the dose of three —drops‖ of —terpentine on sugar forced between the teeth of Arvay to bring her to. (SS 60)

The narrative opens with a description of the town of Sawley where Arvay has been living for twenty one years – it is Sunday, the time of the church service. “Sawley was boiling like a big red ants’ nest [because] it was rumored that Arvay […] was a’courting at last” (SS 601). This first scene of the text provides information about the town and its people: everyone is interested in Arvay’s fate, and they want to see who is courting her and how it is going. It reminds the reader of the policing of the young female’s identity by the community. Though Sawley is not a middle-class community, there is much anxiety over whether or not Arvay is finally going to enter the holy matrimony as is expected of every woman. The process of Arvay’s deliverance from sexual hysteria starts as Jim and Arvay enter the opening Sunday service scene. Though she is quite self-conscious of her looks, by Jim’s side, Arvay’s “vanity put on a little flesh” (SS 617). After the service, Arvay is overcome by “a tremulous desire to take refuge in this man. To be forever warm and included in the atmosphere that he stirred up around him” (SS 620). This wish will be granted to Arvay, but as the reader sees later, she becomes a rather passive participant in the marriage: she is repressed, distant, and withdrawn for a good portion off the novel. The main reason for this distance and passivity surfaces immediately after her feeling of desire mentioned above:

But with the intensity of desire stirred up in her came despair. This was the prettiest man that she had ever laid eyes on. […] What in the world did she have to win him with? [He] had given her something to wish for which she could never have. Nothing to do but submit herself to her fate. But submission tazzled you up inside (620).

Arvay suffers from a sense of inferiority which will haunt her for a long time. She does not resist it, but rather lets this inferiority take over her fate, thus making her passive Jim here voices his views on women; views quite similar to those voiced by
Joe Clarke in "Sweat" and Joe Starks in TE. As Christopher Rieger notices, “Jim’s resemblance to Jody is unmistakable, and the actions of both men betray their words by revealing that they have very little understanding of their wives” (112). Like Joe and Jody, Jim ascribes Arvay a separate sphere, where she is to be kept throughout the marriage. Jim tells Arvay what he expects of her: subservience, male progeny, and happiness. He claims control over her well-being, but also over what gender their children will be, thus beginning to assert control over Arvay.

Arvay Henson is not an appreciated child in her family. She is disappointed because the man, who she thinks loves her, marries her voluptuous and flirtatious sister Ranie. She, therefore, decides to lead a religious life, spurning whoever offers to marry her. When Jim Meserve comes to Sawley, he gets involved impressively in social works which sets him apart from the citizens of Sawley, “who had always been the poor whites who had scratched out some kind of an existence in the scrub oaks and pines, far removed from the ease of the big estates” (SS 7). Jim plans to impress Arvay by picking up an eight-foot diamond-back rattlesnake. This clearly illustrates the arrogant nature of a world view that is based on male physical prowess and a sense of entitlement that validates dominion over “lesser” creatures. The irrationality of his stunt is apparent to Arvay: “...this was nothing to be fooling with. Supposing that thing got loose” (SS 254). When his exhibitionist caper goes away and he loses the control of the snake, Arvay is unable to move, paralyzed with fear, “a standard and predictable reaction, as Jim well knows, to snakes” (St.Clair 59). After Jeff, the black handyman, rescues Jim and wants to kill the snake, Jim dissuades him, declaring the snake to be “a perfect gentleman in every way” (SS 259), because he put up a fight.

Jim subsequently boasts of wanting to do something big and brave and full of manhood. This act is unconvincing for both Arvay and the reader. Blind to his self-serving point of view, he leaves Arvay to ponder what he claims are her past and present shortcomings. St. Clair points out, “There is little reason to trust the narrative voice that insistently reiterates Arvay’s responsibility for Jim's dissatisfaction: the apparent complicity serves only to reveal the insidious duplicity of the situation” (45). Jim’s story represents the privileged, patriarchal status while Arvay’s struggle
represents an attempt to resist oppression and destruction of the self. The male-female
dichotomy running through her novel suggests that Hurston has found a way to use
her feminist consciousness to elaborate on the flawed nature of the white, patriarchal
society. Hurston is writing *Seraph on the Suwannee*. As *Friedan* points out, men
have no problem with the feminine mystique: “It promised them mothers for the rest
of their lives, both as a reason for their being and as an excuse for their failures
(204)”. While not referring to it as such, Hurston's work reveals awareness of the
feminine mystique, an existing framework of beliefs that makes possible a patriarchal
society where a particular group of men have license to dominate those who they
understand are different from and inferior to them. What made the feminine mystique
possible is socially embedded idea that what women needed in order to acquire and
maintain a degree of mental health is different from what men required.

Hurston's intention in this novel is to bring out Arvay's urge for self-identity
and motherhood. At the beginning of the novel, Arvay desires to devote her life to
religion but it is not taken seriously by many of the young men in Sawley. However,
they continue to win her hand in marriage, despite her “fits and spasms” like the ones
which her mother had in her youth: “No one thought too much about the seizures. Fits
were things that happened to some young girls, but they grew out of them sooner or
later. It was usually taken as a sign of a girl being “high-strung”. Marriage would
straighten her out” (SS 6). These “fits and spasms” usually occur when a young man
insists on seeing Arvay home after church: “After the long walk in almost complete
silence on Arvay's part, the venture invariably ended in a hysterical display as soon as
the young man got inside the Henson parlor” (SS 6). Although Arvay's hysteria works
to discourage her unwanted suitors, it would be wrong to see her actions as some form
of female power.

Throughout the novel, Arvay is in search of her identity. In the beginning of
the novel, we see Arvay decides to become a nun for the rest of her life and to serve
the needy becomes the quest of her life until she meets Jim, “She solemnly said that
she had given her heart and her life to the work of God. She planned to be a
missionary” (SS 602). After meeting Jim she finds her life’s quest in domestic bliss,
but at times is waivered by her decision. At one point of time she wants to return to
Sawley and spend the rest of her life there, —she would march away from Jim and go back with her own Kind” (SS 718). When Arvay goes to attend her mother’s funeral she finally comes to the conclusion that she needs to live with Jim and be with him rather than spending her life alone. Ultimately, Arvay is able to find her identity as a wife and mother. Schwarz observes Arvay’s problem is closer to Janie Crawford’s: “she lacks any definition of her identity. Unlike Janie, Arvay lacks a voice, without which she lacks worth, and the ability to imagine freedom” (28-29).

Showalter in her essay states that: The “female anti-language of hysteria” (157), or the feminist idea of madness as a “metaphor of resistance (Caminero-Santangelo 9)” describes a problem, not a solution. As Shoshanna Felman points out:

.... madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. ‘Mental illness’ is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of the political castration (21-22).

Thus, a circular process takes place, a social ethos of oppression requires survival tactics on the part of the oppressed that are defined by those in power as dysfunctional. This has the effect of confirming the rationales for oppression in the first place. What might help to break the cycle is a shift in focus from individual behavior to social context that includes “class exploitation, racial stratification and patriarchy” (Lerman 148). Jim is not so easily put off, however, and “cures” Arvay’s fits by putting a drop of turpentine in her eye: “Then a hurricane struck the overcrowded parlor. Arvay gave a yell from the very bottom of her lungs and catapulted her body from the sofa” (SS 32). While Arvay rushes off to wash out her eye, “Jim and Brock Henson stood face to face and looked each dead in the eye for a moment, to wash out her pretty eye. With a dry grin smothering in his face, Jim led the way to the back porch” (SS 32-33). As Arvay washes her eye with water, her father comments, “Jim, you sure done worked a miracle, to which Jim responds, “A woman knows who her master is and she answers to his commands” (SS 33).

Arvay is successful in keeping her suitors off. This act of hysteria once again manifests the complexity of Arvay’s character. This hysterical madness or a
metaphor of resistance can be best described as a problem, not a solution. While explaining female hysteria, Carminero-Santangelo comments:

Madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, mental illness is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration. (21-22)

However, a determined Jim is not put off by Arvay's hysterical act. He cures Arvay of her self-induced madness by putting a drop of turpentine in her eyes. Being in relationship with Jim, does not help Arvay either. She is unable to love him completely. Despite being with Jim, Arvay remains melancholic throughout her life.

While describing the characteristics of melancholia, Freud explains:

The object has not perhaps actually died but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted....The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity of love.... and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (244-45).

As many feminist critics have noted, Jim views himself as "Arvay's knight in shining armor" (SS 96). From the beginning of their courtship, Jim offers Arvay his "help" and "protection," telling her that she needs "somebody stronger than you, and that can see further than you, and somebody that feels your care, (who) will have to be on hand to look after you” (SS 613). Throughout the novel, Jim consistently provides for his wife, his children, and even Arvay's mother, casting himself as Arvay's generous protector; however, many of Jim's actions significantly complicate the couple's relationship. Many scholars argue that Jim's character is unequivocally domineering and tyrannical, have justifiably focused on his rape of Arvay before their marriage; but perhaps even more revealing of the couple's relational dynamics are the events that immediately follow the rape. When Arvay realizes what has happened under the mulberry tree, she is initially "terribly afraid" because she feels that "She
has been taken for a fool.... What was to become of her now? Where would she turn for refuge?” (SS 645). Arvay naturally fears that Jim will abandon her. But when he presently makes clear that his intentions to marry her have not changed, she feels immensely relieved and is grateful to him for his noble gesture Even though the couple is already engaged, Jim's resolution to marry Arvay after the rape seems magnanimous to her; Jim's violent exercise of power defines their relationship, giving his subsequent actions the appearance of kindness, despite his own responsibility for the circumstances which cause Arvay to fear.

Hurston's descriptions of Arvay Henson, written thirty six years before Lorde’s comments, suggest that she has a similar impression of privileged white women. Hurston's Seraph on the Suwanne draws an awareness of how the traditional coupling of women and Nature has been used to create and maintain their secondary social position of being a mother. From the first page of Seraph on the Suwanne to the last, it is obvious that Nature figures prominently in the message that Hurston is crafting. Perhaps the most salient nature-centered symbol in the book is the mulberry tree. It is used in many African religions to represent life, death, and beyond. It represents “one of the most frequently recurrent myth types in the literature of women in the African Diaspora and on the Continent” (33). Jim rapes Arvay under that very mulberry tree. Hurston writes:

Looking upwards so intently, Arvay did not see Jim when he sprang away from the trunk of the free. She felt his arms suddenly thrust beneath her, and his hands digging into her side…. Arvay opened her mouth to scream, but no sound emerged. Her mouth was closed by Jim's passionate kisses, and in a moment more, despite her struggles, Arvay knew a pain remorseless sweet (644-645).

The mulberry tree becomes a witness to a change in Arvay’s life. She not only loses her virginity, but also her innocence under this tree. She is also destined to serve a dominating man as her husband throughout her life. Hurston connects the imagery of the mulberry tree to a heinous crime such as rape which Arvay undergoes. Susan Edward Meisenhelder writes in this regards:

The wild imbalance between male and female in this novel is, in
fact, imaged in the central metaphor that replaces the pear tree, that of the mulberry tree. ... Hurston’s first description of the mulberry tree, its —new green leaves, punctuated by tiny fuzzy things that looked like green stubby worms prefigures the pervasive rape imagery and the female violation at the novel’s core (95).

The mulberry tree plays an important part in the story and remains constant in Arvay’s life, marking events and suggesting epiphanies that propel her forward. Rachel Stein argues that Huston's work reveals her profound knowledge of feminine psychology. Hurston frames her protagonist's final reunion with her husband as the conclusion of the metamorphosis that Arvay undergoes over the course of the novel, a metamorphosis through which she finally overcomes her debilitating sense of inferiority. As Arvay gains confidence in her position as Jim Meserve's wife, she no longer feels the need to quell her own feelings of inferiority by entertaining racist thoughts about ethnic minorities or hateful thoughts about the lower-class members of her own family. However, as Arvay outgrows her most glaring prejudices and her periodic retreats into spitefulness, she gains an aristocratic mindset comparable to Jim's own in its condescension and sense of power. Two key instances when this mindset surfaces in Arvay occur during her return visits to Sawley. Only twice over the course of the novel Hurston shows Arvay returning to her Florida Cracker home for any extended period of time. Both of Arvay's extended visits to Sawley come at points of significant trouble in her relationship with her husband. Rather than viewing the troubles in her marriage as the results of either Jim's abuses or her own inferiority complex, Arvay attributes these problems to the couple's differences in class background. Though Arvay agrees to marry him, Jim detects “a hold-back to her love”(SS 45),th at bothers him. Joe Kelsey, destined to become Jim's pet Negro, gives him, one shine of hope” by advising that “Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make 'em knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in thy mouth and ride 'em hard and stop 'em short. They’d all alike, Boss. Take 'em and break 'em”. Later that night, Jim goes to bed “thinking hard (45-46).
The subsequent rape that takes place under the mulberry tree and the precipitous wedding that follows, set the stage for a relationship based on the submission of rape. As Jane Caputi points out, “there are, in fact, two experiences of rape- that of the rapist and the one who is raped” (31). Jim's understanding of the situation is couched in terms of dismissal, humor, and ultimately even romance—“ Arvay Henson!” Jim hailed oratorically, “the apostle to the heathens!” Then he chuckled some more “-- is very different from Arvay's --” (SS 56).

Arvay's self-esteem is further lowered, as she is raped by Jim just before their marriage. The rape further shatters her self-esteem. She feels degraded and debased. Hurston writes “It was more than she could bear, to have been so lifted up for a few weeks only to be cast down like this. What was to become of her” (645). The inadequacy and defeating attitude terrifies Arvay and Jim’s married life also, Arvay found that Jim thought her a trifle dumb” (SS 659). As a result Arvay’s feeling of guilt and inferiority increases, making her distance herself from Jim more and more, “Arvay did a lot of communing with herself. Now, she thought, Jim’s real feelings were exposed. He had never taken her for his equal” (SS 716). Arvay becomes more and more shut to her isolated until she recognizes her true worth after twenty years of searching within herself.

Lowe claims that “the text seems clear enough that the desire is mutual (Lowe 820)”. It not only ignores the fact that both Jim and Arvay, albeit with different interpretations, understand the sexual encounter under the mulberry tree as a rape, but also hints at an oft-repeated “rape myth” that “ the woman really wanted it” (Jane Caputi,93). He bases his argument on a passage that Hurston removed from her manuscript that describes Arvay in a celebratory mood as she comes down the steps of the court house after her wedding, a passage that seems at odds with the “expression of a rape victim” (Caputi 284). Lowe is correct in questioning the reliability of this passage in terms of it being an accurate description of any woman's reaction to a rape. But the important thing to note is that Hurston did remove the passage and it seems obvious that she did so because she did not want to trivialize an important theme that would appear again in her book. Hurston both explicitly and
implicitly uses the idea of rape not only to draw a connection between women and Nature, but also to make a statement about the pathology and false foundation of the culture that objectifies both.

Six weeks after the graphically described encounter under the mulberry tree, Arvay discovers that she is pregnant. Although Hurston does not specially link the rape with the pregnancy, subsequent events suggest that she wants the readers to assume such a connection. Significantly, it is Dessie, the black maid, who informs Arvay of the coming event:

Dessie looked at her very hard and began to chuckle. ‘[What’s wrong, Dessie?]’ I declare! That husband you done married is all parts of a man.’ ‘What do you mean by that, Dessie?’ Youse knocked up, that’s what.’ ‘Knocked up?’ Arvay had heard the term too many times to misunderstand what was meant by it. Arvay just did not want to hear it. ‘Going to have a young ’un, just as sure as youseborn to die’. ‘No, Dessie. I’m sure that you’re mistaken. I, Iain’t noticed a thing (SS 62).

Two things are notable in this passage: one, it is Dessie, the black woman who first notices the signs of pregnancy while Arvay seems out of touch with her own body. Secondly Dessie's comments about Jim that he is the source or creator of the pregnancy and that the pregnancy is something that has happened because he is what a man should be. As she does throughout the novel, Hurston makes use of an irony to create a complicated “double-voice discourse” that gives the reader several contradictory ideas to think. Dessie's seemingly straightforward remark is, in fact, a subversive commentary on the part of a black woman who has spent considerable time observing white culture. Arvay's urge for being a mother can be clearly portrayed, when the baby is born. Arvay is stunned by what she sees:

Dessie! Dessie! what is the matter with my child’s hands?” ’It would take a God to tell, Miz’ Arvay. Them don't look much like fingers, do they?’ ’Good gracious! They look like strings'... There was practically no forehead nor back head on her child. The head narrowed like an egg on top... The feet were long, and the toes well
formed, but they looked too long for a new-born baby to have (SS 67-68).

Motherhood is an important theme dealt extensively by Hurston in the novel. Arvay is an embodiment of motherhood. Though she is not portrayed as a strong character but she shows her strongest mother instinct when it comes to her children. Through her motherhood she is able to assert her identity and autonomy .Children are the first priority of Arvay, and sometimes she even goes to the extent of confrontation with her dominating husband Jim for her children’s welfare. Arvay’s first child is Earl who is a physically and mentally challenged child. Arvay loves Earl very much, so Arvay has felt free to get on her knees and pray. First, she asks God for the health and welfare of her child, and please, “let Earl David never be taken away from her” (SS 663). Though Jim also likes his son, but he does not feel as attached as Arvay for Earl and sometime even comes to the point of ignoring him. Earl’s life depends directly on Arvay only. She takes care of him in every way. Even Jim acknowledges this fact. He thinks, but Arvay is a true mother, bless her heart! I can’t, I can’t fault her too much for what she’s done, crazy as it is. Mother-meat never gives over, I reckon. They’ll die and go to hell for their young” (725). Arvay loves Earl more than her other children. Hurston writes:

Every time that she saw heard blow-outs of laughter from the house in the grove of nights, and knew that Jim was down there taking part, and thought about Earl being in that room under watch-care, she boiled. She felt that she and Earl were shut oﬀ in loneliness by themselves (718).

The hunger of the boy symbolizes clearly and even Arvay realizes it herself: “This is the punishment for the way I used to be. I thought that I had done paid oﬀ, but I reckon not. I never thought it would come like this, but it must be the chastisement I been looking for” (SS 662). It is only logical then that Arvay comes to love the baby dearly, it is literally a living piece of her psyche and her past, and that is also why Jim resents the baby. Two weeks later, the baby is still unnamed and Arvay is left to choose a name by herself: “Jim made no objections to the choice of a name (Earl) at all. Said it was pretty and a whole lot better than plain Jim Meserve. He didn't know
as he wanted a child named after himself anyway. Let every man have a name all to himself” (SS 70). Arvay hurries to name the baby before Jim does it, giving it the name Earl David, which is, according to Jackson: “a literal mutation of Carl. […] Since Arvay’s body processes her past in the experience of abjection, then it only makes sense that the disabled Earl is an uncanny double of Carl, a figure who Arvay must learn to love and, eventually, of whom Arvay must learn to let go” (647).

Luckily for Arvay, Jim earns enough money to be able to relocate with Arvay to west Florida, where they begin a new In contrast, Jim's reaction to the baby is low-keyed and restrained:

He did not enthuse at all” and in response to Arvay’s question” what must we name him?” answers “Oh, no rush about that at all...we got plenty time ti figger that out,” and “in a sort of a slow hurry” he leaves Arvay alone with their child (SS 68).

Arvay is psychologically much affected; she thinks that she has a deformed child because of the rape. This feel continuously stirs her mentally almost resulting in a guilty thought within herself. Jim's dream of having his “new young 'un...born on his daddy’s place”, instead of on “borrowed land” (SS 78) comes true two years later when he buys five acres of land and makes plans to build a house. When Arvay is two months pregnant, she recoils at the proximity of their land to a swamp, describing it as “dark and haunted-looking and too big and strong to overcome,” as well as a potential threat to Earl who might wander in those directions, Jim laughs harshly, “That scary thing ain't apt to stray nowhere at all. If that's all you got to worry about, you can put your mind at rest. He's scared to death of even a baby chicken and then he ain't all that active” (SS 80).

Jim's comments not only serve to dehumanize Earl but also underscore the reality of his emotional distancing from the son who is born in Sawley, Arvay's hometown. In addition, they affirm that any children born in the future will be more closely tied to him. Neither Arvay nor Jim can know that the son who is born on “borrowed land” is also living on borrowed time. Arvay's perception that the swamp represents a danger to Earl seems prescient in view of subsequent events. When their
second child is born, Arvay “found out how Jim was, like a father, coming into the room with his baby in his arms, after my mother, too” (SS 85). Hurston describes in detail how much effort Jim is putting into making Arvay happy, she describes in detail his ventures and his sadness over Arvay’s lack of appreciation. Arvay is preoccupied with her body and her past and, also, Jim does not point out things to her like he once promised. He said that he would have expected women to deliver certain things and Arvay tries her best to do exactly that. Somehow, Jim wants more from her without letting her know. Fortunately for the couple, Arvay becomes pregnant with a healthy child, a girl named Angie.

Angie is healthy because she is the product of the couple’s new life, which is rid of much of Arvay’s past and her cracker life. Jim comes to love the girl dearly, while Arvay seems to resent the baby a little, especially her affinity to Jim rather than to her. Angie is Jim’s first product of the possession he has managed to attain over Arvay’s body. Arvay has finally delivered what Jim has been expecting of her. The duality of the novel, however, comes into play at the moment of Jim’s happiness. He suddenly begins pondering leaving Arvay: “There was not sufficient understanding in his marriage, Jim said inside himself. What help for it except by parting from Arvay” (SS 693). Jim realizes that Arvay does not understand him and his efforts and he faults her for his unhappiness. He never considers his part in this lack of understanding.

It is Jim who has been molding Arvay into a passive mule on a high pedestal; it is he who told her to lay back, produce babies, and enjoy the life he shall provide. Despite her passivity, strange moods, and lack of praise for Jim’s achievements, Arvay has delivered. St. Clair rightly points out that “despite his insistence that she neither worries nor thinks earlier in the novel: “he forces her to do both under impossible conditions, for he refuses to tell her his expectations yet requires her to acquiesce in his will” (46).

This duality in Jim’s character and in his treatment of Arvay resonates throughout the novel and makes it difficult for Arvay to understand Jim’s motivations. Though Jim is pondering whether to leave Arvay or not and decides to stay for his own selfish reasons, it is shows later on in the novel that leaving her would have been
a better idea, because Jim’s act of leaving in fact provides space for Arvay to look around and see through Jim’s actions. Hurston, typically of her prose, hints at the hidden power residing in the female oppression because of the oppression and limitations imposed on the female by the middle-class mores and by Jim’s concept of marriage, however, it is difficult for Arvay to wake up to the realization that she is powerful. This is the case of Arvay as much as Delia and Janie; the very opposite is the case of Emma in Color Struck, who never attains this power and never claims her body. Jim, aware of Arvay’s power, does not let her know, but rather lets her succumb to his love – he is holding the reins of this mule. “Knowing more, she might not have been so contented where she was twenty to twenty-five years later on, he could afford to let her know” (SS 695). What she is now, a good mother, a loving wife, and a waiting-woman, is good enough for Jim, that is the result of his pondering.

In contrast to his lack of involvement with Earl, “he never played with him at all” (SS 76). Jim “was hanging over the baby’s crib practically all the time that he was in the house. He had to look at the child and touch it before he could leave for work in the morning. He came bolting in from work and made for wherever the baby was” (SS 85-86). When Arvay becomes pregnant for a third time, “Dessie caught on to the signs right away, and Arvay saw them confirmed in her body (SS 96)”. When the child is born, Jim “promptly” names the baby boy James Kenneth Meseve who will be known as Kenny (SS 106). Over the years, it becomes apparent that all children have not only physical flaws but also some physiological abnormalities as well. From the beginning of his life, “the child seemed to be very much of a ride. Any sudden movement, any strange objects introduced into his presence brought screams of terror (SS 70)”. An ongoing argument arises between Jim, who believes Earl should be “put away” (SS 124) and Arvay who insists there is “nothing much wrong with Earl (SS 125). The full extent of his mental shortcomings is made shockingly clear when he attempts to rape Lucy, the daughter of Jim’s employee.

Subsequently, when Earl is missing, Jim joins a group of “around a hundred men and tramped off to search for her son” (SS 149). Hurston’s use of the pronoun “her” underscores the rift that has grown in the marriage over the years; Earl, in fact, is Arvay’s child while Jim distances himself from the son he would rather not think
about. With the aid of blood hounds, Earl is driven “to a place deep in the swamp” where he is killed” (SS 150). Lowe wonders why Hurston included such a “powerful and grim episode” and concludes that may be she “wanted to demonstrate to white people what a change it might be like for a white mother if her son were accused of rape” (SS 309). But Lowe is more concerned with what the swamp symbolizes in terms of Arvay’s mental health, claiming that Earl’s “final flight into the swamp equals (Arvay’s) frantic repression of the truth” about the sexual fantasies she has had in the past about her sister’s husband”(SS 309). This is in the line with Hemingway’s description of the swamp as “A dark and murky wilderness symbolizing the fearful tangle of Arvay’s sub conscious” (SS 309). However, the fact that swamps were often depicted as a refuge by many slave narrators and stories that involved flight from white mob, gives rise to another line of interpretation that seems more congruent with the Nature.

Jim's relationship with his family seems mixed with a drive for power and control. Several critics have analyzed the complex power dynamics at play in Jim’s relationships with his African American employees, particularly his "pet Negro," Joe Kelsey. Meisenhelder contends that Jim interacts with African Americans in a way that, "despite his good humor and apparent generosity” (113), he ultimately exploits their labor and knowledge for his own personal benefit, all the while endearing himself to them as a benevolent "Boss." Meisenhelder presents as evidence the fact that each of Jim's financial enterprises, "from his still operation to his turpentining, citrus groves, development projects, and scrimping fleet--depends on the expertise and the efforts of black workers"; she asserts that "Whereas Jim takes personal credit for clearing the swamp for the housing development, Hurston points to the black men who provide the labor, ... who make his dreams real but do not participate in them” (113). Konzett argues that in **Seraph on the Suwanee** Hurston articulates what she sees as the unspoken golden rule of the South and thus lays bare a messy system in which traditional oppositions of perpetrator and victim, master and slave, white and black, overlap and are at times indistinguishable from one another (115).
Konzett claims that Joe Kelsey empowers himself through racial staging: Kelsey "retains the mannerisms of the 'old-time Negro,'" calling Jim "Mr. Meserve," "Mr. Jim," or "Boss," in contrast to Jim, who simply refers to Joe by his first name" (115). Nonetheless, in Konzett's reading, "such racial staging coexists with a deep, sincere affection between the two men" (123). Whether, as in Meisenhelder's view, Jim deliberately exploits and manipulates his African American employees, or, as in Konzett's view, he merely capitalizes on mutually-beneficial friendships within an already-existing social system, Jim's position of power as a white male is what ultimately enables him to seem especially kind in his relationships with his African American workers.

Jim's good-natured friendliness with those of other races and nationalities contrasts sharply with Arvay's own fiercely bigoted outlook for much of the novel, and Hurston makes clear that the contrast in their attitudes is linked with issues of power and class status. Cynthia Ward argues that Arvay's "secure place in the ethnic hierarchy--embraced by her in numerous demonstrations of racism--is threatened by Jim's class position, which has less need for overtly racist classification" (81), citing Arvay's is angry when Jim looks down on her family as proof of the connection between Arvay's prejudices and her class inferiority complex: "You come from some big high muck-de-mucks, and we ain't nothing but piney-woods Crackers and poor white trash. Even niggers is better than we is, according to your kind" (SS 713). Significantly, several of Jim's most pointed efforts to transform Arvay's attitude to correspond with her rising class status involve her interactions with African Americans. In a key scene early in the novel, Jim takes Arvay to see their new house, which has been built by a construction company from "Colored Town" (SS 673). Hurston's description of the couple's differing responses upon viewing their new home underscores their differing class perspectives. While Jim is happy to find "all the trash cleaned up and hauled away," Arvay objects that the workers have "toted off all that scrap lumber. It would have helped us out quite considerably for stove-wood. You ought to go make 'em put the last piece of it right back on this place" (SS 673). Jim's response to Array highlights both his own aristocratic (as Hurston defines the term) mindset and his desire to alter his wife's perspective to become more like his:
Then I wouldn't be no gentleman no more, Arvay, and that would cost me something. That's like broken food from the table. The help don't look for ladies and gentlemen to trace up a thing like that. If I act like I don't notice it, I got a lot of willing friends, and nobody will ever steal a thing off this place (673, emphases added).

Arvay finds her identity, her place in life. As Rieger point out, “in her determined destruction of the house Arvay simultaneously reclaims the mulberry tree as her personal symbol, replaces her former passivity with decisive action, and refines her introspective vision” (120). Arvay finally comes to peace with herself. She burns away all her impure thoughts, emotions and guilt, which she had been carrying as a burden throughout her life. She is purged out of all the evil thoughts about her sister Larraine and Carl. She also understands her true worth. She is now able to love Jim without any restrictions and inhibitions. To quote Rita C. Butler:

She has created a space that honors the best of what she can salvage from her past. Hurston, adept at understanding the nuances of discrimination that can begin at an early age in one's own family, suggests that Arvay is neither weak nor inherently mean but rather that her undesirable behaviour in the past reelected a lack of insight into the deep-sighted insecurities she harbored about herself and her place in the world. (135).

She decides to turn the burned house and the garden into a park, and leaves for Citrabelle where she wants to live with her husband. The burning of the house can inextricably be linked to the title of the novel. In the Bible, there is a story that when Isaiah sees God on a throne, under hovering seraphim, he cries out loud that he is last because he is man of sin. One of the seraphim flies puts a hot coal in Isaiah's mouth. He is instantly purged of all his sins. Similarly, when Arvay sets fire to her old house, in a way she is repeating the action of biblical seraphim. By burning her house she purifies herself of all her sins. She has exorcised her fears; she can become an equal to her husband and resist any kind of possessiveness and oppression because she knows she deserves fair and equal treatment. She is not a cracker any more, she has become a Meserve Arvay thus returns to Citrabelle a changed woman, and her
transformation is immediately recognized by those people, for whom she previously has only words of scorn, "Just like Mister Jim, ain’t she, Janie? And everybody knows that Mister Jim is quality first-class. Knows how to carry hisself, and then how to treat everybody" (SS 884). Arvay in rejecting her cracker roots and adopting her middle-class position has finally been accepted by the less privileged, by those who are class-conscious. Arvay, “without realizing, […] had come to prefer Jim’s way of handling things” (SS 885), and she sets out to visit Jim at the sea. It is the end of the year-period given to her by Jim and Arvay, having made a conscious choice – unlike before when she was raped and helped and abused by Jim – rejoins her husband.

As the last lines of the novel suggest, Arvay realizes the power of flesh and sex in a relationship. This is not to say that she did not know this before – as the reader learns, she is aware of the immense power Jim’s body exerts over her. But she does not really know how much power resides in her own body and her sexuality. In accepting this power, she ultimately accepts her role as a wife and a mother of Jim: “Within her own flesh were many mysteries. […] What all, Arvay asked of herself, was buried and hidden in human flesh? […] If you just could know, it would be all the religion that anybody needed” (SS 918). Hurston’s views on African American women as proud sexual beings, striving to lay claim to their bodies, to find their voices, and to oppose repression is portrayed in Seraph on the Suwanee. It is argued that Hurston reworks stereotypical portrayals of black oversexed women into empowering tales of liberation and of coming to terms with one’s sexuality. It is suggested that Hurston depicts some of her characters in terms of the landscape of the South, thus underscoring their claiming of the history-burdened space. Through using the metaphor of a mule, Hurston transforms her characters from submissive into confident, sexually conscious, and powerful women. Finally, all these features of Hurston’s narratives combine to show the black women’s gradual development from voiceless, fearful, and self-conscious into expressive, experience, mature, and sexually liberated.

Arvay is keenly aware of the implications of Jim's remarks, but her pride rebels against his condescension: "Arvay felt a comparison in this, and it hurt. Jim just as good as said that she wasn’t used to things and that he had to teach her and tell her"
Jim's earliest attempt to make a gentlewoman of Arvay thus seems largely unsuccessful. Not until years later does Jim first see a glimmer of hope that Arvay is "finding her way" in the new socio-economic class where he has placed her (SS 704). The circumstances which precipitate this occurrence notably involve Arvay's feeling threatened by Jim's friendliness with Joe Kelsey and then receiving reassurance of her importance to Jim. After the Meserves' youngest son Kenny and the Kelseys' daughter Belinda embarrass Arvay by creating a spectacle at the train station, Arvay at first whips both children and declares to Jim that Belinda has been "leading [Kenny] astray" (SS 700). Jim laughs at Arvay's accusations, claiming, "Nobody ain't apt to do no leading around Kenny Meserve. He's too much like his old man for that. I take it as a grand insult for you to even say such a thing" (SS 701). Arvay's reply to Jim is full of both prejudice and jealousy: "Belinda being that no-count Joe's young'un, I reckon any caper that she might up and cut just have to be put up with. Look like Joe is the boss on this place" (SS 701). Jim answers Arvay, "You're my wife, the most precious thing that I got, and nobody don't compare with you. What's between me and Joe is something different altogether and I wouldn't want you to take a pick at him" (SS 701). After Jim's comforting, Arvay experiences "a great feeling of power and victory" at the realization that "As much as Jim thought of Joe, she had more power of her husband than Joe had" (SS 702). Arvay is so "uplifted" by this realization that she is "extra nice" to Joe's wife and children the next day, first giving Belinda "all of Angeline's clothes that her daughter had outgrown" (SS 702), and then going to town to buy fabrics to make a Sunday dress for the little girl.

A few days later, Arvay is watching when a "white man" comes to the house to make a delivery of cement and pretends that he does not know who Kenny and Belinda are. After Kenny boasts that he is "Jim Meserve's son" and that "My Daddy can lick any man in the world" (SS 702-03), the driver asks Belinda, "And whose little girl are you?" (SS 703). Hurston explains that:

Belinda wanted to come off as well as Kenny had, and was obviously stumped for an answer for a moment. She shuffled her bare feet in the sand, then flung up her head and said, 'I'm Miss Arvay's little girl, that's who' (SS 703).
The driver makes fun of Belinda, which prompts the girl to protest, on the verge of tears, "Yes I is, too. She gived me a pretty white dress for Sunday School,' and Belinda spread her skirts to illustrate, 'and a pretty pink ribbon for my head. Yes I is her little girl so!'" (SS 703). Arvay's response to Belinda is sympathetic: "Arvay saw Belinda about to cry and understood. Belinda valued her and counted on her care and wanted to be loved by her. Arvay knew that feeling" (SS 703). Indeed, Arvay's sense of responsibility for Belinda parallels Jim's attitude toward Arvay herself, and the words she uses in reply to the driver similarly echo Jim's language about his wife: "Yes indeed, Belinda is my little girl,' Arvay said with conviction as she came slowly down the steps to direct the delivery of the cement. 'Born right here on the place, and I wouldn't take a play-pretty for her eithe[r], I'm a'telling you!'" (SS 703).

Arvay's rush to Belinda's defense is both well-intentioned and well-received, leaving the girl "happy and triumphant" and the woman "very light-hearted for the rest of the afternoon" (SS 703); nonetheless, the feelings of both are problematic because only in a racist society would Belinda's desire to "come off as well as Kenny had" (SS 703), lead her to claim to be the daughter of a white woman (who up until a few days before had never even shown her kindness) rather than the child of her own mother. When Arvay tells Jim about the incident regarding Belinda and the cement deliveryman, he responds with approval and excitement that he had known "from the very first time that I saw you, Little-Bits, that you was all heart" (SS 704). Jim goes to bed that night "feeling very encouraged" because it "looked as if Arvay was finding her way" (SS 704). However, Jim continues to be haunted by the sense that Arvay needs him to guide her: "The only snag was, could he make her understand that there was a way and that it was necessary for her to find it? How was he to bring a thing like that about? He had tried every way that he knew how and had only temporary results" (704).

Though Hurston does not designate specifically what Jim means in his references to the "way" which Arvay must find, the context of Jim's reflections suggests that class considerations are a key part of his concern for her development. Jim's anger and frustration at Arvay's inability to live up to his expectations finally
culminate in a fuming tirade in which he resolves to leave her. Jim's speech to her highlights his preoccupation with enhancing her class status and convincing her that a "higher place" in life is indeed where she belongs:

(W)ith you to care for, and loving you like I did, I got off of that teppentime still just as quick as I could, so as to make a better life for you. I knew that that was all that you had ever been used to, Arvay, but I saw you as due a much higher place. So I got out from there and moved you up a notch by coming down here...(SS 838).

Despite his anger, Jim still does not give up all hope that Arvay will one day "meet [him] on some high place" (SS 840); he declares before he leaves to live on his shrimp boat that "if I ever see any signs of you coming to be the woman I married you for, why then I'll be only too glad and willing to try it again (SS 841)". The woman he married her for, of course, is the queenly spouse he envisions. Every swamp is basically “wet spongy land such rated and sometimes partially is intermittently covered with water” (GOV 2306). Thus, every swamp owes its existence to the presence of water, understood since initial times as mythical “watery womb of chaos or formlessness representing the great mother… and subconsciously remembered throughout life as an articulable image” (Barbara walker 1066). Michele Damsel states that: “when the female principal is subjected to sustain….how quietly it submerges. Under the water it swims to the subconscious of the male dominant society, occasionally bobbing to the surface of to offer a glimpse of the rejected harmony” (152,153).

This comment by Dames suggests a way to understand the symbolic meaning of the swamp that, while incorporating the ideas of Lowe and Hemmingway, it nevertheless is more sweeping in scope and more in concert with the idea that prompted Hurston to write of share up in the first place. Hurston uses the image of a swamp to illustrate what is considered to be one of the primary flaws of Anglo-Saxon culture: the tendency to see Nature as an exploitable resource rather than understanding the Natural world as the essential context of human life. Further, just as she explicitly connects Arvay with a watery element in the title of her book, she
implicitly portrays Arvay, the mother, as being in concert with the swamp’s natural state in contrast to Jim’s focus on the way the swamp could be used to make a monetary profit. Arvay’s initial reaction to the swamp has been one of fear, “I don’t want no parts of that awful place. It’s dark and haunted-looking and too big and strong to overcome. It’s frightening!” (SS 80).

Arvay is understandably worried about Earl,” (SS 80). This maternal concern reappears later in the book after Arvay has left Earl in Sawley for a visit to her mother. She is worried for, in her opinion, the nearby river, Suwannee threatens a danger to her son, “It was ever so deep and treacherous. In her dream, she had seen poor Earl following some boys down to the river and being over-persuaded to go in swimming, and getting drowned” (SS 138). Jim’s hope of realizing a financial profit from the swamp one day comes true when Angeline elopes with Hatton Howland, who has acquired a considerable nest egg by selling tickets for the illegal Numbers business. Hatton states that: “hide all that money you make on Numbers in land, specifically the swamp. As Jim points out, “There’s a great big fortune hid in that dark old swamp…” (SS 191-192). For Jim, the swamp is “like Miami Beach before that guy from Indianapolis come along and filled it in and made it worth plenty millions” (SS 192).

Hurston makes a clear distinction between Jim’s relationship to the swamp and that of Arvay. While Jim sees the swamp in terms of economic profit as well as a way to distance himself emotionally from the memory of Earl’s death, Arvay has a more empathic reaction to the clearing of the swamp: “She and the swamp had a generation of life together and memories to keep” (SS 195). Arvay is powerless to do anything but watch from her front porch as “gangs of husky black roustabouts rumbling past in truck loads” (SS 195), set to work in the swamp “swing shining axes to rhythm, felling the giant trees. The activity progresses “until one day Arvay saw the sun setting behind the horizon of the world” (SS 195). Hurston packs a lot of discerning commentary about social hierarchies, race, and the exploitation of nature into this passage. In short, black bodies, modern equipment, illegally acquired cash, and “influence” are utilized to transform the long-standing, primordial swamp into a
housing development that will create a social stratification of the town and provide the comforts of civilization for the “right people” (SS 196).

Over the years, the bountiful, fertile swamp that Arvay, the mother, once perceived as a threat to her son has become a comforting space where she can start to heal from her grief. In contrast, Jim has remained resolute in his desire to use the swamp to actualize a profitable business venture. Jim, too, has come to associate Earl with the swamp, but unlike Arvay who sees swamp as a way to be closer to the memory of her son, Jim seeks to obliterate any memories of the child that he would prefer to forget. Neither Arvay nor Jim has any clear idea of what the other is thinking or feeling. Their psychological disconnect, present from the beginning of the relationship continues to characterize their marriage in the years that follow. The rape that takes place under the mulberry tree and the hurried wedding that follows would seem to place Jim firmly in control of the relationship. Jim’s comment that “Woman folks don’t have no mind to make up no how. They weren’t made for that” (SS 25), appears to set forth the terms of the marriage: Jim will be the privileged head of the household while Arvay will be the subordinate “handmaiden around the house” (SS 99).

Arvay continues her pattern of resistance until the end of the book. Establishing a new pattern that continues throughout their marriage, Jim withholds information about his work from Arvay and then blames her for what seems to be a lack of interest: “…. Arvay knew nothing about the desperate struggle Jim was going through for their very existence” (SS 74). Arvay never asked anything, and so Jim never volunteered to tell her. “May be you will see into my reasons someday, Arvay. It ain’t for me to point out some things for your information’ …… Seeing that I don’t catch on to what you mean. Jim, look like you would tell me’….Naw, Arvay. That way wouldn’t do me no good” (SS 203). Hurston frames her protagonist's final reunion with her husband as the conclusion of the metamorphosis that Arvay undergoes over the course of the novel, a metamorphosis through which she finally overcomes her debilitating sense of inferiority. As Arvay gains confidence in her position as Jim Meserve's wife, she no longer feels the need to quell her own feelings
of inferiority by entertaining racist thoughts about ethnic minorities or hateful thoughts about the lower-class members of her own family. However, as Arvay outgrows her most glaring prejudices and her periodic retreats into spitefulness, she gains an aristocratic mindset comparable to Jim's own in its condescension and sense of entitlement. Two key instances when this mindset surfaces in Arvay occur during her return visits to Sawley. Only twice over the course of the novel does Hurston show Array returning to her Florida Cracker home for any extended period of time.

Both of Arvay's extended visits to Sawley come at points of significant trouble in her relationship with her husband. Rather than viewing the troubles in her marriage as the results of either Jim's abuses or her own inferiority complex, Arvay attributes these problems to the couple's differences in class background. Left in the dark about Jim’s intentions, Arvay concludes that her marginalized position is due to the class differences she imagines between herself and Jim:

The very air of the home was charged with opposition... He had never taken her for his equal. He was the same James Kenneth Meserve of the great plantations, and looked down on her as the backwoods Cracker, the piney-woods rotter (SS 130).

Coming to the conclusion that “she could not hold up her end against what she had to contend with, the great river plantations too powerful for the piney woods,” she plans a trip back to Sawley to be with “her own kind” (SS 131).

Intending to start a new life without Jim, Arvay is startled by the “poor and shabby and mean” appearance of her hometown in comparison to “the bright nourishing look of Citra belle” (SS 132), where Arvay lives with Jim. She briefly considers a career, giving music lessons or sewing. But upon reflection, both options are seen as impractical. What finally sends her back to Jim, however, is awareness couched in terms of slavery that she is powerless to separate from her husband, “God, please have mercy on her poor soul, but she was a slave to that man! How? Why? Those were answers that were hidden away from her poor knowledge. All that she knew was that it was so” (SS 134). Arvay’s lack of self-awareness mirrors the emotional state of the women studied by Freidan; even women themselves, who have
felt the misery, the helplessness of their lack of self, did not understand the feeling: it became the problem that has no name.

Jim’s habit of making decisions and taking action without consulting Arvay reaches a zenith of emotional cruelty when he facilitates the runaway wedding of their underage daughter without telling Arvay. When he eventually admits, I was there” Arvay’s reaction to having been excluded from such an important family event is to retreat “within herself to her temple of refuge” (SS 199). The marital crisis is resolved when “Jim came and carried her back across that hall by main force” (SS 200). Arvay’s feelings of inferiority and guilt, tempered by a passionate nature that seeks expression, constantly conflict with and are exacerbated by Jim’s narcissistic demands. Lowe claims that Hurston might be using her knowledge of psychoanalytic theory in particular Freud’s essay *Mourning and Melancholia,* “to develop the psychology of Arvay” (Freud 271). Her portrayal of Jim suggests that she may also have been familiar with *On Narcissism: An Introduction,* Freud’s only paper devoted exclusively to that subject. Indeed, Jim’s behavior seems to exhibit characteristics of a Narcissistic Personality Disorder as set forth by the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM):

> The essential feature of Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts (714).

His exaggerated sense of self-importance “you don’t understand your own self, Miss Arvay, and somebody stronger than you, and that can be further than you……will have to be on hand to look after you” (SS 17) together with a pretentious manner “[H]e came parading like a king down the aisle behind her…..”(SS 21), reveal Jim’s narcissistic nature. His comment, “See that, Arvay that shows the difference between me and you. I see one thing and can understand ten. You see ten things and can’t even understand one”(SS 261), further illustrates the arrogant attitude with which Jim approaches life. These traits also resemble many aspects of white patriarchal culture that assumes a degree of unquestioned entitlement on the part of those in power.
Christopher Lasch, in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), claims that “every society reproduces - its norms, its assumptions, its modes of organizing experience – in the individual, in the form of personality” (34), a personality that is “suited to the requirement of that culture” (238). Hurston’s focus on the narcissistic personality of her male protagonist and the support he seems to enjoy from the society he prospers in anticipates by thirty five years, though in a more indirect, fictional form, many of the same observations made by Lasch. Further, by placing the events of her novel “in the first decade of the new century” (SS 1)like Lasch, who claims that “the violence against Indians and Nature, which characterized the nineteenth-century conquest of the West, “originated… in the white Anglo-Saxon superego” (10), she recognizes that American culture has a history that is marked by narcissism. An even earlier example can be seen in the case of John and Susannah Wheatley who not only encouraged their slave, Phillis, to write poetry but also imagined that her published book of poems would serve as an “ambassador of their own benevolence” (100). To their surprise, however, instead of praise, they have received reproachful queries asking why she is still a slave. The Wheatleys “Caught in the trap of their own self-image (granted) Phillis her freedom upon her return from England. And Wheatley thus becomes the first in a long line of successful manipulators and demystifies the narcissism inherent in white liberalism” (100).

*Seraph on the Suwannee* emerges as one more contribution to the tradition. Jim and Arvay's mutual physical attraction seems to represent the only area of the relationship where there exists some degree of parity: “Arvay’s eyes had some strange power to change like that when she was stirred for him...It warmed him, it burned him and bound him (SS 106)”. Arvay is unaware of her effect on Jim and he is reluctant to let her know:

The strange thing was that she did not know her own strength. May be it was just as well. Knowing more, she might not have been so contented where she was. Twenty to twenty-five years later on, he could afford to let her know. No sense in crowding his luck (SS 106).
Jim's self-serving conclusion can be explained by Milton’s comment that “emotional intimacy requires that two people strip away the illusion of power and status differences between them, creating a vulnerability intolerable to the narcissist” (292-93). As St. Clair points out, Jim “feels to take comfort from Arvay but denies her the solace of knowing that he depends upon her” (46). Every effort on the part of Arvay at self-assertion is contested and eventually defeated in some way by Jim. In a scene halfway through the novel, Hurston uses the subject of rape once more to illustrate just how mean Jim can be when his wishes are thwarted. Arvay, upset after learning that once again she has been left out of something that “the rest of the family seemed to know” (SS 209), insists on leaving early from a football celebration in Gainesville. In a rage at having to accommodate Arvay, Jim proceeds to drive recklessly back to Citre belle where, in an especially cruel and dehumanizing scene, he reasserts his control by confronting her in their bedroom with the comment:

Where I made my big mistake was in not starting you off with a good beating just as soon as I married you....Get up from there and get out of those clothes...Up with that petticoat and down with them pants before you make me hurt you. Move” (SS 215-16).

After standing “like a statue of authority beside the bed” and looking Arvay over “in a very cool way for a while”, Jim “stretched himself full length upon her, but in the same way that he might have laid himself down on a couch”(SS 217). Afterwards, all rage is dissipated and apparently satisfied at having confirmed his control by physically intimidating Arvay while completely ignoring her attempts to explain her feelings, Jim kisses Arvay “with a kind of happy arrogance” and “then[snuggles]his head down on her breast”(SS 219).

Jim’s narcissistic behavior reaches a pinnacle when he tries to impress Arvay by picking up the rattle snake. When he loses control and Arvay fails to come to his aid because of her great fear of snakes, Jeff steps in to rescue his boss. Jim subsequently rages at Arvay: “You had the biggest chance in the world to make a great woman out of yourself....but you crapped out on it” (SS 260), and blames her for the failure of his stunt. Milton illustrates a tactic used frequently by narcissists
Who use rationalization to construct alternative realities that draw on the actual substance of events but change their significance to excuse blunders and exploitations. Once a time is found that not only saves face but puts the narcissist in the best possible light, it replaces the previous version of events and becomes the working model of reality on which the narcissist proceeds (284).

Jim's behavior perfectly exemplifies this tactic as he brushes aside Arvay's comments and, in an attempt to salvage his damaged self-image, ignores the reality of what actually occurred, reconstructing events in a way that places the blame on Arvay: "Naw, Arvay. You've had your time to talk and you didn’t do it. Let me finish what I got to say” (SS 264), and after enumerating his many sacrifices on her behalf and her lack of appreciation, announces his plans to leave in the morning: “I'm tired of waiting for you to meet me on some high place and locking arms with me and going my way” (SS 266).

Jim's creation of a self-serving alternate reality that allows him to avoid any responsibility for what actually happened demonstrates what Barbara Walker claims is “a universal characteristic of patriarchal societies: namely, the idea that guilt is readily transferred to the innocent” (Barbara 11). Arvay barely has time to reflect before she is called back to Sawley to see her dying mother. Equipped with her expensive Mark Cross luggage, a gift from Kenny, and is excited at the prospect of returning to the site of an imagined ideal childhood, Arvay arrives in Sawley with the idea of re-starting her life. Arvay arriving at her old home, it becomes obvious to her that the local economic boom has bypassed the Henson family. The shabby house of her childhood, “too awful to contemplate” (SS 274), is a remnant of what she left behind when she married Jim and the thought that “(M)ay be she was not as bad off as she had thought (SS 298)”, begins to take shape in her mind. But first, she must deal with the situation at hand: “her mother has things to tell her and the death-bed request”. Maria surprises Arvay with details of what she describes as a genuine friendship with Cary: “Set right down in my parlor and talked with me.” To which Arvay replies, “I never would have thought it of Bradford Cary, but I sure think it was mighty white of him to do it” (SS 278).
Neither Arvay nor Maria realizes that Cary's friendship is a carefully thought-out strategy which has aimed at making him “look like a man of the people” instead of the “moaned aristocrat” (SS 296), he actually is, in order to increase his chances of being elected to public office. The general impression in Sawley seems to be that “he was a big man who made himself one of them. That was ever so much better than one of them trying to make a big man of himself” (SS 297). Hurston's irony borders on cynicism as she effectively exposes Cary's perfidious motives and the gullibility of the general population. She also takes a dig at the credulous passivity of white women like Maria and Arvay who acquiesce to the white male agenda that gives form to the false foundation of Anglo-Saxon culture: “But even if Arvay had known about the skillful manipulation, she would not have cared any more than Maria would have...Arvay was moved to her foundations and satisfied” (SS 297). Hurston recalls poignantly her experience with the death of her own mother, whose final desire she is unable to fulfill. Arvay makes sure that her mother's death-bed request that she “be put away nice, with a heap of flowers on my coffin and church full of folks marching around to say me 'farewell” (SS 280), is fulfilled. All expenses are paid by Cary, the much admired “public spirited citizen” (SS 289), who is also in charge of executing Maria's will which designates Arvay as sole heir to the broken-down family house and the surrounding land.

After her mother's funeral, Arvay returns to the house to find it ransacked by her sister and brother-in-law. Retreating to the shelter of her beloved mulberry tree, she contemplates her situation. Just as the rat-infested house, a symbol of her dysfunctional past, blocks the view of the high-way from the mulberry tree, it also represents that what she feels stands “ between her sign of light and the seeing world”(SS 306). She sets fire to the house and in so doing, imagines herself as set free: “she had always felt like an imperfect ball restlessly bumping and rolling and bumping. Now, she felt that she had come to a dead and absolute rest...She had made peace and was in harmony with her life” (SS 307,308). These words mark the moment of Arvay's surrender to the social forces over which she has little, control. Her epiphany, while suggesting peace and harmony, is expressed by Hurston in terms
of death. Arvay would no longer resist the patriarchal narratives that have shaped her life. Hurston allows Arvay a moment of grace ---the recognition that if given the chance, she is capable of high-mindedness and noble acts. When, for the first time in her life, she becomes the owner of a valuable piece of real estate, she makes the decision to donate the mulberry tree and surrounding land to the city of Sawley to be used for a public park.

Further, by insisting the tree not to be disturbed, she creates an environment where it can flourish on its own terms. Not only does her gift symbolize the free will of Arvay and what she might be able to accomplish if she were free to act on her own, it also ties her to Sawley in a positive way. She has created a space that honors the best of what she can salvage from her past. Hurston, adept at understanding the nuances of discrimination that can begin at an early age in one's own family,(Like Arvay, Hurston's childhood is shadowed by the obvious preference of her father for her older sister) suggests that Arvay is neither weak nor inherently mean but rather that her undesirable behavior in the past reflects a lack of insight into the deep-seated insecurities she have harbored about herself and her place in the world. In contrast to the paternal legacy that includes emotional abuse and a dormant genetic flaw that ultimately causes havoc, Maria, the long-suffering mother, becomes the force that enables Arvay to experience a degree of self-esteem and social power. While the mulberry tree, with the energy of nature, prepares to bloom after the cold winter, Arvay, bowing to the inevitability of a socially-constructed reality that derives its meaning from a patriarchal narrative favoring a particular type of person, contemplates her return to Citra belle. Thinking of the man who she believes has brought sunshine into her otherwise dark world, she muses that “my husband came along and took me off from that place and planned and fixed bigger things for me to enjoy. Look like I ought to have sense enough to appreciate what he's done...” (SS 309).

Lowe claims that “Arvay.... has neither the aspiration, nor training, nor inherent talent to be anything else” (SS 263), except a house wife. But Lowe ignores the fact of Arvay's musical talent and the way Hurston repeatedly brings up the subject first, as something that sets her apart: “Arvay had one comforting advantage over
Larraine. Arvay could play music and Larraine just could not learn it” (SS 99); and later as a possible means of support, “If she was to give music lessons, she would need a piano” (SS 134); and, most importantly, as the source of her son's facility with music, a source augmented by the talents of Joe: “Between me and you, Miss Arvie, we sure pulled that boy through, didn’t us?” Arvay shook her head slowly. “You mean you did, Joe. You learnt Kenny all that your own self. I don't know the first pick on a box”. “That’s where you’ve ever so wrong, Miss Arvay.” Although Arvay is aware of and readily admits to the important role that Joe plays in the musical development of her son, she fails to notice that perhaps Joe, too, could have benefited from having “more chance”(SS 135).

As a girl, returning from a summer visit with an aunt who plays the organ, Arvay has “surprised the family on her return to Sawley in the fall by being able to pick out melodies, and to play a few songs with full harmony all the way through. She showed herself very apt with music” (SS 98). Her interest in music continues to grow after marriage: “Arvay played much better than she did when he married her” (SS 98). Kenny, “bold and even more self-assured than Angie” and “bossy like his father” (SS 108), displays an interest in music from early childhood. His precocious musical talent takes flight under the tutelage of Joe’s musicality, introduced early in the book as a disembodied voice singing the blues: “Hands full of nothing, mouth full of much obliged” (SS 43). Joe introduces Kenny to bottle-necking and shows him how “to make that weeping sound on the guitar” (SS 139), that makes Kenny to have such confidence and Kenny’s plans to make music his career are met with skepticism by Arvay:

I been hearing the darkies picking boxes ever since I been old enough to know anything, and I got my first time to see any of ‘em making a living at it.” Jim has a different point of view, telling Arvay that Kenny “claims that white bands up North and in different places like New Orleans are taking over darky music and making more money at it than the darkies used to …it is just a matter of time when white artists will take it all over.” He adds, “It’s Americans, and belongs to everybody. Just like that swamp (SS 202).
Jim’s comment reveals the acquisitive nature of Anglo-Saxon patriarchy. Jim and Kenny, possessing the social attributes that confer power in such a culture, feel free to exploit whatever is at hand in order to satisfy their own desires. Whether ‘‘darkie’’ music, or the swamp, really ‘‘belongs to everybody’’ could be debated. However, in Jim’s world, only a few are entitled to actually take possession. Kenny does in fact accept an offer to perform in New York and appears to be on his way to a successful career. At the end of the novel, one can learn that Kenny has been successful enough to purchase a boat for his father.

Hurston claims that ‘‘there is no more Negro music in the U.S. It has been fused and merged and, has become the national expression’’ (qtd in Carby x). Hazel Carby claims that in this chapter, which is later removed by Hurston’s editor, Hurston is thinking in terms of a ‘‘cultural exchange’’ (ix). But given the polemical nature of her text, it seems more likely that the deleted chapter is intended to be an elaboration on cultural appropriation or what Bell Hooks calls the ‘‘commodification of Otherness’’ (Hooks ‘Black looks’ 21). As a privileged white male, Kenny has access to sources of self-realization that elude both Arvay and Joe who are socially positioned as patriarchal pets. Indeed, their social reality seems to fit Hurston’s definition of slavery: ‘‘Real slavery is couched in the desire and the efforts of any man or community to live and advance their interests at the expense of the lives and interest of others’’ (D T 230).

Hurston uses the subject of musical talent and the idea of it passing from Arvay (the pet angel) and Joe Kelsey (the pet Negro), to Kenny (white male) in order to construct a message about race, class, Identity, liberation and gender oppression that is in line with feminist theories of intersection put forth by Collins. Moving like a subliminal message through the novel, this theme works to reinforce her subversive text as an example of how different types of social oppression work together in white patriarchal society to privilege the white upper-class male. Arriving back home after her mother’s funeral in Sawley, Arvay’s transformation is immediately noticed by Jeff and his wife Janie as she steps through their front door and affably shoves Jeff and smacks Janie on her hips:
Just like Mister Jim, ain’t she, Janie? And everybody knows that Mister Jim is quality first-class . . . Miss Aravay’s done come to be just like him.’’ Having come “to prefer Jim’s way of handling things,” from this point on, she will exist as a reliable appendage to her husband (SS 314).

This section of the novel, Arvay’s return to Citra belle and the subsequent trip to the coast, beautifully illustrates Hurston’s double-voice technique. In case the reader may have missed the message implicit in her description of Arvay’s overly familiar greeting (try to imagine Janie stepping through Meserve’s front door and shoving Jim or slapping Arvay on the rear end), her narration of the ride out to the coast and their arrival leave no doubt. Settled in the back seat, Arvay takes note of Janie’s appearance:

Janie now, that mixture of colors that she had on. Nothing that Angeline would have thought about picking out to wear at all. But strangely, they did not look funny on Janie. That cheap silk dress became her looks very well indeed. Her short hair was as straight as anybody’s today…..it improved her looks’’ (SS 317).

Arvay is preoccupied with thoughts of her reunion with Jim, feigns interest as Jeff points out the remnants of previous cultures along the route “of a people who had disappeared ages before the coming of the Spaniards; rusting old iron pots left over from the indigo industry of the Minor cans; foundations of an old fort left by the Spaniards” (SS 318). Hurston’s goal here is two-fold: not only does she suggests that blacks are more in tune with their environment and its history than whites, there is also a message about the transitory nature of societies that recalls her previous comments about Anglo-Saxon civilization and the inevitable demise of any culture built on a false foundation. Arriving at the shrimping docks, Jeff offers to “ask if our boat is in” (SS 319). But any idea that Arvay’s transformation implies a new era of social equality between her and her black employees, is soon dispelled by the arrival of Mrs.Toomer, Jim’s white secretary, whose comments to Arvay that her “chauffeur had told her that captain Meserve’s madam was present (SS 319)” confirms the social realities of race and class distinctions.
The initial encounter between Jim and Arvay is friendly but guarded and reveals the inherent inequality that continues to exist between them: ‘‘Oh, hello, Jim!’’ Arvay tried to be brisk and off-handed, but flushed and faltered. Her eyes could not stay where she wanted them to. ‘‘Hello, Arvay,’’ Jim said casually, ‘‘but looked her over boldly’’ (SS 320). Later, in a scene reminiscent of one of their earliest encounters, Jim takes hold of her arm ‘‘very firmly’’ (SS 323) and leads her across the deck of his boat, the Arvay Henson, dressed in clothes, purchased by Jim, that are identical to the fishermen. Arvay agrees to accompany him on a fishing trip. This highly symbolic scene speaks directly to Hurston’s on-going theme of patriarchal co-option. Not only has Arvay become ‘‘just like Mister Jim’’ (SS 324), in terms of performance, even her gender identity has been preempted by patriarchal forces.

Once again, he has a battle with the snake, Jim courts disaster by trying to impress Arvay with a potentially dangerous exploit as he forces his boat over a sand bar before the tide is high enough: ‘‘The mate came plunging up from below...Captain! My Captain! You gone crazy? Turn back! This bar is too rough to cross right now. Oh, captain!’’(SS 328). In contrast to the snake incident, however, Arvay springs into action when the terrified mate grabs hold of Jim's leg:‘‘Let go my husband’s leg!’’ (SS 329). This event epitomizes the ethos of exploitation and domination of Nature that pervades the life aboard the boat. When the first shrimp net of the day is emptied on deck full of sea life, ‘‘Turtles, numerous kinds of fish, a leopard shark, strange unimaginable-shaped things from the bottom of the sea...’’(SS 335), the men, frustrated by the lack of shrimp “went in killing things. First that astonishingly limber-bodied shark.... With shove”. Later in the day when a successful haul is made, a shark is once again caught in the net: “with shouts of vengeful joy the three men fell upon it with the axe, shovel and gig...they hacked through the tough hide and ripped open the belly.... There were little live sharks inside enclosed in transparent sacs (SS 338)”. When Jim tells his crew to leave the whole she-bang over the side and let the little bastards drown!” the men are “put out to see the baby sharks free themselves of their envelopes and swim off. The men expressed the shame and the pity that they had gotten away, and, Arvay thought, carried on like little boys” (SS 339). Their mood improves
immediately, however, as they contemplate the pile of shrimp. With Jim “sitting on the hutch cover and looking as male as a coconut tree,” the mate calls out, “Just look at the money piled up there!” (SS 339).

While the men happily clean the shrimp, “Arvay looked on and noted how like little boys they acted. Didn't men ever get grown?” (SS341). Hurston balances the harsh and commercially-oriented events of the day with a night time scene that suggests a gentle female ascendency: “The white, white, Florida moon rose up and began to guild the ocean. The calm surface rose and fell like the breast of a sleeping woman” (SS 343). But the cool grace of the female moon is about to give way to the unbridled energy of the male sun. Arvay sets the stage for her reconciliation with Jim by leaving her cabin door open and calling out to him. Her carefully thought comments waver when confronted with “that look that Jim was giving her.” As Jim moves toward the bunk “Like he was stalking a prey,” Arvay flinches. But as he tears off his clothes, Arvay has “a moment of great revelation” as she imagines that “Jim, Jim Meserve, Lord, had his doubts about holding her as she had hers about him “...(T)his was a wonderful and powerful thing yo know, but she must not let him know what she had perceived”(SS 347-48). This is an interesting reversal scene where Jim comes to the same conclusion about Arvay. Thus, the reunion is flawed, with both Arvay and Jim feeling the need to harbor survival strategies for possible use in the future. The sexual attraction that has always existed between them brings the relationship full circle with Jim setting forth the roles that Arvay is expected to follow: “You're going to do just what I say do, and you had better not let me hear you part your lips in a grumble. Do you hear me Arvay?” with Arvay answering “yes, Jim, I hear you” (SS 348). The novel suggests resolution and a new beginning. But what has changed is that Jim is basically the same; Arvay, however, is altered. As Jim sighs deeply and snuggles his head on Arvay's breast, “…..He was nothing but a little boy to take care of, and he hungered for her hovering. Look at him now! Snuggled down and clutching onto her like Kenny when he wore diapers” (SS 351).
The language that Hurston uses here is virtually identical to show the identity and assertion to what she used after the marital rape scene and reinforces the image of ‘Big Jim’ (the proposed name of Jim’s sixth boat) as “His Majesty the Baby (SS 314)”. Hemmingway, a great critic, could have this passage in mind when he writes that “this civilization produces very few adult human beings, even fewer adult marriages” (SS 314). Indeed, Hurston makes it very clear that Arvay and Jim do not have an “adult” marriage, that is, a relationship between equals. While Jim demands that Arvay should submit to what he assumes to be his better judgment, Hurston undermines that assumption by repeatedly describing him as a little boy involved in dubious activities or immature behavior and ultimately in need of motherly emotional care. On the other hand, Arvay's status as an angel of the house guarantees that she will be kept in bounds by her financial dependency.

In the end, Arvay’s transformation enables her to submit to the cultural definition of appropriate womanhood, a definition that confines her to the role of dependent wife and mother, the angel of the house, an image that echoes a comment made earlier in the book by Jim: “Look, Little -Bits, I think as mush of you as God does of Gabriel, and of you know that's His pet angel” (SS 113). Thus, Jim and Arvay constitute and are constituted by the social values embedded in the social construction of whiteness which is driven by the narcissistic demands of an irrational patriarchal system. Hurston's diagnostic approach posits Arvay, the wife and mother, as a symptom of what is wrong with Anglo-Saxon culture. She may be complicit but does not possess enough power to be the root cause. As O'Reilly points out, in a patriarchal society “(M) others do not make the rules.... they simply enforce them (44)” . Jim is the means through which Arvay can understand herself as worthwhile. Because he is so highly valued by society, Arvay, as his wife, shares in and benefits from his privileged social position. Thus Hurston centers on a close analysis of the stormy relationship that exists between Arvay and Jim. Arvay’s task is to figure out the way to survive in a aristocratic society that is dominated by white men who presume superiority but who cannot survive without the maternal resources that they habitually exploit. Jim is emotionally immature, often acting like impetuous self-centered little boy who has never completely grown up.
Arvay, on the other hand, fights and struggles hard to cope with Jim. The more she is oppressed the more she tries to get strength to withstand Jim. When she was raped, she immediately yielded to Jim as she wanted to recognize herself as Arvay Meserve. While she gives birth to Earl, she pacifies herself that after all, Earl is her loving son. Her fear for Earl was the greatest challenge she deals in her life. She has suffered a lot by handling Earl in the society. But at the same time her prayers were for Earl’s health and his mental recovery. Arvay has failed in Earl’s matter as he died in the swamp. Arvay could not bear the grief as she is mentally affected by Earl’s death. Meanwhile she asserts herself in her mother’s place where her mother is ailing and dying. Arvay is more dependent on Jim but still when she has come to her mother’s house, she competed with her sister and completes her mother’s funeral alone with nobody’s help. There was an urge for herself and she successfully overcame her loneliness. Though Jim is separated from her, Arvay’s motherly nature could not stop her love for Jim. A day has come when she sees Jim after a long separation. Hurston reveals Arvay as a dependent white mother in many ways, as an outsider within, caught in an emotional tug of war between her own lives experiences of a mother. Though she is dependent, she urges and tries to develop herself by empowering herself as a mother and wife for her children and Jim respectively. This aspect shows women’s responsibility and emancipation to grow as a mother and a wife. Notably Hurston wants to emphasize this aspect of woman that is their feminine authority and maternal power. Commenting on Arvay’s decision to return to her husband, Lille P. Howard writes:

By contrast, Zora Hurston was never able to put love, mothering or serving before her own career. Though she was married at least twice and involved in a number of love affairs she always returned sometimes even escaped, to her career. (146)

As the story unravels, it is seen that Hurston still writes about these oppressions only changing the colour of the skin of her characters. Hurston wants to show that oppression exists not only in African American race but also among whites. Hurston aptly shows that “oppression and its subversion has neither gender nor color. And Seraph on the Suwanee is finally the thinly veiled story of a woman who resists
victimization, throws off oppression, chooses the burden that she will carry, and takes it up with courage, dignity and delight (Clair 199). Hurston in her true trickster manners, mocks at white people and shows their hollowness. To quote Rita C. Butler:

In *Seraph*, Hurston becomes the consummate —people watcher, as she seeks to understand that false foundation. Her novel describes a society where the exploitation of maternal energies I service to patriarchal economic and social goal results in the corruption not only of the personal agency and meaning of women as mothers, but of Mother Nature as well. (41-42)

Endurance that helplessly accepts violence ignores the abuser's sinfulness and denies him a chance for repentance and redemption, which may come from stringently holding him accountable for his act. Endurance, in order to keep the family together, is a shame because the family is already broken apart by the abuse. Hence, in abject endurance, there is no virtue to be gained. In the midst of profound suffering, God is present and a new life is possible.

This “retrospective realization” (Adams 90) transforms one’s character and presents the possibility of a new life coming forth from the pain of suffering. In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, in the face of formidable oppressions, Arvay’s “quiet grace” and “courage” (cannon 135,144) deserves attention and appreciation. She is able to hold on to life against major threats and conflicts. Her constant rumination of her oppression makes women vigilant. Like the mythical phoenix which rises from its own ashes, she emerges a new as a confident woman from her oppressions. She grows as a self-sufficient individual in her own right. Living in the midst of oppressions requires a unique strength, Arvay possesses that strength. Arvay is a self-made woman. She is not simply a brutalized beast of burden who silently endures her slavish existence. Constant oppression transforms her into a resilient woman who would not succumb to oppressions. She combats domestic violence, mustering her innate strength and all available resources within her to safeguard herself from unabated violence to enhance her identity and autonomy.