

ABSTRACT

Rereading Zora Neale Hurston Through the Lens of
“What White Publishers Won’t Print”

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During Zora Neale Hurston’s life, she wrote many controversial statements on race. Scholars continually suggest that Hurston was merely pandering to the white nation or tricking her audience. By using Hurston’s own explanation of “What White Publishers Won’t Print,” I examine the constraints and expectations put on Hurston’s writing. Hurston was expected to write stories about the exceptional Negroes who rise to success. While Hurston appears to write stories about the exceptional, the idea of the exceptional is undermined through her essay “The Pet Negro System.” Her characters are exceptional only because they are someone else’s pet. Thus, Hurston emphasizes the importance of relationship over race and exceptionality throughout *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and *Seraph on the Suwannee*.

Rereading Zora Neale Hurston Through the Lens of
“What White Publishers Won’t Print”

by

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CHAPTER ONE

“What White Publishers Won’t Print”: Understanding Zora Neale Hurston: an Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston once admitted in her 1928 essay, “How it Feels to Be Colored Me,” “Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can anyone deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me” (*I Love Myself When I am Laughing* 155). In this quotation, Hurston acknowledges that she recognizes discrimination; however, she immediately dismisses this problem as if it is preposterous that discrimination would make someone not want to be in her company. Comments like this prompt scholars, such as Deborah Plant, to claim that Hurston had “an irrepressible self-confidence and a combative spirit” (35). Plant defines Hurston as a “staunch individualist, [who] believed in personal industry, individual merit, and self-empowerment” (35). Plant suggests that Hurston ultimately values individual determinacy and argues Hurston believes in her own individual merit. Plant acknowledges that Hurston’s ideology seems simplistic because it is based solely on the individual. However, Plant goes on to argue that Hurston’s worldview is a complex viewpoint that suggests that, because it is not an ideal world, the only thing to do is to achieve success through individual merit.¹ Plant argues that Hurston’s self-sufficiency is not her only reason for believing in individuals rising above their current

¹ Deborah Plant’s chapter “A Philosophical Worldview” in her book *Every Tub Must Sit on its Own Bottom* details influences on Hurston’s worldview such as Franz Boas, Booker T. Washington, and Nietzsche.

status. Instead, Plant believes that Hurston sees the only solution to the disadvantages of an unfair world is for an individual to be so “exceptional” that they achieve success.

However, after an evaluation of Hurston’s definition of “exceptional,” Hurston no longer seems to maintain an ideology of individual merit. In my thesis, I use Hurston’s 1950 essay, “What White Publishers Won’t Print” to look back at her earlier works. In “What White Publishers Won’t Print,” Hurston states, “Publishers and producers are cool to the idea” of literature “about the higher emotions and love life of upper-class Negroes and the minorities in general” (170). Instead, Hurston insists that the publishers must cater to their audience, which is “already resigned to the ‘exceptional’ Negro and willing to be entertained by the ‘quaint’” (173). The public wanted stories about the entertaining African American who was “exceptional.” In order to be published, Hurston was supposed to write about the “exceptional” and the “quaint.” Hurston follows these expectations but also subverts them. Specifically, she subverted the idea of the “exceptional” through her explanation of “The ‘Pet’ Negro System.”

In 1943, Hurston wrote an essay entitled “The Pet Negro System,” in which she declares that every white person is allowed a “Pet Negro” that they value over all other Negroes. These white patrons are convinced that their pet is “exceptional” compared to all other pets. In contrast to Plant’s assertion of Hurston’s individualistic worldview that suggests each individual is responsible for his or her own success, I argue that Hurston contends each individual is dependent on their friendships, which are actually predicated on a system of “mutual dependencies” (Hurston, “The Pet Negro System” 915). Hurston argues that this value placed on certain pets is about individual relationships, relationships that are defined by mutual dependency between patron and pet. In

Hurston's argument, she insists that the 'pet' Negro is not actually better than any other Negro but rather communities and patrons only argue that their particular pet should be considered more exceptional than others because their pet is smart, hard-working, and "different" (915).

Yet, each patron has their own particular pet that they would contend is the most exceptional: "They each have a Negro in mind who is far superior to John"² (916). Each patron believes their pet is "different" than all others who might be an "average darky" simply because that patron knows his pet (915). The merits of the 'pet' may be many, but ultimately it depends on who the patron likes: "But he found John truthful and honest, clean, reliable and a faithful friend. He *likes* John..." (916). The entire pet system is based on affection and respect. Once the patron respects and *likes* the pet then race no longer determines their treatment: "The treatment made and provided for Negroes generally is suspended, restrained, and done away with" (916). Hurston explains, "So you see how this friendship business makes a sorry mess of all the rules made and provided" (921).

By insisting that *liking* someone is more important than merit, Hurston undermines the concept of the exceptional. No pet is truly exceptional and above all other Negroes. Instead, the patron simply believes their pet is exceptional. Hurston's writings are filled with depictions of the "superior" pets who rise above the other Negroes. For instance, Hurston focuses often on the leaders of the community in her novels, the characters who have been singled out for their 'big voices' or even their

² Hurston uses the name John throughout the Pet Negro system to refer to any pet.

looks.³ While these characters appear to be “exceptional” characters who have succeeded by their own individual merit, these characters are actually quite dependent on their patrons. Hurston’s stories about these characters reflect the publishers’ desires to have only stories about the “exceptional” (Hurston “What White Publishers Won’t Print” 952).

Hurston’s explanations of what interested her public is a framework for looking at *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and *Seraph on the Suwanee*. When Hurston first started writing, she followed the rules of the publishing world fairly explicitly: Hurston writes the “exceptional” character of John Buddy in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*. As her work progresses, she increasingly thwarts the expectations of the publishing world. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she emphasizes “The ‘Pet’ Negro System” arguing that the “exceptional” are merely “exceptional” in the eyes of their patrons. In her last novel, Hurston includes “the Pet Negro system” in her story about white people, thus conflating the races and negating the assumption that she was only supposed to write about African-Americans. Each of these texts confirm Hurston’s insistence that people value relationships more than race.

To believe Hurston values relationships over race is to believe that Hurston is sincere when she praises her patrons as her friends and claims there is “a personal attachment that will ride over practically anything” even racial boundaries (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 159). Approaching Hurston’s worldview as sincere bridges the gap between two dominant strains of Hurston scholarship: 1) Hurston’s contemporaries believed that she was pandering to the white nation; and 2) revisionist scholars have argued that Hurston was playing the trickster. A reading of Hurston that maintains her

³ Characters from Hurston’s writings that fit this description would include, but are not limited to, Joe Starke, Joe Clarke, John Pearson, and Moses.

sincerity acknowledges Hurston's commitment to her publishers without arguing that she was always playing the role of trickster. A sincere reading of Hurston is lacking in current scholarship. For instance, Alice Walker, who revived the work of Hurston in the 1970s, laments that until Hurston died in poverty she was not considered a sincere artist. Conversely, Walker also commented, in reference to Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, "it pained me to see Zora pretending to be naïve and grateful about the old white 'Godmother' who helped finance her research, but I loved the part where she ran off from home after falling out with her brother's wife" (309). Even though Walker is saddened by others not taking Hurston's work as an artist seriously, she too insists that Hurston is 'pretending' to be so grateful for her patron's assistance. Walker wants her to be insincere in her pretense of praise for her patrons. Walker's understanding of Hurston is indicative of Hurston scholarship as a whole: Hurston's sincerity is always in question. As Mary Helen Washington points out, "Few critics ever considered Hurston's idiosyncratic views 'philosophically viable' and even fewer excused her because she was sincere" (11).

Hurston's views were certainly idiosyncratic compared to her contemporaries. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who was largely influential in rehabilitating Hurston's autobiography in 1984, suggests that Hurston's obscurity was because her views did not align with many of her contemporaries:

How could the recipient of two Guggenheims and the author of four novels, a dozen short stories, two musicals, two books on black mythology, dozens of essays, and a prize winning autobiography virtually "disappear" from her readership for three full decades? There are no easy answers to the quandary, despite the concerted attempts of scholars to resolve it. It is clear, however, that the loving, diverse, and enthusiastic responses that Hurston's work engenders today were not shared by several of her influential black male contemporaries. The reasons for this are

complex and stem largely from what we might think of as their “racial ideologies.” (291)

Hurston’s “racial ideologies” of Hurston’s did not match those of her contemporaries, who were highly influential in the Harlem Renaissance. Many of the critiques leveled against Hurston when she was alive were in response to her “perpetuating a minstrel image for the benefit of white readers” (Boyd 306). In Valerie Boyd’s biography of Hurston, she says Richard Wright “deplored the lack of overt protest in Hurston’s novel” (306). In addition to Wright’s contention, Langston Hughes and Hurston also had ideological differences that were exhibited in their original collaboration of “mule bone” (Park 1217). Jungman Park has an extensive study that highlights the contention between Hughes and Hurston. Park argues that Hurston wanted to emphasize the folktales within their play to emphasize “black folk drama” (1231). Hurston’s interest in portraying a folk drama contrasts with Hughes’ desire to make the play more refined. Hurston’s artistic desires to portray the folktales were at odds with her contemporaries, who believed Hurston consistently wrote the “stereotypical.”⁴

Hurston’s contemporaries often depicted Hurston as “stereotypical.” Ralph D.

Story explains:

The typical, and male, rendering of Hurston during the HR [Harlem Renaissance] can be seen in Langston Hughes’ autobiography, *The Big Sea* (1940). In this work she is depicted as a joke-telling, uproariously funny woman who went out of her way to ingratiate herself with influential, rich whites—her purpose being to receive material rewards and financial sponsorship to further her literary career. (128)

⁴ Tanya Y. Kam, in her article, “Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails: The Body Speaks Resistance in *Dust Tracks on a Road*” comments on several instances of Hurston’s contemporaries, such as Locke, Wright, and Hughes, who critique Hurston’s portrayal of black culture. For a fuller analysis of Hurston’s contemporaries, Nathan Huggins’ work entitled *Harlem Renaissance* is useful.

Story ultimately argues that Hurston's dismissal from the Harlem Renaissance had more to do with her being a woman than her actual use of patrons. He argues that many of the other writers of the Harlem Renaissance had patrons as well.⁵

Hurston is perhaps more forthright in acknowledging the help she received from her patrons. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she often describes her success as being contingent upon her white patrons. From the beginning, Hurston receives help from white patrons who give her clothes, help her into college, and also eventually give her work. She even coined the term "Negrotarians" in response to the help she received from her patrons (Boyd 100). This system of patronage helped Hurston survive financially, but many scholars have argued that there must be resistance in Hurston's writing. While the common view of Hurston's work at the time by her colleagues was to dismiss it as pandering, newer scholarship has chosen to see this work often as tricking her audience.⁶

Contemporary scholarship tends to read resistance into Hurston's writing. For instance, Susan Meisenhelder, who has done extensive work on both Hurston's folklore and other works, argues that Hurston's use of narrative throughout her folklore tales allows her to recount her findings in a way that eludes the publisher's demands:

Faced with the dilemma of how to present her analysis in a way that could bypass the censoring eye of her mentors and unsympathetic white readers,

⁵ For a more thorough analysis of patronage during the Harlem Renaissance, David Levering Lewis details the use of patrons in his book, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. A more comprehensive look of Hurston's relationship with patrons is outlined in Tiffany Ruby Patterson's chapter "Patronage" in *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life*.

⁶ Keith Walters examines the trickster tale in his work, "Hurston's Revenge in *Mules and Men*." He also acknowledges that his emphasis on the trickster tale is building on previous work from Bell Hooks, Barbara Johnson, Susan Willis, Susan Meisenhelder, and Deborah Plant.

Hurston adopted a strategy of masking social conflict and critical commentary with humor. The persona she creates is crucial to this project. By presenting herself as a lovable “darky,” one who thanks white folks for “allowing” her to collect folklore and who praises the magnanimity of her patron Mrs. Mason, she appears a narrator with no racial complaints or even awareness. (269)

Meisenhelder explains that, even as Hurston approaches her folklore in order to appease her mentors, she is still commenting on social conditions. Thus, even though Hurston is gathering folklore at the request of her mentors, Meisenhelder sees her work not as pandering to her mentors but rather tricking her patrons. Meisenhelder uses the framework of Hurston’s publishers to see how Hurston answered those claims, yet Meisenhelder argues Hurston ultimately conveyed her message through the use of story in her folktales.

Carla Kaplan also investigates the central tension within Hurston scholarship, querying: “Must we choose, however, between idolization and condemnation?” (215). Kaplan explains that scholars tend to view Hurston’s characterizations as either idyllic or naïve, but Kaplan concludes that Hurston’s depictions of folklore allow her to investigate and “play” with the concept of race, which creates a “fluid and alive folklore aesthetic” (230). The use of a “folklore aesthetic” is what scholar Genevieve West explains Hurston employed to justify her use of stereotypes:

She had been accused of depicting African Americans who could be used to confirm negative stereotypes, and she had defended herself based on aesthetics, not politics. By 1944, however, Hurston had seen her fiction, her folklore and her autobiography manipulated by racist readers to support their own assumptions about black life. (193)

West argues that once Hurston realized that her value of a “folklore aesthetic” was not preventing her from being considered a stereotype, she began writing more overtly political essays. West asserts that Hurston’s essays, such as “What White Publishers

Won't Print" and "The Pet Negro System," among others, reflect Hurston's desire to change the reputation she had created among her contemporaries for writing stereotypes. West argues that Hurston ultimately fails to change her reputation and is still condemned by her contemporaries. Both "What White Publishers Won't Print" and "The Pet Negro System" provide Hurston's justification for writing.

"What White Publishers Won't Print" first appeared in print in *Negro Digest* in 1950 in response to a debate on Negro literature in the 1940s and 1950s. Terri Simone Francis, in her article, argues that this essay by Hurston was crucial in defining art for African American culture at this time (9). Francis explains that Hurston was criticized for her "perceived reliance on stereotypes," which was one of the main reasons Hurston's ideas were disregarded.

In "What White Publishers Won't Print," Hurston notes the lack of interest in stories about the average Negro. She faults the publishers for being "cool to the idea" of publishing stories about Negroes who are "above the class of unskilled labors" (950). Hurston points to a lack of interest that she believes is present not just with publishers but rather with the general population: "I have been amazed by the Anglo-Saxon's lack of curiosity about the internal lives and emotions of the Negroes, and for that matter, any non-Anglo-Saxon peoples within our borders, above the class of unskilled labor" (950). Hurston argues that this lack of "demand for incisive and full-dress stories around negroes above the servant class is indicative of something of vast importance to this nation" (950). Hurston believes that this lack of interest indicates that the Anglo-Saxons believe "that all non-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes. Everybody knows all about them" (951). Hurston then argues that this idea of the "typical" or the

“uncomplicated stereotypes” prevents the Anglo-Saxons from being interested in the “internal life of educated minorities” (951).

Hurston does not simply castigate the white public for not being interested. While she sees the lack of interest as problematic, she does not attempt to change this view all at once. Instead, she argues that this lack of interest is due to the financial constraints of the publishing houses, who must produce literature that the public will buy. Hurston believes that stories can generate this interest in the African-American community. Since Hurston is originally writing for the *Negro Digest*, she is not attacking the white nation. Rather, she suggests a solution to this problem:

But for the national welfare, it is urgent to realize that minorities do think, and think about something other than the race problem. That they are very human and internally, according to natural endowment, are just like everybody else. So long as this is not conceived, there must remain that feeling of insurmountable difference, and difference to the average man means something bad. If people were made right they would be just like him. (952)

Hurston believes that literature should express the thoughts of minorities, other than the race problem. To describe or to write literature that only explores the relationships of minorities in response to race limits the minorities because they exist only in conflict with race. Outside of the race problem there must be a literature that explores the “internal life” that is not consumed by race. To be written about only in relation to race and only as “other” is not acceptable to Hurston.

Barbara Johnson elaborates on this idea of “othering” in her study of “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” She argues that this work “is a complex meditation on the possibility of representing difference in order to erase it” (284). By examining the differences, Hurston is able to demonstrate the commonality between Anglo-Saxons and

minorities. Johnson concludes, “The thing that prevents the publication of such representations of Negroes is thus said to be the public’s *indifference* to finding out that there *is* no difference. Difference is a misreading of sameness, but it must be represented in order to be erased” (284). Even though Hurston is arguing for the common ground between races, she insists that to find the common ground all the different types of people must be written about in order to see this common ground:

To grasp the penetration of western civilization in a minority, it is necessary to know how the average behaves and lives. Books that deal with people like in Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* is the necessary metier. For various reasons, the average, struggling, non-morbid Negro is the best-kept secret in America. His revelation to the public is the thing needed to do away with that feeling of difference which inspires fear, and which ever expresses itself in dislike. (954)

In response to Johnson’s study, Elizabeth Abel argues that Johnson employs the same tactics to erase differences between herself and Hurston. In effect, this allows her to “write across race” since she has erased the differences. Abel argues that this deconstruction of difference and sameness allows Johnson to ignore the differences between herself as a white reader approaching Hurston’s text: “Johnson extends and reauthorizes deconstruction through Hurston” (113). Representing color as “figurative” “enables the white reader to achieve figurative blackness” (112). Despite this “privileging the figurative,” Johnson’s use of this figurative allows the readers to understand the complexity of Hurston’s argument.⁷ Hurston’s “privileging the figurative” makes race an unfixed concept, which eliminates differences.

⁷ Priscilla Wald continues Johnson’s discussion of becoming colored. She argues Hurston’s double identity as both black and female could not allow her to follow one particular political stance. See Wald’s article “Becoming “Colored”: The Self-Authorized Language of Difference in Zora Neale Hurston.”

Not only does “privileging the figurative” erase differences in order for Johnson to “write across race,” but also “privileging the figurative” erases the differences between races in order to focus on personal relationships. I argue “What White Publishers Won’t Print” asserts the need to write about complex, thinking minorities, and also suggests a reframing of race that eliminates the differences. If there are no distinctive differences between races, then relationships between the races are not determined by race, but rather by personal relationship. Hurston describes how she has “white friends with whom I would, and do, stand when they have need of me, race counting for nothing at all. Just friendship” (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 920). Furthermore, Hurston’s characters form opinions about, and relationships with, other characters regardless of race. As Johnson notes, if race is figurative, then there are no distinctive differences. Without distinctive differences, characters and relationships are not determined by race.

While a simplistic ideology of personhood over race seems to cater specifically to the white audience, noting Hurston’s ability to deconstruct difference and sameness allows readers to see the deconstruction of race throughout her works. If people are fundamentally alike on the inside, then race is no longer a determining factor in relationships. Hurston expresses this ideal in her essay “The ‘Pet’ Negro System” with both races being “mutually dependent” on each other. Each patron seeks advancement for his pet, and each pet takes care of his patron. Hurston describes these dependencies between the races as a “web of feelings...spun by generations and generations of living together and natural adjustment” (915). Moreover, this “dependency” seems to undermine Hurston’s “self-made” ideology. If everyone is dependent on someone else, then being exceptional is about relationships.

Relationships determine whether someone is considered an “exceptional” person. When Hurston argues for individual merit of an “exceptional” person, she potentially challenges the idea that racial discrimination limits herself and others. However, since Hurston explains that individual merit is actually connected to patronage between both races, she is not undercutting racial discrimination. Instead, she recognizes the discrimination and believes the solution is to portray the “internal lives” of the average Negro. The “internal lives” would reveal that there are not differences between the races. Instead, Hurston believes, “With only the fractional ‘exceptional’ and the ‘quaint’ portrayed, a true picture of the Negro life in America cannot be” (953). Far from simply dismissing the race problem, Hurston sees the answer in her stories and tales. For Hurston, in order to engage with the ‘race problem,’ she must focus on the “average, struggling, non-morbid Negro” (954). To show the inner lives of the average would dispel the myth of the “quaint” Negro because “they are very human and internally, according to natural endowment, are just like everybody else” (952).

Obviously, Hurston recognizes the problems associated with racial discrimination, and she is not simply saying everyone is equal. In fact, she argues that seeing others as different is important to understand that “being made right” does not mean being “just like me” (952). Differences are important to recognize; however, her idea of equalizing the races stems from a recognition of commonality, as well. She emphasizes commonality in her essay “The Pet Negro System” and in her novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*. The various pet systems throughout *Seraph* demonstrate the commonalities

between the races.⁸ In his analysis of rhetorical strategies used by Hurston, Matthew Heard suggests,

Because Hurston succeeds at 'being,' she signals hope for the possibility that she and other potentially marginalized subjects can create spaces in the midst of white-dominated society where racial differences are neither ignored nor invoked as absolute, but are instead explored productively for how they provide us with a richer way of understanding our shared world. (144-45)

Heard's suggestion of "hope" through Hurston's "being" is similar to her call for writing in "What White Publishers Won't Print." Hurston advocates writing in order to create this "richer way of understanding" (145). Understanding this intention in Hurston's writing allows the readers to grapple with the contradictions that arise in her fiction and non-fiction.

Barbara Ryan uses the idea of "mutual dependency" present in "What White Publishers Won't Print" to rehabilitate a reading of Hurston's short story "The Conscience of the Court." By investigating Hurston's claims in "What White Publishers Won't Print" about the lack of literary African-American characters with internal motivations, Ryan uses this essay to suggest that the main character in "Conscience," rather than being a stereotypical maid, eventually reflects a system of comfortable privilege as a maid. Through the character of the maid, Hurston examines the larger culture of achieving privileges as a maid. This application of "What White Publishers Won't Print" to this short story is akin to my larger project of understanding Hurston as a writer consistently working towards the elaboration of "internal motivations" within her

⁸ In her article, "A True Picture of the South" Hazel V. Carby notes Hurston's admitted desire to demonstrate "cultural infusion". However, she focuses mostly on the musical fusion when a white character becomes famous after learning jazz from one of his father's black workers.

African American characters. Even if Hurston's characters behave according to stereotype, Hurston is still interested in portraying the everyday lives of her characters. These characters may not always debunk the stereotypes, but they do give a more nuanced understanding of Hurston's ideology of "mutual dependency."

Hurston's ideology of "mutual dependency" negates the idea of her characters only achieving success through being "exceptional." The framework of constraints detailed by Hurston in "What White Publishers Won't Print" explains why Hurston appears to emphasize the idea of the "exceptional" in her novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Seraph on the Suwannee* and in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*. These texts reflect a wide range of Hurston's literary techniques and span a number of years.

Hurston's publisher, Lippincott, always wanted Hurston to write another *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Boyd 380). This pressure from her publisher suggests that Hurston's earlier novels were more desirable to the white publishers. Furthermore, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* follows the system outlined by "What White Publishers Won't Print" more closely than her later novels. By her last novel, Hurston has moved away from these constraints.

In Chapter One, I analyze Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. The story parallels Hurston's own parents, for the main protagonist is a preacher like her father. This novel follows closely the established rules of "What White Publishers Won't Print." While being almost exclusively about African Americans, this novel recounts a highly dysfunctional marriage like *Seraph*. While this novel follows the rules much more carefully than *Seraph*, Hurston still manages to undermine, even in her first novel, the ideology of the "exceptional" or "typical" that she vehemently discourages in "What White Publishers Won't Print." Genevieve West argues that while writing a novel about

a man, Hurston managed to play the “trickster” and craft a feminist critique. However, rather than just “tricking” the audience by writing a feminist novel, Hurston also tricks the reader into thinking that they are reading a story about the “typical” philandering African-American male. A closer look at the text reveals that the protagonist of *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* appears to be exceptional but is rather a pawn in others’ schemes. Thus, from the beginning, Hurston’s works undermine the typical in favor of a more nuanced view of African Americans. Surprisingly, this reading of Hurston’s texts further works to dispel the image of Hurston propagating the “stereotypical.” However, it is unfair to read Hurston only in opposition to the publishers. To argue that Hurston crafts each of her characters as trickery frames Hurston according to the race problem. Hurston includes the stereotypes in her writing to emphasize that she is not limiting herself to avoid the stereotypes, but rather writing about all the different types.

Hurston’s inclusion of characters who behave according to the stereotypes does not mean Hurston is playing the “darkie.” Despite criticisms that she is playing the typical or “perfect darkie,” she does not refrain from including these stereotypes in order to undermine the assumption that the stereotypes do not exist either. Hurston critiques her contemporaries for their constant concern for the race problem. For Hurston, including characters who were both the extremes and the averages was vital. Thus, throughout *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, she undermines the idea that Jonah was exceptional just as, in the end of *Seraph*, Arvay is not always the exceptional either. Both of these characters appear to be the exceptional according to those who love them. Thus, ultimately Hurston indicates that becoming the exception is only an effect of the surrounding characters, just as her essay “The Pet Negro” suggests.

In the second chapter, I focus predominately on the excised portions of the 1942 *Dust Tracks on a Road*, the highly controversial autobiography commissioned by Hurston's publishers. This work demonstrates the influence the publishers had on Hurston's works in specific excised portions. Contrasting the amount of edits in Hurston's treatise on love versus her treatise on "My People, My People" heightens the readers' awareness of the heavy influence exerted on Hurston's perceptions of race. This non-fictional account of Hurston's life is often described as "evasive." However, the excised portions reflect Hurston's stance on racial positions less evasively. Moreover, these excised portions clearly indicate the influence white publishers had on Hurston's writing. In addition, Hurston's explanation of "The "Pet" Negro System" further demonstrates her attempt to explain that the idea of the "exceptional" is contingent on the system of patronage.

In the third chapter, I examine *Seraph on the Suwannee*, the last novel, which allows readers to recognize the progress and the development of Hurston's ideology throughout her career. Published in 1948, *Seraph* is Hurston's only novel with white main characters. In this novel, she breaks the traditional assumption that African American authors cannot write about another race. While this novel was not well received, due in part to the assertion that the poor white characters talked just as the African Americans in Hurston's other books, this novel still grapples with many of the same complex relationships that are in Hurston's other works. Notably, the marriage between Jim Meserve and Arvay Crawley endures many hardships just as the marriages in other works. In addition to the marital concerns, the novel also examines the relationship between Jim Meserve and his black workers, who work within the pet

system. This work of fiction elaborates on Hurston's premises in "The 'Pet' Negro System." In this chapter, I explain how Arvey becomes a "pet" in her marriage to Jim Meserve. Throughout the novel, she acts as his exceptional pet never rising in status except in connection with a white patriarch. As I trace Arvey's development, she eventually becomes more comfortable in her role as pet, and ultimately accepts this position. Thus, within the overall project, we see that Arvey's role as pet demonstrates Hurston's ultimate extension of the pet system.

A reading that undermines the idea of the exceptional helps to soften the seemingly imperious tone of Hurston's self-made ideology. While Hurston did rely heavily on white patrons and at times had to follow their rules, she often adopts a tone of creating herself as the staunch individualist. Thus, after this study we can read Hurston by first recognizing the constraints of the publishing world and then acknowledging Hurston's contradictions without painting her as either pandering or smoldering. These three texts demonstrate a change in Hurston's approach to dealing with the question of race that emphasizes an ideology of "mutual dependency."

CHAPTER TWO

Exceptionality in Jonah's Gourd Vine

In 1934 Zora Neale Hurston wrote her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, which recounts the life of John Buddy from cotton picker to preacher to poverty-stricken outcast.¹ Despite John's tragic death by train, his character throughout the novel appears to be 'exceptional.' His initial attractiveness, intelligence, and success demonstrate that Hurston follows the rules of the white publishing world. As Hurston details in her essay, "What White Publishers Won't Print" the white publishers wanted a novel about an 'exceptional' or 'quaint' character: "The 'exceptional' as well as the Ol' Man Rivers has been exploited all out of context already. Everybody is already resigned to the 'exceptional' Negro, and willing to be entertained by the 'quaint'"² ("What White Publishers Won't Print" 173). *Jonah's Gourd Vine* outwardly features the 'exceptional' man of John Buddy, who as Blyden Jackson explains, "was a folk figure representing hundreds of semiliterate pastors and evangelists across the black South whose lack of formal training had not diminished their sense of poetry and whose piety had not blinded their eye for a pretty ankle"³ (xv). John as the reverend "folk figure" represents folk characters that Hurston acknowledges in "What White Publishers Won't Print" as the desired characters for her audience.

¹ The protagonist, John Buddy, is often referred to as John Pearson throughout the text and in the scholarship. However, for consistency, the protagonist will be referred to as John Buddy throughout this manuscript, except when quoting other scholars' work.

³ Lee Ramsay Jr. explains in more detail John's role as preacher in the context of the South in his book, *Preachers and Misfits, Prophets and Thieves*.

While *Jonah's Gourd Vine* ostensibly appears to follow these desires with John as the pastor figure, his initial exceptionalism is continually undermined throughout the novel. Hurston subverts the idea of the exceptional through the character of John Buddy because John is not exceptional. Despite his excellent oratory skills as a preacher, he constantly finds himself in trouble, financially and within the town. The character traits that are supposed to make John great actually frustrate his success. Even though he appears to be the exceptional character that the white publishers desire, he is, in fact, ordinary. However, ordinary for Hurston does not mean the stereotypical perceptions of African-American culture. Hurston breaks assumptions of stereotypes by including women of all different types: submissive, promiscuous, and mothering. These characters may be considered stereotypical, but these characters represent Hurston's dedication to depict all types of African Americans, so that her audience understands not all African Americans are alike. Hurston highlights the differences between African Americans through her use of varied characters, as well as through John Buddy's critique of white culture in the courtroom. Throughout *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston subverts the desires of the white publishers by undermining John's exceptionalism, including stereotypes of women, and obliquely critiquing white culture's assumptions of African Americans.

First, John Buddy appears to be the exceptional African American.⁴ He is half white and half black which continually sets him apart as different from most of his community. He stands out from all the other African-Americans and consistently receives praise for his good-looks. His good-looks also attract the attention of a male patron, Alf Pearson, who is John's father, although Pearson never explicitly

⁴ Genevieve West charts previous scholarship on John's success in the community and his appearance as a "Big Nigger" in her article, "Feminist Subversion in Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*."

acknowledges this relationship. Instead, he often comments on the exceptional good looks and intelligence of John. He tells John, “You mind me and I’ll make something out of you” (21). John’s relationship to Pearson is akin to the ‘pet’ negro system of which Hurston later writes. Since Alf Pearson singles out John to be his right-hand man, John operates as the “pet” because he appears to be “different” or better than the other workers in the eyes of Pearson. Pearson believes John to be the “exceptional” worker who is superior to the Negro race. Thus, Pearson encourages John to go to school (21). John readily accepts schooling, which demonstrates he is smarter than the average child, and is “delighted at the prospect of attending school” (21). Pearson’s encouragement to John in school is exactly what Hurston mentions in her essay, “The ‘Pet’ Negro System”:

The Colonel will tell you that he opposes higher education for Negroes. It makes them mean and cunning. Bad stuff for negroes. He is against having lovely, simple blacks turned into rascals by too much schooling. But there are exceptions. Take John, for instance. Worked hard, saved up his money and went up there to Howard University and got his degree in education. Smart as a whip! Seeing that John had such a fine head, of course he helped John out when necessary. Not that he would do such a thing for the average darky, no sir! He is no nigger lover. Strictly unconstructed Southerner, willing to battle for white supremacy! But his John is different. (157)

In this passage, Hurston details how the white patron views his “pet” as both smarter than and different from the other Negroes. Although Mr. Pearson does not encourage John to seek higher education, he does encourage John. Then Mr. Pearson gives John chores that he would have given to his son, if his son had been there (49). Despite John leaving the farm a few times to avoid fighting with other workers, Mr. Pearson always welcomes him back. When John marries, Mr. Pearson gives him a walnut bed as a large wedding present (81). Pearson favors John as his pet because he believes that he is the exception to the Negro community, and he is an exceptional, intelligent, honest, worker.

After this initial setup, however, the character of John unravels. Ultimately, Mr. Pearson tells John for him to survive he must leave his farm completely. Once again, Pearson shows unusual concern for John due to his status as an exceptional man. John's status as Pearson's right-hand man is complicated when the women start to flirt with him despite having husbands. John's good looks continually upset his stature within the community. Thus, John is both exceptional and defeated for his attractiveness, that which sets him apart continually complicates his success. John remains the exceptional Negro, but leaves the plantation because of the women fighting over him.

John's good looks frustrate both his position as a celebrated pet, as well as his marriages, and ultimately leads, in part, to his death. The attractiveness which initially gives John favor, also consistently makes him the target of female admirers. Thus, Hurston undermines exceptionality if the same characteristic is both the source of success and failure. It is not possible to be exceptional if that exceptionality is doomed by its own characteristics. When John visits Hambo, his close friend, he once again falls into the entrapment of a young girl. Even though John attempts to remain faithful to his current wife, Sally, after the persistence of the young girl asking to ride in his car, John Buddy winds up sleeping with her. In a tormented moment, John leaves the hotel room and is killed by a train when his car is hit. In that moment, "The engine struck the car squarely and hurled it about like a toy. John was thrown out and lay perfectly still" (200).

Lee Ramsay Jr. in his analysis of John as a preacher argues that the train was a retributive form of justice for John's philandering ways: "All of this violation finally bears down upon the guilty Pearson when his car crashes into a train (the train of

judgment)” (Ramsey 78). Furthermore, expounding on John’s judgment, Ramsey argues, “As the novel’s many snake images converge in this final mechanical worm, the *deus es machina* cuts down the vine of the preacher who has never completely appropriated the texts on which he preached (130).” Ramsay accurately emphasizes the difference between John’s sermons and his behavior. John fails to live according to his sermons without falling for temptation. Ramsay argues that the final scene is a scene of judgment, and yet, John appears as a sympathetic character. He tries for the entire week to stay away from the woman, Ora Patton, who wanted his money. John seems unable to escape Ora. Furthermore, John tells his wife, Sally, not to buy him a car, but it is this very car which attracts Ora. Hambo warns John that Ora simply wants his money. John resists until the last day of his trip the demands of Ora, but he eventually fails. The cause of his failure is, in part, the flashiness of his success. Each characteristic or success that John acquires, eventually leads to his down fall.

John’s downfall is also an expectation of Hurston’s audience. In “What White Publishers Won’t Print” Hurston writes that the white publishers need the characters to be defeated in the end, and certainly John’s tragic death follows the rule of the white publishers. John, however, is doomed to fail from the beginning. John’s defeat also represents a necessary ending for the defeat of a character on the brink of becoming upper class. Hurston emphasizes that the white readers are not interested in a story about upper-class Negroes, but there is an “insistence on defeat in a story where upperclass Negroes are portrayed, [which] perhaps says something from the subconscious of the majority. Involved in western culture, the hero or the heroine, or both, must appear frustrated and go down to defeat, somehow” (953). With Sally, John could finally

achieve the status that he had lost when he was a moderator and preacher in the town. When John marries Sally, she is a wealthy woman, and John appears to be rising to upperclass status. Shortly after his rise in success, however, he goes “down to defeat” (953).

In the final scene, the preacher states “He wuz uh man, and nobody knowed ‘im but God” (202). Ramsey argues, “The best the presiding minister can say of John Pearson’s funeral is ‘He wuz uh man and nobody knowed ‘im but God’” (78). Ramsey contends that the preacher’s final statement sums up the best possible thing that can be said of John. Alternately, this statement can be read as a call to both reader and congregation to hold off on judgment. Ramsey argues that John Pearson is ultimately “self-centered” and that is his ultimate sin. However, the preacher’s reminder to hold off on judgment suggests that it is unfair to decide John’s guilt in his tragic ending.

Scholar Deborah Plant contends that John’s downfall is a result of John’s inability to reconcile and to balance his own life. Plant argues that the character’s failure is his own inability to take responsibility: “Comparable to a picaresque character, John Pearson never learns his own responsibility in determining his own welfare” (13). Even though John consistently falls to temptation with women, however, his failure is not necessarily his unwillingness to recognize “his own responsibility” (13). John recognizes his complicity in his affairs. In detailing his last affair, Hurston explains, “Two hours later when John found himself dressing in a dingy back room in Oviedo he was mad—mad at his weakness—mad at Ora” (199). John Buddy is mad at his own weakness. He recognizes his responsibility even if he is also angry at his temptress, Ora. Plant argues that Hurston had a worldview that required everyone to take responsibility for their

success. However, Hurston's consistent argument that exceptional characters are only exceptional in the eyes of their patrons argues for "mutual dependency." Throughout *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, John's success and failure hinges on others in the novel. He is only successful when bolstered by Alf Pearson, Lucy, and Sally. Thus, the failure of John Buddy not only follows the expectations of the white publishing world, but also demonstrates John's need for others to support him. Hurston consistently reiterates that friendship determines the relationship and opinion of others. When John loses his position in his church, he recognizes that he always thought he was being held up by his friends, but really he is without a "silken coverlet of friendship" (153). John's life is consistently in the hands of outside sources. While his lust is consistently a downfall throughout his life, he consistently loses positions and success that were only reached through others' relationships.

The marital relationships are often the source of John's success. John's three marriages represent the power each woman used in making him either exceptional or unexceptional. The three wives also represent three different women, which demonstrates Hurston's commitment to writing about all the different types of women. Genevieve West investigates the main women throughout the novel and explains each woman's approach to marriage. West primarily argues that *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is a "cautionary feminist tale" that demonstrates the failure of marriage as a refuge for women, regardless of what type of woman. West effectively argues that each woman represents different types of women from submissive to promiscuous to nurturing. Drawing from the stereotypical roles that West references, I argue that each of these women demonstrate John's inability to succeed in any sphere without a catalyst to success. John's role as

exceptional pet is further demonstrated through his marital relationships; women are simultaneously his success and downfall. Since his success is merely based on the women rather than himself, he is further undermined as exceptional.

When Lucy comes after John, she wants him to be a big man. Many scholars focus on Lucy Pearson as a representation of Zora Neale Hurston's mother since Lucy's death scene is quite similar to that of Hurston's mother in *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Other scholars focus on the role of women in Pearson's life as a critique of patriarchy. With Lucy, Hurston conflicts readers' ideals of Lucy's role in John's life. For instance, she is the reason that John succeeds. In fact, the men in the area even say if they had someone like Lucy they would be as big of a man as John. However, John, despite his protestations of love, refuses to admit that Lucy is the cause of his success. Even with Lucy's power as John's advisor, she is unable to keep him from straying, and he is an absent husband who loses many of those in his church due to his sinful ways.

Scholar Genevieve West argues that Hurston skillfully uses Lucy to critique this ideal of marriage, "specifically the notion of marriage as a woman's refuge" (502). Since staying with John does not make him faithful and is not the answer to the problems, it is a critique of the submissive woman. While West sees each of John's marriages as a critique of patriarchy, his marriages also reflect John's dependency on other characters. Without the women as caretakers, John is unable to maintain his status as a "Big Nigger." Hurston may seem to be writing the story of an exceptional Negro; instead she writes the story of an average Negro being manipulated for each person's purpose.

John's failure as a pastor after Lucy dies further demonstrates that Lucy was the "exceptional" rather than John. Even if she chooses to remain with the wayward John,

she is still an exceptional woman capable of managing a public sphere.⁵ Genevieve West argues that Hurston wants to break down the typical spheres of womanhood within this novel. She insists that Lucy “is complex: She teeters between the conventional submissive wife and a feminist willing to shape life in the public sphere” (504). Lucy can become the great speaker even outside of the home. When Lucy was a young girl, she was one of the top students. She regularly gave speeches, and the narrator even comments after one of the speeches that “The idol had not failed her public” (36). Prior to Lucy’s life as John’s helper, she had a public that relied on her speeches. When she enters John’s life, however, her speeches are used to keep John mastering the church. Thus, Lucy subjugates her own speech in favor of John’s speech. Regardless of perceptions of Lucy as a feminist, it is important to note that her own ability is a catalyst in shaping John’s persona.

Lucy is a catalyst to John’s success, but it is also his guilt for his behavior towards her that renders him useless. John must resist the temptation of women, and yet his very success is dependent on the women in the novel. Even with the recognition that John, despite his philandering ways, seems to be a pawn, Lucy is not the only problem with this situation. Hurston is not necessarily critiquing Lucy’s desire for upward mobility, but rather critiquing her attempt to force John into a role that he was not intending to play. John’s failure as much as his success is dependent on Lucy. This characterization of John also allows Hurston to avoid writing a novel about the upper class Negroes. John never remains an upper class Negro; he always falls short. Scholar Philip Joseph argues that “we are a far cry from a new negro—agrarian fold and upwardly mobile” (465). Joseph

⁵ Peter Gaal Szabo investigates Lucy’s navigation of private and public spheres extensively in his article, “Transparent Space and the Production of the Female Body in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*.”

sees John's failure as indicative of the community as a whole; John stretches to become upperclass but fails as leader of his community. John's inability to become upwardly mobile is, in part, a response to the demands put on Hurston. She was not able to write a novel about the upwardly mobile. But, Lucy certainly has the abilities to seek that upper status. Lucy also wants John to be this big role, but it is ultimately out of her grasp. John is not the exceptional man that she wanted. Nevertheless, Lucy clings to him until she dies, and even her death cannot reform John's ways. Ultimately John is viewed as a detriment to his community, but he never sought that place in the beginning. When his position as pastor is jeopardized, the community refuses to stand by him.

Not only is John Buddy not exceptional, but he also negates the stereotype that African Americans cannot experience an "abiding love" (953). Hurston argues in "What White Publishers Won't Print" that "Anglo-Saxons" are incapable of viewing other races without the implementation of stereotypes. She argues that a love story must be written about people who are not "Anglo-Saxons" or "Until this is thoroughly established in respect to Negroes in America, as well as of other minorities, it will remain impossible for the majority to conceive of a Negro experiencing a deep and abiding love and not just the passion of sex" (953). John's first wife, Lucy, succeeds in bolstering John's career throughout her life. Despite his affairs, John Buddy seems to love Lucy, thus deflating the idea that there is only this passion of sex. Even though it appears Hurston is catering to this idea of oversexualization, John Buddy's ultimate love still resides with Lucy. Even though sex may be John's downfall, this does not suggest that sex is the only passion of the "Negro experience." When John turns against his second wife, Hattie, he tells her how much he remembers his love for Lucy: "Mo' special and particular, Ah

remember jus' how Ah felt when she looked at me and when Ah looked at her" (143). In contrast, John tells Hattie he does not remember loving her:

Aw naw. Ah ain't begged you tuh marry me, nothin' uh de kind. Ah ain't said nothing' 'bout lovin' yuh tuh my knowin' but even if Ah did, youse uh experienced woman—had plenty experience 'fo' Ah ever seen yuh. You know better'n tuh b'lieve anything uh man tell yuh after ten o'clock at night. You know so well Ah ain't wanted tuh marry you. Dat's how come Ah know it's uh bug under dis chip. (143)

John's insistence that he did not truly love Hattie indicates that their was a deep love for Lucy. John does not remember falling in love with Hattie, presumably because she used voodoo. The contrast between Hattie and Lucy, however, emphasizes John's deep, abiding love for Lucy that Hurston wanted her readers to acknowledge. Hurston has been criticized for her critique and exposure of black women, such as Hattie; however, not every woman in the novel is characterized by this oversexualization.

After Lucy's death, John marries Hattie, who represents the forceful, sexually wayward woman. Hattie is, in part, responsible for the degradation of John's character. Right after Lucy dies, John marries Hattie, and his friends do not approve. They confront John that there are rumors around town that Hattie is causing friction within the family. She does not take care of the children (138). Furthermore, John's friends exclaim, "Dat strumpet ain't never done nothin' but run up and own de road from one sawmill camp tuh de other and from de looks of her, times was hard. She ain't never had nothin'—not eben doodly-squat, and when she gits uh chance tuh git holt uh sumpin de ole buzzard is gone on uh rampage" (138). Hattie as a "strumpet" reinforces this idea of a woman seductress. According to West, Hattie "approximates the negative stereotyped of the loose woman" (508). West asserts that Hurston reappropriates the use of voodoo to give power to make

Hattie a strong, determined woman. As a strong woman, Hattie seduces John. He becomes the pawn in her scheming.

Ultimately John divorces Hattie, which leaves Hattie as ultimately inferior to John's other wives. It is difficult to applaud Hurston for creating a strong woman character, if she is ultimately unsuccessful in her endeavors, specifically, when her endeavors are to keep a man. While this is an example of a failed marriage, the failure is not simply because marriage is an unhappy experience for women, but rather that this marriage was conceived from a voodoo plan as well as John is incapable of staying faithful to a woman.

Hurston retains her loyalty to the white publishers' interest by making both characters suffer in defeat. Hattie is left without a husband, and John is left without a church and ostracized. Both of these women, Lucy and Hattie, act as the controllers of John Buddy's fate which enforces the idea of strong women, yet the inability to maintain these relationships reminds the readers that simply having the power of love or voodoo is not enough, especially if the ultimate end must be defeat. Both of these women fail, as well as John. In addition to following the white publishers' desires, there are other reasons for the failure of the characters. First, John is not the exceptional. Each woman asks him to be something he is not. He is neither a preacher, nor a chaste man. Lucy accepts that he is not a chaste man and clings to him as the great man. Her reasoning always relies on her insistence of the church. She warns him not for herself, but for his own glory. She gives up the idea that he will remain faithful, but she pushes him to be the leader. Hattie's designs on John go beyond that of the leader. Even though she recognizes her own power in capturing John, she is unaware that her power will not always be

enough. Even if John easily falls into the trap, he does not remain there because the powers of voodoo are not greater than the powers of sex. Hattie's power over him fails because she does not recognize that the exact impulses that brought him to her will be present in their marriage.

When John finds solace with Sally, he seeks to rectify his mistakes with Lucy. Sally is the wealthy, powerful woman who determines John's fate much like Lucy. But, John fails again. Sally recognizes John in the street from when he was a reverend. While John tries to hide from this identity, Sally sees him only as the former reverend. She assumes that this is his identity, and she also holds him as this exceptional example. Even though John attempts to hide, he ends up crying and telling his whole story to Sally in the first night, "and at eleven o' clock that night she knew everything. He had not spared himself, and lay with his head in her lap sobbing like a boy of four" (189). West equates Sally's role in their relationship as a caretaker and a mother figure, which is another representation of a female role that Hurston uses in this novel. Sally even compares to John to a child when she buys him things, saying, "Who else Ahm goin' tuh spend it on? Ah ain't got uh chick nor uh chile 'ceptin' you. If us ever goin' tuh enjoy ourself, dis is de wold tuh do it in" (193). For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that Sally, like Lucy, attempts to guide John lovingly back to his former role. This role as successful preacher, which John did not intentionally seek, is once again a force of John having to conform to other's desires. John saw his relationship with Sally as a redemption of his failure with Lucy: "He had prayed for Lucy's return and God had answered with Sally" (200). He hoped to never see Sally looking at him through Lucy's eyes. The gifts, bestowed upon him by Sally, however, influence John to show his

former glory off to his former friends. His desire to show Hambo his return to success is the catalyst in his downfall. He returns to his former ways, and he sleeps with a young girl.

John fails to rectify his mistakes with his wives, but he is able to make a critique of white culture. Even though John does not fit the role of exceptional Negro, Hurston brilliantly crafts a novel about an average man being forced to be a preacher or even the voice of his group, much like Hurston herself. Michael Saenger notes that “John is asked to be an informant for white culture, much as Hurston was collecting folklore (officially, at least) for the benefit of her white patroness” (6). In addition to the task given to both John and Hurston, they also have similar constraints. While Hurston most likely would refer to herself as exceptional, she is also being forced to play a role. Not only are the publishers dictating her work, but also the desires of her fellow writers are being forced upon Hurston. She argues repeatedly that she does not want to argue about race, but that is the expectation for her. John attempts to maintain a dualistic lifestyle, but that is unsatisfactory to his coworkers. He is required to be the preacher because he possesses such a strong voice.

John’s frustration with the white culture is demonstrated when Hattie decides to divorce John. She gathers a large group of supporters from the church. Without Lucy’s careful guidance, John no longer had the ability to maintain control of his congregation. According to Plant, John’s inability to maintain his congregation was due to his inability to recognize that the duality of his African religions was unacceptable within the church’s limitations (10). In addition to his distinct differences, without Lucy, John could not keep the respect of his congregation. Thus, with Hattie as the instigator, the town puts

John Buddy on trial. The trial scene reflects John's discomfort in the eyes of the white world, and it also reflects John's belief that the white world is characterizing all African Americans the same way.

In this trial, John's insistence in maintaining silence speaks to his determination to remain outside of the courtroom's demands. While *Jonah's Gourd Vine* rarely refers to white people throughout most of the novel other than Mr. Pearson, the distinct courtroom scene includes an explicit condemnation of not only the courtroom antics, but also the judgment from the white people. When John walks into the courtroom, he sees "the smirking anticipation on the faces of the lawyers, the Court attendants, the white spectators, and felt as if he had fallen down a foul latrine" (167). John immediately recognizes that within the courtroom he is already covered in the waste of the latrine. His fall occurred before he even spoke. While John rarely speaks of the white people throughout the novel, within the courtroom he also refuses to speak. He feels as if he has already lost. While there are other spectators, throughout this scene, white people keep being mentioned, and John is profoundly disturbed by this matter of being on display.

John remained silent on matters of race from the pulpit, and even when a visiting pastor spoke to his congregation, the congregation rejected the preacher because he was a "race man" and that was not the place for it. John, and perhaps even Hurston, recognize that not every platform and pulpit is the place for matters of race, and Hurston certainly uses this scene to indicate the problems with putting the issues of race on display.

However, Hattie, exacting her revenge on her faithless husband decides to share all the gritty details. As John listens to her testimony, the narrator comments that the lawyers and spectators seem to anticipate the downfall of John and Hattie's marriage:

“Now how was it, Hattie? They look around the room at the other whites, as if to say, “now listen close. You’re going to hear something rich. These niggers!” (167). Even though John originally comments on all of the spectators, when listening to Hattie, the narrator emphasizes that the spectators are looking around the room “at the other whites,” as a clear delineation that the whites are the main concern to John Buddy. In addition, the whites are collectively classifying the group together as “these niggers!” when they hear of John’s indiscretions (167). Thus, even in Hurston’s predominantly black novel that deals, only briefly, with issues of race, there is a strong condemnation of classification of groups as ‘these niggers!’ (167).

Even more specifically, John Buddy gives his reasoning for his silence. Even though John could have called forth witnesses to the stand, he declines and accepts Hattie’s demands for a divorce. When his faithful friend, Hambo, asks him why he did not ask for him to come forward, John replies:

And dat’s how come Ah didn’t have ‘em tuh call yuh. Ah didn’t want de white folks tuh hear ‘bout nothin’ lak dat. Dey knows too much ‘bout us as it is, but dey some things dey ain’t tuh know. Dey’s some strings on our harp fuh us tuh play on and sing all tuh ourselves. Dey thinks wese all ignorant as it is, and dey thinks wese all alike, and dat dey knows us inside and out, but you know better. . . .dey be’lieve it anyhow, but dey b’lieved de same thing ‘bout all de rest. (169)

John explains that the white community had already made up their mind, thus he was doomed from the beginning. John’s concerns express the same sentiments that Hurston later writes in “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” Hurston explains “It is assumed that all non-Anglo-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes. Everybody knows all about them” (951). For John, he recognizes that the whites in the courtroom will see him as an “uncomplicated stereotype” (951). Their minds are made up because they already know

all about him. Furthermore, John emphasizes the idea of keeping hidden some elements of their culture without becoming too vulnerable because the white community already “thinks wese all alike, and dat dey knows us inside and out” (169). The idea of deeming a race as one collective body, guilty of all the same sins, remains frustrating to John. He sees fundamentally the difference between Hattie and Lucy.

John refuses to participate in the spectacle of the court in order to remain separate from the judgment of the courtroom. John, more than his friend Hambo, recognizes the proceedings of the court are a mere spectacle. When he refuses to take the stand, the narrator editorializes that “The fun was over in the Court. Whisperings. Formalities. Papers. It was all over” (168). Clearly, the court was a place for fun and a place of formalities that seemed to mean nothing to John. The courtroom spectacle represents how Hurston may have felt her own work was viewed. The white world of the courtroom is watching the proceedings as mere fun. Hurston critiques the idea of viewing African American culture merely as if it is a spectacle.

In contrast, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the courtroom is a place of rectification for Janie. Janie finds herself having to convince a white courtroom that she did not intentionally kill her husband. This ability of Janie to rectify her situation and through her story convince a white audience of her own love is viewed as a victory. However, John in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* does not use his voice to save himself from the criticism of the white culture. John, just as Janie, recognizes that his own life is being used as a spectacle. While Janie participates in these proceedings because of her desire to show the love she has for Teacake, John refuses to take the stand to show that there was no love between him and Hattie. John recognizes that the story of Hattie using voodoo to

make him love her will cause the spectators to view all black women as promiscuous and sinister like Hattie.

Even though Hurston is criticized for her depictions of overly promiscuous women, in some sense, John's critique of white culture's categorizing everyone into one category serves as a defense of Hurston's decision to show different types of women in order to demonstrate her accepting the differences. Hurston includes within this novel her critique of the white culture if they choose to see only Hattie as the representation of all black women. Kirland C. Jones emphasizes the humor within *Jonah's Gourd Vine* declaring that Hattie is merely a farcical representation of a woman who would use voodoo to achieve her purposes (29). Thus, Hurston effectively critiques those who might chastise her for including Hattie as the representation of promiscuous black women. First, she points out through John's words how white people see the black race all as one, and secondly, she uses Hattie as a humorous contrast. By exaggerating the differences, Hurston emphasizes that each character is quite different.

However, even in John's indictment of the white courtroom both as a spectacle and for the people who are trying to classify him, Hurston buries this critique in a chapter that ends on a critique of the black people who would criticize John. John finishes the chapter with a condemnation of black people which surrounds John's condemnation of the white courts. He explains to his friend Hambo that "De minute dey see one climbin' up too high, de rest of 'em reach up and grab 'em and pull 'im back. Dey ain't gonna let nobody git nowhere if dey kin he'p it" (169).

The courtroom scene is also a pivotal moment in John's recognition of his friends. When he most needed their support, they rejected him. In the weeks leading up to the

trial, when John asks for help, his “friends” respond: “Sho, sho they wanted him to win, but you know dese white folks-de laws and de cotehouses and de jail houses all b’longed tuh white folks and po’ colored folks—course, Ah never done nothin’ tuh be ‘rested ‘bout, but—ah’ll be prayin’ fuh yuh, Elder” (153). The sentiment of John’s friends further demonstrates John’s concerns with the courthouse. It is clear that this is a domain that they do not feel comfortable being a part of, even though, there is no ringing condemnation of the white folks’ courthouse. Hurston manages to condemn the courthouse through the people’s refusal to join in that formality. The courtroom “b’longed tuh white folks and po’colored folks--” but the people never finish their sentence about poor colored white folks and their relationship to the courthouse. When John speaks, he indicates that he does not want to be on display, but Hurston never allows the other characters to fully condemn the oppression of the courthouse. Thus, once again, she cleverly disguises this critique within John’s own realization of his friends’ lack of commitment to him. Even though John ultimately claims the courthouse is a spectacle, he never discusses how the people feel that it should be outside of their jurisdiction.

This oblique critique of the white courtroom is hidden within the critique of mob culture: “The rest he saw would fall in line” (153). With their refusal to help him, John recognizes “all his years as pastor at Zion hope he had felt borne up on a silken coverlet of friendship, but the trial had shown him that he reclined upon a board, thinly disguised” (153). In addition to his friends abandoning him, John realizes that he truly had no “coverlet of friendship,” which is another example of Hurston proving the idea that friendship is the necessity to be “borne up” to achieve success.

John Buddy's reliance on his patron, his wives, and his friends emphasizes Hurston's belief in "mutual dependency" on each other rather than one character's exceptionalism. The traits which initially make John appear to be a unique, exceptional character actually frustrate his success. While his wives at times lift him up as a successful preacher and leader of his community, it is also his marital relations that are the cause of his downfall. Thus, Hurston undermines the idea that John is an "exceptional" man. Furthermore, the three wives of John demonstrate Hurston's commitment to writing the various roles of women in the African American community, even if at times, the women are sexually promiscuous. Hurston's inclusion of stereotypes serves as her reminder to the readers that she seeks to portray honestly "a true picture of the Negro life" ("What White Publishers Won't Print" 173). Just as in the courtroom John feels that the whites are judging all Negroes alike, Hurston hopes to combat that idea with her many characters.

CHAPTER THREE

“The Illogical, Indefensible but Somehow Useful Pet System:” Unpublished Manuscripts in *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Hurston’s original manuscript of *Dust Tracks on a Road* includes her essay, “The ‘Pet’ Negro System,” and an expanded chapter entitled “My People, My People.” When *Dust Tracks* was published in 1942, the manuscript no longer contained the essay on the “Pet” Negro system and many other references to Hurston’s discourse on race. In this chapter, I examine the excised portions in the chapters of “Love” and “My People, My People” to determine both the scope of the edits as well as the content. First, analyzing the minute changes of “Love” will provide a helpful clarification to earlier concerns regarding Hurston’s inability to reveal herself. Her more authorial voice also indicates the validity of these passages. Second, recognizing and analyzing the many more changes in “People” provides an answer that dispels both the idea that Hurston is pandering to the white nation and the idea that Hurston is smoldering with anger towards her patrons. Her relationship with her patrons further proves Hurston’s belief in “mutual dependency” between the races. Even in her uncensored passages, she maintains that friendship and relationship are more important than race.

Initially, *Dust Tracks* received glowing reviews, and Hurston was at the height of her career. One such review was printed in *The Saturday Review* in 1942 and complimented Hurston on her frankness and openness about love and race:

The race consciousness that spoils so much negro literature is completely absent here. Miss Hurston is less impressed by her own color than most

Aryan redheads. She gives one chapter to “My People”-perhaps the most sensible passage on the subject that has ever been written. (Strong 12)

In the “most sensible passage” on race, Hurston seems to dismiss that there any problems with racial discrimination. This exclusion of any overt discussion of racial discrimination was influential in helping Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road* win “the *Saturday Review*’s \$1000 Anisfield Award for its contribution to better race relations” (Howard 161).

Despite the initial positive response to *Dust Tracks*, when Alice Walker rehabilitated Hurston’s works, she called *Dust Tracks* “oddly false sounding” (qtd in Washington 20). Similarly, Mary Helen Washington, a contemporary of Walker and a fellow scholar, gives a guarded evaluation of *Dust Tracks* arguing that it “Provides a fairly clear view of Hurston as a child, and it is especially useful for detailing her relationships with her mother, father, and Eatonville, but the rest of it rambles on from one pose to another, sometimes boasting about her achievements and at all times deftly avoiding self-revelation” (20). Since J. B. Lippincott, Hurston’s publisher and patron, commissioned the writing of the autobiography, scholars believed that Hurston was pandering to her white patrons and writing an autobiography that avoided the true discrimination in Hurston’s life or her real struggles. For instance, Robert Hemenway, Hurston’s biographer, notes, “Hurston’s non-confrontational strategy was not unusual for the period, but modern readers should know that *Dust Tracks* sacrifices truth to the politics of racial harmony” (xiii). Hemenway argues that Hurston’s sacrifice of truth was her attempt to pander to her white publishers and agree that there was, in fact, no race problem (xiii). Thus, those who have seen her work brought back into national recognition argue that Hurston’s controversial stances on race were a result of her white publishers and her need to provide financially. Henry Louis Gates Jr. wrote an appendix

to the work in 1984 establishing the importance of *Dust Tracks*. Gates argues that which Hurston “silences or deletes, similarly, is all that her readership would draw upon to delimit or pigeonhole her life as a synecdoche of “the race problem,” an exceptional part standing for the debased whole” (294). Thus, Gates sees *Dust Tracks* as a work that clearly eliminates any part of Hurston that would make her connected to the race problem. In order to avoid discussing the race problem, Hurston places herself as the “cosmic” Zora,¹ who transcends above her race. In order not to limit herself according to her race, Francoise Lionnet suggests that Hurston writes herself as a mythical creature (116). Lionnet argues that Hurston maintains power by creating a myth that she succeeded because of her destiny. Hurston creates this myth so that she does not have to deal with the reality of racial discrimination. Kathryn Hassall also argues that the failure to establish the race problem is mere acting in *Dust Tracks*:

It has long been famous for its erasures, its inconsistencies, its eccentricity of focus, and tone which has struck some readers as dishonest...The most troubling “omission” for many readers, however, has been the book’s apparent refusal to document the impact—emotional, intellectual, even financial—of racism on the author’s life. (159)

Hassall represents scholars who, because of these absences, focus on other parts of the text. Hassall merely ascribes this blatant disregard for the race issue as the result of Hurston putting on a show. She argues “as for Hurston, performance, power, and freedom are linked” (Hassall 163). Thus, in order for Hurston to maintain power in the publishing world, she puts on an act. Hurston constructs a myth of power for herself: “Consistently, she refused to define black consciousness as a reaction to white oppression. When she reported her own experiences, she edited out pain; she edited out weakness. She refused to show her wounds” (171). In an effort to avoid being classified

¹ Eric J. Sundquist discusses the Cosmic Zora in his book, *Jump at de Sun*.

merely as a “reaction to white oppression,” Hurston writes herself with no consciousness of her oppression.

Hurston also avoids writing about oppression by avoiding labeling her community according to race. Lynn Domina explains that Hurston viewed herself “less as a member of a race than as a member of a particular community, one of whose characteristics is race” (3). Lionnet acknowledges Hurston’s attempts to write about more than race struggles: “So, if Hurston sometimes seems to be aspiring toward some kind of “raceless ideal,” it is not because she is interested in the “universality” of human experiences” (Lionnet 119). Lionnet argues rather that Hurston wanted to examine the minutiae of daily life and how each instance affects readers. Thus, Hurston is not saying everyone is alike, but rather everyone is uniquely different thus obscuring the idea of racial harmony. Lionnet’s analysis echoes Barbara Johnson’s analysis of “What White Publisher’s Won’t Print.” Johnson establishes that Hurston argues that since each person is fundamentally unique all the differences make people realize the commonality of human experience (284). Hurston’s interest in writing about the common human experience is rooted in her desire to show the uniqueness of the Negro experience in the common everyday life, not the “exceptional” Negro pets.

Not all scholars, however, have characterized Hurston’s views on race in *Dust Tracks* as avoiding the topic of racial discrimination. Later scholarship attempted to dispel the idea that Hurston was pandering and demonstrate through the unpublished manuscripts that she was both race conscious and not afraid to write about race. One such scholar, Ruth Ann Patterson, in her book study of Hurston’s life, argues for this closer look at the manuscript:

Most of Hurston's critics, who relied solely on the published version of *Dust Tracks* and did not question its reliability, concluded that Hurston had no race consciousness. Yet when the censored passages are restored, we hear a different voice, one that is all too aware of racial oppression and victimization and has plenty to say about it—and that most acerbically...I have suggested that Hurston took the advice of her publishers and acquiesced in their censorship of her work. But it may be more likely that Hurston bristled under this censorship and had no choice but to consent to it if her work was to be published, a reading of the matter that is suggested by a close look at the original manuscript, with the excised passages and the editorial marginalia. (180)

Patterson recognizes that the manuscript reveals a Hurston who is not sacrificing truth.

Claudine Raynaud has also extensively researched the changes in the manuscript of *Dust Tracks*. In his study, he argues “a comparison of manuscript and published versions of *Dust Tracks* retraces the process of Hurston's gradual submission to the control of the white publishing world; conversely the first draft brings to light a freer, but not uncontradictory, ‘authorial’ voice” (57). This “authorial voice,” according to Raynaud, “does not shy away from speaking the sexual and exposing the political” (57). Raynaud demonstrates his conclusions by looking at the entire text of *Dust Tracks* and noting the deletions made by the publisher. He contends the “manuscript crudely unveils the mechanisms of the creation of a fiction: an obsequiously grateful and overpolite Hurston is balanced by an occasionally biting and playfully irreverent Zora” (57). Patterson, who builds on Raynaud's conclusions, argues that by adding in these deletions “a smoldering anger flares up at times, only to disappear again beneath the image that Hurston created so carefully” (180).

While Patterson and Raynaud's study clarifies Hurston's voice, my study demonstrates more fully how she “exposes the political,” particularly in regards to race relations and patronage. In the deletions from the chapter “My People, My People,”

Hurston exposes fewer political mechanisms and more of the undercurrent of the South. Despite her “biting” wit, Hurston still maintains throughout the unpublished manuscript that her friendships have helped her, and that the “pet” system is prevalent throughout the South.

Deletions Made to “Love” Chapter

The changes made in the chapter of “Love” are few, and the deletions refer to Hurston’s self-revelation. The quotations question the idea that Hurston was intentionally hiding her self-revelation. To understand how prevalent the changes are in the chapter “My People, My People,” it is important to juxtapose those changes with the chapter “Love.” In this chapter there are only thirteen changes. Most of these small edits are strike-throughs, a few minor added details that explain Hurston’s timeline, and a few word order changes. These changes appear to be in Hurston’s hand and change very little in regards to content. When Hurston dedicated her manuscripts to Yale Library, on the first page of her manuscript, she explains the deletions that were made: “Parts of this manuscript were not used in the final composition of the book for publisher’s reasons” (Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library 1030468).

Most likely based on publisher’s reasons, the largest deletion within the chapter of “Love” is the section:

Then we met and talked. The separation had loosened both of our tongues. All we could do was sit and stare with the curtains pulled aside. We had both thought and acted desperately in exile, and all to no purpose. (Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Image ID 1018981)

In this passage, Hurston is describing a meeting with her current lover referred to as P.M.P. after a tumultuous relationship and a separation of a few months. One of the added passages indicates that the separation occurred when Hurston was writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Hurston explains that she wrote the novel to entomb P.M.P.² Shortly after returning from her time in the Caribbean, Hurston writes *Dust Tracks* and originally included this passage, which refers to “the curtains pulled aside” (BRL 1018981). This reference to pulling aside the veil, which prevents P.M.P. from knowing her, indicates that it is possible for Hurston to reveal herself.

According to Hurston’s own inscription, these deletions were mandated by the publisher, and thus it is the publisher’s concern about Hurston’s revelatory writing. Raynaud argues, “In *Dust Tracks* the transition from handwritten version to typed version and finally to the printed text illustrates a gradual slippage from an original intent to the final acceptance of a public self/text mediated by editorial pressure” (47). Thus, the mediated self that readers see in *Dust Tracks* is one that is prevented from revealing herself rather than consciously avoiding revelation. Hurston admits her ability to pull curtains aside with P.M.P.; the publishers may have been concerned that this admission might cause the public to hope for Hurston to pull the curtains aside within her writing. This idea of self-revelation figures prominently within Hurston scholarship surrounding *Dust Tracks*; scholars tend to regard *Dust Tracks* as an avoidance of self-revelation (Washington 20), and thus can dismiss her troubling views on the “race problem” or disregard the lack of acknowledgment of the “race problem”(Gates 294). In fact, Hurston

² For a more complete explanation of Hurston’s timeline in her autobiography, see Pam Bordelon’s article “New Tracks on *Dust Tracks*: Toward a Reassessment of the Life of Zora Neale Hurston.”

acknowledges “it is too hard to reveal one’s inner self” as Washington points out in her evaluation (20). But, Hurston’s acknowledgement of difficulty and even her reticence in revealing herself does not imply Hurston is consistently masking herself in *Dust Tracks*. Rather, this overt acknowledgement might, in fact, demonstrate the publishers were carefully mediating the Hurston that the public could see.³

An additional passage that was crossed out in “Love” openly acknowledges Hurston’s relationship with her patrons. She writes, “It was more than my contract with my publishers there was something clawing at my insides for expression” (BRL 1018982). P.M.P. does not want Hurston to continue with her career. Every time she was beckoned to meet with other people about her writing, P.M.P. was upset and wanted her to stay with him. However, Hurston says she had to go, which is eventually what destroyed her relationship. She chose her career over him because she could not let what was inside of her wait. Thus, Hurston acknowledges outright in this passage that she is not just writing to answer the questions of her publisher, but rather she was longing to express whatever it was that was “clawing” at her insides. This violent image expresses Hurston’s need to explain her views, which explains why she added several sections professing her views on subjects in the back of the novel.

³ Judith Robey argues that the precise “value lies in the statement it makes about the debilitating influence her white readership has on the act of writing an autonomous self” (17). Robey argues that by tracing the different genres of autobiographical writing throughout Hurston’s text, it becomes apparent that Hurston could not self-actualize under the pressure of white readership. However, Robey does not include the excised passages that represent a more self-aware Hurston.

Both of these deletions reflect the publishers desire to hide Hurston's self-revelation rather than Hurston attempting to "deftly avoid self-revelation" (Washington 20). Thus, Hurston was revealing a more "authorial" self. To say that this revelation clarifies Hurston's self-identity is still doubtful, but it does indicate that Hurston was not consciously avoiding mentioning self-revelation. In fact, the theme of Hurston's difficulty with revealing herself is actually documented in a letter she wrote to Fanny Hurst, a patron of Hurston's. In an unpublished letter in Fanny Hurst's archives, Hurston writes on January 10th, 1986:

I am sitting here trying to find words for feelings, and sensing all the time that I am not doing a good job of revealing myself to you. But you know me. Go inside and look around. If you find anything worth the having in my heart, please take it and even if you only set it among your lesser treasures, I'll be covered with honor and glad. (Harry Ransom Center, Fanny Hurst Collection)

While Hurst and Hurston's relationship has garnered quite a bit of criticism for Hurston's seemingly obsequious responses to Hurst and Hurst's treatment of Hurston as a child,⁴ in this particular passage, if taken seriously, Hurston admits that she feels she is not doing a good job revealing herself. However, rather than intentionally covering herself, she offers herself to Hurst. Although this seems overly accommodating, once again Hurston at least artificially attempts to reveal herself. While these comments may demonstrate her inability to reveal herself, she is not consistently trying to avoid revelation. In fact, it seems that the publishers are trying to cover any potentially confusing sentiments about Hurston's self. While Hurston may have no choice but to agree with her publishers, it is still surprising that the editors would delete passages that correlate directly to what her publishers had asked her to do. Potentially, the publishers did not want to acknowledge

⁴ Patterson defines the system of patronage in her book, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life*.

that it was possible that Hurston could reveal herself if she was not doing so within her book. However, Hurston was not intentionally curtaining herself off from self-disclosure.

Deletions and Editions Made to “My People, My People” Chapter

Compared to the thirteen changes in the chapter “Love,” the chapter of “People” changed drastically through multiple edits and within different publications. When the text was published by the Library of Congress with Cheryl A. Wall as editor, the chapter on “People” is the typed manuscript held by Beinecke Rare Library. In the notes on the text, Wall explains, “Since the Lippincott editorial files have not been located, it is not possible to determine all the stages of composition the book went through before it was completed, but an examination of the existing materials does give some idea of the process of revision”(982). In this restored version, the publishers argue that the “My People, My People” chapter is the unexpurgated version of Hurston’s “final intention, in the form of the typescript she prepared for use as setting copy” (983). In the appendix, there is an added “My People, My People.” However, neither chapter includes Hurston’s holograph that contains “The Pet Negro System.”

Hurston begins her chapter on “People” by identifying how she felt about the idea of her “people.” This chapter, taken from the typed manuscript, appears the same in the published version, and it is this chapter which causes many to doubt Hurston’s race consciousness. She argues that there is no consensus for what people deem her “people.” In fact, she states “What fell into my ears from time to time tended more to confuse than to clarify. One thing made a liar out of the one that went before and the thing that came after. At different times I heard opposite viewpoints expressed by the same person or

persons” (180). Hurston, a master of words and images, is careful to say “what fell into my ears” which implies no active work on her part. She frees herself from blame by merely reiterating things she has heard from others. In this section, she refuses to acknowledge any part in her own definition of her people, and it is this chapter that appears in the published version of *Dust Tracks*.

Similar to this chapter, Hurston has an essay she wrote while in Haiti which focuses on the diversity of “My People.” Typical of Hurston, she claims there is no consensus behavior for “my people,” but then she proceeds to give a list of things that “my people, my people” have in common (242). In one of the last portions of the appendix, Hurston claims,

Last but not least, My People love a show. We love to act more than we love to see acting done. We love to look at them and we love to put them on, and we love audiences when we get to specifying. That’s why some of us take advantage of trains and other public places like dance halls and picnics. We just love to dramatize. Now you’ve been told, so you ought to know. But maybe after all the Negro doesn’t really exist. What we think is a race is detached moods and phases of other people walking around. What we have been talking about might not exist at all. (*Dust Tracks*, Library of America, 244)

Hurston explains that her people love to put on a show, and in the next sentence, she warns the reader that he or she “ought to know” (244). Hurston seems to be playing with this idea that she can describe her “people” as a mere farce, and that what she is saying maybe does not exist. This rhetorical strategy is similar to Hurston’s explanations of race in “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” As Barbara Johnson notes, if there are no differences between races then Hurston deconstructs the definition of race. This passage in the published version demonstrates Hurston’s questioning of the importance and definition of race in a community. Hurston argues that the “feeling of difference which

inspires fear, and which ever expresses itself in dislike” needs to be dispelled (954). One of the ways to dispel these feelings of differences between the races is to become friends, which Hurston suggests is what causes “The Pet Negro System.”

One of the sections cut from *Dust Tracks* was the original essay “The ‘Pet’ Negro System” which was later published, in part, in *American Mercury* in 1943 and then again in *Negro Digest*. “The ‘Pet’ Negro System,” which was not published in any of the publications of *Dust Tracks* is definitely taken from the holograph images that are at Yale Library. Within the chapter, this system is described in detail with specific names mentioned. To understand the importance of this essay, it is important to understand how inflammatory the text could have been especially if published in Hurston’s autobiography. She implicates herself as part of this system of patronage that both her African American community and her white publishers most likely wanted to distance themselves from. If Hurston is to write a revealing autobiography, the constraints of the publisher’s desires should not be noticeable within the text. Furthermore, Hurston does not want to be pandering to the publishers, either. Raynaud argues Hurston is more authorial and explosive in her text, and also clarifies the complicated relationship between herself and her publishers (57). Raynaud focuses primarily on the edits of the text as a whole rather than the essay, “The ‘Pet’ Negro System.” Hurston’s essay on the pet system reveals a more political voice that admits the unfair system of patronage but advocates that the whole patronage system is more about relationship than the political race struggle.

“The ‘Pet’ Negro System,” as described by Hurston, explicates the complex relationship between both white patron and black pet. The unspoken rules of the system

include the white person consistently advocating for the success of his “pet” above all other pets. Hurston explains, “The pet Negro, beloved, is someone whom a particular white person or persons wants to have and to do all the things forbidden to other Negroes” (915). In fact, the white person always believes that the pet is the absolute exception to the Negro race, and “if all the Negroes were like them he wouldn’t mind what advancement they made” (915). The exceptional pet transcends any other stipulations of race because he is smart and honest, exceeding all other expectations as well because something is inherently different about him than anyone else. This inherent difference is merely the fact that he has a relationship with the white patriarch; the patriarch “likes” him (916).

Because of the relationship with the white patriarch, Hurston also argues that the “pet” actively and willingly participates in the system. A key component of the system is the white patron must be held in high regard by the pet; it is worth nothing to be a pet of someone unworthy. Thus, the pet feels blessed and respected by the system, and will “chase that white person back on to his pedestal” (916) in order for the white patron to maintain the status worthy of having a pet. In her explanation, Hurston is careful to say she does not advocate the system, but that it is “mighty cosy” (915). The “pets” are comfortable in their submissive station as long as they keep gaining the benefits, which might be in the form of job opportunities and financial security.

After explaining how this system works, Hurston spends time explaining how sometimes a Negro might ‘pet’ a white person. Thus, it is not simply a system of white patronage that a Negro actively accepts, but rather the reverse relationship is possible. If a Negro can “pet” a white man, then it is not a question of race consciousness, but rather

a question of relationship. This portion of the essay is what is tampered with most in the subsequent publications. While the published versions maintain the idea of the ‘cozy’ system, much of the continuing explanation is cut. For instance, Hurston extends this explanation to the entire town. If a Negro from another town were to be praised, then suddenly all of the Negroes in their own town would be held in high regard:

And other advancements are only for your own pet negro, that beloved paragon. No more like him or her. Whites are annoyed when some other white person takes the floor and brags on their pets. The only time they will admit that there might be something to any other local negro is when a reputedly smart negro lands there from out of the state or country. Right then, practically all of the local negroes become smart, industrious, thrifty, and swell citizens. The hackles of the local whites go up and their teeth are showing. --- The stranger negro is an object of suspicion until some of the local negroes whose words count-, give the new comer a clean bill of health and don't think for a moment that their opinion of the visitor will be doubted. Afterwards, things will change if a good impression is made. The new-comer will then be accepted as a local, and therefore superior to all other negroes anywhere else.

Whoever put it out that only ignorant Negroes get petted put out a big old something-aunt-so. The Large Negro is in high favor on his native heath. —yes, indeed.—Some of the pettest Negroes in the south are bright, educated. He or she is often given too much rope, that is for the good of the Negro community in general. It makes it very profitable for the pet, however. I could cite chapter and verse in numerous cases and places. But that would be getting personal, what the less educated Negroes call “personating.” When people go to ‘personalizing’ the lose all of their friends. The attitude of the south towards the Negro can be shown by the in-cident of a group of upper-class southern women at a bridge party. One lady bragging on the cook remarked that if any Negroes went to Heaven, it was certainly going to be her Mary. She was good and kind and honest and everything. Yes, indeed, her Mary was apt to go to Heaven.

“Why, Mrs. Colton!” One of her hearers gasped. “you don't really think Negroes will be in Heaven with—er—well, with other people, “do you?” The whole room took it up, and there was a hot discussion. There were two or three other black nominees for the golden streets, all ruled out by Mrs. Colton.

“The way I see it,” she maintained “all the Negroes will go to Heaven. Mary will walk around like everyone else. The rest of the darkies will be out in the back yard with a wash-pot turned down over ‘em.”

That sounded like a happy solution, so everybody picked up their hands again, and Mrs. Colton opened with two spades.

Thus, this system extends beyond the simple one-to-one relationship and throughout an entire community (BRL 1030521). Because an entire community can come together in support of the Negroes in order to beat another town's Negroes, Hurston once again proves her overall conclusion that relationship conquers race. She even states "So in the South it is a personal relationship that naturally functions as a community" (BRL 16).

Within this passage, Hurston, while recognizing that relationship determines who receives benefits, also maintains or demonstrates the racism that clearly exists in the South. Even if the community will stand up for their own Negroes, they are still limiting them to the outside yard of Heaven. Thus, even though Hurston is clearly ascribing to a system built on relationship over race throughout this text she still manages to include a subtle jab at the white ladies drinking tea and assigning "darkies" their place in Heaven. However, rather than asserting her anger about this system she continues by explaining the reciprocal relationship within the pet system.

Hurston defines the reciprocal relationship by including herself and others 'petting' white people. In the published version, Hurston explains "And mind you, the Negroes have their white pets, so to speak. It works both ways. Class-consciousness of Negroes is an angle to be reckoned with in the South" ("The Pet Negro System" 916-917). In the magazine, Hurston describes having white pets, but she uses the qualifier, "so to speak." She then proceeds to explain that it is important that the whites are of a high class. In this way, Hurston does not ignore the idea that Negroes are concerned about class. She opened her chapter about "My People, My People" with a contrast of quality Negroes and those who "woof" and misbehave, critiquing those who would put them all in one place (177-178). She readily admits that there are "white crackers"

almost as if to indicate that there are classes of Negroes as well that should not be overlooked. Her published version mentions that this class-consciousness and petting exists.

Her handwritten holograph, with portions transcribed, examines this relationship more fully and more forcefully:

Oh, yes, we pet white people too. Our own white friends are just fine. There are no more like that. We just can't see what the other negro across the way sees in that white person he is cloacking up with. It isn't as if they were like Mr. Joe and Mr. Bert. Out of this inability to see what the other man sees, comes the majority of the charges of "Tomming"...Myself, I have a number of pet white people. For years and years, I have been petting Fanny Hurst, Dr. Franz Boas, Ruthe Benedict, Dr. Carita Dogget Corse, Bob Wunsch, Dr. Henry Allen Moe, Frank Bert Lippincott, Robert Nathan, Annie Nathan Meyer, and Jane Belo, of the Texas Belos, and some others. You cant tell me a word against them, I don't care how black you come. If you cant find something good to say about them, don't bring the mess up. I don't want to hear it... I know that Walter White, a most militant "race" man, has been friendly for years with Henry L. Mencken, Van Vechten, Clarence Darrow, and many other white people. He is a firm friend of Justice Black of Alabama, and staunchly supports him in the face of widespread Negro opposition, in spite of the fact that Justice Black is not only a dyed in the wool southerner, but an ex-Klansman. That is his friend and he is standing by. (Yale Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1030524)

The published versions, both in the book and the magazine, reflect the idea of the system being cozy, but the specific names as well as the identification of Negroes as being the 'petters' is mostly left out. However, notably, this blatant exposition of patronage, thanking her helpers, is actually a place in the text where she examines and argues that she 'pets' her patrons, thus reversing the system. While it is possible that Hurston says this to expose the system without accusing white patronage, her calling out of other Negroes who have pets suggests otherwise. Hurston includes everyone involved in the system of patronage because it is based on friendship.

Because of Hurston's friendship with Fannie Hurst, Hurston claims she "pets" Fannie. However, Fannie is also Hurston's patron. Patterson contends, "Hurston's obsequious behavior toward her "godmother" and her other patrons was one way she coped with the humiliation of having to play the primitive for the master" (182). Hurston is certainly not describing herself as the "primitive" in these deleted portions. Perhaps, the publishers did not want to acknowledge the power Hurston had over them. Hurston is dependent on her publishers, as she notes in "What White Publishers Won't Print." She acknowledges her complicit relationship with her patrons when she says she 'pets' them as well. Therefore, even if Hurston tires of relying on her patrons, it is still a system of "mutual dependency" as they rely on her.

The deletion of Hurston's comments about her relationship with her patrons also confounds Raynaud. He queries, "But why were Zora's lists of thank-yous, her autobiographical text as "reconnaissance de dettes," kept to bare minimum? Might it be because the litany of names too blatantly exposed the system of patronage and its exploitation of a young black woman's creative talent?" (47). Perhaps Raynaud is right in assuming that the publishers did not want Hurston to call out this system as well as to call people by name; however, the "blatantly exposed system of patronage" in the unpublished manuscripts includes Hurston as a patron. Thus, Hurston was not only calling out her "exploitation" but rather emphasizing co-dependency between publishers and writers.

When "The Pet Negro System" was published, the essay did not mention Hurston's 'petting' as blatantly as her holograph mentions it. The essay in *American Mercury*, which had a predominantly white readership, was closer to the holograph

version. Genevieve West notes that when the essay was published in the *Negro Digest*, there were several changes:

The mock sermon that opens and closes the original essay is gone. The condensed version also omits Hurston's paragraph-length description of the "pet system." The changes in text combined with the new title result in a less inflammatory tone. But her exploration of Southern power structures may still have unsettled black readers. She may have appeared to attack the few Southern "friends" of blacks rather than the system that privileged a few and oppressed the majority. (197)

West argues that Hurston modified her texts to seem less inflammatory to the black community because she wanted to modify her persona as an opportunist. However, West indicates that Hurston failed to change her perceptions since she may have attacked the friends of the blacks for unfairly giving only certain ones privileges (203). Thus, Hurston, regardless of audience, consistently upset both white and black patrons and friends. Her inflammatory essay, even without the excised portions, did not fit the ideal of her publishers or the black community. While West contends that the community may have believed Hurston was attacking their friends, Hurston also includes the entire community in the blame. The "pets" are complicit in accepting privileges from their patrons rather than working to establish privileges for everyone.

While Hurston critiques a system that privileges the few, she also suggests that her writing about her people was in order to expose the truth of the system. In an earlier letter to Fanny Hurst dated March 8, 1934, Hurston writes:

In other words, not to blind myself nor attempt to create the artificial concerning my people for outside consumption, however much I am tempted. Somebody has already suggested that I could have put a little humor into that sermon. I could have done so, but it certainly would not have been true. (Harry Ransom Center, Fanny Hurst Collection)

Hurston, being criticized for one of her early works, argues that she refuses to use her work to create ‘concern’ for her race, but also refuses to make it simply a joke. Hurston’s writing, however, was not trying to create “artificial concerning” for her people. Hurston writes in *Dust Tracks* “But I am satisfied in knowing that I established a trend and pointed Negro expression back towards the saner ground of our own unbelievable originality” (285). Her decision to celebrate black culture is to praise “originality” not to create “artificial concerning.” Hurston’s mission was more than a celebration of black folkways: it was a celebration of “originality,” but not simply the “quaint.” Hurston strove to reach ‘saner ground’ where she could write about the daily lives of Negroes, where she was focused on the daily struggles rather than race struggles.

Hurston, in her holographs and in her typed manuscript never fully admits her stance on race struggles. Even in the excised portions of “The Pet Negro System,” Hurston never settles the question:

Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Who am I to pass judgment? I am not defending the system, beloved, but trying to explain it. The low-down fact is that it weaves a kind of basic fabric that tends to stabilize relations and give something to work from in adjustments. It works to prevent hasty explosions. There are some people in every community who can always talk things over... And that, too, is part of the illogical, indefensible but somehow useful “pet system.” (“The Pet Negro System” 919)

Hurston does not defend the system, but merely includes both her friends and patrons in gratitude and guilt. The unpublished extracts of “The Pet Negro System” clarify

Hurston’s belief that friendship conquers racial concerns:

The truth is, that all men, negroes as well, lean closer to friends than they do to races. You can and do make friend[s] with people who do not look a bit like your own folks. If you never make a friend outside of your own race, it is because sufficient contact is lacking. You find, to your later astonishment, that it is very easy to forgive people for looking different

from you, if you get close enough to them to see beneath the surface.
(BRL 1030524)

With Hurston, it is difficult to “get close enough to see beneath the surface,” but these added extracts indicate the deeper revelation that all “lean closer to friends” (BRL 1030524).

Contemporary reception of the work continued to embrace the ideology that Hurston was a self-made woman whose fighting spirit led her to her success. One reviewer in the *Saturday Post* wrote:

Here is a thumping story, though it has none of the horrid earmarks for the Alger-type climb...Its emphasis lies on her fightin’ spirit in the struggle to achieve the education she felt she had to have. The uses to which it was put—to good uses too—were the fruit of things that cropped up spontaneously, demanding to be done. (Sherman 13)

Sherman’s understanding of Hurston, emphasizing her “fightin’ spirit,” misses the fundamental ideology in her autobiography and “What White Publishers Won’t Print” and “The ‘Pet’ Negro System” that her success was dependent on her patrons. Even if Hurston paints herself as an exceptional child, who learns to “jump at de sun,”⁵ her success throughout her life was dependent on her patrons. She recognized the value of friendship and the necessity of it to succeed. The overt references to her patrons point out Hurston’s recognition of the patronage system. She does not rage against her patrons, but rather she points out repeatedly how this arrangement benefits both parties. By recognizing that she is not the “exceptional,” but rather she is one of many exceptions demonstrates that Hurston understands her own success is dependent on others’ help.

⁵ Hurston’s mother told her children to “jump at de sun” to achieve success. This phrase throughout Hurston’s works and her ideology has been explored thoroughly in Eric J. Sundquist’s book, *Jump at de Sun*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Arvey Meserve as “Pet” in *Seraph on the Suwannee*

Mary Helen Washington succinctly called *Seraph on the Suwannee* Zora Neale Hurston’s “worst novel” (21). Washington suggested that the novel was terrible because Hurston lost all of her folklore creativity by writing about white people: “It was as though, in abandoning the source of her unique esthetic---the black cultural tradition--- she also submerged her power and creativity” (21). Noting this departure from black cultural tradition, Hazel V. Carby explains in her afterward that Hurston wanted to prove that she could write about white people, and she was actively trying to emphasize the “cultural influence” of black culture on white culture (14-16). Another reason that Hurston wrote this novel, as Elizabeth Binggeli points out, was that she was actively seeking a film deal (1). While there were certainly outside factors and pressures on Hurston for writing this novel, it is notably quite the departure from the expected constraints of “What White Publishers Won’t Print.”

In “What White Publisher’s Won’t Print” Hurston explains that readers are not interested in a romance uncomplicated by the race struggle. Hurston bypasses this stipulation by making her characters white, and thus, she avoids dealing overtly with racial discrimination. However, despite the characters’ whiteness, the novel focuses heavily on the exploitation of many characters. Specifically, the “Pet” Negro system is prevalent throughout the novel, but not just in the white characters’ patronage of their pets. Instead, Hurston crafts a marital relationship that mirrors the pet system. The main

character's marriage demonstrates the pet system's coziness and also deeply ingrained "mutual dependencies" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 915).

Susan Meisenhelder references the pet system in her analysis of Arvey's character. Meisenhelder argues effectively that Hurston demonstrates throughout the novel "a white world whose exploitative hierarchies deny full humanity to all people— male and female, black and white" (115). Meisenhelder briefly touches on the exploitative hierarchy of the "pet" Negro system when she explains Arvey's relationship:

Despite her wealth and seemingly ideal life, Arvey's existence as "seraph" [...] is one of the emptiest Hurston has portrayed. Just as being Jim's "pet Negro" (61) does not fundamentally alter Joe's servitude, Arvey's status as pampered "pet angel" only thinly masks her degradation...It takes the whole novel for Jim to "help" Arvey adjust to this view of marriage, but by the end she embraces her role as sexless seraph and nurturing mother. (96)

Meisenhelder recognizes that Arvey's status as Jim's "pet angel" aligns her with Jim's "pet" Joe. However, Meisenhelder does not elaborate on this connection, but rather she focuses on Arvey's eventual acceptance as wholly subservient to Jim. Meisenhelder's view that Arvey surrenders at the end as a "sexless seraph and nurturing mother" differs from the scholars who see Arvey as eventually transforming herself into an assertive wife. For instance, Pearlie May Fisher Peters argues that Arvey "is verbally transformed into an assertive wife who no longer clings to her smalltown Cracker mentality as refuge from the reality of marital life" (29). Peters suggests that her ability to communicate with her husband allows her to become a wife with power. Janet St. Clair focuses on Arvey's character development and suggests that she wields power through submission to Jim (39). Similarly, Ann du Cille states that Arvey is performing an entire act to present herself as a marriageable partner to Jim in the final scene. Arvey willingly transforms

into a southern belle because she recognizes the farce of love that characterizes society. Du Cille argues Arvay represents the true heroine because she recognizes this situation, and participates in the patriarchal society as if she is pretending (142). Arvay's transformation "into an assertive wife" through verbal assertiveness, however, occurs only when she is acting as Jim Meserve's pet. Despite Arvay's eventual reconciliation and partnership with her husband, she remains powerless outside of Jim's domain. Her choice to return to Jim reflects her inability to rise above a pet because of Jim's expectations. Even if the system relies on "mutual dependency," Arvay's place as pet cannot be changed.

Scholar Delia Caparosa Konzett examines the overt references to the "Pet" Negro system in the novel, but she does not make any claims about Arvay's role as pet. Based on Konzett's analysis, she rejects the assertion that Hurston panders to the white nation, arguing: "Far from being simply an attempt to win a white mainstream audience or to serve as a spokesperson for universalist and assimilationist discourse, *Seraph* offers a compelling analysis of Southern race relations and whiteness that reveals the contradictions at the core of racial identity" (143). Konzett analyzes Hurston's use of pets throughout the novel and emphasizes Hurston's demonstration of the "cozy" system. Later scholarship argued that the "cozy" system was a subversive critique of the white patriarchal society contending that Arvay's situation as a brutalized victim of her husband, Jim, represented a white society that Hurston critiques without the readers recognizing the joke. In fact, John C. Charles in his article, "Talk about the South: Unspeakable Things Unspoken in Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," contends that Hurston rages against the white people in her text but does so without ever

voicing her true concerns (31). Some scholars even argue that rather than showing contradictions, *Seraph* actually is “a satirical portrayal of the moral bankruptcy present in working class white society” (Comprone 159). Both Comprone and Charles ascribe a certain amount of underlying anger to Hurston that is not on the surface of the text. With a psychoanalytical approach to the underlying text, Claudia Tate argues that Hurston’s conflation of race, making the white crackers speak with black idioms, makes these white characters essentially black (151). Tate argues that because the characters are racially hybrid, then they should be considered black. However, these characters are white, and thus, Hurston “insinuates their own internal contradictions” (170). Tate argues that Hurston conflates these two races in order to complicate the ideas of race throughout the text.

Hurston further conflates the two races by applying the pet system to include a white couple. First, the “pet” Negro system can apply to white characters because Hurston continually plays with the idea of race and asserts minorities are “internally...just like everybody else” (“What White Publishers Won’t Print” 952). Furthermore, Cynthia Ward analyzes the use of the vernacular in *Seraph* and contends that the “cracker whites” become the “vernacular other” (79). If the cracker whites are the “other,” then they can function as the “pets” to the patrons. Secondly, Hurston describes herself as both a pet and having pets, which crosses both racial and gender roles.

While Hurston participates as a patron at times, Arvay is always the pet, and she actively works to maintain her status as Jim’s pet, which makes her a complicit part of the patronage system. This inclusion of Arvay as a pet emphasizes that the pet system is

not just an unfair system of patronage in the relationship of the races in the South, but rather a necessity in which characters all play their part. Furthermore, this portrayal of Arvay allows for Hurston to critique and to examine the system without raging against the white patriarchy. The system is unfair; Arvay is constantly in service to Jim.

However, Arvay is not an “exceptional” woman rising above her class status; rather she is participating in this system as her only option. By destabilizing the exceptional, Hurston can critique a system that needs to rely on patronage while still accepting the useful attributes.

Hurston chose to model this system with Arvay as a white woman for two reasons. First, in her 1950 essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print,” Hurston critiques the publishers who refuse to publish works about the simple daily lives of African Americans. She writes “Everyone is already resigned to the ‘exceptional’ Negro, and willing to be entertained by the ‘quaint.’ To grasp the penetration of western civilization in a minority, it is necessary to know how the average behaves and lives” (173). By making Arvay a white woman, Hurston can write a novel that focuses exclusively on one average woman’s family without a tragic ending. Arvay starts the novel as a white cracker who is typically left out of the pet system. As she accepts her role in Jim’s life, she more fully accepts her role as pet.

Secondly, she demonstrates that this “pet” Negro system actually works. Arvay’s happiness at the end of the text reflects her complicit understanding of her role as pet. Readers can sympathize with Arvay’s return to her husband, which proves Hurston’s theory that this system is “mighty cosy.” Arvay is not rising in status or gaining power, and Hurston is not raging against whites, merely finding a way to write about daily life

and the inadequate power relationships that people accept. Claudia Tate notes as well that Hurston had tried to write a book about middle-class African Americans, but her publishers had refused to publish it.

Using the “pet” Negro framework to understand Arvay provides readers with an opportunity to understand how and why Arvay ultimately chooses ‘to serve’ Jim. Advocating that Arvay willingly returns to submission is incendiary. However, Hurston never shies from the inflammatory text. Instead, the “pet Negro” system acknowledges that readers will find her explanation of the system infuriating, but Hurston merely exclaims: “Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Who am I to pass judgment? I am not defending the system, beloved, but trying to explain it” (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 919). While it is hard to believe that Hurston truly has no opinion on the matter, she does seek to examine the complexities of southern race relations. One way for her to examine these complexities is through using the “pet” Negro system as a framework for gender relations as well. Other scholars, such as Konzett, have examined the multiple pet relationships throughout the text, but have never examined Arvay’s position as pet.

Understanding that Arvay never transforms from pet, yet happily chooses a relationship in which she is wholly subject to Jim, does not indicate that Arvay’s entire life is a critique of this system. In fact, Arvay’s final position keeps her as a satisfied “pet.” Hurston recognizes that this system is not attractive but that it suits Arvay well. Hurston writes: “Now, my beloved, before you explode in fury you might look to see if you merely know your phrases. It happens that there are more angles to this race-adjustment business than are ever pointed out to the public, white, black or in-between” (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 914). The complexity of Arvay’s situation as a pet wife who

eventually lives quite comfortably reflects Hurston's acknowledgement that more angles exist than people can ever truly see. Hurston notes the unpopularity of admitting that such a system has its benefits, but also she recognizes that black folks enjoy these benefits: "It isn't half as pretty as the ideal adjustment of theorizers, but it's a lot more real and durable, and a lot of black folks, I'm afraid, find it mighty cosy" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 915).

To understand Arvay's role as "pet," it is important to align her position within the text with Hurston's "pets" in the "pet" Negro system. One of the first standards that Hurston delineates in her essay is that the pet negro "is someone whom a particular white person or persons wants to have and to do all the things forbidden to other Negroes" ("The Pet Negro System" 915). From the first moment that Jim comes to the cracker teppentime town of Sawley, he designates Arvay as his woman and pet. Jim comes from outside of the community and maintains his status as an aristocratic white man despite his lack of money. He understands and operates within this system of patriarchy and decides to lift Arvay from the society in which she currently lives. He decides that she is somehow different than the white crackers and tells everyone to their dismay: "She just suited him...and was worth the trouble of breaking in" (*Seraph on the Suwanee* 8). Jim sees the process of breaking Arvay in as a necessary step in making her his pet, and also notes that there is something indescribably different about her when he states: "You have made me see into something that I don't reckon you understand yourself" (17). He sees that Arvay is different from everyone else. This notion that she is somehow different from all others reflects Hurston's notion that within the pet system the patron always maintains that his pet or "his John is different" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 915). Arvay

as Jim's pet is somehow different from all the others, and he decides to pull her out from this situation, but he does not extend this elevation to anyone else within the white society of Sawley.

Similarly, the patrons of the 'pet' system do not believe in promoting the Negroes as a whole, only their pet. In fact, Hurston describes their feelings as, "If all the Negroes were like them he wouldn't mind what advancement they made" (916). But, that is not the case for anyone else. Jim, according to Arvay later in the text, argues, "folks are the slums instead of the places they live in...Place some folks in what is called slums and they'll soon make things look like a mansion. Place a slum in a mansion and he'll soon have it looking just as bad as he do" (*Seraph on the Suwanee* 304-305). To Jim, Arvay is the exception to the white crackers, much like "John" is always the exception to the other Negroes. Later in the text he asserts that he always recognized Arvay was "due a much higher place" (263). He rescues her from the 'slums' of her location and places her on a higher pedestal in connection with him. According to Jim, the patron, Arvay deserves to be higher class. In the patron's mind, their pet is always due a higher place than where they come from. In reality, according to the other patrons, the pet remains from their same class. In an unpublished excerpt from "The Pet Negro System" Hurston expounds that each patron places their pet over another especially in relation to pets from other towns (BRL 1030521). Thus, even though Arvay may have been considered a "white cracker" to Jim, she was always greater than that.

One of the most important characteristics within this system is that the patron must be from the upper white class. Jim maintains this status from his family

background, and Hurston also highlights his class by associating him with Bradford Cary from the beginning of the novel:

Her vanity put on a little flesh, and she began to say a word or two herself to people. And besides, right in front of all those jealous girls, Jim was treating her like she was some precious play-pretty that might break in two. Bradford Cary III's wife could not have been handled more up to time than she was being handled. She was being helped over every little stick and root, and he fended so that she was not bumped into and jostled around. (20)

Jim models Cary's behavior with his wife as he participates in the same system. Notably, the example patron that Hurston uses in her essay is also named Cary, and "Colonel Cary swings a lot of weight in his community" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 915). Jim's association with Cary places him in the patron part, and from the very beginning Arvay notes this connection. She enjoys this attention and allows her vanity to revel in this moment. Although part of this vanity is surely a reflection that Arvay wishes to be above the other women in the text, namely her sister who has always been favored above her, Arvay's recognition that Jim treats her like Cary treats his wife demonstrates understanding of the situation. Scholars tend to note Arvay's dumbness and inability to participate within the 'pet' system as Jim's wife until much later in the text.⁶ From the beginning, however, Arvay enjoys this association. This enjoyment also reflects the notion that Hurston insists that Negroes are actively participating in this system in order to be associated with the quality white folks. This system is not wholly delineated by the patrons, but rather: "It works both ways. Class-consciousness of Negroes is an angle to be reckoned with in the South. They love to be associated with 'the quality'" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 916).

⁶ Pearlle Mae Fishers argues that Arvay finally transforms into a verbally assertive wife (142). Ann duCille argues that Arvay is able to participate in the system because she has finally learned to play the part of a southern woman (32).

Arvay's recognition and participation within the 'pet' system is demonstrated by her interactions with Jim's pet, Joe. Jim provides for Joe and advances Joe's situation throughout the text, and scholar Konzett focuses on this relationship in her analysis of the 'pet' system. Contrary to the notion that Arvay gradually becomes complicit in this relationship and this adds to her transformation, Arvay actively understands and participates within this system as soon as she is introduced to Joe. Hurston writes, "Arvay sympathized and understood. Every southern white man has his pet Negro" (61). As soon as Arvay marries Jim, "She came to be very fond of Dessie, and Joe was her husband's man" (61). Arvay understands the pet relationship, but never embraces it as a patron. She does not indicate that Dessie is her woman, and Arvay is never able to place anyone as her pet within the text. Thus, Arvay's alleged transformation is not her recognition of race relations and her assumed ability to master others, but she does comply with the system. This complicity is noted early in the text when she actually asks Jim "Couldn't we go and take Joe and Dessie with us?" (64), when she longs to leave the town of Sawley and the oppressive nature of her sister, Lorraine. From the beginning, Arvay participates in this system, but not as a patron. Her issues with Jim's pets stem from jealousy rather than a lack of understanding. The complication of Arvay's relationship with the pet Negroes in the text is not due to her inability to understand white relations as Laura Dubek suggests, but rather that Arvay is operating on the same level or placement as the pets within the novel. Dubek argues that Arvay has an extremely "limited vision" due to her upbringing, which is why she always argues with Jim's treatment of others (2). She does not understand why Jim allows his workers to take extra scrap lumber. Arvay's arguing with Jim, however, is not necessarily because of her

limited understanding that Jim depends on his workers. Arvay fully understands the connections that Jim has with Joe and Dessie, as demonstrated by her asking to take the couple with them, but she consistently still feels threatened by the pets in the novel.

Other scholars have noted that Arvay's transformation is not a change in identity, but rather a change in class. Scholar Adrienne Akins suggests Arvay's transformation in the novel is through a rise in her socio-economic standing as Jim molds Arvay into his desired wife (31). Similarly, Brannon Costello argues that Arvay's transformation aids Hurston in offering "a sharp critique of the ways in which racial performances authorize an aristocratic class identity" (37). Costello uses the framework of the "pet" Negro system to explain that Arvay gradually participates within this system and becomes 'noblefied' just like Jim (34). The transformation of Arvay from white Cracker to plantation noble who actively patronizes the pets, however, has two significant problems. First, from the beginning, Arvay actively participates in the "pet" Negro system; thus, her transformation is not indicated by her willingness to embrace this system. Secondly, Arvay, regardless of her white heritage, maintains the position of pet throughout the text. Thus, Hurston complicates the situation by placing a white woman as the pet negro throughout the text, both exposing the nature of the relationship while avoiding an overt critique. Ultimately, Arvay gains status and love through this system, but never achieves a position above a pet.

In Arvay's relationship with Jim, she consistently feels, places, or positions herself in the same relationship as the pets. Konzett, in her analysis of the changing race relations, believes that Joe's progeny represent the changing status of the "pet" system. Konzett contends, "In the character of Jeff and his difference to his father, Hurston

depicts the ongoing transformations in the Southern racial hierarchy and suggests the real possibility of the pet system becoming, like the Old South, an anachronism” (142). Joe’s son, Jeff, however, is only different in relation to Arvay, and those differences occur because Arvay does not see herself as above a pet. On the other hand, Kenny, Jim’s son, treats Belinda, Joe’s daughter, as his pet. This second generation mirrors its parent’s relationship. In one particular instance, Kenny exploits Belinda’s headstand capabilities and enrages his mother because Belinda was not wearing panties. While Kenny’s mistake in showing off Belinda is completely unintentional, he embarrasses Arvay’s sense of propriety. When Arvay tells Jim about it, he laughs it off, but Arvay becomes upset that Jim is not concerned about the incident. Arvay assumes that Jim allows this impropriety simply because he wants to remain loyal to Joe. Jim insists, “This baby-wife I got can’t stand for her husband to think well of anybody but her...Look, Little-Bits, I think as much of you as God does of Gabriel, and you know that’s His pet angel. But...But Joe is my helper” (113). Jim then contends that his relationship with Joe is of a different nature than that between himself and his wife. However, Arvay cannot understand the different relationship, not because she does not understand the system, but because Jim treats her like a “pet,” which is the term that Jim uses to describe their relationship. Jim elevates Arvay to the status of angel to console or dismantle her jealousy, but she is the “pet” angel, the “pet” that is loved and caressed more than anyone else. Arvay remains jealous of the other pets in Jim’s life.

Arvay revels in her apparent successful elevation when Jim assures her that she is above Joe. She thinks “As much as Jim thought of Joe, she had more power over her husband than Joe had” (113). Arvay’s overarching concern is that she will not be

respected enough by her husband. While Jim may not be equating Arvay with his pet Joe intentionally or in his mind, Arvay definitely equates herself with the “pets.” Her equation is not a result of her inability to see things as Jim would like, however, and her ultimate return to Jim is not a recognition that she is not a “pet”; rather, Arvay becomes more conditioned as a ‘pet’ and functions well in this relationship.

While Arvay is satisfied with Jim’s statement that she is worth more than Joe, she does not rise in status. She admits that she feels ‘reconciled’ to the situation and feels what it’s like to be “Jim Meserve’s wife,” but she does not achieve any power. She claims Belinda as her daughter and pleases Jim with this statement. While this scene demonstrates Arvay’s becoming like Jim and gaining status, she still is not reconciled to her relationship with Joe. Moreover, later she finds out about a distillery that Jim runs with Joe. Even though she is mortified by Jim’s actions, she “was still too unsure of herself to lay down any ultimatums to her husband so she took it out on Joe” (116). Arvay decides her only option to deal with Jim is to fight with Joe. Arvay is not personally fighting Joe because she does not understand race relations, but she sees her only viable option for power is to have Jim remove Joe from their life. Still, Arvay ultimately is not responsible for this decision. Because she remains in the pet status, she does not exert power over Joe. Her snarky remarks to Joe merely provide an excuse for Joe to leave his home on the grove (117). She wishes that she could have him back on the place, but she feels that she is incapable. Hurston writes “Jim could do a thing like that” (118). Arvay is not in Jim’s position and cannot remove or reinstate “pets” in their life.

Moreover, Arvay's relationship with Joe is complicated because Joe was the instigator of Jim's rape of her. When Jim worries that Arvay seems distant to him, Joe tells him: "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 they mouth and ride 'em hard and stop 'em short. They's all alike, Boss. Take 'em and break 'em" (46). He gave Jim the advice that he must break in Arvay, and Jim responds by raping and whisking Arvay away. Even though Joe was Jim's pet, he was able to give advice regarding Arvay. While Joe's advice to Jim indicates a larger connection of how Joe and Jim both viewed women as their mules, it also indicates Joe's ability to give advice in matters concerning Arvay. Jim respects Joe's advice, and subjects Arvay to it. Thus, Jim places great importance in his relationship with Joe and even listens to him in how to control Arvay. Joe in some sense, has control over Arvay, or at least the potential to control her. Thus, Arvay occupies a role second to Joe.

When Joe and Dessie move out of their house, Jim moves the Corregio family into the open home on their land. Arvay is immediately distrustful of the Corregio family. The family occupies the role of 'pet' in Jim's life, and Arvay is once again jealous. However, this family demonstrates the fluidity of the role of 'pet.' The Corregios are white according to Jim, although Arvay still views them as foreign due to the husband's Portuguese blood. More importantly, though, Arvay feels threatened by the women in the family. The wife constantly cooks for Jim, and Arvay feels supplanted in her role. Also, the daughter, Felicia, receives clothing and a football ticket to go with Kenny. Jim's gifts to Felicia make Arvay feel left out, but also the gifts show that Arvay's role as "pet" is threatened by this family. This family does not fit in the

traditional role of “pet” Negro, but their inclusion in this system highlights the role of “pet” as both fluid and extending to women and whites.

When Jim abandons Arvay, it is because he sees her as unable to protect him. She fails in her ability to protect him from a large snake. Jim wants to impress Arvay, which is similar to the pet system when Hurston comments that the pets want their patrons to be on their pedestal. Jim tries to occupy this position of power and feels he consistently needs to seek Arvay’s approval. Arvay sees the snake begin to attack Jim, but she is too paralyzed to react and save Jim. Jeff, Joe’s son, occupies Joe’s former role as pet. Jeff immediately saves Jim from impending death. He steps in to fulfill the role that Arvay could not fulfill because she was paralyzed by fear. While this episode is an indication that Arvay was too fearful to know how to act, it is also important to recognize the connection between Jeff and Arvay. Jim wants Arvay to save him, but Jeff must occupy that position because Arvay fails. Arvay does not fail to save Jim because she does not recognize that it is her duty to help him, but rather because she is too scared. Jeff’s reaction to Arvay also clearly signifies that he sees her as the same position in the family. When Arvay eventually tries to run to Jim to help him, she feels incapable of going to her husband because “Jeff gave her a look that halted her where she was. The look forbade her to approach the person of Jim Meserve. It called her unworthy of such an honor and pleasure and privilege by reason of cowardice and treason and trashiness. The look held. Jeff wanted her to know that she had been judged” (256). Jeff judges Arvay because he sees her in the same role. Also, Jeff continues the pet tradition in wanting to place his patron above everyone else. Similarly, Arvay believes that Jeff judges her for trashiness. She cannot occupy even the pet role because she is unworthy. In one sense, Arvay’s

trashiness may be a result of her poor white trash status from her childhood, but also she never achieves the role of patron even if she is rising in class. Her rise in class is solely connected with her position as pet.

Moreover, Jeff never treats Arvay as his patron. Because he sees her as on the same level as himself, he believes that he does not have to treat her with respect. Arvay's utter abandonment from Jim leaves her feeling powerless and without any help. Hurston writes of Arvay's disappointment:

Arvay felt now that she had this vanity stripped from among the nourishments of her life. Her living children were on their own. She had no control over either now. She could neither confer nor deny. Jim had made himself absent so that no act of hers did anything to his days. The day of his departure, he had moved Jeff and his wife, Janie, on the place to look after things, but Jeff let no opportunity pass to have it understood that he was working for *Mister* Meserve and taking orders only from him.
(269)

Despite the eventual reconciliation between Jeff and Arvay, it only occurs by Arvay becoming exactly as Jim wanted her to be. She still does not rise above Jeff because all of their interactions are determined either by Jim's orders or by white male patronage determining her course.

The only power Arvay gains is by remaining within the pet system. When Jim leaves Arvay, she is left lonely and idle in her home, until she finds out her mother is sick. When Arvay returns home, scholar Janet St. Clair establishes this time as the moment when she changes and finally knows what to do (53). A major factor that tends to be overlooked, however, is the help that Arvay receives. Because of her status as Jim's wife, Bradford Cary, the rich white man of the town, decides to take care of her. Arvay comments, "Bradford Cary, who had never noticed her when she was growing up, now chose to be her friend" (297). Arvay recognizes that her rise in class is associated

with her husband when she thinks, “What put her ahead of Lorraine and the other girls who had come along with her? Seemed like it was Jim Meserve” (298). Cary, like Jim, keeps Arvay relegated to the role of pet. In fact, the first time that Cary sees Arvay he commands her “Now, do just as I tell you, and everything will be all right” (287). In part, Arvay acts as the white woman who must be taken care of and patronized in order for Bradford Cary to be the man wielding all the power.

Once Bradford Cary decides to provide help for Arvay, everything Arvay wants is provided and controlled by Banker Cary. She does not do anything for herself. Cary immediately whisks her away to a nice hotel and tells the manager to take care of her. She has absolutely no responsibility in burying her mother. Every time Arvay encounters a problem, the immediate response is to “turn the matter over to banker Cary and let him handle things” (291). When Arvay stays at the hotel, Carl, her brother-in-law, goes to see her, but she does not receive him in her room because the manager warns her that he might be dangerous. The manager specifically notes that he does not want anything to happen to her because she is under the protection of Cary. Cary’s protection provides security to her in every single area, because Arvay is incapable of protecting or providing for herself in any area. When Carl attempts to sue her, the manager reminds her that she has nothing to worry about because of Cary. When Arvay dismisses Carl’s complaint by telling him how to nurse his ‘backside,’ Carl becomes highly offended, and every one of the hotel workers laughs hysterically. Even though Arvay is triumphant in this situation, she is unaware that she has embarrassed and triumphed over Carl. The narrator states “it was plain that Arvay did not know that it was funny” (293). Arvay cannot knowingly participate in the games or patronizing of Carl. Arvay never achieves the status of

understanding or wielding power, so it is implausible to assume that she fully rises in class. She remains on the threshold of class rising because she is the pet. Also, during this scene, “the manager stood like a victorious champion of protection until Carl was good and gone, then comforted Arvay” (293). She consistently needs a champion or protector within the text and not simply because she is a woman, but rather because she is incapable of rising above the status of a pet. It is plausible to believe that Arvay could rise above the status of a pet through Jim’s mentoring, and even Jim desires Arvay to rise to his level; however, Hurston is writing a story that exemplifies this system.

In the “pet” Negro system, the pets never truly become the master. In the unpublished manuscript of “The ‘Pet’ Negro System,” Hurston writes about a group of ladies discussing their maids. Even though the maids may get to heaven, they believe that they are still outside of the home. Thus, Hurston recognizes how deeply entrenched this system is in the minds of the southerners, so for Arvay, she is too deeply entrenched in this role of pet, as well. While Arvay may become like Jim in class, her mindset is that of a pet in order to demonstrate this system. Hurston knew the limitations of her white publishers, but she still wanted to write about a system that both confounds and succeeds in the South.

When the manager comforts Arvay, he explains to her that Carl has been spreading rumors around Sawley that he believed that if he had married Arvay he would have been successful. Arvay is astonished by this revelation. While Arvay had previously loved Carl, she recognizes that she would not have been able to change his outcome. She finds his assertion that she could change him as preposterous; the narrator writes: “Arvay fell on her face across the bed and laughed hysterically. It was too funny.

Weak as she was, Carl believing that she could prop him up” (295). Arvay is absolutely shocked at this assumption, because she recognizes her lack of empowerment and that rich, white males protect her.

Moreover, in the text, Arvay attributes her change to her mother’s funeral, but Arvay was not responsible for this event. After the funeral and the decision to burn her old home, Arvay thinks, “One thing she did know, however. She came away from her mother’s funeral changed inside” (298). The alleged triumph that Arvay gains at the end of the novel is due to her honoring her mother’s dying plea to bury her well. The source of her new found power does not come from her ability to make decisions but rather from Bradford Cary. He is responsible for making “a big thing of putting Maria Henson away” (296). Cary receives the credit, not Arvay. Furthermore, he is the cause of Arvay’s change.

Cary’s patronage to Arvay further typifies the patriarchal system because of the reciprocal nature of the act. Arvay is not aware that Cary’s main purpose for assisting her is to gain a reputation that will help him run for governor. Eventually he wins, and Arvay comments, “When he won, she looked upon it as a personal triumph” (298). Arvay is complicit in Cary’s success which mirrors the “pet” Negro system. From the beginning of his relationship with Arvay, he decides to “cultivate” a relationship with Maria Henson to further his campaign. His manipulation of Arvay does not bother her or her mother, but benefits her. Arvay recognizes that his help is responsible for her success and she feels comfortable with this notion, which echoes Hurston’s assertion that people find the “pet” Negro system “mighty cosy” (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 915).

Arvay's change arises from her recognition of Cary's help. Then, she decides to burn the house partially to keep Lorraine and Carl from getting the house and to rid herself of her youthful insecurities. This change in Arvay only allows her to more fully participate in the pet system. Previously, she had wanted to create a pet system with Carl and Lorraine, even wanting them to occupy Joe's former home. Carl and Lorraine reject Arvay's attempts to become their patron, and Arvay is unable to have any agency in that relationship. Moreover, her mother specifically does not want Carl and Lorraine to get her house, and Arvay does burn the home to prevent this from happening. She is unable, however, to protect the household items that she cherished. Interestingly, the idea to burn her home stems from Carl and Lorraine's initial idea to burn the trees in the yard. Arvay sees the piles of trash around the trees, and merely decides to burn the home rather than the trees. Moreover, despite Arvay's original assertion that the funeral changed her, moments later she feels defeated: "In deep anguish, Arvay moved about, stumbling through the brittle dead weeds of the past summer, and suffering without words and without tears. Her soul was sunk in defeat. Her sense of accomplishment was gone. Both she and her dead mother had been robbed and defeated. All that fine funeral was in vain" (302). Arvay's utter disconsolation forces her to burn her former home. In her hometown, her only success is wholly dependent on Bradford Cary.

As an act to purge herself from her old life, she burns her home, and donates the land for a park. She speaks of giving her house over to Brad: "believe I'll turn it over to Brad and them for what they want to do for a park" (310). She recognizes this reciprocal nature just as she does later with his election. She states: "Brad has been noble with me as a friend, and then putting poor Mama away like he did. So I aim to give this place to

help out what he's trying to do" (310). Even in her act of defiance, the ultimate outcome depends on Bradford Cary. Christopher Reiger sees this decision by Arvay as an act to cultivate the land and characterizes *Seraph* as a working pastoral (121). While Arvay does intend to create a park, it is important to note she decides to follow Bradford Cary's suggestion. Her agency is wholly limited to his demands. Despite her attempts to become a patron, she does not reach that status. Her influence as the white benefactor is always only connected with the man she is following. For instance, when Arvay broaches the topic of her burnt lot to her neighbor, Miss Hessie hints "I can't help from wishing, though, that my grand-boy here was old enough to buy it in and handle it" (309). Miss Hessie, who has just flattered Arvay by insisting that she had always been different than her family's poor ways, hints that perhaps Arvay could help her son to succeed in the world. Miss Hessie participates in this system by cooking and taking care of Arvay from the beginning, but Arvay dismisses this hint because she is still unable to think for herself. The benefits Arvay bestows are not her own idea.

Similarly, when Arvay returns to her home in Citrabelle, she bestows gifts on Jeff and his wife. She does this only in imitation of Jim; she does not fully represent a changed woman. While scholars usually tend to view this as an act to participate in the patronage system,⁷ the scenes with Jeff and Janie underscore Arvay's relationship with them as equals. First, she travels to their house in the backyard and "came to the steps and stood there looking up at them and smiling like a child" (311). Arvay must go to their place of residence and looks up to them since they hold her in contempt. Her ability

⁷ Cynthia Ward argues that Arvay's use of language becomes like Jim's, which indicates Arvay's embracement of a system that exploits others (83). Adrienne Akins also indicates that Arvay becomes like Jim when she gives presents to Jeff and Janie, which indicates Arvay accepts her rise in social class (36).

to reconcile with them brings her to their level. She smiles like a child because she recognizes that she cannot in any way place herself above them. Her relationship with them is as equals. Even with this reconciliation, Arvay does not achieve power over Jeff and Janie. When they thank her for their gifts they tell her “you felt for us and remembered us. Made us feel like we amount to something with you. We feel proud and glad to work around you” (312). They are pleased to be remembered and treated special by her. They do not gain their sense of worth or well-being from her; rather, they are glad to ‘work around’ her, not for her. This specification is also apparent when Arvay decides to go and see Jim. Jeff refuses to let her take the train because he is essentially still working under the orders of Jim. While Jeff and Janie are glad and accommodating to Arvay, it is a partnership rather than a patronage.

When Arvay returns to Jim, she wants to reconcile with him, but she is unable to demand anything of Jim. Earlier, the narrator comments that Arvay “was still too unsure of herself to put down any ultimatums on Jim” (116). Arvay’s reconciliation with Jim is a result of her transforming into exactly what he wanted. Jim delivers an ultimatum that she must return to him before a year is over in order to ‘win’ him back. Once Arvay tells Jeff she wants to see Jim, Jeff whisks her away. While with Jim, her attempts to win him back are orchestrated exactly as he wants. Du Cille states that Arvay is playing a game and actively participating in this farce, but Arvay’s behavior towards Jim is so timid that it is difficult to believe that she merely acts in playing a ritual. Instead, Arvay seems to recognize that she is there to show Jim that she is capable of being his helper.

After sufficiently stroking his pride, while on Jim’s boat, Arvay addresses Jim and the men asking, “Could I give you all any help in any way?” (339). Arvay finally

recognizes that her duty towards Jim is to help and to serve him always. While on the boat, she offers to help cook. Not only does Jim equate her with Cup-Cake, who is a mere worker, but also Arvay is terrified that Jim will not let her help him. Scholar Chuck Jackson contends that Arvay's relationship at the end of the novel signifies her embracing 'universal motherhood' (15). Indeed, she does take care of the men on the ship, but this is the only way that she sees she can relate to Jim. While Arvay does become like a 'mother' on the ship, it is still a role dominated by her need to serve Jim. She sees herself as only being able to connect with Jim through her service to him. While she may take on mothering aspects, such as holding him to her breast like a child, the dominant ideology is still one of service.

When Jim wants to show Arvay the sunrise in an early morning storm, one of the sailors clings to his leg preventing him from successfully mastering the boat. Arvay, without hesitation, responds as "she flung the door open, leaped upon the Mate and grabbed him by his hair to pull him away from Jim's leg" (329). This episode parallels the scene in which the snake was wrapped around Jim's body. Arvay successfully manages to tear the man away when she had failed to do that with the snake. This scene merely places her in the same position as Jeff. She finally accepts her position as pet. When Arvay fails to save Jim from the snake, Jim is devastated by Arvay's inability to act. Jeff must save Jim; in this similar scene, Arvay is capable of recognizing the situation and saving Jim. While this appears to be Arvay recognizing and responding to a situation, it still has her acting as Jim's 'pet' much like Jeff.

Afterwards, Arvay tries to command Jim to stay with her. But, she cannot make him do anything she wants; instead, in this scene, Jim still maintains the power. When

Arvey calls for Jim to come be with her inside the ship, she states, “You can’t go below” she stumbled out. “You got to...” (346). But, Jim cuts Arvey off and tells her not to give him orders. Eventually, Arvey recognizes “all these years and time, Jim had been feeling his way towards her and grasping at her as she had been towards him. This was a wonderful and powerful thing to know, but she must not let him know what she had perceived” (349). But she knows that she must remain wholly subservient to Jim in order for the relationship to maintain stability. The peace that she gains in the end derives from her realization: “She was serving and meant to serve” (353). While Arvey finally recognizes that Jim loves her and this love gives her some power, this power has to be carefully hidden so that she can maintain her relationship with Jim where she is serving him.

Scholars of *Seraph* see the ending of the novel as Arvey’s choice to go back to a dominating husband as subservient wife and mother.⁸ Arvey’s return, however, is due to her inability to leave the “pet” Negro system. Arvey is dependent on Jim and can never leave the relationship. Hurston uses this relationship to examine the complexity of the “pet” system. While she acknowledges the flaws, she also recognizes the durability of the system. Arvey returns to Jim accepting her role as ‘pet.’ The contentedness that Arvey feels in the end is not a subversive critique of patriarchy, but rather an acknowledgement that the system is “mighty cosy.” Hurston does not advocate the ‘pet’ Negro system as an acceptable system, but she does recognize the many facets of the

⁸Chuck Jackson argues Arvey embraces “universal motherhood.” Meisenhelder contends Arvey becomes a “sexless seraph and nurturing mother” (96). Deborah Plant argues that it is Arvey’s choice because she can fully embrace happiness (130). Janet St. Clair also contends that it is Arvey’s choice to return to, and she is “affirming her own identity” to return to a happy marriage (55). Claudia Tate also writes that Arvey “assumes the role of omnipotent mother” (156).

system that make it appealing. Ultimately, Hurston states: “The thing doesn’t make sense. It just makes beauty” (“The ‘Pet’ Negro System” 921). Although Arvay’s relationship with Jim models an imperfect system, their love still makes beauty.

Hurston knew that the general public was uninterested in a “love story uncomplicated by the race struggle” (“What White Publishers Won’t Print” 953). Hurston turns to a white couple in her final novel to write about a marriage that does not end in tragedy. By focusing on whites and moving away from her traditional folklore, Hurston tells a story that allows her to move beyond the control of “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” Even by switching to a story of a white community, however, Hurston still manages to maintain her position on “The Pet Negro System.” Since Arvay’s relationship so clearly models this system, Hurston is able to reiterate that overall relationship, rather than race, dictates people’s interactions.

Seraph on the Suwannee was Hurston’s last published novel and as such demonstrates Hurston’s evolution as a writer. Using “What White Publishers Won’t Print” as a retrospective tool, we see that Hurston continued to push the boundaries of expectations. *Seraph* reflects Hurston’s ability and insistence to move beyond the racial boundaries that were present in her time. Abandoning her folklore and her racial concerns in *Seraph*, Hurston sought to broaden her attempts to inform the public about her racial sensibilities. If on the inside everyone looks the same, then Hurston is capable of demonstrating her ability to write characters of any race.

Hurston began her career as a novelist writing *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, which ostensibly met the expectations of “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” The title character appears to be “exceptional.” However, Jonah’s reliance on his patrons and

wives emphasizes that he was not exceptional. Moreover, Hurston emphasizes the wives' differences, which helps to combat the stereotypes of the African American culture. Hurston insists that white culture judges everyone as the same in John's courtroom scene. Hurston became a spokesperson for her race; she became like a pet. In her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she emphasizes her attempts to reveal herself and show her insides. She reiterates her ideas of the pet system and insists that the system goes both ways.

Finally, Hurston's *Seraph* provides a unique look at racial issues from the vantage of a white marriage. Hurston confirms that the system of patronage, which she so clearly outlines crosses both races and genders. The cozy system is flawed because it privileges individuals rather than the race as a whole, but people cling to it in an effort to maintain status and comfort.

Hurston fought for racial equality not by calling out patronage and discrimination but by highlighting the uniqueness of individuals. The differences between each person regardless of race highlights the commonalities and the "web of dependency" through the races. Hurston's insistence in writing stories about the average demonstrates her belief in the rhetoric of friendship conquering the rhetoric of racial discrimination.

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