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# Narrative Displacement: The Symbolic Burden of Disability in Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwannee*

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Zora Neale Hurston's final published novel, *Seraph on the Suwannee*,<sup>1</sup> enjoyed early critical praise, but its release in 1948 was soon overshadowed by an unfounded, highly sensationalized sexual molestation charge against Hurston. Although she was eventually exonerated, the book—and perhaps the author as well—never recovered publicly.<sup>2</sup> Since then, *Seraph on the Suwannee* has been widely dismissed by literary scholars as an insignificant, even regressive text. Many critics have read Hurston's decision to focus on white Florida "crackers" as an unfortunate capitulation to white publishers and readers. Mary Helen Washington suggests that the novel fails because Hurston abandons the wellspring of "her unique esthetic—the black cultural tradition."<sup>3</sup> Alice Walker, who pioneered a revival of public interest in Hurston's work, flatly rejects *Seraph* for lacking the courage or creative vision present in the author's earlier novels and ethnographic writing: "[Hurston's] work, too, became reactionary, static, shockingly misguided and timid. This is especially true of her last novel, *Seraph on the Suwannee*, which is not even about black people, which is no crime, but is about white people who are bores, which is."<sup>4</sup> In fairness, Walker's complaint has some validity. Compared to Hurston's celebrated feminist heroine Janie Crawford, *Seraph's* Arway Henson Meserve comes across as a whining, indecisive woman, whose great personal triumph entails rejecting moralistic values of her childhood in favor of a more progressive worldview modeled by her charismatic husband, Jim. While the novel does explore social, racial, and gender dynamics of southern Florida, the main focus is the romantic relationship between Jim and Arway, and

the crucial psychological development Arvey must achieve in order to realize happiness with her husband.

In recent years, a few scholars have demonstrated renewed interest in *Seraph* by calling attention to the resistance at play within the text. Claudia Tate, for one, argues that *Seraph on the Suwannee* engages in a persistent joke on white culture's "idealization of passive female desire and its conflation of race and class."<sup>5</sup> Tate refers to Hurston's ruse as a form of "whiteface" used by the author to disguise her critiques of gender roles, marriage, and essentialist ideas about whiteness or blackness. Janet St. Clair also challenges critical dismissals of Arvey as dependent or self-abnegating for failing to acknowledge the "subversive undertow" at work in the "feminist substory . . . [which rejects] both oppression and, more important, the mental submission to oppression."<sup>6</sup> Both Tate and St. Clair argue that Hurston's frustrated (and frustrating) protagonist exposes the idealized passivity of white domesticity, but I would suggest that the material and psychological sacrifices made by Arvey undermine a reading of the novel as a straightforward feminist victory, and instead reveal much more about the social rules—especially among upwardly mobile whites—regulating the parameters of an effective and "successful" marriage.

Specifically, this essay focuses on the melodramatic portrayal and compulsory removal of Arvey's first-born disabled son, Earl. While the novel does expose many levels of oppression and resistance in Jim and Arvey's marriage, the most significant conflicts between husband and wife become symbolically contained in the figure of Earl. Even more troubling and evocative, his death as a young man functions within the narrative to clear the way for Arvey to heal psychologically—and return, physically and emotionally, to her husband and her other, non-disabled, beautiful, and successful children. I examine this depiction of Earl from two directions. First, I argue that Hurston uses disability strategically within the text to negotiate various racial and gender critiques. However, in doing so, she depends on and re-inscribes problematic stereotypes of disability that deserve critical attention. Second, I take issue with critical interpretations of Earl that unquestioningly endorse Hurston's conflation of disability with animalistic, sexual aggression, and champion Earl's death as a feminist breakthrough for his mother.

Broadly, *Seraph on the Suwannee* traces the hasty courtship and nearly 25 years of marriage between Arvey Henson and Jim Meserve, an upwardly mobile, white couple that settles in Citrabelle, a town on the edge of Florida swamplands. When Jim meets Arvey in the small, turpentine and sawmill town of Sawley, he is a brash, self-assured young man determined to win the heart of the shy, nervous, but pretty Arvey. From the beginning, Jim exercises both charm and force in order to

win Arvey, and although Hurston exposes Jim's domineering and sometimes oppressive nature, the author seems also to defend his perspective throughout the text. With Jim's reason and understanding as foundation, it falls on Arvey to learn tolerance, and to develop a courageous, rather than a timid, love.

The power struggle that comes to define the marriage begins during their courtship when Jim physically lays claim to his new bride. Troubled by Arvey's emotional and physical reserve, Jim decides to forcefully take her in hand. After instructing Arvey to dress up for a date, Jim arrives at her home with a horse-drawn carriage. Before departing, however, he leads her behind the large mulberry tree in her backyard, pulls her to the ground in all her finery, drags her underclothes "ruthlessly down her legs," and rapes her.<sup>7</sup> Feminist readings of the novel focus not only on Jim's brutality, but critique Hurston for depicting Arvey's response as a terrified enjoyment of a "pain remorseless sweet."<sup>8</sup> After the rape, Jim is tender and dozing again, and Arvey, partly out of love, partly out of desperation, clings to Jim. When they finally emerge from behind the mulberry tree, Jim hustles her past her gaping parents straight to the courthouse to get married. Before realizing where Jim is taking her, Arvey confronts him about the rape, an accusation he happily owns: "Sure you was raped, and that ain't all. You're going to keep on getting raped . . . every day for the rest of your life."<sup>9</sup>

At once, Jim sexually lays claim to Arvey, but gives himself to her as well. He is both violent and attentive, devoted and controlling. And in many ways, through the complex figure of Jim, Hurston is at her ethnographic and creative best. Tiffany Ruby Patterson describes Hurston as an "expert witness of her time," who provides a glimpse into the "past present" that was her world.<sup>10</sup> Patterson explains further what the role of witness provides Hurston's readers: "She imagined, as every great artist does, but she also made it her business to see, hear, and write as an ethnographer does—in detail, in depth, and by bringing to bear a deep understanding of human complexity."<sup>11</sup> Thinking of Hurston as a witness becomes an interesting way to provide texture to a reading of Jim, Arvey, and Earl. Of the three, Jim has the most layers: he draws on a depth of character that allows him to see multiple dimensions of other people, which provides him with the social skills and knowledge to connect with anyone—across races, cultures, professions, and economic levels. Arvey, in comparison, seems starkly one-dimensional. She sees everything in relation to herself and judges people outside her small family circle with suspicion and contempt. Earl, by contrast, has no dimension of his own, but instead functions as a template on which the tensions, growth, and resolutions of others can be written. Hurston's characterization of Earl doesn't provide



enough texture to depict a complex human, but as a witness of her time, this is notable in its own right because the power of Earl as a symbolic figure depends on his not seeming fully human.

As Patterson suggests, the complexity of character draws readers back to Hurston in an attempt to puzzle out what she really believes about the lives constructed in her writing. In *Scraph!*, the attention Hurston pays to developing Jim Meserve as a multi-dimensional character effectively positions him as the authoritative perspective in the novel. Even though readers are allowed access to Arvay's inner thoughts, hopes, and fears, and Hurston at times seems critical of Jim, his perspective overwhelmingly drives the novel. Hurston establishes Jim's authority as well through his close relationships with African Americans, immigrants, and people across class divides. His friendship and respect for Joe Kelsey, his African American overseer and ostensible moonshine partner, and the fluidity with which he crosses racial lines through language and social practice establishes Jim as a savvy, but fair and generous white man. While Hurston makes clear that Jim's racial privilege allows him to reap the lion's share of the economic rewards in such relationships, he also displays an uncommon sense of fair play and reciprocity for the time. Of these human processes, Arvay "had no idea. She had no understanding to what extent she was benefiting from the good will that Jim had been building."<sup>12</sup> Whereas Jim understands that interracial partnership will benefit everyone, Arvay remains aloof and suspicious, wondering why Jim develops loyalties to people outside the *proper* boundaries of the family.

From the beginning of their relationship, initiated by the power struggle under the mulberry tree, Jim and Arvay are caught in a clash of wills. In many ways, their differences are reflected in Hurston's depiction of Earl. He becomes the stage on which the psychological gulf between them is enacted: their interpretations of him reflect the correctness or distortions of their worldviews—of Jim's progressive rationale and Arvay's timid rigidity. Disability studies scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have argued that although disabled figures are in many ways pervasive in Western literary traditions, the representational role of these figures has been widely under-theorized. In *Narrative Prosthesis*, they point out that while literature has depended on the presence of disability as metaphorical and transgressive—as a means of conveying cultural critiques—the social stigma of disability remains unchallenged: "Literature borrows the potency of the lure of difference that a socially stigmatized condition provides. Yet the reliance upon disability in narrative rarely develops into a means of identifying people with disabilities as a disenfranchised cultural constituency."<sup>13</sup> In other words, even as disability becomes saturated with symbolic and metaphorical meaning, people with disabilities continue

to be read in static terms. This is certainly true of the figure of Earl: he embodies all of the marital and psychological tensions between his parents, but reveals very little about the social realities of disability oppression or stigma. Instead he is rendered an aberration, a problem, and a threat.

This is evident even at his birth. Noting Earl's small hands and misshapen head, Jim accepts his responsibilities to provide for Earl, but does "not enthuse at all" over the child.<sup>14</sup> Arvay becomes particularly upset when Jim avoids choosing a name. Sensing his ambivalence, she preemptively names the baby Earl and devotes herself to the child with a missionary zeal. At the same time, she begins to react instinctively to Earl as a manifestation of the tainted biology she had hoped to escape by marrying Jim. Her anguish around Earl follows two commonplace interpretations of disability during this period: moral punishment or hereditarian determinism. From one side, she thinks Earl could be God's judgment for her "sinful" teenage infatuation with Reverend Carl Middleton, who eventually married her sister Lorraine: "This is the punishment for the way I used to be . . . I never thought it would come like this, but it must be the chastisement I been looking for."<sup>15</sup> She also considers her own "hysterical seizures" and Earl's resemblance to her Uncle Chester, "the one who was sort of queer in his head" as biological explanations for her son's impairments.<sup>16</sup> These thoughts reveal deeply naturalized and internalized narratives of disability: either her "unfit" bloodline or impure nature has caused "deformity" in her child.

Arvay's devotion to Earl intensifies after the birth of their second child. "A damn fine baby you had for me, honey," Jim exclaims.<sup>17</sup> Comparing the baby's auburn hair and beautiful eyes to those of his own mother, he immediately bestows her name of Angeline on his new daughter. At that moment, "Arvay found out what Jim was like as a father. He was hanging over the baby's crib practically all the time." This adoration, however, only underscores his rejection of Earl, and redoubles Arvay's commitment to him: "The lines were drawn, and she had become a partisan."<sup>18</sup>

Although Arvay's partisanship seems laudable, Hurston resists this reading by foreshadowing Earl's violent and uncontrollable nature. When he is five and Angeline three, Arvay hears "inhuman screams" and immediately thinks some "wild beast had crept in from the swamp" to attack her children in the yard. In actuality, Earl is "emitting those animal howls" as he fights with his sister over a piece of fruit.<sup>19</sup> So distressed is she by Earl's unnatural cries that she fears the child in her womb might "be marked" by it,<sup>20</sup> thereby evoking another common fear evoked by the presence of disability. Yet even as she begins to fear Earl, she continues her unwavering protection of him through silence and self-denial.



As the novel unfolds, however, Arvay's continued insistence on Earl's harmlessness is increasingly undermined by Hurston's representation, which reifies cultural narratives linking cognitive impairment to immorality, animalistic violence and criminality. Following this trajectory, readers are not surprised when Earl's sexual awakening takes the form of an animalistic frenzy. When Earl is near 16, one of Jim's friends, Alfredo Corregio, moves his family into the cabin behind the Meserve home. The Corregios have two lovely daughters, the eldest of whom—the teenage Lucy Ann—immediately becomes the object of Earl's obsessive and violent desire. The day the Corregios arrive, he is driven to distraction by something new in the air. Like a "hound dog hunting for a scent," Earl begins to throw himself at his screened window to propel himself out of his room.<sup>21</sup> When Arvay opens the door to investigate, Earl runs her down and races toward the cottage, and is thwarted only because Jim intercepts him on the path.

After subduing Earl, Jim suggests a *practical* solution, one Hurston seems to endorse. "Earl has got to be put away," Jim pleads with Arvay, "He'll do harm to other folks. We ought not to risk it." Arvay's adamant refusal to send her son to "a crazy house" seems irresponsible in the face of such evidence.<sup>22</sup> Her reasoning is rendered even more questionable in her relentless prejudicial accusations that Jim is choosing the Corregio "furriners" over his own son. Jim also points out to Arvay that over the years, he has noticed in Earl "some great craving after guns."<sup>23</sup> Earl had aimed an unloaded rifle at his younger brother Kenny, and since then, Jim had been locking his guns and ammunition away. Jim urges Arvay to be sensible and assures her that he doesn't blame her for Earl's "condition," because it "come through your father's folks."<sup>24</sup> This comment, intended to comfort her, only works to confirm Arvay's long-held suspicion that Jim blames her for Earl's disability, further fueling the feeling that Jim blames her for Earl's loneliness by themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Hurston seems to suggest, however, that this loneliness results less from Jim's indifference than from Arvay's own misplaced devotion. Predictably, within days of this argument, Earl escapes the watchful eye of his mother and attacks Lucy Ann. Sitting at her sewing after dinner one night, Arvay is startled by shrieks mixed in with "howl[s]" and "yelps" coming from the grove.<sup>26</sup> Immediately recognizing Earl's animal-like cries, she runs toward the cottage to find a group now crowded around Lucy Ann, who lies unconscious on the ground. The girl's skirt was torn and pulled up to reveal "a bleeding wound on one thigh." Arvay notices blood running from a "mangly spot" on her neck, and even her fingers are "chewed and bloody."<sup>27</sup> Judging from her wounds, Lucy Ann looks as if she has been attacked by a wild creature, not a human being.

Hurston's depiction of Earl's attack echoes deterministic rhetoric of the time that equated cognitive impairment with sexual "deviancy." The frenzied nature of Earl's violence fits the picture of "mental defectives" developed by eugenicists in the early 20th century. Martin Barr, a physician and strong supporter of surgical sterilization, explained the threat of this population: "[M]ental defectives suffer not only from exaggerated sexual impulses, but from mental and moral debility, causing always a minimum of judgment and of will-power, leaving them greater slaves to the impulse of the moment."<sup>28</sup> Rendered both hyper-sexual and morally impaired, people perceived as fitting into this category were understood to be aggressive time bombs just waiting to go off. Re-inscribing this stereotype, Hurston portrays Earl as incapable of reining in his impulses, and his mother becomes complicit in his crime by refusing to accept the inevitability of violence.

Once Earl attacks Lucy Ann, Arvay can no longer protect or hide him. Within minutes a posse forms outside their home, and in an effort to keep them from killing Earl, Jim joins the manhunt for his own son. Ultimately, however, after a standoff in the swamp where Earl has his rifle locked on his father, the men are forced to shoot Earl to save Jim. As I argue elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> Earl's sexual attack and subsequent death at the hands of this posse posits a re-scripting of the all-too-common lynching stories: Instead of a falsely accused black man falling victim to a racist mob, Earl is positioned as an authentic sexual menace within the community. In order to represent Earl's death as inescapable, and ultimately beneficial, Hurston constructs him as static and atavistic: as a sexual predator, a killer incapable of higher human emotions. Through Earl, Hurston attempts to displace the black male rapist as the villain of the lynch narrative, suggesting instead that specific white men should be rightly understood as a very real threat to women of all races. In making this argument, Hurston draws on the cultural similarity of lynching and eugenic narratives that position black men and cognitively impaired men as sexual predators. However, in her effort to free black men from the trap of false accusations, she positions cognitively impaired men in a similar rhetorical prison.

Not only does Earl's death evoke images of the lynch mob, but as a bona fide "sexual deviant" loose in the community, the threat of his presence displaces the sexual transgressions of everyone else in the novel. Jim's rape of Arvay, specifically, becomes more an act of passion and love when contrasted to Earl's violence and "animalistic" impulses. In other words, while it does seem that Hurston endeavors to expose Jim's rape for what it is, she dampens this critique by continually authorizing his perspective, and by representing Earl as *the real* social menace. Further, Jim's recognition of Earl as a threat positions him as the rational protector, unbiased by his own familial



connections, and committed to protecting the community—even from his own son.

Following Jim's understanding of Earl's death as inevitable and ultimately beneficial, Hurston sets up Arvey's final struggle as an inner battle of accepting the *truth* of this perspective. Hurston constructs Arvey's choice in binary terms: either sever herself emotionally from Earl or lose her marriage. After a month of grieving for Earl, Jim challenges her to admit that she must be somewhat relieved. Although she "would have died rather than admit that Jim was telling the truth . . . [s]he acknowledged to herself that she had put on the greatest show of grief when she caught herself feeling relieved."<sup>30</sup>

This internal confession represents a turning point in the novel—the beginning of Arvey's transformation. As she comes to accept Earl's death, she also admits to herself that her love for Earl had been "something that stood between her and Jim" and had distracted her from Angie and Kenny.<sup>31</sup> This familial narrative of disability was very common in the first half of the 20th century. Professionals routinely argued for institutionalization on the grounds that mothers were not able to balance the care demanded by the disabled child with the needs of other family members. As historians Tyor and Bell explain, "a mentally defective child could exhaust the mother, forcing her to slight her responsibilities to other family members resulting in the disruption of the entire household."<sup>32</sup> Hurston's depiction of Arvey follows this model. Throughout Earl's life, Arvey uses her love for and protection of him to separate herself from Jim, Angeline, and Kenny. Within this context, Earl's death represents the psychological breakthrough that allows Arvey to *come back* to her family. The tacit understanding, of course, is that Earl is not an appropriate member of the family, and this unstated truth allows his death to represent a psychological healing rather than a trauma—as the death of any non-disabled child would naturally evoke.

Through Arvey and Earl, Hurston bears witness to the enduring cultural salience of eugenic ideas that disability cannot be contained in the family or the community—and that disabled figures should be removed, either through confinement or, in the case of Earl, through death. This is a stark and troubling conclusion, and if critics are to examine the "static" or "reactionary" nature of Hurston's final novel, her endorsement of such deterministic understandings of disability represents an important area to explore. Most critical readings of Earl, however, are not interested in the meanings associated with disability, and unquestioningly accept his death as crucial to his mother's emancipation. Returning to the feminist interpretations offered by Claudia Tate and Janet St. Clair, both critics read Earl, not as a representation of disability, but as a metaphorical reflection of Arvey's internal life. Tate reads Earl as a psychological

projection of Arvey's insecurity, so his death is interpreted as finally freeing Arvey from "her guilty burden."<sup>33</sup> St. Clair also interprets Earl reductionally as a metaphorical construct of Arvey's mental state: "Earl, Arvey's idiot firstborn, serves as an image of the deformed and illogical consciousness that restricts her growth and potential . . . But Earl himself is full of destructive potential; and like Arvey's deformed mentality, which invites and expects oppression, he is destroyed so that productive life can resume."<sup>34</sup> This critical endorsement of Earl's characterization perpetuates an exceedingly dehumanizing, tragic conception of a cognitively impaired child within the family—especially as a care-giving burden to the mother. While Hurston does position Earl's death as a central event that continues to shape Arvey's internal identity, the necessity of his death enacts a distinctly eugenic rationale, and does much to challenge such liberating feminist readings of the text.

Arvey's psychological maturation and her ability to reunite with Jim do indeed depend on her reconciling Earl's death as an unfortunate but necessary event. At this point, Arvey begins to understand his death as central to her ultimate fulfillment:

Yes, Earl had been bred in her before she was even born, but his birth had purged her flesh. He was born first. It was meant to be that way. Somebody had to pay off the debt so that the rest of the pages could be clean. God must have thought that she was one who could shoulder the load and bear it . . . Earl had served his purpose and was happily removed from his sufferings . . . She had been purged out, and the way was cleared for better things.<sup>35</sup>

Earl functions, in effect, as a canvas on which Arvey paints her own psychological growth, not as a complex character in his own right. By never challenging the sacrifice at the heart of Arvey's return to her family, and further, by effectively demanding Earl's death, Hurston develops a eugenic script that precludes the existence of a positive, loving, supportive, or productive role for children with disabilities within the domestic site of the (white) middle-class family. In some ways, we might credit Hurston with witnessing this static perception of disability, but knowing her incredible ability to depict the complexity of human experience, it seems that she also accepted these cultural stereotypes as accurate, and even depended on them to provide cohesion to the excessive symbolism contained in her figuration of Earl.

In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, Hurston broke with traditional rules and expectations of the period that African American writers should write about African American people, and constructed her story around an insecure white woman, and her journey toward psychological fulfillment. Arvey's arrival at contentment, however, ultimately depends, not only on the fatal sacrifice of her disabled son, but on her acceptance of



his death as a *happy removal*—clearing the way within *her* for “better things.” This unapologetically able-ist and eugenic solution to the novel’s central conflicts—which revolve around Earl—should be the subject of greater critical concern. Instead, however, Hurston’s use of Earl as the metaphorical container for Arway’s personal growth has been widely accepted as an effective—even liberating—narrative strategy.

In many ways, Hurston’s method for negotiating the racial dimensions of the novel reveals a great deal about the enduring saliency of static, limiting, and dehumanizing thinking about disability. Specifically, Hurston’s strategic use of Earl to embody the discord between Jim and Arway presents cognitive disability as a social threat around which whites, blacks, and immigrants can unite. While Hurston routinely challenged and complicated racial or gendered stereotypes, her conceptualization of disability in *Seraph* depends heavily on deterministic assumptions. Arguably, in fact, she trades on the stigmatization and rejection of disability in her negotiation of race—both in writing about white people, and in realizing her vision of a more racially integrated and egalitarian social space. This remains a troubling paradox: racial openness and marital happiness come to rest on the social exclusion of disability. Hurston’s capitulation to this eugenic solution suggests a compelling need for critical analyses that foreground and analyze race, gender, and disability in *relationship*—whether complementing, intersecting, or opposing each other.

## NOTES

1. Zora Neale Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwannee* (1948; repr., New York: Harper, 1991). Citations refer to the 1991 publication (hereafter cited as *Seraph*).
2. Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 387–401.
3. Before the original 1948 publication of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwannee* (New York: Harper, 1991), the author was arrested and booked on charges of sodomizing three young boys. She denied the charges vehemently and demanded a full investigation. She even provided evidence that she had been in Honduras during the time the alleged molestations were to have taken place. Even though the accusations were completely fabricated by the boys involved, Hurston’s name was not formally cleared for over a year. During that time, her final novel was published. At the time Hurston felt particularly betrayed by African American critics who used the scandal to exploit the sexual content in the book.
4. Alice Walker, foreword to *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, by Robert Hemenway (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), xvi.

5. Claudia Tate, “Hitting ‘A Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick’: *Seraph on the Suwannee*, Zora Neale Hurston’s Whiteface Novel,” in *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, ed. Christopher Lane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 381.
6. Janet St. Clair, “The Courageous Undertow of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwannee*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 50.1 (1989): 38.
7. Hurston, *Seraph*, 51.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 57.
10. Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 7.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Hurston, *Seraph*, 83.
13. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 55.
14. Hurston, *Seraph*, 68.
15. *Ibid.*, 69.
16. *Ibid.*, 6, 68.
17. *Ibid.*, 85.
18. *Ibid.*, 85–86.
19. *Ibid.*, 100.
20. *Ibid.*, 101.
21. *Ibid.*, 123.
22. *Ibid.*, 125, 126.
23. *Ibid.*, 127.
24. *Ibid.*, 125.
25. *Ibid.*, 131.
26. *Ibid.*, 143.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Martin W. Barr, “Some Notes on Asexualization; With a Report of Eighteen Cases,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 51.3 (1920): 232.
29. Michelle Jarman, “Disability and the Lynch Mob: Violence and Sexuality in Eugenic and Lyching Narratives,” in *Sex and Disability*, ed. Robert McKuer and Anna Mollow (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
30. Hurston, *Seraph*, 158.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Cited in Janice Brockley, “Rearing the Child Who Never Grew: Ideologies of Parenting and Intellectual Disability in American History,” in *Mental Retardation in America*, ed. Steven Noll and James W. Trent Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 136. Brockley further suggests that in 19th-century fiction, disabled sons were often represented as punishment for an incompetent or weak father. Because masculinity was supposed to be passed down from father to son, a child with a disability tended to reflect on the father’s virility.
33. Tate, “Hitting ‘A Straight Lick,’” 390.
34. St. Clair, “Courageous Undertow,” 51.
35. Hurston, *Seraph*, 350.