NEGOTIATIONS OF POWER IN RAYMOND ANDREWS’S
MUSKHOGEAN COUNTY TRILOGY

A Thesis
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
in
English

by
Shelli Homer
Spring 2009
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ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATIONS OF POWER IN RAYMOND ANDREWS’S MUSKHOGEAN COUNTY TRILOGY

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My thesis looks at the availability of situational power in Raymond Andrews’s Muskhogean County trilogy—Appalachee Red, Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee, and Baby Sweet’s. My main focus is an analysis of the negotiations of power relationships by victimized people. Andrews shows that upon understanding the social structure that places his characters in the role of victim, they are then able to work within that structure to gain various levels of power. The three manifestations of power I examine are the use of racial ambiguity to gain power, the role the presence of rape plays in allowing characters to negotiate power from their victimization, and the use of sexuality to gain power within their oppression. It is important to distinguish the dynamics of power within the oppressed-oppressor relationship in order to avoid re-victimizing the oppressed by viewing him/her only as a victim. Acknowledging the
power the oppressed is able to negotiate for her/himself allows the oppressed to move beyond the role of victim. Andrews’s ultimate commentary is that the reality of life places most people in the position of victim at some point and that people must find the power to reclaim their importance in order to move forward with their lives. While this power displayed by Andrews is often minimal and far from glamorous, he shows a continuously changing power structure that allows even his most traumatized victim to to find hope in her/his situation.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My American roots (like those of most Afro-Americans) are southern rural. This particular land and the individuals who have lived and died on it are what my books are about.

-Raymond Andrews, Appalachee Red

Raymond Andrews was born in Morgan County, Georgia, where he grew up during the 1930s and 1940s. He spent most of his life adult life between New York City and Europe, but Georgia remained the setting for his novels. Between 1978 and his suicide in 1991, Andrews published three novels Appalachee Red (1978), Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee (1980), and Baby Sweet’s (1983); the novellas Jessie and Jesus and Cousin Claire (1991); and The Last Radio Baby: A Memoir (1990). At the time of his death, “Andrews’s literary reputation and requests for lecturing and reading appearances were comfortably on the rise” (Harris-Lopez 91); however, after his death critical attention of his work dwindled. Andrews has three critics that have published a total of four essays regarding his work, which mainly focus on Appalachee Red. There are an additional three critics who briefly comment on Andrews in either forewords or afterwords for his novels. Andrews’s top critic, Dr. Trudier Harris—who has published two essays and presented several more on Andrews—frequently suggests and refutes
arguments attributed to other critics, though these other critics are left anonymous and remain unpublished.

Appalachee Red, recipient of the James Baldwin Prize, opens Andrews’s trilogy with an introduction to the people and community of the fictional town of Appalachee and the larger Muskhogean County area located in Georgia. This novel opens in the year 1918, but predominantly takes place between 1945 and 1963. This novel provides a mythological framework for the other novels; the first section focuses on the mythic Big Man and Little Bit, while setting the stage for the second section and the arrival of the powerful Red. It also looks at the function of race relations as the members of the community prepare to change their situations and take some power of their own. And in the midst of myth building and race relations Andrews shows a culture of people just living their lives.

The second novel in the trilogy, Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee, Andrews dedicates to his maverick Black-Indian grandmother Jessie Rose Lee Wildcat Tennessee and to his maverick white grandfather who refused to “conform to the Code of the Old South” (xiv) by only loving one another, and who inspired his novel about Rosiebelle Lee. It is set outside of Appalachee on the Muskhogean County cotton plantation known as Plain View, opening in 1906 and then moving to the day of Rosiebelle Lee’s death in 1943. In this novel, Andrews shows the tight bonds and rich atmosphere that exist in the rural Plain View community, as well as the struggles with the modern world that are facing these small farmers and other rural people.
The final novel in the trilogy is Baby Sweet’s which is set in the space in which the first two novels intersect and find closure. Baby Sweet’s returns readers to Appalachee and the white house built by John Morgan that was the center of Appalachee Red. As with the other novels there are flashbacks to earlier time periods but the majority of the novel takes place on the fourth-of-July 1966. The characters from Appalachee and Plain View come together in order to resolve remaining issues and allow for the redemption of a few of Andrews characters. Baby Sweet’s centers on the newly established whore house and, more importantly, the stories and lives of characters who come there and why.

Andrews utilizes a form of narrative that actively engages the reader in the telling of the story. His style has been described by critics in various ways, as a “summary narration from the point of view of a god-like omniscient author, not unlike Henry Fielding’s technique in Tom Jones” (Folks 72), as “signifying on Faulkner” (Byerman 101), as “blend[ing] the authority and measuredness of the omniscient voice with the uniquely individual voice of the community” (Bausch 298), as “allow[ing] no distance between himself and his created world” (Hood ix), and as keeping readers aware “he is narrating, that he is having fun with his narration, and that he is retelling his tale from a black vantage point that pokes fun at blacks as frequently as it pokes fun at whites” (Harris-Lopez 93). The most concise explanation of his narrative style appears in Philip Lee Williams’s afterword to Baby Sweet’s, that Andrews “approaches these tales not as a novelist but as the storyteller” (214). Andrews enters into the rich African American oral tradition; he most prominently uses elements of the speakerly text and call
and response. He allows Red, Rosiebelle Lee, Lea, and Betty Jean pages of the novels for them to tell their stories to other characters and the reader in the black vernacular. Andrews sets up the feeling of a conversation and call and response style as he strategically places an “Amen” or a “Honey, hush yo’ mouth!” at the end of paragraphs, throughout all three novels, though most prominently in *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee*. Andrews’s engagement with the oral tradition and his playful attitude with his characters and readers create a storyteller, rather than a narrator, and a feeling that Andrews is escorting readers through his community.

Harris places Andrews’s writing between that of William Faulkner and Gloria Naylor, as she compares Muskhogean County to Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha and Naylor’s Willow Springs. She judges Andrews to be more lighthearted than Faulkner and less mystical than Naylor. Critic Keith Byerman places Andrews’s writing next to that of Ernest Gaines due to their attention to ideas of black masculinity. Byerman argues that “[w]hile the modes of narrative are different—Andrews is essentially comic and Gaines tragic—the underlying aim is the same, to reconstruct the image of the black man in a way that more accurately reflects his experience” (94). Andrews’s work is inherently masculine, which has led critics to focus on issues surrounding his male characters and has led to the claim that “while two of the novels are named for key black female characters, it is nonetheless the stories of the black men that are central” (97) and other claims that view the female characters as necessarily dispensable for the development of the male characters. Despite the hyper-masculinity of Andrews’s writing, Andrews is genuinely concerned with his female characters, of whom readers are given the most
information and to whom the text draws the most attention. After filling his preface to *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee* with memories and realizations about his grandmother and dedicating the book to her, Andrews spends the novel showing the impact Rosiebelle Lee has on the entire community. In his preface to *Baby Sweet’s* Andrews explains that the book is not about Baby Sweet “*Appalachee Red* is about Baby Sweet” and Baby Sweet’s “is about Lea” (x). I am not suggesting that the black male characters are not central to the novels—except in the case of *Baby Sweet’s*, where there is no main black male character present—but that the female characters are just as central to the novels as the male characters and to Andrews’s portrait of the South.

In his article “The Necessity of Blacks’ Writing Fiction about the South,” Andrews notes that “[w]hen I was growing up, and for many years afterwards, all the blacks I ever read about in American literature (by white and black writers) were ‘victims,’ purely one-dimensional characters. I knew we were victims…yet knew we were much more. And in this ‘more’ was what I wanted to write about” (298). Andrews succeeds in creating multi-dimensional characters who embody the complex characteristics of real people, having both positive and negative qualities. This “more” Andrews is after in *Appalachee Red*, *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee*, and *Baby Sweet’s* is the focus of this thesis.

Chapter one focuses on the roles of the mulatto characters Red from *Appalachee Red* and Rosiebelle Lee from *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee*. I look at the way in which Andrews undoes the “tragic mulatto” archetype with these two main characters. Andrews develops his “untragic mulatto” characters by leaving an air of
mystery regarding their backgrounds. I use Judith Berzon’s concept of mulatto characters overcoming the tragic mulatto archetype by becoming race leaders. Red and Rosiebelle Lee both function within their communities as race leaders and both become race leaders by knowing how to negotiate their way to power. Both characters enter the communities as strangers and immediately set about making changes as they empower themselves and others. Andrews waits until the end of each novel to allow Red and Rosiebelle Lee to tell the tragic side to their lives before coming to Muskhogean County; in doing this, Andrews allows the focus of the novels to be on the accomplishments of the characters and the creation of their multi-dimensions, rather than on their victimization.

Chapter two analyzes the various rape scenes present in Appalachee Red, Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee, and Baby Sweet’s, specifically the experiences of Little Bit, Baby Sweet, Rosiebelle Lee, and Betty Jean. As Andrews strives to write his characters as “more” than victims, he opens up a discussion about varying degrees of rape that exist within the structure of southern society. The question is not whether these scenes qualify as rape, because that answer is yes they do. The question becomes, what can be gained by the character or the storyteller refusing to label the sexual encounters as rape? By allowing his characters to take partial responsibility, pretend it has not happened, or call it something different, Andrews allows his characters to reclaim some power over their bodies and their decisions. It again allows the focus to move from the victimization of the women to their complexities and enjoyment of life.

Chapter three is inspired by chapter two, as I look at the way in which women utilize their sexuality to gain power from men and/or exact revenge. This chapter is
concerned with Little Bit, Rosiebelle Lee, Betty Jean, and Lea from *Appalachee Red*, Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee, and Baby Sweet’s. I use Naomi Wolf’s definition of “power feminism” to show how these women draw power from their position as victim by using their sexuality to manipulate their situations for the better. I analyze the way in which these women move from understanding their position as victim to reclaiming their power so that they do not remain helpless as victims. By claiming control over their sexuality, these women allow themselves to stand up against their victimization.

For all of Andrews’s characters, it is in their ability to negotiate power from their situations that allows them to develop for readers, move beyond the role of victim, and show that their experiences are “more” than their victimization.
The setting of Raymond Andrews’s Muskhogean trilogy is the fictional Muskhogean County and its main town of Appalachee, placed about eighty miles outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Through the multiple descriptions of Appalachee and Muskhogean County across the three installments, Andrews develops the history and frames the racially charged climate that is the backdrop of his characters’ experiences. In Baby Sweet’s, Andrews attributes the name of the town to an American Indian chief and the name of the county to the name of his people’s language, as the only two remnants of a people driven out by whites (4). The racial configuration of Appalachee is directly linked to the neighboring Yankee Town. Andrews sets the tension between the whites of the two towns with their labeling of one another: the citizens of Yankee Town are labeled as “a pile of poor white trash,” southern traitors by Appalachee standards; and the white citizens of Appalachee are labeled “nigger-loving passing-for-whites” by Yankee Town (Appalachee Red 42).

The only black people allowed in Yankee Town are the residents of its prison, as all of the past black residents were killed or chased out of Yankee Town by the Ku
Klux Klan through multiple episodes of “cleansing” (41), after which they took up residence in Appalachee. Andrews describes Appalachee in terms of its segregated communities; there is “the Great Wall” of Georgia red dirt (65) that separates the white community from the black communities, and the black community is divided into the original “Dark Town on the west and [the younger] Light Town on the east,” the former comprised of the “real nigger” and the latter of the “Negro” (66). One block back from the Great Wall and on the line between Light and Dark Town is the focal point of both

Appalachee Red and Baby Sweet’s; within a strategically placed two-story white house that changes over the years from Little Bit’s home to “Sam’s Café” to “Red’s” café and gambling house to “Baby Sweet’s” whore house, the citizens of Appalachee make their stands. It is in this space between Dark Town, Light Town and White Town that the social constructions of racial identities and relationships are challenged and redefined by its black community.

In this space between Light Town, Dark Town and white Appalachee, Andrews deploys his mulatto characters to renegotiate the social constructions of race. Judith Berzon, in Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction, defines the traditional role of the “tragic mulatto” archetype as she searches for less tragic outcomes. She defines the antebellum tragic mulatto, as portrayed by northern writers, as being “at odds with a society that exploits and oppresses him,” and that the mulatto’s “virtues are ascribed to their ‘white blood’” (101), which persists for a century after the Civil War. The postbellum focus of the tragic mulatto is initially centered around the idea of warring mixed bloods, which is rooted in the racist ideologies of the time period; over
time, the concept slowly gains a “greater psychological and sociological complexity” (104). Berzon identifies three solutions in literature by which mulatto characters overcome the archetype of the tragic mulatto: the two most common solutions are first entrance into a mulatto middle-class, or second passing in white society, and the third less common solution, becoming a “race leader” after self-identification with black society (192).

Andrews pushes against the traditional depictions of the tragic mulatto figure with his rejection of the attribution of characters’ behaviors to blood, focusing instead on social constructions of race based on physical appearance and behavior, though he does employ occasional white characters who continue to believe in the significance of blood. He places each of his main mulatto characters in interactions with white and black community members to challenge social constructions of race and places each of them with power as race leaders. With each of his mulatto characters, Andrews explores and challenges a different facet of social rules for race relations. Andrews’s use of Red as race leader in *Appalachee Red* functions in a complex and covert way as Red does not intentionally become a race leader and he remains at a distance from those he is leading; but, it is his distance that he ultimately draws his power from and in turn allows for the empowerment of the town members. In *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee* Andrews employs the mulatta character of Rosiebelle Lee who becomes a race leader within her local community. Since her community exists in a rural setting with some distance from white society, she does not seek to change larger society, but to empower her community by functioning as a mother to keep the community intact during difficult times.
Red functions as an oppressive race leader who serves “his purpose in awakening the blacks of Appalachee to other possibilities and ways of being in the world in relations to whites” (Harris-Lopez 118). Yet, it is not Red’s intention to inspire the black community. On the day before he leaves Appalachee, he reveals his identity as John Morgan and Little Bit’s red baby and his reasons for coming to Appalachee to his brother, Blue. Red’s intention is “‘to make his stand. Yes, to make his motherfucking stand in the very house where he was born’ and to get what ‘‘rightfully belongs to him, John Morgan’s oldest boy, he knew that he would never leave Muskhoge County until he got his due…or leveled Morgan Hill trying…or both” (Andrews, Appalachee Red 257). Red’s success in exacting his revenge on John Morgan is dependent upon the power he is able to press upon the community. Red’s position within the text demands his comparison with the other two legendary figures: the white Boots “the Man” White and the black Big Man Thompson. The mulatto Red is not a compromise between the two, though; rather, he is a more powerful force than either of the other men. Red fulfills Berzon’s description of the tragic mulatto as a “fictional symbol of marginality” by appearing as “an outcaste, a wanderer, [and] one alone” (100), but Red resists the powerlessness of marginalization and, through his resistance, reshapes Appalachee’s society. In contrast to Berzon’s categories, it is because of his marginality, his remaining on the outside of both societies, that Red is able to enter the town of Appalachee and manipulate black and white alike.

Andrews sets the scene for Red’s powerful takeover of Appalachee through his initial mythologization and immortalization of Big Man and Boots. Big Man is a
simple and straightforward man who holds the respect of both the black town and country communities. In “This Disease Called Strength: The Masculine Manifestation in Raymond Andrews’s *Appalachee Red*” Trudier Harris claims, “[t]he concept of black manhood can only be manifested in the black domestic or communal arena, either in bed, beating one’s wife, or beating one’s neighbors” (41). Big Man’s manhood is established in all three areas. Big Man engages his wife, Little Bit, in frequent public brawls to keep his manhood intact in response to her infidelity in the form of her white boss’s daily rapes of her. Since Big Man cannot defend his wife against the white man, he maintains the respect of his wife and community by beating her for her refusal to quit her job that supports them both. The storyteller makes it a point to note that Little Bit acknowledges that her boss “in bed was no Big Man” (Andrews, *Appalachee Red* 7), which means, unlike Big Man, John Morgan is unable to satisfy her sexually. The entire black community is also aware of Big Man’s manhood in bed, as his and Little Bit’s public brawls frequently ended in passionate love making, occasionally in public places. Finally, Big Man’s beating of his neighbors comes in the form of checkers games, where he quickly becomes unbeatable, and in physical beatings where “[o]ver the years his big stone-like fists had broken enough of other people’s bones to convince those who had seen him in action that he, Big Man Thompson, did not need a blade” (37). Rather than imposing himself upon others and wielding the power he has over the community, Big Man remains passive in the affairs of his community. Unable to find work during the Great Depression due to the closure of the local sawmills, Big Man suffers a silent defeat by his wife’s decision to keep her job. Big Man understands the limitations of his power
within the black community and respects that his fellow community members can make their own decisions about their lives. The jobless Big Man becomes stationary in Sam’s Café as he plays checkers all day, everyday, where he maintains his social power with each of his opponent’s defeat.

A once respectable family diner, with the death of Sam’s wife and the onset of the Great Depression, Sam’s Café serves as an ill reputable hangout and fighting ground for the divided young black men of Muskhogean County, the “Town Niggers” and the “Hole Niggers.” The Town Niggers reside in Appalachee’s Dark Town and the Hole Niggers come into Appalachee every Saturday afternoon from the country peach plantation of Hard Labor Hole. In Sam’s Café, Big Man “never got himself involved in the arguments or fights his neighbors waged against the Hole Niggers” (36); however, he does lay down the law that there be “no horse play which might lead to his pool board being turned over during a game” (37). Big Man’s law comes from a night where a fight led to his checkers board being knocked over, to which Big Man responds by throwing his combatants “bodily out of the front door into the street, missing the porch altogether” (37). Big Man’s response is not a senseless act of violence but a respectable defense of his personal dignity. After surrendering his power at home to his wife, Big Man must respond to the two young men’s unintentional insult to keep his manhood intact within the eyes of his community. The creation of Big Man’s “no horse play” law is representative of the social power Big Man holds over the community and shows him as the only person other than the white law man who can enforce order at Sam’s Café.
Big Man’s power over the black community comes out of respect for his clearly defined manhood, while Boots’s power over that same community comes from his legal position as “the Man” and is maintained through fear. Harris argues that with his authority as police officer, Boots “can create his own hegemony in legal, gendered, and racial terms, and he seeks to ensure that no black male will challenge his sovereignty. He thus enters the local lore as a ‘ba-ad cracker,’ and the voyeurs watch him as closely as they watch Big Man” (47). Where Big Man holds earned social power over the black community, Boots is given legal power with the title of police officer by his father’s political position in Muskhogean County. Boots enters “the local lore as ‘ba-ad cracker’” as he terrorizes the black community by “legally” enforcing his manhood on Appalachee.

In a scene similar to that of Big Man and his checker board, Boots, who has an obsession with his clothing, defends his white manhood after a drunken black man bumps into him, tearing a few buttons from his police uniform. It is in this scene that Boots earns his name with a much more violent response than that of Big Man, as the drunken black man finds himself trying “in vain to crawl out of the reach of those steel-plated black boots thundering down upon him and ripping his flesh” (45). The black man lives and is arrested for assault, while Boots rises to immortality as he is named after his “‘nigger-stomping’ boots” (46). Boots’s acts of violence become common occurrences in Appalachee and result in him striking “fear into the very heart of the black community and within a year of joining the police force many blacks from outside the town had stopped coming in all together” (47). Boots forces his way into the black side of town and begins to rule over “the Alley” against the wishes of his Chief of Police. He does not
productively cleanup any of the social problems or violence occurring in Dark Town or in the Alley, but adds his own brand of violence to the scene. Boots wears his police officer uniform and steel-toed boots to revel in his created legal power because without it he does not have any real power over the Appalachee community.

The awe-inspiring and legendary characters of Boots and Big Man must, of course, meet in battle. Every evening, as Boots commences his ceremony of entering Sam’s Café, glaring at the frozen and scared occupants, spitting on the floor, and abruptly exiting, he sees that Big Man is nonresponsive to his presence and never looks up from his game of checkers. Boots “sensed right away the awe and respect the other blacks in the place had for the big man” (47) and he finds that he cannot leave Big Man’s power over the black community unchallenged. It is at this point that the two earlier scenes involving each one’s manhood reappear. First, upon entering Sam’s Café and once again garnering no response from Big Man, Boots violates Big Man’s one law and knocks over his checkers game. Boots succeeds in getting Big Man’s attention as Big Man responds just as he had previously, sending “him flying [across the room] with one blow from the back of his big fist” (49). This action is previously set up to be expected, but at the same time it is unexpected since Big Man has not acted against John Morgan’s assaults on his manhood through the rapes of Little Bit. The difference in the situations is that the black community of Appalachee does not “mind that Big Man would not fight white folks for his wife; what matters, ultimately, is that he fights for himself” (Harris 47). The outcome of the fight between the two must end in death for one of the men in order for the community to immortalize both of them. What matters the most to the black community
is that Big Man chooses to act against Boots; however, “the moment of decision for Big Man is the moment of death, for, in this case, to react is to die. That decision to step into immortality, to transition permanently into folk hero, only inspires the textual audience and the narrator” (Harris 45). As a result of Big Man’s reaction, Boots unloads his pistol into Big Man’s back as he remains unharmed by Big Man. In the eyes of the black community, Big Man succeeds in defending his manhood by fighting with his fists; Boots, on the other hand, realizes that he is outmatched by Big Man and retreats to the artificial power of his “law” authority and the artificial “manhood” of his gun.

The only person who succeeds in doing any physical damage to Boots is Little Bit as she comes to the rescue of her Big Man and slices Boots’s face and eye open with her razor. Out of bullets, Boots reclaims his manhood from Little Bit with his notorious police boots; Big Man’s final image is of “those steel-plated and now red smeared motherfucking nigger-stomping black boots of the Man crashing down upon the blood-covered head of his ‘Li’l Baby’” (Andrews, Appalachee Red 51). The pregnant Little Bit survives the fight but is left with brain damage and/or a psychological break from the trauma of the event. Since Little Bit does not die, she is unable to share in Big Man’s mythic status, despite her being the only one who would “stand and fight toe-to-toe with the young black Hercules” (11) and the only person other than Big Man to fight toe-to-toe with Boots. With her injuries, Little Bit is a reminder of the damage and demoralization Boots is capable of wreaking on the black community. Rather than dying a proud death, her survival as a mere piece of the person she once was and her natural
deterioration makes it necessary that the black community intentionally forget her at Big Man’s death.

For the decade between the historic battle between Big Man and Boots and the arrival of Appalachee Red, the black community of Appalachee is unable to fill Big Man’s throne and Sam’s Café is dominated by the war between the Town Niggers and the Hole Niggers, while Boots reigns unchallenged by either the black or white communities. Harris suggests that Big Man’s legacy “provides the choklit heroic geography against which Appalachee Red will also be measured and whose pattern Red will expand and exceed” (Harris-Lopez 102). In addition to being measured against Big Man by the black community, Red upsets Boots’s understanding of race and redefines his place as “the Man” within the black community by seizing control of Appalachee. Red is setup to play into the traditional tragic mulatto archetype; at his birth when his mother, Little Bit, acknowledges he is “‘as red as a green blackberry’” (Andrews, Appalachee Red 9) and sends him to the North to escape the wrath of Big Man, leaving Red rejected by his white father and his black mother and step-father. Two and a half decades later, Red returns to Appalachee as an unrecognized stranger, both fulfilling the role of the tragic mulatto as he remains on the margins of the black and white communities and challenging it by understanding his position in society and achieving power from that understanding which he passes onto the black community of Appalachee when he leaves.

The first descriptions of Red begin the transfer of power to him from both the terrorizing Boots and the deceased mythical Big Man. Red anonymously hitches a ride into town from his white half-brother, John Morgan Junior, and is witnessed being
dropped of at the bottom of Morgan Hill by Little Bit and his white half-sister Roxanne, but the first substantial descriptions of him come from his initial, distant encounter with Boots: “The man was big and broad-shouldered and he moved like a great cat—apparently indifferent, but actually watchful and, most of all, confident. It was not the walk of any white man Boots had ever seen before. A cold chill which was not brought on by the weather began creeping slowly up the back of Appalachee’s Chief of Police” (63). Red catches the attention of Boots as he walks through the town in search of Sam’s Café. While Red’s intentions and plans that draw him to Appalachee are not yet revealed, Red’s appearing as “indifferent” when he is “actually watchful” and “confident” suggest he knows that he is being watched and by whom. It is not just Red’s indifference that unnerves Boots, but the idea that there is a certain manner in which a white man should walk and Red, as a visibly white man, is not walking in a way that is socially acceptable for Boots. As Boots stands gaping at Red his “cold chill” turns into a paralyzing “fear of the soul.” Boots remains conscious of his fear, but he refuses to acknowledge what motivates his fear. As the son of Ezra White, leader of the mulatto massacre in Yankee Town, Boots carries the same fear as his father, a fear of miscegenation. Boots is unable to negotiate a visibly white man displaying behavioral characteristics of a black man, and he is realizing for the first time and refusing to believe that a black man could potentially pass as white.

As a stranger, Red’s racial ambiguity as the white man who is not a white man disrupts Boots’s strict enforcement of appropriate racial conduct. In order to uphold his beliefs about race and due to his inability to change those beliefs, Boots eventually deems
Red a “foreigner” because “Red was much too clever and bold to have any nigger blood in him, but yet not quite a white man because of the big man’s total inability to extend any sort of warmth or comradeship to another white man” (216). Boots is the only character to acknowledge the attribution of characteristics to blood. As upholder of the social constructions of race, Boots represents the ideologies of Yankee Town in Appalachee. Red’s black brother, Blue, later notes during his plans for integrating his community that with Boots “out of the way I could walk through the county like a black Sherman. Though Yankee Town is gonna be a tough nut to crack” (265). In Blue’s opinion, the “‘nigger-loving passing-for-whites’” white community of Appalachee is essentially being held in its antebellum state of race relations by Boots. Calling Red a foreigner allows Boots to make sense of and to have a more level relationship with Red which that of the white man-black man relationship would not allow.

Controlled by his fear of not knowing, Boots has a power struggle in his head with Red. He imagines himself chasing Red down and yelling,

*Just who in the goddamn hell do you think you are that you can walk right past me, Clyde White, the Chief of Police of Appalachee, county seat of Muskhogean County, Georgia, without so much as a look of respect in my direction? Don’t you know that this is my town? And if you don’t stop that crazy walk and walk like a white man ought to walk and turn around and tell me who you are and just what it is here in my town that you came looking for then I am going to kill you right here on the spot!* (64)

Boots’s obsession with power is reinforced as he establishes his credentials. Not only is he son of the politically powerful Ezra White, he is also the Chief of Police of his town; and not only is he Chief of Police of his town, as county seat, his town is the most important town in the county. As a white man, Boots expects Red to acknowledge his
position as Chief of Police. Red’s lack of acknowledgement coupled with his “crazy walk” is deemed as uncharacteristic white man behaviors by Boots, which fuel Boots’s necessity to know the details of this stranger’s presence in Appalachee. Boots’s obsession with his legal and racial power stems from his lack of southern social status; even though his father is politically powerful that power was earned through Ezra’s hard work not a southern family lineage since Ezra is the son of a poor white prostitute and an unknown Yankee. Boots has absolutely no power over the white community of Appalachee because all of Appalachee’s whites are socially above him, so he seizes his opportunity to wield power over Appalachee’s black community. In addition to reinforcing Boots’s power and control over Appalachee, which is not actually his town, his imaginary play-by-play followed up with his complete inaction begins to show the power Red’s indifferent presence has over the Chief of Police. Boots’s fantasy and inaction are supplied by his fear of the unknown and his potential powerlessness over a potentially white man.

Upon his arrival in Appalachee, Red has two confrontations in Sam’s Café that earn him complete power over all of Muskhoge County. Red forces the toughest members of both the white and black communities to surrender to him, as he surpasses Big Man in flexing his “black manhood.” Red is first confronted by the Hole’s the Bird and the Snake. He looks up from his magazine as the two young men ask about Sam’s whereabouts, and then responds with his one word answer of “[u]stairs” (124). After minimal conversation and tough talking the Bird and the Snake draw their blades to challenge Red; Red draws a gun, referred to as “the ‘white man’s knife’” (116).
Boots is earlier confused by Red’s “crazy walk” that is not a white man’s, the Bird and the Snake are both shocked that the “so-called nigger” chooses to fight with “a white man’s thing” (128). Unable to understand their situation, the Bird and the Snake slowly back out of Sam’s Café surrendering to Red the power over the black community. The Bird and the Snake fail to live up to Big Man’s legacy as they back down from the “white man’s knife” instead of standing their ground, and in doing so the Bird and the Snake fall socially as they forfeit their once respectable status. Thus, Red fulfills the requirement of beating his neighbors, though his strength comes from both his power to engage in tough talk with the two like a black man and from his power to wield a gun like a white man.

The final event that shifts the power from Boots to Red is his seizure of Baby Sweet, Boots’s “black gal” who is confined in Sam’s Café. Here Red shows his black manhood in bed with Baby Sweet as he takes her from the white man. Where Big Man was unable to stand up for Little Bit because he is black, Red’s racial ambiguity with the white community allows him the power to claim his black woman as his alone. Sam and the entire black community await a replication of Big Man’s killing for Red’s violation of the socially acceptable racial conduct. And as expected Boots shows up to Sam’s Café “and with all his pent-up might behind it, kicked open the café door” (130). In an identical scene to that of the Bird and the Snake, upon seeing Red in the nonthreatening position of “sitting there atop the counter holding a magazine in his hands,” Boots becomes paralyzed with fear and never makes it through the doorway. Boots opens the conversation the same way as the Bird and the Snake, and gets the same response, but instead of pressing Red further or challenging him as the Bird and the Snake do, Boots
backs out of Sam’s Café as quickly as possible. Red defeats Boots without an actual confrontation and makes him his business partner. Red’s racial ambiguity allows him a position of power beyond the social power of Big Man, as he turns his power into economic and political power that affects both white and black Appalachee.

Through a series of calculated events, Red assumes ownership of Sam’s Café, turns Red’s into a respectable café, opens an illegal gambling house above the café, rewards black Appalachee with free barbeque and alcohol to elect Boots County sheriff and get him off of the streets of Appalachee, sends Boots with a posse into Dark Town to shut down all gambling and alcohol production or sales, makes himself the only person blacks can purchase alcohol from, and secretly supports Little Bit and Blue financially. During his time in Appalachee, Red maintains seclusion from the community, where only few ever see him and even fewer ever speak to him. It is this illusiveness that allows Red to maintain complete power over the community of Appalachee and contributes to the community’s mythologizing of him. The community mythologizes Red for his bold moves, such as buying a Cadillac when most whites in the area could barely afford a car of lesser status, and overlooks that his economic and political rise have kept a “longtime stranglehold on the black community” (263) and that “he’s just as big a crook to the niggers here as any white” (265). The act of removing Boots from the streets of Appalachee was enough to keep the black community happily oppressed by Red. As ruler of Appalachee Red assumes a paternal role over the town; he functions with power in the public arena, which is gendered in as a male relm.
Red’s time as a ruler of Appalachee comes to an end in 1963 with the death of Little Bit and the return of Blue from his northern, college education and his Civil Rights battles across the South. Blue returns, against Red’s wishes, with plans to integrate Appalachee and hopes that Red will help him defeat his one insurmountable obstacle, Boots. Red does not believe in the possible success of Blue’s plans due to his own unsuccessful race battles as a young man in an unchanging Chicago, and then his experiences as a physically white, black man in a segregated army where he was hated by both black and white men alike. However, Little Bit’s funeral becomes the moment of Red’s revenge on Morgan Hill and his relinquishment of Appalachee to Blue. Red leaves Little Bit’s funeral with John Morgan’s daughter, Roxanne, who has been intrigued and lusting for Red since his arrival in Appalachee, never failing to miss staring at him through her binoculars on his Sunday visits to the bottom of Morgan Hill. Boots follows Red and Roxanne back to “Red’s” to “hear what the ‘foreigner’ had to say in his own defense” (282) for abducting a white woman. It is back in the café where Boots killed Big Man, Little Bit took Boots’s left eye, and Boots stomped Little Bit’s head in that Red kills Boots with one bullet through his left eye and then leaves town with his half-sister as his new lover to complete his revenge on John Morgan. Red’s role as race leader in Appalachee functions in conjunction with Blue’s aspirations to change the racial structure of Appalachee. Red serves “his purpose in awakening the blacks of Appalachee to other possibilities and ways of being in the world in relation to whites” (Harris-Lopez 118) and paves the way for “Big Man and Little Bit Thompson’s boy Blue, who had just blown his horn for all ears of Muskhogean County to perk up and take heed” (Andrews, Appalachee
Red 253). By killing Boots and leaving town, Red removes Blue’s two main obstacles, Boots’s unlimited power and Red’s unchallenged power, allowing him to step up as race leader and giving him his chance to change Appalachee.

Rosiebelle Lee’s role as race leader is less socially charged than Red’s, but at the same time more genuine since she cares about the people she is leading. Rosiebelle Lee functions as community protector as she “constructs a community around herself, and she devotes her life to nurturing it” (Byerman 106). Rosiebelle Lee is less interested in bringing about drastic social change, since her community of Plain View is removed from immediate contact with white society, and more interested in keeping her community functioning in a peaceful manner that is supportive and family like. Rosiebelle Lee who is later named and lovingly referred to as Momma Rosiebelle, fills a maternal role over the people of Plain View; her main focus is on the productivity of the domestic setting, which is traditionally gendered as female. Little is known about Rosiebelle Lee’s past by anyone in Muskhogean County; it is not until the end of the novel and hours before her death that she reveals some details of her past and her intentions for coming to Plain View plantation in a conversation with her daughter-in-law. Finally content after exacting her revenge on many rich white men for the castration of her truelove, Rosiebelle Lee states, “I come heah to live” (Andrews, Rosiebelle Lee 239). Rosiebelle Lee comes to Plain View to settle down and raise a family, supported by a rich white man, Mister Mac. It is her relationship with Mister Mac that upsets the white community of Muskhogean County and her maternal power over her community that leads to her immortalization. Rosiebelle fulfills the tragic mulatto archetype as she
initially enters the novel as a lone wanderer appearing as Berzon’s “fictional symbol of marginality” (100); however, she forces her way into the Plain View community and becomes the center of the community, rejecting her marginality.

There is an initial racial ambiguity upon Rosiebelle Lee’s arrival in Appalachee and again hours later at Plain View that instantly gives Rosiebelle Lee power over those around her. Both the black community of Appalachee and the black community of Plain View question her racial background. The black men Rosiebelle Lee encounters in Appalachee are mesmerized by her because “[t]hough her skin was a smooth acorn-brown, she was definitely not like any colored woman the old eyes squinting out from the shade of Blackshear’s porch had ever hit on before that hot Georgia summer afternoon back in 1906” (Andrews, Rosiebelle Lee 3). The “acorn-brown” of her skin suggests to her watchers that she is a “colored woman,” but her physical features and the manner in which she holds herself is unknown to the old men of Appalachee. Rosiebelle Lee represents something new and unknown for the Appalachee residents. Following her departure from Appalachee, Rosiebelle Lee’s co-workers at Plain View see her as a “strange, non-nigger-looking new servant” (9). Like the old men of Appalachee, the black women working at the Plain View mansion also question her appearance as “strange” and cannot connect her physical appearance to themselves. Rosiebelle Lee’s visual difference and air of importance position her with almost immediate power of the mansion workers of Plain View.
The same questionable features that place Rosiebelle Lee as an oddity and outsider in the black communities are what successfully get Rosiebelle Lee her job at Plain View:

True to her words she had gotten herself hired immediately to a “house” job by none other than the lady of the house herself, Missis Bea, well known for her fetish for pretty and exotic things. Missis Bea felt her plantation house would be greatly ornamented by the addition to her domestic staff of this unusually pretty—but a mite mystic looking—barefoot negro with the long straight black-as-coal shiny hair hanging down her back. (8-9)

Rosiebelle Lee is “hired immediately” to the position she informed the black men of Appalachee she would get at Plain View, despite the fact that there was no need for another house worker. It is Rosiebelle Lee’s visual appearance that inspires Missis Bea to create a job for her. Missis Bea’s “fetish for pretty and exotic things” is generally met with items from abroad that she brings in to decorate her home. Extending this “fetish” to the “unusually pretty” and “mystic looking” Rosiebelle Lee suggests Missis Bea’s desire to classify Rosiebelle Lee as an “exotic” foreigner who it is socially acceptable to be captivated by, instead of a light skinned black woman who Missis Bea is socially not suppose to envy. At the same time, Missis Bea also recognizes Rosiebelle Lee as a possession to add to her collection of “pretty and exotic things.” Rosiebelle Lee’s position as “exotic” foreigner allows her to charm Missis Bea and take over Missis Bea’s responsibilities as lady of the house, giving Rosiebelle Lee power over all of the workers at Plain View.

In addition to charming Missis Bea with her exotic looks, Rosiebelle Lee also captivates Missis Bea’s son, Mister Mac, who provides her with further control over Plain View. After giving birth to his first child, Rosiebelle Lee receives a new six-room,
two-story, white house from Mister Mac so that she can properly raise their daughter. Her white house raises her status in the community because for women in Rosiebelle Lee’s position of “mistress” the “greatest source of self-esteem, and the respect of their friends, relatives, and admirers—and enemies—was a house or a piece of land, if they were fortunate enough to obtain so substantial a token of their white lovers’ gratitude” (10). The gift of the house solidifies Rosiebelle Lee’s place in the Plain View community and assists her in gaining more respect and acceptance from the community. With this house Rosiebelle Lee begins creating a family out of her community. She makes it known that “everybody was welcome through the never-locked door of Rosiebelle Lee’s house[…]any time of the day or night for whatever reason and to stay for as long or as little as one wanted to” (15). As an outsider to the community Rosiebelle Lee opens herself and her home up to “everybody” as she works to gain the complete trust of the community and create a familial environment. Whereas Red as a paternal figure remains outside of the community playing up his marginalized status, Rosiebelle Lee as a maternal figure is working towards becoming the heart of the community. However, she does not want to belong to the existing community; instead, she seeks to build her own community that the people of Plain View are welcome to join. In return for her open home, “she expected exactly the same kind of welcome when she went visiting, anybody, anywhere, any time of the day or night for any reasons feeling fit to, and stayed until she herself felt it was time to leave, which was just about always late” (16). As she sets up her power over the community, Rosiebelle Lee imposes herself on the community members knowing that because they are polite, good people, they will not ask her to
leave. In order to establish her power, she ignored the subtle hints that they wanted her to leave and “stayed until she herself felt it was time to leave.” Rosiebelle Lee’s forcing herself upon her community shows her pushing against the idea of the mulatto character as marginalized. She refuses marginalization for herself by taking the time and effort to establish her presence within the culture and the community.

Rosiebelle Lee is no longer required to work in the Big House after her first baby is born and she is left with the time to become the mother and leader of Plain View. She establishes herself as mother of her community by caring for all of its members:

Rosiebelle Lee was on the scene of every local birth, baptism, wedding, and funeral and also administered her own special Second Sunday church collection for the sick and needy, mostly food stuffs and clothing which she delivered personally—all of which brought her into nearly every colored home in the vicinity as often as kinfolks and kept her more closely attuned to the community’s pulse than any other individual before or during her time. Yet since everyone in Plain View…had enough to eat, clothes to wear, and a decent place to live, nobody there considered himself poor. (26)

Now that Rosiebelle Lee’s time is no longer spent working in the big house, she is able to be present for every major family event in Plain View. She also has time to see that the entire community is cared for by taking up her own “collection for the sick and needy,” which she also “delivered personally.” Her personal deliveries and their frequency begin moving Rosiebelle Lee into the status of “kinfolk” and allow her to truly understand the “community’s pulse.” As a result the residents of Plain View discover that none of them are “poor.” By meeting all of the community member’s basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, Rosiebelle Lee brings her community closer together by reducing economical differences between its members. The final act in which Rosiebelle Lee literally becomes the “true Mother of all Plain View” (34) comes after the birth of her fourth child, Doris
Virginia. During a flu epidemic at Plain View, Rosiebelle Lee becomes the only healthy, nursing mother. Coming to the rescue of her community, “she would jump on Nigger Gal and gallop from house to house, nursing each one of these babies…until their mommas recovered enough to resume their maternal duties” (34). Rosiebelle Lee aids in the survival of this group of Plain View babies and leaves the community indebted to her. She also accepts the title of Momma Rosiebelle, which from that point on everyone in the community calls her.

In addition to seeing that the community of Plain View is provided with their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, Rosiebelle Lee also comes to the aid of the community for larger matters. If one of the families of Plain View finds itself ill or members unable to work their land for any reason, “then Rosiebelle Lee lost no time whatsoever in summoning much needed help for the afflicted by voluntarily volunteering the services of every able bodied man, woman, child, and mule available for work in the community. And nobody refused a favor asked, or given, by Rosiebelle Lee” (29). This shows the extent of Rosiebelle Lee’s power over her community and the sense of community solidarity. Rosiebelle Lee is able to “voluntarily volunteer” any of the people of Plain View because she knows that “nobody refused a favor asked, or given” by her. Rosiebelle Lee’s status as “mistress” of the white man and “mother” of the community makes her community members faithfully fulfill any requests or commands of hers because they know she has the best interests of the entire community in mind when she makes her decisions. The community members also understand the importance of
keeping the families in their community strong and come to Rosiebelle Lee’s vision of Plain View as one family.

As “Mother of Plain View,” Rosiebelle Lee strives to keep her community together as the cotton farming community of Plain View is economically devastated by the rise of the boll weevil, followed promptly by the Great Depression. Rosiebelle Lee’s position as Mister Mac’s mistress allows her and her children to be financially supported during the hard times. And consequently allows her to support the community:

Since she and her children were still living comfortably while everyone around them was visibly suffering, the Mother of Plain View was enjoying a measure of local power that even she had never dreamt of. Since she was now in a position to literally starve out anyone who opposed her philosophy, the doors of Rosiebelle Lee’s house were now open to her flock even wider than ever, and more of her time was now spent giving away everything she’d been given by, or taken from others. (42)

After first arriving in Plain View and taking charge of Missis Bea’s duties at the Big House, Rosiebelle Lee begins firing people who do not agree with her and replacing them with those who share her “philosophy.” Rosiebelle Lee thrives on this type of power and uses it to build a community around her where members hold the same values and could live together peaceably. Her newly available power “to literally starve out anyone” who does not agree with her allows Rosiebelle Lee to finish shaping her community around herself. While volunteering the services of others and collecting items from the needy, Rosiebelle Lee has always given away any items that her community members needed or wanted that she had available to her. Here, during this economically devastating time she comes through for her community and gives “away everything” that she has to give. As a
result she is able to lead her “flock” through the difficult time period and keep her community strong.

The impact Rosiebelle Lee makes on the members of her community is evident as people come from all over to pay their respects to her on her deathbed:

The folks were coming. First those who lived the closest came on foot. Then came the wagons, buggies, mules, and horses, tractors, and trucks. Then came the car crowd. Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee’s children were coming to see their big Momma before she crossed over, bringing with them their children, and their children, and a few of their children, all dressed in their Sunday best on this Saturday…parading slowly and solemnly into the Momma’s room to see, be seen by, speak to, be spoken to by, to touch, to be touched, and blessed by Her. Now lying flat in bed while touching a bowed head here, an outstretched trembling hand there, having her own hand squeezed, kissed, and wetted with tears, the dying Momma Rosiebellelee [sic] was bearing up in typical Wildcat Tennessee style. Eating it up. (165)

Four generations of surrogate children come to Rosiebelle Lee’s bedside from near and far around the county to see their “big Momma.” The actions of her many children serve to deify “Her” as they seek to “see,” “speak,” and “touch” Rosiebelle Lee and receive those same actions in return. The extended community believes that to come into contact with Rosiebelle Lee will empower them or save them. The final desire to be “blessed by Her” ultimately places her on a higher level than a mother. This deification of Rosiebelle Lee suggests the spiritual and moral impact she has had on these many people’s lives. And, “bearing up in typical Wildcat Tennessee style” Rosiebelle Lee relishes in the impact she has made on the community member’s lives, while enjoying this final display of power.

Raymond Andrews initially hides the racial victimization of both Red and Rosiebelle Lee to allow them to be viewed and appreciated outside of their previous
circumstances and seen as the powerful characters they are, as “untragic” mulatto characters. Most of Andrews’s characters regardless of race, class, and gender are victims in one form or another, at the very least they are victims of the social structures they propagate yet do not understand. Andrews uses Red and Rosiebelle Lee to dispel the idea of the mulatto character as necessarily tragic; he instead shows them with the ability to come into power despite their victimization. Red and Rosiebelle Lee both come to Appalachee with an understanding of how society functions in relation to them and how to use that knowledge with their physical appearance to manipulate the oppressive social structures to gain power. Due to gender roles, this manipulation and achievement of power is developed in different ways, with Red as a more hardened paternal figure and Rosiebelle Lee as a loving maternal figure. Neither Red nor Rosiebelle Lee attempts to change the racial structures of Appalachee; instead, by positioning themselves with power they show their communities different ways of using power to their benefit. Red prepares his community to engage in Blue’s integration plans for Appalachee, while Rosiebelle Lee decides that family is the most important part of life and empowers her community with a sense of familial unity. Both leave their communities with better understandings of how to negotiate power for themselves, and with the prospects of future change.
The power dynamic surrounding sexual politics involves negotiations of race, class, and gender. While upper-class, white men struggle to maintain power, the other classes, races, and genders struggle to gain any available power. Depending on a person’s status the power to be lost or gained through sexual encounters blurs the definition of rape. In their book *Rape and Representation* Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver state that, regardless of the forum, when it comes to the issue of rape and its representation “who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as ‘truth’ determine the definition of what rape is” (1). Raymond Andrews’s portrait of African American life in his Muskhogean County trilogy shows rape as a reality of life for both black women and men and poor, white women. Yet Andrews, who is writing from within the African American oral tradition, places narrative responsibility with a storyteller who is consistently ambiguous as to which sexual encounters constitute rape and who is unwilling to label the sexual encounters. By not offering a “definition of what rape is” and refusing to label the various sexual encounters, it becomes the responsibility of the reader to make that definition. Using a general definition of rape as forced sexual intercourse, all four of Andrews’s
main female characters’ sexual encounters are classified as rape. Two of these characters have no voice of their own and their feelings and experiences are relayed through the storyteller, while the other two are given voices, one speaking for herself and the other through her daughter. The ambiguity surrounding these rape scenes is as equally apparent for the characters given a voice in their story as it is for the storyteller, which suggests a complexity involving varying degrees of rape and responsibility. The female characters are given the power and responsibility for choosing to remain sexual prey, while at the same time they are denied the power to escape their situations. What is set up for readers to perceive as “truth” becomes complicated within previous and preceding descriptions of the various sexual encounters, which shows how society and individual women cope with customary sexual violence.

Higgins and Silver go on to specifically address the most unsettling feature of rape within literature as the “obsessive inscription—and obsessive erasure—of sexual violence against women (and against those placed by society in the position of ‘woman’). The striking repetition of inscription and erasure raises the question not only of why this trope recurs, but even more, of what it means and who benefits” (2). Higgins and Silver discuss inscription and erasure in several forms, all ultimately being perpetuated by social standards and acceptance of sexual violence. The inscription and erasure of sexual violence occurs with male authors who are “caught up in representations of masculinity and subjectivity” (6) that are left in place with questionable representations of violence and sexual encounters. Yet, in Higgins and Silver’s framework the only real way for women to gain power from sexual encounters is by allowing them a voice.
The socially accepted or normalized power structures in place in Andrews’s Appalachee trilogy show women struggling as victims of a society controlled by white men, against these power structures, and learning to gain power from within them, even without a voice. Andrews’s use of the inscription—when Andrews presents the sexual encounters within scenes of violence and force—and erasure of rape—when Andrews remains ambiguous about sexual encounters—corresponds with uses and displays of power; the inscription of rape places those characters as permanent victims, while the erasure of rape allows those characters to obtain power from their situations. Andrews creates intertextual doubles, pairing Little Bit Thompson from *Appalachee Red* with Rosibelle Lee from *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee* and Baby Sweet from *Appalachee Red* with Betty Jean from *Baby Sweet’s*. While all four women’s circumstances intersect on various levels, these specific pairings of the women is based on an overlapping of their initial situations along with the inscription and erasure of their rapes. Baby Sweet and Betty Jean each have a sexual encounter that seems to be described and classified as rape, and all four women have scenes which remain ambiguous as to the real nature of the sexual encounters or forces an erasure of rape from these scenes and their experiences.

Little Bit and Rosibelle Lee both work as domestic servants for wealthy white employers whose sons “didn’ know the ways of womenfolks” (Andrews, *Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee* 237), but are none-the-less focused on procuring sexual relations from the black women, acknowledged by white mothers as “being part of that unfortunate phase of life that all men were cursed with having to pass through”
(Andrews, Appalachee Red 10). During this “unfortunate phase of life” it is socially accepted, even expected, that wealthy white men will have a black lover. Andrews portrays the mothers viewing it as a “phase” that occurs before marriage and that their sons will “pass through,” when in actuality it is not a phase of life, but a way of life, as the black lover invariably turns into the black mistress. The titles of “lover” and “mistress,” incidentally, are placed upon these women regardless of their level of participation, as the dominant white society refuses to acknowledge the resistance and violation of these women and as the black society attempts to ignore the violations. Andrews is less concerned with the white male side of the equation; his focus is on the black “lovers” and “mistresses” who do not willingly enter into these relationships and the social situations that define their roles in the abusive sexual relationships. In Little Bit’s and Rosiebelle Lee’s situations, both women find themselves unexpectedly independent—Little Bit suddenly without her husband and Rosiebelle Lee suddenly without her father—yet reliant on white employers for their survival. For Little Bit and Rosiebelle Lee there is an erasure of their experiences of rape through a de-emphasis of and distraction from the events. This erasure of rape allows Little Bit and Rosiebelle Lee to display power over their situations and allows them to be viewed positively by their communities for their socially accepted and expected white-man-black-woman relationships.

The newly married, eighteen-year-old Little Bit Thompson finds herself on her own, after, Big Man Thompson’s mistaken arrest, conviction, and incarceration, and
secures employment as a maid for the town’s most prominent white family. Within days of beginning her new job, Little Bit is given an ultimatum by her employer:

Still deeply in love with her convict husband, Little Bit hadn’t wanted to get all messed up with some other man[...] she had been warned by the arrogant, whiskey-smelling young white man that if she wanted to keep her job with his family, considered at the time by most town blacks to be about the best whites in the area to work for, then she would have to submit to his wishes. This coming from John was no idle threat[...] And after having experienced two frustrating weeks of job hunting before finally finding this “good” one, while not being financially able to repeat the process, the new maid yielded to young Morgan’s demands, thus launching another white-man-and-black-woman love affair, a then-prevalent Southern pastime. (Appalachee Red 7)

The encounter between the white man and his black servant is rape based on the historical white-master-black-slave relationship that places the white man as powerful and the black woman as powerless. The statement, “if she wanted to keep her job…then she would have to submit,” however, is set up to both be read as rape and to question the definition of rape. Reading it as a rape scene, John Morgan forces Little Bit to have sexual intercourse with him by threatening to take away her livelihood. At the same time, however, Andrews complicates the idea of rape by dividing the responsibility for their sexual relationship between both Little Bit and John Morgan. The if-then statement places the responsibility of their sexual relationship on Little Bit by presenting it as her decision. If Little Bit chooses not to quit her job, then she is choosing to enter into a sexual relationship with John Morgan. Andrews further complicates the situation by withdrawing some of Little Bit’s responsibility as he presents the reality of her situation and removes the choice from her decision by pointing out that she not only has the best employers in the area, but also has a “good” job and does not have the financial resources or the time necessary to quit her job and find another. The ambiguity and complications
of the ideas of responsibility and choice begins to remove Little Bit from the position of victim to a position of power within the difficult situation of rape.

Despite their shared responsibility, there remains a clear power structure that places John Morgan in the position of power over Little Bit. His warning to Little Bit is “no idle threat,” and he “demands” her submission to him. Little Bit’s actions in response to John’s aggressive stance, those of submitting and yielding to John’s demands, present her as powerless. Little Bit submits herself to John in response to a lack of viable alternatives, while remaining “deeply in love with her convict husband.” Even though Andrews engages in what Higgins and Silver call an “erasure of rape” in Little Bit and John Morgan’s sexual encounters, the power structure between the two and the language Andrews employs to describe the situation reinforce Little Bit and John Morgan’s sexual encounters as rape. While it is not a violent physical rape that occurs, it certainly is not a “love affair” but the “then-prevalent Southern pastime” of financially forced sexual coercion. Andrews draws attention to the technical aspect of the situation that places Little Bit with the responsibility and some power, and the reality of the situation that places the responsibility on circumstance and the power in the hands of John Morgan. The erasure of rape by framing the relationship as a “love affair” shifts the focus from the actual rape occurring to the surrounding factors that allow Little Bit to benefit from the situation.

John Morgan’s satisfaction with their sexual relationship and Little Bit’s acceptance of her prescribed place within the current social structure gives Little Bit power over John Morgan. Little Bit is shown gaining power in her relationship with John
Morgan as she requests and receives “gifts” in the form of land and a two-story, white house. By agreeing to play her role in the white-man-black-woman relationship and benefiting financially from it, Little Bit is envied by her community as her “status among the town’s blacks soared to incredible heights” (9). Little Bit is respected by the black community for improving her socio-economic situation and becoming a property owner. As a result of benefiting from her situation, a further erasure of the rape occurs when Little Bit takes the full responsibility of their “love affair” as she prepares to face the response of her husband. Regardless of Little Bit’s reasons or lack of alternatives and her community’s positive response to her situation, she knows that Big Man would go up beside her head with his fists in payment for her sinful act…A good beating she knew she deserved and would accept without complaint, but she retained the hope that once her husband saw their new home, he would think twice about whipping her too badly for having gotten up off a little during the year he was away. (10)

Little Bit accepts responsibility for her role in her sexual relationship with John Morgan. Because she is voiceless in a white society, Little Bit cannot label her situation rape; indeed, her subordinate position in society would make that labeling useless. So, despite the rape and her lack of options to remove herself from the situation, by essentially saying “yes” to the rape Little Bit can begin reclaiming some of her power over the situation. Little Bit believes her sexual encounters with John Morgan are a “sinful act,” which suggests a level of intent on her behalf. She also acknowledges that she both “deserved” and “would accept” physical violence from her husband as punishment for her sexual relationship with another man. At the same time, Little Bit hopes that her improved status in the community and her real estate gain will garner her admiration
from Big Man and lessen his anger and punishment. Part of the acceptance and admiration from the community towards Little Bit is based on Big Man’s ability to regain the respect of his community by beating his wife and that Little Bit is not doing any harm to their social structure. Little Bit’s punishment “is administered to the satisfaction of both husband and wife,” but Little Bit refuses to relinquish her monetary gains as Big Man demands (11). For Little Bit, her property represents her power over her situation and relinquishing that property signifies her surrendering her power and accepting that the last year of her life was rape without gain on her part.

Unlike Little Bit who does not have a voice in the telling of her situation on Morgan Hill, Andrews gives Rosiebelle Lee her own voice on her death bed to recount her early experiences to her daughter-in-law. She does not give her age when recounting the traumatic sexual experience of her young life, but describes herself as “gittin’ nigh on becomin’ a woman” (Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee 237), which comparatively places her in her mid-teens. After the disappearance of her father, Rosiebelle Lee is left to care for herself and describes the advances of her employer’s white son:

“‘Spite gwine wid ’n bein’ set on marryin’ Willie Henry, I was bein’ messed wid by the oldes’ white son o’ the house whar I worked. He wouldn’ keep his hands offa me. I didn’ wan’ nud’n to do wid him no way ’n even tole him so. But that jes made him try mo’ harder. At fus’ I could tell he was still young ’n didn’ know the ways of womenfolks lak I knowed the ways of menfolks, ’specially white menfolks. So I thought, wid him I won’ have no trouble ’mount to much.” (237)

Rosiebelle Lee’s account illuminates the white man’s objectification of her; he does not accept that she is in a committed relationship and makes continuous advances towards her. Her description of the knowledge held by the two of them both temporarily places Rosiebelle Lee in the position of power, since he does not “know the ways of
womenfolks,” and implies that she has had multiple sexual encounters because she knows “the ways of menfolks, ’specially white menfolks.” This claim is pieced together with her earlier summation of her knowledge of white menfolks being that “[t]hey took wha’ they wanted, ’n if they didn’ git hit, they kilt somebody” (237). This is framed within her conversation about her own sexuality and sets up her experience and knowledge of white menfolks as rapists. Despite Rosiebelle Lee being the only one of Andrews’s female characters to recount the truth of her own story, Rosiebelle Lee erases her own experiences of rape from her story. Rosiebelle Lee instead glances over of her prior experiences with white men as she recalls the time her pursuer does not succeed in raping her. In this instance, Rosiebelle Lee perceives the young white man’s lack of knowledge as telling of his inaction. His inability to take what he wants suggests that he is also not up to the task of killing somebody to get it, as her previous experience with white men has taught her. By not acknowledging that her knowledge about the ways of menfolks comes from her victimization in rape, Rosiebelle Lee maintains power over herself and experiences.

Rosiebelle Lee, however, mistakes her pursuer’s lack of sexual knowledge as weakness and when placed in a similar situation as Little Bit, instead of submitting to him she takes a stand and tells him she “wan’ nud’n to do wid him.” While she initially holds the power in her relationship with the white man and she is successful in her rejection of him, when he hears she is leaving for Atlanta with her black man he aggressively tries to reestablish his power in the situation:

“He tole me that I couldn’t leave his family to go to Atlanta, or anywhar else, wid a shiftless niggah. Tha’s when I tole him that I could go to Atlanta or anywhar my
Here the young white man is once again trying to tell Rosiebelle Lee what to do; she once again stands up to him and he loses another power struggle with her. Rosiebelle Lee’s claiming of her physical and sexual independence and her placing her black man above the white man pushes the white man too far, which Rosiebelle Lee recognizes as she breaks her account with her reflection of “why did I wanna say that?” At this point the white man turns into a would-be-rapist as he tries “to git” Rosiebelle Lee, but fails to overpower her and her butcher knife. Rosiebelle Lee successfully maintains power over her attacker and protects her body from his force. After he storms away, Rosiebelle Lee finally realizes she may have misjudged his weakness. She decides that the safest plan of action to protect both herself and Willie Henry is for the two to leave for Atlanta immediately in order to avoid any further confrontations with this power hungry white man. However, Rosiebelle Lee’s plans to get out of town do not come to pass and sexual violence does take place.

Unable to gain direct power over Rosiebelle Lee with threats and physical force, the white man seeks reinforcements and moves on to indirectly attack her through the man she loves. The white men succeed in finding Willie Henry before Rosiebelle Lee, but “[t]hey didn’ kill him lak they did to mos’ cullud men. Him, they cut…lak you would a hog for fattenin’. He was no mo’ good as a man. Lawd knows I was sorry for wha’ happen, ’cause I love that man lak nobody buziness” (238). Returning again to her prior knowledge of standard behavior of white men, which is “[t]hey took wha’ they
wanted, ’n if they didn’ git hit, they kilt somebody’” (237), this inexperienced white man and his accomplices react in a manner that is unexpected by Rosiebelle Lee. While Big Man is castrated figuratively by John Morgan’s sexual advances with Little Bit, Willie Henry is castrated literally by the white man as a result of Rosiebelle Lee’s loyalty to him and refusal of the white man. Her refusal leads to the white man transferring his sexual violence to her Willie Henry. Unable to claim sexual power over Rosiebelle Lee, he asserts his sexual power over Willie Henry, leaving him “‘no mo’ good as a man.’” The violent sexual assault on Willie Henry that strips him of his manhood serves to leave Rosiebelle Lee powerless and essentially strips her of her womanhood as well, leaving her sexual partner unable to sexually perform or provide her with children.

Due to the victimization of Willie Henry and her rejection of the socially accepted white-man-black-woman relationship, Rosiebelle Lee is ostracized from her community: “‘Miz’ Luvenia ’n everybody else blamed me for wha’ happen’ to Willie Henry. ’N he wouldn’ see ’n talk to me, ’cause he was so ’shamed. Lawd, hit hurt me too’” (238). Her failed attempt to push back against the accepted social structure causes a backlash from the black community. Where the figuratively castrated Big Man can restore his masculinity by beating Little Bit, the literally castrated Willie Henry cannot possibly reconstruct his masculinity. The violent permanent removal of his masculinity calls his community to his defense and their inability to target their anger at the white perpetrators, leads them to condemn Rosiebelle Lee.

This experience, however, allows Rosiebelle to come to a greater realization of her place within society than Little Bit comes to. Rosiebelle Lee refuses to remain
powerless and moves on to start over in her socially acceptable place in a new community: "’I said to myself that no mo’ was I gonna be the cause of a cullud man gittin’ cut, or kilt, by the white folks ’cause no mo’ would I ever let myself love a cullud man lak I love Willie Henry. I was jes gonna mess ’round wid white men, ’n if they cut or kilt they own ’cause o’ me, then that was white folks’ bizness’" (238). As a response to her social rejection, Rosiebelle Lee reevaluates her decisions with her new knowledge and decides how to turn the reality of her place in society into a position of power. Rosiebelle Lee once again claims sexual power over her own body and the power to protect black men. Not only does Rosiebelle Lee decide to just “mess ’round wid white men” but she decides that she will only mess with the richest white men. She leaves her old community and goes in search of the richest white man in the Appalachee area to ensure that she will have financial security for her anticipated children and protection for herself from other white men. And as is suggested, her rich, white man Mister Mac kills another white man of lesser social status for parking his wagon outside of Rosiebelle Lee’s house in another erased rape scene.

Much like Little Bit, Rosiebelle Lee gains power and status in her community as a result of her new relationship with the rich white man. She receives her own piece of land and white house to care for her children in, which makes her the most powerful black woman amongst the country workers of Plain View. Rosiebelle Lee’s rise to power allows her anything she wants from the black community of Plain View and upon finishing the construction of her own church she turns into a rapist herself:

Arriving at their destination, the captive reverend was led by the hand into the new, still empty Upper Church, where Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee, automatically
assuming the top half of the holy missionary position, ordained God’s number one black man in all of Muskogean County by fucking him into a state of blissful shock. (19)

Rosiebelle Lee sexually dominates her newly selected reverend by “automatically assuming the top half” of the position and sending him “into a state of blissful shock.” This sexual encounter grants the reverend the status of being “ordained God’s number one black man” and makes him the only black man in the county to have conjugal knowledge of Rosiebelle Lee. This one sexual encounter places Rosiebelle Lee forever in power of the reverend, as he spends his time hoping, praying, and remaining at Rosiebelle Lee’s church with the hopes that it would happen again.

In opposition to the power Little Bit and Rosiebelle Lee are able to claim, Baby Sweet and Betty Jean dream of being successfully independent and having power over their own lives as they move from rural country life to the big city of Atlanta. Both women leave their homes in search of opportunity and to make something of themselves. Although their reasons for leaving do not align—Baby Sweet leaves to avoid being one of Mist’ Ed’s Elberta Orchard sex objects and Betty Jean leaves because her father will no longer allow her “white-looking colored baby” (Baby Sweet’s 25) in his home—the actions of the two young women leaving their homes are given through parallel accounts; Andrews even goes as far as to set up the situation in which Betty Jean’s daughter, Lea, recounts her mother’s story to Baby Sweet. The accounts of their initial departures mirror each other:

Fifteen minutes later, wearing her Sunday cotton print dress and tan high-heels with bright red socks, and with her few other belongings stuffed inside an old flour sack clung over her shoulder, Baby Sweet was trudging up the long dirt road leading out of Hard Labor Hole…going north to Atlanta. Free of the Hole, Black Peach took off
her heels, which were beginning to hurt her feet, and socks, and began strutting barefoot up the middle of the highway. (Appalachee Red 83)

“With the guitar slung over my back, my Sunday dress on, a flour sack full of all of your and my things and some cornbread, forty-two cents, and you in my arms, I struck out walking to Atlanta and the WSB Barn Dance. Barefoot.” (Baby Sweet’s 156)

While the storyteller’s portrayal of Baby Sweet’s departure is more descriptive than Lea’s account of Betty Jean’s, both show the same steps being taken by the two women as they strike out on their own. The two women, outfitted in their Sunday dresses, place all of their belongings in flour sacks and begin their barefoot journey towards Atlanta. Mirroring the experiences of the black Baby Sweet and the white Betty Jean, Andrews illustrates that at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder one’s class can have more impact than one’s race. Growing up in the similar environment of working the land of a rich white land owner and not receiving any formal education, both leave the country for the presumed opportunities of city life. Baby Sweet dreams of a nice indoor job with money to buy a radio and nice clothing, and Betty Jean dreams of playing her music on the radio. The first step of leaving their homes shows these two women claiming their independence and power over the outcome of their lives.

The parallel accounts continue as the women head towards Atlanta as both women are given rides by seemingly trustworthy gentlemen, a police officer and a preacher. Baby Sweet and Betty Jean tell the men their stories; Baby Sweet explains why she is running away from her father and landowner and Betty Jean explains that she is kicked out of her home for having a black man’s baby. Their stories set them up to be
victims as their rapists essentially hear that they are alone in the world and no one will care if anything happens to them. Both women feel reassured by the men’s behaviors:

Following the end of her story, Baby Sweet somehow felt better, though still fearful of the red-necked Man up front, and relaxed her bottom a bit on the edge of the seat[...] Her hopes that she might be safe sitting here, protected by the long arm of the law were encouraged when, for a long time after her confession, the Man kept driving slowly up the highway toward Atlanta without saying a word. (Appalachee Red 84)

“The buggy driver was a real friendly-looking, middle-age preacher who sat right there on the seat, kindly listening to my every word[...] After I got through talking, he turned looked at me, giving me the biggest, warmest, softest, and kindest smile of understanding I’d ever seen before on a man’s face.” (Baby Sweet’s 158)

Up to this point both women have been avoiding offers of rides; as a runaway Baby Sweet does not want to be discovered so she hides when she hears cars approaching and Betty Jean feels that she would be vulnerable in the closed space of a car so she refuses all rides that are offered her. But their avoidance of rides does not go as planned when Baby Sweet does not hear the approaching car and is forced into the car by the police officer, and Betty Jean accepts a ride in an open buggy, feeling that it is a safe alternative to a car. Baby Sweet is deceived by believing in the idea of the authority of law and that she is “protected by the long arm of the law.” Likewise, Betty Jean is deceived by believing in the respectability of a preacher with the “biggest, warmest, softest, and kindest smile of understanding.” Both women misread these men’s reactions to their stories; rather than being understanding, as the men continue driving them toward Atlanta they are plotting their attacks on the women. Both of the men are granted power over the communities with their roles as police officer and preacher; by belonging to the two “moral” institutions of society, the law and the church, both men are given the power to
label rape and to label their actions with these women as not rape. The encounter with these two men reclaims Baby Sweet’s and Betty Jean’s newly acquired independence and power over their lives. While both women will end up as these men’s rape victims, it is at this point that their stories diverge and their experiences of powerlessness become unique to their own situations.

From her first introduction, Baby Sweet “the Black Peach” Jackson is set up in opposition to all other females in the Hard Labor Hole orchards as “the Hole’s toughest tomboy” (Appalachee Red 76) who does not have time for girls or their activities. Upon transitioning from girlhood to womanhood she is titled the most attractive and shapeliest female in the county. Baby Sweet spends her youth as an outsider, refusing to be like other women of the Hole. As she matures descriptions of Baby Sweet become increasingly sexualized and, with her “‘ants-in-pants’ walk” that “must be jelly, ’cause jam/ don’t shake like that,” (77) she becomes the focus of all the boys and men in the Hole. At the same time the men of the Hole are discovering that Baby Sweet has a body, Baby Sweet discovers a passion for dancing and creates her own dance called the “Fuzz Shake.” Multiple sexualized descriptions come from different perspectives of Baby Sweet’s dance performances as she is seen “grinding, rotating, gyrating, hesitating, contemplating, leaping out and then away from the crowd in every possible move, manner, and direction” (78) with “sensuous and quivering flesh” (79) and with “high, rounded buttock cheeks and big, cantaloupe-sized breasts jostling loosely beneath her flimsy and much-too-short guano-sack dress” (80). These sexualized descriptions of Baby Sweet occur throughout accounts of her life and keep Baby Sweet as
a permanent object of desire by the men of Muskhogean County. The initial sexualized
descriptions of Baby Sweet’s dancing by both white and black men begin her life time of
objectification. The only factor keeping Baby Sweet from sexual encounters with black
men is fear of the men she “belongs” to; Hard Labor Hole is subject to her father as
overseer, Appalachee is subject to the violent police chief Boots, and then Appalachee
and Boots are subject to the mysterious Red.

The two most important responses to Baby Sweet’s dancing come from her
black dance partner, “the Bird,” and her white employer, Mist’ Ed. Dancing brings the
Bird within inches of Baby Sweet’s “convulsing body yet [he finds himself] never—
though dying to—touching” her, to which the storyteller replies, “Lord God! How much
You want a man to take?” (80). The storyteller’s response to the Bird’s restraint
emphasizes the Bird’s respect for Baby Sweet. Despite his crush on Baby Sweet and
raging hormones, the Bird controls his sexual feelings towards Baby Sweet and displays
his respect for Baby Sweet by not invading her space or uninvitedly touching her body.
However, the voyeuristic Mist’ Ed who watches Baby Sweet’s performances hidden up at
the Big House is less able to restrain himself and upon Baby Sweet’s rebellious and final
performance he stands

peeking down at and drooling over [Baby Sweet…]When Poor Boy had suddenly
appeared and the instant his long pole made contact with his daughter’s swelling,
bumping, and gyrating ass, the fat little landowner had stood there behind the
curtain and nearly creamed his jeans. He had to control himself to keep from
jumping out of the second floor window and running after the barefoot black gal
whose shapely ass he stood watching bouncing downhill and getting lost back in the
trees. Mist’ Ed decided right then and there that he was going to get himself some
of that Baby Sweet[…]and soon. (81)
Mist’ Ed “nearly creamed his jeans” as he watches Poor Boy exert his power and authority in disciplining Baby Sweet for disobeying his no dancing orders. While he does restrain himself from chasing after a black girl in front of all of his workers and her family, he also decides that it is time for him to exert his power over her and “get himself some.” His plans to exert power over Baby Sweet also involve exerting his power over Poor Boy, his overseer and the only one of his workers he ever speaks to, as it is Poor Boy who is responsible for reassigning his daughter to the Elberta Orchard. Just behind the Big House, Mist’ Ed handpicks female workers who he personally oversees and performs “frequent daily ‘checks’ on the young black gals working in the Elberta Orchard” (32). This is another instance of erasure, as the “checks” imply daily rapes that occur just behind the shed and out of everyone’s sight. The black community of Plain View is powerless to resist the reality of the Elberta Orchard and erase their own knowledge of what occurs at the orchard to continue with their daily activities. Despite the erasure and avoidance of the issue of the Elberta Orchard, the entire Hole community knows what goes on at the Elberta Orchard, and all remain powerless to change the situation or protect their mothers, sisters and wives. The women of Elberta Orchard cope with their violations and are eventually replaced by younger women.

Helpless against Mist’ Ed’s orders, Poor Boy responds to his daughter’s new position by placing the blame on Baby Sweet; reminding her “how just the day before he had told her to stop her sinful ways, especially in front of the white folks, and now the merciful and just Good Lord was seeing fit to punish her for her evildoing and there was nothing in the world he, her daddy who had warned her, could do about the Lord’s
punishment upon her soul except to pray” (82). Just as Big Man blames Little Bit for her sexual relationship with John Morgan and Rosiebelle Lee is blamed and outcast from the community for Willie Henry’s castration, Poor Boy displaces his anger onto Baby Sweet as he justifies her future rapes as “punishment” for her “sinful ways.” He also continues his justification by bringing religion into the discussion in order to take the power out of the hands of the white man and give it to a higher power that relieves Poor Boy of the responsibility of acting on behalf of his daughter, against Mist’ Ed, in much the same way Little Bit undoes the reality of her victimization by acknowledging herself as a sinner, and with Rosiebelle Lee’s reverend whose rape is his being ordained by God. Poor Boy is literally a man with the power of a boy; he is unable to keep his daughter from dancing and he is unable to keep her safe from Mister Ed. By placing the power in the hands of God, Poor Boy is able to cope with the situation and say a prayer on Baby Sweet’s behalf and “within a short time… [be] snoring—loudly” (82) because he is powerless to change the situation.

Baby Sweet, however, refuses the inaction of prayer; she packs a bag and leaves Hard Labor Hole, so she can avoid the daily rapes inclusive of being one of Mist’ Ed’s Elberta Orchard girls. Yet to her horror, the very next evening she experiences the first of her daily rapes as the newest member of Appalachee and captive of Police Chief Boots:

[In a small room above Sam’s Café where she lay in the dark with the hem of her new Sunday print dress pulled up above her waist, crying softly and hurting hard beneath the grunting and snorting body of Appalachee’s Chief of Police and silently praying to the merciful and just Good Lord to please hurry up and let whatever was supposed to happen from all that burning action going on down below her belly hurry up and happen before she died from the pain. (85)]
Andrews takes special attention to the inscription of Baby Sweet’s rape scenes and does not attempt to make her initial situation into something other than rape. Baby Sweet’s rapes by Boots are the only rape scenes in which Andrews engages with the physical experience of and physical response to rape. This traumatic sexual initiation has Baby Sweet “crying,” “hurting,” and “burning” as she is laying there in confusion, unaware of what is “supposed to happen” to her. Although she earlier refuses her father’s advice to pray when she finds out about Mist’ Ed’s intentions, now that she is experiencing sexual violence she turns to “silently praying” to survive her rape. In much the same way as Poor Boy earlier turns to prayer to cope with the anticipated rapes of his daughter at the Elberta Orchard, Baby Sweet turns to prayer to cope with the pain and unknown experience.

As Baby Sweet settles into Boot’s ritualized rapes, she accepts these daily encounters as “punishment from God for having been disobedient to her father” (87). Once again trying to cope with her situation, Baby Sweet takes responsibility for her rapes just as her father earlier states that this type of situation is the “Lord’s punishment” (82). And her only regret is “letting herself get caught by the Man,” (88) which also has Baby Sweet accepting the responsibility for her situation and suggests that she might have been able to avoid Boots. The black community of Appalachee perpetuates Baby Sweet’s feelings of responsibility as the rumor spreads that she leaves “her family to become the woman of the Man” (86). While this same community is previously supportive of Little Bit’s “love affair” because she does what is necessary to survive and makes financial gains, they are less supportive of Baby Sweet judging her to have left the
supportive system of her family to enter into a “love affair” with the only truly despised white man of Appalachee. As a response to her relationship with Boots, the community “suddenly stopped speaking to her[...] she could only believe that she was receiving God’s punishment for not having obeyed her father and later running away from home” (86). Baby Sweet is hurt by the community’s actions since she has always been a social person, and she is left alone to survive Boot’s abuse. There is no position for Baby Sweet to gain power in, her victimization is reinforced by all areas of her life, being sexually violated by Boots, outcast from the community, and punished by God.

To survive the sexual violence from Boots, Baby Sweet has her own cleansing ritual that precedes her more important healing ritual of dancing naked in front of her mirror to the late night radio’s spirituals and rhythm and blues. After five months of her nightly two minute rapes by Boots, she encounters the new stranger in Appalachee, Red, as she dances she becomes oblivious to Earth’s all, except her music and her mirror, in which through half-closed eyes she was able to follow every movement of her blurred image. So entranced was Baby Sweet’s soul in this particular sorrowful tune then pervading every cell of her existence that when there suddenly appeared in her mirror’s center another blurred image silently looming behind and above her own, she knew at that precise moment that her soul had finally shed the lonely room for the real world of the mirror along with this towering image whose strong hands she now felt cupping her fast swelling and pulsating breasts and then began caressing them slowly, while drawing her faster and faster into the vortex of the glass. And as she descended deeper into the big mirror, the spiderwebs came to cover over the trail of her descent. But then just for a flashing moment her journey was slowed almost to a stop by a sharp stab of pain produced by a great, blunt object crashing upon her soreness and nearly blowing the mist from the mirror [...] whose first contact with freedom was announced by a long, mournful squeal sent up personally by her soul, signaling that the mirror’s core had been safely reached. (92)
This scene intermingles her sexual invasion with her sexual awakening. While trying to heal her soul from her nightly rape, Baby Sweet separates her body and her soul becoming “oblivious” to her surroundings and “entranced” upon the music and her soul in the mirror. Upon Red’s entrance into her room, she enters “the real world of the mirror.” Baby Sweet’s world above the café does not involve anyone but Boots and her landlord, Sam, so this entrance of another being indicates that she is no longer in her “lonely room.” Red approaches and touches Baby Sweet’s naked body, providing her with alternate sexual stimulation from that which she is accustomed. Red’s presence and contact allow Baby Sweet entrance into “the real world” of feeling and connecting with herself. The “spiderwebs” covering “the trail of her descent” suggest a passing of time and a desire to stay in this “real world” and not return. Upon Red’s penetration Baby Sweet is almost jolted back to reality as it “nearly blow[s] the mist from the mirror.” The “pain produced by a great, blunt object crashing upon her soreness” brings Baby Sweet back to her previous sexual experiences of painful violent rape by Boots, yet with Red the pain disperses and turns into pleasure.

Baby Sweet’s experience of “freedom” and her arrival at the “mirror’s core” represent her first orgasm and signals that she is safe in her new world, as she is awakened to the possible pleasures connected to sexual intercourse. The idea of the mirror being covered with a “mist” during Baby Sweet and Red’s first encounter creates a distance between Baby Sweet and Red, along with a lack of understanding on Baby Sweet’s part as to what is happening to her. Despite the scene culminating in pleasure for Baby Sweet, Red enters Baby Sweet’s room as a stranger, invading her personal space,
takes control over her body as she is out of touch with reality, and she is caught off guard as he unexpectedly enters her body. The presentation of Red as Baby Sweet’s savior, who frees her soul, provides her with her first orgasm, and removes her from the clutches of Boots is partially correct, but with the continued objectification of Baby Sweet, Red removes Baby Sweet from Boots’s possession and places her in his own. Baby Sweet experiences limited freedom in her relationship with Red because Red’s position within Appalachee is as a mythic, all controlling hero of the town. Baby Sweet does what Red tells her to, just as she did what Boots told her to.

As the hero of the novel, Red is depicted by the storyteller and accepted by critics as liberator of the oppressed blacks of Appalachee and his acts of oppression are interpreted in a positive light, as necessary for his mythic status. Andrews’s top critic Trudier Harris-Lopez notes that “Baby Sweet has never had any autonomy” and that “[s]he has more freedom within Red’s Café than she could possibly have had in the ‘Elberta Orchard’ or with Boots White” (112). While these are valid observations, they do not make Baby Sweet’s experience with Red less violating. Red supports her financially, teaches her to read and write, and gives her the responsibility of running the café; however, Baby Sweet does not get to make the decisions about running the café, at many points she is described as fearing Red, and she is even physically assaulted by him after telling him she wants to have his white baby. Despite her financial status and the status she receives by being associated with Red, Baby Sweet remains outcast from the women of Appalachee’s black community, by whom Baby Sweet finds herself “strongly resented—mostly by those females in love, married, unmarriageable, and the old”
(Andrews, *Appalachee Red* 196). In the previous situations of Little Bit and Rosiebelle Lee, the black communities respected and encouraged the status gained by their “love affairs” with white men. Baby Sweet is continuously outcast, first for “becoming the woman” of the wrong white man and then for being with the most successful black man who happens to have white skin. Baby Sweet is forced by Boots and then by Red to remain separate from the community, which leads the community to judge Baby Sweet as thinking she is superior to them. In actuality it is the community who believes Baby Sweet is superior to them; she is more beautiful than any of the women and too beautiful and off limits for the men.

Just as Baby Sweet is violently raped and left alone in the community, Betty Jean is also raped and outcast from both the black and white communities of Atlanta. There are two instances in Lea’s account of her and Betty Jean’s life that address circumstances of sexual violence. Like Rosiebelle Lee, Betty Jean is given a voice separate from the storyteller, through her daughter Lea, to give her own account of her life experiences. Betty Jean’s story is relayed from her to Lea to Baby Sweet to a questionable number of townspeople before reaching the storyteller and then readers, which raises the question of who labeled her sexual encounter as rape. After setting out on her journey like Baby Sweet, Betty Jean is deceived and raped by the white preacher on her way to Atlanta:

“[H]e pulled off the highway and into the woods where after real polite like telling me that if I didn’t do what he wanted me to do, then he would have to kill you, and while his horse grazed and you lay back up on the buggy seat between the guitar and flour sack crying your head off, he raped me down on the ground next to the wheel. He left me there in the dirt with the guitar and flour sack and you still hollering.” (*Baby Sweet’s* 158)
This is the only scene in the trilogy where the sexual encounter is labeled rape—other than the storyteller’s reflection on Rosiebelle Lee’s sexual encounter with the reverend, as the reverend longs for her to “rape” him again. Betty Jean does not give Lea much detail about her rape, other than the preacher politely threatening Lea’s life. There is the simple statement of “he raped me” and then she continues with her story because her daughter’s life remains her most important concern. While Betty Jean is only raped by the preacher one time, she experiences some of the same fear of Baby Sweet as she anticipates being raped again as the preacher begins stalking her. Like Baby Sweet’s relationship with her mirror, Betty Jean also provides a glimpse into the psychological response to her rape as she describes the psychological torment of her rapist turned stalker. The preacher who is eventually spotted a mile ahead of Betty Jean begins stopping to wait for her to catch up to him. Each time he stops, she stops walking and waits for him to begin again. She finally loses him in a small town, but later that evening she hears horse steps and recalls “[t]urning around, I saw coming right at me out of the wind and rain that stormy night, right that second lit up by a flash of lightening, that shiny black horse pulling that black buggy hauling that black-suited white preacher man” (159). Betty Jean’s rape turns into a living nightmare as she is continuously pursued by her rapist. She spends the night terrified, hiding in the woods and as she approaches a roadside diner the next morning she once again is met with the black buggy. From this point on Betty Jean continues her journey to Atlanta by following the road from her protected place, hidden within the woods. Betty Jean’s situation is unique because her responsibility to her baby dictates her actions. She cannot fight back like Rosiebelle Lee.
does and she cannot accept her situation and come into contact with her pursuer for multiple rapes like Baby Sweet because she has to protect her child.

Betty Jean arrives in Atlanta, where she remains powerless and outcast for the rest of her life, as a white woman with a black child. Her sole purpose becomes protecting and providing for her daughter and making sure she gets the education Betty Jean is lacking. In recounting her own experiences growing up, Lea describes another sexual encounter involving Betty Jean that has impacted Lea’s life:

“Then came that unforgettable night when I was awakened by her screams. I jumped out of bed, ran to the door of her lit-up room, and from there I saw this strange, big ol’ man grunting and snorting atop my helpless momma, trying to hold her down while she continued to scream and at the same time was doing all she could to defend herself by trying to choke him to death with both her arms wrapped tight around his neck in a wrestler’s headlock.” (142)

This scene is more traumatic for Lea than for Betty Jean. From Lea’s childhood perception this scene is described in terms similar to a violent rape. Lea sees the screaming Betty Jean as “helpless” and trying to “defend herself” with a “wrestler’s headlock” in an attempt to “choke him to death,” at the same time the man is described as “trying to hold her down” and in a similar way to Boots during his rapes of Baby Sweet with his “grunting and snorting.” Lea responds to this scene by attacking the man and saving her mother, but as Lea gives her Betty Jean’s account of her life to Baby Sweet the presence of this scene as a rape scene is erased. Betty Jean recalls the incident as her selling her body to provide for her daughter, but as her situation is further explained she is in a situation much like that of Little Bit. Betty Jean having a child that is identified as black due to her kinky blond hair prevents her from getting work in the white community of Atlanta and her being a white woman prevents her ability to get work in the black
community of Atlanta. In exchange for allowing her to work at their establishments, Betty Jean is forced to have sexual intercourse with various white men. However, unlike Little Bit, Betty Jean is not allowed the opportunity to gain power from these situations. Betty Jean does not receive any special benefits from her rapes, like property or a house; she is only allowed the regular pay for her singing. The men she comes into contact with are not of the same class as John Morgan or Mister Mac; these men cannot afford to keep a “mistress” on the side, but they do seek to sexually exploit those positioned below them. Betty Jean is functioning outside of the system of the “old” South and in the new system of large cities.

By looking at Little Bit next to Rosiebelle Lee and Baby Sweet next to Betty Jean, Andrews implicitly answers the “what if” question. If Little Bit had resisted John Morgan’s advances, then there is the potential for Big Man to have been assaulted and her life take a similar course as Rosiebelle Lee’s. Likewise, if Baby Sweet had managed to escape Boots and make it to Atlanta, then there is the potential that her situation could have been even worse and she might have found a similar fate as Betty Jean. Showing these various scenarios Andrews forces readers to question their assumptions about rape and consider how the victims reclaim power over their bodies. The erasures of the rape scenes force readers to look at what is happening with the women around the rape scene, rather than focusing solely on the rape itself. Likewise, the inscription of the rape scenes demands the reader focus on the actual rape and the trauma associated with the experience, regardless of any other factors. Andrews’s balance between erasure and inscription stresses the importance of realizing the role or impact of the rape within a
person’s life, in order to acknowledge that rape victims are not only victims but have a life and reality outside of their experiences of victimization.
CHAPTER IV

CAPITALIZING ON THE BODY:
CLAIMING SEXUALITY AS POWER
OVER VICTIMIZATION

In her book Not My Mother’s Sister, Astrid Henry discusses one of the main rifts in feminism of the late 1980s and the early 1990s as the divide between what Naomi Wolf defines as “victim feminism” of the second-wave and “power feminism” of the first- and third-waves (28-29). Second-wave feminist Catherine MacKinnon, in her article “Sexuality,” advocates the idea of victim feminism as female sexuality existing due to “lack of choice” and “powerlessness,” and as such “interpreting female sexuality as an expression of women’s agency and autonomy, as if sexism did not exist, is always denigrating and bizarre and reductive” (172). MacKinnon argues that women cannot gain power from sexuality because sexuality is a social construction created by men, which, until equality between the sexes is achieved, will serve to keep women in the position of victim. In opposition to MacKinnon and other second-wave feminists, Wolf outlines the values of both forms of feminism and rejects the idea of women accepting and embracing powerlessness. Wolf seeks to promote the values of power feminism as ultimately “grieving for the real victimization that women suffer” while enabling women “to see and use their enormous power so as never to be helpless victims again” (142).
Raymond Andrews’s Muskhoge County trilogy depicts both black and white women who embody Wolf’s principle of power feminism as they negotiate power from their oppressed positions within America’s white, masculine society. In his book Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction, Keith Byerman argues that Andrews “suggests the victims who understand the underlying sources of their oppression can manipulate the social order to their permanent advantage” (96). Andrews’s female characters show an understanding of their oppression as they respond to their victimization by finding power in their sexuality and using it to manipulate their position within society in order to move beyond the role of victim and benefit from their situations. Byerman goes on to further explain the transition of power from oppressor to oppressed: “Oppressors are vulnerable precisely because their need to dominate reflects desire and therefore lack. Victims can gain power through apparent, self-conscious gratification of that need” (96). It is Andrews’s female characters’ bodies which their oppressors desire to dominate; with this knowledge, these women use their sexuality to gain both power over their oppressors and power in a general sense within other aspects of their lives.

The response to victimization by finding power in the use of their sexuality manifests itself in two main ways, as an act of personal gain or as an act of revenge. Little Bit Thompson in Appalachee Red both understands and accepts her situation as her white employer’s “mistress” and uses her sexuality to attain property in order to achieve her own gratification from the situation. Rosiebelle Lee in Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee finds power through both revenge and personal gain, first using her sexuality to exact
revenge on white men and then using her sexuality to financially situate herself for the rest of her life. Finally, Betty Jean and her daughter Lea in Baby Sweet’s understand their places in society and respond on behalf of one another, Betty Jean using her sexuality to financially secure Lea’s future and Lea using her sexuality to avenge Betty Jean’s treatment by all men. These women not only find power in their victimization, but also challenge the roles of victim and oppressor—specifically in the instances of revenge—as they set up and control their sexual encounters with men.

Little Bit is the new, young, black maid on Morgan Hill who receives unwanted sexual attention from her young, white boss, John Morgan. Given the “choice” between losing her much needed job and becoming John Morgan’s black “mistress” Little Bit chooses to be the reluctant participant in his “white-man-and-black-woman love affair” (Andrews, Appalachee Red 7). Upon entering into this “love affair,” the storyteller acknowledges Little Bit’s realization of her position in the southern social order as the white man’s submissive sexual object, as well as her opportunity to benefit from the situation:

Wise for her eighteen years, Little Bit was soon to realize that if she was to ever achieve complete gratification from her love affair with John Morgan, then it would have to come through means other than sex, for he, despite evidence of his own satisfaction with the relationship, in bed was no Big Man. And it wasn’t long following her realization that Little Bit began using this moral slip of hers to advantage, materially. From the Morgan’s vast land holdings, which John had assumed control over, she easily persuaded her bewitched lover to present her with a small plot of real estate situated in the black part of town. And in addition he had built for her on this empty lot a two-story frame house, which upon completion, and at her request, was painted white. (7-9)

Little Bit is “wise” for her young age and she realizes that to achieve “gratification” from this unwanted and unsatisfying sexual relationship “it would be through means other than
sex.” Little Bit recognizes that those “means” would be most beneficial if they were to come in the form of material gains. Upon her decision to take material “advantage” of her situation, Little Bit uses her sexuality to “bewitch” and “persuade” her satisfied lover to give her “a small plot of real estate.” John Morgan does not stop at presenting her with this piece of land; he also has a “two-story frame house” built for her. Little Bit moves from her tiny shack in Dark Town into her new house—on the borders of white Appalachee, Dark Town, and Light Town—which she has “painted white,” essentially creating a small version of the mansion on Morgan Hill. Little Bit’s decision to use her sexuality to capitalize on her unavoidable sexual situation allows her to set herself up economically, so that she could leave Morgan Hill and John Morgan. After less than a year of service at Morgan Hill, and upon receiving the house and giving birth to her and John Morgan’s child, “she hadn’t gone near Morgan Hill nor had she any intentions at the time of ever returning” (10). Little Bit secures her financial independence and then reclaims her physical independence as she intends on never returning to Morgan Hill. Little Bit’s property and house represent her move into a position of power and elevates her status.

However, Little Bit’s power becomes challenged with her husband’s return home from prison to her new land, house, and news of her giving birth to a “red” baby. For Big Man, Little Bit’s two-story white house serves as a reminder of bad times in both of their lives, and he insists that they get rid of it. Little Bit attempts keep her house as a representation of her power by continuing to live in her hard earned home and refusing to sell it. However, upon discovering that she is pregnant with Big Man’s baby, Little Bit
decides that her love for Big Man and their happiness together with their expected baby is more important than retaining her power. After agreeing to sell her white house, John Morgan reenters the picture to seize Little Bit’s symbol of power rather than allowing her the power to give it up:

[F]ollowing John Morgan’s discovery that the property he had lovingly presented to his first love was now being put up for sale, an action he attempted to block by threatening to reclaim the land. But the matter was quickly settled by Mrs. Grace herself, who thought it unwise for her son, a member of the county’s first family, to become involved in an emotional squabble with a bunch of niggers over a petty piece of land which after all did rightfully belong to the Negress. Thus, the matter was finally settled. (14-15)

John Morgan perceives the selling of the property that he “lovingly presented” to Little Bit, “his first love,” as an attack on his manhood. After rejecting him physically by not returning to Morgan Hill once she is financially situated and gives birth to his baby, Little Bit’s selling of what John Morgan believes is a symbol of his love brings him to the realization that he no longer has power over Little Bit. Her selling of the white house is her final sexual rejection of him and his action of “threatening to reclaim the land” is an attempt to reclaim power over Little Bit. Mrs. Grace recognizes that the property does “rightfully belong” to Little Bit. She reminds her son that while his sexual relationship with Little Bit and even his gifts to her are socially acceptable behaviors, engaging in a legal and “emotional squabble” with the woman over her own property is not socially acceptable and is potentially detrimental to his status as a “gentleman” and an embarrassment to the Morgan name. In this instance the societal expectations dictating behavior and relations between black women and white men serve to help Little Bit
maintain her power over her own life, while house or no house John Morgan’s behavior shows the power Little Bit still holds over him.

Unlike Little Bit, Rosiebelle Lee does not have a husband to complicate her sexual relationships with white men. There are two accounts of Rosiebelle Lee’s sexual power, the first is her revenge recounted by Rosiebelle Lee and the second is her rise in wealth and status. Rosiebelle Lee’s desire for revenge comes from her experience as a young woman, when after protecting her body and fighting off her would-be-rapist, white employer, her actions result in the assault and castration of her fiancé. The revenge Rosiebelle Lee is after is for both her and her fiancé since the white assailants destroy both of their individual and collective futures. After his castration, Willie Henry refuses to see Rosiebelle Lee “‘cause he was so ’shamed’” (Andrews, Rosiebelle Lee 238) about losing his manhood and he could no longer provide her or any woman with a physical relationship. Rosiebelle Lee is blamed for the castration and forced out of the only community she had ever known. Rosiebelle Lee learns quickly from this experience and transitions from protecting her body from white men to using her sexuality as power over white men. She recounts that “‘evahwhar I went afta that house, I went lookin’ for the riches’ white family I could find, ’cause I knowed no matter whar I went the white menfolk was gonna be afta me ’n thar won’ nud’n under God’s sun any cullud man could do to help me, lest they kilt him, ’n I won’ gonna have that happen agin to me’” (239). By acknowledging that her position within society guarantees “the white menfolk was gonna be afta” her no matter where she lives, Rosiebelle Lee now has the power to manipulate rich white men by actively seeking out the “riches’ white family” and placing herself in
the white-man-black-woman love affair on her own terms. She recognizes that she must remain independent of black men because they are powerless to help her with situations involving white men and there will always be the possibility that they would meet a similar outcome as Willie Henry or death. Her confident, independent spirit allows Rosiebelle Lee more power than any of the other female characters.

Leaving Willie Henry and her old life behind, Rosiebelle Lee uses her sexuality to avenge Willie Henry and herself. In a semi-vague account she describes the terms she set for her sexual relationships with white men and their successful outcomes:

“I was young, sassy…’n pretty, Lawd, Lawd…then ’n I soon learn to be the bigges’ hellraiser ’round. But a hellraiser only wid white men, rich white men. No cullud or po’ white trash ’lowed. I was rich white stuff. But no matter what else I done, I paid the white folks back for wha’ they done to Willie Henry. I ain’t tellin’ you heah t’night but God in heaven knows I paid them all back fuh what they done to my Willie Henry ’n had some change lef’ over.” (239)

Her initial personal introduction to the jealousy and violence of white men, through her experience with Willie Henry, opens Rosiebelle Lee’s eyes to likely responses by white men that allow her to plan her own form of vigilante justice. Capitalizing on the fact that she is “young, sassy…’n pretty” Rosiebelle Lee labels herself “rich white stuff.” In doing so, she takes control of her sexuality and defines her role in these future relationships as a “hellraiser.” Rosiebelle Lee’s exclusion of black men from having sexual relationships with her is her way of protecting them from possible violent encounters with white men, and her exclusion of “po’ white trash” is based on their lack of status in the white society she was seeking revenge on. She labels herself “rich white stuff” based on her knowledge that once she “got the big white man, ain’ no other white man gonna mess wid you, lest he git hiself kilt” (239). This is another show of Rosiebelle Lee’s understanding of the
social structure that she is shown taking action to dictate her place within; she goes “right to the top” to get the most powerful white man in the area because she knows that if another white man of lesser status engages her sexually, “he [will] git hisself kilt.” In plotting her revenge Rosiebelle Lee determines that there will some upper-middle class white men who think they can “mess wit her” despite her association with the “big white man,” which allows Rosiebelle Lee to manipulate her sexuality to get these white men killed.

Even though Rosiebelle Lee “ain’t tellin’” how she “paid the white folks back,” there are moments where she suggests what exactly she means by calling herself a “hellraiser.” Right after Willie Henry’s castration Rosiebelle Lee decides that from that point on she would only be sexually available to white men so that “if they cut or kilt they own ’cause o’ me, then that was white folks’ bizness,‘” (238) for which she is not responsible. What initially appears as Rosiebelle Lee’s desire to protect other black men turns into her revenge plot. In learning to be the “bigges’ hellraiser ‘round,” she learns that when it comes to rich, white men it is not a matter of if “they cut or kilt they own” but when. When Rosiebelle Lee describes her arrival in Appalachee she confirms this knowledge as she explains her normal protocol for entering a new place: “‘I went right to the top myself ’n got the big white man, ain’ no other white man gonna mess wid you, lest he git hisself kilt. Lak Mist’ Mike Nicholson did. But he was the change left ovah from Monroe’” (239). Referencing the earlier Appalachee murder of Mike Nicholson, by her rich, white man, Mister Mac, and attributing it to the “change left ovah” after paying “all” the white men back during her earlier revenge, Rosiebelle Lee suggests that what
only “God in heaven knows” is that Mike Nicholson was not the only white man killed by one of her rich, jealous lovers. By understanding white men’s obsession with power over her sexuality, she uses her sexuality to take the situations in which she is sought after to be victimized and turns her oppressors into victims of her revenge plot, pitting wealthy white men against one another.

Once she is content that she has taken sufficient revenge and paid back all of the white men, Rosiebelle Lee comes to Appalachee to settle down and live the rest of her life in peace. It is at this point that she seeks out the richest white family in Muskhohegan County to use her sexuality for personal gain. Upon arriving at the Plain View plantation, Rosiebelle Lee is immediately adored by Missis MacAndrew, which secures her a job in the Big House where she catches the eye of the MacAndrew’s prodigal son. Rosiebelle Lee “realized early on and lost no time whatsoever in taking the fullest advantage of the unusual spell she cast over both Missis Bea and, especially her son Ira” (9). The “spell she cast over” Missis Bea is based upon her “exotic” beauty that Missis Bea remains enamored with for the rest of her life; she casts a similar spell on Ira, better known as Mister Mac, but his spell goes further as he falls “violently in love” with her (8). Within her first year she had taken “unofficial control” of the house servants, replaced them with those of her choosing, and given birth to Mister Mac’s first child, Luvenia. Rosiebelle Lee uses her sexuality to charm her way into command of Plain View’s Big House and to secure her financial stability by having a child.

Luvenia is described as “Rosiebelle Lee’s coup de grâce” (9) because she becomes a bargaining tool through which Rosiebelle Lee gets new privileges at Plain
View. The day after giving birth to her baby girl in a tiny one-room shack in the cotton fields Rosiebelle Lee took Luvenia in her arms and headed straight up the path to the backyard of the Big House, where she met face to face with her white man lover Ira, whom she called “Mister Mac,” and pleaded for (or demanded—none of the other house or yard niggers got within earshot) a new house where she could raise her Luvenia up in a decent manner. Whether out of charity, duty, decency, guilt, embarrassment, or love…or awe…of this beautiful, masterful, and mystic black gal, Mister Mac—now sole owner of Plain View—was eager to oblige. In a matter of weeks after that Big House backyard confrontation he presented Rosiebelle Lee with a brand-new six-room wood-shingle house built to her specifications and sitting on the periphery of a large tract of MacAndrew woodland. (11)

Rosiebelle Lee presents Mister Mac with his daughter and uses the necessity of raising “Luvenia up in a decent manner” as the reason for desiring a “new house,” not for herself, but for her Luvenia. The community—along with readers—does not know the actual conversation that takes place between Rosiebelle Lee and Mister Mac; however, the report that he is “eager to oblige” and the speed with which the house is built suggests that Rosiebelle Lee neither “pleaded” nor “demanded,” but simply requested a “house built to her specifications” from her spell bound lover and knew that he would meet her request. Another of her reasons for choosing the richest white man is due to Rosiebelle Lee’s understanding of the acceptable social practices of men of the “Old South,” which made it socially acceptable and expected that “prosperous white men were disposed to keep their black mistresses and the off-white spring fed, clothed, and housed” (9). Using her sexuality to have a child that Mister Mac is in the position to support secures Rosiebelle Lee’s food, clothing and housing as she raises that child.

Rosiebelle Lee continues to capitalize on her sexuality by having Mister Mac’s children. After giving birth to Mister Mac’s two sons, Sugar Boy and Speck,
Rosiebelle Lee decides that the boys need space for practical training to one day become farmers. Once again she approached Mister Mac and “this time come away with a hundred acres of woodland that adjoined her house. Half Mister Mac had cleared so that young Sugar Boy and Speck could begin their apprenticeships as farmers; the other half, with its small ponds, streams, and branches, Rosiebelle Lee reserved solely for her fishing” (34). She walks away from this meeting with Mister Mac with the deed to a hundred acres of land. Her house no longer sits “on the periphery of a large tract of MacAndrew woodland,” instead it sits on the periphery of a large tract of Wildcat Tennessee woodland, which Mister Mac takes responsibility for its clearing so his sons “could begin their apprenticeships as farmers.” And again Rosiebelle Lee personally benefits from “the other half” of the land not used for farming. Her property and home ownership is just the beginning of her attainment of power; as she continues to command Mister Mac’s attention and affections, and as the boll weevil brings an end to the “Old South,” Rosiebelle Lee becomes the most powerful and infamous woman in Muskhogean County.

Rosiebelle Lee’s gains and status go far beyond those of Little Bit. After attaining her land and two-story house like Little Bit, Rosiebelle Lee continues her rise to power as she sheds her female responsibilities and becomes more like Mister Mac. After the birth of Luvenia and the building of her new house she is left to a life of leisure:

Rosiebelle Lee as mistress of the master of Plain View and mother of his child was no longer required to work there in the Big House, or any other house for that matter, to earn her daily bread. Her days were now spent roaming the woods with a fishing pole and a mess of squirming worms in her apron pocket, in search of a brook, stream, creek, river, branch, or trickle, in which to fish. (11-12)
Rosiebelle Lee enjoys the privileges that accompany her roles as “mistress” and “mother” as she is freed from her responsibilities as maid at the “Big House” and spends little time at work in her own house. She is provided for by both Mister Mac and Plain View’s black community, over which she has the power of being the “mistress” of the white man, privileging her to take food from their gardens. The description of Rosiebelle Lee “roaming the woods with a fishing pole” is similar to that of Mister Mac, the “huntsman” (181) who is also free from responsibility and spends much of his time occupied with “hunting, the woods, horses, hunting dogs, [and] guns” (151). As Mister Mac returns at the end of each day with several small dry land animals, Rosiebelle Lee returns each day with several catfish. This begins a mirroring of Mister Mac and Rosiebelle Lee on an equal level, which is not a common practice and is a practice that Mister Mac remains resistant to as Rosiebelle Lee continues to expand her power.

Mister Mac is unlike other white men in his social position because he refuses to marry a white woman and have “legitimate” children. He is outcaste from the white community of Appalachee due to his refusal to follow the appropriate social behavior. Mister Mac’s lack of a white wife, or even desire for one, and Rosiebelle Lee being the only woman he ever engages with sexually, shows the true power of Rosiebelle Lee’s sexuality. Mister Mac resists the idea of his being in love with Rosiebelle Lee because he struggles with finding a place for and understanding their relationship outside his ingrained societal expectations. When Mister Mac wants to buy Rosiebelle Lee a bicycle as a gift for her enjoyment, “she opted instead for a horse—a white horse like Mister Mac’s Joe Boy. But here Mister Mac drew the line: No white horse for a black gal.
Instead he bought her a pure black English mare, whom she named Nigger Gal” (17-18). While he rejects society’s expectations of his behavior, Mister Mac does play into the racial roles prescribed by society, like refusing to buy “a white horse for a black gal.” Mister Mac does not have reservations about buying Rosiebelle Lee a horse; it is the color and sex of the horse that cause him to not adhere to her specifications. Mister Mac transfers his ingrained ideas of race and gender onto the horses. As a “black” woman Rosiebelle Lee is supposed to be subordinate to white men, so Mister Mac cannot give Rosiebelle Lee the power of owning and being the master of a white male, horse or not. Nor does Mister Mac want Rosiebelle Lee or Joe Boy’s companion to be a black male, horse or not, out of fear of black men. The appropriate or safe choice for Rosiebelle Lee to be in command of is a “pure black” female, her very own “Nigger Gal” who is not a threat to the white man, white horse, or black woman. Mister Mac’s fear of the power of sexuality becomes apparent in this display; however, Rosiebelle Lee’s power remains in tact as she does in fact covertly negotiate for her own horse.

Despite Mister Mac’s desire to perpetuate social positioning of race and gender, he and Rosiebelle Lee create their own space outside of society; while they do not flaunt their relationship and still follow some of the southern rules of behavior, after the purchase of Nigger Gal, Rosiebelle Lee and Mister Mac are setup as equals outside of society. Rosiebelle Lee and Nigger Gal are situated as a mirror image of Mister Mac and Joe Boy: “Quite often Mister Mack rode beside her on Joe Boy—though never during the daylight hours—the two racing through the night with the only sounds heard above the horses’ rumbling hooves the black gal’s and white man’s spirited laughter” (18). Mister
Mac riding “beside” Rosiebelle Lee instead of in front of her suggests that a level of equality has developed in their relationship. The two use the cover of night to hide their relationship from a society that would likely respond violently to this display of equality. The idea of equality is further suggested by Mister Mac and Rosiebelle Lee’s “spirited laughter” being “the only sounds heard” over their horses. This creates an image of companionship between the two that is based on equal enjoyment of their time together outside of the socially permitted bedroom. Rosiebelle Lee successfully uses the power of her sexuality to entice Mister Mac away from the control of white society and under her control.

Rosiebelle Lee ultimately uses her sexuality to gradually change her position from maid to mistress to companion and finally to superior. At the height of Rosiebelle Lee’s power, twenty-five years after arriving at Plain View and following the economical devastation of the boll weevil, Rosiebelle Lee and Mister Mac literally switch positions as he moves onto her hundred acres after the bank forecloses on all of his land:

[A]board a one-horse wagon driven by his bastard son and drawn by a slow, old, and blind Nigger Gal and with his mother sitting beside him, dressed in her Sunday finest and protecting her pale, delicate skin from the hot Georgia sun with a tiny, once white parasol—the great-grandson of Benjamin MacAndrew took leave of the Plain View mansion for the last time…[Missis Bea’s] son’s black mistress’s two boys built the two white folks a cabin, which, as a last humiliation for Missis Bea, was hardly big enough for Bonaparte’s bed. Thus, a two-room log cabin, all the way downhill, across the spring and back into the woods below Rosiebelle Lee Wildcat Tennessee’s house, became the MacAndrew—white—clan journey’s end. Amen.

(55)

Missis Bea is too proud to live in town with her daughter’s in-laws or return to her family, so she attempts to keep a semblance of superiority in the MacAndrew’s family line as she wears “her Sunday finest” to move from the MacAndrew one hundred and
twenty-five year old mansion to “a two-room log cabin” in Rosiebelle Lee’s woods. Her “once white parasol” serving as a reminder of her economic condition, it is no longer white and clean, but darkened with age. With the final death of the Old South by the boll weevil, Rosiebelle Lee is able to move to the position of plantation owner. She now lives in the large white house residing at the top of Wildcat Tennessee Hill, while the white Missis Bea and Mister Mac live in a small “two-room log cabin” that is “below” Rosiebelle Lee’s home. This is Rosiebelle Lee’s final victory; now Mister Mac finds himself in the position of pleading to Rosiebelle Lee things he and his mother need. Rosiebelle Lee is kind in her position of power as she continues to care for Mister Mac and Missis Bea and continues utilizing her sexuality with Mister Mac for enjoyment now that she has attained the power.

Betty Jean is less successful than either Little Bit or Rosiebelle Lee in the use of her sexuality to manipulate her position within society; however, she does reach the fulfillment of her dreams for her daughter. The social stigma connected to a white woman with a black baby leaves Betty Jean unable to secure employment in segregated white Atlanta. Her black baby was proof to the managers and owners of the establishments where Betty Jean applied for jobs that she was morally corrupt and sexually available to anyone. As she explains her life’s decisions to her daughter, Betty Jean notes that after being turned away from countless job opportunities, “soon it was being made clear to me that the only way I could git a job singing was if I did the owner of each place I went looking to work for a womanly favor” (Baby Sweet’s 164). Betty Jean initially dismisses the thought that the “only way” she would have the opportunity to sing for a living is to
use her sexuality as a commodity and she temporarily gives up trying to find work as a singer. However, after also not being able to find work in Atlanta’s segregated black community due to her dangerous status as a white woman, she resolves “‘to play, or sing, the game by the men’s rules’” (164-165). Betty Jean acknowledges the situation as a “game” dictated by “men’s rules,” which shows her understanding of the social structure and her new place within it. With this full understanding of her situation, Betty Jean is able to begin finding a way to manipulate the “game” and claim the kind of power based on understanding her oppression as outlined by Byerman (96).

Betty Jean refuses to completely submit to the “men’s rules” and maintains power by separating her sexuality from her mind. Understanding the power dynamic as being a physical domination of her body, Betty Jean “decided they could have my body ‘cause the undertaker was gonna end up gitting it anyway, but they couldn’t touch my mind, which was set on singing and gitting you through school so you wouldn’t have to spend your life slinging hash and doing everything else I had to do just to make a living’” (165-166). By understanding the power dynamic, Betty Jean realizes that she can choose to preserve her body if she is willing to sacrifice her dreams of singing and seeing her daughter become the first high school graduate in her family. Disconnecting her self from her body and her mind from her sexuality allows Betty Jean to set her own rules, the most important being that “they couldn’t touch [her] mind,” during her sexual encounters with her various employers. Betty Jean was raised first as a secluded hillbilly in the mountains and then as a country girl on the old plantation of Plain View, remaining illiterate, which drives her dream of giving Lea a better future through a quality education. Betty Jean’s
power is limited to her mind and she understands that her sacrifices for Lea will impact the amount of power Lea is able to attain in her future.

Unlike Little Bit and Rosiebelle Lee, Betty Jean does not own property or a two-story white house, yet financially she does more than just get Lea through school. Lea remembers that “all through my school years Momma provided for me better than well. I lacked for nothing materially that I wanted. She kept me dressed better than the parents of most of the other children in my class could afford. And I was never without spending money” (147). By using her sexuality to keep herself employed, Betty Jean is able to provide for Lea “better than well” and keep her “dressed better than” the other children at her school. Additionally Lea uses most of her endless supply of “spending money” purchasing books and becoming the learned person of her mother’s dreams. Betty Jean continues to bring in large amounts of money after Lea graduates from high school, so that she can afford to pay for Lea’s northern college education. Betty Jean shows up to Lea’s college graduation thin and cancer ridden with gray hair before reaching the age of forty. Betty Jean literally uses her body up to transfer power into the hands of her daughter; first, by providing her with a formal education, and second, by providing her with the truth about their lives. Betty Jean then dies on the bus ride home from Lea’s graduation, content with her life’s decisions because she made her dreams for her daughter come true.

On the day Lea graduates from college Betty Jean finally shares her life story and decisions with her daughter just before dying. Lea blames her mother’s death on the men who had taken and used her body for their own satisfaction and vows to “personally
make those men who killed her pay for her death” (169). Lea spends the next year of her life using her sexuality to exact vengeance first on the men who had used her mother and then on all men. On her first day in Appalachee, Lea tells her and her mother’s story to the attentive and supportive Baby Sweet. Lea explains that she begins her revenge by returning to all of the places she could remember her mother working to compile a list of those she deemed her mother’s killers. The relationships Lea has with these men is reversed from her mother’s experience: “‘In record time I had all I could find of Momma’s former lords and masters crawling before me on all fours like lapdogs, eating right out of my hand’” (170). Lea begins the degradation of these men by removing their titles as “lords and masters” and making them subservient to her. Lea is able to hold complete control over these men because unlike Betty Jean, she does not need anything from them. Where Betty Jean needed to use her sexuality to meet her financial needs, Lea does not have a child to support and is able to use her sexuality to make these men realize their sexual need for her.

Lea does not only use her sexuality as a tease to these men, her real power comes from the social destruction she is able to cause by strategically following through with her offers of sexual intercourse. During her revenge for her mother, Lea is unknowingly following in the footsteps of her grandmother, Rosielbelle Lee, as she upsets the lives of these men:

“And I found ways of making damn sure that all of these men’s womenfolk—wives, sweethearts, mothers, mothers-in-law, daughters—knew what was happening in order that they could see firsthand what chauvinistic lying cheating unconscionable hypocritical two-faced whoremongering womanizing sonsofbitches their men truly were. I even had fathers fighting sons, brothers against brothers, all fighting over my favors…or the promise of them. After castrating these killers of
Lea shows her ability to manipulate both male-female relationships and male-male relationships. As her service to women and her punishment to men, Lea uses her sexuality to draw these men in to engage in sexual intercourse with her in order to threaten their family structure. Alerting “all of these men’s womenfolk” disrupts the manner in which male and female societies both overlap and function separately from one another. “Whoremongering” is a socially acceptable act within the society of white men; however, it is something that is not socially acceptable and that cannot exist within the knowledge of the society of white women. Thus, Lea upsets the social structure by bringing the reality of white male society into the reality of white female society, as she destroys homes. She even pits male family members against one another by providing one with “favors” and leaving the other with only “a promise of them.” She describes stripping these men of their power and manhood as “castrating” them, which is her ultimate goal in avenging the “murder” of her mother. Lea perfects the use of her sexuality to wreak havoc on the lives of men; after exhausting her revenge on her mother’s “killers,” Lea decides to move on to “bigger game” in a decision to avenge all women.

Lea uses her newly acquired pimp’s contacts to reach a higher class of men than those middle-class men she destroyed on behalf of Betty Jean. Of course, like all other men Lea encounters, her pimp worked for her as a connection, rather than her working for him. It is at this point that Lea begins to profit financially from her revenge.
and wonders why she did not think about financial gain from the beginning of her plot. Lea recognizes a power dynamic as she uses her sexuality amongst a different class of men. She observes that

“I was able to meet, make, and degrade the big boys—politicians, lawyers, businessmen, doctors, preachers, teachers, military officers, the intelligentsia, entertainers, jocks, you name them. I took them for all they were worth…and then some. These were the power people, but once I had them kneeling before the pussy altar they were all the same. Weak.” (171)

Lea recognizes that these “power people” are as equally “weak” as her earlier, lower-class conquests when confronted with her sexuality. Fully understanding the power of her sexuality, Lea is able to capitalize off of these men, taking “them for all they were worth…and then some.” While Rosiebelle Lee figuratively pays her men back and proudly has change left over, which she uses, Lea literally takes all their money and power. Since these men have more to lose socially than her previous ones, Lea’s mastery of her sexuality allows her to make them lose more.

Upon the opening of “Baby Sweet’s” whore house in Appalachee, Lea returns to her mother’s home county of Muskhogean in hopes of enacting revenge on her father for not supporting her and Betty Jean. Here Lea meets her new employer John Morgan Junior, the only man to ever help her mother without requiring anything in return. Lea decides that the only way she will work in the whore house is if she is allowed to reserve her services for black men only. Her ultimate goal is for her father to appear in her room, so she can blame, embarrass, and degrade him for her career in prostitution. While she waits in anticipation of meeting her father, she plays up her sexuality in order to send the black men of Appalachee back home to their families ashamed of themselves. Lea recalls
her actions with her first client as a hyper-sexualized “act” on her behalf as she “slowly and tenderly wash off his tool while cooing softly to him about what a nice one it was, before touching the right button and causing him to shoot his load right there on the washcloth. Ten bucks, baby! Next!” (172-173). Here Lea uses her sexuality to overwhelm these men, showing her ability to make money without actually engaging in sexual intercourse with her customers. She succeeds in emasculating these men with very little effort on her part, while recognizing the mastery of her power.

Lea is finally reunited with her previously unknown uncle Speck and grandpa Mac who are her only remaining male family members in Muskhogeanean County, and based on their confessions of truelove for her mother and grandma Rosiebelle Lee she forgives all men and decides to retire from her vengeful prostitution. But, her retirement is briefly postponed as she uses her sexuality in an act of kindness and repayment to John Morgan Junior’s kindness to Betty Jean, by agreeing to serve John Morgan Senior as her last customer. And in the final scene of the trilogy, Lea unwittingly avenges Little Bit and her “red” baby as John Morgan Senior dies on the-fourth-of-July, on his fortieth wedding anniversary, on top of a black prostitute, and in the house he had originally built for his black mistress. Jeffrey Folks in his article, “‘Trouble’ in Muskhogeanean County: The Social History of a Southern Community in the Fiction of Raymond Andrews,” states that “the death of John Morgan, Sr., atop Lea in the upstairs bedroom of the White House turned brothel, quite literally puts to rest the cycle of sexual and economic exploitation in the author’s three-novel cycle set in Appalachee” (72). While this final scene is an inspiring display of poetic justice, it is not clear that “the cycle of sexual and economic
exploitation” has been put to rest. Instead, it suggests the death of John Morgan’s older generation, with a hope that the younger generations will be able to find a way to break the cycle of exploitation, as the younger generations move further away from the older traditions.

Raymond Andrews’s dramatic sexualization of his female characters shows that even though women are victims of sexual violence and exploitation, there are ways in which women have been reversing their exploitation and attempting to benefit from it for centuries. None of Andrews’s female characters end as powerless victims, but move beyond the role of victim because they are more than just victims. By recognizing that inevitably everyone will be a victim in one form or another during their lifetime, Andrews opens the discussion of how individuals can find power within their victimization. The actions of the female characters in the Muskhogean County trilogy align with Naomi Wolf’s description of power feminism, as they look at the reality of their situation and find a way to resist powerlessness even if they cannot escape their victimization. Each of the four female characters previously discussed represent possibilities for the future and display various levels of power. Little Bit serves as the most neutral character who negotiates power for herself without upsetting the accepted social order. Betty Jean is the most tragic victim and is the most limited in overcoming her powerlessness, yet she is able to inspire and create power within her daughter. Lea and Rosiebelle Lee take on more radical representations of the attainment of power as they both challenge the foundations of the oppressive social system by which they are victimized. Andrews’s message is ultimately a hopeful one. He shows that people can
survive exploitation and use what they have available to them to gain their own power, and that the oppressive social structures in place are always changing and can be changed by those willing to push against them.
WORKS CITED


