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The fictional writings of Jessie Fauset

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THE FICTIONAL WRITINGS
OF
JESSIE FAUSET

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
DARLENE IVA WOOD

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Jessie Fauset: Continuator of the Genteel Tradition and Midwife of the New Negro.

Jessie Redmon Fauset was a woman closely associated with the period in black American literature known as the Harlem Renaissance. During much of this period she served as the literary editor of *The Crisis* magazine, whose editor at the time was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. During those years she wrote book reviews, short stories, and personal essays. However, Miss Fauset is probably best remembered for the four novels she wrote: *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). Between the years of 1913 and 1923 she also published five short stories, all appearing in *The Crisis*. In fact, *The Crisis* served as the major outlet for the literary work of Jessie Fauset. Her many poems are to be found there. *The Crisis*' monthly column, "As to Books," provided the forum for the frequent book reviews she wrote. The personal and general essays she composed also appeared in that magazine. The bulk of this study, however, will be concerned with the novels and short stories. Before this examination can begin, a personal look at Jessie Fauset is necessary.

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born and reared in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The exact date of her birth was not provided in any published account. Miss Fauset completed her early education in the
Philadelphia Public Schools. She received a Bachelor's degree at Cornell University in 1905. At Cornell she earned the Phi Beta Kappa key. Her Master's degree was earned at the University of Pennsylvania in 1921. Miss Fauset did further studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. While living in Washington, D.C., she taught Latin and French at Dunbar High School. After retiring from her position as literary editor of The Crisis, she taught the same languages at DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City. Her most memorable occupation, however, was serving on the staff of The Crisis magazine during the years from 1919 to 1926.

The philosophy of the literary section of The Crisis called for the active recruitment of new black talent. Young writers were encouraged to submit their work. Contests and prizes were regular features. As literary editor for The Crisis, Jessie Fauset was in part responsible for the attention and recognition given to the new and talented black writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance. In his autobiography, The Big Sea, Langston Hughes expressed his gratitude to her:

 Jessie Fauset at The Crisis, Charles Johnson at Opportunity, and Alain Locke in Washington, were the three people who mid-wifed the so-called New Negro Literature into being. Kind and critical—but not too critical for the young—they nursed us along until our books were born.1

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In this passage the actual importance of Miss Fauset's work as literary editor is understood. For in this excerpt, Langston Hughes, one of the most acclaimed writers of the Harlem Renaissance, gave credit to three people, Miss Fauset among them, as having been largely responsible for the new black literature which emerged from young minds. And "though she did a yeoman's work for the Negro Renaissance, most of her own literary activities were done during the period of the Harlem Renaissance."\(^2\) She was indeed a very busy woman.

Miss Fauset's first creative works were poetry. These poems began to appear in 1912 with the publication of "Rondeau" in The Crisis magazine. A total of fourteen of her poems can be found in the magazine. They utilize the familiar archetypes of love and nature apparent in the following poems:

**Dilworth Road Revisited**

The little road to Dilworth Town
Still laughs and loiters by the brook,
And lovers love it in the Spring
And haunt each blossomy nook.

Sad years ago my love and I
Strolled all its sunny length one day,
To Dilworth's ivied church, and then
Sighing, we turned away.

Ah, Dilworth Road, can you still laugh
When on another road's expense--
"The Ladie's Road," they call it--lies
My lover, dead for France.\(^3\)


In the following poem, "Touche," the familiar archetypes remain, but Miss Fauset added the element of race:

Touche

Dear, when we sit in that high, placid room, "Loving" and "doving" as all lovers do, Laughing and leaning so close in the gloom,--

What is the change that creeps sharp over you? Just as you raise your fine hand to my hair, Bringing that glance of mixed wonder and rue?

"Black hair," you murmur, "so lustrous and rare, Beautiful too, like raven's smooth wing; Surely no gold locks were ever more fair."

Why do you say every night that same thing? Turning your mind to some old constant theme, Half meditating--and half murmuring?

Tell me, that girl of your young manhood's dream, Her you loved first in that dim long ago -- Had she blue eyes? Did her hair goldly gleam?

Does she come back to you softly and slow, Stepping wraith-wise from the depths of slow? Quickened and fired by the warmth of your glow?

There I've divined it! My wit holds you fast. Nay no excuses; 'tis little I care. I knew a less in my own girlhood's past,-- Blue eyes he had and such waving gold hair.\(^4\)

"Rencontre" is another example of the kind of poetry Miss Fauset wrote:

Rencontre

My heart that was so passionless
Leapt high last night when I saw you!
Within me surged the grief of years

And whelmed me with endless rue.
My heart that slept so still, so spent,
Awoke last night, -- to break anew!

Miss Fauset's poetry is consistent in subject, mood, and style. Poetry such as hers which utilizes the archetypes of love and nature was not uncommon during the Harlem Renaissance. Many women were turning out this same sort of poem. One critic of the literature of this period has said that "most of the literature was written in the Romanticist tradition, saturated with Victorian ideals." From the three examples given above, it is clear that this statement aptly applies to Miss Fauset's poetry.

Her poetry also conforms to the dictates of the genteel tradition as expressed in the poetry of the preceding generation of black poets. The genteel tradition called for the transcending of race in art. More specifically, it was thought that "art--especially poetry--should transcend the mundane, the ordinary; be elevating." Further, it "should deal with higher emotions and ideals; it should avoid sensuality--its language more pure than ordinary speech, more elevated than prose." Art was equated with uplift. Miss Fauset's poetry is well reconciled to that tradition of gentility. It is idealized poetry--light, lyric, and well thought out. Her poems added to the

5 "Rencontre," The Crisis, XXVII (January, 1924), p. 122.
8 Ibid.
collection of existing black literature seeking cultural recognition for the race.

Jesse Fauset wrote many book reviews while she served as editor. She also wrote a number of general essays on a wide variety of topical black issues. When Egyptian nationalists began strong protest against the occupation of their country by Great Britain, Miss Fauset wrote "Nationalism and Egypt." In that essay she traced the history of Britain's control over Egypt. She gave an idea of the thoughts of both the English and the Egyptians in 1920, the date of the takeover:

Not the least task of the British official was to undertake to prove to the Egyptian that it was to Egypt's benefit to remain under British rule. The Egyptian chafed as much as this hypocrisy as he did at the exploitation of his country.9

The essay is very well written and informative. Miss Fauset researched it well and often quoted directly from correspondence between the Egyptian nationalists and the participants of the Peace Conference being held in Paris at the end of World War I. She reported the facts as they existed but in such a way that there can be no doubt or question as to where she stood on the issue. The fact that she wrote the article makes it clear that Miss Fauset acknowledged the notion of Pan-Africanism and the way she wrote it makes it clear that she believed in it.

Miss Fauset often used her general essays to make a specific point. One of her greatest concerns was the way black people were portrayed in literature. In an effort to reach a number of writers and question them on this matter, Miss Fauset, in conjunction with W. E. B. Du Bois organized a symposium called, "The Negro in Art, How Shall he be Portrayed." The results were published in The Crisis with this introductory note: "We have asked the artists of the world these questions." Miss Fauset participated in the symposium herself, and to the question, "What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted," gave this answer:

They must protest strongly and get their protestations before the public. But more than that they must learn to write with a humor, a pathos, a sincerity. ... But above all colored people must be the buyers of these books for which they clamor. When they buy 50,000 copies of a good novel about colored people by a colored author, publishers will produce books. ...

Within this answer was Miss Fauset's philosophy regarding the portrayal of black people in literature. She laid out a format for both black artists and non-artists alike. In her answer she saw the

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10 "The Negro in Art, How Shall He be Portrayed--A Symposium, The Crisis, XXXII (June, 1926), pp. 71-75.
11 Ibid., p. 71.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
solution as rectifying the negative image of black people which permeated American literature. As an artist, Miss Fauset abided by her format. She wrote the novels about which she spoke. The philosophy in her answer was inherent in her literary works. Her strong belief that black people should write about black people gave her the incentive to produce literary works for some twenty-one years.

**Jessie Fauset's Life and Personality as Glimpsed Through her Writings**

Not much has been recorded about the personal life of Jessie Redmon Fauset. It is up to students to gather from her own writings, particularly the general and personal essays, what biographical information there is available. It is in this manner that the following biographical sketch was made.

For a look into the personal life of Jessie Fauset, it is best to consult her personal essays. These eight essays, appearing in *The Crisis*, are invaluable for the placing together of the author's inner life. In them she offers insight into her beliefs, life style, and personality. The essays follow her progression from childhood to womanhood. Coupled with some of the things others have written about her, it is possible to get a reasonably balanced picture of the woman.

Speaking of her childhood she had this to say:

> Always Sunday afternoon has made me sad. But it is a sweet sadness. It must have been connected at first, I think, with the inhibitions which Sunday in a very conservative, not to say very religious household, placed upon the small child. I might not sing songs, I might not play, I didn't know how to write letters, it was wrong to read even fairytales. I could not spend pennies for candy... of course, there was
Sunday school, but even that, which I truly liked did not remove the feeling of restraint and forlornness which can come to a child on a dreary enforced holiday.¹⁴

In the essay, "When Christmas Comes," she again spoke of her childhood and expressed her early interest in literature:

My own idea of indoor sport was to lie on the floor midway between the gorgeous tree and the glowing fire and to bury my head, my mind, my whole being, in some fairy tale or strange romance. I had been taught to read when I was just past babyhood. Small wonder then at eight some one either with or without ... a sense of humor, gave me a copy of "Don Quixote," the hardest nut which my childish mind ever tried to crack. ... What I did read with interest, with amazement, with resentment, with tears, was: "Uncle Tom's Cabin"... on a certain Christmas Day, weary of Rose-Red and Snow White, I happened to peep within those prim covers. They had to pry the book from my unwilling fingers. At the end of three or four days I had read it all, every word of it. I do not think I have ever opened it since, but the story remains part of my permanent mental furnishings.¹⁵

These descriptions of her childhood give insight to Miss Fauset's Background. She was obviously a member of the black middle class. She was brought up in a strict, religious household. The importance of education is revealed in her account on reading. These early influences on her life are carried over into her literary writings.

Miss Fauset wrote another set of personal essays in which she talked about a more mature self, Jessie Fauset the woman. In one she

¹⁴ Jessie Fauset, "Sunday Afternoon," The Crisis, XXIII (February, 1922), 162.
¹⁵ Jessie Fauset, "When Christmas Comes," The Crisis, XXV (December, 1922), 62.
said, "I am grown-up now. I have lived in two or three large cities. I have seen and known many people. I have seen and felt sorrow and grief and pain." 16 And in another such essay she said, "I love comfort, I love ease. I do not consider laziness a crime. I hate to move. Yet so determined am I to see Life as she is that with as much joy as reluctance have I mapped out this plan:" 17 The plan she referred to was her agenda for one of her trips to France. Here again in revealing her own personality she lets her readers know some of the things to expect in her literary creations.

Some of Miss Fauset's contemporaries also made personal comments about her. These too are very valuable for understanding the woman. Claude McKay said that "Miss Fauset has written many novels about the people in her circle. . . . Miss Fauset is prim and dainty as a primrose and her novels are quite as fastidious and precious." 18 Langston Hughes described her circle this way:

At the novelist, Jessie Fauset's parties, there was quite a different atmosphere from that at most other Harlem good-time gatherings. At Miss Fauset's a good time was shared by talking literature and reading poetry aloud and perhaps enjoying some conversation in French. White people were seldom present there unless they were very distinguished white people, because Jessie Fauset did not feel like opening her home to mere sightseers, or fadists momentarily

16 "Tracing Shadows," The Crisis, X (September, 1915), 162.
17 "Yarrow Revisited," The Crisis, XXIX (January, 1925, 107.
in love with Negro life. At her house one would usually meet editors and students, writers and social workers, and serious people who liked books and the British Museum, and perhaps had been to Florence (Italy, not Alabama).\footnote{19}

This comment reveals the kind of people Miss Fauset appreciated. And as will be discovered later, these are the kinds of people she wrote about. Her attitude regarding white people as explained in this passage is also important. She would not allow herself or her writings to reflect the black exoticism that was very popular with many white people during the Harlem Renaissance. She knew that this was merely a fad for white people even before the Depression proved it so. The Depression brought with it an end to the generosity black writers had been experiencing from big publishing houses, from white patrons, and from white theatre producers. By that time the fascination white people held for black people was over.

As a member of the educated, black middle class, Miss Fauset proved to be somewhat of an elitist. In one of her essays she stated, "Incurable sentimentalist though I am, I am still unable to cast a halo about the profession of cobbler and bootblack."\footnote{20} Miss Fauset lived a contradiction which was not uncommon among the black intellectuals of the day. That she loved black people cannot be denied. That she wanted to see black people enjoy the fruits of America without

\footnote{20} Jessie Fauset, "Nostalgia," \textit{The Crisis}, XXII (July, 1921), 154.
discrimination cannot be denied. Neither can it be denied that she was very particular about those with whom she associated. She made very clear class distinctions within the race and aligned herself with what she termed "the better class of colored people," a phrase which appears throughout her four novels.

Where her devotion to "the better class of colored people" is revealed most notably in her short stories and novels, her love for all of black mankind is revealed in her general essays. Her desire to see Pan-Africanism become a reality was expressed in an essay she wrote after attending the Second Pan-African Congress of 1921 in Paris, France. She wrote:

... its members were mainly black and being black had suffered. ... We listened well. What can be more fascinating than learning first hand that the stranger across the seas, however different in phrase or expression, yet knows no difference of heart? We were all one family. ... What small divergencies of opinion, slight suspicions, doubtful glances there may have been at first were quickly dissipated. We felt our common blood with almost unbelievable unanimity. 21

It is obvious that she held strongly to these beliefs. She further commented on the need for unity:

We have gained proof that organization on our part arrests the attention of the world. We had no need to seek publicity. If we had wanted to we could not have escaped it. The press was with us always. The white world is feverishly anxious to know of our thoughts, our hopes, our dreams. Organization is our strongest weapon. 22

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22. Ibid., p. 17.
These are the words of a Harlem Renaissance militant intellectual. Coupled with her elitism, these words reveal the contradiction in her life. As mentioned before, this phenomenon was not uncommon to many of the intellectuals of the day. The life philosophy differed from the personal reality.

Each of these aspects in the personality of Jessie Fauset gives the reader important insights as to the kind of literary work to expect from her. It will be found that her works depict the manners of the black middle class. At the same time, they are vehicles of racial and social protest. Most of her comments are made through the vivid characterizations of beautiful black women.

In the June 1922 issue of The Crisis, in the column "As to Books," Jessie Fauset reviewed the novel, Birthright, by T. S. Stribling, Of this novel she said:

The publishers of "Birthright" could hardly have realized how correctly they were writing when they spoke of it as an "amazing book." Amazing it is in every sense of the word and in no way more than in its contradictions. The story is that of a colored boy, Peter Siner, who after leaving "Hooker's Bend" for four years of Harvard comes back to his own special "Niggertown" and surrenders to its environment. That is his birthright...23

Miss Fauset has maintained that she was prompted to write her first novel, There Is Confusion (1924) in reaction to this very work

23 Jessie Fauset, "As To Books," The Crisis, XXIV (June, 1922) 67.
by Stribling.24 Stribling, a white writer, attempted to depict the life of a poor mulatto who manages to get a college education. While Miss Fauset agreed that the subject of the educated Negro needed literary treatment, it was obvious to her that Stribling was simply not qualified to handle the matter and, therefore, portrayed it falsely. Of Stribling's novel, Miss Fauset said, "Here is an audience waiting to hear the truth about us. Let us who are better qualified to present the truth than any white writer try to do so."25

Being a member of the educated black middle class, knowing that the treatment of this group in literary works was negligible, and eager to present her impressions of this group, Miss Faucet went on to produce four novels, each about the black middle class. Because the subject matter was relatively new, the author encountered difficulty in finding a publisher for her first novel. Marion Starkey, a writer who interviewed Miss Fauset, felt that the book was rejected because "it contains no descriptions of Harlem dives, no race riot, no picturesque, abject poverty."26 Obviously, this setback did not prove much of a hinderance to Miss Fauset, as she wrote four novels, each of which was her personal monument to the black middle class.

26 Ibid., p. 219.
CHAPTER II

SHORT STORIES

For the purpose of this thesis the short stories and novels of Jessie Fauset will be examined chronologically. The stories pre-date the novels and will be examined first. The full exposure of Miss Fauset's development as a writer and as a conscious black woman is most evident in the chronological approach to her literature. From the evidence of some of her general essays, as discussed in Chapter I, her development as a conscious black woman began before she was able to incorporate it into her literary works. She wrote of Pan-Africanism in 1920, but at the same time she was writing poetry which was steeped in the genteel tradition. Her progression as a conscious black woman artist grew with each literary work, especially with her novels, her last creations, reflecting the peak of her growth. Her development as a conscious black woman artist will become clearer as this chronological examination unfolds.

Miss Fauset wrote five short stories: "Emmy" (1913), "There Was One Time" (1917), "Mary Elizabeth" (1919), "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920), and "Double Trouble" (1923). In each Miss Fauset examined the black middle class. She covered their life style, thoughts, and aspirations. She wrote about the people she knew best and offered insights into their social group who she felt needed fuller exposure.
Within this format Miss Fauset covered a wide range of themes. The themes discussed in this thesis will be those receiving the most attention from Miss Fauset herself. It will be found that those she decided on will be repeated in her novels. But now, a look at the short stories of Jessie Fauset.

"Emmy," Jessie Fauset's first short story was published in The Crisis magazine in two successive issues, December 1912 and January, 1913. The story is presented with a fairy tale quality. Emmy is a pretty brown-skinned girl in a small town in Central Pennsylvania. She is engaged to her childhood sweetheart, Archie. He is one of those black people who is light enough to pass for white. This lightness proves to be very convenient for Archie, particularly as it concerns his profession. His color gains him a good position as an engineer in a firm in Philadelphia. But his color also has its drawbacks. Archie is offered a partnership in the firm he works for, but this will necessitate a postponement of his impending marriage to Emmy. Her color would make things very difficult for him. Accordingly, he asks Emmy to delay the marriage for two years. He mentions the color problem and she becomes furious and orders him away. Both spend miserable months away from each other. There comes the time when Archie discloses his black blood to his employer and is fired. Eventually he returns to Emmy, who accepts him with open arms, gets his job back, and makes definite plans to marry immediately.

The theme of miscegenation appears in this story. The fact that Archie Ferrers is light enough to pass for white is obvious
evidence of miscegenation, Miss Fauset doesn't even discuss any details surrounding it. But the details regarding the miscegenous birth of Emmy's mother, Mrs. Carrel, are explained. One scene finds her telling her daughter about her life:

... and one day he came past the sitting room—it was just like this one, overlooking the garden. Well, as he glanced in the window he saw a man, a white man, put his arms around me and kiss me.1

With natural curiosity, Emmy asks, "Who was the other man, mother?"2 And her mother continues her story:

The other man? Oh! that was my father; my mother's guardian, protector, everything, but not her husband. She was a slave in New Orleans, and he helped her to get away. He took her to Hayti first, and then, afterward, sent her over to France, where I was born. He never ceased in his kindness. After my mother's death I didn't see him for ten years, not till after I was married. That was the time—not—you were named for your father, you know—saw him kiss me. Mr. Pechegru, my father, was genuinely attached to my mother, I think, and had come after all these years to make some reparation.3

In this excerpt from "Emmy," the race mixing which resulted in the birth of Mrs. Carrel is acknowledged. At the same time she reveals her personal skeleton in the closet to her daughter. While Mrs. Carrel does not appear to be ashamed or guilty about her parents, the fact

2 Ibid., January, p. 141.
3 Ibid., January, pp. 140-141.
remains that she has kept this fact from her daughter a long time. The reason she tells of the circumstances of her birth is not only to inform her daughter, but to show Emmy that it was mistake to send Archie away; thus, she hoped to save her daughter from a proud but unhappy life. Mrs. Carrel tended to be silent on the question of color until it threatened her daughter's happiness.

This excerpt also reveals what today would be considered racial naivete on the part of Miss Fauset. The paternal benevolence Mrs. Carrel's father showed her mother is mistaken for love. This is not the only instance in which Miss Fauset shows this either. Archie Ferrers loses his job when his true race is discovered by his employer. Later he gets his job back when the employer decides ability is more important than color, a very unlikely situation in the United States in 1913 when the story was published. Perhaps this is how Miss Fauset may have wished it could have been. This, of course, is the way the story reads in retrospect. It stands to reason that Miss Fauset would not have completely contrived these incidents. She may have had reason to believe that slavemasters who took care of their black mistresses really did love them and that ability, not color, was the deciding factor in employment.

A sense of racial pride is revealed in this story primarily through the pretty brown heroine, Emmy. When Emmy was a school girl and was confronted with color-related matters, she dealt with them herself. This is probably because she managed herself so well in such situations. The story opens with Emmy telling her integrated class
that there are five races and to which of them she belonged. After school, one of her white classmates asked, "... but, oh, Emmy, didn't you mind? ... saying you were black and... a Negro, and all that before the class?" The white girl goes on and "seized one of Emmy's hands--an exquisite member, all brown outside, and within a soft pinky white." She continued her thoughts, "Oh, Emmy don't you think if you scrubbed real hard you could get some of the brown off?" And Emmy replies:

But I don't want to, I guess my hands are as nice as yours, Mary Holborn. We're just the same, only you're white and I'm brown. But I don't see any difference. Eunice Leck's eyes are green and yours are blue, but you can both see.

This little interchange shows the extent to which Miss Fauset exposes race prejudice and race pride. There are a few other instances where prejudice and pride appear, but in each case it is manifested in this same unobstrusive way. The basis for white prejudice is always ignorance and the black person to whom it is directed is unable to comprehend its occurrence.

Like Miss Fauset herself, Emmy and her mother are members of a privileged class of black people. Both were born in France. They employ a white French maid. Mrs. Carrel is an interpreter by

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4 Ibid., December, p. 79.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., December, p. 79.
occupation. Both of them wear the finest of clothes. Two white teachers
at Emmy's school even discuss the family and their ways:

She's got to have some of the wind taken out of her sails, someday, anyhow. Look how her mother dresses her. I suppose she does make pretty good money—I've heard translating pays well. Seems funny for a colored woman to be able to speak and write a foreign language. . . . Of course it doesn't cost much to live here, but Emmy's clothes! White frocks all last winter, and a long red coat—broadcloth it was Hannah. And big bows on her hair—she's got pretty hair, I must say. . . . I heard Mr. Holborn say Mrs. Carrel used to live in France; I suppose that's where she got all her stylish ways. . . a colored woman with a French maid. Though if it weren't for her skin you'd never tell by her actions what she is.

In other words, the only thing that sets this family apart from a white American family is skin color. In every other respect they are identical. It is Miss Fauset's intention to draw these parallels. In her literary career the notion of the uplift of the race is very important. And one of the ways she attempts to meet that end is to depict members of the black privileged class as almost copies of white people.

"There Was One Time" is the second of Jessie Fauset's short stories. It was published in The Crisis magazine during April and May of 1917. Miss Fauset sub-titled this work, "A Story of Spring." Published in spring, it is in keeping with the cliche that in spring one's fancy turns to thoughts of love. "There Was One Time" parallels

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8 Ibid., December, p. 81.
a fairy tale which Miss Fauset described in the story. Anna Fetter, the main character teaches French.

The fairy tale, so important to the story and one her French class is translating, speaks of a French shepherdess, who gets tired of her sheep and leaves them alone one spring day. Wearing a sky-blue dress, she walks through a forest until she comes to another country where she meets a prince. He is smitten by the shepherdess and asks her to spend the day with him. She stays with him until sunset and then returns home with a refreshed mind and pleasant memories.

However, at this point Anna's French Department drops the translations in favor of grammar which means that the fairy tale is put aside. It is not until the end of the story that the predictable ending is revealed; the wealthy prince pursues the shepherdess, asks her to marry him and live in his kingdom near the sea. She, of course, says yes and they go off together.

Ann Fetter, the black counterpart of the French shepherdess, is described by Miss Fauset as an ordinary woman:

See her then as she walked home through the ugly streets of Marytown, neither white nor black, of medium height, slim, nose neither good nor bad, mouth beautiful, teeth slightly irregular, but perfect. . . she was as much as any one else the typical American girl done over in brown. . . .

In other words, the only thing that distinguishes Anna Fetter from her white counterpart is color. But even color never has any particular

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significance for her or the story. And Miss Fauset explains that this way:

Perhaps it was because she had lived all her life in a small up-town street in a white neighborhood and played with most of the boys and girls there.\(^{10}\)

Anna Fetter's naivete seems incredible when she has her first encounter with prejudice. After she finishes high school, she attempts to get a job. She is not able to understand the words. "You! Oh no, the position is not open to - er - you."\(^{11}\) Somehow, it doesn't occur to her that she is not being hired because she is black.

She gets her position to teach French through the generosity of a trustee of a small black seminary. She was promised a position teaching art, which was what she wanted to do. But as it turns out, she gets stuck with French. She must study and prepare herself daily just to keep ahead of the students.

In the course of the story, Anna Fetter becomes the French shepherdess. In six years of teaching French, Anna had only missed one day of school. This particular day, as she was on her way to work she decides to take the day off. Like the shepherdess, Anna even wore a sky-blue dress. Aimless walking leads her to a small park on the edge of the town. While sitting and reflecting on her life, she is accosted by an evil looking white tramp with "You're a right good 'looking' gal. How'd you like to take a walk with me?"

\(^{10}\) Ibid., April, p. 273.
\(^{11}\) Ibid.,
. . . You needn't think I mind your being a nigger... I ruther like 'em. I hain't what you might call prejudiced."\textsuperscript{12}

At this point enters Anna's prince. He interrupts the verbal abuse she is getting by posing as a friend for whom she has been waiting. The two begin to talk. He says to her, "I didn't want him to touch you, you seemed so nice and dainty. I'd been watching you for sometime under the trees, thinking how very American you were and all that sort of thing."\textsuperscript{13} It turns out that the prince is gallant but not physically strong. He suffers with malarial fever which makes him very weak, so weak that when he begins to shake after the incident with the tramp Anna thinks he is afraid. But she finds that her prince's strength lies in his love of black people. His explanation about himself and black people is quite unlike any she appears ever to have heard.

He had recently arrived in the United States after spending many years in England. He tells her that what struck him most about black people in America was

"a lack of self-esteem,
a lack of self-appreciation,
and a tendency to measure ourselves by false ideals. . . .
I wanted to tell our folks that there is nothing more supremely American than the colored American, nothing more made-in America, so to speak. There is no supreme

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., April, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
court which rules absolutely that white is the handsomest color, that straight hair is the most alluring. . . . I'd give us the power to realize how wonderful and beautiful and enduring we are in the world's scheme of things. I can't help but feel that finally a man is taken at his own estimate."  

These things cause Anna to think that "his mood, his experiences, his whole personality seemed so remote from anything she had ever encountered."  

All too soon the day is over for Anna and her prince. Anna's life returns to its normal routine. But like the day of the shepherdess, her day of truancy left her mind refreshed and full of good memories. She often thought of the prince, as she called him, and wondered if she would ever see him again. And when her class finally resumed the translation of the fairy tale, her hopes were renewed. She thought to herself, "... the first part of the story had come true, why shouldn't the second?" Indeed, the second part also comes true. Two months after their encounter, Anna discovers the identity of the prince from her young cousin, Theophious. It turns out that Theophious knows the prince because he is the uncle of one of his playmates. Through casual conversation with her cousin, Anna also finds out that the prince, Richard Winter, has found out her identity.

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14 Ibid., April, p. 276.  
15 Ibid., April, pp. 276-277  
16 Ibid., May, p. 12.
Later that day, Richard Winter comes to the home of Anna Fetter; this event in the fairy tale marks the joining of the black prince and princess. Richard's words to Anna confirm the end of the fairy tale: "... you could help me live that wonderful fairy-tale. Dear, I love so --" 17

The story of Anna Fetter and Richard Winter is infused with elements involving race. Obviously, both characters are black. Miss Fauset makes that clear in her descriptions. Prejudice strikes Anna in her search for a job and in the park when she is propositioned by a white tramp. Neither incident, however, is given any particular importance as examples of prejudice per se; rather they are sequences in the development of Miss Fauset's story. These instances don't have any lasting effect on Anna. The incident with the tramp, however, does give Miss Fauset the opportunity to express her belief concerning the importance of individual human worth over race. The "bad guy" in this instance is white. This seems to be an example of image reversal and was purposely included. With this segment of the story, Miss Fauset implies that blanket statements regarding any race are invalid.

Richard Winter is portrayed as a thinking black man. He has travelled widely throughout the world and has returned to America with a different perspective of his people. He speaks of the apparent

17 Ibid., May, p. 15.
lack of pride in self of the black American and of how, if he could, he would give black people the power to realize their worth. His physical weakness due to malaria is not significant next to his strong, healthy attitude about black people. This marks the first time in any of Miss Fauset's short stories that she makes strong racial comments about the condition of black people in America. For this reason, this story is very valuable in the study of Jessie Fauset. But basically the story is a very hard-to-believe black fairy tale.

Next in the chronology of her short stories is "Mary Elizabeth." Like the others, it was published in The Crisis magazine. The date was December, 1919. This story examines two women at opposite ends of the economic spectrum. The differences in their status appear to be directly connected with the circumstances of their birth.

The story is written in the first person with Sally doing the talking. Sally Pierson and her husband Roger are members of the black privileged class. Sally Pierson is a housewife. She has a maid. One might say that she needs a maid. She is obviously accustomed to being waited on. When the maid is late, her husband must leave home without breakfast. She may attempt to make breakfast but will end up with pancakes that are tough, gummy and got cold one second exactly as she took them off the stove. And the coffee boiled, or stewed, or scorched, or did whatever the particular thing is that coffee shouldn't do. Roger sawed at one cake, took one mouthful of the dreadful brew and pushed away his cup.  

18 Jessie Fauset, "Mary Elizabeth," The Crisis XIX (December, 1919), 51.
After this regular occurrence, Roger, generally, stormed out of the house slamming the door. Once he left, Sally would begin to brood and cry. She then tells the reader that both she and her husband are stubborn. Where she won't learn to cook, Roger won't learn to play cards and he knows how she loves to play cards.

At this point the maid, Mary Elizabeth, arrives. Sally describes her as "... a small weakened woman, very dark, somewhat wrinkled, and a model of self-possession." Shortly, Mary Elizabeth begins to explain why she is late:

Mr. Gales [her husband] led me an awful chase last night. ... When I got home yistiddy evenin', my cousin whut keeps house for me tole me Mr. Gales went out in the mornin' en hadn't come back. ... en I had the whole perlice station out all night huntin' 'im. Look like they wasn't never goin to find 'im. But I ses, "Jes let me look fer enough en long enough en I'll find 'im, I ses, en I did. Way out Georgy Avenue, with the hat on ole Mis' give 'im."

This leads to an explanation of who Ole Mis' was. Mary Elizabeth tells Sally that this was a woman she worked for in New York. And when Mary Elizabeth remarried for the second time, Ole Mis' sent a silk top hat to her husband. Since Mary Elizabeth tells Sally some remarkable stories, Sally is captivated and believes her every word. Thus, the story of Mary Elizabeth's two husbands convinces her to never doubt what the woman said. But Mary Elizabeth was telling her story and confusing Sally with the names. Finally, Mary

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19 Ibid., p. 51.
20 Ibid., p. 52.
Elizabeth says, "No-o-me! My first husband was Mr. Gale and my second is Mr. Gales."^{21}

Mary Elizabeth was very talkative the remainder of the afternoon. She spoke of her sister, her sister's home in the country, and finally her background. Her parents were slaves and were never really married, since it wasn't allowed. They did jump over a brookstick though. Not long after Mary Elizabeth was born, her father was sold and forced to leave his family. Years passed and the mother, convinced her first husband was dead remarried. But he returned, twenty-six years, four wives, and several children later. For a while they acted like reunited lovers but realized that because of the changes each had been through, they could no longer be together.

Sally found the story tragic. When Roger came home, she repeated it to him and they talked about how lucky they were to love each other and be together. This realization caused them to patch up the differences which had arisen that morning. So ends the story.

The real purpose of the story seems to lie in the comparisons that can be made between the two women. Mary Elizabeth is a sixty-four year old woman. She was born into slavery and has apparently been someone's maid all her working life. She would fall into the category of the black working class. Sally is a young woman. She has probably never worked a day in her life. Her closest association with slavery was through her maid's stories. Sally says, "It had

been such a long time since I had thought of slavery. I was born in Pennsylvania and neither my parents nor grandparents had been slaves. . .

Her is a happy life with few worries.

The story "Mary Elizabeth" is essentially a portrait of two women at opposite ends of the spectrum of black life. Instead of merely presenting the life of the black middle class as Miss Fauset usually does, she explores the not-so-lucky women. In so doing she reveals some of the realities of slavery. Operating with her notion of decent people, which would include Mary Elizabeth, she examines the lives of different generations, different educational backgrounds, socio-economic status, and life styles.

Thus, Miss Fauset lets her readers know that her knowledge is not limited to the way middle class black people live. For this reason this story is important in her development as a writer. Here she reminds her readers that she has not completely overlooked the not-so-fortunate black people.

"The Sleeper Wakes," the fourth of Jessie Fauset's short stories, was published in The Crisis in three parts in the August, September, and October issues of 1920. It is the story of Amy Kildare, a young white-looking woman who is not quite sure to what race she belongs. As a baby she was left in the care of a black family, the Boldins. She knows nothing of her biological family. The Boldins and their son, Cornelius are very good to Amy and treat her as if she

\[22\] Ibid., p. 55.
were their own. She returns their love but feels as though she were destined for bigger things. The life of a small town girl with the Boldins is not exciting enough for her. So at seventeen she runs away to New York. She gets a job in a confectionary and begins to make her living. In the city she is assumed to be white and she doesn't argue the point. It is during her second year in New York that she meets Zora Harrison, who is to promote several changes in her life.

Within a few weeks she moves into the apartment of her new friend. Through Zora, Amy meets Stuart Wynne, a wealthy, aristocratic Southerner. Smitten by Amy's youth, beauty, and innocence, Wynne asks Amy to marry him. He is fifty-five and she is about twenty. She doesn't love him and tells him so, but under Zora's influence, she agrees to marry him. And so she moves to his big house in a small town south of Richmond, Virginia.

Wynne seems to love Amy completely and showers her with the finest in clothing and jewels. But Amy finds that her husband has an absolute hatred "of all people of inferior birth or standing and looked with contempt on foreigners, except the French and English. All the rest were variously "guineys," "niggers," and "wops"..." This is something Amy just could not understand, for, as Miss Fauset explains it, "Growing up as the average colored American girl does grow up, surrounded by types of every hue, color, and facial configuration she had had no absolute ideal. She was not even aware

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that there was one.\textsuperscript{24}

Indeed it is Wynne's contempt for his black servants which causes the end of their marriage. There is a terrible argument between Wynne and one of the valets. Amy intervenes and insists the valet is her brother, whereupon Wynne's fury is redirected to her. She tells her husband she was lying about the valet being her brother, but insists that she is black. At this point she is convinced of that fact herself. At any rate, the marriage ends in divorce and she goes off to New York. But she is living in a house which her ex-husband provides. This new arrangement isn't quite what she had become accustomed to but she was comfortable. At first she just lets her days pass by emptily. She had been so completely dependent on her husband during their three year marriage she simply does not know what to do with herself. Finally she takes a job as a designer in a small exclusive Manhattan dress shop and her alimony is so generous that she gives her salary to the Red Cross. Her life continues rather routinely until the day her ex-husband pays her a visit. She is glad to see him but her happiness is premature. She thought that Wynne had thoroughly loved her and she expected him to return someday and seek a reconciliation. So naturally she thought that this was the purpose of his visit. What he wanted was for her to live with him as his mistress, not to remarry him. They argue and he humiliates her with his harsh words. He tells her that all she wants is a rich white man, that he will

\footnote{\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., September, p. 227.}
not keep up her alimony and get nothing in return, and that she had sold herself to him. After he leaves she cries and aches with shame. She decides she must leave his house immediately. She tells her servants she is black and asks their help in securing a place to live. Peter, her valet, makes arrangements for her to rent a cottage from his sister in Orange, New Jersey. And she begins to work on a full time basis as a designer. For the next four years she works and pays Wynne back all the rent and alimony she received from him. Now she felt free and her thoughts returned to the Boldins and the home she knew with them. She decides to return to them if they will have her. She writes them a letter saying that she is a friend of Amy Kildare's who knows she wants to come home but is ashamed to write. A reply comes immediately saying that by all means Amy is welcome. The story ends with her packing up her things preparing to go home.

The descriptions of Amy reveal Miss Fauset's concern with epidermicism, which is the fascination with the varying skin shades in the black race. This is best seen in her detailed description of her:

Her looks at this time belief her--her perfect ivory-pink face, her deep luminous eyes--very brown they were with purple depths that made one think of pansies--her charming, rather wide mouth, her whole face set in a frame of very soft, very live, brown hair

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25 Epidermicism, is the fascination with the various complexions found in the black race. Concept was discussed by Dr. C. Fowler at Atlanta University.
which grew in wisps and tendrils and curls and waves back from her smooth, young forehead. All this made one look for softness and ingenuousness. The ingenuousness was there, but not the softness—except of her fresh, vibrant loveliness.\footnote{Ibid., August, p. 172.}

This description makes it very clear that Amy is accepted as white. Her looks capture Stuart Wynne as a husband. Miss Fauset spends a great deal of time describing and analyzing the relationship between these two. She makes sure that the reader is aware of Wynne's seemingly absolute love for Amy. Throughout the story he is found saying things like the following: "Ah, my dear, you'll never realize what you mean to me—I don't envy any other man in the world. You are so beautiful, so sweet, so different!"\footnote{Ibid., August, p. 173.} His so-called love was manifested in the material things he could and did give. Amy is obviously aware of his devotion for after they are divorced she thought, "If she had felt half the love for him which he had professed for her, she would not have sent him away if he had been a leper."\footnote{Ibid., October, p. 267.} What she fails to realize is that what Wynne had felt for her amounted to only a appearance of love, that it was empty of real content.

The point Miss Fauset seems to be making with this relationship between Wynne and Amy is one on black-white relationships in general. She makes this point in the passage after Wynne asks Amy to return to live with him:
there was race antagonism there—two elements clashing. That much she could fathom. But that he despising her, hating her for not being white should yet desire her! It seemed to her that his attitude toward her—hate and yet desire, was the attitude in microcosm of the whole white world toward her own, toward that world to which those few possible strains of black blood so tenuously and yet so tenaciously likened her.29

Amy's experiences in the white world ultimately prompt her to return to the black world. While she isn't exactly sure in the sense that she knows her parents to be black, she does feel it inside of her.

The title of the story, "The Sleeper Wakes," refers directly to Amy. As long as she believed that happiness and whiteness were synonymous, she, in fact, was asleep. She was dreaming, but her dreams were shattered. But the shattering of her dreams made her come to grips with reality; thus, the sleeper wakes. Her awakening gives her the opportunity to find real happiness without pretense. Her explanation of her color to her husband is the beginning of the end of her pretense. She told him, "She took me to Mrs. Boldin's and gave me to her to keep. She would never have taken me to her if I had been white."30 Previously, though, she figured that she must be black because of the compassion she felt for the black servants of the Wynne household. "I am colored," she told herself that night. "I feel it inside of me."31 These feelings made her decide that she

29 Ibid., October, p. 272.
30 Ibid., September, p. 229.
31 Ibid., September, p. 228.
would return to the Boldin family, the only people who had ever shown her real love.

As will be seen in the examination of Jessie Fauset's second novel, *Plum Bun*, there are a great many similarities between it and "The Sleeper Wakes." Like the story, the novel deals with a young woman who is light enough to pass. Like Amy she needs personal proof that the white world is not the best world. And there are similar endings.

This story marks a turning point in Miss Fauset's writing. This is the first that is not written with fairy tale simplicity. It is also the first one wherein she analyzes black-white relationships. She reveals a very perceptive analysis of the nature of such relationships on a personal level, but, more importantly, she uses Wynne and Amy to make a valid comment on the nature of black-white relationships in general.

"Double Trouble" is the fifth and last of Jessie Fauset's short stories. It was published in *The Crisis* magazine in 1923 in the August and September issues. The story takes place in a small New Jersey town called Edendale. Angelique, the main character is a young pretty school girl who lives with her Aunt Sal and older cousin, Laurentine. The elaborate plot concerns the fear of incest. Angelique is a lively bubbling school girl--the type who under normal circumstances would be the most popular girl at school. She is aware that the townspeople act coolly towards her but she is not sure of the reason for their behavior. For a time she has a close friendship
with Asshur Judson, but he leaves to go to college. Even Laurentine with whom she lives treats her coldly. The only one who loves her is her Aunt Sal, and her only friend is Malory Fordham.

Her life at home is not all that pleasant either. She and Laurentine, do not get along well. Laurentine simply does not like her young cousin. But Angelique feels sorry for her cousin, who is well into her twenties and still not married.

The story begins with Angelique walking home from school. Malory Fordham comes along and they begin to walk along together, just talking. She tells Malory that her cousin, Laurentine, doesn't like her and that, in fact, not many people in the town do. They then reminisce on the night they met. It was at a party and even there it appeared as though people did not want them to meet. Malory comforts her by saying that she shouldn't worry whether or not the townspeople like her. He feels as though they don't like him either. She then talks about the way people initially liked her, especially new girls in town of her own age at the beginning, but that they tended to shy away after a while. As they neared Angelique's home, the talking came to an end. Laurentine did not allow her young cousin to have boys in the house. Malory turned to the direction of his home and thought about his dismal life at home with his mother and his three plain older sisters. He then recalled his family's reactions when he spoke of having met Angelique Murray. On their faces he read shock and horror and from their lips he was told to leave her alone. In spite of their warnings he was drawn to Angelique's bright, vibrant personality. The liveliness of Angelique compared so favorably to
the gloomy atmosphere of his own home.

That night Angelique dreamt that she was chasing Malory and that he continuously tried to elude her. When she finally did catch him, he turned around and his face was that of a Greek tragic mask. Through those grotesque lips he was uttering words which at first she could not understand. When she finally figured his words out, she covered her face with her arms in horror.

Malory and Angelique continued to meet clandestinely. She found it exciting but he was sick of having to hide and sneak about. He decided one day that she should come home with him to meet his family. He had the idea that once they knew her, they would love her as he did. When they got to his house they were greeted with "You can't bring her in Malory, you mustn't... Oh Malory you must send her away! Come in and I'll tell you." Angelique turned and started home utterly confused but determined to find out just what was happening the next day from Malory.

The next afternoon after school, she waited and waited for him. When she finally saw him, she followed and called to him. Suddenly she recalled the terrible dream she had had. Eventually, she caught up to him when he tripped over a fallen branch. His words to her were the following:

"Don't come near me!" His breath came whistling from his ghastly lips. "Don't

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33 Jessie Fauset, "Double Trouble," The Crisis, XXVI (August, September, 1923), September p. 207.
touch me!" He broke into terrible weeping.
You're my sister--my sister!" He raised tragic
arms to the careless sky. "Oh God how could you!
I loved her, I wanted to marry her--and she's my
sister!" 34

When Angelique got home she demanded the truth from Laurentine.

In Angelique, Miss Fauset created the tragic mulatto. She is
the daughter of a white father and a black mother. Miss Fauset
describes her this way:

Laurentine was crimson and gold like the
flesh of the mango, her eyes dark emeralds.
Her proud head glowed like an ember carvings
rising from the green perfection of her dress. 35

Thus Miss Fauset has incorporated the tragic mulatto and the
skeleton in the closet into this story. Laurentine is very bitter
about the way she is treated as a result of her background. In asking
Laurentine about being Malory's sister, Angelique expected a little
compassion from her cousin but instead she got the following:

So you've found out have you? You sailing
about me with your pitying ways and your highty-
tighty manner. Sorry for Cousin Laurentine--
weren't you? --because her father was white and
her mother wasn't married to him. But my mother
couldn't help it. She had been a slave until she
became a woman and she carried a slave's traditions
into freedom." 36

34 Ibid., September p. 208.
35 Ibid., August p. 158.
36 Ibid., September p. 209.
Laurentine then reveals the circumstances of Angelique's birth, still being very nasty to her young, heartbroken cousin:

... your mother... whom my mother had shielded and guarded, to whom she held up herself and me--me... as horrible examples,--your mother betrayed Mrs. Fordham, a woman of her own race who had been kind to her, and ran away with her husband.37

Angelique finally asks Laurentine why she disliked her so much, which was something she had wanted to know since she came to live there. In Laurentine's reply, Angelique gets the answer to her question as well as the sad tale of what it is like to be a tragic mulatto:

Look at me... Young, beautiful, educated,--and nobody wants me, nobody who is anybody will have me. The ash-contractor's son offers--not asks--to marry me... because of you. You little fool, because of you! Must I say it again? Because my mother was the victim of slavery. People looked at me when I was a little girl, they used to say: "Her mother couldn't help it, and she is beautiful." They would have forgotten all about it... Now they see you and they say: "What! And her mother too! A colored man this time. Broke up a home. No excuse for that. Bad blood there. Best leave them alone.38

Laurentine then predicted the same future for Angelique and told her what it would be like--to be young, pretty, and alone. To watch the years pass by with no hope for a better future. With this Angelique went to her room to contemplate a life like Laurentine's. Much later that night, her Aunt Sal came to Angelique's room with a

37 Ibid., September p. 209.
38 Ibid.
letter from Asshur Judson. Asshur had loved Angelique before she even met Malory and had told her he would return and marry her once he had finished school. She immediately saw her salvation in him.

"Double Trouble" is very disjointed and loaded down with so many elements that the story is cluttered. On the surface the story is essentially a story of the fear of incest. Along with this fear of incest, Miss Fauset has incorporated epidermicism, the skeleton in the closet, the tragic mulatto, and even the motif of Greek tragedy, and all of this is done in ten short pages. The end result is that the story is ineffective with none of the elements handled well.

The fear of incest is not in the least believable. It does not seem likely that in a small town Angelique and Malory could have continued their relationship for so long without anyone putting a stop to it by telling them about their parental ties. The attempt at affecting Greek tragedy is completely contrived and awkward. The motif appears to be an attempt on the part of Miss Fauset to create a black tragedy within the framework of a classical form. But as it turns out, her attempt comes across as a contrivance.

Having Laurentine portrayed as the tragic mulatto is indeed unfortunate in that she is totally self-indulgent and self-pitying. But Miss Fauset's treatment of her is not developed enough. There is nothing secret about the skeleton in her closet. The whole town is aware of it. This just gives Laurentine one more reason to be hostile. The reader is unaware of the skeletons in either Laurentine's or Angelique's closet until the end of the story. There is obviously
something about both of them that causes them to be ostracized as they are and Miss Fauset creates suspense and dramatic tension rather effectively by waiting until the end to tell their stories.

In the light of all her short stories, however, "Double Trouble" is the most ineffective.
NOVELS

Jessie Fauset is perhaps best remembered for the four novels she wrote: *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1928), *The China Berry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). These novels "originated in protest against the unfaithful portrayal of the educated Negro in T. S. Stribling's Birthright."¹ She felt black writers should write about black people. Miss Fauset's novels are important because they were among the first written about the privileged class of black people by a black author. She was concerned with black people who in education and wealth are not very much unlike their white counterparts. A critic commented about her novels this way:

Most certainly she knows well the better class of Negroes who have been so long an enigma to the reading public at large. I think it fitting that she busy herself about bringing them to light. Books about cabarets, stevedores, et. al., are prevalent enough. Why not this gentlewoman's pen that dips so choicey into the lives of black folk who go to school and come home to the simple niceties of living "just like all the white folks do?"²

It will be found that each novel is a testimonial in behalf of the black middle class. A closer look at the novels will reveal

that the essential emphasis is on race. The characters are of the privileged class. The major conflicts in the stories result from race related matters. William Stanley Braithwaite, however, felt that Miss Fauset's stories brought to light that segment of black society which, before her novels, was assumed not to have existed.

The novels will be examined chronologically to best appreciate Miss Fauset's growth as a race writer. This analysis will explore the varying themes which the author explored herself. It must be remembered that Miss Fauset wrote her novels during the Harlem Renaissance. They not only reflect themes which were personally important to her, but also many of those themes which were important to the times in which they were written. Now, let us take a closer look at her four novels.

There Is Confusion, the first, was published in 1924. It centers around Joanna Marshall, who since she was a child, had the overwhelming desire to achieve some form of greatness. She wanted her singing and dancing ability to bring her universal acclaim. In this quest she was uncompromising. It often caused her to be disdainful of what she considered "ordinariness" in other people. She insisted that her fiancé, Peter Bye, who had a tendency to be lazy, become a surgeon. To this end she assured Peter that she would marry him once he became a surgeon. Peter takes up the study of medicine but eventually finds Joanna's goading more than he can take and drops out of medical school.

Joanna also plays a significant part in making life miserable for her brother, Philip. Philip is in love with Maggie Ellersley, and
she with him. But Maggie is ordinary in birth and goals in the eyes of Joanna. So Joanna takes it upon herself to destroy any notion Maggie has regarding Philip by sending her a very explicit and nasty letter.

Thus, Maggie is humiliated and disillusioned. In desperation she runs off and marries a much older man. To further her troubles Maggie's husband turns out to be a terrible gambler and their union ends in divorce. Maggie on the rebound both from her ex-husband and her true love, Philip, and Peter on the rebound from Joanna, discover each other for a short time and become engaged. This relationship ends because they realize they really don't love each other. The war in Europe required the services of both Peter Bye and Philip Marshall. Before leaving, Peter and Joanna make up. Maggie goes to Europe as a social worker in an attempt to give her life some meaning. While serving wounded soldiers, Maggie is reunited with Philip. She finds though that Philip is suffering with some chronic ailment and will never be completely well again. Maggie's love is such that she devotes the rest of her life to caring for Philip. Upon Peter's return, he marries Joanna. She has realized that material things and greatness do not equal happiness.

The family background of the characters is very important in this novel. Joanna's family is typical of Miss Fauset's "respectable" black families but with a slave background. Joanna's father, Joel Marshall, had been born a slave in Richmond, Virginia. Some time after the Emancipation Proclamation, young Joel Marshall and his mother went to work for a wealthy white Virginian. It was here as a
cook that he learned the trade which would bring him success. On this job he was able to save money and eventually opened a small restaurant. The fame of his good food spread far and wide. This led to the establishment of his catering business. He moved his business to New York City. It was in New York that he married a school teacher, further increasing his respectability. They subsequently had four children, Alexander, Philip, Sylvia, and Joanna. This family's respectability was immediately recognizable to others. Miss Fauset explains Susan Graves' impression of the family this way: "She liked Joel's success, his pride, his air of being somebody. She estimated rightly the correctness of the old-fashioned walnut furniture, the heavy curtains, the kidney table in the parlor, the massive silver service and good linen."³

This respectability was also evidenced in the Marshall family's attitude toward one another. The following passage exemplifies this:

Now the Marshall boys were fine gentlemen. Joel had made them so by teaching, as well as by his attitude toward their mother and sisters. Joanna and Sylvia, . . . helped the boys out with an occasional stitch, an occasional sewing of a button. When Alexander was getting ready for college, and was working nights to help with his expenses, Sylvia used to arrange sandwiches and milk for him when he came in late. And Joanna had recopied his chemistry and history notes. These were only kind trivialities, but the boys treated their sisters like queens.⁴

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⁴Ibid., p. 52.
This image then is in keeping with Miss Fauset's perception of decent people of the black race. In the father is a man who climbed from the nadir of slavery to the zenith of success. He has his own business. He is a good father and husband. He has a fine family.

Two other types of families are also explored in this novel. Maggie Ellersley's "mother was a laundress, a spare hard-working woman to whom life had meant nothing but poverty and confusion." The mother and daughter lived in three rooms of a dingy tenement house. One of these rooms was rented out. Maggie insisted from a very young age that she would not always live that way. The first step was to move out of the tenement. With the help of a friend, Mrs. Ellersley and Maggie managed to get a house in a much more agreeable neighborhood. This too was turned into a rooming house. The reputation of the rooming house spread to "the better class of transients." Living in this neighborhood led to Maggie's friendship with Sylvia Marshall. This she saw as her link with the sort of life she was after. Obviously of a different sort of background, this family is also considered decent by Miss Fauset.

The family background of Peter Eye is the most important in the story. The mystery surrounding this family explains the title of the novel. The story of the Eyes involves a tradition of miscegenation. Since the last decades of the eighteenth century in Philadelphia,

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5 Ibid., p. 55.
6 Ibid., p. 62.
there had been the white Byes and the black Byes. The black Byes had been the slaves of the white Byes. The white Byes were Quakers and freed their slaves in 1780 but kept them on as workers. The connection with the white Byes for so many years enables them to be classified as "old Philadelphians," a title associated with "respectability."

By the time Peter was a young man, the strong ties which had once existed between the black and the white Byes were broken. It was not until Peter went to war that he encountered Meriwether, a white Bye about his own age. Meriwether died in the war and assumed that he was the last of the Byes. The incident of miscegenation had been kept secret. Meriwether's grandfather, also names Meriwether Bye, knows that the black and white Byes are related. When the old man is informed of Peter's child, he tells him of their blood ties. The old man is interested in having an heir and would like to raise and educate the child but without having him know the real reason. This offer is adamantly rejected by Peter and Joanna. This act marks the true end of the white Byes.

Like the other families mentioned before, the family of black Peter Bye is also considered decent by Miss Fauset. In this novel decent black people are judged by their socio-economic status. But morality is also a very important factor. Morality accounts for the fact that the Ellersley and black Bye families are considered decent. Of course, the Marshall family qualities in both counts in that they are financially well off and maintain a high moral code.

The fetish of color was typical of many Harlem Renaissance writers. And Miss Fauset's concern is quite evident in this novel. She
described Judy Bye, the first black woman to have a child by a white
Bye, this way: "She was a tall, straight, steely, black woman with
fine inscrutable eyes, a thin lipped mouth and a large but shapely
nose."7 She described Peter Bye: "He was too handsome with his
brown-red skin, his black silky hair that curled alluringly, his
dary almost almond-shaped eyes. . . ."8 Of Maggie Ellersley she
said: "She was like a yellow calla lily in the deep cream of her
skin. . . . she had a mass of fine, wiry hair which hung like a
cloud, a mist over two grey eyes. Her lips, in spite of her con-
stant malnutrition, persisted unbelievably red."9 And of Joanna
Marshall she commented: "Joanna was a memorable type in these days.
A grave child, brown without that peculiar luminosity of appearance
which she was to have later on. . . . she had a mop of thick black
hair which was actually heavy, so much so that the back of her head
bulged. Joanna knew next to nothing at this time of those first aids
to colored people in this country in the matter of conforming to aver-
age appearance.10

With these descriptions, Miss Fauset showed epidermicism,
the fascination with the various skin colors within the black race.
She also shows her personal preferences. Her ideal appeared to be
most nearly Peter Bye, brown, but with straight hair, almond shaped

7Ibid., p. 41.
8Ibid., p. 57.
9Ibid., p. 59
10Ibid., p. 20.
eyes, straight nose, thin lips. Even Judy Bye, whom she called black, had thin lips and a straight nose. Of Joanna, who apparently had very curly hair, she all but suggested some type of straightener for it. This idea is not unusual coming from Miss Fauset.

A great deal of poetry which came out of the Harlem Renaissance was a tribute to the brown or bronze race. These products of miscegenation were treated as a new phenomenon of the black race, neither black nor white. A number of writers of the day were quite pleased with the results of this admixture. They felt that the results of this mixture were much more beautiful than either of the two alone. And this was the stand Miss Fauset herself took. She found black people particularly beautiful when mixed with some white blood.

Race is dealt with in this novel, primarily in two veins—racial prejudice and racial pride. Miss Fauset examined prejudice as a means to protesting it. Prejudice is revealed in a number of situations. Hugh Glouster explained it this way:

There is Confusion, while not a militantly propagandistic novel, expresses many of the racial disadvantages suffered by Negroes. The consequences of illicit relationships between master and slave are illustrated in the chronicle of the white and black Byes ... The operation of prejudice is revealed in schools, colleges, graduate and professional institutions, stores, restaurants, hospitals, theaters, and even in the world of art. Everywhere in the country the specter of discrimination is shown hovering over the Negro, limiting his sphere of activities, focusing his thinking upon his plight, and obstructing his advancement into a fuller and richer life.\footnote{Hugh Glouster, Negro Voices in American Fiction (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 133.}
Race pride is also important to this novel. It is manifested in a number of ways and by several of the characters. Joel Marshall showed his pride in his race when as a young boy still in slavery, he aspired to be like famous black ex-slaves. Miss Fauset said of him: "And when he was older and come to know of Frederick Douglass and Toussaint L'Ouverture, he knew if he could burst his bonds he, too, could write his name in glory." As a father, he worked at instilling pride in his children. When questioned by Joanna with the following: "Didn't colored people ever do anything, Daddy?" he told her himself of Douglass and Vesey and Turner. There were great women, too, Harriet Tubman, Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, women who had been slaves, he explained to her, but had won their way to fame and freedom through their own efforts." His advice to his children was not limited to examples of greatness by individual black people. He felt that black people had to look out for one another.

He had occasion to express his feelings about this:

"All people, all countries, have their ups and downs, Joanna," he would tell her gravely, "and just now it's our turn to be down, but it will soon roll round for our time to be up, or rather we must see to it that we do get up. So everyone of us has something to do for the race. Never forget that, little girl."

Joel Marshall's teachings appeared to have especially rubbed off on his son Philip. Miss Fauset explained Phillip's thinking on

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14 Ibid., p. 20.
race:

He had a strong desire to sense the social consciousness, for he was trying to learn just what stirred mass feeling and into what channels it could be directed. ... Philip always dreamed of a leader who should recognize that psychological moment and who would guide a whole race forward to the realization of its steadily increasing strength.\(^{15}\)

These lines represent the most militant thoughts of the entire book.

Here is an expression of concern for the entire race and an equally strong plea for unity. Miss Fauset used her characters to make clear her own stance on the race issue. By having her characters speak out as they do, Miss Fauset was able to reveal race prejudice, make racial protest, and even hint at how the problem of prejudice might be solved.

In 1924, There is Confusion was generally warmly received by the critics. In a review in The Crisis, Alain Locke had these kind words for Miss Fauset's first novel:

The novel that the Negro intelligentsia have been clamoring for has arrived with Jessie Fauset's first novel, "There is Confusion." What they have been wanting, if I interpret rightly, is not merely a race story told from the outside, but a cross section of the race life higher up the social pyramid and further from the base line of the peasant and the soil than is usually taken. We scarcely realize how by reaction to social prejudice we have closed our better circles physically and psychologically.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 73.

\(^{16}\) W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, "The Younger Literary Movement," The Crisis, XXVII (February, 1924), 162.
It is obvious that Alain Locke, like Jessie Fauset herself, saw the need for novels about the black middle class. They also thought that these novels should be written by black authors. Miss Fauset did this, and Alain Locke was very pleased that she did.

In another article, William Stanley Braithwaite agreed with her notion of black respectability:

Miss Fauset in her novel "There is Confusion," has created an entirely new milieu in the treatment of the Race in fiction. She has taken a class within the Race, given it an established social standing, tradition, culture, and shown that its predilections are very much like those of any civilized group of human beings.\(^{17}\)

Thus, it becomes evident that Miss Fauset's first novel was greatly appreciated by her contemporaries. The intellectuals of the period obviously wanted novels about people with whom they could identify or at least relate to. Miss Fauset was among the very first black novelists to utilize members of the black middle class as central characters.

In retrospect, many of Miss Fauset's more recent critics have not been black and neither have they been so kind. Robert Bone has said, "There is Confusion is nothing if not well titled."\(^{18}\) Also along this line, Hiroko Sato has said, "The author puts too many events in the novel to give it any artistic unity and coherence."\(^{19}\)

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It is true that there are just too many elements in the story to do any one of them justice. In fact, Miss Fauset might have created several novels out of the one.

Another recent criticism by Nathan Huggins indicated disapproval of the portrayal of one of Miss Fauset's less fortunate characters.

Jessie Fauset's strong class bias is evident in her treatment of Joanna's friend, Maggie Ellersley, who helps run her mother's boarding house. Maggie falls in love with Joanna's brother, Philip, and he loves her, although he is much too shy to let her know. Joanna becomes so enraged at Maggie's social presumption that she writes her an ugly and hurtful letter.20

While this episode certainly does appear in the novel, Miss Fauset was no doubt also trying to show how devastating prejudice perpetrated against blacks can be. She did attempt to absolve this bias against her own people towards the end of the book wherein Joanna mends her elitist ways and Philip and Maggie are finally married.

While all three of the above critics made valid points, it certainly cannot be denied that Miss Fauset was presenting insights into the black middle class which prior to her novel had not been made. For that reason her work was a needed and welcome addition to the body of black American literature. The more recent criticisms are all but predictable in light of the relative abundance

of all sorts of novels by black Americans. These recent criticisms have had the effect of diminishing the importance of the older works. But considering the time of the appearance of *There is Confusion*, it does have historical importance. It is a worthwhile, even though it is not a great novel.
Jessie Fauset's second novel, *Plum Bun*, was published in 1928. The title came from an old nursery rhyme:

> To Market, to Market
> To buy a Plum Bun;
> Home again, Home again,
> Market is done.

The novel has five sections, "Home," "Market," "Plum Bun," "Home Again," and "Market is Done," which are further divided into chapters. Each section of the novel represents a phase in the life of Angela Murry, the heroine. The story begins with descriptions of life in the Murry household. The family consists of Junius and Mattie and their two daughters, Angela and Virginia. Miss Fauset described their neighborhood as "... an unpretentious little street lined with unpretentious little houses, inhabited for the most part by unpretentious people."\(^{21}\) This modest life style represents the most comfort and security the parents have ever known and they are very pleased with their current standard of living. To their oldest daughter, Angela, this style of life was mediocre and to be avoided at all costs.

The degree of lightness and darkness of the family members is very important to the story. Junius was black. Mattie was light enough to be mistaken for white. Virginia, the youngest daughter, was of a "rosy bronzeness" and had deeply waving black hair.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 14.
oldest daughter, Angela, "had received not only her mother's creamy
complexion and her soft cloudy chestnut hair, but she had taken from
Junius the aquiline nose, the gift of some remote Indian ancestor
which gave to his face and his eldest daughter's that touch of
chiselled immobility."23 These descriptions are so important
because the story concerns Angela's quest for happiness by passing for
white. There is a parallel story of the happiness Virginia comes to
know just being herself in Harlem.

From her mother Angela got the notion that one would be
happier if one were white. But "no one would have been more amazed
than that same mother if she could have guessed how her daughter
interpreted her actions."24 As mentioned before, Mattie Murry was
light enough to pass for white. For amusement she would sometimes
eat lunch at exclusive, white-only restaurants, or sit in white-only
sections in theaters. But Miss Fauset explained that she did these
things because of "a mischievous determination to flout silly and
unjust laws."25 The thought of what the white reaction would be if
they knew that she invaded their domains undetected amused her. She
did not want to be one of these people; it was just her particular
sense of humor which led her into these situations. But Angela did
not understand this. When she became old enough, Angela would ac-
company her mother on these once-a-week excursions. It was through

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
these adventures that she formed two conclusions which would have significant impact on her life: "First, that the great rewards of life--riches, glamour, pleasure--are for white-skinned people only. Secondly, that Junius and Virginia were denied the privileges because they were dark. . . "26 Somehow she was able to completely overlook the fact that her mother was devoted to her husband and that the members of the family, with the exception of herself, were pleased with what they were.

Both Junius and Mattie died when their daughters were in their twenties. By this time the girls were working and studying as well. A short time after the death of their parents, Angela decided that she wanted to go away. She told her plans to Virginia, who just assumed that they would go away together. To this Angela remarked:

Don't be absurd, Jinny! How could I live the way I want to if you're with me. We'd keep on loving each other and seeing one another from time to time, but we might just as well face the facts. Some of those girls in the art school used to ask me to their homes; it would have meant opportunity, a broader outlook, but I never dared accept because I knew I couldn't return the invitation.27

Miss Fauset explained that Virginia replied with the following:

After that, Angela dear, I'm beginning to think that you have more white blood in

26 Ibid., p. 17.
27 Ibid., p. 81.
your veing than I, and it was that extra amount which made it possible for you to make that remark. 28

This is one of the instances in which Miss Fauset equated white with evil. In explaining Angela's complete selfishness she gave the indication that indeed it may be due to her white blood. After her life had taken such disastrous turns in New York, Angela herself began to think along these lines. "Perhaps this selfishness was what the possession of white blood meant; the ultimate definition of Nordic Supremacy." 29 Another character in the story, Anthony Cross, black but able to pass for white, expressed the same notion. "I'm not ashamed of my blood. Sometimes I think it's the leaven that will purify this Nordic people of their cruelty and their savage lust of power." 30

This seems to be a clear case of image reversal. 31 Image reversal was not uncommon in the Harlem Renaissance. It was an attempt to erase the concepts of white superiority and essentialness, 32 the belief that white or nordic intelligence created world civilization. In 1972, Miss Fauset was criticized for this by a non-black critic, Hiroko Sato, who wrote: "This stereotyping of

28 Ibid., p. 81.
29 Ibid., p. 277.
30 Ibid., p. 293.
31 Image reversal is an attempt by writers to exalt blackness by the transformation of images from white to black. This concept was discussed at Atlanta University by Dr. C. Fowler.
32 Essentialness is a white misconception of indispensability. This concept was discussed at Atlanta University by Dr. C. Fowler.
the white race as a kind of white fiend startles us when it comes from an intelligent person like Miss Fauset. "33 But for the purpose of the story, image reversal works to Miss Fauset's advantage. It is substantiated by her descriptions of the brutal murder of Anthony Cross' father by a savage white mob. It also highlights the foolishness of Angela Murry in her search for happiness through whiteness.

As it turns out, Angela's exploits in New York result in one disaster after another. When she arrived she enrolls in an art course at Cooper Union in an attempt to meet the kind of white people she is interested in. It could be said that in this she was successful because it led to her romance with Roger Fielding. Roger was a very wealthy young man who could buy for Angela what she felt constituted happiness. And she was happy with him for a while and wanted very much to marry him. Hoping he would marry her, she tried all in her power to attract him. But he was from a socialite family and his upbringing just would not allow him to marry a poor nobody. He did make Angela his mistress and eventually cut off all ties to her.

Angela was also attracted to one of her classmates, Anthony Cross. In the beginning she does not pursue this interest because he is as poor as she is. As it turns out, Anthony is also passing for white. They are married after several years of personal chaos for both of them. Miss Fauset presented these two people that pass for white with very different characters. She maintained that Anthony

Cross passed without really trying to do so. Because he is so light it is assumed he is white. Angela Murry chooses to pass as a means to an end. In both cases the choice belongs to them. Anthony admitted to his color and said he was not ashamed of it. But it was not until Angela admitted her love for Anthony and found out that he was black did she admit to her color. Actually this choice was made for her; since Anthony was black, she would be black too. She is much happier with her own people. She is reunited with her sister. She has made plans to marry a black man and live happily ever after.

To contrast the miserable life Angela spent passing, Miss Fauset gives an account of her sister, Virginia. When Angela went to Greenwich Village looking for a rich white husband, Virginia went to Harlem to teach black children music. And she found happiness in Harlem. This city within a city was always exciting. Jinny was young, beautiful, and happy teaching music. In discussing the lives of the two sisters, the author wrote, "Jinny had changed her life and been successful. Angela had changed hers and found pain and unhappiness. Where did the fault lie?" The novel seems to indicate that Angela's selfishness, her willingness to use her family, her friends, anything, as the road to happiness were the causes of her problems. Miss Fauset never blames Angela for passing, but does blame her for her uncompromising selfishness.

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The element of protest can be seen in this novel. The mere fact that the heroine, Angela Murry, passes is evidence of protest. Angela chooses to pass because she feels it is the only way she will be happy. She is convinced that black people cannot be happy because they are black. So for her, passing was a means for not settling for less than what she wanted. This implies that if black people could get what they want, there would be no need for passing. The fact that certain black people could pass for white makes a mockery of the system of prejudice.

Criticism of Plum Bun was generally favorable at the time of its publication. William Stanley Braithwaite called it "her most perfect artistic achievement and the most balanced force of interracial experience." He further praised the novel for its characterization of "white-coloreds." He said:

... Angela Murray... is nevertheless, the most successful protagonist of the white-colored girl, who tragically sought happiness in the white world. "Plum Bun," is the apogee of this mode among Miss Fauset's novels, for in Anthony Cross again, she has taken a character "over;" and he is the most unique of her male characters, one who went "white" not by choice, but because of the hatred, which the murder of his father by a southern mob, had engendered in him for white people.

Braithwaite was also pleased with the moral of the story and said:

If the story hides a moral, it is, that if one masquerades as white because it is...

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36 Ibid., pp. 27-28.
expedient in the search for happiness and security and not because one is ashamed or would rather not possess the dark blood in them, then a defection which the gods ironically punish with spiritual, and often, physical tragedy. Both Angela Murray and Anthony Cross...tasted this fortuitous draught at the hands of fate.\textsuperscript{37}

Passing for white was a primary concern for Miss Fauset and it was an important one for black people during the 1920's. \textit{Plum Bun} was welcomed as a serious novel concerned with passing. The review in Opportunity magazine by Gwendolyn Bennett had this to say:

\textit{...true, that the author is concerned with the same ordinary well-bred Negro of intelligence and education; but on the other hand this last book seems to come to grapple with a larger, more potent element in Negro life--passing for white. For that reason I am prepared to say that the theme of Jessie Fauset's second novel is of more importance in the scheme of Negro letters than her first book.}\textsuperscript{38}

This second novel by Jessie Fauset is certainly the more comprehensive of her first two novels. The plot is much less involved than that of her first novel. While the incidence of prejudice continues to permeate the whole spectrum of black life as it did in \textit{There is Confusion}, the treatment of race in \textit{Plum Bun} is of greater scope. Violence against blacks, a definite threat to all black people at that time, is dealt with in the story with the murder of Anthony Cross' father by a white mob. The mistaken values of a

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{38}Gwendolyn Bennett, "Our Book Shelf," Opportunity, VII (September, 1929), 287.
young black woman which make her think that she must be white to be happy are disclosed. It was a search for material wealth, not happiness, that led Angela to pass for white. She was not able to distinguish between the two.

The sub-plot of the story, Virginia Murry, served as relief from the world of passing. Miss Fauset had to show that all black people are not Angela Murrys or Anthony Crosses. In Virginia, Miss Fauset portrayed the pretty, well educated, financially comfortable black woman who is far removed from the things that motivated Angela or Anthony. The character of Virginia was essential for some balance in the story. Miss Fauset was able to explore the phenomenon of passing and simultaneously explore the life of a black person happy with being herself.

The theme of passing made it possible for Miss Fauset to deal with a wider range of circumstances confronting blacks; it reflects some of the very real problems black people were faced with at that time in the United States. Miss Fauset makes it perfectly clear that discrimination caused passing. But she was unyielding in her belief that black people were better off being true to themselves and to their race. After the hardship and heartbreak of trying to be white, both Anthony and Angela find real happiness in each other. Once again Miss Fauset has taken the concerns of her times and incorporated them into her novel. This added element points to her development as an aware artist.

Further proof of Jessie Fauset's growth as a writer is revealed in a comparison of Plum Bun and her short story. "The
Sleeper Wakes." It will be remembered that the plots of both works are similar. Each is concerned with black women who passed for white. The story was published eight years before the novels. In terms of artistic development these years produced important changes. The changes in the plot and the shifts in emphasis are significant.

In the story, Amy was content with passing to the point of marrying a white man. Even after their divorce, a direct result of her revealing her race, she still expected and awaited her ex-husband's return. At the end she returned to her family. The emphasis in the story was on the analysis Miss Fauset made of the relationship between blacks and whites.

The novel showed a black man and a black woman who passed for different reasons, but these, in terms of Miss Fauset's intent, had the effect of protesting racial discrimination. The improvement in her development as a social commentator is further evidenced in her treatment of the murder of Anthony Cross' father. Obviously, she was an astute observer of the concerns of her times. Many of the things which appeared in her novel appeared in the artistic works of her contemporaries, image reversal and epidermicism among them. The contrasting life of a happy, proud, black woman added a dimension noticeably absent from "The Sleeper Wakes." The story, however, did mark a turning point in Miss Fauset's short stories. Her role as a literary psychologist began there. The novel was built on the potentials she recognized in her own story. The result was a greatly improved artistic creation.
The Chinaberry Tree, published in 1931, is her third novel.

In the "Forward" she offered some insights into all her novels and into The Chinaberry Tree, specifically. She explained it this way:

Colored people have been the subjects which I have chosen for my novels partly because they are the ones I know best, partly because of all the other separate groups which constitute the American cosmogony none of them, to me, seems so naturally endowed with the stuff of which chronicles may be made. To be a Negro in America posits a dramatic situation. . . . there are breathing-spells, in-between spaces where colored men and women work and love and go their ways with no thought of the "problem." What are they like then? . . . So few of the other Americans know.39

In this passage Miss Fauset revealed the philosophy which dictated the subject matter and the handling of all her novels. In this next passage she explained about The Chinaberry Tree:

In the story of Aunt Sal, Leurentine, Melissa and the Chinaberry Tree I have depicted something of the homelife of the colored American who is not being pressed too hard by the Furies of Prejudice, Ignorance, and Economic Injustice. And behold he is not so vastly different from any other American, just distinctive.40

This excerpt gives an idea of what to expect from this novel. Her description of her own work is very accurate.

The Chinaberry Tree is an enlargement of one of Miss Fauset's short stories, "Double Trouble," which was published in 1923 in The

40 Ibid., p. ix.
In "Double Trouble," Miss Fauset moved away from the fairy tale quality of her first three short stories, but she tried to put too much into it. There are too many plots, too many subplots, too many poorly developed characters, and too many contrivances. In the novel she was able to devote much more time to each of the elements that she insisted go into the story. She was able to develop the characters more fully. The novel is an improvement over the story, but critics of the novel vary in their opinion as to its relative merit in light of all four of her novels.

William Stanley Braithwaite gave praise and disapproval to this one. "In many ways her strongest book on the theme of racial solidarity in its advance stage, 'The Chinaberry Tree' alone strikes what seems to me the one false note in Miss Fauset's artistic equipment." W. E. B. DuBois, on the other hand, felt that The Chinaberry Tree was the best of the three novels published by that time. He said:

Jessie Fauset's third novel represents an advance in her work. The delicate characterizations and spiritual development of the figures which she paints show the same insight as in "There is Confusion" and "Plum Bun." But in "The Chinaberry Tree," the plot is stronger and the climax more fascinating and enthralling.

These negative and positive judgements on this novel are both valid. The novel has its share of strengths and weaknesses. But

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first let us look at the story itself.

The Chinaberry Tree and "Double Trouble" are practically identical. The differences lie in the shifts in emphasis and the fuller characterizations in the novel. Laurentine Strange becomes the heroine. Her mother, Sal, was a slave who loved her white master, Colonel Halloway. The result of this relationship was Laurentine. Colonel Halloway did not marry Sal because she was black, but he was devoted to her and their beautiful daughter. Laurentine led a life of loneliness as a child. Other children of the town were warned not to play with her because she had bad blood. As a child she wondered what was wrong with her. She was not yet able to fully understand what an impact the circumstances of her birth were to have on her life.

Laurentine is portrayed as the epitome of the tragic mulatto, beautiful, educated, and ostracized. By the time she was twenty-four she realized the source of her troubles. Her mother told her about the white man who was her father, and the narrow-minded actions of the town made the disapproval very clear. At twenty-four, Laurentine was still lonely and still ostracized. By this time she had tried to get Phil Hackett, the most eligible bachelor in Red Brook to marry her. He was attracted to her beauty but repelled by her background. He finally came to feel that Laurentine's miscegenous birth could only be a stumbling block to his political ambition and stopped seeing her. But by the time Laurentine is almost thirty, her life takes a turn for the better. A wealthy black couple befriend her. And it is through them that she meets Dr. Denlaigh, who is to become her husband.
The sub-plot still involves Laurentine's younger cousin. Angelique of "Double Trouble" becomes Melissa Paul in the novel. There is no real animosity between Laurentine and Melissa in the novel; rather Melissa's resentfulness is portrayed as being due to immaturity and ignorance. Laurentine never ceases to be generous and forgiving. Melissa's involvement with Mallory Forten, her half-brother, is essential to the novel.

The character of Mallory, however, is more carefully defined. He is portrayed as a spineless weakling not really worth having. In telling Melissa the truth about their mutual father, his love for her turns to hatred and he blames her for what her parents did. The two daughters and the mother of the Brown family are in part responsible for bringing Melissa's and Mallory's relationship to an end. They find out about the relationship and inform Laurentine's fiancé. He in turn gives the responsibility of telling Melissa to Laurentine.

In this situation Laurentine is endowed with a compassion which she lacks in "Double Trouble." Laurentine wants to spare Melissa the truth about her mother and instead of telling her, she does everything in her power to keep the two apart. This effort fails and Melissa finds out the truth in the same way she did in the short story—in the scene describing Mallory's face becoming the tragic Greek mask. And in the novel, Laurentine is there to comfort the heartbroken Melissa.

While the plots of "Double Trouble" and The Chinaberry Tree are almost identical, the differences between the two are worth mentioning. The most outstanding improvement in the story is in the characterization of Laurentine Strange. Instead of the self-indulgent,
self-pitying, passive Laurentine of "Double Trouble," The Chinaberry Tree presents a completely different Laurentine. The Laurentine of the novel is at least optimistic about her future. Her humanity is such that despite her white father and black mother the reader feels compassion for her. The tragic mulatto perseveres and is able to overcome her handicap.

In this novel, as with the others, Miss Fauset offered to her readers a view of the black middle class. Respectability again is of the utmost importance. These types of people are best shown when the author was describing Laurentine's new-found friends. "Mrs. Ismay was a little thin woman, a Bostonian by birth with all the trade marks of her native city thick upon her. It was impossible to spend an hour in her presence without becoming aware of a gentility which was innate, and of an unaffected sincerity and kindness which even her Boston vowels could not conceal." The neighborhood of these people was described by Miss Fauset: "This section of Red Brook had by tacit consent been handed over to the better class of colored people." And of the new friendships Miss Fauset said, "For the first time in her life Laurentine broke bread with colored people of her own rank and sympathies."

Hiroko Sato, a recent critic of Jessie Fauset's novels, is

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44 Ibid., p. 85.
of the opinion that respectability is the main point of the novel.\textsuperscript{46} And indeed Miss Fauset made sure that Laurentine and Melissa remained respectable in spite of and no doubt because of their backgrounds. Sato explained his thesis this way:

The main point of this novel, however, is to show a reader why colored people had to be rigid in their moral code and how Laurentine and Melissa, though in different ways had to suffer from it. Though full of descriptions of elegant lives of wealthy colored people, we cannot help feeling what a strong influence the problem of race has had in forming black people's mentality. . . . They have to be decent and moralistic to avoid the depreciating criticism of whites. In spite of the criticism, this book represents a deeper and subtler problem—the impact of the racial discriminations and prejudices by the whites on the black society in the long run.\textsuperscript{47}

These statements seem to reflect what Miss Fauset herself said about her characters in her forward: "And behold he is not so vastly different from any other American."\textsuperscript{48} Inherent in this statement is that white America is the model to which all minorities aspire. The fact that Miss Fauset's characters are so much like their white counterparts indicates that she felt the imitation of white people would have the effect of eventually stopping the prejudice perpetrated against them. The reason is only partially to win acceptance; more significantly, it is done because of a belief that Western culture


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pp. 76-77.

is the best. This comes across in the story primarily by the emphasis given to material goods, a means of demonstrating good taste, as well as by the social manners and etiquette of her characters.

Miss Fauset devoted a great many words to the description of material goods. She had this to say regarding Melissa's bedroom at the Strange home:

The walls were tinted a delicate orchid, there was a French lavender and white cotton coverlet on the old-fashioned broad bed, two oval rugs in tones of purple and lavender lay at the side of the bed, before a plain vanity-table, with its long, revealing mirror. A couple of fantastic creations by Maxfield Parrish adorned one wall.49

In another passage she described black women in such a way as to show off their wealth:

The street outside was lined with cars of colored ladies who had driven out to Red Brook from New York, Newark, the Oranges, Trenton, Bordentown. Two of them had been driven in by their chauffers. The place was full of the excited high-pitched chatter of well-to-do, well-dressed women. Melissa caught the sheen of colorful gowns, flashing jewels. The rich tones of dresses brought out the gold and yellow and cream flesh tints of their possessors.50

These passages represent examples of how important wealth is to respectability in this novel. Miss Fauset herself saw her writings as those of "the better class" of black people and with passages like the two previous ones she made clear the criteria for respectability in the black middle class.

49 Ibid., p. 17.
50 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
The theme of racial solidarity is again evident in this novel. Its existence seems to result from necessity. The unbending moral rigidity of the town as regards the birth of Lauretine and Melissa was not so much to viciously ostracize them as it was to maintain the town's respectability. The actions of Denlaigh and Asshur towards the unfortunate cousins are portrayed as gallant. Not only did Denlaigh and Asshur ignore the circumstances of their birth, they intend to make respectable women out of them through marriage. The day to day concerns of the townspeople are the most consistent indicators of racial solidarity. Their concerns are those of the black middle class. White people are rarely mentioned in the book. Miss Fauset has said that these characters are "not being pressed too hard by the Furies of Prejudice." And this gives them time to be concerned with the acquisition of wealth, education, and refinement, which Miss Fauset and some of her contemporaries equated with solidarity.

In retrospect this novel is valuable in the sense that it reflects the middle class concerns of that period. At the time of its publication, some critics consistently made mention of the reality of the characters and their actions. Edwin Berry Burgum said that "the significance of Miss Fauset's Chinaberry Tree is that it is one of the first novels that takes Negro life seriously." W. E. B. DuBois commented that "the meaning is, not that she is creating a

\[51\] Ibid., p. ix.
world, but rather painting one which exists, and yet is little
known. If for no other reason, this novel can be appreciated for
its characterization of the middle class black people of that period.

The Chinaberry Tree is not a great artistic achievement. It
suffers from too many contrived coincidences. The chinaberry tree in
the backyard holds too much significance. The tree is both a tie to
the past and a symbol of security for the future. Hiroko Sato has
pointed to another contrivance: "If there is anything to blame in
this novel, it is this artificial subplot of incestuous love—
obviously influenced by Greek tragedies—between Melissa and her half-
brother, Malory Forten." But Miss Fauset tried to rectify this by
giving Melissa's story a happy ever-after ending. All the time
Melissa was involved with Mallory, she had been getting love letters
from Asshur Lane, who promised to come after her when he had finished
college. So after Melissa's world is pulled out from under her, she
finds happiness in the arms of Asshur Lane.

The story of the tragic mulatto as told through Laurentine
Strange is important. Miss Fauset does not give Laurentine a choice;
she is to be a part of the black race, but she must suffer and wait
to be accepted by them. She waits and finally does find acceptance
and happiness. It is for this reason that The Chinaberry Tree is
worth study. The Harlem Renaissance is essential to the study of

53 W. E. B. DuBois, "The Browsing Reader," The Crisis XXXIX
(April, 1932), 138.
54 Hiroko Sato, "A Study of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen,"
The Harlem Renaissance Remembered, Arna Bontemps, ed. (New York:
black American literature and this novel explores in detail the tragic mulatto which received so much attention during the period.

Comedy: American Style is the fourth and last of the novels of Jessie Fauset. It was published in 1933. There are six chapters, titled respectively, "The Plot," "The Characters," "Teresa's Act," "Oliver's Act," "Phebe's Act," and "Curtain." This novel with its ironic title is truly a tragedy. It is the ultimate manifestation, in the person of Olivia Cary, the main character, of the impact of racial discrimination in America. Braithwaite said of this novel, it "... is both the most irritating and at the same time, the most powerful of her books."\(^5\)

The beginning of the book reveals the background of Olivia Cary. Two events of her childhood were extremely significant to the development of the tragic figure she was to become. One January day Olivia was throwing snowballs and accidentally hit her white neighbor, who was about her own age. The white girl was furious and shouted at Olivia, "Don't you ever hit me again with a snowball, you nasty little nigger."\(^6\) Thus, at an obviously young and very impressionable age, Olivia felt directly the hurt of prejudice and felt humiliated because she was different. Part of her grew to hate her parents for making

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her black. As a result of this incident she began to believe that one must be white to be happy. Within a month of this incident her father died and shortly thereafter Olivia and her mother, Janet, moved to another small Massachusetts town. They moved into a neighborhood bordering an Italian section.

It was here that the second event took place. At the school near their new residence, Olivia was walking through the hall when one of the teachers called to her. She was calling to "that little Italian girl," and Olivia simply did not realize that the teacher meant her. A fellow student informed her and she went to see what it was the teacher wanted. She merely wanted Olivia to deliver a note, but first the teacher gave the child a lecture about not being ashamed of being Italian. So now Olivia did not have to be black. It had been decided for her that she was Italian. Needless to say, she never argued the point.

Miss Fauset made it clear that Olivia would not have cared about being white had it not been for the obstacles to happiness being black held for her in mind. But since this was the case, she made up in her mind to be white at all costs. She did, however, marry a black man, but one who like herself was able to pass. She subsequently had three children, Chris, Teresa, and Oliver. She chose her husband with the impression that since he was so light, their children would be able to pass. And she was right about the first two, but wrong about Oliver, the youngest child.

57 Ibid., p. 5.
Olivia creates a miserable life for her family. Incident after incident shows her forcing her beliefs on her family. Her husband is a doctor and serves a black community in Philadelphia, but Olivia insists that they pass for white. She spends considerable amounts of money entertaining her white friends. She forces her oldest children to pass. Because Oliver is brown, he suffers the most. This is truly ironic considering that he was named for his mother. Somehow Olivia manages never to be seen in public with him. When her white friends are at her home, she convinces Oliver that they are playing a game and passes him off as a foreign house boy. She succeeds in breaking her husband's spirit. She is able to marry off her daughter, Teresa to an insipid, mediocre Frenchman, Aristide Pailleron, in Toulouse, where Teresa remained unhappy ever after. Chris, the oldest son, like the others, knows that his mother is ridiculous. He defies her, but does not offend her. He marries a black woman, Phebe. Phebe had blond hair and white skin but like Chris is faithful to the black race. Olivia did not like the fact that Phebe openly admitted her color and openly associated with black people. But she was pleased that Phebe was light enough to pass for white. But Phebe was adamant in being true to her race. And this became a constant source of annoyance for Olivia. As Olivia saw it, Phebe had all the physical attributes which could bring her happiness, but she would not compromise herself. Phebe became Olivia's nemesis. Physically they were alike, but mentally they were worlds apart.

Miss Fauset should be credited for presenting the two women as she did.
Oliver finally reaches the stage in his life when he is able to realize what his own mother was doing to him. In desperation he wrote to his sister in France asking if he could come live with her. But Teresa was truly her mother's daughter and refused her brother because he showed color and she was afraid of what her husband's reaction would be not only to Oliver, but to her if he knew that she were black. Between the rejection from his sister and the humiliation he suffered at the hands of his mother, Oliver, the brown child, the most beautiful child, commits suicide.

Despite all the unhappiness Olivia had caused her family, she remained true to her beliefs. She continued to believe that she had done the right thing. The novel ends with Olivia, dismal and alone, living gloomily on a pension in France. She has been rejected by her daughter, her son-in-law, and her own husband as well. She is a pitiful, tragic woman.

Once again, there are several parts of this novel that seem completely contrived. These contrivances make it easy to question the reality of the novel. A recent critic recognized this and had this to say:

When we finish reading the book, Olivia's coldness toward her family is unbelievable. Also, there are some unnatural situations. How could Olivia hide that she and her family were Negroes, when her husband, Dr. Cary, was practicing in the black community in Philadelphia, even though he had white skin?58

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This is a very valid criticism, but it appears that Miss Fauset's use of these extremes was to crystalize the point she was making. She tried to make her readers understand how devastating racial prejudice can be to its victims. The particular phenomenon as exhibited in Olivia Cary could only have been carried out by one who was light enough to pass. Only a certain kind of black person could carry such an illusion to such extremes. There was the presence of an extreme self hatred. Olivia wanted nothing to do with anything reminiscent of color. Even though her family was black, she was able to wreck their lives with her mania for whiteness.

Prejudice is explored because it is responsible for the personality of Olivia Cary. It also creates a great deal of suffering for a number of young, intelligent black people in the novel. As in the other novels, discrimination occurs in every sphere of life, from education, to professions, and most unfortunately to human relationships. Prejudice prevented Teresa from attaining the happiness she expected to have with her husband, Henry Bates. She and Henry had planned to elope. Henry's color was obvious and Teresa knew her mother would never approve of their marriage.

But Olivia finds out about her daughter's plans. The confrontation between Olivia and the engaged couple is extremely bitter. Olivia explained how she had raised her daughter to be white so that she could escape a life of inferiority. And that she expected her daughter to marry a white man so she could really be free. Henry was proud and incensed. He asked Teresa how she felt about the matter. She responded:
You know how I feel, ... But, Henry, perhaps there is something to Mother's point of view. ... I was thinking, I was wondering ... your Spanish, you know. Couldn't you use it most of the time and ... and pass for a Mexican? In that way we could avoid most inconveniences."

Henry Bates was not one to be comprised and replied to this insult:

Are you crazy, both of you? I'm perfectly satisfied to be an American Negro, tough as it all is. I can help other men to work their way to better conditions. What am I going to do, throw aside all my traditions, all my old friends and be a damned gringo just to satisfy the vanity of two make-believe white women! ...

Again Miss Fauset showed her readers what prejudice and the fear of prejudice can do to people. At one time there seemed to have been some hope for Teresa, but after this episode she was completely broken and under her mother's control. It is shortly after this incident that Teresa married the pitiful French professor.

As in her other works Miss Fauset revealed her preoccupation with epidermicism. For her the color spectrum was not only fascinating, it was a thing of beauty to be enjoyed. So as might be expected, she described each of her characters in great detail. But she best described her feelings about the spectrum through the words of Teresa's black classmate, Alicia Barrett:

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60 Ibid., p. 143.
80.

You see, Tess, you don't know anything about colored people. If you did, you'd know of the surprising differences among them in appearance, I mean. . . . You ought to see a lot of colored girls at a party . . . Why it's just like looking at a flock of lovely birds. . . .

Of all the themes and elements Miss Fauset has incorporated into her story, race and race prejudice are the most important. She chose Olivia Cary not only to expose racial prejudice but to protest it. To her white readers she seemed to have said, stop, look what you are doing to black America. For the context of this novel she was operating under the assumption that whites were unaware of their own inhumanity. To her black readers she was saying, stop, look at what whites are capable of doing to you.

William Stanley Braithwaite described the terrible irony in the story very aptly:

She built this desire upon an illusion, which was not of her own creation, but finding it as she did, she began early as a child and pursued the purpose through the rest of her life until we leave her at the end of the story, that purpose to cheat the creator of the illusion. She did just the opposite, and it is the irony and paradox of her story, that those she cheated were herself, her husband and her children.

It is essential to the story that the reader understand what Braithwaite was saying. Olivia Cary is not truly at fault for her behavior. White America was her creator and is to be blamed for the tragedy of Olivia and her family.

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61 Ibid., p. 85.
A more recent critic has explained it this way:

Yet a reader somehow is made to feel that the total blame should not be placed on Olivia. All through this novel sufferings of the gifted and brilliant young people, like Phebe, Chris, Nicholas, and their friends--prejudices and discriminations... are shown. You are almost convinced that you have to have white skin to enjoy living. I think the author's intention lies there, judging from the ironical title of the book.63

In terms of Jessie Fauset's development as a writer and a conscious black woman, Comedy: American Style is her most impressive and powerful novel. She translated her social consciousness into this work. This is the only novel that has a depressing ending. And this was obviously the result of the depression she must have felt as she analyzed the racial situation in depressed America in 1933. Every movement, every action of the characters was dictated by race. The story of this fourth and last novel was presented in very extreme terms, but the extremes were necessary to make her point and because of them the point is well taken. Perhaps it is also significant that Jessie Fauset's literary career ended with this tragic novel.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Jessie Redmon Fauset had a very long and prolific creative writing career. It began in 1912 with the publication of her first poem, "Rondeau," and ended with the publication of her fourth novel, _Comedy: American Style_, in 1933. During that twenty-one year period she published twenty-two poems, five short stories, and four novels. In addition to these strictly creative works, Miss Fauset wrote numerous general and personal essays and book reviews. This period also included her years as the literary editor of _The Crisis_ magazine, where she was a vital catalyst for the Harlem Renaissance.

Miss Fauset's first creative writings were poetry. She had fourteen poems published in _The Crisis_ magazine between the years of 1912 and 1929. Her other poems were published in anthologies. Her poetry is very consistent in subject, mood, and style. It also abounds with the familiar archetypes of love and nature. Poetry, similar to her's of love and nature, was being written by a number of women during the Harlem Renaissance. There is nothing extraordinary about her poetry. But it is important in terms of the thoughts of the Harlem Renaissance. This poetry demonstrated that black poets could write just like the white poets did. It was thought that this poetry would help to foster black acceptance.

In terms of Miss Fauset's development as a writer, poetry can be considered her first step. Her poetry was written in the Western tradition of Romanticism. In only a few of her poems is race even
mentioned. With her poetry, Miss Fauset was more interested in being a writer than a race writer.

Miss Fauset's next literary works were short stories. All five were published in The Crisis. In these, the development of Jessie Fauset as a black writer begins to evolve. In "Emmy," the first story, there is a very conventional theme but with a black twist. Boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back, and it is assumed that they live happily ever after. It is important to note that color is important. At one point the boy is willing to postpone his marriage to his brown fiancee for the advantages he sees in passing for white on his job. The second, "There Was One Time" is a black fairy tale based on a French one. Color has very little significance in this story. With "Mary Elizabeth," the third tale, Miss Fauset compares black women of two different generations, one with and one without a slave background. In "The Sleeper Wakes," her fourth, the romanticism and the realities of passing for white are revealed. The disillusionment and the ultimate return to the black race is essential to the story. In her last story "Double Trouble," the tragic mulatto represents another aspect in the lives of some black people. The problem of being caught between the two races but belonging to neither, and being wanted by neither provides the tragedy here.

These brief descriptions of each story are designed to show the way race becomes ever more important with each story. This appears to be an important sign in Miss Fauset's development. She started with black fairy tales where color was only important for
descriptions and went on to tales of passing for white and the tragic mulatto, where color determined the action of the story. The stories which treat the race issue are no longer an evasion but an artistic transposition of the black situation as the author perceived and experienced it. It should be noted that none of these stories can be considered great artistic achievements but it does seem that the more important race becomes, the better the story. For when race is an issue, the story can be judged favorably because of its social commentary. Perhaps Miss Fauset was experimenting with her stories. This experimentation appears to have determined the direction of her novels. With her novels there can be no question that Miss Fauset was a race writer, where in the stories she only seemed to be moving in that direction.

Jessie Fauset is no doubt best remembered for her four novels: There is Confusion (1924), Plum Bun (1928), The Chinaberry Tree (1931), and Comedy: American Style (1933). Miss Fauset utilized the motif symbolism of traditional Western literature in her novels to present her images of the black middle class. These novels are most important for their characterizations, particularly of black women. In one of her personal essays Miss Fauset had this to say about women, "Woman being the weaker creature must harden herself proportionately just that much more to meet the exigencies of her existence."¹ This gives the readers of her novels an indication of why her women characters

¹Jessie Fauset, "This Way To The Flea Market," The Crisis, XXIX (February, 1925), 163.
The term art for people's sake can be applied to Miss Fauset's novels. Although the term was not introduced until the 1930's by Marxists, in retrospect it is now used from the black perspective. Considering the realities of the times in which she wrote her novels, it should be apparent how this nomenclature applies. Many proponents of the Harlem Renaissance felt the necessity for novels that dealt with black middle class life. Not solely for the sake of art but to expose and attempt to vindicate the plight of this class. Miss Fauset equated beauty in art with propaganda. In each novel she usually had several points to make regarding a social phenomenon. Her desire for black people to have free access to the rights accorded white Americans was reflected in the longings of the majority of black people. Miss Fauset's literary work is worth re-examination because of its historical significance. She was able to channel her social observation and racial consciousness into commendable writings.
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