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UN-FAIRYTALES: REALISM AND BLACK FEMINIST RHETORIC IN THE WORKS OF JESSIE FAUSET

by

DANIELLE L. TILLMAN

Under the Direction of Elizabeth Burmester

ABSTRACT

I am baffled each time someone asks me, "Who is Jessie Fauset?" As I delved into critical work written on Fauset, I found her critics dismissed her work because they read them as bad fairytales that showcase the lives of middle-class Blacks. I respectfully disagree. It is true that her novels concentrate on the Black middle-class; they also focus on the realities of Black women, at a time when they were branching out of their homes and starting careers, not out of financial necessity but arising from their desire for working. They establish the start of what Patricia Hill Collins later coined "Black feminism" through strong female characters that refuse to be defined by society. This thesis seeks to add Jessie Fauset to the canon of Black feminists by using Collins' theories on Black feminism to analyze Fauset's first two novels, *There Is Confusion* and *Plum Bun.*

INDEX WORDS: Thesis, Jessie fauset, Harlem renaissance, Feminist rhetoric, Black feminist thought, Feminist theory, Hegemonic forces, Gender, Class, Globalization studies

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by

DANIELLE L. TILLMAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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by

DANIELLE L. TILLMAN

Committee Chair: Elizabeth Burmester

Committee: Pearl McHaney
Elizabeth West

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2010

# DEDICATION

"I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. . . . Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife." ~Zora Neale Hurston

This is dedicated…

To my uncle, Garland Doyle, who saw my potential and never let me give up. I did not always understand why you pushed me so hard or why I could not scribble like normal kindergarteners, but it has all become much clearer now. Thank you for teaching me to continuously sharpen my oyster knife.

To my younger siblings—Corzetta, Ashley, Britney, Tonisha, Shantel, Anthony Jr., Robert, and Lionelle—I hope that you see that dreams do come true and that nothing is impossible with a little hardwork and dedication. May I help you to sharpen your knives the way Uncle Garland helped me?

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## Introduction

I am baffled each time someone asks me, "Who is Jessie Fauset?" How can people not know of one of the most prolific Harlem Renaissance writers? I soon found my answer as I delved into critical works on Fauset. The work of Jessie Fauset, who was once acknowledged by Langston Hughes as the "midwife of the Harlem Renaissance," continues to collect dust in libraries across the country. This oversight is in part due to critics such as Robert Bone and Barbara Christian. Bone argues that Fauset's "efforts to convey a flattering image of respectable black society led to novels that were 'uniformly sophomoric, trivial, and dull'" (qtd Wintz 208). Christian dismissed Fauset's novels as "bad fairytales" that "sacrifice the natural flow of life to the thesis that she feels she must prove—that blacks are as conventional as whites" (Christian 43). I respectfully disagree. While it is true that Fauset's novels concentrate on the Black middle-class, they also display the realities of Black women both in the early twentieth century and now. They reveal the genesis of what Patricia Hill Collins later coined Black feminism, a legacy of strong female characters who refuse to be defined by society, but instead define themselves. Characters such as Joanna Marshall, Sylvia Marshall, Maggie Ellersley, Angela Murray, and Laurentine Strange still represent the struggle that Black women face due to the complexity of intersecting oppressions in America.

Fauset uses her novels as a forum to discuss how women attempt to balance careers and love, and to reveal their inner turmoil. Not only do her novels showcase the lives of women, but they also testify to Black feminist thought and underscore the

"outsider" status that many Black women experience but never discuss. Fauset's novels are narrated predominately by women. Silencing the fictitious Black male voice sets Fauset's work apart from other Harlem Renaissance literature, and I argue opens her novels up to be read rhetorically with feminist undertones. I intend to use my thesis as a platform for revisiting Fauset's work and providing rhetorical and feminist interpretations of selected texts, I use Patricia Hill Collins' theories on Black feminism and the "outsider within" to reexamine Fauset's novels and to expand the critical assessment/measure of her work to encompass feminist rhetorics.

So, why Jessie Fauset? Why revisit her work now? And, significantly, why claim Fauset as a rhetorical figure? Jessie Fauset was a Black woman working in an environment that was for the most part non-receptive to Black women's work. Her early background—once assumed to be middle class and comfortable probably due to Fauset's level of formal education—has since been discovered, by Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, to be poor; her family's economic status was due to their size and her father's small ministry work. If Fauset was arguably middle class in any way it was through her family's practices, not their economic status. As Slyvander states "While Jessie Fauset could be called a member of a Negro cultured class or intelligentsia in her early life, it is not accurate to call her middle class or prosperous or socially established" (26). Fauset was one of the first Black women to attend Cornell University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1905. Moreover, she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, potentially making her the first Black or first female member of Phi Beta Kappa at Cornell. Fauset received her second degree, a Masters

of Arts, from the University of Pennsylvania in 1919. From 1906 until her appointment as Literary Editor for *The Crisis* in 1919, a fourteen year span, Jessie Fauset taught full-time in the District of Columbia's public school system. (Sylvander 32) She served as editor for *The Crisis*, the NAACP publication, from 1919 to 1926; displaying and cultivating her activism in "the most radical interracial organization of the time" (Sylvander 47); even being in the background makes Fauset an "institutional transformation" activist (Collins 204).

Fauset's connections to many of the power players of the Harlem Renaissance especially through her work on *The Crisis* gave her insight into another world, that of Black men and intellectuals. Alain Locke, originator of the term "New Negro," used the publication of Fauset's first novel, *There Is Confusion*, to kick off the "New Negro Movement" later referred to as "The Harlem Renaissance." What was supposed to be a celebration of the first publication of the movement turned historically into a speech that focused on Locke's political agenda. Ironically, *There Is Confusion* is Fauset's only novel that includes a fair balance of male and female voice.

In addition to her literary connection to Locke, Fauset worked closely with W.E.B. DuBois, coiner of the "Talented Tenth," and the scholar most often discussed when the Harlem Renaissance is mentioned. Fauset's personal friendship and professional relationship working as an editor for DuBois' magazine *The Crisis* afforded her a window with direct access to the behind-the-scenes workings of this literary movement. While her own work was being shunned and read superficially by her male peers, Fauset helped to launch the careers of two prominent male authors,

Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. This role itself ensures her "outsider within" status in a movement that she helped launch, but she receives very little recognition from literary critics or historians, now or during her lifetime. Although the Black male writers within this literary circle critiqued Fauset's work unfavorably, she went on to publish more novels than any other Black writer of this period and even won the respect of the white literary establishment (Myree-Mainor 194).

Fauset's work speaks to me personally as a Black woman and as a scholar. For example, in the novel *There Is Confusion,* Joanna Marshall's drive for a successful singing career at all costs, even love, in the novel *There Is Confusion* speaks to my undergraduate career. I spent five years working hard for my undergraduate degree while barely making time for fun or love. Like Joanna I did not see the importance or value in making time for anything other than school until the potential for dating and relationships was no longer readily available to me. Another Fauset character who has close ties to my own life is Angela Murray from *Plum Bun*, who moves away from her family and friends in Philadelphia to become a New Yorker and attempts to pass for white. While I did not attempt to pass for another race when I moved to Atlanta for my masters degree program, I did try "passing", for "normal." As Angela's moving away became a chance for her to start over, my escape from the dysfunction of my family served the same purpose. Facing some of the same obstacles as Fauset's characters, I relate to them and I am convinced that many other young Black women readers and scholars will benefit from studying her work particularly through a Black feminist lens.

What does Fauset bring to the rhetorical canon? Fauset used her novels to deliver messages of Black womanhood and empowerment much like those found in the writings of bell hooks and Alice Walker that stand as a solid platform for Black women's voices. Through her work behind the scenes in the NAACP, Fauset was an activist and advocate for women's rights, before Black feminism was defined by Patricia Hill Collins. Fauset is among the group of African American women that Jacqueline Jones Royster describes as resistant to sociopolitical barriers (4). Fauset bridges two fields of interest—feminist rhetoric and African American literature—that when studied concurrently can broaden our understanding of Black women's creative works. Adding Fauset's work to the feminist rhetoric canon will contribute to interdisciplinary studies, specifically the intersection of African American literature, rhetoric, and women's studies. Interdisciplinary studies are important because they not only open the door for the bridging of multiple disciplines, but also provide the opportunity for new readings and research. In my case, a study of Fauset's novels allows me to work with two disciplines simultaneously. It gives me the chance to bring African American literature to the forefront of rhetorical studies and vice versa.

## Chapter One: Jessie Fauset: Author, Editor, Activist, and Feminist?

This chapter seeks to not only give biographical information on Jessie Fauset, but to also situate her as feminist through a discussion of Patricia Hill Collins discussion of Black feminism. I will also set up a discussion of Fauset as rhetor through the use of Shirley Wilson Logan's discussion of the persuasive discourse of nineteenth-century Black women.

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born on April 27, 1882, in Camden County, New Jersey, to Redmon Fauset and Annie Seamon Fauset. she was their seventh child. Following the death of her mother, early in Fauset's life, her father married Bella Huff, and they had five children. Fauset's early background was modest, marked by a lack of money, but with a strong ethic for education and work. If Fauset was middle class in any way it was through their family's practices not money. Her half-brother, Arthur Fauset, described a family that "read newspapers and books," "discussed politics and religion," and "fought against the binding racial biases that made life in the City of Brotherly Love often a burden. It is in these respects that the family was middle class: working; aspiring; discussing; getting their children educated to the extent that biases would permit" (Sylvander 26).

Fauset's family life placed her on a path to graduation with honors from the Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1900 as the only Black student. Upon her high school graduation she was accepted to Bryn Mawr, but due to racial prejudice she

ended up attending Cornell University. She graduated from Cornell in 1905 with a bachelor of arts in classical languages. Fauset became the first Black elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Cornell, as well as the first Black woman to be elected to the honor society in the country. After being denied a teaching job in the Philadelphia public school system, Fauset began teaching in the District of Columbia public schools in 1906, where she remained until her appointment as literary editor for *The Crisis* in 1919. Fauset also received her second degree, a Masters of Arts, from the University of Pennsylvania in 1919. Fauset's work for *The Brownies Book: A Monthly Magazine for the Children of the Sun,* twenty-four issues of which were published from January 1920 to December 1921, also shows her commitment to changing not only social institutions but her community as well. This magazine featured historical biographies of prominent Black people and other educational articles for children that showcase her desire to teach Black children about their heritage.

Fauset's work, both personal and professional, achieves the goals of a Black feminism, as defined by Collins in her text. Collins states that

> Black feminist thought aims to empower African American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Since Black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women's particular needs. (22)

In addition, Collins discusses seven core themes of Black feminism: Work, Family, and Black Women's Oppression; Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling

Images; The Power of Self-Definition; The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood; Black Women's Love Relationships; Black Women and Motherhood; and Rethinking Black Women's Activism. Fauset's novels address all these themes, but this chapter will focus primarily on "Rethinking Black Women's Activism" and "Self-Definition" through an analysis of Fauset's personal and professional life.

According to Collins, U.S. Black women's activism has occurred in two primary dimensions. First, the struggle for group survival consists "of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures. This dimension may not directly challenge oppressive structures because, in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred nor possible. Instead, women craft Black female spheres of influence that resist oppressive structures by undermining them" (Collins 204). The second dimension "consists of struggles for institutional transformation—namely, those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of governments, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other social institutions" (Collins 204). I maintain that Jessie Fauset fulfills both these dimensions of activism. Her novels are spheres of influence within existing structures and the work she did with the NAACP during her tenure as editor of *The Crisis* was activism on an institutional level. The former specifically aids in the self-definition of Black women while the latter aids in the view of Black Americans in general. Black women's activism is oftentimes community based—one specific version of this community activism is "Black women's support for education…which has long served as a

powerful symbol for the important connections among self, change, and empowerment in African-American communities" (Collins 210).

Fauset's written work, particularly her novels and short stories make the cases that she is a "group survival" activist (Collins 204). Fauset's novels are narrated for the most part by Black women; *There Is Confusion (1924)*, her first novel, is the only novel that includes a fair balance of male/female voice. It is likely that Fauset decided to silence male characters throughout her novels as a way of giving voice to Black women who were silenced in other arenas. She also portrays many of the male characters as weak, while the female characters serve as their figurative backbones. This serves to rhetorically represent Black women as strong and capable of uplifting their communities.

In the chapter entitled "The Power of Self-Definition" Collins discusses the importance of U.S. Black women defining themselves through resistance and rejection of mammies, matriarchs, and other controlling images and stereotypes. For Collins, self-definition is not only about defining the individual, but also the community. She asserts:

> Given the physical limitation on Black women's mobility, the conceptualization of self that has been part of Black women's self-definitions is distinctive. Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from other. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community… By being accountable to others, African-American women develop more fully human, less objectified selves (113).

Fauset's critics have focused on her creation of a Black middle class, ignoring the community she creates. Her work has been classified as fulfilling a bourgeois aesthetic, popular during the period that is empowering for those included within the bourgeois community. When I first read Fauset's novels I found that the biggest problem with her protagonists are their initial lack of inclusion of both family and community when attempting to define themselves. However, by each novel's close these characters realize the importance of both their families and their communities, which leads them to happier lives.

Additionally, what some critics such as Bone see as "a typical novel of passing, structured around a nursery rhyme…" (Bone 102) in *Plum Bun*, others such as Thadious Davis read as "a means of representing the arbitrariness and destructiveness of racial constructions in the United States" (Davis 78). Davis argues that Fauset's concerns with race's impact on women and the limitations placed on Black women oftentimes by their own communities were often masked in "complicated, unwieldy plots culminating in happy marriages" (Davis 78). *There Is Confusion* and *Plum Bun* both end with the protagonist finding love after navigating the world of racism. If critics paid more attention to the navigation and not the ending they would see the points Davis makes, and might be inclined to agree with him. What Davis sees is what I'm arguing through Collins theory on Black feminism that these novels show the intersection of oppressions that Black women face in America.

It is these complex ideas on race and gender shown in her literature that make her an intellectual, according to Collins' standards: "One is neither born an intellectual

nor does one become one by earning a degree. Rather, doing intellectual work of the sort envisioned within Black feminism requires a process of self-conscious struggle on behalf of Black women, regardless of the actual social location where that occurs" (15). Fauset's novels challenge both the stereotypes of Black women as well as the ideals of what it means to be a woman of color. Additionally, Fauset's use of her own life in her novels is similar to feminist methodology that encourages the use of personal experience in their work. Many of her main characters go through life experiences that Fauset herself faced. Since the struggle of Black women tended to be overlooked in other arenas, Fauset created a place for her experiences in her novels. The two characters that are being focused on in this project are a window into Fauset's own life. As with Joanna Marshall in *There Is Confusion*'s, Fauset was very dedicated to her career and dreams, and choosing not to marry until later in life. Joanna faces discrimination when she wants to take a dance class with a specific instructor, but the White girls already in the class are not willing to include "Colored" girls. The instructor creates a separate class for the Colored students. This experience mirrors Fauset's enrollment at Cornell University instead of Bryn Mawr, where the administration did not want to deal with backlash from the White women in the program. Fauset's experience of being excluded from her academic endeavors also mirrors *Plum Bun*'s Angela Murray's experience at art school. An event which leads to Angela moving to New York and deciding to "pass". These are just a few examples of Fauset's practice of interweaving her own life experience into the lives of her characters.

## Chapter Two: Joanna Marshall: More Than the Black Lady

This chapter explores Fausets representations of self-definition through her character, Joanna Marshall. At first glance, Joanna can be misread as the controlling image "The Black Lady", as defined by Collins, but that only touches the surface of her complexity. Joanna represents what I consider to be the multi-faceted Black woman then and now, from her constant need to strive for excellence to how she deals with both racism and sexism, as well as her attempts to find balance between work and love. Additionally Joanna comes to represent an activist in her own right.

*There Is Confusion*, Fauset's first novel, introduces us to Joanna Marshall, a hardworking, highly motivated, and career-driven woman. "The Black Lady" is defined as "the hard-working Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else… they have jobs that are so all-consuming that they have no time for men or have forgotten how to treat them…Highly educated Black ladies are deemed to be to assertive—that's why they cannot get men to marry them" (Collins 81). From the on-set of the novel, Fauset portrays Joanna as highly focused and a stickler for success—"With Joanna success and distinction were an obsession. It never occurred to her that life was anything but what a man chose to make it, provided, of course, he did choose to make it something" (Fauset 2). The use of "man" shows that Joanna considers herself equal to men. She does not make a distinction between what men can do as compared to women. Readers learn early that she has dreams of being a famous singer and dancer; and that she plans to do whatever it takes to become one despite the

racial climate. She is also an example of Black women's community activism through the pursuit of higher education; and a clear proponent of self-definition.

Joanna is always stating that she can do whatever she wants despite her skin color. When she tells Peter of her intentions to sing everywhere—Carnegie Hall, Boston and London, he is astounded and reminds her that "coloured people don't get any chance at that kind of thing" (Fauset 45). Joanna responds, explaining the determination and optimism that motivates her:

> Coloured people can do everything that anybody else can do. They've already done it. Some one colored person somewhere in the world does as good a job as anyone else, --perhaps a better one. They've been kings and queens and poets and teachers and doctors and everything. I'm going to be the one colored person who sings best in these days, and I never, never, never mean to let color interfere with anything I really want to do. I dance, too, and I'll probably do that besides. Not ordinary dancing, you know, but queer beautiful things that are different from what we see around here; perhaps I'll make them up myself. You'll see! They'll have on the bill-board, 'Joanna Marshall, the famous artist,' (Fauset 45).

This passage is just the start of Joanna pushing Peter Bye to excellence within academics. It is also the passage that introduces Joanna as a Black feminist through her determination to define herself despite what the outside world may think of her when they see only her skin color.

While Joanna is driven like Collins' stereotypical Black lady, she is not without love in her life. Peter Bye loves Joanna deeply, and eventually Joanna accepts him despite her fear. She cautions Peter, "You know perfectly well that for a woman love usually means a household of children, the getting of a thousand meals, picking up laundry, no time to herself for meditation, or reading, or…" (95). It is clear that Joanna fears losing her career if she allows herself to fall in love. Joanna disregards this fear and pursues a romantic relationship with Peter. Her willingness to purse the relationship further defies the expectations of the Black lady.

Years later after they are engaged to be married Joanna Marshall finds herself once again attempting to motivate Peter Bye. In a discussion about the racial oppression they both feel in their respective careers, Peter expresses his discouragement with the oppression he feels as a Black surgical student, but instead of agreeing with Peter when he contemplates dropping out Joanna states:

> "I don't want a coward and a shirker for a husband. As though that weren't the thing those white people—those mean ones—wanted! Not all white people are that way. Both of us know it, Peter. And it's up to us, to you and me, Peter Bye, to show them we can stick to our last as well as anybody else. If they can take the time to be petty, we can take the time to walk past it. Oh, we must fight it when we can, but we mustn't let it hold us back. Buck up, Peter, be a man. You've got to be one if you're going to marry me." (157)

Throughout the novel, Joanna drives Peter's to continue his education and strive toward success. Joanna's push for excellence aligns her with the Black feminist

activists that Collins discusses that push for education as a means of empowerment. These examples are just a small portion of the work that Joanna does to further the movement of higher education for Black Americans.

While Joanna works hard in academics and pushes others, she is still very selfish. For Joanna self-definition comes to be "self" and that is who she looks out for ultimately. She focuses on herself and those who do not fall into line of what they should be, she dismisses. She tells Peter during their first meeting as children that " I can't stand stupid-common people" (46). And she lives up to her beliefs about common people. When she believes that her brother, Philip, will marry Maggie Ellersley, someone she views as common because of her background and the fact that she is not doing anything extraordinary with her life, she writes Maggie a scathing letter that sends Maggie into the arms of another man. In addition, Joanna's selfishness almost leads to the loss of Peter Bye forever. After their disagreement on Peter wanting to give up medical school, she not only returns his ring to him, but also delays answering his letter he wrote that expresses his love and insecurities. Despite the fact that she can't stop thinking about him and their future together, she has "been a slave of Ambition" too long to give in to her heart. (162). And when she finally does answer his letter, she responds calculatingly and cold-heartedly despite her actual feelings—

Dear Peter:

No, I don't love you as you are. The man I marry must be a man worth while like my father or Philip. I couldn't stand the thought of spending my life with some one ordinary.

> But I want to love you, Peter. Write me soon and say you are going to get to work in earnest. Happy New Year. (165)

Joanna believes that this letter will motivate him, but instead it leads to the demise of their relationship and Peter's engagement to another woman. It is in this moment of losing love that Joanna finally understands the importance of family and community and love. She tells her sister that she did not realize how her words hurt Peter and that she would "rather have had him exactly as he was, faults and all, than to lose him altogether" (176). Through her loss and grief Joanna realizes "…the importance of human relationships. What did a knowledge of singing, dancing, of any of the arts amount to without people, without parents, brothers, sisters, lovers to share one's failures, one's triumphs" (177). Joanna's realization of the importance of community leads her to spend more time with her family and while she does marry Peter Bye in the eventually it seems less of a "happily ever after" and more of a showcase of the inner turmoil that Black women face when attempting to balance their ambitions and their love relationships.

Joanna's decision to get married and become a housewife initially seems to go against what we have come to expect from feminism. Isn't she supposed to have it all? It is important to remember that *There Is Confusion* was written in the 1920s, and women choosing a career before marriage at the time would be seen as radical. I think it is important to remember that Joanna's decision to choose marriage still fulfills tenants of feminism, because it is her choice. A choice informed by her experience of what it feels like to not have love in her life. While her career once made her happy it

becomes clear that she wants something more and making the choice that is best for her is ultimately what feminism is about.

Joanna fulfills the tenants of Black feminism from her refusal to be defined by white society coupled with her realization that being a part of a community is just as important as her individual success. Joanna is more than the controlling image as many would define her as—she is in her own way an activist for community. While I cannot say for sure that these were Fauset's intentions when creating Joanna Marshall, it is clear that she is more than the stereotype attributed to her; and that Joanna is still represented in Black women today. No, she is not attending marches or boycotting the white establishment, but she is instead making the institution work for her while simultaneously defying their expectations through excellence. Joanna's refusal to allow race to stop her from being equal to her white counterparts; as well as her determination to define what being a woman means to her parallel Fauset's life. Fauset does not marry until she is forty-seven, after the publication of her first two novels. In the 1920s, waiting until your 40's to marry typically would result in becoming an old maid. Fauset's activism in life and in her fiction should not be overlooked, for Fauset and her characters are the everyday activists that Collins discusses should be given recognition for what they do.

## Chapter Three: Angela Murray: Self-Hating Black Woman or Self-Defining Black Woman

Many times when the concept of "passing" is used in Black literature the audience reads it as self-hatred, but when I read *Plum Bun*, I see a young Black woman on a quest to define herself. I acknowledge that the catalyst for Angela Murrary leaving Philadelphia was the discrimination she faced because of her race, but she does not hate herself because of her skin tone. I believe that Fauset's character Angela is a representation of the Black woman not wanting to be put into the box that has been defined for her—a colored schoolteacher that marries and leads a quiet simple life. In this chapter, I intend to show how Fauset uses self-definition to create a character that learns to define herself, and that once she is comfortable with herself, then she can then be an asset to her race. Additionally, I discuss how Fauset showcases the intersections of oppression of Black women through Angela's experiences in New York.

Angela Murray presents a sharp contrast to *There Is Confusion's* Joanna Marshall. Where Joanna sees no limit despite her race, Angela sees nothing but limits because of both her race and her gender. Angela Murray is introduced as a melancholy young Black woman who is unhappy with the "comfortable" life she lives with her parents and younger sister, Jinny. Initially she seems ungrateful for the hard work that her parents have put in for her to live a "middle-class" life, but it soon becomes clear that her unhappiness comes from her ability to live in two different worlds, and her

awareness of the limitations placed on her, and the exclusions she is supposed to accept. She chooses not to accept the status quo. Fauset reveals Angela's mindset:

> Colour or rather the lack of it seemed to the child the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming. One might break loose from a too hampering sense of duty; poverty could be overcome; physicians conquered weakness; but colour, the mere possession of a black or a white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods (13-14).

It is here where the reader sees the start of Fauset critique of race, gender, and class ideologies all at once.

Angela does not understand why "coloured people were to be considered fortunate only in the proportion in which they measured up to the physical standards of white people" (18). In her mind, her race does not change who she is on the inside, and whenever someone inquires once they discover she is coloured her response is always "Tell you that I was coloured! Why of course I never told you that I was coloured! Why should I?" (44, 72). Angela does not hate her racial makeup, but she does resent the way she is treated and the opportunities that are taken away from her when people find out about her bloodline. The loss of a friendship because of her race causes Angela to contemplate what is more important "a patent insistence on the fact of colour or an acceptance of the good things of life which could come to you in America if either you were not coloured or the fact of your racial connection was not made known" (46).

What Angela does have in common with Fauset's earlier character Joanna is her lack of commitment to her community. Angela, like Joanna is concerned only with her personal happiness and does not want to be an advocate for the greater good. It is also clear that she wants to define herself and not be placed in a box by anyone else. She often mentions her disdain with being a representative of her race during her discussions on the subject of race with her sister, Jinny and their friends on the subject of race. "I'm sick of this business of always being below or above a certain norm. Doesn't anyone think that we have a right to be happy simply, naturally?" (54) Jinny, sees her ability to pass as a gift to the race. During their conversation about Angela's desire to leave Philadelphia and start over, after once again being treated with disdain when her race is discovered, Jinny says

> "…I don't think you ought to mid quite so hard when they do find out the facts. It seems sort of an insult to yourself. And then, too, it makes you lose a good chance to do something—for all of us who can't look like you but who really have the same combination of blood that you have" (79).

Angela dismisses Jinny thoughts as more unnecessary philosophizing and does not understand why she should be denied her personal desires in order to aid the community. It is for this reason that she makes the decision to move to New York and start over where no one else will know her. Like Joanna Marshall, Angela chooses success by any means and for her that means "passing" and leaving her sister and any ties to Philadelphia behind. Her new life in New York is the start of her self-definition, beginning with changing her name to Angele Mory.

Ironically, despite Angela's move to New York to begin anew and to escape being judged based on her race, she spends quite a bit of time pondering race while there; from her colored art classmate to the colored girl she meets while at a friends place. When she begins dating a wealthy white man, Roger, she starts to think of all the good she can do for them financially.

> She would do lots of good among coloured people; she would see that Miss Powell, for instance, had her scholarship. Oh she would hunt out girls and men like Seymour Porter,--she had almost forgotten his name,--or was it Arthur Sawyer?—and give them a taste of life in its fullness and beauty such as they had never dreamed of (131).

The reader sees Angela's inner turmoil shortly after this scene. When she's on a date with Roger, he shows his racial prejudice by having a party of colored people put out of the restaurant. Angela is devastated and spends the rest of the evening imagining the thoughts that would be running through their minds. This event is also a turning point for Angela and the scene exposes the reader to Angela's extreme selfishness. Despite being appalled by Roger's behavior, Angela does take him back, because he has money and will be able to give her the lifestyle and access to power that she desires.

In addition to the racial issues that Angela faces while in New York, are the gender issues. Upon her arrival in New York, Angela begins to ponder how she will be able to get all the things she desires—mainly power and the influence needed to become a great artist. Her new plan involves not only passing for white, but also marrying a white man.

> She knew that men had a better time of it than women, coloured men than coloured women, white men than white women. Not that she envied them. On it would be fun, great fun to capture power and protection in addition to the freedom and independence which she had so long coveted and which now lay in her hand (88).

It should mean something to be painted by "Mory." People would say "I'm going to have my portrait done by 'Mory'." But all of this would call for position, power, wealth. And again she said to herself… "I might marry—a white man. Marriage is the easiest way for a woman to get those things, and white men have them." (112)

Angela is an example of the intersection of oppressions that women of color must confront and the thought process that many must go through in order to reach a level of contentment. Her artistic talent is nothing without a man to "protect" and "vouch" for her in the end. This idea of needing a man to validate her work mirrors that of Fauset's own life—she is a respected editor because DuBois endorses her—her first novel receives attention because Alain Locke used it to being the "movement".

Fauset also showcases the quandary that women face when it comes to love and relationships through Angela's discussions with Paulette and Martha (her new girlfriends) throughout the novel. Paulette and Martha are two examples of different women. Paulette is single and free-spirited; and seems more in touch with her sexuality. Martha on the other hand is married and appears to be more on the conservative. If the reader pays close attention to their conversations with Angela they will find more beneath the surface.

When Angela visits Paulette for the first time, the reader quickly learns that Paulette is a woman who attempts to define herself. When masculinity and femininity come up in their conversation, Paulette is offended that Angela does not see any qualities of masculinity in her:

> "There is a great deal of the man about me. I've learned that a woman is a fool who lets her feminity [sic] stand in the way of what she wants. I've made a philosophy of it. I see what I want; I use my wiles as a woman to get it, and I employ the qualities of men, tenacity and ruthlessness, to keep it. And when I'm through with it, I throw it away just as they do. Consequently, I have no regrets and no encumbrances" (105).

It is this passage that begins the feminist rhetoric hidden within *Plum Bun*. Paulette is the first character to speak of women doing whatever they want just like men. Paulette does not seem to allow her gender to stand in the way of what she wants, in contrast to Angela's constant musings on needing a man to get what she wants out of life.

During a conversation with Martha on the subject of getting a man to love you and marry you, Angela tells Martha that it all seems like a complicated game to which Martha replies:

> It is a game, and the hardest game in the world for a woman, but the most fascinating; the hardest in which to strike a happy medium. You see, you have to be careful not to withhold too much and yet to give very little. If we don't give

> enough we lose them. If we give too much we lose ourselves. Oh, Angele, God doesn't like women (145).

This discussion with Martha is an example of how Fauset uses her literature to give a voice to the hardships that women face within their relationships. Martha is not Black, but that does not negate the experience, instead it shows the reader how much more complex navigating the relationship world will be for Angela as a woman of color, not to mention the added danger of her "passing" and dating a white man. Fauset is showing how some issues transcend race—and love is one of them. This act of falling in love while still holding on to who you are is one that many women face, and what Fauset's earlier character, Joanna feared about love. Angela stood to lose her identity being with Roger—she would not be able to associate with her sister or her colored friends. She would once again be put in a "racial" box.

Angela quickly learns these dangers when she has to choose between Roger and Jinny. In an effort to insure that Roger does not find out that she is in fact colored, Angela pretends not to know Jinny when they meet again in New York. Unfortunately, snubbing Jinny for Roger proves to be a waste. Instead of her much anticipated marriage proposal, she receives a concubine proposal. Roger also begins to lose interest in her after they are intimate. He publicly flirts with other women and ignores her, and finally breaks up with her. Angela quickly learns that she does not come from the right socioeconomic status. Roger was willing to set her up and support her financially, but he would never think "of marrying her or any other woman so far removed from his father's ideas and requirements" (207). Imagine Angela's

devastation at knowing that despite hiding her race, her socioeconomic status will also prevents her from marrying whom she chooses.

Like Joanna, Angela begins to go through a change once she loses love. She spends more time with Jinny, who moves to Harlem a year after Angela settled in New York. She begins to focus more on her painting and making a living. When talking to Martha about going home she also reminisces and realizes that she misses her roots.

> How marvelous to go back to parents, relatives, friends with whom one had never lost touch! The peace, the security, the companionableness of it! This was a relationship which she had forfeited with everyone, even with Jinny. And as for her other acquaintances in Philadelphia, Henson, Butler, Kate and Agnes Hollowell, so completely, so casually, without even a ripple had she dropped out of their lives that it would have been impossible for her to re-establish their old easy footing even had she so desired (241).

As she ponders on her loneliness, Angela begins thinking about where she went wrong. It is here when she first questions her choice of passing. Her loneliness soon sends her back to her "community."

> For deep in her heart she realized the longing to cast in her lot once more with Virginia…And as for colour; when it seemed best to be coloured she would be coloured; when it was best to be white she would be that. The main thing was, she would know once more the joys of ordinary living, home, companionship, loyalty, security, the bliss of possessing and being possessed (253).

Angela's realization and commitment to rebuilding her relationship with her sister sets in motion a new life for her. She seeks out a former beau, Anthony, only to discover that he is now engaged to Jinny. Is this her punishment for denying her race? As with Joanna before her losing loves results in an internal review. She realizes that she no longer wants to live a life full of secrets. And says as much to Roger once he returns and wants to marry her, but hide it from his father.

> Oh Roger, Roger! I wouldn't consider it. No, when I marry I want a man, a man, a real one, someone not afraid to go on his own! Some people might revive dead ashes, but not you and I, … I'd never be able to trust you again and I'm sick of secrets and playing games with human relationships (321-322).

This indignation parallels the letter that Joanna sent Peter in *There is Confusion*. Both Angela and Joanna are firm about the type of men that they want. Mena that are hard workers and define themselves.

In addition to changing her expectations of a man, she also begins to display more racial pride—she no longer shys aways from conversation about race and even describes colored people differently. She finds herself pondering if it would "be worthwhile to throw away the benefits of casual whiteness in America when no great issue was at stake? Would it indeed be worthwhile to forfeit them when a great issue was involved" (333)? Soon she's given the opportunity to decide when both her and Miss Powell, a colored classmate, receive scholarships to France after winning an art contest. Angela soon finds out that Miss Powell will no longer be going because she would not be able to board the ship due to her color. When reporters question Angela

about her feelings she outs herself as being colored: "…Miss Powell isn't going to France on the American Committee Fund and I'm not going either. And for the same reason. …if Miss Powell isn't wanted, I'm not wanted either. You imply that she's not wanted because she's coloured. Well, I'm coloured too" (347). Angela standing up for Miss Powell brings her close to Jinny again. She loses her job and the passage money to France, but she gains much more peace of mind and the continued friendship from those she though would shun her if they knew. Like Joanna, Angela's so-called "happily ever after" comes only after she denies her own selfish wants and embraces the community to which she belongs too.

## Conclusion

The task of revising and broadening critical assessment of Jessie Fauset is challenging. This thesis touches only the surface. Other characters such as Sylvia Marshall, Maggie Ellersley, and Virginia Murray from *There Is Confusion* and *Plum Bun*; as well as Laurentine Strange, Melissa Paul, and Olivia Carey from *The Chinaberry Tree* and *Comedy* can contribute to further discussion of both feminist and African American rhetoric. Jessie Fauset's novels are more than just fairytales they are fictional diaries of the reality that many Black women lived during Fauset's time.

As previously discussed Fauset's life as an educator and editor for *The Crisis* make her an activist for her community according to the tenants of Black feminism discussed throughout. Her storylines display this activism through veiled rhetoric that can be uncovered through the use of Patricia Hill Collins themes on Black feminism, as well as theories of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Shirley Wilson Logan's on African American rhetoric. As mentioned throughout Fauset's novels display a strong focus on the importance of education and self-definition for Black women thus opening the door for new critiques of her work.

Furthering the use of Collins theory on Black feminist themes of—"The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood," "Black Women's Love Relationships," and "Black Women and Motherhood"—to read Fauset's work would also be profitable. The Sexual Politics of Black womanhood would allow for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between Angela Murray and Roger in *Plum Bun*, as well as that of Sarah

Strange and Halloway in *The Chinaberry Tree*. Collins explores the factors around the suppression of Black women's voices on the topic of sex and sexuality, and the link between sexuality and power when constructing Black women's sexualities. The fact that both characters enter into relationships with white men despite the consequences will make for an interesting analysis.

"Black Women's Love Relationships" a sub-category arising from the issue of sexual politics explores the following questions: "How do the sexual politics of Black womanhood influence black women's interpersonal love relationships?...How might an increased understanding of these relationships enable African-American women to tap sources of power as energy and thus become more empowered?" (Collins 151) Fauset's novels focus on the intimate relationships of Black women as well as their platonic relationships. Again Angela Murray and Sarah Strange, would be the perfect candidates for discussing how their love relationships affect their families and others. Angela has to shun her sster keep up appearances with Roger. Sarah's relationship with Halloway results in the conception of Laurentine and leads to social ostracization for both of them. Additionally, an exploration of Joanna Marshall's relationship with other female characters from *There Is Confusion*, particularly Maggie Ellersley is another option.

Finally, "Black Women and Motherhood" explores the historical stance behind the controlling image of the "superstrong Black mother" and the struggle to remain on this pedestal (Collins 174). Fauset's final two novels *The Chinaberry Tree* and *Comedy* display mother-daughter relationships predominately throughout the storyline.

Exploring these relationships, particularly in *Comedy* is yet another place for future exploration.

Additionally, scholars might consider using Jacqueline Jones Royster's book, *Traces of a Stream*, to read Fausets novels. She encourages new readings of African American women's work through literacy. Royster views "the acquisition of literacy as a dynamic moment in the lives of African American woman" (5), she does this by developing a framework which considers how early African American women incorporated literacy into their lives. Her theory begins with the idea that "a community's material conditions greatly define the range of what this group does with the written world, and, to a significant degree, even how they do it" (Royster 5). Ultimately, she uses how African American women have used writing as a means of "expression of self, of society, and of self in society" (Royster 5). Royster uses the work of writers—Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison, and others to discuss how African American women have used different genres of writing, such as the essay, novels, and poetry to prevent being stuck in a box. I believe Royster's work opens the door for different readings of Fauset's work as well, since she wrote across genres as well. If scholars are open to reading Fauset as more than a writer of fairytales they will be able to see how she uses her novels as an "expression of self, of society, and of self in society."

Fauset scholars may also consider using Shirley Wilson Logan's *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* to re-evaluate her novels and essays. Logan's work seeks to identify "distinctive and recurring

patterns of rhetorical practice" (xiv) in the public persuasive discourse of historical nineteenth-century black women. She does not argue for a separate genre for these women, but instead identify common practices among rhetorical acts tha were constrained by the dominant tradition (xiv). Logan focuses on club women, church women, and educators. While Fauset does not give public speeches on her points of view, she is an educator who writes novels with persuasive discourse embedded throughout. The discourse from both *There is Confusion* and *Plum Bum* about the difficulties that women faced during the nineteenth-century should be viewed as rhetoric just like the speeches given publicly from Black women. Exploring the different ways that Black women found to express their struggles beyond the obvious public speeches gives room for a more critical look at "fiction" written during the period.

Jessie Fauset deserves her own companion reference book, due to her role within the Harlem Renaissance. One book dedicated to her work to serve as critical, comprehensive examination for future generations of scholars and writers who may overlook her contributions to feminist rhetoric. It is my hope that one day I will not have to answer the question "Who is Jessie Fauset?" when listing the names of Harlem Renaissance writers; because others will already know.

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