ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AFRICAN-AMERICAN MODERNISM IN THE NOVELS OF JESSIE FAUSET AND NELLA LARSEN

Mary Hairston McManus, Doctor of Philosophy, 1992

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Joyce Ann Joyce
Professor, English

Because early critical evaluations of the literary works of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen were superficial, their reading audience generally regarded both writers as sentimentalists and authors in the genteel tradition. A close analytical study of Plum Bun, The Chinaberry Tree, Quicksand, and Passing reveals the presence of a feminist sensibility not widely discerned. The themes which these two writers employ are typically mainstream modernist, whereas their strategies are African-American. Both Fauset and Larsen depict the mulatta as alienated, restless, and confused in her quest for autonomy and self-expression. Because the mulatta image is acceptable to a wide reading audience, it becomes an ideal narrative strategy for deflecting attention from issues of female sexuality, female subjectivity, and female spaces.

Fauset and Larsen bring their writing into the modern era by conjoining the historical, African-American technique

of masking with thematic strands which adhere to the modernist ideology. Such a literary plan requires a re-defining of modernism to include race and gender. When the execution of that plan results in an empowering of oppressed groups and a heightened consciousness of the female presence in literature and in society, we have African-American modernism.

Fauset and Larsen expand upon a sensibility which their literary predecessor Frances Harper suggested in her novel. These two writers of the Harlem Renaissance anticipate by approximately fifteen years the handling of feminist issues by such writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy West, and Ann Petry. Fauset's and Larsen's novels, along with those of Hurston, West, and Petry, demonstrate the evolution of sexuality from a masked female issue for reasons of morality and respectability to the greater openness seen in later works. The mulatta's significance as a masking strategy diminishes as these writers exercise a female subjectivity. Fauset's reliance upon a female subjectivity results in greater use of material consumption while Larsen explores unconventional female spaces. Both writers display African-American modernist tendencies through experimenting with greater sexual expression, individuality, and displacement of the woman from a male-centered perspective.

Fauset and Larsen use the mulatta in their novels to explore new and broader arenas for female expression.

Likewise, a re-configuration of modernism to include empowerment of race and gender insures both Fauset and Larsen a less marginalized position in the literary world.

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by

Mary Hairston McManus

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cl.
MD
Dept. of English

Advisory Committee:

Dr. Joyce Ann Joyce, Chairperson/Advisor
Dr. Jackson Bryer
Dr. David Wyatt
Dr. John Howard
Dr. Maurice Bennett
Dr. Cordell Black

Maryland
LD
3231
.M70d
McManus,
M.H.

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Mary Hairston McManus

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my parents

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section		Page
Chapter I	Introduction	1
Chapter II	Female Sexuality: A Display of African-American Modernism in Plum Bun and Quicksand	23
Chapter III	Female Subjectivity Through Material Consumption in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree	81
Chapter IV	Progression in African-American Modernism: Deforming Female Spaces in Quicksand and Passing	139
Chapter V	Conclusion	188
Works Consulted		210
Works Cited		217

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance for several decades has held fascination for those persons -- scholars and the masses -- interested in the cultural milieu of African-Americans. Repeatedly historians refer to the 1920s as a seminal period in African-American culture, though even today disputes surround the exact period of this artistic revolution. Some historians and critics argue that the Harlem Renaissance began as early as 1919 and lasted until 1934.[1] Several writers focus on 1924 when the cultural revolution was publicly recognized.[2] But nearly all critics agree that the climax occurred in 1928.[3] By sheer numbers that was the year of greatest productivity: five different

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[1] David Levering Lewis, When Harlem Was in Vogue (New York: Oxford UP, 1979). Lewis's historical account of the movement discusses a wide array of events and literary figures; however, Lewis, at one point in his text, marks the movement's inception with the end of World War I -- 1919 (xvi). Somewhat later a conflicting statement begins, "Nineteen twenty-five -- Year I of the Harlem Renaissance ... " (117).

[2] See Arna Bontemps, "The Awakening: A Memoir," The Harlem Renaissance Remembered, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972) 1; Amritjit Singh, The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance (University Park: Penn State UP, 1976)3.

[3] Ernest Kaiser, "The Literature of Harlem," Black Expression, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969) 239-255. Kaiser's essay documents the literary and historical publications, including dissertations, done by Harlem writers and about Harlem starting with the 1900s.

novelists -- W.E.B. DuBois, Jessie Fauset, Rudolph Fisher, Nella Larsen, and Claude McKay -- published their works; two of the writers were women; and most of these artists, along with others who comprised the "new Negro movement," had already published poetry, short stories, or novels by 1928. Other cultural developments also contribute to this zenith: Opportunity and Crisis awarded their first prizes for literary expression at the NAACP's awards dinner in 1924, and by 1928 the prizes had become a regular citation. And most notably, The New Negro had been in circulation long enough to become the "cultural Bible" for the movement.

Important to the regenerative period which we call the Harlem Renaissance was the changing landscape for minorities, a shift from the rural south to the northern urban areas. Anticipating escape from the brutality, bigotry, and poverty indigenous to the south, thousands of African-Americans migrated north. The war industries provided jobs for many of those who ordinarily would not have been offered work and for many women who, were it not for men-turned-soldiers, would not have been expected to seek employment. Such a burgeoning labor market strengthened the economy, created the need for more housing, and unwittingly occasioned a more distinctive class system among African-Americans. The influx of minorities marked the beginning of Lenox Avenue as the main thoroughfare for Harlem's African-American community and "Sugar Hill,"

overlooking the Lenox Avenue district, as the section of Harlem where the city's most prosperous African-Americans would live. Such a division marks more clearly the establishment of an elite class based on economic prosperity.

Apart from the issue of class, Harlemites already knew or soon discovered that racism and sexism were not exclusively southern practices. However, the sense of power and possibility engendered in this period inspired them to organize and demand more equitable living and working conditions. Publications such as The Crisis, an instrument of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; The Messenger, a more radical paper run initially by A. Philip Randolph; and Opportunity, a scholarly paper and tool of the Urban League, aided the movement toward greater freedom for African-Americans. The spirit of progress which these publications imbued would go a long way towards the empowerment of a race. For although Harlem was the site for much of the expansion which characterized this period, persons outside Harlem witnessed reverberations from the growth as well.

The politics of the Harlem Renaissance advocated a new world order which included placing race issues "before a world forum," as Nathan Huggins so aptly describes it in Harlem Renaissance (41). There was interest not only in improving the status of African-Americans, but also in

ensuring international protection of people of African descent. W. E. B. DuBois's participation in the Pan-African Congresses effected much of the revolutionary attention to parity for minority races. James Weldon Johnson assisted DuBois on the international level while Charles Johnson, Jessie Fauset, and Walter White assumed leadership on a national scale. The philosophy of these leaders and their subsequent texts informed a race consciousness and an urban pluralism on the part of African-Americans, prompting them to reject white patronage and to encourage cultural autonomy. Such conscious behavior was termed "race building" and the disciples of such teaching were the "new Negroes."

The term "new Negro" described not only the new racial attitude, but also the new literary movement led by Alain Locke, along with James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Jessie Fauset. Many considered Locke to be the intellectual father of the cultural revolution. Championing intellectual achievement, he continuously challenged the "new Negro" to direct her/his talent to creative expression, away from mere propaganda and debate. Locke was, indeed, the one who identified modernist trends within the African-American literary community. He saw writers such as Fauset, Fisher, and Toomer producing a new aesthetic, a new body of art for art's sake, writing for themselves as African-Americans, but not necessarily for the race. Making a fine distinction

between the earlier writers who felt that their art should be propagandistic and these "new Negro" writers, Locke noted,

> It has been their achievement . . . to bring the artistic advance of the Negro sharply into stepping alignment with contemporary artistic thought, mood, and style. They are thoroughly modern, some of them ultra-modern, and Negro thoughts now wear the uniform of the age (The New Negro 50).

What becomes problematic about Locke's observation is his tendency to approve conformity. While it seems plausible for the new artists to retain in their work some of the qualities of modern art, it seems even more important for the character inherent in an African-American culture to manifest itself in the creations of its people. As the intellectual leader, Locke failed to acknowledge the inclusion of culture-specific qualities in the music, painting, sculpture, or literature. One has only to hear the musical compositions of Eubie Blake, view the paintings of Aaron Douglas, watch the cabaret performances of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, or read the poetry of Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes to recognize the African-American grain.

While the works of Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, and Jean Toomer reflect the experimental form of mainstream

modernism, they also bear distinct traits characteristic of the African-American culture. Hughes's blues and jazz poetry earned him the title of "poet laureate of the Negro world." His blues poems reflect the sorrow, despair, and desolation of lost love, or the overpowering feeling of emotional and sexual ecstasy. Yet they praise the culture or protest the conditions of African-Americans. Douglas received wide acclaim for his geometrically styled paintings which served in many instances as illustrations for the poetry and fiction of his era. Though his work bore the formal qualities of modernism, he created images of Biblical stories, Negro spirituals, and African-American customs.[4] Coupled with Hughes and Douglas in their distinctive genres was Toomer whose Cane defied a genre classification with its pastiche of short fiction, poetry, and drama. Most critics assume that these artists are valid representations of modernism while their art shows the indelible presence of African heritage and ethnocentricity.

Because this study seeks to evaluate the specific components of African-American modernism in Harlem Renaissance art, it seems necessary to show how African-American modernism differs from mainstream modernism. Modernism, as Norman Cantor discusses it in Twentieth Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction, encompasses

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[4] See David Driskell's essay "The Flowering of the Harlem Renaissance" in Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America (New York: Abrams, 1987).

nearly a forty-year period from 1900 to 1940. Like other cultural revolutions, modernism emerged as a result of changing intellectual values and dissatisfaction with the ideology of previous eras. And, like the Harlem Renaissance, this more pervasive revolution had an impact on politics, philosophy, literature, and the visual and performing arts. Cantor identifies several new intellectual characteristics apparent in modernist literature: microcosmic thinking, rejection of polarities, anti-historicism, cultural despair, isolation and fragmentation.

Micro-cosmic thinking as a modernist trait emphasizes the minute particles of human experience and art, devoting attention to detail and stressing the need to examine the specific in order to understand the whole (36). It represents a departure from the universalist thinking of the nineteenth century. Among American modernists, Ernest Hemingway's novels stand as prime examples of micro-cosmic thought. In the personal quest for self-identity, heroicism, or love, characters in Hemingway's novels engage in terse dialogue in a cafe scene or from a hospital bed, shutting out much of the action of the outside world. This study shows that Nella Larsen also replicates this kind of micro-cosmic thinking in Quicksand. Therefore, her novel is modernist to a degree.

Modernism also advocates a commingling of forces and consequently a rejection of absolute poles of thought and

behavior. Where distinctions in time and space and gender existed, modernists perceive of interactive functions (38). Such perception ostensibly results in a more liberal and open sexuality, paving the way for androgyny and feminism.[5] Critics turn to Gertrude Stein's Three Lives and Toomer's Cane as works reflecting this modernist blend. Both works, modernist in form and theme, depict ethnic masses concealing their disillusionment behind an exterior of physical satisfaction.

Cultural despair or cynicism, depicted oftentimes in mournful and sad imagery, replaced the optimism of the Victorian era. A spiritual malaise resulted from the pessimism of the modernist movement. Much of the literature subsequently reflects individuals with an eroding self-identity. The loss of social or group action, sometimes known as contact with Other, manifests itself in a kind of "death-in-life" existence. European critic Hartwig Isernhagen explains the loss of communication in terms of "increased activity without productivity" (20). Writers use the modernist themes of frenetic activity, fragmentation, and isolation to depict such despair, personal as well as cultural. Jake and Ray, characters in Claude McKay's Home

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[5] See The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology edited by Bonnie Kime Scott. Scott contends that modernist scholars need to move toward a new scope for modernism, to embrace gender, race, and marginal genres. She views traditional modernism as white male-gendered, emphasizing the privileged genres' of the novel and poetry.

to Harlem, represent the despair and marginalization which lower-class and middle-class African-Americans endured. Also, Wallace Thurman's Infants of the Spring depicts how racism exacerbates the alienation of artists.

Though the modernist themes of isolation and fragmentation and the formal patterns of microcosmic thinking manifest themselves in some of the art of the Harlem Renaissance, African-American artists did not restrict themselves to that temper. Moreover, anti-historicism, one of the dominant traits of mainstream modernism, becomes problematic in Harlem Renaissance literature. Traditional modernism advocates the discovery of truth by the close examination of an object outside historical sequence. In other words, modernism holds that all time is irretrievable and that understanding the present through direct symbolic meaning is the responsibility of the creator and the interpreter of art. Denying the relevancy of historical events to modern art is an especially problematic aspect of modernism for African-American artists. They find it essential to connect historical events, especially slavery and its repercussions, with nearly all artistic expression. Although the characters in the 1920s fiction of McKay, Larsen, and Toomer, for instance, have what Michael Cooke refers to as "self-exhausting mobility," and "a rootlessness in time or space," a slave heritage informs these modernist traits. In terms

of the Harlem Renaissance then, anti-historicism and rejection of polarities become prime examples of the need to re-define modernism.

Two African-American scholars whose work articulates the relationship between modernism and Harlem Renaissance literature are Arnold Rampersad and Houston Baker. Rampersad explains the importance of blues and jazz music to modern poetry while Baker re-defines modernism to show interaction between tradition and the distinctive form of African-American expression. In an essay[6] focusing on the beginning influence of modernism on African-American culture, Arnold Rampersad opens with a rather scathing attack of Ralph Ellison who, as a young undergraduate, confessed to seeing no connection between modernism and the blues. Rampersad reports, however, Ellison's recognition of a kinship between modern poetry and jazz music. Rampersad traces modernist traits seen in Paul Laurence Dunbar's, James Weldon Johnson's, W.E.B. DuBois's, and Fenton Johnson's poetry, in Jean Toomer's Cane, and in Bruce Nugent's short stories. Rampersad notes that Countee Cullen and Claude McKay break from the canon of renaissance writers in that the two choose to remain with conservative forms. The indignation which Rampersad has for Ellison's inability

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[6] This essay, along with the others which comprise Harlem Renaissance: Revaluations edited by Amritjit Singh, originated from a conference on Harlem Renaissance literature held at Hofstra University, Long Island, New York, May 2-4, 1985.

to see the blues as the progenitor of jazz matches his indignation at Melvin Tolson's repudiation of his own African-American heritage in the language of his poetry. Regarded as "the first authentic black modernist poet," Tolson comes under attack in Rampersad's essay for failing to make his poetry the accessible art which racial feeling demands. Further, Tolson appears to take on the modernist form of obfuscation at the encouragement of Allen Tate and similar white critics. "The result," says Rampersad, "was poetry beyond the ability of all but a few readers to understand, let alone enjoy" (58).

Rampersad's point is well-taken, for he shows how Langston Hughes's poetry, in contrast to Tolson's, is imbued not only with racial feeling designed to empower the Black race, but also is "loyal to the essential modernist criterion" (60) of focusing on the present. Indicating Hughes's rejection of European modernism and the elitism of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens, Rampersad shows Hughes in a closer alliance with the earlier modernist poets Walt Whitman, Vachel Lindsay, and especially Carl Sandburg, singers of the common people. Whether Hughes embraced these writers to any great degree is still open to debate; what becomes more important to this study is his obvious awareness of "the black modern" being different from "the white modern" and subsequently "structur[ing] his art . . . along the lines of that black modernism" (Rampersad 61).

The art form which Rampersad calls African-American modernism, which he claims Ellison was unable to identify, is the blues. Although the blues as the earliest form of African-American modernism is the culminating point of Rampersad's essay, Hughes's blues poetry serves merely as a paradigm, for Rampersad adds the following qualification:

> Far from suggesting that only Langston Hughes in the Harlem Renaissance discovered the black modern, I see the whole Harlem movement as struggling toward its uncovering . . . . [T]he Harlem Renaissance was simply an attempt by the artists to understand blues values and to communicate them to the white modern world (67).

Just as Rampersad expands the scope of modernism to include the blues form, in Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance Baker discusses forms of African-American expression which he terms mastery of form and deformation of mastery. These are strategies which Baker uses to inform a dichotomous state of African-American modernism begun by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. Citing Washington's Up from Slavery as a paradigm of mastery of form, Baker equates form with a mask which he shows Washington using to conceal those revolutionary ideas which a white audience would find offensive and to display those behaviors which the same audience anticipates. Washington's white contemporaries, for example, did not encourage oratory

and literacy skills among African-Americans although Washington himself possessed them and advocated them for his race. Washington masters form by interjecting a tale of his mother allegedly stealing a chicken which she prepares late at night and awakens her children to consume. His portrayal of his mother as a chicken thief becomes a mask which his white audience found "soothing and reassuring" because it projected, according to Baker, "a formidably familiar image of 'Negro behavior'" (27). Baker convincingly shows how Washington engages in the dialectic of culpability and inculpability: though he produces the image of his mother as a chicken thief, he appropriates historicism, suggesting that she was "simply a victim of the system of slavery." More significantly in terms of Baker's theory of mastery of form, Washington's chief ambition is to write of literacy and oratory as skills related to the acquisition of freedom, skills which he must conceal behind the chicken-stealing incident. Baker observes that Washington "achieves an effective modernity," providing empowerment of his race (31, 36).

African-American modernism acquires a fuller dimension through Baker's explanation of deformation of mastery as exemplified in DuBois's Souls of Black Folk. The mask, which Washington feels obliged to don, DuBois deforms or destroys. Unlike Washington, DuBois provides in Souls a "cultural performance" intended to display in a lyrical

manner the disappointments and aspirations of the African-American. With little inclination to couch his message in ambiguous language and compromising anecdotes, DuBois offers a new resonance. To reiterate his theory that mastery of form and deformation of mastery are African-American modernist forms which contribute to empowerment of the race, Baker concludes, "If Washington provides a speaking manual, then DuBois offers a singing book" (68). The lyricism of DuBois's work does not obscure his belief that African-Americans have suffered tragically from the institution of slavery and the racism subsequent to slavery's abolition. The appropriateness of the lyrical quality -- "the singing book" -- lies in DuBois's belief also that African-Americans' double-consciousness affords them a view of society far clearer than the blind-vision which people outside the African-American center sometimes exercise.

The twenty-five year time lapse between the release of Washington's and DuBois's works and the publishing/performance/display of Harlem Renaissance art did not eliminate the need for concern about what the white reading audience would accept.[7] A retrospective analysis of the

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[7] See "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed? A Symposium," The Crisis (April - December 1926). Editors of this NAACP instrument considered the issue significant enough to pose seven questions to various artists. The following is a sample question: "Can publishers be criticized for refusing to handle novels that portray Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting?" (April 1926)

creative writing of that period can plausibly reveal the use of subversive strategies comparable to those in Up From Slavery. The theory of mastery of form, therefore, seems especially applicable to the work of Harlem Renaissance writers interested in raising the consciousness of society on matters pertaining to race and gender. As DuBois predicted, race continued to be problematic, and a more equitable consideration of modernity would also include gender. Therefore, incorporating the talents of the intelligentsia and the proletariat, Harlem Renaissance writing embraces an African-American modernist ideology and form distinct from Euro-American modernism.

What has not been fully recognized, in my view, is the significant role women writers played in shaping a female literary tradition as part of the African-American modernist movement. Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen are part of that revision, contributing significantly to the consideration of gender as part of the movement. Fauset's Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree and Larsen's Quicksand and Passing embellish a tendency begun by several nineteenth century women writers -- focusing on the plight of the African-American woman. From the Harlem Renaissance emerge four novels which have female protagonists who express the tension between domestic roles and the pursuit of careers and who explore the limitations of female sexual expression.

278.

Fauset and Larsen improvise upon the strategies of nineteenth-century slave narratives and serve as precursors to African-American women writers of the 1930s and the 1940s. Such an empowerment of race places both writers in the vanguard of African-American modernism. Furthermore, Fauset and Larsen represent African-American modernism from a female perspective.

The two writers' strategy involves the use of the mulatta, which becomes a mask for the exploration of a female sensibility. Each author is aware of the common tendency among writers of both races to portray the mulatta in fiction, sometimes as a tragic figure groping for her identity, pondering the notion of passing or of intermarriage, often belonging to the bourgeois class and nearly always emerging as a virtuous and intelligent character.[8] Thus the mastery of form as a modernist strategy becomes applicable to both Fauset's and Larsen's novels. As I analyze Fauset's novels I intend to show that throughout them she masks the conditions, the treatment, the aspirations, and desires of women. Although Larsen utilizes

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[8] Judith Berzon discusses the mulatto fictional types in her book Neither White Nor Black, noting distinctions between the mulatto used in African-American fiction and that written by whites. One theory by Berzon which deserves attention here pertains to a racist tendency by white authors to have the character's life always end in tragedy, the tragic end suggesting the racial disharmony and lost potential of the mulatto being. Where this occurs in Larsen's fiction, I take the position later in this study that the tragedy is gender related and not primarily racial.

the mulatta mask to a degree, she throws it off on occasion to reveal the heretofore repressed desires of women.

Essentially this study will examine Fauset's and Larsen's representation of the African-American woman and their use of African-American modernist trends to show their continued awareness not only of the double-consciousness of which DuBois spoke, but of a "double" double-consciousness[9] based on gender and race. I want to examine three strands of a female ideology embedded in the novels of Fauset and Larsen and discernible through the mulatta as an African-American modernist strategy: the attention to female sexuality, the use of material consumption as a form of female subjectivity, and the mirroring of symbolic female spaces.

When modernism, both traditional and African-American, becomes inflected with gender, the issues of female sexuality, female subjectivity, and symbolic female spaces assume greater importance and women writers such as Fauset and Larsen acquire more prominent roles as modernist writers. I regard both women as sharing their status with predecessors and successors, for the works of these two women writers form part of a continuum of African-American women's writing. Frances E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy becomes the first work in the continuum; its alignment with African-

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[9] The idea of "double" double-consciousness was borrowed from an unpublished, untitled poem by Ken McManus.

American modernism stems from a historical perspective. Harper uses the female mulatta as a narrative strategy, not so much to mask female concerns as to posit the adversities of slavery. Much in the manner of Booker T. Washington, Harper masks literacy and race autonomy while writing openly of racial uplift. In her introduction to Harper's Iola Leroy, Hazel Carby writes, "Iola Leroy was a novel written for the edification of black youth: a contribution toward their education and the ethical and moral precepts of intellectual leadership" (xvi). Carby concludes that Harper's concern for African-American youth "showed a concern for the future of the race." Through her use of the mulatta to depict literacy and racial uplift, Harper ostensibly directs "her voice toward women." Reconstruction, however, constrains Harper's novel, and Iola's search for family and true racial heritage precludes her search for an individual identity except that acquired through marriage.

Having drawn the historical and literary parameters for the discussion of Fauset's and Larsen's works in the introductory chapter, I begin in Chapter Two of this study to discuss female sexuality as a conflation of the traditional modernist trend towards greater openness on sexual matters and the African-American modernist technique of masking sexuality for reasons of morality. The works which form a continuum for the analysis of female sexuality

are Iola Leroy, Quicksand, Plum Bun, and Their Eyes Were Watching God. Both Fauset and Larsen, though still reluctant to write openly of sexual matters, move farther away from Harper's ideas of marriage for morality's sake and individual happiness subsumed by racial uplift. Yet, the repression of sexuality remains: in Plum Bun, manifesting itself through Fauset's use of objective correlatives; in Quicksand, through fragmentation and frenetic travel. Both novels display a commodification of sex: Helga Crane becomes a sex object both in Harlem and in Denmark; Angela Murray initiates her own commodification through passing and engaging in free love. Finally, this section shows how Fauset and Larsen make space for Hurston's treatment of female sexuality: Janie's status as a mulatta diminishes; marriage for legitimacy of sex decreases, and sexual passion emerges through a romantic image rather than through the objective correlative which informs a condition or behavior completely devoid of emotion.

In Chapter Three I analyze female subjectivity through material consumption. Just as female sexuality assumes a different status depending upon the societal codes which the author rejects, so does the significance of material and bourgeois property increase or diminish based on the writer's reliance upon individuality. This chapter refutes the androcentric approach to the use of middle-class symbols and bourgeois life-styles in Fauset's novels. While there

is no attempt to deny the presence of conventional propriety, I show that part of Fauset's African-American modernist strategy is to posit female individuality and immanence without regard for public reaction. Fauset takes her cue in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree from Harper's Iola whose material possessions are linked patriarchally to her white father. Iola becomes disinherited upon the father's death and can re-acquire such possessions only through the roles of wife and teacher. Though Harper makes bold attempts as a nineteenth-century writer to liberate her female protagonist, on a continuum reflective of female subjectivity, Fauset has more success. Through daring plot and theme experiments, Fauset invokes race "passing" and "free love" to depict female subjectivity and to disrupt the formulaic principles drawn up for minority writers. Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree become precursors to later works such as Dorothy West's novel The Living Is Easy. This novel, published in 1948, seems to be the last in a series of African-American works to stress material consumption as a means of expressing female individuality.

In Chapter Four of this study, the mulatta becomes a paradigm for the attention Larsen directs to symbolic female spaces in Quicksand and Passing. By female spaces I refer to traditional positions which Larsen's female characters are expected to assume. The archetypal character in these novels may emerge as a schoolteacher, the wife of a

successful man, the partner in an interracial marriage, a society matron, the wife of a minister, or a woman oppressed by excessive childbearing. Whereas Harper, Larsen's predecessor, leaves her character in some of those spaces as a presumed gesture of respectability, Larsen, as a modernist, experiments with displacement, with psychoanalysis of the character in specific spaces, and ultimately intimates through the open endings of both novels that such spaces can be life-consuming.

The fluidity with which Larsen treats symbolic female spaces allows a later writer such as Ann Petry in The Street to disrupt entirely the theory of female spaces. Petry shapes her female characters' lives out of a sense of isolation caused by poverty and racism. Poverty forces Lutie Johnson to explore spaces not typically female, though a racist environment precludes her success in them. In a sense, Petry's novel becomes a conflation of modernism and naturalism. The female protagonist's fragmented existence takes her on an endless search for survival, portrayed, as Calvin Hernton notes, in "painstaking, graphic, naturalistic detail" (69). While showing the effects of sexism and racism throughout her novel, Petry also decenters the feminist view to protest an environment where many negative forces defeat the individual.

In the concluding chapter, the study shows how issues of female sexuality, female subjectivity, and symbolic

female spaces coalesce to reflect a heightened consciousness of the female presence in literature. Fauset and Larsen are indeed part of that group of writers omitted from the modernist canon because, as Bonnie Kime Scott so deftly describes it, "The inscriptions of mothers and women, and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not adequately decoded, if detected at all" (2). This study should inspire a re-reading of Fauset's and Larsen's texts, resulting in a more adequate decoding of African-American modernism.

CHAPTER II. Female Sexuality: A Display of African-American Modernism in Plum Bun and Quicksand

A woman with a burning flame
Deep covered through the years
With ashes -- ah! she hid it deep,
And smothered it with tears.
Georgia Douglas Johnson
from "Smothered Fires"

It is more than coincidental that Georgia Douglas Johnson was writing poetry such as "Smothered Fires" at approximately the same time that Fauset was writing Plum Bun and Larsen, Quicksand. The excerpt cited above from Johnson's poem epitomizes the repressed sexuality which many middle-class African-American women of the twenties and thirties endured. Elise Johnson McDougald's essay "The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation" in the March 1925 edition of Survey Graphic states, "Negro women are of a race which is free neither economically, socially nor spiritually" (691). In spite of the gradual overcoming of limitations imposed by slavery, McDougald declares that "true sex equality has not been approximated" (691). Regarding sexuality, McDougald asserts a close connection between economic standards and sexual behavior and refutes the charge by "superficial critics" that Negro women have lower sex standards or that they are more immoral than women of other races. Still attempting to refute the myths that miscegenation, during

and after slavery, emanated from the wantonness of African-American women, the bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century repeatedly encouraged its female members to exercise a Puritanical or a Victorian fastidiousness in their sexual behavior. This defensive position on women's sexuality pervaded the thinking and writing of African-American middle-class women even as Kay Boyle, Janet Flanner, and Tess Slesinger -- white middle-class writers of the same era -- were flaunting free love and other sexual freedoms in their novels.[10]

Apparently Johnson, Fauset, and Larsen knew that the social restrictions placed upon women's expression of sexuality were far more severe than those placed upon men. They knew also that those restrictions were even greater for African-American women. Yet, they dared to broach the subject in their literary works. Although Johnson's poem, when seen in its entirety, bears no reference to color, her role in shaping the Washington, D. C., segment of the cultural revolution of the 1920s is well-known. As one

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[10] I have chosen Boyle, Flanner, and Slesinger as writers with whom to contrast Fauset and Larsen because they seem more legitimately to be peers. They all wrote only one to four novels in addition to several short stories and children's fiction. All received praise for their novels upon publication but soon receded into anonymity. None took the radical stance on feminism of Gertrude Stein who never faded from the public's eye. See Kay Boyle, Year Before Last 1932 (New York: Penguin Books, 1960); Janet Flanner, The Cubical City 1926 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1974); and Tess Slesinger, The Unpossessed 1934 (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1984).

newspaper critic observed of Johnson, her poems became her "artistic credentials" after the death of her lawyer husband who during his lifetime stifled her creative talents.[11]

The justification for attempting to draw parallels between Fauset's and Larsen's lives and the fictive lives of their characters is debatable. Both Plum Bun and Quicksand, however, provide proof of their author's awareness of gender limitations. Early in both novels the authors show their intent to utilize the mulatta to explore a female sensibility. Each novel opens with frenetic activity to suggest the protagonist's incompatibility with her environment. Though neither Angela in Plum Bun nor Helga in Quicksand realizes the specific shape of her future, each realizes that she must leave her present location. This initial departure marks the beginning of the restlessness and shifting state of mind which characterize the protagonists in both novels.

Angela Murray leaves her birthplace in Philadelphia and goes to New York to live incognita, actually passing for white. Fauset has Angela ruminate on gender differences as she faces her new life: "She knew that men had a better

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[11] Sarah Booth Conroy, "Authors of Change: Locke, Johnson and The Black Renaissance," The Washington Post 3 April 1990, F3. Conroy reports on the 17th annual conference of the Washington, D. C. Historical Studies where one of the scholars argues for a Washington New Negro Renaissance, citing Washington's elite "composed of well-educated, wealthy men and women." Georgia Douglas Johnson and Alain Locke were the leaders of this group.

time of it than women, colored men than colored women, white men than white women" (88). Angela does not contrast the condition of "colored and white women" because she has already chosen to pass based on her belief that "I [should] declare for the one [race] that will bring me the greatest happiness, prosperity and respect" (80). Such thinking automatically sets Angela apart from her mother. Also, Fauset shows her awareness of generational differences, and thus her tendency to invoke history, through the use of a sub-plot involving Angela's parents. Angela's early restlessness, contrasted with the contentedness of her sister Virginia, is Fauset's method of foreshadowing the quest for independence which Angela will undertake. The sub-plot involves Mattie and Junius Murray attending church services with the two daughters. And on Communion Sundays Angela's fitfulness is juxtaposed with her sister Virginia's ecstasy over the minister's explanation of the sacrament. The transfiguration of the sacraments parallels the transfiguration of the Murray family -- the death of the parents and the separation of the sisters, along with the family estate. The breaking of the bread is a symbolic religious experience for Virginia, but for Angela, whose belief in conventional religion has waned, it is the breaking up of family, the disruption of cultural tradition and the shift towards a life outside her native culture where she expects to find independence, which will include

sexual autonomy.

Larsen does not choose passing for her protagonist, but she situates Helga Crane in an environment where her marginality as a woman is apparent at the outset. Helga realizes that she must leave Naxos, the segregated preparatory school in the south where she had begun her teaching career. She suddenly becomes aware that Naxos's "air of self-righteousness" and "intolerant dislike of difference" do not constitute an ideal environment for a "pretty, solitary girl." "She was a failure here. . . . Therefore, no need, no use, to stay longer" (5). Frenetic activity ensues.

The African-American modernist trend of masking is apparent, though it has shadings of difference in the two novels. Larsen masks her character's desire for sexual expression behind acts of indecision and narcissistic behavior whereas Fauset shrouds the quest for female autonomy in the respectability of marriage. Employing an introspective approach, Larsen shows Helga engaged in a search for surroundings more tolerant of her own goals and ambitions. Her assessment of Naxos is that the people are resistant to change because of their certainty of being correct. The friction between Naxos's conservatism and Helga's desire for change, between Naxos's pride in what it represents and Helga's self-centeredness justifies the chasm which Larsen constructs. Yet Helga remains the ambivalent

restless character, for she is unsure what she wants; "[s]he couldn't define it, isolate it" for it had no tangibility" (11).

Because Larsen retains such a high level of ambiguity in depicting Helga's desires, the obscurity itself becomes a mask for discussing female sexuality. Fauset, by contrast, veils female desire in the propriety of marriage. Shortly after Angela's arrival in New York, the reader sees Angela engaged in a kind of stream-of-consciousness about her new-found freedom in which she muses over the idea "free, white and twenty-one." Her sense of freedom is so strong under her new disguise that she adds, "If I were a man . . . I could be president." That thought of "power, greatness, authority" she quickly reserves for men, adding that "there were sweeter, more beautiful gifts for women, and power of a certain kind too" (88). One speculates that even as a "white" woman, Angela confines her concept of power in this instance to the woman's sexuality. The irony is that her thinking extends back to her real heritage when she thoughtfully adds that she would need "protection" and "perhaps it would be better to marry . . . " (88). Fauset's use of the mulatta mask is obvious here, and she plausibly allows her character to retain aspects of her earlier culture. Angela's thinking is a throwback to Mattie's belief in the security and respectability of marriage.

In her introduction to Quicksand and Passing, Deborah

McDowell remarks, "Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen could only hint at the idea of black women as sexual objects behind the protective covers of traditional narrative subjects and conventions" (xiii). As McDowell so adeptly points out in the introductory essay, the need to conceal avant-garde subjects with conventional narrative subjects also carried risks for the authors: "[R]eaders miss the more urgent problem of female sexual identity" (xvii). In his book The Way of the New World Addison Gayle critiques Larsen and her mulatta character. He sees Larsen's life as having been tragic and her work as belonging to the genre of tragedy:

> The tragedy of Helga Crane and Nella Larsen . . . is that neither knew of the values of courage and endurance depicted in the life-style of Toomer's Cane, and therefore looked upon black life as lived by the poor through the distorted lenses of white sociologists. In their flight from themselves, blacks have all too often accepted the same images of each other as have whites (111).

Gayle suggests through his statement that Larsen transfers her self-hatred to her main character. Gayle misreads Larsen's strategy -- the use of the mulatta to depict the frustration, alienation, and marginality of the lives of women of color. Oddly enough, Gayle and Arthur P. Davis contrast what they consider to be Larsen's failure with Toomer's success in the artistry of depicting African-

American life. According to Davis in From the Dark Tower, Cane represents "the ability of the Negro to transfer his pain into artistic acceptance" (46). And though Davis praises Larsen for creating in Helga Crane an intriguing and complex character -- subordinate only to Kabnis in Toomer's Cane -- he remains critical of her dialogue, her depiction of life in Harlem, and her lack of confrontation between the races (96-97). In other words, he does not allow Larsen the aesthetic privileges he allows Toomer.

Though Barbara Christian confirms a female sensibility in her assessment of Larsen's Quicksand, Christian, too, seems to dwell on the mulatta figure as "pathetic," one "seldom perceived as a person in either the black or the white world" (53). When Christian adds, however, that the mulatta Helga Crane is an image, she provides clearer perception of Larsen's purpose: to create through the character an image of the African-American woman inextricably bound by the values of a white male society. Christian explains, " . . . her [Helga's] tragedy is specifically a female one. She is destroyed by the womb" (53).

DuBois stands practically alone among male critics in applauding Fauset and Larsen for their craft in depicting the plight of the woman. Generally DuBois sees both writers' craft tinged by the "shadow of the Veil." He believes that African-Americans always view life from a

racial stance, that they are continuously aware of their blackness and their Americanness. He fittingly looks beyond the Veil for other formal and thematic trends. He praises Fauset's handling of morality, noting somewhat sardonically that "the variety of sex experience among colored folk is supposed to be strictly limited to frank prostitution or careless promiscuity" (Crisis 138). In Larsen's Quicksand DuBois sees Helga as "typical of the new, honest, young fighting Negro woman" (Crisis 202). That DuBois would see in Fauset's novels a depiction of morality among African-American women, of which he approves, and in Larsen's novel a true depiction of the assertiveness of "young Negro women" suggests a duality of purpose in Fauset's and Larsen's novels. It points to what I termed earlier as a "double" double-consciousness. Both authors apparently knew that they must mask the progressive behavior of their female characters behind standards of morality emanating for women of color from the days of slavery and Reconstruction.

The residual effect of slavery on women's morality dominates the thinking of one of the earliest African-American women novelists -- Frances E. W. Harper. It is not uncanny that strong links seem to exist between Harper's Iola Leroy and Fauset's and Larsen's novels. Frances Smith Foster, in her introduction to the Schomburg edition of Iola Leroy, says that the Harper novel "represents the transition from the antebellum period to the Harlem Renaissance and

links Afro-American fiction to women's fiction" (xxxvii). Foster is justified in expressing a historical link between writings of the 1890s and those of the 1920s. More problematic, however, is Foster's inclination to justify linkages between two genres which she terms Afro-American fiction and women's fiction. Women do, in fact, write much of African-American fiction. To see two distinct genres is to acknowledge that women's writing lies outside the African-American canon and that gender is a justifiable discriminating base.

Harper was aware of the resistance to an open expression of women's sexuality in literature. As Foster observes, Harper "understood the preferences . . . of her nineteenth century audiences." She knew of their interest in religion, temperance, slavery, Reconstruction, and racial uplift. William Still's introduction to the early edition of Iola Leroy is proof of what Harper's reading audience of both races expected. Viewing the novel in a polemical sense, Still noted, "Doubtless the thousands of colored Sunday-schools in the South, in casting about for an interesting, moral story-book, full of practical lessons, will not be content to be without 'Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted.'"[12] Although Iola Leroy's use as a Sunday-school

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[12] William Still's introduction was the kind of authenticating document necessary for the publication of many of the early works by African-American authors. Integrated with the text of the novel (page 3), Still's introduction is to be distinguished from Frances Smith

book would be an extreme, Harper's interest in racial uplift and emphasis on morality are so strong that other themes in which she has an interest are less apparent. In Invented Lives Mary Helen Washington agrees that the refutation of inferiority becomes a preoccupation in African-American writing but emphasizes the additional burden of the African-American woman writer to defend her intellectual capabilities as well (73-77). Writing in the nineteenth century as an African-American woman, Harper labored under the burden which Washington identifies.

Harper creates a mulatta character who is capable of passing but in repeated episodes of looking for work Iola reveals her mixed heritage, causing employers or peers to subsequently reject her. In this manner Harper promotes racial uplift and validates the moral character of her protagonist. Whenever Iola speaks of women becoming enterprising, she subverts their independence to racial uplift or to marriage. For instance, after Iola moves north she approaches her uncle Robert with the idea of her joining "the great rank of breadwinners." She believes her proposal will be more convincing if connected with a moral code which her uncle already embraces. Thus she begins, "I have a theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living. I believe that a great amount of sin and misery springs from the weakness and inefficiency of women" (205).

Foster's introduction to the Schomburg Collection.

She further solidifies her argument in telling her uncle, "I think that every woman should have some skill or art which would insure her at least a comfortable support. I believe there should be less unhappy marriages if labor were more honored among women" (210). Harper asserts the need for self-discovery, though she suggests that the woman's right to a satisfying sexuality lies in the institution of marriage. Her female character's persistence in acquiring a career, the negation of passing, and the rejection of the white doctor's marriage proposal all point to Harper's primary concern for race-building over individual achievements.

Although racial uplift permeates Iola Leroy, Harper intermittently allows her character to recount the sexual oppression of her era and to articulate the potential for change. In the debate with Dr. Gresham over why she cannot marry him -- a white man -- Iola speaks of social ostracism, outcast girls, and fallen women. Showing her concern for morality and race, Iola refers to women who have broken the moral code. And even though the code applies to women of both races, Harper makes it clear that race is the determining factor. Iola cites the case of her mother's attempt to take an "outcast colored girl" to a shelter which rejects her. Later her mother, with two white women, takes an "outcast white girl" to the same shelter which accepts her. Iola summarizes the paradox:

> It was as if two women were sinking in the quicksands, and on the solid land stood other women with life-lines in their hands, seeing the deadly sands slowly creeping up around the hapless victims. To one they readily threw the lines of deliverance, but for the other there was not one strand of salvation (232).

Here Harper makes one of her strongest stands on feminist solidarity. She strengthens her position on race uplift and her attitude against passing while she maximizes the need for women to support one another. In the chapter "Dawning Affections" she constructs the relationship between Iola and Dr. Latimer on the basis of a mutual feeling for their race. Iola speaks of her admiration for Dr. Latimer who chose not to pass: " . . . when others are trying to slip out from the race and pass into the white basis, I cannot help admiring one who acts as if he felt that the weaker the race is the closer he would cling to it." Dr. Latimer responds by citing an instance of "a young lady who could have cast her lot with the favored race, yet chose to take her place with the freed people, as their teacher, friend, and adviser" (263). It is in such cryptic language that the two declare their admiration for each other, make plans for marriage, and move back to the south to resume their work of race-building. Harper's tendency to subordinate sexuality to racial uplift is apparent in Iola's response in Biblical

analogy to her uncle's inquiry, "How do you like him?" Iola answers, "'I must have within me a large amount of hero worship. The characters of the Old Testament I most admire are Moses and Nehemiah. They are willing to put aside their own advantages for their race and country. Dr. Latimer comes up to my ideal of a high, heroic manhood" (265). Thus, in two chapters, "Dawning Affections" and "Wooing and Wedding," where the reader would anticipate more explicit statements of the protagonist's feelings, the narrator merely reports the effect Iola has upon Dr. Latimer. Iola's passion remains passive or even absent in the description of her "filling a larger place in his heart," of "[t]he touch of her hand thrill[ing] him with emotion," and of [h]er noblest sentiments [finding] a response in his heart." Ultimately even the doctor's passion assumes a subverted role, for "[i]n their desire to help the race their hearts beat in loving unison" (266). As if depicting a coital relationship, Harper writes of their desire for racial uplift.

Such an analogue prompts more than one critic to assert that Harper uses the mulatta for political reasons. Mary Helen Washington refers to Harper's strategy, as well as Pauline Hopkins's, as "devising ways for their heroines to become political and social activists" (76). Hazel Carby, in her introduction to a 1987 edition of Iola Leroy, speculates on Harper's intent to create a possible Utopian

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

relationship between African-American men and women "at the expense of sexuality." Carby believes that Harper "represses sexuality to gain an independent heroine" and that she "was unable to represent a black heroine who was also a sexual being" (xxv). Though Carby's reference to Iola Leroy as Harper's vision of an "uprising" of women is questionable, it is irrefutable that Harper opens doors to Fauset's and Larsen's further examination of female sexuality.

In the introduction to this study, I alluded to slavery as a social and historical construct for African-American literature. In an attempt to explain and accurately depict present conditions, African-American modernists insist upon the need to recall the origin of their race. Slavery is an integral part of that origin. Implicit in Fauset's and Larsen's treatment of female sexuality is the notion that slavery had an inevitable impact on women's sexuality which the mulatta epitomizes. Therefore, both writers utilize the mulatta to gauge attitudes towards sex and marriage, to define sexual oppression, to analyze sex and childbearing all within a historical context.

The importance of history is apparent in Fauset's novel Plum Bun. It makes use of a generational trope through the mulatta. Mattie Murray is the mulatta mother whose story consumes the first five chapters of the novel. Fauset depicts her as the "contented" mother of two attractive

young daughters. Angela is as fair as her mother and can engage in temporary acts of passing along with her mother; Virginia has "rosy bronzeness" and "deeply waving black hair," a combination of features inherited from both parents. Mattie's frenetic behavior readily suggests ambivalence, ranging from her contentment in motherhood and housekeeping and the ecstasy in being the wife of Junius to ignoring him and Virginia on a downtown street during one of her passing episodes. Later she reflects on her previous life as live-in maid, seamstress, and personal servant for a white actress. She recalls how Junius saved her from the sexual advances of Haynes Brokinaw, the lecherous politician. The mulatta, therefore, becomes an ideal model for displaying the ambiguity resulting from a slave heritage. Mattie vacillates between her life on Saturdays as a Philadelphia matron, which her near-white features make possible, and her routine life as Junius's wife. Fauset suggests in this scene and elsewhere that marriage is either a trap or a safety net.

Another example of African-American modernism is Fauset's use of stream-of-consciousness to describe historical imperceptions about race and gender. The mulatta becomes an ideal paradigm for the expression of varied and disjointed thoughts regarding the charge that miscegenation resulted from the loose morals of African-American women. In Mattie's recapitulation of her experience working for the

actress, Mattie contrasts in her mind the actress's morals with her own: "[She] was young, pretty and innocent; the actress was young, beautiful and sophisticated" (28-29). Because Fauset filters the entire segment on the actress through Mattie's mind, Mattie's morality and that of the actress at times become confused. For instance, when Mattie thinks, "[H]igh ideals and personal self-respect were too abstract for her slightly coarsened mind to visualize," the reader cannot be certain whether Mattie is expressing her own feelings about the actress or whether these are the feelings Mattie suspects the actress holds about Mattie and other women of her race. Fauset's ambiguity seems intentional. The impact of history prevents Mattie, a representative African-American, from thinking clearly about which charges are true about women of either race. Mattie's reverie closes with her imagining the actress thinking, "[A]t any rate they [high ideals and self-respect] were incomprehensible and even absurd in a servant, and in a colored servant to boot" (29).

The self-hatred implicit in Mattie's speculation on the actual words the actress uttered about miscegenation points directly to the effect of master/slave relationships on African-American female sexuality. "She felt dimly that all coloured people are thickly streaked with immorality. They were naturally loose, she reasoned, when she thought about it at all" (29). Such was the actress's generalization

about "coloured people." This faulty generalization became her major premise, from which she formed the minor premise: "Look at the number of mixed bloods among them; look at Mattie herself for that matter, a perfectly white nigger if ever there was one. I'll bet her mother wasn't any better than she should be" (29). The implied conclusion of this faulty syllogism is that Mattie is, therefore, immoral.

Fauset creates in this episode the mulatta image based on race-mixing, self-hatred, and white women's disdain for the mulatta. Such an image becomes an ideal mask for discussing the African-American woman's position in the early 1900s. Sexually, she has little chance for individual fulfillment and in essence becomes a commodity for consumption and/or rejection. Mattie, for instance, assuages her unfulfilled needs with Saturday excursions into downtown Philadelphia department stores and tearooms, passing for white. Yet she is at such a tremendous loss for handling her own life that when Junius dies, she wills herself to follow him. It is as if Fauset depicts sexuality in Mattie as a commodity to be protected, through marriage to Junius, from the racist accusations and false generalizations of people such as the actress.

Deborah McDowell's introduction to Plum Bun acknowledges the frequency with which critics fail to see the progressive and daring manner of Fauset's endorsement of female independence and her critique of the sexual double-

standard (xxi). Readers who fail to see beyond Fauset's mask relegate their interpretations to the "fairy tale" level of Angela's and Virginia's imagination when their mother ended their bedtime stories with the improvisation, "'And so they lived happily ever after, just like your father and me'" (33). Fauset capitalizes on the fairy tale, for subsequent to the storytelling she shows the mother contemplating her daughters' future, saying firmly, "My girls shall never come through my experiences," for "they [are] both to be school-teachers and independent" (33).

As Fauset slips the mask from mulatta mother to daughter, she reveals the discordant and fractured lives of her modernist characters. In an incident that nearly parallels Junius's marrying Mattie to save her, Angela becomes humiliated when she and Matthew Henson attempt to see a film at an all-white theater. Though Angela can pass, Matthew cannot. An attendant, thinking them a mixed couple, directs Matthew to the segregated balcony. In a fit of emotion after the incident, Angela, like her mother, transforms her humiliation into compassion for Matthew: "Unexpectedly she lifted her delicate face to his, so stricken and freckled and woebegone, and kissed him, lifted her hand and actually stroked his reddish, stiff, 'bad' hair" (76). Angela's gestures of ardor cause Matthew to walk home contemplating when the two of them can be married. Angela decides, however, that she wants neither to marry

Matthew nor to teach school. Lying in bed, with the head-boards of their "narrow, virginal beds" touching the adjacent walls, Angela tells her sister of her decision to go away and "pass." This departure from the constricted life in a virginal bed or marriage to Matthew indicates the beginning of Angela's attempt to break out of the "mulatta trap."

Fauset's own race ideology and her knowledge of the modernist concept of communication between self and Other become apparent at this point. When Angela leaves Philadelphia to live in New York, she loses intimacy with her sister. They no longer occupy the narrow chaste beds, and in terms of Angela's cultural and family heritage, a kind of death in life ensues. Angela's first experiences in New York, though initially seeming ideal, ultimately end in increased activity without productivity. Her action is mainly voyeuristic. She spends her days in Fourteenth Street Square observing people, strolling along the streets near the hotel where she lives, and focusing on a gathering of men in front of a piano store. She "follows their emotional gamut," watching their reactions to jazz, love songs, and Irish and Scottish tunes (90). Her face reflects heightened desire and takes on "the wistfulness of the men gazing in the music store" (93). Angela explores her own loneliness while denying any homesickness for Philadelphia. Her continuous activity, though devoid of productivity,

takes her frequently to the movie houses where she is less interested in the film than in attempting to achieve intimacy with the audience.

The voyeurism continues when she goes to Harlem where she watches "the moiling groups on Lenox Avenue," paying especial attention to "amazingly well-dressed and good-looking throngs of young men on Seventh Avenue at One Hundred and Thirty-seventh and Thirty-fifth Streets" (97). There is, however, a remoteness with which Angela observes this group -- contrasting them with the people on Fourteenth Street and referring to them as "these people." The question becomes whether Fauset's protagonist, now out of the narrow confines of her Philadelphia community, can plunge into this heterogeneous society and find satisfaction.

Sublimation of desire through art is the next observable pattern in Angela's behavior. She reminds herself that she was "neglecting her Art," and that art was the reason she had come to New York in the first place. Yet when she enrolls in an art class her immediate preoccupation is with establishing intimacy. There are students of Jewish, German, Scandinavian, and Spanish background and a "colored girl," Rachel Powell, all of whom Angela is soon on "jestingly intimate" terms with except Rachel. Rachel is the logical exclusion, not only because she is Black but also because her female sensibilities are similar to those

which Angela knew in Philadelphia. The sexuality which Angela practices in New York is a conflation of the sexual behaviors learned from her peers in the art class. Though she is somewhat astounded at Paulette's feminist philosophy, it does for a time influence Angela. Paulette sees her femininity as a commodity to be bartered for more valued acquisitions. She insists,

> 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 am through with it, I throw it away just as they do" (105).

Paulette's philosophy serves a dual purpose in the novel. First, it has a profound effect upon Angela's behavior. Though she compromises her ambitions and becomes Roger's lover rather than his wife, initially she sets out to marry him for the economic security and social prominence marriage to him would bring her. Fauset thereby shows the extent of Angela's ambivalence. Secondly, Fauset may be using Paulette's philosophy to critique white morals, for Angela rejects the idea of "free love" after her return to her native culture, using an old adage "Marriage was good enough for my mother, it's good enough for me" (320). Angela embodies the ambivalence of modernist characters,

however, as she confesses that she was using art now as she always had, "to get in touch with interesting people and with a more attractive atmosphere" (110).

Fauset shows distinctly modernist trends in her representation of female sexuality through a pattern of objects, namely, the automobile and art. The automobile stimulates an emotional response at the outset and at recurring points in Plum Bun so that it becomes an objective correlative for female desire. Mattie Murray falls in love with Junius after he rescues her from the lecherous Brokinaw, a friend of her employer. The irony of the situation is that Junius is a coachman without a car of his own. Fauset thereby suggests the plight of the underprivileged African-American man whose status makes him no less desirable in relationships within his race. To Mattie "he was God" (33).

When Junius is finally able to own a car, he acquires a used Ford model which the entire family considers an indulgence now that both girls have grown up. The family -- Junius, Mattie, Angela, and Virginia -- take Sunday rides to the outskirts of Philadelphia. The car becomes the literal vehicle by which Junius conveys his daughters to the outside world, marking the beginning of heterosexual relationships with middle-class professionals such as Matthew Henson. Though Virginia's world does not expand so rapidly, Angela will travel far from the route of the Sunday excursions to

immerse herself in another culture.

Fauset continues her use of the automobile as an objective correlative for Angela's emotional feelings for Roger Fielding. Designated to escort Angela home from Martha Burden's party, Roger gives her the option of walking or riding. And though they elect to walk, the availability of the car impresses Angela. His little blue car, coupled with his attractiveness "like a blond, glorious god" (129), repeatedly suggests how Roger can carry Angela to unimagined boundaries in terms of desire, security, and privilege. The car continues to be the object which stimulates desire even when the relationship involves a different person. When Roger proposes keeping Angela as his mistress, she rejects him because her moral standards militate against such an arrangement. Resuming a friendship with Anthony prompts her to contrast his and Roger's social status: "Roger would have had the blue car at the door" (139). The car represents economic security just as it did for her father. Because Angela has decided that love for her is yoked with privilege and status, she does not accept Anthony's declaration of love. After all, she reasoned, "She was no sentimentalist" (142). As Carby suggests, Fauset represents the new generation as revising the history of their parents. While Angela makes occasional references to her parents' way of thinking and doing, she has for the most part embarked on a new course for the attainment of happiness and security.

The frenetic activity characteristic of modernist literature, and depicted in Angela's quest for individual satisfaction and self-identity, dominates Quicksand, also. Thadious Davis, Larsen's biographer, links the interest in and knowledge of modernism exhibited in both Quicksand and Passing to the scientific research Larsen's husband, Elmer Imes, did on relativity.[13] The "randomness of human experience" manifested in Larsen's own life may be relevant to her writing. Davis and other critics who have studied Larsen point out the changes and shifts in careers which Larsen herself underwent. Having received nurse's training, Larsen worked from 1915 until 1921 as a nurse at Tuskegee Institute, at Lincoln Hospital, and for the New York City Department of Health. Then she shifted in 1921 to work as a librarian with the New York Public Library where she remained until 1926 when she began her career as a writer (Dictionary of Literary Biography). Notwithstanding Larsen's erratic personal life and the speculation that Helga Crane is Nella Larsen's nemesis, Davis states the truth most succinctly in her essay in The Gender of Modernism when she observes, "Her [Larsen's] movement from

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[13] See Thadious M. Davis, "Nella Larsen (1891 - 1964)" in The Gender of Modernism, 209-216 ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. Also, see Thadious Davis, "Nella Larsen," Dictionary of Literary Biography vol. 51. Though the latter is a more detailed account of Larsen's life and works, Davis does not refer in this piece to Imes's work as having an impact on Larsen's own writing.

nurse to librarian to writer demonstrates a personal search for class position, meaningful work, social prestige, and full self-expression that was not unlike Helga Crane's in Quicksand" (212).

Larsen herself was a modernist and it seems only logical that she would want to extend the modernist image through her writing. Being a middle-class woman and the wife of a prominent scientist and college professor, she was also aware of the need to mask certain propensities in the African-American modernist world. One was sexuality. Just as Helga Crane the teacher at Naxos observed that the "smiling submissiveness" of her young students masked "poignant heartaches and perhaps much secret contempt for their instructors" (5), so Larsen must have known that in Helga's world she must mask the unconformity and desires of an unmarried woman marginalized by gender and race. The novel opens with a suggestion of isolation. Helga sits in her large room with curtains drawn and a single light which gives the impression of her being on a "small oasis in a desert of darkness" (1). Her room, comfortable though isolated, is a metonymic contrast for the suffocating desert -- the Naxos campus.

Repressed sexuality is evident in the opening scene of the novel:

> An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade. A slight girl of

> twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned, arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined, she was -- to use a hackneyed word -- attractive. Black, very broad brows over soft, yet penetrating, dark eyes, and a pretty mouth, whose sensitive and sensuous lips had a slight questioning petulance and a tiny dissatisfied droop, were the features on which the observer's attention would fasten; though her nose was good, her ears delicately chiseled, and her curly blue-black hair plentiful and always straying in a little wayward, delightful way. Just then it was tumbled, falling unrestrained about her face and on to her shoulders (2).

The third-person narrator twice informs the reader that this description of Helga is for the benefit of an observer. Yet there is no observer; Helga is in her room alone. Her sensual looks -- to include the petulant lips and unrestrained hair -- are wasted on the room where she sits for the entire evening as if awaiting a caller. Though the setting is "intentional isolation," Helga typifies the

restless, impetuous being, struggling to be free of her environment. When she stirs at the end of the evening, it is with an unnamed, perhaps unknown, desire for some kind of activity. The sexual repression which this scene represents is comparable to the restraint implicit in transvestism. Helga's provocative appearance signals sexual desire, but because her isolation is also apparent, dressing and posing will be the consummate act.

On the surface Helga gives the impression that what she finds totally frustrating is the futility of her endeavors to teach in such a stifling environment. In the same scene in the privacy of her room, however, she contemplates going away from Naxos and knows that she must, therefore, break the engagement to James Vayle, a colleague to whom she had become engaged during her first semester at Naxos, when they were both new and lonely. Her thoughts of Vayle "took on the frigidity of complete determination." Frigidity is only one of a catalogue of ambivalences which Helga experiences. As she reflects on the relationship with Vayle, she senses shame that her sexual attraction is the main attraction for Vayle, and that, as Larsen describes her, she becomes an object of desire for Vayle. Her feelings vacillate, and she has a sense of power that she is part of the "ancient appeal" which women become for satisfying men's sexual desires.

Close parallels exist between the scene in Plum Bun in

which Mattie reminisces about events leading to her marriage to Junius and the spectacle in Quicksand which prompts Helga to flee from Naxos. Larsen filters through Helga's mind all that the reader discovers about Naxos and its oppressive environment. Helga's repressed creativity, attractiveness, and desires become the objects of pursuit by Dr. Anderson, the Naxos administrator, and James Vayle, the would-be lover. The chapter closes with the following scene, highly suggestive of a setting involving two lovers:

> Books and papers scattered about the floor, fragile stockings and underthings and the startling green and gold negligee dripping about on chairs and stool, met the encounter of the amazed eyes of the girl who came in the morning to awaken Helga Crane (9).

There has been no sexual encounter; rather, it is the result of Helga's frustration and disillusionment with an environment which suppresses self-expression and individuality.

In an essay on feminist literary criticism entitled "Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective," Susan Willis discusses community, journey, and sexuality as concerns about which African-American women writers articulate their views. Regarding sexuality Willis observes, "Black women write against the erosion and the repression of female sexuality as it is channeled by male

desire and stifled by domestic life" (226). Willis's critique of women's writing is relevant to Fauset's and Larsen's strategy in Plum Bun and Quicksand respectively. Depicting life at the turn of the century, both writers knew the need to sublimate women's sexual desire and to treat female sexuality subversively. Larsen depicts Helga's ambiguous feelings when subjected to the pressure of male desire. Shortly after Helga decides to inform the headmaster that she is leaving Naxos, Dr. Anderson's dominating view overwhelms her, nearly convincing her to stay. She becomes "silent, feeling a mystifying yearning which sang and throbbed in her." The urge to please Dr. Anderson subsumes her own desires and she becomes momentarily complicitous with his urging that she remain at Naxos. "She was shamed, yet stirred," and she now felt the "actual desire to stay." Arousal and desire in Helga are masked behind the urge to serve the community and to help Dr. Anderson. This ambivalence, however, gives way to the decision to leave for Chicago, a more modern and cosmopolitan world. Repression of sexual passion is apparent in her thought associations, for she thinks now of her own mother who "risk[ed] all in one blind surrender" (23). Helga leaves Naxos, but Dr. Anderson remains indelibly in her memory to test whether she, like her mother, will surrender blindly to the passion which she has so neatly disguised as the need to serve.

Larsen creates a tension between male sexuality and female sexuality as depicted in the relationship between Helga Crane and Robert Anderson. Helga's immersion in the Harlem culture diverts her attention from her dissatisfied feelings about her own identity. She obtains a job where for the first time "references" -- meaning for Helga a history of background which she does not have -- are unessential. The community she has established with Mrs. Hayes-Rore bridges the chasm which Uncle Peter's rejection of her created. Even when Mrs. Hayes-Rore queries Helga about family background she maintains self-control, unlike the scene in Naxos where Anderson's inquiry about her background hastens her decision to leave Naxos. Mrs. Hayes-Rore intimates a kind of community within the female gender which Helga does not glean from Anderson's remark, "You have dignity and breeding" (21). When cultural cohesion seems most apparent, a re-encounter with Anderson disrupts it. Helga senses a "strange ill-defined emotion, a vague yearning" (50) upon seeing him again. The tension emanating from Anderson's remark that Helga hasn't changed, that she is still seeking something, thwarts the passion she had felt for him. Repeatedly Anderson is the singular person who brings out in Helga what Deborah McDowell sees as contradictory impulses. The tension between the two is an ideal way for Larsen to project the modernist image of an ambivalent female character.

Although Robert Anderson is the dominant male figure in the male-female tension with Helga, Axel Olsen contributes to it when Helga travels to Denmark. Olsen's involvement suggests that Helga's quest for wholeness does not rest with Anderson alone, that her dilemma is indeed representative of a more expansive problem, and that race is an underlying force. Critic Amritjit Singh sees Helga's emotional and sexual problems inextricably bound to race. He speculates thusly:

> If Helga could have seen herself as an individual rather than a human organism dominated alternately by black or white blood, she might have been reasonably happy with Axel Olsen or even happier with Robert Anderson. . . . Helga Crane finds herself unable to accept her blackness and incapable of adapting to whiteness (102).

Singh's point seems to be valid, for what Helga lacks is the DuBoisian concept of double-consciousness. Because she does not accept her blackness, she is unable to fully utilize the gift of double-consciousness with which DuBois says the African-American is endowed.

One of Helga's acts of self-examination, though lacking substantial discovery, grows out of the sexual tension between her and Olsen. She refuses his offer of marriage, both because he had presumed she would be his mistress and because she could not marry a white man. Helga assumes that

her exotic mulatta features make her attractive to Olsen as his mistress, but she also reflects on her heritage, that which produced her mulatta traits, and finds it objectionable, historically and morally as well, to accept either of Axel's offers. She realizes that any plan for her life would be a fusion of "doubts, rebellion, expediency, and urgent longings" (83). The divided self is apparent whether she is searching for a culture in which she can live and function or a relationship that will sustain her desires. On the day of her departure from Denmark she asks herself why she couldn't have two lives or be satisfied in one place? (93)

Larsen projects the image of a divided self throughout both of her novels, reflecting an ambivalence which results in critics' regarding her as more clearly the modernist than Fauset. Under the theory of African-American modernism, however, they are equally modernist. Only their techniques differ: Fauset's practice is the continuous masking of female sexuality behind domestic scenes, especially marriage. Larsen has female passion repressed but intermittently removes the mask to reveal female eroticism and a degree of sexual freedom. Though both writers end their novels with a depiction of sexual fulfillment within marriage, Larsen's use of the marriage scene connotes a less than positive image.

Marriage in Plum Bun becomes a paradigm of

respectability and moral uprightness while the author covertly raises questions regarding female sexuality. Fauset seems to give the nod to marriage even when a character on the surface seems opposed to it. In a scene involving Angela and Roger Fielding, Angela resides in an apartment so small that, without leaving her bed, she can reach around the door into the next room and answer her telephone. Several things are implicit in this tranquil scene which are absent from Quicksand and the scene in Helga's room in Naxos. Though small, Angela's apartment is satisfactory because it is essentially a "waiting room." She expects to transform her residence from this tiny apartment to a larger house through marriage, preferably to Roger who can also offer greater financial security. The compactness of her present living quarters represents the suppressed state of her sexual desires. The attention Roger devotes to her gives her a sense of power, and she is thus willing, momentarily, to suppress her desires until marriage can legitimize their expression.

Fauset interfuses plots to show the problematics of passing and its ultimate effect on sexuality, whereas Larsen explores the psychology of her character as reflected in the character's self-examination. For instance, Angela's sister Jinny meets Anthony Cross after her arrival in New York. The relationship between Anthony and both sisters intensifies without either sister's knowing about Anthony's

double life. Nor, of course, does Roger know about Angela's former life. Such a complex racial network allows Fauset to reject passing and to maintain her firm moral stance on sexual matters. Jinny acts as Angela's conscience when she reminds Angela of Roger's intentions: "His ultimate intentions! Why, Angela what are you talking about? You know perfectly well what his ultimate intentions are. Isn't he a white man? Well, what kind of intentions would he have toward a coloured woman?" (166) Through Jinny, who remains within the African-American culture, Fauset posits a relationship between history and male/female desire. Jinny recalls the awkward scene at the railroad station when Angela, owing to Roger's unexpected presence, cannot acknowledge that Jinny is her sister. She also recalls Roger's insolence and Angela's coldness toward her. Each reminds Jinny that interracial affairs during slavery bred the same kind of insolence and coldness: "[I]t had been possible in slavery times for white men and women to mistreat their mulatto relations, their own flesh and blood, selling them into deeper slavery in the far South or standing by watching them beaten almost, if not completely, to death" (167-68). Thus, Angela and Jinny represent two different poles in terms of race ideology.

Fauset displays her craft as an African-American modernist in the masking of sexuality behind race ideology. Carolyn Wedin Sylvander's biography of Fauset reports in

significant detail the impact of growing up in a segregated educational and social environment on Fauset's own race and sex ideology. Sylvander notes that "Fauset was intensely aware of the discrimination and problems faced by women of any race, and of the dual discrimination faced by Black women" (83). Yet Fauset's extensive work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), her undaunting efforts to further art and culture through her work with The Crisis, and the notion that she ostensibly belonged to the middle-class resulted in her "generally balanced and optimistic attitude toward life." Sylvander further links Fauset's general optimism with her tendency to emphasize the strengths of African-American women as well as their difficulties (83). In Plum Bun Angela's decision to pass relates to her belief that she is a mixture of two races and should therefore associate with the race which will bring her the greatest happiness and success. Not only does she anticipate that marrying Roger will benefit her personally, but also she expects to use her status as Roger's wife to help humanity. "Lots of coloured people will be much better off on account of me," she declares (162). According to Angela's plan, racial uplift will subsume her own desires. Fauset's own ideology, however, was resistant to passing as a viable alternative to racial oppression. Therefore, she undercuts her character's intention to marry Roger. Angela cannot use marriage to

legitimize sex and, as Iola Leroy did, practice racial uplift. Though Fauset and Harper handle plot differently, their ideologies actually merge. Iola refuses to pass, rejects Dr. Gresham's marriage proposal, and marries Dr. Latimer instead, a mulatta like herself who is interested in racial uplift. True to African-American middle-class tradition, Fauset cannot allow Angela to marry Roger to whom the concept of racial uplift is completely foreign. Nor will Fauset's code of ethics permit Angela to "ascend" from her native culture by passing and subsequently marrying white and hypocritically contribute to the uplift of "lots of coloured people."

Fauset and Larsen display modernist tendencies in the shifting values and changing life styles depicted in Plum Bun and Quicksand respectively. Having the mulatta span two generations enables Fauset to expand the moral code for the middle-class which Angela represents. The strict adherence to religious principles undergirding the lives of the Murray family diminishes in the adult lives of Angela and Jinny. In fact, the rituals embodied in church and family life gradually wane so that Angela has memories only of the domestic scene such as the Monday night dinners on Opal Street. Because she expects to marry, she wants to retain knowledge of those qualities which will make her the proper wife.

The shift in landscape permits Fauset even greater

latitude in changing moral codes. Angela moves from the provincialism of her Philadelphia community to the great metropolis of New York City where she experiences a mode of living indigenous to white people. As one passing for white, this is primarily Angela's world, though she wanders into Harlem where she is "amazed and impressed" at "coloured life" which she had never seen "so thick, so varied, so complete" (96). Fauset prepares the reader for Angela's changed behavior as she contemplates her new freedom and unrestraint which come from isolation and anonymity. Thus the mechanistic secular white world of New York City, combined with the intoxicating, exotic "colored" world of Harlem, shapes the hedonistic personality which Angela now has. Such a changed milieu informs the commodification of sex which pervades the two middle sections of Plum Bun.

From the instant Angela leaves her sister and the family residence in Philadelphia, she embarks on a commercial venture of using her new status -- from fair-skinned mulatta to white woman -- to barter for greater freedom, independence, and happiness. Paradoxically she knows that those qualities for a woman of respectability can be acquired only through marriage. Thus from her point of view, her relationship with Roger must culminate in marriage. According to tradition, however, she should give the appearance of being the object pursued, not the subject engaged in pursuit. From Roger's standpoint Angela is the

object. Examining her as if she were a work of art, and he a connoisseur of art, he finds her delightful, charming, resembling "an arrested movement" which "had been stopped in the swift transition from one mood to another" (122). Fauset, however, begins to experiment with the idea of equality between the sexes. Paulette Lister, another art student and friend, forewarns Angela of her increasing propensity to move from object pursued to pursuer: "When you've set your heart on anybody or anything there'll be no telling what you'll do, Angele" (127). And then as if the game becomes one of bartering, Paulette cautions Angela, "One thing, if you do start playing around with Roger be careful. He's a good bit of a rotter, and he doesn't care what he says or spends to gain his ends" (128).

Angela epitomizes the modernist heroine with a narrowly focused memory, for Paulette's advice is short-lived. Fauset manipulates time to capture the commodified emotions which Angela has for Roger: "She saw the days of the week, the months of the year in little narrow divisions of space" (128). Like the true modernist character, Angela concentrates on given moments spent with Roger. The intensity of those moments in her memory undermines comprehensiveness or rationality. She assumes that the flowers, fruit, candy, books, and reproductions of paintings he gives her are investments in the principal commodity which he will eventually acquire through marriage, "for it never occurred

to her that men bestowed attentions such as these on a passing fancy" (131).

When sexuality is viewed as a commodity, the person, even as an object, perceives of herself as having power. And that is primarily what keeps Angela involved with Roger. She is willing to flaunt her power, maintaining just the proper amount of retreat and aggression, as her more experienced friends have advised. Angela is aware of Roger's interest in sex as a commodity, of his willingness to secure her as his possession in a seven-room apartment on Seventy-second Street with a maid. She would be his exclusively to enjoy, invest in, reinvest in at his leisure. Angela would become his museum piece. Knowing Roger's interest, Angela persists in her belief that using the power of her sexuality, displayed in a scene of domesticity, she can convert Roger's pursuit of the commodity of sex into the act of marrying. Their desires are not entirely in opposition; it is only that Angela must have hers cloaked in the respectability of marriage.

Fauset employs the language of ambivalence to suggest Angela's wavering attitude in the scene culminating in intimacy between Roger and her. At the evening's beginning she is dispirited, appalled by her thoughts and longings, fearful, distraught, and tense. Yet when there is physical contact between them "her very bones turned to water" and "the air [became] charged with passion" (201, 201). Angela

succumbs to sex with Roger. Between the affairs she has periods of remorse for her behavior. Fauset's persistence in maintaining an acceptable moral stance for her character results in a philosophical and historical analysis of what the sexual act connotes. Free love as a concrete act is transposed into the abstract symbol of freedom. It is as if Fauset reaches back into history to recall that coital acts between the master and female slave were not voluntary on the slave's part, that such acts resulted in conception of the mulatto/a, that sex was indeed a commodity, and that a post-slavery mulatta such as Angela moves a step further towards freedom as a sexual being.[14]

Whereas Fauset shows steps toward sexual freedom in her manipulation of the mulatta mask in Plum Bun, Larsen seems less interested in maintaining a moral equilibrium and devotes a substantial part of Quicksand to delving into the psychological effects of commodifying sex. Larsen allows Helga Crane to retain her heritage even as she wanders in and out of the African-American world. Creating a highly

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[14] In regard to greater emphasis being placed on freedom than love in the phrase "free love," Fauset's Plum Bun exists as an entity among other texts. Intertextuality is especially observable with Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl where Linda Brent confesses to taking a white lover instead of bowing to the sexual demands of her white master. Her rationale follows: "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (55).

sexual character, Larsen makes her the object of renunciation by her first suitor's family and some of her white relatives, the object of envy and curiosity by African-American and European women, and the object of pursuit by African-American and European men. Helga's rejection causes her to grope more desperately for acceptance to the extent that she displays her sexuality through dress and deportment, thus becoming the object of envy and desire by women and men respectively.

In discussing literature and politics in Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Wintz makes the distinction between Fauset's and Larsen's novels in terms of negative and positive images and strength of characters. Wintz notes that Fauset's characters "made choices and exercised control over their lives" while Larsen "projected very negative images of women who were essentially hopeless and powerless to control their circumstances or their destinies" (211). Though there may be an element of truth in what Wintz observes, he seems to be judging the outcome of the two authors' craft without giving adequate consideration to what each author set out to represent. Wintz is less mindful that Fauset creates a passing plot in Plum Bun so that Angela initiates action and appears to have control over her life while she passes. When she discloses her African-American blood, she becomes more the object of rejection that Helga is, and thus loses the subject/doer status which

she appeared to have had previously.

Several women critics also discuss the powerlessness of Helga Crane. Deborah McDowell, in her introduction to Quicksand and Passing, sees Helga as powerless to express her own sexuality outside the confines of marriage and motherhood. The conclusion of Quicksand does appear to confirm McDowell's observation. Resignation to her fate seems to be the overwhelming emotion though dissatisfaction and pity are part of Helga's feelings in the end. Hazel Carby's essay "The Quicksands of Representation"[15] considers race, class, and gender as factors impacting Helga's power or powerlessness. Carby views Helga as a middle-class woman who uses money to gain the appearance of freedom through movement but adds that Helga is also "potentially a consumable object." Carby's succinct statement of Larsen's objective, an assertion which agrees in part with the position taken in this study, is that Larsen illustrates "the ideologies of consumerism, of capitalism, and of sexuality as being intimately connected" (173). If one reads Quicksand, however, as a critique of sex as a commodity, that is, as an object of desire, rejection, or envy, Helga's power would conceivably lie in making herself more attractive and more accessible.

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[15] Carby's essay is reprinted in one or more critical anthologies. All parenthetical citations in this study will refer to Carby's book Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the African-American Woman (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

The first rejection of Helga as a sex object comes from James Vayle's family. When Helga decides that she will leave Naxos and that leaving means severing her relationship with Vayle, her immediate thought is that his family will be relieved because they had disapproved of the engagement in the first place. His family sees Helga as a valueless commodity because of her enigmatic background. In her own analysis of the problem Helga speculates on a graver problem -- her illegitimacy. An uncanny kinship between rejection by Vayle's family and Helga's uncle becomes apparent when Helga asserts, "Negro society . . . [is] as complicated and as rigid in its ramifications as the highest strata of white society" (8). As soon as Helga reaches Chicago and decides to visit Uncle Peter, she verifies her observation about the two races' rigidity. She meets with rebuff from Peter Nilssen's new wife, who resents Helga based on race and class. Mrs. Nilssen rejects Helga not only because of her mixed heritage, but also because she suspects that Helga's mother was not legally married to Helga's father. Thus in the case of the Vayles and the Nilssens, the idea of "tainted" sex causes them to reject Helga. And when the pre-paid inheritance check arrives from Uncle Peter, with an attached note advising Helga not to "do as your mother did," the check for five thousand dollars suggests the uncle's desire to "buy" a commodity different from Helga's mother.

As a result of rejection Helga begins searching and

yearning for a constituency much like Angela Murray after her arrival in New York. Both Fauset and Larsen create modernist characters who are so alienated that they have no sense of Other in their lives and thus have less a feeling of being whole individuals than of being commodities available for consumption. Upon being turned away from her uncle's house, Helga returns to her tiny YWCA room and stands poised at her window looking down into the street at crowds of people. She moves to her doorway and finally into the crowd but never achieves a sense of belonging.[16]

Helga's restlessness and lack of immersion into African-American culture becomes more apparent when her relationship with Mrs. Hayes-Rore and her niece Anne Grey proves unsatisfying and she sails for Denmark to live with her aunt and uncle. It is obvious that here under the tutelage of the Dahls she will be the object of curiosity, envy, and exoticism. Beginning with the maid Marie, who Helga speculates had never seen "a Negro outside the pictured pages of her geography book," there are curious glances at this unusual specimen with slightly brown skin and dark hair. Helga accepts with amusement rather than resentment her special status as an object of scrutiny. For the exhibitionism she experiences here as a foreign commodity she finds temporarily satisfying; "she [gives]

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[16] The passage in Quicksand (30) describes Helga as feeling the same kind of isolation which Angela feels (Plum Bun 90, 96).

herself up wholly to the fascinating business of being seen, gaped at, desired" (74). She must surely regard herself as an object of desire when Fru Dahl begins to select bright clothes to set off the color of Helga's brown skin, dresses cut to reveal her fine back and shoulders, and shoes with higher heels and buckles to accentuate her nice legs and feet. Helga, the object of curiosity and desire, is all packaged for viewing except that Herr Dahl suggests adding long earrings, the addition of which makes Helga feel like "a veritable savage."

In spite of being the center of attention within the Dahls' social coterie, Helga remains a marginal figure. The women admire her without feeling jealous; the "cut down" dress, the barbaric jewelry, the excessive rouge make her an attractive, exotic commodity, but not a woman to threaten their status (70). Axel Olsen's scrutiny of Helga further marginalizes her from the Scandinavian crowd:

> For an imperceptible second he bent over her hand. After that he looked intently at her for what seemed <u>to her</u> an incredibly rude length of time from his heavy drooping lids. At last, removing his stare of startled satisfaction, he wagged his <u>leonine</u> head approvingly (71). [emphasis mine]

The preceding description of Olsen's reaction is Helga's perception of how he views her. The ambivalence of the scene reflects both Helga's feeling that she is assessable

and her resentment that Olsen shows so much power in his scrutiny of her. As an artist Olsen assesses Helga's suitability as a subject for his work, making her no less a consumable object. In all instances she seems excluded from the majority. She is a fascinating object with very conspicuous differences.

The restlessness which Helga experiences after a year in Denmark derives from the lack of fulfillment she feels in the European culture, where she is the focus of a cultural group but is not a part of that culture. For twelve months she the exotic creature has been on display, and her aunt suggests marriage as a satisfactory finale. But Helga is not ready for such a form of capitulation. Perhaps she recalls her uncle's advice: "Don't do as your mother did." Here Larsen employs a genealogical trope similar to Fauset's. Helga is the product of a union between a European, or possibly a Euro-American, mother and a West Indian Negro father. The trope seen here is irony. In order to follow Uncle Peter's advice, Helga, a mulatta with dominant Negroid features, would have to avoid marrying a European. Helga remains that object being pursued for the gratification of others. The Dahls want to use her as bait to capture Olsen and establish for themselves a closer connection with the artistic world. For Olsen himself she would be the exotic subject for his art, which he could

secure by making Helga his mistress.[17]

Helga Crane typifies the modernist character who has gradual but limited insight into her actual needs. The frenetic activity which takes her back and forth in the South, Chicago, Harlem, and Denmark alerts her to the need to become immersed in a culture. She has not found the source of real satisfaction, but, like a mad scientist, she laboriously seeks out those "diseased" areas which are most damaging to her psyche. Her parting remarks to Olsen are quite revealing: "But you see, Herr Olsen, I am not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't care at all to be owned. Even by you" (87).

Although Helga knows that marriage to Olsen would not be expedient, she cannot discern what constitutes the proper amount of control and order in her life. She returns to New York and immerses herself in African-American culture. When she stumbles into a pentecostal church service, the self-righteousness of the Reverend Pleasant Green and his parishioners prompts them to regard her as a wayward woman desiring to be saved. A seemingly religious conversion catapults her into an affair with the minister, for which

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[17] Strong resemblances exist between Fauset's novel and Larsen's in terms of their treatment of interracial affairs. Angela Murray in Plum Bun pursues Roger for a marriage when he wants her only as his mistress. In Quicksand Helga is the object of Axel's pursuit, primarily to be his mistress. Whether the mulatta is the object of pursuit or the pursuer in interracial relationships, both authors posit the idea of moral standards lower than those within the race.

she must atone by immediately becoming married to him. They return to his native home in the South. As the wife of a nearly illiterate southern minister she is not only the object of desire, but also the object of envy by the women parishioners. Helga believes that she will be a leader and teacher of the women -- practicing racial uplift. But her light skin and generally sophisticated appearance alienate her from the women who call her an "uppity" northerner. Ironically they are the ones who ultimately mold Helga into the proper commodity for bearing many children and acquiring the strength to care for them, her house and garden, and for meeting the needs of her husband. Indeed, she does become a consumable commodity.

Larsen explores the expression of female desire beyond the point imagined in a novel of the 1920s. Calling attention to the frustration and alienation of the African-American woman, especially one of middle-class status, she flouts the conventions of her time. Larsen searches psychological depths to expose the dialectics of order and disorder, control and laxity, perception and myopia, which pervade the mind and shape the behavior of the African-American woman. Yet she provides no definitive answers. Her critics question the ending of Quicksand. Having exposed the marginality of the mulatta and her unwillingness to conform, Larsen leaves Helga in a state of ambivalence about her future yet about to bear her fifth child.

Does Larsen, in her progressiveness, show the repression of sexuality and the commodification of sex and then retrogress in depicting Helga as a poverty-ridden wife and mother whom provincial mores and fundamentalist religion constrict? Hazel Carby concludes that the novel offers "few avenues of resolution." She notes Larsen's exploration and rejection of Europe as an alternative to the United States and the mulatta's disdain for a "despised social group" but her inability to live in a white world. Most notably Carby sees the novel as a negative representation of "the folk," and thus a rejection of the folk tradition as an alternative to the urban elite (174). Mary Helen Washington poses a rhetorical question pertaining to Larsen's literary career itself, but more pointedly the question directs the reader's attention towards the problematic ending of Quicksand. Washington asks:

> Why didn't she leave us the greater legacy of the mature model, the perception of a woman who confronts pain, alienation, and isolation, and grapples with these conundrums until new insight has been forged from the struggle (Invented Lives 165)?

While it is true that Larsen provides few resolutions to the problems surrounding Helga's ambivalent nature, and while it may be valid to ask why Larsen stopped short of creating a character strong enough to grapple with and overcome

alienation and isolation, it is also true that Helga epitomizes the African-American modernist character. Helga Crane the mulatta strikes a fitting pose for the problems of female sexuality, she calls attention to the ambivalences in order and control in asserting one's sexual identity, and she empowers race and gender by her position as protagonist.

Larsen points to an aspect of African-American women's writing which she was only able to explore, but she leaves a legacy for other writers, a legacy best articulated in Helga's mental monologue at the end of Quicksand. The scene shows Helga physically bound to her bed yet dreaming of a ubiquitous future free from the oppression and degradation of her present life:

> It was so easy and pleasant to think about freedom and cities . . . . It was so hard to think out a feasible way of retrieving all these agreeable, desired things. Just then. Later. When she got up. By and by. She must rest. Get strong. Sleep. Then, afterward, she could work out some arrangement. So she dozed and dreamed in snatches of sleeping and waking, letting time run on. Away (135).

Helga's allusions to the future are indicative of Larsen's anticipation of greater freedom for writers who succeed her.

Just as Fauset and Larsen are less inclined than Harper to concern themselves with racial uplift and morality as a

female virtue, so do successors to these two Harlem Renaissance writers show less inclination to mask female desire. One of the writers for whom Fauset and Larsen provide space for greater exploration of female sexuality is Zora Neale Hurston as seen in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Hurston diminishes Janie's mulatta status through the portrayal of a character immersing herself in African-American culture. Also, Hurston places less significance on marriage for the legitimizing of sex and employs symbols for sexual passion compatible with her lyrical style.

Critics who see all African-American women writers prior to Hurston romanticizing the mulatta run the risk of overgeneralizing and of engaging in a superficial analysis of those works.[18] The mulatta, as has been discussed in this study, becomes an African-American modernist strategy for Fauset and Larsen. She represents the woman -- racially oppressed, socially marginalized, and sexually frustrated and repressed. Hurston's novel nearly a decade later employs a more direct approach as it celebrates what Cheryl Wall calls "the creativity and complexity of Afro-Americans that signal the survival of the human spirit despite

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[18] See Vashti Crutcher Lewis, "The Declining Significance of the Mulatto Female as Major Character in the Novels of Zora Neale Hurston, College Language Association Journal XXVIII (December 1984) 127-149; Hiroko Sato, "Under the Harlem Shadow: A Study of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen," in The Harlem Renaissance Remembered ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), 63-89.

oppression" (The Gender of Modernism 173).

This is not to suggest that Hurston entirely solves the problems related to female sexuality. Initially Janie, like the protagonists in Plum Bun and Quicksand, sees marriage as the passage to experiencing love.[19] The differences lie in how the authors in all three instances sustain and/or dispel the myths related to sexuality. Janie marries three times, the first arranged by her grandmother to Logan Killicks to legitimize sex and to provide financial security. But Hurston allows Janie to grow to the realization that Killicks regards her as a commodity, more for material gain than for sexual desire. He signifies on her family, orders her to work, and accuses her of infidelity. When she flings off the apron and sets out to meet Jody Starks, the apron symbolizes Janie's break with

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[19] Fauset, Larsen, and Hurston have their protagonists express a nearly identical belief that love, if not present before marriage, will follow the legal ceremony. The notion suggests to me how drastic an effect Western mores have on the shaping of emotions. In Plum Bun Angela, anticipating marriage to Roger for security, thinks, "Well, anyway, if they married she would probably come to love him; most women learned to love their husbands" (130). Helga, in Quicksand, contemplates breaking her engagement to James Vayle. She, too, reflects, "Certainly she had never loved him overwhelmingly . . . but she had liked him, and she had expected to love him, after their marriage. People generally did love then, she imagined" (24). And finally in Their Eyes, Janie comforts herself with a similar thought prior to marrying Logan Killicks whom Nanny secures for Janie: "Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant" (38).

Killicks's domestic domination. She marries again before sundown without the legal benefit of divorce. Her growth, however, is not complete because she accepts the idealized position in which Jody places her, isolating her from the people. In such a position Janie becomes an object of desire by the men and of envy by the women.

The structure of Hurston's novel allows the reader to see Janie's development from adolescence to maturity. And though the maturation process spans three marriages, Janie achieves self-identity and a greater degree of parity only in her third marriage with Tea Cake. Robert Hemenway, Hurston's literary biographer, contrasts Tea Cake's acceptance of Janie with her first and second husbands' domination and elitism: "Without the hypocrisy and the role-playing that characterized her other marriages, this love is strong enough to make both parties open and giving" (233). The hypocrisy and role-playing which Hemenway observes in Janie's first two marriages are the same traits which dominate the lives of the characters in Plum Bun and Quicksand. For Angela Murray and Helga Crane, class and racial bias, moral restraint, and sexual inhibitions conflate to form an image of female sexuality as an irrepressible state always to be subdued. Hurston takes a more straightforward approach.

First, although Janie is a mulatta, her immersion in folk culture lessens the importance of her mulatta status.

The early scenes in Their Eyes are very much like opening scenes in Plum Bun in that both novels provide background on the mulatta's early life. Angela is reared in a middle-class urban environment whereas Janie comes from a poor rural background and is left to be raised primarily by her grandmother. Nanny's main goal is to halt the sexual abuse of the third generation of women in her family by having Janie legally married and financially secure. Having told Janie the history of her family, Nanny makes a final plea: "And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you: Have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate" (37). Janie now knows that Nanny's slavemaster used her "for a wood-ox and a brood-sow" and when Leafy, Janie's mother, was born, the wife of the slaveowner had Nanny beaten. Further, Janie knows that the colored schoolteacher raped her mother, Leafy, and Janie was born of that forced union. So Janie takes the knowledge of her heritage and Nanny's advice that "us colored folks is branches without roots" (31) and goes off to find happiness wherever it lurks. Her mulatta status counts for little in such a folk culture.

Secondly, Hurston uses the folk environment -- Nanny's oral history lesson and nature -- to teach Janie about female sexuality. Janie is unlike Angela and Virginia Murray whose middle-class status compels them as young women to lie in their "virginal beds" with headboards touching

adjacent walls groping for a respectable expression of their sexuality. Nor is Janie like Helga Crane who dresses in sensual clothing and immerses herself in a sensuous but isolated environment much in the manner of one practicing transvestism. Instead, Janie's first teacher is nature. She is only sixteen years old when she begins to spend her leisure time in the back-yard under a blossoming pear tree. Unlike the voyeurism in which Angela engages, Janie's gaze on the "dust-bearing bee sink[ing] into the sanctum of a bloom" results in her first orgasm (24). She is figuratively a pear tree in bloom, and it is Nanny who observes the change.

Having observed the change, Nanny invokes her own plan for order and control, a plan which does not necessarily mesh with Janie's own plan. In her essay "Change, Chance, and God in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God," critic Joyce Ann Joyce sees all aspects of the novel being influenced by Hurston's skill as a creative writer and a behavioral scientist. Joyce explains the conjunctive forces of nature and human behavior at work in Hurston's novel to shape Janie's character and her pragmatic attitude towards God. Joyce writes,

> Hurston merges her use of nature to represent change and her use of the horizon to indicate Janie's willingness to let chance control her life. For Hurston demonstrates how the cycle of

> human existence follows the same pattern of caprice, unpredictability and transience as the cycle of nature (74).

Janie's communion with nature enlightens her about human nature. She watches the bees pollinate the pear tree blossoms in her back-yard. Conversely, Janie herself collects knowledge and stores it to use in her multiple relationships. As Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake change, so does Janie's vision of what will empower her. Janie's behavior does not reflect the equivocation which characterizes the sexuality of Angela Murray and Helga Crane.

Hurston makes use of a folk culture in Their Eyes to create a panoramic view of woman's sexuality in complete opposition with masking. She depicts female sexual expression at times pathetic and tragic, at other times innocent and compromising, but finally celebratory and instructive. Hurston wrote Their Eyes nearly a decade after Fauset wrote Plum Bun and Larsen wrote Quicksand. Robert Hemenway's observation in "The Personal Dimension in Their Eyes Were Watching God" seems valid regarding the impact of white patronage. Noting that Hurston wrote under private patronage from 1925 until 1932, Hemenway contrasts the mediocrity of her earlier works with the brilliance of Their Eyes, published in 1937 (32-33). To take Hemenway's point a step further, I would suggest that if Their Eyes had been

written under private patronage, Hurston might have been forced to mask sexuality to as great an extent as Fauset or Larsen masked it.

An increased feminine sensibility has resulted in a continuum of women's writing -- Iola Leroy, Plum Bun, Quicksand, and Their Eyes Were Watching God -- which reflects a gradual release from the strictures of slavery and the preoccupation with racial uplift. This continuum of works reflects a trend away from the strict code of morality set by white culture and a trend towards immersion within the African-American culture, thus promoting a more wholesome outlook upon and practice of female sexuality.

CHAPTER III. Female Subjectivity Through Material Consumption: African-American Modernism's Resistance to Patriarchy in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree

> Tonight she was to go out with Roger. She wore her flame-coloured dress again; a pretty green one was also hanging up in her closet, but she wore the flame one because it lighted her up from within -- lighted not only her lovely, fine body but her mind too.
>
> --Jessie Fauset
> Plum Bun

> Beyond in the next room Laurentine's lovely fingers were flashing in and out of lengths of gorgeous shades of silk, georgette and velvet while she directed Mattie Gathers and Johnasteen Stede, her assistants.
>
> --Jessie Fauset
> The Chinaberry Tree

Jessie Fauset created scenes such as the two above throughout her novels, but the trend seems most prevalent in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree. Interwoven in a scene depicting a wardrobe selection is Fauset's suggestion that her character is also making decisions about her life. She is mapping out mental strategies for dealing with shades of difference in human relations as well. And the industriousness called up in the second scene points to the displaced woman's need to survive at her own hand and to display talent and aesthetics while she does. Critics have too frequently looked at descriptions of Fauset's female characters and concluded that the author was only interested in depicting middle-class life and race problems occurring

within that group. Making a connection between Fauset and Toomer, who published Cane in 1923, J. Saunders Redding attributes Fauset's decision to portray a different level of society to her being a woman and "a little shocked" at the kind of people Toomer revealed in Cane (106). Although Walter White wrote Flight in 1926, Redding does not explore the reason White treated the southern bourgeoisie in his novel, nor does Redding contrast White with Toomer. Hugh Gloster sees Fauset's novels illustrating "that bourgeois Negroes are interesting subjects for literary treatment"; however, Gloster does recognize that Fauset goes further to illustrate that women and women's issues deserve attention too. Gloster calls The Chinaberry Tree "a modern analogue to Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter" (136). Edwin Burgum, a reviewer of The Chinaberry Tree, concentrates on plot weaknesses of the novel and gives no importance to Fauset's description of material possessions. Rather indifferently, Burgum writes, "One puts aside the occasional infelicities of diction in which clothes and table linen are described in the savory cliches of department store advertisements" (88). The tone in which the reviewer dismisses Fauset's treatment of clothes and household decor suggests that he, like Redding, sees any deviation from male forms of discourse as female writers' shortcomings.

Rather than being regarded as a writer's shortcoming, such a deviation results in female subjectivity, which is a

way to resist patriarchy. Broadly defined, female subjectivity means having the narrative, the characterization, and setting evolve from a woman's perspective. This is especially important in a patriarchal society where standards for canon formation and criticism descend from the "male line." It is even more significant for African-American women writers who labor under the additional constraint of projecting a positive image of the African-American woman. Appropriately, critic Mae Henderson discusses what constitutes African-American female subjectivity as "black women speak[ing] from a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality" ("Speaking in Tongues" 19). Because of the impact of race and gender, writers such as Fauset, and, to a degree, predecessors such as Frances E. W. Harper, devised a strategy for voicing their own values and their history.

The strategy is well-grounded in that Fauset herself was a modern middle-class woman who, according to her biographer Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, delighted in "cultural soirees" and enjoyed repeated trips to Europe and Africa (68, 79). Fauset's personal correspondence attests to her fondness for stylish clothing, quality food and drink, and sophisticated outings. In a letter to Harold Jackman, a member of the Harlem Renaissance literati, Fauset wrote from Paris, France in 1924 of spoiling her best hat, "a Parisian one," in the grey rainy weather so typical of the region.

In the same letter she wrote in detail of her social life there: attending teas, drinking aperitifs in the Montmartre cafes, going to cabarets, or, as she described it, to a "dansant" or a "bal."[20] Such glimpses into Fauset's personal life reveal the close relationship of the author's dreams and ideals with those expressed in her novels. Though there is no attempt here to call Fauset's work autobiographical, what is suggested is that the dramatically conceived characters in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree bear a strong similarity to the author and, therefore, constitute a form of subjectivity.

Fauset reveals kinship to African-American writers who precede her in that she is always mindful of the role of history in thematic influence, in characterization, and in formal qualities. Critics who find fault with any one of these aspects of Fauset's craft owe it to themselves to examine more closely what she attempts to accomplish. It is true that she handles racism rather delicately, that she experiments with passing, that she focuses on the middle-class almost exclusively, and that she creates parallel plots which contribute to an array of characters. Though not flawless in controlling such a literary juggling act, Fauset emerges with a view of women from a woman's perspec-

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[20] Jessie Fauset, letter to Harold Jackman, 21 December 1924, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

tive. She critiques the sexist and racist ideologies of the society in which women must live and function and even projects, though modestly or subversively, how women will cope with those negative forces: through intimacy with other women and through career ambitions in lieu of/along with marriage. Couched beneath the concrete, material interests which abound in the two novels is the theme of two abstract but significant qualities for which Fauset's women grope -- respectability and freedom.

The excerpts from Fauset's novels which serve as the epigraph to this chapter of my study disprove the theory of critics such as Redding, Gloster, and Burgum who hold that Fauset's novels are mere treatises on race with minimal traces of propaganda. As in the case of female sexuality, Fauset uses the mulatta's preoccupation with material wealth and physical property to mask her critique of sexist ideology and her advocacy of community among women and career ambitions for women. What becomes problematic is Fauset's tendency to reflect at times more of the mainstream modernist trend towards elitism, which undercuts the resistance to patriarchy. Because Fauset focuses on the middle- and upper-class woman, class tends to marginalize other dispossessed women who grope for respectability and freedom.

Neither Fauset nor Harper her predecessor seemed able to completely remove herself from the grip of patriarchy, a

residual force from slavery. In Iola Leroy, Dr. Gresham, though taken aback by the knowledge that Iola has mixed blood, presumes that he will marry her and take her away to the North where her heritage will be least likely discovered. Gresham's presumptuousness derives not only from his love for Iola, but also from his status as a white doctor. He would be able to support Iola and more likely suppress any information regarding her heritage. Because Harper's primary concern is with racial uplift, she does not allow Iola to marry Gresham and desert her people by leaving the South. In a subversive manner Harper attempts to resist white patriarchy.

Notwithstanding the mild resistance in Iola's refusal, Harper recalls the history of Iola's mother Marie. Eugene Leroy, a dissipated white youth falls in love with Marie, his mulatta nurse. Grateful for her care and wanting to marry her, he first sends her away to the North to be educated. He returns to Marie's graduation, proposes to her, and receives applause from her classmates who are happy that Marie will become "the wife of her guardian" for she "had been deprived of a parent's love and care" (76). Though he incurs disfavor from his friends, Leroy marries Marie, making her "the mistress of his home" and the owner of the family silver and jewelry (76). Harper mentions such material gains as if they were antithetical to the status of a woman, to be sure, a woman of mixed blood.

Though the unfolding of the story becomes melodramatic, Harper shows her opposition to the possession of material wealth at the expense of freedom. Marie can experience only momentary happiness as the wife of a white slave-holder. The notion constantly haunts her that she and her children would be remanded to slavery if her husband should die first. She continuously questions Leroy regarding the legitimacy of his will and their marriage certificate. She does not trust Alfred Lorraine, Leroy's only close relative. The unrest undermines her happiness in a marriage where she has servants and an otherwise upper-class life style.

The Biblical allusion to "the sins of their fathers" becomes a theme in Iola Leroy and later in The Chinaberry Tree. It disrupts family, reverses freedom and enslavement, and devalues material wealth. Harper's concern for racial uplift is dramatized in the tragedy which befalls Iola's parents and Iola herself. Although Leroy can well afford to send Iola and her brother north to boarding school, he does it primarily because their mixed blood isolates them from community and because he wants to spare them, as children, of that knowledge. Neither Iola nor her brother ever forms an intimate relationship with their father. And their own freedom is so tenuous that Iola is unable to see that her father's owning slaves is wrong. In a discussion with a classmate, Iola represents the race politics of the South and her classmate, the northern view. Iola argues that many

of the slaves would not elect to be free if freedom were offered and that northern abolitionists only wanted to take the southerners' property. A counter position is manifest in the question the northerner poses to Iola: "Would you be satisfied to have the most beautiful home, the costliest jewels, or the most elegant wardrobe if you were a slave?" (97)

The resistance to patriarchy in Harper's novel is connected with race. She minimizes the happiness which Marie can experience in a marriage with Leroy, a white slave-holder. And their children must pay an even dearer price. True to Marie's suspicions, she and her children are remanded into slavery upon her husband's sudden death. Iola realizes the meaning of freedom only when she is reduced to the status of a slave. Whatever wealth she and her family possessed had descended from her white father; they were no longer entitled to such properties. Iola can, subsequently, realign her life as a colored woman, become a teacher, marry, and work for racial uplift. Harper thus emphasizes the need to be free economically as well as socially and politically.

Marrying within her race and becoming a teacher and an advocate of race empowerment places Iola at the beginning of a spectrum of cultured women including those in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree and Dorothy West's novel The Living Is Easy. Materialism in works by male writers frequently

proves to be negative. Male writers, creative and critical, see the display of material wealth as the aping of European culture. For instance, Rudolph Fisher's The Walls of Jericho and Claude McKay's Home to Harlem, both published in 1928, are proletarian novels. Though Fisher himself was a member of the middle-class, his novel is a satire of middle-class values and relationships between the races. John McCluskey's critical introduction to Fisher's collected short stories recalls the disillusionment DuBois felt over the brief glimpses which The Walls of Jericho gives to the "better class of Negroes" (xxix). Likewise, McKay depicts the working-class Harlem community in their relationships at work on the docks or in their social life in the saloons, pool halls, and cabarets. Jake, the protagonist in Home to Harlem, becomes the prototype of the radical "new Negro." Although some critics would contest the yoking of McKay and Fauset, it is possible for Fauset's female protagonists in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree to share with Jake the distinction of being called the radical "new Negro." Commentaries on the cover of the new edition of Home to Harlem from The Northeastern Library of Black Literature and Wayne F. Cooper's foreword contain the following descriptions: ". . . this classic novel gives voice to the alienation and frustration of urban blacks during an era when Harlem was in vogue"; ". . . McKay expressed with great clarity and vigor his race's deepest emotions as an

alienated, besieged, and tormented minority within Western civilization." In other words, McKay exercises a male working-class subjectivity and shows resistance to the influences of a white patriarchy. The tributes paid to McKay for his accomplishments could be applicable to Fauset and her novels if critics extended gender and class to include middle-class women.

At least one critic sees a historical connection between authors and the importance they give to materialism. In Afro-American Literature of the Twentieth Century Michael Cooke posits the theory that access to political power replaced access to possessions and comfort and luxury. Cooke further theorizes that materialism was prevalent when literary authors practiced self-veiling, but as authors moved toward self-discovery, materialism became less widespread. He cites Fauset as the author most tenacious in holding on to materialism and Hurston as the author moving towards self-discovery (74). However categorical Cooke may seem in his discussion of materialism, he does show awareness of an author's underlying motivation. He writes, ". . . where the environment threatened annihilation at every turn, to veil the inner self and invest in material facades was at least to be responsible for decision and action" (62). For Fauset, responsibility for decision and action translates into a female subjectivity using material consumption to dramatize women's concerns.

The mulatta's interest in material possessions in both of Fauset's novels is connected with male ancestry, and the careful reader detects Fauset's subtle and gradual resistance to it. The opening scene of The Chinaberry Tree proclaims the direct influence of white patriarchy, whereas Plum Bun alludes to it through generational differences. The two generations of the Murray family have disparate views of material possessions. Mattie regards her house on Opal Street, her weekly forays into Philadelphia's better department stores, and the ownership of a private automobile as adequate barriers to the racism and poverty which she had experienced earlier in her life. She defers readily to her husband Junius for rescuing her from the racist, sexist ordeals of her single life. Angela, on the other hand, relates a good life with access to "broad thoroughfares, large, bright houses, delicate niceties of existence" (12), which far exceed the minimal accumulations of her parents. Angela observes that substantial wealth is only accessible to white people, and complete freedom, therefore, lies within the white race. Unlike Iola, who refuses to sacrifice freedom for material gain, Angela believes that she must resist the influence of her father and seek freedom and happiness outside her own culture.

Clearly Fauset is using material consumption to mask her critique of the sexist and racist ideologies of her time. The parallel plots in Plum Bun explain the difficulty

which women such as Angela have in resisting white patriarchal influence. Angela's belief that "the great rewards of life -- riches, glamour, pleasure, -- are for white-skinned people only" (16) emanates from her weekend escapades with her mother in Philadelphia to Chestnut Street, to Wanamaker's, to the Bellevue Stratford. The description of mother and daughter in these scenes reflects ambivalence on race and gender matters. Fauset seems to give the nod to temporary passing in having the third-person omniscient narrator explain that Mattie Murray's forays into downtown Philadelphia are a respite from the domestic duties required of her during the week. The sexist custom of assigning housewives the drudgery of Monday washdays, followed by special days for ironing, scrubbing and sewing children's clothes could be offset by a day to fantasize in department stores, hotel lobbies, and tea rooms. Repeatedly, however, the narration of Mattie's weekend activities includes terms such as "innocent," "childish," "harmless," and "without malice or envy" (16). Mattie becomes in these instances the young mindless, slavish figure who emulates white customs without understanding the importance of her action. Yet Fauset makes her responsible as seen in the deceptive reasoning which Angela derives from her mother's behavior. "It was from her mother that Angela learned the possibilities for joy and freedom which seemed to her inherent in mere whiteness" (16).

The themes of respectability and freedom develop concurrently in Plum Bun. Fauset shows the two generations -- mother and daughter -- yoked together in pursuing, through "passing," a respectable lifestyle. Yet, she points out the irony of the situation and the absence of freedom in the fact that skin color splits the family in half. Junius and Virginia must seek respectability through another means. The formal divisions of the novel emphasize this point. Fauset devotes two lengthy paragraphs to Mattie and Angela's explorations in the modern, material, white world while Junius and Virginia explore the old, historical Philadelphia. Fauset notes the divisiveness of the two environments and subsequent split of the family in a brief one-sentence paragraph juxtaposing the two longer paragraphs: "Much of this pleasure, harmless and charming though it was, would have been impossible with a dark skin" (16). She points to the racism which breeds this divisiveness and Angela's misconceived viewpoint later in the novel: "The daughter could not guess that if economic status or the racial genius of coloured people had permitted them to run modish hotels or vast and popular department stores her mother would have been there" (17). Fauset posits the idea that freedom to enjoy the finer things in life is what Mattie Murray seeks and not association with white people.

Yet Angela's imperception of her mother's search for

freedom and respect leaves the daughter in a confused state. She rejects all aspects of her family tradition except those which suggest luxury and material prosperity. She minimizes the value of going to church, equating it in importance with the Saturday outings in that she "liked the luxuriousness of being 'dressed up' on two successive days." She resists the Sunday rituals, "thinking this was a stupid way to spend Sunday and wondering at just what period of one's life existence began to shape itself as you wanted it" (22). Through Angela's contrary feelings about family and religion, Fauset posits misgivings about the patriarchy undergirding the Murrays' religious practices. Junius, according to Angela's perception, imagines that only through divine intervention was he, "a poor boy, homeless, a nobody," able to become "a respectable citizen, house-owner, a good provider" to his family. The status which Junius views as prosperous is negligible compared with the wealth Angela sees in downtown Philadelphia. The disparity not only causes her to be cynical, but also leads her to the conclusion that "coloured people were to be considered fortunate only in the proportion in which they measured up to the physical standards of white people" (18). Angela then, unlike her mother, is not content to pass temporarily. Instead, she ponders joining the race she believes will bring her "the greatest happiness, prosperity and respect" (80).

There is a recess in Angela's determination to find a greater freedom with another race when she begins to enjoy economic independence in a fledgling career as a teacher. Although both she and her sister are teaching in segregated schools in Philadelphia, Angela's temporary state of contentment lends credence to Fauset's ideological stance that African-Americans want less to be with white society than to enjoy an equal amount of prosperity. The tension between the two generations decreases when Angela's and Jinny's work puts them on a more equal plane with other job-holding adults. The narrator notes, "The Saturday excursions were long since a thing of the past; Henry Ford had changed that" (56). It is as if Fauset brings the Murrays into modern society with the automobile. No longer do Angela and her mother, using their mulatta status to advantage, go into a dream world of wealth and upper class which Junius and Jinny cannot share. Having a car of their own reunites family and gives them access to more expansive portions of society. "They rode out Jefferson Street and far, far out Ridge Avenue to the Wissahickon and on to Chestnut Hill" (52). Though the Murrays are not affluent enough to live in such areas, the car at least allows the entire family to explore without masking their color. The euphoria which only Mattie and Angela once felt now pervades the entire household: "They came back [from the car rides] laughing and happy and pardonably proud. The dense, tender

glow of the late afternoon September sun flooded the little parlor, the dining-room was dusky and the kitchen was redolent of scents of ginger bread and spiced preserves" (52).

Fauset seems careful, however, to contrast the domestic tranquillity of the Murray family with their failure to participate fully in the American dream. She still sees the need to call attention to the business and social establishments which separated the races. She emphasizes Mattie's and Angela's ambivalence about their position in society so that their contentment fluctuates. An intimacy between mother and daughter replaces the tension which existed earlier. Ironically they lapse into the same kind of activity:

> Still there were times when Angela in search of a new frock or intent on the exploration of a picture gallery asked her mother to accompany her. And at such times the two indulged in their former custom of having tea and a comfortable hour's chat in the luxurious comfort of some exclusive tearoom or hotel. Mattie . . . still responded joyously to the call of fashion and grooming, the air of "good living" which pervades these places. Moreover she herself was able to contribute to this atmosphere. Her daughters insisted on presenting her with the graceful and dainty

clothes which she loved . . . (56). [emphasis mine]

Fauset conveys the impression that in spite of the Murrays' rise in status they remain outside the economic and social milieu of the white upper-class. In order to enjoy certain comforts outside their home and car, they must re-enter the world of white hotels, restaurants, and art galleries. And these facilities were open to the Murrays only if they appeared to be white. Only Mattie Murray and her daughter Angela can indulge in the temporary passing. Clearly Fauset is using both mulatta characters here to criticize a culture which marginalizes women, African-American women more especially, to the extent that they seek satisfaction in material consumption. Deborah McDowell summarizes, from a feminist's point of view, how Fauset makes clear in her novels the antagonism towards African-American women. McDowell notes that Fauset "criticiz[es] the American society which has institutionalized prejudice, safeguarded it by law and public attitude, and in general, denied the freedom of development, the right to well-being, and the pursuit of happiness to the black woman" ("The Neglected Dimension of Jessie Redmon Fauset" 87). In essence, McDowell sees Fauset questioning the politics of the 1920s society pertaining to the treatment of African-American

women.[21]

Fauset's own race and sex ideology was instrumental in the crafting of her novels to reflect the alienation and frustration of women common in modernist fiction but primarily to depict the struggles toward freedom and respectability for African-American women. For this reason, in Plum Bun Fauset characterizes Angela as highly ambivalent in her search for freedom. Initially she intimates from her mother's pursuits that "joy and freedom [are] inherent in mere whiteness" (14). Later as her family moves closer to the white race in economic status, she becomes less restless, though still ambivalent: "Life was pretty humdrum, but it was comfortable and pleasant. . . . [S]he was seeing enough of a larger, freer world to make her chafe less at the restrictions which somehow seemed to bind in her own group" (57). By this time the colored school district has appointed Angela as a teacher, "a lady-like, respectable position." She is "able to have pretty clothes" and

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[21] Fauset's work with The Crisis and with the NAACP overall suggests that she was aware of the exclusion of African-American women from the women's rights movement. Contemporary history scholars note that discrimination against women of color who advocated reform was widespread. See Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination Against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920" in The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images, 17-27 ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat P, 1978). Plum Bun becomes a convenient vehicle for Fauset to mask, through material consumption, her protest of the lack of opportunity for meaningful work for African-American women.

"draw[s] an appreciably adequate and steady salary" (49). Her salary allows her to study art at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts where most of the students are white. The temporary contentment that Angela experiences results from a middle-class status which situates her on the periphery of white society.

Fauset appears to voice her own beliefs about middle-class African-Americans being on the border of, yet outside the circle of, freedom and prosperity which white people enjoy. As she moves Angela closer to deciding to "pass," Fauset figuratively makes Angela a mouthpiece for minority women in the arts:

> "Why should I shut myself off from all the things I want most, -- clever people, people who do things, Art, -- " her voice spelt it with a capital, -- "travel and a lot of things which are in the world for everybody really but which only white people, as far as I can see, get their hands on. I mean scholarships and special funds, patronage" (78).

Aware that people of means get ahead more quickly and with greater ease,[22] Fauset justifies the transition in the

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[22] In a letter to Harold Jackman, Fauset wrote from Paris in December 1924 of the French people's comparative freedom yet fear of poverty. She reveals her appreciation for her own economic comfort when she writes: " . . . if one doesn't have to dread shortness of funds etc., it is just heaven. Particularly for one of us,- but I should hate to be genuinely poor and have to

novel where Angela breaks with her heritage and passes for white in order to participate in the arts and live a "freer" life. This defensive conversation between Angela and her sister looks back to the loss of patronage, so to speak, which Angela experiences from Mr. Shields, instructor at the art academy, and Mrs. Shields when they learn from Esther Bayliss that Angela is colored. The Shields' had painted an optimistic picture for one of their students: possibilities of scholarships, becoming director of drawing in one of the local schools or buyer for art in a department store, travel to Europe, and exposure to liberal-minded people in the artistic world. They had seen talent in Angela, who "possessed an undeniable air, . . . dressed well, even superlatively" (64). In announcing her decision to pass, Angela nearly mimics Mr. Shields who cites the advantages in the art profession for a white woman. Also, the conversation looks ahead to Angela's final disillusionment before she announces publicly that she, like Anthony Cross and Rachel Powell, is colored. Prompted by Rachel's denial of an art scholarship and a travel grant to France because she is obviously colored, Angela's announcement compels her to give up the grant as well. It is as if Fauset were saying, through Angela's decision, "Certain artistic talents are marketable if packaged in acceptable coverings; and certain commodities as dear as freedom and respectability

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live in Paris or anywhere in France for that matter."

are attainable if one has the proper appearance."

At the same time that materialism in Plum Bun masks the author's objection to racist and sexist ideologies, it provides insight into intimacy and community among women as an inroad to freedom. Fauset situates her character so that in her changed role as a young woman passing for white she observes the rapid pace of New York life, the remoteness of people and places, and the independence and assuredness of masses of strangers. She perceives Fifth Avenue as a canyon, which intensifies her feeling of isolation. Such a modern milieu makes Angela less eager for independence and wealth and more aware of her loneliness and the need for friendship. Ironically Angela's desire for intimacy becomes her primary reason for enrolling in a college art class. More than anything else, she anticipates meeting pleasant people with whom she can take lunch or tea.

Angela becomes a medium for Fauset to analyze the intimacy between women as contrasted with female/male relationships as well as intimacy between women of different racial backgrounds. Fauset's manipulation of material consumption makes both distinctions obvious. Soon after Angela's arrival in New York she wanders into Harlem, observing the crowds of people of various complexions. One brown woman "dressed as exquisitely as anyone she had seen on Fifth Avenue" and a man with an artist's face convince Angela that not all of the residents of Harlem are servants

or people with other menial jobs. She counters her observation with the thought that even though the man may be an artist of sorts, their artistic goals are different. Further, she deduces that people in the arts in Harlem are not as free as those in the rest of New York: "In all material, even in practical things these two worlds [are] alike, but in the production, the fostering of those ultimate manifestations, this world [is] lacking, for its people [are] without the means or the leisure to support them [the arts] and enjoy them" (97). In her search for intimacy, Angela notes the presence of material prosperity and people with artistic inclinations but rejects Harlem as her world because she believes there are not enough people, middle-class to be sure, to appreciate and support the arts. Angela's observations and conclusions about Harlem result from a kind of mental re-immersion in her own culture. The effect is her decision to remain physically in the white world which she perceives to offer the greater freedom.

Fauset shows further resistance to patriarchy by establishing intimacy between two women of different races. Angela seeks a friendship with fellow art student Paulette because Paulette seems generous and capable and because Angela wants to "know something more about these people with whom she [is] spending her life" (102). Although unaware of Angela's passing, Paulette needs a closer relationship with other women, assuring herself that she "could have a gang of

men." The two women establish their friendship over dinner for two. While Paulette prepares the meal Angela gets a self-education in her new culture by examining the contents of Paulette's apartment. The anomalous structure and contents of the apartment suggest to Angela the contrasts in Paulette's philosophy of life:

> The front room was . . . the bedroom, [containing] a dressing-table and a wide, flat divan about one foot and a half from the floor, covered with black or purple velvet. The dressing-table was a good piece of mahogany, but the chairs were indifferently of the kitchen variety . . . made out of a large packing box. In the living-room, where the table was set . . . the china was fine, even dainty, but the glasses were thick and the plating had begun to wear off the silver ware (103-104).

As Fauset is prone to do in all of her novels, here in Plum Bun the third person narrator filters through Angela's perception this view of Paulette's living quarters. This strategy accomplishes two things: Angela's keen perception of material quality reflects her own middle-class upbringing as part of an "old Philadelphia" family, and Angela derives from the scene an impression of Paulette's self-assuredness and even androgynous qualities. The front room, often called the living-room, is Paulette's bedroom. She

integrates bedroom activities with the rest of her life. She suggests through the black or purple velvet valance around the divan a sense of pride or even royalty in her life. The good mahogany and fine china, alongside improvised chairs and thick glasses, point to Paulette's practicality and emerging sense of the modernist woman. This scene, coupled with subsequent conversation between Paulette and Angela, reveals to Angela Paulette's status as "mistress of herself and her fate" (105). Paulette invites intimacy when she sends Angela into the bathroom to wash before the meal, offering to share her favorite hand lotion and obviously more significant knowledge into her sexual activities. Angela is amazed upon discovering in plain view "a man's shaving mug and brush and a case of razors" (104). While Paulette gives ample evidence of her intimacy with men, she herself eats heartily, tosses off two cocktails before her meal, and smokes cigarettes, inhaling while she does. The insight which such scenes provide into the life of single women of the 1920s, and especially into the attitude towards their lifestyles, justifies Fauset's tendency to treat material consumption.

As an African-American modernist, Fauset posits the idea that female subjectivity allows women to create space for other women to tell their own stories. In other words, female subjectivity not only resists patriarchy, but also promotes intimacy. An example is the relationship between

Angela and Paulette in Plum Bun. Although Angela is the one who purportedly seeks intimacy, she never verbalizes her need but rather puts herself in the position to acquire friendship and then proceeds to assess her accomplishments. At the end of the evening at Paulette's apartment, it is Paulette who says wistfully that she does so want a woman friend, that "[w]hen a woman really is your friend she's so dependable and she's not expecting anything in return" (106-7). Paulette expresses her need for intimacy for the sake of intimacy, as contrasted with intimacy for sexual satisfaction. Angela has the same need, having admitted to herself before going to Paulette's house that "she was not quite ready for meeting men" (102). Angela leaves Paulette's apartment thinking that she is "in a new world with new people" and wondering how she will handle this new-found freedom (107).

The friendship between Angela and Paulette does indeed prepare Angela for the ensuing relationship with Roger Fielding. She is able to detect Roger's method as "a bit florid" when he invites her to dinner for the first time. The ornateness of his speech in essence foretells his material extravagance. Angela prepares for the setting by wearing a dress which she had chosen with Paulette's advice -- flame-colored, plain "beautiful glowing silk" with a neckline "high in back and girlishly modest in front." Her accessories are "a string of good artificial pearls and

two heavy silver bracelets" (122). She not only impresses Roger, but also finds pleasure in the compatibility of her dress with the elegance and grandeur of the hotel where they dine. For the moment, Angela is convinced that she is handling her new-found freedom well.

When Angela's pursuit of freedom, however, becomes yoked with Roger's material wealth, Fauset seems to recall a period of history related to slavery and Reconstruction. Like her predecessor Frances Harper, Fauset invokes the theme of African-American women being denied a legacy from their white husbands /lovers.[23] While it becomes a dominant theme in The Chinaberry Tree, Fauset treats the idea only on a psychological level in Plum Bun. She shows Angela continuously warring with herself about the permanence of her relationship with Roger. There is a typical racist scene in a restaurant.[24] Dining with Roger in a small cafe on Tenth Street, Angela notices the lavish

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[23] The disinheritance of the woman and her offspring in an interracial affair is a common occurrence in nineteenth-century African-American fiction. In addition to Harper's Iola Leroy, see William Wells Brown, Clotel (1853); Frank J. Webb, The Garies and Their Friends (1857); and Charles W. Chesnutt, The Marrow of Tradition (1901).

[24] Fauset duplicates the restaurant scene in The Chinaberry Tree, though Carolyn Sylvander sees it as an "intrusive, unincorporated" incident. The primary justification for it could be Fauset's recollection of a similar incident involving her husband and herself. See Marion Starkey, "Jessie Fauset," Southern Workman (May 1932) 219-20, qtd. in Sylvander, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Black American Writer, 209.

atmosphere: "[T]he glitter and perfection of crystal and silver, of marvelous napery and of obsequious service" (132). The ambience is so suggestive of high-class that Angela cannot use ordinary words to describe routine items. The odor of food becomes aroma, mineral water and wine become nectar, the bread and fish are ambrosia, and the food in general she refers to as viands (132). In a matter of moments, however, the entire scene is blighted when Roger observes an African-American group of three about to be seated nearby. He protests to the headwaiter, the trio leave, and Roger returns to Angela, feeling victorious. His assessment of the incident leaves Angela devastated:

> "Well I put a spoke in the wheel of those 'coons'! They forget themselves so quickly, coming in here spoiling white peoples's appetites. I told the manager if they brought one of their damned suits I'd be responsible. I wasn't going to have them here with you, Angele "(133).

This incident makes Angela aware that she would never experience freedom with Roger in spite of all the material comforts he could provide, for he could never know her true identity. Roger's willingness to pay if there should be a lawsuit speaks clearly to his belief in the power of money over freedom. To some degree, he resembles Colonel Halloway in The Chinaberry Tree and other white male figures in interracial affairs in the nineteenth century novels.

The ambivalence which Fauset's women characters show in their resistance to white patriarchy has a direct correlation to the intimacy they have with other women. Notwithstanding the propensity which Fauset shows for marriage of nearly all of her female characters, there is the subtle resistance to acquiring material possessions through men as long as there is strength and unity within a community of women. When that community breaks down, the resistance to white patriarchal influence weakens as well. Whether the intimacy is between mother and daughter, between sisters, or between women who are mere friends, it has a self-sustaining quality in the woman's quest for freedom and respectability. In Plum Bun, Angela isolates herself from her sister Jinny even after Jinny comes to New York, owing to Angela's decision to pass. She loses the closeness with Paulette when Paulette leaves for Europe. The severing of these ties makes Angela vulnerable to Roger and the materialism he offers: the little blue car; the elegant restaurant meals; gifts of books, flowers, and candy. Enjoying these delights clouds Angela's mind to the extent that she cannot imagine enduring hardship for the sake of love. She construes access to material wealth to be happiness and therefore a precursor to freedom. She contrasts her mother's plight with her own present situation:

She thought of her mother who had loved her father

> so dearly, and of the wash-days which she had endured for him, the long years of household routine before she and Jinny had been old enough to help her first with their hands and then with their earnings. She thought of the little, dark, shabby house, of the made-over dresses and turned coats. And then she saw Roger and his wealth and his golden recklessness, his golden keys which could open the doors to beauty and ease and -- decency! Oh, it wasn't decent for women to have to scrub and work and slave and bear children and sacrifice their looks and their pretty hands, -- she saw her mother's hands as they had always looked on wash day, they had a white, boiled appearance. . . . It was not likely that she, a girl who had left her little sister and her home to go out to seek life and happiness would throw it over for poverty,-- hardship (142).

Angela has these contradictory thoughts when she considers her feelings for Anthony, who is poor, and the pleasures Roger can offer her. She recalls her mother's endurance owing to love for Junius. Angela rationalizes that she herself had already rejected love for happiness in giving up her sister and that it would therefore be foolish to retreat now. Yet Angela confuses the love of her sister with her mother's love for her father. Loving Jinny did not exact

the price of decency from Angela. Angela's misperceptions of love, happiness, and decency cause her to see Roger's wealth as "golden keys which could open the doors" to freedom and respectability.

In Angela's relationship with Roger, Fauset shows the ability of a modern woman to choose, to err in her choices, but to grow as a result of the negative and positive experiences. Stopping short of an actual epiphany, Angela moves closer to self-discovery, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency. "She would not accept money, she would not move to the apartment on Seventy-second Street," but after her experience of free love with Roger, "she paused to take stock of that other life, those other lives which once she had known" (204). Angela is now able to evaluate the worth of previous intimacies and of new friendships with women. With some difficulty, she tries to re-establish a closeness with her sister Jinny. She also takes lunch occasionally with Rachel Powell, and she becomes friendly with Rachel Salting, the Jewish girl living above her. It is as if the view of life from her position alongside Roger -- riding in his car, dining in expensive restaurants -- enables Angela to re-immerse herself not only in an ethnic culture, but also in a female culture for which she now has a fuller appreciation.

Just as Fauset in her crafting of the novel exercises a female subjectivity, she also is inclined to engage her

female characters in friendships, intimacies, and similar interests which constitute a bonding against patriarchy. Angela discovers that Jinny has sought and found her own "sister" with whom she can share an apartment on "Striver's Row" in a "beautiful block with its tree-bordered pavements, its spacious houses, its gracious neighborliness." "A doctor and his wife occupied the first two floors . . . . They had practically adopted Virginia and Sara . . . . The doctor's wife occasionally pressed a dress for them; on stormy days the doctor drove them in his car around to "Public School 89" where they both taught" (242). Angela senses her own exclusion when she visits Jinny; she and Sara, without any real vindictiveness, make Angela feel like the outsider. What becomes apparent are Fauset's tendency not to condone race passing and her attempt to show the possibility for comfort and prosperity within the African-American middle-class community.

Because Angela rejects her heritage and seeks freedom outside her native community, Fauset cannot allow her character to re-enter painlessly. She must explore other routes to intimacy within the female culture. It is ironic that a closer relationship develops between Angela and Rachel Salting. The material side of Angela is dormant as she begins "in her loneliness to approach Rachel for nothing other than those almost sisterly intimacies which spring up between solitary women cut off in big cities from their

homes . . . " (244). Angela's gestures and feelings epitomize the modernist hero who finds herself isolated in a metropolis where people abound but also where physical closeness is antithetical to the formation of friendships. Both Angela and Rachel are young unmarried women in modern New York City, trying to live independent lives while they pursue careers in art. With an air of penitence for having previously pursued Roger for material gain, Angela remarks of the ensuing relationship, "'If anything comes out of this friendship to advance me in any way . . . it will happen just because it happens but I shall go into this with clean hands and a pure heart -- merely because I like Rachel'" (245). The remorse which Angela feels for her earlier behavior and the hopefulness she expresses for the future suggest Fauset's familiarity with the Biblical story of Jacob and Rachel. Though Jacob wanted Rachel for his wife, the innocence with which he pursued her seems to make the incident in Plum Bun an analogue to the story in Genesis.[25] The connection seems valid as Fauset gives her character the name Rachel and suggests in her relationship with Angela the androgynous friendship typical in modernist novels. In

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[25] Jacob's vow to pursue a wife and return to his father's house; his discovery of Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother; his promise to work for Laban for seven years to secure Rachel's hand all point to an attitude of innocence, dedication, and forethought. See Genesis 28:20-22, 29:1-22. A similar attitude seems to color Angela's thinking in her sincere effort to pursue a friendship with Rachel.

fact, Angela becomes the third person in a triangular relationship, for Rachel's fiance accepts Angela as well. When he is away, the two women busy themselves with "domestic, homely affairs," advising each other on dress and new recipes. Angela indeed becomes the older sister to Rachel, listening to budgetary plans for operating a household on John's meager salary, saving "house-wifely clippings" from newspapers, and proposing decorations for Rachel's and John's modest house (246-47).

In Plum Bun, interest in material consumption, mainly related to domestic settings, continues to mask intimacies among women and career pursuits. Only when a community of women with common interest in careers unite does Angela find the wherewithal to admit her heritage and legitimately pursue her interest in art simultaneously. To this end, the unlikely relationship of Angela and Rachel Powell takes on greater significance than the closeness with Rachel Salting. First, it points to Angela's re-emergence into her native culture. When she first arrived in New York and enrolled in the art class, she and Rachel Powell were the two students farthest removed from each other. Now both find themselves working zealously at their art in an attempt to win fellowships to the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts. When the committee makes the awards, both women win prizes of equal value: Angela receives an award for her "Fourteenth Street Types" and Rachel Powell for "A Street in Harlem."

The paradox of the incidents which follow is that although Rachel and Angela had won, notwithstanding their choice of African-American subject matter, Rachel's award is revoked because she is colored. Sensing the unfairness, Angela rejects her award and reveals her own colored blood as the reason. Angela's conversion at this point, though for reasons of race, is not unlike the conversion in terms of sexuality which Helga Crane undergoes in Quicksand.[26] Each has experienced an awakening which prompts her to assume a drastically different lifestyle pertaining to material wealth and class.

Fauset deceives the casual reader at the end of Plum Bun by giving an unusual twist to her female character's quest for freedom and her resistance to white patriarchy. Yet Fauset retains her integrity regarding race and sex ideology. Angela returns to the African-American culture, and is, therefore, free to regain the intimacy with Jinny which passing deprived them both of. Her art work gains her the respect of several art friends who support her going to Paris in spite of having given up the fellowship. Once there, she immerses herself in the Parisian art world. Except for letters, she copes with the absence of home until a strange package arrives on Christmas morning. The package

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[26] Angela experiences a "sudden wave of relief and contentment" upon admitting that she is colored. The act seems comparable to Helga's quixotic behavior at the pentecostal church service, confessing to be spiritually lost (113-14).

turns out to be Anthony, sent with the mutual consent of Jinny and her old beau Matthew Henson. The reader assumes that he and Jinny will marry and that now Angela is free to marry Anthony. While that is an option, it is worthwhile also to note that Fauset has her character well on the way to pursuing art for art's sake, to starting a career, to choosing to return to the African-American community or choosing expatriate status. The reader might also observe that Anthony arrives as a "gift" to Angela. Fauset has reduced the male figure to a possession which Angela can accept or reject.

While Fauset ends Plum Bun with the displacement of male figures as a gesture towards resisting patriarchy, she begins The Chinaberry Tree with the patriarchal figure's absence, though his influence is present. The opening scene of the novel alerts the reader to the material legacy which the wealthy white planter bestows on Aunt Sal and her daughter Laurentine Strange. The quiet pastoral setting of the house in Red Brook, New Jersey, which Laurentine and her mother occupy, acquires its beauty mainly from nature -- the velvety grass, the flowers in full bloom, the grape arbor, and the Chinaberry Tree. The tree, however, becomes the dominant symbol of beauty and a material object. Colonel Halloway, Aunt Sal's lover and Laurentine's father, had bought it and had it sent from Alabama to grace the lawn of the house he had arranged for his mistress and their child.

The chinaberry tree, commonly known for its yellow ornamental fruit, stands as a living symbol of Halloway's love for the Negro girl, servant to his mother. Though Halloway likened Sarah (Aunt Sal) to a white birch tree, tall and slender, perhaps the chinaberry tree with its yellow fruit was a more appropriate symbol for the woman he could not marry because he was white and she, of mixed blood.

In spite of the economic security Aunt Sal derives from the relationship, she and her daughter remain isolated from both the white and Black community. As a small child Laurentine plays under the Chinaberry Tree "with two exquisite dolls, wondering rather wistfully why the few children in the neighborhood didn't play with her" (2). The two dolls, apparently expensive ones, are inadequate replacements for playmates which Laurentine wants but does not have because of her "bad blood." Such scenes in The Chinaberry Tree suggest alienation. Laurentine remembers "the tall, serious white man who came to see her mother [emphasis mine] daily -- he used sometime to place his hand on her head and his eyes, she knew later, mutely implored her forgiveness" (2-3). Laurentine regards the daily visitor not as a parent but as her mother's lover. Thus she forms no parent/child bond with Halloway, nor does she as an adult initiate any association with the white race. Rather, she attempts to immerse herself in the African-American

community and to make her own livelihood through becoming a seamstress. In a limited fashion her action suggests a resistance to white patriarchy.

The tension which exists between mulatta mother and daughter in Plum Bun does not exist between Aunt Sal and Laurentine. In The Chinaberry Tree Aunt Sal wants independence, prosperity, and respectability for her daughter. Using the legacy from Colonel Halloway, she works to help Laurentine achieve decency within the race. After her daughter's high school graduation Aunt Sal explains the property rights and the will which stipulated that they should get a percentage of Halloway's factory income in order to maintain the estate. Halloway's widow, however, deliberately keeps the factories from producing income in order to deny support to her husband's mulatta mistress and child. Thus, mother and daughter unite to offset the typical occurrence: the disinheritance of offspring from an interracial affair. Fauset develops a plot to show solidarity among the oppressed. Aunt Sal, "with a mind totally unfitted for business," perceives that "Mrs. Halloway at the risk of losing her own fortune was undoubtedly allowing her estate to be mishandled so as to minimize the share of this woman who had so grossly usurped her place" (10).

Fauset's theme of freedom and respectability in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree would likely falter if she had

not employed the genealogical trope mentioned earlier. The image of family as seen between Mattie and Angela Murray and between Aunt Sal and Laurentine Strange evinces the need for freedom and the desire for respectability. In both novels, Fauset uses women of two generations to effect the mood of continuity and change, of cynicism and optimism regarding material wealth. The Halloway daughters transform the tension between races depicted in Mrs. Halloway's treatment of Aunt Sal into intimacy with Laurentine. Fauset displays several strategies for resisting patriarchy while creating intimacy among women: When the Halloway girls visit Laurentine to offer financial assistance, they allow Aunt Sal to supply Laurentine's surname, they refrain from mentioning the Colonel's name, they acknowledge their father's connection with Laurentine's mother but question whether Laurentine has been included in the will, and one states her interest in running the factories some day (11-12). The narrator later refers to them as sisters. From the twist Fauset gives to the novel, it seems less likely that she is interested in calling attention to the blood relationship of the women than she is in regarding them as "three well-bred women facing a problem for which not one of them was responsible" (12). For they and Laurentine are young women in search of their own place in society, free to pursue careers with dignity and respect. Because the Halloway women are white, have the advantage of travel

abroad, "some wealth, education and a name known and respected," they are, therefore, in a better position to help Laurentine. Her most immediate response to their offer nearly becomes, "'Give me life, give me contacts, give me the good times which are every young girl's due. Don't leave me here to perish, to dry, to wither.'" Her gaze into their faces tells her that they possess "a melancholy of the same stuff and substance and, perhaps, quality as her own" (12). Laurentine perceives of a common bond between the two women and herself. They are unable to free her entirely from an environment of isolation and disrespect. Here in Red Bank what the Chinaberry Tree symbolizes undermines her talent, her sociability, and her freedom. Whereas Aunt Sal gets her nourishment from the pleasant memories of her happiness with Colonel Halloway, Laurentine must find ways to avert her perishing, withering state. She finds it in dressmaking and designing, her sisters bearing the cost of the training.

Though Fauset is well on her way to validating Laurentine's claim of the need for a respectable image in the community, the sudden arrival and nearly as rapid exit of Aunt Sal's sister Judy thwarts the struggle. It is not so much that Judy has values diametrically opposed to her sister's; rather, it is the shallow and mean character which Fauset creates. Judy, "bold and tactless," blames her sister for the isolation which she and Laurentine endure:

"God, Sarah, you don't have to shut yourself up like this just because you had a white man do you" (3)! Fauset makes her strongest class distinctions involving Judy. Just arriving from Alabama, she speaks with a "thick Southern accent" and stays only long enough to become friendly with Mrs. Forten and determine that Aunt Sal is prosperous enough to take care of Melissa, the daughter from an affair with Mr. Forten.

While the two-generation plot in Plum Bun is effective, Fauset seems to overwork it in The Chinaberry Tree. Judy seems to exist solely for the purpose of producing Melissa, whose own struggle to prove that her mother was legally married and she is therefore decent, subverts Laurentine's struggle for respect and decency. When Melissa returns as a teenager, sent there by her mother, Aunt Sal slowly opens the door, indicating, "Come in. You c'n have the room across from Laurentine's" (17). Their living arrangements suggest the opposition between the two women in the achievement of their goals -- acceptance and regard.

Laurentine does not provide the familial relationship for which Melissa yearns. While Melissa stands in her bedroom and imagines that she has found a home, her cousin pauses at her sewing to contemplate the disruption Melissa's arrival will cause. Countering Laurentine's negative thoughts, the young girl becomes entranced with the idyllic view:

> The walls were tinted a delicate orchid, there was a fresh lavender and white cotton coverlet on the old-fashioned broad bed, two oval rag 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. On another hung a chastely mounted print of the head and slender shoulders of a young girl, her eyes full of dreams and beneath, the line -- "She dwelt among th' untrodden ways" (17-18).

Through the third person narrator Fauset gives both a visual artist's and a literary artist's impression of the bedroom scenery. It is unlikely that Melissa's cultural experiences and age would allow her to appreciate fully the details of color coordination, to identify the early twentieth century painter's work, or to recognize the line from one of Wordsworth's Lucy poems. But the ambience of the room makes it inviting to the young girl, and she imagines that her aunt and cousin designed it intuitively for her. While this positive scene implants itself in Melissa's mind, Laurentine mentally counters it with thoughts of Judy's sudden disappearance and how Melissa's presence can now re-emphasize "the apartness of her family" just when "a special niche was being created for her in the little quiet, closely-knit Jersey town" (19). Laurentine fears that

Melissa will undermine progress towards acceptance and respectability. "Her work, her constantly increasing clientele, her dignity, her remarkable beauty, her distinguished clothes were bringing her a half-begrudged, half-admiring recognition" (19).

The mental warring between Laurentine and Melissa symbolizes the struggle Fauset has in bringing her characters into modernity. Laurentine, the more conservative of the two, expects her diligence at work, the community's acceptance of her diligence and her physical appearance -- "remarkable beauty" and clothes -- to make her a part of the community. Invitations to bridge parties, attendance at church socials, and dates with Phil Hackett, "son of the wealthiest colored man in the town," all indicate to Laurentine that she is gradually winning acceptance. Such activities, coupled with her pleasure drives in Hackett's car and occasional trips to the movies, also point to Laurentine's gradual and respectable emergence into modern society. She does not want Melissa's presence to jeopardize her progress. Melissa, however, like her mother, represents the more radical shift towards modernism. She wonders to herself why Aunt Sal and Laurentine live such secluded lives. "'My goodness me,'" she thinks, "'what if Aunt Sal and that old Colonel weren't married! What's Laurentine got to do with that? She needn't act as though she were under a curse -- that sort of stuff is all out

nowadays'" (21). Fauset uses Melissa's progressive thinking throughout the novel[27] to speed the progress towards modern behavior which Laurentine, in her quest for respectability, must handle conservatively. To this end, Melissa serves a useful purpose, for she has "the modern young person's scorn for unnecessary formulae" (22).

Fauset exercises caution in unmasking the African-American woman's desire for freedom from moral conventions, especially among the upper-class. Melissa flouts class distinctions which Laurentine and her mother have been unable to dismiss or to break down. The two colored doctors in Red Brook and their families are part of the exclusive society to which Laurentine remains unexposed. Melissa attends a church play rehearsal at Dr. Brown's house and has the chance to observe Mrs. Brown's bridge group: chauffeur-driven ladies, "well-to-do, well-dressed" in "colorful gowns, flashing jewels" (34). Melissa vows to become a part of this group, her promise becoming a throwback to Angela's determination to enjoy the material wealth of white society which she observes in downtown Philadelphia and in New York

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[27] Melissa represents the progressive thinking of her generation. Kitty Brown nearly mimics Melissa when Mrs. Brown expresses sympathy for Melissa who has to live with Aunt Sal and Laurentine, regarded as "those two funny women." Kitty responds, "'I'm sick of hearing about those Stranges and Colonel Halloway. What's it all about? You'd think a white man had never looked at a colored woman before in these United States'" (97). Fauset shrewdly allows only her young, naive characters to take that leap into modernity.

City. The main difference is that in Melissa's case, she intends to make a lateral move to another class but to stay within her race.

Continuing to show the opposition in Laurentine's and Melissa's pursuit of acceptance, Fauset shifts to Laurentine's narcissistic self-portraiture of finding acceptance. Her prosperous dressmaking business permits her to dress appropriately for an outing in Phil Hackett's car. She assesses her looks in the mirror:

> Her slender, well-molded figure showed to every advantage in a dress of green developed in silk and wool, its uneven hem-line reaching in places to her ankle. Her stockings of tan and her dainty yet sturdy, slender shoes of brown and tan snakeskin afforded just the necessary contrast. Above the trim dress rose her slender, proud neck and her small, perfect head. . . . [P]ulling on her tiny, smart, green felt hat, she got hastily into her green cloth coat with its high mink collar that fitted so beautifully, so snugly (35).

In such detailed descriptions of clothing Fauset seems to anticipate by five decades today's fashion trend towards color analysis. She not only shows her characters in colors which complement their mulatta complexions, but also exercises care to depict them in quality materials of silk, wool, fur, and snakeskin. Contrary to the commonly held

belief that Fauset is merely trying to show that a certain class of African-Americans are on a par with white people, she projects an image of the African-American woman employing what Carolyn Sylvander calls a "redeeming redefinition" (195) of freedom and respect. Laurentine shows pride in her appearance. Believing that she looks "perfect," she is suited to do battle with the wives of Dr. Brown and Dr. Ismay.

Ironically what helps Laurentine to "win the battle" with Mrs. Ismay and Mrs. Brown is not her attire but her skill in creating attire for other women. The intimacy between the doctors' families and the Stranges grows out of the women's respect for her skill. A generally placid air surrounds Red Brook, particularly the Stranges' house. Laurentine's dressmaking becomes a thoroughly modern business, requiring her two assistants to work even on Saturdays. The narrator describes Johnasteen and Matilda picking up scraps of material before closing down the sewing-machines, as if Laurentine's work has reached factory proportions. Her dressmaking and designing seems to be an integral part of Red Brook's economy, which now boasts the luxury of automobiles and tennis games -- and lounging pajamas. Shallow perception prompts critical comments that The Chinaberry Tree is "a novel about the first colored woman in New Jersey to wear lounging pajamas" (Bone, The Negro Novel in America 102). What Fauset actually does in

having Laurentine and Millie Ismay discuss loungewear is not only stress the intimacy which has sprung up between the two women, but also validate Laurentine's skillfulness in tailoring. Mrs. Brown, the other doctor's wife, is even interested in having Laurentine duplicate the pattern for her daughter Kitty, prompting Mrs. Ismay to repeat the idea of the garment's originality in design and to praise the seamstress for her craft.

While Laurentine's work flourishes, her social life does as well. Although lapses occur in Laurentine's quest for respectability, Fauset conveys the notion that security which accompanies meaningful work also carries over into social life. Her friendship with Mrs. Ismay consists of weekly bridge games, occasional trips to New York City, and Laurentine's learning to drive, practicing in the doctor's Ford. At other times they find pleasure in discussing Laurentine's work:

> . . . [S]he and Millie Ismay would talk with the complete intimacy and interest which women absolutely <u>en rapport</u> with each other employ. Millie, who was comparatively indifferent to her appearance outside, was amazingly given over to a consideration of her indoor apparel, her house dresses and negligees. Often Laurentine brought with her one of her latest books of modes, and scraps of material used in fashioning apparel for

> Mrs. Judge Manners and her lovely and exclusive, newly-married daughter, Mrs. del Pilar. Laurentine would hold the cloth up against Mrs. Ismay's skin and drape with her magic fingers the stuff into marvelous fold and line, employing an enthusiasm and liveliness of interest such as she rarely manifested to her customers (146).

Laurentine is fulfilling her promise to herself that when she and Mrs. Ismay became friends "she [Laurentine] could bestow a favor on her [Mrs. Ismay] as a token of that friendship" (56). Laurentine and her mother had been so pitifully isolated before Melissa arrived that Laurentine had no colored customers. Also, she feared jeopardizing her livelihood by duplicating her white customers' designs for non-whites. Now that she and Millie are friends she dares to try designs and colors on Millie which were exclusively for her white customers, Mrs. Manners and her daughter. Laurentine obviously derives more pleasure from her work when she has a closeness with her customers.[28]

Once having established her key character in lucrative and respectable work, Fauset does not allow Laurentine to veer from that course. This small degree of independence

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[28] This detailed display of craft on the part of Fauset's character seems strongly suggestive of Fauset's need to comment on her own craft and the influences upon it. Just as she differentiates between Laurentine's customers -- white and colored -- it appears that Fauset had the race of her audience in mind when she wrote.

seems rooted in her resistance to white patriarchy. Rather than solidifying her independence, however, Fauset shows it being buffeted by two counterplots, both of which relate to marriage. First, Aunt Sal wants marriage to Phil Hackett for Laurentine because, in the mother's opinion, marriage to the son of Red Brook's wealthiest family would be the ultimate in respectability. In this regard, Aunt Sal looks ahead to Nanny and her wish to see Janie married to Logan Killicks in Their Eyes Were Watching God.[29] Both Aunt Sal and Nanny represent the post-slavery generation which held that material wealth, which translates into security for the woman, must naturally emanate from marriage. Secondly, Melissa's trysts with Asshur and later with Malory Forten become a subplot which nearly thwarts Laurentine's strivings. Although the tension which Melissa brings to the household does not disappear totally, it abates while Laurentine enjoys the friendship of Hackett, Mrs. Ismay and later Dr. Denleigh.

Melissa's relationships are continuously posed in opposition to Laurentine's. Fauset appears to situate

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[29] When Phil Hackett stops seeing Laurentine, Aunt Sal goes to see him to inquire about his intentions. Laurentine tells her mother it was unnecessary, that she didn't love him anyway. Aunt Sal responds, "There are things in life that matter more than love" (68). Obviously the mother refers to security just as Nanny refers to Killicks' sixty acres as security for Janie. The situation in each instance points to tension between generations, the older generation advocating marriage for the sake of security whereas the daughters/granddaughters seek independence and self-discovery.

Melissa so that as a more progressive and youthful personality she will motivate Laurentine to be less conservative. Yet the imbalance remains. Laurentine excitedly imagines herself engaged to Phil Hackett, thinking of the engagement ring, "its safety, its security, its promise" (58). But on the very night she expresses that hope, Hackett fails to appear. By contrast, Melissa has Asshur and Malory to choose between, both of whom give her identical watches as Christmas gifts. The two watches suggest the abundance of time which Melissa has, contrasted with society's view of Laurentine at twenty-four with little time left to secure her position as a wife. Because both women rely upon society for approval, their use of time is crucial.

Notwithstanding the time she devotes to achieving propriety in her work, Laurentine knows that her respectability in the eyes of the community is somehow entwined with Melissa. Yet Fauset constructs a tragedy of errors in letting so much time elapse before the community and, least of all, the couple themselves, discover the truth of the relationship between Melissa and Malory. Melissa really does not have an abundance of time nor choices about her own freedom. Asshur, "having no notion of his power," returns to save Melissa from emotional destruction and to offer her a big house in the South while he completes his studies at Tuskegee. Dr. Denleigh offers Laurentine security as his

wife. The novel ends in a picnic scene under the Chinaberry Tree with the two couples and Aunt Sal: "They piled a table high with strawberries, salad, upside down cake, a bowl of punch, sandwiches, a deep dish of iced cantaloupes and watermelon scooped out in little balls" (339). Such a repast suggests celebration, and the participants bring to mind a pre-nuptial party. Aunt Sal's thoughts run to safety and security for her daughter and her niece with "such splendid men."

The Chinaberry Tree, replete with descriptions of material consumption, has the problematic ending disturbing to critics, both in Fauset's time and today. Does Fauset intimate in the assumed marriages of Laurentine and Stephen Denleigh and Melissa and Asshur that the institution of marriage provided the ultimate in freedom and respectability for women? If so, what useful purpose do her allusions to modern lifestyles and attempts at independent careers serve? In the first instance, Fauset seems aware of the restrictions on African-American middle-class values and reflects that sensibility in the mulatta characters she creates. Yet her own sense of the rising modernity of the 1920s prompts her to critique the racist and sexist ideologies of that same period and to experiment with community among women and with career independence as means of undercutting the effects of racism and sexism. Deborah McDowell, in her introduction to Plum Bun, says that the

novel -- and by extension, its author -- "baits the reader with a range of familiar expectations about women and blacks . . . but then refuses to fulfill them . . ." (xxix). The novel does fulfill one of the most familiar expectations for women, and that is marriage. But more importantly, Fauset at the same time surprises her reading audience by exercising a female subjectivity, by giving a woman's perspective on familiar and unexpected issues.

The astonishing attention which Fauset gives to material consumption paved the way for later African-American women writers to exercise a greater degree of female subjectivity in their novels. Dorothy West, for instance, began writing on the cusp of the Harlem Renaissance. Her novel, The Living Is Easy (1948), abounds in material consumption as a means of expressing female individuality. West published her only completed novel fifteen years after Fauset's The Chinaberry Tree and seventeen years following Fauset's final work Comedy American Style, the novel which critics most closely link with the West novel.[30] Despite the wide variance in the two authors' careers, their own middle-class background and the concern for depicting women in pursuit of self-

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[30] Deborah McDowell noted close similarity between Comedy American Style and The Living Is Easy. In her interview with Dorothy West in June 1984, 1985, West said that she "didn't know the novel" and further intimated that Fauset's and Larsen's age and class difference set them apart from her literarily.

definition emerge as common factors in the writing of both Fauset and West. In one of her essays in Black Feminist Criticism, Barbara Christian observes a tendency among most African-American women writers until the 1940s to direct "their conscious intention toward a refutation of the negative images imposed upon all black women" which resulted in "an incredible tension between the 'femininity' of the heroines and their actual behavior" (173). Christian specifies The Living Is Easy as one of the novels in this category; however, she overgeneralizes in including West's novel. Although it treats African-American women, depicts a fastidiousness about speech and behavior, and portrays a heroine obsessed with material consumption, West's mimicry of class, morality, and religion borders on the satirical manner of eighteenth century English writers. At the same time, West exerts a female subjectivity in creating an image of the woman at the turn of the century beset with problems of racism and sexism. These problems turn her into a cold, calculating, money-grabbing, status-seeking shrew. Neither Cleo Judson nor any of the other women in The Living Is Easy are admirable types.

The same kind of symmetry exists between Fauset and West regarding female subjectivity as lies between Larsen and Hurston regarding female sexuality discussed earlier in this study. West, like Fauset, reflects African-American modernism involving the mulatta and her quest for freedom

and respectability. West, however, does not mask the intimacy among women nor the woman's desire to be other than a wife/mother. Her technique suggests deformation of mastery in that she unequivocally directs her reading audience to the devastating psychological and sociological effects of classism, sexism, and racism. Cleo Judson spends her entire life struggling to free herself and her sisters from these biases and to ensure that her daughter Judy and her nieces do not experience the same humiliation. She fails miserably and ruins the lives of her husband Bart and her three sisters.

West shows the debacle of Cleo's family at the end, after having permitted them economic prosperity and elevation in social standing earlier. In The Living Is Easy West's narrative strategy resembles Fauset's in Comedy American Style wherein Olivia Cary's preoccupation with color leads to the disintegration of her family. Both novels utilize settings and themes which stress materialism, superseded in Comedy American Style only by Olivia's delusion with light skin, and epitomized in The Living Is Easy by Cleo's obsession with money. In fact, the novel opens with the pocketbook as the symbol of materialism. Cleo securely grips her purse in one hand and Judy by the other hand as she sets out to rent a large house in Brookline, a better section of Boston.

The purse connects Cleo with a higher class of Bosto-

nians and with her sisters, whom she needs in order to establish a female community against male society. The "large patent-leather pouch" contains forty-five dollars for the house rental and records of money and clothing sent to Cleo's sisters who will eventually move into her house and become totally dependent on her and Bart. Afraid that the contents of the purse will show Mr. Van Ryper that she is not financially able to rent his house, Cleo carefully conceals her credit books and pawnshop tickets when she opens the purse to pay her first month's rent. The purse continues to be the repository for material gain or deception. On the trolley ride back home Cleo, using Judy as an innocent abettor, continues her fraudulent schemes of raking off a dollar here and there; she changes the rent receipt from twenty-five dollars to forty-five, anticipating a twenty dollar profit each month from the rent money Mr. Judson will allot her.

Always referring to her husband as Mr. Judson, Cleo has an adversarial relationship with him from the beginning. The tension between them derives from their equal distrust of the opposite gender. Bart Judson distrusted women until he met Cleo, thinking, "all they saw in a man was his pocketbook" (32). Bart's love for Cleo blinds him to her deceptive tactics for obtaining money from him for Boston cultural lessons for Judy, for furnishings for the ten-room rented house in Brookline, and for promoting her sisters'

transition to the middle-class. Additionally Bart's blindness to Cleo's greed stems from his preoccupation with keeping his "pocketbook" filled. The large warehouse he rents for ripening his bananas must always be filled to capacity. His skills as a businessman compete with Cleo's skills for keeping her house filled with good furnishings, food, clothing, and her female relatives. Bart's male stature opposes Cleo's feminine though domineering figure when he holds the sisters spellbound with his story of how he rose in the banana trade. He ends dramatically with "I been after the Almighty Dollar all my life, and I'll sprinkle salt on its tail before I die" (232). Money becomes personified for Bart, and for Cleo and her sisters Bart himself symbolizes money. The warring between the sexes is ongoing while both Bart and Cleo lose their battle. Bart struggles to remain the Banana King -- the most respectable colored businessman in Boston. Cleo fights to set up her all-female family dynasty in a respectable middle-class northern community.

Critics view Cleo's failure from different vantage points. Approaching the novel from a feminist viewpoint, Mary Helen Washington in Invented Lives credits West with being sensitive to a woman's story, though Washington sees sexism as thwarting West's original attempts to narrate "the

story of a woman artist." [31] The result is, according to Washington, ". . . Cleo the woman monster." "Punished for her willfulness, for her attempts to claim power, she is, at the novel's end, frightened, pathetic, uncomprehending -- and in need of male support" (350). This seems an accurate assessment of Cleo's character. In such a depiction West, perhaps unknowingly, parodies the ending of Fauset's Comedy American Style. Both Cleo and Olivia emerge as pathetic characters who so drastically misuse their power that they end up powerless. Of greater significance is that both authors through their novels' endings point to the female character's resistance to patriarchy and the subsequent futility of it all.

Adelaide Cromwell's Afterword to The Living Is Easy emphasizes the dialectics of the novel: "love, control, and weakness [woven] together in a web of dependency, despair, and power" (358). Cleo herself seems to embody all of these contrary forces at various times. At the end West depicts her protagonist in a state of dependency, despair, and weakness as she says to her sister Charity, "'When I moved in this house, I thought I was on top of the world. I used to think I'd have an automobile by now. And I haven't even

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[31] Washington's concept of Cleo as artist grows out of a close analysis of and emphasis on chapters two and three of The Living Is Easy. She pursues the theme of narrative distancing and denial of voice in her essay "I Sign My Mother's Name: Maternal Power in Dorothy West's Novel The Living Is Easy."

got a decent clock, let alone a gas stove'" (289). All of the receptacles for material possessions are empty: the cold-box outside the kitchen window, the battered icebox in the hallway, and most of all, Cleo's pocketbook and Bart's warehouse.

In the strongest defense of her character, West tells Deborah McDowell that "Cleo uses all these traits that make us hate her for a very positive end: to make conditions better for future generations. She wanted the children to have good manners, to speak well, etc. which, she believed, would get them far in life" (277). If we are to accept West the author as critic, then Fauset's and West's belief in literary perspective becomes closely intertwined, for they both use their artistic skills as African-American modernists to empower their race.

Just as West sees her character Cleo using her perceived-to-be-negative traits for a positive end, the use of material consumption in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree transfigures female subjectivity into a modernist strategy for Fauset's literary successors. Fauset leaves to later African-American women writers a legacy sometimes barely discernible in her own works. Her need to mask the woman's desire for autonomy and self-affirmation frequently caused critics to fail to see her expression of female individuality and her resistance to patriarchal ties. The right of the artist to express individual taste was the point of

discussion in an essay entitled "Our Literary Audience" by poet/critic Sterling Brown. Writing in 1930, Brown asserted the right of an artist to "deal with that to which he can best give convincing embodiment and significant interpretation" (44). If the critical position Brown takes is expanded to include the female gender, neither Jessie Fauset nor Dorothy West should have feared for their literary lives simply because they chose to exercise a female subjectivity emphasizing material consumption.

CHAPTER IV. Progression in African-American Modernism: Deforming Female Spaces in Quicksand and Passing

> With rapture almost, she let herself drop into the blissful sensation of visualizing herself in different, strange places, among approving and admiring people, where she would be appreciated, and understood.
>
> -- Nella Larsen
> Quicksand

> Stepping out of the elevator that had brought her to the roof, she was led to a table just in front of a long window whose gently moving curtains suggested a cool breeze. It was, she thought, like being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below.
>
> -- Nella Larsen
> Passing

Larsen's treatment of unconventional female places in society is somewhat less subtle than the masked female sexuality which Chapter Two of this study analyzes. Both Quicksand and Passing experiment with displacement of the female protagonist in interracial situations, in career positions, in social settings, and in familial circumstances. Well aware that the African-American woman's morals are always under scrutiny and equally aware that the conventional role for women confines them to domestic duties, Larsen exercises care and discretion in transforming her female characters from the traditional figures which her reading audience and literary critics have come to expect.

Yet she shows more daring than some of her contemporaries in exploring the psychological effects of constricted spaces on her women characters. Larsen moves Helga Crane, Irene Redfield, and Clare Kendry within various geographical areas to suggest their modernist tendencies towards the quest for self-identity and fulfillment. But more than that, as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter indicates, she shows her characters' discontent with cramped spaces, their inclination to move into expansive public spaces, and their need to move to elevated heights to avoid the suffocating air of more congested lower regions. The uneasiness which Larsen depicts in her characters as they inhabit traditional female spaces informs the changes, physical and psychological, which all three protagonists undergo.

A general definition of the shift from traditional female spaces to more unconventional spaces, critic Susan Willis calls "the transformation of domestic space." Though she directs her literary theory to a more contemporary group of African-American women writers in Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience,[32] Willis's theory, in retrospect, seems applicable to Quicksand and Passing. Larsen retains traditional roles for her characters, but

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[32] Willis explains "the transformation of domestic space" as a subtlety in African-American women's writing where the future takes shape within the confines of the oppressive present. Women envision the future as expanded and improved while remaining in the domestic environment. "In so doing, the fiction lays the basis for expanding its transformed image out of the household and into society at large" (160).

allows them to move in and out of those positions to experiment with innovative lifestyles. The anomaly of relationships between women and between men and women in both novels points to Larsen's inclination toward an androgynous view. Assuming the stance that constant transition blurs gender (and even racial) boundaries would place Larsen in the mainstream of modernism. Ever mindful, however, of the effects of slavery and the restrictions which African-American women underwent during the post-slavery era, Larsen cannot wholeheartedly assume a modernist stance regarding female spaces. Instead, she assumes the role of an African-American modernist and experiments with "deforming" traditional female positions. Neither the characterizations of her women protagonists nor the endings of her novels suggest that she has solved the problem of women's place in society.

Though the transformation of domestic space as a phenomenon of African-American women's writing seems amplified in Larsen's novels, Harper's Iola Leroy foreshadows the idea. Harper, herself a lecturer, a poet, short story writer, and ultimately a novelist, exemplified the image of woman intent on enlightenment, reform and racial uplift, which Iola advocates in the novel. Yet Harper and her fictional character were compelled to maintain such an unrealistically high level of respectability that that in itself limited them to female

spaces/places which Larsen and her characters more than half a decade later could expand. Just as Harper's audiences thought her lectures during Reconstruction too sophisticated to come from the lips of a colored woman, so does Harper in Iola Leroy depict Iola as such a proficient nurse that she astounds Dr. Gresham, who observes that she "must have been a born nurse to put such enthusiasm into her work" (56). Believing Iola is white, Dr. Gresham has some difficulty reconciling Iola's willingness to serve humanity with her purported superior status:

> "She is self-respecting without being supercilious; quiet without being dull. . . . I cannot understand how a Southern lady, whose education and manners stamp her as a woman of fine culture and good breeding, could consent to occupy the position she so faithfully holds" (57).

Harper gives an ironic twist to the novel by endowing Iola with skills and beauty and allowing Gresham to admire both qualities to the degree that he falls in love with her before discovering that she has mixed blood.

Even though Harper averts Iola's marriage to Gresham -- one of the most traditional spaces for a mulatta who wishes to pass -- the careful reader discerns Iola's preoccupation with racial uplift and respectability. Harper enhances Iola's respectability by having her refuse Gresham's marriage proposal and continue to serve as a nurse

to the rebel forces in the Civil War battles.

Simultaneously Harper seems to undercut Iola's position as a leader by having Iola work patiently at her nursing duties, absolving herself of the need to find her family. Only coincidentally in tending Robert, one of the wounded colored officers, does she discover that he is her mother's brother. Iola then promises her uncle that she will search for her mother by "advertis[ing] for her in the papers, hunt[ing] for her in churches" while primarily offering herself "as a teacher in one of the schools which are being opened in different parts of the country" (142-43). These are all channels for promoting literacy and morality. Harper does not allow Iola to pursue an independent, direct search for her other relatives. In other words, service as a nurse and teacher takes precedence over the search for family.

Harper's predilection for assigning male characters to leadership roles and female characters to humbler positions leaves the women without any real power. While she shows the women to be competent, they must, out of a sense of propriety, confine their activities to acting as helpmates to the men. The novel depicts Iola's mother Marie, Miss Delaney, and Iola herself as well-trained, socially and politically aware women. Yet not one of them is asked to participate in an interracial forum to which Dr. Gresham invites Iola's brother Robert: "Come down to the Concordia [Hotel] . . . tomorrow night. If you know any [other]

colored man who is a strong champion of equal rights, bring him along" (220). When Robert explains that he is to bring "some wide-awake colored man," ostensibly "to discuss the negro [sic] problem," "someone who can do justice to the subject," Iola, with complicity, suggests Rev. Carmicle, of whom Robert approves (220). With her own early feminist leanings, Harper raises speculation that she is ridiculing the Post-reconstruction politics which so sharply delineate women's and men's roles. Yet she must maintain an expected level of respectability for her female characters; she cannot allow them to assume a political position nor any other public space beyond the church, the school, or caring for the sick and injured.

While Harper's primary concern in Iola Leroy is with respectability for women in whatever position they assume, advocates of stronger roles for women in fictional works must credit Harper with greater contributions to that cause than most of the writers of Larsen's own era. Harlem Renaissance novelists, as well as writers of short stories, who succeed Harper during the next two to three decades, are, for the most part, prone to assign their female characters to traditional spaces. Such a trend reflects an adherence to chauvinism rather than to a depiction of realism. History reflects that the Great Migration to the North, consonant with World War I, disrupted the traditional lifestyles of all women, especially African-American women.

The need for women to replace men called into proscription resulted in the transformed domestic life of women of all classes. That was especially applicable to women in industrial and metropolitan areas which Rudolph Fisher, Claude McKay, and Wallace Thurman portray in their novels The Walls of Jericho, Home to Harlem, Banjo, The Blacker the Berry, and Infants of the Spring respectively. Yet, the latter two novels by Thurman are the only ones in the group which take women out of traditional roles and attempt some parity between the sexes. More concerned in The Walls of Jericho with the merger of class, Fisher uses Linda Young, a middle-class woman working as a maid, to prod her boyfriend "Shine" Jones to seek more respectable work than that of a furniture mover. Fisher seems less interested in Linda's job mobility than in her ability to remove class barriers.

McKay's two novels provide even less space for women than Fisher's The Walls of Jericho. Jake in Home to Harlem frequents cabarets, night clubs, and dives in search of sensual pleasures which female singers, waitresses, and whores can provide. Most of the women remain faceless and nameless except for the stereotypical features associated with such positions. Two positive features of McKay's novels, as related to this study, pertain to the potential of his character Ray in Home to Harlem and the setting of that novel, as well as Banjo. First, Ray's philosophy of life is antithetical to Jake's. Depicted as the

intellectual, Ray questions the primitive instincts which Jake manifests, frequents the nightlife spots more for conversation than for sensual and physical pleasures. And though Ray's girl remains essentially unknown, he displays a degree of respect for her which is absent from Jake's feeling for Felice and the other women Jake meets. Secondly, some of the settings prevalent in McKay's novels, namely the cabarets and nightclubs, are refined and used in Quicksand and Passing. The vitality and the determination to enjoy life, which McKay seems to restrict to men such as Jake and Banjo, will be discussed later as spaces Larsen permits her female characters to inhabit.

The deference to male characters seems less apparent in both of Thurman's novels. Thurman employs a satirical approach to intraracial prejudice in The Blacker the Berry. His female protagonist Emma Lou undergoes a quest for her true identity, emanating largely from her extremely dark complexion, a search which keeps pace with Larsen's mulatta characters. Thurman is obviously preoccupied with race generally and with complexion more particularly. He satirizes society's color biases as he moves Emma Lou, a bright, college-educated woman, from career spaces to social spaces where she is continuously rejected. The fact that Thurman focuses on women, citing their dark complexions as the cause for their rejection, while Larsen uses the mulatta as the displaced entity, suggests a deeper malady than

complexion. Amritjit Singh hints at the politics of gender in The Blacker the Berry by his observation that "it would have been easier for Emma Lou to find acceptance within her family and among black people had she been a boy" (The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance 108).

In Infants of the Spring Thurman shows an even stronger sensibility to the marginalized positions which women inhabit. In the satirical fashion with which he began his earlier novel, he continues to lampoon the African-American artists of the Harlem Renaissance for their lack of direction and their preoccupation with white culture. Although Thurman depicts the project as a failure, owing to the faults already mentioned, it is Euphoria Blake, a female character with business and leadership skills, who organizes a center called Niggeratti Manor for the Renaissance artists. When the artistic activities at the manor begin to dissipate, Blake converts the center into a dormitory for young African-American women. As her name suggests, Euphoria discerns her initial idea for the center to have been too idealistic and abandons it for an equally worthy one. Thurman makes Euphoria Blake the woman of action whereas Dr. Parkes, "guardian to the Negro artists," merely provides philosophical advice. Thus, Thurman, even as he too harshly judges the success of the Harlem Renaissance, veers away from the white-male-prescribed female spaces for which Larsen also shows disdain in Quicksand and Passing.

Uprooting her characters from what appears to be a secure environment becomes one of Larsen's most obvious examples of displacement and "deforming" of conventional female space. She begins by situating the character in a typical middle-class position in terms of social standing or a career. Onlookers may admire or even envy the protagonist in her role. But the stifling effect of the environment leaves the character devoid of contentment and satisfaction. In Quicksand Helga is engaged in a mental conflict with her environment. Her apartment serves as a haven from the intolerable air of conformity which pervades Naxos. The high-backed chair with rich tapestry isolates Helga, and the bathtub relaxes her after a toilsome day at the rigid campus where she had expected to participate in racial uplift. Helga's discovery that she is unsuited for a teaching career at Naxos is one of Larsen's most pronounced experiments with displacement. The mental monologues which the reader overhears in Helga's private room reveal that the real dissatisfaction stems from the patronizing ideology of the white minister who addresses the assembly at Naxos. He is representative of "the white man's magnanimity" and has come, Helga believes, to ensure Naxos's conformity to "the white man's pattern" (4). The patriarchal influence pervades the campus, extinguishing all hopes for innovation and individualism. The auditorium takes on the air of a slave ship as "hundreds of students and teachers [are]

herded into the sun-baked chapel" (2). Helga finds the environment suffocating and decides to leave. Her colleague Margaret reminds her of the inherent risks: "They won't give you a reference if you jump up and leave like this now . . . . You'll be put on the black list. And you'll find it hard to get another teaching-job" (14). Margaret's warning informs the precariousness of Larsen's dare to remove a young African-American woman from the conventional space of a southern school teacher.

Larsen initiates a pattern of relationships between her female characters in Quicksand which she more nearly perfects in Passing. While Margaret and Helga do not share the closeness of friends, Helga considers Margaret "the most congenial" of all the faculty at Naxos and believes that Margaret "appreciates" her. Margaret makes her plea for Helga to remain, noting "the good salaries, decent rooms, plenty of men." But fearing the loss of her own position, she looks at her watch and remarks, "Well, I've really got to run, or I'll be late myself. And since I'm staying -- " (14). Because Margaret chooses not to disrupt conventional space, she becomes lost among the crowd at Naxos. More exactly, she is left to suffocate among the masses after fulfilling her role as exhorter to Helga.

Even as Helga relocates, Larsen shows the risk that is imminent in women fleeing conventional spaces in search of greater freedom and a fuller awareness of themselves.

Mechanical conveyances figure significantly as the character moves from one space to another. It is as if the victim in transit can use that time to become acclimated to the change. The stifling atmosphere of Naxos follows Helga as she travels by train to Chicago:

> Long, soft white clouds . . . streaked the blue of the early evening sky. Over the flying landscape hung a very faint mist, disturbed now and then by a languid breeze. But no coolness invaded the heat of the train rushing north. The open windows of the stuffy day coach, where Helga sat with the others of her race, seemed only to intensify her discomfort. Her head ached with a steady pounding pain. This, added to her wounds of the spirit, made traveling something little short of a medieval torture (22).

The space which Helga occupies as a passenger on the segregated train is in direct contrast to the open landscape she observes from the train's window. Though she is leaving Naxos, the constricted surroundings on the train match the stifling atmosphere of the auditorium in Naxos. The white man who strides through, making the doorway impassable and polluting the water receptacle, is the counterpart of the patriarchal figure at the Naxos assembly. Both men's gestures symbolize the suffocating space to which they confine the African-American woman.

In her introduction to The Gender of Modernism, Bonnie Kime Scott refers to Larsen's use of "restless travel . . . to explore the bewildering array of shifting possibilities for modern women" (13). Perhaps the travel suggests restlessness because Scott, like Larsen in her time, is aware of the staid lives which women of the 1920s were expected to lead. Larsen depicts train travel as especially constricting for her characters, owing in part to racism [33] and in a greater sense to the limited, respectable movement for women. The discomfort which Helga experiences while traveling by train thwarts her mobility in both the North and the South.

The constraints placed on women such as Helga not only leave them restless, as Scott so aptly puts it, but also result in a highly ambiguous concept of home space. Nowhere is the concept of home more equivocal than in the scene in Quicksand involving Helga's trip to her uncle's house in Chicago to obtain money. She discovers the uncle remarried to a woman who disclaims for her husband any connection with a niece of mixed blood. The rejection sends Helga back into the streets to observe the masses of people, "the moving multi-colored crowd," with whom she forms a temporary

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[33] Robert Stepto discusses the "seminal journey" used in African-American literature as the journey north. We can extend Stepto's definition, which obviously refers to the underground railroad, to later include the segregated train. See Stepto, From Behind the Veil (Urbana: Illinois UP, 1979), 67.

alliance, a feeling "that she had come home. She, Helga Crane, who had no home" (30). Helga's feeling here does not stem entirely from her mixed blood or even the illegitimacy which Peter Nilssen's wife intimates. The attitude harkens back to the risk Margaret Creighton warns Helga of when she impulsively quits her job at Naxos. Larsen uses the incident in Chicago with the Nilssens to critique the dependency of women, especially when they venture outside conventional spaces.

The exploration outside sanctioned spaces leaves Larsen's female characters isolated, disillusioned, and oftentimes emotionally depleted. Attempting to sustain themselves, in some instances, they return to routine spaces temporarily. Larsen emphasizes the conventionality of female career spaces -- work places which women can regard as "home" -- in a scene subsequent to Helga's being cast out of her uncle's family. Hopeful of finding work as a librarian, Helga discovers that she lacks the qualifications. What follows is a catalogue of women's work which runs through Helga's mind:

> Teaching, even substitute teaching, was hopeless now, in March. She had no business training, and the shops didn't employ colored clerks or salespeople, not even the smaller ones. She couldn't sew, she couldn't cook. Well, she <u>could</u> do housework, or wait on tables, for a short time at

least (32).

Helga's debate with herself results in acquiescence to service work. Such work tends toward the transformation back to the most conventional domestic space. Helga has not given up her struggle but she has reached a stalemate in her quest for self, as indicated by the conditional phrase at the end of her reverie, "for a short time at least." Larsen posits the idea which Claudia Tate says African-American women writers project in their writing: "[T]heir fictional characters engage in perplexing struggles to maintain their human dignity and emotional sensitivity in an impersonal, alien, and frequently threatening world" (Introduction to Black Women Writers at Work xvi).

A reprieve from the alienation and struggle for Larsen's women characters sometimes comes in sustenance from other women who need reciprocal support. Although we see the potential for that kind of mutual support between Margaret Creighton and Helga, it does not materialize. Nor is it realized in Chicago between Helga and the women at the Young Women's Christian Association or at the Negro Episcopal church on Michigan Avenue. The sense of community begins only when Helga, with some resignation, accepts a job as a "traveling-companion for a lecturing female on her way to a convention" (35). Helga's train trip from Chicago to New York bears marked contrast to her previous one from the South. Mrs. Hayes-Rore becomes the medium to greater

freedom for Helga. She is busy editing the lecturer's speeches, and the productive work as an editor becomes the primary activity, not being a mere passenger on the train. Though the job is short-lived, it serves as a crucial moment in Helga's life. First, unable to explain her background to Robert Anderson, Helga establishes a rapport with her present employer which forces the story of her dreadful heritage. Helga has feelings entirely different from the ones she had on the train ride from Naxos: "The other woman still looked out of the window, apparently so interested in the outer aspect of the drab sections of the Jersey manufacturing city through which they were passing . . . " (39). Helga is so engrossed in sharing her long held-in feeling of lack of heritage that she loses the sense of suffocation, of being closed in. In fact, Mrs. Hayes-Rore stares out the train window at the dismal surroundings, giving the impression that she and Helga inhabit the more pleasant environment there on the train. Secondly, the train carries Helga to a temporary sanctum: friendship and living arrangements with Mrs. Hayes-Rore's niece Anne Grey and employment with a Negro insurance company. Unlike Chicago or Naxos, Harlem gives Helga a "transforming experience," and a less fleeting sense of "having come home."

The viability which Larsen gives her characters intermittently, between the restlessness and boredom, serves

as a glimmer of hope. She creates an air of anticipation that Helga has found "family," that she has finally positioned herself in the cultural milieu of Harlem. That, however, is only a transitory feeling. In creating the wavering personality, Larsen analyzes the mulatta figure and allows the reader to reflect on those spaces which enhance and those which retard the character's development. She also pauses to have Helga engage in self-evaluation, although she remains far from an epiphany. The excerpt from Quicksand which serves as an epigraph to this chapter is an instance of self-analysis on Helga's part. It is the end of a four-page chapter which accounts for periods of introspection marked by "frayed nerves," "hot and dispirited" days of living "in intimacy with people one would not have chosen had one been given a choice" (53). Helga realizes at this point that she is tired of the race problem with which her friend Anne Grey has been so completely engrossed. Moreover, Helga is bored with colored Harlem and resents her own blackness. The letter and check for five thousand dollars from her uncle brings feelings "of relief, of liberation" (54). The array of feelings continues: "a smoldering hatred," a sense of being "shut up, boxed up, with hundreds of her race," and even a feeling of "self-loathing" (54-55). Having convinced herself that Harlem, after all, is not the place for her and having the resources to change locations, Helga entertains thoughts of

a European setting "among approving and admiring people, where she would be appreciated, and understood" (57).

It is appropriate that Larsen in one brief chapter of Quicksand uses so many psychological terms. This is a pivotal point in Helga's search for her identity. She has no interaction with any other characters, except to ask her employer's permission to go out for air. Within the confines of her mind, she battles with the prospect of changing places, ethnically and geographically. The dilemma of where to go intensifies as Helga mingles with Harlem professionals at a dinner party and later with all manner of Harlem's population at a cabaret. Ironically, she is on a ship headed for Denmark in neutral waters of the Atlantic before she reflects on her life in Harlem and decides, "No, she hadn't belonged there" (63). She thus imagines that Europe is her rightful place.

As I have discussed the impact of sexuality in Chapter Two of this study, it bears repeating that Helga's gender affects the reality of her dream: she finds herself among Europeans who have more admiration for her than they have understanding.[34] She is metaphorically the peacock on

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[34] In her analysis of Ida in James Baldwin's novel Another Country, Trudier Harris likens Ida's elusive qualities to Helga Crane in Larsen's Quicksand. Harris notes that once Ida leaves Harlem, "she is cut adrift from the black community" and "becomes a peacock paraded before the white characters' notions of black womanhood." See Trudier Harris, Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin (Knoxville: Tennessee UP, 1985), p. 126.

parade. Initially she is pleased with the luxury, the attention, the complete reversal of her "sad forlorn past" and concludes that "this, then, was where she belonged" (67).

Larsen accounts for the contrast in her female characters' public life and their private thoughts in ambiguous terms. Even while they look for public approval and obtain admiration, they explore the recesses of their minds for justification for their behavior. Having enjoyed for a time the Europeans' assessment of African-American womanhood, Helga returns to Harlem to renew connections with her native culture. Her thoughts reflect the duality of her existence:

> This knowledge, this certainty of the division of her life into two parts in two lands, into physical freedom in Europe and spiritual freedom in America, was unfortunate, inconvenient, expensive. It was, too, as she was uncomfortably aware, even a trifle ridiculous, and mentally she caricatured herself moving shuttle-like from continent to continent. From the prejudiced restrictions of the New World to the easy formality of the Old, from the pale calm of Copenhagen to the colorful lure of Harlem (96).

Helga's ruminations indicate her frustration as well as anger with the complexities of her life. How is she to rid

herself of the inconvenience and expense of a life shuttling back and forth from one continent to another, from the North to the South, from one group of friends to another, from one job to another? Larsen, through Helga Crane, poses those questions about African-American women, but fails to provide definitive answers. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Quicksand remains primarily Helga's visualization of herself in strange and different places.

The unsatisfactory ending which Larsen gives to Quicksand proves less so when the reader examines the "mental quagmire" in which Helga remains throughout. A struggle persists in each phase of her life to situate herself in society replete with space to realize self-worth. One highly respected critic during Larsen's career perceived of her plan. W. E. B. DuBois reviewed Quicksand for The Crisis in June 1928 and wrote of Larsen's "subtle comprehension of the curious cross currents that swirl about the black American" (202). DuBois's imagery of cross currents coincides with Larsen's quicksand imagery in the novel. Noting in his review that the novel lacks a "happy ending," DuBois adds that the theme, however, is not defeatist. A close reading of the novel justifies both DuBois's statement and Larsen's handling of the ending. The space which Helga occupies at the end -- lying in bed recovering from the difficult birth of her fourth child or, a few months later, conceiving a fifth time -- is not what she would choose for herself.

Nevertheless, the environment does not entirely destroy Helga's spirit of resistance, for "she was determined to get herself out of this bog into which she had strayed" (134). The dislodgement, to be exact, is more cerebral than physical. Helga transforms herself in this environment into a one-woman think tank. First, she contrasts her moments of fantasy -- her religious conversion -- with this longer period of reality. Obviously focusing on her husband and his poor parishioners, she expands the idea of religion and its meaning for people generally: "Religion had, after all, its uses. It blunted the perceptions. Robbed life of its crudest truths. Especially it had its uses for the poor -- and the blacks" (133). Helga shows a level of cynicism about religion that is comparable to the French emperor Napoleon who said that religion is the opium of the masses, keeping the poor from becoming murderers. Secondly, Helga begins to search within herself for contentment, recalling that the present feeling of asphyxiation had been with her in Naxos, New York, and Copenhagen (134). And finally, she envisions the future for her children, a mental exercise which Susan Willis calls seeing "the future born out of the context of oppression" (159). The recollection of Helga's own childhood heightens her sensibility to the dilemma of motherhood. She can only anticipate that her endurance of this oppressive space will somehow transform into greater freedom for her children.

The tentative peace which Larsen depicts in leaving Helga in a conventional space at the conclusion of Quicksand correlates to Irene Redfield's position in the opening scene of Passing, Larsen's second novel. Irene's contentment is highly superficial. As the wife of a medical doctor who wants to take his practice from Manhattan to South America, Irene dissipates her energy trying to keep her husband happy in Harlem, rear their two sons in typical upper-middle-class fashion, manage a house run by servants, and lead innumerable charity functions. The main quality separating Helga in her final situation in Quicksand and Irene throughout Passing is class. Irene will not forgo security, though she pretends that family, friends, and the less fortunate are her reason for existence.

Having created such an apparently staid personality in Irene, Larsen offsets her with Clare Kendry, a vibrant attractive middle-class woman from humble beginnings. Part of Clare's defiance of the poverty and deprivation she knew as a child is to pass as an adult and to marry a wealthy white man with whom she can travel, acquire material possessions, and become a part of mainstream society. Such a lifestyle, however, leaves Clare disillusioned and cold towards white society, including her husband and daughter. She re-encounters Irene Redfield, who knows her past. The two form a tenuous friendship whereby Clare uses Irene to re-connect with the colored world. Because Clare is

unwilling to give up her space as the partner of the racist Bellew, her position in the colored world is highly ambiguous. She has no real loyalty to anyone; her emptiness is seen in her slinking feline movements, accompanied by her bell-like laughter, announcing her prowls through the Harlem culture. Clare seems always to be stepping on the precipice of destruction, whether it is of her own life or someone else's.

Larsen uses a series of flashbacks through Irene Redfield's memory to convey the transformation of domestic space and racial space in Clare's life. Her displacement begins with the defiance of traditional relationship between father and daughter and extends to Clare's traverse as an adult between two races. The first hint of Clare's seeming "out of place and alien" comes in the third line of the opening scene of the novel (143). The mysterious envelope, made from exquisite Italian paper, rather illegibly addressed, stands out from the rest of Irene's mail and becomes an objective correlative for the isolated, marginalized life which Clare Kendry led as a child and which she continues as the adult Clare Bellew. The letter, though unopened, causes Irene to reflect on how Clare was "[s]tepping always on the edge of danger" (143). It began with her resistance to paternal domination:

> Clare had known well enough that it was unsafe to take a portion of the dollar that was her weekly

> wage for the doing of many errands for the dressmaker who lived on the top floor of the building of which Bob Kendry was janitor. But that knowledge had not deterred her. She wanted to go to her Sunday school's picnic, and she had made up her mind to wear a new dress. So, in spite of certain unpleasantness and possible danger, she had taken the money to buy the material for that pathetic little red frock (144).

In showing Clare's defiance of her father's rules, Larsen deforms the conventional space of a daughter's subservience to her father. Theoretically, Clare assumes the space of dressmaker much like the dressmaker on the top floor who pays Clare to run errands. She is willing to risk punishment from her father in order to acquire the little red dress she wants for the picnic.

Irene's reflections on the risks Clare was prone to take are similar to Margaret's warning to Helga not to resign from her teaching position at Naxos. Discernible in the parallel situations is Larsen's tendency to use one character as a foil for the other. The two women occupy similar spaces while assuming ostensibly different views.

Irene remains as dominant as Clare throughout the novel, not only because the image of Clare filters through Irene's memory, but also because Irene emotionally seeks to abandon her conventional spaces and often finds herself

perfunctorily filling those roles prescribed for her. Especially does Irene show ambivalence in her interactions with Clare. Repeatedly Irene vows not to "assist Clare to realize her foolish desire to return for a moment to that life which long ago, and of her own choice, she had left behind her" (145). At times it appears that Irene shows more excitement for the life that Clare leads than Clare herself shows. The reader tends to believe Margaret in Quicksand when she runs off to safeguard her position at Naxos, but skepticism mounts as Irene retreats from Clare's telephone calls, refuses to answer her letters, but acquiesces to her pleas for invitations to teas, benefit dances, etc.

Tension exists between the two characters although their inward nature is very much the same. Some of the misgivings which Irene has about Clare emanate from her own insecurities. The feline qualities which Irene ascribes to Clare in the following passage seem applicable to Irene herself:

> Catlike. Certainly that was the word which best described Clare Kendry, if any single word could describe her. Sometimes she was hard and apparently without feeling at all; sometimes she was affectionate and rashly impulsive. And there was about her an amazing soft malice, hidden well away until provoked. Then she was capable of

> scratching, and very effectively too. Or, driven to anger, she would fight with a ferocity and impetuousness that disregarded or forgot any danger; superior strength, numbers, or other unfavourable circumstances (144-45).

Ironically, Irene describes Clare in much the same way that critics see Irene herself. In her essay "Larsen's Passing: A Reflection of the American Dream," Joyce Ann Joyce sees Irene as "confused, hypocritical, and far too superficial to sustain an allegiance to anything outside the security of her marriage and social standing" (72). Joyce believes that Irene's bourgeois attitude isolates her from her race and that her chief pursuit is the American dream -- material assets, personal security. If this theory is accurate, the survivalist qualities apply equally to Irene. While she remains within traditional domestic space and reflects less than admirable qualities, Irene is fighting for her life just as vigorously as is Clare. In spite of the impressive status Irene holds as society matron and wife of a doctor, she seems unfulfilled or insecure. She knows that Clare needs to associate with Blacks while remaining married to the white racist John Bellew. Yet Irene remains confused, as Joyce notes, when it comes to allegiance to her race or to Clare. Repulsed by Bellew's racist remarks, Irene threatens to reveal Clare's true identity but does not. After arranging for Clare to fraternize with Harlemites, she

suspects Clare's intimacy with Brian and threatens again to disclose Clare's mixed blood but refrains from doing so. When Bellew finally discovers Clare at the Freelands' apartment, resulting in Clare's fatal fall, only Irene believes that she might have pushed Clare. Irene's distrust, suspicions, and inadequacies metastasize into a paranoia which leaves her nearly as lifeless as her counterpart who falls from the window.

Larsen's strategy of having Irene and Clare coexist reveals Irene's confusion about the spaces she is expected to occupy and those in which she finds comfort and satisfaction. It is far easier for her to discern Clare's needs than her own. She seems more content when she is out of the social milieu prescribed for her, that is, wife and mother. While in Chicago, she becomes totally exhausted in shopping for a gift to take home to one of her sons and flees to the rooftop tearoom of the exclusive Drayton Hotel. As indicated in the epigraph to this chapter, in the tea room she finds relief from the stifling world below, as if she were "being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world" (147). Indeed, it is another world, for Irene can enjoy this setting only because she is temporarily "passing." The idea of "passing" on a regular basis does not appeal to Irene because she feels financially secure in her middle-class Negro station. On the surface, Irene's status appears to be comparable to that of Mattie Murray in

Fauset's Plum Bun. Both Irene and Mattie seem content with their marriage to men within their own race and have only an occasional yearning to step into the spaces which middle- and upper-class white women occupy for social gratification. Irene's ambivalence, however, manifests itself in her vacillating behavior when she and Clare discuss possible justifications for passing:

> Irene could only shrug her shoulders. . . . and though conscious that if she didn't hurry away, she was going to be late to dinner, she still lingered. It was as if the woman sitting on the other side of the table, a girl that she had known, who had done this rather dangerous and, to Irene Redfield, abhorrent thing successfully and had announced herself well satisfied, had for her a fascination, strange and compelling (161).

The uncertainty Irene shows is another instance of Larsen's experimenting with displacement. The risks and psychological damages inherent in Irene's making more than an occasional visit into the white world would disrupt more than her life. There are the impending devastations of her husband's career and the personal lives of her two sons. The transformation of domestic space in Irene's case would be more far-reaching than Clare's earlier decision to alter her racial situation. While I tend to distinguish between Clare's "passing" and the encroachment on family ties which

Irene's decision to "pass" would create, Mary Helen Washington views the act essentially as the denial of spaces entirely. She calls "passing" "an obscene form of salvation," adding that "[t]he woman who passes is required to deny everything about her past: her girlhood, her family, places with memories, folk customs, folk rhymes, her language, the entire long line of people who have gone before her" (Invented Lives 164). Indeed, Clare risks losing the security which she acquired through her marriage to Bellew because of the nostalgia she has for her native customs and localities. Although Washington's view and my own pertain to moving from one racial space to another, there is an additional issue of class. Irene is situated in a middle-class location where she receives more than adequate financial security. If she should be downgraded in status, she would also be deprived of congenial customs in much the way that Helga is in her decision to marry the poor, rural Southern minister. Obviously, Larsen experiments with class and racial forms of displacement in both novels. She suggests that Helga, Anne Grey, Irene, and Clare cannot be pigeonholed into positions as schoolteacher, society matron, wife and mother without experiencing feelings of restlessness, boredom, and suffocation.

In spite of the distinct personalities which the four women have, Larsen never quite empowers her women characters in Quicksand with the vitality and determination to enjoy

life which the women in Passing display. Anne Grey fades into nothingness after she is married to Dr. Anderson. The hopefulness and endurance which Helga shows while living and working in New York subsides into passivity in Denmark. By contrast, the struggle against an impersonal and alien world, which Claudia Tate discusses, consumes Clare's life. To be sure, Clare becomes the middle-class likeness of Jake from McKay's Home to Harlem. Clare "thrills" to Harlem in much the same way that Jake does. Having entered the white world for security, she has a compulsion to re-enter the culture of Harlem for its energy and spirit. In a letter to Irene after moving to New York, Clare writes, "'You can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be free of. . . '" (145).

Clare's pursuit of vitality and excitement pits her against the conventional image of African-American middle-class women. She minimizes her role as a mother,[35] intrudes on the family and social life of the Redfields, and

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[35] I agree with Barbara Christian that African-American motherhood was a concern of literature in the beginning of the twentieth century, but that the treatment of motherhood differed from that of the nineteenth century novels. Christian's view and my own digress beyond this point. She believes that the image of "the black mammy" was what African-American writers sought to avoid and that they therefore turned to beauty and refinement. See Christian, "An Angle of Seeing" (211-252) in Black Feminist Criticism. I take the view that novels such as Quicksand and Passing assume a different stance on motherhood owing to the author's interest in disrupting conventional female spaces.

projects the ambivalent image of the party crasher/honored guest at Harlem social functions. In several instances Clare's failure to adhere to a standard can be measured by Irene's more nearly perfect adherence to it. Such is the case in their parenting. While Irene fills the space of mother so dutifully, Clare negates the image in the manner of Kate Chopin's Mrs. Pontellier who, the narrator says, is not a mother-woman.[36] Clare remarks, "'Children aren't everything. There are other things in the world, though I admit some people don't suspect it'" (210). Clare not only admits her own minimal interest in children, but also intimates Irene's excessiveness. Notwithstanding Clare's observation, Irene perpetuates the image of the good mother as she warns Clare, for her young daughter's sake, not to risk having her race revealed by spending so much time in Harlem. "Clare's face took on a startled look, as though she were totally unprepared for this new weapon with which Irene had assailed her. . . . 'I think,' she said at last, 'that being a mother is the cruellest thing in the world'" (196-97). Clare at this moment offers the clearest example of the woman breaking away from conventional female spaces.

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[36] Even though they bear no resemblances in ethnicity, Chopin's The Awakening (1899) and Larsen's two novels raise similar issues regarding a feminine sensibility. Chopin uses Edna Pontellier and Adele Ratignolle in a French Creole upper middle-class environment to critique the attitudes at the turn of the century towards feminist issues in much the same way that Larsen uses Clare and Irene in Passing, as well as Helga in Quicksand. See Chopin, The Awakening 1899 (New York: Norton, 1976).

The tension in Larsen's female characters' relationships shows the ambivalence regarding the spaces which society assigns to women and the positions for which they show ability and desire. Referring to Irene and Clare as psychological doubles, Thadious Davis, in her contribution to The Gender of Modernism, sees a contrast of the "self-denying" and the "self-seeking" in Irene and Clare respectively (211). Because Irene denies herself space for autonomy and personal realization, she is continuously filled with frustration, guilt, and oftentimes suspicion and rage. Her eagerness to be the consummate mother while away from her children, visiting her father in Chicago, results in misguided behavior. On a sweltering day she searches in more than five shops for a drawing-book which her son Ted had "gravely and insistently given her precise directions" to bring back (146). Such an intense search leaves Irene so irritable and hot that she fails to show human concern for a man who collapses from heat exhaustion on the street in front of her. In this scene Ted's drawing-book becomes an objective correlative for the irrational precision of Irene's life. The near fanaticism she shows for carrying out Ted's wish indicates how her son actually draws the parameters for her behavior. Having denied herself almost entirely, Irene cannot see that her own comfort and the inquiry into the welfare of the heat victim are more important than finding the specific type of drawing-book Ted

has requested. Thus, the question which Davis accurately describes as basic to Larsen's other novel appears to be common to both of Larsen's works -- "the woman's place in relation to self, family, and society" (211).

Larsen raises the question of the woman's place without giving definitive answers. Readers of both novels can arrive at some conclusions of their own through Larsen's techniques. She repeatedly weighs Irene's outward appearance of total giving with Clare's inclination to find her own happiness. The "self-seeking" behavior of Clare exceeds the determination to enjoy life which even Irene's opponents would expect. Clare's selfishness leaves little room for family or society except when the two groups bring her closer to self-gratification. Irene's perception of her friend's egotism is disclosed in Part Two of the novel, which Larsen labels "Re-Encounter." Irene recalls her encounter with Clare in Chicago and vows, upon receiving a second letter two years later from Clare in New York, that she will not get involved in Clare's traversing the color line. Irene reasons:

> If at the time of choosing [to pass], Clare hadn't precisely reckoned the cost, she had, nevertheless, no right to expect others to help make up the reckoning. The trouble with Clare was, not only that she wanted to have her cake and eat it too, but that she wanted to nibble at the

cakes of other folks as well (182).

Indeed Clare does seek her own fulfillment at the expense of family and society. She goes to that extreme while trying to free herself from the restraints which she perceives society places on her by virtue of her race and gender.

Through Irene's assessment of her, as well as through her own confession, Clare emerges as the self-serving type who intrudes upon the lives of others. Becoming bolder in her exploits into Harlem, Clare spends an inordinate amount of time with the Redfields, ingratiating herself with Irene's sons, her husband, and the domestic help. She not only goes to dances, house parties and cabarets with Irene and Brian, but also stands in for Irene with Brian at bridge parties and benefit performances (208). One might conclude that Irene shares her domestic space with Clare. While her white racist husband remains unaware of her re-immersion into colored society, Clare in fact has the proverbial cake and eats it too. Meanwhile, reflecting the usual ambivalent feelings, Irene cannot be sure whether this new intimacy is "a joy or a vexation." Larsen chooses to have Clare herself define her position as one diametrically opposed to Irene's: "'Can't you realize that I'm not like you a bit? Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I'd do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really, 'Rene, I'm not safe'" (210).

Critics who conclude with certainty that Irene pushes

Clare to her death would likely see Clare's preceding statement as justification for Irene's action. Because Clare lives on the edge of Black and white society, she sees herself as a daring individual without scruples. Clare is not, however, as destructive a force as she presumes herself to be. Nor is Irene as deadly a silent weapon as critics purport her to be. Larsen has skillfully crafted the novel so that Clare and Irene become an almost composite picture of the displaced middle-class woman of the 1920s. Clare's declaration of her desperate state shows that she is willing to risk moving out of conventional spaces allotted to women. She is willing to face the dangers associated with her action, not only for herself but for her child. Irene's friendship sustains Clare, and Irene's household becomes a haven when Clare needs the nurturance of a home.

Because of her reluctance to break out of conventional spaces, Irene remains frustrated and translates all of her suspicions and imagined occurrences into real ones. She cannot understand Clare's behavior beyond remaining quiet and safe in her chosen life of passing. Yet Clare announces her explorations in clarion tones. In seven different instances in the novel Larsen describes Clare's laughter as bell-like. The bell becomes an objective correlative for the hilarity which Clare possesses in contrast with the somberness of Irene's personality. Irene recalls their first encounter in the tea room at the Drayton Hotel.

Because Irene has temporarily stepped out of her conventional space -- to avoid suffocation -- she does not dream of meeting anyone she knows. It is Clare's laugh that identifies her: "The woman laughed, a lovely laugh, a small sequence of notes that was like a trill and also like the ringing of a delicate bell fashioned of a precious metal, a tinkling" (151). Irene interprets Clare's mirth in contrast with her rumored past of being an entertainer or even a prostitute for white men. Irene cannot reconcile that rumor with Clare's present apparently middle-class state.

The bell-like laugh changes according to the mood which Irene perceives of for Clare. Because the two women's lives are so closely intertwined, Irene interprets the bell-like sounds of Clare's laughter. The two of them discuss the calamity of Clare's teen-age years and the mixed signals she received about who she was. When she recalls that forbidding atmosphere, "[s]he laughed and the ringing bells in her laugh had a hard metallic sound" (159). Though Clare has moved into a more secure position, the recollections are unpleasant as her "hard metallic" laughter indicates. Her laughter peals in the fashion of a prolonged ringing of a bell while she dominates the conversation with news about Europe and her travels there. What Irene finds incongruous is Clare's discussion of world affairs at a tea party. The provincial lives which Irene and Gertrude lead do not allow them to join in Clare's talk of post-war France and Germany,

the industrial strike in England, or Parisian dress designs. Clare, to be sure, recedes from the conventional space which African-American society women occupy.

Yet Larsen cannot sustain Clare's position outside the commonplace. For whatever she experiences is at the expense of her race and gender. The next instance of her bell-like laughter proves her alienation from her native culture. When Bellew explains why he gave Clare the nickname "Nig," Clare, Gertrude, and Irene join him in hysterical laughter at the intended joke. Clare's "ringing bell-like laugh" has the same empty sound as the others in this case because they are all cohorts in deception. The humiliation which all three women conceal through their hysterical laughter is a reminder of Booker T. Washington's masking in Up From Slavery when he recalls his mother's involvement in the chicken-stealing incident.

Clare's tinkling laugh (195) and Irene's recollection after Clare's death of "the ringing bells of her laughter" (239) are the final symbols of Clare's ubiquity in Irene's life. While Clare moves economically from poverty to affluence, racially and geographically back and forth, the psychological hold she has on Irene remains steadfast. Irene marvels at the jovial, care-free personality of a woman who would risk her husband's discovery of her mixed blood, would chance her daughter's emotional ruin, and would even risk being mistaken for a woman "of easy virtue" in

order to be a part of the renaissance society in Harlem. In light of Clare's dauntless behavior, Irene assesses her own: "[I]n spite of her determined selfishness the woman before her was yet capable of heights and depths of feeling that she, Irene Redfield, had never known" (195).

The two women are so different yet so closely entwined emotionally that Irene shares her space with Clare while believing that Clare is attempting to usurp that space. A weary and depressed mood causes Irene to spend the morning aimlessly wandering through the streets of Harlem after ordering flowers for an afternoon tea. While dressing for the tea, she transposes her own restlessness to Brian and again wonders if his moodiness relates to the recurring desire to go to South America to practice medicine. Irene does not want her conventional space threatened by her husband's desire to leave the country. Like Clare, Irene wants to retain her place while she experiences discontent inhabiting it.

The incident at the tea which Irene hosts informs the depth of her anguish and the extent of her subliminal unhappiness. She imagines that Brian appreciates her only as his sons' mother. As the rage intensifies, she absentmindedly drops her teacup. "There was a slight crash. On the floor at her feet lay the shattered cup. Dark stains dotted the bright rug" (221). The honored guest, a white writer named Hugh Wentworth, is at her side. He apologizes

profusely for his clumsiness, thinking he has pushed her. Irene concocts a story of the cup's origin:

> "It was the ugliest thing that your ancestors, the charming Confederates ever owned. I've forgotten how many thousands of years ago it was that Brian's great-great-grand-uncle owned it. . . . It was brought North by way of . . . the underground. What I'm coming to is the fact that I've never figured out a way of getting rid of it until about five minutes ago. I had an inspiration. I had only to break it, and I was rid of it for ever" (222-23).

Strong correlations exist between this scene and the final one which marks the end of the novel, the scene in which the final displacement occurs. Irene's breaking the cup is Larsen's use of adumbration; it is a dramatic foretelling of Clare's fall from the window of the Freelands' sixth floor apartment. More importantly, the broken cup becomes an objective correlative for Irene's emotional breakdown.[37] The conversation Irene has with Wentworth following the incident confirms her confused state

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[37] Hortense Spillers explains in a highly sophisticated manner Larsen's use of the objective correlative or "metonymic close-up" in Passing. Spillers's view, however, makes Clare the undisputed other woman, an opinion which I still hold in some doubt. According to Spillers, "Irene Redfield never says to anyone that she knows that Clare Kendry is stealing her husband Brian, but we know she knows when she drops a piece of crystal [sic] that shatters on the carpet" ("Afterword" in Conjuring 255).

of mind, to which critics have already alluded. She does not want to tell Wentworth that she believes the security of her marriage is being threatened. Consequently, she lapses into race matters -- typical tea party conversation -- and identifies the cup as having come from the Confederate south and as having been one of the ugliest pieces of property of Wentworth's ancestors. Through a stream of consciousness, however, Irene reverses her opinion of Clare, whom Irene has always thought beautiful and now, through the symbolism of the cup, refers to Clare as one of the ugliest "properties" of southern white ancestry. Additional proof of Irene's confused state is the anachronistic reference to Brian's family and to the Underground railroad. Brian's uncle, five generations removed, would not have lived "thousands of years ago." Nor was subway an alternative term for the transport of runaway slaves to the North. Yet Irene's spontaneous but incoherent explanation curbs her subconscious urge to destroy what she believes to be a threat to her space. She returns perfunctorily to her job of pouring tea.

The experiment with displacement which Larsen makes involving Clare and Irene is highly inconclusive. One is left in the suffocating environment of urban middle-class pretentiousness while the other fights the boredom of passing until her death. The two women's lives are too mutually dependent for Larsen explicitly to portray Irene as

Clare's murderer. Instead she posits the notion of Irene's guilt solely because Irene is so emotionally dependent and unreliable. Irene's instability and subconscious guilt cause her to believe that she pushed Clare.

In both of Larsen's novels the expansion of female spaces appears more psychological and temporal than physical and permanent. The characters envision a future for themselves or for other women out of the oppressive settings from which they see only momentary relief. An ironic twist occurs in Quicksand in that Helga's illness for six weeks following the birth of her fourth child requires her to remain in bed. The white doctor who visits her has the same negative effect as the minister at Naxos and the train conductor. Some healing takes place when the nurse arrives, for she understands Helga's need for rest. Though no healing emerges at the end of Passing, the inevitability of Clare's destruction seems inextricably bound with Irene's temporary escape from suffocation at the beginning. Larsen ends the novel with the same kind of spatial relationship with which she begins. The vertical move by elevator from the staggering heat of the crowds to the expanse of the rooftop restaurant brings Irene and Clare together for the first time in many years. Likewise, the trapped feeling which pervades the Freelands' sixth floor apartment precipitates Clare's fall. The descent in this case breaches the precarious relationship between the two women.

Larsen positions Irene and Clare so as to posit the notion that "a highly refined state of psychological oppressions . . . is no less a death than direct physical destruction.-"[38]

Although several of Larsen's female characters remain lodged in a mental quagmire, and although Clare suffers physical destruction while Irene endures psychological oppression, Larsen does, in fact, prepare the way for greater expansion of female spaces in the literature of other African-American women writers. Larsen's temporary displacements prepare later reading audiences for Ann Petry's disruption of female spaces in her novel The Street. Petry exposes the racist and sexist barriers which the African-American woman of a lower class experiences. In an attempt to overcome those barriers Lutie Johnson channels her energies and talents toward creating an autonomous life. Petry does not eradicate the domestic aspect of women's lives, but uses the woman's feminine sensibilities as a motivating factor to achieve independence. Lutie's love for her son is primarily what drives her to battle the forces in the street to avoid his destruction and her own. The street becomes a metaphor for the economic, racial, and sexual

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[38] Frances Cress Welsing expresses the parity between psychological and physical destruction in her discussion of the responsibility of African-American adults to future generations in her essay "Black Women Moving Towards the 21st Century." See Black Books Bulletin, volume 8, 1991 Annual, pp. 1-5.

opposition to Lutie's survival. An array of characters comprise an environment hostile to Lutie's survival.

Petry takes an ingenious approach to depicting the ill effects of poverty and racism on an African-American woman who aspires to the American dream. Lutie, like Chester Himes's Bob Jones in If He Hollers, Let Him Go, battles against the pressures of her environment. More like Himes's male character than readers might expect, Lutie expects her willingness to work hard and her talents, not her attractiveness as a woman, to earn a respectable living for Bub and herself. Acknowledging the traditional space she occupies as mother to her son, she rationalizes that there should be no other prescribed positions to which she should fear being relegated. As she ascends the stairs with the Super to inspect the apartment on 116th Street, she debates with herself the misgivings she has of the Super:

> "The tall gentleman who is the superintendent is supposed to rent apartments, fire the furnace, sweep the halls, and that's as far as he is supposed to go. If he tries to include making love to the female tenants, this is New York City in the year 1944 . . . " (19).

The ironic reference to time is as telling as Larsen's character's grasp at modernity in Passing when Irene reminds Clare that "this was the year 1927 in the city of New York" (198). Lutie Johnson discovers, however, that men

frequently invade the private space which women regard as their own.

Petry's depiction of Lutie as a pragmatic, willful woman, striving for autonomy, may seem in direct contrast with Larsen's middle-class mulatta characters.[39] Yet, the difference is more apparent than real. Larsen's experiment with the transformation of domestic space enables Petry to protest openly the restrictions which society places upon the African-American woman of the lower class. The emotional debilitation inherent in the spaces that Larsen's women occupy prefigures what Calvin Hernton calls "Multiple Oppression" of women in The Street. In his book The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers, Hernton discusses the pervasiveness of sexism in the literary world. More specifically, he credits Petry with a seminal treatment of the "economic, racial and sexual violence let loose against black women in their new urban ghetto environment" (61). Rather than seeing Larsen and Petry as writers engaged in literary opposition, as Spillers affirms, or separated by distinct interests in class, as Hernton implies, I see Larsen's and Petry's novels as part of a continuum. This

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[39] Hortense Spillers believes that the contrast of Petry's "ideology of the environment" and Fauset and Larsen's belief in "genetic determinism" would not allow the two periods of writing to inhabit the same "literary universe." See Spillers' Afterword to Conjuring, p. 254. In terms of female space, I take the view that forces in the environment conspire with distorted perceptions of female qualities to restrict the positions which women can occupy.

continuum informs the stifling effect of gender-prescribed roles and the powerlessness of African-American women to change courses.

Petry's Lutie Johnson is interesting because of her unusual maneuvering. The reader never senses that Lutie wants to abandon her domestic space as mother to Bub. She is determined to rear him in her/his home, not in the anteroom of a white family's house. She does not want him to shine shoes as a boy for fear that he will always be regarded as a "boy." Consequently, Lutie works for a wealthy white family to support Bub, leaving him in their New York apartment with his unemployed father. Petry reverses traditional roles of husband and wife rather subtly except to show Lutie emotionally undone when Jim takes another woman in Lutie's absence.[40] This incident is the first in a long series in which Lutie's vulnerability as a woman and mother undercuts her determination to remain independent and respectable -- to borrow a trait from the Harlem Renaissance mulatta characters of Fauset and Larsen.

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[40] Donald Petesch misplaces the emphasis in Lutie's taking the job away from home when he summarizes in the following manner: "In order to save money she goes home to visit Jim, her husband, only once every two months, and their marriage breaks up." See A Spy in the Enemy's Country, pp. 37-38. Petesch points out Lutie's adopting the materialistic belief of the Chandlers, but the reader also infers Petesch's belief that the greatest deprivation is the husband's carnal needs. Such a critical view may emerge from Chapter 7 of the novel where Petry employs flashbacks involving Lutie's soul-searching attempts to understand the failures in her life, including the alienation of her husband and her father.

The strength of Petry's character Lutie lies in her persistence to move boldly against the metaphorical street to claim her own, her son, her values, and her autonomy. Lutie becomes a giant in her perception of the white world which she views through the Chandlers. From her vantage point as maid, she sees their world as strange, as if she were "looking through a hole in a wall at some enchanted garden" where "the people on the other side of the wall knew less about her than she knew about them" (41). The vision which Lutie acquires in working at the Chandlers' suburban estate helps her to see the wall which exists between her values, her status as a woman and the urban world to which she returns. Yet her perception never materializes into changed behavior, owing to economic conditions. When she mounts the narrow suffocating stairway to the apartment she will rent for Bub and herself, she senses the Super's consuming stare but cannot afford to refuse the apartment. The "cold November wind" turns garbage can tops, discarded newspaper, and even chicken bones into enemy forces comprising a naturalistic setting wherein Lutie feels compelled to take shelter.

The woman's vulnerability remains apparent even as Petry shows her character progressing in self-reliance. Lutie's rescue from the Super's attempt to rape her comes at the hands of Mrs. Hedges, who wants to save Lutie for the white pimp Junto. The Super avenges Lutie's rejection of

him by involving Bub in mail theft. Though Lutie does not discover Bub's juvenile, criminal activity for some time, she senses the need to earn more money as a singer in a nightclub in order to afford a better apartment than the 116th Street one for Bub and her. Her frustration returns when she discovers that she must entertain for experience unless she can afford voice lessons or receive them in exchange for sexual favors to the owner of the Crosse School for Singers. Petry's situating of Lutie in the foregoing predicaments and Lutie's subsequent despair foreshadow Gloria Naylor's depiction of the lower-class African-American woman in The Women of Brewster Place. Lutie thinks, "From the time she was born, she had been hemmed into an ever-narrowing space, until now she was very nearly walled in and the wall had been built up brick by brick by eager white hands" (323-24). The race hatred which consumes Lutie shows Petry's inclination to conflate social protest and naturalism in her denouncing of poverty, racism, and sexism. All of these negatives prompt Lutie to see herself as self-loathing with the "uncontrolled savagery" of the animals she and Bub had seen at the zoo.

Lutie's frustrated, distorted image of self prepares the reader for the final scene, considered unique to African-American women's writing at that time. Ironically, Lutie's final effort to save her son from the most despicable segment of the street exposes her powerlessness.

The lawyer, the nightclub manager, and his boss take advantage of Lutie's desperation as the mother of a young child in trouble to try to sate their appetites for money and sex. Lutie murders Boots. In doing so, she steps out of her role as mother, discards her aspiring image of respectability, and becomes a sexless, raceless entity. Hernton credits Petry with having made "the boldest stroke that a black woman author ever dared." He assigns her the dubious distinction of authoring "the first writing in which a black man is killed by a black woman for being an unmitigated villain in the oppression of that woman" (59).

Though Hernton in this instance seems to put too much emphasis on sheer plot, he is more nearly accurate in assessing the boldness reflected in Petry's novel. There is little masking in Petry's writing. Unlike Larsen who had to be concerned about publishers' rejection and who mirrored her own class image because she knew hardly any other, Petry steps outside the range of her own upper-middle-class upbringing.[41] She draws the material for her fiction from the proletarian class which she discovered in large northern cities, especially the Harlem ghetto. More importantly, Petry's novel bridges the gap between Harlem Renaissance women's writing and contemporary African-American women's

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[41] See Arthur P. Davis, From the Dark Tower (Washington: Howard UP, 1974), p. 193, and Mary Helen Washington Invented Lives (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 304. Both Davis and Washington refer to Petry's heritage of New England professional parents.

novels. Following the expansion of female space seen in The Street, Gwendolyn Brooks's Maud Martha (1953), Kristin Hunter's God Bless the Child (1964), and Toni Morrison's Sula (1974) portray women who suffer from the constricted spaces they must occupy. Like Lutie Johnson, the women in novels succeeding The Street -- Maud Martha, Rosie Fleming, and Sula Peace -- are heroes of the female subculture. They struggle against a society which denies them meaningful work and satisfying lifestyles. Nearly all search for spaces that are nontraditional but ultimately find themselves in positions which leave their lives blighted, resulting in muted voices and aberrant behavior. To paraphrase Cheryl Wall in her assessment of Helga Crane, although these characters' quests end in defeat, their struggles are nonetheless desirable ("Passing for What?" BALF).

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Even though present day scholars show an intense interest in the Harlem Renaissance, for the nearly half century since its inception, the interest has been sporadic. Fauset's four novels, written between 1924 and 1933, and Larsen's two novels, written in 1928 and 1929, comprise a large and significant part of the literary works of the early twentieth century which contribute to the African-American literary canon. Yet, when many of today's octogenarians recall their participation in the Harlem Renaissance, they reminisce mainly about the cabarets, rent parties, and other social functions which they witnessed. Or they mentally pick up one of Fauset's or Larsen's novels, speak proudly of the display of the DuBoisian theory of the "talented tenth" and gently lay the works aside. Although there is no intent to criticize the level of involvement of our elders, it is obvious that the masses considered the economic, social, and political aspects of the renaissance to the exclusion of the literary works. Even the more scholarly members of the population of that era have evaluated Fauset's and Larsen's writing by the standards of male writing. These critics, such as Eda Lou Walton in an Opportunity review, express disappointment in failing to find in Larsen's novels the "zestful interest in life in

Harlem" which "other novelists of Negro life" have depicted (213). Or, as two reviews in the Times Literary Supplement suggest, Fauset's contemporaries found Plum Bun preoccupied with the commonplace and The Chinaberry Tree boring because of the author's tendency to make one of her women characters too distinct (29 Nov. 1928; 23 June 1932). Because Fauset and Larsen were being held to the standards of male writing, critics not only found the novelists' subject matter boring and irrelevant, but also failed to see the female sensibility which both writers were espousing. Such reactions and oversights result in a superficiality towards the renaissance itself.

While undertaking this study of Fauset and Larsen, I paused momentarily to try to decide whether superficial interest in or sporadic excitement for the Harlem Renaissance is the lesser of the two evils. Ultimately I decided in favor of the lull in interest, for I have been encouraged by the renewed energy resulting in scholarship which began in the 1970s. The presence of a feminine sensibility in novels by Fauset and Larsen has become the issue of current study by scholars such as Thadious Davis, Gloria Hull, Deborah McDowell, and Mary Helen Washington. Neither these critics nor others have come to a consensus on what Fauset and Larsen are doing with the issue of women or how successful either writer is in positing a feminist view. What has been enriching is that we all, to varying degrees,

see Fauset and Larsen as having gone beyond the stereotype of writing sentimentally about the upper-class and lamenting the tragedy of the mulatta character.

Through close analysis this study has shown that both Fauset and Larsen use the mulatta as a narrative strategy to mask feminist issues to which their reading audiences would be overly sensitive. These authors bring their writing into the modern era by conjoining the aforementioned historical strategy and thematic strands which adhere to the modernist ideology: the micro-cosmic thinking of Helga Crane; the social isolation of Helga, Angela Murray, and Laurentine Strange; the elusive self-identity of Angela, Helga, and Clare Kendry; and the genderless stance of minor characters in Plum Bun and Quicksand. Both authors provide a paradigm of African-American modernism, as they raise the awareness of their audiences regarding the female presence in literature and point to race empowerment for oppressed people.

An examination of Fauset's and Larsen's work has required a re-defining of modernism to include greater attention to race and gender and less emphasis on form. While the content/form struggle has been a long-standing one in the evaluation of African-American literature, the tension diminishes in light of feminist critics and minority theorists who offer new ways of examining minority literature. Substantial progress has taken place since

Fauset's biographer Sylvander was forced to defend her position against critics' views that African-American artists lacked skills in the "manipulation of foreshadowing[,] . . . flashback . . . and characterization."[42] Subsequent to Sylvander's somewhat isolated stance in praise of Fauset's craft, theories such as Houston Baker's have emerged that critics, and by inference creative artists as well, are free "to hypothesize and represent [new] meanings" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 138). Some of the most enlightening contexts of modernism are found in Bonnie Kime Scott's introduction to her anthology as she attempts to wrest from modernism its sexist and racist meanings.

Critics continually observe the influence of Henry James, Sinclair Lewis, and Kate Chopin on Nella Larsen especially.[43] In all instances the similarity between Larsen's novels and the aforementioned authors' works pertains to gender. The characterization of women and themes related to their treatment and their positions in

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[42] Sylvander believes that Fauset was "quite successful in reconciling the form-content difficulty" (10). In her discussion of the ongoing battle, Sylvander quotes opposing views of Edward Bland in an essay in Negro Quarterly (1942).

[43] See Robert E. Fleming, "The Influence of Main Street on Nella Larsen's Quicksand," Modern Fiction Studies 31 (Autumn 1985): 547-553; Mary M. Lay, "Parallels: Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady and Nella Larsen's Quicksand," College Language Association Journal 20 (1977): 474-486. In Chapter IV of this study I allude to Kate Chopin's The Awakening and its similarity to Passing.

society are what would bring these writers into a common circle. Yet there appears to be a missing entity in the circle which these women could form. With all of the pathos which the women in Main Street and The Awakening evoke, none of the empathy for the plight of women is spent on minority women. As Robert Fleming discusses Lewis's work as one which "startled middle America out of its complacency" (553), he brings in a factor which Lewis and other white writers seem less aware of. The feminine sensibility which their writings might have called attention to continued to exclude African-American women. While the limitations of white America and those within her race stifle Helga Crane, Chopin's character has no such dual barriers. Edna Pontellier's access to a quadroon nurse who looks after the Pontellier children bolsters her search for self-awareness and autonomy. While Chopin transforms the real mother's domestic role into one of practicing artist, the nurse assumes the unnatural role of mother by virtue of race and class. It seems incumbent, therefore, upon African-American women writers to delve into issues of sexuality, careers, and social choices for women of color. Fauset and Larsen have done exactly that in their novels.

The politics of the two novelists' race and era motivated them to acknowledge the importance of racial heritage in African-American letters and at the same time treat a class of women about which they had knowledge and

experience. This strange blend of political savvy results in the use of the mulatta -- an acceptable strategy to both white and African-American audiences -- to mask the woman's need for self-expression. Notwithstanding economic and geographical differences, the conventions of society militate against the female character's realization of a true identity. The metaphorical quagmire alluded to in Larsen's Quicksand is the sexism and racism which stifle not only Helga, but also the lives of the women in Passing, Plum Bun, and The Chinaberry Tree. Class becomes much less problematic than race and gender if one considers the plight of the characters in all of the novels under study.

While asserting in the introduction that Harlem Renaissance writers operated under a common rubric of advocating urban pluralism, rejecting white patronage, and encouraging cultural autonomy, in subsequent chapters I have shown that women writers such as Fauset and Larsen have taken solo flights into a higher atmosphere to advocate greater space for women. Much of what they have attempted has been experimental and subversive, but the close analysis of their works suggests the presence of a female sensibility less pronounced in the writings of their predecessor Frances E. W. Harper, who was compelled to put race before gender. Harper, nevertheless, joins with Fauset and Larsen to form a trajectory which Hurston, West, and Petry have continued. This trajectory constitutes what I have called at other

times in this study a continuum in the examination of African-American modernism. The amassing of female concepts and characterizations by women writers of color is closely akin to what Henry Louis Gates describes in his essay " . . . What Is 'Black' Literature?" in the January 1990 edition of Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA). Gates asserts that a Black literary tradition emerged from "many black authors read[ing] and revis[ing] one another, address[ing] similar themes, and repeat[ing] the cultural and linguistic codes of a common symbolic geography" (20). Fauset and Larsen have been the vanguard of African-American women writers who read and revise and repeat gender codes to contribute to a woman's literary tradition which must be included as part of African-American modernism.

Fauset and Larsen show in their novels that gender is a barrier to complete freedom and mobility for their female characters. Though Fauset's first novel, There Is Confusion, lacks the singular focus and control of Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree, it shows Fauset's attempt to connect the historical events of the Civil War era to the life-style and thought of her 1920s characters Joanna Marshall and Maggie Ellersley. Fauset's ideology at this point in her career seems closely linked with Harper's in that both subordinate the rights of women to the struggle for the realization of race equality. Fauset is inclined in her first novel to create women of talent and fortitude who

use their strength to help men, foregoing life-long career ambitions and pursuing upward mobility through matrimony.

Fauset progresses in Plum Bun and The Chinaberry Tree to the point of focusing on female sexuality and female subjectivity, issues which strike at the heart of a feminine sensibility. Here I detect a confluence of ideologies of the two writers. Both Fauset and Larsen make use of the female subculture in the quest for true identity and autonomy. Daughters rely upon mothers to show the way to sexual autonomy in Plum Bun. The generational ties break down when the mothers show excessive loyalty to the past -- to tradition and respectability. The break between mother and daughter results in stronger ties between women peers, creating a community of women contemporaries in search of their sexual independence. When the relationships among interracial couples fail and racism overwhelms friendships between women of different ethnic backgrounds, the search for the cause ensues. Does Fauset send a message of disapproval of passing, of disdain for interracial cohabitation, of her belief in the futility of female bonding, of the inherent sexual superiority of men? Fauset's own ideology is much less significant than her ability to craft a novel regarding women's sexuality, suggesting society's resistance to its free expression. Furthermore, her approach is decidedly African-American

modernist, owing to her attempt to empower her women characters at the same time that she has them maintain a respectable stance.

Very much like Fauset, Larsen takes a modern writer's approach to female sexuality through the ambivalence her characters show. They feel guilty because of their desire to break away from the sexual roles, mainly as wives and mothers, which society has prescribed for them. At other times the guilt derives from failure to carry out the roles to which they ascribe. In the novels of both writers a kind of sterility sets in almost immediately after the onset of sexual awareness. Mothers and mother figures, such as Hettie Daniels in Plum Bun, teach respectability rather than a healthy sexuality to Angela and Virginia Murray. Mattie Murray exposes her daughters to proper etiquette, material wealth, and Christian ethics. But when Angela inquires about her mother and father's sexuality, Mattie lapses into abstractions about love. The dialogue between mother and daughter remains stilted and polite. The two sisters themselves have an even greater physical barrier -- the walls of their bedrooms and the headboards of their bed -- between them as they raise issues of sexual awareness. Their future seems relegated to chance as Virginia finds delight in a domestic life while Angela searches for material wealth and security, expecting to sacrifice sex in return.

Larsen shows a similar degree of reticence in having her female characters mature in their sexual awareness. Although Helga lacks the stable family background which would have permitted intimacy between mother and daughter, Larsen fails to create that kind of relationship between Helga and her aunt. Frau Dahl's greatest concern is for exploiting Helga's sexuality. She assumes Helga to be sexually and emotionally prepared for marriage; the main objective is to find the right partner. Helga possibly increases her awareness at the point where growth is least expected. Even as she lies recovering from the birth of a fourth child, she considers her worth and, albeit, her responsibility to her other children. If she gets out of this quagmire, will she at the same time consign her own daughter to one equally stifling? Helga's ambivalence increases, but so does the reader's perception of the need for lessons in sexual growth and development.

Both writers flirt with the idea of free love, Fauset in Plum Bun and Larsen in Quicksand, perhaps offering it as an experiment with freedom from prescribed roles as wives and mothers. Yet, they back away from it almost as quickly as they propose the idea, likely because, as Deborah McDowell says in her introduction to Larsen's novels, they must "honor the . . . ethics of sexual conduct" required of African-American middle-class women of the 1920s (xiv). The inclusion of free love as part of the exploration of

sexuality in these literary works takes an interesting twist, which seems to confirm McDowell's theory that both writers felt compelled to honor a particular code of ethics. The proposition to engage in free love takes place in a culture alien to African-American women. Angela Murray is passing for white at the time that Roger asks her to live as his mistress. The affront which Angela feels at his suggestiveness stems from her cultural background which forbids such behavior, though Roger is unaware that she is Black. Even after he discovers her true racial heritage and returns to repeat the proposal that she become his mistress, Angela surmises that it is lack of respect for her race that prompts Roger to make his offer. Likewise, Helga experiences an insult to her race when her Danish admirer Axel Olsen proposes to her directly rather than going first to her uncle. She cannot be sure of his sincerity because he violates her cultural code of obtaining the parent/guardian's permission. Thus Fauset and Larsen evince in their treatment of free love their inclination to maintain the African-American woman's virtue or to suggest a different set of principles for two different cultures.

Repression of sexual desire represents an appreciable portion of the treatment of women's sexuality in Fauset's and Larsen's novels; the other negative representation is in the form of commodification. At the same time, African-American history becomes ingrained in the literature of

these two authors. The exploration of sexual freedom shows the residual effects of slavery. Historically, the mulatto has symbolized the product of the white man's ability to sate his sexual appetite with slave women whom he also used as property. The image perpetuates itself in the minds of both the victim and her violator, resulting in what Angela Davis calls "a collective consciousness" for African-American women of their "sexual victimization" (Women, Race and Class 183). This does not mean that women have continued to acquiesce to such victimization in a physical sense; rather, it manifests its grip on the psyche of African-American women. It, therefore, becomes realistic to portray them in fiction as regarding themselves as objects. Owing to their shortsightedness, some critics see writers who represent women as objects as being novelists of the "old guard," an accusation without merit. Once the female character is regarded as an object, both Fauset and Larsen, to varying degrees, set in motion a struggle on the female character's part to destroy the idea. Helga says firmly to Axel Olsen, "I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man" (87). Recalling her racial heritage, Helga feels compelled to inform Olsen that she is no longer property to be transferred from owner to owner. Larsen displays the cultural gap which exists between this African-American and European pair. Olsen cannot understand why their marriage to each other would signify ownership to Helga.

The strategy Fauset uses in Plum Bun to disrupt the notion that the female protagonist is a commodity, for sale to or for mere use by her male counterpart, is to use a variation of the dramatic technique of the aside. At the same time that the protagonist maintains a sanguine attitude in her conversation with her suitor, she engages in a mental monologue about the outcome, which counters her side of the conversation. Such underlying conversations are indicative of the alienation which Angela Murray symbolizes. As mulattas, whose racial heritage, middle-class, and gender marginalize them from both races, Angela and Helga Crane mask the ambivalence, anger, and frustration which African-American women experience in the passive role of being pursued as sex objects. The conversation they have with their subjects is diametrically opposite of the intense battle going on within themselves.

Though Fauset in Plum Bun advocates a decline in the treatment of women as commodities, she seems less than optimistic about its ending. Just as the women in Plum Bun fail to pass on to their daughters the legacy of sexual autonomy, so do the men neglect to free their sons of the conventional thought that women are part of the wealth which men acquire like money and land. Race nor class frees Roger from the tendency to treat women as objects. He admits to Angela that he is "not entirely [his] own master" in suggesting that she serve as his mistress. Roger's father,

wealthy and white, monitors his son's social life, as if it were his own, in order to control their economic future. In this instance, Fauset looks back to the era of slavery and intimates the minimal progress which women have made towards sexual freedom.

Contemporary critics refer to Fauset's market motif in Plum Bun as sex-oriented.[44] Combining her artistic craft with her knowledge of the times, Fauset affects a kind of innocence in using the nursery rhyme " To Market, To Market." McDowell and Sylvander support such a view in the insightful analyses they offer of Fauset's use of the nursery rhyme to promote sexual imagery. Because, as an African-American writer, Fauset continuously interjects history into her literary plots, she attempts a multi-faceted function with the nursery rhyme. From the domestic scene involving Angela's mother, the author traces Angela's journey into the public arena (the Market) where she discovers that her sexuality limits and therefore diminishes her worth. Angela bargains in the marketplace and loses in her deal with Roger. Because of the heavy collateral which she must post in the deal with the white world generally and with Roger particularly, she also loses much of what she naturally had with her sister Jinny. Yet Angela acquires some knowledge of the marketplace through the bargaining

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[44] See McDowell's introduction to the 1990 edition of Plum Bun (xix) and Sylvander's Jessie Redmon Fauset, Black American Writer (186).

tips which her art friends give her. Fauset imbues some of her white female characters, cerebrally at least, with genderless traits so that they can anticipate the bargaining strategies of Roger and his gender. Returning home more experienced, Angela has a clearer understanding of her mother's role, though she herself could never assume that role. Fauset includes Angela's brief visit to Philadelphia as part of the plot to re-establish her cultural connections before she departs for Europe, a much more culturally-diverse marketplace. The plum bun which Angela initially thought she would exchange for the security and respectability of marriage becomes less significant in Angela's life than it was in Mattie Murray's entire life. In Chapter III of this study, I alluded to Anthony's arriving in Europe as a "gift" for Angela. Though Fauset ends the novel with the suggestion that Angela and Anthony will likely be married, perhaps she reverses the commodification to hint at a more equalized partnership. The marketing is complete because Angela has both her career as an artist and emotional satisfaction. In a subtle, but artful fashion Fauset shows the gradual empowerment of the African-American woman.

Part of women's authorization to act and speak for themselves emerges in Fauset's use of material consumption in her novels, which I have analyzed in Chapter III of this study. Fauset alerts the reader to the masking, subtleties,

and ironic twists present in several of her novels. The Foreword to The Chinaberry Tree asserts Fauset's preference for sheer aesthetics over propaganda and didactics. She admits at the end of her two-page commentary that "in spite of other intentions" she does moralize on Fate and Chance and the dramatic impact both have had on the life of the colored middle-class American. While she refers to this representative American in the generic sense, she subtly notes that the story is Aunt Sal's, Laurentine's, and Melissa's -- all about women. The only reference to the patriarch Colonel Halloway is in the symbolic chinaberry tree. With so many subversive tactics Fauset indeed prepares her reading audience for the female subjectivity which I see her exercising in the novel.

The success apparent in having the characterization and setting develop from a female perspective dwindles as the plot unfolds in The Chinaberry Tree. The manner in which one female character undercuts the progress and well-being of another nearly overshadows the rich descriptions of clothing which Laurentine creates out of her own sheer talent and with the financial assistance of her two half-sisters, both white. Optimism pervades the scenes in which Laurentine, with the support of customers such as the two doctors' wives, creates a flourishing business. She becomes the quintessential designer of women's wear and sheds the specter of Colonel Halloway, symbolized by her lonely days

with her mother under the chinaberry tree. Patriarchy meets with less resistance in scenes where Judy and, later, Melissa, to the detriment of other women, rely so heavily upon men for happiness and security. The novel takes on a subplot which undercuts Laurentine's pursuit of self-autonomy and respectability. The novel seems to come full circle; Melissa replaces Aunt Sal under the chinaberry tree, rescued by Asshur who will make his fortune in the South, though at Tuskegee rather than on a plantation. Laurentine, in spite of the sabotage from the subplot involving Judy and Melissa, seems to have grown in much the same way that Angela Murray grows in Plum Bun. At the end Laurentine's coexisting plan includes not only Dr. Denleigh, but also her sewing business. One gets the idea that she derives too much satisfaction from her artistic creations to abandon the work entirely. The "solid ground beneath [her] feet" is truly different from Melissa's.

Fauset appears to falter in her inclination to practice a female subjectivity in The Chinaberry Tree. As an African-American modernist she practices what Baker in contemporary terms refers to as mastery of form. Her use of the subplot involving Judy and Melissa becomes a mask for the freedom, respectability, and autonomy which Laurentine acquires. Fauset more closely approximates deformation of mastery, or removal of the mask, in Plum Bun in that the female subjectivity she exercises in that novel empowers her

women characters. The generational trope which she uses in her Plum Bun more effectively depicts progress. If Fauset had remained consistent in her characterization in The Chinaberry Tree, in creating community among women in their acquisition and consumption of material possessions, she would necessarily have shown Melissa in as positive a light as Laurentine. Thus, Fauset meets with criticism for failing to maintain, as consistently as she might, a strategy that is, nevertheless, unique in African-American women's literature: the use of material consumption to assert the right of the female to judge what is proper for her gender.

While this study has shown that both Fauset and Larsen veil female sexuality and that Fauset to a lesser degree conceals her propensity for female subjectivity, it has also evinced Larsen's rejection of the androcentric approach to confining women to a domestic sphere. The journey motif is her most common way of showing the female character's discontent with the status quo. Using divergent settings and drawing from her own experiences and culture in the creation of a fictional piece, Larsen orchestrates the search for spaces which complement her characters' individual identity. And while she permits them to plan, imagine, anticipate, and visualize places of permanent satisfaction, they never quite realize such a place. They can only experiment with innovative lifestyles as they move

from one position to another.

The change in geographical location is not always indicative of the transformation of domestic space, as seen in the forever haunting conclusion to Quicksand. Larsen's strongest evidence of the search for adequate female spaces is in the imagery of suffocation. Sometimes physical enclosures produce the stifling effect, not necessarily by their size alone but by the activities taking place or by the presence of offenders -- patriarchal figures, male suitors who commodify women, women themselves who accept traditional roles, and children whose birth and rearing subvert energy in Quicksand. Though some of these offenses occur in Larsen's second novel, she tends in Passing to hold her women characters themselves less blameless. Their own preoccupation with security puts them in the predicament of struggling for their emotional lives and/or destroying their physical lives.

Because Larsen's women often analyze themselves, seeking an answer to their problem of space, they often engage in self-flagellation. Whether they recede into the isolation of their homes, take to their beds in illness, engage in monologue or in conversation with another victim, the search is often an introspective examination of self. Helga's uniqueness in Naxos leads her to conclude, regarding herself, that there was "[a] lack somewhere" and that "there were parts of her she couldn't be proud of" (7). Even as

Clare Kendry divorces herself from the role of doting mother, she contrasts herself with Irene, whose consuming interests include her children. In a self-deprecating tone, Clare admits to Irene, "'I haven't any proper morals or sense of duty, as you have, that makes me act as I do'" (210). Larsen suggests that the restricted roles in which women find themselves have metamorphosed into self-hatred. The transformation of domestic space is costly even when it is only temporary.

Yet Fauset's and Larsen's novels do not end on such a dismal note, for they bring African-American women's writing into the modernist era in several ways. They explore a female sensibility and experiment with changed behavior and attitudes on the part of women of color. And they offer empowerment to African-American women writers who succeed them.

This study concedes that the explorations of and experimentation with women's issues have remained dormant for the most part in Fauset's and Larsen's writing because race and gender were, as Scott states it, "not adequately decoded." To go a step farther, when French writer Marcel Proust defined the purpose of the modernist novel as the discovery of "a different self,"[45] he likely did not have in mind the novels of women nor minorities. Yet the discovery of self is a seminal issue in Fauset's and

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[45] Marcel Proust, qtd. in Cantor, 43.

Larsen's novels. From the backdrop of a burgeoning African-American urban society, these Harlem Renaissance writers use the mulatta to mirror what Cantor aptly refers to as "the confusion, hesitancies, and partial perception" of the modernist individual. A re-configuration of modernism allows for their inclusion.

Acknowledging that Fauset and Larsen were involved in the modernist movement allows for the removal of their work from a sub-literary plane. The discussion of female sexuality, female subjectivity, and female spaces, based on close reading, illuminates Fauset's and Larsen's novels to show them in an evolving tradition of feminism. This study establishes a legitimacy for their craft and shows Fauset and Larsen "writing beyond the ending" of their novels.[46] Their depiction of the marginalized woman recurs in the writing of African-American women such as Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy West, and Ann Petry. Although Calvin Hernton says that feminism was a hidden and disguised tendency in African-American women's writing before Ann Petry, he implies that the advocacy, however subversive, of equal rights and opportunities for women was Petry's legacy

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[46] The expression is the idea and title of a book by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. She discusses "writing beyond the ending" in terms of twentieth century novelists who devise multiple narrative strategies with psychosocial meanings as an alternative to their nineteenth century predecessors whose novels ended in marriage or death. See DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985). I have adapted the expression to suggest the impact which Fauset and Larsen have on later writers of their race and gender.

from her foremothers. Instead of making the leap from Frances E. W. Harper, whom I credit with a seminal treatment of feminist issues in the African-American novel, and Fauset and Larsen to Petry, I have shown that greater constancy exists in the canon of women's literature. Hurston dovetails on Fauset's and Larsen's treatment of the African-American female's expression of her sexuality beyond the confines of a tradition. And West expands Fauset's assertion of the woman novelist's right to express individuality, as both do through the recourse to material consumption.

As novelists, Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen had marginal positions among the coterie of writers of the Harlem Renaissance. As African-American writers and as women writers, they have remained outside the canon of modernist literature. A re-defining of modernism to include empowerment of race and gender insures both women a more centralized position in the literary world. Already their voices echo in the writings of contemporary authors who openly advocate a greater awareness of the female's presence in both the fictional and the real world.

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