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Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích

Pedagogická fakulta

Katedra

Diplomová práce

**Selected Novels of Jessie Redmon Fauset: An Analysis of an
Influential Harlem Renaissance Author**

**Vybrané Romány Jessie Redmon Fausetové: Analýza Významné
Autorky Harlemské Renesance**

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České Budějovice 2023

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Acknowledgment

I would hereby like to thank PhDr. Christopher Erwin Koy, M.A., Ph.D. for his valuable advice, time, inspiration, recommendation, and supervision regarding the compilation of this master's thesis.

Anotace

Student přečte a rozebere vybraná tři díla od Jessie Redmon Fausetové, důležité spisovatelky během harlemské Renaissance. Dále vyzkoumá její roli jakožto přední redaktorka vydavatelství pro černošskou literaturu a jak tato žena umělecky prezentuje život Afrických Američanů během období slavného jazzu, kde si poprvé černošská kultura získala pozornost a obdiv od Bílých Američanů.

Abstract

The student will read and analyze three novels by Jessie Redmon Fauset, a prominent Harlem Renaissance novelist. She will examine her role as a major publishing editor of a Black journal and how this woman artistically presented the life of African Americans during the famous Jazz Age period when, for the first time, Black culture was widely admired by white America.

Obsah/Table of contents

1.	Historical Context	1
1.1.	Post-Civil War.....	1
1.2.	New Negro Movement	2
1.3.	1920s	5
1.4.	Literary Movement	7
1.4.1.	Goodbye Uncle Tom.....	8
1.5.	Harlem Renaissance	10
1.5.1.	Jessie Redmon Faucet.....	15
2.	Comedy – American Style Analysis.....	17
2.1.	Plot.....	17
2.1.1.	The Plot.....	17
2.1.2.	The Characters	18
2.1.3.	Teresa’s Act	19
2.1.4.	Oliver’s Act.....	20
2.1.5.	Phebe’s Act	22
2.1.6.	The Curtain	24
2.2.	Characters	24
2.2.1.	Olivia	24
2.2.2.	Teresa.....	26
2.2.3.	Christopher Jr.....	27
2.2.4.	Oliver.....	28
2.2.5.	Phebe	30
2.2.6.	Marise	32
2.2.7.	Nick	33
2.2.8.	Janet.....	34
2.3.	Analysis	34
3.	The Chinaberry Tree	38

3.1.	Plot.....	38
3.2.	Characters.....	45
3.2.1.	Laurentine Strange	45
3.2.2.	Melissa Paul	47
3.2.3.	Sarah Strange and Judy Paul.....	48
3.2.4.	Dr. Stephen Denleigh	49
3.2.5.	Malory Forten	49
3.2.6.	Asshur Lane.....	50
3.2.7.	The Ismays	50
3.2.8.	Kitty Brown	51
3.2.9.	Gertrude Brown.....	51
3.2.10.	Mr. Stede.....	52
3.3.	Analysis	52
4.	Plum Bun.....	55
4.1.	Plot.....	55
4.1.1.	Home	55
4.1.2.	Market	56
4.1.3.	Plum Bun.....	58
4.1.4.	Home again.....	58
4.1.5.	Market is done.....	60
4.2.	Characters	61
4.2.1.	Angela Murray	61
4.2.2.	Virginia Murray	63
4.2.3.	Roger Fielding	64
4.2.4.	Anthony Cruz/Cross.....	64
4.2.5.	Mathew.....	65
4.2.6.	Miss Powell	65
4.2.7.	Mattie and Junius Murray.....	66
4.3.	Analysis	66

5.	Conclusion	69
6.	Závěr	71
7.	Bibliography and Sources	73

1. Historical Context

1.1. Post-Civil War

The first two decades of the twentieth century were in the name of reinvention. The American Civil War that raged from 1861 to 1865 marked the beginning of emancipation for Black people in the United States of America. That was immediately followed by the reconstruction era from 1865 to 1877. Suddenly around four million slaves gained their freedom¹. However, the former Confederate states were not pleased with this emancipation and sought to control the newly freed people through different means.

These means were known as the 'Black codes'. These codes were made to be as close to slavery as possible. Black people living under these codes were no closer to freedom than they were before the Civil War.

*"This was by design, as slavery had been a multi-billion dollar enterprise, and the former Confederate states sought a way to continue this system of subjugation."*²

They lost the war, but they were determined to not lose their power. They found a loophole in the 13th Amendment. This law prohibited slavery under any circumstance but one. Slavery was permitted as a punishment for crimes. Therefore, the black codes were made so it would be extremely easy to imprison Black people and strip them of their freedom once again.

The northern states were outraged by this course of events and the support for the Reconstruction dwindled. Every time a positive change was made in the United States the South would find a way to reverse these changes. This constant fight resulted in the return and strengthening of white supremacy in the South mainly led and promoted by the Ku Klux Klan.

¹ Reconstruction: Link: <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction>

² How the Black Codes Limited African American Progress After the Civil War, Link: <https://www.history.com/news/black-codes-reconstruction-slavery>

Eventually, these 'Black codes culminated into the well-known Jim Crow Laws after the 14th and 15th Amendments were instated. These laws were valid for almost one hundred years and were abolished in 1968. These laws were meant to restrict the freedoms of Black people in the South much like its predecessor the 'Black Codes'. The legal system in the former Confederate states was skewed against Black people with former Confederate soldiers being in powerful positions such as police officers and judges.³

1.2. New Negro Movement

All of this culminated into the New Negro era in the early twentieth century. The decades of abuse gave life to new philosophical movements. The main idea was to reinvent. Reinvent the ideas that people had on not only the world itself but the kind of people living in it. It mainly focused on the marginalized groups. So although Black people were subjected to this reinvention they were not by far the only ones.

"By the 1890s, a range of concepts of reinvention circulated throughout the national narrative: the New Woman, the New Negro Woman, the post-Reconstruction New South, and the New Negro—this last, after an attenuated attempt at national reconstruction and the reconstructed Negro."⁴

Black literature existed throughout the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. However, they were not well known due to the aforementioned marginalization of Black people therefore the black arts suffered. The Black arts went beyond just literature. Music, dance, photography, painting social history were significant parts of Black political and cultural history. Their art was known to be intertextual and was responding to the moment. This later culminated into the Black Art Movement long after the Harlem Renaissance ended.

Thus far the portrayal of Black people in literature, that made it to the majority of American citizens was only through white authors. However, that idea was largely

³ Jim Crow Laws, Link: <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>

skewed. Many Black authors believed that white authors could not properly portray Black people in their works. They only perpetuated negative and invalid stereotypes.

The New Negro Movement sought to fight these stereotypes perpetuated by white supremacists. They advocated for observing the situations and people from multiple angles to give proper representation. They fought for different treatment than the one they were given. They fought to be seen. They self-selected the parts of their lives that were unseen or misrepresented. They questioned preexisting notions and sought to correct them.

The New Negro Woman was a term existing as an extension of the New Negro and the New Woman. The New Woman Movement sought to reinvent the term Woman and what true womanhood means. So while both the New Negro and New Woman movements excluded Black women they redefined themselves. Their motive was to defend all Black women. One of the main representatives of this movement was Margaret Murray Washington.

A good example of the marginalization of Black women within Black communities is the novel by Zora Neale Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She herself as a Black author holds relevance since just like Jessie Redmon Fauset Zora Neale Hurston is also considered a part of the Harlem Renaissance. She was born in Alabama as one of twelve siblings. Her dad was a preacher and a mayor of an all-black town. She however was seen as a 'Yellow nigger' due to her mixed nature as her mother was raped by a white man. After her mother passed away her father married a girl two years her senior. Zora Neale Hurston was fourteen years old at the time and her stepmother sixteen. Due to them being so close in age, they clashed often and their arguments usually resulted in physical fights. Her father ultimately picked his wife and kicked Zora Neale Hurston out of the house. She ended up working for a circus for a while and later as a maid for rich white people. She was noticed for her writing by a white woman she worked for. She saw potential in Zora Neale Hurston and ended up paying for her education. Zora Neale Hurston ended up studying at an IVY League school. She was helping her Jewish professor of anthropology collect stories from colored people since they were more likely to trust her. She was searching for bookless blacks, as she called them, who were untouched and unaffected by white culture and collected their stories. Zora Neale

Hurston's goal and the goal of the Harlem Renaissance as a whole was to find what remained of Africa in colored people.

In this book, a young Black woman by the name of Janie Crawford finds herself in a series of unhappy marriages. First, a loveless marriage to a farmer later running off with and later marrying Joe Starks. They move to an all-Black town called Eatonville. Here Janie's husband becomes a respected mayor. However, their marriage soon turns sour as Joe becomes abusive. She is rescued by her husband's death whereupon his deathbed she expresses her resentment for not allowing her to be herself. A man known as Tea Cake comes into the picture and treats Janie better than any of her previous husbands so she runs away with him despite people around her saying he is using her for her money and is beneath her. Their love story is going well until Tea Cake catches rabies and tries to kill Janie. She now values herself and in the effort to save her life, she shoots and kills Tea Cake.

This new generation of Black people was no longer content to sit and dream about equality, they were determined to fight for it. They wanted to experience the world in new ways in ways of the white people. They fought by challenging the idea of the Black man. In the efforts to gain new selfhood and new equality, they were happy to abandon their past and start anew.

“Rather than operating simply through the impetus to “make it new,” modern Black writers of the New Negro Movement in literature found that they were indeed happy to abandon their immediate past—except within the context of family—and to leave behind their experiences of slavery, exclusion, and violence, although an ancestral past would come to play a role.”⁵

Black people are now entering the middle class with new counter-narratives to white supremacy pointing out their perverted logic. In the process of this transformation, the idea of Christianity is also put into question. That was however no simple task. White supremacists in their efforts to fight back employ supposed scientific narratives also known as scientific racism. Using science they attempted to prove that equality is against nature and science. People like Louis Agassiz supported the theory

⁵JIMOH A Yemisi, Mapping The Terrain Of Black Writing During The Early New Negro Era, pg. 497

called polygenism which claimed that the different races were also distinct species. This pseudoscience supposedly proved by measuring skulls that white people are superior to Black people. By the early twentieth century, this theory was disproven however scientific racism remained through incomplete and purposefully skewed studies.

“Studies showing high rates of imprisonment among Black Americans were used as proof of innate criminality, while pseudoscientific intelligence testing claimed the mental superiority of white people. These flawed, biased studies failed to account for political and social factors such as poor housing, poverty, lack of healthcare, and virulent racial oppression. But they provided the so-called evidence needed to fuel systemic forms of anti-Black racism, like segregation.”⁶

In their conquest for equality, Black people were repeatedly met with demeaning imagery. Authors like Thomas Nelson Page spread this imagery and continuously degraded the Black community. Page’s book *The Lynching of the Negro: Its Causes and Prevention* is a glaring example of this demeaning imagery. He argues that the reason why is lynching so prominent is because of Black people speaking out. He addresses the New Negro Movement as the New Issue and says that no longer being regulated is causing them to act out. He insults the new generation of freedom fighters and says that the generations before them, the ones who stayed silent for decades, are the good Black people and the new generation is too far gone.

“Page further contends that the “worthy” or “better element” among black people was not to be found among the “New Issue” or its “Prominent leaders: those who publish papers and control conventions”⁷

1.3. 1920s

The 1920s marked a major turning point for African American culture. Supported by famous white artists like Pablo Picasso anything African became popular with the wider white population. He himself took African masks and used them in his art. Up until that point, Africa and its people were seen as primitive. Colored people were viewed as

⁶Harvard Library, *Scientific Racism*, Link: <https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/scientific-racism>

⁷JIMOH A Yemisi, *Mapping The Terrain Of Black Writing During The Early New Negro Era*, pg. 500

less than. To white people, they were seen more as animals than people. This misconception of primitiveness created a wall between the two races. Many people were ready to defend that wall.

The politics around it supported the hostility from both sides. Radical movements arose calling out the United States for not being a good place for colored people to live in. These movements supported the return to Africa. Two new African countries were eventually formed. Liberia was for the citizens of the United States of America and Sierra Leone was for the citizens of the British Empire. One of the most well-known radical political activists was Marcus Garvey. Full name Marcus Mosiah Garvey Jr. was a Jamaican political agitator. He was very vocal about colored issues. He was angry that colored people were treated like dogs. He supported the return to Africa since he believed there was no future in America for colored people. He reinterpreted a quote from W.E.B. DuBois: *“To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.”*⁸ as a reason to leave the United States.

However, W.E.B. DuBois advocated for the reformation in the United States. There were very few colored politicians. Colored people lived mostly in the South since they remained there after being freed and they started moving North years later. During the Restoration era after the Civil War, the Union army occupied the former Confederate states. The individual states had to reapply to enter the United States once again. Until then they lived under military law without democracy. It was humiliating for the white residents of these states and they were furious. What added to their fury, was the fact that colored people had the right to vote and be voted while Confederate soldiers and politicians could not. For a time, there were a lot of colored politicians. However, white people were eager to get their power back and once they were accepted back into the Union they started making oppressive local laws against the colored community. These were known as the Jim Crow laws. What added to the abuse was the Ku Klux Klan also known as the KKK whose members mostly comprised of people in law enforcement.

The first gateway to black culture for white people was jazz. For the first time, white people showed interest in anything to do with colored people’s culture. Jazz music

⁸W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903

was played by colored people in small bars. These colored musicians did not have formal education in terms of music and therefore did not know how to write notes. Because the music was not written down most of these songs were lost to time. However, when white people discovered it they wanted to play these songs at home for themselves. White musicians often sat in on these shows writing down the notes and then patenting the songs themselves. Although, the songs were preserved this way but they were nonetheless stolen and mimicked.

Slowly but surely black literature started getting the same. This literary boom was known as the Harlem Renaissance.

1.4. Literary Movement

“A literary movement might also operate among disparate writers who engage intersecting social, political, cultural, historical, and literary energies in similar ways for a distinct period.”⁹

A literary movement needs a few key things. It needs to be periodized and it needs to differ from other movements. While the consensus on periodization is questionable since no more than two authors can decide on the beginning, which could have been somewhere between 1917 to 1919 the end is something many can agree on. The ending of the Harlem Renaissance is marked as 1935 with the Harlem Riot.

A critical point to make with the fragmentation of modernism is that not everyone belongs to all literary movements that were around the time the author was publishing. Which is why it is crucial to determine the key features of literary movements to accurately classify authors. Not every Black author, who was publishing around that time, was part of the Harlem Renaissance.

The literary movement’s key features were accurate descriptions of the lives of Black people living in Harlem, portraying their issues. An important and unique feature is also the closeness with political and social movements. It was the first movement that gave control of the narrative to Black people.

⁹JIMOH A Yemisi, Mapping The Terrain Of Black Writing During The Early New Negro Era, pg. 493

While defining a literary movement there are three ways to theorize about them according to A. Yemisi Jimoh's publication *Mapping The Terrain Of Black Writing During The Early New Negro Era*. She also applies it to the New Negro Movement. The three ways go as follows: theorizing while the movement was underway, before publications around certain movements, and after the movement ended.

About the New Negro movement she puts out many names of authors. As for theorizing while the movement is underway she calls out names such as Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, Larry Neal, Carolyn Rodgers, or Toni Cade Bambara. Authors theorizing before the movement started is for example W. H. A. Moore who is credited as the first person to call for such a movement. After the movement ended the most prominent names speaking of it were John Hope Franklin, Eugene Redmond, Darwin Turner, Gloria Hull, Houston Baker, James Smethurst and many others. This part of the analysis and theorizing continues to this day.

Wallace Thurman is a colored author associated with the Harlem Renaissance. His novel *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life* follows the story of Emma Lou. It tells a story opposite the one that Jessie Redmon Fauset writes. The main character Emma faces colourism and discrimination from lighter-skinned blacks.

*"What has gone unremarked, however, is that is setting out as a Columbus to discover the hidden islands of color prejudice within black US society and communities, Thurman fittingly wrote a novel that draws upon and seeks to reconstellate a distinctly insular (ie. island based) topography."*¹⁰

1.4.1. Goodbye Uncle Tom

Goodbye Uncle Tom is a movie from 1971. It was directed, written and produced by two Italian filmmakers Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosper. It is a docudrama based on real events. It was banned in Italy and was cut and rereleased. Germany and France released the uncut version.

¹⁰ RUSSELL, R. B - *(Ex)Isles in the Harlem Renaissance: The Insular and Archipelagic Topographies of Wallace Thurman's The Blacker the Berry*; ; *Literature Online*, 2011, pg. 92

The movie starts with the announcement of the death of Martin Luther King Jr. as colored people collect cotton in machines, creating a parallel to slavery. It then switches over to riots in the streets following Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. The slogan 'Down with Uncle Toms' is being spray-painted on the walls. One of the main criticisms of Martin Luther King Jr. was that he was an Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom became a symbol of submissive colored people who placate the white people. Extremist groups take it as a sign to fight. As shown by the treatment of Martin Luther King Jr., kindness does not work and everyone who stands behind Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideals is also an Uncle Tom Pig.

The movie draws parallels between the time of slavery and modern times. There is horrific imagery of the level of abuse the slaves have suffered. They are being treated like animals. They are eating off the floor, they are hung by their feet naked to be viewed by potential customers and many other abuses like rape and public castrations. Two parallel scenes show an all-white church with colored people peeking through the windows and preying outside. The other scene shows an all-black church with one white old lady sitting in the middle reminiscing on the days of slavery and watching the sermon and the black community around it like they are a spectacle. They are her playthings.

The movie calls out the fake biology to justify racism. In the past, the need to run away was called an illness and not a wish for freedom as colored people have no understanding of what freedom is. This is a clear comparison to livestock who do not seek out escape from their kennels and they are content as long as they are fed. The comparison and treatment remain until the present. Both the present and past scenes portray the colored people as stupid and useless. The grotesque is used as their only weapon.

The movie was not received well. It was labeled as racist and exploitative by many. It was filmed in Haiti under a dictator Papa Doc Duvalier who gave his blessings to the filmmakers and gave them whatever they needed. All the black actors were poor Haitian people. Despite all this controversial background and grotesque scenes, it is an important piece of media. It points towards one of the biggest failures of mankind – slavery.

1.5. Harlem Renaissance

For any future analysis, we need to determine the time period and the movement in general. Harlem Renaissance lasted from the 1910s to 1930s in Harlem, New York. To understand the movement, we need to understand Harlem as a whole since the roots of this movement lie in its history. *“Harlem is known internationally as the Black Mecca of the world...”*¹¹ Before New York’s population grew there used to be farmland ultimately turning it into a residential area. During the 1880s Harlem experienced a short-living boom but during these times many apartment buildings saw the light of day. They originally built Harlem for the residents of lower Manhattan.

However, things did not go as planned and Harlem landlords were approached by real estate agents offering to fill out the empty apartments by black residents. This started a chain reaction as more and more black people began to move into Harlem from not only lower Manhattan but also from the American South and even the Caribbean. Many Southern African Americans saw this as an opportunity to escape the Deep South controlled by the Jim Crow Laws enforcing segregation. *“from Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race.”*¹² This massive migration of black people seeking job opportunities and better wages broke records. Harlem flourished and this period received the name ‘Harlem Renaissance’.

Harlem Renaissance doesn’t consist of only literature. It is considered a cultural revival of African American art, music, dance and even fashion. There were other names for Harlem Renaissance such as the ‘New Negro Movement’ Although mostly centered around Harlem the movement inspired many black writers and other artists outside of the United States. Many factors contributed to the end of the Harlem Renaissance. Many argue that The Great Depression started the end of this movement. *“The end of Harlem’s creative boom began with the stock market crash of 1929 and The Great*

¹¹ History of Harlem, Link: <https://www.harlemheritage.com/history-of-harlem/>

¹² Jim Crow Laws, Link: https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/jim_crow_laws.htm

*Depression.*¹³ However, the definite end of the Harlem Renaissance is considered the Harlem Race Riot in 1935.

Although, the Harlem Renaissance as a movement ended, we can still see the impact it left. Harlem Renaissance is seen as the golden age of African American artists. It helped with the creation of their identity. *"It gave these artists pride in and control over how the Black experience was represented in American culture and set the stage for the civil rights movement."*¹⁴ Harlem Renaissance successfully revived black culture and helped to integrate it into the American culture. The image of African Americans among the white people changed from peasants and uneducated brutes to sophisticated and intelligent individuals. This change allowed African American people to reach high positions previously occupied by only white people and became public figures. Harlem Renaissance helped build a strong and confident black community and it gave foundation to the Civil Rights movement. Harlem Renaissance gave the world a new definition of what it meant to be African American. This new definition was given by the African Americans themselves and fought against the stereotypes made by white people.

However, not even the Harlem Renaissance could not escape criticism. One point of criticism became the attempt to fully separate themselves from white culture. The critics point out 'mimicry' and the level of assimilation of the intellectuals with white culture, namely fashion and etiquette, as a way to discredit their attempts and their work. The second point of criticism became their struggles to appear different from the whites. They were often compared with the works of foreign authors.

There were many magazines like *The Crisis* or *Opportunity* that published poetry and short stories written by black authors and hired prominent members of the Harlem Renaissance to work as editors. Two magazines under two organizations fighting for black rights.

The National Urban League (NUL) published *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*. Founded in 1910 The National Urban League had and still has the goal to improve the

13 Harlem Renaissance; Harlem Renaissance Ends, Link:
https://www.history.com/topics/roaringtwenties/harlem-renaissance#section_12

14 Harlem Renaissance; Impact of the Harlem Renaissance, Link:
https://www.history.com/topics/roaringtwenties/harlem-renaissance#section_12

lives of African Americans and other minorities. Their motto is: “*Uplifting and Empowering Americans since 1910.*”¹⁵ They educate, help people find jobs, or assist with housing.

The first issue of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* started published in 1923 and it ran until 1949.¹⁶ The academic journal served as a platform for African American studies conducted mostly by the National Urban League. But it was also crucial for the development and success of the Harlem Renaissance. The academic studies mostly focused on social issues like housing, employment and education which coincides with the work the National Urban League does to this day. The main editor Charles Spurgeon Johnson pushed the ideology of the scientific approach. The magazine’s popularity grew with its peak in 1927 when its numbers rose to eleven thousand copies.¹⁷

However, despite the scientific nature of the magazine, it inspired many writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Johnson also promoted and organized literary contests every year. This helped authors like Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen to build their contact network and find publishers for their work. Upon the departure of Johnson in 1929 *Opportunity* went through a lot of changes with the new editor and the magazine started to decline. Although Elmer A. Carter still tried to stick to the original intent and goal of *Opportunity*, he also published a lot of poetry and fiction. In the thirties, the content became more variable short stories and various articles about the Urban League or general news. The Great Depression put the journal in a financial strain as donations dwindled. The Second World War also did a lot of damage due to rations being put on printing supplies and paper. However, despite the dire financial struggles the new editor Madeline Aldridge managed to keep it relevant. Under her editorship *Opportunity* became a forum where African Americans could express their views on the war.

On the contrary, the magazine *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* prided themselves on being subjective. Although the title later changed to just *The Crisis*, this

¹⁵ NUL; Mission and History, Link: <https://nul.org/mission-and-history>

¹⁶ Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, online archive Link: <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/cinfo/opportunity>

¹⁷ Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, Encyclopedia.com; Link: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/opportunityjournal-negro-life>

magazine remained prominent. Published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a civil rights organization, the magazine focused on the dangers of prejudice. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in 1909 following a race riot the previous year. “...eruptions of anti-black violence – particularly lynching – were horrifically commonplace, but the Springfield riot was the final tipping point that led to the creation of the NAACP.”¹⁸ Inspired by the founder of the Niagara Movement W.E.B. Du Bois, a sociologist, historian and writer, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People began their work to ensure racial equality. The Niagara movement opposed and attacked Booker T. Washington and that was its sole purpose. Although they stopped by the year 1909 the ideology gave life to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. “Du Bois played a prominent part in the creation of the NAACP and became the association’s director of research and editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*.”¹⁹

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People mainly focused on the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. These Amendments protected the African Americans from slavery, and unfair justice and gave them the right to vote. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People fought many legal battles with discriminatory laws and scored many victories, defending the three aforementioned Amendments of the Constitution. They became an important legal advocate for black rights. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also fought for stopping lynching starting a long legal battle by gathering and publishing statistics. They also organized protests hoping to end the violence. Those were the years of the Harlem Renaissance. During the Civil Rights era the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People they successfully eliminated segregation in schools. However, the implementation of these laws was very slow. Although criticized by the Civil Rights Movement, they represented its members in the legal system and provided for the protesters.

The first issue of *The Crisis* came out in November 1910. *The Crisis* was much more successful in terms of sold copies by the end of the first decade of publishing. During the

¹⁸ Our History, NAACP.org; Link: <https://naacp.org/about/our-history>

¹⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, Link: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/W-E-B-Du-Bois>

times of the Harlem Renaissance Jessie Redmon Fauset acted as the editor for this magazine. Thanks to Fauset *The Crisis* became one of the leading publishers for black writers together with the aforementioned *Opportunity*. Although the original intent of the magazine aimed at politics and general news, during the Harlem Renaissance its literary impact became more than significant thanks to the work and influence of Jessie Redmon Fauset. The poet Langston Hughes even described her as a midwife of the Harlem Renaissance.

The best-renowned writers of the Harlem Renaissance first published in *The Crisis* and became famous through these contributions to the magazine. Fauset provided the readers with a large variety of literature such as plays, short stories, poetry and even essays despite her own taste in writing. After the departure of Jessie Redmon Fauset, the magazine began to decline as it was unable to maintain the high standards set by Jessie Redmon Fauset. The magazine declined even further with the resignation of W.E.B. Du Bois as an editor due to his controversial ideas, in the eyes of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. “...following frequent clashes with the NAACP’s board members, who objected to his increasingly controversial opinions, such as his support for interracial marriage.”²⁰

There were many disagreements within the colored community as to the approach to literature and how to portray the lives of colored people. Two possible options clash and criticize one another.

The first approach is talking about the lives of colored people without any white people present in the stories. Zora Neale Hurston belonged to this methodology. She never had a single white person in her novels. The only white person she had in her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was a judge who pronounced the main character Janie not guilty of shooting her husband. Another person who wrote their novels without white people was Claude McKay. His novel *Home to Harlem* was the first bestseller written by a black man. It is a love story between a former soldier and a prostitute he falls in love with. The soldier searches for her everywhere and in the end succeeds.

²⁰ The Crisis, Britanica; Link: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Crisis-American-magazine>

The biggest critic of this approach and the most notable representative of the opposition is Richard Wright. His commentary towards Zora Neale Hurston is that she is writing about what white people want her to write. He criticizes her for being whitewashed. He later adds that it is no wonder Zora Neale Hurston writes for white people because they paid for her education. He also heavily criticizes Claude McKay and *Home to Harlem* for being disingenuous. He believes there is no place for happy endings in the lives and stories of colored people. He believes that writing without white people is racist they are ignoring the main issues.

The second approach must include white people and the racism they spew. Richard Wright believes talking about racism should be the main focus of colored writers. He published a blueprint for coloured writers giving them instructions on how to write. He believed if writers did not follow his blueprint, they were traitors to their race. Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* portrays just that. The main protagonist accidentally kills a white woman and pays a heavy price for it. The *Native Son* was the second bestseller after *Home to Harlem*. He portrays that during the trials the white judges are intentionally blind to racial issues and pin false facts on the murder case.

Just as Richard Wright criticized Zora Neale Hurston for her writing style she was able to return the blow when *Native Son* was published. While she admitted her novels were a bit idealistic at least they were not so full of hate as Richard Wright's works often were.

1.5.1. Jessie Redmon Faucet

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born in New Jersey and studied at Cornell University New York State. She became the first black female student to graduate. She graduated in classical languages. Before becoming an editor for *The Crisis*, she worked as a teacher. She herself contributed her work to the magazine before becoming an editor. She moved to New York City after taking a job as an editor. As a literary editor, she took it upon herself to introduce unknown writers to the world of literature. Among the authors she helped succeed stood Anne Spencer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Claude McKay. However, she did not stop publishing her own work. Besides her poems and short stories, she published in *The Crisis*, Jessie Redmon Fauset wrote and published several

standalone novels some of which will be the subject of this thesis. Her novels include *There Is Confusion; Plum Bun; the Chinaberry Tree and Comedy, American Style*. Her initial motif for these novels became a novel by Thomas Sigismund Stribling called *Birthright*. Jessie Redmon Fauset believed that a white man cannot accurately describe the life of black people and their character. Fauset knew that positive representations of black people and their lives were scarce. Her inspiration became the idea of portraying the lives of black people as realistically as possible but also as positively as possible. Fauset focused mainly on the lives of the middle class that was better educated. She was also the editor for a children's magazine *The Brownies' Book*. However, this magazine lasted for only two years. After leaving *The Crisis* she went back to teaching. She taught French in a Bronx high school until 1944. In 1958 after her husband's death, Fauset moved back to Philadelphia where she grew up.²¹

²¹ Jessie Redmon Fauset, poets.org; Link: <https://poets.org/poet/jessie-redmon-fauset>

2. Comedy – American Style

2.1. Plot

2.1.1. The Plot

In the very first chapter, we are introduced to a young girl named Olivia. She is a colored girl who hates being colored. This hatred and disgust stemmed from her childhood when she was bullied because she was colored. Both she and her mother were light skinned while her father was darker. Because of this, she began to resent and hate him. She had a dislike for her own mother also because she was happy being colored. Olivia couldn't understand that.

After her father's passing Olivia and her mother Janet moved away into a white neighborhood. When Olivia started going to school here, she was mistaken for an Italian immigrant by one of her teachers. Olivia wasn't offended by it quite the contrary. She realized that she was white passing to people who didn't know better since Italy was generally understood to be predominantly white. Following this incident, she became obsessed with being seen as white-passing and integrated herself into white society by marrying a white man. She begged her mother to not tell people they were colored which saddened her. These two events, the racist little girl and being mistaken for a white girl herself, shaped the kind of person Olivia would become.

Janet loved her late husband Lee dearly and his passing devastated her. She wanted to keep his memory alive through her late husband's books and by telling Olivia stories. But Olivia did not care for it. She was more than eager to forget and embrace her white identity. Olivia did not want her children to be looked down on the way she was when she was a little kid. Janet grew lonely wishing to meet a man like Lee. Eventually, Janet found her calling by housing black university students. But in order to do that she had to move. Olivia, who was then still a minor, wanted to stay and live on her own. However, Janet threatened Olivia that she would be completely on her own without her support, so Olivia reluctantly left with her mother.

Janet's business was moderately successful since she always had people to house. However, among the students, whom she provided for, she received a letter from a southern man asking for accommodation and Janet agreed. He was around her age and

they slowly started growing closer. He believed young, colored people take themselves too seriously. The two ended up falling in love and agreeing to get married. Janet spoke to her new partner about Olivia and her hate towards colored people. She expressed worry that Olivia would disapprove of the relationship. To her surprise Olivia was indifferent. When Janet gave birth to Olivia's twin half-siblings she was worried again about her reaction. Olivia again surprised her mother when she played with them. Although, the only reason she did so was because her half-siblings were light-skinned.

Olivia had many suitors, but she did not care for anyone. She was still hoping to marry a white man. As she grew older this dream slowly vanished so when a young student of medicine Christopher came by, she was ready to settle. Christopher was white-passing, so she still had a chance at having white-passing children.

2.1.2. The Characters

We skip forward to Olivia having her own children. Her oldest was a daughter she named Teresa. Her views on colored people have not changed and since Teresa was white-passing she was good in her mother's book. But she was very controlling over Teresa's friendships. Teresa had two close friends Phebe and Marise. Both girls were coloured but only Phebe fit Olivia's standards on the kind of people her daughter should be associating with. Phebe was welcome in their home but because Marise was dark-skinned she was not allowed. For this reason, Phebe never visited either so she and Teresa always stayed over at Marise's house after school. Something she would never tell her mother about.

Olivia was living through her children. The dreams she always had for herself she now moved on to her children. She would never marry into a white family, but she was determined to get her children to marry white. Her husband Christopher eventually caught onto what was happening and was very disappointed so he started to actively work against his wife's efforts. Olivia later gave birth to her middle son who was named after her husband Christopher. Chris Jr. was also white passing so he received the same treatment as his older sister.

When Olivia was pregnant with her youngest, she was very excited to meet him. She had the highest expectations for him. She wanted to name him after her since her

middle was named after his father. She even wanted to take him to England right after he was born. These plans ended up never coming through. Olivia got sick around the time she was to give birth and when her youngest, Oliver, was born to her utter disappointment he came out darker. She grew angry and hateful and would always take her anger out on him.

Olivia's indoctrination towards Chriss and Teresa failed. Teresa preferred Marise's house over her own since they spoke of love and kindness instead of racial superiority. She wanted her own family to be like that. She often wondered what makes who colored and what makes who white. She and everyone else admired and looked up to Marise. She wanted to be a celebrity and to her classmates she was. A love triangle is formed. Nick liked Marise while Phebe liked Nick. Nick eventually started going out with Phebe realising that Marise may not be the girl for him. Eventually, both Teresa and Chris leave home for school but are unhappy to leave their youngest brother alone knowing their mother will never love him.

2.1.3. Teresa's Act

Teresa was never happy at her new school. The school was picked by her mother Olivia. She was the only colored student surrounded by clueless white students and teachers so nobody realized she was colored, and Teresa lacked the bravery of her old friends to speak up. She felt like she couldn't be herself, so she resorted to being a passive onlooker rarely contributing to conversations and just listening. She never formed any close friendships. Many of the discussions were about colored people. She heard so many ignorant ideas from her schoolmates. Although she wasn't happy there, she didn't go home for Christmas.

Eventually, a colored girl named Alicia came to the school after Christmas break. She was the polar opposite of Teresa. She was proud to be colored and wasn't afraid to call people out. Teresa latched onto her confessing that she is also coloured. The two became friends and Teresa even went to Alicia's home for a visit making up a lie to her family as to why she could not come. She felt out of place she felt like she was robbed of her racial birthright. She felt she couldn't call herself colored. She ended up falling in love with a family friend of theirs, Henry, and they got engaged.

When she eventually made it home, she realized her mother was not present but was instead on a trip to Europe. In her excitement, she took her brother Oliver aside and told him the good news that she got engaged. She promised that once she and Henry get married, they will take him in and she will become his new mother. Oliver was excited at the idea and promised Teresa that he would keep it a secret. She becomes deceptive trying to hide the truth from her mother. Olivia keeps feeding lies to her mainly about her friend Phebe. Olivia said that Phebe married white to try and convince Teresa to do the same. The truth however soon came to light as Teresa met Phebe who was still together with Nick.

Teresa starts detaching herself from the family getting ready to leave everyone but Oliver behind. She was preparing herself to run away with him and her fiancée Henry. The idea of never seeing her mother fills her with determination and confidence. She made up her mind to be herself. She told her mother that she was seeing a white man to try and get away from her. Unfortunately, this backfired on her as Olivia found out exactly where she went and came to visit. Olivia was eager to meet the person her daughter was seeing. Despite her best efforts Olivia did find out that Teresa's fiancé was a dark-skinned colored man. An argument ensued and Teresa did not stand her ground, so Henry left her.

Teresa was devastated. Following the end of her engagement, she had fallen ill. She became even more passive than before. Her plan to escape was in vain. She gave up. In the end, Olivia succeeded and ruining her daughter's life and achieved her dream of getting her child to marry a white man. Teresa ended up in a loveless marriage with a French man and moved with him to Paris France.

2.1.4. Oliver's Act

Oliver lived a life of pain due to his mother's lack of love. Even as a child, he could see that she treated him differently but since he was so little, he didn't understand why. Olivia took every chance to send him to his grandparents on his father's side. Oliver was with his grandparents so much he was practically raised by them. They loved him dearly. They did their best to compensate for Olivia's lack of love encouraging Oliver to pursue his dreams. He cherished the family he had and formed a close bond with his

grandfather. His grandfather often spoke to him about successful people hoping to encourage Oliver to be just like that. He also inspired in him the dream of being a musician. He held onto that dream as well as the promise of his older sister Teresa to be his mother. Oliver's grandparents knew Olivia would leave him nothing, so they left everything they had to him after their passing.

He started pulling away from his mother knowing she did not love him and focused on the people that did. But deep inside he still craved her love and approval. For this reason, he was happy when his mother suddenly became very nice to him. Olivia wanted so desperately to impress her white lady friends by having a dark-skinned butler. Her husband denied this request saying they cannot afford it. So, Olivia turned her attention to her youngest child. She manipulated him with her words and fake sadness. Oliver saw this as his chance to get his mother's love, so he was happy to play help. Olivia turned it into a game for her son. He was pretending to be a colored butler for his mother's white friends. However, Oliver's older brother Christopher was appalled by his mother's behavior and forbade young Oliver from participating in this twisted game their mother played. He was the one to serve them instead of humiliating their mother.

That was the only time Oliver received any love from his mother so we went back to pulling away. However somewhere deep inside he still craved her love and affection. Oliver wanted to believe that his mother loved him. This illusion was shattered when he discovered a letter written by his mother. Something in him told him to read it and so he did. Once again he saw that all his mother saw was his unfortunate color. That one letter finally broke him. He remembered his sister who was now living in France. She was more of a mother to him than Olivia. She was helping him whenever she could and even promised him a new life with her husband. He wanted to get out of that house, so he reached out to Teresa. He wrote her a letter, reminding her of the promise she once made to him.

He patiently waited for a reply. When it arrived, he eagerly opened it. However, he received disappointing news from Teresa. She informed him that although she remembered her promise and sympathized with her brother's plight, she could not let him in. Teresa's situation has changed. She was not married to a colored man but a white one. Her French husband was terribly racist and would never allow Oliver to stay in their

residence. Oliver has lost all hope. There was no family for him. No one person could give him the love he so desperately craved. He reached for his father's gun and ended his life. It was his older brother Christopher who found him but by then it was too late to save him.

2.1.5. Phebe's Act

Phebe was still with her high school sweetheart Nick. However, the lovers were having trouble. Nick was getting colder towards Phebe. He was so cold and distant that Phebe began to worry whether he still loved her. In the meantime, another man shows interest in Phebe. He was a white man who mistook Phebe for a white girl herself. He was a rich man who wanted to spoil Phebe. She was unsure about him but went out with him regardless until he kissed her. She was not a cheater.

Her partner, Nick, was already planning on leaving her. He wasn't worried about her. He knew she was strong and with her fair skin, she would be better off without him. Nick didn't feel worthy of her. He felt that she could do so much better than him. He didn't want to hurt her so he thought it best to leave her. He would hurt her just this once instead of damaging her for the rest of her life. He noticed the looks strangers were giving him. They looked at him so hatefully due to their misconception of Phebe. Because she was white-passing they assumed the colored Nick was stealing away good white girls from good white men. Nick didn't want a girl like Phebe due to this. He didn't want to be pursued by a hateful mob. He was in love with their old friend Marise who was now a successful woman in a big city.

After successfully ruining two of her children's lives, Olivia turned her attention to her older unmarried son Christopher. Olivia knew well her middle child just like her daughter idolized Marise. She knew Christopher loved her and would try to pursue her with the intention to marry her. She couldn't let that happen. She wanted to force her son to marry white just like she did with Teresa. Olivia got to Marise first. She explicitly forbade Marise to court her son. Olivia spoke for a long time telling her that she knows what's best for her son. Marise was indifferent. She did not care too much for relationships so agreeing with Olivia wasn't too hard. She also did not want a mother-in-law like Olivia. She had successfully ruined another chance for happiness for one of her children.

Christopher reached Marise second and made his confession. Marise making true to her promise rejected Christopher's proposal. She pondered on him for a long time. She was regretful for rejecting him. She felt lonely and she knew that Christopher would treat her right, but she had made her choice. Christopher was gone never to come back for a second choice. Nick was the last one to reach her. Ant for him she agreed although she did not care for him, in her eyes, it was better than her loneliness. She ends up marrying Nick.

Christopher and Phebe both heartbroken meet. Christopher knew of Phebe as she was his sister's friend, but they never interacted much. They work on healing each other. They can see a future together. The white man who was trying to court found out from Phebe that she was colored. He was appalled that she tricked him. He immediately leaves her, but Phebe does not mind as she has Christopher now. The white man ends up sending her an insulting letter claiming to still love her despite her color. Phebe merely laughs at his arrogance and discards it. She found herself falling in love with Christopher.

Christopher proposes for the second time to Phebe and she accepts. Olivia has no issues due to her skin color. Although they were each other's second choices they were determined to make it work. However, the couple faces many issues. During the proposal, Phebe had agreed to live with both her and her new husband's parents. Christopher's father has fallen very ill after the suicide of his youngest son Oliver and Phebe has promised to look after him while Christopher is the breadwinner of the household.

Phebe realized how difficult living with their parents was. Her father-in-law needed around-the-clock care and her mother and Olivia were very hostile towards one another. This hostility started and was fueled by Olivia's intolerance of visibly colored people. Phebe would have been fine just taking care of her father-in-law, but Olivia's presence was impossible to handle. Olivia did as she knew best, making everyone around her miserable. Phebe was just about ready to give up completely since Christopher was always working and couldn't help her. She was exhausted and at her limit.

Phebe met Nick again. He expressed immense regret over leaving her. He wasn't happy with Marice. He missed the love Phebe gave him. Nick did not care about cheating on his spouse and Phebe went with it. When she looked at Nick she saw freedom. She

dreaded coming home to her chaotic household. For her Nick symbolised an escape from her miserable life. They would meet frequently and Phebe would lie to her husband about where she was going and what was she doing. She started feeling regretful. Her mind kept going to her family, to her mother, to Christopher and even her parents-in-law. Phebe was supposed to meet with Nick at a hotel and leave with him. As she stood in front of the building, she chose her husband and returned home with newfound strength. In the end, her issues with her mother-in-law Olivia resolved themselves as she took all she had and moved to France to be with her daughter Teresa.

2.1.6. The Curtain

In the final chapter, Olivia is hopeful to find a better life with her daughter Teresa and her white husband in France. She rented a small room believing it would only be temporary. She was however not received kindly. Her son-in-law was furious at her due to her lying about the economic situation of their family. He wanted nothing to do with Olivia. Teresa was also not eager to receive her mother. She was a reminder of all the pain she suffered. Teresa herself contemplated suicide after her younger brother died.

Olivia returns to her room. However, she doesn't know how to live by herself. She had never lifted a finger in her house and never worked a day in her life. Olivia was not ready to let go of her pride and work. She saw working as something that was beneath her. The money she had was slowly running out so she wrote to her husband since they were still legally married. He in the meantime recovered significantly without his wife around. She remained lonely cut from her whole family.

2.2. Characters

2.2.1. Olivia

Olivia is single-minded and self-absorbed. She had her own interpretations of life. She was traumatized at a very young age by racism. However, instead of pointing her finger at the actual problem she blamed her parents. She was a child who didn't understand and her parents failed to address it. When her mother Janet did and tried to speak with her about her views it was already too late. All her life she was obsessed with

not just passing as white but being white. For that reason, she surrounded herself with white people.

“She thought him very distinguished, standing there with his dead white face, his flashing dark eyes, his burnished hair. In his presence too she felt so much more securely white.”²²

Olivia has carried on with these ideals her whole life to the detriment of her family. Her husband Christopher did love her however he grew to hate her after the birth of their youngest son Oliver. Oliver had darker skin than their older two so Olivia’s racism came out in full force when she flat-out refused her youngest child.

“But even from babyhood, little Oliver sensed in himself one lack which early automatically destroyed any root of undue self-esteem. He knew he did not have his mother’s love...”²³

Everyone around Oliver did their best to fill the hole Olivia left by withholding love but it wasn’t enough and her youngest child whom she despised so much ended his own life. But it wasn’t just her youngest’s life that she destroyed with her obsession. Her oldest daughter Teresa always suffered at the behest of her mother. Olivia was so controlling that she stalked her daughter to see who she was with and limited the people who could come visit her. Light-skinned coloured people were permitted but darker people like Oliver were not.

“I just don’t want you to have Marise and people like that around because I don’t want you to grow up among folks who live the life that most colored people have to live... narrow and stultified and stupid.”²⁴

Only her middle child Christopher Jr. had somewhat of a happy ending but his mother’s meddling and bigotry also affected him greatly. She cost him his first love and nearly his second with her constant abuse towards her daughter-in-law’s mother. She is abusive and manipulative alienating her whole family resulting in her being abandoned

²²FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 155

²³FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 35

²⁴FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 31

in France with no money. She has never worked a day in her life and even at the brink of poverty she never did hoping for her husband to send her money.

2.2.2. Teresa

Teresa from a young age resented her mother. All she heard at home was talk about race and how important passing as white is. She loved Marise's family because it felt more homely more loving. Teresa's home was cold. Olivia had controlled every aspect of her life. All Teresa wanted was happiness. All Teresa wanted was for her family to be like Marise's.

*"Teresa loved the atmosphere of Marise's house. It was not at all like her own."*²⁵

*"It seemed so wonderful to the child that Marise's mother instead of talking of Ambition, or Standing or Racial Superiority should mention only Happiness."*²⁶

She had admired Marise and Phebe because they had something Teresa did not have. The two girls were colored and proud. They were brave and never ashamed of being colored. Teresa on the other hand was weak and scared. She would never admit on her own that she was colored. She had always felt out of place regardless of company. She felt like she was robbed of her racial birthright.

*"Emotionally, as far as race was concerned, she was a girl without a country... Later on in life, it occurred to her that she had been deprived of her racial birthright and that that was as great a cause for tears as any indignity that might befall man."*²⁷

She felt like she couldn't be herself around anybody. When she was with Marise and Phebe she felt like she couldn't relate. When she was sent to a prestigious school with no coloured students she felt like that even more so. In both instances, she merely listened to the conversations around her.

²⁵FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 36

²⁶FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 37

²⁷FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 69

“Teresa settled back in her chair. She was alternately amused, mystified and instructed by the girls’ thoughts and ideas on races. This was, strangely enough, the first time that this possibility had come up”²⁸

She couldn’t be completely transparent in front of anyone. The people she would be the most honest with were her brothers and her partner Henry whom she loved so much. She wanted to marry Henry as soon as she was done with school. They were planning a life together. She even planned on taking her younger brother Oliver with her to take him away from their mother. However, in the end, her mother’s words got to her and she adopted Olivia’s single-mindedness which resulted in the end of her relationship and the loss of her happiness.

““You know how I feel,” she told him simply... “But, Henry, perhaps there is something to Mother’s point of view.” She was surprised herself at the words issuing from her lips.”²⁹

She spent the rest of her life miserable hiding her true identity in front of her racist husband. She had lost sight of herself and when her brother Oliver begged to take him in, she remained weak and could not fulfill the promise she had made to him. She believed that there would be someone to love him but when her brother shot himself, she too thought of suicide. Teresa’s story does not have a happy ending. She had never learned how to stand up for herself and to be proud of who she was.

2.2.3. Christopher Jr.

Christopher Jr. is undoubtedly the strongest out of the siblings. He is Olivia’s middle child and his father’s namesake. While Teresa was scared and Oliver desperate Christopher did not care for his mother’s words. She did not control him the way she controlled Teresa. He was always able to protect his siblings and stand up to their mother when there was an injustice. When Oliver became a butler for their mother, he was furious and wanted to make Olivia sweat.

²⁸FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 59

²⁹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 106

“There are a lot of other things she won’t like either, “the older boy returned grimly. “Here, show me where all this stuff is...” With Sally’s aid he crowded the tray incontinently with tea, hot water, cakes and sandwiches. He strode into the sitting-room wishing that he were the color of jet and that they could all hear him calling her Mother. She paled as she saw him, came forward to meet him.”³⁰

He also possessed the bravery that his older sister lacked. Much to his mother’s disappointment he surrounded himself with coloured people. He remained loyal to his race and his family. He is a kind hardworking man who followed in his father’s footsteps. Despite his resentment towards his mother for what happened to his younger brother Oliver, he knows that she will go where his father is so when discussing marriage with Phebe, Olivia has to come along.

““We must see him often,” Christopher said frequently. “I wish,” he added wistfully, “he might live with us.” But of course this was impossible as that would mean the including of Olivia.”³¹

Despite his own struggles and pain, he always put others before himself mainly his wife Phebe and his broken father. His main goal was to restore his father and help Phebe heal from her broken heart after she lost Nick. He learned to love her and had undying faith in her. With his hardworking personality and the support from his wife, he was able to heal his father and his strength was rewarded with a happy end.

2.2.4. Oliver

Oliver was a disappointment to his mother Olivia the moment he was born. The rest of the family did their best to compensate for Olivia’s lack of love mainly his paternal grandparents. They were the ones to raise him until they passed away. When they did, they left him with their money to pursue his dreams.

He was a good-looking boy and was fairly popular. He was loved by everyone but the person he wanted to be loved by, which was his mother. Although he eventually gave

³⁰FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 155

³¹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 214

up trying to win her love. The only time Olivia gave him any attention was when she wanted a Filipino butler and her husband could not afford one.

He had a dream of becoming a famous musician which was a dream inspired by his grandfather. He often played music and talked plenty about it to young Oliver. Although surprised at the beginning his grandparents supported him.

“He would be a musician, he told his grandfather, gravely exchanging confidences for the old man’s reminiscences, as they roamed through the latter’s happy hunting ground, down South Street, teeming with unwashed Negroes and Jews, through Ninth Street, less picturesque and primitive, down and across to Seventh and Race where they would sit in Franklin Square.”³²

Despite everyone’s best efforts, Oliver was lonely and when his grandparents passed he was permanently stuck with his mother in their house. The book doesn’t talk too much about friends Oliver might have had which only amplifies his loneliness. His sister Teresa has moved out for school, his brother Christopher is also usually out until late in the afternoon and their father works all day because Olivia doesn’t have a job and only entertains guests in their shared home. He is essentially stuck at home with his unloving mother. Therefore, his music became his escape and he clung to it as it was a remnant of his loving grandparents.

“In the cold nights, he wrapped himself in his blankets and thought peacefully and happily of Teresa, of his music, of The Ode.”

Although he was lonely and miserable in the house he remained hopeful. His existence hung onto his sister’s promise. Teresa had promised to take him with her and her soon-to-be husband Harry. However, due to Olivia’s manipulation and Teresa’s weakness Henry left and that marriage never happened. In her new life, Teresa had no place for Oliver. After he reached out to her in desperation he was denied. All his hope was crushed. There was truly no one left to love him. Teresa’s letter was his breaking point.

³²FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 140-141

“Teresa had failed him! His faith in all that was good in the world lay dead within him.”³³

In the end, he hated himself and his skin color.

“With one chill finger he touched his beautiful, golden skin. No, certainly it wasn’t ugly. His eye, trained to the recognition of loveliness, told him that it was much more beautiful than the pinkish, yellowed, grayish or drab skins by which he was usually surrounded. Yet it had kept him from the enjoyment of that most ordinary and universal possession, a mother’s tenderness... It had separated him from his sister.”³⁴

Although his story ends there, his death remains a symbol. It is a catalyst for his father’s health, his sister’s own thoughts of suicide and his brother’s desperation for marriage. His death colors the rest of the story and always remains in the back looming over the heartbroken family he had left behind. Only Olivia does not grieve. She does not mention him until the very last sentence of the story.

“He was a slender, rather tall lad, but young. About the age of Oliver in the days when he used to come running up to his mother’s room to confide in her about his algebra.”³⁵

2.2.5. Phebe

Phebe is described as quiet, elegant and creative by Teresa and many others. She is close to Teresa but her best friend is Marise. Although she is not as confident as Marise she is braver than Teresa. While Teresa hides that she is colored Phebe proudly announces it to the whole class. She announces it twice because the teacher does not believe her. She later shows a picture of her mother as proof.

³³FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg.163

³⁴FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg.163

³⁵FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 235

“The teacher was having a review lesson on races one day and she asked Phebe what race she belonged to and Phebe said: ‘I belong to the black or Negro race.’”³⁶

She even as a child knows where she belongs and how to stand up to people. She shows her bravery again and again when facing Teresa’s mother. Due to her fair skin, she is allowed into Teresa’s house but her best friend Marise isn’t because she is darker. Instead of leaving her friend behind and visiting Teresa alone, she chooses to avoid the house altogether in a show of solidarity.

“‘Hardly tomorrow, but some other day very soon, I am sure. Come on in, Phebe.’ ‘No, thank you, Mrs. Cary,’ the child answered, pushing back the thick gilt hair which framed her face. ‘I was with Marise first, so I’ll go on with her.’”³⁷

She loves Nick, their classmate and they begin to date much to the support of everyone else. We hear from Phebe years later after Oliver’s death. She is still loyal to Nick who starts pulling away from her. Despite hanging out with a white boy her heart still belongs to Nick until he breaks up with her. She tries with the white boy but she feels dishonest. She is reacquainted with her old friend’s brother Christopher. He is broken due to his family falling apart and his recent rejection from Marise. She is eager to let him help her heal.

“She looked into his strained young face. ‘Oh, Chris, you’ve been unhappy... I know what it is... I’ve been unhappy too! Yes, dear, I’ll marry you. I’ll help you.’”³⁸

Although the start of their marriage is rough she persists. She takes care of her father-in-law and diffuses fights between her mother and mother-in-law. She is exhausted and wants to give up. That is when Nick comes back to her life. He had married Marise but he wants Phebe. They both meet behind their partners' backs. She missed the passionate love the two had shared since Christopher was always working so they

³⁶FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 30

³⁷FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg.29

³⁸FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 214

could make ends meet. However, she starts to feel guilty. In the end, she chooses to stay faithful to Christopher and cuts Nick off.

"Why what was she doing here in this hateful street about to enter this house, to take a lover, when at home her husband was awaiting her responsible, uncomplaining, loyal! ... She turned and walked as fast as her feet could carry her down the dingy uninviting thoroughfare."³⁹

Her faith is also rewarded as the main source of the troubles, Olivia, has left for France. The departure of Olivia also springs new life for her father-in-law. Together with his son, he opens a clinic. A new beginning for their greatly reduced family but a happy one.

2.2.6. Marise

Marise is everyone's idol. Everywhere she goes she is loved. She is mean to have attention on her as she wishes to be famous one day. No one ever doubts her conviction. Her strength and conviction are something most colored people admire. Teresa is among the ones who like her.

"But I like Marise best. She's such fun."⁴⁰

"Marise is so smart you know. She can think up all the most wonderful things. Why she changed her name herself. It used to be Maria. And she said that was all wrong. She said she didn't look like a Maria person and she didn't feel like a Maria person."⁴¹

Phoebe also admires her.

"Even Phebe, knowing Marise as well as she did, was impressed. Teresa for her part was completely overwhelmed. How could a girl of thirteen know all these

³⁹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 224

⁴⁰FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 30

⁴¹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 31

things! The story teemed with bloodshed, terrible threats, gallons of whiskey, strong men, glamorous women, unbridled passion, sharp-shooting and the moon!”⁴²

Marise is the symbol of the ideal colored person. She is strong and unashamed. She has a goal that she is striving towards and will not let anything stop her. She captured the hearts of many boys including Nick who is dating Phoebe and Christopher, Teresa’s brother. In the end, she is successful in achieving her dream of fame. However, she feels lonely. She rejects Christopher based on his mother’s words but ends up marrying Nick although she has no love for him.

2.2.7. Nick

Nick is the first love of Phebe. He, Phebe and Marise are involved in a love triangle. Phebe loves Nick, Nick loves Marise and Marise is in love with life and later her career. Nick starts dating Phebe because he thinks Marise is too good for him. He ends up asking her for a dance knowing she would pass but not Marise.

“What about you? Say, Phebe, I never saw anybody dance, I never saw anybody look like you looked this afternoon. You were wonderful, you were a peach. I never saw anybody dance like that. What are you going to do, go on the stage some day?”⁴³

However, Nick soon realizes the struggles of dating a white-passing girl. He as a clearly coloured man is met with hostility from white people. He didn’t want a girl like Phebe. He wanted a girl like Marise. He uses the color as the reason to break up with Phebe and goes after Marise.

“I’ll tell you, Phebe. It’s about our color...” Whatever else she may have been expecting, it was clearly not this. She could only echo stupidly: “Color?” “Yes, color! I’ve been meaning to tell you about this for years. But how could I? Still even you must have noticed, heard what I mean.... Haven’t you seen people whispering, and staring when we’ve got into street-cars? White men leering at you and looking

⁴²FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 37

⁴³FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 41-42

daggers at me? White women curling their lips at both of us? I've seen it and I tell you, Phebe, I've grown sick and tired of it..."⁴⁴

Nick later comes back as a husband to Marise wanting Phebe back. He did not get the life he imagined so he wanted to go back to what he had with Phebe. Although Phebe initially goes along with it at the end she chooses her husband leaving Nick behind to live with his choices.

2.2.8. Janet

Janet is the mother of Olivia. She is a proud colored but white passing woman. Her husband however has darker skin which results in Olivia being bullied as a child by white kids. Both she and her husband realize Olivia dislikes them.

"Olivia almost hated them both with a flaring intensity no less violent for the immaturity of the heart which engendered it. How could they— how could they have made her colored?"⁴⁵

She was hoping her hate would pass. She kept retelling stories of her and her husband to Olivia, but she didn't want to hear them. What broke Janet's heart was when Olivia begged her to pretend to be white. Olivia's mind could not be changed and Janet knew. However, she wanted to fulfill her dream and opened lodging for colored students.

In the end, she finds love again, gets married and gives birth to twins. She was worried about Olivia's reaction but since they were white passing, she was happy to play with them. The same siblings that ended up trying to help Teresa escape with Henry.

2.3. Analysis

There are many themes and topics discussed in *Comedy: American Style*. Jessie Redmon Fauset focuses on one main theme that colors the entirety of the novel. The main theme is Olivia's obsession. All the other themes and questions the novel poses stem from said obsession. The side themes the novel explores include the question of

⁴⁴FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 188

⁴⁵FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 8

colored pride, what makes a colored person colored and the stereotypes in other literary media, namely the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Olivia's obsession starts in her childhood. It is triggered by two events. The first one is the bullying and the second one is being mistaken for a white Italian at her new school. She wants to be white to spare herself and her children from the life she lived in her younger years.

*"All of them black or brown," she raged, "and all of them looked down on! If you think I want my children to feel toward their father as I felt toward—"*⁴⁶

Olivia was desperate to enter the upper class. While other characters from Jessie Redmon Fauset's characters also have this wish Olivia is the most persistent and the clearest example of this topic.

*"Fauset's attention to working class privation, the striving attempts of black outsiders to position themselves to penetrate the ranks of the privileged class, and the hypocritical posturing of the entrenched elite, is most clearly understood through a materialist analysis of class dynamics and the adverse effects of social pressure on the individual."*⁴⁷

She blames her father for her misfortune much to the sadness and anger of her mother Janet. Olivia retains her wish to marry white but ends up settling for the white-passing Dr. Cary. She realizes that is the closest to marrying white. She then moves her ambition to her children. Her obsession becomes worse with motherhood. She is most obsessed over her daughter Teresa. Her obsession also truly shines with her youngest son Oliver who has a darker skin tone than the other children. Every tragedy that happens in this story can be linked to Olivia's racism and obsession over passing as white be it Oliver's suicide, Teresa's ruined relationship, nearly breaking Christopher's marriage and her loneliness in the end is all caused by her own actions.

Colored pride is a topic that frequently appears in the Harlem Renaissance. Olivia's main goal is to teach her children to not be proud of being colored. Although she fails

⁴⁶FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 15

⁴⁷ CALLOWAY, L. M. – *Black Family (Dys)Function in Novels by Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, & Fannie Hurst*, PETER LANG, 2003, pg. 12

with her middle child Christopher she succeeds with Teresa and Oliver. Teresa cannot find any racial pride in herself.

*"Neither she nor Teresa, of course, was consciously aware of this stand. And yet the latter knew that she had behind herself no such pride either of race or of personality as Alicia constantly displayed."*⁴⁸

While Oliver is so ashamed he runs a bullet through his own head. Olivia and Teresa lead him to believe he cannot be loved because of his skin color.

*"Yet it had kept him from the enjoyment of that most ordinary and universal possession, a mother's tenderness... It had separated him from his sister."*⁴⁹

Nick raises a question: What makes who are colored and what makes them white? This is a line that gets blurred a lot in other works of Jessie Redmon Fauset, namely the *Plum Bun*, where the topic of passing as white is also one other the main themes and a source of most conflicts.

*"But if she ain't white, why ain't she white? She's whiter than lots of those white girls at our school. What makes her colored and makes those white girls white?"*⁵⁰

It is a question that Jessie Redmon Fauset leaves unanswered. She addresses the topic of conflict between the races in many of her works for example the *Plum Bun* and *The Chinaberry Tree*.

Stereotypes and cultural references also appear in media from the Harlem Renaissance. The most commented novel is certainly *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In this novel, Jessie Redmon Fauset makes a reference to Topsy. Topsy like many characters from that novel has become a symbol. A symbol of the silliness and stupidity of the colored people. Topsy doesn't know anything. She only knows how to cause trouble. She needs the intervention of the white child Eva to be better. Using Topsy to describe the colored

⁴⁸FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 65

⁴⁹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 163

⁵⁰FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 40

people is to say that they cannot be better on their own. The comparison is made by the white ignorant people in the book.

“My goodness me!” Marian exclaimed. “What would we do with one dancing around here like Topsy, and her hair sticking up all over her head!”⁵¹

Through their words, they show white people's ignorance of colored people. Although during the jazz era, white people grew interested in black culture for the first time they were still quite ignorant and haughty.

The novel *Comedy: American Style* points out how hate can ruin not just one person but several generations. There is a thin line between white and colored with light-skinned people and they have to choose what world to belong to. They can be either white-passing or they can embrace their colored heritage closing many opportunities.

⁵¹FAUSET, J. R. – *Comedy: American Style*, Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, New Jersey, And London, 1933, pg. 60

3. The Chinaberry Tree

3.1. Plot

The story takes place in the colored upper- and middle-class community. What disturbs the peaceful life is the Stange family. Sarah Strange and her daughter Laurentine. The two Strange ladies are subjected to gossip. They are ostracised from the community completely. The reason for this hostile treatment from their neighbors is Sarah's relationship. The colored lady had an affair with Colonel Halloway. Although Halloway is a respectable member of society he is also married. His relationship with the young Sarah is in its nature adultery. Laurentine is the result of this relationship and therefore bears the sin of her mother. Although Halloway provides financially for Sarah and Laurentine and they live in his house he is not physically present for his daughter.

A second reason for the complete isolation of the Stange ladies is Sarah's sister and Laurentine's aunt Judy. She came to visit her sister Sarah in her residence for some time. While staying there she much like her sister slept around with married men. Although she slept with one due to the situation between Sarah Strange and Colonel Halloway rumors about Judy's promiscuity spin out of control. Out of pure shame, she leaves.

Laurentine grows up alone. She only had her mother and her work friends. Sarah works as a seamstress and has other seamstresses living with them on Colonel Halloway's estate. Laurentine's only solace in the world becomes the Chinaberry tree growing in their garden. She often sat under it on a bench circling the tree and pondering. Her second escape became sewing. Her mother and her friends taught her everything she knew and eventually, she herself joined them making it her profession. Laurentine found her passion in dressmaking specifically. She had a natural talent for colors.

Her situation changes when Laurentine's cousin and Sarah's niece Melissa join the Stange household. Melissa's mother Judy sends her daughter to live with her sister. Melissa doesn't know her parent's story, but she knows Laurentine's story. Melissa only knows her situation is different as her parents are married and Laurentine's are not. The community is not thrilled with Laurentine's younger cousin's arrival and she is only tolerated since she is still a child herself while Laurentine is already an adult.

Melissa eventually gained favor and significant popularity with her lovely and bubbly personality. Melissa is a happy child who has not had her spirit broken by her family situation. Melissa unlike Laurentine is being invited to parties and is welcome to participate in the community while Laurentine remains alone in the house with her mother. Although, soon Laurentine accepts the way things are and is happy to have Melissa around. Laurentine realized she could live vicariously through Melissa and have her as a provider of a life she had always wanted to have for herself.

Nothing lasts forever and eventually, rumors spread through the community once again and Melissa is ostracised once again. Her association with Sarah and Laurentine Strange was exposed and as a result, she loses a lot of her friends. Melissa takes her anger on her aunt and cousin blaming them for her misery. This in turn breeds resentment in Laurentine. Since Melissa lost her fun and enjoyable life Laurentine no longer has anyone to live through. Laurentine blames Melissa for falling back to misery. This sudden resentment does not go by unnoticed by Melissa. She ends up confident to her friend Asshur and asks why Laurentine hates her.

In the meantime, Laurentine has a prospective husband in Philip Hackett. For a time she feels genuinely happy. Her 'bad blood' and Laurentine's ability to get over it eventually ends that relationship. This 'bad blood' as they call it is a limitation for both Laurentine and Melissa. Laurentine is not only a child of sin due to her parents being unmarried, but she is also mixed as Colonel Halloway is a white man. Melissa watches her cousin crash and burns after her relationship with Hackett ends and she vows to never become like her.

Laurentine in her grief torn to the church and religion. She hoped to find answers to her sorrow. Her prayers are answered when she is met with Mrs. Ismay a wife to Dr. Ismay. Mrs. Ismay insists on bringing Laurentine to her home. Despite initial protests Laurentine eventually relents. She wanted to rest at home but Mrs Ismay had other ideas. Mrs. Ismay has gotten in her head that she wants to straighten Laurentine up. She enlists the help of her husband and together they aim to help Laurentine. Spending time with Dr. and Mrs. Ismay was the first time Laurentine had been in the company of other colored people. As she sat in the company of the Ismays a stranger came to the residence. He introduces himself as Dr. Stephen Denleigh.

After Melissa was saved by Asshur from drunk Harry the two started becoming closer, spending a lot of time by the Chinaberry tree. She talks to him about everything happening in her life and reminisces about the time she had spent here. However, she didn't want to be vulnerable in front of him. Melissa likes Asshur but she cannot imagine a future with him. Asshur surprises her by proposing. He cannot watch Melissa being bullied by her cousin Laurentine. Asshur is moving away to a farm in Alabama and wants to take Melissa with him. Melissa rejects Asshur's proposal. She is devastated to see him leave since she will have nobody to confide in about Laurentine, but her ambition does not allow her to settle on a farm in the South. She wants a rich city life that Asshur cannot provide. She ends up writing about the ordeal in her diary to lift her spirits.

Hostility between the cousins steadily rises. While Melissa finds a new friend in Kitty, Laurentine continues getting closer to Mrs. Ismay. She was spending more and more time with them. Mrs. Ismay's presence has helped Laurentine get over her heartbreak with Philip Hackett. As Laurentine healed her hate and resentment towards her cousin also subsided and she no longer felt anger and jealousy. Dr. Denleigh and Dr. Ismay often time join the ladies. In her spare time, if she isn't with the Ismays, Laurentine goes out to read in the forest. As she is there sitting in the grass to her surprise Dr. Stephen Denleigh joins her. For the first time they converse. Stephen Denleigh has not spoken while at the Ismays's house. Laurentine had caught his eye and the feeling was mutual. The two begin to flirt with one another enjoying nature and each other's company. However, Laurentine is still hesitant about entering a relationship, still worried about her bad blood.

Through her new friend Kitty, Melissa is introduced to a solemn man named Malory. They meet at one of Kitty's parties. The two become very close. Malory is enchanted with Melissa's personality. She is vibrant and lovely, unlike his family. During the party, Melissa was keeping him company and he was glad for it. He has moved back here to his family after his Aunt Viny, whom he lived with, passed away.

As Melissa finds her partner in Malory, Laurentine and Stephen Denleigh also become closer and closer. Despite Laurentine's rejection some time prior she does long for love. Laurentine wants to be loved but before then she needs to know the man. She wants to test him before she ends up heartbroken again. Stephen takes Laurentine for

car rides around the place. He enjoys her company as he sees her as real and down to earth. She ends up pouring her regrets about being cruel to her cousin Melissa to Stephen on one of those rides. It devolves into an argument about biology. She confesses to Stephen about her 'bad blood' and her struggles. Stephen is outraged that she would believe something like 'bad blood' can affect their relationship. Stephen does not care for the 'bad blood', he sees her for who she is. Laurentine's trip with Stephen motivates her to be nicer to Melissa and apologize. This never comes to fruition as Laurentine finds Melissa's diary. As she read through it her anger was reawakened when she saw how pitifully Melissa looked at her.

Melissa keeps receiving letters from Asshur as he is telling her about his life and work around the farm. But she was in love with Malory and only saw Asshur as a friend. She was coming to see Kitty very often and they became good friends. Her house was the only place outside of school where she could see Malory. Malory is Melissa's first love and she was infatuated with him. Malory was no different. He yearned for a livelier family. His mother and two sisters were forever gloomy and depressed after his father's death. She was already planning on marrying him after knowing each other for a very short time. A war had broken out between the cousins because of the diary. This increase in hostility only strengthened Melissa's resolve to marry Malory and leave. They make each other incredibly happy.

Laurentine is also happy spending her days with Stephen Denleigh. Her relationship with him is much better and healthier than with Philip Hackett. Stephen is also happy to share time with a wonderful woman after his ex-wife's passing. He had expressed his love for Laurentine by sharing stories of his childhood and his marriage to his first wife. Laurentine is touched by his stories and makes a vow under the Chinaberry tree. Stephen Denleigh also starts coming over to the house and dining with Laurentine, her cousin Melissa and her mother Sarah. Melissa silently judges their relationship hoping that Laurentine will leave her alone now that she has Stephen Denleigh.

Christmas comes by and it's a full house. Melissa is splitting her time between the house and Malory. In Malory's home, the Christmas spirit has not arrived. While he gives his family thoughtful gifts he gets an ugly dark suit in turn. His sisters barely say thanks while his mother doesn't even pen the present when Malory gave it to her. Malory also

brings up marriage to Melissa being very pushy about it and not wanting Melissa to do anything and be a homemaker. Although Melissa is initially against it and wants a job, she eventually becomes excited by the idea. As she goes home Harry offers to bring her home. She is reluctant but lets him come along. Harry starts asking about Malory which makes Melissa very uncomfortable. She knows nothing good can come of it. And she ends up being correct. Harry starts talking about Melissa's family and the circumstances of her cousin's birth. Melissa did not tell Malory about it. Harry indirectly threatens Melissa. She comes home distraught wondering about his true intentions. She catches herself wishing for Asshur's and Laurentine's love but shakes away the thought.

Melissa is haunted by nightmares. She is afraid of losing Malory due to her cousin's bad blood and her family's reputation. She is forced to walk forward when she doesn't want to. She knows she cannot build a relationship on a lie. She knew she had to tell Malory before they got married. Day and night she is thinking about the possible ways their relationship can go wrong and she is distracted all the time.

Malory is disheartened by how his Christmas went. He is angry at his family for always being miserable and not thinking about him. He reminisces about his Aunt Viny. He remembered spending Christmas with her and her friends. Although it wasn't the best it was a hundred times better than his mother and sisters. The only thing that made him happy was spending time with Melissa. He decided to surprise her with a visit. He knew he couldn't come the normal way because of Laurentine so he snuck in. Melissa was happy to see him and she hid him in the kitchen. While baking cookies together, Malory asked Melissa about her family. This caught her off guard and she cut the meeting short but they agreed to meet again.

Laurentine was enjoying Christmas for the first time with Stephen around but Melissa had not noticed her cousin's happiness. Both girls were so preoccupied with their own relationships and partners that they rarely spared each other a thought. Both girls were busy thinking and planning their futures. Both couples were thinking about their Christmas next year. Both were hoping to have their homes and their families. Both were dreaming about their own little paradise. At the house, Stephen is thinking about his happy future with Laurentine and Laurentine feels restored by Stephen's kindness.

Melissa sneaks out to Kitty's party to see Malory. The silent and serene scene of the house is contrasted with the loud party. The music is wild and everybody is dancing like there is no tomorrow. Melissa, feeling playful, dances with somebody else to make Malory jealous. She then teased him by feigning jealousy herself when he turned his attention to someone else. Melissa ended up staying overnight at Kitty's and having a meal with Kitty's family and Malory the next day. When Kitty and her sister Gertrude asked Melissa about her relationship with Malory she lied fearing it would get to Laurentine who is already restricting her by not allowing her to bring Malory over.

Melissa sees Malory the next day having fun in the snow. While hanging out with him she remembers her nightmares. She knows she needs to come clean and once again tries to motivate herself to tell him. She starts feeling conflicted between Malory and Asshur. Asshur knows her family's story and he does not care. Asshur loves Melissa the way she is without any secrets needed.

Malory is coaxed by Kitty's family to come over for lunch. He is shocked by what he sees. He sees a family who talks to each other, who laugh together and who does things together. He becomes aware of his own family situation. He also thinks about Melissa's family. He begins to realize that this is the kind of family he wants and not his own and not even Melissa's. He finds himself falling out of love with Melissa and growing interested in Gertrude.

With Laurentine's new relationship blossoming Melissa had more opportunities to sneak Malory in the kitchen again. With spring on the horizon, they need to come up with a new place to meet. The Stranges and their friends were outsiders, so the community eventually noticed Malory and Melissa spending a lot of time together and started to watch them closely. The community is quite unhappy as they don't want Melissa to marry Malory, they want her to marry Asshur. They started plotting against them.

Melissa in the meantime was still weighed by the secret that is her family history. She knew her family was notorious if not infamous. She worried someone would tell Malory before she could. She was getting ready to leave this town and she wanted to leave the secret behind as well but the next time she saw him she was unable to tell

Malory once again. She was happy to defy her cousin, but she was still afraid. Malory however surprised her by suggesting their new place to meet should be the Chinaberry tree. Melissa is immediately against it since Laurentine's windows face the tree and she would be able to see them. Malory grew frustrated with the situation and demanded to know why Laurentine was so against them. Melissa finally comes clean. Malory is not happy but does not want to leave Melissa for it when she stands up for herself and her family. She agreed to meet Malory under the Chinaberry tree. Much to their luck Laurentine did see them kissing.

As Easter approaches Laurentine's hands are full. She has so many orders to finish before the holiday since so many ladies want their dresses ready. She cannot therefore keep her eyes on Melissa who continues to meet with Malory.

During the meal with Malory Gertrude Brown falls in love with the boy and makes plans to steal him. Her sister Kitty is disgusted with her sister since it is clear Melissa and Malory are a couple. When Malory accepted an invitation from Gertrude to attend her event he forgot himself and almost forgot about his meeting with Melissa. Once he noticed he forgot he ran out as fast as he could with the excuse that he needed to run an errand for his mother. Gertrude was unhappy about that and wondered where he went. As a result, she sets out to hunt for information about the two of them. Her search eventually brings her to Mr. Stede, an old family friend of the Stranges. She starts poking but the old man is reluctant to reveal anything. Only when Gertrude says that Melissa and Malory intend to marry Mr. Stede reveals a devastating secret.

The news spread around the community fast and it only fuels the desire and need to keep Melissa and Malory apart. All the while Laurentine and Stephen are on a trip to New York. Gertrude first tells her sister Kitty about what she had learned from Mr Stede and Kitty passes that information to her mother, Mrs. Brown, who immediately tries to contact Dr. Denleigh, but he is currently out of his office. Immediately upon their return Mrs. Brown calls again and begs to see him without disclosing the reason why. The doctor is not in a good headspace due to him losing a patient and their child and the trip that did not go well.

In the end, he agrees and she comes to see him revealing the secret. The doctor immediately heads to the Stranges's house to speak with Laurentine. He asks her to keep Melissa busy so she cannot go and see Malory. However, a misunderstanding happens and Laurentine and Stephen have a falling out. Laurentine does not give Stephen the option to tell her the full story mainly because he believes Laurentine knows and she gives the indication that she does. But Laurentine thinks it is about their 'bad blood' once again. In the end, the misunderstanding is cleared on the day of Melissa's eighteenth birthday, on the day she intends to marry Malory.

The truth as to why they cannot marry is because they are biological half-siblings. Melissa and Malory are the only ones who don't know the truth and they are angry at everyone trying to keep them apart. They are even more determined to get married and run away together. Malory is stopped by his mother. She learned from one of his sisters that he was seeing Melissa because he tried to sneak her in. His mother tells Malory that his father had an affair with Judy, Melissa's mother and Melissa is the result of that affair. He is filled with anger and blames his broken family on Melissa. As she waits for him in front of the church he approaches her and attacks her in anger. Malory tells Melissa as she lays on the ground stunned that they are siblings and leaves her there.

Melissa remains there until Laurentine and Stephen find her. They bring her to the car and bring her home. Melissa becomes ill with grief. She lost her first love and all her dreams. Malory, the man she loved and who loved her back, hated her now. The family sends for Asshur to come back to see her. His return marks the beginning of Melissa's healing. Asshur eventually asks Melissa to marry him once again. This time she accepts. Stephen and Laurentine make up and a new happy beginning is on the horizon. The book ends with Sarah, Melissa, Asshur, Laurentine and Stephen having a picnic under the Chinaberry tree.

3.2. Characters

3.2.1. Laurentine Strange

Laurentine is one of the main characters along with her younger cousin Melissa. She is the child of an affair between a colored woman and a married white man. She is

beautiful but lonely. Because of the circumstances of her birth, she was ostracised. She had spent all of her free time by the Chinaberry tree.

“Laurentine’s meditations under the Chinaberry Tree, always lapsed, if they reached back this far, into a temporary confusion.”⁵²

Eventually, she resigned and stopped trying to make friends. Her hope for new life came in the form of Melissa. Melissa’s mother Judy has caused some issues so Laurentine was indifferent to Melissa. However, the first impression on Melissa is that she is proud.

““Proud Laurentine,” said Melissa to herself and henceforth always gave her that dramatic title in her meditations.”⁵³

Laurentine becomes delusional after Melissa’s arrival. She quickly attaches herself to Melissa as her cousin gains popularity. Melissa was living the life that Laurentine wanted. Laurentine became reliant on her cousin. She becomes hostile as Melissa gets shunned. She directs her anger at her blaming her for this situation.

Afterwards, she becomes overbearing.

“She was overbearing, inclined to be triumphant – no one knew why.”⁵⁴

She became controlling over Melissa’s life and time. When Melissa gets a boyfriend Laurentine immediately shuts it down saying that she is too young to date. She wants to control Melissa by not allowing her boyfriend to come to the house. She herself had lost a partner so she was attempting to ruin her cousin’s relationship as well.

A positive change in her character when she starts dating Dr. Denleigh. He heals the pain that she kept in for years. However, even during their relationship, she is weighed by her idea of ‘bad blood’. She is scared that this ‘bad blood’ makes her unlovable and this mentality ends up ruining a lot of her relationships. Thankfully, Dr. Denleigh loves her for who she is and helps her accept herself. Thanks to him she starts to dream and believe that she could have a happy ending.

⁵²FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 6

⁵³FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 16

⁵⁴ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 14

A trait that she does not get rid of is her recklessness and quickness to judge and misunderstand. First, she misunderstands what Melissa wrote in her diary about her. Second, she misunderstands her partner Stephen Denleigh when he comes to tell her about the real reason why Melissa and Malory cannot get married.

In the end, she gets her happy ending with Stephen and makes up with her cousin and the cycle of mutual hatred and abuse is broken.

3.2.2. Melissa Paul

Melissa is young playful and naïve. Her playful nature is mostly shown when she is with Malory. She meets him at a party hosted by Kitty

“Her happy guest laughed. “Let’s hear you. Come Malory, Malory.” She started off at a little run and the lad followed her, lanterns bobbing about in his hands and he pursued her over the slightly uneven ground.”⁵⁵

During the winter she and Malory play in the snow like children. They are a typical young couple. They think about marriage shortly after they start dating.

Melissa is also burdened by ‘bad blood’. She worries that her family’s past can ruin her perfect love the way it ruined her popularity when she first came to live here. She is controlled by fear. She is afraid of her cousin and of her family. She is afraid to lose her love. She desperately clings to him since she sees him as her only escape. She wants to go somewhere no one would know her.

Despite her fear of Laurentine and her potential to ruin her happiness, she is happy to defy her order to stop seeing Malory. She is stubborn and determined to prove her love to her cousin. The more either Laurentine or anyone else from the community tries to pull her away from Malory the more determined she is to marry him and run away together.

In the end, her world is shattered when she finds out she and Malory are siblings and he turns hostile towards her. He proves right that the ‘bad blood’ is something to make you unlovable. With the help of Asshur, she is able to heal. She realizes that she

⁵⁵ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 106

truly loves Asshur and accepts his marriage proposal. When Asshur proposed for the first time she rejected him not wanting a life on a farm but after all the pain she went through she begins looking forward to it. She makes up with Laurentine and both girls get to have a happy end.

3.2.3. Sarah Strange and Judy Paul

Sarah Strange is the mother of Laurentine. She and her sister are the sources of most of the conflicts. The whole issue of 'bad blood' comes into play due to Sarah affair with Colonel Halloway. Although her initial actions were selfish she wants the best for her family and heavily encourages both her daughter Laurentine and niece Melissa to live happily. She accepts Stephen Denleigh into the family and is ready to do the same for Malory but Laurentine shuts it down.

The second conflict Sarah and Judy cause together. Judy sleeps with a married man, Mr. Forten, like her sister and Colonel Halloway. Just like in her sister's case Judy gets pregnant with Melissa. Both Sarah and Judy keep this information to themselves. Because the only person in the house who knows about it is Sarah, she can monopolize it. She keeps it to herself until the secret itself gets out and she has to explain.

"She turned to Denleigh. "I should have told you before Stephen, but I was afraid. It's Gods curse! Before she married, Melissa's mother used to-to run around with this Forten boy's father;"⁵⁶

Judy Paul herself appears only at the beginning two chapters of the book her actions and personality are referenced mainly through either Sarah or Melissa. Melissa when coming clean to Malory about her aunt and cousin says that her mother is honourable since she is married. Sarah corroborates that when speaking about her affair with Mr. Forten.

"Judy never meant to carry on with him; she really liked Mrs. Forten. She used to say she was a fool but she felt sorry for her... Only Sylvester Forten wouldn't leave Judy alone."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 333

⁵⁷ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 337

3.2.4. Dr. Stephen Denleigh

Dr. Stephen Denleigh is a friend of Dr Ismay. He first appears when he visits them at the same time as Laurentine. He is a man broken by his late ex-wife. He loved her but she wasn't ready to be a wife. She got terminally ill after they divorced and because he loved her Stephen was by her side. He had given up on love until he met Laurentine.

"He was an unknown and then too he'd been married and presumably knew what her was looking for. If he'd found that in Laurentine – why so much better for Laurentine,"⁵⁸

He is appalled by Laurentine's beliefs of 'bad blood' and convinces her there is no such thing and that all people have the same blood. Laurentine breathes fresh air of life into the older man and he helps her get over Hackett. He begins to share his dreams of grandiosity with her. They become each other's rocks helping each other after their previous relationships ended horribly. Although it is not always smooth sailing but any issue that arises comes to a good conclusion.

3.2.5. Malory Forten

Malory Forten is a melancholic boy whom we are introduced to during a party organized by Kitty Brown. His family life is not happy. His mother and both his sisters are gloomy and miserable.

"I don't suppose that's what's the matter with me. It's my family," he said desperately."⁵⁹

He complains about them multiple times. He is stuck in his own misery and mentions them at every opportunity. He has no compassion for his family. Every time Malory's family appears the atmosphere is gloomy.

His only source of happiness is Melissa. He clings to the first person who has a semblance of life in them which ends up being Melissa. However, her family is also not

⁵⁸ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 250

⁵⁹ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 107

very accommodating. He is later enamoured by the Brown family who are nothing like his or Melissa's family. They are lively and friendly. They are the family he wants to have.

After learning the truth about Melissa his love turns to anger. He blames his misery on her. She is the reason why his family is depressed and making his life lifeless. He blames her for his own suffering. It is unclear what happens to him after he attacks Melissa but it is implied that now that he broke up with Melissa, Gertrude will start pursuing him.

He has little to no character development. He remains sad despite being with Melissa. He cannot let go and in the end, he gets fully engulfed in his pain turning it into anger. Even when he is supposed to be happy with Melissa, he cannot help himself but keep bringing up his awful home life tainting the supposedly happy moments.

3.2.6. Asshur Lane

Ashur Lane is an honorable man who truly loves Melissa. Until he leaves for Alabama he does his best to protect her from drunk Harry and Laurentine's abuse. He is dedicated to Melissa and sticks by her no matter what.

"I don't understand any of it Melissa. I like Laurentine – what I've seen of her. But I sure don't like the idea of this sudden turn she's taken against you. Tell you what-“ [...] “Tell you what Melissa, marry me now – before I go away, I can take care of you, protect you-“⁶⁰

Although Melissa rejects him he remains dedicated to her, sending her letters whenever he could. In the end, when Melissa is sick with grief over Malory, Asshur comes back to be by her side. He is the one who restores her and helps her heal her heartbreak. He even asks Sarah Strange if there are any more secrets. He doesn't want Melissa to be hurt again and wants her to be happy.

3.2.7. The Ismays

Dr. Ismay and his wife Mrs. Ismay are a compassionate couple, who wish to help Laurentine. They are the catalysts to Laurentine's path to happiness. Their presence and

⁶⁰ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 91

kindness help with Laurentine's loneliness. Their true intent is to straighten her. Dr. Ismay while skeptical at first, he joins his wife's efforts.

*"Gosh-almighty," he groaned, "what a beaut! No wonder you've raving so about her! What are you going to do with her Millie?" [...] "But Robert, from all I've been able to hear, she's had a terribly raw deal, all her life. You've got to help me straighten her out. She can't go on living like this.""*⁶¹

They end up introducing Laurentine to their friend Dr. Stephen Denleigh. The Ismays become Laurentine's friends even after she and Stephen become a couple and the two couples even go on trips together. The Ismays provide an outlet for Laurentine so she would get out of the house more. Their friendship makes Laurentine happier and more secure in herself.

3.2.8. Kitty Brown

Kitty Brown is an outgoing young lady who befriends Melissa. Kitty and Melissa become friends by accident. Kitty's invite to Melissa leads to Melissa meeting Malory. Melissa, just like Laurentine, is lonely. The Ismays have saved Laurentine from her loneliness and Kitty saved Melissa. She is as eccentric and wild as her parties but she is also compassionate towards Melissa even picking her side against her sister who aims to steal Melissa's partner Malory from her.

*"This is what isn't being done. No girl like you with a chance to meet all the up and coming coloured boys in the country is coming into a little hick town like this and snatch away a helpless girl's one stick of candy."*⁶²

She takes a stand against her sister until she finds out from Gertrude that Melissa and Malory are siblings. It is now in Melissa's best interest to break up with Malory so she joins her sister's efforts to separate them by letting her mother know to help her friend from making a mistake.

3.2.9. Gertrude Brown

⁶¹ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 86-87

⁶² FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 276

Gertrude Brown is the selfish sister of Kitty. She is a city girl who has no interest in dating until she is introduced to Malory. He catches her eye immediately but she notices that Melissa occupies much of his time. She asks Melissa about their relationship. Melissa lies and she takes that as her opportunity to go for him. Eventually, her interest turns into love.

“Kitty,” she said her mouth trembling a little, “don’t you dare laugh. I’ve got it this time. I’m I love.”⁶³

Kitty’s response is disbelief and then disgust when she finds out who Gertrude falls in love with. Despite her sister’s protest to pursue Malory Gertrude starts going around to find information that would cause Malory and Melissa to fall out of love. Although her actions were selfish her search resulted in a disaster being avoided.

3.2.10. Mr. Stede

Mr. Stede is a family friend of the Stranges. His biggest role in the story is to be a guide to the younger generation doing his best to give good advice. He knows the circumstances of Melissa’s birth, alongside with Sarah and that Forten ladies. He is the one who spills the secret to Gertrude after she tells him that Melissa and Malory are dating. Together with Gertrude, they managed to prevent the siblings from getting married. He made a choice that is for everyone even if it meant breaking Melissa’s and Malory’s hearts. Although he wasn't fond of Gertrude, knowing she would go after Malory he did tell her.

“He didn’t like this girl, who, he suspected, had all her life succeeded in getting what she wanted, who always would succeed... [...] On the other hand what would become of Melissa if she did marry him?”⁶⁴

3.3. Analysis

The story of *The Chinaberry Tree* is much happier than the story of the *Comedy: American Style* novel. There is still plenty of pain and suffering and not everyone has a happy ending but most of the main characters end up happy. Both Melissa and

⁶³ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 274

⁶⁴ FAUSET, J. R. – *The Chinaberry Tree*, Dover Publications, inc., 2013, pg. 296

Laurentine end up with people they love after getting hurt by past relationships. Just as in her previous work, she has a main theme for this book. From this main theme stems all other issues. The main theme is adultery. This raises confusion and fears over racial identity. Both Laurentine and Melissa are weighed by the choices that their mothers and aunts have made. The community itself plays a role.

The adultery of a colored woman Sarah with a white man is the catalyst for the story. Their being an interracial pair creates a child who is labeled as having 'bad blood' due to being mixed. The child named Laurentine is rejected by the community. She has lost friends and even her lover. Melissa on the other hand also lost her lover due to her mother's, Judy's, adultery since she fell in love with her half-brother. Both Judy and Sarah were selfish homewreckers who ruined the lives of the families whose husbands and fathers they had affairs with and set up their failure and misery.

The story takes place in a black upper middle class society of educated people. People who are also full of prejudices. There is a lot of judgment toward the Strange household. The Stranges and their friends are ostracized. The only time the community gets involved is when they need to keep Melissa and Malory apart. The exclusion of both girls is what fuels their fear of revealing their family past. They have lost friends and lovers and are scared to enter more relationships. Jessie Redmon Fauset was herself of the black upper middle class so she used that as the background for her novels.

*"While Jessie Fauset is often described as a member of the black bourgeoisie, she suggests a proletarian aesthetic as she advocates black unity in "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress.""*⁶⁵

Jessie Redmon Fauset explores the topic of bad blood in detail. The romance between Sarah Strange and Colonel Halloway happened during a time when interracial marriages were illegal. They couldn't marry but loved each other dearly. Children born out of unions were heavily judged by both the colored community as well as the white people. Once again Jessie Redmon Fauset's main character is a light-skinned black and the theme of not belonging remained however the stories are different. Laurentine is

⁶⁵ JONES, S. L. - *REREADING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*, GREENWOOD PRESS, 2002, pg. 2

more directly mixed and therefore is stigmatized in the small town the family lived in. After being rejected over and over she internalized the stigma and entered every new relationship knowing it would end soon. It was only Dr. Denleigh that managed to get through to her. Although she almost jeopardized that relationship as well he did not give up on her.

Although Melissa isn't affected by the prejudice as much she did lose friends because of her aunt and cousin. She is slowly overcome by fear that manifests into nightmares. She is in love with Malory and is afraid he would leave her as others did due to her family. She also grows fearful of her cousin Laurentine who becomes controlling. She is afraid that her family will cost her her lover.

Love is also a major theme. Both Melissa and Laurentine are fearful around their first partners. That fear foreshadows the ending of those relationships. They couldn't trust them with their secrets because they would leave them. With their second partners, it is different Stephen and Asshur gain their trust and they do not need to have any secrets. They are not afraid to reveal their secrets because of said trust. The men help the girls heal. It is a novel meant to uplift as it is with many of Jessie Redmond Fauset's major works.

"Fauset's focus on upwardly mobile blacks indicates her desire to model a standard of conduct which would facilitate a racial uplift agenda."⁶⁶

The conclusion of the story is overall happy and all issues are resolved. Although the judgment of the community remains, Laurentine and Melissa are now safe, secure and loved. The pain and fear vanish and is replaced by love and hope for the future. It is an idealistic novel that touches on the issues of small-town black communities full of prejudice. It shows that racism is not solely a trait of white people.

⁶⁶ CALLOWAY, L. M. – *Black Family (Dys)Function in Novels by Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, & Fannie Hurst*, PETER LANG, 2003, pg. 8

4. Plum Bun

4.1. Plot

4.1.1. Home

The story starts in Opal Street in Philadelphia. It is a nasty street with no secrets and only depravity. In a house on this street lives a family of four, a mother and father and their two daughters Angela and Virginia. The older daughter Angela hates the house and Philadelphia while her parents see it as their little paradise.

Both daughters have their aspirations. Angela wants to leave Philadelphia and be free. She has a passion for painting so she wants to pursue that in New York. Angela just like her mother was light-skinned and white-passing. She didn't want to be restrained by her race and wanted to live in a white society. Both Angela and her mother liked to go around and tease white people with their light skin and while her mother was proud to be coloured Angela wanted to pass. She and her mother also weren't too fond of attending church but they had the opportunity to dress up.

Virginia did not understand her sister. She had high dreams of being a teacher in Philadelphia. Her skin color was darker than Angela so she could teach only in colored schools. Virginia was more like her father. She loved going to church with her dad and loved helping around the house. Virginia was also a great pianist, so the family loved listening to her play. Her dad would always ask her to play his favorite song called The Dying Christian. However, Angela starts to pull away.

Their parents know what poverty is like. Their mother was working for a white family as a servant. She was treated well but she witnessed a lot of racism toward darker coloured people. Due to this, she grew to appreciate her light skin. She was happy to fall in love with her husband and quit her job and settle down. Virginia loved hearing her parents' love story.

Angela is skeptical of her younger sister's dreams of being a teacher. She cannot see past the limitations of her color. She wanted her pain to go away and did not understand her sister. Angela hated being judged. She had a lot of friends who didn't realize she was colored. She had one friend called Mary Hastings. She was a popular girl

and Angela was happy to be by her side. After the school elections Mary won and wanted to appoint Angela as her assistant but the other candidate Ether Baylis exposed her in front of everyone to be colored. Mary was shocked by the revelation. Although she still wanted to be friends with Angela, it was never the same. Angela often wondered why she needs to clarify that she is colored.

Angela starts to believe that being colored is a curse. The final nail in the coffin is her parents' declining health. First, her mother is rushed to a hospital after she collapsed. She is immediately accepted since she is white-passing but when her dad comes to pick her up he has to pretend he is her butler so she would get the proper treatment. Later on, after her mother recovers her father becomes ill. Sadly he succumbs to his illness. Their mother, unable to live without her lover, follows soon after him.

She tries to pursue art but she is once again exposed for being colored. The teacher who was previously very kind, stopped offering her opportunities. After her boyfriend Mathew was denied entrance to the movie theatre, she realized there was no future in Philadelphia where the life of colored people is a nightmare. Although Virginia is sad and disappointed that her sister is abandoning her Angela leaves for New York with the money she has from her parents' passing. She did her best to cover her tracks so no one could find her and ruin her life again.

4.1.2. Market

Angela loves the opportunities she has in New York but she isn't sure how to make friends. Her wish was to marry a white man to secure her life so she didn't have to live like her parents. She became synthetic in her observations. She started frequenting places like theatres. She also returned to her passion for art so she enrolled herself to an art class at Cooper Union.

She started befriending her classmates who were mostly white except for one girl Miss Powell. Her first friend was Miss Paulette Lister. Her second acquaintance was Anthony Cross. His last name was originally Cruz, but he had it changed. She was happy to finally find someone who would not be judgemental since they did not know her origin. She was also glad to return to her art and be able to share it. She had confessed

to them she was living out of a hotel so her new friends were able to help her get an apartment.

In her spare time, Angela traveled to Harlem to admire the colored life. It was much different than the one in Philadelphia. Harlem was a beautiful city within a city. She more than once caught herself wishing to be a part of it but in the end, she wanted the security that a rich white man could provide.

Her new friend Paulette started setting her up with men. She continued to use her art as a means to meet people. She is eventually introduced to Roger Fielding. He is the kind of man Angela wants. He invites her to lunch but she has already made a promise to Anthony. She managed to talk him down to a diner. She continued this day after day; a lunch with Anthony and a dinner with Roger. They eventually start dating and Angela starts dreaming about her future with him.

Her world is shaken when she receives a letter from her sister Virginia that she is coming to see her in New York. She has a test that she needs to pass. She is worried she will lose her relationships again. This fear is only strengthened when Roger expresses his hate towards colored people. When driving together he goes on a racist rant. Angela realizes that he can never know she is colored. She cannot forget about Virginia. She is thinking about her more and more as her arrival approaches. For a while, she avoids Roger for his outburst but she soon realizes how dependent she is on him.

Meanwhile, Anthony is happy spending time with Angela. He found happiness with her but she doesn't want that. She knew that Anthony was poor and Angela preferred the security Roger could provide her. She often thought about him and his question of whether she knew how to overcome hardships. She would look back at her situation and ponder about what it feels like to feel love. She did not love Roger. She loved what he could provide. She needed to convince him to propose to her so she took the advice of her friends to not give or withhold too much. She needed to make him want her more the she wanted him. She was playing a game with him, a game she didn't need to play with Anthony.

Roger had a big day in his job, provided by his father and Virginia was supposed to arrive a day before. As she waited for her at the train station Roger showed up. Angela

panics and tries to get him to leave so he doesn't see Virginia. In the end, she has to forsake her sister for him. She immediately feels guilty and starts doubting herself and her choices. She is ashamed of herself and the country she lives in. She calls over and over to get a hold of Virginia but she realizes that she is losing her sister.

4.1.3. Plum Bun

Virginia decides to stay in Harlem and teach there. Roger starts to spoil her because he does not want Angela to be cold to him again. But he is keeping her a secret and Angela does not like that. Roger under his father's foot and he would not approve of Angela and he would lose his money. When she confronts him about it he becomes dismissive. Angela starts to realize that Roger wants her only for her innocence. The two of them begin to argue and Roger tells her he does not want to or can marry her. He is supposed to marry a different rich girl. Still, he wanted to spend every day by her side. Her strength left Angela and she became possessive of him.

Virginia knew bad things would come of them being seen together. She didn't want her sister to suffer but she didn't know much about Virginia. They hadn't talked for a long time. She is inspired by him talking about racial sacrifice. He also talks about the need for racial pride. The lecture inspired her to look inside herself. What the speaker was talking about directly related to Angela's life. She had no racial pride and she sacrificed her family for comfort. Angela and her white friends go to Harlem to listen to a colored speaker for one of his lectures. She sees her sister with Anthony after the lecture.

Gradually Angela loses interest in Roger. Slowly she realised she had no close friends after three years. He wanted to renew the possessiveness but she was indifferent now. They started drifting apart but she no longer cared. She had lost her sister because of him and she was disgusted with herself. One final argument between the two of them marked the end of their relationship. Angela was suddenly alone and money was fleeting. She got a job though her friends.

4.1.4. Home again

Angela decided to head home for the summer. She needed some time to collect herself. She clung to her new friend Rachel. Angela is starting all over again but this time with a little more confidence and pride. She loved having Rachel around. Sadly Rachel marries and moves away leaving Angela behind once again. All of her efforts were in vain again. She had to have two sets of acquaintances. A one made of colored people and one of white people. She desperately wanted her sister back.

Virginia on the other hand was swamped with friends. She was successful but Angela was not. This prompted a question in her mind. She was asking herself: what did she do wrong? She knew that her only crime was forsaking her sister. She went to visit her in Harlem. There she found out that Virginia was engaged and was leaving back home for some time. Virginia forgave Angela. She was happy to have her sister back after she had been lost for so long.

Angely starts searching for a new man to avoid her loneliness. After pondering for a long time she realised she loved Anthony. She no longer cared for poverty. She knew she could be herself around her and she knew that he loved her. Angela finally realizes that life is more important than color. She wanted to be successful to be able to help others. She wondered if Anthony had forgotten her. She sent a letter to him but she got no response so she set out herself to find him and speak with him. He is happy to see her but is apprehensive. Anthony wants to leave but Angela pulls him back in. He kissed her and vanished, telling her not to come back but she came back and begged him again to be a couple.

Anthony reveals he is colored and believes their future is impossible. She is shocked by the revelation but her love for him does not dwindle. Angela knows it is possible because she is also colored. Before she could explain he had ushered her out the door and again told her to give up. She dwells on Anthony's story. She wanted to give him light, wanted to help him through his struggles. She found it in her heart to forgive Roger since he taught her to love herself. She was willing to be colored for him, for Anthony but she is denied once again.

Angela made one last attempt to reach him. She had been preparing her speech to Anthony but when she saw him she forgot all she wanted to do and cried. Anthony

reveals to Angely that he is engaged. Worst of all he is engaged to Virginia. Angela realized it even though Anthony had not revealed his fiancé's name. The roles reversed. Anthony wants to work things out and tries to convince Angela that they can be together. She didn't want to take him from her sister. She had already hurt her enough and Virginia would not be alright without Anthony.

Angely fell ill. Her soul was sick. She loved Anthony but could not bring herself to take her sister's fiancé. Miss Denver, her neighbor, was helping wherever she could. All of Angela's regrets come back to her. She shouldn't have forsaken Virginia. It was her one and only crime. She wanted to die but she had to persist. Her friend Rachel came to cheer up Angela. She also has issues with a relationship. Angela does her best to help but finds her issues trivial.

One day Roger comes back to see her. He wants her back and offers marriage. She denies him laughing at his ignorance. She asks him about his rich finance. Turns out she had married someone richer. Angela asks how would their relationship work. When she realizes Roger wants things to stay the same she berates him and tells him she will not be anyone's dirty little secret.

Eventually, she returned to painting. She spent more time with Virginia in Harlem repairing the relationship that she had once forsaken. A relationship she almost lost. However, she never tells Virginia about her relationship with Anthony. She only mentioned that they were classmates. Virginia also comes clean that she isn't sure if she truly loves Anthony and loves Mathew, Angela's old boyfriend in Philadelphia.

4.1.5. Market is done

Angela and her classmates are trying to win a scholarship and travel to France. She and Miss Powell win so she starts getting ready to head out of the United States. Eventually, she learned that Miss Powell was denied due to color. She is outraged and wants to help her. Their white classmates want to help but Miss Powell does not want it. Anthony confessed his color to justify Miss Powell's desire to quit fighting.

Angela decides to pay her a visit. Miss Powell was surrounded by news reporters asking her intrusive questions and making racist and ignorant comments. Seeing Miss

Powell's discomfort Angela stood up for Miss Powell admitting to her race and forsaking the victory money. Miss Powell's mother called Angela foolish but Miss Powell herself was grateful for her words.

She went to visit Virginia telling her about what had transpired. Virginia cried because her sister was back. The next day the incident appeared in the newspaper. Angela got fired for admitting to being colored. Fortunately, she retained a couple of friends despite her color, although they were all shocked. Since Miss Powell refused the money that was raised for her they offered it to Angela convincing her to still go and she agreed to take it.

She briefly returned to Philadelphia before leaving for France. She wanted to see her old house that was now sold but was harshly denied and called slurs for white people. As she sobbed in front of her childhood home her old boyfriend Mathew stumbles upon her inviting her to come over. Mather confesses his feelings towards Virginia. Angela, knowing Virginia also loves him, encourages Mathew to confess to Virginia.

Virginia loved Paris. She even reunited with an old classmate Edith. She helps Angela and adopts her into her group of friends. She is immersed in her work distracting herself. She had hoped that Matthew would confess and both she and her sister could be with the men they loved.

As Christmas comes, she is waiting for a gift from Virginia that she had promised in one of her letters. No package ever arrives and Angela is worried the package might be lost or that Virginia is too preoccupied with her new marriage. She was ready to give up on Anthony. On Christmas, she partied with her friends and went to sleep after coming home. She was woken up by knocking. Her roommates tell her that someone is waiting for her. When she came to see who it was, she found Anthony in the living room. He was sent by Virginia and Mathew. It was their Christmas gift for Angela.

4.2. Characters

4.2.1. Angela Murray

Angela Murray is the main character of the story. During her childhood, she was met with many difficulties due to her race. Due to her light skin people assumed she was white and were offended when Angela's color was revealed.

"Mary said again: "Coloured!" And then, "Angela, you never told me you were coloured!""⁶⁷

These revelations had often cost her friends. Although Mary wanted to stay friends with her their friendship had never recovered. She loved having friends and she started to see her color as an obstacle. She noticed that when she was out with her mother, also light-skinned, they were treated well.

*"It was a hospital to which no coloured woman would ever have been admitted except to char, but there was no such question to be raised in the case of this patient."*⁶⁸

She became determined to live her life as a white person, but in order to accomplish that she needed to move away from Philadelphia and never be found by the people, who knew she was colored. She moved to New York to accomplish it. She becomes systemic in her observations when searching for friends.

Although she admired the colored life in Harlem, she never participated in it. She knew she could not be seen with colored people or else she would lose everything again.

*"On an exquisite afternoon she went to Harlem. [...] But she was amazed and impressed by this bustling, frolicking, busy, laughing, great city within a greater one."*⁶⁹

After meeting Roger, she becomes even more anxious. Roger is rich and white. Angela liked him for what he could provide. She had to be careful not to lose him. She had even forsaken her sister to save face in front of him. This event marks the first breaking point for Angela. For the first time, she doubts her conviction. She wonders if this life is worth losing the only family she has left.

⁶⁷ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 43

⁶⁸ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 58-59

⁶⁹ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 96

The second point comes after attending a lecture. The colored speaker talked about topics that Angela knew well. He spoke of racial pride of which Angela had none. She was amazed by his speech and felt a little shame. She began pulling away from Roger for several reasons. They eventually broke up. That was the last straw and she took the initiative to get her sister back and later go to Anthony, a man she knew loved her and a man she loved also.

The true return of the person Virginia knew happened when Angela's friend, a colored girl named Miss Powell was denied scholarship money and a trip to Paris due to her color. It was the first time Angela proudly announced she was colored.

*"I mean that is Miss Powell isn't wanted, I'm not wanted either. You imply that she's not wanted because she is colored. Well, I'm colored too."*⁷⁰

From that point onward Angela is never ashamed of her color and gains the racial pride the colored speaker talked about. She retains some of her friends and with their help, she is able to go to Paris to pursue art. In the end, she is rewarded with happiness when Anthony comes to be with her.

4.2.2. Virginia Murray

Virginia Murray is the virtuous younger sister of Angela. Her skin is darker than Angela and she embraces herself. From the start, she is seen as morally superior to Angela. While Angela wishes to pass as white, Virginia does not understand since she does not have the shame her older sister does. She is proud and driven.

*"She possessed her father's attitude toward Mattie as someone who must be helped, indulged and protected. Moreover she had an unusually keen sense of gratitude towards her father and mother for their kindness and their unselfish ambitions for their children."*⁷¹

This sentiment prevails throughout the rest of the story. The only time Virginia wavers is when it comes to her sister. When Angela denied her at the train station she knew her sister didn't want her anymore. She was ready to give up her until one day

⁷⁰ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 347

⁷¹ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 33

Angela stood at her door. Virginia's last kindness in the story is letting go of her fiancé, Anthony, since she knew the two loved each other. She herself is rewarded with the love from Mathew, Angela's old boyfriend.

4.2.3. Roger Fielding

Roger Fielding is a rich racist white man whom Angela briefly dates. Roger's racist views come up pretty early in the relationship. His racist rant after an outing with Angela leaves the girl in distress and she doesn't want to see him for a while. His racism again surfaces after he attends a lecture by a colored man with Angela and Paulette. He does not believe a colored man can speak like that.

*"Roger said meditatively, "I wonder what proportion of white blood he has in his veins. Of course that's where he gets his ability.""*⁷²

Roger also proves to be spineless when it comes to his family. He claims to love Angela and yet insists on keeping her a secret. His father would not approve of Angela due to her financial situation so he keeps her around for intimacy. Angela does not like being his secret but only stands up for herself when Roger returns to her after breaking up with her. He only comes back, when the rich girl he was supposed to marry marries someone else.

4.2.4. Anthony Cruz/Cross

Anthony Cross is Angela's classmate who is colored but also white-passing. Anthony becomes quick friends with Angela when he sees her in the class for the first time. He falls in love with Angela soon after but he never takes it further than having lunches with her. He assumes that Angela is white but because of racial trauma, stemming from his father's murder, he does not want to date a white woman. Angela would reject him if he did since Anthony was poor. He slowly cuts her off after Angela starts dating Roger.

After Angela comes back into his life he denies her over and over because of the trauma. He still loves her but he is also engaged to Virginia. The roles reverse once that is revealed. Anthony is determined to make things work now that he knows Angela is

⁷² FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 220

colored but Angela refuses to hurt her sister. They both resign on their faith. However, in the end, Virginia ends up with Mathew and Anthony travels to Paris on Christmas to be with Angela.

Although he is white-passing, he is also proud to be. However, he only announces his color in support of Miss Powell much like Angela does some time later. He sympathizes with Miss Powell and understands her wishes to drop the fight. He delivers a heartfelt speech to support her decision.

“If you knew the ceaseless warfare which most coloured people wage, you’d understand that sometimes they have to stop their fight for the trimmings of life in order to hang on the essentials which they’ve got to have and for which they must contend too every day just as hard as they did the first day. No, they’re not quitters, they’ve merely learned to let go so they can conserve their strength for another bad day. I’m coloured and I know.”⁷³

4.2.5. Mathew

Mathew is an old acquaintance of Angela and Virginia from Philadelphia. He is almost naïve and innocent when they are all young. He is denied entrance into a movie theatre due to his race. He doesn’t understand since he had been in there before. He retains this childlike freshness into adulthood. When he speaks to Angela after she visits Philadelphia before her departure to Paris he confesses he fell in love with Virginia after Angela left for New York. His courage to confess to Virginia, supported by Angela, results in happy endings for everyone.

4.2.6. Miss Powell

Miss Powell is the only non-passing student in Angela’s art class. She immediately catches Angela’s attention. She is not talkative and interacts only with Anthony occasionally. Angela only observes her yearning for her friendship. Miss Powell is nonconfrontational and when she is denied a scholarship based on race she decides it is not worth the fight. Despite being badgered by reporters she is resolute in her choice.

⁷³ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 338-339

She is grateful for Angela's proclamation and is happy that there are people like Anthony and Angela who will stand up for her.

*"Oh," she said, "it was magnificent – I never guessed it – but you shouldn't have done it..."*⁷⁴

4.2.7. Mattie and Junius Murray

Mattie and Junius Murray are the parents of Angela and Virginia. Junius is a virtuous Christian man Mattie is slightly morally ambiguous. While Mattie did not mind being colored she frequently teased white people with Angela. After Junius passes away Mattie also reveals to her younger grieving daughter, Virginia that she wishes to die. And she fulfills her wish.

4.3. Analysis

The *Plum Bun* is Jessie Redmon Fauset's most famous work. It is by far the happiest novel out of the three in this thesis. It is once again a story about passing as white. The overall theme of this novel is fear and insecurity about her race. Most of the issues in the novel are once again rooted in the fear and insecurity.

The main character Angela is cannot be herself in fear of losing friends. It had happened to her time and time again when she was in Philadelphia. All it took was one person revealing she was colored and she lost everything she had built forcing her to start over again. She struggles with the question of why does she need to tell people she is colored. Everyone always assumes she is white and then they are offended and disgusted that she is not correct them as if her color is something she needs to warn people about. Jessie Redmon Fauset had an experience of being the only colored student in her class and she used that experience to build Angela's personality and motivation for her actions in the novel.

"Unlike Dorothy West, who attended a private preparatory school in Boston, Fauset attended a racially integrated public school. The experience of being the sole black student in her high school classes caused some anxiety for her, which she

⁷⁴ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 348

replicates in her novels through the portrayal of segregation between blacks and whites in the North.”⁷⁵

The need to clarify spans the entire novel. Time and time again Angela hears from people: Why didn't you tell me you were colored? This need to hide her identity is supported by an event from her youth. Her mother gets help because she is white-passing. Her father had to pretend he was the butler so her mother would receive proper help. Angela does not want to suffer like so many colored people in Philadelphia. She chooses to be white-passing and only asks herself: What is so wrong with being white-passing?

The subtitle of the *Plum Bun* is *a novel without a moral*. Angela is the one the subtitle points toward. Her sister Virginia is morally superior and in contrast to Angela's lack of racial pride. Virginia is supposed to be the ideal to strive for.

“Fauset belabors Virginia's point in order to emphasize her location of meaningful satisfaction with life in close-knit family relationships and solid Christian values, which are meant to represent a universal set of standards superseding the influence of middle-class white America.”⁷⁶

Angela tries to get rid of her colored identity and so she forsakes her morals. This immorality is what almost costs her, Virginia, her sister. Only then she embraces her identity as a colored woman she gains her sister and her morals back. Only then do good things start happening to her.

“You're a fool and the darlinest girl that ever lived, and my own precious, lovely, wonderful sister back again.”⁷⁷

Jessie Redmon Fauset explores the idea of a supporting white community. While most of her other works portray white people as either racist or ignorant in the *Plum Bun* there are white people who have no problem being friends with colored people and helping them. While there are racist white people in the novel like Roger Fielding

⁷⁵ JONES, S. L. - *REREADING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*, GREENWOOD PRESS, 2002, pg. 21

⁷⁶ CALLOWAY, L. M. – *Black Family (Dys)Function in Novels by Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, & Fannie Hurst*, PETER LANG, 2003, pg. 21

⁷⁷ FAUSET, J. R. – *Plum Bun, a Novel Without a Moral*, Beacon Press, 1992, pg. 350

and Angela's art teacher back in Philadelphia the majority of the white characters are supportive. All of her classmates in her art class in New York rally behind her and Miss Powell when they are denied scholarships based on race and raise money for Angela to still go. Her white neighbor Miss Denver although a bit apprehensive continues to be her friend.

5. Conclusion

Jessie Redmon Faucet is an author of a literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance lasted between the 1920s and 1930s. It encompassed not only literature but also other forms of art like painting, music, fashion, dance and many more. It was called the golden age of African-American culture. What had given the Harlem Renaissance so much power was jazz music. Through jazz the white community had discovered colored culture for the very first time.

Jessie Redmon Faucet was not only a leading figure in this movement she was also an editor in a major publishing journal *The Crisis*. *The Crisis* published exclusively works of colored artists. She provided the readers with a large variety of literature such as plays, short stories, poetry and even essays despite her own taste in writing.

She has a very specific writing style. All novels that were picked for this essay had many things in common. Almost all of her protagonists were white-passing or otherwise clearly mixed young women. The only exception is the character of Oliver in her novel *Comedy: American Style*. Her female protagonists form a scale of what being white-passing or mixed can do to a person's mental state. Olivia is bullied as a child for her race so she grows obsessive in her attempts to shield her children from that fate. On the other hand, Angela, who for a while shares similar ideals to, Olivia unlike her, Angela sees that her approach is wrong and finds joy in being colored while Olivia does not admit fault and shows no attempt to change. Laurentine is obsessed with her 'bad blood' and wishes to hide it but in the end, thanks to her lover she is able to overcome and let go of her obsession.

She keeps coming back to the topic of being white-passing in several of her novels mainly *Comedy: American Style* and the *Plum Bun*. In *Comedy: American style* she is focused on the obsession of Olivia to pass as white causing pain and misery where she goes. In the *Plum Bun*, the story is also about passing as white to secure a more comfortable life but Angela never goes to the extent that Olivia does. In the case of *The Chinaberry Three* Jessie Redmon Faucet focuses more on the issue of 'bad blood', meaning being of a mixed race. Laurentine serves a sort of middle ground between Olivia and Angela.

The setting of her novels is also important. Jessie Redmon Faucet chooses the upper and middle class as her setting. She also centers her stories on big cities like New York or Philadelphia. Some of her characters also hold important societal jobs like doctors or teachers. Many of her characters also have higher education. All of this is meant to portray the colored community as civilized and educated. This was an idea that had never crossed the minds of white people. In the *Plum Bun* a white character named Roger also attributes a colored speaker's skills to the white blood in his system.

Jessie Redmon Faucet's portrayal of white people varies throughout her novels. Through her novels, Jessie Redmon Faucet provides a full scale of personalities. Her worst portrayal is in *Comedy: American Style*, where every white person is either racist or ignorant. There are not many white people in *The Chinaberry Tree* and the ones that do appear are cold but reasonable. They are not outwardly cruel. The *Plum Bun* had the most positive outlook. Although there are still racist characters most of them are kind and respectful towards the colored characters.

There are two outlooks on how to write about colored issues. One is to completely omit white people and focus only on the colored people and the other demands to talk about racism and the race conflict. Jessie Redmon Faucet has many white characters in her novels and she talks heavily about the issues of white-passing. However, her stories divert from the second approach by having a happy ending in every novel regardless of how sad and heartbreaking the overall story is.

6. Závěr

Jessie Redmon Faucetová je autorem literárního hnutí známého jako Harlemská Renaissance. Harlemská Renaissance trvala mezi 20. a 30. léty 20. století. Zahrnovalo nejen literaturu, ale i další formy umění, jako je malba, hudba, móda, tanec a mnoho dalších. Tomuto hnutí se říkalo zlatý věk afroamerické kultury. Co dalo Harlemské Renesanci tolik síly, byla jazzová hudba. Prostřednictvím jazzu bílá komunita poprvé objevila černošskou kulturu.

Jessie Redmon Faucetová byl nejen a vůdčí postavou tohoto hnutí, ale také redaktorem významného časopisu *The Crisis*. *The Crisis* vydával výhradně díla černošských umělců. Poskytla čtenářům širokou škálu literatury, jako jsou divadelní hry, povídky, poezie a dokonce i eseje, a to i přes svůj vlastní vkus v psaní.

Má velmi specifický styl psaní. Všechny romány, které byly vybrány pro tuto esej, měly mnoho společného. Téměř všechny její hlavní postavy byly černošky světlé kůže nebo jinak jasně smíšené mladé ženy. Jedinou výjimkou je postava Olivera v jejím románu *Comedy: American Style*. Její ženské hrdinky tvoří škálu toho, co může s duševním stavem člověka udělat být černoškou světlé kůže nebo smíšené rasy. Olivia je jako dítě šikanována kvůli své rase, takže se stává posedlá ve svých pokusech chránit své děti před tímto osudem. Na druhou stranu, Angela, která na chvíli sdílí podobné ideály jako Olivia na rozdíl od ní, Angela vidí, že její přístup je špatný, a nachází radost z toho, že je černoškou, zatímco Olivia nepřiznává chybu a neprojevuje žádnou snahu o změnu. Laurentine je posedlá svou „zlou krví“ a chce to skrývat, ale nakonec se jí díky svému milenci podaří svou posedlost překonat a vzdát se jí.

V několika svých románech, zejména v *Comedy: American Style* a švestkové buchtě, se stále vrací k tématu bídy. V *Comedy: American Style* se zaměřuje na posedlost Olivie, aby se vydávala za bílou a způsobuje tím bolest a utrpení kdekoliv přijde. V *Plum Bun* je příběh také o procházení jako bílá, aby si zajistila pohodlnější život, ale Angela nikdy nedosáhne takové míry, jako Olivia. V případě *The Chinaberry Three* se Jessie Redmon Faucetová zaměřuje více na problém „zlé krve“, což znamená, že je míšenec. Laurentine slouží jako středový bod mezi Olivíí a Angelou.

Důležité je také prostředí jejích románů. Jessie Redmon Faucetová si jako prostředí vybírá vyšší a střední třídu. Také se zasazuje své příběhy do velkých měst, jako je New York nebo Philadelphia. Některé z jejích postav také zastávají důležité společenské funkce, jako jsou lékaři nebo učitelé. Mnoho jejích postav má také vyšší vzdělání. To vše má vykreslit černoškou komunitu jako civilizovanou a vzdělanou. To byla myšlenka, která nikdy nepřišla na mysl bílých lidí. V *Plum Bun* bílá postava jménem Roger připisuje schopnosti černošského řečníka bílé krvi ve jeho systému.

Zobrazení bílých lidí Jessie Redmon Faucetové se v jejích románech liší. Jessie Redmon Faucetová prostřednictvím svých románů poskytuje celou škálu osobností. Její nejhorší zobrazení je v *Comedy: American Style*, kde je každý bílý člověk buď rasista nebo ignorantem černošské kultury. V *Chinaberry Three* není mnoho bílých lidí a ti, kteří se objevují, jsou chladní, ale rozumní. Nejsou navenek krutí. Nejpozitivnější vyobrazení měla *Plum Bun*. Přestože se zde objevují rasistické postavy, většina z nich je k černošským postavám laskavá a uctívá.

Existují dva pohledy na to, jak psát o problémech černošské komunity. Jedním je zcela vynechat bílé lidi a zaměřit se pouze na černošské problémy a druhý požaduje mluvit o rasismu a rasovém konfliktu. Jessie Redmon Faucetová má ve svých románech mnoho bílých postav a hodně mluví o problémech být černochem světlé kůže. Její příběhy se však odklánějí od druhého přístupu tím, že mají šťastné konce v každém románu bez ohledu na to, jak smutný a srdcervoucí je celkový příběh.

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