

JESSIE REDMON FAUSET: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project is to reclaim a lost woman writer, Jessie Fauset, by detailing her contributions to literature during the Harlem Renaissance. Fauset's contribution as literary editor at *The Crisis*, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) journal, was three fold: mentor and editor, journalist and critic, and creative writer. Fauset's contribution as an editor and mentor was to promote women writers and issues, build self esteem of black readers by encouraging pride in cultural heritage, transform stereotypes of Blacks and build a community of African American writers. Despite the "quality" of the works she reviewed, Fauset's philosophy on writing emerges from her critical commentary. Fauset's creativity as a writer of poetry, essays and fiction is evident in the creative work she published in *The Crisis*. Fauset was much more than a novelist, and she made important contributions both on and off the page.

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## CHAPTER ONE: JESSIE FAUSET'S PLACE IN THE HARLEM

### RENAISSANCE

There are many famous figures from the Harlem Renaissance, such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jean Toomer. However, my goal here is to discuss a figure who has been ignored. Jessie Redmon Fauset was a woman writer who has long been considered a minor player in the Harlem Renaissance, but this assessment does not give Fauset the full credit she deserves. Fauset's contribution is evident in the many important roles she played, including that of a mentor and editor, journalist, and creative writer.

The Harlem Renaissance, a unique period in literature, saw the beginning of change for African American writers during the 1920s and 1930s. A mass migration of African Americans occurred, in which people moved from the southern rural life to Harlem, a predominately African American neighborhood in New York. Harlem became the cultural center of the African American community, not just for literature but also music, drama, and art. Though there was no organized movement, the work produced in Harlem at this

time uplifted the Black experience, celebrated Black heritage, and encouraged Black creativity. There was at the same time a movement toward education and increasing literacy of the African American community. In many cases, it was the first time Black writers and poets could be published and the first time value was placed on their work.

In a predominant position during the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, the "Talented Tenth," or intellectual elite, aspired to show the best of their race both to themselves and to white society. Fauset was a follower of this idea. Led by Du Bois, The Talented Tenth believed that, despite race, similar socio-economic groups were essentially the same. Therefore, the upper class circle of Blacks was not any different from that of Whites. Early intellectuals in Harlem believed the best way to fight social injustice and racism was to prove that there were few differences between the upper classes of both races. Du Bois, with Fauset, "aspired to *high* culture as opposed to that of the common man" looking at artistic ventures "as a bridge across the chasm between the races" (Huggins 5). The later Renaissance writers like Hughes and Hurston shied

away from the elitism of the Talented Tenth, instead looking closer at the common man and what they believed were universal Black experiences.

Many organizations arose during the Harlem Renaissance and formed newsletters and magazines for the purpose of advocating civil rights, educating the community and showcasing work by African American writers and artists. These publications managed to do much more than these things; they helped raise the consciousness of the African American people. *The Crisis*, a magazine formed in 1910 by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and for which Fauset was the literary editor, was one of the first journals to appear after the abolitionist period and for many years was considered the premiere Black magazine. *The Crisis* touted the beliefs of the Talented Tenth, largely because the majority of readers were white, even though the writers and subjects were Black.

Placing Fauset within the framework of the Harlem Renaissance requires establishing the dates of the period. The end of World War I was considered the traditional beginning of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1919, a returning

troop of African American soldiers marched down Fifth Avenue in New York to Harlem (D. Lewis 3). This march represented more than just soldiers returning from war, it symbolized the New Negro, the fighting man. In addition employment opened up for African Americans after World War I, creating the mass migration to the north. Thousands of African Americans moved from the south, an economically depressed area, to the industrial north. With this migration, a political agenda sprang up and an African American middle class grew. Du Bois was at the center of the political movement with the NAACP, an organization which catered to the growing middle class. The birth of the NAACP was momentous event in the Harlem Renaissance. This was the first of the organizations with power created to uplift African Americans.

A second starting date of the Harlem Renaissance was the publication of Alain Locke's *The New Negro* in 1925, which heralded "a new Black proletarian culture [that] had come into existence during and after the First World War" (Moses 61). Locke is one of the important figures of the Harlem Renaissance period, and scholars have based their ideas of the Harlem Renaissance on the information from his

book. Locke assembled a collection of pictures, essays, poetry, and stories in *The New Negro*. Locke's basic theory was that Blacks needed to overcome the stereotypes of the past and realize that they were valuable. He advocated a creation of a new consciousness for Blacks. Locke realized that the "New Negroes were not only bohemian artists, but staid intellectuals, rugged labor leaders, tough-minded preachers, and conservative pan-Africans" (Moses 63). The dates of the Renaissance, in addition to the name of the movement, have been debated. Many scholars begin the Harlem Renaissance with the publication of *The New Negro*, but Du Bois dates the period from 1900. Others have lengthened and shortened the time period, but for my purposes, the Harlem Renaissance began around the turn of the century. This focus on dates and names is important because it helps modern scholars place this time and the work done then within a larger literary framework. The confusion over these issues with the Harlem Renaissance affects the way I discuss *The Crisis*. Beginning the Harlem Renaissance in 1925 with the publication of *The New Negro* excludes Fauset from this period.



Of all of the organizations which appeared during the Harlem Renaissance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was the most influential, and Fauset was in their employ. In 1905, Du Bois was among those who created the Niagara Movement, which evolved into the NAACP in 1910. The NAACP included liberal and radical Whites in addition to leaders of the Black community. The goal of the organization was to fight injustice against Blacks. As a means to this end, *The Crisis* was formed, with Du Bois as editor. The first issues of *The Crisis* described lynchings in the south. Ostensibly, *The Crisis* was an extension of the NAACP, but Du Bois often clashed with the NAACP board members over creative control.

Journals, including editors like Fauset, played a considerable role in the Harlem Renaissance. Different organizations like the NAACP and National Urban League (NUL) had these part-literary, part-political magazines. The NAACP had *The Crisis*, a largely literary magazine, and in 1923 the NUL developed *The Opportunity*, a political journal. These magazines provided a variety of services. They hired Harlem Renaissance writers for their staffs, offered literary contests with publication or prizes as

rewards, and provided venues of publication for writers. *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity* were not the only journals published during the Harlem Renaissance, though they were the largest and most influential. Other magazines sprang up in cities like Boston and Philadelphia. In addition to these were lesser journals, such as *The Messenger*, created by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen. *The Messenger* was touted as a more militant magazine than the others, but eventually just became a vehicle for Owen's organization, The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

As the Harlem Renaissance progressed, the younger writers Fauset mentored, who originally published in *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity*, created magazines of their own. These magazines helped educate the African American people, but also created an audience among White readers for works by African American writers. Through these magazines, African American writers were given a chance to publish compositions that large publishing houses would not publish. Fauset edited *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926; Charles S. Johnson edited *The Opportunity*. In 1926, Langston Hughes and other young radical authors created a magazine entitled *Fire!* with Hughes, Hurston, and others on

staff. These later magazines were possible because the earlier journals like *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity* broke down the race barrier.

Du Bois greatly influenced Fauset's career and created *The Crisis* in 1910. *The Crisis* was a journal for the middle class of both races and those interested in civil rights. As editor, Du Bois reigned with "a relatively free hand" and so much of what is printed in the journal reflects Du Bois' political and economic views (Record 381). Du Bois' views were similar to those of Marcus Garvey, who advocated a return to African heritage. The difference between Du Bois' ideas and Garveyism was that Du Bois encouraged national pride in Blacks as Americans. Before bringing his ideas to the United States, Garvey was the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in his native Jamaica in 1914. Du Bois was an advocate of the Talented Tenth, and Du Bois influenced Fauset. Du Bois was the leading force behind a series of Pan-African Congresses in the early 1910s, and the movement peaked after a 1920 conference in Europe. The movement was beneficial because it allowed American Blacks to learn about Blacks living in the rest of the world, their trials and tribulations. Du

Bois influenced Fauset in other ways as well, and in a 1905 letter she writes, "I am so proud, you know, to claim you on our side" (Aptheker 95). Fauset saw Du Bois as "an example of the heights to which it is possible for some of us to climb" (Aptheker 95).

Because Fauset was the literary editor for *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926, she played an important role in the Harlem Renaissance, perhaps one of its most influential figures, male or female. She promoted young African American writers' careers and used her influence to publish writers like Hughes, Toomer, Countee Cullen, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Nella Larsen. Fauset was the only woman who held a position as powerful as literary editor. However, she also wrote many articles, book reviews, poems, and short stories for *The Crisis* as well as *The Brownies' Book*, a short-lived children's publication produced by the NAACP, which she almost solely supervised. From 1924 to 1933 Fauset wrote four novels: *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*, *There is Confusion*, *The Chinaberry Tree* and *Comedy: American Style*. This was an enormous accomplishment for a woman writer of the Harlem Renaissance.

To fully understand the contributions Fauset made, it is necessary to know something of her life, especially since many of the facts have been misconstrued or mistaken. Most of this confusion originates from Fauset herself, who misrepresented her age and her background. Carolyn Wedin Sylvander has corrected many of the mistakes about Fauset's life with her 1981 book, *Jessie Redmon Fauset: Black American Writer*. Fauset was born in 1882 in New Jersey, and though Fauset claimed she was middle class, scholars have debated the family financial status. The most complete biographer of Fauset to date, Sylvander has determined that the family did suffer financial problems. Fauset's father was an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) minister, and her mother died when she was young. Fauset was the youngest of seven children, and when her father remarried, she gained three step-siblings and later three half-siblings. Despite these potential problems, she attended Cornell University, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1905, one of the first African American women to do so. Although she received a scholarship to study at Bryn Mawr, the college did not accept African Americans and referred her to

Cornell University. Fauset also attended the University of Pennsylvania, earning a Master of Arts in French in 1919.

Fauset moved to New York after receiving her Masters degree, and there worked with Du Bois, with whom she had corresponded since 1903. Du Bois offered Fauset career advice and encouraged her to branch out. He suggested that she teach in the South and expand her horizons. He was her mentor, friend, and guide in career decisions. After Fauset left *The Crisis* as literary editor in 1926, she remained on as contributing editor. In 1927, she left completely and returned to teaching. She married Herbert E. Harris in April of 1929, at the age of forty-six.

Fauset's knowledge of French language and culture influenced her writing and is a universal link in all her works. Aspects of French dominated Fauset's professional life. Teaching French was her primary means of support because she could not support herself entirely with her writing. She traveled often to Europe and Africa, but most frequently to France. After giving up her writing career, Fauset returned to teaching French until she died in 1961.

The purpose of this study is to add to the critical discussion of Fauset's work as an editor and as an author.

Fauset spent seven years as literary editor of *The Crisis*, another year as contributing editor, and she continued to submit items to the journal until 1929. Her relationship with *The Crisis* began well before she joined as literary editor. As early as 1912, she submitted short stories, poetry, columns, and later she also wrote articles, essays and book reviews. After leaving, Fauset submitted her poetry, and her last publication was in 1929. Her time with *The Crisis* spans a period of almost twenty years and therefore deserves more than just a cursory glance. This study will examine Fauset as an editor first, and then as a writer, dividing selections of her work into non-fiction and creative writing.

One of the critical debates in the studies of African American literature is whether white scholars should study African American writers. Nellie McKay, in her recent guest column in *PMLA*, considers this issue with respect to teaching. McKay writes that the academy needs more African American Ph.D.s, and she is critical of white scholars who critique African American literature but are not qualified. However, she does not say that all white scholars are not qualified to study African American literature and seems to

encourage programs to allow white graduate students to study African American literature. Her only concern is that white scholars who study African American literature be competent and qualified. Frederick Stern also deals with this issue. He says, "despite all efforts or good intentions, each white person will retain some vestiges of racism. . . This very fact, then, makes the white critic's *critical objectivity*, as well as his *critical sensibility*, more than a little suspect" (640). According to Stern, it is the fact that white critics have been raised with racism that makes the difference, as opposed to an American studying French literature. Stern also mentions Joseph Keller's "Black Writing and the White Critic," saying Keller's position is that "it is impossible for the white reader *to learn to understand* anything about the Black experience" and therefore the only accurate knowledge is that which is firsthand (Stern 646). Stern acknowledges that this position is extreme, and if this were true, then the only work a critic could critique would be that of his own ethnicity, social class, or gender. To offset my lack of experience in African American culture, I approach



Fauset by learning as much as possible about her life and works and the Harlem Renaissance.

Almost all scholarship on Fauset includes biography, but Sylvander's is to date the most complete biography of Jessie Fauset with criticism on her work with *The Crisis* and her novels. In addition to her book, Sylvander published Fauset's entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 51: Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940*, which includes a complete bibliography of publications by Fauset and about her work. KRAFTON also published a short article, "The Life and Work of Jessie Redmon Fauset," along the same lines as Sylvander, including a biography and criticism of her novels. ARTHUR P. DAVIS in *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960* looks at Fauset's life and work, as well as the themes of her novels and her work with *The Crisis*. DAVIS calls Fauset an "unusual woman" who made "a small but significant contribution to the literature and to the intellectual climate" of the Harlem Renaissance (94). JANET SIMS has written the only annotated bibliography of Jessie Fauset, "Jessie Redmon Fauset (1885-1961): A Selected Annotated Bibliography."

A large part of scholarship views Fauset's work as minor and inconsequential. Robert Bone in *The Negro Novel in America* dismisses Fauset's novels as ineffectual, but praises her for her work on *The Crisis*. James Young in *Black Writers of the Thirties* classifies *Plum Bun* as "an insipidly romantic dramatization of the black middle class" (136). Amritjit Singh in *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance* classifies Fauset mainly as a middle class writer. Margeret Perry in *Silence to the Drums* says that Fauset's themes in her novels are valuable, but her style is awkward and undeveloped.

Many scholars focus on Fauset's theme of Blacks passing for Whites, which appears in all her novels and in her short stories. Mary Conde in "Passing in the Fiction of Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen" and Vashiti Crutcher Lewis in her article "Mulatto Hegemony in the Novels of Jessie Redmon Fauset" discuss Fauset's use of racial identity, mainly the phenomena of passing in Fauset's novels. Conde discusses Fauset's use of passing in a historical context, noting that it appeared in early African American literature, justifying Fauset's use of the theme. However, Lewis implies that Fauset's treatment of

this subject perpetuates the oppressive nature of slavery. Jacquelyn Y. McLendon in her book *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* justifies Fauset's use of passing because it challenges the standard body of literature.

Another topic of scholarship on Fauset's work is her attitude toward Black identity. Hiroko Sato in "Under the Harlem Shadow: A Study of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen" discusses another theme trumpeted by Fauset, that Blacks were not different from Whites. Sato believes that Fauset's message is that Blacks are too involved in the white world and cannot escape its influence. This idea of Fauset's interplay between the Black and white community is continued in Wilbert Jenkins' "Jessie Fauset: A Modern Apostle of Black Racial Pride" although to a different conclusion. Jenkins claims Fauset was aware of the history and difficulty of Blacks in America and that she did not cater to white audiences. Fauset, according to Jenkins, was a Black Cultural Naturalist and as such was interested in racial pride.

A number of scholars have also taken a structural criticism approach to Fauset's works. Elizabeth Ammons

devotes a chapter in her book *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* to a comparison of Fauset and Edith Wharton. She compares their surprisingly similar backgrounds and plots. "A Sardonic, Unconventional Jessie Fauset: The Double Structure and Double Vision of Her Novels" by Joseph Feeney claims that Fauset has underlying structures in her four novels that add depth. Underneath the romantic upper plots, according to Feeney, are subverted structures of comedy, childhood, and a double look at the Black experience. In "Black Women and Survival in *Comedy: American Style* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" Mary Jane Lupton looks at the use of race by Fauset and another writer of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston. Lupton in "Bad Blood in Jersey: Jessie Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree*" looks at Fauset's use of "bad blood" in relation to intermixing of the races, incest and immorality.

Feminist criticism has discovered the works of Fauset, with many scholars claiming her as a feminist writer. Nina Miller in "Femininity, Publicity and the Class Division of Cultural Labor: Jessie Redmon Fauset's *There is Confusion*" argues that Fauset makes middle and upper class Black women

icons of racial achievement and success in *There is Confusion* because her characters all run contrary to the popular view of mainstream prejudice. In "Black Women and the Reconstruction of The Black Family: Jessie Fauset's *There is Confusion*," Eva Federmayer focuses on Fauset's development of Black women as important in the marriage compact. "Clothes and Closure in Three Novels by Black Women" by Lupton compares Fauset's use of clothing in *Comedy: American Style* to that of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*. Lupton asserts that all three writers use clothing to demonstrate a transformation of character and to facilitate independent female characters. Fauset would never have called herself a feminist, but she certainly advanced the feminist cause.

Although Abby Arthur Johnson's 1978 article "Literary Midwife: Jessie Redmon Fauset and the Harlem Renaissance" is a crucial analysis of Jessie Fauset as a "Literary Midwife," until recently we have not understood the impact Fauset had on the Harlem Renaissance. Johnson is one of the few scholars who concentrates on Fauset's career as a critic and literary editor of *The Crisis*, the NAACP magazine. Johnson writes that Fauset "helped establish a

literary climate favorable to Black writers of varying persuasions, even to those who would never have come to her for assistance" (145). Johnson agrees that Fauset's novels appeal to a small segment of readers, but claims that her writing in *The Crisis* appeals to a much wider audience. According to Johnson, Fauset helped raise Black consciousness through her work, and she promoted Black authors despite political leanings. In doing so, she helped open the way for publication of Black writers.

Another important contribution to scholarship on Fauset and women's literature is Cheryl Wall's chapter "Jessie Redmon Fauset: Traveling in Place" in *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*. This chapter looks at Jessie Fauset and how her travels affected her writings. Wall is unusual because she mentions in detail Fauset's work at *The Crisis* and *The Brownie's Book*. Fauset's most impressive work comes from her work in *The Crisis* according to Wall and not from her novels. Wall also comments that Fauset's influence during the Renaissance "she was eager to encourage exploration and innovation in others" (*Women* 35). Wall also wrote an introduction to Fauset's entry in *The Gender of Modernism*. This introduction to Fauset's non-fiction from

*The Crisis* and selections from her novels places Fauset in an important role as a mentor and supporter of women during the Harlem Renaissance.

Deborah McDowell in "The Neglected Dimension of Jessie Redmon Fauset" from *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition* considers Jessie Fauset as a feminist writer because she shows "concern with exploring female consciousness" and this positions "Fauset squarely among the early black feminists in Afro-American literary history" (88). McDowell looks at "The Sleeper Wakes" and *There is Confusion* as social criticism on the treatment of women. McDowell believes that Fauset was forced to hide her inclinations toward feminism behind ambivalence because she could not publish otherwise. In response to the claims that Fauset's work is trivial and weak, McDowell writes "Censorship and rejected manuscripts were what she came to expect, and thus, Fauset had to develop strategies to offset rejection, strategies that frequently took the form of indirectness" (99). Even though she was indirect, Fauset clearly had the concerns of women on her mind.

Fauset and her work are essential to an understanding of the Harlem Renaissance. In a variety of roles, Fauset

contributed to African American literature. One aspect of Fauset's influence often neglected in scholarship which I discuss in my next chapter is her status as a mentor.

Fauset's role in the Harlem Renaissance affected the outcome of writers who followed her. She cultivated their talent, reconciling their work when needed, and in many cases discovered new poets or writers.



## CHAPTER TWO: FAUSET AS MENTOR AND EDITOR AT *THE CRISIS*

Jessie Fauset joined *The Crisis* in October of 1919 as the literary editor, although her name does not appear in the credits until the following issue (November 1919). She stayed in this position until 1926 when, for a variety of reasons, she moved to being a contributing editor, a post she kept until 1927 when she left *The Crisis* entirely. *The Crisis* played an important role in the Harlem Renaissance, along with the other periodicals of the time. The goal of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* was to help portray Blacks "more realistically for that segment of the white population which was at least willing to acknowledge the Black man as a part of society" (Perry 8-9). Although the majority of the audience was White, the editors of *The Crisis* were targeting their Black audience.

Although Fauset has received recognition for her novels, her editorial work at *The Crisis* is possibly more important but it remains untouched in scholarship. No articles have been published devoted entirely to Fauset's tenure at *The Crisis*, although Abby Arthur Johnson in "Literary Midwife: Jessie Redmon Fauset and the Harlem

Renaissance" does discuss it in more detail than most. Although Johnson's scholarship on Fauset and *The Crisis* is much more comprehensive than others, she falls into the pattern of the others by pulling Fauset's novels into the equation. In addition, only a few books on the Harlem Renaissance take a superficial look at this time in her life, and most take a biographical perspective rather than a critical perspective. Fauset's contribution as an editor and mentor for African American writers promoted women writers and issues, increased the variety and quantity of literature published, built self esteem of black readers by encouraging pride in cultural heritage, transformed stereotypes of Blacks and built a community of African American writers.

Those scholars who do discuss Fauset's time at *The Crisis* seem to agree that she was a more than competent editor. Even scholars who are negative towards Fauset's novels admit that her editorial work is excellent and probably represents the way she was most influential during the Harlem Renaissance. Krafton acknowledges Fauset's skill as an editor, saying Fauset "offered young writers encouragement and insightful criticism, and steered their work into the hands of influential book editors, eager to

see it reach a wider readership" (861). Bone, in *The Negro Novel in America*, sees Fauset as a "paradox" because she "championed the young rebels of the Harlem School," but she was conservative in her own writing, particularly her novels (101). Bone cannot merge the Fauset who was editor and the novel writer. Based solely on his opinion of her novels, Bone categorizes Fauset with the "Rear Guard," the conformists in his estimation, because they wanted to minimize the differences between Blacks and whites to gain acceptance for the race, rather than rejoicing in the matters that make them unique. Sato agrees with Bone, that Fauset "wants her people as good as the best of the whites" (69). This comment negates all the work Fauset did to achieve and instill racial pride in her *Crisis* readers. Sato also places Fauset among the "Talented Tenth" and says she "treats the less fortunate of her race as if they were an inferior kind" (75). However, Sato's comments are based solely on Fauset's novels and not her work at *The Crisis*. If one looks at this period of Fauset's career, the complete opposite is apparent, evident in Fauset's support of radical young writers.

Generally, however, Fauset's contributions to *The Crisis* are glossed over or overshadowed by the great men of

the period--Du Bois, Locke, Charles S. Johnson, and White. This is not typical only of Fauset, but of most of the women writing during and involved with the Harlem Renaissance. According to Sylvander, part of the reason Fauset gets so little recognition now is that she never played up her own role in the Harlem Renaissance by praising herself (65). Fauset's own modesty kept her in the background and allowed men like Du Bois to take all the credit. Conceivably history would have been written differently if Fauset had the appropriate role models, those of strong women who forced recognition for their deeds, and the knowledge of how to stand up for their own accomplishments. Perhaps she never realized how much she was doing for the Harlem Renaissance and for Black literature in terms of helping younger writers. If she did not think she was doing anything important, Fauset would not have felt the urge to fight for herself. Fauset's modesty is evident in her behavior at the Civic Club dinner of 1924. *The Crisis* staff believed that this dinner was a tribute to Fauset's publication of *There is Confusion*, as that was the original idea for the dinner, but Charles S. Johnson and Locke evolved the dinner into a coming out party for young writers. After waiting her turn to speak,

Fauset "thanked the audience for honoring the publication of her new novel" (D. Lewis 94).

Despite the limitations society placed on her due to her gender, Fauset was able to undertake many roles as literary editor. The role she played at *The Crisis* was broad and far-reaching. She was midwife and editor, encouraging work while also being firm. This job required more than just deciding what literary pieces would appear in each issue, but that in itself was a substantial job. David Levering Lewis comments that "There is no telling what she [Fauset] would have done had she been a man" (121). Perhaps it is fortunate that she was not a man. Had Fauset been a man, she would not have been able to make the impact that she did by essentially "mothering" young writers, and her interest in women writers and women's issues would not have been as pronounced, both in *The Crisis* and her novels. For many publication here was a way of getting the exposure needed to move on to improved publications. Fauset was especially sensitive to the work of women writers, because she understood the trials of a female trying to succeed in a male-dominated profession. Undeniably, her traditionally female attributes benefited African American literature, even though her gender held

back her career and kept her from achieving the success she should have had.

Fauset's primary goal at *The Crisis* was to choose the literature that would appear in each issue. Under Fauset's guidance, *The Crisis* increased the number of short stories, poems, and artwork appearing in each issue. The variety of article subjects also increased. The first articles in the first issues of *The Crisis* dealt primarily with lynchings, but once Fauset joined the staff, the topics became more diverse.

Before Fauset joined the staff, in the January 1919 *Crisis* (17.3), three poems appeared: "Peace on Earth" by Mary J. Washington, "The Return" by Fauset, and "To Bishop Hood" by Joseph S. Cotter. Also appearing in this issue were three articles: "What the Statute Covers and What It Doesn't," "The War Work Council," and "Welfare Work and Negro Employees." However, in the June 1919 (18.2) issue, only three articles appeared, the largest written by Du Bois entitled "An Essay Toward A History Of The Black Man In The Great War." The other two articles are entitled "Negro Vote" and "The Anti-Lynching Conference." The lynching issue is fairly standard of the contents of *The Crisis* until Fauset joined the staff. On average there

appeared three to four articles, an occasional poem, and the regular columns, "The Looking Glass," "The Outer Pocket," "The Horizon," and Du Bois' "Opinion" column.

Once Fauset came to *The Crisis*, she began increasing publication of literary materials. In the January 1920 (19.3) issue, there are three poems, a story, three articles, and eight pages of pictures, in addition to the regular columns. The March 1920 (19.5) issue contains a story by Anita Scott Coleman, two poems by Georgia Douglas Johnson, as well as three other poems. In addition, there appear four articles and four of the items are illustrated. While not every issue is as diverse in content, the average issue of *The Crisis* included more literary items, an indication of Fauset's influence and the broadening in genre for the journal.

From a magazine that only deals with the oppression of Blacks, *The Crisis* was transformed into a journal that was aimed at building the self-esteem of their readers. Fauset also initiated the literature competitions that provided more opportunities and interest in Black writers. Winners were published in *The Crisis*, making *The Crisis* popular and increasing circulation "to the point where, at one time, it distributed an estimated eighty thousand copies" (Record

381). Sylvander states that the majority of the credit for popularity should go to Fauset, although "The establishment of *The Crisis* as a unique and powerful voice for Black people from 1910 on was Du Bois' doing" (Sylvander 65). It is Fauset who made the impact on Black literature, but it is Du Bois who received the credit.

*The Crisis* was not only an outlet for Black writers in order to create a body of Black literature, but also to try to change white societal impressions of Black people. In addition, the editors of *The Crisis* also tried to give their readers a sense of racial pride. This was one of Fauset's undertakings. She published material that spanned the whole spectrum of Black culture. Fauset was well educated with two college degrees and realized that variety of expression would offer potential and interest for all *The Crisis* readers. Fauset "tried, while on the staff of *The Crisis*, to encourage diversified interests and to attract large numbers of readers" (Johnson 149).

Fauset published artists with very differing styles, philosophies, and subject matter. Consider, for example, some of the major writers Fauset published--Hughes, Toomer, McKay, Cullen. First, Hughes employs the blues in his poetry, very experimental at the time. He uses jazz and



music in his poetry, subjects to which the poorer classes could relate, and makes Black culture a legitimate source of literary inspiration. Toomer's poetry deals with his life in the rural South. His novel, *Cane*, is a lyrical journey through Georgia, and the poor side of Georgia at that. Claude McKay's poetry has a political theme, opposing racism. He also uses dialect and weaves his native Jamaican culture through his poetry. Fauset reviewed *Harlem Shadows*, McKay's book of poetry in the kindest of terms, calling it "genius" ("As To Books" 66). On the other hand, Cullen was classically trained in literature, and so knew all about the standard forms for poetry. This is what the majority of his poems reflect--strict meter, classical allusions, structured forms. His style was diametrically the opposite of Hughes, McKay, and Toomer. Cullen believed that poetry should stand on its own merit, and that the race of the author should not matter. Although the conventions some of these writers employed are no longer so extreme, during the Harlem Renaissance they were considered radical. In fact, some were so radical that they did not come into critical favor until the 1960s, as was the case with Toomer.

The women's poetry Fauset published is different from men's poetry, leaning more to the traditional and

conventional style. Fauset was greatly impressed by Anne Spencer. In "As To Books," Fauset says, "I wonder why we have not heard more of Anne Spencer" and proceeds to compliment her style and themes (66). In the same review, Fauset also mentions Georgia Douglas Johnson and "the narrowness of her medium of expression" though generally she feels it is a "fair showing" (66). This comment is fairly typical of Fauset's criticism, her best way to encourage writers. Through her routine criticism, Fauset nurtured her young writers, becoming a mother figure by virtue of her encouragement and guidance.

Fauset generally tried to avoid what she called propagandistic works and looked for imaginatively worthy pieces. Fauset's definition of propaganda is social criticism, not militaristic or radical political propaganda. Considering the stated goal of *The Crisis*, it would be difficult to avoid including pieces that were not social criticism, in that they discussed race in some form or fashion. *The Crisis* by its very definition promotes propaganda when defined, as Fauset would have it, as helping or promoting a cause. In the first issue of *The Crisis* (November 1910) the editorial purpose was published: "The object of this publication is to set forth those facts

and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested to-day toward colored people" ("Editorial" 10). This is also obvious in the policy set forth by the editors:

It will first and foremost be a newspaper: it will record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect the Negro-American.

Secondly, it will be a review of opinion and literature, recording briefly books, articles, and important expressions of opinion in the white and colored press on the race problem. ("Editorial" 10)

It was impossible to be a Black writer and not deal with the subject of race relations when published in *The Crisis*.

Fauset's main concern was with writers who showed pride in their heritage as Black Americans. As Johnson writes, "Fauset gave special recognition to those who appeared to convey the heritage of Black Americans honestly and artistically" (146). She enthusiastically sought writers who were creative and innovative in style and thought, even when those things went against her own personal style and philosophy, for example Hughes. One of

Fauset's main accomplishments, whether it was a calculated decision or purely accidental, was to raise Black consciousness. Fauset herself has been accused of catering to white society because of her use of racial passing in her novels. In reaction to Sato, Abby Arthur Johnson says "This woman who reputedly turned her back on her culture urged readers to find satisfaction in their own heritage" (146). She wanted to encourage pride in being Black both in her readers and in writers. She tried to project positive role models in *The Crisis* as well as the *Brownies' Book*. One way Fauset sought to correct these omissions was in the *Brownies' Book*, which frequently published biographies of famous Blacks.

However, selecting publication pieces was not Fauset's only job at *The Crisis*. Fauset held a number of "unofficial" roles while at the magazine. Fauset also took on the role of mentor, publication agent, women's activist, assistant, and mother. To promote the careers of writers, she developed friendships with many of the writers featured in *The Crisis*, and created an intellectual circle. She also actively promoted women at a time when Black women's writings were almost completely unrecognized. In addition Fauset undertook the role of Du Bois' aide. Moreover, she

did all these things at a time when men were prominent in the publication field, but women were relegated to "safe" careers or positions, like teaching. Fauset's activities during 1919 to 1928 are more remarkable because no other Black women then held the role of editor.

First, Fauset was able to promote the careers of young authors, both as a mentor and as an editor. Fauset was able to support the careers of authors, in particular Hughes, Cullen, Toomer, McKay, Larsen, Spencer, and Georgia Douglas Johnson. It is important to notice that she took an interest in the women writing too, though that will be discussed later in the chapter. When she published her first book, Fauset was already thirty-eight, and she was closer in age to Du Bois and White than to Hughes and McKay. This age gap accounts in part for Fauset's role as a mother figure because she was too much older than Hughes and McKay to be considered a friend. She was of a different generation than the younger writers in age and thought.

Hughes has dubbed Fauset, along with Charles S. Johnson and Alain Locke as one of "the three people who midwifed the so-called New Negro literature into being" (218). Fauset discovered Hughes when he first began to write, just out of high school, and developed a good

friendship with him, while at the same encouraging his writing by publishing his work in the magazine. He goes on to say they were "Kind and critical—but not too critical for the young—they nursed us along until our books were born" (218). I like Hughes' analogy of Fauset as a mother because she was mothering writers by nurturing their careers, taking an interest in their lives, and raising tolerance levels about Black topics and writers in literature, much as mothers do with their children. In doing so, "she helped establish a literary climate favorable to black writers of varying persuasions, even to those who would never have come to her for assistance" (Johnson 143). Cary Wintz calls Fauset the "older sister" to younger writers because of her encouragement of younger writers with kind criticism (128). It is this aspect of Fauset's criticism that is most fitting with Hughes' "midwife" comment. Langston Hughes first poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" appeared in the June 1921 issue. In the July 1921 issue, another Hughes poem emerged, "Aunt Sue's Story," and "The Negro" is published in the January 1922 issue. After these initial publications, Hughes' work appeared frequently in *The Crisis*.

Another of Fauset's protégés was Toomer, who submitted his poetry for publication in *The Crisis*. Fauset was impressed with Toomer's work and sent a copy of one of his poems to Arthur Springarn, the legal counsel for the NAACP, in 1923 (Sylvander 60). Arthur Springarn also gathered writing samples by Blacks from around the United States and was interested in Toomer's work. She began publishing Toomer's poetry in April 1922, when "Song of the Son" was published. That same year, she and Toomer shared a series of letters now catalogued at Fisk University.

By 1923 Cullen had published five poems in *The Crisis* and developed a relationship with Fauset which was "long-lived and warm," which continued with his widow, Ida, even after Cullen's death in 1946 (Sylvander 63). Fauset's concern with the lives and careers of the younger artists is evident in her personal correspondence. While Cullen attended Harvard in 1925, Fauset wrote asking about school, "Is Harvard as wonderful as you had dreamed?" (Nov. 4, 1924). She also offers congratulations on Cullen being awarded the John Reed Memorial Prize, saying, "We were all mightily interested" (Nov. 4, 1924). Poetry and preparations for visits were also common topics, and when Cullen requested Fauset's poetry for his anthology *Caroling*

*Dusk*, she was pleased to oblige, writing "I'm very much flattered that you want to put my things in your anthology" (October 1925).

She cultivated lasting relationships with these writers despite drastic differences in style and thought. Sylvander writes that, "The three had widely different writing styles, used different kinds of materials, and had differing political and social sympathies and contacts" (63). Fauset and Hughes could not have been farther apart in their approaches to politics, but they retained a friendship, perhaps because Fauset was the first to publish Hughes and launch his career. The same is true for Cullen and Toomer. However, based on the letters between Cullen and Fauset, I would say they shared a deep friendship, based on more than mere gratitude for career advice. The frequent mention and planning of visits seems to indicate that the two genuinely admired each other.

As a mentor, Fauset also used her contacts to help young writers network at parties given at her home. Hughes comments on Fauset's party in his autobiography *The Big Sea*:

At the novelist, Jessie Fauset's, parties there was always quite a different atmosphere from that at most



other Harlem Good-time gatherings. At Miss Fauset's, a good time was shared by talking literature and reading poetry aloud and perhaps enjoying some conversation in French. White people were seldom present there unless they were very distinguished white people, because Jessie Fauset did not feel like opening her home to mere sightseers, or faddists momentarily in love with Negro life. At her house one would usually meet editors and students, writers and social workers, and serious people who liked books and the British Museum, and had perhaps been to Florence. (Italy, not Alabama.) (247)

These gatherings were very popular but not merely social in intent. Often, discussions of French works and authors would arise and be conducted in French. Fauset's home "became...a shelter for arriving talent, as well as a forum for cultural activity" (D. Lewis 123). Fauset organized these parties because "she knew a good deal more about the world of literature than the academics and civil libertarians in Harlem who were becoming overnight experts" (D. Lewis 121). She had dreams of one day working in a publishing house and even went so far as to write Joel Springarn, a board member and one time Chairman of the

NAACP, a letter when she left *The Crisis* asking him to help her find a job. However, she knew her chances at a publishing job were limited because she was Black.

Fauset's contributions are important because men have dominated and overshadowed women in the Harlem Renaissance and Fauset was one of the first to try to change attitudes toward women writers. Women's literary works were not considered of the same quality as men's and were considered Victorian in style and content. Fauset encouraged middle-class women to voice their opinions and to break the silence imposed on them by men and society. According to Shockley, "The increasing number of Black publications helped liberate the voices of Black women writers, who were contributors and in some cases editors and founders" (Shockley 403). Fauset worked to change these ideas about women's writing by validating works written by women.

Fauset used her position to encourage women writing as this time. As the only Black woman editor, she understood the difficulty women faced during this time and was willing to help them succeed. Fauset was a liberator for Black women in the 1920s, helping women find a voice in literature--a voice almost categorically denied them. She published poems and short stories by women such as Larsen,

Georgia Douglas Johnson, Coleman, Leila Amos Pendleton, and Ruth R. Pearson. Fauset was greatly concerned with women's writings and women's issues, a topic she covered in her journalism. She developed special relationships with Johnson and Spencer.

These women were the forerunners to Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor, and other African American women contemporary writers. Although many men dismissed the writings of women, Fauset encouraged women to write, seeing substance and profundity in their work. In addition to *The Crisis*, she also allowed women a venue through *Brownies' Book*, the children's publication by the NAACP. Her encouragement was not limited to just writers; she also published artworks and sketches by artists, usually female. Although many of the women published did not achieve a lasting reputation, Fauset gave these women opportunities for expression. Fauset was the first to realize the potential in Nella Larsen and publish her article "Scandinavian Games." Critics note that she did not make editorial selections according to narrow ideological issues. Sylvander writes that "Fauset published a large number of women writers, some Black and some white, whose views revealed in stories, poems, and essays range from

conservative to radical on racial and sexual issues" (95). In this manner Fauset promoted a feminist ideology.

It should be noted that Fauset's role as literary editor was broader than her title implied, and she accomplished a great deal more than merely deciding what pieces to publish and managing the literary contests. She was, to a certain extent, an assistant to Du Bois, though she never formally took on the title. During the time Du Bois was involved with the Pan African Congress movement in 1922, Fauset virtually ran *The Crisis* in his absence. Because of her gender, she also acted as his secretary/personal assistant, making his travel plans and preparing his speeches. Du Bois was Fauset's mentor and a father figure as well as her boss, so it seems appropriate that she substituted for him while he was otherwise occupied because she shared many of Du Bois' beliefs.

Du Bois undoubtedly had a remarkable and influential role in Fauset's life, beginning just after her father died in 1903. Fauset's professor at Cornell, Walter Willcox, often quoted Du Bois in his lectures, and was the one to first bring Fauset to Du Bois' attention. She wrote him for advice in 1903, seeking a teaching position for the summer. Du Bois either helped her or pointed her in the right

direction for help, and Fauset taught at Fisk University during the summer of 1904 (Sylvander 31). This guidance began a trend in the relationship with Fauset and Du Bois. At this time, Du Bois had already established himself as a leader in the Black community. He then established himself as a mentor to Fauset by encouraging a correspondence and later helping her establish her editing career. In fact, Fauset was so close to Du Bois that in 1921 she threw a surprise anniversary party for him and his wife. In a letter to his daughter, Yolande, dated December 31, 1921, Du Bois writes "there we stood completely flabbergasted by the sight of a hundred or more people seated at the tables all dressed up to celebrate our silver wedding" (Du Bois 256). Du Bois guided Fauset as his protégé, and she admired and respected him.

At this same time, Fauset also assumed responsibility for *The Brownies' Book*, a magazine sponsored by the NAACP but designed specifically for children. This short-lived production published stories, poetry, articles, and a number of other items aimed at young Black children. It was a unique publication, since few other magazines targeted children, much less Black children. *The Brownies' Book* is important because it illustrates how Fauset is almost never

given the full credit she deserves for this period by scholars and critics. Her participation with *The Brownies' Book* is rarely attributed in scholarship. If mentioned, Du Bois is placed superior to Fauset, although he was involved in the First Pan African Congress at the time and not even in the United States to run the magazine. In fact, *The Brownies' Book* itself does not receive much acknowledgement in scholarship or history. This project was the first of its kind and quite an accomplishment at that time. This magazine gave Black children a feeling of self-worth at a time when Black people were considered inferior by the majority of white society. This magazine was yet another way Fauset and the NAACP helped foster racial pride by targeting the next generation. It is not unusual that Fauset would take control of this periodical in 1921, since it was a project Du Bois was enthusiastic about and sponsored.

Fauset was one of the few women in a position of power in a publishing world run by men. Those few women who did have some sort of power during the Harlem Renaissance were white women, many on the board of the NAACP. Fauset was the only Black woman editor during this period, and her contemporaries were men. Charles S. Johnson was the editor

at *Opportunity*; Alain Locke was considered a bright name in literature at the time; and even at *The Crisis*, her immediate superior, Du Bois, was male. Lewis expands on Hughes' idea of three "midwives" and mentions six people who helped shape the emerging Harlem Renaissance: Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson, Walter White, Casper Holstein, James Weldon Johnson and last, Jessie Redmon Fauset.

I think that Fauset's accomplishments should be considered even more remarkable because she managed to achieve without any female role models or mentors. What must it have been like for her to be working in a male-dominated field? Her background was very middle-class oriented, and Fauset's choice of careers, namely teaching, was one that was considered appropriate by her peers and family. Wall believes that "Fauset occupied a much less powerful position than any of her male counterparts" because she was a woman (*Women* 35). Wall notes that Fauset was limited in her career choices due to her gender. Her male counterparts held a variety of "the most influential posts then available to black men" and others had the wealth to access those positions (Wall *Women* 35). The patronage system was one way of making a career of writing during the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes, at one point, had a

wealthy, white patron, and many other writers relied on people who would support them in order to keep creating art. In a letter to Du Bois dated February 16, 1905, Fauset writes, "I am looking forward to my teaching days with much pleasure" (Fauset "To Du Bois" 94). Fauset probably chose teaching because it was considered a "safe" career for women, and because it allowed her to remain independent.

After Fauset left *The Crisis* in 1926, the quality of organization declined. On June 8, 1928, McKay wrote to Du Bois, "I think I beseeched you over a year ago not to publish those poems I sent to the 'Crisis' towards the end of 1925" (C. McKay 374). Although Du Bois responded to McKay telling him that Fauset was in charge of such matters, by the time of this letter, Fauset had resigned as contributing editor. Hughes also complained in 1928 to Du Bois about old poems appearing in *The Crisis*. He wrote in a letter: "Some months ago I asked for my old manuscripts, but they couldn't be found. I was hoping they were really lost, but lately some of the poems have been in *The Crisis*" (Hughes 374).

In conclusion, Jessie Fauset managed to accomplish many things while she was at *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1927. She held a position that no other Black women held and did



so at a time when men were dominate. She made major contributions to the Harlem Renaissance through this post, and she deserves consideration for her accomplishments. Fauset was mother, supporter, and mentor during this time, and a writer in her own right. Future scholarship will find that Fauset's work at *The Crisis* deserves critical attention and a way out of the Harlem shadows.

### CHAPTER THREE: FAUSET THE COLUMNIST AND CRITIC

After understanding Fauset's role as literary editor of *The Crisis*, we can appreciate better Fauset's contribution as a writer. In Fauset's duties as literary editor, she frequently wrote book reviews, criticism, and articles in *The Crisis*. For the purpose of this study, I discuss Fauset's column "What To Read," and her review and criticism articles "New Literature on The Negro," "As To Books," and "Our Bookshelf." These essays and columns (1912-1926) demonstrate Fauset's talent as a reviewer and critic. These works are key to understanding Fauset's importance, but are often neglected in scholarship. Wall says, "Because her tenure at the journal began before the Harlem Renaissance was in full flower, she devoted much of her attention early on to books of negligible literary interest" (*Women* 55). Despite the "quality" of the works she reviewed, in her critical commentary, we see Fauset's philosophy on writing and art emerge. She advocates a simplicity of style and work that is artistic and does not "set forth propaganda" ("New Literature on the Negro" 80). In a letter to Du Bois in 1905, Fauset sums up her

philosophy, writing that it is "worthwhile to teach our colored men and women *race pride, self pride, self-sufficiency* (the right kind) and all the necessity of living our lives as nearly as possible, absolutely, instead of comparing them always with white standards" (Fauset "To Du Bois" 95). She also justifies the beliefs of the Talented Tenth claiming "these criteria are the best, and not essentially because they are white" (Fauset "To Du Bois" 95). While trying to live up to her philosophy, Fauset incorporated her interests as part of her reviews. Because of her background in French, which she incorporated into her reviews and the rest of her literature, Fauset was able to introduce African and Caribbean authors.

It is also important to note here that though Sylvander claims that Fauset wrote the column "The Looking Glass" after joining the staff of *The Crisis*, the column appeared anonymously. For this reason, I have chosen not to include it in my study. While it is conceivable that she contributed more writings to *The Crisis* than she is credited for, determining authorship of these works would be difficult. I have chosen works that appear with her name.

Fauset's book reviews are essential to the scholarship about her work because they are some of the best indications of Fauset's critical genius. She shows amazing insight in her book reviews; even Wall acknowledges that, "Despite the vagueness of her critical vocabulary, Fauset's judgment was sound" (*Gender* 157). Fauset's book reviews were intended to increase interest in books by or about African Americans. Most reviews include lengthy passages from the book reviewed, because the quotes are highly representative of the work. Excerpts also gave readers a sample before purchasing the book, and they were intended to increase interest. In most cases, Fauset selects the section which best describes the work. In the January 1912 "What to Read" Fauset quotes a passage from "The White Man's Burden," stating, "The main thesis can be shown by one quotation" (*The Crisis* 3.3 123). The last line of this section, "Side by side there would eventually grow up a dual civilization in the American States...one purely white American and the other Afro-American" seems to have been chosen for its controversial content (*The Crisis* 3.3 123).

Fauset's strength as a critic comes from belief that literature should be art and not political propaganda. While she realizes the need for "propaganda" to influence

the race issue, Fauset expresses greatest appreciation for works of purely artistic motivation. Fauset's criticism is more open than that of Du Bois for this reason alone. Du Bois believed that art should be used as propaganda for uplifting the Black people and used *The Crisis* as a platform for his issues. Fauset, on the other hand, was looking for literary talent and "she wanted to use objective literary standards, to judge novels as works of art" (Johnson 146). However, as I have stated earlier, this standard was difficult to achieve in *The Crisis* based on the goal created at its inception. Fauset reviewed a variety of genres and authors, and occasionally those of little literary value. In addition to books of little consequence, Fauset also reviewed those of major importance, including Hughes' *The Weary Blues*, Du Bois' *Darkwater* and Cullen's *Color: A Book of Verse*.

"What To Read" was a regular column in *The Crisis* beginning with the first issue, November 1910. Although the first columns were published anonymously, on occasion other writers on *The Crisis* staff would contribute to this column. Of these other authors, William Stanley Braithwaite wrote one column in 1911. Fauset wrote the column for 1912 and towards the end of 1913 wrote "guest"

columns. Though most of the books Fauset reviewed were of negligible importance to the canon of literature, they had some significance to Fauset. In addition to books, Fauset reviewed articles and pamphlets or pieces appearing in other magazines or papers, such as "On the New-time Negro" by Mary White Ovington, "The Lower Animal" and "The Black Pawn" from *Harper's Magazine*.

Because of the mission of *The Crisis*, all the books reviewed deal in some way with what Fauset terms "the race problem" either by being written by Black writers, having Black topics, or contributing in some way to the knowledge of African or African American history. This was the purpose of *The Crisis*, and even Fauset could not avoid propaganda. Fauset especially was favorable toward biographies of Black heroes which sent a positive message to children and adults. Fauset was the first to admit that some works were not great literary masterworks, but gave reasons why the work was important. In "New Literature on the Negro," Fauset reviews *The Sword of Nemesis* and *The Immediate Jewel of His Soul*, which "do not by many means represent the highest type of novel" (*The Crisis* 20.2 80). However, the benefit of these works is that they are

writings by Blacks "into the realm of pure romantic fiction" (*The Crisis* 20.2 80).

The majority of Fauset's reviews gave a plot synopsis or character analysis, and usually included lengthy quotes from the original work. These reviews were not only by Black writers; occasionally white writers were featured. Those white writers were usually ones who supported the progress of Blacks or those who wrote on the race issue. Occasionally, Fauset would include a writer or book which was negative or displayed prejudice. These were included to educate readers on what some White writers were thinking and hopefully to encourage Black writers to retaliate by writing their own novels in response. Fauset's own career as a novelist began this way. T. S. Stribling's *Birthright* outraged the Black community because it portrayed stereotyped characterizations of Blacks, and many writers, including Fauset, took it upon themselves to correct the inaccurate portrayal of Blacks. Fauset included reviews of books that and writers who were racist in order to encourage other writers to take up their pens and change America's mind about African Americans. Some of the authors reviewed include T.S. Stribling, H.A. Shands, Herbert J. Seligmann, and Layman Abbott.

Fauset's critique was polite and kind, and even in cases where she had to be negative, she always tried to find something positive to write as well to offset the criticism. In her effort to temper the bad with the good, Fauset was yet again in the role of metaphorical mother. For example, in the August 1912 "What To Read" Fauset reviewed Otis Shackleford's *Seeking The Best* admitting that, "while not great literature, [it] has a style so attractively simple and naïve that one insensibly turns many a page before he puts it down" (*The Crisis* 4.4 183). Here again, she tried to offer a positive comment with a negative, providing balance and not destroying the confidence of the writer.

In "What To Read" in the March 1912 issue, Fauset reviewed a racist book by Reverend William Hayne Leavell. In this untitled work, the Reverend urged the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment, which ensured freedom to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Fauset comments ironically, "The Negro, being an inferior being, must be kept down, and it is better for the moral sense of the community that it should be done openly rather than by subterfuge" (*The Crisis* 3.5 211). This column was Fauset's first credited "What To Read" and



includes reviews on books by Mary White Ovington, a member and leader in the NAACP, and Du Bois.

In the April 1912 "What to Read" column, Fauset reviewed an article which appeared in the *Independent* on January 25, 1912 about a new kind of slavery. This article, entitled "New Slavery in the South" was about a woman who has spent the majority of her life as a servant to white people. Though she is badly mistreated, she cannot leave her position because if she tried her present employer would attempt to sabotage the new job. Fauset displayed great sympathy for this woman confined in a position with no recourse from the law. Though slavery was gone, a new type had emerged--that which bound women to situations in which they were vulnerable and could not escape. This review exemplifies Fauset's sympathy towards women's issues.

In the May 1912 "What to Read" Fauset reviewed a book by white writer, Alexander Corkey's *The Testing Fire*. This book was important to Fauset because "it presents the point of view of a white non-American toward the color question in the United States" (41). Fauset likely included this review because she traveled outside the United States, mostly to France, and she realized that the prejudice

against Blacks in America was not as prevalent overseas, particularly in France. This point of view helped Black Americans realize that these perceptions are not universal, and thus they can begin to change their current situation using Europe as a model.

In this same column, Fauset reviewed another white writer with prejudiced intentions. "Letters to Unknown Friends," according to Fauset's interpretation, is a twist on the Good Samaritan parable. Fauset quotes from this work: "it is a moral blunder to introduce into a white or Protestant school...a Negro, or a Jew, or a Roman Catholic" (261). Not only did this exemplify to Black readers the hatred they must fight to gain equal status, but it also demonstrated that other groups are hated too, in this case Catholics or Jews, who could be allies in the struggle for equal rights. One interesting aspect of this review is Fauset's use of unrestrained irony. She comments, "Surely we are behind the times then if we think this parable was meant to teach the lesson of charity to all" (261). This bitter irony is unusual for Fauset and seemingly out of character, but likely an indication of the limits of her patience.

Many of the reviews Fauset included were for educational purposes, particularly biographies. One purpose was to educate *The Crisis* readers on the state of the "race problem," but also to educate them on the status of people around the world. Fauset felt biographies were important for children. In an interview with Marion Starkey, Fauset says,

When I was a child I used to puzzle my head ruefully over the fact that in school we studied the lives of only great white people. I took it that there simply have been no great Negroes, and I was amazed when, as I grew older, I found that there were. (qtd. in Starkey 220)

To fill this void in literature, Fauset reviews an autobiography and biography in the June 1912 issue; one is by Matthew Henson entitled *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* and S.A.M. Washington's *Biography of George Thomas Downing*. She sees the Henson book as important because "not many true stories of adventure end so triumphantly" (92). The biography of Mr. Downing is significant because this man accomplished many things in his life and represents a positive role model. Downing participated in

the Underground Railroad, the Anti-Slavery Society and worked to abolish slavery with legislation.

In an article on "New Literature on The Negro" (1920) Fauset began to comment on the current state of Black literature. She writes, "That the Negro has come into Literature to stay is evidenced by the increasing number of books issued each year in which the Negro, or his condition, forms the main discussion" (78). She wrote on many books, but in particular she discussed Du Bois' *Darkwater*. She gave a glowing review to this novel, praising Du Bois in every sentence. She writes, "Dr. DuBois has bestowed upon the world a triple gift" (82). She praised this novel as "the most significant single contribution to the 'Negro Problem' of the age" (82). I can't help wondering if the review would have been different if it had been published in the *Opportunity*, a journal not run by Du Bois. She published this review in a magazine edited by Du Bois, so I believe she had to be placed in an awkward position as reviewer of her employer. However, her letters to Du Bois indicate her respect towards him and his work, and in her 1905 letter she calls him a "splendid example" (Fauset "To Du Bois" 95).

The "As To Books" review of June 1922 contains two essential books--James Weldon Johnson's anthology *The Book of American Negro Poetry* and Claude McKay's first collection, *Harlem Shadows*. Of all the thirty-two poets included in Johnson's anthology, Fauset only comments on four, two of which are women--Georgia Douglas Johnson and Spencer. The importance of this anthology, Fauset says, is its indication of "Negro genius" (66). Of *Harlem Shadows*, Fauset writes "This is poetry!" (66). She is impressed by McKay's lack of propaganda and calls this collection "the truest mark of genius" (66).

"Our Book Shelf," subtitled "Books Which You Must Know About Reviewed by Sympathetic Readers," is an important review because it features Cullen's *Color: A Book of Verse* and Hughes' *The Weary Blues*. Fauset is thrilled by Cullen's work. She writes, "It is such a work as this that the peculiar and valuable contribution of the American colored man is to be made to American literature" (238). Cullen has "the gift to express colored-ness in a wild of whiteness" (238). Of Hughes' she is more reserved, but still comments, "His poems are warm, exotic and shot through with color. Never is he preoccupied with form. But this fault, if it is one, has its corresponding virtue, for

it gives his voice...the perfection of spontaneity" (239). Her main complaint with Hughes' work is the use of dialect, stating that she is "no great lover of any dialect" (239). Despite her disapproval with dialect, she also writes,

While I do not think of him as a protagonist of color,-  
he is too much a citizen of the world for that-, I  
doubt if any one will ever write more tenderly, more  
understandingly, more humorously of the life of Harlem  
shot through as it is with mirth, abandon and pain.  
(239)

Although Fauset was more comfortable with traditional poetry, she critiqued Cullen and Hughes based on the quality of their individual work, not her personal tastes. She recognized in both poets's work beauty and a beneficial addition for Black literature.

Journalism was another part of Fauset's job, one at which she was successful. Fauset's feature articles showed her interest in the world, national issues and women's issues. These articles are significant but do not receive any attention and are part of the basis for some critics claim that Fauset was an early feminist writer. Fauset's articles reveal her encouragement of women's movements and organizations. Her other articles "reveal her willingness

to grapple with new cultural and political concepts" (Wall, *Women* 48). She shows a stylistic competence in her articles, using clear language and a graceful style. In *From the Dark Tower*, Davis writes, "One learns from her articles that Jessie Fauset had a clear, keen, no-nonsense type of intellect" (94).

One article, "Nationalism and Egypt" appears in the April 1920 issue of *The Crisis* and is important for several reasons. First, it demonstrates Fauset's discussion of events outside the United States. Secondly, Fauset subtly creates a link between the Egyptians and Black Americans. She writes of injustices the Egyptians face, all of which are similar to the problems facing Blacks in the United States. Fauset relates the story of the oppression of Egypt by England, which was to be an "advisor of Egypt's complicated political affairs" (310). The British occupied Egypt on the assurance that it would be a temporary arrangement; however, they continued to take more and more control of the government. By immediately mentioning the situation, Fauset creates sympathy among Black Americans. For example, Fauset cites a story of four Black Egyptians who are given the death penalty for a case that was obviously not murder. Egyptians have trouble attaining

"justice in the courts" which immediately creates a bond between the readers and the subjects (311).

Fauset also writes that the Egyptians were called to fight by the British, even though they no longer had control of their own country. This is similar to Blacks being called to fight in World War I although they had so few rights. Du Bois was against the Blacks fighting in World War I and protested loudly in *The Crisis*. It is hardly surprising that this was written in 1920, so soon after the war ended. It is not surprising that Fauset might agree with Du Bois on this subject, since they held similar opinions on other subjects. Lastly, through her portrayal of the Egyptians, Fauset gives Black Americans the example of national pride, for she writes, "Who doubts that Egypt is really speaking for the whole dark world?" ("Nationalism" 316).

Pan-Africanism was one of Fauset's interests which appeared in her articles. In 1921 Fauset wrote two articles on this topic: "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress" and "What Europe Thought of the Pan-African Congress." Pan-Africanism was the "belief that their African heritage should be a source of pride and the basis of a racial solidarity that linked all colored



people" (Wintz 45). It was an idea that Du Bois supported and one Fauset felt had potential to bring people together. They used "black history...to stimulate black patriotism" (Wintz 45). However, at no time was this push for Africanism intended to detract from *The Crisis*' stance that Blacks were American and as such should be an integral part of American society. It was intended to let the Americans learn their history for the purpose of instilling pride in being Black. It was, as Hutchinson writes, "part of a worldwide tactical movement against white supremacy but not necessarily against the western cultural inheritance of African Americans, let alone their identification with the civilization of the United States" (146). Above all Pan-Africanism encouraged Black Americans to be proud of being Black and being American, to find a way to reconcile the paradoxical relationship of being both African and American.

Fauset's first article on this topic, "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress" is a positive accounting of the 1919 event which met in four cities: London, Paris, Brussels and Geneva. Fauset gives a listing of the participants at each of the four congresses, and a brief account of the events. She also lists the countries

represented, including South Africa, the Gold Coast, the United States, Martinique. Fauset proceeds to describe what occurred at each city and the mood of the meetings. Fauset reports of men sharing experiences and "voicing...the long stifled desires of their hearts" (16). What is of most significance is that Fauset gives the readers a feeling of what occurred, and of the attitude of the participants. It is not a dry or boring list of minutes, but rather an overall sense of impressions and Fauset's reactions to the Congress. Although she is openly optimistic about the effect the Congress would have, "Fauset's assessments of the Congress's accomplishments were measured and reasonable" (Wall, *Women* 50). The overall feeling of the article is one of commonality, of finding a common link despite the differences, whether they be economical, linguistic, or cultural. Although Wall finds some of Fauset's comments arrogant in their naiveté, she comments, "there is a sense of reaching out, of honestly groping for a better understanding that is admirable" (*Women* 50). The excitement for Fauset was learning that she, and other Black Americans, was not fundamentally different than the other Blacks at the Congress. Fauset writes, "What can be more fascinating than learning at first hand that the

stranger across the seas, however different in phrase or expression, yet knows no difference of heart?"

("Impressions" 12).

The second article, "What Europe Thought of the Pan-African Congress" is an account of the comments of the foreign press. Fauset quotes extensively from a variety of foreign articles on the Congress, the majority being from England, Scotland and France. She makes few comments in this article, and those few are only reiterations of the comments of the foreign press. However, Fauset does write at the end of the article, "it made plain to the world not only what it thought of the members of its own race, but pretty plainly what it thought of the members of others" (67). The articles Fauset cites range from being excited and supportive, to being uneasy about where the future is headed. However, in a rare example of self-reference, Fauset pulls a quote from Scotland's *Glasgow Herald* which mentions her own presentation at the Pan African Congress:

"Miss Fauset, of Philadelphia, literary editor of *The Crisis*, spoke on the impact of the colored women in American, who, she said, had been a great moving force behind all the movements for emancipation...Colored women were everywhere branching out into every field of

activity in the professions and in business." (qtd. in "What Europe" 66)

Despite the overt masculinity of the Congress, Fauset managed through her speech to bring women into the conversation and reinforce the notion that the "movement" needed the support of women.

Not only did Fauset devote her articles to informing and raising the race question, she also used them to express her views on Women's issues. In two articles, "The 13<sup>th</sup> Biennial of the N.A.C.W." and "The 'Y' Conference at Talladega" (YWCA) Fauset delves into the role that Black women were playing in the United States. These first of these, the article on the National Association of Colored Women appeared in 1922 and includes Fauset's impressions and accounting of the conference at which she presented a talk on modern Negro poetry. Fauset was impressed with the variety of members, "there were literally all sorts of colored women there--Black, white, brown, tall and short, portly and slender" as well as with the variety of deeds accomplished by the organization ("13<sup>th</sup> Biennial" 257). The NACW at that time had several departments devoted to fine arts, social sciences, charity, "home economics, literature, lynching, defense, hygiene," and Black women in

business (258). Fauset was hopeful and enthusiastic about the role of the organization and the accomplishments of its members. Fauset also commented on the faults of the group, which, according to Fauset, included "too much bickering, too many personal, petty, needless jealousies, too many antagonisms insufficiently veiled, not enough appreciation of the fact that one person or one club or one faction cannot have all the honor" (260). In this article, Fauset supports women's organizations like the NCWA for educating women.

Fauset's second article on the YWCA Conference appeared in the September 1923 issue, and demonstrated Fauset's surprise with the organization. Fauset claimed she was unaware of the extent of the membership of the YWCA. Again, at this conference, Fauset was among the presenters and was to give "a certain amount of instruction to these young women" yet found herself the one who was educated (214). Fauset began the article with an astonishing statistic, in her eyes, that there existed over 600 student subgroups of the NACW. What impressed Fauset the most was "how deep a sense these girls had of the importance of the part they would have to play in the near future in an attempt to solve or at least adjust the race

question" (214). Fauset sees an optimistic future in these young women, a hope for change. The article reveals Fauset's surprise and gives information about the organization in order to educate and encourage readers to become involved themselves.

To conclude, Fauset's non-fiction writing comprises the majority of her work and contribution to *The Crisis*. Her book reviews served several functions and were criticism of writers combined with a catalogue of the kind of literature being published. Her articles are timely and well written. In all her writing, Fauset championed the self-awareness of Blacks but never so much as in her articles. Her non-fiction shows a writer concerned with current events, national and international, and one who tried to raise Black consciousness.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: FAUSET THE CREATIVE WRITER

Fauset's creative writing in *The Crisis* is just as important as her non-fiction, though her non-fiction is probably better from a critical standpoint in terms of style, clarity and content. Her creative work, which includes poetry, essays and short stories, is more abundant, more varied in genre and topic. I have included Fauset's personal essays among her creative writing because they are expressively written, although many scholars include these pieces with her journalism.

Fauset's creativity as a writer of poetry, essays and fiction is evident in the creative work she published in *The Crisis*. Her poetry does not reflect social criticism, but draws on traditional themes, such as love, nature and friendship. Her essays, which many consider her best writing, are highly diverse combining biography, social criticism, and personal reflection. Her fiction often uses plots with biracial identity issues, such as biracial characters passing for white before they reconcile with the Black side of their identity. A unifying feature of all her creative writing is her love of French literature.

One unifying feature found in the majority of Fauset's creative writing is the use of French or mention of France. French phrases are liberally sprinkled throughout her poetry, and her essays usually deal in some way with her travels through France. Fauset's love of French culture stems from a visit she made to France in 1914 and also from her graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, where she received a Master's of Arts in French in 1919. Fauset traveled a great deal to Europe, primarily France, and spent time there in 1914, 1919, 1924 to 1925, and even a later trip in the mid 1930s, after she had "retired" from writing. Fauset was also a teacher for many years and taught French after leaving *The Crisis* in 1926. These travels show up in her essays, and her knowledge of French appears in her poetry.

Although Fauset is considered only a minor poet, her poetry should be included in this discussion because it demonstrates the different aspects of her writing. In her poetry Fauset turns to a personal voice and leaves the political voice of her novels behind. She uses traditional forms, but her use of language is skillful. Lewis believes that Fauset's love poetry was inspired by her feelings for Du Bois, but that may only be conjecture on his part (122).



The consensus is that Fauset's poetry lacks literary merit. This dismissal of her work seems to come from her topics-- "love, romance, and nature" (Shockley 417). But underneath the clichéd subjects lies clever language usage and a sense of pain which transforms the cliché into something more meaningful.

However, there is a good reason to study Fauset's poems. Most well known poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is modernistic, incorporating music-primarily jazz and blues-and the use of dialect. The assumption of those with only casual information on the Harlem Renaissance is that all the poetry of the time was like that of Hughes and Toomer. However, the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is separated into two veins, the traditional and the modern. Fauset's poetry is on the opposite end of the stylistic spectrum from Hughes; her work is traditional in form and theme. Her topics and themes include love, friendship, patriotism, nature and seasons. Because her poetry is so different from the poetry of her male contemporaries, it must be studied in order to understand women's poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. Although Davis says of her poetry, "Her verses, typical lyrics of love and nature, were light and sophisticated, and neither good enough to become an

impressive part of the canon of New Negro poetry or bad enough to be overlooked entirely", there is value to her work because of its wide reaching application to her readers (93).

A number of Fauset's poems appeared in *The Crisis* and anthologies such as *Caroling Dusk* edited by Countee Cullen. Fauset's reputation as a poet has suffered as trends changed in literary aesthetics so that modern readers are discouraged from reading her work. That her poetry was published frequently is an indication that writers and editors during the Harlem Renaissance found some value in her poetry and appreciated her work. Her poetry served personal needs for self-expression rather than social purposes, such as promoting African American art. Among her most famous works are "La Vie C'est La Vie," "Stars in Alabama," "Here's April!", "Rain Fugue" and "Again It is September."

Of her love poetry, "La Vie C'est La Vie" expresses the pain of lost love and is probably her best known poem. She tells of the one she loves, "But he will none of me." The poem has a much lighter tone than her other love poetry despite the ending line, "The world is full of jests like these--/I wish that I were dead." The speaker is sitting

in a park, with the one she loves, realizing that he does not feel the same way. She has deep feelings for the man, "And there's a man whose lightest work/can set my chilly blood afire;/Fulfillment of his last behest/Defines my life's desire." The appeal of this poem is in its sensitivity and passion.

In "Stars in Alabama," love is contrasted to a starlight Alabama night. Two lovers walk under the noon sky, "Cling hand in hand,/and Passion, hot-eyed, hot-lipped,/Lurks unseen". It is in the evening when the stars are full in the sky that "he's but a wistful boy,/A saintly maiden she." Here she combines nature and love, finding a relationship between the two. The heat of day and passion is contrasted with the cool and holiness of the night and innocence.

"Here's April!" "Rain Fugue" and "Again It Is September" are examples of Fauset's nature poetry. "Here's April!" (1924) uses the analogy of Spring coming to create hope of love. In the first stanza, Winter is described as departing and Spring comes in as a "healing balm." Winter is "dank and raw," "dark and mean," but with "light," "verdant," "gold-tinted" Spring comes life and "April's here in tree and grass!" Pain is set aside "For peace and

mirth." "Rain Fugue" (1924) also portrays nature, in this case rain, as healing. In this poem rain is the cleansing force, "Slanting, driving, Summer rain/How you wash my heart of pain!" It is again a poem set in a season and nature is seen as a balm, a healing force. The season is not set, and rain in any season-Summer, Autumn, Winter, or Spring-is emotional. Summer rain cleanses; Autumn rain is "coaxing to forget/Things that are, for things not yet"; Winter rain "make me hug my hearth,/Laughing, sheltered from your wrath"; and Spring rain brings "me to remembering/ Far-off times and lovers too." "Again It Is September" (1917) has a wistful tone of nostalgia combined with a sense of cynicism. The speaker says, "It seems so strange that I who made no vows/Should sit here desolate this golden weather." Memory then moves to "yearning, a glowing look and words that knew no bounds," a rather sensual event for the pages of *The Crisis*. From this memory comes a longing for forgetfulness, "mutely praying/ That I may not remember!"

Unlike most of Fauset's writing, her poetry contains no message for the race. These verses explore and chronicle the basic emotions of love and pain and of the healing power of nature. Her style is simple, her forms

traditional, making her poetry accessible to a wide audience. Her poetry is personal, and she writes poetry "seeming to delight not just in finding the right word, but in finding the unusual and unexpected word" (Sylvander 128). Although Fauset's verse has been neglected, it plays a significant role in depicting the intimate personal voice of the writer.

Fauset's essays are probably her best creative work because they lack the weakness of development present in her novels. They indicate Fauset's love of variety, as shown in the subjects she tackles. The genre of essay was best suited to Fauset's style, and her essays are personal and insightful. Sylvander calls Fauset a "very good essayist" because "the intelligence, the precise language skill, the wide-ranging interests, the intense sensitivity" that appear in her essay writing are most suited to this the genre (99). Wall also commends Fauset's essays saying, "Her personal essays contain her best writing" (*Women* 48). Fauset seems more confident and comfortable in her essay writing because she "reveals herself and her own experience and strengths and fears much more readily...than she does in fiction" (Sylvander 99).

Three distinctive types in Fauset's essays appear: personal, travelogue, and social criticism. Personal essays are those that combine episodes of Fauset's life with her reflections on various subjects. They provide entertainment and offer insight into Fauset's personal thoughts. The travel essays present insights Fauset gleaned from her travels throughout the world. Her main purpose is to show readers the universality of the human spirit and the diversity of conditions outside the United States. Fauset also frequently related the condition of African Americans in other countries for the purpose of education. These first two categories are well accepted by scholars of Fauset's work. A third category, one I call social criticism, is not well acknowledged by scholars. These essays are articles in essay format with a large element of the creative writing. However, what makes them different from the other essays and true journalism is that they are didactic. Fauset's gift for teaching shows through.

Fauset's essays cover a wide range of subjects from educational themes to the role of African heroes around the world. They reveal, like her articles, an interest in foreign affairs. The one unifying factor of Fauset's

essays, with the exception of "Looking Backward," is that each deals in some way with her interest in French culture. Most are reminiscent of Fauset's travels in France and relate her experiences and the insights into human behavior she gained from travel.

One essay, "My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein" is representative of her personal essays. It is a charming essay on the subject of her ideal house. She describes what she dreams of in a house in exacting detail. She especially goes into detail about the library, saying "my library is of all portions the very dearest to me" (144). She lists the books included in her imaginary library, and the titles include *Alice in Wonderland*, *Arabian Nights*, the *Bible*, and *Essays* by Walter Pater. To Fauset, this imaginary house is as real and important in her mind as the house she occupies daily. She writes, "banishment from my house would surely be life's most bitter sorrow" (*The Crisis* 145).

Another personal essay, "When Christmas Comes" (1922), delves into the power of memory. Through detail and sensory images, Fauset creates the Christmases of her childhood in Philadelphia. The essay begins by invoking the power of smell to open "the gates of memory" (61). The

smell of "snow-laden air...carried me back down the slope of yesterdays to a scene which I had completely forgotten" and opened the flood gates of memory which evolves into this essay (*The Crisis* 61). She paints childhood in idyllic scenes of running, playing, getting into mischief without any punishment. Childhood becomes a dream, and "that childish life was the real, the permanent, thing" while being an adult is "hardly worth the long preparation" (61). She is enthusiastic about the decoration of Christmas time, describing making ornaments and paper dolls. Fauset then brings up the "intensity" of anticipation of the holiday season (61). A nostalgic tone dominates the essay, creating a longing for a lost childhood which every reader can understand.

A unique essay, "Sunday Afternoon" (1922) is a quiet meditation on Fauset's memories of childhood and what Sunday afternoon has come to mean to her, a collage of thoughts and memories. Sunday afternoon is a special time; which engenders mental clarity and quiet reflection. She writes, "Always Sunday afternoon has made me sad. But it is a sweet sadness" (162). Attempting to relay the feeling that Sunday afternoons have always brought, she writes that it is difficult to describe. She compares herself to "a



gourmet caressing his wine against his palate, yet letting it go, knowing he must not try too long to hold its flavor" (163). She then describes some of her favorite Sunday activities, which include reminiscing, thinking, or reading. Rather than making a point of social significance like many of her other essays, this essay is one of sharing private experiences with readers.

Fauset also wrote a number of travel essays, on the subject Paris or France. "Tracing Shadows," one of Fauset's early travels essays published in 1915, describes a 1914 visit to France as World War I breaks out, and Europe prepares to go to war. Fauset relives the experiences of people of all different classes. She is sensitive to the courage the people display in the face of this frightening event. Fauset and her party, all referred to by type names, such as the Musician, the Artist, the Student and the Lady rather than proper names, were oblivious to the changes happening about them. However, the experience taught Fauset the value of learning from encounters with other people. She asks, "But what were we and our petty troubles compared with a nation's agony?" (249).

Another travel essay, "This Way to the Flea Market" (1925) exposes readers to a variety of characters Fauset

met on a visit to a French flea market. She interacts with merchants and shoppers, "all sorts of a given class, with here and there a curious visitor like myself and my friend, but otherwise representatives of the poorer groups of all those nationalities with which Paris teems" (163).

Visiting the flea market, Fauset leaves the safety of the better areas, the middle-class areas in which she is comfortable, and confronts the poor in their "worn and faded" clothing (162). It is jarring to be faced with the aspect of society that one would most like to forget exists. Fauset brings the subject of the poor to the forefront, forcing readers to acknowledge the problem and to find some solution.

Homesickness is the subject of the essay "Nostalgia" (1921), comprised of several anecdotes, is an essay of social criticism. Fauset defines nostalgia in several languages in order to show that it is a universal feeling, "as universal a phenomenon as that of possessing a mother" (155). The point of Fauset's essay is that African Americans do not have a true home. Though Africa is the ancestral home, most African Americans have never been there and are not likely to go. While America is the birthplace, African Americans are not given equal rights

under the law and until the race question is solved, it can never be a true home. She speaks of nostalgia for African Americans as being a "spiritual" nostalgia (157). His idea of home "he has built unconsciously from his childhood a dream country" that is founded on the Constitution (157).

Another of Fauset's essays of social criticism, "Looking Backward" (1922), presents her musings on Reconstruction and Robert Brown Elliot, a African American man who was a member of the South Carolina State Legislature. Fauset considers Elliot "the model, as the mould in human form, of the possibilities of our race" (125). This essay is another example of Fauset's writing about African American heroes to inspire her readers. This story in particular is hopeful because it is the story of a African American man in the south who fought against slavery. Fauset finds his story important like others of African American heroes, writing "their memory must be kept green, their tale must be retold in order that we of a later day may take fresh heart" (126). She does not write this essay so much as a tribute to Robert Brown Elliot but as inspiration for African American youth.

Fauset's short stories are important because they served as precursors to her novels, but also because they

discuss biracial identity problems. For example, "The Sleeper Wakes" can be seen as a preview to *Plum Bun*, and "Double Trouble" is definitely a first draft of *The Chinaberry Tree*. In transforming "Double Trouble," Fauset changed character names and developed the plot. One exception to this pattern, "Mary Elizabeth," is a different style for Fauset "in its use of Southern dialect and first person narration" (Knopf xxx). Reading these stories give us a better idea of the development of Fauset's fiction, the work Fauset is primarily known for. This short fiction also plays a role in literature today which the increase of bicultural relationships. The topics she discusses are becoming more prominent today with an increase in the number of biracial persons in our society.

Fauset earliest short story, "Emmy" (1912) appeared in two installments and is, despite the title, the story of a African American man, Archie, who is light enough to pass for white. "Emmy" represents Fauset's first attempt at short stories and lacks the feminist element that is found in later stories. However, this story shows Fauset's interest in depicting the racial prejudice African Americans suffer, and it demonstrates Fauset's belief that African Americans need to be proud of being African

American and not hide behind it. Emmy is Archie's love interest, but also his downfall. Archie works for a white man's company that fires him after discovering his upcoming marriage to dark Emmy. At this point, Archie admits to being Black. Emmy is a prize for Archie rather than someone cherished for her own personality. After Archie accepts his heritage and stops passing, he and Emmy find happiness and fulfillment.

The story begins with Emmy discovering that she is "different" because she is African American. Fauset deals with race issues using Emmy as the catalyst. Emmy is the only African American child in a white school and is told by her teachers and classmates that she is "too nice and smart to be a--er--I mean, to be colored" (79). Emmy, on the other hand, sees no differences between herself and her White classmates and says that they "were just the same, only you're white and I'm brown" (79). From this initial focus on Emmy, the story moves to focus on Archie. This in itself is unusual for Fauset's fiction, which usually revolves around her female characters.

A common misconception about Fauset's fiction is that she advocated passing because so much of her writing deals with that topic. However, although Fauset creates

characters who pass, they all are unhappy until they accept and embrace their African American heritage. The most disappointing aspect of this story is that Emmy is not the central focus throughout the whole story, and that she is presented in a submissive role to Archie. However, the message of "Emmy" is that happiness can only be achieved when people become comfortable with who they are.

Another story, "There Was One Time," (1917) exemplifies Fauset's experiments with romantic form, a style of writing she believed more African American writers should try, according to a book review she wrote. This is a classic tale of boy meets girl and falls in love. In this story, Anna meets Richard when he saves her from being bothered by a tramp in the park. They instantly find a connection. Later, he finds her and declares his love for her. In the first half of the story, however, Fauset deals with the race issue. Anna has a difficult time finding a job in her chosen occupation, business secretary, because she is African American. This is parallel to Fauset's own life in that she could not find a job teaching in upper class schools because she was African American. Fauset was highly qualified in languages after leaving Cornell but

could only teach at African American schools and she was denied a position in Philadelphia.

Another stylistic departure, "Mary Elizabeth" (1919) is told in first person and uses dialect. Mary Elizabeth is an African American servant to an African American couple, Sally and Roger. Sally narrates of the story, which begins when Mary Elizabeth late for work one day resulting in an argument between Sally and Roger. The use of dialect comes into play through the character of Mary Elizabeth, a device unusual for Fauset who was not a fan of using dialect, as she often comments in her reviews. It is interesting that the single time Fauset employs dialect it is with a character who is a servant. Mary Elizabeth is one of the few characters Fauset creates who is not a member of the middle class, and the only character in her writings to use dialect.

Mary Elizabeth is an older woman, born in slavery. She tells Sally the story of her parents who "jumped over a broomstick, en they wus jes as happy" (*The Crisis* 53). Later, Mary Elizabeth's father is sold by his owner, and the family assumes he is dead. They move and discover that he is alive and has married three other times. The story greatly affects Sally, who finds tragedy in the story

because after all the time has passed, they find Mary Elizabeth's father again when he is old and married. The story makes Sally understand how lucky she is to live when she does and to have her husband Roger. As Sally relates the story to Roger, they both come to a realization of how lucky they are to have each other.

Another story which deals with accepting heritage, "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920) is a story of awakening in a young African American woman named Amy. Amy, who does not know with certainty her race, runs away from the African American family who has raised her to New York. In New York she meets and marries a rich white man whom she does not love. Unfortunately, Amy discovers Wynne is prejudiced and frequently made derogatory comments about African Americans. Amy begins to realize that she herself is African American and is upset by Wynne's treatment of the servants and finally admits that she is colored. After this revelation, Wynne leaves Amy. Amy's awakening occurs when her ex-husband returns and asks her to be his mistress. She works to repay Wynne the money that supported her during their separation and finds a house of her own, becoming self-sufficient. After she has repaid



all the money, Amy returns home to her African American family.

The message in this story is one Fauset used in her novels, that passing does not bring happiness, and only coming to terms with one's race can bring fulfillment. Amy only finds true happiness when she comes to terms with being African American. Another aspect of her awakening is the realization that she does not need a man to make her life worthwhile; she finds it within herself when she learns to support herself. This story represents one of Fauset's first attempts at feminist oriented writing, in that and she creates a woman character who finds independence.

This story is parallel to the novel *Plum Bun* (1929). The plot is one Fauset utilized in her novels-that of a African American woman passing for White and hoping to find happiness, but realizing that she can only do that when she accepts her heritage. The problem is that Fauset attempts to write a novel in the form of a short story. "The Sleeper Wakes" spans a number of years, too many to be portrayed in the detail in the genre of a short story and lacks the development which would be found in a novel.

Fauset takes the basic plot later and develops it into *Plum Bun* by increasing development of the characters and plot.

Of all Fauset's short stories that later developed into novels, "Double Trouble" and *The Chinaberry Tree* share the closest relationship. "Double Trouble" (1923) is an early version of Fauset's 1931 novel *The Chinaberry Tree*. She makes a few minor changes in the names of characters and expands the plot, but the central characters remain the same. The most focus of "Double Trouble" is on Angelique (known as Melissa in *The Chinaberry Tree*). The action centers Angelique's decision between two young men, Malory and Asshur. As is the case with "The Sleeper Wakes," the genre of short story is not adequate to develop the story and characters. "Double Trouble" centers almost entirely on the incestuous relationship of Malory and Angelique. It is a disaster barely avoided and ends with Angelique becoming involved with Asshur.

All the female characters, at the same time as they are facing issues of identity, are also working through the problems of relationships. *The Chinaberry Tree* is the story of three women's lives and loves--Sarah (Sal), her daughter Laurentine, and her niece, Melissa. The characters in this book deal with issues of legitimacy,

being biracial, being ostracized, and living in a small town. Sal lives outside the African American community because she has a common law relationship with a White man. Laurentine is the product of this relationship and faces many problems such as illegitimacy, being biracial, and being part of neither African American nor white society. Melissa, as the youngest, strives to create her own identity, while at the same time dealing with the issues facing her family.

In *The Chinaberry Tree*, Laurentine becomes the main character, and Fauset delves deeper into topics like biracialism, illegitimacy, interracial relationships, not merely incest like "Double Trouble." Through the novel, Fauset creates female characters who are strong and find their own place in a society which outcasts them. Laurentine does not fit in either group until she learns to take her creativity and make it work for her through her business.

The short stories are important because they are early drafts of her novels and examples of Fauset's support of racial pride and women's needs. Although the weakness in her stories is the similarity of plot and theme, these stories were used to educate and entertain, and Fauset

obviously recognized the limitations of the genre and transformed these stories into her novels. A knowledge of Fauset's short stories is essential to any thorough study of Fauset's novels. The two are entwined, and one gains a greater appreciation for her novels when presented with the stories.

Fauset's creative writing adds to our understanding of African American literature and women's literature because it brings a female perspective to the predominately male Harlem Renaissance literature. Fauset's poetry and essays have value because they are personal and intimate, communicating something of the woman she was. Fauset also demonstrates her knowledge of international affairs and human nature through these works. Her short stories are important in relation to her novels, since they are the foundation on which the novels are based. The Harlem Renaissance has for too long been dominated by men and their politics, but the life and career of Fauset shows that Black women writers were interested in politics but also in developing an African American body of literature. I am suggesting that Fauset's poetry needs to be re-read, her essays carefully read for their creative quality, and her fiction has been misread.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CHIAROSCURO

In conclusion, Fauset's work at *The Crisis* is an important part of the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. Despite the critical focus on Fauset's novels, her *Crisis* work made the most impact. Fauset was much more than a novelist, and her editorial work included more than merely selecting pieces for publication; she made important contributions both on and off the page. If the scholarship continues to focus only on her novels, Fauset's contribution will be limited. A whole body of her work which exists outside the four novels is rich in variety and virtually ignored. The title for this chapter is "Chiaroscuro" which in art means the treatment of light and shade. It is also attributed to mean half-revealed, which is where Fauset stands now in the context of literature. Although Fauset's work is becoming noticed, a great deal of her work remains in the shadows.

I have with this project brought Fauset out of the shadows of the Harlem Renaissance. I have categorized Fauset's *Crisis* writings into Journalistic writing and Creative writings to show the variety of her writing. I

have also discussed in detail a large portion of the book reviews, articles, poetry, essays and short stories that Fauset contributed to fill a void in scholarship. I have focused on material which appeared in *The Crisis* mentioning her novels only when they relate to her short stories.

Fauset's book reviews and articles created interest in Black writing and she worked to raise social and racial awareness. Fauset was also concerned with giving children positive role models to encourage them to seek more from themselves. In this way, Fauset supported goals of the Black community and did not betray her culture as some have claimed. In addition, Fauset is credited with the discovery of Langston Hughes, with supporting the careers of a number of writers who achieved fame, and with encouraging women writers, artists and issues. At the same time, she was the only woman with such a powerful position.

To accredit the women of this period for the roles they played, the first step is reclaiming Fauset. It is time to refute the negative male criticism Fauset received because the men did not understand her power and her goals. Fauset was probably the most influential woman of her time and place, and one of the most influential people, male or female, in the field of Black publication. Her mentoring

and support of younger writers paved the road for acceptance of Black literature in the United States. Studies of literary editors contribute to a better understanding of authorship and literary history. They are studies of the infrastructure that creates and supports literary culture.

Fauset's *Crisis* writings reveal her personal thoughts and ideas. Her book reviews and criticism indicate her ideas on art and the approaches she feels are necessary to encourage African American art. Her articles reveal the topics Fauset believed to be important, such as women's issues, international issues, and cultural heritage. Through her essays, readers also get a view of the topics mentioned previously, as well as a view of Fauset's private life. Her love of travel and France, her cosmopolitan perspective, and her belief that African Americans should know how minorities are treated in other countries all come into play in her essays. Fauset's poetry is intimate, a unique look into the deep emotions she felt. Fauset short stories not only evolved into her novels, but also dealt with topical and difficult issues in a manner not well suited to other genres. Most importantly, this body of work reached the majority of her readers through the

circulation of *The Crisis*. Fauset's audience with this work was much larger than that of her novels. Her work helped develop Black literature as a resource for her culture that extended beyond the Talented Tenth.

I hope that interest Fauset will continue to grow as scholars come to understand her importance. Two projects that would advance Fauset scholarship are (1) an anthology of her work in *The Crisis* and other periodicals and (2) a collection of her letters.

A small selection of Fauset's writings appear in anthologies. Although all these anthologies are excellent, they are only a sample of Fauset's total writings. None of her articles, few of her essays, poems, and book reviews are available. The work that is anthologized represents only the cusp of Fauset's talent. To fully understand Fauset and her role in the Harlem Renaissance, the full scope of her writings must be taken into account. We must include the book reviews, articles, essays and short stories in order to complete the collection of Fauset's work. For this reason, I am proposing a comprehensive anthology of Fauset's writings for students as well as scholars.



By increasing access to Fauset's prolific writings in *The Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book*, the whole body of her work will get the recognition deserved. Much of the scholarship focuses on her novels, and while they are important, they have become all for which Fauset is known. In order to view all Fauset's work, one has to look it up in *The Crisis* or in *The Brownies' Book* or the other various anthologies and magazines. This is impractical because Fauset's work spans a period from 1912 to 1927 and appears in several different publications.

An anthology of this work will help round out and develop the scholarship on Fauset and on the Harlem Renaissance. An anthology will transfer the focus from her novels to the variety of other material she published. I think including her work in *The Brownies' Book* is also important. This was the first publication for Black children about Black issues. It gave Black children role models to look to and a feeling of pride in their race. Fauset's work here included poems, stories, histories, and biographies. This is also a major part of Fauset's writings, though it only had a short run.

The mere variety of her work in itself should be justification enough, but an anthology of Fauset's *Crisis*

work will stimulate scholarship on Fauset. I think an anthology will help promote scholarship of Fauset because she will no longer be a mystery to scholars or students. By completing the scholarship on Fauset, another task will be fulfilled; scholarship on the Harlem Renaissance will also be more complete. This anthology will show that Fauset is not and should not be considered a minor influence in the Harlem Renaissance. An understanding of Fauset's role, by increasing knowledge of all her writings, will add to the general information of the Harlem Renaissance itself. Part of the problem, despite a growing interest in Fauset, is that her works are only partially available. While her novels have been reprinted within the last ten years and are relatively easy to order, there is not a complete collection of her *Crisis* work. Though her work has appeared in other anthologies, these are also not complete records because Fauset is only one of many authors in these publications.

Another project that would be valuable is a collection of Fauset's letters. Fauset's letters are housed at a number of universities and collections around the United States. She wrote many, especially between Countee and Ida Cullen and Du Bois, and these are good indicators of

Fauset's personal beliefs, which impact her writing.

Because so many of her observations are present only in her letters, access to her full range of works will aid in understanding women writers who wrote in diverse genres.

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