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There is Heterosexuality: Jessie Fauset, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Problem of Desire

Near the end of Jessie Fauset's first novel, *There is Confusion* (1924), Joanna Marshall gratefully accepts Peter Bye's offer of marriage, saying, "Why, nothing in the world is so hard to face as this problem of being colored in America. . . . But now that we have love, Peter, we have a pattern to guide us out of the confusion" (283). Peter echoes Joanna's thoughts when he says, "Yes, thank God, we've got Love. . . . But you're right, Joanna, it is frightful to see the havoc that this queer intangible bugaboo of color works among us" (284).

On the one hand there is love as "pattern"; on the other, there is race as "queer intangible bugaboo." Joanna and Peter expect the pattern to trump the bugaboo; they expect "love" to offer some solidity, some foundation in an otherwise tortuous American racial landscape. There is something sweet about their expectation in the same way that there is something sweet about the desperately naive. For if there is one thing that Fauset's novels tell us, it is that love in the 1920s, particularly for African American women, is a decidedly slippery piece of work—more queer intangible bugaboo than safe, reassuring pattern.

This is especially the case if we understand love to be the public face of something called "heterosexuality," and if we understand that heterosexuality was a relatively recent invention by 1924—a structure of desire bearing very little similarity to the heterosexuality we know today. In the pages that follow, I want to play out the implications of the metonymic substitution that my title enacts. More specifically, I want to read the "confusion" of Fauset's title less as the result of racial deformation, and more the necessary byproduct of a newly emerged heterosexuality. And though I have begun with an emphasis on *There is Confusion*, my focus here is also Fauset's second novel, *Plum Bun*, published in 1929. For if *There is Confusion* ends in the hope that love can offer stability amid racial confusion, *Plum Bun* shows that hope to be misplaced, as the novel's heroine Angela Murray struggles to find her place within the new heterosexuality.

In fact, *There is Confusion* and *Plum Bun* comprise something of a two-part movement on the themes of desire, marriage, and heterosexuality in the twenties.¹ Fauset had been planning *There is Confusion* since at least 1914, though it would not be published until ten years later.² The fifteen years between the inception of *There is Confusion* and the publication of *Plum Bun* witnessed a number of significant changes in Fauset's life, most of them having to do with her ever-evolving relationship with W. E. B. Du Bois. At the risk of joining art too neatly to biography, I do want to read these two romances as parts of a romantic trilogy—the third volume being the real-life relationship of Fauset and Du Bois. In so doing, I offer a new way of thinking about Fauset's novels in relation to the rapidly changing sexual currents of the 1920s. At the same time, I complicate the newly emerging story of heterosexuality's early days by emphasizing its roots in perversion—in Fauset's case, a perversion complicated by the interlocking relations of race and sex in America.

Heterosexuality as a trope has long been embedded in Harlem Renaissance discourse, ever since Langston Hughes referred to Fauset as one of the three people who “midwifed the so-called New Negro Literature into being” (218). Midwifery invokes heterosexual reproduction and one’s somewhat ambivalent relation to it: responsible for the birth, but not ultimately responsible; engaged in heterosexual reproduction, but only after the instigating moment. And we should not forget that the very phrase “Harlem Renaissance” depends upon the same set of associations—a new *birth* in Harlem. With heterosexuality serving as the governing logic of these central Harlem metaphors, it is worth pondering Fauset’s relationship to it. As we will see, heterosexuality in the 1920s contained within it the dueling energies of the respectable and the illicit, the normative and the *outré*; also, the question of Fauset’s respectability has been a key issue in the response generated by her novels.

Fauset’s early reputation followed almost precisely the fault lines that divided literary Harlem in the twenties—between those like W. E. B. Du Bois, who imagined literature as the place to portray the “best” of the race, and that younger cohort of fire-breathers who sought to portray the New Negro, warts and all. The former liked what they saw in Fauset’s work; the latter scoffed. And in their scoffing, they painted Fauset as an uptight remnant of earlier times, a writer stubbornly clinging to Victorian ideals in an age of the New Woman and free love. Three years after the publication of *There is Confusion*, fellow writer and Harlem fixture Wallace Thurman described it as “an ill-starred attempt to popularize the pleasing news that there were cultured Negroes, deserving of attention from artists, and of whose existence white folks should be apprised” (199). Two years later, in a letter to Langston Hughes, Thurman declared simply: “Jessie Fauset should be taken to Philadelphia and cremated” (119).

In *A Long Way From Home*, Claude McKay remembers Fauset as belonging “to that closed decorous circle of Negro society, which consists of persons who live proudly like the better class of conventional whites, except that they do so on much less money.” Though “all the radicals liked her,” McKay writes, “in her social viewpoint she was away over on the other side of the fence” (112). The word that keeps coming up in McKay’s remembrance is “prim,” which leads him to a condescending though revealing metaphor:

But Miss Fauset is prim and dainty as a primrose, and her novels are quite as fastidious and precious. Primroses are pretty. I remember the primroses where I lived in Morocco, that lovely melancholy land of autumn and summer and mysterious veiled brown women. When the primroses spread themselves across the barren hillsides before the sudden summer blazed over the hot land, I often thought of Jessie Fauset and her novels. (113)

The pretty, dainty primrose juxtaposed against the blazing summer heat—Fauset juxtaposed against a sex-and-blues-saturated Harlem—McKay’s image poses the question of Fauset’s relation to the rough and tumble of the bodily. A midwife for Hughes, for McKay a precious ornament on an otherwise barren landscape, Fauset, as a figure in other peoples’ stories, stands somewhat apart from the true work of heterosexuality.³

As Ann duCille and Deborah E. McDowell have argued, however, this image of Fauset as prim and decorous misses both the difficulty of her context and the sexual radicality of her novels. As duCille writes, “At a moment when black female sexuality was either completely unwritten to avoid endorsing sexual stereotypes or sensationally overwritten to both defy and exploit those stereotypes, Fauset . . . edged the discourse into another realm: a realm precariously balanced on the cusp of the respectable and the risqué; a realm that is at times *neutral*, perhaps, but never *neuter*” (“Blues Notes” 443). McDowell also sees Fauset as occupying something of a switch point between competing cultural and narrative pressures. As she writes, “Fauset structures marriage

into the geometry of each of her novels, but her response to that institution takes the form of both conformity and critique. In her work marriage seems on the one hand to be linked to issues of sexual respectability and preservation of the status quo. But on the other hand . . . she questions whether sexual expression for women should be attached to the moorings of marriage" (64). DuCille's and McDowell's readings remain the best, most densely historicized treatments of Fauset's relation to sex, gender, and marriage. Their ability to slip the yoke of binary thinking, to evade the either/or traps that shaped much of the Fauset criticism that came before, opened up genuinely new ways of thinking about Fauset and her characters.⁴ Now seems the time, however, to revisit Fauset with a new lens, one that takes advantage of the most recent development within sex and gender studies: critical attention to heterosexuality as a historically specific structure of desire. For duCille, marriage was "not a transhistorical bourgeois ideal or a linear literary convention but a sign of the times that shifts with the times, the place, and the people" (*Coupling* 4). For my purposes, it is useful to think of heterosexuality in the same way, as a "sign of the times." By positioning Fauset's life and her novels in relation to a newly emergent heterosexuality, we get both a much clearer and more surprising picture of the ways in which McKay's image of the primrose gets things exactly wrong.

In referring to heterosexuality as newly emergent, I am invoking the recent scholarly attention to heterosexuality not as some universal and divine force, but as a structure of desire with a discrete history. While folks have obviously been engaged in what we would recognize as heterosexual activity for some time, the sense of "heterosexuality" as a condition—as an identity—is strikingly new. According to Jonathan Ned Katz, "Heterosexuality" first appeared in the American medical lexicon in 1892 in an article by Dr. James G. Kiernan (19). For Kiernan, "heterosexuality" signified the perverse, since it referred partly to male/female sexual behavior divorced from reproductive imperatives. Since reproduction normalized eroticism, sexual pleasure occurring outside of a reproductive context was seen by Kiernan and others as unhealthy, as pathological. Katz also offers the example of Dr. Charles Hughes, who in 1893 told those attending the Pan-American Medical Congress that "[s]exual and psychical eroto-erethism [an abnormal erotic sensitivity] may be subdued, the mind and feelings turned back into normal channels, the homo and hetero sexual, changed into beings of natural erotic inclination, with normal impulsions and regulated restraint" (C. H. Hughes 563). Here, Hughes lumps the hetero in with the homo, both of which are deviations from the normal. This trend can also be seen in Marc-Andre Raffalovich's "Uranism, Congenital Sexual Inversion," published in *The Journal of Comparative Neurology* in 1895. Understanding both homosexuality and heterosexuality to be pathological conditions governed by nonprocreative sexual excess, Raffalovich writes, "it is difficult to do justice to the inverts; so also it would be difficult to do justice to the heterosexuals if we were to confine ourselves exclusively to their sexual life" (42). "The repression of heterosexuality" is, according to Raffalovich, "one of the problems of the future" (42), and at the moment, heterosexuality should not be treated "with too much indulgence or enthusiasm" (49). These discussions of heterosexuality in medical journals led to its appearance in the 1901 edition of *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*, where heterosexuality was defined as "abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex" (qtd. in Katz 86).

Lest I leave the impression that the pathologizing of a newly emergent heterosexuality was purely a phenomenon of a rarified medical discourse, it is worth taking a look at the ways in which the term entered a less specialized version of an American lexicon. "Heterosexuality" made its first appearance in Merriam Webster's *New International Dictionary* in 1923, where it was defined as a "morbid sexual passion for

one of the opposite sex” (Katz 92). Such passion was morbid—diseased—because it was divorced from reproduction. Only eleven years later, however, the second edition of *Webster’s* gives a more familiar definition of the term: a “manifestation of sexual passion for one of the opposite sex; normal sexuality” (*Ibid.*). And yet, the association of heterosexuality with disease is still strong enough in the mid-thirties for the 1936 edition of *Funk and Wagnall’s New Standard Dictionary of the English Language* to define heterosexuality as “depraved feeling toward the opposite sex.” Depraved—“marked by corruption,” “evil,” “perverted”—this is hardly the stuff of

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normative expectation. Without overstating the relation between dictionary definitions and peoples’ lived experiences, it is fair to suggest that the shifting terminology of this period marks the public face of liminality.⁵ Heterosexuality, as a newly public possibility, is being torn between its constitutive components: on the one hand, a bodily desire for something other than babies, and on the other, its inchoate status as a hugely powerful hegemonic force. Fauset’s triptych on desire—*There is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, and her own relationship to Du Bois—offers a window into this heterosexual liminality, as sexual passion oscillates between morbidity, normality, and depravity. Fauset in the twenties, in both her life and her work, offers herself up as something of a case study on the new heterosexuality, one always mediated through the distortive logics of race in America.

While heterosexuality is notoriously hard to pin down—like whiteness, it has, until recently, avoided the glare of the spotlight, even as it has occupied center stage—its more concrete manifestations are a bit more discernible. The best example of this, of course, is marriage, and Fauset’s characters’ preoccupation with marriage serves as a productive way in to the logics of heterosexuality in the twenties. For example, early in *There is Confusion*, Joanna Marshall and her sister Sylvia encounter a group of children playing a dancing game on the street. The dance enacts a courtship narrative, beginning with an invocation of marriage. The children sing, “Sissy in the barn, join in the weddin’.” Once a young “couple” is in the center of the circle, they continue, “Say, little Missy, won’t you marry me?” (47) Joanna is “absorbed” and “enraptured” (47) by the performance and shouts “I can play it! Girls let me play it, too!” (48) This little episode fittingly announces the novel’s sense of marriage and courtship, where romance is a performance to be enacted, marriage a game to be played. Here, Joanna is excited to play the game, but the pages that follow reveal a deeper ambivalence.

At the first sign of romantic talk from Peter Bye, her childhood friend and eventual husband, Joanna protests, “None of that, Peter,” priding herself on “her own aloofness from such tactics” (93). Increasingly frustrated, Peter argues that “Love is the most natural and ordinary thing in the world,” “but Joanna didn’t believe that” (95). Peter says that “you have to found your life on love,” but Joanna replies: “Don’t talk like a silly, Peter. You know perfectly well that for a woman love usually means a household of children, the getting of a thousand meals, picking up laundry, no time to herself for meditation, or reading” (95).

This last comment is in direct contrast to the view of Maggie Ellersley, Joanna's foil in the novel, and a young working-class woman of the city's Tenderloin district. For Maggie, marriage represents not an immersion in the kind of duties that Joanna catalogs, but an escape from them. When she asks her mother's cousin, Miss Sparrow, why an acquaintance married a man she did not love, Miss Sparrow replies, "H'm child, wouldn't you do anything to get away f'um hard work, an' ugly cloes an' bills?" (56). In contrast to Joanna, Maggie wants "desperately to marry," and to marry Joanna's brother Philip, "in order to secure for herself the decent respectability for which those first arid fourteen years of her life had created an almost morbid obsession" (80).

If marriage is the route to respectability, the novel is aware of the ways in which it butts up against other, less respectable impulses. Maggie's failure to secure Philip leads her into the matrimonial arms of Henderson Neal, who turns out to be a notorious gambler, thus queering Maggie's hopes of respectability. Joanna, who so disdained the prospect of chaining herself to a husband and a household, begins to experience the quivering and tingling charges of the body. Despite what Fauset calls her "hard unripeness" (103), Joanna begins to find her own version of Peter's "gusty, boyish passion" (105). As Fauset writes, "She was feeling the pull of awakened and unsatisfied passion. It is doubtful if she could thus have analyzed it, for she had rather deliberately withheld her attention from the basic facts of life" (180). Not only is it doubtful that Joanna could have analyzed her desire, but it is equally doubtful that she could have named it, for what she is beginning to feel is heterosexuality—a sexual pleasure that is pathological because it lacks the legitimating context of either marriage or procreation. This surprising emergence of physical desire throws Joanna off her game, complicating her desire for a career uncluttered by children and laundry.

Meanwhile, Maggie suffers through a series of plot twists that made it possible for critics to make fun of Fauset's title, whose outcomes are Philip's reunion with her in Europe, Philip's severe war injury, and Maggie's ministrations to him.⁶ Having gotten over her desire to marry, Maggie decided to "stand on her two feet, . . . serene, independent, self-reliant" (261), a decision that sent her to Europe, and ultimately into Philip's company, where they declare their mutual love for one another. However, Philip refuses to marry Maggie, not wanting to foist his invalid helplessness on her, at which point Fauset enacts a rather surprising narrative move: "Then," she said, and the last tatters of her old obsession, that oldest desire of all for sheer decency—fell from her, 'then I'll be your mistress, Philip. . . . You'll make me the by-word of all New York but I won't care, Philip, for I love you' " (268). Having dangled the possibility of nonmarital debauchery, Fauset quickly removes it by reporting that Maggie and Philip were indeed married, only a few pages before reporting that Philip did indeed die—trumping the idea that romances end either in marriage or in death, by making this one end in both.

However, the marriage that properly ends the book is, of course, the marriage of Joanna and Peter, a marriage that raises a number of troubling questions about female desire and autonomy. Discussing their eminent union, Peter says, "I'm afraid you'll have to give up your career, dear Joanna," to which Joanna responds, "Of course, of course, I know it" (284). While it was slavery that had "thrown the lives of [Peter's family] into confusion," it is apparently marriage to Joanna that renders order out of chaos, that trumps "this queer intangible bugaboo of color" (284). Joanna renounces her ambition for greatness, pledging herself to a new religion; as she tells Peter in the novel's last lines, "my creed calls for nothing but happiness" (297). This novel ends in the traditional way: marriage ends both struggle and narrative. It provides a happiness long sought and barely imagined. In 1924, Fauset allowed herself and her characters the happy ending of fairy tales, even as that happy ending required the surrender of Joanna's desire for a career as an artist and has Joanna taking her subordinate place in relation to Peter: "In a thousand little ways she

deferred to him, and showed him that as a matter of course he was the arbiter of her own and her child's destiny, the *fons et origo* of authority" (292).

If in 1923 heterosexuality was understood as "morbid sexual passion for one of the opposite sex," it barely troubles the waters of Fauset's first novel. Yes, Joanna twice experienced the frisson of physical desire, but she and Fauset quickly put it away again. It is nowhere to be found in the novel's conclusion—one governed more by duty and sacrifice than by desire of any sort. In short, in *There is Confusion*, desire is rarely sexual, and certainly not morbid. But what will happen when Fauset returns to these themes five years later, when she throws yet another black female character into the economies of love and marriage in the twenties? The short answer is this: heterosexuality will come calling, and it will do so with a vengeance.

Fauset's *Plum Bun* tells the story of Angela Murray, a light-skinned African American woman from Philadelphia, who in pursuit of the "happily-ever-after" promised by fairy tales moves to New York, passes for white, and seeks her salvation in the form of a moneyed white man. Her goal is of course marriage, but what Fauset reveals is that the route to marriage is not what it used to be. Despite Fauset's undeserved reputation as being too prim and proper a novelist in the context of the sex-and-blues-saturated Harlem twenties, *Plum Bun* offers a surprisingly explicit account of an African American woman's attempt to reconcile sexual desire with respectability. As opposed to *There is Confusion*, where desire surfaced briefly only to be submerged, in *Plum Bun* Fauset takes it much more seriously, allowing it full and often destructive reign in the life of Angela Murray. In Angela's attempt to reconcile sexual passion with her need for the happy ending of respectability, we witness the fact of desire as a possibility unleashed by the new heterosexuality, as a newly actionable commodity in a suddenly visible pleasure system.

In fact, this war between desire and respectability finds its emblem in one of the novel's minor characters, Hettie Daniels, who fills the roles for Angela of "housekeeper, companion, and chaperone" (65). Before moving to New York, Angela would often find herself sketching Hettie's head, while Hettie told stories of "romantic adventures" (65) from her remote youth. As Fauset tells us, "Miss Daniels' great fetish was sex morality": "young fellers was always 'round me thick ez bees. . . . But I never listened to none of the' talk, jist held out again 'em and kept my pearl of great price untarnished. I aimed then and I'm continual to aim to be a verjous woman" (66). In such moments, Fauset writes, Hettie's

unslaked yearnings gleamed suddenly out of her eyes, transforming her usually rather expressionless face into something wild and avid. The dark brown immobile mask of her skin made an excellent foil for the vividness of an emotion which was so apparent, so palpable that it seemed like something superimposed upon the background of her countenance. (66)

Here Fauset cleverly uses Hettie not only to foreshadow Angela's future difficulties reconciling sexual desire with the desire for respectability, but she also makes these difficulties an emblem for the artistic process. That tension between the "immobile mask" and the "unslaked yearnings" is clearly what draws Angela's visual sense as a portrait artist, and it is also what draws Fauset's narrative sense as a novelist. In both cases, the foiled relation between desire and repression becomes the site of artistic possibility. This early exposure to Hettie Daniels encapsulates a great deal of what follows. Will Angela's portrait resemble Hettie's, or, refusing to leave her yearnings unslaked, will she offer up a different portrait of African American womanhood?

In her fairy-tale search for a moneyed happy ending, Angela meets her white knight in the form of Roger Fielding, a poster-boy for the new heterosexuality and the novel's most rabidly racist character. Roger wastes no time in introducing Angela to the new world of love in the twenties: he offers her a fully furnished house in the

suburbs—a “love-nest,” he says, “where I and only I may come” (182). Angela is appropriately shocked, but seeing in his offer a possible first step to the marriage she seeks, she at least agrees to hear him out. When she objects that “people don’t do that kind of thing, not decent people,” Roger responds (calling her by the name she goes by when among white folk), “Angèle, you are such a child! This is exactly the kind of thing people do do. And why not? Why must the world be let in on the relationships of men and women?” (184) For three increasingly frustrated months Angela and Roger continue this negotiation, with Roger gradually gaining the upper hand. As he argues,

My dearest girl, think of a friendship in which two people would have every claim in the world upon each other and yet no claim. Think of giving all, not because you say to a minister “I will,” but from the generosity of a powerful affection. That is the very essence of free love. I give you my word that the happiest couples in the world are those who love without visible bonds. Such people are bound by the most durable ties. Theirs is a state of the closest because the freest, most elastic union in the world. (192)

Roger’s self-interested principles begin to find their counterparts in Angela’s own logic. As she reasons to herself, “The world was made to take pleasure in; one gained nothing by exercising simple virtue” (193). Whereas Joanna had rebelled against and quashed the first stirrings of her heterosexuality, Angela embraces them.

For what is free love if not another name for heterosexuality, one that tries to avoid the taints of pathologized sexual pleasure? Dating back to the 1820s, “free love referred not to promiscuity—or sex with multiple partners—but to the belief that love, rather than marriage, should be the precondition for sexual relations” (D’Emilio and Freedman 113). By the 1920s, Greenwich Village had secured its “national reputation as a center of ‘free love’ ” (Chauncey 233). According to Ellen Chesler, “The Village crowd was, of course, even more notorious for flaunting conventional marital and domestic arrangements than for advancing economic radicalism” (qtd. in Melody and Peterson 70). Fauset brings this history into her novel in the form of Roger, who works hard to free that newly emergent heterosexuality from the taints of morbidity and depravity by associating it with free love—a similarly marginalized commodity, but one possessing a much longer history and much loftier ideals.

As it turns out, however, it is not Roger’s avant-garde sophistry that wins the day. Rather, it is the unexpected appearance of “one enemy with whom she had never thought to reckon”: the “forces of nature” (198). As Fauset writes, “gradually [Angela] had grown to accept and even inwardly to welcome his caresses” (194). “She was appalled,” we are told, “by her thoughts and longings” (200). “Her weapons” against this enemy, Fauset writes, “were those furnished by the conventions but her fight was against conditions; impulses, yearnings which antedated both those weapons and the conventions which furnished them” (198-99). In short, Angela is awakened to the fact of her own desire, a desire unsanctioned by marriage; when Roger takes her in his arms, “her very bones turned to water” (201). At this, the reader knows what to expect, and it is only a page before Angela is pleading, “Oh, Roger, must it be like this? Can’t it be any other way?” (202), to which Roger responds, “Everything will be all right, darling, darling. I swear it. Only trust me, trust me!” (203) At which point Fauset gives us that favorite convention of narrative delicacy: the sex gap, that blank space between paragraphs wherein bodies go bump in the night.

Having allowed her heroine this sort of indiscretion—an indiscretion that, we are led to understand, gets repeated quite a few times between the lines in the pages that follow—Fauset ultimately has her come to her senses. For example, Angela begins to meditate on the nature of the norm, on the workings of convention—its role as a guardian of morality and, by extension, civilization. As Fauset writes, Angela “began to see the conventions, the rules that govern life, in a new light; she realized suddenly

that for all their granite-like coldness and precision they also represented fundamental facts; a sort of concentrated compendium of the art of living and therefore as much to be observed and respected as warm, vital impulses" (228). She cannot believe how she let herself "throw aside the fundamental laws of civilization for passion, for the hot-headed wilfulness of youth" (232).

This newfound respect for convention—for the norm—not only leads Angela to break off her affair with Roger, but it is a far cry from a desire Angela had voiced before moving to New York and wading into the shifting currents of heterosexual commerce. Talking with friends about the "race question," Angela had said, "I'm sick of this business of always being below or above a certain norm. Doesn't anyone think that we have a right to be happy simply, naturally?" (54) What heterosexuality teaches Angela is that norms matter; ironically, the norm that matters is not heterosexuality, but marriage. In turning to the novel's ending, I want to place these terms—so fundamentally linked in our own thinking—into opposition. I want to suggest, in fact, that, during this time of heterosexual instability and transition, the marriage that is implied in the novel's end is anything but heterosexual, even as it is a marriage between a man and a woman.

Critics have often remarked Fauset's problem with endings—with narrative closure. McDowell usefully describes this as Fauset's "difficulties with resolving the relation between ideology and form" (71). These difficulties are nowhere more apparent than in *Plum Bun*. As Angela and the novel begin the seemingly inevitable march toward the narrative resolution of marriage, Angela has learned to see marriage in what the novel calls "a different light" (274). As Fauset writes,

Until she had met Roger she had not thought much about the institution except as an adventure in romance or as a means to an end. . . . But now she saw it as an end in itself; for women certainly; the only, the most desirable and natural end. From this state a gifted, an ambitious woman might reach forth and acquit herself well in any activity. But marriage must be there first, the foundation, the substratum. (274)

These thoughts lead Angela to consider (or, more accurately, to reconsider) Anthony Cross, a white man she had previously discarded because he represented a life of poverty and privation. After her experience with Roger, however, Angela suddenly sees Anthony as someone who can rescue her from loneliness and offer her both protection and purpose. Echoing Joanna Marshall's thoughts at the end of *There is Confusion*, Angela decides that Anthony "should be the greatest thing in the world to her. He should be her task, her 'job,' the fulfilment of her ambition" (292). For this to happen, however, Fauset has some work to do, setting a rather convoluted plot in motion in which obstacles are created, revealed, and overcome. Anthony, it turns out, is not white but has been passing. It also turns out, however, that he is engaged to Angela's sister, Virginia. However, Virginia is actually more in love with a childhood friend, Matthew Henson. In the novel's final pages, Virginia and Matthew reveal their love for one another, and they send Anthony to Paris as a Christmas present for Angela, who is there honing her skills as a portrait artist. The novel ends with Anthony's line, "There ought to be a tag on me somewhere . . . but anyhow Virginia and Matthew sent me with their love" (379).⁷ Thus, while the novel does not actually end in marriage, it does end in the narrative promise of marriage. This is not to say, however, that the novel ends in heterosexuality.

In fact, the novel's narrative arc requires us to think of marriage not as an embodiment or a structure of heterosexuality, but rather as its antithesis. Marriage becomes a place apart from the new heterosexuality—a safe harbor in an otherwise stormy sea of sexual possibility. If heterosexuality is in the 1920s still defined by a desire that is pathological, marriage is what cures the pathology. Further, if we take seriously *Plum Bun*'s representation of heterosexuality as a sign of incoherence rather than coherence, then we are also forced to rethink the power of heterosexuality as a norm capable of regulating and enforcing sexual commerce.

This emphasis on the normative power of heterosexuality has shaped most scholarly attention to heterosexuality's work in the world. For example, as Judith Roof has argued in relation to Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," "The reproductive imperatives of [Freud's] story produce heterosexuality as the magical, motiveless mechanism that turns everything right, while homosexuality and other perversions—also necessary elements—make all fail to cohere, exposing the story's parts in a meaningless, short-circuited, truncated, narrative gratification that heterosexuality seals up again" (xxii). But what if we—as we must in relation to *Plum Bun*—understand one of those "other perversions" to be heterosexuality itself? If heterosexuality is not doing the rescuing, but is that from which we need rescuing, we are left with a paradox: nonheterosexual marriage between a man and a woman. Ironically, this paradox serves as an agent of resolution. Or to put this another way: if heterosexuality exists in a metonymic relation to the confusion of Fauset's first novel, by the end of her second that confusion has been vanquished. While I began with the seemingly self-evident assertion that "there is heterosexuality," the ending of *Plum Bun* requires an ironic rejoinder: No, there is not.

If this is the story of the novels, what then is the story of the life? In *Plum Bun*, as Angela is crossing the Atlantic on her way to Paris, she receives a letter from Anthony that both suggests his love for her and insists on its impossibility, given his engagement to her sister. Angela puts this letter under her pillow. As it turns out, there was an autobiographical basis both for the journey to Paris and for the receipt of the letter. Fauset sailed for France in June 1914, having received a fellowship to study in Paris. On board ship, she ignored a host of bon voyage letters and telegrams in order to open one she was particularly interested in. After reading and rereading this letter, she tucked it under her pillow.

Who was this letter from? Her mentor, soon-to-be-boss, and soon-to-be-lover, W. E. B. Du Bois. According to David Levering Lewis, by 1921 "there could be little doubt" that Fauset and Du Bois "had been lovers for some time."⁸ And while proof is, in Lewis's words, "part of the entropy of the past" (*Fight* 49), their relationship was "a secret . . . known to many of the civil rights influentials" (274). While we do not have Du Bois's letter, Fauset's response in June of 1914 contains hints of intrigue and familiarity not apparent in their earlier correspondence. Addressed to "Dear kind Du Bois" instead of the previous "Professor Du Bois" or "Mr. Du Bois" (the first such greeting I have found in their correspondence), the letter recounts that Fauset "got fifteen letters and two telegrams from old reliables, and ungratefully opened and read yours first and re-read it, and tucked it under my pillow my one sea-sickish night and thought literally 'on' it, many times" (24 June 1914). Fauset continues,

When you want to be you can be so unspeakably kind and nice. And evidently you wanted to be this time. Mark you I don't agree with you in everything you said. I really think I've been an unspeakably selfish and cowardly woman putting the little things before the big and not knowing the highest when I saw it. But since my motives honestly were o.k. I have to think that "somehow good *will* be the final goal of ill." And there's an end on 't. And we won't talk of it never no more.

Without the instigating letter from Du Bois, all we have is conjecture to fill in the cryptic blanks. That said, Fauset's reference to "not knowing the highest" when she saw it echoes the back-and-forth between Roger and Angela on love as an ideal unfettered by institutions. Fauset's admission of cowardice seemingly invokes her failure to overcome convention in pursuit of higher, if unconventional ideals.

Though Fauset was unmarried, this was just one of many extramarital relationships that increasingly took up Du Bois's time. A "priapic adulterer," according to

Lewis, Du Bois took full advantage of the attention he received from the women around him (267). “By the mid-twenties,” writes Lewis, “the emotional core below the Du Boisian layers of public virtue and personal rigor implicated him in an evolving state of affective being in which he seemed ever more driven to exploit the enormous fascination he exercised over many women” (185). Lewis’s knack for euphemism—“an evolving state of affective being”—gives way to the language of pulp fiction when he quotes a letter that Du Bois sent to writer Georgia Douglas Johnson in 1926: “Dear Georgia, I’m thinking of you. I’d like to have you here. Write me. I[’m] coming to see you at midnight. Please come down half-dressed with pretty stockings. I shall kiss you” (183). The record gets perhaps too explicit when Lewis quotes “a distinguished scholar-diplomat” on Du Bois’s physical attributes: “He was very well hung . . . and I always had an impression that when sex was concerned, he was well endowed and was interested [in women] and his wife certainly was never around.” For these reasons and more, the couch in the inner office of *The Crisis* was called by “those in the know” the “casting couch” (186). By the late twenties, after the affair with Fauset was over, and with his wife and daughter abroad, Du Bois had clearly turned up the volume on his extramarital romantic life. As Lewis writes,

It was at this point . . . that his relationships with women, always vigorous and varied, became sexually ever more exuberant to such a degree that they resembled the compulsiveness of a Casanova. The episodic dalliances, the star-crossed love affair with Fauset, the comfortable arrangements with Georgia Johnson and Mildred Jones began to be replicated with a seeming insatiety that yielded nothing to advancing years. . . . (*Fight* 267)

In the context of Fauset’s novels, focused as they are on marriage as narrative resolution, Du Bois adds a new twist. For in the complicated record of his married life, we see the ways in which marriage is not so much the end of narrative difficulty, but rather its beginning, despite one’s hopes otherwise. In a very late essay called “My Character,” Du Bois admits to such hopes when he discusses the origins of his marriage to Nina, a marriage preceded by a troubling series of sexual misadventures: being “literally raped” by his landlady in East Tennessee; “a brief trial with prostitution in Paris”; and, finally, upon his return to Atlanta, being “faced with the connivance of certain fellow teachers at adultery with their wives.” As a result, Du Bois admits to being “literally frightened into marriage before I was able to support a family. I married a girl whose rare beauty and excellent household training from her dead mother attracted and held me” (1120). Similarly, Matthew Towns, Du Bois’s alter ego in *Dark Princess*, ponders marriage as the end of struggle: “Marriage was normal. Marriage stopped secret longings and wild open revolt. It solved the woman problem once and for all. Once married, he would be safe, settled, quiet; with all the furies at rest, calm, satisfied; a reader of old books, a listener to sad and quiet music, a sleeper” (138). For the man on whom Towns was based, however, such hopes turned out to be chimerical, at best. That marriage could be a bulwark against heterosexuality was a hope both ironic and illusive.⁹

Lacking the biographical specificity that Lewis has supplied for Du Bois, an understanding of Fauset’s feelings during this time must be sought not only in her novels, but in her poems—many of which, in the 1920s, recorded her responses to loving and losing her mentor. They provide, in Sterling Brown’s elegant phrase, an account of her “ironic disillusionment” (qtd. in Sylvander 129). More specifically, they display the very same tension I have been tracking in the novels—between cold and hot, between a desire for respectability and desire as a physically destabilizing presence. In “Rencontre,” published in *The Crisis* in January 1924, Fauset writes,

My heart, which beat so passionless,
Leaped high last night when I saw you.
Within me surged the grief of years

And whelmed me with its endless rue.
My heart which slept so still, so spent,
Awoke last night—to break anew.

Here, a “passionless,” “still,” “spent” heart awakes to new sensation—though the sensation is of pain, not pleasure. And yet, if pain and pleasure are the only options, Fauset, echoing Tennyson, chooses pain, as she makes clear in a later poem, “Dead Fires”:

If this is peace, this dead and leaden thing,
Then better far the hateful fret, the sting,
Better the wound forever seeking balm
Than this gray calm!

Is this pain’s surcease? Better far the ache,
The long-drawn dreary day, the night’s white wake,
Better the choking sign, the sobbing breath
Than passion’s death!

Again we find love and desire structured through contrasting possibilities—between an emotionless surface and the fret, sting, and ache that lie beneath.

This theme gets its fullest treatment in what is perhaps Fauset’s most famous poem, “La Vie C’est la Vie,” published in *The Crisis* in July 1924. Here, Fauset contrasts her feelings for Du Bois with her feelings—or more accurately, her lack of feelings—for another suitor, by whom she sits “quiescent . . . in the park,” “idly” watching “the sunbeams gild / And tint the ash-trees’ bark.” Compared to the peace of this quiescent idleness, there is what she feels for another man, unnamed, though clearly Du Bois:

And there’s a man whose lightest word
Can set my chilly blood afire;
Fulfilment of his least behest
Defines my life’s desire.

The poem ends with the devastating final line, “I wish that I were dead.”

In “Noblesse Oblige,” composed after giving up her editorship at *The Crisis* in 1926 and published in *Opportunity*, Fauset portrays herself as someone whose passion constitutes a secret life, forever buried beneath carefully performed outer surfaces. She writes,

None may know the smart
Throbbing beneath my smile.
Burning, pricking all the while
That I dance and sing and spar,
Juggling words and making quips
To hide the trembling of my lips.

“Only I may know the truth,” she writes: “Love is lost, and—bitter ruth— / Pride is with me yet!” In Lewis’s devastating phrase, this poem was “the goodbye that preceded [Fauset’s] engagement and marriage to a New Jersey businessman with whom she would be demurely miserable” (*Fight* 190).¹⁰

In all of these poems, we see the same tensions that animate Fauset’s heroines: Joanna’s “aloofness” from romance, the war between her “hard unripeness” and the “tug of passion”; and Angela’s awakening to “impulses” and “yearnings” that render obsolete the hard-encrusted fact of convention. The poems and the novels document a personal struggle as Fauset turns sexual tension into lyrical and narrative tension. In fact, the poems remind us how clearly this is the case as their greater autobiographical transparency helps us to discover the autobiographical elements of the novels despite the workings of novelistic disguise.

For if Du Bois made his anonymous appearance in Fauset's poetry of the twenties, it is also the case that he showed up in various forms in her novels of this decade. Philip Marshall, in *There is Confusion*, is clearly modeled on a young Du Bois, as is more obviously Van Meier, a minor character in *Plum Bun*. The differences between these two representations mirror the differences between the novels themselves—the first being a rather tepid flirtation with heterosexual desire, the second its full-blown eruption. Like Du Bois, Philip graduated from Harvard, and he had grand plans for an organization not unlike Du Bois's vision of the NAACP: "He proposed that an organization be started among the colored people which should reach all over the country. . . . 'White and colored people alike may belong to it,' said Philip, his eyes kindling to his vision, 'but it is to favor primarily the interests of colored people'" (129). Like *The Crisis*, "the organization had a magazine, 'The Spur,' of which Philip was editor" (130). Philip disappears for much of the novel's middle section, traveling on behalf of his project, but he reappears near the end of the novel in his other role: as a love interest of Maggie. Unfortunately, the war has left him physically wrecked: "He was very much changed, not only older and graver, but weak, physically. He had been wounded twice and had been gassed slightly" (263). His physical incapacities make him unfit for marriage, as he tells Maggie:

You don't suppose I'm going to ask you, a beautiful woman . . . to marry me. My dear, I'm a wreck. . . . I'd always be good for nothing, sitting around, ailing, getting on your nerves. . . . These gas cases are absolutely unpredictable. (266)

As discussed earlier, Philip does marry Maggie, but he dies soon after.

If Du Bois's first appearance in Fauset's fiction is less than auspicious for someone who had a future as a priapic adulterer, the record gets corrected in *Plum Bun*. Late in the novel, Angela and her friends go uptown to see a lecture by Van Meier, "a great coloured American, a littérateur, a fearless and dauntless apostle of the rights of man" (209). As opposed to the twice-wounded and slightly gassed Philip, here Du Bois appears as a physical titan:

Angela saw a man, bronze, not very tall but built with a beautiful symmetrical completeness, cross the platform and sit in the tall, deep chair next to the table of the presiding officer. He sat with a curious immobility, gazing straight before him like a statue of an East Indian idol. And indeed there was about him some strange quality which made one think of the East; a completeness, a superb lack of self-consciousness, an odd, arresting beauty wrought by the perfection of his fine, straight nose and his broad, scholarly forehead. One look, however casual, gave the beholder the assurance that here indeed was a man, fearless, dauntless, the captain of his fate. (217-18)

Paulette, a white friend of Angela's who keeps a man's shaving kit in her house in case of the spontaneous overnight visitor, is quite enamored of Van Meier: "I wonder what he would be like alone" (220), she muses. Paulette decides to find out, and finagles an entree to Van Meier's office, where she let "him see that [she'd] be glad to know him better" (222). Van Meier refuses to take the bait—"Take her away," he tells his secretary (222)—a departure from the real-life model if Lewis's account of the "casting couch" is to be believed.¹¹

From *There is Confusion* to *Plum Bun*, Fauset's Du Bois figures have undergone quite a transformation, from gassed and wounded invalid to a figure of iconic sexual power and magnetism. It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that, behind this transformation stands Fauset's increased intimacy with the man himself. It is a slightly greater stretch to suggest what I am going to suggest next: that the real stand-in for Du Bois in Fauset's first two novels is neither Philip Marshall nor Van Meier, but Roger Fielding, the white playboy of *Plum Bun*.

As I discussed earlier, Roger is the novel's advocate for "free love," for "love without visible bonds" (192). "Think of giving all," he tells Angela, "not because you say to a minister 'I will,' but from the generosity of a powerful affection. That is the

very essence of free love” (192). Now, while Roger is making this theoretical case for a decidedly nontheoretical and quite urgent purpose (as McDowell points out, “Roger” is both “a noun for penis” and “a verb for copulation” [75]), that does not mean that his argument should not be taken seriously in this context. As Angela’s reversion to sexual conventionality in the novel’s conclusion makes clear, the question of love’s proper place is at the very center of this novel. But what would it mean in our reading of this novel to see Roger as the fictional alter-ego of Du Bois, despite his whiteness and despite his thoroughgoing racism (about which more shortly)? Can Du Bois’s “priapic adultery” be redeemed by understanding it in the context of the ideals of free love?

In “Race and Desire: *Dark Princess: A Romance*,” Claudia Tate offers an intriguing reading of one of the most quoted and least understood passages in all of Du Bois’s writing. In “The Criteria of Negro Art,” Du Bois famously wrote, “I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.” But as Tate points out, critics often miss the sentence that precedes this claim: “I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy” (Du Bois, “Criteria” 1000). Tate’s emphasis is on the final phrase, “the right of black folk to love and enjoy.” As Tate writes, “rather than invoking the conventional and no doubt expected rhetoric of civil rights to define the objective of his social mission, he refers instead to libidinal prerogatives—indeed, to desire and gratification—to describe the goals of racial activism” (Tate 48).

Michele Elam and Paul C. Taylor take this argument even further in “Du Bois’s Erotics,” where they position Du Bois as a “Dionysian perfectionist” (211). Avoiding the palpable sense of reluctance in Lewis’s record of Du Bois’s “transgressions,” Elam and Taylor argue that Du Bois’s extramarital erotic life must be seen and claimed as a constitutive element of his politics. As they write, “Du Bois’s priapic license was a consistent manifestation of his thoroughgoing interest in the sensual, affective, and especially sexual aspects of experience, and that the persistence of this interest reveals itself in the ethical commitments that frequently shape and permeate his fiction and nonfiction” (215). In “Criteria of Negro Art,” Du Bois had lamented that blacks “are bound by all sorts of customs that have come down as second-hand soul clothes of white patrons. We are ashamed of sex and we lower our eyes when people will talk of it” (1001). And by 1938, in a commencement address at Fisk University, Du Bois made a plea that sounds more than a little like that made by Roger to Angela:

Life is more than meat, even though life without food dies. Living is not for earning, earning is for living. . . .

. . . Life is the fullest, most complete enjoyment of the possibilities of human existence. It is the development and broadening of the feelings and emotions. . . . It is the free enjoyment of every normal appetite. (“Revelation” 1060)

Later in the same speech Du Bois emphasizes “the freedom to love without limit” (1062), a phrase that certainly rhymes with Roger’s plea for a “love without visible bonds” (192).¹²

In “My Character,” Du Bois looks back upon “one aspect of his life . . . with mixed feelings; and that is on the matters of friendship and sex” (1119). More specifically, he laments that “if a man and woman are friends, they must be married and their friendship may become a cloying intimacy, often lasting 24 hours a day” (*Ibid.*). It is fair to assume that he is speaking about his wife Nina here, since later in the same paragraph he addresses her specifically:

My wife’s life-long training as a virgin, made it almost impossible for her ever to regard sexual intercourse as not fundamentally indecent. It took careful restraint on my part not to make

her unhappy at this most beautiful of human experiences. This was no easy task for a normal and lusty young man. (1121)

Given these sentiments, and these situations, it is not surprising that Du Bois's "evolving state of affective being" (to return to Lewis's quaint phrase) was a decidedly complicated matter. And while it is easy (and, yes, necessary) to reprimand Du Bois as a hypocrite—as someone who turned women into metaphors for his highest values even as he went through them like cheap mints—Elam and Taylor are right to insist that we understand "Du Bois's forays into the erotic, in his life and his writings, as products of a considered ethical sensibility" (230). They continue:

Du Bois treats life as growth, and sees growth as a matter of cultivating, in a classically balanced and harmonious manner, all the potentialities of human embodied existence. Under these terms, right conduct is a matter of revaluing or breaking the rules that new conditions have rendered obsolete. . . . (230)

If heterosexuality in the twenties is tainted by morbidity and depravity, it is Du Bois's hope—as it is Roger Fielding's—to remove that taint, to create a clean space for the unfettered pursuit of "every normal appetite." Without understanding it on these terms, Du Bois was, in his own queer way, bringing into being the heterosexuality that we have with us today: "normal sexuality."

At the same time, however, in her writing and in her life, Fauset was coming to precisely the opposite conclusion: that rules and conventions are to be worshipped, clung to as anchors in stormy seas. Surely the reasons for this difference are not hard to discover. Particularly as a black woman, Fauset could neither inhabit a heterosexuality that still connoted morbidity and depravity, nor could she transform it into a "free enjoyment," to quote Du Bois. For her and for her female characters, no enjoyment was free; everything must be paid for, and the price was usually too high.

But it is not just black women whom Fauset must save from the taint of heterosexuality; it is also black *men*. If I am right in suggesting that Roger is a fictional alter-ego for Du Bois, it is revealing that Fauset chose to embody Du Bois's views on love and pleasure in a white skin. Fauset highlights this transference by calling attention to Roger's whiteness at every opportunity, primarily through his virulent racism. As the novel's strongest proponent of free love, Roger is not simply a white man; rather, he is the most antiblack white man in the book. Angela's nascent romance with Roger is disrupted rather early on by Roger's racism. Dining in a small café on East 10th Street, Roger and Angela are interrupted when "three coloured people" request a table and are about to be seated. Outraged, Roger intervenes, forcing the restaurant's manager to evict the colored diners. As he reports back to Angela, "Well I put a spoke in the wheel of those 'coons'" (133). "I'd send 'em all back to Africa," he continues (133). This encounter leads Angela to break things off with Roger, though, as we have already seen, her resolution does not hold.

Later, as Roger presses his case for free love with Angela, Angela responds, "'Relationships of the kind you describe don't exist among the people I know.' She was thinking of her parents, of the Hallowells, of the Hensons whose lives were indeed like open books" (184). She was thinking, in other words, of her circle of black family and acquaintances, for whom a nonmarital, nonprocreative sexual pleasure system was unimaginable. Returning from Angela back to Fauset, however, the "people I know" would surely have included Du Bois, for whom such a pleasure system was not only imaginable but eagerly inhabited—with Fauset herself. Yet when the time came to plot that possibility in her fiction—to write a character who would embody the ideals of free love and sexual pleasure—Fauset had to put him in white-face. Fauset could not imagine a black free lover, even as she was with one. The necessity of keeping the taint of heterosexuality away from black folks—even from black men—was so great that only a thoroughly antiblack white man could serve Fauset's narrative purposes. Roger is usefully seen as a stand-in for Du Bois not

simply because he echoes Du Bois's thoughts on love and pleasure, but because in doing so he exposes the racial logics of a newly emerged heterosexuality.

These racial logics inform and shape the narrative arcs of both *Plum Bun* and Fauset's life. In both instances, an immersion in the clandestine world of heterosexuality serves as prelude to marriage—in Fauset's case to someone who would make her “demurely miserable” for the rest of her life, in Angela's, to someone who would—well, who knows, really? But what the novel represents as salvational, Fauset's life reveals to be much less so, and that awareness cannot help but color our sense of *Plum Bun*'s conclusion. Heterosexuality supplied the novel's narrative juices, but once it is banished, so is the possibility of narrative. Heterosexuality never had the chance to segue from morbidity to normality, from depravity to something healthier.

For Du Bois, on the other hand, marriage became the site not of heterosexuality's banishment, but of its fullest development, though admittedly not with his wife. In contrast with Fauset's inability to imagine and claim a black heterosexuality in her first two novels, Du Bois was able to do so in real life, with a vengeance. Married to Nina for fifty-three years, Du Bois pursued an extramarital sexual pleasure system based in friendship, love, and opportunity. He survived the connotations of heterosexuality as morbid and depraved, winning the opportunity to inhabit fully heterosexuality's next and longer-lasting identity: “normal sexuality.” That Fauset and countless others lacked this opportunity tells us something important about the racial and gendered logics of early heterosexuality. While we might be tempted, following Fauset, to understand heterosexuality as an exclusively white franchise (think Roger Fielding), Du Bois's presence here complicates that assumption. What we learn instead is that early heterosexuality was, surprisingly, an exclusively *male* franchise. That a system predicated on difference—on erotic attraction for a so-called “opposite” sex—was born as a boys-only club remains one of the grand ironies of heterosexual history.

1. This is not to say that Fauset's third and fourth novels—*The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy, American Style* (1933)—do not also take up these themes. For my purposes, however, her first two novels, in large part because of their thematic relation to the events and themes of the Harlem Renaissance, offer a more focused vision of the issues I am pursuing here.

2. In a June 1914 letter to Du Bois, Fauset wrote, “I really think myself ‘There is Confusion’ is a decent title. And if I can just put in the book—if I can get written out in *words* the things I think about—oh then folks will begin to know something about us and our problems.” *The Papers of W. E. B. Du Bois*, subsequent citations by date in the text.

3. A similar emphasis is visible when “Fauset” appeared in other Harlem Renaissance novels. Douglas calls Mary Love, the heroine of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, “a thinly disguised portrait of Fauset” (98). The first page of Van Vechten's novel portrays Mary's prudish response to a group of people “who would never have been admitted to certain respectable homes in Harlem” (19), and later, pondering her apparently inability to develop intimate relations with men, Mary wonders if she is a “physical prig” (88). And in Countée Cullen's *One Way to Heaven*, Fauset shows up as Mrs. Harold De Peyster Johnson, whose

race consciousness dated back some seven or eight years. She had, as it were, midwived at the New Negro's birth, and had groaned in spirit with the travail and suffering of Ethiopia in delivering herself of this black *enfant terrible*, born capped and gowned, singing “The Negro National Anthem” and clutching in one hand a pen, in the other a paint-brush. In the eyes of Mrs. De Peyster Johnson this youngster could do no wrong, nor had his ancestors ever been guilty of a moral lapse. . . . (150-51)

Once again, Fauset arrives trailing clouds of prudery and primness, incapable of imagining—much less participating in—moral indiscretion.

4. DuCille's and McDowell's arguments worked against the then prevailing view of Fauset as someone who in Christian's words merely “accepted the literary conventions of the nineteenth-century black novel” (43). This view was echoed by Carby, who argued that Fauset “adapted but did not transcend the form of the

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romance" (168). Prior to the generation of Christian and Carby, critical sentiment toward Fauset was summed up by Bone, who called her novels "uniformly sophomoric, trivial, and dull" (101).

5. For a cogent warning against such overstatement, see George Chauncey, Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance," *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982/Winter 1983), 115.

6. As Thurman wrote in 1929, "Miss Fauset once wrote a novel entitled *There is Confusion*, which is also an apt criticism of everything the lady has written" (248).

7. McDowell smartly reads this line as being a metacritical self-reference: "Fauset must have thought that there ought to be a tag on *Plum Bun*, for this ending is clearly tacked on" (71).

8. Lewis's characterization of "the intimate character of [the Du Bois/Fauset] relationship is based on numerous on-and-off-the-record interviews," in addition to "a careful reading of the correspondence" (*Biography* 677n64). Lewis's view contradicts that of Fauset's biographer, Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, who describes the Du Bois/Fauset relationship in more restrained terms: "mutual admiration and support, mutual learning and teaching" (38). Sylvander's biography of Fauset is the best available, though it lacks the details of the Du Bois/Fauset relationship that Lewis was able to unearth.

9. For an excellent reading of *The Dark Princess* in relation to the metaphors of heterosexuality, see Claudia Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998).

10. Again, Lewis contradicts Sylvander, who writes that "Fauset's late life from the time of leaving New York City up to the death of her husband in 1958 appears to have been happy" (82).

11. Interestingly, in a September 10, 1925 memo to Fauset on the merits and deficiencies of her novel in progress (then titled "Market"), Du Bois makes no mention of his "appearance" in the novel.

12. Given the chronology, I am of course not suggesting a direct relation between Du Bois's words and Roger's. Rather, I am simply suggesting a compatibility of vision that would have been apparent to Fauset even in the early twenties.

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