Building on Quicksand: Investigating the *Bildungsroman* in Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* and Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life*

Jacqueline Miller

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By: Jacqueline Miller

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

Dr. Nicola Nixon PhD

_____ Examiner

Dr. Nicola Nixon PhD

_____ Supervisor

Dr. Stephen Ross PhD

Approved by _____

Dr. Nathan Brown PhD, Graduate Program Director

July 2025 _____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte PhD, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

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This thesis examines and assesses the *Bildungsroman* as a valid and conceptually sound literary genre capable of recounting the development narratives of racialized protagonists. It presents three primary arguments: that intra-racial colour prejudice is more harmful to the psychological and social development of Black-identifying people than systemic racism: that "race," philosophically recognized as a social construct, functions as a performative construct within the context of the examined works: and that racially inequitable societies are intrinsically amoral, impeding the development of moral character.

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Introduction

This thesis examines and evaluates the *Bildungsroman* as an authentic and credible literary genre, in relation to its ability to accurately and objectively depict the coming-of-age stories of racialized protagonists. It will achieve this goal through an examination of works by two African American authors from the Harlem Renaissance period. *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* by Jessie Redmond Fauset, (1882-1961) and *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life* by Wallace Thurman-- (1902-1934). This study offers a detailed comparative analysis of both novels, using secondary literature and relevant references to critically assess from a feminist standpoint how the key characters in their respective narratives conform to or deviate from the conventions of *Bildungsroman* heroines—or anti-heroines, as may be the case. It asks whether the *novel of development* adequately represents the protagonist whose principal struggle transcends mere adaptation to a society in which she will eventually take her place, focusing instead on her quest to accept and to understand "how to live as a [B]lack social being according to the complex civic (and social) logic of [W]hite supremacy."[1] Furthermore, it implicitly asks rather than answers the question: what types of characters can we aspire to build within structurally inequitable societies?

The inspiration to concentrate on this specific topic emerged following the viewing of *Selective Outrage*, a stand-up comedy performance written and performed by Chris Rock in 2023. Televised before a large and predominantly African American audience, his monologue critiques the so-called "woke" generation while mocking the grievances of those whom the

[1] Mark Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman* in the Harlem Renaissance," in *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Rachel Farebrother and Miriam Thaggert (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 74.

comedian jokingly asserts are too entitled to express legitimate complaints about any socially relevant issues. White men and light-complexioned Black people are humorously upheld as the primary targets of his diatribe. Meghan Markle, a.k.a., The Duchess of Sussex, becomes a topic for discussion under the sub-heading, "everybody's tryin' to be a victim…"[2] While pretending to ridicule Markle's right to hold any objections with regards to her personal life, Rock asks a loudly appreciative audience, "Didn't she win the light skin lottery? Hit the fuckin' light skin lottery and still going on complainin!"[3] Then, much to the delight of the audience, the comedian dismisses Markle's objections to the alleged concerns expressed by her husband's relatives regarding "how dark "their baby might be as potentially "racist," pointing out that "even Black people wanna know how *brown* the baby's gonna be—cause you gotta see what kind of Black child you're gonna get. We check behind them ears, that's a scientific test! Is this a Steph Curry baby or a Draymond Green baby? That Daymond Green baby's gonna have a *hard* life!"[4] It is essential to note however, that these sensitive remarks are made within the context of a comedy show, where the intent is to make others laugh. Entertainers like Chris Rock, known for their confessional style, often incorporate elements of truth in their jokes. The primary reason Rock's presumably like-minded audiences laugh so appreciatively and continue to attend his performances, is contingent on their understanding of the humour within a specific cultural and contextual framework. Margo Okazawa-Rey's observations support this under riding element of truth in Chris Rock's humour and with our historical preoccupation with skin tones. She states:

> Color often enters into the choices [B]lack people make of whom to date and whom to marry. In the presence of a newborn, one can still hear passed down folklore which

[2] Chris Rock, *Selective Outrage*, *Netflix*, Mar. 4, 2023, 53:06
[3] Ibid., 50:43
[4] Ibid., 50:12

> predicts the baby's skin color and hair texture. Though oblivious to these concerns, the young black infant must learn to function in a society in which the shade of one's skin functions as a status determining characteristic.[5]

The "young black infant" referenced by Okazawa-Rey, who within African American culture unknowingly inherits the "politics" associated with her skin tone, can be likened to Thurman's fated protagonist, Emma Lou Morgan—or to the real-life figure of Draymond Green, whose shade of Blackness Rock satirically predicts, brings Black infants no advantages in life. To those unfamiliar with celebrity sports figures, both Stephen Curry and Green are successful basketball players with the NBA. Curry, affectionately known as "Steph" to his many fans and hailed as "the greatest shooter of all time,"[6] has a very light complexion and is not generally ridiculed because of it. Green, on the other hand, often referred to as a "dirty player"[7] reportedly due to his aggressive playing style, is very dark skinned—or in Chris Rock's coinage, "sneak-up-on-you-black," and is perhaps more salable to an audience as a comic or even monstrous figure. In *The Blacker the Berry,* Emma Lou observes something quite similar:

> It was the custom always of those with whom she came into most frequent contact to ridicule or revile any black person or object. A black cat was a harbinger of bad luck, black crape was the insignia of mourning, and black people were either evil niggers with poisonous blue gums or else typical vaudeville darkies. {…] They never provoked mere smiles or mere melancholy, rather they were the signal either

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[5] Margo Okazawa-Rey, Tracy Robinson and Janie Victoria Ward, "Black Women and the Politics of Skin Color and Hair," *Women and Therapy* 6, nos. 1-2 (1987): 92, doi.org/10.1300/J015406N01_07.
[6] J.A. Andrade, "Curry's Brand of Leadership is the Kind that Often Gets Overlooked," *ESPN*, 22 May 2025,www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/19039446/nba-warriors-fun-culture-relies-curry. Accessed: 22 May 2025 13:58.
[7] Des Bieler, "Draymond Green Says He Doesn't Do Dirty Things'—Proceeds to Kick Kyrie Irving,'" *Washington Post*, June 02, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2016/02/draymond-green-says. Accessed: 22 May 2025 14:22.

for boisterous guffaws or pain-induced and tear-attended grief."[8]

I regarded Rock's monologue on Draymond Green, particularly when he made an effigy of the athlete using one hand while joking that he should wear a bell around his neck to alert others to his presence as he was "too black" to be discernible by the human eye as symbolic of a blackface performance by proxy. Although Rock does not smear his face with black shoe polish or use a white pastel crayon to exaggerate the size of his mouth, his mocking of the basketball player echoes the derogatory depictions of Black people denoted by Emma Lou's narrator. While some may insist that we as a "people" have moved on since the primitive days of minstrel shows, as evidenced by the "roasting" of a wealthy African American athlete by a similarly affluent African American entertainer in front of a largely African American audience, certain "taboos" within African American culture still exist. Chris Rock would probably not have selected a dark-skinned female celebrity as a subject for his segment on Black skin tones. Had he done so, the response from the audience would likely not have been as enthusiastic as certain subjects which touch on our collective physical appearance as Black people, are still regarded as too sensitive to joke about. The question raised by this fact however, is why? What accounts for the continued gender-related sensitivity of this topic? Moreover, when we subscribe to notions of colourism, even in jest, at whom are we really laughing, and why?

Following my watching of *Selective Outrage*, my interest in the two central characters in the discussed works intensified. Fauset's emotionally distanced heroine initially introduced as Angela Murray, a "coloured" girl easily mistaken for White by those unaware of her ethnic background, longs to liberate herself from what she perceives to be the constrained, marginalized

[8] Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life*, (USA: Mint Editions, 2022), 15.

existence she views as endemic to "Negro" life. In contrast, Emma Lou Morgan, another "colored" girl whose darker skin tone is regarded as "unfortunate" by most of her family members and as unacceptable by the broader Black community, longs to be accepted by the "right kind of people" within her own ethnic community. Both protagonists combat racially and intra-racially fraught social environments and struggle to come of age in their narratives. My analysis of the two works posits that structurally inequitable societies are necessarily amoral, thereby undermining the formation of moral and well-balanced characters. Angela and Emma Lou exhibit a persistent preoccupation with their outward appearances, particularly in relation to how they are perceived by the members of the dominant race. It is a form of what W.E.B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness," intensified by class and colourism. Angela, as a young child, was aware of the differences in the skin tones within her own family and "began thanking Fate" for having "bestowed upon her the heritage of her mother's fair skin. [For] she might easily have been like her father, black, or have received the melange which had resulted in [her sister's] rosy bronzeness."[9] Thurman's narration commences with the revelation of the protagonist's growing devaluation of her skin colour and of its perceived disadvantages. Much like her counterpart, she too notices the variety of skin tones within her own family and also has a "black father," however, unlike Angela, she has not, as Chris Rock jokes, "won the light skin lottery:

> More acutely than ever before, Emma Lou began to feel that her luscious black complexion was somewhat of a liability, and that her marked variation from the people in her environment was a decided curse. … [H]er mother was quite fair, so was her mother's mother, and her mother's brother, and her mother's brother's son; but none of them had a black man for a father."[10]

[9] Jessie Redmond Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press,1990),5.
[10] Wallace Thurman, Ibid., 13.

In view of the strong connections to which both protagonists allude about their future prospect, the physical traits passed down from their parents which are seen as a blessing or a "curse," engender in each an affinity towards lighter skin tones or towards "whiteness" in its entirety. It is not surprising to observe that both Angela and Emma Lou harbour an aversion to *black* Black men. I argue that within the context of these novels, intra-racial colour prejudice poses a greater threat to the psychological and social advancement of African American individuals than structural racism.

Although of opposite genders and distanced in age by a generation, Fauset and Thurman write *Bildungsromane* situated in the 1920s which depict the lives of young Black women struggling to find acceptance and above all, a sense of belonging within their respective environments. Both of their protagonists are raised in middle-class families and have—at least on the surface—reaped the benefits of stable home lives. However, both young women strive to be seen for whom they are rather than whatever pre-judged notions are attributed to their physical appearances. When Angela decides to relocate and abandon her home and family in Philadelphia in order to pursue her dreams as a young White woman n another city, it is not primarily as Nolan Gear suggests, to pursue a career as a painter,[11] and as he later adroitly observes, to finally "drift into anonymous public being."[12] Angela gains a sense of renewed freedom and identity in blending in as a member of the dominant White majority, which frees her from the responsibility of being judged as an African American "below or above a certain norm. … Now for the first time she would be seen, would be met against her new background, or rather against no

[11] Nolan Gear, "A Curiously Intimate Sort of Audience': Moviegoing and Public Life in Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*," *Modernism Modernity* 8, no. 1, (2023): 10, http://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0271.
[12] Ibid., 5.

background, … Except for her hair and eyes, she was nondescript."[13] Unlike Angela, Emma Lou has little choice when it comes to openly identifying as African American and makes it clear from the outset that she had no objections to "being [B]lack [as] being a Negro necessitated having colored skin, but she did mind being too black."[14] Consequently, she perceives that it is her darker complexion that restricts her social mobility within White and Black communities in equal measure. In contrast to Angela, Emma Lou longs to blend in with "coloured" society rather than escape it. However, both protagonists ultimately place higher value on social acceptance as being more important than self-acceptance, and both exhibit class as well as colour conscious biases: "Emma Lou was determined to become associated with only those people who really mattered, northerners like herself or superior southerners, if there were any, who were different from whites only in so far as skin color was concerned."[15] While Fauset's narrator is a good deal more subtle about Angela's snobbery, the implications expressed in her values and the paths she chooses in order to obtain them, clearly reveal her feelings about Black people in general as she on one occasion informs her sister, Virginia: " [A]fter all, I am both white and Negro and look white. Why shouldn't I declare for the one that will bring me the greatest happiness, prosperity and respect?"[16] Through the perspectives articulated by the protagonists in both novels, it can be inferred that both regard the White race as a monolithic entity, divinely entrusted to establish standards of cultural and social development for all non-dominant races to emulate. Angela reasons before disconnecting herself from her ethnic heritage that "[I]t isn't being coloured that makes the difference, it's letting it be known."[17]

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[13] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 37, 66.
[14] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 13.
[15] Ibid., 32.
[16] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 56.
[17] Ibid., 55.

In Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, its author aims to disrupt or "trouble" historically observed binary associations used to define or designate gender. Most of Butler's assertions in this work which focus on the "indeterminacy of gender" based on "social appearance," align with current discourses concerning the perceived disparities between racial assignation and cultural orientation. Butler's analysis of gender inadvertently addresses the perception and consolidation of identity and essentialism under an "epistemic/ontological regime."[18] She theorizes:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. …[W]ithin the discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who can be said to pre-exist the deed.[19]

Stephen Ross reinforces Butler's argument further, emphasizing that gender is understood as performative functioning and as citational repetition rather than an essential quality.[20] In light of the works under discussion, this study posits that race, often understood as a social construct, also functions as a performative one.

In *Plum Bun*, Angela perceives whiteness and White identity as a *doing* rather than a being, regarding it as akin to wearing a "badge" or to transporting oneself with a shield which

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[18] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), xxx. Kindle.
[19] Ibid., 33,45.
[20] Stephen Ross, "Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*: Lecture Notes." (Course: "Contemporary Critical Theory," Montreal: Concordia University, 2022).

communicates to others one's authority and inalienable right to belong. Morgan Jerkins states that Angela Murray passes for white so that she can access the same spaces and opportunities as her white counterparts.[21] This writer contends that Angela's reasons for wanting to pass as a White person, go far beyond what Jerkins suggests. In Butler's discussion of the female impersonator Divine, she opines that his brand of drag "implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes for the real. Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourses about genders always operates."[22] If we imagine for a moment that Butler is discussing racial passing rather than female impersonation, and race instead of gender, we may be better positioned to grasp the troubling implications behind Angela's determination to escape the constraints of an ethnic identity in which she feels deprived and "trapped." Thurman's protagonist navigates systemic and inter-racial prejudice without the benefits of racial ambiguity. Thus, racial performativity is more nuanced and rooted in her conviction that "the right kind of [Black] people" *act* White. Both central characters, throughout the course of their narratives *perform* rather than inhabit their racialized identities and neither considers her Blackness—or blackness—as an essential quality in relation to her being.

It is essential to remember that in the context of these works, the term "black" does not yet serve as a racial identifier. It pertains instead to hue or to colour. Chris Rock's jokes regarding Draymond Green's blackness refers specifically to his skin colour, rather than his African American identity. This study employs the terms white, black, and brown to delineate skin tone instead of ethnicity. In discussions of ethnic origin, I will use capital letters e.g., Black

[21] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, x.
[22] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxx.

or White. The expressions "Negro" and "coloured" or "colored" although used frequently as racial identifiers in both novels, will appear within quotation marks in this thesis. The term "race," will be used interchangeably to designate ethnic origin or descent.

A Brief Discussion of The Bildungsroman

The term *Bildungsroman*, employed to characterize a specific literary genre, is believed to have been first used in 1819 by a Prussian academic named Johann Karl Simon Morgenstern.[23] Although there is a consensus that *Bildungsroman* is a German term, Sarah Graham contends that this is where the consensus ends, noting that while some critics laud Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and his celebrated work *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*), written between 1795 and 1796 as the earliest example of the *Bildungsroman* model, many others credit Christophe Martin Wieland and his work *Geschichte des Agathon* (*The Story of Agathon*), written almost thirty years before Goethe's novel, as the prototype. Graham concludes that the emergence of the genre appears to be closely linked to the German Enlightenment.[24] Of the *Bildungsromane* unique to the Harlem Renaissance period, Mark Whalan concurs with Graham's conclusion and submitting that "its popularity reflected the movement's extensive ties to German Romanticism and idealism, which flowed most influentially through [W.E.B.] Du Bois … (Indeed, DuBois had studied under the first major

[23] Todd Kontje, "The German Tradition of the Bildungsroman," in *A History of the Bildungsroman*," edited by Sarah Graham, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 10.
[24] Sarah Graham, "Introduction," in *A History of the Bildungsroman*," edited by Sarah Graham (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2.

scholar of the *Bildungsroman*, William Dilthey, in Berlin.)"[25] In Pin-chi Feng's study of the genre, she gives us, among other things, Dilthey's understanding of the genre:

> [The *Bildungsroman*] examines a regular course of development in the life of the individual: each of its stages has its own value and each is at the same time the basis of a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary transit points of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony. And the 'highest happiness of humankind' is the development of the person as the unifying, substantial form of human existence.[26]

Feng calls our attention to two distinct "narrative patterns" characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* genre which she describes as " a linear progression toward knowledge and social integration, and an upward [or "spiral"] moment toward spiritual fulfillment." [27] Building on Jerome Buckley's writings, Whalan aligns with Feng concerning the conventional trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, a pattern observed in the *Bildungsromane* produced by many well-known African American authors during the Harlem Renaissance. He states that "[t]he genre is conventionally understood … as a novel that 'portrays all but two or three of a set of characteristics,' including 'childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy.'"[28] Both *Plum Bun* and *The Blacker the Berry* follow this format; however, as Feng asserts, the "male-biased" tradition of the genre

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[25] Mark Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman* in the Harlem Renaissance," in *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Rachel Farebrother and Miriam Thaggert (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 72.
[26] Pin-chia Feng, *The Female Bildungsroman by Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston: A Post Modern Reading* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. 1988), 2. Quoted in G.B. Tennyson, "The *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century English Literature."
[27] Feng, Ibid.
[28] Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman*, 72, quoted in Buckley, Jerome H. *Seasons of Youth*, Harvard University Press, 1974.

limits the possibilities and potentials of both protagonists. Both Angela and Emma Lou, due to the intersections of race and gender, must find ways to continue progressing as their paths are frequently obstructed by the larger and more dominant societies in which they struggle to find happiness and realize their interpretation of the "American Dream."

A Brief Discussion of The Harlem Renaissance

In his influential book *Harlem Renaissance*, Nathan Huggins brings an illuminating if not androcentric view of a unique literary and historical movement in American history. The Harlem Renaissance, sometimes referred to as the Negro Renaissance, began by general consensus around 1919 and ended around 1929, with the beginning of The Great Depression.[29] Sharon L. Jones, however, posits that the Harlem Renaissance, a pivotal phase in the evolution of African American literature, began as early as 1903 with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*.[30] This period in history is rendered all the more remarkable as it occurs roughly fifty years after the abolition of "Negro" slavery in the United States of America. Black men and women who half a century earlier, perceived and treated as sub-humans in comparison to their White counterparts, were achieving significant advancements on numerous fronts, including the arts, academia and industry. Consequently, the "Renaissance "is quite literally, the rebirth of the African American as a "New Negro," with a collective self-perception now assessed from his own perspective rather than that of his former oppressor's. The New "Negro" in contrast to the "Old Negro," had no master apart from himself/herself. Alain LeRoy Locke, a

[29] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2007.
[30] Sharon L. Jones, *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 9.

distinguished author and philosopher, recognized by Huggins as the father of the New Negro and the so-called Harlem Renaissance,[31] writes:

> Locke insisted that…the appearance of the New Negro seemed shocking only because the old Negro had long been a shadow and fiction preserved in white minds through sentimentalism and reaction. The Negro, because he had found it paid, helped to perpetuate this fiction through protective social mimicry. … [T]he Negro had been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,' to be '… harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden.[32]

Jones reminds us that the fiction of this prolific era is divisible into three main categories: folk, bourgeois and proletarian and infers that this rigid categorization assigned to the fiction created by African Americans writers and published by publishing houses owned by Whites restricted not only the creativity but the cultural evolution of the literature. She argues that as a result of this unofficial policy "stereotypical notions among the critics regarding which aesthetic constitu[ted] authentic African American literature affected the production and reception of works by these writers."[33] The desire on the part of the establishment—Black and White alike—to envisage African Americans as agrarian, or "folk" whose "speakerly texts" referenced and reiterated an oral tradition of self-expression among Blacks during the time of slavery, Jones asserts, "led to the canonization of African American writers who seemed to embody the folk aesthetic and the devaluing of authors who evoked the bourgeois or proletarian aesthetic."[34]

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[31] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance Updated Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57.
[32] Ibid. quoted in Locke, Alain, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, New York, 1925.
[33] Jones, *Rereading*, 3.
[34] Ibid.

Notable women authors of this period strove through their writings to depict the experiences of African American women in ways that both reflected and diverged from their realities. Jones posits that Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West in particular "fought against narrow-mindedness and bigotry in an attempt to transcend racial, class, and gender boundaries."[35] While acknowledging and crediting Fauset and her contemporaries in their efforts to control or challenge the image of the American "Negro," there is a temptation to assume that the "narrow-mindedness" and "bigotry" against which each one struggled, was exclusively linked to the racially-charged milieu in which they resided. However, many Black American during this period, contended with these identical forces within their own families and communities. Did not similar forms of discrimination like colourism and classism also prevail within African American communities themselves? The protagonists in *Plum Bun* and in *The Blacker the Berry* both profess feelings of estrangement and alienation, first, within their own immediate families and then within their larger communities.

***Plum Bun*, Colourism and Family Dynamics**

Fauset depicts Angela as exemplary of the ever-evolving "Negro" *bourgeoisie*. The seeds of her dissatisfaction are sown early in life as she learns to navigate the physical and emotional constraints of life under Jim Crow. Her mother Mattie, who regards the laws of Jim Crow as "silly and unjust," unwittingly instills in her elder child the notion that White people experience more enjoyment in life, and introduces her to the leisure activity of racial passing: "It was from her mother that Angela learned the possibilities for joy and freedom which seemed to her

[35] Ibid.

inherent in mere whiteness."[36] Consequently at an early age Angela learns to associate complete freedom and personal fulfillment as not merely unrealistic acquisitions to anyone "coloured" but that to be born a "Negro" was a type of condemnation: "One might break loose from a too hampering sense of duty; poverty could be overcome; physicians conquered weakness; but colour, the mere possession of a black or white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods."[37] It is important to note that the "game" of racial passing in the Murray household is an activity reserved exclusively for Angela and her mother. Her father, Junius, whom she describes as "black," and her sister Virginia, who is "brown," are by necessity excluded from experiencing what both mother and daughter repeatedly embrace as ultimate freedom rendered possible only through racial impersonation. In her discussion concerning the origins of the systemic inter-racial colour prejudice which exists within African American communities, Okazawa- Rey observes that "[o]ften it is within the family, where a variety of skin colors may be represented among individual members, that [B]lack children first learn the values attributed to differences in skin color. When the child enters the larger social world, she carries the color-conscious attitudes beyond the confines of home, and in turn, those attitudes are reinforced by that world.[38] Both the Murray and Morgan families exemplify the type of nuclear family described by Okazawa-Rey. In Angela's home social outings were often organized according to caste: " [T]he two parents inaugurated a plan of action which eventually became a fixed programme. Each took a child. . . . It is true that Mattie accompanied by brown Virginia could not move quite so freely as when with Angela."[39] Each of Angla's parents justified the practices of colourism through believing she had selected the daughter whose personality traits

[36] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 5.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Okazawa-Rey et al., "The Politics," 90.
[39] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 6.

most resembled her own. Through this custom, Fauset illustrates how skin colour is sometimes used to delineate character type or essentialism: "As it happened, the children themselves solved the dilemma; Virginia found shopping stupid. Angela returned from her father's adventuring bored. Gradually the rule was formed that Angela accompanied her mother and Virginia her father."[40] We observe, as Okazawa-Rey theorizes, that Angela's colour-consciousness learned in childhood, follows her into adult life as she explains to Anthony Cross at a moment when they have both revealed their true racial identities to one another that, her mother was "colored" but white, while her father was "black" and her sister was "brown."

Emma Lou Morgan as well first experiences racial profiling within her family. With the exception of her maternal uncle, Joe, she receives messages during her early childhood which lead her to believe that her "birth had served no good purpose" and that despite her middle-class upbringing, the darkness of her complexion severely limited any future prospects. Angela's supposition that skin colour was pre-determined by the god of "Fate" is similarly echoed by Emma Lou who "couldn't comprehend the cruelty of the natal attenders who had allowed her to be dropped, as it were, in indigo ink."[41] This fatalistic account of her birth and of the cruel and unusual afflictions cast upon her by imagined wicked fairies, stands in stark contrast to Angela's realization early in her narrative that due to the luck of the draw or to winning the light skin lottery, she can escape the fate which awaits Emma Lou. When we first encounter Emma Lou, she has only just begun to come to terms with the perceived "tragic significance" of her "unhappy condition." The value she assigns to the physical traits she has inherited from both parents, is eerily similar to Angela's testimony: "Emma Lou had been fortunate enough to have

[40] Ibid., 7.
[41] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 13.

hair like her mother's, . . . but she had also been unfortunate enough to have a face as black as her father's, and a nose which, while not entirely flat, was as distinctly negroid as her too thick lips."[42] The perception that she is "too black" to be beautiful is primarily reinforced by her mother and maternal grandmother, whose desperate yet futile attempts to reverse the accident of her darkness through the application of skin-bleaching creams and medicines reserved for dermatological disorders serve only to intensify the anger, shame, and resentment each one harbours toward the other. Due to a long-standing history of colour prejudice within the Morgan family, Emma Lou suffers physical, emotional, and verbal abuse from her family. Okazawa-Rey theorizes that "[c]olor-consciousness is rooted in the social, political, and economic conditions that existed during the centuries of slavery in the U.S.," adding that "[i]n the American south, [B]lacks were subjected to enforced segregation, while white men were allowed to victimize enslaved and defenseless [B]lack women."[43] In *The Blacker the Berry*, Thurman creates an unflattering portrait of some these same descendants whom Ozakawa-Rey references, portraying them not as children born to slave women who had been violated but, in the case of his protagonist's grandparents, as the "mulatto products of slave-day promiscuity between male masters and female chattel."[44] Thurman's employment of the term "promiscuity" to describe the sexual interactions which occurred between free White men and enslaved Black women presents an unsettling perspective, suggesting that some of the encounters may have been consensual. It is also an intended snipe at Maria Lightfoot, Emma Lou's maternal grandmother, whose creation of a racially exclusionary social organization known to the people of Boise, Idaho as "the blue veins" due to the apparent lightness of their complexions which bordered on physical

[42] Ibid., 19
[43] Ozakawa-Rey, et al., "The Politics," 92.
[44] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 16.

transparency, casts her as the familial source of Emma Lou's unhappiness and self-loathing. The objective of Maria Lightfoot's organization, that African Americans get ''whiter and whiter [with] every generation,' until the grandchildren of the blue veins could easily go over to the white race and become assimilated,"' is not only extirpative of African Americans but of Emma Lou herself. Maria's resolve to escape racism through ethnic cleansing disguised as assimilation, is viewed by the elders in Emma Lou's society as the only means of avoiding racial oppression and social injustice. Of this irrational and possibly post-traumatic reaction to centuries of slavery and denigration, Huggins offers some psychological insight into the mindsets of Blacks like Emma Lou's grandmother theorizing that "[s]hame of the past made the Negro reject much of the reality of his people's condition. In the mad rush from slavery, inferiority, and oppression into citizenship, and manhood, [womanhood,] much was garbled and confused." [45] It is within this "garbled" and "confused" environment that Thurman's protagonist rears herself and attempts to make her own way in the world through a limited understanding of both it and herself.

An investigation of the *Bildungsromane* in the works under study thus far reveals two comparable middle-class African American households in which two ostensibly distinct young protagonists develop characters based on childhood their experiences. Despite a seemingly ideal family life and supportive loving parents, Angela spends much of her childhood and adolescence in a state of profound distress as she feels prevented from pursuing the things in life which she feels would bring her the greatest joy. She identifies these "things" as opportunities which would lead to "scholarships, special funds [and] patronages, which, she contends, "are in the world for everybody really but which only white people . . . [can] get their hands on." [46] During her most

[45] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 62.
[46] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 55.

formative years, Emma Lou is indoctrinated by her mother to believe "that a black boy can get along, but that a black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment."[47] Both protagonists though far from lacking in the elemental needs of food, shelter and education, suffer from cultural and spiritual deprivation which appear to cause protracted stages of arrested development which begin in their childhoods yet persist throughout much of their narratives. Angela, unable to accept herself due to the anti-Black racism she witnesses while living with her family in Philadelphia, fulfills the aspirations of the blue veins of Idaho and decides to move to a new city and live her life as a young and perceptively privileged White woman while Emma Lou, who has thus far not really experienced anti-Black racism, has suffered similarly under the demoralizing weight of intra-racial colour prejudice which she experiences as a child within her family home, unwittingly embarks on a pattern of first starts and new beginnings.

When Emma Lou first leaves her hometown of Boise, Idaho to attend university at a racially integrated cosmopolitan university in Los Angeles, California, she is inadvertently misled by her Uncle Joe to believe that she was journeying towards a cultural mecca as "it was only in small cities [that] one encountered stupid color prejudice such as she had encountered among the blue vein circle in her hometown."[48] Nevertheless, as the semesters progress and she fails to connect with any of the "right kind of people" who comprise an elite group of predominantly light-complexioned and "what is known in the parlance of the black belt as high brown" freshmen and sophomores who silently ostracize her from their inner circles. Having experienced little positive reinforcement during her childhood, Emma Lou easily accepts defeat and believes finally that "[h]er Uncle Joe had been wrong [and] her mother and grandmother had

[47] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 13.
[48] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 22.

been right. There was no place in the world for a dark girl."[49] Despite being sent to university with a masterplan in place to minimize her chances of failing, "[s]he was to take the four year college course, receive a bachelor's degree in education, then go South to teach, . . . "[50] Emma Lou, angry, distressed, and lonely, drops out of university after three years and without her degree deciding instead to take a job as a domestic worker in order to earn funds to relocate to New York City. It is worth mentioning that Angela, after completing her secondary studies, also abandons her "appointment" as a school teacher after a short period, and, following the death of her parents and the acquisition of a small inheritance, also relocates to New York City in search of a less predictable life. Whalan acknowledges through the writings of Saidiya Hartman, that this Bohemian and self-serving attitude characteristic of the Harlem Renaissance youth, states: "[A]t this moment, 'young [B]lack women were in open rebellion,' deploying 'radical and wayward practices' in a struggle to create 'autonomous and beautiful lives."[51] While Angela finds acceptance at a selective art studio and an apartment in Greenwich Village and settles down to focus on her drawing and painting, Emma Lou finds employment as a theatrical assistant to a minor celebrity whose nightly performances are done in blackface. It is critical to emphasize at this juncture, that Emma Lou's descent from a privileged university in Los Angeles to the inner bowels of an unremarkable theatre house in Harlem, is propelled not by anti-Black racism initiated by White students, but rather, from anti-*black* racism enforced by colour-conscious students of her own ethnic denomination.

[49] Ibid., 39.
[50] Ibid., 22.
[51] Whalan, *The Bildungsroman*, 73, quoted in Hartman Saidiya, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, 2019.

The events which influence Angela's decision to flee her hometown and famial and communal ties are, in some respects, more pressing that the passive yet committed freezing-out by the in-crowd that Emma Lou suffers as an undergraduate at UCLA. Angela encounters a series of disturbing and subtly violent incidents which expose her to anti-Black racism, resulting in a splintering response rather than complete break under the weight of the racially motivated aggression she endures. Realizing that her racial fluidity offers her an escape route from the challenges of affiliation with a "tragic race," while lightly interrogating her conscience, she resets her priorities to suit the path she envisages as most likely to bring her freedom to live her life dictated by her own desires and on her own terms: "And she began to wonder, which was the more important, a patent insistence of the fact of colour or an acceptance of the good things of life which could come to you in America if either you were not coloured or the fact of your racial connections were not made known."[52] Her move to Greenwich Village rather than to Harlem, indicates that the choice between identifying as "coloured," or disappearing into the mainstream of a White majority was a relatively simple one. Shortly after enrolling in a selective art academy in Greenwich Village, Angela Murray changes her name to Angèle Mory and embraces a new philosophy centered on *carpe diem*. Her protracted adventures while presenting as White, exemplify the inherently performative nature of race, and she soon discovers that appearing White for a few hours a week with her mother in Philadelphia is incomparable to the freedom she experiences as an adult White-presenting woman:

> She was seeing the world; she was getting acquainted with life in her own way without restrictions or restraint; she was young, she was temporarily independent, she was intelligent, she was white. She remembered

[52] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 31.

> the expression 'free, white and twenty-one,' this was what it meant then, this sense of owning the world, this realization that other things being equal, all things were possible.[53]

The fact that while living in Philadelphia, she was also "young," "intelligent" and temporarily independent," does not hold the same significance for Angèle as it did for Angela who possessed these same attributes but from the marginalized position of a woman of colour. She becomes cognizant of the privileges these attributes hold for the first time while embracing and performing Whiteness.

Fauset appears cautious in the depiction of her protagonist as a White-performing character. Angèle's foray into the White world summons her amusement rather than her outrage as she observes the automatic perks conferred on the individual who is presumed White. Despite being unemployed and without references, she is able while in the company of Paulette Lister, described as "a slender girl with blue eyes, light chestnut hair and cheeks fairly blazing with some unguessed excitement,"[54] to rent an expensive apartment within an exclusive artist colony located within walking distance of her art school: "It was more than [she] should have afforded … but the ease with which her affairs were working out gave her an assurance, almost an arrogance of confidence."[55] No longer condemned to accept an "appointment" as a schoolteacher as Angela had been, she signs a two-year lease to her new residence while taking profound delight in not knowing what her future holds as she believes that being perceived as White, did not incur the same limitations or dangers as did being identifiable as "coloured:" "Two years, '[she] said gaily, everything in the word can happen to me in that time. Oh, I wonder what will

[53] Ibid., 61.
[54] Ibid., 66.
[55] Ibid., 71.

have happened; what I will be like![56] Angèle soon finds "love" of a sort, with a young White man from an affluent and class-conscious family. Despite earlier admissions of uncertainty regarding her future self, she is now firmly committed to her new life and identity and becomes more aware than ever of the need for wealth and stability. She thus regards Roger Fielding—her new beau—as a pragmatic means to an end:

> If she could afford it, she would have a salon, a drawing-room where men and Women, . . . should come and pour themselves out to her sympathy and magnetism. To accomplish this, she must have money and influence; indeed since she was so young, she would need even protection; perhaps it would be better to marry . . . a white man. . . . [I]t would be fun, great fun to capture power and protection in addition to freedom and independence which she had so long coveted and which now lay in her hand.[57]

In his study of the distinctiveness of the Harlem Renaissance *Bildungsroman*, Whalan observes that "White bourgeois" culture is portrayed as "acquisitive, materialistic, atomistic, and emotionally emaciated. . . . "[58] Jerkins additionally notes in her forward to *Plum Bun* that "even amongst the descriptions of New York society . . . and the hoity-toity-ness of the elite, there is a hollowness that cannot be ignored. The dynamics of [Angèle's] new circle are about as artificial as her new identity." [59] While identifying as "Negro" in Philadelphia, Angela Murray was vehemently opposed to preconceptions that linked her essential character to her ethnicity. She rejected the notion that her race defined whom she should be and what she should desire in life.

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 62.
[58] Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman*," 81.
[59] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, xi.

There is a pivotal moment in the text when she disgustedly dismisses her sister's belief that "being coloured often [did]spur you on," to which Angela responds: "I'm sick of this business of always having to be above or below a certain norm. Doesn't anyone think that we have a right to be happy simply naturally?"[60] Angèle felt deprived of this "simple" and "natural" satisfaction while openly identifying as African American. Fauset makes an audacious statement through her protagonist, resisting the temptation to transform her into an extraordinary individual while passing as White. Instead, she defends Angèle's right to remain average and even somewhat shallow, inferring that Angèle Mory now represents only herself rather than her entire race.

Whalan observes that "[t]he Harlem *Bildungsroman* written by female authors . . . often staged highly critical engagements with not only the marriage plot but also the passing plot as potential routes to fully socialized maturity, a pattern indicative of the limited range of options available for [B]lack women to successfully navigate the era's respectability politics."[61] Angèle's romance with Roger, which she wrongly believes will lead to marriage and an idyllic life, expunges the guilt and responsibility she felt as the object of Matthew Henson's affection whose courting of her she reviled as "clumsy and distasteful lovemaking." Roger's virulent objection to eating in a restaurant where African Americans are also present and swiftness in having them ejected, is at first alarming to Angèle, and she notes the abrupt change in his normally "gay" and "glorious" demeanour. However, her response to his public outburst and professed hatred of "Negroes" suggests an underlying admiration for him and subtle sexual arousal: "It's you, you're so violent. I didn't know you were that way!"[62] At this moment, it is not Roger's racism which stir feelings in Angèle but the force and the power he appears to wield

[60] Ibid., 37.
[61] Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman*," 79.
[62] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 96.

while wearing "the badge," which contrast the pity and shame she felt as Matthew Henson's date whose ejection from a racially segregated cinema exposed his powerlessness and impotence. In Nolan Gear's discussion of this same incident, he states: "For Angela, a racist ticket-taker in Philadelphia proves the final straw in a series of indignities that sends her to Manhattan."[63] It is contestable, however, that the "indignities" suffered are entirely Matthew's as Angela is already in the process of metamorphosing into Angèle and is already adopting what Gear adroitly describes as an "anthropological gaze" not only in regards to Matthew's humiliation but to the continuous struggles of "coloured" people in general: after witnessing her Black boyfriend's denigration, it is narrated that "[s]he was very kind to him in the car; she was so sorry for him, suddenly conscious of the pain which must be his, at being stripped before the girl he loved of his masculine right to protect, to appear the hero."[64] How is it that Angela is only suddenly aware of what Black men confront on a daily basis under Jim Crow? What is most illuminating about this incident is Angela/Angèle's readiness to only "feel sorry" for Matthew rather than to identify with him. Is the racial injustice to which he has been subjected not also hers? In this early instance, Angela/Angèle is clearly already engaged in the *doing* of her new racial identity and, as a result, is willingonly to sympathize rather than empathize with Matthew. She displays a similarly sympathetic yet emotionally detached demeanour while contemplating the trauma of the young Black girl who is part of the group of guests that Roger has had thrown out of the restaurant and is compelled to think of her "brown" sister in order to summon empathy: "But the girl, the girl whose shoes she herself might so easily have been! . . . [W]atching her intently and

[63] Gear, "A Curiously Intimate," 16.
[64] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 53.

yet with the indifference of safety, she recalled Virginia, so slender, so appealing she was and so brave." [65]

Angèle's fast friendship with Paulette Lister corrects the childhood error she made with Mary Hastings, a White student who, new to her elementary school, befriends her only to spurn her once it is disclosed to her that Angela is Black. Her warm and initially welcoming acceptance in her new art school since relocating to Manhattan, counteracts an earlier incident when as a teenager in Philadelphia, seemingly disbelieving of her first experience in being outed as "coloured," Angèle as Angela, re-attempts while enrolled in a painting class, to present herself "simply" and "naturally" as an American rather than as an African American: "Her fellow students and the instructors were more cordial, there was an actual sense of camaraderie among them. She had not mentioned the fact of her Negro strain; indeed, she had no occasion to, but she did not believe that this fact if known would cause any change in attitude." [66] Nonetheless and unsurprisingly, Angela has miscalculated the tolerance and sophistication of her instructor and fellow classmates and is once again subjected to the humiliation of public exposure as a "Negro." This incident is compounded by the involvement of Esther Bayliss, her childhood schoolmate and rival who initially revealed her secret to the only other student in their class whose friendship she had deemed valuable. Angela's decision to stop fighting a battle she cannot win is primarily due to these specific life-altering events which lead her to formulate her own version of the "eternal race question" in relation to her personal circumstances: "You certainly don't expect me to say first thing: 'I'm Angela Murray. I know I look white but I'm coloured and expect to be treated accordingly! Now do you?" [67]

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[65] Ibid., 97.
[66] Ibid., 44.
[67] Ibid., 56.

The Blacker the Berry, Colourism and Family Dynamics

Emma Lou Morgan would likely have answered "yes," to Angela's hypothetical inquiry as she herself does not understand why she, as another "coloured" student on campus, should not "be treated accordingly" by her fellow Black classmates. The latter portion of part one of *The Blacker the Berry* chronicles Emma Lou's relatively brief yet intensely distressing experiences while enrolled as a student at UCLA. Thurman's deceptively sedate narration during this section effectively mirrors the protagonist's slow but continuous realization and reluctant acceptance that her new environment in Los Angeles was merely a replica of the one she left behind in Boise. Thurman uses dramatic irony to illustrate Emma Lou's ignorance of the reality that it is *she* rather than her environment that remains unchanged. He explains rather than justifies the negative manner in which most of the Black students receive her writing: "Emma Lou was essentially a snob. She had absorbed this trait from the very people who had sought to exclude her from their presence."[68] This statement, however, proves contestable. Although Emma Lou had been conditioned from an early age to believe "that a black boy could get along but that a black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment,"[69] she strives constantly to refute this line of thinking while pursuing higher education and a higher class of people with whom to associate. Her determination to ingratiate herself with the Black student elite is perceived as a strategic way to meet her social equals on campus. She at first, tries to challenge the cynical words spoken by her mother and grandmother throughout her childhood replacing them with her own reason: "What did the color of one's skin have to do with one's mentality or native ability? Nothing whatsoever. If a black boy could get along in the world, so could a black

[68] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 32.
[69] Ibid., 13.

girl, and it would take her, Emma Lou Morgan to prove it."[70] What she fails to grasp is implicit in the narrator's earlier statement in regard to her own exclusionary mentality. The "coloured" students whose company she most desires reject her for the identical reasons that she herself rejects those whom she considers socially beneath her. To illustrate the protagonist's profound lack of self-awareness, Thurman somewhat mischievously introduces a new character called Hazel Mason whom we summarily identify as Emma Lou's *Doppelgänger*. As a nouveau-riche Texan, Hazel symbolizes everything that Emma Lou has been socialized to detest about her race. She regards the new student's racial performativity as "clownish" and a living justification to every stereotype Whites purportedly assign to Blacks. While Emma Lou's provincially "early arrival on campus had been to find some of her fellow Negro students, . . . [71] meeting someone as *gauche* as Hazel Mason was not part of her agenda: "She resented being approached by anyone so flagrantly inferior, anyone so noticeably a typical southern darky, who had no business obtruding into the more refined scheme of things. [She] planned to lose her unwelcome companion. . . . "[72] When Hazel tries to engage her in conversation, Emma Lou hears only her incorrect grammar and perceptively loud southern accent as reason for the negative attention she feels she attracts from the White students whom she fears may presume that she and Hazel are alike: "Two white girls who had fallen into line behind Emma Lou snickered. … She wanted the white people to know that she knew her grammar even if [Hazel] didn't. … Imagine anyone preparing to enter college saying, 'Is you,' and, to make it worse, right before all these white people, these staring white people, so eager and ready to laugh."[73] When Hazel shares with Emma Lou her sense of loneliness and isolation through the words, "Honey, I was just achin' to

[70] Ibid., 34.
[71] Ibid., 24
[72] Ibid., 26
[73] Ibid., 25

see a black face, …" she does so as a frightened young woman who feels completely out of her element: "Her life had been spent only among Negroes. . . . [S]he confessed to Emma Lou [that] she couldn't get used 'to all these white folks.'"[74] Emma Lou, however, having spent her high school years as "… the only Negro pupil in the entire school," is herself all too conscious of the "white folks" and how she may be perceived by them and as such, cannot represent the safe space Hazel is in search of. Additionally, Emma Lou's in-bred class-consciousness not only prevent her from accepting Hazel as a peer, but as well from perceiving her as a fellow human being. Taking the side of her own detractors, she echoes their words and sentiments:

> [S]he classified Hazel as a barbarian who had most certainly not come from a family of best people. … No wonder people were so prejudiced against dark skinned people when they were so ugly, so haphazard in their dress, and so boisterously mannered as was this present specimen. She herself was black, but nevertheless, she had come from a good family, and she could easily take her place in a society of the right sort of people.[75]

But Emma Lou is of course, self-deceived. She does not "come from a good family" by any stretch of the imagination, and very much like Hazel she is, her narration indicates, a product of her own provincial upbringing. Thurman demonstrates how similarly she is perceived by others as a replica of Hazel when she attempts to befriend another student at the university whom she believes she herself most resembles in demeanour and dress. As she hastily approaches the new girl who eventually introduces herself as Alma Martin, she has no recollection of how closely her interaction mirrors her inaugural meeting with Hazel as she gushes to the stranger: "I've never

[74] Ibid., 27.
[75]

gone to school with any colored people before. . . I am just dying to get acquainted with the colored students."[76] When Alma feigns pleasure in meeting her and quickly makes an excuse to "lose her unwelcome companion," Emma Lou is unperturbed and believes that she has finally been successful in "her quest for agreeable acquaintances. . . . Here she was coming into contact with really superior people, … all trying to advance themselves and their race, unconscious of intra-racial schism caused by differences in skin color."[77] As she continues to believe that she has placed herself on the path to success, even while continued attempts to infiltrate the Black inner circle on campus fail, her isolation only deepens her convictions against the inclusion of African Americans like Hazel Mason, seeing her presence as a constant source of embarrassment to all of the Black people affiliated with the university:

> Hazel was a veritable clown. She went scooting around the campus, . . . playing the darky for the amused white students. The very tone and quality of her voice designated her as a minstrel type. . . . She was a pariah among her own people because she did not seem to know, as they knew, that Negroes could not afford to be funny in front of white people even if that was their natural inclination. Negroes must be sober and serious in order to impress white people with their adaptability and non-difference in all salient characteristics save skin color."[78]

Although Thurman, unlike Fauset, was neither a protégé of Du Bois nor an advocate of his "respectability politics," Du Bois's philosophical construct of double-consciousness is clearly

[76] Ibid., 32.
[77] Ibid., 33.
[78] Ibid, 35.

evident in his protagonist's critique of Hazel's minstrel-like demeanour which is perceived through the lens of how she imagines White people in general view all Black people.

The Bildungsroman in Context

When Emma Lou ultimately disconnects from her family and college in order "to escape the haunting chimera of intra-racial color prejudice, . . . ",[79] she remains unaware that she is merely initiating a cyclical process of retracing her steps and commencing anew. Having gained no constructive self-critique from her past experiences, she makes little to no progress in her journey from girlhood to womanhood. It may be beneficial to consider the identifying and formulaic "linear" progression of the conventional *Bildungsroman* in light of Thurman's narrative structure in the recounting of Emma Lou's story and its pattern of folding back on itself—and in some instances, collapsing altogether, leaving the protagonist as well as the reader at odds with the world within the novel. This literary method may be applied to illustrate the racially fraught and inherently irrational society in which Emma Lou is anticipated to navigate and ultimately discover within it her true identity. However, her inability to reflect inwardly and attain self-knowledge often leads to a misreading of her surroundings and of the individuals within it. Emma Lou's belief that it is solely due to her darker skin tone that she is denied a place and the right to pursue personal fulfillment within her society is the obstacle—or cog in the wheel that Thurman's unconventional *Bildungsroman* confronts and attempts to resolve within the course of the story.

I.

[79] Ibid., 45.

Angèle Mory's protracted performance as a White-presenting individual which might also be regarded as a form of minstrelsy performed in *whiteface,* starts to unravel just as she begins to gain recognition as a promising portraitist. Still deeply immersed within the character of a sheltered and privileged White woman, it is Angèle rather than Angela who assumes full credit for any artistic progress gained. Angela Murray's "instinct for self-appraisal" is supplanted by Angèle's need for affirmation from her new role models: "Mr. Paget, the instructor, spoke of her painting with increased respect; the attention of visitors was directed thereto. Martha Burden and even Paulette, . . . admitted her to the freemasonry of their own assured standing."[80] What is most compelling about this change in Angèle's perception of her emerging talents as an artist, is how she herself assesses her progress and more importantly, with which of her personas does she identify? Is she to herself, Angela or *Angèle*? In this respect, Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness, "feeling both their identities as [B]lacks of African descent and their present reality as Americans,"[81] is complicated as we cannot, at this stage in the story, locate the protagonist's "present reality." Fauset's structuring of her questionable *Bildungsroman*, although constitutively linear in progression, is persistently and most likely, intentionally compromised by a constantly shifting and alternating protagonist. Angela, who begins the story, is eventually eclipsed by Angèle, an alter-ego who as suggested earlier, sympathizes rather than empathizes with other African Americans. In this novel, Fauset employs both dramatic and situational irony to critique and undermine the conventional *Bildungsroman* genre, as evidenced in her heroine's commitment to playing the role of a White-presenting character, which can be likened to an

[80] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 152-53.
[81] Jones, *Rereading*, 9.

example of method acting. As a result, the central character and focal point of the narrative remains undetermined and subsequently, indeterminable. We discern this paradox most clearly in the section titled "Plum Bun," which illustrates that Angela/Angèle's narrative resembles a meta-*Bildungsroman* one which consciously mimics all the features in the standard novel of development while satirizing the idea that the protagonist is ultimately on a journey toward self-discovery and social conformity. Much of this segment focuses on Angèle's mental anguish as she believes that she has "reached a milestone in her life" and endeavours to reconcile what she now recognizes as the two opposing forces within her own psyche. As Angela Murray fights to regain control over her imposter and arrest the demoralizing treatment she accepts as Roger's mistress rather than as his wife, Angèle Mory continues to thwart her efforts, believing that Angela symbolizes a regressive version of her former self: "If she withdrew, then indeed, she would be the same old Angela Murray, the same old girl save for a little sophistication that she had before she left Philadelphia."[82] Angèle regains moderation and balance in her life through reconciling the two extremist aspects of her personality imbued in the conflictual personalities of Angela and Angèle. She thus unites them, taking the best traits of each one; Angela's "native fastidiousness," and Angèle's courage and sense of entitlement. This distinct character, whom we might call Angèla, emerges as the stable protagonist towards the end of her story.

When both Angèle and Rachel Powell are awarded scholarships to study in Paris, both accept but not long after, Rachel's scholarship is rescinded once the patrons who financially support the fund discover that she is "coloured." While *Plum Bun* ostensibly centres on a young Black woman's quest for unimpeded freedom within a fundamentally inequitable framework, it is through the profoundly dehumanizing experiences of Rachel Powell that the harsh truths of

[82] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 129.

systemic racism are most clearly revealed. "Miss Powell," as she is called by Angèle, is strongly reminiscent of Emma Lou Morgan and may be considered as Fauset's martyr within the "terrible, grasping, raging white world."[83] In his elucidating discussion on the collective cultural mindset of the New Negro and the social and political climate in which it arose, Huggins stresses that "the new style Negro would not accept accommodation or ignore grievances. . . . He would no longer 'turn the other cheek,' be modest and unassuming. He would answer violence with violence rather than with meek and moral protests and requests for justice."[84] Huggins asserts that there was a feeling among African Americans veterans of this period that they had defended America against her enemies as citizens rather than as emancipated slaves. This renewed insistence on citizenship, its privileges, and the collective belief that they as a people could shift the ruling forces within their societies is also evidenced in Angela Murray's childhood belief that White people had the upper hand "… because for the present, they the badge of power."[85] It is within this tense and potentially explosive milieu that Rachel Powell is denied the right to represent herself as an American citizen and as one of the best students in her art school while studying in France. Huggins infers in his discussion of this time in history that the educated and socially mobile "Negro" represented a greater threat to the White hegemony than did the illiterate and dependent slave. He recounts that "[t]he postwar years saw a spectacular revival of racism; the Ku Klux Klan found white support throughout the country and violence against Negroes increased. . . . Apparently white Americans believed in the New Negro as much as black Americans did."[86] Fauset depicts her protagonist's rite of passage as a transition from

[83] Abby Arthur Johnson, "Literary Midwife: Jessie Redmond Fauset and the Harlem Renaissance," *Pylon* 39, no. 2 (1978): 146. Johnson cites these words from Fauset's description of the manner in which W.E.B. DuBois depicts the racial climate in his work *Darkwater*.
[84] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 53.
[85] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 52.
[86] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 56.

shame to pride, rather than a shift from girlhood to womanhood or from White presenting to Black identity. During her initial and possibly last visit to Rachel Powell's residence, Angèla discloses her ethnic identity as "coloured," to a group of presumably White journalists whom she believes have descended upon Rachel and her mother in order to "bait" them like "animals." Through outing herself, she becomes empowered to do what she would not voluntarily do as Angela and could not do as Angèle: accept herself. But who is that "self?" Initially, Fauset permits her to hide behind the sentimental but ultimately hollow "dictum" expressed to her by her late mother: "Life is more important than colour."[87] However, Angèla's new insight and subsequent relocation to Paris without the prize money from the academy, will eventually lead her to conclude that colour—or more specifically, the perception of one's colour may greatly influence the life that one desires to live.

As stated previously, we do not detect any substantial advancement in Emma Lou's social or psychological development until the final pages of the novel. Only until circumstances beyond her control compel her to abandon her complacency does she begin to take stock of her life in an honest and meaningful way and implement changes. Firstly, her position as a theatrical assistant is dissolved when her employer departs on a European tour, subsequently facilitating her employment as a residential assistant to a retired actress and her husband, Campbell Kitchen, described as a "faddish" writer with a professed affinity for "[t]he Negro and all things Negroid." Campbell, whom Emma Lou unconsciously adopts as a replacement for her Uncle Joe, discovers a way to connect with her, lower her defensive walls, and provide her with the care and parental direction that she has never before received. Feeling more like a member of the family than an employee, Emma Lou accepts her employer's paternal counselling while admitting that "it was

[87] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 251.

because of [their] chance talks that she finally decided to follow Mrs. Blake's advice and take the public teachers' [*sic*] examination."[88] She as well conducts for the first time, a series of frank self-interrogations suggestive of a willingness to reconsider her mindset and allow for the possibility that she could be mistaken however, she is not quite ready to assume all of the responsibility for how much she has suffered at the hands of her own people: "She wondered if Alva had been right in his allegations. Was she super-sensitive about her color? Did she encourage color prejudice among her own people, simply by being so expectant of it? She tried hard to place the blame on herself, but she couldn't seem to do it."[89] Her resolution to achieve "economic independence" as advised by Campbell, motivates her to focus on her academic performance and awakens in her a sudden feeling of empowerment as she begins to understand that through her present actions, she can shape and direct her future. A conscious focus on her future prospects for advancement and financial autonomy, requires her to consciously embrace adulthood and not allow the inner wounded child within her to govern her for the remainder of her life. She becomes aware for the first time after leaving the Kitchen's household that the substance of her character is a more significant indicator of her character than the colour of her skin and at once realizes the need unify her fractured identity in order to continue moving forward in her quest for personal happiness and a sense of belonging within her society.

Through the protagonist's protracted period of emotional maturity, Thurman makes an important distinction between narcissism and self-possession. Throughout most of her life thus far, Emma Lou has relinquished her power to others by allowing them to define her. Her childhood grievance, namely that "her birth had served no good purpose," also provided her with

[88] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 117.
[89] Ibid., 117-18.

an excuse for under-achieving or for abandoning goals altogether. Her decreasing narcissism allows her to see herself as a member of society rather than as its outcast: "After all, she wasn't the only black girl alive. There were thousands."[90] Most significantly, a growing feeling of inclusiveness finally allows her to *empathize* with others. The connection she suddenly feels to others around her—particularly toward other African Americans—is cathartic and epiphanic: "It was clear to her now what a complete fool she had been. It was clear to her at last that she had exercised the same discrimination against men and the people she wished for friends that they had exercised against her—and with less reason."[91] The moral of Thurman's story is clear: Emma Lou begins to understand and accept the world once she begins to understand and accept herself.

Conclusion

In both novels, intra-racial colour prejudice is shown to be more harmful to the personal and social development of Black individuals than structural racism. Angèla's formative years are distinguished by an intra-racially divided household influenced by her and her mother's escapades in racial passing. Through gaining access to spaces which would have discriminated against her if she had revealed her true ethnic identity, she erroneously cultivates the notion that White was right and Black was wrong. It becomes a notion which never entirely leaves her mindset. The mixed messages she receives from her parents prevent her from taking pride in her ethnicity. Her father who regarded his wife's "excursions" as a "harmless" and "essentially

[90] Ibid., 136
[91] Ibid., 138.

feminine quality," believed that in racial passing, there was no "genuine principle involved."[92] While performing as Angèle, she expresses the fallacious belief that her complexion indicated that "she belonged to two races, and to one far more conspicuously than the other."[93] Angèla's father, was, by her own admission, a *black* Black man. This identically false belief is also held by Emma Lou's mother, Jane, who after giving birth to her daughter " was abysmally stunned by the color of her child, for she was certain that since she herself was so fair that her child could not possibly be as dark as its father.[94] Emma Lou grows up absorbing the shock, disappointment, and shame of her mother's denial of her own ethnic heritage and her refusal to accept that despite the lightness of her skin, that "some of her ancestors too had been black and that some of their color chromosomes were still embedded in her."[95] The mutual blame that Emma Lou and her mother attribute to one another forms the basis of their problematic relationship. Consequently, Emma Lou is raised with a father in exile and a mother who is ashamed of her.

Neither of the households in which Angèla and Emma Lou are raised reinforced their self-esteem as African American women nor equipped them with the necessary tools needed to navigate their racially challenging terrains. Angèla's acceptance of her true ethnic heritage, even at the conclusion of her narrative, is at best disconcerting as she appears to settle for a kind of ethnic opportunism over a stable identity: " [A]s for colour; when it seemed best to be coloured, she would be coloured; when it was best to be white, she would be that."[96] Similarly, Emma Lou does not learn to embrace her "blackness," but rather, to accept that it is beyond her control to alter. The damage inflicted on Emma Lou precipitated by intra-racial colour prejudice seems

[92]Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 20.
[93] Ibid., 197.
[94] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 19.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 188.

irreversible, as she cannot imagine that as a dark-complexioned female, she can ever be deemed conventionally attractive according to the standards set even by her own community. She forms her most influential friendship with Gwendolyn Johnson, an upper middle-class woman with "light brown skin" who has been socially conditioned from a young age to reject "yaller Negroes" in favour of those deemed "full-blooded." Gwendolyn's unrelenting praise of darker-skinned African Americans, confounds rather than flatters Thurman's protagonist: "Emma Lou would listen attentively, but all the while she was observing Gwendolyn's light brown skin and wishing to herself that it were possible for her to effect a change in complexions, since Gwendolyn considered black skin so desirable."[97] Thurman illustrates through Gwendoly's character not only that reversing intra-racial colour prejudice among Blacks in favour of dark skin is equally ridiculous, but that lighter complexioned people like Gwendolyn, lacked a profound understanding of the damage caused by intra-racial colour prejudice to African American females in particular:

> But Gwendolyn was a poor psychologist. She didn't realize that Emma Lou was possessed of a perverse bitterness and that she idolized the thing one would naturally expect her to hate. . . . She didn't understand that Emma Lou hated her own color and envied the more mellow complexions.[98]

Okazawa-Rey posits:

> If a dark-skinned young girl is constantly told that she is ugly, she may begin to feel as such. This is particularly true when the treatment she

[97] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 125.
[98] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 124-25.

> receives within her community of origin, the black community, is consistent with the negative and self-deprecating messages doled out by the larger society.[99]

Intrinsic to Okazawa-Rey's point, is the crucial role Black communities play in not only shielding darker African American children, but in providing safe spaces for all African American children who are destined to grow up within racially inequitable societies. Intra-racial colour prejudice as she explains originated within the political and economic conditions that prevailed throughout centuries of Black enslavement in the United States[100] and is not comparable to "inter-black racism" or to "white anti-black racism." The preference among many African Americans for other African Americans with lighter skin tones does not inherently harm the psychosocial development of African Americans as a whole. However, intra-racial colour prejudice as understood and implemented as a form of apartheid within Black communities themselves and within the social and political contexts of the works under examination, is essentially destructive to Black individuals as it replicates the racial inequity present in the dominant or in Okazawa-Rey words, "larger" societies.

The performance of racial identity is heavily featured in both works. Fauset's protagonist, a young African American woman, leaves her home and only sibling to reside in another city where she, unbeknownst to others, poses as someone White, is perhaps the most compelling example of viewing race as a performative construct. Angela's fairly radical decision to present as White exclusively during her five-year sojourn in New York City, is informed by her conviction that the difference between being treated with respect and not rests for some

[99] Okazawa-Rey, "Black Women," 91.
[100] Ibid., 92.

exceptional people in the arbitrary disclosure of their true racial identities. She memorably reminds her younger sister of this fact in an earlier segment stating that "it isn't being coloured that makes the difference; it's letting it be known."[101] Angela's first experience with the brutality of overt racial discrimination comes to her in early childhood when she is denied the opportunity to act as her class treasurer because as stated by the classmate who announces her ethnicity: "I should have to think twice before I'd trust my subscription money to a coloured girl."[102] From this indictment, Angela understands that if she were perceived as being White, she would not automatically be suspected of being a thief. When as a teenager, she is once again denounced as African American while studying at a drawing school in Philadelphia, it is because the person who is aware that she is not White is offended at the very idea that she is acting as if "she was as good as a White girl," and engaged in an activity perceived as being reserved for Whites only. The art instructor Mr. Shields, who is in disbelief that he and his wife could have warmed to someone "coloured," argues: "Why she looks and acts just like a white girl. . . . [She] possessed an undeniable air, and she dressed well, even superlatively." When she, as Angèle, finally takes the initiative to expose herself as African American, she is denied a scholarship and asked to leave the art academy for her "deceptive" ways. What is most significant about this experience is that if she had not let the truth of her ethnic identity be known, her teachers, friends, and classmates would have continued believing that she was White and like them, wholly relatable. If we remember Butler's discussion of the female impersonator, Divine, they ask the question: "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance. . .

[101] Fauset, *Plim Bun*, 55.
[102] Ibid., 29

[103] We might envisage Angèla's racial performance in retrospect as a form of "drag" or an "imitation" of race rather than of gender. Moreover, by changing a few words in Butler's question we may then ask: "Is drag the imitation of [race], or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which [race] itself is established? Does being [White] constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance?" Will we one day welcome "trans-racial" individuals within our societies as we have those who identify as trans-gender?

In the case of Emma Lou Morgan, Whiteness is performed by Blacks through the collective adoption of a false consciousness which apes the ways of "White folks" in everything "except race." Emma Lou's first visit to an employment agency in Harlem is governed by the conviction that her physical attire and formal diction should reveal to the employment agent that she is not like the other "Negroes" who by their unwashed and unkempt appearances are seeking jobs as "dishwashers" and "nurse girls." She feels that it is obvious that her demeanour demands "congenial" work. She is summarily distressed to know that thinking "White" is not even enough to secure her employment in a law firm owned by African Americans because her darker complexion does not correspond with their biased image of the type of "coloured" girl they need. To them, "Negroes" who look like her, do not seek "congenial" work. Throughout much of her narrative, Emma Lou is unable to reconcile how she is perceived by others with the manner in which she perceives herself.

Racially inequitable societies, due to their inherent amorality, are inconsequential to or undermining of moral character formation. In *Plum Bun*, Fauset presents Angèla's life in an idealized and almost fairy tale manner, replete with a flowery and improbable ending. However,

[103] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxi.

her protagonist, when compared to Emma Lou, appears conspicuously lacking in depth. In another light, we may come to regard Fauset's heroine as the expected product or model of an amoral society. We may also respond to a question raised earlier in this thesis: What kind of characters do we aspire to cultivate within racially inequitable societies? The answer to that query might well be someone very much like my invented character Angèla. The suggestion that this work functions more effectively as a meta-*Bildungsroman* of any era rather than a traditional *Bildungsroman*, becomes increasingly plausible. Whalan reminds us however, that "[t]he clash of generations, the question of what model of racial leadership was best suited to this moment of American modernity, and how to navigate through a frequently baffling and hostile urban, consumer-oriented environment, were staples of the several *Bildungsromans* produced by the Harlem Renaissance's major authors."[104] Perhaps *Plum Bum* can be viewed instead as a more experimental form of the familiar Harlem Renaissance *Bildungsroman*.

The Blacker the Berry, more emblematic of the unique character of the Harlem Renaissance *Bildungsroman*, simultaneously conveys both a folk and *bourgeois* aesthetic in its poignant depiction of "Negro Life." The crucial lesson learned by Emma Lou while not overtly mentioned in her narrative, is implicit in the traumatic witnessing of her first and likely last minstrel performance. It is the moment when a White entertainer in blackface re-enters the stage riding a mule while singing a song which symbolizes Emma Lou's own personal struggle, and a much-despised and disturbing performance becomes her legacy: "A yellow gal rides in a limousine, / A brown gal rides a Ford, / A black gal rides an old jackass/ But she gets there, yes, my Lord."[105] And, *yes*, Emma Lou does "get there" by the end of her story—despite the

[104] Whalan, *The Bildungsroman*, 73.
[105] Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*, 111.

obstacles she confronts along the way. But as Thurman asserts, it is a "pyrrhic victory," one which secures her presence as an anti-heroic rather than tragic figure within her story.

Ultimately, the conventional *Bildungsroman* as generically defined, does not accommodate the racialized protagonist: it is the racialized protagonist who accommodates the genre. Earlier in the thesis, it is suggested that Fauset intended Angèla to mirror the amoral cultures in which she has found a place for herself. Jerkins further asserts that *Plum Bun* "is also a portrait of one woman's ambition that stylishly leans towards a reflection of our own drives and impulses instead of a simple morality tale."[106] In other words, Angèla is just an ordinary American like all Americans within the larger world who is prepared to do whatever it takes to realize her aspirations and fulfill her potential. The adjective "amoral" according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means "without morals; unconcerned about right or wrong.[107] Amoral differs slightly yet significantly from "immoral," which the *OED* defines as "not following accepted standards of morality."[108] The latter definition infers that there exists a moral code to which the majority of civilized humans agree upon and live by. If Angèla's past actions of allowing members of the dominant majority to perceive her as being one of them—a practice she is not inclined to abandon by the end of her story—render her "amoral," meaning "unconcerned about right or wrong," it is due to the unjust societies in which she is obliged to make her way that have shaped her behaviour and her character. Jerkins argues conclusively that Angela's "actions are demonstrative of a shamefully unequal society where oppressed people make life-changing choices in order to survive or thrive."[109] One could argue that if the race that dominates during

[106] Jerkins, *Plum Bun*, xii.
[107] *Oxford English Dictionary Seventh Edition*. Edited by Maurice Waite, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979, 21.
[108] Ibid., 361.
[109] Jerkins, *Plum Bun*, xii.

Angèla's time, does not collectively experience guilt or remorse for the conditions they create for those considered "unequal," why should Fauset's protagonist feel any differently? Has she not gone through great pains to model herself in their image?

Martin Japtok expounds on Jerkin's discourse regarding the precariousness of Black existence within racially inequitable and "oppressive" societies. He writes:

> The system of racism forces those living under it to know the oppressor well, but the oppressor cannot bear the thought of being known, since they very idea of supremacy rests on the notion that the oppressor is a higher order of human being. Obviously, this notion crumbles when the oppressor can be analyzed by the oppressed; since that very analysis presupposes intellectual equality.[110]

Both Angela and Emma Lou, as bell hooks would undoubtedly agree, "have a special knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people, . . . to help [them] cope and survive in a white supremacist society.[111] Fauset shrewdly illustrates the folly of those African Americans who behave as though they inhabit the same meritocratic societies as their White counterparts through crafting her protagonist's *Doppelgänger*, Agnes Hallowell:

> Agnes was as fair as Angela, but she talked frankly, even with pride of her racial connections. . . . On her graduation she had applied for an internship at a great hospital for the insane; . . . But the man in charge of such appointments, . . . told her suavely that such a position would never be

[110] Martin Japtok, "The Gospel of Whiteness: Whiteness in African American Literature," *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 49, no. 4, 2004, 483-498. www.jstor.org/stable/41158092.
[111] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Publishers, 1992, 165.

given to her not if [she] passed ahead of a thousand white candidates.[112]

Japtok's philosophical theories regarding the insecurities of the "oppressor," are well worthy of consideration while contemplating the injustice to which Agnes, a medical doctor in training is subjected under Jim Crow. It would be reasonable to assume that in 1929, the overwhelming majority of patients admitted to state institutions for chronic mental illnesses were White. Agnes's "oppressor," will not permit her to be seen as a person in an authoritative position with White patients even those labelled, "insane" as they are still upheld as her superiors. Agnes's ability to psychoanalyze White individuals vanquish her oppressor's "notions" of "white supremacy" as her abilities "[presuppose] intellectual equality." We may recall Angèla's childhood nemesis, Esther Bayliss who refused to allow Angela to draw an impression of her because she felt that a "Negro" was "drawing from her as though she [were] as good as a White girl."

Kathleen Pfeiffer discloses in her writings on the "New Negro," that in 1929, Fauset subtitled her last major work, *Plum Bun*, "A Novel without a Moral," in protestation of Carl Van Vechten's controversial book, *Nigger Heaven*, which to Fauset's outrage had been praised in a prominent New York journal as "A Novel with a Moral."[113] Her angry reaction to what she viewed as the derogatory depictions of Black Americans particularly by a White American is generally believed to be the reason that she specified that *Plum Bun* be regarded as a novel without a moral, implying that if Van Vechten's book constituted the White establishment's notion of "morality," she wanted no part of it. Pfeiffer further informs us that the publication of *Nigger Heaven* and what Fauset saw as the complicit silence of her contemporaries, particularly

[112] Fauset, *Plum Bun*, 195.
[113] Kathleen Pfeiffer, "The New Negro among White Modernists," in *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Rachel Farebrother and Miriam Thaggert (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 64.

those whom she had "mentored," cause her to disassociate herself from the New Negro movement entirely[114] In stark contrast to Thurman, Fauset does not wish her protagonist to find herself within the racially hegemonic conception of morality because to her, it has no real legitimacy. She designs her protagonist to not only beat the system, but to make a mockery of it while Thurman teaches his protagonist a lesson in humility. Emma Lou accepts that while she is not free to change her world, she is free to change how she responds to it. Arguably, Emma Lou represents the "New Negro" as she becomes self-empowered to control her destiny; but will she ever be able to within the confines of her society? Angèla is able to escape the environmental constraints of her society through escaping the "tragedy" of her race. Of *Bildungsromane* like *Pum Bun*, Whalan writes: "Such novels posit passing as the route to full socialization but the death knell of authentic selfhood; where classic *Bildungsromans* ended in balanced compromise . . . passing plots become zero-sum games.[115] Fauset might have countered however, that as a "coloured" girl under Jim Crow, her protagonist had nothing more to lose.

[114] Ibid., 63.
[115] Whalan, "The *Bildungsroman*," 80.

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