



7-21-2017

# The Harlem Renaissance's Hidden Figure

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## Recommended Citation

Grice, Jada A., "The Harlem Renaissance's Hidden Figure" (2017). *English Summer Fellows*. 13.  
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The Harlem Renaissance's Hidden Figure

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Major- English

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July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

## Abstract

This project will seek to look at the Harlem Renaissance's hidden figure, Jessie Fauset. Jessie Fauset was born to an A.M.E. minister and his wife as one of ten children in Camden County New Jersey and raised in Philadelphia. From there she got her college degree and began teaching all over the country. She has written four novels, *There is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, *The Chinaberry Tree*, and *Comedy: American Style*, all of which I have read this summer. Each novel focuses on the early twentieth century black family. I will be analyzing these novels under the four themes of passing, acceptance, romance, and Paris/escape. I will also be mapping the characters in the novel on a QGIS system in order to indicate where the majority of the novel takes place and to see if certain characters have more movement than others. I will finally map Jessie Fauset's life in order to see if her life parallels with the lives of her characters. Mapping consists of a close reading of the novel, identifying locations in the book, creating an excel spreadsheet, and plotting the spreadsheet onto an online map on QGIS.

The Harlem Renaissance, which started in the 1920s and ended in the 1930s, was a movement that led way to an explosion of African-American creation, thought, art, and literature. Due to this movement Harlem is still deemed the cultural capital of African-Americans. Blacks from around the world, including Paris, Caribbean countries, and even Africa, traveled to Harlem to be a part of and/ or were inspired by the Harlem Renaissance. Many great artists helped the Harlem Renaissance to thrive including writer Langston Hughes, poet Countee Cullen, and novelist Zora Neale Hurston. The person who is really noted for being the key representative of the Harlem Renaissance is Langston Hughes. Langston Hughes is a male as is Countee Cullen and these are the names that are usually referred to when speaking of the movement. My project will intend to alter this male driven narrative of the Harlem Renaissance and look at a hidden figure of the Harlem Renaissance who was female. Langston Hughes and this hidden figure had a long correspondence amongst themselves. Hughes eventually named this hidden figure the Midwife of the Harlem Renaissance. They were great friends who helped each other; she even published Hughes' work in the Crisis magazine since she was its literary editor. This notable female is Jessie Fauset. Jessie Fauset was a forward thinking woman who chronicled the lives of African-American families in each of her four novels. Her four novels, which I have read, are *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). She also added in various types of female characters to her stories that ranged from having Victorian beliefs to more modern ones. She showcased the black family and put the black woman in the forefront of these families in a time when African American women had few freedoms

I will be comparing and contrasting each of Jessie Fauset's four novels under four themes/commonalities. The four themes are passing, acceptance, love, and Paris/escape. Along

with comparing and contrasting the novels I have mapped some of the novels on a mapping system, QGIS. I will also be looking at novels that were not able to be mapped due to imaginary circumstances. The circumstances that are imaginary might not be imaginary today but were then due to the time period they were written. I also wanted to see if some of Jessie Fauset's life correlates with some of the characters in her novels. Fauset wrote for and about the strong black family of America and it is important that her story be told as a part of the narrative of the Harlem Renaissance.

### Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance spanned from the 1920s-1930s an exact start date is not clear; the renaissance began with an interest in the world of African-Americans and Harlem from white readers so publishers began publishing African-American writers. White philanthropists who were interested in the "exotic" world of African-Americans funded writers and other artists. This went hand in hand with the time period because the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance arose during the roaring 20s. David Levering Lewis talks about how blacks were a great selling piece for the literary world in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. Levering states, "Harlem luminaries were keenly aware that some white writers had already found the Afro-American a salable commodity in the literary world" (91). The more prominent authors of the movement included Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen, Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen and Zora Neale Hurston. The older generation which served as mentors were Claude McKay, Alain Locke, and Charles S. Johnson (History). The Harlem Renaissance started with one key event, a party at the Civic Club. The Civic Club was the only upper crust club in New York which did not have any sex or color restrictions. Charles S. Johnson invited a number of unknown poets and writers to the Civic Club, the party's initial

purpose was to celebrate Jessie Fauset and the release of her first novel but it turned into a literary symposium. (Lewis 90-91). This party was known as the dress rehearsal of the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance fostered a lot of new artists and brought their artwork alive to the American nation. The Harlem Renaissance fizzled out during the Great Depression and was not recognized again until the Civil Rights Era.

### Women of the Harlem Renaissance

Well known women of the Harlem Renaissance include Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen. All of these women were African-American and had one thing in common they wanted to throw African-American culture into the spotlight through strong artwork. Women of the Harlem Renaissance such as Jessie Fauset were friends with the well-known artists of the time such as Langston Hughes and were thought to swap ideas with them yet most of the women of the era are not well known.

### Jessie Fauset

Jessie Fauset was born, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1882, in Camden County New Jersey one of ten children to an A.M.E. minister and his wife, she grew up in Philadelphia. Fauset attended high school at Philadelphia High School for Girls and after being turned down from Bryn Mawr University she earns a scholarship to Cornell University. Before graduating from Cornell University Fauset begins to correspond with W. E. B. Du Bois and he helps her to land a teaching position at Fisk University. She eventually goes on to study at the University of Pennsylvania, receiving a M.A. in romance languages. After her studies she goes on to teach at Douglass and Dunbar high schools in the Washington D.C. and Baltimore areas. Fauset also takes classes at the La Sorbonne in Paris during the summer of 1914. (Wall 33-84) Through her

education Jessie Fauset was able to lead a life well-traveled teaching and studying. She was also a literary editor for the Crisis magazine which was the official magazine of the NAACP founded by W.E.B. Du Bois. Fauset was in charge of the magazine when DuBois traveled and he did so often. Fauset was known to publish a plethora of works from up and coming writers in the Crisis earning her the nickname, from Langston Hughes, the midwife of the Harlem Renaissance. Jessie Fauset got married in her late forties and finally goes back home to rest in her old age. She eventually dies in her brother's house on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1961 at the age of 79.

Below is the raw biographical data I have combined in an excel spreadsheet about Fauset's life and the map which I plotted on QGIS. Jessie Fauset has lived a well-traveled life as shown through this raw data and mapping. Fauset was able to have a well-traveled life because of her education. Without her education she would not have moved around in order to teach and/or attend classes. Fauset also has time abroad in Paris like many of her characters throughout her novels do. Mapping her life in the QGIS system helps to track Jessie Fauset's movement and see the patterns between her life and that of her characters.

Person	Place	Latitude	Longitude
Jessie Fauset	The Model Hospital in Newark	40.74405	-74.1914
Jessie Fauset	Girls High School of Philadelphia	40.03877	-75.1461
Jessie Fauset	Fisk University	36.16718	-86.8041
Jessie Fauset	Cornell University	42.45347	-76.4736
Jessie Fauset	University of Pennsylvania	39.95223	-75.1932
Jessie Fauset	Douglass High School	39.31495	-76.655
Jessie Fauset	Dunbar High School	38.90802	-77.0129
Jessie Fauset	La Sorbonne Paris, France	48.84825	2.343087

Jessie  
Fauset          Rue de Sevres                                  48.84881                                  2.320743

Figure 1- Raw biographical data of Jessie Fauset's life before it is mapped on an online map with the QGIS system



Figure 2- Jessie Fauset's biographical map, mapped on an online Stamen Toner map

### Passing

The act of passing is seen in three of Fauset's novels and they are *There is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, and *Comedy: American Style*. Passing is when a person of African-American descent acts as if they are white due to possessing a lighter skin tone. In *Plum Bun and Comedy: American Style* the act of passing comes with the denial of the father because of his darker skin tone. The novel *There is Confusion* was Fauset's first novel penned in 1924. It is about the families confusion and is Fauset's calmest novel. There is no main character that passes for white in this novel, yet it is a secondary character who we meet later in the story. The fact that Fauset does not usher in the use of passing as a major issue with a main character until her second novel shows that she did not want to stir up too much controversy for her first novel, she needed it to

be accepted and loved instead of picked apart. The main character, Joanna, runs into her friend Vera on the street who admits that she is passing. They have a quiet and calm conversation until Joanna asks to be shown to a restaurant where she can get excellent service and quality food. Vera knows a great place but she usually passes at that specific restaurant and knows that being seen with a person of color there could blow her cover. The text reads,

“Look here Janna, I might as well be frank, we were all of us children together- doesn't it seem ages ago? You know I wouldn't ever try to fool you. But the truth of it is I go to that particular restaurant often with the other girls in my office and of course the restaurant people think I'm- I'm white. See? I don't know just what they'd think if they saw me with you- some one who definitely showed color- or what might come of it. You don't think I'm a pig, Joanna?” (Confusion 197).

Joanna says she doesn't think she is a pig and they go to eat where no one knows Vera. Vera is set up as a tragic mulatta. She is an African-American woman who can pass for white and is caught between two worlds. Vera's act of passing is passed off as innocent and we are made to feel sorry for this tragic mulatta. With Joanna forgiving Vera the act of passing is officially accepted and cast to the side in a matter of one page. In Fauset's other novels the main characters who are passing are created to be disliked not felt sorry for. The main characters in her other novels that pass are all female; passing is an extremely controversial act, and this act is mainly associated with women.

In Fauset's second novel *Plum Bun*, penned in 1928, the main character Angela moves from her hometown of Philadelphia in order to pass for white after the death of her parents. Her sister Virginia follows her to New York but is brown skin, a sisterly conflict develops from there. From the beginning of the novel Angela is glad to have fair skin like her mother. The text reads,

“Gratitude was no strong ingredient in this girl’s nature, yet very often early she began thanking Fate for the chance which in that household of four had bestowed on her the heritage of her mother’s fair skin. She might so easily have been, like her father, black, or have received the *mélange* which had resulted in Virginia’s rosy bronzeness and her deeply waving black hair. But Angela had received not only her mother’s creamy complexion and her soft cloudy, chestnut hair, but she had taken from Junius the aquiline nose, the gift of some remote Indian ancestor which gave to his face and his eldest daughter’s that touch of chiseled immobility” (Plum 14).

This love for fair skin pushes Angela away from her father and into the arms of her mother. The only good thing she received from her father is his aquiline nose which is sharp and helps her to pass. The fact that she dislikes her father’s skin tone kills any notion of a strong father/daughter relationship. Angela’s father Junius is left to be loved by his bronze daughter Virginia.

Fauset in every case of passing has females be the passers and these females thank God that they do not have the black color of their father. This denigrates the black man but more specifically the black father. The black father cannot be a dependable source in Fauset’s novels because he is not loved by his daughter who hates his skin. The black father is belittled to nothing more than his color, the color of his skin is all that he is and all that he will be. Even though the black fathers of these stories are providers everything they do is simply overshadowed by their color. I believe that the role of passing has been bestowed to girls who later become women because there is a stereotype that mainly women are obsessed with how they are perceived and societal standards which were, during that time, ‘white is right’. The American beauty standard usually praises white and light skin while it demeans chocolate and darker skin shades. A woman who is passing would be grateful to be rid of the darker skin tone

of her race and be able to get all of the advantages of a white individual. Passing is a dangerous game but if it goes undetected the passer is granted better treatment.

Another person obsessed with the 'white is right' ordeal is Olivia from Fauset's 1933 novel *Comedy: American Style*. This novel is about the Cary family, an African-American family that has skin fair enough to pass for white that is everyone but the last born Oliver who is born with a bronze tone. The story highlights their tumultuous family relationship and the Cary's relationships with surrounding friends. Olivia is an extremely difficult child. Early in the novel it is evident that this child does not even care for her parents despite the affection she is shown. Like Angela her mother is fair skinned and her father is brown-skinned. Olivia inherits the fair skin of her mother and does not correct the teacher in school who believes that she is Italian. From a very young age Olivia does not see the harm in passing for white, she actually prefers to pass for white. The text reads,

""Well, then," Olivia finished, coming to her point, for her clear mind told her no further discussion was necessary, 'since the girls, and the teachers too, at school think I'm white, don't you think I'd better be white?"" (Comedy 10).

Olivia's attempt to pass only gets worse with age. Her husband refuses to pass and her son as well. This ties in with Fauset's female characters always wanting to pass, black men who can pass for white in this novel are adamant about being African-American. During a get together Olivia is having with some white women she makes her son Oliver, who cannot pass, dress up as a butler her other son Christopher sees this and is outraged. Instead of having his younger brother carry in the tray he does, and all the while wishes he was darker just to spite his mother. The text reads,

“He strode into the sitting-room wishing that he were the color of jet and that they could all hear him calling her Mother” (Comedy 213).

The business of not passing is usually left up to the men and can even create a hatred against the women who do decide to pass. In this novel the women who pass are villainous and meet their ends with boring and fickle lives in Paris. While the men who do not decide to pass end up living happy, simple together in America. A mindset of wanting to associate with blacks is always in the minds of the men who do not pass and the fact that Christopher Cary Jr. wishes that he were jet shows that he is not for any of his mother's passing schemes. Most men choose not to participate in the act of passing but what happens when passing is not even present in a Fauset novel?

In Fauset's 1931 novel *The Chinaberry Tree* passing is not present. The novel is about the Strange women of Reddbrook New Jersey. The torrid extramarital affairs that the Strange women have leave their daughters in a sticky predicament growing up. The reason passing is not present throughout the novel is because in the suburb of Reddbrook New Jersey the races mingle closely. In this town an African-American male doctor can birth babies from Italian women and white and black children are able to go to school together. The community of Reddbrook is an idealistic town that mixes the races together at a time when they were separated. There is a character named Laurentine who has white blood in her and really light skin, she could pass for white if the entire town did not know about her African-American mother's affair with her white father. The fact that this relationship is out in the open hinders Laurentine from being able to interact with others, so she not only cannot pass because of the knowledge of the affair but also does not have the time to care what others think and passing is associated with keeping up appearances.

## Acceptance

Acceptance is another theme that is present in the novels of Jessie Fauset. Acceptance is the need to feel as if one belongs. Some of the characters in Fauset's novels receive acceptance such as Maggie and Laurentine but only towards the end of the novel. The character of Oliver never receives acceptance from the one person he wants it from, his mother Olivia. This theme is showcased throughout three of Fauset's novels. In Fauset's *There is Confusion* Maggie feels as if she needs to be accepted with the upper crust of African Americans. Maggie lives a lower class life since her mother is a laundress. She knows that if she is able to attach herself to a strong family of good economic and social standing she can be seen in a positive light. The text reads,

“If Peter was unconscious of the utter desirability of association with the young Marshalls, Maggie Ellersley was not. Ever since her childhood when she had overheard a conversation between a cousin and her mother, she had made up her mind to attach herself to some such family and see what came of it” (Confusion 55).

While associating herself with the Marshalls Maggie follows around Sylvia Marshall and begins acting and fashioning her hair after her, she believes that by looking like the Marshall's she can then inherit their ways. Maggie also falls in love with Philip the eldest son. Not only is Maggie copying what she sees of the Marshall sisters but she is looking to marry into the family in order to increase her status. Maggie has lighter skin which is high up on the hierarchy of skin tones but this skin tone does not help her move between classes nor elevate her status in any way. Maggie reaches acceptance at the end of the novel through her marriage with Philip and the fact that she acquires meaningful work by the end of the novel.

In Fauset's novel *The Chinaberry Tree* a main character Laurentine yearns to be accepted by her community. The only involvement she has with her community is making dresses and she solely makes dresses for the white community for the first half of the novel. Being so closed off leads Laurentine to imagine different instances, specifically romantic encounters, underneath the chinaberry tree. Laurentine is even scared that she will not be accepted by the man that wants to call for her Dr. Denleigh, so she explains the affair between her mother and father. Acceptance is something that Laurentine wants and she is granted that acceptance through the love of Dr. Denleigh and the friendships from Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ismay. Both Maggie and Laurentine find acceptance through love.

The person who wanted to be accepted the most out of all of Fauset's novels is Oliver. Oliver is the only child born without a fair skin tone to the Carys in the novel *Comedy: American Style*. Oliver sees the letters his mother sends stating that his color is a weight around the family's neck and feels the way that she constantly ignores him and belittles everything that he does. The reader immediately feels sorry for Oliver, he cannot even feel at home in his own home. He tries various ways to win his mother's love one of these ways includes acting like he is a Filipino butler when his mother holds a party with her white friends. The text reads,

“Oliver yielded, suddenly feeling very tired. ‘It isn’t anything really, Chris. She wanted a Filipino butler and Dad said he couldn’t afford it. So she told me bout it...’

‘And she asked you to be the butler!’

‘No, she didn’t ask me,’ said Oliver, not understanding the rage which seemed to have taken possession of his brother. ‘I offered to do it for her. Really I did, Chris. ... You’ll have to let me go, they’re waiting for more tea. Mother won’t like it’ (*Comedy* 212).

Oliver does everything in his power to gain his mother's affection and approval and never earns it. When Oliver feels as if he can't take life in America anymore he messages his sister Teresa in Paris and asks to live with her. She cannot take him on because she is passing and her French husband does not know that she is colored, he actually does not like colored people very much. This is the last straw, when Oliver sees he has no escape he reaches for his hunting gun and pulls the trigger. When there is a lack of acceptance it can lead to unseemly events but in this case the lack of acceptance is lethal.

### Love

The romance that is most prominent in Fauset's novel *There is Confusion* is between Joanna and Peter. Joanna Marshall and Peter Bye become husband and wife after being separated by Joanna's musical career that caused her to travel. The reader builds up the story where one thinks that the two will never be together but the two eventually find their way back to each other at the end of the novel and get married. The text reads,

“Joanna and Peter married and Peter came at Joel's insistent request to live in the One Hundred and Thirty-eighth Street house. It was marvelous to see how the two old people renewed themselves in the youth of their children. Joel was as proud of Peter as he had been of Joanna. Even Mrs. Marshall's long allegiance to Sylvia wavered a little”  
(*Confusion* 290).

Joanna gives up her entire livelihood, of singing, in order to be a wife and mother. This sets Joanna up to be an old school woman. This is one of the few women that Fauset shows giving up her career in order to raise her children. Fauset was truly a feminist writer because she not only

showcased working black women but also showed black women who stayed at home and kept house. The love in this story also transcends class levels. Maggie who is born lower class, to a mother who is a laundress, marries Philip who is middle class, born to a famous caterer and school teacher. Everyone is able to get their happy endings and love is spread evenly throughout this novel.

In the next novel *Plum Bun* Angela finally gets love after accepting that she is colored and stops passing. She comes out publicly as colored and is able to gain the love of her life Anthony Cross. Virginia and Angela are both in love with Anthony at one point in the novel but in the end Anthony and Angela are together and Virginia returns to Philadelphia to be with Matthew. The text reads,

“His eyes on her astonished countenance, he began searching about in his pockets, slapping his vest, pulling out keys and handkerchiefs. ‘There ought to be a tag on me somewhere,’ he remarked apologetically, ‘but anyhow Virginia and Matthew sent me with their love’ (Plum 379).

Virginia and Angela grow up in Philadelphia and the loves they choose reflect their tendencies. Virginia is more of a home body from the very beginning of the novel and finds love with a fellow native Philadelphian, Matthew. Virginia finds love with Anthony Cross the man who she meets when she moves to New York. He eventually follows her all the way to Paris. Their relationship transcends race she is African-American and he is Brazilian. Anthony is the new and unknown, he is the male embodiment of Angela’s ambitions to conquer the new and unknown of Paris. Whereas Virginia, Ginny’s, beau Matthew is native and shows her tendency to stay within her comfort zone. These two sisters both get the loves of their life and it shows their tendencies to either stay in their comfort zone or venture out into the unknown.

The novel *The Chinaberry Tree* shows the forbidden love between an African-American, Aunt Sal and a white person Colonel Halloway. This relationship is concealed throughout most of the novel. The only time it is brought up as a topic of gossip. During the time the novel was written relationships between whites and African-Americans were frowned upon. It takes Aunt Sal's daughter, the product of her relationship with Colonel Halloway, to realize that she did indeed loved Halloway. The text reads,

“Aunt Sal was thinking: ‘Now, my child is safe, and Melissa too. These are such splendid men. ...Dear Asshur did anyone in this world ever look as happy as he? Frank and I were like that once.’ And suddenly she felt free to think of her dead lover,-with ease and gratefulness and the complete acceptance which always made their lack of conformity of absolutely no moment” (Chinaberry 339-340).

The fresh love of Dr. Denleigh and Laurentine and Melissa and Asshur let Aunt Sal know that her daughter and niece will be loved and protected and it also gives her the freedom to remember earlier days where she was young and in love. This love is very healing and is the complete opposite of what Fauset showcases in her next novel.

In Fauset's novel *Comedy: American Style* love is more about help. Chris Cary Jr. needs Phebe to help him with his life's work. A man gaining a helpmate in marriage is usually common rhetoric in the church and this can be reflective of Fauset's childhood, growing up with an A.M.E. minister for a father. The text reads,

“I think I ought to make plain to you, Phebe, that I'm looking for someone who loves her home, who wants children , who wants to love and accept love....But there's something else besides. I want someone who is willing, within reason, to help me in my

life work.' 'Why,' she said in bewilderment , 'there's no way, is there, in which I could help you with your medicine?' 'No, I don't mean that... My life's work is to try to restore my father. He's a broken man since Oliver's death'" (Comedy 297-298).

Love in this case can be seen as redemptive as well as bringing about help. Fauset also shows that love is not perfect when Phebe visits Nicholas in New York. She kisses Nick but decides on not having a fully-fledged affair because she realizes how important Christopher is to her. In the end of all Fauset's novels love usually wins out with all of its hopeful and redemptive qualities.

### Paris/ Escape

Europe is a breeding ground for freedom for African-Americans during the early twentieth century in Fauset's novel *There is Confusion*. France is used for many soldiers fighting in the war but it is also a way out for professional blacks. France is highly romanticized and thought to be the land of the free and brave. Even if it means a person has to start over, moving to Europe is the way to go. Paris is the epitome of freedom for African-Americans and is the way to success. The text reads,

“Well, it's like this, Janna. I've had a message-indirectly-from Harley. He- 'She bit her lip, ' he isn't coming back to America. He managed to get his discharge in France and he's made up his mind to live there. Isn't it great for him? It means he'll have to start his training all over again, but he says he'd rather do that than waste his life bucking this color business anymore. And there's all sorts of work for a dentist in those little French towns. Just imagine old Harley's being free to come and go as he pleases. No more insults for him, no more lynching news. Why it'll be life all over for him, won't it Jan? And I can't blame him'" (Confusion 272).

The African-American man knows that he will be able to be a man without concern for color so why not make Europe home? Europe is the ultimate escape, it might come with a few setbacks but it is the place of ultimate freedom. Paris is not only a place for black professionals it is also a place for black dreamers.

Angela of Fauset's novel *Plum Bun* dreams of having an illustrious art career. After coming out as African-American to the art institute she was passing at in New York she moves to Paris in order to escape. She wants to be out of the public view after winning her big art award and coming out. Paris not only leads way for escape but it also gives one rest. It gives a colored person the ability to rest their head without being judged about the color of their skin. The text reads,

“Paris at first charmed and wooed her. For a while it seemed to her that her old sense of joy in living for living's sake had returned to her. It was like those first few days which she had spent in exploring New York. She rode delightedly in the motor-buses on and on to the unknown, unpredictable terminus; she followed the winding Seine; crossing and re-crossing the bridges each with its distinctive characteristics” (Plum 374-375).

Paris also brought about uncharted terrain for Angela to explore. But, with all the freedoms Paris brings Angela still ends up feeling lonely, the next novel discussed also shows how. Europe is not always what it is cracked up to be in the case of freedoms.

Finally in Fauset's novel *Comedy: America Style* the female characters who are passing for white escape to Paris. Teresa is the first to permanently make her home in Paris with her French husband. Teresa realizes she can move easier as a white woman in Paris where no one

knows her true identity. She is also suffering from a lost love, once she learns he has married an exotic Mexican woman she wonders why she cannot also have an exotic love. She eventually learns that Paris is not all that it is cracked up to be. The text reads,”

“She thought back over her life. School in Philadelphia, at Christie’s, at Smith. She dwelt in some wonder on her mother’s ambitions. Was this all it was to bring to her, life in this little southern town, bearable only with an ignorant peasant woman? ... Absurd but true. Gradually her expectation of a change died away and she settled down into an existence that was colorless, bleak and futile” (Comedy 183).

Teresa’s mother also goes to Paris to escape the guilt she feels of not accepting her son. She is called a murderer by her daughter in law and needs to get away. As she talks to a woman she meets in Paris the woman is baffled that Olivia believes that Paris is the greatest thing ever she knows that it can be a difficult place. The text reads,

“Mrs. Reynolds, suddenly weary, thought she must go. Tomorrow she would, she knew, be her old chipper, assured self. But tonight it made her sick to see a woman, past middle age, with a home and husband in God’s country, pass them up for the fabled freedom of Paris” (Comedy 324).

Fauset debunks the wonder and splendor surrounded around Paris in her final novel. She starts off with it being a safe haven for a small town dentist and ends with it having fabled freedoms. Fauset herself lived and worked in Paris and may have experienced for herself first hand just how hard life *still* was. In her novel *Plum Bun* she even has Angela the main character visit a place in the exact same area where she was when she lived there. Which goes to show Fauset threaded her life throughout her novels. Even though she lived in Paris and it is described as

magical by many others it is still overall a place where you must work hard in order to gain any success. The streets aren't made of gold but Fauset's novels just might be.

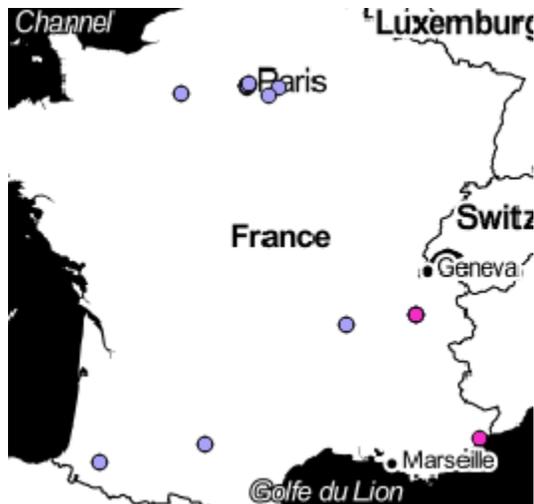


Figure 3- This map shows all the areas where France was visited by three of Fauset's novels:

There is Confusion, Plum Bun, and Comedy: American Style.

### The Unmappable

The only novel that was not able to be mapped was *The Chinaberry Tree*. This novel was not able to be mapped because it was a fictional place. This place was fictional because it consisted of blacks and whites living peacefully together in a suburb of New Jersey. Interracial neighborhoods were not found at this time. People of different races were so close that an African –American man was able to deliver white women's babies. Racial tension does not exist in this area and the only time racial tensions occur is when the characters travel outside of their beloved home to New York. This novel is written in a slightly utopian sense. In a short article about Jessie Fauset the writer Arthur P. Davis states that "*The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) deals not so much with interracial problems per se as it does with *human* problems" (93). Therefore the novel *The Chinaberry Tree* is colorblind and not able to be mapped due to its fictional setting.

Overall reading Fauset's novels opened my world up to the idea of progression and reoccurring themes. I was able to explore the idea of expatriation through Paris. Expatriation is to withdraw oneself from residence in one's own country. Fauset began with Paris being the land of freedom to it being a bleak, futile land of fabled freedoms. Fauset also gains a bit of nationalistic views by stating at the end of her last novel that America is God's country (Comedy 324). Through the duration of Fauset's novels she debunks the myth of Paris. I was also able to look at three other themes of Acceptance, Passing, and Love. I think through the themes of love and acceptance she is trying to show that love and acceptance will conquer all frayed race relations. She speaks on passing because it was a big problem during the early twentieth century and she poses the theme of Paris just to debunk its magical powers. Fauset was encouraging African-Americans to stay in America and too tough out harsh race relations. Love transcended all things and was theme that emerged in each of Fauset's four novels. I was able to truly enjoy the full scope of Fauset's novels and learn more about African-American families in the early twentieth century. I learned about the ordeal of passing and that early twentieth century families tended to stick close together. Jessie Fauset is a hidden figure of the Harlem Renaissance that needs to be learned about more often. Her novels are golden and the themes that rest amongst their pages are timeless.

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