

“THE LIVING IS (NOT) EASY”: INVERTING AFRICAN AMERICAN DREAMS  
DEFERRED IN THE LITERARY CAREERS OF PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS,  
JESSIE REDMON FAUSET, AND DOROTHY WEST, 1900-1995

by

ERICA LORRAINE GRIFFIN

(Under the Direction of R. Baxter Miller)

ABSTRACT

Often considered champions of Black bourgeois values, authors Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West examine issues in their work that go beyond those of socioeconomic status and ultimately address their own personal and professional challenges. Hopkins became literary editor of the *Colored American Magazine* from 1903-04. Fauset held a similar position at *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926 and co-founded the short-lived children’s magazine *The Brownies’ Book* (1919-20). Dorothy West founded both *Challenge* (1934) and *New Challenge* (1937) magazines. Despite their admirable efforts to publish both established and unknown writers at each publication, these women, professional authors in their own right, were all destined to forfeit their powerful positions because of gender and political pressure. Not surprisingly, each editor’s creative and journalistic writing reveals her awareness of the importance of mentoring, as does her professional maneuvering and contact with the authors she supported. Themes and images such as the heroic spirit, the romantic quest, and the inner child emerge in their novels and lesser-known magazine fiction, the latter of which is the focus of this study. Hopkins’s characters are of the good-or-evil variety, and the former always overthrows the latter in the name of justice. Fauset’s characters are often naive youngsters who seek grand, romantic adventures and ultimately acknowledge the gritty reality that defers their dreams. West’s child characters are generally wiser than their dreamy-eyed parents, fathers in particular. Adult characters are often emotionally childlike and embrace their inner innocence. In their professional lives, these women displayed similar traits. They show heroism in the face of conflict, a romantic-turned-realistic attitude in the male-dominated world of publishing, and a deep concern, one that is at once parental and childishly optimistic, for the welfare of future writers of color. They ultimately invert their deferred dreams of professional success into positive mentoring experiences.

INDEX WORDS: Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Dorothy West, African American women writers (1900-1995), African American magazines (1900-1940), African American women editors (1900-1940), African American publishers (1850-1950)

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December 2002

## DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my maternal grandmother,

ETHEL MARIE BEADEN TAYLOR,

11 May 1923 - 25 March 1998,

and to the memory of my paternal grandfather,

ROBERT LEE GRIFFIN, SENIOR,

9 June 1926 - 20 December 2001,

for their constant love and encouragement on both the temporal and spiritual planes.

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## PREFACE

This project is the culmination of five years of research, writing, inspiration, and angst (1997-2002). It also has origins in the spring of 1993. I began studying the life and work of Jessie Redmon Fauset in a seminar on the Harlem Renaissance at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I was interested in Fauset for several reasons, particularly for her editorial work for *The Crisis*. Her love of travel and higher education appealed to me as well. It was ultimately the novelty of learning about this Black woman of letters who evidently wasn't aware that Black women didn't do -- or rather, weren't *supposed* to earn Master's degrees, speak fluent French, or travel abroad in the early twentieth-century. They certainly didn't hold many levels of professional power, although Fauset is regarded as a powerful literary mentor, or "midwife" of the Harlem Renaissance.

I wrote a course paper on Fauset's first novel, *There Is Confusion* (1924) and its connection to her early travel essays. She wrote these works during the outbreak of World War I in Paris in 1914, and during her less-than-romantic second encounter with postwar Europe and North Africa in 1925-1926. Both the novel and essays emphasized African Americans' newfound sense of identity on foreign shores, as opposed to the second-class citizen treatment they receive in their homeland. George Hutchinson recommended the paper to Dolan Hubbard, who suggested several revisions before including it in *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts: Race, Class, and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (Knoxville: Tennessee UP, 1995). This first major publication introduced me to the rigors and challenges of scholarly research. I read Fauset's four novels. In addition, I read her seven travel essays and some of her short fiction in order to present a more complete portrayal of the mutual effect of her fiction and nonfiction writing on the African American literary tradition. My central argument was that in her travel essays, Fauset wrote beyond the bourgeoisie -- generally the focus of her novels --



in an attempt to embrace the common struggles of people of all races and nationalities. Her topics included poverty, class bias, sexism, abuse of women, and stereotypes of so-called “wealthy” Americans.

I was still interested in Fauset’s publishing career, and at the time I was unaware that she was not unique in being African American literary midwife. In fact, she was a near-descendant of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, known as “our literary foremother.” I began studying Hopkins in the spring of 1995 at the University of Georgia with Barbara McCaskill. Hopkins was an intelligent and powerful woman of letters who helped to found and promote the *Colored American Magazine* in 1900, an era that was even more restrictive, especially for Black women in post-Reconstruction, post-Victorian America. Hopkins nevertheless flourished as a novelist, short story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and mentor to new writers. She was also a talented singer and stage performer as well as a temperance advocate. This is an ironic juxtaposition -- an “actress” of sorts who preaches against other unrespectable behavior -- that reflects her often ambiguous attitude toward women’s role in society. In her fiction and essays, Hopkins seems to subscribe to the dictates of the cult of true womanhood, i.e., purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness. She wishes to include Black women in that lofty category in order to lift the veil of ignorance and stereotypes about overt Black female sexuality and primitive instincts. On the other hand, Hopkins herself never married and remained a career woman throughout her life. Like Fauset, she is a fascinating study, i.e., an intelligent, independent woman whose ability to work beyond the domestic realm gains her praise and notoriety. Both women found themselves bereft of their literary editor titles, and they never regained that same level of professional success, although they tried desperately to do so. Hopkins sank into obscurity; Fauset turned to marriage and teaching for security. It seems that they were ultimately “punished” for transgressing sex roles, i.e., subverting conventional notions of nurturing and productivity by raising “literary” young rather than biological children.

My course paper in spring 1995 was a close reading, a character analysis from a scene in Hopkins second novel *Hagar's Daughter* (1902). My focus on such a small segment likely inspired me to read the author's short stories, and I eventually read her other three novels as well in preparation for comprehensive exams. Like Fauset's short fiction, published in *Crisis* and its partner magazine for children entitled *The Brownies' Book*, scholars often neglected Hopkin's short stories in favor of her better-known novels. Now with two Black women editors/writers in mind, I began to ask myself more and more about these outspoken literary foremothers. How did they obtain their editorial positions, particularly in such racially and sexually oppressive eras? Why did each woman leave her well-earned position? Finally, would a study of their short fiction, with a brief history of their ill-fated publishing careers, truly add a new dimension to current African American literary scholarship?

Dorothy West came as a complete surprise to me, although I now suspect that there are no accidents in literary scholarship, or any other type of research, for that matter. In the spring of 1996 I attended the College Language Association conference in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I picked up a copy of *The Wedding* (1995) at the book exhibit, intending to read it strictly for pleasure. The story of a wealthy young Black woman's impending marriage to a poor white jazz musician and its effect on her Afrocentric, Martha's Vineyard-dwelling family appealed to me as a respite from long "required reading" lists. I noticed a photograph of the author and read the biography, noting the following: "West founded the influential magazine *Challenge* in 1934, and in 1937 she started *New Challenge*, with Richard Wright as her associate editor." This was a most serendipitous discovery. In addition, the biographical sketch mentioned West's recent collection of short stories and essays entitled *The Richer, The Poorer*, also published in 1995. This last-living member of the Harlem Renaissance was experiencing a second Renaissance all her own, as her previous novel, *The Living Is Easy* was originally published in 1948. Here was a third African American literary midwife who,

unlike her predecessors, started her own magazine, over which she held complete editorial control. West was, moreover, a prolific short story writer whose work found a wider audience than either Hopkins or Fauset. She published in *Challenge, Opportunity, Messenger, Saturday Evening Quill, New York Daily News, Boston Post, and Vineyard Gazette*, among others. Why then, was so much critical energy devoted to *The Living is Easy (TLIE)*, the autobiographical novel about her parents' rocky marriage and her intense relationship with her mother? The focus on *The Wedding* was understandable -- a second novel after twenty-seven years. The simultaneous publication of *The Richer, The Poorer* was marketing magic, as it made readers aware of West's talents as novelist, short story writer, and essayist. For myself, it introduced me to my third literary foremother.

By the time I began studying for comprehensive exams in spring of 1996, I had already formulated a basic outline for my prospectus. I wanted to do an intensive study of the magazine fiction of Hopkins, Fauset, and West. I wasn't sure whether to include yet another series of analyses of their novels but felt partly compelled to do so. I was concerned that I wouldn't have enough material worthy of a dissertation-length project if I focused solely on the short fiction. After all, Hopkins had only written seven such works for *Colored American Magazine (CAM)*. An unfinished novella entitled "Topsy Templeton" appears in two installments of *New Era* (1913), Hopkins's short-lived magazine. However, tracking down actual copies of this post-*CAM* work was nearly impossible via interlibrary loan. I ultimately relinquished that quest, although I would like to retrieve this novella for future research, in order to compare this last work of short fiction with the themes of her fiction for *CAM*. Fauset was somewhat more productive; she published six stories in *Crisis* and four in *The Brownies' Book*. Yet would a study of these works -- for Hopkins and Fauset -- be enough to comprise two full-length dissertation chapters and be as worthy as yet another critique of their novels? I remained unconvinced and anxious.

I had the opposite problem with Dorothy West. This truly *prolific* author wrote more than forty short stories. Her most fruitful association was with the *Daily News*, which published two stories a month between 1940 and 1960. Despite this fact, I was amazed at the lack of criticism on her short work, i.e., as opposed to the body of scholarship on *TLIE*. My main concern was having such an emphasis on my third literary midwife; her large body of work could easily make up forty percent of the dissertation. Would this be a bad step, or was devoting two chapters to West's work unavoidable? I was uncertain.

By the fall of 1997, after a summer of recovering from comprehensive exams, I began read each author's short fiction and to make copious notes. I had a tentative title, "Militant Midwives, or 'The Damnation of Women': The Politics of Publishing for Three Black Women Writers, 1900-1937." I would focus on Hopkins's morality theme, Fauset's emphasis on fantasy versus reality, and West's urban irony. I would look at each woman's professional history at each magazine, noting its effect on her fiction. There was a definite connection, although I had not determined exactly *what*. In winter and spring of 1998 I was reviewing the limited scholarship on each author's short fiction and trying to develop my own critical angle. In addition, I began doing archival research; I was looking for personal and business correspondence that would reveal more about their professional and creative work.

Spring and summer of 1998 brought personal loss, and a need for healing supplanted the need for research. Ethel Taylor, my maternal grandmother, passed away in March of that year. The effects of that loss ran much more deeply than I realized, causing much delay in the formation of a clear vision, outline, and prospectus for my project. To make matters worse, Dorothy West passed away in August of that year; this caused a significant shift of focus. I eventually turned toward an intriguing psychoanalytical/archetypal approach and a new title: "Ever Feeling Their 'Twoness': Examining the African American 'Collective Unconscious' in the Magazine Fiction of

Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West, 1900-1940.” I reread their short fiction that summer, made more copious notes, and sought additional secondary research. I had compiled the mother of all bibliographies -- eighteen pages’ worth of information -- but I was still no closer to a completed prospectus.

By the fall of 1998, the research had overwhelmed me, and I considered limiting my project to West, who up to that point had *not* been the subject of a book-length study. Would this be better, both as an academic challenge and as an homage to the two important women I had lost that year? I had yet another working title, “A Wealth of Irony and Innocence: The Literary Legacy of Dorothy West.” I planned to cover a selection of West’s short fiction, analyses of her two novels, and a chapter comparing her editorial work at *Challenge* and *New Challenge* with that of Hopkins and Fauset. I was also determined to access issues of the *Boston Post*, which published her earliest fiction between approximately 1914 and 1926, and *Daily News* (1940-1960). I had hopes of recovering West’s unanthologized, “unknown” stories (much like Hopkins’s “Topsy Templeton” of 1913). This also became an archival researcher’s nightmare. Unable to find these newspapers from my home base in Athens, and unable to travel to Boston or New York at the time, I eventually shelved that search. However, this is another topic for future research; I wish to seek the lost short fiction of both authors.

I was, however, fortunate to have access to a great deal of West’s fiction. The University of Georgia library holds copies of *Challenge* and *New Challenge*, in which West pens fiction under two pen names, Mary Christopher and Jane Isaac. In reading her fiction in these magazines as well as in *Opportunity* and *Messenger* (also at UGA), I noticed recurring archetypal images of children, plantation myths, and virginal goddesses. My critical approach slowly began to form. I would recover West’s “unknown,” or rather, unstudied work. I would take an historical and biographical approach, tracing West’s experiences in the White- and male-dominated world of publishing. The project would have a feminist slant, particularly in placing the

author/editor in the tradition of Black literary foremothers with Hopkins and Fauset. The strongly autobiographical slant of her fiction and emphasis on childhood experiences and family relationships favored a psychoanalytical approach; I would thus pursue an archetypal analysis of these recurring themes and images and their significance to West's life and work.

Somewhere between the fall of 1998 and spring of 1999, however, I found myself again working on all three authors. Perhaps my plan of focusing on West was too ambitious, requiring much more archival research than I was financially or mentally prepared to undertake at the time. In addition, I learned that it was generally best to focus on three authors for a dissertation, which would have a better chance for future publication. In the meantime, my prospectus outline continued to grow, change, and mutate into an absolute monstrosity. At one point I had added a neoclassical angle to the already top-heavy psychoanalytical/archetypal/feminist/archival/biographical/historical approach. Finally, in April of 1999, nearly two years after completing my comprehensive exams, I produced a prospectus entitled: "The Mystery Within Them: Multiple Consciousness in the Magazine Fiction of Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West." The ambitious Du Boisian theme of "double consciousness" would become a "quadruple consciousness": Black, American, female, middle-class. I chose specific archetypal patterns for each author. For Hopkins, I would focus on the African motherland. For Fauset, I would explore fairy tales and plantation myths. For West, I would investigate childlike optimists and their ironic reversals. Again, I would open with a chapter on each author's editorial careers and their effect on her short fiction. In addition, I would discuss how a reading of these understudied works would enhance the current scholarship on their novels and thus expand the critical horizons for all three writers.

Feedback in 1999 was diverse and helpful. I was advised to consider focusing on one writer, particularly since my outline, with its overarching theme of multiple

consciousness, was so complicated. I was also encouraged to focus on specific literary techniques for each author, if I were to include all three in my study, and to stress the importance of these techniques as tools for understanding each author's work. Beyond this, I was asked to define what I meant by a "Black feminist sensibility" and to explain how each author's writing changes ways of looking at Black women's writing and adds to the literary canon. Most importantly, I had to explain why I had chosen these particular three authors and find ways to connect each woman's short fiction, as well as her editorial experiences, to the others. I thus refined my archetypal patterns and traced the heroic spirit in Hopkins, the romantic quest in Fauset, and the inner child in West. These themes were not exclusive to their respective authors; Hopkins had inner children, Fauset had heroic characters, and West had romantic quests in her work. The patterns overlapped. Moreover, they reflected traits that each woman expressed in her editorial work. They exhibited heroism to overcome racism, sexism, and classicism. They had romantic goals of success for themselves and future generations of Black writers. Lastly, they had a childlike faith that their efforts would be acknowledged and that the mentoring tradition would continue.

Armed with these suggestions, I spent the summer and fall of 1999 doing even more archival research. I drew up an ambitious plan for visiting university and other archives, including Fisk University (Hopkins), the University of Massachusetts, the Schomburg Center in New York, the Library of Congress, Howard University, and Tulane University (Fauset), Yale University (Fauset and West), and Boston University (West). I knew that I would have to limit my choices to only a few of these locations; time and funds were limited. Fortunately, I found that many items of personal correspondence were in fact available at the UGA library on microfilm and via interlibrary loan. Some Fauset-Du Bois correspondence had been compiled in Herbert Aptheker's collection of Du Bois's letters. I eventually requested microfilm copies of Fauset and West correspondence from the Beinecke library at Yale and learned that West

had yet another pen name, Mildred Wirt. Here was yet another interesting topic for future research. Where did Mildred Wirt published short fiction, and was there another body of work somewhere out there, under this false name, waiting to be recovered?

As for primary information, I was again fortunate at UGA. Besides having access to complete collections of *Colored American Magazine*, *Crisis*, *Brownies' Book*, *Challenge*, and *New Challenge*, I was able to retrieve Hopkins's and Fauset's short fiction in Elizabeth Ammon's collection *Short Fiction by Black Women, 1900-1920* (Oxford UP, 1991). Stories that were not included in West's collection *The Richer, The Poorer* were easily available in *Opportunity*, *Messenger*, and in another collection entitled *The Sleeper Wakes: Harlem Renaissance Stories By Women*, edited by Marcy Knopf (New York: Doubleday, 1995). As for their editorial work, I spent months perusing issues of each writer's respective magazine, first noting the nature and variety of fiction and poetry, and later returning to look at the biographical, personal, and historical essays, editorials, and book reviews. By April of 2000 I had prepared conference paper for the College Language Association conference in Baltimore, which was based on each author's editorial work and their parallel professional fates. By then, my dissertation's working title was, "Subversive Midwifery: The Publishing Politics and Literary Craft of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West, 1900-1940." Afterwards, I was finally able to travel to the Schomburg Center in New York City, where I retrieved copies of photographs of Fauset and colleagues Langston Hughes, Charles Johnson, and others. I was able to view other resources available for scholars of African American literature, although I was unable to find much of Fauset's personal correspondence (which I later ordered from Yale).

Actual writing of chapters commenced in summer of 2000. I was revising an introduction that I had written that spring, completing a chapter on Hopkins, and half of a chapter on Fauset. In the meantime, I began reading the Yale/Beinecke microfilm correspondence, particularly that of Fauset and Hughes. By fall of that year I found



myself once again leaning toward West, with an emphasis on the Jungian individuation process of growth and maturation. This would be called “‘The Living Is (Not) Easy’: Inverting African American Dreams Deferred in Dorothy West’s Writings, 1926-1995.” I would argue that West’s literary individuation process combined American Dreams of professional success with the (African) American Dream of family reunion and community strength. I would include Hopkins and Fauset in the chapter on West’s editorial career and add a chapter about West’s nonfiction personal essays; this is another possible topic for future research.

By spring of 2001 I had completed both a chapter on West’s early short fiction (1926-1940) as well as the publishing chapter on Hopkins, Fauset, and West. My challenge was to find a justifiable connection between the professional work and the creative output. In addition, I had to decide whether to slant the project toward a biographical/historical approach, i.e., the publishing politics of African American women, or a more literary analysis of one woman’s work, using her professional career as a foundation. That April I presented a paper at CLA in New Orleans entitled, “The Irony of Innocence: Eternal Children and Women ‘Behaving Badly’ in Dorothy West’s Early Short Fiction, 1926-1940.” At that point I still fully intended on focusing on West for the dissertation. By summer, however, and in the interests of time (as my candidacy was due to expire in 2002), I decided to retrieve the Hopkins and Fauset chapters and to complete this project once and for all. At this point, I felt that a study of three authors by a fledgling scholar might be better received than an ambitious work claiming to be the definitive text on one author. I also decided to leave Athens after seven years and to return home to Chicago.

Several months of adjustment passed; I had a new home with my parents, a new job, and had to recover from another personal loss in December of 2001 with the passing of my paternal grandfather, Robert Griffin, Senior. Yet an intensive period of writing followed; I completed the entire rough draft between February and April of 2002. The

final title became: “‘The Living Is (Not) Easy’: Inverting African American Dreams Deferred in the Literary Careers of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West, 1900-1995.” An intensive summer and fall of rewriting swiftly followed, as I discovered that my candidacy would indeed expire in December 2002.

As before, I was advised to maintain a continuous thread between each author’s editing and fiction, as well as connections between all three authors. I also needed to explore Hopkins’s contradictory message to Black women. On one hand, she suggests that they adhere to the dictates of true womanhood in order to find freedom from racial and sexual stereotypes. Unfortunately, however, this “liberating” status also confines women within a patriarchal construct and limits their sphere of activity. Meanwhile, Hopkins remained beyond the traditional domestic realm. Was Fauset doing the same thing in her fiction, i.e., both liberating *and* enslaving Black women at the same time by using the fairy tale motif in her work? The clash of “folk” and bourgeois classes was another recurring theme, particularly in Hopkins and Fauset. Was there deliberate class division here or a sincere attempt to bridge the gap between the bourgeois and the folk? West’s transition from the Harlem Renaissance to the Depression and her accompanying “raceless” fiction opened up themes of rewriting established attitudes about race and identity, giving her a modern slant. I tried to address most of these suggestions, all of which are interesting topics for future research. I ultimately drew upon each woman’s editorial work as a literary midwife, or mentor, and traced that theme of mentoring into the short fiction. These writers teach and guide readers to achieve their (African) American Dreams deferred through their own heroic, romantic, and childishly optimistic examples. Hopkins’s heroic spirit guides her through her professional challenges at *CAM* and *New Era*, and her fictional characters likewise overcome multiple obstacles in their quests for personal achievement. Fauset’s romantic quest for professional success and respect is constantly thwarted, as she bitterly admits in her essay “Some Notes on Color” (1922). Yet rather than become defeated, she inspires future generations of students,

writers, and editors to pursue their dreams in a realistic fashion, rather than retreat into an unrealistic fantasy world. Her characters often learn this lesson the hard way by first sinking into self-delusion and later waking to reality. Although she considered herself a “matriarchal bosom” for post-Harlem Renaissance writers, West’s tenure with *Challenge* and *New Challenge* reflects the childlike optimism of her characters. In particular, her adult characters sow the seeds of their own failed dreams in their children, while others resurrect their own inner children, thereby hoping to regain a sense of former optimism for their own futures.

Although complete for now, this project threatens to grow, mutate, and regenerate with new topics for research. I want to retrieve Hopkins’s elusive “Topsy Templeton” and *New Era* magazine issues as well as Dorothy West’s many published yet unanthologized short stories in *Boston Post* and *Daily News* (perhaps under one of her three known pseudonyms). There is also the matter of Fauset’s fifth novel, which was unfinished at her death in 1961. Issues of womanhood, class, and race continue to emerge. All of these are intriguing subjects for future investigation and publication, particularly that elusive book-length project on West. Although uncertain of the outcome, I am eager to pursue these mock-heroic, romantic, and childishly optimistic quests.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION  
SUBVERSIVE MIDWIFERY: THE PUBLISHING POLITICS AND LITERARY  
CRAFT OF PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS, JESSIE REDMON FAUSET, AND  
DOROTHY WEST, 1900-1995

Considered champions of Black bourgeois values, authors Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West examine issues in their work that go beyond those of socioeconomic status and ultimately address the challenges that they encountered in their own lives. Ultimately, obstacles of racism and sexism deferred each woman's American Dream of professional success. Rather than become bitter and defeated, however, they inverted their deferred dreams; they redirected their frustrated energies and turned personal failure into success by mentoring future generations of writers. Hopkins officially became Literary Editor of the *Colored American Magazine* (hereafter *CAM*) from 1903-04 and later established the short-lived *New Era* magazine (February - March 1916). Fauset was Literary Editor of *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926, and she co-founded and edited the children's magazine *The Brownies' Book* (1919-20) with Editor-in-Chief W.E.B. Du Bois. Although Fauset did the lion's share of the writing and editing for this publication, she doesn't always receive proper credit for her work. Dorothy West was the sole founder of both *Challenge* (1934) and *New Challenge* magazines (1937) and ceased publication of the latter when new influences threatened to obscure her original vision. Personal and political pressure ultimately cost each literary midwife her powerful position. Their fiction and nonfiction writing thus reflects their editorial experiences. Their creative work in particular reveals their awareness of the importance of professional mentoring, as does their personal contact with and

maneuvering on behalf of the authors they supported. Although Hopkins, Fauset, and West ultimately forfeited their editorial careers, they each continued to produce creative work that speaks just as powerfully as their journalistic writing. Both mediums guide and encourage readers to pursue their own dreams. As a result, these authors do succeed as literary midwives and artists. Their body of work continues to be an integral part of the African American literary tradition.

Certain related themes and images arise in the novels and lesser-known short stories of each author: the heroic spirit, the deconstruction of the romantic quest, and the inner child. These recurring archetypes uncover characteristics that these authors expressed in their editorial work. Each woman demonstrated personal courage to face ideological and political opposition, a romantic-turned-realistic perspective in her pursuit of professional success, and a concern for the welfare of future writers of color that is at once idealistic, naive, and maternal. In addition, all three women were proud of their New England heritage. Hopkins was born in Maine and raised in Boston, and West was born and bred in Boston. Although Fauset was born in New Jersey, she was raised in Philadelphia and always identified herself with that city. In addition, each author espoused traditional American values of individualism and the work ethic. Thus they remind African Americans that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are the rights of every citizen and that the United States, the “melting pot” of the world, is a culturally rich country that should be cherished, in spite of its cultural divisiveness.

One goal of this project is to trace each author’s philosophy of mentoring, or rather, “midwifery” in her creative work as it reflects her influential, albeit often behind-the-scenes, editorial activity. Each writer’s mentoring ideology fosters intellectual and spiritual growth in her general reading public as well as the more specific audience of new Black writers. Hopkins, Fauset, and West promoted racial uplift and self-knowledge in their creative and editorial work. They focus on themes of family ties, heritage, and faith in oneself. They emphasize the necessity of maintaining a sense of optimism in

order to minimize the hardening effects of American racism and sexism. Their short fiction expands the African American consciousness by creating potent morality tales (particularly in Hopkins's case) in which characters undergo dramatic self-transformation through heroic effort, hardship, and epiphany. As editors, these women emphasize the importance of studying Black role models in history and literature as well as introduce foreign culture to their readers -- the world beyond the American segregation of the early twentieth century. As literary midwives, they encourage the creative expression of fledgling writers of color through supportive editorials and literary competitions.

Chapter One discusses each author's professional mentoring career (1900-1937) and traces its effect on her short fiction. Chapter Two looks at the heroic spirit of Pauline Hopkins's short work (published in *CAM*, 1900-1903). Biography and its inspirational content inspires these stories. The works also reflect Hopkins's interest in mentoring future generations by holding up heroic examples of famous women and men of color. Chapter Three focuses on frustrated romantic quests and deferred American Dreams in Jessie Fauset's short fiction (published in *Crisis*, 1912-1923). Particularly important is the ability to recognize the fact that "mainstream" fairy tale ideals work for no one, and especially not for African Americans. Because of the sheer volume and variety of Dorothy West's short fiction, this study devotes two chapters to that author. The prolific West wrote literally hundreds of short stories, only a few of which have been anthologized in her collection *The Richer, The Poorer* (1995). Many of these works have been retrieved from the pages of *Opportunity*, *Messenger*, *Saturday Evening Quill*, *Challenge*, and other literary magazines. Chapter Four looks at Dorothy West's early short fiction (1926-1940), in which the themes of inner children (and actual youngsters) and parental sacrifice on behalf of children predominate. Chapter Five examines West's later short fiction (1940-ca. 1995), which includes themes of mid-life crises, nostalgia, the pursuit of happiness, and the author's modern approach to "raceless" fiction. West's

ironic critique of marriage, family life, and gender roles is evident in both her early and later short fiction.

Each author's concern for future generations of Black readers and writers is evident from her journalistic work. Hopkins and Fauset wrote biographical articles on historical yet little-known Black Americans. Fauset and West additionally wrote travel articles based on their personal foreign adventures. Hopkins wrote biographical serials for *CAM*, and Fauset provided similar articles for both *Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book*. These works present the life stories of positive role models to readers of color, whose standard history textbooks glorified only White heroes. Interestingly, Hopkins includes much of her own dramatic commentary in her portraits of famous African Americans, and the result is compelling, creative nonfiction. The introductory paragraph of Hopkins's "Heroes and Heroines in Black" (January 1903) illustrates the "high" tone of her biographical-historical essays as well as the inspirational spirit of her more didactic fiction:

The heroic spirit in man [. . .] is the foundation of universal history, history itself being but an account of the deeds of men who have been the models and patterns for the great mass of humanity in past centuries even from the beginning of the world. A man may be in obscurity today [. . .] lo, on the morrow, he may, by one unselfish act, beautiful and sublime, become one of men sent into the world as an instrument to accomplish the will of the Father. (206)

Jessie Fauset's interests were cosmopolitan and international. She reveals these qualities in six travel essays about her experiences in Europe and North Africa. The first one was published in 1915. She also published a series of five essays (1925-26). In all, they include "Tracing Shadows" (September 1915), "Yarrow Revisited" (January 1925), "This Way to the Flea Market" (February 1925), "The Enigma of the Sorbonne" (March 1925), "Dark Algiers the White" (April-May 1925), and "The Eucalyptus Tree: A



Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy” (January 1926). Dorothy West penned an essay for *Challenge* about her cultural encounters in Russia entitled “Room in Red Square” (March 1934). In these works, each author introduces the concept of “universal” experiences across racial, language, and geographical barriers as well as the unique experience of the African American abroad. Readers, whether aspiring writers or not, benefit from this “armchair” travel reading. It expands their own imaginative horizons and informs them that, ironically, the world beyond their own shores promises much more “liberty and justice for all.”

To encourage creative “procreation ” in new authors, Hopkins and West made a point in their editor’s columns of welcoming fresh short story submissions for *CAM* and *Challenge*. Hopkins’s editorial of May 1902 anticipates the literary spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. It also expresses the mentoring philosophies of Fauset and West: “Our short stories, by our Race writers, are becoming more and more literary in style . . . down deep into your general composition, may be lurking a gem of literary fire, which only needs encouragement and development” (76). Dorothy West also solicits new “voices” in her editorials for *Challenge*, as in her issue of May 1935:

Even when we were turning ten, we had an old head on our shoulders, and went about patting the cheeks of shorter children. And now that our age enables us to be looked up to, we are more than ever willing to be a matriarchal bosom. So *Challenge* continues to hold to its premise, and on the new voices depends its use and growth. (45)

Fauset expressed her own concern for young writers in a special editorial, “Prize Story Contest” (*Crisis*, June 1923). Here, she laments the overall lack of proper literary training in elementary and high schools and recommends that student writers read a well-rounded curriculum of classic and contemporary authors. She also emphasizes the importance of embracing the writer’s craft, such as constant practice and revision in order to achieve literary mastery. She also notes the instructor’s role in preparing future

authors: “The geniuses are of course born, but the shaping of most writers of talent lies in the hands of our teachers” (58).

The second goal of this project is to recover and increase scholarly interest in the lesser-known and critically neglected short fiction of these three creative and professional mentoring agents of African American literature and culture. Thus, Chapters Two through Five discuss the short stories and novellas of Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West. Most scholars critically neglect these works; they have focused instead -- and often with much disparagement -- on each author’s novels. This study assumes the reader’s familiarity with the better-known novels and thus will make only occasional reference to them. It will focus instead on a selection of each author’s magazine stories in order to examine their archetypal richness as an important rhetorical tool for African American political and spiritual uplift. It will also recognize and discuss each author’s creative expansion into new territory such as children’s literature, folk humor, and experimental fiction. The recurrence of unpopular and subversive subject matter is also notable in their short works. Controversial for the times in which Hopkins, Fauset, and West wrote, these themes reveal much about each author’s fearless mentoring spirit.

Scholars of Hopkins, Fauset, and West may note each author’s reverence for particular genres, recurring images, and themes as well as narrative techniques, namely, drama, myth, and irony, respectively. The archetypal richness of their work, especially as it reflects certain elements in their lives, merits careful attention. In the analysis of each author’s fictional work a single aforementioned theme will dominate, although all three archetypal patterns will be discussed. Chapter Two will highlight the heroic spirit in the fiction of Pauline Hopkins by examining the presence of ordinary as well as extraordinary heroes and heroines in her work, characters who are conceived as symbols of inspiration and uplift. Chapter Three will focus on Jessie Fauset’s subversion of the romantic quest for the American Dream as well as reveal plantation “myths” as they affect her bourgeois characters. Her fiction gives readers a sense of practical uplift as

opposed to Hopkins's more spiritual and emotional inspiration. The inner child (optimist) in West's early fiction will be the focus of Chapter Four; there is a particular emphasis on the ironic juxtaposition of the wise child (actual/offspring) and foolish child (inner/parent). Chapter Five discusses the constant battle between one's altruistic conscience and the more self-involved -- and sometimes self-destructive -- inner child. West's stories offer readers a choice, i.e., either to mature by rising above limiting circumstances, or to regress, allowing obstacles to enclose and suffocate them.

One argument against the archetypal approach is that it is archaic. However, the archetype is a powerful inspirational tool in African American fiction and is particularly strong in the work of Black women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor. Recurring themes and images in their novels include the quest for self, or the individuation process, powerful mother figures, symbolic names, the death/rebirth cycle, and the anima/animus (destructive/creative) relationship between the sexes. However, although there is a wealth of archetypal criticism in literary studies, that which relates specifically to women -- and to women of color in particular -- is very limited. Jane Campbell's *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History* (Tennessee, 1986) traces symbolic imagery in African American literature such as the messiah and the edenic garden (x). She focuses on the romance genre because of its ability to reinvent reality and thus to reinvent the negative image of Black folk in America. Aware of the goals of fictional representation for writers of color, Campbell states:

Because the black artist invariably writes from an intensely political perspective, he or she searches for rhetorical devices that will move the audience on the deepest possible level. Myths, by definition, voice a culture's most profound perceptions, and, when given fictional form, can awaken the audience's strongest impulses. Thus the black artists who rely on myth have the

potential to provoke whatever response they wish: to move the audience to consciousness, to attitude, even perhaps to action. (ix)

In this passage, Campbell suggests that writers of color purposefully incorporate mythic images in their work to satisfy both artistic and political agendas as well as to emotionally stir their audience. Thus, the archetype becomes a rhetorical tool, as is noticeable in the works of all three authors. Their recurring images of heroic and questing figures, would-be princes and princesses, and naive dreamers warn readers of the blurred line between fantasy and reality and of the importance of taking action in their “real” lives against opposition and oppression.

Another argument is that the archetypal critic might be tempted to find archetypes everywhere. Hence, this study limits the analysis to the three aforementioned patterns -- the heroic spirit, deconstruction of the romantic quest, and the inner child -- which connect Hopkins, Fauset, and West and also illustrate the link between each woman’s journalistic and creative work. A good general introduction to this branch of feminist criticism is Annis Pratt’s essay “Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism” in the *Bucknell Review* (1973). Her book, *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* (Indiana UP, 1981), also limits an analysis of women’s novels to three major symbolic patterns of rebirth, grail legends, and witchcraft. Moreover, Pratt’s New Feminist approach widens the scope of male-centered analyses of C.G. Jung, Northrop Frye, Leslie Fiedler, and Joseph Campbell. Her approach makes these traditional interpretations more “androgynous,” so to speak, so that the woman’s quest for identity, rebirth, and “psychomythological development” is given equal importance to that of the male (“Approaches” 3). Pratt makes brief reference to the experience of African American women in her book, calling it one of “multiple alienation” based on sex, class, and race. Pratt goes on to discuss this alienation in a selection of *Bildungsroman* works by Black women (33).

In their editorial work, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West reveal their strength of character and independent spirit. It is not surprising, then, that each author's fictional subject matter is often controversial, although perhaps more so at the time of composition than by today's standards. This rebellious literary quality did not always endear them to readers and critics. However, their writing is generally matter-of-fact, even defiant in nature. In addition, unlike their novels, whose plots frequently spiral out of control, their short magazine fiction adheres to the dictates of economy of plot and action required by the genre. It also reveals each author's attempt to broaden her creative expression to include folk humor, children's stories, experimental fiction, and social critique.

Hopkins's novels and short fiction (1900-1903), which exemplify both the protest tradition and the philosophy of racial uplift of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, echoes elements of William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), and Charles Chesnutt's *The Wife of His Youth* (1899) and *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900). In its demand for Black women's intellectual, spiritual and physical well-being, her work recalls Anna Julia Cooper's manifesto *A Voice From the South* (1892). Hopkins produced four novels; the first, *Contending Forces* (1900), was the only one published in book form. The other three were serialized in *CAM: Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1902), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1903). Hopkins also wrote seven short stories for the magazine: "The Mystery Within Us" (May 1900), "Talma Gordon" (October 1900), "General Washington, A Christmas Story" (December 1900), "A Dash for Liberty" (August 1901), "Bro'r Abr'm Jimson's Wedding, A Christmas Story" (December 1901), "The Test of Manhood, A Christmas Story" (December 1902), and "'As The Lord Lives, He is One of Our Mother's Children'" (November 1903). Hopkins additionally published the first

installment of “Topsy Templeton,” a never-finished novella, in *New Era* (1916), her short-lived magazine.

Writing in the tradition of protest and racial uplift, Hopkins adopts the literary techniques of sentimental and mystery fiction as well as the dictates of the Victorian cult of true womanhood in her melodramatic tales of moral strength and heroic quests. Her characters are of the good-or-evil variety, and the former always prevails. Her fiction presents Black characters of dignity and humanity and emphasizes the ordinary and extraordinary heroism of everyday people. Protagonists are noble-hearted martyrs or lost souls in need of mentors and nurturers who will gently guide them toward an uncertain future. Hopkins also frequently tackled the then extremely taboo subject of miscegenation in her work, particularly that concerning White men marrying octoroons who, in turn, are unaware of their “dark” heritage. In response to a letter to the editor from an indignant “Christian lady” Hopkins writes, “Marriage is made illegal between the races and yet the mulattoes increase. Thus the shadow of corruption falls on the blacks and on the whites, without whose aid the mulattoes would not exist” (“Reply” 399). It was her intention to illustrate the humanity of both races to all of her readers. Hopkins’s “tragic mulatto” characters, moreover, are generally more heroic than tragic, if only on a small scale. This is the case in her Dickensian tale “General Washington: A Christmas Story” (reminiscent of both *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*), about a mulatto runaway who manages to save the life of a bigoted Senator. After the child sacrifices himself in the process, the Senator decides against presenting his prepared “speech against the Negro.” In addition, Hopkins occasionally introduces comic relief in her work, such as folk humor and mock-heroic quests. Most notable is her satire of hypocritical church folk, “Bro’r Abr’m Jimson’s Wedding,” in which a successful and respected elder who wishes to marry his much-younger sweetheart is revealed to be a bigamist with several children.

In Fauset's short stories and novellas (1912-1923), written in the popular, best-foot-forward spirit of the Harlem Renaissance "New Negro" and the Du Boisian "Talented Tenth," characters strive to overcome barriers to their aspirations in White America. Their romantic quests for self-knowledge and awareness of their "double-consciousness" reveals Fauset's admiration for W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Her tales of "passing" into the White world and either "coming home" to one's Black identity or fading into a false existence echo James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). In their pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Fauset's characters are forced to rewrite the American Dream in more realistic terms, keeping in mind the importance of self-knowledge and faith in one's abilities in spite of endless opposition. Likewise, Fauset did not let critics -- particularly White publishers and reviewers who suggested that her bourgeois characters of color were unrealistic -- discourage her (Lewis 124). She published four novels: *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). She had already written six short stories for *Crisis*: "Emmy" (1912-13), "My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein" (1914), "'There Was One Time': A Story of Spring" (1917), "Mary Elizabeth" (1919), "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920), and "Double Trouble" (1923). Fauset's body of work includes African Americans of all socioeconomic levels, albeit with an emphasis on the upwardly-mobile middle-class. Her artistic goal in *There Is Confusion* was to introduce this little-known element of American society to the "mainstream," which was content with stereotypical images of Blacks in novels such as T.S. Stribling's *Birthright* (1922). However, sensationalistic novels of Harlem "folk" life such as Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1929) continued to appeal to readers despite Fauset's alternate offering. Her most "daring" novel, *Plum Bun*, tells the story of a fair-skinned Black young woman who passes for White and has an affair with a wealthy White playboy. Stories of premarital sex, passing, and feminine independence were

bound to upset some readers, particularly those who, like Pauline Hopkins's indignant correspondent, were obsessed with their fear of racial "amalgamation." Controversial themes such as runaways, passing, and incest also appear in Fauset's last two novels, *The Chinaberry Tree* and *Comedy: American Style*, as well as in her shorter works, including "The Sleeper Wakes" and "Double Trouble."

Fauset, whose Victorian upbringing is strongly evident in her work, reveals a modern sensibility -- anticipating West's own ironic literary style -- that subverts the romanticism of fairy tales and nostalgic plantation myths. Her characters are generally naive youngsters who seek grand success in America and soon encounter the gritty reality that alienates them from their happily-ever-after fantasies. In "'There Was One Time!': A Story of Spring," two young African Americans are frustrated in their unwitting reenactment of a French fairy tale. Only when the heroine reconciles herself to more realistic expectations can the couple unite and prepare for the future. Fauset demystifies the Cinderella complex and critiques female socialization in her best-known story, the *Bildungsroman* "The Sleeper Wakes." Here, ingenue Amy Boldin learns through a series of painful experiences that her good looks are not her sole asset. She realizes, moreover, that she cannot rely on any Prince Charming to provide a happily-ever-after ending for her journey into self-awareness. Fauset also branches out into children's fiction for *The Brownies' Book* in 1920-21. Her stories of particularly precocious children include "Turkey Drumsticks" (November 1920), "Merry Christmas to All" (December 1920), "Ghosts and Kittens" (February 1921), and "Cordelia Goes on the Warpath" (May 1921). Fauset's creative nonfiction essay, "My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein" (1914), is her most experimental work. Here, a completely romanticized ideal living space -- in Spain -- reflects her desire for escapism from racial and gender oppression in the United States. Like Hopkins, Fauset also utilizes elements of folk humor, the slave narrative, and plantation myths. In "Mary Elizabeth: A Story" (1919), a trickster figure



servant teaches her bourgeois mistress to be grateful for her comparative “freedom” as a housewife.

West’s short fiction (1926-ca.1995) reveals a Dostoyevskian obsession with “moral, psychological, and social confinement” (Ferguson 188). Many of her stories depict the irony and suffocating limitations of Black urban life (particularly during the Depression) and anticipate Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946) in their depiction of the Black American’s mounting frustration and despair. The lack of emotional and financial security that West’s characters feel reflects a postmodern fear of the “void”; there is no safe haven. West’s concentration on family relationships and emphasis on the innocence of children reflects an even deeper Dostoyevskian influence (188). In particular, she examines the significance of the parent-child relationship, which, if mutually supportive, leads to the successful future of both parties and, if divisive, leads to self-doubt and mutual mistrust. West introduces positive and negative examples of the inner child in her work. Some characters are pathologically unable to cope with the responsibilities of adulthood and the racial limits put upon them by American society, while others manage to retain an aura of innocence and optimism in spite of oppression. This youthful spirit is beneficial to themselves as well as to others and represents the ideal, well-nurtured inner child, or optimistic self. West explores themes of childhood innocence as well as the entrapment of adults in an unsympathetic American society (Ferguson 188). West’s child characters are generally wiser than their dreamy-eyed parents, and West examines the father-daughter relationship in particular. Ironically, these fathers favor the future dreams of their daughters, whereas in real life West -- as well as Fauset and Hopkins -- faced definite patriarchal opposition in their professional lives.

West also frequently experiments with character perspective in her early short fiction (1926-1940). She writes from the point of view of a frustrated husband and father in “The Typewriter” (1926) and “An Unimportant Man” (1928). She portrays a pregnant

young wife in the naturalistic “Hannah Byde” (1926), a self-sacrificing middle-aged “old” maid in “Cook” (1934), and a thirty-something housewife in “Prologue to a Life” (1929). Interestingly, West’s matronly characters seem to age rapidly and/or to die young. In the case of “Cook,” “Aunt” Viney, who works as a servant and sacrifices and scrimps to support her immature sister and young niece, dies inexplicably at age fifty. She seems, however, more like a seventy-year-old in description, outlook, and attitude. In “Prologue to a Life,” Lily Bemis-Kane is “complacent” and “fat, but her skin [is] firm and soft” to her husband’s touch (89). After ten years as a wife and mother, she is described more as a woman in her fifties, even sixties, than as a thirty-two year-old. West experiments with “raceless” themes in her later short fiction (1940-ca. 1995) -- stories in which characters’ ethnic identities are never revealed -- in order to illustrate the universal human experience as well as to defy racial labeling of her work. She also critiques conservative concepts of marriage and family as a means of emotional security. In her modern examination of these institutions, West reveals the need for a revision of traditional gender roles and an acceptance of nontraditional family structures in postwar America.

In addition, many women are “behaving badly” in West’s stories, a subject that was also risky during her writing career. Mothers are either emotionally distant from their children or are unnaturally obsessed with them. There is further emotional (and often physical) estrangement between wives and husbands, and there is at least one instance of a wife’s adultery in “The Five Dollar Bill” (1936). Other plots include that of a young wife who is not at all enthralled by the prospect of impending motherhood in “Hannah Byde” (1926). West’s subject matter is heavily inspired by her own childhood; she was attached to her doting father and detached from her aggressive mother. Rachel West’s behavior was probably “unwomanly” for a wife and mother in the early twentieth-century (and might still raise eyebrows today). West immortalized her mother in the

character of Cleo Judson, the social-climbing, financially-manipulative, yet strangely family-oriented matriarch of West's best-known work, *The Living Is Easy* (1948).

Throughout the text, a feminist analysis of each author's editorial and literary careers will be conducted via archival research and close reading in order to establish historical as well as biographical background. The ultimate goal is not to conduct a psychoanalytical probing into each woman's personality but rather to gain insight into her creative and professional world. This study also intends, among other things, to present a positive image of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century career women. Hardly unnatural anti-mothers or professional spinsters, these women were talented writers and editorial midwives who were able to thrive in the business world, if only for a short while. They had an extraordinary desire and ability to nurse new literary talent in others as well as in themselves as well as to raise strong, independent literary young, some of whom would achieve fame. Moreover, the focus in this work is the privileging and recovering of Black women's professional and creative work. Ultimately, each woman's ability to function, thrive, and support others in a traditionally male-oriented environment helped her to undergo her own metamorphosis into an artistic, autonomous self. As West does in her literary demystification of marriage, gender roles, and family values, so each woman redefine socially created roles for twentieth-century American women and men in her professional work. This project ultimately seeks to connect their editorial mentoring with the creative mentoring. As editors and creative writers, Hopkins, Fauset, and West inspire their audience to invert, or reverse, past failures and dreams deferred in order to achieve success. In short, the ability to survive and triumph over disappointment and thus be able to encourage others to pursue their dreams is each woman's crowning success.

The archival approach provides an historical context for the journalistic work of Hopkins, Fauset, and West. The limited number of publishing outlets for writers of color, and the even more limited professional and creative outlets for Black women in

particular, is a reflection of conditions from the turn of the century, through the Harlem Renaissance, up to the latter part of the twentieth century. Even during its heyday, allegedly “fortunate” African American artists of the twenties were subject to the whims of their eccentric, bohemian white patrons. Men received the lion’s share of financial opportunities, while Black women who were beyond a “certain age” felt the pangs of double discrimination (Hull 10).

This project will examine, to a limited degree, work from issues of each author’s respective magazines, review personal correspondence, and study published interviews. Issues of *CAM*, *Crisis*, *The Brownies’ Book*, and *Challenge* and *New Challenge* document the contributions of Hopkins, Fauset, and West to domestic and international Black literature and culture. Their nonfiction articles, biographical sketches, essays, and editorials suggest a cosmopolitan awareness of the world and cover diverse topics and issues such as international conferences, politics, working conditions, women’s clubs, anti-lynching campaigns, and education. Personal letters and interviews reveal each woman’s desire to mentor new authors as well as her need to express herself as an artist in her own right.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any record of correspondence between these three remarkable African American women of letters, although there is considerable overlap in their lives. There is no correspondence in the Pauline Hopkins collection at Fisk University in Nashville. One letter from Hopkins to a W. M. Trotter, dated April 1905, is mistakenly listed as being in the Charles S. Johnson Papers at Fisk and appears to be missing. In contrast, there is a treasure trove of Jessie Fauset’s correspondence in several collections: the James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Langston Hughes collections in the Beinecke Library of Yale University; the W.E.B. Du Bois papers of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; the NAACP papers at the Library of Congress; the Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection and Alain Locke Papers at Howard University; the Countee Cullen Papers of Tulane University in New Orleans; and the

Schomburg Center for Research and Culture in New York City. Dorothy West's papers are housed in a small collection at the Mugar Memorial Library of Boston University. Her correspondence with James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay are also located in the Beinecke Special Collections at Yale University. Her correspondence with Countee Cullen is located in his collection at Tulane University.

The definitive text on the publishing careers of these and other African American editors is *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of African-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* by Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson (University of Massachusetts Press, 1979). Specific studies on Hopkins include a collection of essays entitled *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, edited by John Cullen Gruesser (University of Illinois Press, 1996) and chapters in Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford UP, 1987) and Claudia Tate's *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford UP, 1992).

Thorough criticism covering Fauset's editorial as well as creative work include Carolyn Wedin Sylvander's definitive biography *Jessie Redmon Fauset, Black American Writer* (Whitson, 1981) and a chapter in Cheryl Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Indiana UP, 1995). Specific studies on her work with *The Brownies' Book* can be found in the dissertation of Violet J. Harris (University of Georgia, 1986) and in articles by Harris in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Winter 1989: 192-96) and Elinor Sinnette in *Freedomways* (Winter 1965: 133-42). Only recently has a book-length study of Dorothy West been published; a special edition of the *Langston Hughes Review* is now available (2002). In addition, several interviews offer revealing information about West's writing and publishing career: Genii Guinier's seventy-five page study, "Black Women Oral History Project" (Cambridge, 1981), Deborah McDowell's "Conversations with Dorothy West" in *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined* (Ed. Victor A. Kramer. New York: AMS, 1987. 265-82), and Katrine

Dalsgard's "Alive and Well and Living on the Island of Martha's Vineyard: An Interview with Dorothy West" (*Langston Hughes Review*, 12.2, Fall 1993: 28-44).

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930), known in 1892 as "Boston's Favorite Soprano," was a stage performer who also authored plays long before joining the staff of *CAM* (Campbell, *DLB* 183). Hopkins's magazine stories reflect her dramatic flair, her love for the stage, and her interest in popular genre writing. Each installment of her three serialized novels: *Hagar's Daughter* (1901-02), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1902-03), ends on a "cliffhanger" to keep readers in suspense until the next issue. Her short stories are equally melodramatic, although contained, with romantic heroines, brave heroes, and hateful villains. Here, readers find elements of women's sentimental fiction, gothic, and mystery stories in abundance, as well as Hopkins's penchant for the heroic quest and the literary convention of hidden or multiple identities.

Born in Portland, Maine in 1859 and raised in Boston, Hopkins began her career of spiritual uplift at age fifteen by denouncing "spirits." Her 1874 essay, "Evils of Intemperance and Their Remedies," won Hopkins the ten-dollar first prize in a contest sponsored by William Wells Brown and the Congregational Publishing Society of Boston. By age twenty, she had written a musical drama entitled *Slaves' Escape: or the Underground Railroad* (also known as *Peculiar Sam*), which she performed onstage with family members in 1880 to good reviews. For twelve years, Hopkins was a "minor celebrity" who gave singing recitals and lectures in Boston (McKay, "Intro" 3). She continued this dramatic work until 1892, after which she trained as a stenographer to secure steady employment. In 1900 she became a member of the board of directors for the newly-established Colored Co-Operative Publishing Company, which would produce *CAM* as well as *Contending Forces* (4). Although Hopkins had much influence over the style and content of the new magazine, her name does not appear on the masthead as Literary Editor until the issue of May/June 1903. Therein, the "Editorial and Publishers'

Announcements” apologizes to readers for the missing April number. Under new management, the magazine had experienced professional opposition and had nearly gone under (466). This would not be the first time that the publication would change hands. Emissaries of Booker T. Washington would later surreptitiously take control *CAM* in 1904, making it the political instrument of the Tuskegee Machine. According to Nellie McKay, Hopkins’s name appears as Editor-in-Chief in the issue of March 1904, although she would leave the magazine in the fall of that year (“Intro” 7). From 1900-1904, however, Hopkins held much influence over much of the magazine’s content, particularly in history and fiction, her two passions. She chose short fiction, serialized novels, and poetry by writers such as Frances E.W. Harper and William S. Braithwaite. She also published her seven short stories and three novels, sometimes under her mother’s maiden name, Sarah A. Allen, in order to prevent her own name from appearing too often as a contributor (Campbell, “PEH” 187). She additionally produced two biographical serials, “Famous Men of the Negro Race” (February 1901-September 1902) and “Famous Women of the Negro Race” (November 1901-October 1902). Moreover, she always encouraged a variety of articles from other writers in each issue. Topics included politics, religion, travel, music, education, and profiles of prominent Blacks -- particularly Men’s and Women’s Club Members -- of different cities in a column entitled “Here and Now” (Johnson and Johnson, *Propaganda & Aesthetics* 5).

After leaving *CAM*, Hopkins sporadically wrote articles, both self-published and for other publications such as *Voice of the Negro*. In 1916 she founded *New Era Magazine* with former *CAM* colleagues, which continued in the tradition of uplift and protest and showcased Black American culture (McKay 8). The new journal lasted only two issues, after which Hopkins returned full-time to stenography. She died tragically from a household accident in 1930, an ironic and dramatic end to an heroic life.

Considered the most prolific female novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882-1961) is best known -- or rather, notorious -- for her tales of the

Black bourgeoisie: *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). In her novels, novellettes, and short fiction, Fauset's subversion of popular fairy tales and plantation myths reveals her skill in revising popular archetypes. She recreates images of Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty, making them more realistic -- or rather, appropriate -- for her African American audience. She revises the American Dream as well, reminding readers that hard work and talent are not enough for the hero or heroine of color. Moreover, she demystifies the "Miss Anne" plantation ideal in the form of upper-middle-class African American women in tales of Black "mistresses" interacting with their "trickster figure" servants. She thus warns readers of the ease with which people of color unwittingly invert a disturbing scenario in African American history.

A self-described Philadelphian, Fauset was actually born in Camden County, New Jersey on 27 April 1882. Her large family was "poor, but cultured" and consisted of ten children, her father, who was an outspoken African Methodist Episcopal minister, and her stepmother (Sylvander, *DLB* 77). The family emphasized the importance of education, and Fauset attended elementary and high school in Philadelphia. She was admitted to Cornell University when administrators of Bryn Mawr College decided to initiate a scholarship for her to go there rather than face the repercussions of admitting a Black student to their own institution (77). During her junior year in 1903, Fauset began a correspondence with W.E.B. Du Bois requesting his assistance with her application for a summer teaching position (Aptheker 66). According to a letter written in 1905, she was successful in acquiring such work and taught during a five-week term at Fisk University (94). After graduation, however, she sought and was denied employment in the Philadelphia schools and sought positions first in Baltimore, then in Washington D.C. She found time from 1918 to 1919 to complete a Master of Arts in French at the University of Pennsylvania and began working for her mentor Du Bois at the *Crisis* in November 1919 (Sylvander 77).



Fauset had been contributing short fiction, book reviews, poetry, and articles to *Crisis* since 1912; thus, she was quite familiar with the magazine before joining its staff as Literary Editor. During her tenure (like that of Hopkins at *CAM*), the magazine produced the highest quality of creative, biographical, political, and educational work. In addition, Fauset was responsible for the discovery and first publication of many unknown writers, including Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay. She also promoted the early works of women writers such as Georgia Douglas Johnson and Nella Larsen.

Like Hopkins before her, Fauset felt strongly about teaching Black history and biography to African Americans, especially children. In her interview for *Southern Workman* (1932), Fauset laments the gaps in her early education as well as those in the curriculum of most Black students at that time: “When I was a child I used to puzzle my head ruefully over the fact that in school we studied the lives of only great white people. [ . . . ] It is a pity that Negro children should be permitted to suffer from that delusion at all” (220). Her homage to African American literature and culture in the pages of both the *Crisis* and *The Brownies’ Book* (1919-1920) do much to fill these curriculum gaps. The quality of the children’s magazine reflects Fauset’s concern for completing the limited education that young Black students received in their elementary and high schools.

Fauset decided to leave *Crisis* in April 1926 following a personal conflict with mentor Du Bois. Noticeably afterwards, both the literary quality and the treatment of new writers declined considerably. She married in 1929 after writing *Plum Bun* and returned, somewhat unwillingly, to teaching. She went on to write her last two novels, published in 1931 and 1933, and a fifth manuscript was left unfinished at her death from heart disease (Sylvander, *DLB* 85). Her life exemplifies the American Dream deferred. Although she was well-educated and articulate, an experienced teacher and literary editor, Fauset was nonetheless denied several opportunities in the subtly segregated

North. Her long tenure at *Crisis* was rewarding but stressful, as she often took on full responsibility of the magazine during Du Bois's frequent business trips. Unable to find similar employment in "mainstream" publishing after leaving *Crisis*, Fauset resumed her original teaching career, writing in her spare time. Likewise, her fictional characters, no matter how qualified and noble, find themselves stonewalled by discrimination when trying to pursue personal and professional fulfillment. The American Dream is a fairy tale that will not come true for them, and yet Fauset's message is not one of despair, but of cautious idealism. She warns African Americans to prepare themselves well in advance, to have faith and, above all, to be prepared for the opposition.

The last link between the Harlem Renaissance and the turn of the century until her death in August 1998, Dorothy West (1907-1998) is the most prolific short story author of this trio. She is best remembered for her two novels, *The Living Is Easy* (1948) and *The Wedding* (1995). Her body of work focuses on themes of lost innocence and false hopes, and irony permeates each piece. Children gain wisdom beyond their years while their parents remain infants who grasp at fantasy. Often the child – actual or inner -- becomes the source of hope and future achievement in West's world. Marriage is another important issue in her short fiction, in which wives become reborn virginal "goddesses" and husbands create their own personal myths in order to survive in a world of strife. Images of enclosure and suffocation -- for both husband and wife -- are recurring patterns in West's stories. She indicates the need for a "modern" marriage, that is, one in which traditional gender roles are revised in order to adapt to changing times: couples without children, women entering the workplace, and men becoming more nurturing agents in the home.

Born the only child of Rachel Pease Benson and Isaac Christopher West on 2 June 1907, Dorothy West (who was never given a middle name) was raised in Boston. Isaac West was an ex-slave from Virginia who established a successful wholesale fruit company that earned him the nickname "Black Banana King." Rachel Benson was one

of twenty-two children from a Camden, South Carolina family. Concerned relatives arranged for her to move to Springfield, Massachusetts in order to escape a future of “ruin” as a beautiful Black woman in the South (Ferguson 188). Her husband, a dark-skinned man with blue eyes, was several years older than Rachel, and it is possible that she welcomed a mercenary marriage so that she could financially support her numerous siblings. As a result, Dorothy West grew up in a household that welcomed a steady rotation of visiting relatives (188).

A bright youngster, West was admitted to the second grade at age four but was tormented by racial insults from her working-class Irish-American classmates. Transferring to the Girl’s Latin School, she encountered “the more subtle racism of her middle-class liberal classmates,” but she would prevail, graduating in 1923 and going on to study journalism and philosophy at Columbia University (188). West began writing fiction at age seven; by age fifteen she was winning weekly writing contests sponsored by the *Boston Post* newspaper. In an interview with Katrine Dalsgard she admits: “I don’t think [my family] ever read [my stories], but they expected the ten dollars extra. They got really mad when I got the five-dollar-prize or the two-dollar-prize” (31).

More recognition came in 1926, when West’s short story “The Typewriter” tied with Zora Neale Hurston’s story “Muttsy” in *Opportunity*’s short fiction contest. West traveled to New York at age seventeen with cousin Helene Johnson and met the twenty-five-year old Hurston, who was initially cool toward the young writer. The older woman eventually befriended West, who moved into Hurston’s apartment with her cousin and became known as the “little sister” of a literary circle of friends that included Wallace Thurman, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay. She also met White Harlem Renaissance benefactors such as Carl Van Vechten and Fannie Hurst. West kept in touch with Van Vechten for years, although a social faux pas estranged her from the eccentric Hurst (Ferguson 189).

Few of West's stories were published during the Renaissance, so she sought work in acting. She first took a small role in the original stage production of *Porgy* through the Theatre Guild in 1927, which went to London in the summer of 1929. In June of 1932, West sailed to Russia with twenty-two African Americans to make a film that was to be called "Black and White" (190). An unrealistic study of Black American life, the project was ultimately shelved as a result of media and racial controversy -- particularly fears of Communist recruitment of African American intellectuals. Opposition from White American engineer Hugh Cooper, also in Russia to build the much-needed Dniepastro dam, also led to the project's demise (191). However, West remained in the country for several months under a new contract with another filmmaker. She returned home shortly after learning that her father had passed away following a business failure (192).

Oddly enough, West was given three hundred dollars upon leaving Russia, although she never understood how or why. She used part of the money to found *Challenge*, a new literary magazine for the post-Renaissance generation. Printed in Boston, the magazine "headquarters" eventually returned to New York. James Weldon Johnson wrote the Foreword to the premiere issue of March 1934: "It is a good thing that Dorothy West is doing in instituting a magazine through which the voices of younger Negro writers may be heard. [. . .] But these younger writers must not be mere dilettantes; they have serious work to do" (2). West addressed her own professional aims in her editorial column entitled "Dear Reader." At age twenty-five, she felt that she and her fellow intellectuals "did not altogether live up to [their] fine promise" during the Harlem Renaissance. As a result, they would now "challenge" the "newer Negroes" of the post-Renaissance to do better (39).

Unfortunately, the first submissions that West received from her target group were remarkably undistinguished, as she notes in the second issue (September 1934): "We felt somewhat crazily that the authors must be spoofing and that they didn't really mean us to take their stuff for prose and poetry" (29). The literary monthly became a

quarterly, then a nearly semi-annual publication because of the continued poor quality of submissions and reliance on the tried and true voices of Hughes, Bontemps, Cullen, Helene Johnson, Hurston, and McKay. There was some new blood in the third issue (May 1935), most notably the poetry of Frank Yerby, but the magazine was still struggling to find quality pieces in 1936. The last two issues, published in Spring and Fall 1937, introduce work from the Chicago Group. A new ideology emerges in the editorial statement: “We want *New Challenge* to be a medium of literary expression for all writers who realize the present need for the realistic depiction of life through the sharp focus of social consciousness” (3). Dorothy West and Marian Minus are listed as co-Editors, and Richard Wright is listed as the Associate Editor. His now famous “Blueprint for Negro Writing” appears in this final issue, as well as Ralph Ellison’s first published work, a book review. Financial trouble and withdrawal of support by the Communist party, coupled with a disagreement between Minus and West, as well as Wright’s attempt to legally wrestle the magazine from West, led to the downfall of *New Challenge* (Fabre 146).

West worked as a welfare investigator for eighteen months after the demise of her magazine. She later joined the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writers’ Project to obtain income during the Depression. In all, West authored more than forty short stories for several publications, including *Opportunity*, *Messenger*, *Saturday Evening Quill*, *Challenge*, and *The New York Daily News*, which commissioned her to write two stories a month between 1940 and 1960. She left New York after 1945 to settle permanently in her family home on Martha’s Vineyard. Her most famous work, *The Living Was Easy* (1948), was generally well received. West continued to write short stories, articles, and a weekly column for the *Martha’s Vineyard Gazette*, a local paper. In the introduction an interview with David Evanier (1983), she is described as “working as the chief cashier at the Harborside restaurant in nearby Edgartown” to support herself (7). However, more fame awaited her in 1995 with the publication of her long-awaited

second novel *The Wedding*, which became a two-part television movie adaptation (1998). A collection of “Stories, Sketches, and Reminiscences” entitled *The Richer, the Poorer* also appeared in 1995. A photograph of the young Dorothy West graces the cover. She is sitting in her parents’ living room, pencil and paper in hand, hard at work on yet another story.

Although relegated to the second-string class of literary artists, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West are notable figures who worked on both sides of the publishing world as writers and editors. They inspired future generations of Black writers to pursue their craft and career goals despite the limited markets for African American fiction, “traditional” gender roles for “respectable” Black women, and stereotypical images of people of color. Their professional and creative works were heroic efforts for African American women living in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century. Moreover, their positions of power on magazines gave them the kind of agency usually reserved for men, and their independent thought garnered them much opposition from their male counterparts. Yet they were heroic, defiant dreamers who pursued their romantic quest for artistic freedom for themselves and their literary “children” at each magazine, and they maintained a hopeful, optimistic view that their contributions would be appreciated and remembered. Though denied those accolades during their lifetimes, these literary foremothers and “subversive” midwives are greatly revered and honored by their descendants for widening the threshold of literature and publishing for all to enter.

CHAPTER 2  
THE PUBLISHING POLITICS AND DEFERRED AMERICAN DREAMS OF  
PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS, JESSIE REDMON FAUSET, AND DOROTHY  
WEST, 1900-1937

In a letter to Countee Cullen in January 1934, Dorothy West discusses her hopes and fears for her new literary magazine:

I am really too small to be an editor. My feet don't reach the floor. But there was never anyone with so much faith. Alfred Hampton of the Boston Chronicle [sic] [. . .] has been a gem. I owe him a very great debt for his belief in me. It is he who says I can whenever I say I can't. Countee, I hope this magazine -- it is definitely "Challenge" -- means something to all of us.

West was fresh from a nearly year-long sojourn in Russia. She, along with Langston Hughes, Henry Moon, and nineteen other African American intellectuals, sailed to Moscow in June 1932 to participate in an ill-fated Russian film project that was supposed to document Black oppression in the United States. West was originally unwilling to make the trip, partly because of her anxieties about Communism. Ironically, it was unexpected funding from the Soviet Union that helped her to initiate plans for *Challenge* magazine upon her return to America in the spring of 1933. Moreover, it was the influence of the Marxist party, particularly the Chicago School and Richard Wright, that ultimately led her to discontinue publication of the magazine's successor, *New Challenge*, after its premiere Autumn issue in 1937.

West's brief editorial career echoes those of two of her literary foremothers, Jessie Redmon Fauset and Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins. Moreover, each woman's American Dream of professional success strongly influences her fiction. Their fictional

characters are confronted with obstacles that threaten their defiantly heroic, overly romanticized, and naively optimistic pursuit of happiness and success. Hopkins, Fauset, and West were moderately successful authors of novels and short fiction who served as literary editors for African American magazines. Hopkins is listed as Literary Editor for the *Colored American Magazine* (hereafter *CAM*) from 1903 to 1904, although her influence stems from its first issue in May 1900. Her heroic attempts to maintain a culturally and historically significant publication failed as a result of political pressure from Booker T. Washington's operatives. Hopkins ultimately resigned her position. In 1916 she established the short-lived magazine *New Era*, which produced two issues in February and March. Fauset held a similar position at *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926, where she also wrote biographical articles, book reviews, personal and travel essays, and conference reports. In addition, she co-founded and edited *The Brownies' Book*, a children's magazine, which produced twenty-four issues in its two-year run (1919-20). Her ambition was more romanticized; that is, she envisioned widening the cultural and intellectual horizons of the African American community -- particularly the children -- so that they would become internationally enlightened, politically well-informed, and intellectually independent citizens. Ultimately, they would awaken from the spell of ignorance cast upon them by "mainstream" assumptions of Black inferiority. West's childishly optimistic ventures, *Challenge* and *New Challenge* (1934-37), were intended as a nurturing forum for the post-Harlem Renaissance generation of new writers. Hopelessly unprepared for the rigors of publishing and editorial guidance, however, West was unable to realize her dream. Moreover, her efforts fell in the wake of Richard Wright's counterplot, which was to use the magazine as a political organ.

Despite their admirable work as behind-the-scenes associate editors and their official efforts as literary editors to publish both established and unknown writers, Hopkins, Fauset, and West were all destined to forfeit their powerful positions as a result of ideological differences. Each editor desired to subvert the status quo of racial and



gender discrimination by creating opportunities for new writers of color to enter a more level playing field in the White- and male-centered world of publishing. Unfortunately, however, each woman's editorial experience -- not unlike the heroic, romantic, and optimistic misadventures of their fictional characters -- illustrates her frustrated American Dream of professional success. Race and gender discrimination creates a double barrier between themselves and accomplishment, i.e., as Black working women they present a double threat. As women, they challenge the patriarchal status quo by letting their women's voices intrude upon the traditionally "male" domain of publishing. As African Americans, they subvert the Anglo power structure, which limits markets for writers of color, by opening up opportunities for fresh dark "voices" that would otherwise go unheard. In addition, it is interesting to note that each woman eagerly supported fledgling authors in lieu of taking on the traditional nurturing role of mother. There is no record of Pauline Hopkins marrying or having children. Jessie Fauset married in her late forties and did not have a family with her husband. Although West desired to do so, she was unable to have children and refused more than one marriage proposal for this reason (among others).

An admirable determination to succeed in a "man's" profession, a realistic perspective that tempered their romantic views of the American Dream, and an optimistic vision of better opportunities for future generations of African Americans also links these three women of letters. The fact that each woman had to relinquish her editorial position is the most telling -- and unsettling -- parallel in their lives. In the case of Hopkins and Fauset, warmly encouraging announcements in both *CAM* and *Crisis* mark their arrivals as literary editors. Coldly polite and terse editorial statements mark their departures, however, and these reveal the tense undercurrents on each magazine's staff. Their professional experiences remind us that women of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century who dared to live beyond the expected role of domestic agent and to

obtain positions of power were often punished for their “transgressions.” It also reminds us that, to a certain extent, the same is true for women in the twenty-first century.

For Dorothy West, the small yet pivotal professional period of 1934-1937 represents her adolescent, “rebellious” creative phase. She refused to believe that the Harlem Renaissance ended with the advent of the Great Depression. Founding *Challenge* served a double purpose, for she wished to “challenge” herself and her peers to live up to their potential as literary artists. She also wished to “challenge” the next generation of “voices” (as she refers to contributors in six of the seven issues) to add their new creativity to the African American literary continuum. Her editorials, though often glib and disparaging of poor-quality manuscript submissions, strive to encourage this younger block of artists; moreover, they reveal her maternal concern for the literary “children.” Yet her self-proclaimed “matriarchal bosom” reaches beyond the racial divide to young authors of all shades, and thus her publication exudes a multicultural spirit. West also emerges heroic (or perhaps mock-heroic) from her encounter with Richard Wright and the Communist party, albeit at the cost of her magazine. Unlike her professional foremothers, however, West did have ultimate control over *Challenge* and *New Challenge*, and her editorial decisions were final. Although Hopkins and Fauset were also heroic in their efforts to overcome internal political strife, they did *not* wield such power. Yet their departures from their respective magazines precipitated a decline in the quality of literary submissions and overall editorial management. *CAM*, which once prided itself on having an impressive balance of political and cultural content, suddenly became the mouthpiece for Booker T. Washington’s industrial ideology. Ultimately, it failed. Following several complaints from disgruntled contributors, *Crisis* also eventually phased out creative submissions altogether and strengthened its position as the NAACP’s political organ. West halted publication of *New Challenge* before the Communist party could gain a stranglehold on her literary magazine. Ironically, the

advent of political agendas led to the deconstruction of each author's vision of an intellectually and creatively enlightening magazine.

Pauline Hopkins's tenure at *CAM* is difficult to document because she does not always receive official credit for her work. She joined the Colored Co-Operative Publishing Company as a shareholder and became a member of its board of directors when it was established in Boston in early 1900. The company was founded by Walter Wallace, a young Black Virginian who had migrated North, and three other young Virginians of color. These original officers included Harper S. Fortune as treasurer, Jessie W. Watkins as advertising executive, and Peter B. Gibson as soliciting agent (Braithwaite 23). Inspired by the proliferation of inexpensive, mass-market mainstream American magazines such as *McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan*, Wallace wanted to publish the first general-purpose magazine for an African American audience (Benson 123). Its Afrocentric perspective would showcase important current events abroad as well as domestic (in particular, the dangerous Southern racial climate with its ever-increasing number of lynchings). It would serve both political and aesthetic purposes with inspirational portraits of famous Blacks throughout history, travel pieces, creative writing, and profiles of successful businessmen, politicians, and club members. According to Ann Allen Shockley, Hopkins responded to an advertisement for "certificates of deposit" in the magazine (which invited both readers and contributors to become members of the cooperative venture) in order to become a business partner. Moreover, she became a creditor of the company with the publication of *Contending Forces*, her only novel published in book form, in October of 1900 (*Afro-American Woman Writers, 1746-1933* 290). Wallace and her colleagues praise the book in the journal, and subscribers received free copies.

In the "Editorial and Publishers' Announcements" column of the premiere issue of *CAM* (May 1900), Hopkins is named editor of the "Women's Department" (hereafter "WD"), a column that appears only once, in the June issue. A mercifully short-lived

endeavor, “WD” seems to have been a token gift from her male colleagues, an honorary (and patronizing) position that apparently seemed “appropriate” for a female journalist:

[Hopkins] is especially well fitted for this work among the women of her race. While [she] has a very happy manner of presenting any subject which she may write, she has that which is of still greater value in a department of this kind, a heartfelt desire to aid in [every/way] possible in uplifting the colored people of America, and through them, the world. There will appear from month to month in this department, articles that will be of special and practical value to all women. (64)

In the single installment of “WD,” Hopkins records the current events of various women’s clubs and also pens a defense of these alleged “strutting,” aggressive individuals. A brief essay is also included in this section, which suggests the following about women’s suffrage and other political involvement:

[It is] a good thing if limited in some degree. It is right that women vote on such questions as property rights, the wife’s personal rights and rights in her children [. . .] Physically, women are not fitted for the politician’s life; morally, we should deplore seeing woman fall from her honorable position of wife and mother [. . .] There are, indeed, many reasons why it is not desirable for women to enter the political arena. (122)

The piece is unsigned, but it is difficult to believe that the outspoken Hopkins would espouse such conservative sentiment. On the other hand, this essay -- as well as Hopkins’s fiction, which is full of “honorable” wives and mothers of color -- would be in keeping with her desire to include African American women, commonly considered sexually immoral in the eyes of the “majority,” within the confines of the Victorian cult of true womanhood, which demanded piety, purity, and domesticity, among other requirements, from wives and mothers. In any case, the “Women’s Department” disappears after its maiden voyage and is replaced by “Here and Now.” In this new

column, Hopkins profiles prominent Black men and women's club members from various cities, although the emphasis remains on East Coasters, particularly Bostonians (Johnson and Johnson, *P & A* 6). Aside from including notable Blacks in the "Here and Now" column, Hopkins would also compose biographical statements of the magazine contributors, often with photographs, so that readers could "meet" the writers who had penned the articles, stories, and poems that they enjoyed in each issue.

Next to literature, history -- specifically the life stories of famous African Americans -- was a passionate fixation for the crusading editor. To Hopkins, history revolved around biography, the individual's effect upon the world, rather than the reverse. Because conventional, mainstream textbooks omitted the deeds of famous people of color, Hopkins felt that it was her duty (as would Fauset during her tenure at *Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book*) to include such information in *CAM*. She penned two biographical serials, "Famous Men of the Negro Race" from February 1901 to September 1902, and "Famous Women of the Negro Race" from November 1901 to October 1902. More than merely informative articles, these pieces rise to the status of inspirational, creative nonfiction or "exemplary texts" (Doreski 74). An excerpt from a January 1903 article, "Heroes and Heroines in Black," outlines Hopkins's philosophy of "the noble trait of heroism" (which is also pervasive throughout her fiction) and her desire to instill its qualities in her people:

[It is] a military attribute of the soul: a fine contempt for safety or ease; a mind of such chivalric mold that thoughts of danger cause no disturbance; the highest degree of natural enthusiasm which the world profoundly venerates. [. . .] If cultivated, it instills a wild courage, a "stoicism of the blood" that brings to any race undying fame. As a race, we need the stimulus of books and tales of this "cathartic virtue" more than any other literature we can mention. (206)

In particular, Hopkins wished to introduce African American models, as well as the life stories of Pan-African heroes and heroines, in the pages of *CAM*. She had already

succeeded with her two abovementioned serials, which documented the lives of important historical figures such as Toussaint L’overture, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet Tubman, and Booker T. Washington. In a serialized article on women of letters entitled “Some Literary Workers” (March-April 1902), Hopkins paid homage to her own literary foremothers and some contemporaries, including Phillis Wheatley, Angelina Weld Grimke, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Frances E.W. Harper, Mary Church Terrell, and Mary Shadd Carey, some of whom were contributors to the magazine.

In an “anonymous” article of January 1901, which profiles various *CAM* staff members, Hopkins writes her own biography in the same dramatic, “high-toned” style as that used in her character sketches of others. It reveals both her personality and her professional difficulties:

Pauline Hopkins has struggled to the position she now holds in the same fashion that *all* Northern colored women have to struggle -- through hardships, disappointments, and with very little encouragement. What she has accomplished has been done by a grim determination to “stick at it,” even though failure might await her at the end. (218)

An accomplished woman of letters in her own right, Hopkins published seven short stories and three serialized novels in *CAM*: *Hagar’s Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1902), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1903). She sometimes wrote under her mother’s maiden name, Sarah A. Allen, in order to prevent her own name from appearing too often in the magazine. She also devoted much of her time and energy to nurturing up-and-coming writers as well as established authors and poets, including Angelina Weld Grimke, F. E. W. Harper, William S. Braithwaite, Benjamin Brawley, Augustus M. Hodges, and James D. Corrothers. Her editorial dated May 1902 reveals her concern for new voices and anticipates the literary spirit of the Harlem Renaissance as well as the mentoring philosophies of Jessie Fauset and Dorothy West:

Our short stories, by our Race writers, are becoming more and more literary in style, and we shall soon see an era of strong competition in the field of letters. Let us have your matter; we shall offer you the benefit of our suggestions, as, down deep into your general composition, may be lurking a gem of literary fire, which only needs encouragement and development. (76)

Hopkins was in an unusual position of power for an African American woman at that time. In addition to her numerous responsibilities as literary editor, contributor, and shareholder, she seems to have served as the chief editor for *CAM* (Braithwaite 24). She was responsible for choosing both journalistic and creative submissions, although her special interests in fiction and biography took precedence. Despite her efforts, however, Hopkins received no official masthead credit until her name appeared as Literary Editor beginning with volume six in November 1903. Nonetheless, her contributions were considerable, particularly since Wallace's "literary standards" did not always match his professional enthusiasm for the publication (Braithwaite 23). Hopkins not only took full responsibility for choosing and soliciting manuscripts, but she also "inaugurated the policy of paying" the authors. In his retrospective article, "Negro America's First Magazine" (1947) Braithwaite states:

She not only wanted the Negro author to feel that his work, if accepted and printed, was worthy of remuneration, but as an editor she felt it gave her an independence of action in making selections, and a dignity in soliciting manuscripts of the best. (25)

Hopkins established the Colored American League and, with the assistance of twenty prominent Black Bostonians, sought to widen the distribution of *CAM* through personal solicitations for subscriptions and business. She made promotional tours around the country to gain more support for the journal in 1904 (Campbell 189).

Despite Hopkins's steadfast loyalty and unflagging enthusiasm, she nevertheless encountered many personal obstacles behind the scenes. In his article, Braithwaite

describes the slow disintegration of working relationships on the magazine staff. In 1903 the successful Black Bostonian Colonel William H. Dupree and two other Black Bostonians, William O. West and Jesse W. Watkins, purchased the financially troubled magazine. The three men wanted to keep the magazine in the city and to retain Hopkins as its chief editor (Johnson & Johnson, *P&A* 9). Dupree became President of the Colored Co-Operative Publishing Company, with Wallace as Vice-President and Hopkins as “editor of the magazine” (Braithwaite 24). The “Editorial and Publishers’ Announcements” of the issue for May/June 1903 includes an apology to readers for the missing April number:

Owing to legal complications [. . .] the April number did not appear, and we find it advisable to issue the May and June numbers as a double number.

At the cost of many anxious moments and sleepless nights, when not a star of hope was on the horizon, God has permitted us to save this enterprise to our race. Envy and covetousness have sat with us in council, but even as did the Christian martyrs of old forgive their tormentors [. . .] so do we forgive our enemies. At some future day we hope to be able to tell our true story to our readers, who will then give us the full sympathy of their warm hearts. (466)

Written in a familiar dramatic style, putting the editorial board in the role of persecuted heroes fighting an epic battle, this announcement is more than likely Hopkins’s own work. However, this would not be the last time that the magazine and publishing interests would change hands. According to Braithwaite, Dupree eventually came to regret his “association with this literary and journalistic venture” because of the “temperamental” Hopkins, who resented the “quiet but effective work” of R.S. Elliott, a White publisher who had technical production experience. Moreover, Wallace made “insistent efforts” to produce a quality journal (25). Braithwaite singles out Hopkins:

As a novelist [she] regarded herself as a national figure, in the company



of Charles W. Chesnutt and Paul Lawrence [sic] Dunbar and as such felt free to impose her views and opinions upon her associates in the conduct of both the book and magazine publications. Miss Hopkins resented bitterly Elliott's veiled authority, and was generally critical of Wallace's literary incompetence though it was chiefly due to his vision and enthusiasm that her own literary ambition had found its opportunity. (25)

Although Braithwaite supports Hopkins's creative work, praising *Contending Forces* as the "outstanding contribution" of the Colored Co-Operative's literary output, he likely resented her professional power (24). After all, his own poetry, which was published often in *CAM*, undoubtedly received Hopkins's frank editorial appraisal (Carby, Intro xxxi). Ironically, he shows a corresponding ingratitude toward Hopkins, who, after all, did help his "literary ambition" to find "its opportunity" in the magazine.

In her discussion of author Georgia Douglas Johnson in *Color, Sex and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance*, Gloria T. Hull refers to Braithwaite's introduction to Johnson's poetry collection *The Heart of a Woman* (1918) in order to reveal his seemingly progressive, yet ultimately traditional attitude toward women:

[Braithwaite] speaks perceptively about how women have not yet been wholly emancipated and how the world is still ignorant of what remains hidden within their hearts "of mystery and passion, of domestic love and joy and sorrow, of romantic visions and practical ambitions." Unfortunately, like most critics, Braithwaite concludes by extolling her (woman's/the poet's) "marvelous patience," "wonderful endurance," "persistent faith," and "sad felicity." But, before he fell into these cliches, he was groping towards something meaningful -- the implications of which he may not have wanted to pursue. (157)

Apparently, Braithwaite's idea of an emancipated woman was just that -- a good concept in theory only. He laments that "it is only a little over half of a century since she has

either spoke [sic] or acted with a sense of freedom” in his introduction (vii). When faced with the actual manifestation of such a woman in Pauline Hopkins, however, Braithwaite not only resisted but bristled, ultimately preferring the status quo of patriarchal leadership and female acquiescence. Hence, his profiles of Hopkins’s colleagues are mild, while he reserves the more disparaging character analysis for the “temperamental” literary editor.

Hopkins became Editor-in-Chief in March 1904, but her association with *CAM* ended in the fall of that year (McKay, “Intro” 7). Fred R. Moore, an emissary of Booker T. Washington, bought out the magazine, which eventually became the political instrument of the Tuskegee machine. Anti-Washington sentiment appears in Hopkins’s fictional work, including her novel *Contending Forces*. Her characters Arthur Lewis (Washington) and Will Smith (W.E.B. Du Bois) debate their respective racial philosophies. In Hopkins’s short story “A Dash for Liberty” (*CAM*, August 1901), she renames historical figure Madison Washington as Madison Monroe for her fictionalized account of a slave uprising. Hopkins’s and Washington’s mutual animosity led to the former’s departure from *CAM*; she learned that she was to be “frozen out” of her position in favor of Roscoe Conklin Simmons, a nephew of Mrs. Booker T. Washington, once the magazine moved from Boston to New York (Shockley 293). According to Johnson and Johnson, “the new management found her embarrassingly outspoken,” specifically regarding racial and political manners, and especially for an early twentieth-century woman (*P&A* 8). W.E.B. Du Bois frankly assesses the situation in *Crisis* (November 1912): “It was suggested to the editor [. . .] that her attitude was not conciliatory enough,” for she did not kowtow to the white patrons who supported the magazine (33). Hopkins resigned in September, and her departure was announced in *CAM* (November 1904):

On account of ill-health Miss Pauline Hopkins has found it necessary to sever her relations with this Magazine and has returned to her home in Boston. Miss Hopkins was a faithful and conscientious worker, and did much toward the

building up of the Magazine. We take this means of expressing our appreciation of her services, and wish for her a speedy return to complete health. (700)

In his article, Du Bois adds that in New York the magazine “became so conciliatory, innocuous and uninteresting that it died a peaceful death almost unnoticed by the public” (33). Meanwhile, Hopkins sporadically wrote articles, both self-published and for other publications, such as *Voice of the Negro*. In 1916 she founded *New Era* magazine with former *CAM* colleagues, which continued in the uplift and protest tradition with an emphasis on Black American culture (McKay 8). The new journal lasted only two issues, after which Hopkins turned to stenography work full-time. Her accidental death in 1930, caused by burns suffered from a fire in her home, is a sadly tragic and dramatic end to a life of heroic effort.

During her Junior year at Cornell University, Jessie Redmon Fauset, who would become the most prolific Black female novelist of the mid- to late-1920s and early 1930s, initiated a correspondence with noted scholar and *Crisis* Editor W.E.B. Du Bois. Fauset’s father, Reverend Redmon Fauset, died 1 January 1903, and she established a correspondence with Du Bois in her letter dated 26 December of that same year. Carolyn Wedin Sylvander notes that Fauset highly admired and respected both men. They “were in many ways similar,” and bonding with Du Bois suggests “a continuity in influence on her life, or at least in backdrop to it” (37). Indeed, Du Bois appears as a mentoring, fairy godfather figure who guides the ingenue Fauset through the initial stages of her literary career. Fauset requested his assistance in procuring a summer teaching position (which she later held at Fisk University in 1904). She also praised him for his recently published book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): “We have needed someone to voice the intricacies of the blind maze of thought and action along which the modern, educated colored man or woman struggles” (Dec. 26, 1903). These lines were prescient, for after graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell University in 1905, the highly qualified Fauset unsuccessfully struggled to acquire teaching work in her hometown, an experience that

she recalls years later: “I have had to leave Philadelphia -- the city of my birth and preference, because I was educated to do high school work and it was impossible for a colored woman to get that kind of work in that town” (“Notes” 77). Rejected by the discriminatory employment practices of the City of Brotherly Love, Fauset turned to Baltimore and Washington D.C. for teaching positions. In Washington she formed congenial relationships with other accomplished Black women. She worked with Angelina Grimke at Dunbar High School and joined Georgia Douglas Johnson’s literary circle (Wall 43). She also began contributing original work to *Crisis* in 1912, a professional association that would continue beyond her seven-year tenure on the magazine. Fauset’s early stories emphasize her romantic spirit: “Emmy,” a lengthy two-part novella about young lovers taunted by racially frustrated American Dreams (December 1912-January 1913); “My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein,” a speculative work describing her ideal living and working space -- a castle in Spain (July 1914); and ““There Was One Time,’ A Story of Spring” an ironic, autobiographical fairy tale romance about a frustrated schoolteacher (April-May 1917). Fauset also wrote poetry, which often focused on unfulfilled romantic quests: “Rondeau” (April 1912), “Again It Is September” (September 1917), and “The Return” (January 1919). Her seven-installment book review series entitled “What to Read” appears sporadically from March 1912 to September 1913. Early articles include “The Montessori Method -- Its Possibilities” (July 1912) and her first travel essay, “Tracing Shadows” (September 1915), which documents her experiences in Paris during the outbreak of World War I. As a frequent contributor and correspondent of Du Bois, Fauset was quite familiar with the publication before joining its staff. Du Bois was obviously impressed by her work over the years and showed her special consideration by praising her fiction as “strong” and “striking” and anticipating her future publications in his editorials. As Sylvander notes, “That Du Bois thought highly of Fauset and her work in these years is clear from these references, especially in view of the fact that other writers are not singled out in this

way” (46). Eventually, this combined father figure and mentor invited his talented protege to join him in New York as a colleague -- a fairy tale dream come true.

*Crisis* was started in November 1910 as the organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Du Bois received fifty dollars a month in support from the NAACP’s board of directors for the venture, and the magazine’s editorial board was composed of members of the association that included, ironically enough, William S. Braithwaite, who would later praise Fauset’s fiction (Daniel 139). Du Bois envisioned better success for *Crisis* than for its predecessors, such as the defunct publications *CAM* and *The Voice of the Negro*. His overtly radical magazine, with the backing of the NAACP, would best serve his more liberal, (namely, anti-Booker T. Washington) position, promote news of Black accomplishment rather than of Black crime, lambaste the “national disgrace” of lynching, and support higher education for African Americans, among other issues (141). Primarily political, the publication expanded to include international, Pan-African concerns after WWI and, with Fauset’s appointment as Literary Editor, interests in literature and the arts (143). The “Men of the Month” column of November 1919 reads as follows:

Miss Jessie Redmon Fauset joined THE CRISIS staff last month as Literary Editor. She has for many years been a contributor to our pages. She was born in Philadelphia, educated in the public schools, holding the alumnae scholarship in the High School for Girls, and afterwards took her Bachelor’s degree at Cornell, where she gained the Phi Beta Kappa key. She has studied in Paris and at the University of Pennsylvania, holding a University scholarship, and took her Master’s degree there last June. Formerly Miss Fauset taught Latin and French in the Dunbar High School, Washington D.C. (341)

Fauset would officially serve as literary editor of *Crisis* from November 1919 to April 1926 and serve unofficially as Editor-in-Chief during Du Bois’s frequent business trips.

During her tenure, as during that of Hopkins at *CAM*, the magazine produced the highest quality of creative, biographical, political, and educational work. As Du Bois had mentored her, Fauset in turn took on the mantle of “fairy godmother.” She encouraged and gave first publication to authors such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay. She maintained a close correspondence with Hughes in particular. She also wrote to Cullen and Toomer, although the latter was elusive and apparently never responded. Like Hopkins, Fauset continued to publish much of her own creative work in the magazine, including three additional short stories: “Mary Elizabeth” (December 1919), “The Sleeper Wakes” (August-October 1920), and “Double Trouble” (August-September 1923), all of which deconstruct preconceived notions of fairy tale romance and ideal marital unions. Unlike Hopkins, however, Fauset found mainstream publishers for her four novels: *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933), two of which are considered outgrowths from her short fiction, and all of which have been criticized for their emphasis on the Black bourgeoisie. Her most remarkable writing comes from her group of travel essays based on her experiences in WWI-era France (September 1915) and postwar Europe and North Africa from 1925-26. In “Yarrow Revisited” (January 1925) Fauset describes the world of postwar Paris, which is no longer romantic and springish, but autumnally dismal. “This Way to the Flea Market” (February 1925) vividly portrays the struggle of poor Parisians on market day. “The Enigma of the Sorbonne” (March 1925) is an “historical account” of that university, and “Dark Algiers the White” (April-May 1925), possibly the most impressive of the group, is “a penetrating study of the lives of oppressed women” (Griffin 76). Finally, “The Eucalyptus Tree: A Reverie of Rome, the Catacombs, Christianity and the Moving Beauty of Italy” (January 1926) is another historical piece, yet one that is also touched with romanticism and drama. These essays expand Fauset’s horizon beyond the materialism and class-consciousness of her fiction to embrace the theme of humanity

across racial and national boundaries. Her portraits of war-torn Europe and the suffering of the poor in France and Algiers, particularly that of women, are keenly felt.

Like Hopkins, Fauset felt strongly about the importance of teaching Black history and biography to African Americans. In an interview for *Southern Workman* with Marion Starkey (1932), the author laments the gaps in her own early education as well as that of all students of color:

No part of Negro literature needs more building up than biography [. . .] When I was a child I used to puzzle my head ruefully over the fact that in school we studied the lives of only great white people. I took it that there simply have been no great Negroes, and I was amazed when, as I grew older, I found that there were. It is a pity that Negro children should be permitted to suffer from that delusion at all. (220)

Fauset also expressed a desire to write her own “Plutarch’s Lives” of Black history; unfortunately, this dream never materialized (220). However, her contributions to African American literature and culture in the pages of *Crisis* are worthwhile historical documents in their own right. She generally maintains a straightforward biographical approach in her sketches of famous Blacks, although there are some moments of Hopkins-like drama and militancy. In her March 1921 essay, “The Emancipator of Brazil” (with Cezar Pinto) she writes:

The mass of Negroes in Brazil were still groaning in a hateful bondage. Into this crisis came striding Jose do Patrocinio -- young, ardent, single of purpose. All his thought, his ambition, his means, his strength were but for one end -- the abolition of slavery in Brazil. (208)

In a biographical tribute to performer Bert Williams in May 1922, Fauset compares his artistic struggle to the struggle of the race: “Why should he and we obscure our talents forever under the bushel of prejudice, jealousy, stupidity -- whatever it is that makes the white world say: ‘No genuine colored artist; coons, clowns, end-men, claptrap, but no

undisguisedly beautiful presentation of Negro ability” (14). Not surprisingly, this statement recalls the obstacles that she faced as a woman of letters. She was first rejected by the Philadelphia school system. Later, mainstream publishers would not easily accept her novels of bourgeois Black life in America. Ultimately, the mainstream presses would not hire a more than qualified woman of color after Fauset left *Crisis*.

Fauset also did the majority of the editing work for Du Bois’s short-lived *The Brownies’ Book* from 1919 to 1920, in which Langston Hughes and Nella Larsen published early work. Aimed at ages six through sixteen, the children’s magazine is a remarkably sophisticated collection of biographical articles, short stories, poetry, children’s games and folk tales from around the world, moral lessons, and current world events. It is a fitting legacy for future generations. Fauset penned a regular column entitled “The Judge,” in which an older narrator advises a group of children in matters of family, morality, education, and planning their futures. Children’s letters to the editor are included in “The Jury” column, while parents’ letters appear in “The Grown-up’s Corner.” “As the Crow Flies” (penned by Du Bois) discusses current events, both domestic and international, with an emphasis on Pan-African issues, and the author does not “dumb down” the information for his bright and literate audience. The magazine also served as another outlet for Fauset’s creative and journalistic talent. She wrote poetry, articles, biographical sketches, and four short stories for children: “Turkey Drumsticks” (November 1920), “Merry Christmas to All” (December 1920), “Ghosts and Kittens” (February 1921), and “Cordelia Goes on the Warpath” (May 1921). Three stories feature the Forest family, a bourgeois clan complete with seven highly precocious youngsters, a demanding “Miss Ann” mother, and Deborah, the ever-jovial “Mammy” housekeeper. Recurring themes of noblesse oblige abound as the unusually self-possessed children share their spare time and allowances with the less fortunate. Yet there is also mischief, as the children go to great lengths to outwit an unfriendly new housekeeper in “Ghosts and Kittens” in order to reclaim Deborah as their beloved domestic goddess.



Like Hopkins and West, Fauset encouraged submissions from young writers and felt personally responsible, as a former teacher as well as an influential editor, for improving the education of these new voices. After reading several lackluster entries for a short story contest for *Crisis* in 1922, she laments:

I have been a teacher so I am rather chary about placing the blame for the shortcomings of pupils on the members of the teaching profession. Yet in this case, since all the entrants were students, and probably representative, I should say that much of the blame must lie with the method of instruction. No matter how much a person desires to write he cannot write unless he has practice. And he cannot practice without models [ . . . ] Do our colored pupils read the great writers and stylists? [ . . . ] Are they encouraged to develop a critical faculty? [ . . . ] The geniuses are of course born, but the shaping of most writers of talent lies in the hands of our teachers. (58)

By 1926, personal rifts with Du Bois led Fauset to leave *Crisis*. According to David Levering Lewis in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, her mentor owed her \$2500 and seemed unwilling to repay; moreover, he refused to expand the cultural content of his magazine or to moderate its political focus to suit her editorial vision (177). Du Bois himself would officially resign his position on 26 June 1934 (Daniel 145). Notice of Fauset's departure seems congenial enough (May 1926):

MISS JESSIE FAUSET, after seven years' active service as Literary Editor of THE CRISIS, changes this month to the less exacting duties of Contributing Editor. The office will miss her monthly co-operation but our readers will still have the opportunity of following her gifted pen in our pages. Several of her essays will appear in the near future. (7)

The phrase "less exacting duties" belies the unresolvable tension in the office. Despite Fauset's considerable contributions to Du Bois's magazines, as well as her education,

intelligence, and managerial skills, she was still a “colored” woman. As such, she was unable to secure employment in New York City’s mainstream publishing arena. Fauset applied to publisher and intellectual Joel Spingarn for assistance in finding a new position as either “a publisher’s reader,” “social secretary in a private family,” or a situation with “one of the Foundations in New York.” In addition, she took the French exam in order to qualify as a Junior High School teacher as a backup; she admitted, however, that “I prefer not to teach . . .” In the close of her letter she added, “In the case of the publisher’s reader, if the question of color should come up I could of course work at home” (Jan. 26, 1926). Unfortunately, Fauset was forced to return to the classroom, as no other options became available. She continued to write novels and did indeed contribute additional fiction, reviews, and articles to *Crisis*, but she never regained the professional success and power that she held while she was associated with the publication. Color and gender issues overshadowed her intelligence and professional talent; no mainstream publisher would hire her, and positions in Black publishing were few and far between. Her essay, “Some Notes on Color” (1922) reveals her feelings about her own thwarted American Dream of success as well as those of her ambitious, upwardly-mobile characters: “The puzzling, tangling, nerve-wracking consciousness of color envelops and swathes us. Some of us, it smothers” (77). The curse of racial and gender prejudice cast upon her, Fauset could only hope that her past efforts on behalf of future writers of color would eventually lift the spell from her people.

Dorothy West, the youngest of these three women when she decided to found and edit her own literary magazine in 1933, was on a personal mission. She wanted to make up for the time that she had wasted during the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance by fostering the talents of new, post-Renaissance writers. Mainstream presses were unwilling to publish her short fiction during the twenties and early thirties. Unlike Hopkins and Fauset, however, who were limited to one publication, West found several outlets for her early work in Black journals such as *Opportunity*, *Messenger*, and *The*

*Saturday Evening Quill*. (West would find an even wider audience from 1940-1960 writing “raceless” fiction for the *New York Daily News*.) She found additional income with several small jobs in theatre. In June 1932 she sailed to Russia with her fellow African American intellectuals to make the movie “Black and White.” An unrealistic study of Black American life, the propaganda project was ultimately shelved because of media and racial controversy. The media exploited fears that Communists were simply trying to recruit the twenty-two Black Americans. Moreover, there was opposition from White American engineer Hugh Cooper, who was then in Russia to build a much-needed dam (Ferguson 191). West remained in the country for several months after the failed venture under a new contract with another filmmaker, then returned home after learning that her father had passed away (192). Upon leaving Russia, she received three hundred dollars. In a 1993 interview with Katrine Dalsgard she admits, “I was the only one who got that. To this day I will never know why the Russians gave that money to me”(38). She decided to use part of her unexpected windfall to found her new literary magazine and to hire a printer in Boston, although she would move her editorial office to New York City by the second issue.

During the Harlem Renaissance, West had made powerful literary contacts who now supported her literary business venture. James Weldon Johnson and Carl Van Vechten mentored her in creative writing, and Johnson wrote the Foreword to the premiere issue of *Challenge* (March 1934). West’s friendly association with Hughes, Hurston, Cullen, Thurman, and other well-established authors gave her an impressive literary pool from which she could elicit submissions for her fledgling magazine. These notable connections, as well as her youth and optimism, gave her confidence for her new venture. Yet, as indicated by her ironic comments in an interview with David Evanier (1983), West was certainly aware of potential obstacles for herself as a Black professional woman:

I did not know then that it was harder for women. I was black, I was female,

so I had two strikes against me. [. . .] But I was not aware of it then. In any case, *Challenge* came out. Don't forget now, I was a woman. Two or three years before, a beautiful magazine, *Fire*, had been brought out by men. The editors had always been men, and here comes this girl -- who's she? Don't expect me to get all the praise in the world for that magazine -- from them. [. . .] I financed it, I was the editor, I was the everything. (9)

West emerges as a New Woman of sorts in her desire to have control over her own endeavor, rather than work for others. Although she seeks the patriarchal guidance of Johnson and Van Vechten (and chooses Dostoyevsky as her literary mentor), she does not, as does Fauset, seem to rely on them as surrogate father figures (although like Fauset, she had also recently lost her father shortly before turning to these older male mentors). On the other hand, she does not feel compelled to challenge their authority by aggressively promoting herself, as does Hopkins. Instead, West creates her own power source, i.e., a magazine over which she has complete editorial control. Her naive faith in the project reveals that, much like her fictional characters, West is a naïve optimist who heeds the dictates of the inner child to produce something that will make others (as well as herself) proud.

So why, then, did *Challenge* and *New Challenge* fail? Aside from the fact that the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance was over -- both financially and emotionally -- with the onset of the Great Depression, it is also possible that West's scheme evinced more idealism than realism. With her professional connections -- unusual for women in such a male-centered environment at that time -- she could easily have benefited from further mentoring. She could have approached established magazines such as *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *Messenger*, particularly those that were already familiar with her work. Charles Johnson at *Opportunity* would likely have encouraged one of his prize-winning authors, and both Fauset and Du Bois were concerned and supportive of new writers. Yet West did not publish in the *Crisis*. She could have learned more about the business of

publishing from Eugene Gordon, literary editor of *The Boston Post*, who had published her juvenilia on a regular basis and awarded her weekly cash prizes for “best story.” Gordon also founded the Boston Quill Club, a Black literary group of which West was a member, and he was editor of the *Saturday Evening Quill* magazine. Gordon published three issues between 1928 and 1930, including West’s stories “An Unimportant Man” (1928) and “Prologue to a Life” (1929) (Johnson & Johnson, *P & A* 92). Both stories examine the naive, loving, innocent spirit of adults who are ever in tune with their inner (as well as actual) children. West could also have sought advice from her friend Wallace Thurman, who produced the ill-fated *Fire!* (November 1926) and the equally short-lived *Harlem* (November 1928), if only to learn from his mistakes.

Unfortunately, however, for all her enthusiasm and professional support, West admits that she was not assertive within her literary circles:

I went to the Harlem Renaissance and never said a word. I was young and a girl so they never asked me to say anything. I didn’t know I had anything to say. I was just a little girl from Boston, a place of dull people with funny accents. (Washington, “Sign” 150)

Whatever this naïve spirit learned she gleaned by listening closely to her aggressive literary kin at various gatherings; she did not, apparently, single out individuals for practical guidance. Moreover, as an enthusiastic yet immature young person, West rebelled against the Old Guard, for she sensed a certain class division. She did not feel that established writers would help her: “Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen were a different breed . . . They would feel themselves very much above these up-and-coming young writers” (McDowell 274). As a result, West took on the mantle of “literary midwife” for a new generation of authors in *Challenge* magazine and defied the Establishment with her idealistic vision. Johnson’s Foreword to the premiere issue (March 1934) echoes West’s own sentiments:

It is a good thing that Dorothy West is doing in instituting a magazine through

which the voices of younger Negro writers may be heard. The term “younger Negro writers” connotes a degree of disillusionment and disappointment for those who a decade ago hailed with loud huzzas the dawn of the Negro literary millennium. We expected much; perhaps, too much. I now judge that we ought to be thankful for the half-dozen younger writers who did emerge and make a place for themselves. But we ought not to be satisfied; many newer voices should be constantly striving to make themselves heard. (2)

Ironically, the premiere issue relies heavily on the tried and true voices of well-established authors and includes stories by Hughes and Bontemps as well as “Heard Songs” (poetry) by Countee Cullen and West’s cousin Helene Johnson. It also relies on the editor’s own talents. As “Jane Isaac” West pens “Cook,” a stereotypical yet characteristically ironic portrait of a self-sacrificing surrogate matriarch who supports her sister’s “dicty” family. As “Mary Christopher” West writes an essay entitled “Room in Red Square,” a travel essay based on her experiences in Moscow. West goes so far as to include both personae in the “Voices” (Contributor’s Notes) section:

JANE ISAAC, a new writer, sends us her manuscript from Cambridge, with a charming letter pledging her cooperation.

MARY CHRISTOPHER is, we believe, a pseudonym for a young woman who went to Russia a year ago with an acting company. If she has written other things, we hope she will send us more of her manuscripts. (40)

This clever ruse was likely staged in order to encourage more new young “voices” to submit their own work. West’s first editorial, “Dear Reader,” is likewise a call to the post-Renaissance generation:

This magazine is primarily an organ for the new voice. It is our plan to bring out the prose and poetry of the newer Negroes. We who were the New Negroes challenge them to better our achievements. For we did not altogether live up to our fine promise. (39)

Unfortunately, however, the submissions that the idealistic young editor received from her target group were remarkably undistinguished, as she notes in “Dear Reader” (September 1934): “Bad writing is unbelievably bad. We felt somewhat crazily that the authors must be spoofing and that they didn’t really mean us to take their stuff for prose and poetry” (29). The literary monthly had become a “quarterly” and still relied on notable names such as Hurston, Bontemps, and McKay, although there is some “new blood” with the appearance of Frank Yerby’s poetry. Also notable is a lengthy “Guest Editorial” poem by Blanche Colton Williams, which honors West’s desire to support up-and-coming writers. Van Vechten defends the post-Renaissance African American artist in his three-paragraph note entitled “Comments”: “I believe the Negro of today to be on a much more solid basis as an artist and as a social individual as he was then.[. . .] If standards are higher, the talent of genius expressed is greater too” (28). Another work by “Mary Christopher” appears, an epistolary love story entitled “Russian Correspondence,” again with inclusion in “Voices”: “MARY CHRISTOPHER too, appears again, and again with a Negro setting. We are glad she is a regular contributor” (31). In addition, there is an announcement for a literary contest, which is never mentioned again in the magazine.

West’s lack of professional tact likely frightened off potential contributors, though she notes that she is “rather pleased” with the magazine’s third issue (May 1935); many new young authors appear here, and not all of them are African American. The young editor feels that “now [that] our age enables us to be looked up to, we are more than ever willing to be a matriarchal bosom. So *Challenge* continues to hold to its premise, and on the new voices depends for its use and growth” (45). Interestingly, this naïve child-editor wishes to play “grownup”; despite her own youth, West still feels the need to nurture those who are yet younger and less experienced than herself.

The “Dear Reader” column of issue four (January 1936) mentions “considerable praise” for the previous number and addresses some criticism as well:

Somebody asked us why *Challenge* was for the most part so pale pink. We said because the few red articles we did receive were not literature. We care a lot about style. And we think a message is doubly effective when effectively written without bombast or bad spelling. [. . .] We would like to print more articles and stories of protest. We have daily contact with the underprivileged. [. . .] Yet the bourgeois youth on the southern campus . . . is joining a fraternity instead of the brotherhood of serious minds. (38)

These comments foreshadow the more Marxist slant that the magazine would take with the appearance of Chicago Group writers such as Marian Minus and Richard Wright. It also reflects West’s merciless critique of her own social class and her desire to identify instead with the proletarian masses. Her experiences with people of all socioeconomic ranks during the Harlem Renaissance and in Russia, as well as her admiration for Dostoyevsky’s literary ideology, likely stirred her interests, although she resisted becoming too heavily involved in the Communist party.

By issue five (June 1936), the magazine had become a semi-annual affair. It again relied on “Mary Christopher” for a short story entitled “The Five Dollar Bill.” Here a young girl loses her childlike optimism and faith in both of her parents when she learns of her mother’s blatant adultery. Langston Hughes contributes a poem, and Georgia Douglas Johnson contributes a “raceless” short story under the pseudonym Paul Tremaine, entitled “Gesture” (Hull 196). (She would contribute “Tramp Love” in the Spring 1937 issue under the same pen name.) In her editorial column, West prints an “explosive letter” from a Memphis reader who dismisses the third issue as the “trashiest” of Black magazines and adds that the fourth issue “lifts my opinion ever so slightly” (46). However, the reader includes a subscription payment and some encouragement and also



requests that the magazine continue to live up to its promise of quality literary newcomers.

The last two issues, published in Spring and Fall of 1937, introduce work from the Chicago Group. In her Spring editorial West comments:

We have become greatly interested in a young Chicago group [. . .] *Challenge* has come in for considerable dispraise, but we have never resented honest opinions. And we have retaliated by offering them a special section in a forthcoming issue, that they may show us what we have not done by showing us what they can do. (41)

Apparently, what they could do was try to take over the magazine. In *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, Michel Fabre notes that “there was no telling whether *New Challenge* would finally realize Wright’s dream of bringing together a group of progressive black authors” (142). West was uncomfortable with the Communist slant of Wright’s “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (Autumn 1937). However, her editorial seems to reflect a new spirit: “We want *New Challenge* to be a medium of literary expression for all writers who realize the present need for the realistic depiction of life through the sharp focus of social consciousness” (3). West and Marian Minus are listed as co-Editors with Wright as Associate Editor, although, according to Fabre, he “eventually did most of the work for the publication and made almost all the editorial decisions” (142). Indeed, Wright had published two newspaper articles announcing his new political vehicle. “Negro Writers Launch Literary Quarterly” appears in *The Daily Worker*, a New York Communist party publication, on June 8, 1937. His goal was clear: “An organizational plan, similar in purpose and structure to that of the old John Reed Clubs which influenced so many young white writers during the past seven years, is being launched with a literary quarterly, ‘*New Challenge*,’ as its organ.” Apparently, *Daily Worker* supported the new literary magazine, although *New Challenge* was not supposed to promote Party interests. Yet the editorial discussions of West’s revamped magazine remained political,

calling for “an active struggle on the part of Negro writers against war, fascism, and reaction in general.” A longer article, “Young Writers Launch Literary Quarterly, Sept. 1” appears in the *San Antonio Register* on July 9, 1937. Here, Wright expresses his desire to “weld the regional groups [of Black writers] into a league of Negro writers” and notes the existence of such regional groups in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles. His noble intentions to inspire and unite young Black writers, like those of West, were ill-fated, even before the venture began. Interestingly, a small column advertisement for a funeral home appears after the final paragraph of Wright’s article for the *Register*. This is an inadvertently ironic touch -- not unlike the plot twists in West’s fiction -- and it anticipates *New Challenge*’s fate.

Critics generally focus on Wright’s contribution to *New Challenge*. Robert Bone notes the “transitional and somewhat defensive tone” set in the premiere issue of *Challenge* and contrasts it with its later “emphasis on social realism” and the effects of the “party line on Negro art.” He then praises Wright’s work on the last issue as “a high point in the Negro writer’s excursion into ‘proletarian art’” (117). In *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse also focuses on Wright’s contribution, dismissing the previous six issues as “very undistinguished, [revealing] the growing lack of ability of Negro writers to come to grips with the critical demands and potentialities of their own social facts of life. [. . .] Its only bequest to the next young generation, its ideological poverty” (186). Walter C. Daniel gives the most comprehensive analysis of all seven issues in his essay “*Challenge Magazine: An Experiment That Failed*” and suggests that “The race, the nation, and large parts of the world were leaning toward a proletarian artistic vision which Miss West never fully understood” (494). He perceptively notes that West’s desire to produce a nonpolitical magazine that showcases new talent is supplanted by the inclusion Wright’s heavily political “theory of racial literature” for “added stature” (502-03).

*New Challenge* produced only one issue. Although, according to Fabre, the magazine received great praise from Left columnists in the *New Republic* and the *Daily Worker*, the Party itself would not financially support the new publication (146). Moreover, editorial friction between Dorothy West and Marian Minus, plus Wright's attempt to wrestle the publication legally from its founder, led to its demise. West recalls that, "I have a certain strength and I said no. They couldn't do anything without me. So that was the last issue" (Evanier 10). More revealing is West's recollection in her interview with Deborah McDowell:

Maybe you don't realize it, but it was very hard for one little woman back then. Women of the present are a little more aggressive than I was back then. I guess you could say I was passive. Plus, I was small and my voice soft. So when the Chicago group started having meetings about the direction of the magazine, I remember deciding to give it up. (271)

West refers once again to her "little sister" persona, the one best known to her Harlem Renaissance peers and that also labels her an idealistic, inner child of sorts. Yet this "little sister" still maintained ultimate editorial control over the magazine, and it was in her power to stop it before it was taken from her.

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West were brilliant and talented literary figures whose American Dreams of professional success came true -- but only to a point. Hopkins enjoyed a brief period of editorial control rarely given to women, and especially women of color. Yet her heroic, outspoken nature, in direct conflict with conservative patriarchal values, limited her sphere of activity. Once her ties to *CAM* dissolved, so did her professional influence. She had a brief, fleeting success in establishing the short-lived *New Era* magazine, but after its demise she sank into relative obscurity. Fauset had even more literary influence, for with her nurturing, romantic spirit, she was able to discover and encourage the work of many new writers and to lift the "spell" of ignorance from her readers, most notably children. In addition,

she was able to work within the patriarchal power structure -- and without submerging her own identity as an intelligent and powerful Black woman writer -- and benefited from working on equal terms with Du Bois at *Crisis*. In addition, she had almost complete editorial control over content for *The Brownies' Book*. Like Hopkins, however, once she left the magazine, she was unable to regain her former editorial status. Race and gender discrimination (primarily the former) blocked her desire to pursue additional work in "mainstream" publishing, and she returned to teaching -- and marriage -- as a means of survival. Ironically, the young and naive West was the most "successful" of the three women in terms of professional power, for she established and maintained her own magazine and stood at the editorial helm. She founded *Challenge*, and she discontinued the publication when Wright's influence became unbearable. Unfortunately, her inexperience with the business of publishing, combined with naive ideals, wry editorials that were by turns encouraging and overcritical, and the unexpected new political slant of *New Challenge*, dissipated her literary dream. Her forum for new "voices" became a battle of ideologies -- her desire to showcase the post-Harlem Renaissance generation of young writers versus Wright's vehicle for Marxist self-expression. Her well-intentioned desire to "parent" literary young echoes her recurring fictional theme of optimistic characters who try -- often in vain -- to guide the next generation.

Rather than let personal bitterness defeat them completely, however, Hopkins Fauset, and West focused on the good deeds that their positions of leadership allowed them to perform. They worked for the benefit of up-and-coming writers, and they used their vision as writers to enlighten their readership. As literary midwives, these editors were determined to nurture and guide fledgling authors into the publishing arena by encouraging submissions, sharing their own literary talents in their respective magazines, and offering advice on the craft of writing. As writers, they continued to mentor their audience by providing biographies of then unknown famous Black men and women. They widened readers' horizons with personal essays of foreign travel and challenged the

next generation to have the courage to pursue their goals despite racial, sexual, and economic oppression. In her biographical essays, creative nonfiction, short stories, and novels, Hopkins emphasizes the heroic spirit, reminding readers that one brave soul can save the masses. This heroic theme continues in her short fiction, as characters learn to fulfill their dreams through “good works.” In her subversion of the romantic quest, introduced in her personal essays and made manifest in her fiction, Fauset alerts her audience to the lure of romantic fantasy. She admonishes readers to maintain a realistic stance in order to attain their goals. She ultimately deconstructs the idealized American Dream as her characters confront “the puzzling, tangling, nerve-wracking consciousness of color.” In her “mothering” capacity as literary editor and publisher of her own magazine, West always recalls the importance of family and community as a nurturing foundation. This is important for actual children, but also for the inner child -- the innocent, optimistic spirit -- that follows us throughout our lives. Thus, her early short fiction emphasizes the “certain strength” of parents who sacrifice everything for the next generation and live out their dreams through their children. In contrast, West’s later fiction centers on the child within and its own relentless “pursuit of happiness” for good or otherwise. Like fond parents, Hopkins, Fauset, and West give freely of themselves to their literary young in hopes that these “descendents” will not only succeed, but will also continue the “midwife” tradition well into the future.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “LET THE GOOD WORK GO ON”: PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS, (AFRICAN) AMERICAN DREAMS, AND THE HEROIC SPIRIT, 1900-1903

In the preface to Pauline Hopkins’s first novel *Contending Forces* (1900), her only work published in book form during her lifetime, the author announces her aesthetic and political aims. These (African) American Dream ideals inform her editorial as well as her creative writing for the *Colored American Magazine* (hereafter *CAM*):

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs -- religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. *No one will do this for us; we must ourselves faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.* (14)

As in her editorial and journalistic work, Hopkins uses her fiction as a “true” mentor of sorts. The stories suggest a higher road to her readers, one that can lead them from the tunnel of ignorance to the plateau of self-revelation. Hopkins also warns against “false” mentors, or negative temptations, which usually appeal to the lower instincts – e.g., greed, envy, hate, and fear -- and lead to self-destruction. Hopkins’s magazine fiction follows the inspirational mode. Between 1900 and 1903 she wrote seven short stories (which are the focus of this chapter) and three serialized novels: *Hagar’s Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-02), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood: or, The Hidden Self* (1903). Each of her works (some written under her mother’s maiden name, Sarah A. Allen) contains an essential message that meant to help her Black audience to develop a much-needed sense

of self-pride during America's post-Reconstruction era. Moreover, Hopkins is determined to enlighten her skeptical White audience by showing them the humanity of African Americans. Thus, in a sense she "mentors" readers through her creative work; she offers herself as an inspirational and spiritual guide to those who need her aid, particularly women of color who were (and are) victims of degrading sexual stereotypes. Her inclusion of Black female characters in the Victorian cult of true womanhood thus liberates and enslaves them. On one hand, they are honorable women; on the other hand, particularly in "Talma Gordon," they are mere trophy wives -- women with no true sense of autonomy. This is an ironic and contradictory message from such an outspoken and independent woman. Hopkins's stories are nevertheless parables and cautionary tales for Black readers, guides that help them to transcend their feelings of fear and hate. Despite the harshness of life as African Americans, they must learn to endure without losing their core faith in themselves or in God. Most importantly, they must remember their proud heritage and pay homage to those who suffered -- and more desperately -- in the past.

The triumphant heroic spirit is the overarching theme of Hopkins's body of work. This theme emerges on both the small and large scale. In particular, many of her characters seek to reestablish family bonds, some lost as a result of separation in slavery, as are husband and wife in "A Dash for Liberty." Other relatives are lost to death, as in the case of the orphaned child in "General Washington," and/or to abandonment, as in the case of the runaway son in "The Test of Manhood." In their romantic quests for success and happiness, "apprentice" characters usually encounter a mentoring spirit. In "The Mystery Within Us" and "General Washington," respectively, a supernatural "godfather" and "fairy" child arrives and gently guides the protagonist toward the appropriate action to resolve a personal conflict. Characters who willingly martyr themselves for others, such as in "General Washington" and "As the Lord Lives, He is One of Our Mother's Children," emerge as naïve, innocent souls and represent the countless sacrifices made by African American ancestors for their descendants. These plot lines also reflect Hopkins's

emphasis on Black biography and history -- particularly “A Dash for Liberty” -- as inspirational guides and tools for enlightenment.

Hopkins incorporates many genres in her fiction (Ammons 16). The tragic mulatta slave narrative is a recurring plot in these works, particularly in “Talma Gordon.” Moreover, the quest to reunite the Black family, as in “Bro’r Abr’m Jimson’s Wedding: A Christmas Story,” is a subversion of sentimental fiction devices. The reunion of long-lost relatives is their reward, rather than the traditional marriage. Thus, the theme becomes specific to the African American experience. Multiple and hidden identities, as in “Talma Gordon” and “The Test of Manhood,” often surface as a byproduct of Hopkins’s emphasis on the topic of “amalgamation.” Melodramatic elements abound, most notably in “Talma Gordon,” in which Hopkins incorporates Gothic revenge plots with foreboding ancestral homes, heinous villains, and angelic victims. She also introduces elements of early mystery fiction, for amateur sleuths as well as professional detectives appear in her work. In addition, Hopkins utilizes the “locked-room” device originated by Poe in his short fiction (Woods xiv). Thus, her literary interests were as broad as her professional interests in African American history and biography, politics, and travel. As writer and editor, Hopkins experiments, enlightens, and encourages her readers; most importantly, she inspires future writers of color to broaden their own intellectual and artistic horizons.

Hopkins’s first short story, “The Mystery Within Us,” appears in the premiere issue of *CAM* (May 1900). Anticipating her later novel, *Of One Blood* (serialized in *CAM* in 1903), “Mystery” incorporates themes of mentoring, i.e., guidance away from a life of self-absorption and toward a life of higher calling. Also present is the importance of acknowledging one’s identity and thus acknowledging the strong link between both temporal and spiritual worlds. Hopkins’s principal characters are raceless: suicidal young physician Tom Underwood, and his ghostly “godfather” Dr. Thorn, a famous scientist. Cynthia D. Schrager suggests that Hopkins purposefully does this in order to subvert the



racist assumption that only Anglo scholars can exist and suffer for their studies.

“Neurasthenia” is a term coined in the late nineteenth-century for a type of depression. It is a nervous, melancholic condition resulting from such “brain-work”; it was allegedly an “epidemic” among middle- and upper-class White intellectuals (185). By creating characters of undeclared racial identity, one of whom obviously suffers from this illness, Hopkins leaves her readers to draw their own conclusions about them; that is, they are not to automatically assume that these are White intellectuals. In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins rejects this elitist perspective again by creating the character of Reuel Briggs. Briggs is also a successful, yet melancholy mulatto physician who passes for White and who is ever conscious of the Du Boisian “veil” that separates him from his colleagues, although he is their intellectual equal. He is just as emotionally distraught as Tom Underwood of “The Mystery Within Us”. Unlike Underwood, however, Briggs is afraid to take his own life: “So he had tormented himself for months, but the courage was yet wanting for strength to rend the veil” (442). In this case “rend[ing] the veil” refers to committing suicide, yet it can also be used to describe the ever-present racial barrier. Not only is Briggs (and Underwood, presumably) aware of himself as a Black man passing for White, but he is also aware of the Black-and-American conflicted self as described in the racial philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois. The well-read Hopkins was likely familiar with Du Bois’s article for *Atlantic Monthly*, “The Strivings of the Negro People” (1897), an early version of Chapter One of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): “The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight [. . .]. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness [. . .]. One ever feels his two-ness” (“Strivings” 194). Hopkins was also influenced by William James’ essay for *Scribner’s Magazine* entitled “The Hidden Self” (1890), in which the famous psychologist discusses “supernatural phenomena” and recent studies of trance-states on those who suffer from “hysteric disease” (363). She quotes James in the opening paragraphs of *Of One Blood*, although she attributes the passage to the French doctor M. Binet. She renames “The Hidden Self”

as “The Unclassified Residuum,” after a phrase that James uses in his opening paragraph. He does so in order to describe “exceptional observations” that scientists cannot easily classify and usually [deride] as “paradoxical absurdities [that] must be held untrue,” particularly “mystical” occurrences (361). Yet as James argues (and as Hopkins quotes in her novel):

All the while, however, the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history. No matter where you open its pages, you find things recorded under the name of divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healing and productions of disease, and occult powers possessed by peculiar individuals over persons and things in their neighborhood. (James 362)

“The Mystery Within Us” tells the story of Dr. Thorn’s ultimate reincarnation via the young doctor over whom he possesses such “occult power.” Thorn is a famous physician and author of “The Philosophy of the Three Ethers” on new cures for chronic disease. Thorn returns after his untimely death as a “Presence” to counsel young doctor Tom Underwood. Disappointed in money and love, Underwood is ready to consume prussic acid. Thorn appears and convinces Underwood that his life serves a higher purpose: “What would you do, rash man? Overcome by the petty obstacles that have filled a pathway intended to end in benefit to yourself and others [. . .]. By the divine will of God you were designed as an instrument for the accomplishment of certain plans formed before your birth.” (17) These predestined “plans,” namely, Underwood’s ultimate contribution of scientific knowledge, is in fact Thorn’s own research, left unfinished at his death. This work culminates in a volume entitled “The Ethics of Life” and brings Underwood sudden wealth and success. He does not write the text himself. Manuscripts magically appear each morning on his desk, composed by his mentor spirit, his godfather guide.

Like most fairy tales, in which heroes and heroines receive tools to aid them in their romantic quests, Underwood accepts this powerful asset in order to achieve fame. Unlike the fairy tale hero, however, he wins success at the loss of self. In a sense, he is reduced to the earthly vessel through which Dr. Thorn transmits his own wisdom. Underwood is as much under Thorn's power as he is the beneficiary of his mentor's knowledge. As he prepares to take the prussic acid in their initial encounter, Underwood finds that his "entire body had lost the power of volition" (16). In "Pauline Hopkins and the Hidden Self of Race," Thomas J. Otten refers to the Thorn-Underwood relationship as a state in which "the psychological boundaries of a person become permeable enough for one self to take over the will of another" (236). Thorn appears, informs his apprentice of his new life path, then proceeds to control Underwood's earthly essence with his ethereal influence. In addition, although he benefits materially and spiritually from that wisdom, Underwood, unlike the heroes of fairy tales, seems fated not to share it with loved ones. He has, as the narrator relates, "foresworn matrimony" and lives in solitary splendor in a bachelor apartment (15). This "freedom" from marital and domestic responsibility also renders Underwood spiritually dependent on Thorn -- a childlike spirit.

Blurring the lines of identity is an oft-repeated theme in Hopkins's tales of the unwitting "amalgamation" of the races in America and its result: passing. "Race" and "self" become secondary concerns to the overarching goal of spiritual uplift. Moreover, Hopkins's "raceless" tale actually subverts the meaning of "race." She presents her message in a "fantastic" genre in which all notions of identity are insignificant. Instead, the essential theme is the importance of spiritual guides, or mentors, who will lead the living toward heroic efforts. Hopkins additionally suggests that African Americans acknowledge their rich and noble heritage, from which they can claim intellectual and spiritual strength. Whether their personal efforts be on a small or large scale is unimportant, for the ultimate goal is collective development. Thus, the greater good of the race becomes a more realistic (African) American Dream. In "Mystery" Tom

Underwood must have the courage to look beyond his personal despair in order to share Thorn's knowledge with the medical community and the general population. Moreover, Dr. Thorn, whose physical life has ended, needs this young apprentice to carry on the work that he has already established. Just as Hopkins nurtured and supported new generations of Black writers in the pages of her magazine, so Thorn mentors Underwood, an "understudy" who is forced to take on the main actor's role. In her introduction to *Short Fiction by Black Woman, 1900-1920*, Elizabeth Ammons notes the importance of recognizing literary foremothers and forefathers. Moreover, she elaborates upon the link between medicine and writing as healing arts: "Writing constitutes communion across generations [. . .]. To despair of life . . . is to render voiceless not only the present but also the past, the literally life-saving words of those who have gone before. [. . .] The written word can enable the past and the present to join in life" (13). Thus, together Underwood and Thorn become physical and spiritual healers for the community. Likewise, in her support of the work of new writers of color, Hopkins pays homage both to her own literary forebears and fosters a creative environment for future authors, who will in turn continue that mentoring tradition.

"Talma Gordon," is Hopkins's second short story (*CAM*, October 1900). It shares themes of hidden lineage, family bonds, and virtuous Black womanhood with her novels, particularly *Contending Forces* (1900) and *Hagar's Daughter*. In "Talma Gordon," Hopkins emphasizes the importance of recognizing both true and false mentors, i.e., those whose guidance lead to true enlightenment and fulfillment of one's American Dreams, as opposed to those who satisfy their own ambitions by merely pretending to guide others. Moreover, she gives examples of both truly heroic and mock-heroic figures, i.e., those "mentors" whose actions are truly selfless as opposed to those whose alleged guidance is in fact self-serving. Moreover, Hopkins inculcates the dictates of true womanhood through her characters. Talma, who adheres to the values of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, is rewarded with a "good husband" and seeming domestic bliss. Her

sister Jeannette, however, who sins by killing their father and stepmother, is punished with mental unrest and eventual death. In her infamous article for the “Women’s Department” (*CAM*, May 1900), Hopkins argues against female politicians: “morally, we should deplore seeing woman fall from her honorable position of wife and mother” (122). Thus, *any* subversive female behavior -- even that which is in part heroic -- demands the most severe punishment. Although Jeanette is a brave and supportive sister, she is a fallen soul who has committed one of the greatest sins: killing one’s parents. Ironically, Hopkins’s vision of “true womanhood” for women of color rings false here. Talma’s happily-ever-after ending, although secure, doesn’t liberate her; she is merely an infantilized, enshrouded woman who lives in a gilded cage. Her story is a triumph for “honorable” Black women of Hopkins’s era, so long reviled as unchaste and immoral. It is a crushing defeat, however, for the same honorable women who also desire self-expression and personal freedom. Hopkins’s adherence to the cult of true womanhood contrasts with her own nontraditional behavior. She was a career woman her entire adult life, and there is no record of her ever taking on the mantle of “honorable position of wife and mother” for herself. Her editorial career, moreover, was rife with “politics,” and she was very outspoken. By her own emphasis on women’s moral and biological duties, as well as her abhorrence of female politicians, Hopkins has cast herself out of the “true womanhood” category.

The false mentoring spirit is the so-called liberal-minded character of Dr. Thornton. He is yet another metaphysical healer who narrates the title character’s sad family history. At a gathering of professional White men who are discussing “Expansion; Its Effect upon the Future Development of the Anglo-Saxon throughout the World,” Thornton advances the “problem” of amalgamation as the unavoidable byproduct of colonization. He supports the idea, provided only the best of both races amalgamate, thereby insuring “superior” progeny. He then relates Talma’s story of woe, which begins with her criminal trial for the mysterious murders of her father, Captain Gordon, her

stepmother, and their infant son. Because of her frequent arguments with her stepmother, her father's refusal to consent to her marriage to a poor artist, and Gordon's intention to bequeath the lion's share of his wealth to his son, Talma emerges as the prime suspect. Most damning is the disappearance of Gordon's will, following his murder. Talma is exonerated in court. However, just as in the 1893 Lizzie Borden murder trial in Fall River Massachusetts (which is a likely inspiration for Hopkins's mystery plot in this story), she becomes a social pariah, deemed guilty by the townspeople. On Dr. Thornton's advice, she and her sister Jeannette become expatriates in Europe.

Elements of true mentoring, the heroic spirit, and willing self-sacrifice emerge most clearly in the pivotal yet minor character of Jeannette Gordon. Ironically, it is she who takes the most active part in the story as an amateur sleuth. She uncovers the secret of her family lineage and bravely defends her birth mother's honor against her cruel, unjust father and "wicked" stepmother. In this way, Jeannette also reunites herself and Talma with their true racial ancestry. As a mentor, or spiritual "godsister," Jeannette also gives Talma a classic melodramatic weapon -- a letter -- to aid her in her romantic quest for domestic bliss. Jeannette's posthumously revealed missive reveals that both sisters share their mother's octoroon lineage. After his first wife's death in childbirth to a dark son (who also dies), Captain Gordon retaliates by all but disinheriting his daughters. Bent on revenge, Jeannette admits that she had entered their father's bedchamber with an "Old East Indian dagger," prepared to murder him as well as to steal his will. Finding all three dead, Jeannette flees, but the memory of her dark intention haunts her until she dies of melancholy and guilt. The letter symbolically reunites both sisters beyond the grave and prompts Talma to the right action -- to reveal her true racial identity to her lover. However, despite her selfless act on her sister's behalf, Jeannette dies miserably. Because of her (intended) sin of patricide -- thwarted only when she finds that someone has done the deed before her arrival -- she receives no reward, in this life or the next: "Do you wonder that my disease is past medical aid?" (66)

The mock heroic spirit is represented in the pivotal -- and convenient -- character of Simon Cameron. Posing as a mysterious Englishman, this trickster figure is in fact an East Indian and the Gordons's murderer. He is also the only other person who knows the secret passageway to Gordon's bedchamber. Cameron reveals that he had been seeking revenge against Gordon for years, for the Captain had murdered Cameron's father, a fellow pirate, when burying treasure years ago. Cameron's true identity and purpose are revealed in his deathbed confession; he is a patient in Thornton's tuberculosis clinic. In the meantime, Talma herself clings to life after the final insult of being rejected and deserted by Edward Turner, the impoverished lover whom she had met in Italy.

Cameron's actions in the story provide an anti-heroic contrast to Jeannette. His vigilante behavior results in Talma's complete downfall, although her only "crime" is the "pollution of Negro blood" (66). Hazel Carby acknowledges that the character of Cameron is representative of all colonized people of color who are "oppressed and murdered in that first moment of European mercantilist expansion" (136). Moreover, it is revealed that the Gordon family name, like that of countless Puritan founders, has been established in America through what Carby calls "acts of piracy," i.e., the willing murder and plunder of native people and their land for the sake of Anglo expansion (136). Cameron's presence is a reminder to readers of the negative effects of such colonization on the humanity of both people of color as well as of the Anglo imperialists. In contrast, Talma Gordon emerges as an angelic, innocent soul, a romantic and sentimental pawn whose fate depends on the guidance and courage of others. She is "a fairylike blonde in floating white draperies," more woodland creature than a true flesh-and-blood woman (53). Her father thwarts her romantic quest by refusing to let her marry Edward Turner, (more because of her "tainted" bloodline than because of Turner's poverty). Later, Turner recoils in horror when he learns of her octoroon lineage: "I could stand the stigma of murder, but add to that the pollution of Negro blood! No man is brave enough

to face such a situation””(66). Even murder, it seems, is preferable to amalgamation; thus, Turner departs.

Dr. Thornton functions as the surrogate father figure and mentor in Talma’s life. He advises both her and Jeannette following their parents’ deaths and handles their business affairs. He is initially ignorant of Talma’s (dark) family history. Yet he is “brave enough” to marry the stigma-ridden young woman. His action is mock-heroic, however, because his respected status in the Anglo-American community certainly cushions him from the brunt of society’s condemnation. Thus, his false heroic spirit is merely a watered-down version of Jeannette’s true heroism. His allegedly “brave” act of marrying Talma becomes a sociological experiment that simply leaves his peers in awe. In contrast, Jeannette, who sacrifices all in order to protect her mother, sister, and herself, pays dearly, first with her soul, and with her life.

As a domestically-inclined “angel in the house” figure, Talma is finally “rewarded” for her travails by her marriage to the more liberal-minded Dr. Thornton, although the arrangement is a far from the sentimental tale’s traditional happy ending. Because of the scandalous trial and her racial history, she is “entirely unknown to social life” (49). In fact, she can only be presented to society in her husband’s presence -- and only in their home. Talma is thus downgraded to “domestic conversation piece,” an intriguing object to entertain her husband’s guests: “Gentlemen, if you will follow me to the drawing-room, I shall have much pleasure in introducing you to my wife -- *nee* Talma Gordon!” (68). Moreover, in her willing obedience to Thornton’s guidance, both before and after marriage, she renders herself, like Underwood to Thorn in “Mystery,” a physical and emotional dependent rather than an autonomous self. Protected by a well-respected Anglo authority figure in a domestic setting, she is “seen but not heard” until called for, much like a child.

Again, Hopkins’s overt message in “Talma Gordon” is the importance of recognizing true mentors over false ones. Although Dr. Thorn functions as narrator,



patriarch, and Anglo authority figure on the surface, it is really Jeannette, the blood relative and spiritual mentor, who enlightens Talma by revealing her true racial heritage. As Hopkins often illustrates in her fiction, family ties cannot be broken, particularly when the child “follows the condition of the mother.” Moreover, the boundary line between the races blurs dramatically as a testament to the effects of slavery and colonization on American (and world) history. As a result, race and identity, as in “Mystery,” become absorbed and subverted. Hopkins’s covert, secondary message ultimately includes the cult of true womanhood in the “false mentor” category. It ostensibly rewards “good” women and punishes those who are “bad” or subversive. Yet the reward is unfulfilling. In addition, although Hopkins uses the dictates of true womanhood to liberate women of color from derogative sexual stereotypes, those dictates deny female self-expression.

Hopkins’s third short work, “General Washington, A Christmas Story” (*CAM*, December 1900), is a holiday parable, a tale with a moral lesson. She uses this form again in her final short story, “As the Lord Lives, He Is One of Our Mother’s Children” (*CAM*, November 1903), in which realism gives way to “New Testament truths” (Ammons 15). In the case of “General Washington,” the theme of true mentor and heroic spirit supplanting the false reappears. There is also the symbolic rebirth of an innocent soul into an angelic spirit. A life of suffering and an act of heroic self-sacrifice are important elements in Hopkins’s choice of biographical subjects for her articles for *CAM*. These acts lead to spiritual rewards in the afterlife; they also earn the devotion of those who have witnessed the hero’s selflessness. In particular, these deeds of courage, determination, and compassion help Hopkins to inspire her Black audience. They showcase the equality and humanity of African Americans for her skeptical mainstream audience.

The tone of “General Washington” differs considerably from Hopkins’s preceding stories. The narrator speaks gently, as if targeting a children’s audience, unlike

the philosophical, rhetorical style of “Mystery” and the heavily sentimental and dramatic tone of “Talma Gordon.” There is also the unexpected yet welcome appearance of comic relief in her description of the local color of the “shady atmosphere of Murderer’s Bay in the capital city” (69). Hopkins’s comic skill is better represented in a later work, the mock-romantic comeuppance tale “Bro’r Abr’m Jimson’s Wedding, A Christmas Story” (December 1901). Her appreciation of folk humor is evident in this piece as well. Notable is her portrayal of working-class Black folk at Christmas market and the regulars of “Dutch Dan’s,” a bar and dance hall that caters to “the worst characters, white and black, in the capital city” (77). In addition, there is a wealth of irony in “General Washington,” particularly in the understated, yet Dickensian biography of Buster, nicknamed “the General” by his cohorts:

All that he could remember of father or mother in his ten years of miserable babyhood was that they were frequently absent from the little shanty where they were supposed to live [. . .]. One night the General’s daddy being on a short vacation in the city, came home to supper; and because there was no supper to eat, he occupied himself in beating his wife. After that time, when the officers took him, [he] never returned to his home. The General’s mammy? Oh, she died! (69)

General Washington becomes a streetwise orphan who hustles to survive in the nation’s capital by dancing and selling “chitlins” in the street. The irony of his famous name is particularly poignant here; in the midst of incredible wealth, in the capital of the world’s most powerful nation, George Washington’s namesake can barely keep himself alive from day to day.

General, like many of Hopkins’s primary characters, is a mulatto. At the unceremonious burial of his pet cat Tommy, “thrown off the dock into the Potomac [. . .] a stream of salt water trickled down his master’s dirty face, making visible, for the first time in a year, the yellow hue of his complexion. After that the General hated all flesh

and grew morose and cynical” (71). Not unlike the brooding mulatto character Reuel Briggs in *Of One Blood* and the suicidal Tom Underwood of “The Mystery Within Us,” General plumbs the depths of despair before he is given a sense of uplift in the form of a would-be mentor. “Fairy” Tallman, a privileged Senator’s granddaughter, appears -- an angelic vision -- and becomes General’s self-appointed moral guide. In their initial encounter, General is impressed when Fairy “[throws] him the pinks that she carried in her hand” (71). She is supposedly a benevolent spirit. However, her kind gesture -- tossing flowers to a commoner -- reveals a patronizing sense of noblesse oblige, i.e., the noble obligation of the upper-classes to be charitable to those who are less fortunate. Like Underwood in “Mystery,” however, General unwittingly falls under the spell of this new presence in his life when he encounters Fairy a second time:

The fairy stood beside him. She was a little girl about his own age, well wrapped in costly velvet and furs; her long, fair hair fell about her like an aureole of glory; a pair of gentle blue eyes set in a sweet, serious face glanced at him from beneath a jaunty hat with a long curling white feather that rested light as thistle-down upon the beautiful curly locks. The General could not move for gazing, and as his wonderment grew his mouth was extended in a grin that revealed the pearly whiteness of two rows of ivory. (74)

Hopkins’s descriptions set up racial and class distinctions between the children. Fairy’s “costly velvet and furs” contrast with General’s poverty, just as her “long, fair hair . . . an aureole of glory” contrasts with his “dirty face.” Her “gentle blue eyes” and “sweet, serious face” reflect her comfortable upbringing, whereas General’s tear-streaked face and “morose and cynical” attitude reflect his poverty-stricken and tragic background. However, General smiles in Fairy’s angelic presence, for she is an otherworldly creature, unlike any person he has met in his hand-to-mouth existence. She is, in fact, a goddess, far above such “rabble” as himself.

Their ensuing conversation centers around General's dishonesty to his "chitlin" customers and Fairy's desire to teach the orphan about religion. In this exchange, she is the no-nonsense goddess who has deigned to come to earth and enlighten an unworthy mortal. In a socioeconomic context, Fairy's tone toward General reveals her awareness of her comparably "aristocratic" status (racial as well as financial) to his own. She calls him "boy" and is alternately imperious in her demand that he speak to and shake hands with her and gracious when she realizes that he is embarrassed to touch her clean hands with his grimy ones: "I'll excuse you this time, boy [. . .] But you must remember that I wish you to wash your face and hands when you are to talk with me; and,' she added, as though inspired by an afterthought, 'it would be well for you to keep them clean at other times, too'" (74). Their conversation is interrupted by Fairy's even more class-conscious nurse, a Black "mammy" figure who refers to General as a "dirty little monkey" and "trash." She proceeds to hurry her angelic White charge back to "the most aristocratic quarter of Washington," but not before Fairy makes General promise to visit her on Christmas morning so that her mother can "teach [him] more about God" (76). Unfazed by the nurse's insulting comments, General decides at once to embark upon his new romantic quest -- for an eternity of comfort as the reward for a life of sinlessness on Earth: "'Heaven's where God lives. Plenty to eat, warm fire all de time in winter; plenty o' clos', too, but I'se got to be good. 'Spose dat means keepin' my face an' han's clean an' stop swearin' an' lyin'. It kayn't be did.'" (76)

As in "Talma Gordon," however, the false mentor becomes obsolete when the true mentor arrives. General truly rises to angelic status. He enlightens Fairy, who has only a limited sense of spirituality, tainted by class-consciousness. General is also an appropriate spiritual guide for her grandfather, Senator Tallman. This bigoted public servant is woefully shortsighted in his views of African Americans, for "his favorite argument was disbelief in God's handiwork as shown in the Negro": 'You argue, suh, that God made 'em. I have my doubts, suh. [. . .] A nigger, suh, is the image of nothing

but the devil” (79). The Senator is an easy embodiment of the Old South; he is a former plantation and slave owner, imperious in his antebellum views, and fond of “a mint julep at bedtime” (79). He later changes his tune. General ultimately earns his spiritual reward by taking on the heroic task of rescuing the Tallman family from harm. The boy overhears the conversation of a group of criminals at Dutch Dan’s, who are planning to rob the Tallman’s home that very night. General beats the thieves to the Senator’s house to warn him. However, Tallman is shocked and repulsed at General’s sudden appearance in his study, and he accuses the “black devil” of thievery. General is caught in the crossfire between criminals and police and mortally wounded when “Jim the crook” shouts, “‘It’s the nigger did it!’” in order to deflect attention from himself (81).

General awakens Christmas morning in a soft bed, with the Senator and Fairy sitting beside him; a painting of Christ hangs above the boy’s head. Appropriately enough, “a glorious stream of yellow sunshine [falls] upon the thorn-crowned Christ” and grows brighter when it touches General’s “ugly face,” which wears “a strange, sweet beauty (82).” Hopkins’s brief description of General’s death is in deliberate contrast to her lengthier description of Fairy’s allegedly more aesthetically pleasing, yet spiritually empty beauty. General’s beauty comes from within, and he transcends the material world. As he quietly passes over, Fairy protests: “‘O General [. . .] don’t you die, you’re going to be happy all the rest of your life. *Grandpa says so*” (82). [emphasis mine] Fairy is too firmly attached to the material world and its comforts, particularly those bestowed upon her by established Anglo patriarchs, to comprehend truly General’s comparable happiness. His heroic spirit has led him to fulfill his romantic quest for eternal happiness: “Buster’s Christmas Day was spent in heaven” (82). By sacrificing his own life to save the Tallman family, General has earned the title of martyr as well as angelic child. Moreover, his spiritual status elevates him above the White “aristocrats” who either patronize him with their charity or fear and hate him because of his color. He has literally made the repentant Senator “see the light,” for the public servant “never made

his great speech against the Negro” (82). Hopkins’s Christmas parable is ultimately a call for humanity, for the acknowledgement of the brotherhood of all people.

Hopkins’s fourth story, “A Dash for Liberty” (*CAM*, August 1901), is a fictionalized account of the actual slave uprising on the ship “Creole” on 7 November 1841. Here, the author is able to put into practice her strong belief in the didactic possibilities of African American history and biography, as told through fiction. “All the fire and romance” of one man’s heroic spirit, as well as the fictionalized account of his romantic quest, serves her purpose well. Hopkins blends elements of the male slave narrative, historical and fictional accounts of newspaper articles, biographies and novels, as well as her own melodramatic, creative style in this portrait of the man who organized the rebellion of 135 slaves. His exemplary tale is also a prime example of the mentoring spirit; that is, his positive example uplifts and inspires the African American audience toward personal greatness and transcendence of life’s obstacles.

The real-life hero was Madison Washington, a former slave from Virginia who fled to freedom in Canada. Hopkins renames her fictionalized hero “Madison Monroe” and dramatizes his attempt to rescue his wife, first from their former plantation, then from the ship “Creole.” John Cullen Gruesser speculates that the name change was careful and deliberate and possibly done in order to link her historical subject to former President James Monroe. This native Virginian was in favor of the Back-to-Africa (Liberia) colonization movement (105). This is a significant detail; Madison Washington demanded that the newly-liberated “Creole” be re-routed to Liberia. He soon settled for Nassau in the Bahamas, however, when informed that the ship was ill-prepared for an extended, trans-Atlantic voyage (100). Gruesser also speculates that Hopkins changed his name from Washington to “Monroe” in order to erase any possible alliance to Booker T. Washington, with whose accommodationist politics she did not agree. It is also possible that Hopkins renamed Washington in order to “[emphasize] the fictiveness of her version,” her willingness to take poetic license in this dramatization of his life and

make it distinct from existing historical and fictional accounts of the “Creole” uprising (106). In addition, having recently published a short story with a character named “General Washington,” Hopkins might not have wanted to confuse the two. It is also likely that the author wanted to underscore the link between powerful American Founding Fathers and their slave progeny; thus, Hopkins names these oppressed Black characters in her short fiction and creative nonfiction after these Great White Men. Gruesser suggests that “Monroe’s” desire to return to the South from Canada to rescue his wife is the “high point” of the “romantic plot.” His successful liberation of the “Creole” slaves is the “climax” of the “patriotic” or heroic plot. Both plots combine to illustrate Hopkins’s concern for unified racial action for African Americans in general and sexually exploited Black women in particular, concerns that haunted people of color during the “nadir” (post-bellum) period of African American history (108).

“A Dash for Liberty” incorporates many themes, the most important being reclaiming African American manhood and womanhood as a basis for a strong family unit. The driving force behind Monroe’s actions in the story is his desire to reunite with his wife Susan from the Virginia plantation. Hopkins’s description of him as a larger-than-life Black hero is a reassuring contrast to her frequent praise of octoroon and Anglo characters, for he is “an unmixed African, of grand physique, and one of the handsomest of his race.” Hopkins focuses on racial purity and pride here, and she goes on to imply Monroe’s strength of character and self-awareness: “His dignified, calm and unaffected bearing marked him as a leader among his fellows. His features bore the stamp of genius. His firm step and piercing eye attracted the attention of all who met him” (90). In conversation with his Canadian employer at the beginning of Hopkins’s work, Monroe arises as a noble soul, and his elegant language is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Othello:

“It is hard for you to understand; you white men are all alike where you are called upon to judge a Negro’s heart. [. . .] Imagine yourself in my place; how would you feel? The relentless heel of oppression in the States

will have ground my rights as a husband into the dust, and have driven Susan to despair in [two years'] time. [. . .] I have determined to return to Virginia for my wife. My feelings are centered in the idea of liberty. [. . .] I shall only taste it in all its sweetness when Susan shares it with me.”  
(89-90)

Like the Revolutionary figures, who declared their independence from Great Britain, Monroe resolves to reclaim his manhood and his family from America's racial stranglehold. “The relentless heel of oppression” as well as “the idea of liberty” and its “sweetness” echoes the sentiments of those who fought for their own freedom not a hundred years before. His evident love for his wife is written in romantic language; his American Dream is incomplete without her: “I shall only taste [liberty] in all its sweetness when Susan shares it with me” (90). This determined speech against racial oppression, as well as in Monroe's determination to reunite with his wife, reveals an heroic and aristocratic figure. Monroe not only unites his people in a common racial struggle for selfhood but also attains noble status. Moreover, as in her third novel, *Of One Blood* (1903), in which Reuel Briggs is restored to ancestral glory as an Ethiopian king with his queen Candace, Monroe is ultimately rewarded in his romantic quest. Queen Susan, a Virginia blue-blooded octoroon, is at his side by the story's conclusion. (This is, however, an interesting contrast to the former, in which Reuel is the mulatto king and Candace is the “unmixed African” queen.)

The second part of Hopkins's story relates Monroe's journey back to Virginia. This journey reverses the male slave narrative, for Monroe is actually returning to the potential risk of bondage: “The fugitive, unable to travel in the open day, had hidden himself for three weeks in the shadow of the friendly forest near his old home, filled with hope and fear [. . .] After weary days and nights, he had reached the most perilous part of his mission” (91). He manages to blend in with a group of slaves who are “corn-shucking” in the woods, returns to the plantation grounds, and later finds himself trapped



in his wife's sleeping closet in the main house by the overseer and "master." Undeterred, Monroe fights off both men, and three more besides, before succumbing to multiple wounds and blows. This heroic act of self-sacrifice in order to save his wife sets the groundwork for part three, in which Monroe becomes one of 135 slaves taken onto the "Creole" heading "down the river" to New Orleans. Unbeknownst to Monroe, his wife Susan is also on the ship. The octoroon woman's family history once again reveals Hopkins's awareness of willing amalgamation on the part of Great White Men:

It was a tradition that her grandfather had served in the Revolutionary War, as well as in both Houses of Congress. That was nothing, however, at a time when the blood of the proudest F.F.V.'s was freely mingled with that of the African slaves on their plantations. [. . .] The most refined, the wealthiest and the most intellectual whites of [Virginia] have not hesitated to amalgamate with the Negro." (94)

Here, as in her renaming of Madison Washington and in the ironic naming of her mulatto character "General Washington" in the preceding story, Hopkins undermines the myth of the untainted morality of America's Founding Fathers. Apparently, the great men were capable of base outrages against their female slaves, and the result was the blurring of the racial identity line in the form of mulattoes. If there is any benefit from this association, it is, as she says, "Who wonders that Virginia has produced great men of color from among the exbondmen, or, that illustrious black men proudly point to Virginia as a birthplace?" (94). Generations of rape have linked these African Americans to "blue-blood" Whites, and the excessive pride of some of their Anglo heritage -- the more often than not violently-established blood link to the Founding Fathers -- is the unsettling result.

However, Susan, in contrast to many of Hopkins's female characters, arises in this story as a not-so-tragic mulatta. She shows that she is not helpless against her would-be violators, as she manages to turn the tables on the ship's captain: "Quick as a flash she

struck him a stinging blow across the eyes, and [. . .] sprang out of the doorway [. . .] with the evident intention of going overboard” (96). Susan’s own heroic quest is to preserve her virtue, for she does not intend to become yet another enslaved concubine. This is especially important in this case; the ship is headed to in New Orleans, where it was the “custom of the country” for White men to keep “placees” (octoroon mistresses) as well as legitimate (White) wives. Knowing her value as “Black Gold,” Susan dares to destroy herself rather than to surrender her honor. In this way, Hopkins also refutes the stereotype of the oversexed Black woman and links her female characters to the cult of true womanhood. Through her own act of rebellion, Susan reclaims her rightful status as a pure and pious woman and wife. Her faith is in God, to whom she cries for “mercy” as she flees from the captain. Thus, this becomes a more positive instance of rewarding “true women” than that which Hopkins illustrates in “Talma Gordon.”

Monroe’s heroic quest is to save the masses from further enslavement. His battle cry to his eighteen accomplices who help him take over the ship -- “Follow me: it is liberty or death” -- echoes Patrick Henry’s speech from the Richmond, Virginia Convention of 1775. Hopkins likely included this reference to the famous line: “Give me liberty or give me death” in order to even more firmly establish the link between her characters and Virginia. Monroe is rewarded with success; by morning, the “Creole” is headed to a “British port” (97). Ironically, a colony of the country from which the slaves’ owners had revolted not one hundred years previous becomes the one to which Monroe and his newly-freed companions declare their own independence.

The successful manifestation of the heroic spirit for Monroe and Susan intertwines with their romantic quest at the end of Hopkins’s story. They are finally reunited the morning after the revolt amidst their “astonished company [who] closed around them with loud hurrahs” (98). In her concluding paragraph, Hopkins warns: “Every act of oppression is a weapon for the oppressed. Right is a dangerous instrument; woe to us if our enemy wields it” (98). This becomes the author’s declaration of

independence from American racism. It is also a call to readers whose (African) American Dreams comprise unity and freedom. Moreover, “A Dash For Liberty” reminds those readers who honor the memory of the Founding Fathers that the African Americans of the post-bellum “nadir” period were more than capable of overcoming their oppressors in a unified group, much like that aboard the “Creole.”

“Bro’r Abr’m Jimson’s Wedding, A Christmas Story” (*CAM*, December 1901) is refreshingly comic in contrast to the dead-serious nobility of Hopkins’s other short fiction. Her characters here are interested in the “pursuit of happiness,” as opposed to the more altruistic aims of a Madison Monroe, for example. Their American Dreams include material wealth as well as romantic bliss. Thus, as Mary Helen Washington comments, this story “represents a less repressed Pauline Hopkins” with much less emphasis on “sentimental conventions and the cult of true womanhood” (82). This story is also unusual in its emphasis on folk humor, strong, independent female characters, and a relaxed, wry narrator. Hopkins’s use of dialect is also more successful here than in her other work. In addition, this story is situated within the African American community -- upwardly-mobile churchgoers with deeply Southern roots -- and has only a very minor inclusion of Whites, as opposed to her other short fiction. Her Black characters, introduced as materialistic and pretentiously imitative of Anglo values, emerge as more realistic and down-to-earth than the heroic, martyred, too-good-to-live personages of previous stories. Hopkins reveals an accurate ear for “folk” dialogue and an ability to find humor in her all-too-human characters. However, as in her more didactic short fiction, would-be villains are brought to justice, and the “good” are rewarded at the story’s conclusion. Moreover, the congregation’s random comments, sprinkled liberally throughout the story, serve as a Greek chorus to the main action. “Brother” Abraham Jimson is a Church leader whose American Dream is to maintain this high position and to complete his perfect life with an impish, nubile young wife, Chocolate Caramel Johnson.

His clay feet are revealed, however, when his long-abandoned *first* wife interrupts the couple's Christmas nuptials -- and her (and Jimson's) six sons.

The story opens with the arrival of twenty-year-old Chocolate Caramel Johnson, who "[dawns] on the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church in a populous New England city" in early spring (107). In her most flattering description of a non-octoroon woman of color, Hopkins writes:

There was no denying the fact that she was a pretty girl; brown of skin, small of feature, with an ever-lurking gleam of laughter in eyes coal black. Her figure was slender and beautifully moulded, with a seductive grace in the undulating walk and erect carriage. But the chief charm of the sparkling dark face lay in its intelligence, and the responsive play of facial expression which was enhanced by two mischievous dimples pressed into the rounded cheeks by the caressing fingers of the god of Love. (109)

As in "A Dash for Liberty," Hopkins praises her central character. She uses details that reveal a sense of racial purity ("brown of skin," "eyes coal black"), royal ancestry ("undulating walk and erect carriage"), intelligence, and -- in this case -- even a sense of humor ("ever-lurking gleam of laughter," "two mischievous dimples"). After the congregation recovers from the minister's announcement of her unusual name-- "I'd get the Legislature to change that if it was mine, 'deed I would!"(109)-- Caramel becomes the center of local gossip: "'That sister's too good lookin' fer [the choir girls], an' they'll be after her like er pack o' houn's, min' me, Sis' Tobias'" (109). "Sister" Tilly Anderson -- the main voice of the Greek chorus -- is quite prophetic in her assessment of the situation, for Caramel quickly becomes the object of "Brother" Abraham Jimson's mock-romantic quest. Church trustee and pillar of the community, Jimson becomes her mentor, or "future spiritual teacher" (110). He quickly applies himself in earnest to help her find work. Her double occupation as music conservatory

student and housemaid give her both goddess and mortal status; she becomes both siren and domestic angel in his eyes.

Yet Caramel has her own pursuit of happiness in mind. She does not develop beyond the role of materialistic temptress, and she also maintains a stubborn and childish self-absorption. Her literal May-December romance, which begins appropriately enough in the spring and culminates in a failed Christmas marriage ceremony, is purely mercenary. Referring to Jimson affectionately as “old rheumatics,” Caramel continues to flirt with her old lover (and cousin) Andy Nash, son of Widow Maria Nash. Her parting words to him reveal both her practical materialism and immaturity: “A man with money suits me best, an’ you ain’t got a cent. [. . .] I’ve quit likin’ you, Andy Nash” (114). This love goddess is neither innocent nor angelic, but she *is* coldly pragmatic. She is willing to “sell herself” into marital bondage, or neo-slavery, so to speak, in order to maintain a comfortable economic position.

Jimson, who becomes completely absorbed in his mock-romantic quest, ignores all the rules of morality and common decency. Like Caramel, Jimson is a selfish character who pursues his own pleasure with no consideration for others. Yet he keenly feels his own discomfort. He also knows of Widow Nash’s “movement on foot against his power,” and Jimson is afraid of losing his sweetheart: “If he lost her he felt that all happiness in life was over for him. [. . .] He was tormented, too, by jealousy.” Thus, Jimson fails to help Andy following the young man’s fight with a local Irish woman at work. Eventually, the Widow confronts Jimson when he comes to inquire after her son and to “sound her on the subject nearest his heart” (117): “You leadin’ men with money an’ chances don’ do your duty. [. . .] you hard-faced old devil . . . I had to git the money from my white folks . . . Um! all the trouble comes to us women.” (119). Here, as Washington points out, Hopkins “makes us aware of the economic disparity between men and women; for [. . .] women [. . .] are dependent on the ‘leading men with money’ who do not always live up to their ideals or the community’s expectations” (83). Because

Jimson reveals himself as a false mentor or “leading man” of the church, it is up to Widow Nash, also a respected church board member, to right his wrongs and to expose him to the congregation. He is not at all the “salt of the earth” that he pretends to be, for she knows that he has bad-mouthed Andy to the judge in order to keep the young man from his beloved Caramel -- and she vows revenge. Widow Nash arises as the true mentor of “Wedding,” for it is she who exposes Jimson’s hypocrisy to the entire community by revealing his shadowy past, even though she does so in the spirit of revenge; she is, after all, a woman scorned and frustrated in her own romantic quest. Before Caramel’s arrival, Maria Nash “was ahead in the race for the wealthy class-leader” although “it had been neck-and-neck for a while between her and Sister Viney Peters [. . .]. Sister Maria owned a house adjoining Brother Jimson’s in the suburbs, and property counts these days” (111). The class-conscious Widow Nash is ill-prepared to find a rival in her own niece. Yet she directs her venom toward Jimson rather than at Caramel, and the former becomes well aware of “his secret foe” (111). His parting words are to Widow Nash (as are Caramel’s cruel taunts to Andy) a final insult. After the Widow proclaims that she would never have married him herself, he replies: ““Yes, Sister; I’ve hearn tell of people refusin’ befo’ they was ask’d”” (121). And yet she is “among the first to appear” at his wedding on Christmas morning, “and even the Queen of Sheba was not arrayed like unto her.” Dressed for battle, she waits for “a group a strangers accompanied by Andy Nash” to help her to wreak her vengeance (123).

The heroic spirit arises in the unexpected wedding guest -- Jimson’s first wife. Deserted fifteen years before, along with six sons, Jane Jimson comes to reclaim her husband and to reaffirm her rightful status in the community. Her appearance at her husband’s second marriage ceremony -- a brave act that could certainly have resulted in her further rejection and humiliation -- marks the climax of the tale. Jimson caves in readily, however, knowing that his mock-romantic quest has failed: ““I’m a weak-kneed, mis’able sinner. [. . .] God forgive me””(124). In the ensuing riot, Jane Jimson attacks the

bold Caramel, who threatens to sue Jimson for breach of promise. Jimson disappears once again -- this time permanently -- and his wife legally inherits all of his property and emerges as the true victor in the story.

“Brother Jimson” is ultimately an entertaining look at middle-class values and the hypocrisy of alleged community leaders. “Brother” Jimson reveals his true character by attempting to commit bigamy. As a result, his status as mentor and church leader is irrevocably destroyed. His destruction, however, occurs on a comic, rather than a tragic scale, and he is cast out of the Garden of Love. In comparison, Jane Jimson and the Widow Nash emerge victorious. Mrs. Jimson is rewarded as a true heroic spirit, with a proper home for herself and her children. Widow Nash becomes the true mentor, supplanting the false “Brother” Jimson by uncovering his deceit and, like his wife, profiting from his “fall from grace” by replacing him as a respected pillar of the community. She is no more noble, however, than the fallen church leader whom she replaces.

Mrs. Jimson’s quest to find her husband echoes Madison Monroe’s American Dream in “A Dash for Liberty,” i.e., his desire to reunite with his enslaved wife Susan and thus to reclaim a sense of family unity. This also reflects Hopkins’s recurring theme of the importance of strong family bonds within the African American community, particularly bonds broken through slavery (as in “Dash”) and desertion (as in “Wedding”). In “Wedding,” as in other of Hopkins’s short work, the family ties that are lost or rejected because of deception are reinstated through epistolary revelations (“Talma Gordon”) or physical reunion (“The Test of Manhood”). On another level, the establishment of Mrs. Jimson as a legal (and more deserving) property owner in the community supplants the patriarchal leader (Jimson) with a strong matriarchal figure. Moreover, she connects with the extended family of the church and its congregation, which, particularly as she is now a wealthy woman, will certainly welcome her with open

arms. Thus, her own American Dream of security, respect, and social standing in the community has come true.

“The Test of Manhood, A Christmas Story” (*CAM*, December 1902) is a model of the classic “passing” theme. It was published alongside an installment of *Of One Blood* (1903), in which Reuel Briggs also masquerades as a White man. Moreover, Hopkins wrote her sixth short story for *CAM* under her mother’s maiden name, Sarah A. Allen, so that her own name would not appear too often in the magazine. In “The Test of Manhood,” the hero’s romantic quest to pursue the (Anglo) American dream gives way to an heroic act; he ultimately relinquishes the social advancement he has received as a White man and reclaims his Black heritage. This is similar to *Of One Blood*, in which Reuel Briggs learns of his Ethiopian ancestry and reunites with the race of people whom he has denied in order to attain his own (Anglo) American Dream. Moreover, images of true and false mentors arise in “Manhood” as well as in Hopkins’s other works. Initially it is a Northern White man who inadvertently inspires young Mark on his romantic quest for success after the eighteen year-old overhears his conversation with a Southerner concerning the “amalgamation” issue:

“When the white blood is pronounced enough, just disappear and turn up again as a white man. Half of your sectional difficulties would end under such a system.”

“And would you -- a white man -- be willing to encounter the risk that such a course would entail -- the wholesale pollution of our race?” thundered the man called Morgan, in disgust.

“Why not? You know the old saw, -- Where ignorance is bliss ‘tis folly to be wise. Better that than a greater evil.”

“You Northerners are a riddle --” (206)

Leaving his mother behind, Myers decides to head North. Like Monroe in “A Dash for Liberty,” there are elements here of the male slave narrative, only in this case, it is not



reversed; Myers flees to Boston in order to escape the oppression of the South, while Monroe returns to the dangerous antebellum South in order to rescue his wife from slavery. Like Monroe, Myers takes many precautions in order to minimize the chance of meeting others: “He avoided the main roads and kept to the fields, thus keeping clear of all chance acquaintances who might interfere with his determination to identify himself with the white race” (206). Yet while Monroe of “Dash” fears meeting the Whites (and some Blacks) who would reclaim him in bondage upon his return to Virginia, Myers solely fears encountering other Blacks.

Weeks later, Myers arrives in Boston and almost immediately finds a new mentor in the form of well-known lawyer John E. Brown (another name that Hopkins likely chose for its historical reference). Impressed with the young man’s honesty in returning his lost wallet, Brown takes Myers on as a porter and messenger at his law firm. The runaway is relieved that his plan has worked so well thus far:

As Mark stepped across the threshold of the inner office and hung up his hat and coat he felt himself transformed. He was no longer a negro! Henceforth he would be a white man in very truth. After all his plans, the metamorphosis had been accomplished by Fate. For the first time he seemed to live -- to feel. (209)

Brown, assuming that his protege is a White man, serves as Myers’s professional mentor. Unfortunately, this young trickster figure is in need of a spiritual mentor, for in a sense he has sold his soul in order to attain his goals. In his only moment of conscience, the youth ignores his inner guidance and denies his mother:

“Oh, mammy [. . .] if you knew you would forgive me. Some day you shall be rich --” He broke off suddenly and dropped his head in his hands. Did he mean this, he asked himself in stern self-searching. His mother could not be mistaken for a white woman [. . .] From now on she should no more exist -- *as his mother* -- for he had buried his old self that morning, and packed the earth hard above the coffin. (209)

After five years under Brown's tutelage, Myers rises from rags to riches -- from a lowly clerk to a full partner in Brown's law firm. Moreover, he also becomes romantically involved with Katherine, the lawyer's daughter. Thus far, his (Anglo) American Dream is well on its way to fulfillment; yet Myers succeeds at the cost of his soul, as well as the loss of his true cultural identity.

By coincidence, Myers's mother, known as "Aunt Cloty" to his sweetheart Katherine, also arrives in Boston in search of her son. After years of poverty, Cloty becomes associated with the Brown family as "a worthy object of charity" (212). In this instance, Katherine Brown emerges as a truly benevolent spirit (in contrast to the judgmental and class-biased attitude of Fairy of "General Washington"), for her interest in Aunt Cloty is personal and empathetic. Touched by the older Black woman's heartbreaking story, Katherine decides to have her come to live in her father's home. Moreover, she is determined to help Aunt Cloty to achieve her (African) American Dream of family reunion. Aunt Cloty, meanwhile, is a truly childlike spirit. Because of her age and frailty, she is described as a "helpless creature" who needs to be placed under constant care (211). Moreover, she always keeps the faith that she will find her son, and she refuses to believe that he has merely become selfish and unfilial: "He mus' be daid or he'd neber leave his ol' mammy to suffer" (212). Her innocent and trusting spirit links her to the title character of "General Washington." Her desire to reestablish family bonds echoes other Hopkins stories in which characters actively seek out their family ties, namely, parentage ("Talma Gordon") and lost (or wayward) spouses ("Dash" and "Wedding," respectively). In this case, however, it is a wayward, runaway son who sends his mother on her quest of faith.

By chance, Aunt Cloty joins the Brown's household on the very evening that Myers arrives to propose to Katherine. In the Judge's living room, Myers confronts his past in the form of his mulatto mother and hesitates in horror. He realizes that his new White life is in jeopardy and prepares for its annihilation:

Mark stood as if carved into stone, in an instant he saw his life in ruins, Katherine lost to him, chaos about the social fabric of his life. He could not do it. Then with a long breath he set his teeth and opened his lips to denounce her as crazy, but in that instant his eyes fell on her drawn face, and quivering lips. In another moment he saw his conduct of the past years in all its hideousness. [. . .] All that was noble in his nature spoke at last. (217)

Myers then embraces his mother, thereby embracing his true identity and all that it entails, including “[renouncing] the rewards that white society has bestowed on him, including its prize, a white wife” (Carby 158). Myers’s heroic spirit emerges in his decision to face his conscience -- his true mentor -- and to use it to guide his actions at this, the most pivotal moment of his life. As in “Talma Gordon,” blood ties become stronger than false values and materialism. Thus, Aunt Cloty’s American Dream ultimately becomes Myers’s own, and he regains his sense of loyalty to heritage and family.

“As the Lord Lives, He is One of Our Mother’s Children” (*CAM*, November 1903), is Hopkins’s seventh and final short story. It is a parable, a tale with a moral lesson (Ammons 15), much like “General Washington.” The “passing” theme emerges here as well, but it is secondary to the theme of martyrdom and heroic self-sacrifice. As in “General,” the main character of this story, “George Stone” (a.k.a. Jim Wilson), is exonerated after his selfless act of courage on behalf of others. His American Dream is that of belonging to a community that accepts him in the true spirit of brotherhood rather than one that despises him and stubbornly maintains the status quo of racial divide. Moreover, Reverend Septimus Stevens, the character who is supposedly the established mentoring and authority figure, comes to learn humility from and respect for “George.”

Despite the Reverend’s “New England training” and “full sympathy” with “the Negro question,” Stevens needs additional enlightenment concerning the true brotherhood of man (276). In addition, the Reverend represents yet another childlike

figure; although he is a leader in the community, he initially exhibits ignorance and fear. He does, in fact, go to great lengths in order to avoid the ugly reality of harsh Western life. Gradually, however, he comes to acknowledge these realities and gains the courage to speak out against the atrocities of race crime. Hopkins again mentors her “mainstream” readers in the hope that they will ultimately recognize the spiritual equality of African Americans and of their right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in any part of this country.

The anti-lynching theme comprises the story’s introductory scene. Although the West represented a new frontier of material wealth for those who envisioned a romantic quest for gold, for African Americans it also represented yet another forum for racial animosity. At first, Reverend Stevens hides from the violence by pulling his curtain down in order to obscure the brutal lynching scene outside of his window. However, he does see the victim beforehand, and Hopkins’s description of the noble man of color echoes that of Madison Monroe in “Dash”:

[Jones] was a grand man -- physically -- black as ebony, tall, straight, deep-chested, every fibre full of that life so soon to be quenched. Lucifer, just about to be cast out of heaven, could not have thrown around a glance of more scornful pride. What might not such a man have been, if -- but it was too late. “Run fair, boys,” said the prisoner, calmly, “run fair! You keep up your end of the rope and I’ll keep up mine.” (278)

Jones’s defiance in the face of death contrasts with the more cowardly behavior of George Stone, who escapes to the woods. Formerly known as Jim Wilson, or “Gentleman Jim,” Stone is originally from Wilmington, North Carolina. He and Jones, his business partner, are driven out of town because of an envious White businessmen. Stone’s wife and children are killed when their house is set on fire, and he and Jones flee to the West, seeking a (racially) safe haven and a fresh start. An old White enemy, Jerry Mason, follows them cross-country and incites an argument. Later, Mason is fatally shot,

and both Wilson and Jones are falsely accused of his murder and imprisoned in the local jail. When the lynch mob comes for them, Wilson escapes and Jones is killed.

Wilson hides in the woods for weeks, and when the reverend finds him, the newly self-christened “George Stone” is, to all appearances, a down-on-his-luck White man. Reverend Stevens, true to the Good Samaritan code, takes him in and later appoints him as church sexton. The new sexton forms a close bond with Flip, the rector’s son, and comes to “[worship] the golden-haired child” almost as much as General worships the angelic Fairy in “General Washington” (280). It is Stone’s love for the child -- a reminder of his own lost family -- as well as his gratitude to Reverend Stevens, that enables him to transform himself into an heroic spirit by the story’s conclusion.

Eventually, Stevens learns Stone’s true identity and confronts his sexton. After hearing Stone’s personal history, he turns to his faith in God to aid him in his decision whether or not to return the sexton to “justice”:

Suddenly stopping, he flung himself upon his knees in the middle of the room, and raising his clasped hands, cried aloud for heavenly guidance.[. . .] It was the outpouring of a pure soul asking for help from its Heavenly Father with all the trustfulness of a little child. It came in a torrent, a flood; it wrestled mightily for the blessing it sought. (283)

Again, the reverend appears to be helpless and childlike without some sort of protection, first physical (the curtain), then divine (heavenly guidance). His faith, in a sense, becomes a crutch upon which he leans too heavily for strength, rather than an empowering influence in his life. He finally decides to keep Stone’s secret, especially knowing that the sexton will be lynched just as Jones had been. However, the Reverend does request that Stone leave town as soon as the initial danger has passed.

Months later, however, Stone is able to redeem himself by saving the lives of Reverend Stevens, his son, mother, and many other passengers as their train returns from the East on the day before Thanksgiving. Stone’s almost supernatural awareness of

danger approaching reflects the mystical influence of “Mystery” and *Of One Blood*, in which characters exhibit almost psychic abilities to foresee both good and bad fortune:

He looked about him in a dazed way and muttered, “He’s coming on this train, he and the kid!” [. . .] Stone went upon the railroad track, and stumbled over something that lay directly over it. It was a huge tree [. . .] Soon -- very soon -- upon the iron pathway, a great train, freighted with life, would dash around the curve to wrack and ruin! [. . .] He pictured the faces of his benefactor and the little child, so like his own lost one, cold in death; the life crushed out by the cruel wheels. [. . .] “God help me to save them!” he cried. (285)

Like Reverend Stevens, Stone calls on the Lord for divine assistance, yet his is a more noble cry. He does not call out in the fear and weakness of a child, as does Stevens, but with the empowerment of love. He is willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save others. He does so not only in repayment for their kindness to him, but also in memory of his own lost family and his friend Jones -- who courageously faced his death while Stone fled. His act of bravery helps him to repay the karmic debt for his previous transgressions. By single-handedly removing the tree from the tracks, Stone prevents the predicted accident. The effort results in his death, as he is crushed by the engine; fortunately, however, he does not die in vain.

Because of this heroic act, the community posthumously exonerates both Stone and Jones. Jerry Mason’s true murderer is discovered, and Reverend Stevens preaches Stone’s funeral sermon to a full house. Stone’s noble end finally empowers the rector, and he is transformed from a weak, childlike man into a more fitting leader. The dead hero becomes both muse and spiritual mentor to Stevens, just as General becomes a source of enlightenment for the bigoted Senator Tallman in “General Washington.” Here, Stone’s ultimate sacrifice inspires Reverend Stephens to finally write and deliver “the greatest sermon of his life,” the topic from which Hopkins takes the story’s title

(286). Ironically, this sermon, which the reverend is unable to compose at the beginning of the story, becomes the one for which he will be remembered. Moreover, he has finally succeeded in his own American Dream, or rather, romantic quest; i.e., he finally succeeds in bringing a spirit of brotherhood to this new-founded and seemingly lawless community.

The heroic spirit is an integral element of Pauline Hopkins's editorial work and short fiction. It is also apparent in the literary careers of Jessie Fauset and Dorothy West, although to a more limited degree. Fauset emphasizes practical fantasy, i.e., the pursuit of realistic romantic quests for African Americans. West provides several portraits of naïve, optimistic adults in her work, although often with an ironic twist. Fauset's literary response to authors at the turn of the twentieth century, such as Hopkins includes everyday heroes -- people who achieved success on a smaller (but just as noble) scale. West's characters remain noble in their ability to keep the faith in spite of opposition. Common literary techniques, such as characterization and plot will also be discussed, such as Fauset's use of a Greek chorus (as Hopkins uses in "Wedding") to foretell trouble in her short story "Double Trouble" (1923), as well as in her third novel developed from that work, *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931); plantation myths (Mammy, Miss Anne, trickster figures) who appear in Fauset's "Mary Elizabeth" (1919) and even more notably in Dorothy West's "Mammy" (1940), just as they appear in Hopkins's "General Washington" and "Wedding"; the "passing" plot, which Fauset uses in her serialized novella "Emmy" (*Crisis*, 1913), as well as in her best-known short work, "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920) and her second novel, which is developed from the latter story, *Plum Bun* (1929), as Hopkins uses in "Manhood" and "As the Lord Lives." In addition, naive ingenue characters (similar to Aunt Cloty in "Manhood") appear in the works of Fauset and West, such as the naive ingenue Angelique ("Double Trouble") and the self-sacrificing "Aunt Viney" in "Cook" (1934), respectively. The presence of these elements: the heroic spirit, the romantic quest, and the inner child, as well as the appearance of true

and false mentors and their ultimate effect on one's American Dreams, will be discussed in the following chapters on Fauset and West.



## CHAPTER 4

### “THE PUZZLING, TANGLING, NERVE-WRACKING CONSCIOUSNESS OF COLOR,” OR, AN AMERICAN DREAM DEFERRED: JESSIE REDMON FAUSET’S ADVENTURES IN RACELAND, 1912-1923

Unlike Pauline Hopkins, who published the bulk of her fiction during her editorial career at *Colored American Magazine* (1900-1904), Jessie Redmon Fauset was publishing short stories and novellas long before she became literary editor of *The Crisis* in 1919. Fauset was a public school teacher in Baltimore and Washington D.C. from 1905 to 1919. Carolyn Wedin Sylvander speculates that “probably the best years of her creative life were exhausted” in this profession (33). Although Fauset did produce much writing during this period, her early teaching and later editing duties at *Crisis* (1919-1926) likely depleted the bulk of her creative energy by the time her first novel, *There Is Confusion*, was published (1924). Even more discouraging, Fauset had originally wanted to teach in Philadelphia, her adopted hometown, in order to complete her Masters degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the City of Brotherly Love did not welcome this accomplished woman of color into its school system; the ambitious Fauset never truly recovered from that rejection. Yet she completed her degree in French in 1919 and also distinguished herself as “an impressive person as well as teacher of French and Latin” at M Street (renamed Dunbar after 1916) High School in Washington D.C. (35). In the midst of her academic and professional activities, Fauset produced several works of fiction, poetry, and articles for *Crisis*; like Hopkins, her publishing outlet was limited to that one, albeit notable, magazine. Her early fiction includes “Emmy” (1912-13), “My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein” (1914), and “‘There Was One Time’: A Story

of Spring” (1917). After she joined her mentor W.E.B. Du Bois at *Crisis* (Fall 1919), Fauset produced more short fiction: “Mary Elizabeth” (1919), “The Sleeper Wakes” (1920), and “Double Trouble” (1923). Fauset’s characters, much like their creator, are accomplished, intelligent, far-sighted, and ambitious. Yet as in Fauset’s life, virulent American racism and sexism always frustrates their American Dreams. In retaliation, some characters go to extremes in their romantic quests for success. Some characters “pass” for White, while others fantasize about utopian worlds or look to the past for inspiration. In most cases, the characters learn to appreciate their ancestors, whose sacrifices made it possible for them to advance further, albeit within racially proscribed limits. Other characters let fairy tale ideals distract them, particularly in respect to love relationships, and they must awaken to reality. Those who are comfortable, or bourgeois (a quality for which Fauset and her work are always criticized), unwittingly adopt plantation personas, e.g., “Miss Anne,” while their servants become wily trickster figures, of the Br’er Rabbit variety.

Ultimately Fauset, much like Hopkins, uses her literary work to mentor her African American audience. She encourages them to pursue higher goals despite the limitations of racial (and gender) divide. Hopkins’s generation of readers was faced with lynching, disfranchisement, stereotypes about their sexuality (women in particular), and the advent of social Darwinism following the late nineteenth-century’s false science of “ethnology” (eugenics). Fauset’s readers, although still faced with these issues, had certain advantages over their predecessors. In particular, many African Americans were becoming well-educated in the early twentieth century, holding professional positions and often advanced college degrees, like Fauset herself. They were frustrated when denied rewards for their Talented Tenth status. Racial bias prevented them from advancing in their fields; many teachers, engineers, doctors, retailers, and other professionals found themselves either working for themselves or for “mainstream” employers at significantly lower wages than their White counterparts. African American

culture suddenly came into “fashion,” however, during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Many artists of color won acclaim as well as financial support, although primarily at the whims of Anglo sponsors; these benefactors often followed the “cult of the primitive” in folk, jazz, and African-themed drama, music, literature, and art. Studies of the Black bourgeoisie -- middle- to upper-class people of color -- were not a “hot” item, as the generally cool reception of Fauset’s work illustrates. As one publisher commented in a rejection letter for *There Is Confusion* (1924): “White readers just don’t expect Negroes to be like this” (qtd. in Starkey 219). Nevertheless, Fauset found publishers for three additional novels: *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy, American Style* (1933). Yet even as the most prolific Black woman novelist of the period, Fauset never gained the popular and critical acclaim of writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, and Nella Larsen. Ironically, Fauset “discovered” and mentored all of these writers at different times during her work at *Crisis*, and their professional success ultimately overshadowed her own.

After Fauset departed Du Bois’s magazine in 1926, she became frustrated in her quest for a new editorial position. As in her early job hunting experiences as a young teacher, Fauset could not enter the “mainstream” professional world. Ironically, she had to return to teaching; her energies were indeed “exhausted,” as the more sketchy quality of her last two novels reveals. Her life’s purpose, one could speculate, was to provide a path for others’ professional success and acclaim, rather than to achieve the same for herself. Fauset’s creative work truly reflects the mentoring spirit. Her best energies were indeed spent for the greater good of encouraging others, rather than for furthering her own interests.

Although “Emmy,” Fauset’s first work of “short” fiction in *Crisis* (December 1912 - January 1913), is named after its heroine, the central conflict concerns Emmy’s love interest, Archie Ferrers. Like Mark Myers in Hopkins’s “The Test of Manhood” (1905), Archie must relinquish a “white man’s chances” and become heroic

enough to assert his true racial identity. Archie's sincere affection for his loved ones complicates his professional ambitions. Just as Mark Myers disowns his mother and later reunites with her in "Test," so must Archie postpone his plans to marry Emmy, then realize his mistake. He wants to live and work in a White environment long enough to save money for their future. He ultimately reveals his racial deception to (and defends Emmy's honor against) his bigoted employer when the latter insults Archie's "Black Venus." As Carolyn Wedin Sylvander notes, the emphasis in this story, as in Fauset's other fiction, is not in "racial and interracial conflicts" but "what characters do with their heritage and their experiences. In 'Emmy' the conflict centers around Archie's honor [. . .] The psychology of the man rather than the woman is explored" (132). Yet Fauset's novella does open with a focus on Emmy's school years, during which the privileged and pampered heroine experiences both subtle and not-so-subtle encounters of racism in a seemingly liberal central Pennsylvania town. She is frequently unaware of these negative undertones, however, as during a conversation with one of her White classmates. The girl is amazed that Emmy doesn't "mind" standing before class and identifying herself with the "Negro" race as part of an assignment. Emmy's most significant early experience is with false mentor Miss Wenzel. Wenzel is a teacher who envies Emmy's comfortable financial status (for her mother has a French maid and can afford fine clothes for her daughter). She also has allegedly "good" intentions, and she tries in vain to make Emmy truly understand her "place" as a second-class American citizen. Her "gift" to Emmy and its eventual effect on the girl's life recalls the well-used fairy tale plot in which a "wicked witch" puts a curse on the "princess" in order to frustrate her romantic quest. Rather than having Emmy prick her finger on a spindle and fall into a deep sleep, however, Miss Wenzel gives the girl what still amounts to a bad luck charm -- a Robert Louis Stevenson motto, framed and sealed under glass. Miss Wenzel sees it as "a sort of text, to preach a sermon on humility without aspiration" (442). Emmy does not immediately comprehend the meaning of lines such as "To renounce when that shall be

necessary and not be embittered” (442). The complacent heroine goes on to high school, and, in spite of the “occasional impasse which [. . .] might generally be traced to color,” Emmy is “perfectly satisfied with being colored” (443). By the time she has her first serious conversation with Archie about race and racism, Emmy has already undergone an awareness and acceptance of herself as a Black woman. But Archie’s words, like the Stevenson motto, are prophetic: ““Just being Emilie Carrel seems to be enough for you. But you just wait until color keeps you from the thing you want the most, and you’ll see”” (447).

Although Emmy’s character development appears to stop altogether after part three of this nine-part novella (after which Archie’s plot takes over the narrative), her presence does continue to serve a much more legitimate function than as the hero’s “reward.” Sylvander describes Emmy’s character as “static” and self-satisfied (132); Cheryl Wall insists that Emmy “exists mainly as the prize whose worth the male protagonist must eventually recognize” (44). Aside from being his romantic interest, however, Emmy is also Archie’s conscience, or spiritual mentor. In turn he worships her, much as General worships Fairy in Hopkins’s “General Washington” (1900), although Emmy’s guidance is not class-biased, as in the former. She constantly rebukes Archie to be true to himself. As his “inflexible bronze goddess,” absolute in her opinions, Emmy admonishes Archie to choose the right path of self-acknowledgement, rather than continuing to “pass” for, as he says, “a foreigner of some kind --Spanish or something” (446).

Apart from her role as spiritual mentor, Emmy Carrel’s life is indeed limited. As her surname suggests, she lives in a quiet, enclosed space in which she confronts her “passive” existence until she hears from her lover. Archie’s romantic quest, as opposed to Emmy’s, recalls that of standard male fairy tales in which “poor boys play an active role in winning kingdoms and princesses” (Lieberman 386). He gathers up courage to slay the dragons of bigotry in the professional world. Meanwhile, his beloved Emmy,

who is unemployed after graduating from high school, plays the traditional female fairy tale role in which beautiful girls “wait, are chosen, and are rewarded” with marriage (386). This situation also recalls, to a lesser extent, the myth of Odysseus and Penelope. During her husband’s prolonged absence, Penelope waits, patient and faithful, until his return. Likewise, Emmy, whose character is developed early on in the story (save for a moment of bitter revelation in the final chapter), waits for Archie to complete his own quest for self-actualization. Afterwards, he will reach her level of satisfaction with her racial identity, and then they can reunite, marry, and live “happily ever after.”

Archie’s pursuit of the American dream accelerates with the brief appearance of another well-intentioned yet false mentor, the “young, wealthy and quixotic” Robert Fallon. This idealistic hotel guest encourages the ambitious bellboy to continue to “pass” and is impressed by his daring: “So, it’s all a gamble with you, isn’t it? By George! How exciting your life must be -- now white and now black -- standing between ambition and honor, what?” (447). He refers Archie to Mr. Nicholas Fields, who owns an engineering “concern” in Philadelphia, then warns him to “Be sure to keep your mouth shut, Ferrers” and dashes out of his life. Archie later confesses to Emmy that “I couldn’t resist it. You don’t know what it means to me. I don’t care about being white in itself any more than you do -- but I do care about a white man’s chances” (448). He continues to care until Mr. Fields spies Archie with Emmy in Philadelphia and later insults the young man’s “Black Venus” by exclaiming, “Boys will be boys, and everyone to his taste” (456). Archie is infuriated, yet he does not defend Emmy’s honor so as not to reveal his true identity. His ensuing guilt is twofold, for as well as his being his true mentor, Emmy is also virginal, fresh, and innocent, “The whitest angel that ever lived, purity incarnate” (457). She is, in fact, nearly always dressed in white. Emmy’s honor, like that of Hopkins’s female characters, must be protected against the racial stereotypes perpetuated by the “majority.” Thus Fauset also incorporates values of the cult of true

womanhood in her characters, albeit at the expense of their heartache and disappointment.

Archie eventually comes to realize that his romantic quest to pursue the (Anglo) American dream is empty and meaningless. The crisis arises when Mr. Fields suggests that Archie not only serve as a “silent partner” in his firm in lieu of his idle son Peter. He also suggests that Archie come to live near him on Chestnut Hill, an all-white neighborhood. Archie approaches Emma with the plan of postponing their marriage for two years so that he can live and work closer to his employer. For Emmy, this proposal recalls both the Stevenson motto and Archie’s earlier warning. Now she must “renounce” her lover so that he can pursue his goals; moreover, she must not become “embittered” by the barrier of color, for Archie cannot have both a “white man’s chances” and an (obviously) Black wife. Her color, over which she has no control, has finally kept her from the thing she really wants -- Archie -- and so she breaks their engagement.

Interestingly, the only scene in the novella in which Emmy dons a red dress instead of her usual white further illustrates Fauset’s adherence of the Victorian standard of true womanhood. Punishment for good, “true” women who become “bad” seems to be necessary. As Hopkins punishes her subversive women characters with madness, death, and social ridicule, so Fauset uses Emmy’s misbehavior to maintain female decorum. The red dress thus becomes a symbol of frustrated love, passion, and cruelty. Worn partly to tempt Archie to hasten their wedding day, the dress also reflects her anger at his true intention -- to postpone it -- and the ill-fated consequence of her own impulsive behavior. In addition, this is Emmy’s punishment for wearing a daring color -- and thereby appropriating the role of temptress -- instead of donning her accustomed white and thus retaining her virginal persona. Fauset’s theme of punishment for willing self-exploitation becomes more sophisticated and disturbing in “The Sleeper Wakes” of 1920, in which innocence is truly lost; here, the punishment is temporary, yet just as effective in keeping Emmy “in line,” so to speak.

Archie ultimately musters enough “heroic” spirit to defend Emmy when Fields finds her photo in the young man’s apartment and advises him against the marriage: ““Oh, I suppose it’s some of your crazy foreign notions. In this country white gentlemen don’t marry colored women.”” Archie rejoins, ““White gentlemen don’t, but colored men do”” (467). Afterwards, he realizes the emptiness of his once important “chances” and the impact of Emmy’s warnings about his insistence on “passing.” Meanwhile, Emmy experiences her own epiphany, during which the consciousness of color finally sinks in. Her mother reveals a tragic story about the death of her jealous West Indian husband Emile (Emmy’s father), who becomes enraged after seeing his wife embrace a White man (her father) and strikes her. Mrs. Carrel sends him away, and later Emile is killed in a train accident. She thus advises her daughter to forgive Archie’s thoughtless transgressions; yet her story does not encourage Emmy, who later rationalizes: ““If grandmother hadn’t been colored she wouldn’t have been a slave [. . .] Color -- color -- it’s wrecked mother’s life and now it’s wrecking mine [. . .] It must be wonderful to be white’ [. . .] She checked herself angrily [. . .] ‘It doesn’t seem as though I could be the same girl’” (472). The complacent heroine finally comes to terms with the Stevenson motto: ““I’ve renounced -- there’s no question about that [. . .] but no one could expect me not to be bitter”” (472).

Fauset always rewards her young lovers, albeit after a series of reversals and personal disappointments. Here, both Emmy and Archie learn from their mentors, for better or worse, and bravely pursue their own romantic quests, although within a less-than-rosy framework. Childhood innocence and optimism is severely tested; yet, provided they can maintain their relationship, these young people have a good chance for a happy ending. The conclusion to “Emmy” is quite unrealistic, however. Unlike Mark Myers in Hopkins’s “The Test of Manhood,” who relinquishes all the perks of life as a “White” man when he reunites with his mother, Archie is doubly rewarded by the story’s end. Not only does he win Emmy over, but his White employer also comes around. Mr.



Fields decides to keep Archie on at his engineering firm despite his racial origin. This is not the last of Fauset's subverted fairy tale romances, nor is it the only instance in which she critiques and deconstructs the idealized pursuit of the American Dream.

The most experimental of Fauset's literary output is the surreal short work entitled "My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein" (July 1914). In this piece of creative nonfiction, as in her personal memoir and travel essays written for *Crisis*, the author reveals much of her personality. In addition, her narrative style is more relaxed in her nonfiction than in her fiction (Sylvander 99). "House" is essentially a dream sketch in which the narrator's romantic quest revolves around the sensual and intellectual enjoyment of her ideal home and working environment, one that could never exist in her waking life. It is an isolated, hilltop mansion in Spain, surrounded by gardens and a forest. Inside are strangely winding hallways, oddly-shaped rooms, and -- most important -- an ever-expanding, world-class library. Her mentors are the literary greats of the past: "Schopenhauer and Gorky, Petrarch and Sappho, Goethe and Kant and Schelling; much of Ibsen, Plato and Ennius and Firdausi, and Lafcadio Hearn" (Ammons 479). She reveals her attachment to fairy tales and adventure in her additional collection of "all the dear simple tales of earlier days, 'Mother Goose,' 'Alice in Wonderland,' 'The Arabian Nights'" (478). Fauset's external description of the house is reminiscent of a Gothic novel, while its internal properties are disturbingly Kafkaesque, and both descriptions are written in the style of high romance:

Far away on the top of a gently sloping hill stands my house. On one side the hill slopes down into a valley, the site of a large country town; on the other it descends into a forest, thick with lofty trees and green, growing things. Here in stately solitude amid such surroundings towers my dwelling [. . .] An irregular, rambling building is this house of mine, built on no particular plan, following no order save that of fancy. Peculiarly jutting rooms appear, and unsuspected

towers and bay-windows, -- the house seems almost to have built itself and to have followed its own will in so doing. (476)

Aware that this house is merely a work of “dream-fabric,” the narrator is nevertheless content to embrace the fantasy. It becomes a setting for play, of tapping into the inner child, and Fauset envisions her surroundings as “an enchanted forest, the Forest Morgraunt -- in and out among the trees pass valiant knights and distressed ladies” (477). In her attic of precious stored memories, she becomes an heroic spirit, “a queen come into her very own” (478). The house is a fortress against the world, in which she is free to become both scholar and child, to pursue her literary studies as well as to revel in her lush creature comforts: “The mere possession of it [. . .] is very sweet to me. It is absolutely the *chey soi* of my soul’s desire” (479). Here, Fauset not only embraces the inner child but also inadvertently voices her concern for the lack of private working space for women intellectuals. Her visionary ideal anticipates Virginia Woolf’s essay collection *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), which advocates the importance of materialism for female artists:

Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time [. . .] Women, then, have not had a dog’s chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own. (108)

In her own life, Fauset definitely had little leisure time to concentrate on her writing. She was a working woman throughout her literary career, and her several demands, first as a teacher and later as editor for *Crisis* and *The Brownies’ Book*, frustrated her attempts to master her muse. In an interview for *Southern Workman* (1932), Marion L. Starkey notes that the part-time author “looks wistfully to the day when she can accumulate the surplus thousand or two that will enable her to devote a year or so to novels that she has in mind. ‘Just to see what I really could do if I had my

full time and energy to devote to my work” (217). Fauset did, however, make time to pursue post-baccalaureate study, mainly during summer breaks and brief leaves of absence. She completed her M.A. in French in June 1919 after resigning from her teaching position in Washington D.C. Meanwhile, Fauset had also started working with Du Bois in 1918, although her formal appointment as literary editor would not take effect until October of the following year (Sylvander 53). She later pursued advanced language study at the Sorbonne and the Alliance Francaise in Paris on her third trip to Europe in 1924-25 while on leave from her editorial duties (68). While such educational and travel opportunities enriched her personally, Fauset rarely succeeded in finding comparable time and energy for her creative endeavors. She did manage to draft ideas for her second novel, *Plum Bun* (1929) during her language study abroad. Yet the bulk of her third novel, *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), was written “in the hours left free after she had completed an eight o’clock morning class in French at Columbia” on a bench in Riverside Park (Starkey 218). In addition, her 1929 marriage to insurance broker Herbert Harris put additional strain on her muse, for her husband “seems to have been boorishly resentful of his wife’s literary success” (Lewis 274). There was never a proper “room of [her] own” or ready money to support Fauset’s creative endeavors, and it is possible that this lack of private time, money, and space contributed to her lack of fully realized laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own. (108)craftsmanship. As early as 1914, ten years before she had published *There Is Confusion* (1924), Fauset realized that her romantic quest for private physical and intellectual working space could only be fulfilled through “dream-fabric.”

The narrator’s biggest concern -- the conflict between the world of fantasy and that of reality -- arises in the conclusion of “House”:

Is it right to feel thus, to have this vivid, permeating and yet wholly intellectual enjoyment of the material loveliness and attractiveness of my house? May this not be perhaps a sensuality of the mind, whose influence may be more insidious,

more pernicious, more powerful to unfit me for the real duties of life than are other lower and yet more open forms of enjoyment? (480)

Here, Fauset expresses a sense of guilt that probably reflects her own concerns. As an educated, yet working-class woman of color in the early twentieth century (despite her white-collar employment), it was unrealistic for her to speculate about attaining complete intellectual and financial freedom. Moreover, as Ammons notes in her introduction to *Short Fiction by Black Women, 1900-1920*:

Is this story her nightmare vision of her own life? [. . .] The house Fauset describes is beautiful, sensuous, and luxuriant, but it is also haunted by isolation, irrelevance, and incapacitation. Is this lifeless, silent house a metaphor for the creative life of a modern middle-class black woman as the contemporary West has constructed it? (15)

Perhaps it is just such. As an African American woman who had to travel abroad in order to experience equal treatment, Fauset places the dream house not in her homeland, but across the sea, where her narrator is likewise free from racial prejudice. Thus, Fauset can only achieve her American Dream of literary success in a fantastic, foreign setting. She feels that she must remove and isolate herself not only from America but from the workaday world and its people in order to conquer her muse. Yet despite the danger of being rendered incapable by this magical existence, Fauset also suggests that escapism can be a healthy outlet -- within reason -- that may help her and others to return to and face the gritty reality of life in "the land of the free." As she notes in her essay "Some Notes on Color" (*The World Tomorrow* 1922): "I cannot if I will forget the fact of color in almost everything I do or say" (76). Escapism becomes a healing process, and the vision of the Spanish estate -- the perfect living and creative space -- is one that seems at first ideal, then is ultimately accepted as the product of fantasy. Fauset realizes that writers of color cannot live and work in complete isolation from others or from their homeland. Interactions with others, both positive and negative, are necessary in order to

expand the creative consciousness. Ultimately, the writer must find a room of her own within herself. She must also remain connected to the greater world without.

Fauset's third short story, "'There Was One Time': A Story of Spring" (*Crisis*, April - May 1917), traces additional elements of Fauset's own frustrated American Dream. At the time of its publication, the aspiring writer was nearing the end of her fourteen-year teaching tenure at Dunbar High School. Fauset's ironic fairy tale is ostensibly an entertaining romance written not only to divert her audience from real-world worries but also to lighten her own spirits. The reader later realizes that it is also a cautionary tale, one that advises one to recognize the difference between wishful thinking and reality. Lewis notes that Fauset was "just going through the motions" as a teacher, according to former students, although "competently and to the letter, to be sure" (121). Likewise, in "Time" the author introduces Anna Fetter, a cynical, twenty-six year-old French teacher who wants to escape her humdrum and racially hampered existence. However, unlike the narrator of "House," who hides behind a dream fortress, Anna does feel the influence of the outside world as it penetrates her fantasies. Moreover, she must learn to transcend its negative influence so that she may "live happily ever after" with Richard Winter. In this sense, the plot is similar to "Emmy," in which lovers are thoroughly tested before they can finally be united. Anna's encounter with the mock-heroic Richard parallels a French fairy tale (a class translation assignment for her pupils); an impoverished shepherdess neglects her charges and meets up with a noble -- and socioeconomically unbiased -- prince in a distant village. They separate, and later the prince seeks her out and asks her to marry him. In Fauset's subversion of this fairy tale, issues of race and miscommunication complicate Anna and Richard's romantic quest for happiness. Yet Fauset does provide a happy conclusion for them both, albeit unrealistic, complete with aid from cherubic mentors: Anna's cousin Theophilus and Richard's nephew Tommy. Thinking she lives in a distant town, like the shepherdess, "prince" Richard travels widely, not realizing that Anna lives in the same town where he is visiting

relatives. When Tommy asks for help with the translation assignment, Richard realizes that Anna is his nephew's teacher. He then promptly goes to her house to propose. However, even in this pleasant fantasy, Fauset reminds her intended audience that it is important to have realistic -- or rather, revised -- romantic expectations that are more applicable to them as African Americans. Anna cannot expect the stress-free union of the French shepherdess and her prince. This story provides a model for Fauset's future subverted fairy tales, "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920) and *Plum Bun* (1929), in which ingenue characters supplant youthful fantasies with mature self-realization after a series of frustrated romantic quests and unrealistic, self-deluded expectations.

Like Emmy Carrell, whose surname suggests the limitation of an enclosed space, Anna Fetter is "fettered" by racism in her various pursuits for employment and romance. She graduates from the Business High School in Philadelphia at eighteen and is "the typical American girl done over in brown" (much as Fauset describes herself in "Some Notes in Color"). As such, the young woman does not receive professional employment. By default Anna ends up teaching "languages -- always her special detestation -- [which] seemed to her the final irony of an ironic existence" (Ammons 525), and one that also reflects Fauset's own unsuccessful search for employment in the city of brotherly love after graduating from Cornell University in 1905. By age twenty-six, Anna is hopelessly bitter, not only for herself, but for her loved ones as well. Although she recognizes cousin Theopilus' considerable musical talent, she concludes: "'Of course, he won't get a chance at it when he grows up.' The memory of her own ironic calling stung her. 'He'll probably have to be a farmer just because he'll hate it'" (529).

Yet Anna is also a hopeless romantic, for one morning she dons a blue dress by chance and recalls the French fairy tale: "'I wish I were that little shepherdess off on a holiday. She was wearing a blue dress, I remember'" (529). After missing her streetcar, the young teacher decides to take a day off and strolls to the town's park. Just as Anna decides that "being alive was pretty decent after all [ . . . ] teaching school, being colored,

even being poor were only aspects [. . .] the thing to do was to look at life in the large” (530), she is accosted and propositioned by a white tramp in the park:

“That’s right, smile at me,” said an oily voice, and she looked up to see one of the idlers leaning over the back of her bench. “You’re a right good-lookin’ gal. How’d you like to take a walk with me?”

She stared into his evil face, fascinated. [. . .] She felt herself growing icy, paralyzed. “You needn’t think I mind your being a nigger,” went on the hateful voice, “I ruther like ‘em. I hain’t what you might call prejudiced.”

This was what could happen to you if you were a colored girl who felt like playing at being a French shepherdess. (530)

In this disturbing scene, Fauset undermines the young teacher’s would-be fairy tale by producing a hideous “troll” figure; not only does the tramp frighten and insult the unprotected “shepherdess,” but this encounter, sadly enough, is much more realistic than one in which a romantic young woman encounters Prince Charming in a deserted park. Fauset later remarks on the lack of chivalry shown to her as a Black woman in “Some Notes on Color” (1922):

I go to work by means of the subway, which is crowded. Presently somebody gets up. The man standing in front of the vacant place looks around meaning to point it out to a woman. I am the nearest one. “But oh,” says his glance, “you’re colored. I’m not expected to give it to you.” And down he plumps. (76)

Fauset also shares her anxiety about emergencies and crowds: “‘If there should be an accident, a fire, none of these men around here would help me.’ *Place aux dames* was not meant for colored women” (77). Thus, it comes as no surprise that, given the complete absence of common courtesy given to women of color, they are more likely to receive indecent proposals in a public park. Fauset again advises her readers -- Black women in particular -- to choose their daydreams wisely.

Fortunately for Anna, however, Richard Winter arrives “exactly as though on cue” and frightens the vagrant off. Yet Anna is not initially impressed, and her natural cynicism takes over when she notices his nervous laughter and trembling. She assumes that her would-be rescuer is shaken by the encounter and that his heroic stance is merely a facade. When he informs her that his behavior is due to malarial fever, Anna is placated, although she is secretly disappointed that he “didn’t have the strength for anything but diplomacy” (531). Fauset again subverts the romantic fantasy, in which heroes are strong and robust, in favor of true realism; Prince Charming is rather sickly here, and Richard (as in “Richard the lion-hearted”) becomes a misnomer. In addition, despite his noble intentions, Richard is a “sensitive” type, an intellectual man whose illness renders him physically unable to protect the object of his affection. He is a romantic rather than heroic, and his idealism renders him more of a childlike spirit, a die-hard optimist. Richard is a world traveler who dreams of becoming an engineer, of building bridges in foreign lands, and of later returning to America to become a race leader. Like Anna, however, harsh reality shatters his romantic idealism. While living abroad, Richard decides that “to live under a republican form of government, with lots of my own people around me, would be the finest existence in the world” (532). He is surprised that his American companions find his enthusiasm amusing. He comes to understand their “secret joke” when he is reintroduced to homegrown racism in the United States; his English accent gains him entree into an otherwise all-white hotel in New York. Yet this negative experience brings Richard closer to his people, and through his utopian vision of race leadership -- more than likely inspired by her mentor Du Bois -- Fauset has created “a distinctly *American* fairy-tale [. . .] set off against the ‘false ideals’ and foreign models that have kept Americans enthralled” by “combining an emphasis on the distinctiveness of black American experience and culture with American cultural nationalism, as well as with the propaganda of racial uplift and the promotion of middle-class values” (Hutchinson 155). Anna and Richard’s story ultimately imitates that of the



French shepherdess. Yet that fairy tale model is imperfect when applied to working-class African Americans who generally don't have time or leisure to embrace impromptu escapes from responsibility, improbable romantic encounters, and grand plans for leading the masses. Ironically, however, by the story's conclusion, the couple decides to make their fortune in Europe -- he by building bridges and she by drawing the plans -- before returning to America to "preach [Richard's] gospel -- for nothing" (545). As in "My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein," Fauset centers the ideal working environment for the African American in a foreign setting, a pleasant escape from the obstacles in one's own homeland. Conditions in her own country were so oppressive that even in Fauset's fictional world, which was completely under her control, she created situations in which her characters sought their freedom abroad. Fauset is ultimately an ambiguous mentoring spirit. She encourages her readers to dream big, yet she continually warns them to remember themselves and the reality of American life for them, even in the midst of the most tempting fantasy.

"Mary Elizabeth" (*Crisis*, December 1919) is unique among Fauset's short stories in several respects. It is the only work of adult fiction written in first-person; here Sally Pierson, a bourgeois housewife, is the primary narrator of the story. Fauset experiments extensively with dialect here -- a rare element in her writing -- to imitate the title character's speech. "Mary Elizabeth" also focuses on the working-class woman's family history, rather than focusing on the bourgeois class. Fauset ultimately expresses her respect for and appreciation of the "folk," as embodied in the title character; Mary Elizabeth's wisdom surpasses that of her cerebral, presumably advantaged "mistress" Sally. Moreover, Fauset pays homage to her own ancestors, the generations of slaves and newly emancipated people of color whose families, more often than not, were irrevocably separated. She thus emphasizes the importance of honoring one's family ties. In addition, the action of the story (save for Mary Elizabeth's flashback tale) takes place in a single day. In Fauset's other short work, months (and, in some cases, years) elapse,

which makes her stories read more like “trial” novels (Sylvander 136). Finally, as Ammons notes, the housekeeper’s family history, with its emphasis on reuniting with lost loved ones, contains elements of the female slave narrative (15); this is Fauset’s contribution to that African American literary genre.

Mary Elizabeth’s interactions with leisured housewife Sally (who is also African American), complete with “Yas’m” on one end and “But, Mary Elizabeth!” on the other, becomes an uncomfortable revision of antebellum plantation stereotypes. The housekeeper is a trickster figure of sorts in her relationship with her employer; Mary Elizabeth becomes an unreliable narrator in relating her family history and other anecdotes about her personal life. Sally is never sure whether the older woman is serious or simply “puttin’ on missus” with her whimsical storytelling. Yet Mrs. Pierson does, if unwittingly, embody the stereotype of bourgeois privilege -- plays the Black “Miss Anne” -- in her reaction to and treatment of Mary Elizabeth, by turns amused and befuddled by the wily older woman.

The story opens with a disagreement between Sally and her husband Roger. Because the housekeeper is late, Sally must prepare breakfast, which is a disaster: “The cakes were tough and gummy [. . .] The coffee boiled, or stewed, or scorched, or did whatever the particular thing is that coffee shouldn’t do” (560). Here emerges Fauset’s rarely seen comic and ironic gift. This description of the “incompetent” wife and her unreasonable spouse subverts the fairy tale ideal of the successful romantic quest and “happily-ever-after” marriage. In fact, it appears that the honeymoon is definitely over, ““It seems to me you might learn to make a decent cup of coffee”” (560). Roger slams out of the house, and Mary Elizabeth reports to work at eleven o’clock, completely nonchalant about her tardiness. She is “a small, weazened woman, very dark, somewhat wrinkled, and a model of self-possession” (561). Sally comments on Mary Elizabeth’s hat, which is “a small, black, dusty affair, trimmed with black ribbon, some dingy white roses and a sheaf of wheat.” It is never removed “until [Mary Elizabeth] has been in the

house some two or three hours” (561). Hats are a symbol of pride, both for Mary Elizabeth and for her senile second husband, the octogenarian Mr. Giles. He has received his “high silk beaver” from “ole Mis,” his wife’s former employer, and he is never seen without it, especially when he wanders off from home in the middle of the night. However, despite Sally’s occasional gifts of castoff hats, as well as clothes, Mary Elizabeth holds onto her own “millinery” almost as if it were a badge of honor. Her employer fails to understand its importance until much later.

Incredibly, Mary Elizabeth proceeds to eat the “awful viands” that Roger has left untouched and to drink “that unspeakable coffee [. . .] and she didn’t warm [the cakes] up either” (561). This comical image serves a more serious purpose; it reminds readers of the older woman’s history. Memories of hunger have taught her to waste no food, no matter how “awful.” This scene recalls her family’s slave history; i.e., Mary Elizabeth must eat the leftovers from the table of her “massa” and “missus” -- if she is to eat at all -- just as she accepts their castoff clothing. However, Sally Pierson does not seem to realize this. She wonders instead “whether Roger was too finicky or Mary Elizabeth a natural-born diplomat” (561). Hunger, not diplomacy, is the key to her housekeeper’s behavior, and Mary Elizabeth remains stoic and matter-of-fact while consuming the cold hotcakes. Her behavior is a mature -- and pragmatic -- contrast to Roger’s instant and childlike disgust.

When Sally asks whether Mary Elizabeth would consider marrying a third time, the housekeeper responds: ““Oh, no-o-me! [. . .] Though I don’t know why I shouldn’t. I’d come by it hones’. My father was married four times” (564). Sally reveals her own class bias in her reaction: “I hadn’t thought of people in the state in which I had instinctively placed Mary Elizabeth’s father and mother as indulging in divorce” (564), but she soon comes to understand the reason behind the father’s numerous nuptials. Mary Elizabeth goes on to recount the heartbreaking story of her parents’ failed romantic quest. Cassius and Maggie, both former slaves, are unable to reunite after years of

separation. Mary Elizabeth reveals a childlike spirit by referring to them as “Papa and mamma,” even though she is a woman of sixty-four, and Sally is touched by this detail:

“Papa and mamma wus slaves, you know, Mis’ Pierson, and so of course they wusn’t exackly married [. . .] So they jumped over a broomstick, en they wus jes as happy! But not long after I come erlong, they sold papa down South, and mamma never see him no mo’ fer years and years. Thought he was dead. So she married again.”

“And he came back to her, Mary Elizabeth?” I was overwhelmed by the woefulness of it.

“Yas’m. After twenty-six years.” (564)

Cassius finds Maggie and Mary Elizabeth in Virginia and discovers that Maggie is expecting her fifth child with her second husband. Meanwhile, he and his fourth wife are living in the same town. When Sally pleads, “Surely she went with him after all those years. He really was her husband,” her housekeeper retorts, “Oh, no-o-me, mamma couldn’t a done that [. . .] Her ole master, whut done sol’ my father down river, brung her up too religious fer that” (566). Ironically, the “peculiar institution,” which destroyed countless African American families, also managed to brainwash its victims to follow its so-called “moral” laws about marriage and fidelity.

As a result of this tragic story, Sally feels obliged to give Mary Elizabeth another “castoff” dress (although she still has some attachment to it). The housekeeper displays uncustomary emotion to the unexpected windfall (“Haytian!”) and then goes “trudging bravely back to her second husband, Mr. Gales, and his high silk hat” (567). Meanwhile, Sally decides to prepare dinner herself. Mary Elizabeth’s sad history inspires her to remember her comparative good fortune. Neither her parents nor her grandparents, born and raised in Pennsylvania, had ever been slaves; thus, their family had never been “sold away.” Thinking of her own emotional and financial status -- for she is secure and legally married to the man she loves -- she decides to make up with Roger for their petty

argument. However, the gender-based double standard overshadows her marital bliss. When she relates the housekeeper's tale to Roger, he insists that Maggie "might have waited" (569). He also proclaims that, "'If I had been Cassius [ . . . ] and I had married fifty times and had come back and found you married to someone else, I'd have killed you, killed you'" (569). The undercurrent of violence is disturbing, especially since Roger has no reason to fear Sally's desertion, but Fauset's narrator seems nonetheless content to be married to this man of "blessed stupidity."

Ultimately, Sally comes to appreciate Mary Elizabeth as a mentor figure who reminds her of the collective African American memory of slavery and the difficult Reconstruction era. Her housekeeper's sad tale of her parents' separation while in bondage and unsuccessful reunion many years later is a heartbreaking subversion of the "happily ever after" romantic quest. Moreover, the desire to reunite family ties lost during slavery emerges here -- as in Hopkins's fiction -- as Mary Elizabeth recalls her encounter with her aged father, whom she barely remembers. Yet despite her grief over this tragic situation, the seemingly humble housekeeper maintains an heroic facade, a liveliness of spirit and childlike optimism that keeps her head -- always carrying her worn hat -- held high, despite her life's disappointments. Sally Pierson's existence, in contrast, is the epitome of the American Dream for first-generation "free" Blacks, for she has the comparative comforts and luxury of home and hearth, the security of a legitimate marriage (albeit to an oafish spouse) and freedom from the threat of bondage.

Unfortunately, however, Fauset's story also demonstrates that the effects of slavery -- division of families, color caste, and field laborer versus house servant rivalries -- have conspired to create the ever-present though invisible barrier between African Americans of all socioeconomic -- and pigment -- levels. While Sally Pierson admires Mary Elizabeth's practical courage and wry wit, she has no deep understanding of or appreciation for the older woman's life experience. Thus, she does not unite with

her on any more than a surface level and can only give her gifts of castoff clothes, rather than empathy.

Fauset's subversion of the romantic quest is most evident in her best-known short work "The Sleeper Wakes" (*Crisis*, 1920), a *Bildungsroman* that has been compared to her novel *Plum Bun* (1929) because of its similar "passing" plot and inversion of women's romantic fairy-tale ideals, particularly those of women of color. In *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (1985), Deborah McDowell notes Fauset's concern with "female psychology and socially-conditioned female role patterns" and her tendency to place many of her fictional heroines "in the adolescent stage -- a stage of becoming, of maturing -- to demonstrate that her possibilities for development and attainment of freedom, well-being, and happiness are sorely limited in range" (88). Female conditioning by such means as folk literature, namely, fairy tales that promise "happily-ever-after" fates (which rely primarily on the manifestation of some Prince Charming), guarantees disappointment and disillusionment. Such fantasies ultimately work for no woman, let alone a woman of color. Adolescent girls in particular, who are on the verge of maturity and confused about their identity, are thus particularly vulnerable.

Amy Boldin is the ingenue heroine of "The Sleeper Wakes" who, like the title character of "Emmy," is the victim of traditional female socialization. While Emmy has been taught to sit and wait for a husband, Amy, from early childhood to late adolescence, has willingly absorbed the misleading fantasies borne of fairy tales, novels, and Hollywood movies. The effect of her physical beauty on loved ones (and complete strangers) convinces her that she too is a romantic figure. Thus, based on looks (as well as a certain amount of Machiavellianism), she can achieve the same happily-ever-after ending as her fictitious (White) role models. These false mentors mislead her, however, and she realizes that she must revise her American Dream. Instead of searching for Prince Charming and a fairy tale castle, Amy must create her own kingdom, or selfdom.

Her life should have a foundation of self-respect, industry (hard work), self-reliance, and loyalty to family and community, namely, the African American community.

Interestingly, Amy's true racial identity is never revealed, which is unusual in Fauset's "passing" fiction. However, she does ultimately align herself with the Black race, for, after all, these are the only people who have ever expressed true love and concern for her. As a five-year-old, Amy comes to live permanently with the Boldin family. Her escort to their household is a "tall, proud, white woman" who may or may not be her biological mother. The little girl asks, matter-of-factly, "'Am I going to be colored now?'" and receives an affirmative answer, but no further explanation is given for her abrupt life change. At age sixteen Amy asks a similar question of Mrs. Boldin, who can only "[tell] her truly that she did not know" (168). This never-solved enigma does create a romantic -- if potentially dangerous -- element to Amy's life. Her vague racial identity is the powder keg secret that later explodes when her "passing" is revealed. Thus, Fauset creates a would-be princess whose "dark" secret (or spell) brings about the complete decimation of her romantic quest. However, it also leads her to a sense of self-realization and rebirth.

Amy's journey to that self-realization is a long one, however. Although abandoned, Amy continues to idolize and to model herself after the "tall, proud woman[']s]" romantic figure. Ironically, both of them have succumbed to the lure of fairy tales, and they are later disappointed and disillusioned. The fact that the woman leaves Amy -- possibly her own daughter -- to be raised by another family indicates that her own romantic quest has ended badly, resulting in scandal. Thus, her illegitimate child must remain forever hidden, although the stigma of having had a (possibly) Black child will haunt her for the rest of her life. As for Amy, the narrator states that the only reading that "ever made any impression on her head," is that which her earliest mother figure (and mentor) taught her. She has filled the girl's impressionable mind with fairy tales and "descriptions in novels or histories of beautiful, stately places tenanted by beautiful,

stately women. She could pore over such pages for hours, her face flushed, her eyes eager” (169). By the time Amy reaches late adolescence, her delusions are deeply entrenched. As the narrator states, “a girl of seventeen has no psychology, she does not go beneath the surface, she accepts” (168). Amy is more than aware that her new “power” over men -- that of physical beauty -- is the key that will allow her to pursue a life of romantic adventure. She buys into the fantasy, unaware of the fact that she is bartering her self-respect as well as her beauty in order to find happiness. Ultimately, Amy’s decision to “sell herself” to a rich White husband casts her out of the “true” (good) woman category. For this behavior, she (like the “subversive” women in Pauline Hopkins’s short fiction and Fauset’s early fiction) must suffer. Amy embraces a life of neo-slavery -- or rather, legalized prostitution -- in order to cling to her romantic quest. Only after a series of reversals -- as Emmy and Anna experience in “Emmy” and “There Was One Time” does Amy regain a sense of self-respect and reclaim her right to be considered a “good,” respectable woman.

In contrast to the “tall, proud woman,” the false mentor of Amy’s formative years, the Boldins -- although rather indulgent -- give Amy a sense of well-grounded American pragmatism, although she rarely follows their advice. Mrs. Boldin offers Amy a true sense of motherly love that she never received from the “tall, proud woman.” Mr. Boldin and his young son Cornelius are often charmed by Amy’s beauty and allow her more than generous latitude, but Mr. Boldin also warns her: “You’d better stop seeing pretty girl pictures . . . They’re not always true to life” (169). Nevertheless, Amy is determined to pursue her romantic fairy tale quest for happiness. She equates the American Dream with the happy endings of the “pretty girl pictures” of penniless girls who are embraced by wealthy suitors. She invokes her dreams, “apostrophiz[ing] the beautiful, glowing vision of herself” in her bedroom mirror in an ironic inversion of the wicked witch’s invocation: “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, Who is the fairest of them all?” Amy calls forth her desires for “wonderful clothes . . . men adoring me . . . I want -- everything” (170). She is well



aware that she has nothing to offer in return “but her beautiful face,” just as her role model movie heroines. Moreover, Amy is unaware that as a (presumably) young woman of color her chances of achieving such heights of bliss are slim to none in a racist society.

Ill-fortified by her false mentors, and thoughtlessly neglectful of her true role models, Amy runs away to New York, where she immediately takes advantage of her mysterious racial identity by going “immediately to a white Y.M.C.A.” and becoming a waitress in Greenwich Village. She remains “unspoiled” for two years (170), until she encounters Zora Harrison, a rich White divorcee artist who becomes the second “tall, proud woman” in the young girl’s eyes. In fact, Zora is an even more romantic figure. She is a “blonde, golden beauty” who dresses in “dark and regal” purples and “strange marine blues” that contrast with Amy’s more pastel beauty and appeal to the girl’s love of color and fashion (171). Oddly enough, Amy is just as much a figure of romance to Zora. The older woman is fascinated by her mysterious beginnings (although Amy fails to mention her racial ambiguity) and is inspired to “plan and build a romance” and new persona for Amy. She furthers Amy’s romantic quest by advising her to play up the Anastasia Complex; that is, she must make use of her mysterious family history and unique position as a pure, untouched, and unknown beauty in order to snare a rich husband. Amy transforms into a distant relative of the wealthy Kildare family, descended from an outcast son who ran away and married an actress. To this Zora attaches the title of “artist,” assuming that “Amy had run away in order to study art,” much like herself (171). Thus, Zora not only reinvents Amy’s already highly romanticized self-image, but she also adapts it to her own preconceived notions, modeling it after her own days as a young adventuress. Moreover, Zora’s actions -- renaming Amy and changing the girl’s family history -- also recalls African American history, in which the slaveholders’ routinely changed African first names to Western ones, added their own surnames, and thereby robbed slaves of their freedom, native identity, and heritage.

Ultimately, Zora further inspires Amy's happily-ever-after delusions. Whatever moral qualms the Boldins taught Amy are thus vanquished, for she does indeed "score" an (alleged) Prince Charming, the much older, wealthy, White Southerner Stuart James Wynne. Her pangs of conscience are weak and thus ignored, although she is aware that she has made a fatal mistake: "It seemed to Amy somehow that she was driving a bargain -- how infamous a one she could not suspect. But Zora's teachings had sunk deep" (173). The naive girl accepts this easy-come Prince Charming at face value, refusing to heed her inner voice's warning about the toad within. Again, she has bartered herself, body and soul, in order to achieve this would-be happy ending. Interestingly, Amy's relocation from New York to Richmond, VA represents a back-to-bondage or reverse slave narrative. She leaves Northern freedom for Southern neo-enslavement as a rich man's wife. She embraces her bondage willingly, allowing herself to become obedient slave to her husband's plantation owner and "Master" persona.

Wynne becomes Amy's third false mentor, for although he "expands" her mind with wider reading than fairy tales and romance novels, he also corrupts her intellect and innocence by making her read aloud to him "literature of a certain prurient type," for "[h]e fairly reveled in the realistic novels which to her depicted sheer badness" (227). This is probably a reference to naturalistic period novelists such as Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, whose works depicted the harsh, fatalistic struggles of characters striving -- unsuccessfully -- to rise beyond heredity and environment. This is not unlike Amy's own struggle to find happiness, for she does so at the expense of her self-respect. She denies her racial heritage, sells herself, body and soul, into a loveless marriage, and becomes more concubine than wife. Moreover, the graphic novels not only reveal the toad inside of Prince Charming, but they also reveal Amy's own hypocrisy. Not only does she not love Wynne, but she doesn't even "consider him good-looking" and encourages him only to wear "dark blue" (much like Zora) to "take away from that awful whiteness of your skin" (227). These "ugly" undertones in Wynne's appearance

and literary tastes -- along with his virulent hatred of all nonwhite people -- foreshadows the “realistic” scenes to come. He later lashes out at a Black male servant and then later at Amy herself, who, in defending Stephen, threatens to reveal that she too is a “colored woman” (229).

With this revelation, Amy’s romantic quest fails on a grand scale. Wynne divorces her, although he allows her to continue to live comfortably on his money in New York. Yet he adds insult to injury by returning to her after ten months of separation with a heinous proposition. They can live together abroad as man and mistress, but never again as husband and wife, for “[a] white man like me simply doesn’t marry a colored woman. After all, what difference need it make to you?” (270). This crushes Amy’s fairy tale fantasy, for after their ten-month separation, she discovers that she actually *did* love him. She is humiliated and ashamed to learn that his return to her was not the romantic triumph she had envisioned. Instead, she ends up devalued, debased, and devastated. Fauset thus subverts fairy tales and romance novels by undermining Amy’s complete misconception; her heroine now knows the true nature of her “power over” Wynne. He exhumes the fears that she buried within her conscience before her marriage three years prior: “You sold yourself to me then. Haven’t I reason to suppose you are waiting for a higher bidder?” (271). In short, in striking such a heinous bargain, she has forever soiled her image in “good” society. Wynne is probably not the only man who believes that Amy is “bound to fall to some white man” (271) and that she is holding out, not for Prince Charming, but for that “higher bidder.”

A violent scene ensues in which Amy strikes out at Wynne “in a sudden rush of savagery.” She falls “under the fearful impact of his brutal but involuntary blow” (271). This behavior fulfills the anticipated violence of the realistic, “awful novels.” It also recalls violent scenes of African American history, namely, the never-ending cycle of Black female exploitation at the hands of their White “masters.” Amy can no longer defend her own honor in this no-win situation, and the only role that this would-be

romantic heroine can play is that of concubine. The ideal role of Princess/Queen and Lady of the Manor/Miss Ann, or even that of a traditional, respected wife, is unattainable. Her self-deluded quest and reliance on beauty alone has led to her ultimate downfall. Cast out of the category of “good” or “true” women, and now realizing that she is a victim of overly effective negative female socialization, Sleeping Beauty “Wakes” and dreams no more.

Amy decides that she must repair and reinvent not only her own image, but also her American Dream of personal happiness. The Boldins’ early teachings finally return to her now, and she resolves to become self-reliant and financially independent of Wynne. She becomes a clothing designer for a French modiste and moves away from New York to Orange, New Jersey. After four years of steady work, she buys her “freedom” from Wynne by paying him back for the ten months that she lived on his money during their separation. With her newfound sense of responsibility (work ethic) and freedom (declaration of independence) comes a revision of identity, a rebuilding of true character based on inner resolve. Amy rejects her former love of adventure and diverts her attention from “phases and the proper setting for her beauty” (272). If anything, she comes to revile her looks, which have brought her nothing but grief. Where she once apostrophized and embraced her lovely reflection, she now refers to it as ““You *thing* . . . if you hadn’t been so vain, so shallow!” and “[strikes] herself violently again and again across the face until her head ached” (272). This comical and (literally) heavy-handed self-loathing yields Amy a newfound sense of self-respect and freedom once her debt (which, interestingly, Wynne never reclaims) is paid off.

Freed from the shackles of bondage/concubinage, neo-enslavement, and “passing,” Amy is able to pursue her true American Dream. In part, this is a quest for her own individuality, an acknowledgement of selfhood. Having succeeded in that, and in aligning herself with the African American community, she can now achieve a new dream of reunion with the family that she had abandoned almost ten years before. This

completes her maturation process. Where she once only cared for “externals” and had no real feelings for anyone, she now cares deeply for her long-lost loved ones. Thus, Amy’s happily-ever-after ending no longer consists of Prince Charming and Castle but of returning to her true love(s), the Boldins. She also resolves to “work and help with colored people . . . the only ones who have really cared for and wanted me” (274). Her decision to remain racially ambiguous strengthens her sense of tolerance and generosity. She thus represents the American melting pot, which is another American Dream, after all. Being “raceless” increases her feeling of unique individuality and also allows her to be “citizen of the world,” a generous-spirited, multiethnic figure who judges others based on character rather than on “externals.”

Fauset’s deconstruction of the romantic quest culminates in “Double Trouble” (1923), her final short story for *Crisis*. It is also the basis for her third novel, *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and it is generally associated with the latter. In “Double Trouble,” as in “The Sleeper Wakes,” Fauset delineates the unhappy outcome of fairy tale hopes and deferred American Dreams of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” In this case, the fate of cousins Angelique Murray and Laurentine Fletcher intertwine because of their scandalous lineage. Hence, “Double Trouble” is more deterministic and fatalistic than Fauset’s other short stories. Although she continues to warn readers against overly romantic expectations in their quests for happiness, she also reminds them that the sins of the fathers are indeed passed on to their children. Moreover, one must acknowledge and address these past sins, or else the child’s quest for happiness will become one of heartache and tragedy. In “Double Trouble” Fauset also incorporates -- albeit often with a heavy hand -- elements of Greek tragedy, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (from which the title is taken). According to Thadious Davis, it is based on a true story of tragedy and incest that the author heard as a teenager (“Introduction” xviii). Along with the family “curse” and fatalism, this sad tale includes other elements of Greek tragedy such as the chorus, tragic consequences for past transgressions, and what Joseph

F. Feeney refers to as “recognition scenes” (212) in which characters become aware of the true nature of their situations.

Significantly, Laurentine and Angelique’s failed romantic quests and American Dreams of respectability and security suffer from the weak foundation of “Aunt” Sal Fletcher’s own unhappy romantic history. Edendale, the fictional setting of “Double Trouble,” is an insulated Paradise established by former slaveowners and slaves who “following the Civil War had drifted into Jersey from Delaware” (33). Some, apparently, drifted into antebellum patterns as well. Aunt Sal willingly followed her White lover from one life of slavery in the South to another life of neo-slavery in the “free” North. No more than her former master’s concubine (which is reminiscent of Wynne’s insulting offer to Amy in “The Sleeper Wakes”) Aunt Sal submits to a second-best “romantic” fantasy, a submission that forever taints her daughter Laurentine and niece Angelique. Each young woman’s deepest ambition is to gain a respectable foothold in the community and to pursue personal happiness. Their desire for a settled home, stable family life, and respectability are forever elusive because of their family history. This determinism undermines their pursuits of happiness, and both young women are doomed to “settle” for second-best reality.

Angelique is a spirited yet naive seventeen-year-old who thoughtlessly skims through her high school lessons on Shakespeare and classical drama, unaware how applicable they are to the unfolding of her own tragic plot. She blithely quotes “Silly stuff from Macbeth, ‘Double, double, toil and trouble’” (29), unaware of the trouble brewing in her own future. She makes casual reference to “Greek tragedy” while feigning distress in front of “stiff poker-like” Laurentine and is only vaguely disturbed by the fact that neither Laurentine nor “many folks around here do like me” (27). She is puzzled that boys proposition her “as though it didn’t matter how they treated me” but fails to probe beneath the surface: “Maybe it’s because my father’s dead” (28). She loves Malory Fordham, who is significantly “shy, pensive, and enveloped by the aura of

malaise which so mysteriously and perpetually hung over his household” (26).

Unbeknownst to the young lovers, Malory is her half-brother, for Angelique is the product of the adulterous affair between her mother and Malory’s father. Her mother’s actions, as well as her aunt’s, dash Angelique’s romantic hopes. Malory is equally “cursed” by his father’s adultery. Everyone else in town, especially Malory’s three witchlike older sisters, is aware of this awful truth. However, much like Macbeth’s witches, they wait until conditions are right to stir up trouble.

Angelique’s cousin Laurentine is a proud, resentful twenty-eight year-old spinster and illegitimate daughter of Sal Fletcher and Ralph Courtney, Aunt Sal’s former “master” and lover. Laurentine represents the complete subversion of the fairy tale heroine, for this tragic mulatta’s quest for romance and respectability is impossible. She is flawlessly beautiful but also riddled with character flaws. Described as “a dragon . . . hateful, proud, jealous, scornful, intractable” (35), Laurentine is more of an evil stepsister or wicked witch than a princess or damsel in distress. She is the perfect foil for Angelique, who has a truly childlike spirit, a “romantic dreaming girl” (34) whose loss of innocence is the primary tragedy of Fauset’s story. However, the ostracized Laurentine shows no empathy for her cousin, though she is well aware of Angelique’s blemished parentage. Laurentine’s own outcast status has ruined any chance of marrying “well,” which, as in “The Sleeper Wakes,” is presented as a woman’s only means of moving up in the world. Thus, she lashes out jealousy at her carefree cousin, who has two eligible beaux: Malory, who aspires to be an engineer, and the rough but sincere Asshur Judson, who aspires to be a farmer.

The townspeople, along with Malory’s three witchlike sisters, serve as a Greek chorus that not only recants the history of scandal and betrayal but also dons the “tragic mask” when they see Angelique and Malory together in public. There is a palpable “hush” in the crowd as Malory escorts his sweetheart/half-sister to the town picnic, and the collective “face” of the townspeople wears a “fleeting shadow of horror and dismay”

(35). This presages the look of horror on his sisters' faces when he attempts to bring her home to meet them. Once they reveal that she is his half-sister, he proceeds to avoid her in public. Angelique pursues Malory, "feeling something vaguely familiar about the act" (37). When she catches him, his facial expression recalls her earlier nightmare; it is one of "horrid staring eyes, with awful gaping lips, the face of a Greek tragic mask!" In true dramatic style, Malory "raise[s] tragic arms to the careless sky" and appeals to a higher power: "'Oh God how could you! I loved her, I wanted to marry her, and she's my sister!'" (37). The recognition of awful truth, a final acknowledgement of an indifferent Universe, and the destruction of one's personal quest for happiness all serve Fauset's highly dramatic purposes. Malory and Angelique have lost their innocence forever, not only because of their parents' actions but also because of years of harmful secrecy. Neither their respective families nor the townspeople have properly nurtured or "mentored" them. Instead, they have conspired to keep the town's darkest secret from the two people whose fates relied most heavily on its revelation.

Sadly, their worst fate is yet to come, for a long and unhappy adulthood looms ahead of them, much like that of their elders. They will be lonely, resentful outcasts, their quest for happiness destroyed. Angelique faces her own future when she runs home to Laurentine. Her demonic cousin is even more hateful and cruel. Laurentine reveals that the stigma of Angelique's parentage, more than her own illegitimate background, has ultimately destroyed Laurentine's romantic quest:

"Look at me . . . Young, beautiful, educated, -- and nobody wants me . . . [It's] because of you . . . Because my mother was the victim of slavery . . . They would have forgotten all about [that] . . . Now they see you and they say: 'What! And [Angelique's] mother too! A colored man this time. Broke up a home. No excuse for that. Bad blood there. Best leave them alone. . . ' Well you'll know all about it too . . . And you'll sit and watch the years go by . . . And at night you'll curse God, -- but pshaw you won't . . . You'll only cry--" (38-39)



Both of Fauset's would-be romantic heroines are ultimately "cast out of the garden" of Edendale and romantic Paradise as well, for they will never be fully embraced by that provincial-minded community and its aversion to their "bad blood." Ultimately, they must follow Aunt Sal's path and take whatever "leftover love" they can find from their scanty list of suitors. Angelique must settle for the plodding Asshur Lane; and Laurentine must accept the condescending offer of marriage from the "ash-contractor's son" (38). The sins of their forebears have destroyed their own chances for happiness. In addition, the upwardly mobile Black community's willingness to hold onto those sins, rather than forgiving the sinners or their innocent children -- the "products" of those transgressions -- weakens Edendale's social fabric. Without true nurturing, understanding, and compassion, none of its citizens can hope for a happy ending.

Jessie Fauset's characters are often heroic in their romantic quests for personal happiness and material success, the American Dream. Yet naive and misguided romantic notions undermine their quest. With adequate mentors, or at least an enlightened sense of selfhood, they can revise their American Dreams without becoming bitter about the realities of racism and sexism. In "Emmy" and "There Was One Time," Fauset rewards her young lovers by making them face reality rather than succumb to fairy tale illusions and false American Dreams. Once they accept their identity as African Americans and leave off "passing" and imitating nursery rhyme heroines, can they truly face their future with self-assurance. Likewise, in "Mary Elizabeth," Fauset reminds readers to appreciate their comfortable existence, that is, in comparison with the tortured lives of their slave ancestors. The American Dream of a strong family unit is more attainable for these "free" descendants, whose loved ones were *not* sold apart -- and never seen again. In "The Sleeper Wakes" and "Double Trouble," Fauset warns readers of the importance of self-awareness and the dangers of complacency. There are no romantic, happily-ever-after endings for these characters. Instead, they must do the inner work of understanding their lives, i.e., their family history, their inner desires, motivations, and their true

character. Those who have probed their own soul discover a true sense of freedom. Those who are either ignorant of or blithely indifferent to potentially tragic circumstances around them will suffer the most from their deferred American Dreams of personal happiness. Fauset probes her own soul in “My House and a Glimpse of My Life Therein” by envisioning an ideal creative space that allows her freedom to express herself without fear of racism or sexism. However, she is aware throughout that this is an unattainable fairy tale ideal. Yet she can dream without bitterness and continues her romantic quest for literary success despite the limitations placed on Black women writers of the early twentieth century. In spite her own deferred American Dreams, she can still mentor and inspire future generations.

Dorothy West also enjoyed early success publishing her short work before becoming a literary editor in 1934. Like Fauset, she overcomes creative and professional disappointments and emphasizes the importance of mentoring, which will be discussed in the following two chapters. West recognizes the importance of community as a strong foundation for one’s American Dreams. Each individual, especially children, deserves proper nurturing so that the social fabric will be strong enough to produce productive individuals. These quests for happiness continue to be heroic and inspirational, as depicted in Pauline Hopkins’s short fiction, and they often suffer from misguided romanticism, as in Fauset’s work. However, West’s tales incorporate an appreciation of innocence, of inner and actual children, and rewards the naive, optimistic spirit, provided it is based on a foundation of self-reliance and work ethic. Her American Dream, like that of Hopkins and Fauset, is to ensure that readers gain an awareness of self based on knowledge of their cultural history, family background, and their own character.

## CHAPTER 5

### “A CERTAIN STRENGTH”: INNOCENCE AND IRONY IN DOROTHY WEST’S EARLY SHORT FICTION, 1926-1940

Like Jessie Fauset, Dorothy West began publishing short stories years before she became the literary editor of *Challenge* magazine, which she founded in 1934. West’s creative history is longer than Fauset’s, however, for the Boston native began writing at age seven. She published her first short story, “Promise and Fulfillment,” in the *Boston Post* at age fourteen. She regularly won that newspaper’s weekly writing contests over the years, which led to her association with the Boston Quill Club. Eugene Gordon, short story editor of the *Post*, founded this group of Black creative writers and published the *Saturday Evening Quill* magazine. This annual publication had three issues: June 1928, April 1929, and June 1930 (Johnson & Johnson 92). Two of her stories (included in this chapter) were published in the *Quill*: “An Unimportant Man” (1928) and “Prologue to a Life” (1929). These, along with her prize-winning “The Typewriter” (*Opportunity*, July 1926) reveal a talented young writer whose early short fiction is characterized by a recurring theme, i.e., the influence of the parent’s American Dream on the child. In most cases, the parent-child relationship is mutually nurturing and supportive, but at other times there is a strong conflict of interest. The child’s desire to form his/her own identity is expressed in goals that contradict parental values. In some cases, this leads to an irreparable family rift. Overall, however, parent figures sacrifice their own happiness in order to provide for their children, and the prevailing sentiment in West’s early short fiction is that the hope of the race rests on its offspring, its future.

Reminiscent of these well-meaning parents in West's early fiction, as well as of Jessie Fauset in her capacity as literary midwife, West embraced her role of mother and editor when she decided to found *Challenge* magazine. She saw herself and her post-Harlem Renaissance generation as a failure. She wanted to continue the tradition of producing great, inspiring artistic work. She felt that she could make a greater impact on the creative world through supporting the works of younger writers. Still young herself, West was nonetheless able to speak of her care and concern for the next generation of literary artists in her "Dear Reader" column of *Challenge*. The twenty-five year-old editor wrote, "Now that our age enables us to be looked up to, we are more than ever willing to be a matriarchal bosom" (May 1935). Just as she was an innocent abroad in the Red Square (for the failed African American-Russian film project), she and her colleagues were innocents abroad in the unfamiliar seas of literary publishing. The failure of her literary magazine, with all its good intentions, was in part the result of her lack of experience working with literary children and her inability to communicate writing advice to them -- tactfully. To make matters worse, there were conflicts with Richard Wright and his political agenda for *New Challenge* in 1937. There was also West's awareness of subtle, yet potent opposition from other patriarchal figures: "The editors had always been men, and here comes this girl -- who's she? Don't expect me to get all the praise in the world for that magazine -- from them" (Evanier 9). West's care and concern for these young artists does, however, continue the tradition of nurturing and mentoring. This concern builds upon the success -- in spite of racism and sexism -- of both Pauline Hopkins at *Colored American Magazine* (1900-04) and Jessie Redmon Fauset at *Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book* (1919-26). Thus, West's early fiction (1926-40) reveals this "matriarchal" spirit, for as a literary midwife she represents her fictional adult community, which protects its children by anticipating their future accomplishments and preparing them accordingly.

“The Typewriter” (1926), probably West’s best-known short story, shared second prize with Zora Neale Hurston’s “Muttsy” in the fiction contest for *Opportunity*. It was also included in *The Best Short Stories of 1926* (Ferguson 188). Like most of West’s early fiction, it focuses on the struggles of poor urban Blacks whose lives differed from her own more comfortable upbringing. In an interview with Deborah McDowell, the author states that “[My mother] didn’t know how I could write the story because I had no first-hand knowledge of poverty. I remember being indignant and saying to her, ‘I can write about poor people; I can understand how poor people feel.’ [. . .] Maybe my heart goes out to people in difficult situations. [. . .] I am a defender of the underdog” (279). This compassion is evident in “Typewriter,” which Margaret Perry has compared to the later story “An Unimportant Man” (1928). They share the plot of “childlike men” who “satisfy themselves through the lives of their children, even though their communication with the children is partially defective” (133). This in part echoes West’s parents: her aggressive, often manipulative mother, and passive, nurturing father. It is also, however, an unconscious reversal of male and female power, which West experienced as a female literary editor in the male-centered world of publishing. That is, she appropriates a role that had traditionally belonged to men, thus “challenging” the established order and infusing that role with distinctly matriarchal power.

Another recurring element in West’s stories, notably “Hannah Byde” (*Messenger* 1926) and “Prologue to a Life” (1929) is that of the entrapped, bitter Black woman. “Tricked” into motherhood by biology, they are resentful and difficult companions. This probably reflects West’s own ambivalence concerning marriage, after witnessing her parents’ awkward union, and her unhappiness at not being able to have children of her own. (It is interesting to note that West never married.) In contrast, husbands “[retain] a measure of innocence”; this elevates their spirit (Perry 133). Neither Hannah nor Lily Bemis Kane considers abortion as an option, but each scorns impending motherhood, albeit for different reasons. Hannah is a high-strung, neurotic young wife who is

mentally unprepared for the rigors of such responsibility. Lily, on the other hand, grieves the loss of her ten-year-old twin sons, the “golden princes” who physically reflect their father’s “golden bride.” Thus, readers empathize more with the bereaved mother, who has lost her beloved sons, than with the immature Hannah, who lives in a fantasy world and scorns her well-meaning, if not overly romantic, husband. Other wives, although more minor characters, repeat the harpy hausfrau refrain. The nagging, bickering wives of “Typewriter” and “An Unimportant Man” are almost indistinguishable. Marital incompatibility is evident in all of these stories, the worst case being “The Five-Dollar Bill” (*Challenge* 1936), in which the wife commits adultery and uses her own daughter to assist her in her betrayal. Moreover, wives are all fair-skinned beauties with long dark hair; they are also high-strung and controlling like West’s mother, Rachel Pease Benson. Husbands are dark-skinned, nurturing, hard-working and protective of their children -- daughters in particular -- like her own father, Isaac Christopher West, the Black Banana King of Boston. Perry comments that the women “psychologically emasculat[e]” their husbands (134), while the men, although “unachieving, disappointed persons” emerge as innocent and “childlike” (133).

Although the men in West’s stories are the primary breadwinners, they are not mercenary creatures. Control of household funds, management, as well as socioeconomic advancement, is the wife’s domain. The male American Dream in West’s early short fiction is to provide a comfortable home for his family and to prepare his children to be successful, i.e., to go beyond the limits that he could not transcend. In contrast, the female American Dream is often a desire to rise socially, professionally, and economically -- in some cases all of the above. Yet they are also concerned for youngsters. The career-driven Margaret of “Black Dress” (1934), although coldly detached from the reality of her father’s death, is tenderly attentive to her best friend’s offspring, particularly her namesake. Because she did not receive encouragement to pursue her theatrical career (a scandalous profession for all women at the time, especially

for women of color), she admonishes the narrator's children to be relentless in their quests for personal happiness. Other surrogate motherhood themes arise in "Cook" (1934). Here, spinster "Aunt" Viney first sacrifices her youth to support her flighty, bourgeois younger sister after their mother's death, then dedicates her middle-age years to help her niece Lestra to achieve her dream of becoming a concert pianist. An exception to the general nature of West's female characters, Viney is spiritually aware, modest, and generous. Her piety presages that of Mrs. Mason in "Mammy" (1940) and strengthens West's recurring theme of spirituality. The dying father of "Typewriter" and near-death mother of "An Unimportant Man" fear the final confrontation -- meeting God and facing judgment. Aunt Viney, on the other hand, embraces her spirituality and is comfortable to find herself at the end of her life, having succeeded in fulfilling her American Dream to provide for her family. This makes her akin to the father figures of West's other stories rather than likening her to West's frustrated fictional mothers.

Young Essie of "An Unimportant Man," Lestra of "Cook," and Margaret of "The Black Dress" are the artist-daughters who reap the benefits of their elders' sacrifices. Each wants to pursue artistic work, although their American Dreams are "challenged" because of racism, sexism, and, in some cases, even well-meaning family members who insist on higher education and traditional career paths. Essie is gently guided away from dancing to pursue a college education. Lestra is more fortunate, for she has a generous aunt who willingly funds her musical studies abroad. Margaret's complete estrangement from father and hometown is the opposite extreme. Her professional rise to popularity as a stage performer contrasts with her spiritual descent, as is reflected in her "hard" but "beautiful" face. West suggests that, without family and community support, as well as tolerance for the child's nontraditional goals, the child will become an alienated, embittered adult, perhaps even one without a soul. West's award-winning short story "The Typewriter" (*Opportunity*, July 1926) introduces readers to one man's severely circumscribed world. The introduction of a fabulous alter ego, successful

black businessman J. Lucius Jones, brings brief elation to the nameless father figure, and its unexpected demise leads to the man's complete self-annihilation. Many of West's pre-*Challenge* stories contain naturalistic themes of heroic yet futile struggles to overcome one's predetermined existence. Anticipating Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946), West's characters are severely limited by heredity and environment as well as psychological defects. The only way in which West's fictional pawns can hope to succeed, i.e., overcome life's limitations, is through their children. Thus, the father of "The Typewriter" is not only socioeconomically and racially hampered but also emotionally underdeveloped. A once optimistic, Southern-born youth who coveted the American Dream of financial success, the unnamed man instead becomes a harried, fifty-something downtrodden husband, exhausted father, downtown janitor, and lackluster manager of his apartment building in Boston. A series of disappointments, including a nagging wife, two dependent daughters but no son to succeed where he has failed, and constantly harping tenants make him retreat into a fantasy world. Inspired by elder daughter Millie's dictation typing assignments, the faceless breadwinner transforms himself into J. Lucius Jones. This new persona initially saves him from despair, but once he discovers that his daughter has found a secretarial job and removed the machine from their home, he perishes alongside his alter ego. In short, his real life is a poor substitute for his fantasy life, and he cannot accept this humdrum existence.

West includes several easy stereotypes, including an Irish washer woman, henpecked husband, barefoot pickaninny (the protagonist in flashback), and harpy housewife. Yet the young author's portrait of a man who is ultimately crushed by his own lack of ambition and inability to rise above circumstance is incisive and moving. Readers can perceive, almost from the opening paragraph, that the unnamed character, "an abject little man of fifty-odd years" is no hero but rather a Prufrockian underdog who bows and scrapes to others, even those of his own class. His passive-aggressive thoughts further



undermine his character and foreshadow his downfall, for he secretly despises the dependent loved ones for whom he toils with such seemingly servile devotion:

He began to wish passionately that he had never been born, that he had never been married, that he had never been the means of life's coming into the world.

He knew quite suddenly that he hated his flat and his family and his friends. And most of all the incessant [typewriter] that would 'clatter clatter' until every nerve screamed aloud, and the words of the evening paper danced crazily before him, and the insane desire to crush and kill set his fingers twitching. (9)

Fantasies of rebellion against wife and tenants dissipate once he decides that he cannot escape "himself and the routine of years" (10), and this fatalism seals his doom. Unable to develop his personality, or even the courage to speak up and defend himself against others and pursue his dreams of success, he has condemned himself to a life of mediocrity. He lacks the ambition of an Isaac West, the Black Banana King of Boston who taught daughter Dorothy the American work ethic. As his alter ego, J. Lucius Jones, the nameless father of "The Typewriter" can visualize himself in an office on Boylston Street. Yet he cannot actualize that goal. He is not "the progressive type" and thus ends up instead in a succession of poorly paid service jobs (11).

In keeping with the tone of West's early short fiction, the underlying theme in "Typewriter" is one of parental sacrifice of personal comfort and happiness for the sake of the children's future success. The father figure exhibits a grudging willingness to sacrifice needed "food and fuel" money for his daughter. He is shamed into it, however, by his ever-disappointed wife Net, who claims that she wants nothing for herself, but only for her offspring: "You're a poor sort of father if you can't give that child jes' three dollars a month to rent that typewriter. Ain't 'nother girl in school aint got one. An' mo' of 'ems bought an' paid for" (11). Her burden rivals that of her husband, for she must manage the family budget, childrearing, housework, and well-worn clothing, as well as defend her timid spouse against their complaining tenants. Thus, she becomes a shrill,

unhappy woman who nevertheless sacrifices the vanity of new clothes so that the household money can go to Millie's secretarial training (and hopefully a better future as a self-sufficient career woman).

On a symbolic level, the typewriter helps the protagonist to turn his weak, if "insane desire to crush and kill" into a more productive occupation. He wants to reinvent himself as a truly heroic figure. As the fantastic J. Lucius Jones, he no longer desires to murder but to create, and his imaginary correspondence between himself and business luminaries such as Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Morgan is "really the work of an artist" (16). Although it is "just for fun, y'understand," this persona makes it possible for the otherwise psychologically impaired man to perform his daily acts of humility for employer, family, and tenants. The typewriter, at first an "infernal thing" and "a vampire slowly drinking his blood," eventually becomes an instrument of salvation (11). The unnamed protagonist embraces the alter ego that the typewriter allows him to create, not only in name but in spirit. He adopts the mannerisms and habits of a successful man of business; he takes up cigar smoking, reading trade papers, and posturing in front of his secretary, "Miz Hicks" (Minnie) as he dictates his letters to her. Ultimately, however, Jones becomes a crutch upon which the father leans too heavily in order to disguise his low self-esteem. He mails one of his letters to himself, albeit surreptitiously, and carries the rest in his breast pocket for the world to see. When shunned on the streetcar, he privately reminds himself of his own importance as the fictional Jones. These actions reflect his poor self-image in real life, for although his alter ego deals in "billions," he can only deal in small change. He uses this all-enveloping persona as a means of escaping, if only temporarily, his impoverished, humdrum existence. The life of J. Lucius Jones is one that only its creator can truly appreciate; those around him cannot share his unrealistic American Dream. Rather, they are absorbed in their own hardscrabble existence. The father's dream is ridiculous and unattainable in their eyes, not because of racial barriers, which are challenge enough, but because the protagonist lacks courage to

assert himself in small household confrontations with family and tenants, let alone against powerful businessmen.

The father's choice of make-believe name for Minnie is interesting here, for Mrs. Hicks, a bullying tenant, is one of many threatening female presences in his life, including his wife and two daughters. Therefore, by giving Millie the name Hicks, her father acknowledges her as a potentially powerful matriarchal force. That is, by appropriating the name, she symbolically takes on the mantle of the strong-willed and dominant women in her father's life. Moreover, in her successful acquisition of a \$12 per week secretarial position, she emerges as a more successful breadwinner than her father. This final emasculation, as well as the destruction of his fond fantasy by returning the typewriter to the rental agent, becomes a twofold blow. Now the protagonist is unable to compose his final professional missive in which Jones is to consummate a big deal with J.P. Morgan and thereby fulfill his ultimate fantasy of belonging to the Brotherhood of successful American businessmen. To make matters worse, Minnie's success brings peace into the home, and the final sitting room scene is tranquil and pleasant. Net, who is "talking animatedly" to Minnie, later tells the younger Daisy to be quiet so that their father can read the newspaper in peace. It is the attainment of security, after years of struggling, that provides such tranquility. Knowing that her daughter will succeed where her husband has failed makes Net calm and happy in this scene.

Yet it is the peaceful silence that finally kills West's weak-willed protagonist. There is silence where there was once constant typing; there is also silence from his soul, in which the saving comfort of imagination once lived. His daughter --or rather, Miz Hicks -- is no longer his muse, and the typewriter, the mystical instrument that inspired his constant mental compositions, calculations, and creativity, has been removed, leaving him to his miserable existence. Ironically, the silence that "blurred his vision, dulled his brain" is "vast, white, impenetrable" (17). He cannot forget the final mockery of his American Dream; it is, indeed, a "white" dream, which -- in order to be attained by

people of color -- must first be reenvisioned. That is, one must be prepared for the racial barrier as well as for the presumption that one must be at least twice as competent as one's White counterparts. Moreover, the whiteness of the evening paper, which announces the activities of the real J.P. Morgan, shocks the fictional Jones back to stark reality: "It burst upon him. Blinded him . . . Why this -- this was the end! The end of those great moments -- the end of everything [. . .] Against that wall of silence J. Lucius Jones crashed and died" (17). The father's American Dream fails because of its weak foundation, for he is, after all, no financial giant. When his persona perishes, he dies along with it, for his heart can neither withstand life as it is, nor maintain an unattainable fantasy life.

Millie, on the other hand, will fare better, because her character depends on practical ambition rather than impossible daydreams. By setting goals and working diligently toward them, she achieves success. Her reward of a secretarial position, although not a glamorous one, is a realistic foundation upon which to build. In Millie's eyes, the father's death means that she will indeed supplant him and become a more successful breadwinner than her progenitor. Yet her father's life is not sacrificed in vain, because without his financial and emotional support, as well as his participation in their Jones/Hicks charade, Minnie would not have seen her plans come to fruition.

As in "The Typewriter," the protagonist of "Hannah Byde" (*Messenger*, July 1926) is a romantic dreamer who, unable to handle reality, succumbs to a mediocre, if self-inflicted existence. Hannah's American Dream, in contrast with that of the hapless janitor of "Typewriter," is to attain bourgeois status through a good marriage. This reveals a deeply inscribed Cinderella complex; i.e., instead of improving her own lot in life, she relies on Prince Charming to rescue and provide for her. Yet, like the would-be businessman, both a weak personality and biology trap Hannah, for impending motherhood forces her to put aside her own disappointments and to plan for her child's future. She is ultimately a high-strung, self-centered woman who is prone to fits of

temper exacerbated (unbeknownst to her) by her pregnancy. At first, West's narrator seems to empathize with Hannah, for she is a "gentle woman crushed by environment." The narrator soon contradicts this premise, for Hannah is "a spiritless woman of thirty who, having neither the courage nor strength to struggle out of the mire of mediocrity, had married, at twenty, George Byde, simply because the enticing honeymoon to Niagara would mark the first break in the uneventful circle of her life" (197). Hannah can, to a certain extent, be likened to a modern Madame Bovary in her desire for high romance and material comfort, but she has neither the ambition nor the courage to pursue her dreams, for better or worse, as does Flaubert's ill-fated heroine. Thus, Hannah can only retaliate against the results of her own inertia by lashing out at her well-meaning but working-class husband, who is a stable, if not stellar, provider. West's narrator seems caught between empathy and irony in her description of "these sensitive, spiritless Negro women caught fast in the tentacles of awful despair" (197). The tragic mulatta tale is subverted here, for Hannah enslaved herself with her own weakness and becomes the victim of circumstances that she has created for herself, rather than those imposed upon her by others.

Despite a tendency toward melodrama, nineteen-year-old West skillfully illustrates the effects of color caste, socioeconomic class, educational disparity, and gender issues on Hannah and George. The former is a fragile "yellow flower in the wind," while the latter is a "great, coarse, not unkindly, startled giant" in spite of his wife's outbursts. However, he does become a potentially menacing figure when pushed too far, for his lips "thicken" and "the look of a dangerous, savage beast dominate[s] his face" (197). The narrator emphasizes the Beauty/Beast dichotomy by wondering "how the gentlewoman Hannah could have married him . . . his brutal coarseness, his unredeemed ignorance" (197). The nervous wife also plays on the disparity in socioeconomic class by snubbing his gifts of player piano, victrola, and Mamie Waters records. To the struggling, blue-collar provider, these are appropriate presents that

represent his success as a provider. To Hannah, however, who in childhood aspired to be truly rich, her husband's meager gifts are merely the "flaunting emblem of middle-class existence." To add insult to injury, she attacks his modest intellect: "Oh, don't go to the trouble of trying to understand that" (197). The yellow, educated Black woman holds herself above her dark-skinned, humbly literate Black husband, which undermines his own American Dream of comfortable home and family life as a reward for his hard work. It also reflects the sexual tension in their relationship, for Hannah puts up physical barriers as well as those of class, barriers that might (along with the West's own experience of infertility) explain the much-delayed conception of their first child. To make matters worse, Hannah infects George with her dis-ease by taunting him with psychological cruelty and frigidity. Frustrated by his inability to unite with her on any satisfying level, he parallels her cry: "By God you drive me mad! If I was any kind of a man I'd beat you till you ran blood" (197). Their marital incompatibility becomes even more evident with the unwanted arrival of Tillie, the "congenial, jazz-loving" wife of neighbor Doctor Hill. She has an instant rapport with George, who, rejected by Hannah, welcomes the free-spirited, restless newlywed into his home and proceeds to entertain her with the hated Mamie West records. Meanwhile, his high-strung wife wanders off "in customary isolation" to her window retreat while the raucous music offends her "sensitive ears" and Tillie praises it as "the monkey's itch" (198). She and George are simpatico in their mutual love of jazz and blues and good times, all of which the high-bred Hannah considers lowbrow. Moreover, just as she uses her intelligence and cruel wit to wound her husband, so George retaliates, by using Tillie as a weapon against his fretful, hysterical wife. Both relish Hannah's discomfort in the presence of their combined "folk" forces, and their behavior increases the class disparity between husband and wife.

In a moment of despair, Hannah unsuccessfully attempts suicide. George's shock at finding her "prostate figure" turns to scorn and parallels his wife's early vision of her

own dead body. Her husband envisions “dreadful details of inquest and burial” and feels only resentment and hate for her (198). Her apparent suicide symbolizes his failure as provider and life’s companion. Losing his first wife would obligate him to begin his romantic quest all over again; he would have to rebuild the foundation for a stable, settled domestic life. Like the frightened Tillie, George is unable to handle the situation, and they both retreat to the kitchen while Tillie’s husband, Dr. Hill, attends to Hannah. Hill, meanwhile, emerges as the patriarchal voice of reason; he instructs Hannah to prepare herself both mentally and physically for the birth of her child. He is the only character who empathizes with the high-strung young wife and privately opines that her life would have been better “had this gloriously golden woman been born white” (198). His paternal stance contrasts with Hannah’s childish defiance, but his empathy does not override his well-meaning advice that seals her doom. She must remain with her husband and bear her stifling existence for the sake of her child. She must submerge her wild caprices, and she must become mature and maternal. What Dr. Hill sees as a New Year and a new beginning, Hannah sees as the beginning of the end: ““There’s no way out. My hands are tied. Life itself has beaten me”” (199).

Although an admission of defeat, there is a minor sense of selflessness, even minor heroism, in Hannah’s decision to put her child’s future above her own. She informs George of her condition, which almost instantly transforms him into a proud and doting father-to-be. Repulsed by the “gleam in his eyes,” the “swell of passion in his voice,” and the liquor on his breath, she once again constructs a physical and emotional barrier between them by requesting that he sleep on the couch (199). His desire to soothe her with jazz music as she prepares for bed reflects the ever-widening gap between them, even as eventual parenthood bonds them unwillingly together. Hannah’s burst of wild, ironic laughter at the music presages much more of the same for the years ahead -- laughing to keep from crying.

The theme of parental self-sacrifice for the benefit of future generations is very explicit and powerful in West's story "An Unimportant Man" (*Saturday Evening Quill*, June 1928). Recurring themes of marital incompatibility, class distinctions, and conflicting ambitions are also present here. Although reminiscent of the better-known "The Typewriter," this tale ends on an optimistic note. After three tries at the bar exam, Zebediah Jenkins finds that his eventual pass has been disqualified because of another examinee's fraud. However, unlike the weak-willed father of "Typewriter," Zeb survives the annihilation of his American Dream of becoming a lawyer and instead dedicates himself to his daughter's future success so that she can transcend life's defeats. West skillfully weaves the thread of selflessness into her plot. She first traces Miss Lily's undying maternal faith in mediocre Zeb's scholastic ability from high school to the bar exam. She then illustrates the individual and collective concerns of Zeb and his wife Minnie for the headstrong Esther ("Essie") as well as Miss Lily's ambition for her granddaughter. West also introduces "young Parker," an ambitious associate of Zeb, who emerges as a son figure who succeeds where the older man has failed. Parker also becomes a secondary father figure to Essie. As practical a planner as Millie in "Typewriter," he passes his bar exam and realizes his American Dream of becoming an attorney. In turn, he plans the rest of his life with concern for future children uppermost in his mind, e.g., the "right" social circles, the "right" wife, and the "right" environment in which his offspring can succeed. Essie, whose character combines an interesting contrast of practical realism and dreamy-eyed fantasy, is a child of hope. She is the beneficiary of generations of encouragement, faith, and careful planning. The efforts of her elders, including Parker, her parents, and her grandmother, have insured that she will be strong enough to achieve her own American Dream. Moreover, as in "Typewriter" the father lives through his child's future accomplishment, aware that his own life will proceed in an "unimportant" manner. As the primary patriarchal influence in Essie's life, Zeb is the emotional, romantic force, while both Miss Lily and Minnie represent the



rational, practical force; this sex role reversal is yet another recurring theme in West's early short fiction.

Miss Lily is determined to protect the future of granddaughter Essie, who dreams of becoming a dancer. Miss Lily considers this a nonrespectable profession for any young woman. It is, moreover, a particularly dangerous occupation for a respectable young woman of color, who must preserve her virtue at all costs (which is not unlike Pauline Hopkins's inclusion of Black women -- for better or worse -- into the Victorian cult of true womanhood) and thus preserve the reputation of her family and race. Aware that Essie is intelligent, she admonishes the girl to "let your brain work for you, chile, not your face." She also reasserts her loyalty to Zeb: "They ain't nothin' I've done for you I regret. They ain't a gray hair on my head, they ain't a line on my old face, they ain't a misery in my old bones that I ain't glad it's there, if it's meant the independence of my chile!" (148). Miss Lily is even more vehement in her desire to protect Essie's future than Zeb's; however, the child is too young and self-centered to appreciate the older woman's passion: "She was interested but unmoved [. . .] Old people were fools" (148). Zeb initially defends his daughter's romantic aspirations to his mother, convinced that her happiness -- much like his own thwarted romantic quest, which was supplanted by his mother's ambitions for him -- comes first. He regrets leaving behind a simpler life of love and creature comforts in the South for an uncertain future in the North. Following Miss Lily's lead in repayment for her sacrifices as a single parent, he has relinquished any chance for personal happiness. Instead of fulfilling the romantic quest of marriage with Wanda, his childhood sweetheart, Zeb instead marries the "lost white bird" Minnie Means, who becomes yet another bitter, querulous, and high-strung harpy wife. He fears that Miss Lily's manipulation of Essie's future will result in his daughter's unhappiness as well.

Zeb's defense of and desire to bond with Essie is also a further development of the father-daughter relationship introduced in "Typewriter." Yet rather than use her as a

means to fulfill his own fantasy, as in “Typewriter,” Zeb talks to his child as an individual and tries to understand her unique personality. Instead of preaching independence and education at her, as Miss Lily does, he empathizes with Essie’s desire to “be something that’s beautiful,” though he warns her that the classical arts are traditionally closed to women of color. Yet Essie is as determined as Young Parker to succeed in life: “Nothin’s ever going to be hard for me, Papa [. . .] God didn’t make me that way” (150).

Parker becomes a secondary patriarchal influence in Essie’s life -- and a more traditional one at that -- for he has definite ideas about the proper career choice (if any) for women. Like Millie of “Typewriter,” his path is clear and has recognizable, attainable goals. He is described as “expensive and prosperous” in his attire; he is socially in demand and displays some (potential) economic power, “prattling . . . about a new Harmon” and giving Essie a silver dollar. Again, however, the young girl is unimpressed with her elders and focuses instead on the “little beads of grease on his forehead” and notes how “his nostrils distended too much when he talked” (153). Her childish outburst to his opinion that “All nice colored girls are teachers [. . .] There’s nothing else for a real nice girl to do” presages her rebellious adolescence, ““Then I won’t be a nice girl . . . I won’t be a crazy old teacher. I’m gonna be naughty all the rest of my life, so I can be a dancer”” (154). By asserting herself as a future artist, she rebels against social dictates for women of color and her right to choose her own American Dream. She won’t wear a false mask of bourgeois manners in order to become socially acceptable, as does Parker: “Way down deep in me I sorta like music, but nobody’s ever going to know it” (155).

A near-death “spell” forces Minnie to reveal her true love and concern for her daughter. Her fear of death and God, like that of the dying father in “The Typewriter,” compels her to exclaim to Zeb, “I’d cut off my hand in a moment if I thought it would do her any good” (156). Her speech begins to convince her husband that he has perhaps led

Essie astray by preaching the pursuit of happiness, rather than higher education and traditional employment. Minnie's limited education and ensuing adulthood of near-illiteracy contributes to her frustration. It is understandable, then, that she does not want her child to become an uncultured household drudge like herself: "I'd rather my child died right now than grow up an ignorant woman like me" (157). Knowing that Zeb cannot provide a stable economic future to support Essie's artistic ambitions, Minnie begs him to promise to send their daughter to college. At first Zeb rebels, not only against his wife, but against his mother and Parker, childishy siding with Essie's desire to choose her own path rather than have it chosen for her by others. But he also sees his own weakness in his child and becomes more realistic.

Zeb receives a providential sign that forces him to carry out his wife's wish: the letter that announces the invalidation of his original pass on the bar exam. "He understood now [. . .] She was too much like him [. . .] And he had wrongly encouraged her" (160). He sees Essie's "glorious behavior" as a tool for the advancement of the race and fears that her "childish whim" will ultimately destroy her, just as his idle, simple, romantic dreams crushed him. He ultimately adopts the traditional American Dream as prescribed by mother, wife, and surrogate "son" Parker -- education -- for his daughter. West concludes her story much as Pauline Hopkins does in her early twentieth-century fiction, i.e., with the theme of racial uplift. Personal sacrifices for the benefit of the race, combined with the spirit of self-reliance, financial independence, personal pride, and success reflect well on the entire race: "The race was too young, its achievements too few, for whimsical indulgence [. . .] It must not matter that it broke your heart, if sacrifice meant a forward step toward the freedom of our people" (160).

Themes of parental sacrifice, family ties broken then renewed, and reincarnation characterize "Prologue to a Life" (*Saturday Evening Quill*, April 1929). As in "Hannah Byde," West combines images of an unhappy, frigid wife and a nurturing yet unappreciated husband as well as the trappings of fairy tale romance. "Prologue" also

anticipates the creation of West's most memorable fictional character, Cleo Judson, of *The Living Is Easy* (1948). The heroine of this story, Lily Bemis, is yet another golden bride with long dark hair who enchants dark-skinned, blue-eyed Luke Kane when a bicycle mishap brings them together (a tale loosely based on an early encounter between West's parents). Luke becomes a knight in shining armor who rescues the lovely princess and quickly sweeps the fellow Southerner off her feet. They are soon wed, and they quickly set up a new home in Boston. Like Cleo, Lily is calculating and socially ambitious for herself and her future children, although she is indifferent to her husband: "She did not love him [. . .] Men were chiefly important as providers. She would have married any healthy man with prospects . . ." (86). Luke, on the other hand, does love her, but he also worships her as a trophy wife. At first, it appears that his romantic quest is a success, for he has apparently won top prize: a "golden bride" who will become his "queen" (87). Yet as in "Hannah Byde," there is a striking contrast between the frigid, Beauty wife and hardworking, yet vaguely brutish Beast husband, whose "wolfish" eating habits make Lily "rather ill" (87). They do, however, share the American Dream of economic and family security. Lily wants a good provider and a "smart sturdy son." Like mother Minnie in "An Unimportant Man," she knows that her best success will come from bearing clever children. Luke, on the other hand, wants to provide a stable home and business for his loved ones.

Typical of West's reversed sex roles, Lily emerges as the rational, practical force in the marriage, and Luke is the emotionally driven, nurturing force. Lily's outlook on life, moreover, is curiously misogynistic, and her attitude toward women presages her ultimate detachment from her daughter (and echoes Essie's sentiments about women in "An Unimportant Man"): "I can't get along with no women. I almost hate women. They're not honest. They're weaklings. They care about cheap things" (88). This ironic self-hatred -- for she knows herself to be as guilty of the qualities that she despises in other women -- reveals a weak character incapable of transcending personal tragedy.

When Jamie and John, her twin boys, die in a skating accident, she is destroyed. They are Lily's "golden" trophies, an extension of herself, just as she is Luke's prize, an extension of himself. Beyond perfection, they are clever, courteous, intelligent, beautiful, and obedient little princes. For ten years they round out Lily's contented existence. Her pride in her firstborn twin boys is so obsessive that her own spirit dies with them (much as the father of "The Typewriter" dies with the annihilation of his persona, J. Lucius Jones). This spiritual death presages her physical death in childbirth to daughter Lily II. Moreover, after the twins' funeral, she withdraws both emotionally and physically from her husband, sleeping in the boys' bedroom, and she becomes, much like Hannah Byde, a mentally unstable "ice princess" in her grief.

Luke's position as a restaurateur -- feeding others -- as well as his gift of spiritual healing, reflects his nurturing strength. He cooks for the masses as well as for his wife and mother when their spirits are low following the family tragedy. He later brings Lily back from the brink of death when she contracts pneumonia. The birth of his daughter Lily II, who is the mirror image of her father (dark-skinned with blue eyes), suggests that the nurturing forces of love, devotion, and spirituality are stronger than those of vanity, materialism, and status; these last represent Lily's socioeconomic ambitions. Luke's primary American Dream is that of a nurturing, mutually supportive family unit, while Lily's Dream is primarily one of status, i.e., one's standing in the community, which she can achieve through a successful husband and clever children.

Lily II is a miracle child of sorts, conceived during her parents' final night of union following Lily's miraculous recovery from pneumonia. After learning of her pregnancy, however, the embittered mother rebuilds her physical and emotional walls and damns the unborn child, "curs[ing] it in [her] despair" (93). Although her behavior is reminiscent of Hannah Byde, Lily garners more sympathy as a much-bereaved mother rather than the flighty, immature young wife, who is frustrated by her own fairy tale delusions of romance and escapism. Luke's raw emotion contrasts with his wife's scorn;

he weeps in the face of her hatred for the new life growing inside her. Her unwillingness to terminate the pregnancy is based more on her fear of God rather than on parental love, and she chooses unhappiness on Earth rather than eternal damnation in the afterlife. Yet it is this bitter resignation that leads to her own death. The daughter cannot survive with such an unloving mother, and Lily is content to die. To add insult to injury, the unwanted child is a girl, a despised “weakling,” as Lily regards all female creatures.

Luke’s love cannot overcome Lily’s grim willingness to die, but it is strong enough to breathe life into his newborn daughter. Rather than sacrifice himself with grief for the loss of his wife, as Lily does for their twin boys, he instantly bonds with Lily II. He immediately names her, thereby reincarnating his wife’s spirit and continuing the cycle of life. Lily II’s name, combined with Luke’s features, creates a miracle child whose very existence links the otherwise eternally distant husband and wife. Their ultimate American Dream -- continuing the family line through surviving children -- comes true with Lily II’s birth and Luke’s heroic pledge to live to raise and protect his daughter, rather than turn away in scorn. His actions echo the self-sacrifice of fathers in “The Typewriter” and “An Unimportant Man” and promise a safe, loving haven for his child.

“Cook” was published in *Challenge* magazine (March 1934) under one of West’s two known pseudonyms, Jane Isaac, based on her father’s name, Isaac Christopher West. (She also published work in her magazine as Mary Christopher.) The author’s work during the *Challenge/New Challenge* period (1934-37) becomes more realistic than naturalistic; the emphasis turns away from details of impending pregnancy, illness, and threats of physical self-destruction to a modern deconstruction of the traditional, nuclear family unit. Here West describes “broken” homes and untraditional (e.g., name-only) marriages, extended families, and surrogate nurturers. The young literary editor also experiments with a different point of view here, writing from the perspective of a pious, fifty-year-old domestic worker. Miss Lavinia Williams (“Viney”) is a hard-working

matriarchal figure whose American Dream is simply to provide for her sister's family; this consists of struggling young doctor Neil Clements, pampered wife Adele ("Dell"), and their high-strung, artistic daughter Lestra. "Cook" is a definite "Mammy" figure, and her character is riddled with stereotypes. She is fastidiously religious, hums "sad slave songs," and, for a relatively young woman of fifty, she has a "grandmother face" and is full of grandmother wisdom. She is appropriately loyal to her employers, although she is also critical of them as "second class white folk" (32). She is also a Big Mamma matriarch and has sacrificed her own youth to raise her flighty younger sister. She puts Dell through boarding school and college, which allows Dell to become a woman of leisure whose education wins her a respectable husband and "dicty" lifestyle; thus, the younger woman's American Dream is completely fulfilled. Resigned to being a "born old maid," on the other hand, Viney overcomes her initial jealousy when her niece Lestra is born. Viney embraces her maternal instinct by devoting her life to Lestra as a surrogate parent, just as she devoted her youth to Dell's upbringing. Of her house in Harlem (which has apparently been bought and paid for on a cook's wages), Viney says: "All this house means to me is that it's a roof over her head" (31). She selflessly brings her "numbers" winnings of \$2500 from Boston for her sister's family; providentially, Viney also brings her "modest insurance policy" with her on what turns out to be her final visit to New York.

West's recurring theme of dissociation from church and religion altogether appears in "Cook." Thus, Viney's American Dream of providing for her family includes bringing them into a spiritual awareness. She is the family's moral center, the caretaker of their souls as well as of their temporal desires (again, not unlike the dictates of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity of the Victorian cult of true womanhood). The God-given "power to foresee" lucky numbers in her dreams is Viney's reward for her spirituality, and she uses divine direction in order to determine how best to share her winnings with others. Her sister Dell, on the other hand, is overly concerned with

material wealth, although her lifestyle is already considerably luxurious, and she covets the social attention of other Black bourgeoisie. In a hypocritical moment, however, she reveals her true self: “My God, you know a hundred niggers will be running amuck here tonight. And there isn’t one of them who couldn’t use two thousand dollars” (32). Viney is appalled over the lack of religious guidance in the Clement household; her concern for the fate of her race is a spiritual counterpart to the conclusion of “An Unimportant Man”: “Colored folks were too few generations removed from sorrow songs and slavery. How could they forget the God of deliverance?” (32). West again suggests that in keeping with the philosophy of uplift, people of color must maintain a sense of faith and spirituality to help elevate the race.

Neil shares Viney’s concern for posterity and is frustrated by the high infant mortality rate in his community. In his despair he becomes as profane as his wife: “Oh God, Negro children die in droves; and they are all our hope” (33). Yet unlike his social-climbing wife, his exclamation is tempered with sincerity. Like Luke Kane of “Prologue to a Life,” Neil is a nurturing, healing masculine force. He is more compassionate than his frivolous wife, though he also takes divine guidance lightly, for which Viney frequently reprimands him. With her help, however, he is inspired to fulfill his own American Dream. Rather than become bitter and discouraged over the lack of proper health care for his people, he instead determines to open his own (or rather, Viney’s) house as “a fine big hospital” (34). Again, Viney selflessly agrees to give away her only material possessions -- her home and \$2500-- to aid him in his quest.

Lestra, who wishes to study piano in Italy, is the fruition of West’s earlier artistic children, such as Ellie in “An Unimportant Man,” who desire to “be something beautiful.” She also has a profane streak that shocks her Aunt Viney, yet Lestra’s words belie her passionate defense of her practice space, which she will lose when the family moves from their fine big house. Viney replies: ““You all in this house are forever calling ‘Lord, Lord!’ and not one of you ever goes inside a church”” (35). Yet for all her



intense ramblings, Lestra is as practical and determined as Minnie in “The Typewriter.” She has a realistic plan for her artistic future; she has chosen a maestro and calculated the cost of overseas passage and living expenses in Europe. The pragmatic daughter and her idealistic father are prime examples of the (African) American Dream of individual success in spite of obstacles. Viney empowers their dreams by providing necessary emotional and financial support as well as spiritual guidance. Viney achieves success by enabling them to achieve theirs, knowing that she is, in contrast, the mule of the world; she is a woman who “dies in harness” and is the “lowliest of the flock” (34). Her early sacrifices for Dell come to fruition in Lestra’s talent and in Neil’s selfless devotion to the masses. Viney thus emerges as another maternal figure in West’s early fiction, such as Lily in “Prologue” and Minnie in “An Unimportant Man” who, seeing their own limits, make sacrifices to ensure that their loved ones escape a future of quiet servitude and mediocrity.

West takes a more cynical look at unconditional parental love, self-sacrifice, and broken American Dreams in “The Five Dollar Bill,” (as Mary Christopher in *Challenge*, June 1936). Here, a father sets aside his own ruined American Dream of an ideal, stable family unit for his child’s sake. He is very much aware of his young wife’s infidelity -- both emotional and financial -- yet he keeps up appearances so that his daughter Judy can still maintain a sense of security. The tragedy of the story is that Judy does not understand her father’s sacrifice, though she is well aware of her mother’s disloyalty to her father. This is an interesting contrast to West’s other early stories, in which such sacrifices promise optimistic results. Moreover, the girl realizes that she herself plays a poor second fiddle to “the college man,” her mother’s lover. Judy ultimately resents both parents: her mother because of her insincere, manipulative love, and her father because of his apparent weakness in letting the sham marriage continue. Judy learns that adults cannot be trusted and that parents are not necessarily kind and generous gods but flawed human beings. Because she still holds a child’s romantic, idealistic notions about “grown-

up people,” she cannot forgive them their weaknesses. She also abandons both parents by withdrawing both emotionally and physically from them. Thus, West undermines the ideal of the strong nuclear American family as a nurturing haven for a child; that is, she demystifies this particular American Dream by anticipating a more modern family structure of broken homes and emotional detachment between relatives. The father’s emotional and financial sacrifices are great, yet they are essentially unappreciated. Finally, there is no true sense of understanding between parent and child. It is sadly evident that this father loves his daughter very much. Yet his desperate attempt to bandage the damaged family unit creates a rift between himself and Judy that is almost as wide as that between Judy and her disloyal mother.

Interestingly, West’s tale is semi-autobiographical. As in many of her early short stories, her husband and wife characters are modeled after her own parents, Isaac and Rachel West. In this case, the author recalls an incident at age seven (much like Judy in “Five”) in which she earned five dollars for selling magazine subscriptions. Rachel West took the money from Dorothy with never-fulfilled promises of repaying her. West reveals that her father, although wealthy, did not give her mother spending money, so Rachel West pawned many of her own belongings for cash (Guinier 10). West develops these childhood anecdotes into a full-fledged tale of betrayal and loss of innocence. Significantly then, the mother-daughter relationship is the heart of the story. West explores the psychology behind this particular parent-child union, rather than focusing on her more typical father-daughter relationships, such as in “The Typewriter” and “An Unimportant Man.” What makes this relationship even more intriguing is its poignancy, for the child craves her mother’s love and is always disappointed. West clearly illustrates the mother’s desperate attempts to cling to her lover, even at the expense of losing her daughter’s trust and respect. By doing so, West completes her deconstruction of the child’s American Dream of heroic parents and shows them instead as they truly are, i.e., individuals with often irrational desires and lapses in judgement. Judy’s mother is a

woman who is hell-bent on her romantic quest. Judy's father is a successful provider who has yet failed to achieve the American Dream of loving home and family; yet he struggles to keep the dream alive for his child, even if it is only an illusion.

The opening paragraphs set up the theme of mistrust and indicate early on that there is some division within the family. Seven-year-old Judy seems to be wise to the ways of adults. Curiously, however, she is also somewhat unenlightened about her own family relationships. She recognizes her father as a relative "because they had the same name," but because of his advanced years, she wonders if he is "like a grandfather" (19). Yet she hesitates to ask about the specific nature of their blood tie, for she knows that she won't get a satisfactory response: "either the grown-up people said, run and play, or gave you ridiculous answers with superior smiles . . . It was the big questions . . . that grown-up people were never truthful about" (19). Moreover, Judy is aware that her parents do not share a bedroom and in fact "often [wonders] if the father lived with them" (20). She later overhears her mother tell her "college man" lover that "Jim and I have not lived together as man and wife for months" (20).

Although the father's unappreciated sacrifice for his daughter -- salvaging his American Dream by keeping up appearances -- is tragic, the central heartbreak is Judy's alone. Throughout the story she recognizes her father's loyalty, yet she clings emotionally to her disloyal mother. The father-daughter relationship is kind and loving, if a bit aloof on the daughter's side. The father is demonstrative and protective. He "[hugs] and [kisses] her hard" when she successfully reads to him at age four. Judy notes "his kind eyes" as she tries to determine his relationship to her; and he protects her when her mother is angry and swearing, "[reproaching] her for saying such words before Judy" (20). His greatest sacrifice comes when he recants his threat to divorce the mother and take Judy away from her. The girl's tearful reaction makes him decide against both courses of action "for the child's sake" (21). He knows that his marriage is in name only, but he will not allow his daughter to live in a broken home. When Judy later decides that

she wants to sell reproductions of famous paintings in order to buy a “moving picture machine,” her father is supportive and “proud of his little businesswoman” (22). He helps her to send off for the merchandise, not knowing that Judy plans to give the money to her mother to give to “that old college man” for “his old books” (22).

West contrasts Judy’s unrequited love for her mother with the mother’s unrequited love for her “college man.” The author’s simple yet telling descriptions undermine yet another American Dream; that is, if a child is said to have such a dream, it is that of a stable home and loving and trusting relationship with her family. West sums up the mother’s character in one sentence: “Mother could kill anything without feeling queer” (20). This ironic line applies to human love as well as to household pests. While Judy feels a childlike compassion for a “fly’s family” once she kills it, or is nauseated by a bloody, squished mosquito, her mother is actually pleased: “Got him good, didn’t you, darling” (20). Her words belie her cold and well-calculated actions throughout the story. She unthinkingly “kills” love in her own home, first her husband, then her own child. Yet Judy remains as protective of her mother as her father is protective of her. She longs to run to her mother’s defense when her parents quarrel, although “her mother’s words hit hardest” (21). When her father threatens divorce, Judy “[throws] herself into her mother’s arms . . . sobbing wildly and saying hysterical things” (21). The mother uses Judy’s loyalty in order to save herself; she realizes that if it not for this child, she would be divorced and homeless. Thus, she milks the loving mother role, and Judy unwittingly plays right into her hands. “Her mother held her close and began to cry too, saying, there, there, my precious, just like Judy had always wanted to say to her” (21). If she loves her daughter at all, it is only in proportion to her daughter’s usefulness in achieving her own ends.

Judy hopes to keep her mother’s love, but she knows that it is a hopeless situation. She feels “sick and afraid” when she sees her mother walk “up and down and around the room looking burningly beautiful” (22), sick with her own unrequited love for her

scornful young lover. When the father ceases leaving the mother household money, Judy decides to sell the reproductions so that her mother can pay the “college man” for his “books.” At first Judy thinks that her plan to win her mother’s love is successful, for the mother is “radiant” and holds her daughter’s hand when the father brings Judy’s five dollars’ worth of profit home. Judy doesn’t realize that her mother’s happiness stems not from the loving mother-daughter bond, but from knowing that this money will bring about her reconciliation with her beloved “college man.” In the meantime, Judy believes that she and her mother are having a special “moment,” for they “[smile] at each other and shut out the male, their husband and father” (23). While the mother turns her back on her (legal) life partner and breadwinner, Judy turns her back on the one person who truly loves and protects her in order to curry favor from the mother who constantly betrays her. Reality sets in, however, when Judy accompanies her mother to the store to cash in her silver money for a five-dollar bill. At first she indulges her mother, saying “you take it for me Mommy, with the same indulgence that mothers use in saying to small children, you may carry the package, dear” (23). When her mother charms the shopkeeper into borrowing a nickel for the pay phone, however, (which she promptly uses to phone her lover), Judy feels sick again. “She knew her mother’s burning beauty had not been for her, nor was it now for [the grocer]” (23). There is further evidence of her mother’s betrayal, for there is “company china” in the kitchen sink when Judy comes home for lunch the next day: “The plate her mother set before her was not a company plate” (24). Moreover, her mother fabricates a story about Judy’s five-dollar bill: “Darling, I sent your money off myself. I was passing the post office . . .” (24). She and Judy continue the charade in front of Judy’s father; weeks pass, and the “moving picture machine” that Judy allegedly sent off for in return for selling the reproductions never arrives. Her mother speaks “cheerfully,” and her eyes, as she looks blatantly at her daughter, are “bright” and “unwavering” (25). Eventually, her father tells her that “Judy must just consider it an unfortunate experience and profit by it” (25), not realizing just

how meaningful his words are. Losing trust in one's parents is a truly "unfortunate experience" for a small child.

The concluding paragraphs reaffirm Judy's initial distrust of adults. She receives a cruel "newspaper page" from the Chicago advertiser of the reproduction/moving picture machine company that tells the story of a little girl who went to jail for not sending her money to the company after selling the pictures: "[Judy] knew even if she screwed up the courage to go to a grown-up, she would get the untruthful answer, children don't go to jail, when there was that picture of that little girl which proved that they did" (25). She is afraid to tell her parents because she can no longer trust them. West's final cynical lines sum up Judy's "unfortunate experience," for "childhood is full of unrequited love, and suffering, and tears" (25). Judy's unrequited love for her mother leads to a sense of suffering and fear that will take years to heal. She sheds tears for the loss of innocence and broken dreams of a happy home and stable family life. West suggests that parents look back on their own childhood years and remember their own painful experiences in order to empathize with their offspring. Most importantly, in order to help their children to realize their goals -- whatever they might be -- parents should try to provide an environment of honesty and trust, rather than protecting children from harsh reality. A strong, loving foundation can give children a sense of self-worth; it can also give them and the strength to survive the racial challenges and obstacles that threaten to defer their American Dreams.

Two of West's early short stories, "The Black Dress" (*Opportunity*, May 1934) and "Mammy" (*Opportunity*, October 1940), explore the dark side of the American Dream, or rather, the American Dream gone awry. In each tale, a Black woman achieves a certain level of professional success, albeit at the expense of her own humanity. She loses essential connections to family and community. The ostracized child becomes an embittered adult in "The Black Dress," while the white-collar professional becomes estranged from her ancestral (in this case, Southern) roots in "Mammy," as reflected in

the latter story's ironic title. In order for the American Dream of professional success to come true, West suggests that one needs a strong foundation of family and community support as well as an appreciation for heritage. A child without such a foundation will grow up without a soul. In addition, "Mammy" reveals a pervasive fear of the complete alienation -- even annihilation -- of once-revered family bonds (as hinted at in "The Five Dollar Bill") as well as to one's heritage. Attempts to connect with the past and to use that knowledge to enrich one's present and future are futile and meaningless. On one hand, there is no fundamental understanding of or appreciation for those slave ancestors and their sacrifices, as reflected in the welfare case worker's ultimate dismissal of "Mammy's" claim. On the other hand, there is no common ground with one's peers, as reflected in the case worker's encounter with the elevator operator. As for the future, there is no hope whatsoever, for it has been murdered in order to protect a false history of glory days that ultimately means nothing, as reflected in Mrs. Mason murdering her mulatto grandson in order to maintain her status as a "White" woman. Ultimately, West's characters find themselves alone in the "void," for there is no security, or faith, upon which they can grasp for comfort.

"Black Dress" is told in first-person -- a rare point of view in West's fiction, as in Fauset's -- from the perspective of a well-intentioned wife and mother who anticipates the arrival of her long-absent best friend Margaret Johnson. The unnamed narrator hopes to bridge the gap between Margaret, a successful stage performer who left home twelve years ago, and her dying father, Mr. Johnson. Margaret's rejection in childhood by her father and community contrasts with most of West's fiction. Family and community usually unite to nurture and encourage children, whether they choose nontraditional goals (e.g., an artist's life) or a conservative lifestyle of college education and professional work. The lack of mutual tolerance or acceptance permanently undermines the father-daughter relationship in this story, though the well-meaning narrator is convinced that Mr. Johnson regrets his behavior; thus, she believes that reconciliation is possible.

Because it is Christmas -- the season of brotherhood and forgiveness -- the narrator hopes that she can both comfort Margaret during her visit and reunite father and daughter. Ultimately, however, the narrator learns that her best friend has grown callous and cold during the years of her estrangement from home and family.

West critiques the artistic lifestyle here, for it seems that Margaret has taken the immoral path -- as foretold by her childhood community -- and confirmed their worst suspicions, as indicated in the narrator's casually ironic phrase, "between shows and husbands" (140). Thus, this story bookends "An Unimportant Man" and serves as a cautionary tale. Margaret, the embittered, thirty-year-old performer, represents Essie's possible fate -- an adult who has pursued her dream to be "something beautiful," but at a heavy cost. Margaret's strained relationship with her father is unusual in comparison to the close father-daughter bonds present in West's other stories; moreover, it reveals an anti-Electra complex. Again, the artist must maintain family bonds, natural or extended, in order to round out her success as an individual. The narrator notes Margaret's "hard" yet "beautiful" face as she admonishes the narrator's children on Christmas Eve to "Be happy. Let nothing stand in the way of your being happy" (140). This advice echoes Zeb's misguided early advice to Essie to put personal happiness above community responsibility and racial uplift. Margaret, in turn, is determined that the narrator's children also pursue their happiness at all costs. Her hardness reflects her own early experience with rejection as well as her fear that the children will also be judged and criticized if their life choices aren't socially acceptable. In contrast, the narrator, a traditional wife and mother, who is nurturing and protective of her loved ones, feels guilty about withholding news of Mr. Johnson's death until after Christmas. She does so, however, not wanting to spoil her children's holiday. Yet one wonders whether she would remain loving and protective, should her children grow up and adopt conflicting values. Moreover, would the children follow Margaret's advice to abandon all for the sake of happiness? Ironically, one of the narrator's children is named after the actress,



the underlying assumption being that she may very well become Margaret's namesake in every way.

On another ironic level, the narrator is ashamed of her part in delaying news of Johnson's passing (of which Margaret is well aware before her arrival). Yet "the most wicked thing I would ever do" is nothing compared to the callous way in which Margaret shoves her black dress -- at the last minute -- into her suitcase upon receiving the fateful telegram. This is the final blow to her humanity. Ambition meant more to her than family, as also exemplified in her inability to form lasting relationships, even that with the narrator -- her alleged best friend -- save for occasional telegrams and generous yet meaningless, checks. She is so disconnected from other people that she can register no emotional response to her father's death. In fact, she is "radiant" upon reaching the narrator's home for her holiday visit, yet she can only mechanically go through the motions of including appropriate funeral attire in her (emotional) baggage. The narrator reaches her epiphanic moment upon seeing the crumpled-up dress in Margaret's suitcase and hearing her friend's indifferent comment: "'This went in at the last moment. It'll have to be pressed before I wear it'" (158). Sadly, the narrator's efforts to soften the blow become useless, and she grows into a final, cynical awareness about her best friend's true character. Suddenly, Margaret is a "stranger," seemingly untouched by the death of her last living relative.

"Mammy" (1940) recalls themes of "Cook" as it centers around the life of a faithful, God-fearing, Aunt Jemima-like household servant. In this case, however, Mrs. Mason ("Mammy") is emotionally -- and morally -- tied to the family for whom she cooks and cleans. West incorporates the popular "passing" plot as well as many other antebellum themes in this story, e.g., the tragic mulatta, the plantation hierarchy amongst "house" and "field" slaves, and the relationship between "Miss Ann(s)" and their trickster figure servants, who "put on missus." West also incorporates modern topics, e.g., isolation, alienation, class struggle, and -- influenced by the Depression -- a realistic and

naturalistic “survival of the fittest” theme, for each character struggles desperately to maintain a safe socioeconomic status. There is also a modern sense of disconnection, i.e., futile attempts to connect to others that result in even greater misunderstanding between people. There is, moreover, no secure existence for these characters in their own psyches. Unable to connect with their own history and to share it with others, they feel no sense of heritage, i.e., a strong foundation upon which to build a satisfying life. West’s characters imprison themselves in their own anxiety; they understand neither themselves nor each other.

American Dreams are in conflict throughout this story. The unnamed “Negro welfare investigator,” who has achieved educational and professional status, has thus earned the respect of her peers. Her success is the manifestation of parental sacrifice, as seen in West’s earlier stories. Yet the investigator’s accomplishment has come with a price -- the loss of active empathy for one’s fellow beings -- which is reminiscent of Margaret in “Black Dress.” The investigator’s training and sense of duty to her employer has divided her from the very people she is supposed to help, the struggling Black citizens on relief. In particular is the group of transplanted Southern Blacks, whose painful history she, as a Northerner, can neither understand nor accept as part of her own heritage.

The elevator operator who insults her in front of a White passenger (the first “Miss Ann” figure) is simply playing the old plantation role of “puttin on missus” in order to safeguard his position. Ironically, the investigator is a “house servant” in “field worker’s” clothes who transgresses the Big House rules by using the front entrance and main elevator instead of the service facilities. The elevator operator, who has already witnessed the replacement of a Black doorman with a White one, is disrespectful to her out of fear. He is the house servant who must follow the rules or “eat dirt” with field hands. Thus, he treats the welfare investigator like an intruder, i.e., a field hand who intrudes on his turf. Ironically, however, the investigator is even more privileged. Far

from being a field hand, she represents both a socioeconomic and gender threat to the elevator operator. Her advanced education allows her wider employment opportunities than those available to him. Her profession, moreover, requires probing interaction with others, whereas his job is mechanical and impersonal. That is, the investigator gains entree into the homes and conversations of White society -- doors that remain closed to the elevator operator, who merely shuttles them between floors. He is essentially invisible to the White world, so long as he stays in his place. The investigator, on the other hand, does *not* do so and thus becomes a visible threat to the status quo for the operator as well as his passenger. Should the investigator lose her position, however, her training ensures that she will probably find new employment relatively quickly. In contrast, should the same happen to the elevator operator, whose options are limited to service work, it is likely that he would end up on relief -- and possibly one of the investigator's new cases. Moreover, her matriarchal power over him, as displayed in her threat to report his rudeness to a higher authority, further emasculates him. She could cost him his job and reduce him to a helpless infant, in need of her help.

Antebellum plots of the tragic mulatta and passing emerge in Mrs. Coleman's hidden family history. Her American Dream is to emulate the "Miss Ann" figures of her Southern upbringing, though she is in fact African American. She hides this fact for years, treating her own mother, Mrs. Mason, as "Mammy" and servant and raising her daughter as White. When the first grandchild is born -- obviously of color -- she has it killed in order to protect her false status in the White world. Typical of the tragic mulatta tale, the revelation of Black blood leads to the dissolution of that comfortable lifestyle as well as ostracism and division of family by physical separation. However, Mrs. Coleman's own drastic measure -- infanticide -- precipitates the tragic downfall of her family. Her daughter becomes a mad recluse who clings to the empty bassinet (reminiscent of the hysterical mother-to-be of "Hannah Byde" and the grieving Lily Kane of "Prologue to a Life"). In fear for her soul, Mrs. Mason flees her daughter's

sinful household for the safety of honest Black folk in Harlem. Mrs. Coleman suggests that her daughter can have more children to replace the one that “died.” Yet if they should also betray her hidden racial “condition,” the doting grandmother would probably continue her murderous campaign in order to safeguard her position as “Miss Ann.” She is willing to sacrifice family and morality and emerges as even more ruthless than Margaret of “Black Dress.”

The importance of spiritual guidance, introduced in “Cook,” is greater here. Mrs. Mason, who was content to be “Mammy” until the murder of her great-grandchild, fears for her own salvation. Her American Dream is simple but potent; she wants to live a comfortable, sinless life on Earth in preparation for eternal rewards in the afterlife. This, however, is impossible in Mrs. Coleman’s home. Unfortunately, Mrs. Mason is unable to tap into the investigator’s empathy or convince her to understand the importance of her remaining apart from her family. The investigator, who becomes aware of the whole horrible truth after talking with the older woman, continues to dismiss her as a “contrary,” gossipy servant. She concludes that Mrs. Mason has no real need for relief funds and decides that she should simply return home, in spite of its decayed moral climate.

On the positive side, readers can sense the investigator’s internal ambivalence, first in dealing with the elevator operator, and again in her encounter with Mrs. Mason. The former appeals to her when they are alone in the elevator: “I was just puttin’ on to please [the White passenger] [. . .] You ought to understand. I was only doing my job” (49). Although the investigator does not respond, she feels “sick” inside. This Big House treatment is new to her, yet she understands his situation. The investigator dislikes having unwittingly played a part in his Big House charade. She does feel the sting of conscience when Mrs. Mason pleads: “You’re my own people, child. Can’ you fix up a story for them white folks at the relief so’s I could get to stay here where it’s nice?” (51). It privately galls her to have to refuse her aid, and her forced cheerfulness and efficient

manner in dispatching her duty by packing the older woman's bags in preparation for her return is merely a self-defense mechanism that shields her from their shared history of Southern plantations, slavery, and generations of race mixing through rape. She turns her back against the horror of passing, Jim Crow, color caste, and infanticide by pleading, as did the elevator operator, that she is merely doing her job in refusing aid to Mrs. Mason. In doing so, however, she unwittingly acknowledges her participation in the Big House game; she must ensure that Mrs. Mason enters through the servant's entrance, or else she will end up "eating dirt" with the other field workers. She must be ruthless -- let intellect take precedence over compassion -- in order to survive.

The lost soul theme -- the loss of faith in one's own ancestry and connection to others -- reaches a crisis in both "The Black Dress" and "Mammy." Margaret loses her humanity in order to fulfill her American Dream of professional success. In "Mammy," inspired by West's work as a Depression-era welfare investigator, each character suffers varying levels of spiritual "loss." Moreover, it is apparent to the reader that "the privileged and the poor, like house servant and field slave, are sometimes desperately united" (Washington xv). Mrs. Mason's American Dream is of simple comfort on Earth and eternal reward in Heaven. Mrs. Coleman's American Dream, in contrast, is to retain her false status as a wealthy White American woman at any cost, even the sacrifice of her Black grandchild. The elevator operator's American Dream is of mere survival, for it is the Depression, and he must keep "puttin' on" for his White employers and building tenants, even at the expense of insulting a Black passenger. Similarly, the investigator, who has achieved her American Dream of education and white-collar professional work, must also struggle to maintain her status. She finds herself pleading with Mrs. Mason -- just as the elevator operator had pleaded with her -- for understanding and absolution for her unforgivable behavior. West's irony, which is the unifying strength throughout her body of work, is especially powerful here, for it invokes moral challenges for readers as

well as her characters. She poses the ultimate ethical question: Should our American Dreams come true at the expense of our humanity?

Dorothy West's parent and mentoring characters are often heroic in their attempts to aid their children. They achieve their once-deferred American Dreams through their offspring. This is not unlike the unceasing editorial efforts of Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and West, who each wanted to give a new generation of Black writers opportunities to publish and gain professional success that they never fully realized for themselves. In the case of West's fictional mentors, however, misguided, romantic notions about what is and is not appropriate as well as enduring optimism makes these would-be nurturers appealingly childlike. In West's later short fiction, however, (1940 - ca. 1995), there is a shift in priorities from self-sacrifice to self-fulfillment. Concern for future generations, as shown in Hopkins's heroic role models, Fauset's hard-working, upwardly mobile characters, and West's doting parents, becomes a desire to embrace one's own inner child. In some cases, mid-life crisis brings out the inner child; in others, nostalgic memories of childhood recall the inner child. However, a common theme runs throughout West's body of early and later short fiction, i.e., the importance of creating a nurturing environment in which all members benefit. Improperly nurtured individuals -- both neglected children as well as adults who neglect their inner child -- will become unhappy and, in some cases, self-destructive or harmful to others. Hopkins, Fauset, and West encouraged knowledge of and pride in one's ancestry as well as the importance of a mutually supportive literary alliance for creative "children" in their editorial work. West reprises this theme in her later short fiction by emphasizing community support and self-love as the keys to achieving one's American Dreams.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, OR, A RETURN TO HUMANITY IN DOROTHY WEST'S LATER SHORT FICTION, 1940-ca. 1995

Dorothy West's later short fiction (1940-ca.1995) marks a turning point in her literary career in which the American Dream focuses on the pursuit of personal happiness by appealing to the "inner child." These stories also reflect the effect of her short-lived editorial career with *Challenge/New Challenge* (1934-37). These years mark West's heroic, "rebellious adolescent" phase, in which she turned to her "literary children" as a means of self-expression. Although West romanticized herself as the "matriarchal bosom" for the new generation of young, post-Renaissance artists, she was also their willing pupil, i.e., a childlike spirit. The fledgling editor wanted to live vicariously through her writers, while enjoying the success that she failed to achieve during the Renaissance by helping them succeed professionally during the Depression era. Her "challenge" to the White- and male-dominated literary status quo aligns her with her predecessors, literary midwives Pauline Hopkins and Jessie Fauset. They were also heroic and rebellious in their desire to provide supportive forums for new writers. They were romantic in their ideals for themselves and their readers in their publishing and creative work. They were honest and optimistic as well, and that open faith reveals a connection to the childlike spirit, or inner child.

While West's early short fiction (1926-1940) focuses on the rearing, protection, and development of children, her later fiction delves into the adult psyche. Regret is linked to nostalgia in these works. Rather than sacrificing their own desires for the sake

of the next generation, characters turn to children -- either actual or the inner child -- as mentors who guide them in fulfilling their once-frustrated romantic quests. Pearlie Peters suggests that these largely “nonracial and suburban or rural countryside characters . . . are often faced with similar social and moral conflicts like their lower-class cousins in Harlem” (18). Again, these characters are more preoccupied with their own personal desires and are thus more likely to abandon the dictates of their higher conscience (superego) for those of that demanding inner child (id).

In addition, West’s (ironically) mature short fiction reveals an appeal to a wider audience and yet still manages to focus on the lives and concerns of people of color. One story, “The Penny” (1941), first published in the *New York Daily News*, is one of many “raceless” stories that West produced in her more than twenty-year association with the newspaper. Her tales of characters of unspecified ethnicity were well received. Thus, the author willingly complied with this unspoken agreement with her editors and audience. She was commissioned by the publishers to write two stories a month for the paper. According to Peters, however, although these stories reflect “the general or universal human condition . . . West was so artistically shrewd in her thematic craft and design of the short story for circulation and acceptance in national newspapers that she still wrote about black life . . . Her message was that her characters were simply human beings experiencing life like everyone else; that’s all the public needed to know at the time” (17). Peters speculates that this keen “literary vision,” namely, the ability to write “raceless” fiction that would appeal to people of color as well as to the “majority,” was influenced by West’s “New England upbringing, which immersed her in American individualism.” It was her desire “to write simply about life (17),” to document collective human experiences and desires rather than a need to pander to a mainly White audience for profit.

Ultimately, West reveals modern tendencies by writing beyond and challenging traditional and conservative notions of “race.” In her literary experiments with



“nonracial” characters, she rebels against her audience’s stereotypical expectations of African American writers. Her subject matter is universal; i.e., her themes of marriage, family, heartache, and dream deferred appeal to all readers. Yet she doesn’t neglect her readers of color, with whom she shares racially deferred dreams. The author is, moreover, ever aware of the socioeconomic disparities between her own privileged upbringing and that of her more “proletarian” characters, and she does not privilege one class over another.

In “The Penny” (*Daily News*, June 1941), a self-appointed do-gooder and false mentor figure manipulates a small child. She wants to fulfill her own American Dream, i.e., to establish herself as an heroic defender of the underdog and also to reinforce class distinctions between herself and the less fortunate. Although often overly dramatic, West cleverly illustrates the willing self-delusion of a would-be heroic spirit and the ironic contrast between her characters’ opposing points of view. Thus, “The Penny” becomes a classic example of the ill effects of false mentoring, such as lack of personal and professional growth, and a sense of alienation from others. In addition, there is an ever-present class struggle, which is pervasive throughout West’s body of work. There is an unwillingness to either comprehend or breach the ever-widening gaps between socioeconomic groups.

As the story opens, the impoverished father of an unnamed six-year-old boy gives his only child the rare treat of spending money. The boy’s elation is short-lived, however, for he trips and loses the penny in a sidewalk gutter on his way to the candy store. Enter Miss Hester Halsey, who sees the bruise on the boy’s cheek, hears him cry, and concludes that he is yet another victim of blue-collar domestic abuse. Thus, the story’s focus switches from the misadventures of a small boy to the self-delusion of a middle-aged spinster. Through her sanctimonious gesture of salvation and goodwill, Miss Halsey emerges as a false surrogate mother, who recognizes the boy as “the son of that worthless drunk and that lazy slattern” (*TR*, *TP* 79). She indicates her disdain for

those beneath her own white-collar class by touching him with her foot to get his attention. She proceeds to interrogate him about his home life with the promise of another penny. The boy's fearful, anxious behavior in response to her aggressive assumptions reflects his desire to escape her. However, she misinterprets it as further evidence of domestic abuse. West's portrayal of miscommunication between characters is impressive here; Miss Halsey emerges as a self-righteous prig who cares only for her own image as a good citizen than for the child. She undermines her alleged act of charity by touching the boy with her foot. Her pity becomes gloating and insincere, a weapon for keeping the poor in their place. In the course of the story, the changes in her voice and body language illustrate the unsettling passion with which she pursues her cause. It is initially "soft" and "strained" as the frightened boy moves "crabwise along the curb" to escape her. Her "fluid movement after him" becomes a full-blown pursuit of her own preconceived notions concerning his home life. As she is determined to make a case for abuse, her voice becomes "eager" and "hoarse with righteousness," even "relentless." With an almost religious zeal, she "feverishly" produces the new penny from her purse, hence psychologically smothering the child and insisting that he admit that his parents are responsible for his bruise:

"It was your father wasn't it?" said Miss Halsey in a rich, full voice. "He came home drunk as usual and struck you with a poker. Your mother . . . was off gallivanting at some neighbor's. You crawled as far as this corner, and I found you . . . That's how it was, little boy, wasn't it?"

"Yes'm," he said joyously.

Miss Halsey released the penny. (80)

Miss Halsey demands the boy's cooperation in her delusional fantasy; she also "push[es] him down" socioeconomically. Her condescending treatment reveals her opinion that his kind can never rise above their class. If he *does* manage to do so, however, then she will no longer have a "cause" for which to fight. Thus, he must remain forever beaten and

bruised in the gutter -- literally and figuratively -- and she must remain forever elevated above him, financially and socially superior. From her lofty height, she can rescue him and punish his parents by reporting them to the “proper authorities.” Her ultimate ambition is to maintain this tentative yet insidious socioeconomic status quo. She can feign maternal concern for a disadvantaged youth; she can benefit from her “act” of charity toward him without becoming personally involved. Her encounter with him becomes a “high note of moral victory” in an otherwise humdrum workday. She can recommend that he be placed in a “Home”; she can also write a spirited letter to her minister in order to secure her heroic and “good Christian” self-image.

“The Penny” also reminds readers of the importance of maintaining a human connection, particularly in cases of charity, in which benefactors often infantilize their beneficiaries. Moreover, Ms. Halsey can only see the boy and his parents as strange, savage, and “shiftless” beasts who should be institutionalized either in Homes or in prisons. She feels that she has done her duty as a hard-working American citizen by helping the boy to admit to his shameful situation and by vowing to “rescue” him from it. Her voice becomes “warm” and “purring” when she misinterprets his “pleading look” to escape her as a plea for salvation from starvation and abuse. West’s final line is poignantly ironic, for it suggests an unending cycle of willful misunderstanding between socioeconomic classes: “In the whole town there were no two people happier than Miss Halsey and the little boy” (81).

“The Roomer” (*Daily News*, March 1941) reiterates themes of marital incompatibility, miscommunication, and underlying sexual tension from “Hannah Byde” (1926) and many of West’s early short fiction; it also undermines the romantic quest. “The Roomer” is also a classic example of conflicting American Dreams that weaken an already fragile and unhappy marriage. In this case, however, readers are better able to empathize with the frustrated thirty-year-old wife. She wishes to appease her inner child in the face of an otherwise disappointing existence, rather than to torment her mate

emotionally by lashing out at him and threatening suicide. In “The Roomer,” moreover, the husband also desires and, in fact, succeeds in escaping from his emotionally barren home in order to pursue happiness for his own inner child. He actively rejects the predetermined “trapped” existence that Hannah Byde accepts. In West’s early fiction, characters are more likely to sacrifice their personal desires in order to maintain a stable home life. In this case, however, the American Dream is not one of providing for the family, but of obeying the call of the inner child -- the pursuit of happiness at any cost. West again deconstructs conventional ideals about the unity of married life and its alleged benefits for both husband and wife. In “The Roomer” (and throughout West’s work), spouses are unable to share the same American Dreams. Their conflicting needs -- her need for material comfort, and his need for a loving life partner -- lead to eventual emotional and physical separation.

The unnamed wife stands “dispiritedly” in the doorway as her roomer, Mike, drives off to work. She “wave[s] a listless goodbye” and shivers at the cold air, which changes her “sullen expression” to one of fear. Her home (and bedroom in particular) is “cheerless,” and she shares it “unwillingly” with her husband. Thus far, she is Hannah Byde reborn, a wife who is financially, emotionally, and sexually depressed. Unlike Hannah, however, she is cunningly able to meet her own needs, albeit by wounding her husband’s pride. She secretly purchases a fur-trimmed winter coat and hides it in her cedar (hope) chest. She also hides “secret, special meals” in the back of the icebox and feeds him “tasteless” leftovers when he comes home from lunch. Her actions recall Hannah Byde’s desire for a better life. Moreover, her means of providing these small treasures for herself are reminiscent of Cleo Judson in *The Living Is Easy* (1948), who frequently skims off the top of the household money for personal agendas. The unnamed wife of “Roomer” charges Mike six dollars a week and tells her husband that they only receive four dollars. With this extra income, she allows her inner child to indulge in all

the secret treats and rewards that it craves. Sadly, these surreptitious means only temporarily fulfill her American Dream of material comfort, of the “good life.”

The unnamed husband of “Roomer” is equally unhappy in his marriage. As an unsuccessful breadwinner (unlike Black Banana King Bart Judson in *The Living is Easy*), he realizes that his wife is dissatisfied with the meager life that he has provided. Moreover, he feels threatened and emasculated by his more ambitious tenant and fears that Mike is having an affair with his wife. Thus, upon arriving home for lunch, his voice is “anxious” as he calls out to her; he is afraid of discovering one of their trysts. His smile is “apologetic,” and his tone is by turn “bashful,” “uncertain,” and “hollow” in the presence of his indifferent spouse and the “unattractive table” that she has prepared for him. The tension between them becomes more evident when she announces that “I got something to say to you.” Suddenly “the pulse in his temple beg[ins] to throb,” (128) and he immediately leaps to his own defense, afraid that she is “gonna dog [him] about [his] pay cut (128).” He is dismayed to learn that his wife has somehow managed to procure a winter coat for herself. He concludes that Mike has been paying her for sexual favors on the sly and informs her that he knows about “them fancy things in the icebox” (129). He implies that not only does Mike get the best food and best bedroom in the house (formerly his own), but that the roomer also gets the best of his wife. Moreover, as his wife does admit, Mike has “get-up-and-go,” while her husband lumbers heavily through a life of pay cuts and privation. To further undermine his status as provider, his wife explains that it was up to her to bring in the boarder’s extra income: ““One of us had to do something about it. You was too scared to speak to your boss. I rented our bedroom to Mike. So what? It was good money”” (129). Here, West illustrates the changing roles of husband and wife in the 1940s. A wife’s ability to procure money supplants her dependence on her husband as a breadwinner. Thus, the husband becomes threatened. This economic “demotion” leaves him to ponder whether his very existence is necessary.

The wife's protests of fidelity are unconvincing; pushes her away "as if she were a worrisome puppy, and he an old and tired dog" Although she is unhappy in the marriage, she has not strayed from it. Her betrayal was an economic one, not a physical one. Yet he equates financial dishonesty with sexual immorality. "The Roomer" translates phonetically into "rumor," which reflects the husband's willingness to deceive himself by acting upon his ill-founded fears. The wife simply wants to provide herself with creature comforts, although her means of doing so are dishonest. He, in turn, daydreams about having Mike's "get-up-and-go" attitude. Ironically, he does just that -- gets up and goes -- leaving their dreary home and marriage behind for the nearby train station. The wife's last-ditch attempt to prove her fidelity by showing him Mike's weekly rent receipts seems a child's desperate plea for forgiveness. By satisfying her internal whims, she has unwittingly sacrificed her marriage, which, though unsatisfying, has nevertheless been her major means of support. Without her husband she has no income whatsoever, save for the roomer's weekly pittance; thus, she is worse off at the end of the story than she was at the beginning. Now she mourns the loss of security -- albeit meager -- more so than the loss of companionship. Meanwhile, her husband, who is also "sick" of their marriage and wants to be like Mike, says, "'You think I don't want to work for myself and have a fling with my landlord's wife? Mike's plenty smart. And I ain't too dumb not to take his tip'" (130). His departure is a declaration of independence, for, convinced of his wife's infidelity, he no longer feels bound to his marital ties. West's final image illustrates the futility of saving the troubled marriage and any shared dreams: six-dollar rent receipts fluttering away from the wife's hands into the wind. The husband has wanted all along to find an excuse to escape their mutually miserable union, and her subterfuge has given him the perfect motivation.

In "Fluff and Mr. Ripley" (*Daily News*, August 1944), West continues the theme of a failed romantic quest. Again, a disillusioned husband abandons his marriage and home. West undermines the assumed security of marriage by showing how conflicting

American Dreams can ruin any chance of shared happiness and make married life intolerable. In this case, the title character leaves his insistently youthful wife. The lack of communication is such that the Ripleys no longer speak the same “language”; they cannot understand each other when they *do* try to communicate. Mr. Ripley’s behavior here is more justified than that in “The Roomer,” for he can no longer coexist with a woman whose ultimate ambition is to remain young. Both wife and husband are undergoing mid-life crises; fearing a loss of future security, they latch onto inappropriate or outdated value systems. Mrs. Ripley emerges as a caricature than character, and West deftly mocks her determination “to stay a wide-eyed child.” She fears that her advancing years and refusal to have children will encourage her husband to seek a younger, fertile woman. She seeks comfort in the company of younger women, who ridicule her behind her back. Mr. Ripley’s American Dream is to have a comfortable family life, and he envisions his wife as the “ideal wife and mother” (103) of two children. “A nice old dog” completes his fantasy image.

His wife’s refusal to procreate in order to prolong her youth is the first blow: “You couldn’t stay under forty when your selfish child made you a grandmother” (104). In short, Mrs. Ripley would not be able to lie about her age, with swiftly aging children -- and grandchildren -- proving her a liar. Thus, Mr. Ripley concedes to having a child-bride of sorts. He has assumed that his vain young wife would “grow into maturity” and has played along with her “charming ways” of hiding her true age and climbing into his lap (104). He decides to get a dog as a consolation prize. Pal will offer him quiet companionship since his self-absorbed wife cannot. Mr. Ripley vehemently rejects the idea of a “little and cute” pet that will “preen before him [and] climb into his lap” (104); he subconsciously relates the dog analogy to his wife, although he is guilty of creating this *enfant terrible*, a monstrous woman-child. He settles for comfortable company with Pal, a “gentle and dignified mastiff.” Jealous of her husband’s attachment to the

“dangerous dog,” Mrs. Ripley throws a “temper tantrum” until her husband gives up and returns the dog to the pet shop.

Aside from maintaining her youth, Mrs. Ripley’s secondary ambition is to “keep her husband at home” (105). In *her* American Dream (a modern revision of Mr. Ripley’s family expectations), her ever-adoring husband is an appreciative audience to her “charming ways.” Her vision of perfect family life comprises herself, the child bride (although she is forty-five), her husband “many years her senior” (at fifty). Completing the vision is “a month-old handful of fluff” puppy. This will serve as a surrogate child to them both as well as a suitable replacement for Pal. Mrs. Ripley’s last-ditch attempt to keep her husband becomes “symbolic of the whole unreality of [their] marriage” (106), for the puppy brings out her “latent maternalism” (105). Fluff ensures that Mrs. Ripley will always be a much-needed (young) mother to a helpless small animal. He will always be dependent on her for his needs and, like his mistress, will “never grow up” emotionally. Thus, her American Dream remains intact, with her as young “mother” and wife of an older, dignified husband.

Instead of uniting them, however, Fluff tears them further apart: “This tiny white dog would never be a fine big fellow like Pal. This was a woman’s pet that his wife had bought to show her contempt for him” (106). As in “The Roomer,” the husband allows further misunderstanding of his wife’s intentions to give him a legitimate reason to leave home for good. The final death knell comes when he compares widow Heath’s grief over her dead son to his wife’s exaggerated grief over Fluff’s tail-docking operation: ““Your dog lost his tail. Other women have lost their sons”” (107). Again, the complete lack of marital communication leads the husband to abandon his original American Dream of nuclear family for a modern, mature relationship for his own advancing years. He now seeks companionship with his secretary, Mrs. Heath, a widow who has just lost her son in World War II. She is a mature woman whose concerns are tangible and logical and



whose temperament is “gentle” and “unobtrusive”; thus, she is a more suitable and comfortable companion for him.

West suggests, here and throughout her work, that outdated expectations of marriage must be revised to accommodate changing times. Wives are either career-oriented women or are able to procure supplementary income. They may or may not choose to have children. Husbands find themselves rewriting their life scripts as breadwinners. If childless, they may choose to become surrogate nurturers outside of the family circle. They may thus opt to “find themselves” and to seek new “dependents” if they find that their presence is not essential at home. Shared American Dreams could possibly prevent the complete dissolution of these unions, but West seems to remain cynical about the status of marriage in 1940s America.

In “The Maple Tree” (*Daily News*, August 1957), West focuses on the fragile friendship between two women who have achieved their American Dreams of material success and comfortable family life. Once again, however, miscommunication -- and the selfishness of the inner child -- destroys the tentative bond between people who were once kindly disposed toward one another. As a result, the summer neighbors on Martha’s Vineyard become irrevocably parted. Emotional detachment protects each person from additional pain yet weakens their sense of humanity and connection. The bone of contention is the white picket fence, which is representative of insurmountable barriers between people. Betsey Comden installs this boundary around the maple. The tree itself becomes an ironic symbol of permanence and stability that mocks the instability of human relationships. Liz Terrell’s biggest fear is that new neighbors will come to uproot the maple and then to build on the neutral territory between her summer property and that of the Comdens. Yet the real estate agent assures her that “it was a safe assumption that the tree would outlast them all.” It is already overgrown and has destroyed the house that once sat on the property, and “the grass [has] grown over [the house’s] wounds” (132). Thus, the tree serves as a silent mentor of sorts, for it has already outlasted several

generations of landowners. It serves as a reminder that, in contrast, a friendship that is built on a weak foundation, (much like the destroyed house), has but a short life. Moreover, the maple tree is an unwitting trophy over which both the Terrells and Comdens “do battle.” Although Betsey Comdon’s husband initiates buying the tree on the neutral property between the two summer homes, it is the wives who suffer and who are ultimately cast out of their Edenic paradise. The maple tree, which was once the peaceful setting for the womens’ tentative teatime meetings, becomes a site of betrayal and ensuing mistrust.

Liz Terrell represents West’s “modern” married woman; she is a childless New Yorker and a fashion industry professional who moves in sophisticated social circles. Betsey Comden is a more traditional wife, a Boston hausfrau and mother of four with a “comfortable income” from her husband’s law practice. West makes a point of contrasting the different lifestyles, which leads to the ultimate breach between the two wives. When each woman first sees the maple tree with its “breathtaking grace and grandeur” on neutral property (132), she decides to buy her summer home there. Each woman initially makes the mistake of thinking that the tree is on her property. When Liz moves into her new home, she notices “that the grass had been cut on the lot where the tree stood” so that the Comdens’ property “would not have a stretch of unsightly wild growth beside it” (133). The Comdens have already marked their territory, in a sense, and this foreshadows their actual claiming of the tree onto their property. The women’s initial encounter is polite, yet reserved, and their acquaintanceship never truly goes beyond the “summer neighbors” level. As the narrator explains, “except for an exchange of Christmas cards . . . their common interests ended with their return to the city” (131). Moreover, even in summer “their pleasure in each other’s company, though deepened, did not leave the orbit of the maple tree” (133).

As a result of the casual, aloof nature of their camaraderie, Betsey neglects to inform Liz that her husband Steve has asked the real estate agent to “give him priority if

the owner ever decided to sell” the neutral property that contains the maple tree (134). She continues to keep this fact from Liz over the course of their two-year (or rather, two-summer) acquaintanceship. Betsey’s easy, albeit unwitting thoughtlessness, exacerbated by the weak foundation upon which their friendship is based, leads to the friendship’s disintegration. There is no higher conscience or “mentor” of sorts to bridge the gap between these women or to reestablish “their understanding.” Betsey realizes too late that she has done permanent damage to her relationship with Liz, and she also realizes that she does not have “the light touch she admired so in Liz” to introduce the “delicate” matter (134). Thus, when Liz returns to her island home for a third summer and finds the maple tree newly fenced in with the Comden’s property, she rejects Betsey’s clumsy apology and awkward attempts to correct the faux pas. Betsey’s voice is “strained” and her hand “[feels] hot in Liz’s cold clasp” (134). She speaks in a rush and “too eagerly” offers Liz tea, and Liz rejects all offers of future hospitality with a “lovely, meaningless smile”(134). As the narrator explains, the white picket fence has “come between them and their understanding . . . neither was sure the trip was worth making,” and as a result, they “[walk] out of each other’s lives”(135). The physical barrier compounds the already wide barrier of lifestyle, and the casual relationship ends as easily as it began. Betsey Comden has her beloved tree, home, and picket fence, but now she has no one to share it with in those long weeks before her husband and children arrive for their summer vacations. Sadly, Betsey’s (or rather, her inner child’s) selfish pursuit of an American Dream has come at the sacrifice of human connection. The status and comfort of a summer home with a beautiful tree is cold comfort.

The title story of West’s 1995 collection, “The Richer, The Poorer” (originally published in 1967), is one of her more popular morality tales. It is also a more successful illustration of an (African) American Dream fulfilled through the family bond of sisterly ties. It is also a more optimistic tale of transformation and rebirth, for it illustrates the importance of embracing the inner child before it escapes forever. Here, characters are

able to bridge the gaps of contrasting value systems and develop an appreciation for one another rather than becoming completely detached and alienated by their differences. In this tale, hard-working, penny-pinching Lottie, who has spent her entire life preparing for old age, allows herself ultimately to be guided by two mentors. First, her higher conscience requires her to take in her penniless sister Bess after her husband, a free-spirited musician, dies and leaves Bess stranded in Europe. Second, Bess herself enlightens Lottie in the ways of enjoying every moment of life by freeing her inner child.

After many years of scrimping, saving, and planning, only to find herself old and alone, Lottie realizes, almost too late, that her life has been one of miserliness and isolation. Her entire existence has been an ongoing pursuit of money, at first for objects of pleasure (all of which she later rejects) and later as something simply hoarded for Lottie's future life. As a result, she never allows herself to enjoy the present. As a child, Lottie "put herself to work . . . minded babies [and] ran errands for the old" (53) and denies treating herself to candy and ice cream with her hard-earned money. She "could not bear to share with Bess, who never had anything to share with her" (53). West's ironic line sums up Lottie's personality perfectly: "When the dimes began to add up to dollars, she lost her taste for sweets" (53). Hence, Lottie has cheated herself out of the "sweetness" of life in a curiously short-sighted quest for material security. As a twelve-year old, Lottie works as a store clerk and decides to save for new clothes for high school, but by her freshman year she finds herself "unable to indulge so frivolous a whim, particularly when her admiring instructors advised her to think seriously of college" (54). Yet she even rejects higher education in favor of hoarding her money. She denies herself personal happiness as well, for she views getting married as impractical: "to give up a job that paid well for a homemaking job that paid nothing was a risk she was incapable of taking" (54). Ironically, this attitude reflects West's ambivalent feelings about matrimony; like Lottie, the author refused to yield her independence. Her character thus becomes an exaggerated caricature of herself. Meanwhile, Bess, although

impoverished for the duration of her married life, enjoys travel and adventure with her husband. Her only regret is not having had children, which, Lottie suspects, “she was better off without [and] would have dumped them on [Lottie’s] doorstep” in hard times (54). This is also a revision of family life, for the infertile West seems to argue to pros and cons of having children in modern America with herself throughout her body of work.

A contemporary Scrooge, Lottie does eventually allow herself to buy a cheap house from her boss but lets the unused rooms “go to rack and ruin,” much as she let her childhood go “unused.” She continues throughout adulthood to ignore her inner child. Moreover, much like her unused rooms, she shuts herself off from others and avoids company at all costs: “Since she ate her meals out, she had no food at home, and did not encourage callers, who always expected a cup of tea” (55). Lottie does anticipate the needs of her sister, however, and prepares for Bessie’s arrival by spending “a week of hard work and hard cash” redecorating the guest bedroom. To her, “It didn’t seem fair that Bess should reap the harvest of Lottie’s lifetime of self-denial” (55). Once the room is ready, her selfish impulse is to keep it for herself, but then she realizes that giving Bess her own bedroom instead of the newly redecorated one would be wrong: “[Her] conscience pricked her . . . [She] went about [redoing that room] with an eagerness that she mistook for haste” (55). In fact, Lottie’s neglected inner child slowly transforms her into the generous, fun-loving person that she repressed her entire life. She goes from one room to another; her “lifetime of self-denial” has resulted in an ugly, drab home and a “mean and miserly” sensibility. Preparing for her sister’s arrival forces Lottie to see herself honestly on all levels -- physical, emotional, and spiritual -- and she begins to make dramatic changes in her lifestyle and appearance beyond enjoying “putting the rooms to rights.” She sleeps “like a child after a long and happy day of playing house” (55). The inner child truly emerges here, helping to reawaken her spirit and encouraging her to treat herself to a shopping spree and a makeover, from which she “emerg[es] . . . a

woman who believed in miracles” (56). Soon after experiencing a true sense of the childhood that she had denied herself -- Lottie is finally able to experience true maturation.

Lottie’s reluctance to indulge freely in emotions as well as material pleasures makes her yet unable to recognize her true feelings of excitement and love for her sister. She intentionally attributes her racing heartbeat to “the heat from the oven” as she prepares a welcome dinner. She blames her “eyes suddenly smarting” with tears on the “onrush of cold air” at the front door as Bessie arrives. Yet she is disappointed when Bessie doesn’t immediately recognize the symbols of an essentially materialistic American Dream fulfilled: Lottie’s “splendid appearance,” the “lovely room” prepared for the visitor, or “the size of the bird” that Lottie serves up for dinner. The need for praise is almost overwhelming, yet the newly enlightened hostess soon realizes the true situation; she is just as dependent on her sister as Bessie is on Lottie. With no other blood ties in the world, they must comfort one another. Thus, Bessie sees “only what she had come seeking, a place in her sister’s home and heart” (56).

Despite differences in character, these women (unlike Betsey and Liz in “The Maple Tree”) finally learn to appreciate their sisterhood. Bessie admires Lottie’s solid dependability, and Lottie respects Bessie’s fun-loving approach to life. Lottie openly confesses to her sister that hers was “a life never lived,” while in contrast, Bessie, although poor, has had a lifetime of experiences on which to reflect in old age. Without judging her sister’s “lifetime of self-denial,” Bessie offers herself as a wise mentor of sorts: “Don’t count the years that are left us. At our time of life it’s the days that count” (56). Lottie, her transformation complete, expresses her newly freed inner-child’s joy with “a real wide-open grin” and allows herself to “feel giddy” (57). Guided by her wise mentor sister, Lottie completes her spiritual transformation and is rewarded with a well-rounded and revised American Dream, one of hearth and home as well as family. Thus, she is able to embrace her own humanity, thereby becoming a truly spiritual woman.

“About a Woman Named Nancy” (*Vineyard Gazette*, February 1987) continues the theme of an independent woman whose rigid lifestyle yields regret. It shows the danger of clinging to false, materialistic values rather than embracing the human connection. Ironically, Nancy’s perfect home, secure job, and never-ending yard work “kills” her by absorbing all of her strength. Terminal illness turns her American Dream of comfort into a nightmare of escapism and denial. There is no security from death. Ultimately, sickness claims her life just as she begins to allow herself to enjoy the benefits of friendship and leisure in her waning days. Her house, “her whole life . . . immaculate, polished, shining, not a smidgen of dust or dirt anywhere” (117), reflects her own personality. Nancy is determined to keep up appearances, to maintain a facade of perfection for herself as well as for her property. Ironically, although she has “no time to visit people, and no inclination to waste time with idle callers [who] interrupted her rigorous schedule” (118), she does appear to be a generous, nurturing, and generally well-liked, if emotionally distant, neighbor. She often shares her professional cooking talents with neighbors, particularly families with many children. However, this tentative connection never goes beyond these well-meant acts of kindness, which sets up permanent barriers between herself and those she feeds.

“Nancy” represents another of West’s rare excursions in the use of first-person narrative (as “Black Dress” in 1934), lending an autobiographical flavor to this tale of life in Martha’s Vineyard. Here the narrator serves as a mentoring guide to the reader as well as to Nancy. She reminds us that, although it is important to seek security for the future, it should not be done at the expense of living. Again, West suggests that it is important to maintain connections to family, friends, and community, a network of support that is more valuable than material possessions.

The narrator undergoes a certain amount of spiritual growth in “Nancy.” Initially, hypochondria makes her avoid Nancy when hearing of her illness, yet she overcomes her selfish impulse, for “A human being was my species and I had turned my back” (119).

Later, her true fears surface when she feels the “presence . . . the hard fact of death in the offing” (120) at Nancy’s doorstep. She “acts” for Nancy and is “full of breezy talk,” as if nothing is the matter: “We reach an age, beginning in our thirties, when acting becomes a natural part of our existence. Without it, in so many instances, we fail our fellow beings with gratuitous blunt truth that may hurt more than it helps” (123). She reverses the roles of nurturer/hostess and patient/guest, for, as Nancy had once invited the narrator in for apple pie, the latter now prepares a meal for Nancy. She additionally suggests that Nancy’s friend Connie stay with her during her illness, and that Nancy take a trip to the hospital to make sure that her mysterious illness is properly diagnosed. After Nancy’s doctor informs the narrator of Nancy’s impending death, she protects her neighbor from the truth while keeping Connie apprised of her friend’s true situation. Together, Connie and the narrator purposefully “act” as if nothing is wrong.

In the meantime, Nancy keeps up a brave front when she first enters the hospital and believes the doctor’s lie: “In three weeks they would operate and she would be a new woman” (122). When the narrator and Connie come to visit Nancy, the sick woman boasts that “she did not envy [them their] wholeness,” although it is evident that her own health is fading rapidly. When the realization of death becomes unavoidable, Nancy “stubbornly [clings] to life . . . an exercise in willfulness beyond credibility” (123). Her fear of death, that is, of dying without ever having “felt the joy of just being,” makes Nancy fight to stay alive, despite the hopelessness of the situation. On the other hand, as she grows weaker, the fantasy for which she has fought -- to return to her home and life -- begins to lose its appeal. When Connie and the narrator mention her home she “[makes] a grim line of her mouth and [turns] her head away” (123). Her house represents her “lifetime of self-denial” (like Lottie in “The Richer, The Poorer”); it has drained her vitality and ultimately denied her the limited time she now enjoys with her friends. She realizes too late what is most important, and yet her inner child continues to rail against death.



Once Nancy is released from the hospital to die peacefully at home, Connie asks the narrator for permission to “get drunk.” “Go ahead,” the latter replies. Allowing Connie to begin the grieving process allows *her* to grieve as well. Nancy’s final return to the hospital, quickly followed by her death, releases her friends from further pain. Once again, the American Dream includes not only material but also emotional security -- the importance of supportive family and friends who can empathize with one’s pain as well as one’s joy.

Much like the frustrated husbands of “The Roomer” and “Fluff and Mr. Ripley,” George Henty of “The Envelope” (undated) desires to reclaim his freedom. He is inspired to follow a once-lost romantic quest. He moreover declares his independence from predeterminism. Like the husbands of West’s stories such as “The Typewriter” (1926) and “An Unimportant Man” (1928), his American Dream of self-importance and love is doomed. He has four realizations: (1) that his wife is indifferent to the fact that she is was second choice, (2) that both his wife and his mother considered his lost love Adrienne Hollister to be too good for him, (3) that his mother didn’t put him on a pedestal, as he had believed his entire life, and (4) that the black-bordered envelope that is supposed to renew his romantic quest in fact ends it permanently, for it contains news of Adrienne’s death. West, who deconstructs George’s old-fashioned sentimentality, illustrates how such romantic delusions reveal his fear (as in “Nancy”) of dying without having truly lived. Thus, he clings to his romantic fantasy until the true nature of the letter is revealed.

George seems to have achieved the typical (male) American Dream. Although he has lost his first love and settled for a second-best wife, he possesses a comfortable income and home. Every night a full table and a reliable spouse await him. Lottie meets all of his material needs. Ultimately, these domestic comforts allow him to settle into a life of quiet mediocrity. He endorses a conservative marriage in which the husband is the sole breadwinner and the wife is strictly a homemaker. In the meantime, Adrienne

Hollister achieves her own American Dream and romantic quest by marrying a man who owns a publishing company and thus furthering her writing career. By gaining some recognition in her profession, Adrienne represents West's modern marriage, in which the wife has both a career and family.

The story focuses, however, on George's point of view and on the two women who have most greatly affected his romantic quest -- an American Dream of emotional happiness -- by turning it into a much more practical quest for domestic security. His mother and his patient, complacent wife "Lottie, who understood him" (95) have figuratively allowed him to return to the womb (which he never left). Emboldened by the black-bordered letter, however, George lashes out at his wife, confessing that he "never loved" her. Lottie is completely unfazed, for "All of these years she had known his heart was not hers, and she had not been dismayed by that knowledge" (98). Secondly, George learns that Lottie agreed with his mother in his youth that not only would she make a better wife for him than Adrienne, but that Adrienne was "head and shoulders above" George. Lottie takes a practical attitude. Like her mother-in-law, she knows that Adrienne was an ambitious, creative woman who ultimately would have been unhappy as a stay-at-home wife. Thirdly, Lottie reveals that George's mother originally declared that Adrienne was too good for him, hence crushing his idyllic memory, "I was her idol . . . My happiness was her whole life" (99).

Although George understands that Adrienne "would [have been] restless and discontent [and] would destroy [his] way of life," he refuses to admit that Lottie and his mother are right: "She meant that Adrienne lived in the clouds. That she would have been a poor housekeeper. She never meant that Adrienne was my superior." Lottie tolerantly replies, "Yes, you can look at it like that" (100). Finally, he realizes the most crushing blow. The black-bordered envelope, which he had assumed was Widow Hollister's "challenge down the years . . . telling him she was free in a hand that was still firm and young"(96) is in fact from Adrienne's daughter. She is writing to inform him of

her mother's death. She also tells George that her father had provided Adrienne with professional success and domestic security -- as *he* could never have done. Although the daughter (also Adrienne) says, "Mother spoke of you very often. I believe that you gave her her inspiration to write" (100), the knowledge does not comfort him. While Adrienne Hollister achieved her romantic quest, partly because of him, she has far surpassed his own mediocre achievements. Thus, their individual lives could never have been successful had they married. Being separated in their youth was the best thing for them after all, as George's mother and wife knew all along. His romantic quest finally defeated, George feels "suddenly old and futile, and [needs] reassuring." Thus, he turns to Lottie, who accepts and understands him even after his childish tantrum. He now rejects his frustrated quest for personal happiness: "A home and husband are career enough for any woman. Adrienne would have made a very poor wife" (101).

Adrienne's achievement of a full, well-rounded success in her life contrasts with West's, which, like George's, was only partial. West had a fruitful writing career, but she never experienced marriage or family. She opted to be a self-supporting single woman throughout her adult life and had very ambiguous feelings about matrimony and women's traditional "roles." Thus, George Henty's sour-grapes likely reflects her own conservative interpretation of women's choices. What first appears to be a critique of career women, however, becomes an exoneration of them. West ultimately presents an alternative ideal for the woman who wants to "have it all," while respecting the woman who chooses the traditional role of wife and homemaker.

Two of West's later short stories are autobiographical, nostalgic remembrances of childhood, family, and innocence. The focus here is on the true inner child, i.e., that which the adult narrator recalls through her imperfect, idealized memory. Underlying this so-called innocence, however, is an ironic, realistic perspective, one that is well aware of the not-so-cherubic behavior of young children. Thus, her idealism is tempered with pragmatism. Unlike most of the adult characters of West's other stories, however,

Colby of “The Bird Like No Other” (undated) and Deedee of “The Happiest Year, the Saddest Year” (undated) do manage to overcome their initial, selfish impulses; moreover, they gain a certain wisdom and power of acceptance. Their lessons of tolerance, patience, and understanding far surpass those of allegedly mature characters, and the impression is that these children will not suffer the same deferred dreams of their elders. Once again, West’s pervasive theme stresses the importance of family, both natural and extended, as a means of building a strong foundation of self and community. In the African American community, with its history of slavery and families that were often permanently separated, foster, or “extended” families can sometimes become “lifelines” that heal lost blood ties. Ultimately, the tradition of “courtesy aunts” and “play cousins” etc. lives on, and individuals become more connected to their community. This also ties into West’s publishing politics, for she wanted to build a safe haven in which her literary children could far surpass her own limited success during the Harlem Renaissance. Her ideal was to build a community of supportive writers who together would “challenge” the lack of creative outlets for artists of color.

In “The Bird Like No Other,” wise “courtesy aunt” Emily teaches eight-year-old Colby the importance of having patience and tolerance with loved ones, particularly his three older sisters. Her own personal loss, the death of a young son many years earlier, influences her actions; she knows the worth of family and thus infuses Colby with a generous spirit. Moreover, she encourages his imagination to see unusual beauty in ordinary things, first as a diversion, then later as an enlightenment tool. In “The Happiest Year, The Saddest Year” -- an autobiographical memory of West’s own childhood loss -- , Deedee, another precocious eight-year-old, has her wish for “a real baby” to take care of fulfilled when her two young cousins come to live with her wealthy family. This often happened in West’s own childhood, as the narrator states in the story: “An extended family was part of daily living. Sharing was a lifeline” (89). When two-year-old “Sister” dies, however, Deedee resents the fact that her other cousin, blonde, blue-eyed

“Brother,” survives. She later regains an appreciation of the blood tie, for Brother’s living spirit reconnects her to her beloved Sister, and in a supernatural twist, Sister’s spirit bridges the temporal gap between Deedee and Brother. West’s literal child figures -- as opposed to adults’ inner children --in each story do gain wisdom, a sense of connection, and an appreciation for family ties. They are guided by wise mentor figures and emerge from their experiences better equipped to move on in life (or so the author suggests).

“Bird” is both a classic parable that teaches a life lesson and also an example of a successful mentor-student relationship. Young Colby learns to seek out “Aunt Emily” when he has a family conflict. Emily, a longtime family friend and wise older woman, has similarly entertained Colby’s mother when she was a little girl. The bond between woman and boy is strong partly because Emily misses her own son, who died in a traffic accident. Thus, this “courtesy aunt” is an extended family member whose presence recalls the adage: “It takes a village to raise a child.” She Emily insists that “She wasn’t any Solomon to decide . . . to punish the bad [or] to keep a promise to the good” (84). She does, however, wisely concoct a “gentle fiction” in order to make Colby forget his trials with his three older sisters. In addition to being a “surrogate son” of sorts to Emily, Colby is a willing pupil to her teachings. His imagination is easily stirred, which calms his egotistical, boyish temper, and he willingly searches for a nonexistent creature, “a bird of so many colors,” which, Emily says, will come only the boy remains still and quiet. Emily somehow manages to distract Colby with this fantasy bird for four years. Then one day the eight-year-old thinks that he actually *does* see the bird perched on a branch, lit by “a confluence of golden sunlight and blue sky and green leaves and shimmering summer air” that lends it a temporary “astonishing beauty” (86). When it finally “release[s] itself from its brief enchantment and [flies] away in the dress of a blue jay” (86), Aunt Emily confesses to concocting the “gentle fiction” and asks him to determine her motives for doing so. Colby correctly concludes that the wondrous fantasy

bird was meant to distract him from “say[ing] bad things about [his] family when [he] was mad” (86). Moreover, he also understands that Aunt Emily didn’t want to make him “sit still like a punishment” (86). Thus, she created a diversion in order to enrich his mind and turn his attention from such petty concerns as fights with his sisters to higher things. Colby and Emily are thus well rewarded at the end of the story. As a successful mentor figure, Emily receives the instant gratification of seeing Colby “learn his lesson,” so to speak, of the importance of “family loyalty,” which is “as beautiful to look at as that bird” (86). Moreover, Colby benefits not only from the moral lesson but also from harnessing the power of his own imagination, which was easily stirred in this egotistical yet otherwise innocent child. This power is a gift that allows him to see unusual beauty in ordinary things. As Colby rushes home at the end of the story, Emily sees him “trying to catch up with the kind of man he was going to be . . . rushing toward understanding” (86). She is happy to know that she has planted the seed in him that will allow him to grow into a man of generous, tolerant, and patient character.

In “The Happiest Year, The Saddest Year” (undated), Deedee, who rejects female socialization at age three by rejecting her mother’s gift of a baby doll, suddenly embraces the concept of mothering. The baby of the family herself, she requests “a real baby” for Christmas (88). This wish is finally granted in her ninth year when her cousins, “Sister” and “Brother,” come to live with her family. West’s autobiographical remembrances are evident here. Also notable is the theme of a strong family foundation upon which to build one’s (African) American Dream. The “lifeline” of sharing connects living relatives to one another and bridges the gap between temporal and spiritual worlds by healing the pain of loss. West experiments here with the romantic concept of psychic bonds between family members and the transcendence of the human spirit over personal tragedy.

Deedee forms an instant, albeit unspoken bond with two-year-old Sister, “a little brown girl, with an almost unearthly beauty” (89). Although three-year-old Brother, “very blond and very fair,” is devoted to Deedee, he remains a poor second to Sister,

who is “Deedee’s life, and [Deedee] was the little girl’s existence” (90). Thus, when Sister suddenly becomes sick and dies, Deedee’s reaction is powerful and childishly cruel: ““Why did God take our brown baby and let our white baby live?””(91). Afterwards, just as she rejected the blonde and blue-eyed doll given her at age three, she rejects her nearly white cousin Brother. She is, by turns, neglectful and cruel and punishes the “white” baby for living while the “brown” baby died. Fortunately, however, Deedee has three mentoring “presences” in her life who enlighten her and enable her to find of sense of peace despite her heartache. The first is her mother, who teaches her the importance of the extended family bond. Next is Brother, who teaches her unconditional love, for, despite her cruelty, he “continue[s] to trust her because love is forgiving” (92). Finally, Sister shows Deedee that soulmates can communicate beyond the grave in order to heal breaches between the living.

Deedee’s initial, egotistical excitement at having a death in the family is reminiscent of an early West story entitled “Funeral” (*Saturday Evening Quill*, June 1930), in which euphoria is closely followed by realization, acknowledgement, and bitterness. In “Funeral,” protagonist Judy recoils in horror from her uncle’s untimely death and retreats from the family circle into her own, fearful inner sanctuary. In contrast, Deedee of “Year” comes to accept her link to Sister and is spiritually reunited to her through Brother, who communicates with his dead sister. Through Brother, Deedee apologizes for her ill-treatment of her “white baby” cousin, and Sister’s spirit evidently approves, for the “faint scent of carnations” envelops the sleeping cousins, as they had enveloped Sister’s coffin. By Christmas the family tie between Deedee and Brother is stronger than ever, for they share an awareness of Sister’s loving presence, which has been made manifest through their temporal bond. Thus, West indicates that the strong family foundation is successfully established, which will ensure each child’s personal growth and sense of connection to others.

The final two undated short stories in *The Richer, The Poorer* examine traditional American Dreams of individuality and the pursuit of happiness. Moreover, they follow the romantic quests of more male-child figures, which is reminiscent of Colby's journey into consciousness in "The Bird Like No Other." In "Odyssey of an Egg" (undated), a young man's sense of self is frustrated and denied by an unsupportive family. To a greater extent, it is frustrated by his own weak personality, which leads him to follow false mentors and role models who eventually lead him into danger. In "To Market, To Market," a young boy turns a quick trip to the store into a romantic odyssey of adventure and self-discovery. He is rewarded for sharing his colorful stories, though he expects to be punished by being late for dinner. West again emphasizes in "Market" the point that properly nurtured children will become productive, well-rounded adults. Neglected children who cling to false mentors, however, will become destructive, frustrated adults who can neither make human connections nor truly develop their own character or manifest their dreams. She warns in "Odyssey" against the harmful effects of arrogance, folly, and self-delusion. Again, it takes an entire "village" to nurture these children, and it is important to choose one's role models carefully, for false mentors used as substitutes for parental guidance can do considerable damage to one's development.

"Odyssey of an Egg" is a classic example of negative nurture. Its unusual title likely refers to the fact that its protagonist is a "bad egg" whose ill-chosen mentors and misadventures lead to his well-deserved comeuppance. "Odyssey" also seems to be a parody of the 1940s (would-be) gangster mentality, which makes it applicable to contemporary times. The protagonist thinks very highly of himself and his would-be romantic quest for infamy. A more likely title -- or an accurate subtitle -- would be "Fall of the Id," for Porky Tynes' unrelenting, selfish pursuit of greed and pleasure guarantees self-destruction. West's antihero is an aptly named piggish, chauvinistic, ne'er-do-well whose rich fantasy life bloats his ego. Although his use of a make-believe world as a diversion from personal woes echoes Colby's pursuit of imagination in "The Bird Like



No Other,” Porky’s fantasy life does not develop his personality in any constructive way. Porky represents the egotistical boy-child who never received proper guidance and who, as a result, grows into a self-centered man who is tripped up by his own delusions of grandeur. His false mentors include actors in Hollywood gangster movies, whom he tries to imitate, and the police detective, whom Porky mistakes for a real-life gangster, and who ultimately takes Porky into custody when the young man is mistakenly [affiliated] with a counterfeiting scheme.

The reality of this young man’s life is that he is an unemployed, cowardly Mamma’s boy who lives at home and shrinks both from an honest day’s work and any possibility of bodily harm. Porky is physically nondescript, ordinary, and uninteresting. Yet in his mind he is a big-shot-in-training, swaggering down the street. “[He] hitched his pants and lit a cigarette . . . pulled his hat over one eye, thrust his legs apart, and drew his brows together in the menacing way the head guy had done in the movie. The passersby paid no attention” (109). He looks down upon these “miserable rabbits,” who are not “tough” like him. In truth, he fears everyone around him and has no future to speak of. Moreover, he is about to be kicked out of his parents’ house and has already been kicked out of trade school for theft; thus, he can’t (or won’t) find work. He can only look down on the helpless -- a small boy (“ragged kid”), whom he injures by kicking the child’s ragged tin can, and a sick elderly woman (“old hag”), whom he frightens next by kicking the can at her -- for he truly fears other men. He flees the “burly man in a doorway” to whom the injured boy runs for consolation, for “getting beat up . . . over a sniveling kid and a bunch of old rags -- was beneath [his] dignity” (110).

When the hand that clutches his arm turns out to belong to the old woman rather than to the “burly man,” Porky’s initial fear gives way to scorn and absolute contempt, for he has no empathy whatsoever for this particular “miserable rabbit.” Thus, he behaves “insolently” and “disdainfully” to the woman and sneers at her. He walks her home only because she offers him money, and he is yet ungrateful for “a lousy dime for

carting an old dame down the block” (110). He also fears that the “burly man” is still watching him. In addition to his other flaws, Porky is a paranoid narcissist; he sees himself as the center of attention and “dart[s] shamed glances around the street, ” embarrassed to be seen with her. When she later collapses in her apartment, he thinks only of the “wad of dough” that he finds next to her body. Suddenly, he can “tell his old lady where to get off” and “kick his old man where it would hurt most” (112).

Porky’s new mantra becomes, “He had the nerve, and now he had the money” (112); true to form, however, he can only think big because he is too afraid to speak his ambitions aloud. His native cowardice undercuts his false bravado, and he lampoons himself. He retreats to his sanctuary -- the movie house -- to count the money in the rest room and to speculate whether the old woman has more hidden funds in her apartment. He scuttles past the ticket taker (“Someday he’d draw a bead on that guy”) and the ticket seller (“He’d get her up a dark alley some night and give her a reason to remember him”). He thinks that others see him as he sees himself -- as a menacing character in a gangster movie: “Self-identification made him shiver with joy” (113). After watching yet another gangster movie, Porky is suddenly ravenously hungry, yet he is afraid to use a hundred-dollar bill in a cheap lunchroom, where the “lamebrain behind the counter . . . might get suspicious and call the cops” (114). He swaggers back to the old woman’s apartment to look for more money, but he is afraid of the dark room and of her dead body: “He leaned against the door for support and whimpered like a puppy” (114). He tells himself that he’ll kill the old woman if it turns out that she isn’t already dead. After all, “he had the nerve, and he had the muscle to croak a double-crossing old dame.” Yet her motionless body “made him want to yell for his mother, made him want to hide his head in her skirts” (115). Neither an heroic nor a romantic figure, Porky reveals the frightened inner child that is his true identity.

Porky’s comeuppance arrives with the sudden appearance of a police detective, who has been waiting in the apartment for the old lady’s criminal accomplices, Porky is

suddenly “so humbly grateful that he wanted to cry” (115). He admires this “big man with gimlet eyes” and thinks he has found the perfect partner in crime, a “triggerman” (115). (More importantly, he is no longer alone in the dark.) But his romantic quest for notoriety ironically succeeds; the detective arrests Porky and tells him that he has in fact stolen fake money and that the old woman was a “go-between” for the counterfeiters. Suddenly Porky’s would-be alter ego disintegrates, and his true identity -- “miserable rabbit” and whimpering puppy -- emerges as he “collapse[s] against the detective” (116). He protests his innocence and clings to the belief that his heretofore scorned parents will protect him, but to no avail: “I been out looking for work all day. You can ast my mother.” Ultimately, Porky falls -- literally -- and is carted off to jail “like a sack of mail” (116). Thus, his immature, boyish quest ends; interestingly, the detective, initially a potential false mentor (triggerman) becomes the only true mentor in Porky’s life. As a law-enforcement officer, he forces the younger man to become more accountable for his actions and perhaps even to reevaluate his so-called quest for glory. In any case, West suggests that ambitious, self-destructive American Dreams built on weak foundations and improperly nurtured are guaranteed to crumble.

In contrast, “To Market, To Market” (undated) is an example of positive nurturing that yields a sense of healthy self-expression rather than encouraging self-destructive impulses. “Market” is a return to innocence that is reminiscent of “The Bird Like No Other.” Here, West uses an actual child character in order to demonstrate how parents recapture their youth through their offspring. In this case, a father who has achieved his material American Dream -- steady work, family, and home -- can now spend his leisure time in the pursuit of personal happiness. He can relax and enjoy his family, for whom he has so successfully provided, rather than fall into the role of traditional, loved-yet-feared, patriarchal authority figure. Moreover, as in “Odyssey of an Egg,” young Jimmy’s small-scale mishaps are given global significance -- in his own mind, at least -- and are magnified into a romantic quest (or at least a lively series of mock-Herculean tasks). The

seven-year-old's hurried trip to the store to buy bread for dinner becomes an odyssey during which he must perform his several potentially "dangerous" tasks before he can return safely home: find a penny, search for a baby bobwhite bird, outwit a bully, battle over a marble, escape an unfriendly dog, grab the (golden) bread, and brave the "thundercloud" face of his father, who stands glowering on the front porch upon the boy's belated arrival for dinner. He successfully overcomes each obstacle and, as in "The Bird Like No Other," he is rewarded with understanding and positive guidance from his father/mentor, rather than with punishment. Moreover, this supportive father-son relationship ensures that Jimmy (unlike Porky in "Egg") will always have respect for authority figures, rather than fear and loathing for all but negative role models. In turn, the boy serves as a spiritual mentor of sorts, for he is the medium through which his father reunites with his own inner child.

The nature of Jimmy's tasks are typical of a young child's experiences, but the way in which he handles each situation reveals that he, much like Colby in "Bird," is on his way to becoming a considerate, generous, and nurturing adult. His first task, rescuing a penny from his mother's pansy bed, reveals his conscience. The boy feels a sense of guilt for leaping from the front stairs and landing on her pansy bed. Because he has no time to repair the damaged flowers, he instead takes the time to search carefully for her lost penny so that he can pay for the loaf of bread that she requests. Jimmy's second task, rescuing what he thinks is a baby bobwhite "in distress," recalls an earlier incident in which he carried a similar baby bird back to its nest. This is not the case, however; it is only a healthy adult bird, which flies out of the bushes and away from the boy. Jimmy's concern reveals his compassion for helpless creatures (unlike Porky, who despises "miserable rabbits"), for "It wouldn't be right to just walk past when the neighborhood was full of cats" (162).

Jimmy's next few tasks -- the first of which is to overcome the threat of menacing bully Bandy Carver -- require some assistance. In this case, Bandy wants revenge for an

insult: “Jimmy had told a perfidious friend that Bandy had curly hair like a girl’s” (163). The Minotaur-like Bandy ignores Jimmy’s protests of having no time to fight and single-mindedly continues to approach. Compared to the looming threat of Jimmy’s father, however, Bandy is nothing to worry about, for “his father would whale the daylights out of him” (163). Fortunately, Jimmy’s friend Johnny Ames arrives just in the nick of time with an equitable solution for everyone. He will officially announce the rematch between Jimmy and Bandy at school the next day. This appeases Bandy, who finally departs. However, Jimmy escapes one conflict only to find another when he and Johnny suddenly spot a “shining marble, a big one, a beauty, anybody’s property” (163). They proceed to do battle over this boyish treasure, which Johnny is about to win, when the next threat, “a large, strange dog,” comes upon them, growling. When it refuses to leave and becomes threatening, Johnny distracts it by throwing the marble far away from himself and Jimmy; the dog races after it. Thus, both boys not only concede defeat over the forever lost marble, but also strengthen their bond of friendship, for Johnny has now twice saved his friend Jimmy from danger.

On his own again, Jimmy faces his final two tasks. He finally buys the bread, which turns out to be the simplest of all his encounters, and then he faces the final, most difficult and frightening of all of his adventures -- facing his angry father with a worthy explanation for his tardiness. Jim Senior is waiting on the front porch, “looking like a thundercloud” (164), and Jimmy braves the “unyielding face” by immediately telling his father of his exciting fifteen-minute quest for bread. Surprisingly enough, these adventures are music enough to tame the savage beast. When Jimmy tentatively concludes: “I guess . . . you’re too mad to eat,” his father suddenly blushes, then replies, “I guess I was seven once” (164). Jimmy is surprised to see this softer side, for he has unwittingly tapped into Jim Senior’s inner child. As a result, rather than bemoaning his belated dinner, his father, influenced by memories of his own carefree youth, becomes more flexible in his thinking and realizes how unreasonable his “six-o-clock-sharp”

dinner demand has been. The now tame beast admits, "I'm as hungry as a bear . . . I hope you win tomorrow" (164). This is the final reward for Jimmy, who has successfully survived his fruitful journey, for he has made peace with the most important authority figure in his life. Moreover, Jim Senior has made peace with the inner child and thus made his home environment much more comfortable for himself as well as his family. His American Dream of a happy home is now complete, and Jimmy's freedom of expression is honored.

Dorothy West's later short fiction illustrates the American Dream of personal happiness (or lack thereof) by examining the powerful appeal of the inner child. In West's early short fiction, a desire for self-knowledge often revolves around some sacrifice on behalf of others. In contrast, her later stories examine a need to escape -- at least temporarily -- from adult responsibility and to reclaim a highly romanticized adolescent (or even pre-adolescent) spirit. Moreover, West critiques and deconstructs the institution of marriage and shows readers that individuals who are privately dissatisfied with their lives are likely to break the legal ties. Marriage must be revised for a modern world, in which gender roles have changed: from breadwinner and homemaker to couples without children, women who balance work and family, and other "nontraditional" family units. Characters who are unable to adapt to modern times rebel in vain against change or bolt -- fleeing all responsibility for the lifestyles they created for themselves. The importance of family (extended and real) connections and compassion for others is evident in these stories, such as "The Richer, the Poorer," "The Happiest Year, the Saddest Year," and "About a Woman Named Nancy." Lastly, "The Penny" and "Odyssey of an Egg" proclaim the need for positive role models and the damage done by negative mentors. Overall, West's later fiction exhibits deeper psychological probing into the needs and desires of these characters who are obsessed with the "pursuit of happiness." In the best instances, they willingly embrace their own vulnerability in order to make successful human connections, connections that in turn produce a mutually

supportive environment in which everyone benefits from the American Dream of individualism and peace.

West's later fiction embraces the concept of childhood -- both temporal and spiritual -- as an important mentor for adults. It also continues the romantic quest theme, as is evident in Jessie Fauset's subversion of traditional fairy-tale values. It reiterates the need for heroism as well as the importance of positive role models exhibited in Pauline Hopkins's short fiction. Ultimately, these stories represent West's adolescent, or rebellious phase, in which her youthful high hopes for the next generation of authors "challenged" the established patriarchal and racial order that limited the literary success of women and writers of color. In this way, West, along with Hopkins and Fauset, helped found a new African American literary history by devoting herself to nurturing her literary young. In her editorial as well as creative work, West challenges writers and readers to adapt themselves to a new order of gender and racial changes. They should not succumb to a pervasive fear that there is nothing beyond established beliefs and customs. In West's utopia -- as well as that of Hopkins and Fauset -- writers of color can write beyond race. Moreover, professional women can nurture outside of the home, and all literary children are safe and free to express themselves and to pursue their American Dreams of success and fulfillment.

CHAPTER 7  
CONCLUSION  
HONORING OUR LITERARY FOREMOTHERS

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Dorothy West are three Black women writers and editors whose contributions enhance the African American literary tradition. Despite the obstacles of racism and sexism, each woman of letters finds the courage not only to produce her own creative work but to inspire her readers, particularly aspiring writers of color. In this sense, each woman's American Dream -- of providing a supportive forum in which new generations of artists feel free to participate in the world of creative writing and publishing -- is a success. Nurturing beyond the domestic realm is yet another American Dream fulfilled for Hopkins, Fauset, and West. These literary foremothers nurture their artistic young in lieu of becoming "traditional" mothers, wives, or homemakers. This indicates that they are not "unnatural" career women, but rather women who enhance that traditional female role of caretaker by using those skills in the workplace as writers and editors. Ultimately, their most important victory is that of overcoming professional challenges in order to do good work for their respective magazines. The unwillingness of mainstream publishers to accept their work, and the opposition of male colleagues, who often resist women's professional power and authority, severely limits each woman's sphere of activity. However, before Hopkins, Fauset, and West were ultimately forced to relinquish their positions, they were able to voice their concerns. They acknowledged the importance of introducing African American history and biography to provide role models for people of color, of honing one's literary craft in order to attain creative mastery, of acknowledging the world beyond America's segregated shores, and of honoring one's literary ancestors.



Hopkins, Fauset, and West came from an honored tradition of Black women writers and editors, including Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet E. Wilson, and Frances E. W. Harper. In addition, each woman's desire to encourage aspiring authors is revealed in her editorial work, which anticipates that of her successor. Hopkins published writers during her tenure at the *Colored American Magazine* (1900-1904) such as F. E. W. Harper, Angelina Weld Grimke, Ruth D. Todd, Marie Louise Burgess-Ware, and Gertrude Mossell. She also paid homage to her literary forebears in her article "Some Literary Workers," which includes Phillis Wheatley, Grimke, Wells-Barnett, Harper, Terrell, and Carey. She solicited "gem[s] of literary fire" from unknown authors, hoping to find more inspiring voices to add to the chorus of uplift. As the *Crisis* literary editor (1919-26), Jessie Fauset published poetry and fiction by her contemporary Georgia Douglas Johnson as well as Anne Spencer and Anita Scott Coleman, drama by A.W. Grimke, and essays by Marita Bonner. In *The Brownies' Book* (1919-20) Fauset also published contributions from the then unknown Nella Larsen as well as G. D. Johnson. She emphasized the importance of literary models, constant practice, and of proper education as guidelines for new writers. In the pages of *Challenge* and *New Challenge* (1934-37), Dorothy West focused on contemporary and new talents such as G. D. Johnson [Paul Tremaine], Zora Neale Hurston, Helene Johnson, Margaret Walker, and Marian Minus. With each generation, the focus on developing new talent becomes stronger, particularly with West, who "challenged" fledgling authors to succeed where her post-Harlem Renaissance and Depression era colleagues failed, and offered her own "matriarchal bosom" as a source of support.

In their short fiction, as in their editorial work, Hopkins, Fauset, and West revealed similar traits, which are revealed in three central archetypal patterns: the heroic spirit, the romantic quest, and the childlike spirit. Their desire to succeed professionally and creatively in spite of obvious barriers renders them heroic, particularly Hopkins,

whose bold self-expression was rarely appreciated by others, male or female, Black or White. In turn, each author's characters defiantly pursue their dreams despite obstacles, if not for themselves, then for their loved ones. Personal and racial pride is their ultimate goal. Hopkins's desire to include women of color in the cult of true womanhood contrasts with her own, nontraditional career activities, yet her often dramatic defense of Black womanhood is sincere.

Each author's vision of a democratic literary world in which women, and people of color, are welcome to participate reveals a romantic spirit. This quality manifests itself in their tales of characters who quest for tolerance and equal opportunities for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, each author also maintains a realistic stance. Fauset especially uses plantation and happily-ever-after myths to warn readers against potentially harmful idealism. One must be fortified against the harsh realities of racism and sexism and must not withdraw into a fairy tale world of false expectations. A healthy balance of hope and pragmatism -- or rather, a sense of realistic romanticism -- guarantees success.

Finally, each author emphasizes the importance of nurturing the childlike spirit, i.e., the inner child, in oneself as well as future generations -- in her fictional work. West illustrates this throughout her body of work in ironic tales of parental self-sacrifice, as well as those of adults who ultimately heed their inner children, for better or worse. The importance of community nurturing of innocent spirits is essential in order to build a strong foundation in which each member can achieve success. The denial of one's heritage and ancestry, as Hopkins and Fauset illustrate, and the inability to recognize one's own strengths and weaknesses -- as West shows, can only lead to failure.

Hopkins's short fiction not only incorporates values of uplift, true womanhood, and sentimental fiction, but also experiments with new genres such as detective fiction. It is interesting to note that her story "Talma Gordon" (1900) is included in a collection entitled *Spooks, Spies, and Private Eyes: Black Mystery, Crime, and Detective Fiction*,

edited by Paula L. Woods (1995). Hopkins's literary legacy includes contemporary mystery writers such as Eleanor Taylor Bland ("Marti MacAlister" police detective series, 1992-Present) and Barbara Neely ("Blanche White" amateur detective series, 1992-Present). Her exploration into spirituality, mysticism, and even science fiction, as in "The Mystery Within Us" (1900) and *Of One Blood* (1903) anticipates works by Octavia Butler (e.g., *Kindred*, 1979) and Toni Morrison (*Sula*, 1973; *Beloved*, 1987). Hopkins's heroic spirit lives on in these tales of strong and heroic characters who seek the truth and embrace the unknown.

Fauset's work critiques female socialization, plantation myths, and other romantic quests. She emphasizes female self-awareness, such as in *Plum Bun* (1929) "Emmy," (1912-13), "There Was One Time" (1917), and "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920). She also focuses on the appreciation of one's ancestry, as in "Mary Elizabeth" (1919) and "Double Trouble" (1923). These themes anticipate novels that feature communities of women, such as Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and *Paradise* (1998), Gloria Naylor's *Brewster Place* (1982) and *Mama Day* (1988), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Hardly sentimental romances, these novels embrace the harsh realities of life for African American women without rendering them bitter or defeated. These women find strength in ancestry and self-knowledge, as well as in their personal ties.

West's stories focus on family relationships, particularly the important parent-child connection. Her novel *The Living is Easy* (1948) and stories such as "The Five Dollar Bill" (1936), and "Mammy" (1940) focus most intensely on the mother-daughter union, although most of her stories emphasize the father-daughter bond, such as "The Typewriter" (1926), "An Unimportant Man" (1928), and "Black Dress" (1934). West's focus on family relationships looks forward to African American and Afro-Caribbean writers such as Paule Marshall (*Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 1959), Tina McElroy Ansa (*Baby of the Family*, 1989), and Edwidge Danticat (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 1994). Equally interesting are West's stories that venture into areas of realism, naturalism, and

determinism. Examples include “The Typewriter” (1926), “Hannah Byde” (1926), “The Penny” (1941), and “Odyssey of an Egg” (Undated). The fear of losing security and a sense of connectedness to others is appears in “The Black Dress” (1934), “Fluff and Mr. Ripley” (1944), “The Maple Tree” (1957), and “About a Woman Named Nancy” (1987). Here, characters desperately try -- often too late -- to reach out to their loved ones. Thematically, West’s works are precursors of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946). More positively, however, they suggest Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha* (1953); this is a much less grim but realistic vision of working-class African American life. West ultimately shows that human connections, family bonds in particular, are the necessary foundations of human character, and inspire one to pursue success and happiness.

Happily, there are more now markets for African American fiction than were available during the eras in which Hopkins, Fauset, and West wrote. The *African American Review* of Indiana State University publishes works of poetry, fiction, and essays, as does *Callaloo* at Texas A&M (printed by The Johns Hopkins University Press) and *Obsidian III*, housed at North Carolina State. For many years, the author Charles Johnson worked as fiction editor for the *Seattle Review* in Washington. Today, the *Black Issues Book Review* bimonthly magazine circulates news about Black authors, along with new trends in publishing African American fiction, politics of working in “mainstream” presses, and related issues. The mainstream markets for fiction by writers of color has expanded considerably just in the past ten years, and it continues to do so. The same is true for African Americans working in the publishing industry; there are more and more opportunities both at large trade presses as well as academic publishers. In primarily academic circles, organizations such as the College Language Association and the Langston Hughes Society sponsor creative writing contests annually and devote their activities toward an appreciation of Black writing, teaching, and editing. In short, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Dorothy West have paved the way for these creative

and professional literary phenomena. It is gratifying to acknowledge that the heroic, romantic, and childlike enthusiasm of our literary foremothers. As pioneers in the craft of editing, they have established themselves as leaders in our tradition of African American women of letters.

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