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**AN ANALYSIS OF "PASSING AS WHITE" IN JESSIE REDMON
FAUSET'S *PLUM BUN***

**AN ABSTRACT
BY
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**Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree in English
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Dr. Nitaya Suksaeresup, Mr. Martin Grose.

This research was conducted to explore reasons for passing as white of the two main characters, Mattie and Angela. In addition, it was conducted to compare passing as white of the two main characters: Mattie and Angela. This study was analyzed by using theories and the concept of passing as white of Elaine K. Ginsberg and Cherryl I. Harris.

The results of this study showed that the two main characters, Mattie and Angela, in *Plum Bun* passed as white to gain privileges. Both Mattie and Angela passed as white to gain three advantages: economic, social services and pleasure. However, Mattie and Angela passed as white in different ways. Mattie just temporarily passed as white.

Although Mattie passed as white to fool around white people, she did not have the desire to be a white woman. She was proud to acknowledge other people to percept that she

was colored. In contrast, Angela permanently passed as white. She did not like being one part of the black. She ignored her black family and her black friends to gain advantages without the awareness of the value of her own identity.

Obviously, the inferiority and inequality of black people caused the main characters Mattie and Angela to pass as white.

การวิเคราะห์ "การแฝงตนเป็นคนขาว" ในเรื่อง *PLUM BUN* ของ เจสซี เรดมอน ฟอเร็ท

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

นางสาวณกายมาศ พิมมาศ

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตาม

หลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

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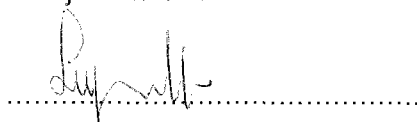
งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาว่าอะไรคือเหตุผลที่ทำให้ตัวละครเอกของเรื่องคือ Mattie และ Angela แฝงตนเป็นคนขาว นอกจากนี้งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาความแตกต่างของการแฝงตนเป็นคนขาวของตัวละครเอกดังกล่าวมีหรือไม่และอย่างไร งานวิจัยนี้ได้วิเคราะห์เนื้อหาตามแนวคิดเรื่องการแฝงตนเป็นคนขาวตามทฤษฎีของ Elaine K. Ginsberg และ Cheryl I. Harris เป็นสำคัญ

ผลการวิจัยพบว่าตัวละครเอกของเรื่องคือ Mattie และ Angela แฝงตนเป็นคนขาวเพื่อได้ประโยชน์ในด้านเศรษฐกิจ การบริการในสังคมและความสุข อย่างไรก็ตาม Mattie และ Angela แฝงตนเป็นคนขาวในลักษณะที่ต่างกัน Mattie แฝงตนเป็นคนขาวในระยะเวลาอันสั้นเท่านั้น แม้ว่า Mattie แฝงตนเป็นคนขาวเพื่อหลอกลวงคนขาว Mattie ก็ไม่ได้มีความปรารถนาที่จะเป็นคนขาวอย่างแท้จริงเพราะ Mattie มีความภาคภูมิใจให้ผู้อื่นทราบว่าหล่อนเป็นชาวผิวสี ในทางตรงกันข้าม Angela ได้แฝงตนเป็นคนขาวอย่างถาวร Angela ไม่มีความปรารถนาที่จะเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของชาวผิวดำ นอกจากนี้ Angela ได้เพิกเฉยต่อสมาชิกในครอบครัวและเพื่อนของตนเองซึ่งมีผิวดำเพื่อที่จะได้มาซึ่งผลประโยชน์ในด้านต่าง ๆ โดยไม่คำนึงถึงความสำคัญและคุณค่าของเชื้อชาติของตนเอง

จากการวิเคราะห์เห็นได้ชัดเจนว่าความไม่เท่าเทียมกันของบุคคลในสังคมเป็นสาเหตุที่ทำให้ตัวละครเอกของเรื่องแฝงตนเป็นคนขาว

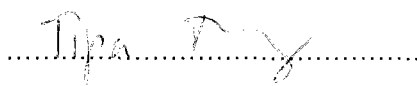
The Master's Project's Committee and Oral Defense Committee have approved this master's project as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

Master's Project Advisor



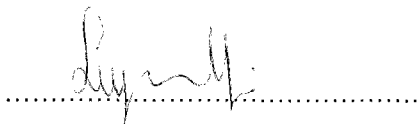
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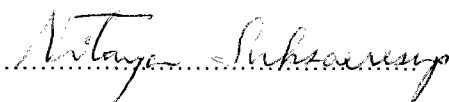
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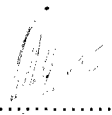
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

There are many ethnic groups in the United States, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Italian Americans, Cuban Americans and Mexican Americans. According to Adalberto Aguirre, African Americans are considered the lowest social level among these ethnic groups because they were brought to the United States as slaves (18). Although they were emancipated, they were still discriminated against in economics, religion, education and politics. They experienced higher rates of poverty, higher rates of unemployment, lower income, and less access to higher education than any other group of Americans.

African Americans were treated cruelly and unequally during the Jim Crow era between 1877-mid 1960s. The term Jim Crow was used to categorize racial classes. It supported not only anti-Black laws but also anti-Black racism. The Jim Crow system created the principle "separate but equal." As a result of this system, Blacks had to go to

different schools, churches, cemeteries, restaurants, and restrooms. Also, they were not allowed to shake hands with whites because it indicated social equality. In addition, they were not allowed to offer a hand or light a cigarette to white women because of the possibility of being accused of rape. They could not even express their affection in public. Furthermore, they were called by their first names instead of titles such as Mr., Mrs., Sir, or Madam (Stetson Kennedy 216-217).

Because of these inequalities, there is no doubt that African Americans with white appearances have tended to cross the boundary into the white world, which is called "passing as white." In the article, "The Rate of Black to White Passing," Frank W. Sweet states that "...as of the 2000 census, between 35,000 and 50,000 young adults who previously were identified by their parents as black, switch to identify themselves publicly as white or Hispanic". The number has decreased and increased due to the intermarriage rate. At present, the rate of passing as white is higher than during Jim Crow period. This indicates that passing as white still exists in American society.

Passing as white was an important issue during the Harlem Renaissance. In this period, there were also numerous literary works concerning this topic. For example, *Passing* (1929), written by Nella Larsen, illustrates the psychology of racial passing and sexual issues of African American females. *The White Girl* (1929), written by Vera Caspary, is the story of Solaria, a beautiful mulatto who passes as white and commits suicide by drinking poison after her racial identity is revealed. *Black No More* (1931), written by George Schuyler, portrays main characters who are offered US \$ 50 to pass as white in three days. Sergeant Waters's novel, *Soldier's Story* (1984), is a story of a selfish woman who passes as white and leaves her black family.

Jessie Redmon Fauset is one of the writers dealing with passing as white. She is eulogized by Langston Hughes and he groups her with two others who "mid-wifed the so-called New Negro literature into being". She wrote four novels: *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy* (1933). *Plum Bun* is considered a famous novel. According to the critique of Deborah McDowell, *Plum Bun* displays the most salient features of the novel of passing. "It is a richly textured and

ingeniously designed narrative, containing plots within plots and texts within texts that comment upon one another in intricate combinations" (15).

Plum Bun is about the life of Angela, a light-skinned African American who lives with her family in Philadelphia. Her mother, Mattie is also a light-skinned African American. Mattie marries Junius Murray, a warm black man who is a carpenter. After the death of Angela's parents, Angela decides to cross the color line and passes as white. She goes to New York City in order to begin life as a white woman. In New York City, she has to change her name and family name to conceal her racial identity. Moreover, she attempts to find a rich white man to marry, but she is not successful. Finally, she reveals the truth that she is colored and appreciates black life and culture.

In Thailand, the researcher has not found scholars who study passing as white as presented in *Plum Bun*. Therefore, this study aims to explore and compare the passing as white of the two main characters: Mattie and Angela. Although they both pass as white, they perform in different ways. This study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the reasons and advantages of Mattie and Angela to pass as white? What are

the differences between passing as white of these characters? This study will help the audience to get a better understanding and appreciate literary works about passing as white. Additionally, it will help the audience to understand people who live in the society.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the reasons for passing as white of the two main characters, Mattie and Angela, in the following aspects:
 - 1.1 Economics
 - 1.2 Politics
 - 1.3 Social Status
 - 1.4 Social services
2. To compare passing as white of the two main characters, Mattie and Angela.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study will be the following:

1. The study will help the audience to have a better understanding about passing as white and appreciate the literary accomplishment.
2. The study of passing as white of the two main characters, Mattie and Angela in *Plum Bun* will increase understanding of its effect on African Americans.
3. The study will assist the audience to understand the literary works of Jessie Redmon Fauset.
4. This study can be used as a guide for the audience to analyze other kinds of passing.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is as follows:

Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun* (1929) focusing on passing as white of two main characters: Mattie and Angela.

Definition of Term

"Passing as white" refers to the action that people who have the same physical appearance as whites: facial structure, hair color and skin color blend into the white world. They act and accept the identification as if they are white people. It is also called "going to the other side" and "crossing over".

Procedures

The procedures of the study were as follows:

1. Accumulation of Information

The information was collected on the following topics:

- 1.1 The biography of Jessie Redmon Fauset
- 1.2 The concept of passing as white
- 1.3 The research on passing as white

2. Information Analysis

2.1 The text of "*Plum Bun*" was examined.

2.2 The two main characters, Mattie and Angela were analyzed by using the concept of passing as white and theories of Elaine K. Ginsberg and Cherryl I. Harris

3. Report of Findings

Findings of the study were discussed in expository form.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Studies

Conclusions were drawn from the findings, and suggestions were made for further studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of the related literature is divided into three parts: the biography of Jessie Redmon Fauset, including Fauset's life, education and literary works, the concept of passing as white and the research on passing as white.

Part I: Jessie Redmon Fauset's Biography

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born in 1882 in New Jersey, Philadelphia. She was the seventh child of Redmon and Annie Seamon Fauset. Her father was a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She attended integrated schools in the city of Philadelphia and graduated from the prestigious Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1900. She was the only black student in the school. After that, she got a scholarship to study in Cornell University and she again was the first black student who attended this university. She graduated as Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell University majoring in classical languages. Then, she received a Master of Arts degree in French from the University of Pennsylvania in 1905.

In 1906, she was a teacher of Latin and French at Dunbar High School in Washington, DC. She worked there for 13 years. In 1919, she was the literary editor of the Crisis magazine. Fauset was an important literary editor who encouraged work and writing of young black writers. She was keen on biography of prominent blacks because she believed that it was useful to educate young blacks. In order to illustrate blacks' struggles and passing as white, she wrote four novels: *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy* (1933). In *Plum Bun*, *There is Confusion* and *The Chinaberry Tree*, Fauset attempted to illustrate that the classification of races was influenced by cultural construction. Additionally, these novels illustrated that color line still can be found in the society.

Part II: The Concept of Passing as White

The concept of passing as white is divided into five parts: the definition of passing as white, the origin of passing as white, the methods of passing as white, the reasons for passing as white, and types of passing as white.

The Definition of Passing as White

According to Elaine K. Ginsberg, "passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing. Passing is also about secularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen" (2).

From Ginsberg's writing, the term "passing" is used to identify the movement from a subordinate and oppressive group to a better group. It is used to describe a person who appears to be someone else. This term is also used widely in gender, class, and ethnicity. Gender passing is a transgender of a person to be accepted as their preferred gender. Most transsexuals will live and work as their preferred gender. They want to be accepted as that gender rather than their natal sex. Gender passing associates itself with a mix of physical gender cues such as hair style, clothing, behavior, comportment and communicative style. For example, a woman who passes as a man will dress in men's clothes and walk in a masculine way.

Racial passing is the description of a person of a subordinate ethnic group who attempts to be accepted by other people as another race. For example, Edmund Kenney is an African American whose physical appearance is white: straight hair, and light skin. Strangers suppose that he is white because of his appearance. He escapes from his white master and passes as white. However, he is legally black according to American's law.

"Passing as white" refers to the action that people who have the same physical appearance as whites: facial structure, hair color and skin color blend into the white world. They act and accept the identification as if they are white people. It is also called "going to the other side" and "crossing over".

The Origin of Passing as White

White racial dominance and privilege is consistent in the United States. There is no doubt that passing as white is well-known to the black community of the United States. In American history, blacks were brought to the United States as slaves. They were considered to be objects that could be bought or sold. According to Ginsberg, the white masters had sexual relationships with black women (5). This indicates exploitation of black

slave women by white men. Moreover, it helped white men to maintain power and control over all black women, black men and white women. In addition, this helped white people to maintain blood purity.

By having sexual relationships with black women, white masters could gain further advantage by selling mixed children. According to American law, these mixed children inherited their mother's race. Therefore, they were similar to other black children because they were treated cruelly and could be purchased. Mixed race people were discriminated against like other blacks. For example, they were not allowed to work like white people, and they were not allowed to vote, though they looked like white people. For these reasons, mixed people had to pass as white to gain these advantages.

The Methods of Passing as White

According to Frank W. Sweet's article, "The Rate of Black to White Passing," birth certificates to indicate racial identity were recorded between 1880 -1965. However, most nineteenth century birth certificates did not indicate racial identity. Some states stopped indicating that in the 1960s. At present, there are only five states which indicate racial

identity in the United States: Hawaii, Mississippi, Connecticut, North Carolina and Texas.

Therefore, passing as white is easy because there is no record of racial identity. According to Ginsberg, passing as white includes two methods: physical appearance and geographical movement (3).

1. Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is needed for passing as white. People who want to pass as white must have the physical appearance of white people: hair color, texture and skin color.

2. Geographical Movement

People who pass as white have to leave the city, state or region to live in a place where nobody knows their true identity. It is necessary to be separated from their families. They also have to ignore darker-skin or black friends and families.

The Reasons for Passing as White

People pass as white for the following reasons: economics, politics, social status and social services.

1. Economics

According to Cheryl I Harris, people passed as white to have a better standard of living. Some jobs were available for white people only. They earned more than those who were colored. Higher incomes helped them to send their children to a private school or college. They could have their own house. These advantages are the enforcement for black people to pass as white.

2. Politics

Harris also states that the concept of racial identity is associated with property. In the past, white people were considered superior to black people. Whites had advantages in many ways. These advantages were set in American law in order to maintain their power, such as in social services, politics, and education (1709-1715).

3. Social Status

According to Adrian Piper's research, "Passing for White, Passing for Black,"

happiness is related to social status. People who pass as white believe that they will be happy if they live in the white community. They have to move from their ancestors' community to a place where they hope to get greater access to rights, liberties and privileges.

4. Social Services

Whiteness allows people to get access to social services: schools, buses, restaurants, theaters, and hospitals. For example, in the past, black people were discriminated against in many ways. They were not allowed to use the same toilet as white people. On buses and in cinemas, they had to sit in their own areas, which were not comfortable. They were not even allowed to sit in the same restaurant or go to the same school as whites. These problems lead them to do something to gain social services access. Therefore, passing as white offers them a better life.

Types of Passing as White

Passing as white can be divided into two types: situational or intermittent passing and permanent passing (Ginsberg 3).

1. Situational or Intermittent Passing

The situational or intermittent passing is temporarily passing because people want to gain occupations or economic advancement. They also want to gain experience of being white. For example, two white journalists, John Howard Griffin and Grace Halsell passed as black for a short period in order to write about racism.

2. Permanent Passing

People who permanently pass as white cross the color line to white completely. The need of being white takes deep root in their soul, and they will never change. They will move to live in a place where nobody knows and will not tell other people about their true identity.

Part III: Research on Passing as White

Karen A. Chachere, in "Visually White, Legally Black: Miscegenation, the Mulatto, and Passing in American Literature and Culture, 1865-1933," points out that some American literature written from 1865-1933 focused on miscegenation, the mulatto and passing. The writers in this period indicate the fear that whites are concerned about legal, social and economic advantages. In this period, white and black writers such as Mark Twain, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, and Jessie Redmon Fauset use these themes to complain about social, legal and political conflicts that Americans desire to maintain their power and whiteness by the venomous.

Steven J. Belluscio, in "To be Suddenly White: Realism and the Problem of Agency in United States Passing Narratives," states that literary works from 1899 to 1931 aim to satirize racial discrimination. Passing cannot be accepted because it is a cultural violation, culturally undesirable and a biological impossibility.

Kateleen Pfeiffer, in "All the Difference: Race Passing and American Individualism," points out that passing as white is a legitimate expression of American individualism. It affirms that a person passes as white because he desires to manipulate his identity to achieve success: equal opportunity and social mobility. The main character who passes as white not only rejects his race, but also embraces American individualist mythology and pushes it to its potential limit.

Carlyle Van Thompson, in "The White to pass: Miscegenation, Mimicry, and Masquerade in Chesnutt, Johnson, Larsen, and Faulkner," argues that black individuals believe that whiteness represents paradox. Passing as white illustrates a hegemony of whites. Passing as white reflects the denial of blackness and the desire of economic advantage. A person who passes as white is considered the outsider. He denies not only his culture and language but also his history.

The researcher has not found any study of passing as white concerning the two main characters, Mattie and Angela, in *Plum Bun*. Therefore, this study attempts to compare the passing as white of Mattie and Angela and analyze their reasons for doing so.

CHAPTER 3

AN ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher explores the passing as white of the two main characters, Mattie and Angela, according to the concept of passing as white. The analysis of passing as white is divided into two parts: passing as white of Mattie Murray and passing as white of Angela Murray.

Passing as White of Mattie Murray

Mixed race children were not accepted in the same way as those who were black. According to American history, white masters had sexual relationships with black women in order to maintain their power and control over black women, black men and white women. However, after mixed children were born, they inherited their mother's race because of American law. These children were similar to other black children because they could be purchased. Besides, they were treated and discriminated against cruelly, just like other blacks, although their features were similar to white people; white skin, blond hair, and blue

eyes. Therefore, there is no doubt that these people could gain a considerable advantage by pretending to be white which is called "passing as white."

In *Plum Bun*, the main character, Mattie Murray is a beautiful mixed - race woman with white skin. Although the author does not mention her appearance directly, it is clearly revealed through the description of her daughter:

"But Angela had received not only her mother's creamy complexion and her soft cloudy, chestnut hair, but she had taken from Junius the aquiline nose, the gift of some remote Indian ancestor which gave to his face and his eldest daughter's that touch of chiselled immobility". (14)

From the description above, it is clearly shown that Mattie has white skin. According to Ginsberg's idea, passing is the seen and the unseen. This idea is well applied to Mattie. 'The seen' indicates that Mattie's appearance is that of a white person. Therefore, the stranger believes that she is a white woman. 'The unseen' implies that the truth of her identity is not revealed. People who pass as white must have the physical appearance

similar to those who are white: hair color and skin color. Therefore, Mattie who has this quality can pass as white successfully.

In *Plum Bun*, it is clear that Mattie starts to learn the advantages of being white when she works as a servant for Madame Sylvio. As Harris suggests in *Whiteness as Property*, people pass as white because they want to gain the experience of being white. Although Madame Sylvio knows that Mattie is a coloured girl, it is believed that Mattie can be trusted because of her white skin. Therefore, she is chosen to be a personal servant of Madame Sylvio. Her white skin provides her a more comfortable room. Besides, she can have much more free time for her evening toilette. Moreover, she is free to go wherever she pleases. This clearly illustrates that these white privileges influence Mattie who is a coloured woman to pass as white.

Harris states that black people were not allowed to go to the same restaurants as white people. Therefore, coloured people who had the appearance of white people passed as white to gain service in restaurants. Like in *Plum Bun*, Mattie passes as white to obtain

this privilege when she is a servant for Madame Sylvio. At that time, Mattie's friend informs Junius that Mattie passes as white. Mattie accepts the truth and says:

Yes, yes, of course I do," she explained it eagerly, "but never to them. And anyway when I am alone what can I do? I can't label myself. And if I'm hungry or tired and I'm near a place where they don't want coloured people, why should I observe their silly old rules, rules that are unnatural and unjust because the world was made for everybody, wasn't it, Junius? (31-32)

From this excerpt, it can be said that Mattie passes as white in a short period to get service in the restaurant. The sentence "I am hungry and tired" emphasizes that Mattie passes as white because she wants to eat good food in a good restaurant as white do people. Moreover, she wants to be treated very well like those who are white.

Mattie passes as white to get service in the restaurant again at the Walton Hotel. Mattie likes going out to a stylish tea-room with her daughter, Angela who also has white skin. This place is impossible for blacks to enter. The reason for going to this place is that she wants to be treated well like those who are white. At the Walton Hotel, Mattie and

Angela are well-dressed. During that time, she sees her black husband, Junius and her brown (half-cast) daughter, Virginia. Like Ginsberg's idea in *The Politics of Passing*, people who pass as white have to ignore or neglect their black family. In this story, Mattie cannot talk to her husband and daughter because she does not want other people to look down on her. Besides, she does not want them to know that she is coloured. Therefore, Mattie pretends not to know her husband and daughter by letting them pass by without any communication with them.

In this story, Mattie passes as white to gain treatment when she is admitted to the hospital in Broad Street. In Harris's theory, people pass as white to gain social services: schools, buses, restaurants, toilets, theaters and hospitals. Similarly, Ina Corinne Brown says that there was a serious lack of access to medical services. In addition, some white doctors refused to accept black patients. Moreover, black doctors and physicians were denied hospital privileges and stimulation of association with white medical colleagues. Some states and local medical societies refused membership to black doctors regardless of their personal or professional qualification (153). In "*Plum Bun*," Mattie who has white

appearance, passes as white to gain medical service. It is a hospital for white people only. However, she is admitted to this hospital because she looks white. There is no doubt that she conceals her true identity to obtain this advantage. When her husband comes to pick her up at the hospital, he has to pretend to be a chauffeur. Otherwise, he will not be allowed to come into the hospital.

Obviously, Mattie passes as white for pleasure as well. She says: "I've only done it for fun but I won't do it anymore if it displeases you" (32). This excerpt shows that Mattie does not have the desire to be in the white society permanently. She is glad and proud to be married to a black coachman though he is poor and homeless. She only wants to fool around with the white folk because it is believed that whiteness brings great privileges. This belief and rule are set up by white people. Therefore, passing as white offers Mattie a great chance to challenge the rule and fool white people.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Mattie temporarily passes as white to gain two advantages: social services and pleasure. For Mattie, passing as white brings great opportunities; access to good restaurants, getting medical treatment and a

feeling of happiness, but in reality, Mattie does not have the desire to be a white woman.

The reason is that she is satisfied with what she has; a black husband and lovely daughters.

Although Mattie passes as white, she does not have a desire to live in the white society permanently. She feels guilty every time when she passes as white. She knows that it is not her right to conceal her true identity. Besides, she thinks that blackness can be admired. She tells her husband the reason for passing and promises not to pass as white again. She expresses her feelings for her husband as follows: "I was at my old game of play acting to-day, June, passing you know, and darling, you and Virginia went by within arm's reach and we never spoke to you. I'm so ashamed..." (19). Mattie's expression reveals that she feels guilty when she pretends not to know her husband and daughter. Moreover, passing as white is just "a game" for her to play around white people. For Mattie, passing as white provides her an opportunity to challenge the stupidity of white folk who believe that whiteness is their "property" which brings them privileges.

Passing as White of Angela Murray

Harris states that American law was issued by white people in order to maintain their power, such as through social services, politics, economics and education. They attempted to provide this access for white people only. This law caused black people to experience difficulties in living. Therefore, this enforced inferiority led many coloured people who had features similar to whites to pass as white. Also, they had a negative attitude towards their own racial identity.

In *Plum Bun*, Angela is indoctrinated by her mother to believe that whiteness is the key to open the door to great opportunity in her life. As mentioned in the first part, Mattie passes as white with Angela when Angela is young. Since then, Angela has learned the ways of passing as white with her mother. As a result, her mother's action influences her admiration of whiteness a great deal. She believes that whiteness can bring her everything, such as riches, glamour and pleasure. This belief deeply takes root in her mind. Also, she believes that her black father and her brown sister will never get these privileges because they have black skin. For example, as a child, she accompanies her

mother to the Walton Hotel. At the hotel, she says that it is very nice that her black father does not see them because she does not want other people to know that she is coloured. This illustrates that Angela starts to learn how to pass as white from her mother when she is young.

In *Plum Bun*, Angela passes as white when she attends a secondary school.

Although it is an integrated school, there are no other coloured girls in her class. There have been only two or three during her school life. The schoolmates who know that Angela is coloured avoid interacting with her. When she goes to the Assembly, no one wants to sit next to her unless there is no seat vacant. They also glance at her with mean amusement. It shows that she receives a deep and violent wound in her heart; the wound that is caused by being coloured. Desperately, she needs friends to remedy her loneliness. This, therefore, is the reason why she conceals her racial identity when she meets a rich beautiful white girl, Mary Hastings. Having Mary Hastings as a best friend, Angela is very happy because this white friend brings her advantages. She will never be left out of the group. Moreover, Mary has plenty of money, so they can go to the gymnasium together.

Also, they get attention from teachers and other friends. One day, there is an election of the representatives for the school magazine. Mary chooses Angela to be her assistant.

Then, Ester Bayliss reveals the truth that Angela is coloured to Mary:

"Mary said again: "Coloured!" And then "Angela, you never told me you were coloured!" Angela's voice was as amazed as her own: "Tell you that I was coloured! Why of course I never told you that I was coloured! Why should I?". (43-44)

From the above excerpt, it can be said that Angela conceals her identity because she wants to be accepted by her white friend. According to Adrian Piper's research, people pass as white to gain social status advantages. They want to be accepted and surrounded by whites so that they will be very happy. In *Plum Bun*, Angela passes as white to gain social status because she can make a new friend. She wants to be accepted by Mary as a close friend. This part clearly illustrates that Angela passes as white to gain social status advantage.

Adalberto Aguirre suggests that all blacks did not get an equal share of education.

The pattern of segregated schools spread throughout the United States between 1920 and 1940. In the South, state legislators, local political figures, school boards, and courts created a separated educational system. In the North, residential segregation led to separate school systems. During the 1960s, the states increased school integration because of black activism. In the 1980s, more than half of all black students attended schools in which minority groups were overrepresented. African Americans had endured a long history of exclusion from the system. Even today they are overrepresented in poor, minority-filled schools (79-80). Because of the hardship of African Americans in getting an equal share of education, black people passed as white to gain educational advantage. This is clearly shown in *Plum Bun*.

In *Plum Bun*, in the art class, Angela passes as white again to gain educational advantage. Mr. Harry Shield is a racist instructor who teaches her and promises to help her in getting a scholarship. He believes that Angela is a white woman because she dresses, talks and acts like white people. Unfortunately, when he finds out the truth that

Angela is coloured, he says "But, Miss Murray, you never told me that you were coloured"

(72). After that, he immediately stops teaching her and stops supporting her to get a scholarship. According to Harris, blacks lacked the opportunity to study with white people.

This part shows that Angela passes as white to gain educational advantages. She has a desire to study in a good school that can provide her a better opportunity to gain knowledge and a scholarship, so she conceals her racial identity to gain this advantage.

In accordance with Ginsberg's idea, after the death of her parents Angela, who admires whiteness, needs geographical movement in order to start a new life in New York as a white woman. She has to leave her city to live in a place where nobody knows her racial identity. Angela says: "I said I was going away. I'm going to leave Philadelphia, give up school teaching, break away from our loving friends and acquaintances, and bust up the whole shooting match" (77). It is necessary for Angela to be separated from her only brown sister, Virginia. Angela also has to ignore her darker-skin or black friends, so she decides to live in New York and promises not to come back again.

Before leaving her house, Angela tells Virginia that if Virginia wants to meet her, she must call her by the name 'Henrietta Jones' to prevent other people knowing her real name. In addition, Angela has to get on the train from the North Philadelphia station because she does not want other black friends and neighbors to know that she is leaving to live in New York. She even does not allow her only sister to see her off. This part clearly illustrates that it is the first time that Angela starts to pass as white permanently.

In New York, at the art school, Cooper Union, Angela changes her name to 'Angele' Mory and pretends to be a white woman. Again, as in Ginsberg's theory, a person who passes as white has to ignore black friends. Angela only participates with white roommates although there is a black student named Miss Powell in her class. One day, Angela asks Roger, who is her white rich boyfriend, to pick her up at the school. On the way to meet her boyfriend, she happens to meet Miss Powell. Angela pretends not to know her black classmate: "She heard footsteps hurrying behind her, heard her name and turned to see Miss Powell, pleased and excited. She laid her hand on Angela's arm but the latter shook her off" (148). This part clearly shows that Angela passes as white to gain social status

advantage. Angela does not want her racist boyfriend to know that she associated with blacks. Moreover, she does not want him or other white friends to know that she is coloured. She only wants to be wrapped in and accepted by white society.

When Angela falls in love, it clearly illustrates that Angela passes as white again to gain economic advantage. She does not reveal to Roger that she is coloured. Although she loves Anthony Cross, a coloured man from Brazil, she decides to have a love affair with Roger who is a handsome wealthy white man: "And she knew she wanted Roger and what he could give her and the light and gladness which he always radiated. She wanted none of Anthony's poverty and privation and secret vows..." (143). She hopes that Roger will ask her to marry him. Then, he will be the golden key to open the door to wealth. She can have a lot of money to open a salon and a drawing room. She also believes that she will be the most envied girl in New York. Finally, she hopes she will have a pleasant, safe, and beautiful life.

In order to conceal her own identity, Angela has to ignore her only sister when she goes to pick Virginia up at the train station. Angela wears her most unobtrusive clothes: a

dark blue suit, and a small and fitting down cloche that covers her eyes because she does not want other people to recognize her. At the train station, she happens to meet her racist boyfriend, Roger. She tells him that she is waiting for Paulette instead of her sister. When Virginia arrives, she pretends not to know Virginia because she does not want her boyfriend to know that she is coloured: "Angela, her eyes beseeching her sister's from under her close hat brim, could only stammer the old formula. 'Really you have the advantage of me. No, I'm not Mrs. Jones'" (159). Angela goes back to her apartment with her boyfriend but neglects her own sister at the train station. This part illustrates that Angela ignores her sister in order to be a perfect white woman. This situation destroys the relationship between Angela and Virginia. Angela is very cruel to her own sister because it is Virginia's first time in New York. Angela believes that if she informs Roger that she is waiting for her black sister, her racial identity will be revealed. After that, she will lose an opportunity to marry a rich man. She will not have plenty of money, a salon and other material things.

As discussed above, it is clear that Angela passes as white to gain three advantages: economic, social status, and social services. However, Angela passes as white differently from her mother, Mattie. Angela says, "But it isn't temporarily inconvenient; it's happening to me every day. And it isn't as though it were something that I could help" (79). Unlike her mother, Angela permanently passes as white. The sentence "it's happening to me every day" clearly illustrates that Angela permanently passes as white. She learns to admire whiteness when she is young. Although she has a warm family, she is not happy at all. All she wants is to be wrapped up by white people and the white community. She ignores her black family and her black friends to gain advantages without the awareness of the value of her own identity. Angela moves from Philadelphia to live in New York in order to get advantages from pretending to be a white woman. Angela does not only deny her racial identity, but also herself. She never knows that although she looks white and pretends to be a white woman, she will never be accepted by the white world.

Pretending to be a white woman, Angela is still not successful in her life. After breaking up the relationship with Roger, Angela starts to learn what is going wrong with her

life; what she really wants in her life; economic success, social status, or love and understanding from her black sister and black friends. She comes to realize that what she longs for, such as economic success and social status, cannot make her happy. Indeed, they make her suffer a great deal. In addition, they make her forget her true love, her roots, and herself. At the end of this story, Angela reveals the truth of her racial identity to everyone. That makes her happy and successful in her life. She reunites with her true love who is a coloured man. Also, she reconciles with her sister, Virginia. Besides, Angela fights for the rights to get a scholarship to study in France as a black woman. What Angela experiences is not only an expensive lesson for herself but also for all of us to appreciate the value of our race.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Conclusion

In *Plum Bun*, the two main characters: Mattie and Angela pass as white for the following reasons:

Mattie passes as white to gain two advantages: social services and pleasure. For Mattie, she does not have to experience the hardship of poverty as black people do when she passes as white. In respect of social services, she can go to the same restaurant and hospital that are available for white people only. Crossing the colour line also provides Mattie privileges that she cannot access.

In "Fooling White Folks, or How I Stole the Show: the Body Politics of Nella Larsen's *Passing*," Deborah R. Grayson states that race is a biological fact that is based on appearance. "People who pass as white are able to challenge the rigid color line in

American culture that is based on visibility" (33). She also indicates that people cannot believe in what they see. Besides, we cannot accept that what we see is real or true.

In *Plum Bun*, because of having the physical appearance of white people, Mattie is "able to challenge the idea that once one is inside of a particular body (architecture), one cannot enter and/or leave this particular "race" and "gender" body" (31). Like Grayson's idea, Mattie can "enter, leave, reenter, try on and discard different modes of wearing her body" (32). Therefore, Mattie temporarily passes as white. Because Mattie looks white, passing as white is just "a game" for her to play around white people. It is white people who set up the rules that whiteness is the greatest thing. Therefore, passing as white makes Mattie happy and satisfied because she can challenge and fool white people.

Although Mattie passes as white, she does not have a desire to be a white woman. She feels guilty every time when she passes. Mattie knows that it is not her right to conceal her true identity. She believes that race is not the main factor that makes her happy. Actually, the most important factor that makes her happy is love and understanding from her husband and daughters.

In "A study of Black Identity in "Passing" Novels of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," Priscilla Ramsey suggests that the black author attempts to illustrate the struggles of black people in the United States. The "Passing" issue is an important way to help the black audience appreciate their identity. The black author shows that black identity can be valuable and acceptable. Passing authors can be divided into two types: conservatives and radicals. Radical authors such as Jean Toomer, Walter White, and Langston Hughes try to show agrarian values, slave images, slave values and slave ideologies in their works. In contrast, conservative novelists try to show the hardship of the black middle class and lower class. Besides, they attempt to convey the message that passing as white should not exist in the society. Conservative novelists suggest that people cannot deny their past, family, and identity. Therefore, authors such as Nella Larsen and James Weldon Johnson use sentimental techniques in their literary works. The works typically end in such a way that characters who pass as white in these novels are punished. They suffer and die for passing as white. Therefore, most conservative novels

end tragically. Jessie Redmon Fauset, the author of *Plum Bun* is one of conservative novelists.

In *Plum Bun*, Angela passes as white to gain three advantages: economic, social status, and social services. Angela attempts to marry a rich man in order to gain economic success. As Valerie Smith discusses in "Reading the Intersection of Race and Gender in Narratives of Passing," "Angela can gain access to white privilege only through the agency and goodwill of a wealthy white man" (44). She wishes to have not only money, a house, a car, a gallery and a salon but also social status. Angela who has white skin wants to be accepted by the white community. She believes that other people will associate with and admire her if she makes them believe that she is a white woman. To get access to educational advantages, Angela also crosses the colour line to study in the white school and get a scholarship.

Unlike Mattie, Angela permanently passes as white. She admires the whiteness because she used to pass with her mother. Angela had been brainwashed by the white society since she was young believing that blacks are associated with ugliness and

negativity. She does not like being a part of the black community. Although she has a warm family, she is not happy at all. All she wants is to be wrapped within the white community and be with white people. She ignores her black family and her black friends to gain advantages without the awareness of the value of her own identity.

Since as mentioned, most conservative novels end tragically, characters who pass as white endure suffering and punishment when they pass. Angela, in *Plum Bun*, suffers from trying to keep the secret of her racial identity from others. Furthermore, she is not successful in getting married to a white man. Angela has to keep in mind that she will never be able to get rid of her blackness. African Americans will never be white, so Angela will never be accepted in the white world.

It is obvious that throughout this novel, Jessie Redmon Fauset attempts to illustrate the necessity of passing as white. She tries to show that people pass as white for economic advancement, social status, social services and pleasure. Moreover, she indicates that passing as white still exists because of the inferiority and inequality of black people in the society. In addition, she shows that the one drop rule, the rule that a person

is considered as black if he or she possesses one black ancestor, still exists. Although there is now a law stating that black and white people are equal, black people are still discriminated against.

After conducting this research, it is found that this has been useful to both audience and the researcher. This research illustrates that people should be proud of their own identity. The concept that one racial identity is superior to others should not be maintained. Nowadays, people are surrounded by illusion. Human beings, who are considered the smartest species among living beings, should not be trapped in the wrong perceptions. People should be aware of the importance of their identity. Therefore, there is no need to deny family, history and identity in order to get only advantages and admiration.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Suggestions for further studies are as follows:

1. *Plum Bun* deals not only with the racial issue, but also with gender issue.

Therefore, the studies that can answer the questions about the main character's motive and

behavior can be conducted. That is, why is Angela dependent? Why is Angela controlled by her boyfriend? Why is Angela submissive?

2. Most of the literary works of Jessie Redmon Fauset deal with race and passing.

Therefore, other works such as *There is Confusion*, the *Chinaberry Tree*, and *Comedy* can be studied.

3. The studies of race as well as the studies of passing as white in other literary works can be conducted.

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