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Susan Isaacs's Critique of Ntozake Shange's Sassafrass, Cypress, and Indigo

Susan Isaacs believes that Ntozake Shange's first novel, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, is mildly entertaining and enjoyable, but her writing, "sometimes loses a thread and makes a mess" (395). Isaacs praises Shange's style, while finding fault with some of the techniques she employs.

The main character that is introduced to the readers in Post Modern American Fiction's [excerpt](#) from Shange's novel, *Sassafrass Cypress, and Indigo*, is Indigo, the youngest of three daughters in the story. Indigo's character borders on the [mystical](#). She has dolls she still talks to, and a fiddle that Sister Mary Louise, a friend of Indigo's, remarks, "Too much of the Holy Ghost came out of Indigo and that fiddle" (Shange, 44). One of Isaacs's criticisms has to do with Indigo's use of magic. Indigo is an avid fiddle player, she, "had mastered the hum of the dusk, the crescendoes of the cicadas, swamp rushes in light winds, thunder at high tide, and her mother's laughter down the hall" (Shange, 45). The technique of mixing magic and fiddle playing does not sit well with Isaacs, who states, "It's

an intriguing idea, but it fails because although the author tries to present Indigo as a wise innocent, a mystical power, a joyous embodiment of the black spirit, the rhetoric of her [musings](#) is earthbound radical-feminist, predictable and silly..."

Isaacs continues her criticism of the notion that Indigo has any magical abilities, and the use of magic as a story line and as a part of Indigo's character, saying, "And if Indigo's black magic is real,...How can she and her people-a people with such potent magic-tolerate the evils the author catalogues so movingly?" (396). Isaacs wonders about the reason for Indigo's magical, mystical qualities, and continues along this track, wondering if the magic might be a metaphor, a fantasy of Indigo's, or Shange's own portrayal of black folklore. Regardless of the intended portrayal of Indigo's magical qualities, Isaacs believes that, "it is not presented with enough clarity. The reader remains mildly fond of Indigo--people who talk to dolls can be enchanting--but it is nonetheless befuddled about her role in the novel" (394).

Despite Isaacs' problems with the structure of the novel, and some of the devices and techniques Shange used in her character development, she does praise Shange as a novelist, comparing her art to weaving, a skill shared by both the mother and the eldest daughter in Sassafrass, Cypress, and Indigo.

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