

## **The African American Traumatic Image of Self in Nella Larsen's Novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929)**

**Asst. Prof Dr. Juan Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Banna**

Dept. of English. College of Languages  
Salahaddin University/Erbil  
[banaali\\_juan@yahoo.com](mailto:banaali_juan@yahoo.com)

**doi: 10.23918/vesal2017.a18**

### **ABSTRACT**

The African American people have suffered continuously from racial discrimination. Writers started to reflect such discrimination in their works. Nella Larsen (1891-1964), Harlem Renaissance writer uses such traumatic image of tormented self in both of her novels *Quicksand* and *Passing*. The female heroines Helga and Irene are portrayed as exotic selves who suffer to achieve self determination. Larsen's main characters Helga Crane, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, share in the same racial discrepancies, but with different identity. This study examines such agonistic situations these heroines suffer from as Mulatto and analyses the causes and effects they daily face. Views of critics and other specialists in this field are necessary for emphasizing and suggesting suitable solutions by theorists and psychologists to get rid of traumatic moments and help the heroines to have unified selves. The study is of two sections and an Introduction. The first section examines notions about trauma and the views of theorists and specialists in psychology about traumatic selves. It also discusses Nella Larsen's innovative achievement in her novels. The second section sheds lights particularly on both novels and pinpoints samples that present traumatic situations the heroines find themselves in. The last part is concerned with a conclusion and a list of references.

**KeyWords:** African American, Discrimination, Nella Larsen,, *Passing*, *Quicksand* .

### **1- INTRODUCTION:**

In modern scholarship, Larsen is recognized as one of the central figures in the African American, feminist and modernist canons, a reputation that is based on her two novels (*Passing* and *Quicksand*) and some short stories.<sup>1</sup> As of 2007, *Passing* is the subject of more than 200 scholarly articles and more than 50 dissertations,<sup>2</sup> which offer a range of critical interpretations. It has been hailed as a text helping to "create a modernist psychological interiority ... challenging marriage and middle-class domesticity, complexly interrogating gender, race, and sexual identity, and for redeploying traditional tropes—such as that of the tragic mulatta—with a contemporary and critical twist." Clara Kaplan (2007) However, literary critic Cheryl wall (1986) summarizes the critical response to *Passing* as less favorable than to Larsen's first novel *Quicksand*.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, the significance of sexual jealousy in the story has been seen to detract from the topic of

racial passing; conversely, even if racial passing is accurately treated in the novel, it is considered a historically specific practice and so *Passing* appears dated and trivial.

Thadious M. Davis (1986) claims that during the 1920s, when Harlem was black America's culture capital and the "New Negro" was in vogue, Nella Larsen grappled with the complexity of being a modern black female. Born in Chicago during its headlong rush into modern development, she was the first of the twentieth-century black women writers whose sensibility was completely urban and whose understanding of fiction was thoroughly modern. She was born in the 1890s, when Chicago propelled itself by means of the Columbian Exposition in (1893) into an unparalleled acceptance of urban modernity. Her arrival in the New York of the 1910s anchored a fascination with urban existence that both characterized and stabilized her adulthood (qtd in Scott 209). Andrew W. Davis (2006: 59-60) believes that the issues Larsen's novels address lead Deborah E. McDowell (1986:xxxii) to argue that "[Larsen] has to be regarded as something of a pioneer, a trail blazer in the Afro American female literary tradition [. . .] [her novels] represent the desire, the expectation, the preparation of eroticism that contemporary black women's novels are attempting to bring to franker and fuller expression". McDowell's praise of Larsen among current African American female writers helped reintroduce Larsen's novels into the literary canon. Juda Bennett (2001: 206) argues that McDowell's introduction "was instrumental in securing Larsen new readers as well as sparking critical interest" in Larsen's novels.

Larsen became acquainted with modernist authors through her training at the Library School of the New York Public Library (1922-1923) and her job at the 135<sup>th</sup> Street branch library, where "New negro" writers of the older generation (James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, W.E.B. Du Bois and the younger (Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes) gathered for readings.<sup>4</sup> An additional influence was her friendship with white novelist and critic Carl van Vechten, who in the 1920s was often in the forefront of "new" tastes and directions, such as "Negro Harlem," Walt Whitman, and Gertrude Stein (Scott 1990: 210). Davis (2006) also believes that despite her identification with what Alain Locke (1925:47), godfather of the Harlem Renaissance, termed "the talented few", those who were in Du Bois's formulation "the talented tenth" of the race, Larsen recognized that neither class privilege nor caste position could protect women from the external and internal circumstances that impede their development, circumvent their ambition, and fragment their personalities. Her two published novels, *Quicksand* (1928) and *passing* (1929), have at their centre the same issues that feminists today explore: gender identity, racial oppression, sexuality and desire, work and aspiration, marriage and ambition, reproduction and motherhood, family and autonomy, class and social mobility. Her intricate explorations of the personal consciousness and psychology of women transcend the limits of a single fictive character because on a subsurface level they address the condition of, and ambivalence toward, women in an emergent modern society. Both novels are marked by discourses on female desire and allegories of repression (Scott 1990: 210-211).

## **Section One**

### **1.1. Loss and Melancholic Selves**

In his famous essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Sigmund Freud writes that the loss of an object normally provokes a reaction known as mourning. The mourner knows whom or what he/she lost and is aware that suffering is part of a normal process at the end of which a new life

begins. Yet, Freud adds that in some people the same event produces melancholia instead of mourning. In many cases one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost. This situation is common in psychoanalysis, even when the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his/her melancholia, but only in the sense that he/she knows *whom* he/she has lost, but not *what* he/she has lost in him/her. Freud suggests therefore that melancholia is in some way related to an object lost which is withdrawn from consciousness. The most striking characteristic of the melancholic personality is extreme diminution in self-regard: somehow the loss of an object has triggered an impoverishment of the self. As Freud puts it: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (Freud, 1989: 585). In other words, while it would seem as though the loss suffered is that of an object, what the melancholic has actually experienced is a loss of self (qtd in Mroziak 1-2).

According to Julia Kristeva (1989: 13-14), the author of *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*, the melancholic suffers not from the Object but the Thing (French *Chose*) lost, which is "an unnamable, supreme good, something unrepresentable, that [...] no word could signify. [...] The Thing is inscribed within us without memory, the buried accomplice of our unspeakable anguishes". Kristeva identifies the Thing with the Mother, by which she understands the pre-Oedipal Mother – the one strongly bonded to the child and then prohibited in the Name of the Father. The mother is the child's first love which has to be abandoned in order to enable him or her to become the subject, which in Lacanian terms means to enter the language. Kristeva emphasizes that even though the process of losing the maternal (semantic) in order to become part of the paternal (symbolic) is common to both the male and the female child, it is the girl who suffers more from the matricide. While the boy, entering the paternal sphere, identifies with the father and replaces the mother with another object of the opposite sex, the girl has to return to the abandoned mother to identify with her in order to make herself an object of the opposite-sex desire. According to Kristeva, this is "an unbelievable symbolic effort," as for the girl the act of killing the mother is, in fact, the act of killing herself. "In the midst of its lethal ocean, the melancholy woman is the dead one that has always been abandoned within herself and can never kill outside herself" (30). For Kristeva, as well as for Luce Irigaray (1993), the only possible way to solve the problem of the melancholic and to halt his/her self-destructive drive is to "reveal the sexual (homosexual) secret of the depressive course of action that causes the melancholy person to *live with death* [...]" The separation henceforth appears no longer as a threat of disintegration but as a *stepping stone* toward some other – conflictive, bearing Eros and Thanatos, open to both meaning and non meaning" (Kristeva, 83). Though recovery of the lost object (the maternal Thing) as an erotic object (the Object of desire) insures continuity in a metonymy of pleasure, for women, it means the necessity of being faced with "the dilemma of homosexual drive."<sup>5</sup> And what, for Kristeva and especially for Irigaray, is expected to be an unquestionable value or at least an unavoidable consequence of the economy of desire (since lesbianism is understood as a re-creation or repetition of the primary mother-daughter (homosexual) attachment),<sup>6</sup> for Judith Butler (1999:82), it is not necessarily such a great feast of the mother-daughter reunion. According to Butler, who in *Gender Trouble* juxtaposes Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" with his later work, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), "the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual 'dispositions' by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible" (Butler, 1999: 82). Butler's comparative reading of Freud's essays proves that he has separated identification (desire to be) from desire to have (desire for); for him these have been "two psychologically distinct ties:" "For Freud, desire for one sex is always secured through identification with the other sex; to desire and to identify with the same

person at the same time is, in this model, a theoretical impossibility” ( Catherine Rottenberg 2003). Butler notices that in heterosexual order a complicated process of gender identification and desire directed at the opposite sex, which is, at the same time, the process of one’s dealing. These views of the theorists and psychiatrists clarify how and why Larsen's heroines behave in such odd way which is clear in the following section.

## **Section Two:**

### **2.1.The Concept of Mulatto in relation to Traumatic incidents of Nella's heroines**

Many writers tackle this subject in their works. Jeffrey Gray(2012) discusses it in his article entitled as Essence and the Mulatto Traveler: Europe as Embodiment in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. The situation of a person who is half white and half black is a difficult one and the person is torn between two worlds. One means of avoiding the choice of "uplift" vs. "primitivism" and yet incorporating that binary opposition into "the psychological struggle of the heroine" was to make the heroine a mulatto, as Larsen did in both *Quicksand* and her second novel *Passing*, and to place the question of racial indeterminacy at the heart of both novels.' Another means was to transport the action, midway through *Quicksand*, to Europe, where Helga's (and Larsen's) heritage partly lay. "mulatto" is still read as "black" in the white cultures of both the United States and Europe; 7) racism is merely replaced, as Helga discovers in Denmark, by exoticism; and 8) the move itself from the United States to Europe reinscribes, in Helga's and other Americans' thinking, the "primitive" vs. "uplift" binarism-that is, Helga herself sees going to Europe as a move away from "primitive" forces in America. Nevertheless, it is these two conditions-of travel and the mulatto heroine-which establish *Quicksand* as a novel is about the African-American's construction and self-construction as art object abroad. Helga's status as mulatto is further differentiated from the mulatto figure traditionally realized in fiction, when we note that she is not the mulatto represented in *Quicksand*'s epigraph:

My old man died in a fine big house.

My ma died in a shack.

I wonder where I'm gonna die,

Being neither white nor black?

Hortense E. Thornton has suggested that the epigraph-from Langston Hughes' poem "Cross"-is inappropriate because Helga Crane's plight does not arise there is another powerful reason why the epigraph is inappropriate: it represents the wrong kind of mulatto. Helga's is not the plantation case of the white master's seduction/rape of the black woman slave. Frantz Fanon, writing of the Martiniquaise novelist Mayotte Capécia, explains that a white mother is rarer than a white father for a mulatto. "The white man can allow himself the luxury of sleeping with many women.... But when a white woman accepts a black man there is automatically a romantic aspect.... It is an honor to be the daughter of a white woman. That proves one was not 'made in the bushes'" (Fanon 1986: 46). Nella Larsen herself was born to a Danish mother and a West Indian father. Her father died-unlike Helga's who deserted-and her mother remarried a white man, with whom she had other children, but by whom Larsen was not well-treated. Larsen, like Helga, spent time in Chicago, where she was born, in New York, and in Copenhagen, where she attended university classes. Except for the death of the father in Larsen's case, the parallels are clear-cut, and certainly the estrangement which the author felt in her life is one we can trace in her heroine. But whether or not we wish to allow the biographical text into the literary text, we have at least to see that Helga's indeterminate position as mulatto is additionally problematized, in that she was brought up with

whites and has no black family. Her going to Europe, therefore, is not only in order to seek a happy future in Copenhagen, where there were no Negroes, no problems, no prejudice( Quicksand 123),but to join the only blood relatives who will accept her. (Ironically, her journey is facilitated by the blood relative who will not accept her, Peter Nillsen, who gives her \$5,000 and god speed.)What Fanon goes on to say in his discussion of mulatto fiction is especially Germane to Quicksand": only one course is left for the heroines :to go away" (47).Thus, the two questions of racial indeterminacy and of geographical "place" are not only equally paramount but finally become a single question. The mulatto is a traveler, moving back and forth between black and white communities, or, in Helga's and other contemporary cases, between continents. As with most journeys, Helga's is a quest for Self and for Self-location. But her shuttling geographical movement also corresponds to the binarism in which the African- American novel of the time found itself trapped: primitive vs. uplift, where the United States represents the primitive of the repressed Self, and Europe the idealized (and aestheticized) Other. This shuttling movement is the controlling figure of Quicksand.Larsen's female characters feel alone because of such traumatic moments they pass:

*. . . For I am lonely, so lonely . . .cannot help longing to be with you again, as I have never longed for anything before; and I have wanted many things in my life. . . . You can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be free of. . . . It's like an ache, a pain that never ceases. . . ." Sheets upon thin sheets of it. And ending finally with, "and it's your fault, 'Rene dear. At least partly. For I wouldn't now, perhaps, have this terrible, this wild desire if I hadn't seen you that time in Chicago.*

*. . . (Passing 8).*

Another traumatic moment is the issue of color which is endless. Always they feel agonic towards the people when looked at:

*Very slowly she looked around, and into the dark eyes of the woman In the green frock at the next table. But she evidently failed to realize that such intense interest as she was showing might be embarrassing, and continued to stare (Passing 17).*

In *Passing* , women recognize each other by smile, the tone of voice, and at last by the look. For Irene, Clare's eyes are not only "dark, almost black," but most of all "magnificent," "always luminous," "arresting, slow and mesmeric," and, interestingly, "mysterious and concealing." Irene sees that there is "something withdrawn and secret about them" (Larsen, 1995: 161) and both at the Drayton hotel and later at Clare's place she attempts to reveal the friend's secret. (qtd in Mrozik 4)

*Clare handed her husband his tea and laid her hand on his arm with an affectionate little gesture. Speaking with confidence as well as with amusement, she said: "My goodness, Jack! What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured?"*  
*(68 passing)*

Eye contact is very important in the Irene-Clare relationship. Women "look at each other," "stare," "gaze," "glance" and "watch," but from the beginning they have problems with giving each other a recognition. While Irene's eyes are described as "unseeing" (149),Clare's are "peculiar, dark and deep and unfathomable;" "the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart"

(172). Cheryl A. Wall considers that “in ironic contrast to her name, Clare is an opaque character, impossible to ‘read’” (1995: 122).<sup>5</sup> (qtd in Mrozik 5)

What if Clare was not dead? She felt nauseated, as much at the idea of the glorious body mutilated as from fear. How she managed to make the rest of the journey without fainting she never knew. But at last she was down. Just at the bottom she came on the others, surrounded by a little circle of strangers. They were all speaking in whispers, or in the awed, discreetly lowered tones adapted to the presence of disaster. In the first instant she wanted to turn and rush back up the way she had come. Then a calm desperation came over her. She braced herself, physically and mentally. "Here's Irene now," Dave Freeland announced, and told her that, having only just missed her, they had concluded that she had fainted or something like that, and were on the way to find out about her (passing 213).

According to Catherine Rottenberg (2003), Irene's main problem, which she is not able to deal with successfully, is her racial identity, or, to be more precise, her being torn between her identification with Blackness and desire to be white. Since “white racist regimes create a distinct bifurcation between identification and ‘desire-to-be,’ [...] certain subjects are encouraged to privilege and thus desire attributes associated with whiteness, but currently these same objects are forced to identify as black”. As whiteness circulates as an ideal, Irene desires it and aspires to be white, though never admits it openly (qtd in Morzik 11-12). Later, still disturbed by the experience, she reflects that her friends had all along divined the presence of that something, undisclosed to her who feels herself "inside" it:

some characteristic, different from any that they themselves possessed. Else why had they decked her out as they had? And they hadn't despised it. No, they had admired it.... Why? (184)

The sound of the tom-tom also echoes the earlier scene in the Harlem jazz club where Helga, after surrendering to the music, feels ashamed and longs all the more to flee to Europe. The problem of the Negroes is how to hide themselves from the Americans. They wanted to feel free, speak freely and behave normally away from America. Helga travels to find peace but unfortunately was not happy. She has been received in her uncle's home. Axel Olsun painted her but she did not like her face and body drawn by Axel. She felt herself as disgusting, sexual and was really sad for having such feeling. The scene is a pivotal one: the Harlem nightclub where, after being "drugged, lifted, sustained ... blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra" (130), Helga comes to herself with a sense of shame at having succumbed; she looks on the other dancers with disgust; watching them, she sees a "moving mosaic":

*There was sooty black, shiny black, taupe, mahogany, bronze, copper, gold, orange, yellow, peach, ivory, pinky white, pastry white. There was yellow hair, brown hair, black hair; straight hair, straightened hair, curly hair, crinkly hair, woolly hair. She saw black eyes in white faces, brown eyes in yellow faces, gray eyes in brown faces, blue eyes in tan faces. Africa, Europe, perhaps with a pinch of Asia, in a fantastic motley of ugliness and beauty, semibarbaric, sophisticated, exotic, were here. But she was blind to its charm....* (130-31)

Velina Manolova (2008) Claims that Larsen's two novels, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, both address the predicament of women who embody social ambiguity by transgressing the color line, the public/private split, bourgeois sexual mores, and hetero normative sexual scripts. Helga's characterization as a hysteric, as they lead up to the hysterical episode that sends her to Chicago. The narrator's remark that Helga “could neither conform, nor be happy in her unconformity” (11) and question “But just what did she want?” (14) both point to a fundamental inability or refusal to be satisfied central to the psychoanalytic definition of a hysteric.<sup>9</sup> Her hysterical fit in Naxos, like

her subsequent fits, combines sexual confusion, a violent reaction to an interpellation, and flight. When the school principal, Robert Anderson, first pronounces her name as she sits in his office, “she was aware of inward confusion. For her the situation seemed charged, unaccountably, with strangeness and something very like hysteria” (21-22).

Helga’s intuitive response to Anderson foreshadows his role as an agent of her hystericization and sexual confusion throughout the novel. Anderson’s charisma almost keeps Helga in Naxos. Listening to Anderson, Helga feels “a mystifying yearning which sang and throbbed in her. She felt again that urge for service, not now for her people, but for this man who was now talking so earnestly of his work, his plans, his hopes.... It was not sacrifice she felt now, but actual desire to stay, and to come back next year” (23). But Anderson makes the mistake of ending a flowery speech about “service,” “aiming high” and Naxos’s need for “people with a sense of values” with interpellating Helga into a specific class positionality and positing her class identity as something inherent and outside the social realm.

“You’re a lady,” Anderson insists. “You have dignity and breeding” (24). The class interpellation causes “turmoil [to rise] again in Helga Crane.” “Trembling,” she informs the principal:

“If you’re speaking of family, Dr. Anderson, why, I haven’t any. I was born in a Chicago slum.(qtd in manolova 20)

*The man chose his words, carefully, he thought. “That doesn’t at all matter, Miss Crane. Financial, economic circumstances can’t destroy tendencies inherited from good stock. You yourself prove that!” Concerned with her own angry thoughts, which scurried here and there like trapped rats, Helga missed the import of his words. Her own words, her answer, fell like drops of hail. “The joke is on you, Dr. Anderson. My father was a gambler who deserted my mother, a white immigrant. It is even uncertain that they were married. As I said first, I don’t belong here. I shall be leaving at once. This afternoon. Good-morning.” (24)*

Helga’s construction of her racial identity runs congruent to her struggles as a woman and with her sexuality. As Helga’s biracial heritage prevents her from fully fitting into either African American or white communities, similarly, each community somehow hinders Helga’s exploration of her sexuality by either repressing or exploiting it. The novel links the construction and performance of race to the expression of female sexuality, specifically African American female heterosexuality in the context of race conscious and racist societies. Just as the novel underscores limiting modes of defining race— as either African American or as white-- the novel conveys the restrictive modes of representing female sexuality—as either chaste or promiscuous. As Helga struggles to define her racial identity she also tries to maintain her sexual autonomy. Through Helga’s journey, the novel defines and refutes the stereotypes that objectify literary representations of African American women. In her introduction to the novels, McDowell outlines the historical and literary traditions that created the two dichotomous modes of representing African American female sexuality (McDowell xii-xiii). One such representation is the figure of the exotic and promiscuous African woman who is prevalent throughout the literature and cultural myths of early American society (Rennie Simson 1983: 230). Such archetypes influenced much of the writing of the Harlem Renaissance, which exploited African American women as “primitive exotic sex objects” (McDowell xv qtd in Davis 2006 4-5).

The "quicksand" finally is the body into which her subjectivity is sinking, and within which the more she struggles (travels and questions), the farther down she sinks. The body is, at the end of the novel, represented in its least artificial, most biological, most "given" terms. Once aware that

she is sinking, Helga begins to dream again of her former life, of "things," of change and (re)construction, but it is too late. Before her surrender to the "physical" and the dream of pastoral-"Pleasant Green" and Alabama-Helga has choices, personal, marital, and geographical. It is these choices that distinguish Quicksand-as one feels Larsen must have desired to distinguish it-from the "tragic mulatto" tradition. Helga's failure is not, as Lillie Howard (1987: 226) argues, that "she cannot reconcile herself to the reality of her race," or that her "materialism" "masks the essence of herself," or that she "lacks the basic capacity to accept herself as she is" . *Quicksand* offers the much more profound (and, to many, no doubt distressing) idea that there is no essence, black, white, or mulatto, that arrival at essence is always deferred; and that in our awareness of ourselves as difference, everyone is a mulatto, born of and self-located between two differences. The racially indeterminate and travelling mulatto figure serves to open up possibilities, to heighten our awareness of that absence of determined essence, and of the reality that the construction of the Self goes on, home and abroad, subject to forces that crowd the body with contradictory representations-pleasant and disturbing, limiting and enabling. Helga returns to the United States out of the same restlessness that motivated her departure: she is not satisfied. There was a painful incident in which she was accused, apparently unjustly, of plagiarism ;and there was an equally painful divorce. But Larsen evidently wrote no more ;she had been working as a nurse at a Brooklyn hospital when she died in 1963.<sup>10</sup> (qtd in Gray 268).Most of Larsen's works concentrate on this sensitive point which is to avoid underestimating human beings no matter what color or cultural background they possess.

### **Conclusion**

Helga Crane suffers a lot psychologically to fulfill her own desire which is to have a unified self determination in Larsen's *Quicksand*. Helga tries to coop with her own American people. Being Black ,she runs from social discrimination imposed on her in her society thinking that she can fled from her tormented, melancholic self. Her Journey to Denmark , Copenhagen then her marriage from a Black American preacher in the village Alabama did not free her disturbing ties . She becomes a mother of four children and expecting the fifth had changed her body which made her psychological state worse. She faces terrible transformation from a strong , independent teacher to a rural woman with no identity at all. Helga's choice indicates a radical effect to get rid of a repressed feeling .The novels' endings not only critique the conventional endings which depict idealized African American communities, but also suggest that there is no place for autonomous, non-stereotypical representations of African American women in such societies. All three protagonists are unable to obtain complete agency and lose their identity under the weight of their oppressive societies. the fates of Larsen's characters do not negate either novel's position against the stereotypical representations of African American women in American literary tradition. The characters' failure to succeed in their society does not reflect upon the novels' failure in creating characters that resist objectification or submission to dominant ideology. Helga's awareness of her repression and exploitation elevate her above the objectified figure of the African American female the novel critiques. The novel clearly does not endorse Helga's fate; the final pages narrating Helga's inner monolog give voice to the marginalized figures victimized by dominant white male culture.

### **NOTES**

- 1-Kaplan (2007),p. ix.
- 2-Kaplan (2007), pp. 539-46.
- 3-Wall, (1986), p. 105.

- 4- Jacquelyn Y. McLendon (1995). *The politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen*. University of Virginia Press. pp. 71–93. ISBN 978-0-8139-1553-1
- 5- Kristeva writes that the lost object may be recovered as erotic object (and this is the case of male heterosexuality or female homosexuality); transposed onto the other (sex) now eroticized (in case of heterosexual woman); or constructed into “sublime” erotic object (in social bonds, intellectual and aesthetic productions etc.). (28).
- 6- This is what Irigaray concludes in her essay “Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother” (1993).
- 7 -Two of Larsen's critics-Hortense E. Thornton and Deborah E. McDowell-have specifically addressed this epigraph; virtually all of the critics who have examined Quicksand in the last two decades have argued that there is a danger in letting the issue of race displace that of gender. Hortense Thornton may be the earliest to take this view (in 1973); others are Cheryl A. Wall and Anne E. Hostetler.
- 8 - Constance Webb does not attribute most of the remarks she quotes or paraphrases, explaining that they come from personal conversations with Wright or from his diaries.
- 9- See, for instance, Freud, Lacan, Gallop, Findlay, and Leeks. Findlay makes the case for the hysterical refusal to be satisfied as a distinctly queer sensibility.
- 10 -For this and other biographical information, see M.H. Washington, "Nella Larsen," *M s.* (December 1980) 44-50.

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