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The Impressionistic Vision of the Color-line Problem in Rebecca Hall's Film Adaptation (2021) of Nella Larsen's "Passing"(1929)

ABSTRACT

"Passing" is the most controversial film adaptation by Rebecca Hall (2021) of Nella Larsen's novella (1929) with the same title. The winner of (2022) "Independent Spirit Award" for "Best Cinematography" has achieved unexpected success though it has been produced in black and white. Hence, this article aims to investigate the secret of this success exploring the phenomenon of passing and the color-line problem; their racist implications, and camouflaged types. The misunderstanding of the African-American identity and their Double conscious diagnosed by Du Bois has developed different and contrasting shades of inner and outer social conflict in the USA in terms of black and white, submission and rejection, self-satisfaction and self-hatred, staying and passing. The importance of this article then lies in recalling the color-line problem as the main problem of the 20th century which unfortunately seemed to be unsolved in the 21st century through Larsen's literary impressionistic vision and Hall's impressionistic cinematography treatment. Therefore, the researcher has traced the literary impressionist techniques in both Larsen's novella and Hall's film adaptation to expose some personal, social, racial, and political viewpoints that reflect two different generations' visions. Finally, the conclusion has asserted that the color-line problem is ongoing and that the fair fight against racial injustice will not come to an end unless having all these segregation walls demolished inwardly and outwardly.

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الرؤية الأنطباعية لمشكلة خط الفصل العنصري في فلم ريبيكا هول المقتبس (2021) عن رواية نيلا لارسن

لارسن

ميادة زهير الخفاجي/ جامعة بغداد / كلية التربية البدنية وعلوم الرياضة
الخلاصة:

"العبور" هو الفيلم الأكثر إثارة للجدل لريبيكا هول (2021) والمقتبس عن رواية نيلا لارسن (1929) بنفس العنوان. حقق هذا الفلم الحائز على جائزة "ذا إندبندنت سبيريت" (2022) عن "أفضل تصوير سينمائي" نجاحًا غير متوقع على الرغم من إنتاجه باللونين الأبيض والأسود. ومن ثم، إن الهدف من هذا البحث هو التحقيق في سر هذا النجاح للتعرف على ظاهرة العبور ومشكلة خط الفصل العنصري؛ آثارها وأنواعها

المموهة. لقد أدى سوء فهم الهوية الأمريكية الأفريقية ووعيهم المزدوج الذي تم تشخيصه من قبل Du Bois إلى ظهور ظلال مختلفة ومتناقضة هيمنت على الصراع الاجتماعي الداخلي والخارجي في الولايات المتحدة من حيث اللون الأسود والأبيض ، والخضوع والرفض ، والرضا عن النفس وكرهية الذات ، والبقاء والعبور. تكمن أهمية هذا البحث في التذكير بمشكلة خط الفصل العنصري باعتبارها المشكلة الرئيسية في القرن العشرين والتي للأسف ظلت عالقة حتى القرن الحادي والعشرين من خلال رؤية لارسن الانطباعية الأدبية ومعالجة هول السينمائية الانطباعية. لذلك فقد تتبع الباحث التقنيات الانطباعية الأدبية في كلا العاملين لعرض بعض وجهات النظر الشخصية والاجتماعية والعرقية والسياسية التي تعكس رؤية جيلين مختلفين. أخيرًا ، أكد الاستنتاج أن مشكلة خط الفصل العنصري مستمرة وأن الكفاح العادل ضد الظلم العنصري لن ينتهي ما لم تهدم جدران هذا الفصل داخليًا وخارجيًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التصوير السينمائي الانطباعي ، ، العبور ، تقنيات الانطباعية, مشكلة خط الفصل العنصري

Introduction:

"Passing" is a common theme in literature relative to works about race, class, and gender. The term 'Passing for' is defined as presenting "a false appearance ". In other words, it means pretending, simulating, faking, deceiving, and acting as someone else (Merriam-Webster, 2022). A more clarifying definition by V. Rohy (1996) suggests that "Passing" is a displacing desire that "designates a performance in which one presents oneself as what one is not, a performance commonly imagined along the axis of race, class, gender or sexuality" (Rohy, (1996), p. 21).

Sociologically, "Passing" has been described as a social management strategy. Erving Goffman, a sociologist believes that everyone has social management strategy and that "Passing" is "the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self." Individuals with stigma or feeling shame of being black or homosexual or sick or disabled for example or any unaccepted social category, they try to pass for the other side to gain societal respect and acceptance (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). In a study by Kapp (2020) on Lobbying autism's diagnostic revision in the *DSM-5*, neurologists describe "Passing" as an attempt to "hide stigmatized identity by pretending to be a member of the unstigmatized majority". They have considered it a deluding and unaccepted behavior when individuals diagnosed with autism attempt to pass for normal (Kapp,Sk; Ne'eman,A, 2020, pp. 167-194) also in (Brown, 1991).

Mike Allen (2017) portrays "Passing" as a process of disguising or masking or in another word camouflaging by which an individuals can adopt false identity rather than their own real identity to gain the membership of certain social group without the permission of that group. The individuals try to pass as another social group member by masking their own genuine characteristics for two general motivations which are either to achieve social advantages or to avoid social problems. This theory could be applied to a variety of situations that take place in education, occupations, peer relationships, gender, racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, religion, age, and disability status (Allen, 2017).

In his book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Robin DiAngelo, (2019) confirmed that the term "Passing" has been first used in the United States to describe a person with a multiracial identity who can be accepted as white in order to escape the legal and social restrictions of racial segregation and discrimination. He also stated that these mixed racial heritage people may succeed to pass as white but they still suffer of isolation and rejection from their own color community who cannot pass (DiAngelo, 2019).

However, racial "Passing" is not a new subject for American literature. The nineteenth century witnessed many attempts by authors like William Dean Howells and Harriet Beecher Stowe to exploit its dramatic and political potentials. Pioneering African American novellaist as William Wells Brown had introduced this subject in his novella *Clotel, or The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* published in 1853. The novella explores slavery's destructive effects on African-American families, the difficult lives of American mulattoes or mixed-race people. In which, "Passing" is associated with the "tragic mulatto" or "mulatta", a biracial light skinned people "neither black nor white, an ill-fated-in-between-figure" who can escape their black race and pass for white to gain some political or financial benefits yet still tragic for the "social resentment" (Fabi, 2001). Although the reasons behind "Passing" are deeply individual, Allyson Hobbs (2014) attributes the history of African Americans "Passing" as white to the longtime of slavery and post- emancipation. In his book *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial "Passing" in American Life*, he has categorized the history of American racial "Passing" into four time periods: the antebellum era or the period before the American Civil War, post-emancipation, Reconstruction through Jim Crow, and present- day (Hobbs, 2014) .

In 1929 Nella Larsen evoked the same problem in her novella "Passing" narrating the story of two mulatto black women, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield who have claimed the privilege of

"Passing" the color-line for white so they can reach kind of self-satisfaction. Larsen's classic novella "Passing" explores the themes of race and identity through the phenomenon of "passing." Clare's decision to pass as white carries with it the assumption of self-hatred and the oppression of her identity as an African American woman. Her attempt to reconnect with her roots ends in tragedy, which emphasizes the dangers of denying one's true identity. "Passing" develops many issues that converge on the novella's larger theme of the consequences and nuances of racial "Passing" in the 1920's. Larsen extends her understanding of "Passing" to more than its obvious racial considerations. Martha J. Cutter (1996) has stated in her article *Sliding Significations: "Passing" as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen's Fiction* that all Nella's protagonists want to "pass." She says that "Passing" is more than just a racial strategy for them. It is a strategy to be someone else "to be a person" that they are not. Nella has used "Passing" as a destroying strategy just to break the collar of race, class, and sex discrimination and turned it into a means of liberating in her two novellas, the "Quicksand" (1928) and "Passing" (1929). In the first novella, *Quicksand* (1928), her protagonist Helga Crane ends "Passing" as a wife is an attempt to have a unified identity instead of "Passing" to multi identities as a devoted teacher, an artist, a religious Christian, anti-racial activist, or a submissive mother. Unlike Helga, Clare the protagonist of "Passing" does not adopt any significant identity. She wants to cross the whole lines of race, class, and sexuality to develop a plural presence or multi-self-identity and hence came her tragic end (Cutter, 1996).

With her only two black feminist novellas *Quicksand and "Passing"* (1928-1929), as Ann Banfield (2003) puts it, Nella Larsen has created a black American post-impressionist modern fiction. Just like Virginia Woolf, Nella Larsen has turned the characters and every moment they pass through into a living "impressionist canvas." She has related "past to future in a time-series," (Banfield, 2003).

In this view, the release of Rebecca Hall's film adaptation (2021) of Nella Larsen's "Passing" (1929) confirms the ongoing problem of racism and brings the memory of Jim Crow racial segregation and the color-line problem concept founded by W.E.B. Du Bois (Du Bois, 2007, pp. ii,v,24). Both the writer and the director have introduced an iconic problem in the history of the African-American people in two different centuries with different impressionistic visions to reflect on past, present, and future related issues socially, politically, economically, and psychologically. Hence, this article aims to shed light on two important issues: firstly, the color-

line problem and Larsen's self- impressionist vision. Secondly, the impressionistic cinematography treatment and Hall's black and white vision exploring some personal, social, racial, and political reflections.

The color-line problem from Larsen to Hall: Self- impressionist vision

The term "color-line" was first introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1900 referring by that to a global dilemma "the color-line belts the world and the social problem of the twentieth century is to be the relation of the civilized world to the dark races of mankind." This term became a symbol of racism and framed the social, economic, and political conflict in the American society during the time of segregation under Jim Crow and the following reforms in the mid-twentieth-century (Brogden, 2017, pp. 211-234) . Du Bois also introduced another perspective for the color-line problem, when having it associated with the double consciousness concept of being African and American; or as he described as "condition of twoness, of internalized self-contradiction and self –striving," (Wald, 1996, p. 166). He wrote in 1903, "One ever feels his two-ness,-An American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals, and one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder," (Du Bois, 2007, pp. x,iii)

Hence adopting the color-line in Larsen's novella "*Passing*" (1929) was to tackle many themes besides "Passing" such as deception, reality and appearance, racism , as well as seeking identity; or more specifically the double consciousness and the self-striving of black-white identity as being introduced by Rebecca Hall's film adaptation (2021). The color-line problem then has framed the portrait of "*Passing*" leaving the colors to interpret the conscious and unconscious feelings of the characters to justify their ends for crossing that line.

Separated by a century both women have portrayed the same problem of color line and both reflected personal experiences with the concept. Nella's personal history is incarnated in her portrayal of her characters simply because "the reality behind the image was her own story." (Wall, *Passing for What?Aspects of Identityin in Nella Larsen's Novells*, 1996) . Being a biracial herself, "Passing" as white, or being received in the white society without being stamped as colored was a dilemma that caused Larsen to lose her job and even stop writing. Nella has suffered from racial discrimination. Her father was light black so he decided to pass, Anna her

sister was “light enough to pass” but “Nella was not.” Some biographers state that Nella’s mother “emotionally abandoned Nella early on because of her blackness.” It seemed that she lived a hard life filled with confusion about her race, her identity because she simply could not fit in with her white family nor with the black society. She grew up in troubled times in the highest of racial segregation and tension.

In Harlem Nella was also discriminated against because by marriage she became a member of black professional class and socialized with prominent figures like W.E.B. Du Bios, Walter White, and James Weldon Johnson. Unfortunately because of her low birth, mixed family origins, and lack of college degree Nella was out casted from black middle class. Her husband was treated and ranked differently causing marital problems that ended with him having an affair with a white woman leading to their divorce in 1933. (Pinckney, 2006)

And the serious questions imposing here: was "*Passing*" about the inability of the 'colored' to pass as white or their failure in deceiving the white? Was it about the white's stupidity in recognizing deception or in accepting it? Was it a call to emigrate and live where black majority can survive? Or was it a cry of rage against all kind of racism to end the color-isolation among white majority? To answer these questions, both of Larsen and Hall delved into the psychological trauma of the idea of "Passing." The novella readers or even the viewers of the film adaptation can realize the feeling of disdain and resentment not only from white people but also from the half-black like Clare, Gertrude, and Claude Jones the black Jew who can deceptively change their color, class, religion, sex, and identity because they have the privilege of "Passing" as white. Larsen's rage was also against white racists whom she described as "so stupid" for being deceived by others' appearance. She asserted through Irene that white people were stupid and easily deceived "by the most ridiculous means, finger nails, palm of hands, shapes of ears, and other equally silly rot...Never...suspect that she was a Negro," (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 19). The novella as well as the film made a call to break the color –wall inwardly rather than outwardly and defend the rights of the black and all colored to stay and live as free citizen in a free country and stop feeling not belonging.

Critics, therefore, nominated Larsen's novella "Passing" to be the best treatment of its subject in Afro-American literature; as came in Cheryl Wall's article (Wall, *Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels*, 1996). In reference to the notion of literary impressionism presented in Adam Parkes' book *A Sense of Shock* (2011), one can conclude that Larsen's

"Passing" gave answers to the color-line problem and "the idea of psychological receptivity" associated with it or the violence evoked by it.

As an impressionist writer of her age, Larsen has made of "Passing" a record of historical experience seeking to define the moment in which that history to be imagined." By using impressionist techniques or "strategies of inwardness" as Fredric Jameson called it, Larsen has heightened the readers' "sense of individual perceptual experience." These techniques included "a chronological and multiple narration, centers of consciousness, and visual imagery." Some critics considered these techniques as "literary equivalents" of the brush strokes, luminous colors, sexual atmosphere, and multiplication of subjective perspectives typically found in impressionist painting (Parkes, 2011, pp. 4-7).

Both of Judith Butler and Deborah E. McDowell reflected to black women sexuality and subjectivity in Larsen's "Passing." They agreed that it is unnecessary to tell whether "Passing" is about sexual conflict, sexuality, or race because all these domains are linked to produce a text about "racialization of sexual conflict." According to Judith Butler, Larsen wrote "Passing" in (1929) exploring the tradition of the Harlem Renaissance within a context of that cultural and social world (Butler, 2014, pp. 173,174) . In her turn, Deborah E. McDowell suggested that Larsen portrays "black female sexuality in a literary era that often sensationalized it and pandered to the stereotype of the primitive exotic," (McDowell, 2010, p. xvi).

However, other critics alleged that Larsen's "Passing" has failed to introduce the drama of racial passing and inclined to arouse sexual jealousy and homoeroticism. They considered the topic of "blacks passing for white" as outdated and insignificant (Wall, *Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels*, 1996, p. 95).

The Impressionist Cinematography treatment: Hall's black and white vision

Impressionist Cinema movement is an avant-garde film movement founded in France 1918-1929. This movement is characterized by using camera and editing techniques to emphasize the beauty of the image and capture characters' psychological states. As with Impressionist painters, Impressionist filmmakers consider film as a piece of art that should give rise to emotions and lead audiences to figure out the truths. They are more interested in recording mood and gestures rather than the novella or the play. Some notable Impressionist directors include Abel Gance

(1889–1981), Marcel L’Herbier (1890–1979), Germaine Dulac (1882–1942), Jean Epstein (1897–1953), Jacques Feyder (1885–1948), Jean Renoir (1894–1979), and Russian émigré Dimitri Kirsanoff (1899–1957) (Leskosky, 2016).

In 2021, Rebecca Hall a biracial screenwriter and first time director makes a revolutionary impressionist cinematography. This is when she has decided to rewrite Nella Larsen's novella "Passing" to the screen and adapt it into a black-and-white film with an old school of film noir (back to 1930s and 1940s). According to Wheeler Winston Dixon (2015), shooting in black-and-white is "a transformative act" of the source material into reality with different modes and interpretations (Dixon, 2015, pp. 2,11). In this view, Hall has transformed the novella with all its 20th- century race, gender, psychological, and political problems into a film noir style to counter the same old problems of colorism in the 21st-century and assert its seriousness .

Hall takes this decision on the background of discovering her black roots and the long history of her ancestors' "Passing" experience in the united states since 1872 through "Finding Your Roots" with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is a documentary television series hosted by Henry Louis Gates Jr; season 8 ,episod1 (Finding Your Roots, 2022) In An interview on BPS News Hour (2022), Hall reacts to the tragedy of "Passing" in that dark time of American history from the Jim Crow South onward. She shows great empathy and reveals her family's suffering to keep the secret of their biracial identity. The history of many families for generations and generations has been erased due to that secret. She proudly declares that her film is an homage to her ancestors. Hence, producing the film in black-and-white is unnegotiable. The film aims "to point out the construction of race, that it is a sort of slippery reality." Ironically, the black-and-white- films, as she comments, "are gray;" there is nothing black or white about it, (Hall, 2022).

The film wins the Independent Spirit Award for Best Cinematography 2022. A cinematographer Eduard Grau describes Rebecca Hall's film adaptation of "Passing" as "visually striking poetry." He attributes her work to the wonderful combination of acting, writing, and directing experiences. By deciding to shoot the film adaptation of Nella Larsen’s 1929 novella in black-and-white, he believes that Rebecca has shot the heart of the story. The dilemma of race, gender, and class frames the tale of two black women Iren and Clare of light skin color who can pass as white women but choose to live on opposite sides of the color-line (Tangcay, 2021) . Irene Redfield, a classy 1920s Harlem black woman, enjoys the feeling of "Passing" as a white from time to time. After a long day of shopping in New York City, she decides to have some tea at

Drayton Hotel where she will accidentally meet her childhood friend Clare Kendry who looks quite white. This unexpected reunion will bring the old memories back, encounter present contradictions, answer serious questions about passing, and foreshadow the coming threats.

Imani Perry (2021), the Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, clarifies that Rebecca Hall has expertly used the craft of cinema in her adaptation of *"Passing"* "to explore race and colorism from a Black point of view." Comparing Hall's film adaptation of *"Passing"* to Larsen's novella, Perry finds out that Hall has impressively captured the tensions of *"Passing"* to be effective in the 21st century. The richness of this black-and-white film, in her perspective, is tangible in sense of "texture, light, and gesture" rather than "suggestive" as with Larsen's novella (Perry, 2021).

Unlike the glowing colors in Larsen's novella, Hall uses the monochrome technique or the absence of colors to avoid their erotic indications and distraction and focus on the characters' gestures to record their "impression of the moment," (Colombino, 2009, p. 3). In his review, Richard Brody an American film critic states that in the film as in the novella, Irene is the main character of the story and its central consciousness while Clare is the motivator of the actions that will take the events to its climax. Throughout the film, Hall follows Irene's gestures and record her impression of the moment while "watching, looking, gazing, staring, pondering," (Brody, 2021). On the contrary, more attention is paid for Clare's passive actions, indifferent attitude, lavish dress, unlimited liberty, selfishness, desperate mood, irresponsible behavior, and wild desire from Irene's point of view.

An English director, composer, and a playwright, Claire van Kampen (2021), compares Hall's film adaptation to an imaginative journey inside a dark cave "full of glistening stalactites and stalagmites which have grown twistingly in the dark; the further you journey into the mountain, holding your light to the rock face, the more you see, layer upon layer of solidified slow drops of time." She describes Hall's *"Passing"* adaptation as a "beautiful haunting work". A black-and-white film is cleverly produced to answer a question about the meaning of *"Passing"* as white in the early 20th century from a 21st century perspective. In her opinion, Hall has paradoxically reflected on the black Harlem ghetto and the classy white racist society living in the downtown during a very sensitive period in the American history of Harlem Renaissance and segregation during 1920s (Kampen, 2021)

Many prominent Harlem Renaissance novellas of the 1920s confirm the theme of home, divided-self, and confined freedom as in Larsen's two novellas "*Quicksand* 1928 and *Passing* 1929," Mackay's "*Home to Harlem* 1928," and Fisher's "*The Walls of Jericho* 1928." All the heroes and heroines have that magic sense of having come home in Harlem. Harlem with its life streets, food, dance, songs, and breath was "a life-giving home." However, living in Harlem as a ghetto in New York City was just like to live in an "island within an island." (Bremer, 1996, p. 50) The freedom of this black minority was limited within the white class majority. Metaphorically, the walled city in Fisher's stood for the divided city, communal limits, the separation of black from white, Harlem from New York City, and the divided-self. Carl Van Vechten (to whom Larsen has dedicated "*Passing*") in his 1926 novella "*Nigger Heaven*" used a slang idiom to refer to the segregated balconies in theaters especially occupied by Negroes. He identified Harlem as a "Nigger Heaven! That's what Harlem is! We sit in our places in the gallery of this New York theatre and watch the white world sitting down below in the good seats," (Bremer, 1996, p. 51).

Brody, impressively discusses how Hall has transformed the Harlem of the nineteen-twenties into "a stage of grand philosophical tragedy" in the twenty-first century. The city life are filmed in the height Harlem in sharp details through Irene's visual and mental reflections. Visual figures as the "staccato rhythms" of brownstone architecture on the Harlem Street, and the Redfields' town house make a cinematic harmony of aesthetic and culture to take on humane and politics issues. Brody characterizes "*Passing*" as "a drama of vision and of inner vision of appearances and images and self-images." The cinematic style that Halls adopted, according to him, shed light on the "inward aspect of the action, its crises of consciousness." (Brody, 2021)

Technical and thematic treatment of *Passing*

Earlier in the reunion scene, four cases of "passing" are introduced. Clare who successfully hides her identity and passes as white for money and prestige. Gertrude who also has married to a white man and passed as white but she does not hid her race. Claud Jones, mentioned as another black schoolmate, who has changed his religion and his look. He is no longer Negro and Christian and passes as a "Jew." And of course, Irene who feels not belonging to passing society and even to her husband Brian.

The film adaptation, therefore, has technically and thematically developed the concept of deceptive identity since "Passing" means deception or to pretend to be someone else to achieve self-satisfaction or self-interests as being displayed through the two protagonists.

Apparently, Clare has completely succeeded to deceive her luxury community and pass as a white high class woman, married a white banker husband for money and social rank. Whereas Irene lives as black middle-class activist woman in Harlem town society with her black physician husband and two sons; feeling so secured. However, she does not miss the opportunity to pass as white though for a while since she can for her light-skin. Deceiving the white racist society to get some special treatment in the hotel café makes her feel free and self-satisfied. This is what Parkes calls it the "image" or self- image they both pretend to be but the truth lurks "after-image" (Parkes, 2011). In fact, both of them are unhappy and insecure. By denying her black identity and deceiving her husband and community as well as herself; Clare feels lonely and suffers from alienation. In her letter to Iren, she seems so alluded:

... For I am lonely, so lonely...cannot help longing to
You again, as I have never longed for anything; 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... (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 8).

The pain of nostalgia for her black roots and for herself as a "person" that she describes as the "bright pictures of that other I was" in particular is a matter that will lead her to unexpected end. By adopting a white identity, Clare has confined her black soul under that skin. She is completely conscious of her loneliness, pain, and desperation of her colorless life describing her life as pale; as if she is dying. Ironically, her husband, John Bellew calls her "Nig" because "she's getting darker and darker." His statement that "She'll wake up one of these days and find she is turned into a nigger" (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 67) predicts the changing process that she will go through seeking her black identity back. Metaphorically, her darker outward image reflects her darker inward self-image. Despite her technical profession attitude as a white woman, she feels scared and insecure that she may once have a black child and get discovered. The fear of getting discovered by her husband, Clare as well as Irene find themselves in a real problem that will

develop the conflict between them and their husbands causing Clare to lose her life and Irene to lose her feeling of security.

This fear of having one's secret identity revealed and rejected by others was the main reason behind Clare's continuous deception. Clare's desire to belong to the white society and get the wealth she dreamed of is achieved by her complete deceptive "Passing" forgetting all about her past and her black identity. Larsen attributes the successful "Passing" of Clare to the religious and social condition of her father and grandfather's white family.

However, meeting Irene, her childhood friend has awakened her black soul in desperate way. She ends her letter blaming Irene for that "...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." (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 8)

On the opposite side of the line stands Irene who does not deny her black identity yet she feels so happy when passing as white. The opening scene of the film when in Drayton Hotel in Chicago, explores Irene's overwhelming feeling of happiness. As in the novella, Irene steps out of the elevator that had brought her to the roof feeling "like being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below" (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 13). Larsen metaphorically describes Irene's feeling high when passing as white as if traveling between two worlds; the downward sizzling black world and the upward pleasant white world. This short term of triumph encloses "an inner disturbance, odious, and hatefully familiar," not because she is "a shamed of being a Negro, or even of having it declared," but because she is scared of being discovered and "ejected from any place." Irene's impression on "Passing" however does not intersect with considering white people as "so stupid." They always take her "for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a gipsy. Never...as a Nigro" (Larsen N. , 1929, pp. 18-19). Being an activist strong black woman is just a veil to hide her fear and tension of other's eyes. The scene when Clare has recognized Irene in the café, this moment of inward consciousness is carefully described by Larsen and cleverly captured by Hall when Irene "by some sixth sense she was acutely aware that someone was watching her." She feels "her colour heighten under the continued inspection, she slides her eyes down." She keeps wondering if something wrong with her dress or her makeup; " she shot a glance over it...what was it?... Again she looked up, and for a moment her brown eyes politely returned the stare of the other black ones" (Larsen N. , 1929, pp. 17-18).

This sense "of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" becomes a framework of thinking about race in America according to W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He believes that all the African- American people have developed a "double-consciousness" due to living beneath the veil of race. They live to strive to prove their true-self and get free of the "two-ness" identity born in. Their strife and longing to regain "self-conscious manhood" and to merge this "double self into a better and truer- self" is the history of American Negro (Du Bois, 2007, pp. x,50).

Both Larsen and Hall reflect to this sense out of their personal experiences each in different century. They have treated the same phenomenon of crossing the color-line and topics related to segregation to show how deeply has affected the soul of black people psychologically and sociologically yet so differently. While Larsen's novella has exploited erotic colorful words to indicate what it wants to perceive, Hall's black-and-white film adaptation indicates "what it wants to escape" (Parkes, 2011, p. 6) .

Hence, themes of racism, hatred against black people, and their strife to prove their true-self make a basic framework for Hall's adaptation. She has carefully captured Mr. Bellew's racist attitude and contempt throughout the film in three important scenes right from the beginning of the film with the scene of the reunion. While meeting Clare's childhood friends in the tea-party, he keeps making jokes about Clare's changing color using the word "Nig." When Clare's has asked him "What difference would it make if...I was one or two percent coloured?" His answer has sounded definite and final:" nothing like that with me...I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family." Humorously, Irene asks him:" So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?" The answer reflects his unjustified hatred for black people " I don't dislike them, I hate them...They give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils." The sense of racism is heightened when he declares that he never meets any Negro before but he knows people "who've known them better than their black selves," and read about them in the papers "Always robbing, and killing people. And...worse." Ironically, all his argument confirms Irene's opinion about how white people are "so stupid." He cannot figure out that he is "sitting here surrounded by three black devils drinking tea," (Larsen N. , 1929, pp. 68-70). The second scene exposes his contempt and mounting outrages when he knows the truth about Irene' and Clare's race the day he runs into Irene on the street with Felise and realizes that she is black. This shock will lead the events to its climax and put the conflict to

an end. In the final scene of the film as in the novella, John bursts into the party at the Freeland's apartment to confront Clare about her deception: "So you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 175). His racist blind attitude gives Clare no choice. Whether she falls or is pushed out of the sixth-story, someone put an end to this game of deception.

Reflecting on more racist issues brought up by Larsen at that time, Hall sheds the light on very sensitive subject like lynching which has never faded since 1882 until nowadays. The reference to 1927 lynching victim John Carter in Little Rock, Arkansas is a reminder to the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in 2020. The question of Ted "why ...they only lynch colored people?" arouses an argument between Brian and Irene around taking about race problem to the children or not. She wants "their childhood to be happy and as free from the knowledge of such things as it possibly can be." And he wants them to be aware of the white hostility and hatred towards African-American to be prepared for the realities they will face:

...You know as well as I do, Irene, that it can't. What was the use of our trying to keep them from learning the word 'nigger' and its connotation? They found out, didn't they? And how? Because somebody called Junior a dirty nigger (Larsen N. , 2021).

Brian's steady view about the false freedom in Harlem, New York reflects both Larsen and Hall's views; each in a different era. Their wish to live in a land free of colors is still a dream for every colored- person as it was for Brian, Irene, and all Jim Crow South migrants century ago. According to Sidney H. Bremer, the new Harlem was the goal of many African American migrants in the 1910s and 1920s recording more than 200.000 black migrants by 1930. Harlem the "Promised Land," or "Mecca," became the Capital of the intellectual Negroes such as W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Eugene O'Neil, Paul Robeson, Countee Cullen, and Arna Bontemps. The Renaissance they made is proved to be a sugar-coated bitter reality (Bremer, 1996, p. 49).

This reality is exposed through Brian's reference to his hidden desire of emigration to Brazil as a safe land for black majority where "there is no racial prejudice" (Burns, 1993, p. 322). Brian's silence threatens Irene's security since she has rejected his wish to take the family somewhere safer than "this hellish place." His dream as many African Americans to have a fresh start in the North suggests having an opportunity to "pass" as a freeman among other white New Yorkers;

not to pretend to be white. The "Promised Land" has broken its promises and open its walls to white people to play around. Brian sarcastically, reflects on Irene and Clare's conversation about the attendance of so many white people such as the well-known white writer Hugh Wentworth to the N.W.L. dance, stating that: "Pretty soon the coloured people won't be allowed in at all, or will have to sit in Jim Crowed sections (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 125); in reference to Carl Van Vechten's 1926 "Nigger Heaven," (Bremer, 1996, p. 51). However, when asking about the reason that makes white people come to Harlem; Irene and Brian give contradicted answers. Irene confidently attributes this open socializing to the spirit of the age: "This...was the year 1927 in the city of New York, and hundreds of white people of Hugh Wentworth's type came to affairs in Harlem, more all the time." Unlikely, Brian feels so humiliated attributing this passing desire or socializing or in other words violating their life to the same reason of Clare just "to see Negroes," (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 125) as if they are displayed in a candy shop or nature reserve.

The theme of socializing with its positive and passive implication is developed by Hall through the scene of charity dance organized by The N.W.L., revealing new meaning for "Passing" to the new Harlem culture. Both Irene and Hugh Wentworth make a good representative of this new culture. They reflect the progressive racial views of African-American community where black and whites can socialize with one another. Something that Brian seems failed in because he could not socialize with the white people in New York not even with his profession as a doctor or his patients. On the contrary, Clare has easily joined this open-minded community without questioning her race. Her desire "to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh," finds a good welcome from both the black and white Harlmites (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 129). In their conversation about race and relations, Irene and Hugh argues the diversity of the attendees and their various motives. Gazing over the bright crowd, Iren and Hugh make a nice study in contrasts recalling an old rhyming nursery just popped into her head " Young men, old men, white men, black men; ...Rich man, poor man, Beggar man, thief, Doctor, lawyer," (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 137). They look at the dance party metaphorically as a microcosm of Harlem community. In which, ironically, white people are more interested in and enchanted with the black beauty, life qualities, and features than the black themselves. Hugh makes of Clare "A case in point" (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 140). Irene justifies this desire to

...a kind of emotional excitement. You know, the sort
of thing you feel in the presence of something strange,

and even, perhaps, a bit repugnant to you; something so different that it's really at the opposite end of the pole from all your accustomed notions of beauty...
(Larsen N. , 1929, p. 139).

Whether for curiosity or other various motives, "lots of people 'pass' all the time," Irene refutes Hugh's notion of passing for purely predatory reason. She confirms to Hugh that, if "it's easy for a Negro to 'pass' for white," it would not "be so simple for a white person to 'pass' for coloured," (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 142). By this statement, Irene makes a clever hint to the deceptive appearance of Clare "the blond beauty out of the fairy-tale" who cannot hide her relation to the black race anymore (Larsen N. , 1929, p. 137). The scene of dancing as Hall states in her interviews is the most important scene as it elevates the definition of social "Passing" earlier presented in the reunion scene. Hall as Larsen assures that people can "Pass;" can change and hide their name, status, color, religion, sex, and lifestyle, but they cannot hide their "racial identity" (Butler, 2014, p. 175).

Irene, Larsen's and Hall's key character, the critic eye who wonders between the two worlds reflecting her double-conscious as African-American modern Harlemit. Her sincere desire is to live as a free person and gets the respect she deserves whether in the black or white community just like any citizen without color definition. The misadventure death of Clare puts an end to her self-striving, fears, and insecurity for hiding her identity as a Negro. Whether she has committed a suicide or pushed by Irene, Larsen prefers to end Clare's life as a Negro among her black people rather than to continue her pale rootless life as a white stranger. Her fallen may metaphorically refer to her reckless desire to claim her black roots and get rid of her light-skin body which she cannot fit in anymore.

Conclusion

From personal experiences of anguish, confusion and anxiety of Nella Larsen during the twentieth century incarnated in her self - reflective novella *Passing* (1929) to the same personal experiences of Rebecca Hall after few decades and a century in her self – reflective adaptation of the novella into *Passing* film (2021) one can understand the depth and universality of the color line dilemma. Introducing "Passing" in black-and-white film rewritten and produced by Rebecca Hall in 2021 confirms that the problem of color-line has never been faded and still on although Jim Crow Laws had ended in 1968.

Ironically, the color- line problem has continued even when Barak Obama an African- American mixed race won the presidential elections for two tours (2009-2017). However, the offensive prejudice has elevated against immigrants and minorities with the coming of President Donald Trump in 2020 to include all mixed races Asian American, Hispanic, Arab, and Muslim, in addition to African American causing a public racial unrest break out. Black people keep trying to pass as freemen and crying out for their life safety and racial equality. Calls by Black Lives Matter, an anti- racism movement, for ending police racism and law brutality are heightened since 2013 till present. With the brutal murdering of George Floyd in the U.S. city of Minneapolis by a white police officer on May 25, 2020, the public anger has risen. The protests continued through 2022 calling for new law amendments against racial discrimination. This incident brings to the memory the ku klux klan violence and the brutal assaults against black people introduced in the novella in reference to 1927 lynching victim John Carter in Little Rock, Arkansas.

A List of Elite African- American leaders of pure or mixed race such as W.E.B Du Bois author, Booker T. Washington advisor, and Florence Price musicians have contributed to the racial uplift since The 1800s. Other black activists who led the civil rights like Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali, Frederick Douglass, Jackie Robinson, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. More leaders of the Harlem Renaissance including musicians, writers, entertainers and thinkers form a virtual who's who of African American cultural achievement: Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Nella Larsen, James Weldon Johnson and many others. Great jazz musicians formed a central part of the Renaissance: Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie

and Duke Ellington, singers Bessie Smith and Billie Holliday, and the great dancer and fashion icon Josephine Baker. They all participated in writing the African American history and the glory of the United States despite all kinds of humiliation to pass as equal people and breathe liberty.

As a Muslim, I would like to show my gratitude and thanks to Allah the Whole Mighty and Most Merciful for the blessing of Islam. Racial equality is one of the basic religious and ethical ideals of Islam. In his Last Khutbah (Sermon) "The Farewell," Prophet Mohammed (peace and prayer be upon him) said:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action. (Habibi & Habibi, 2019, p. 721)

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