

MIXED-RACE IDENTITY POLITICS
IN NELLA LARSEN AND WINNIFRED EATON (ONOTO WATANNA)

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This dissertation entitled
MIXED-RACE IDENTITY POLITICS
IN NELLA LARSEN AND WINNIFRED EATON (ONOTO WATANNA)

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The dissertation examines how two women authors of mixed-race, Nella Larsen and Winnifred Eaton (Onoto Watanna), resisted American identity politics in their works. The ideological complexities of mixed-race identity, which is “in-between” races, are the focus of my argument. To discuss what Judith Butler calls “the performativity of identity” in the interracial context, “passing,” “masquerading” and “mimicking” are used as key strategies. I examine whether the space of hybridity, in which the incompatible notions of difference and sameness exist together, opens up the horizon of transformation of significations. In Chapter One, I discuss how Larsen used her “mulatto” heroines to criticize the essentialist notion of identity. I probe how crossing boundaries (passing, geographical crossing and transgressing sexual norms) functions in her novels. In Chapter Two, I examine the works of Winnifred Eaton, who passed as Japanese in her authorship. By crossing the “authentic” ethnic boundaries and placing herself in a fictional identity, Eaton challenged racism and sexism. The dynamics of Orientalism, race and gender in Eaton’s works are examined in this chapter. Postmodern feminist theories and postcolonial theories are

used in tandem to support my argument, which tries to discuss how the system of racial oppression operates in multi-racial/multi-ethnic women's literature.

Approved:

J. Richard Hamilton, Baker and Hostetler Professor of Humanities

*To my father, Akira Nakachi, and
to the memory of my mother, Mariko Nakachi*

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INTRODUCTION

RACE AND GENDER IN BETWEEN SPACE

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negative activity. —Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* and *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. —Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.²

This project explores how two women authors of mixed-race, Nella Larsen and Winnifred Eaton (Onoto Watanna), resisted American identity politics in the early twentieth century when racial mixture was considered abominable. These writers are often considered enigmatic because of their ambivalent attitude towards race, ethnicity and gender. This dissertation discusses their transgression of racial boundaries by using “passing,” “masquerading” and “mimicking” as key strategies. Larsen and Eaton have not been discussed in the same context before, but, despite differences in their literary fields and ethnic backgrounds, they show significant similarities. One of the prominent similarities is the fact that both of them had the burden of being mixed-race women and concealed their parentage or their complicated situations from the public eye. Although Nella Larsen is categorized as an African-American writer and Winnifred Eaton as an Asian-Canadian writer, their hybridity refuses easy assimilation to the ethnic group

identities society attributes to them. The hybrid space that Larsen and Eaton open in their texts disrupts the essentialist notion of identity by questioning the boundaries of race and ethnicity from within.

I. BORN BETWEEN RACES: LARSEN AND EATON

Nella Larsen was born of Mary Hanson, a Danish woman, and Peter Walker, a “colored” man, and probably an immigrant from the Danish West Indies, in 1891.³ Her Danish mother gave birth unattended by a physician or a midwife, and the baby, Nellie Walker, was designated as “colored” at birth. Before she settled down in the name, “Nella Larsen,” she had several changes in name: “Nellie Walker,” “Nellie Larson,” and “Nellye Larson.” The frequent change of her name signifies the experience of subsequent dislocations. Her mother married Peter Larson (later he changed the spelling of his surname to Larsen) in 1894, and the child Nella became the only colored child in a white family. The presence of a brown-skinned daughter may have been a problem for the Larsens, because it represents Mrs. Larsen’s violation of a social taboo. Larsen’s special position as a colored child in a white family affected Larsen’s novels, which are preoccupied with the themes of race and marginality.

In her childhood, Larsen was educated in the school of the Scandinavian community in Chicago. In 1907 she enrolled at Fisk University, the most prestigious African-American school of the time. The

student body of Fisk University was composed of African-Americans from good families. The school, which has W. E. B. Du Bois as an alumnus, emphasized the mission of educating students to be race leaders. “The psychological impact of its race-centeredness on Larsen cannot be underestimated” (Davis 53).

The years 1908 to 1912 of Larsen’s life are a mystery. Larsen claimed that she studied for two years at the University of Copenhagen as an auditor. But Thadious M. Davis, Larsen’s bibliographer, speculates that “Larsen may have married shortly after leaving Fisk and spent at least a year in a small southern community” (67-68), though it does not go beyond the speculation. Whatever she did during these years, it is obvious that she “made a conscious choice to conceal them” (Davis 67). In 1912, Larsen entered New York’s Lincoln Hospital and Home Training School for Nurses. After she graduated from the Lincoln School in 1915, she started to work at the Tuskegee Institute Training School for Nurses in Alabama as the head nurse. Her job was quite responsible: “she was an administrator, a teacher and a practicing nurse” (Davis 97). But just as Helga Crane in *Quicksand* had difficulties in her life in Naxos, a fictional Southern community, the life in Tuskegee was not suited for Larsen’s sensitivity. Larsen returned to New York in 1916. She was appointed a district nurse in the New York Department of Health in 1918.

The life in New York brought Larsen a new start. She married physicist Elmer Imes in 1919. Davis says that Larsen considered her marriage “a move upward in society” (127). Imes, who completed a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan, was a member of the African-American elite, and marriage with him promised Larsen an “entry into a privileged African-American world” (Davis 121). In 1921, Larsen resigned from the New York City Department of Health, and she started to work at the New York public library. Encouraged by her colleagues and supervisors at the library, she also got a certificate from the Library School in 1923 and became a certified librarian.

It is in the years of her librarianship that Larsen became close to novelists such as Walter White, Jessie Fauset, Carl Van Vechten, and Dorothy Peterson. She also read extensively. Charles S. Johnson said that she had “a most extraordinarily wide acquaintance with past and current literature” (Davis 163). In 1926, she published two short stories, “The Wrong Man” and “Freedom,” in *Young Magazine* under the pseudonym Allen Semi. It did not take long until she was recognized as a representative writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Her novel, *Quicksand*, was greatly praised by W. E. B. Du Bois, and it won a bronze medal from the Harmon Foundation in 1928. *Passing*, published in 1929, earned Larsen a position among the New Negro authors. In 1930 she became the first African-American woman to win a Guggenheim for creative writing. By the age of thirty-eight, Larsen had

gained everything that most middle-class African-American women wished to attain: she was not only one of the most significant figures in the Harlem Renaissance, but also the wife of a middle-class successful handsome black man.

Her life, however, was soon covered by shadow. In early 1930, Larsen discovered Imes' affair with a white woman at Fisk University, from which he had accepted a professorship. In 1930, her literary life was also damaged by the accusation of plagiarism. Her short story, "Sanctuary," was compared with Sheila Kaye-Smith's "Mrs. Adis." Larsen admitted that she used "Mrs. Adis" as a storyboard for her work, but she claimed that she did not find her practice deceptive because the story was almost folklore. Thus, Larsen refuted the charge of plagiarism, but ultimately "Sanctuary" became her last work as a writer. From September 1930 to January 1932, she spent her time in Europe with a Guggenheim grant. This was an opportunity to discover new themes for her writing, but Larsen did not publish another new novel. She finally divorced Imes in 1933. By the early 1940s, Larsen had completely withdrawn from the literary world and lost contact with novelists and publishers. For the rest of her life, she supported herself by working as a nurse and did not associate herself with people outside the hospital. When Larsen died in 1964, her body remained unfound for a week, and her funeral was attended by only a few of her acquaintances.

Winnifred Eaton, who was born sixteen years earlier than Larsen, shared Larsen's ambition for writing. Winnifred Eaton was born in 1875 in Montreal as the eighth child of the fourteen surviving children of an English father and a Chinese mother.⁴ Her father, Edward Eaton, was a silk merchant but later became a painter. In his youth, he took frequent trips to China to further his father's business. He met Grace Trefusis, who had been adopted by an English missionary couple and educated in the English style, in Shanghai, and married her in spite of his parents' disapproval. They had their first son in China in 1864 but soon moved to England because of war in China. Edith Eaton was born in England in 1865. About 1872, however, Edward decided to leave England, and he moved his growing family to Montreal.

The Eatons had sixteen children, fourteen of whom survived into adulthood. The life of the Eatons were, as Winnifred describes in *Me: A Book of Remembrance* and *Marion*, very poor and Bohemian. Since Edward Eaton "earned next to nothing from his paintings, and his occasional jobs as clerk and bookkeeper at the cotton mills brought in very little" (Birchall 12), the children had to find ways to support themselves when they became teenagers.

Yet, poverty was not a sole source of suffering for the Eatons. As Edith Eaton, the elder sister of Winnifred, writes about the experience of racism she had from her childhood, the Eatons' children suffered from racial

prejudice in the white community in Montreal. Although Edith tried to establish her identity by referring to her Chinese-ethnicity, many of the Eaton's children were ashamed of their ethnic origin. May, one of the Eaton sisters, passed as white. She concealed her Chinese origin so completely that "the knowledge was not even passed down to her own grandchildren" (Birchall 19). The oldest brother, Edward, "was also ashamed of his background and took pains to hide his Chinese heritage" (Birchall 19). Winnifred hated her Chinese origin and was always reluctant to speak about her mother.

The Eaton children's hatred for their Chinese ancestry can be traced to the social prejudice against Chinese. In 1882, the US congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which forbade entry to all Chinese except tourists, merchants, diplomats, students, and teachers. "This law officially confirmed the inferiority and undesirability of the Chinese and seemed to sanction any expressions of hatred so that, particularly in the western states, Chinese were robbed, assaulted, lynched, burned and entire populations driven out, even murdered with impunity" (Ling, *Between Worlds* 24). Because of the antagonistic American attitude toward the Chinese, many Chinese came to work in Montreal. Although Canada was considered to be a country where racism was not as virulent as it was in the United States, Edith's writing tells us that Montreal also had its share of racism. Edith writes the she and

her brother were teased by white kids, who shouted, “Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman, yellow-face, pig-tail, rat-eater” (Sui Sin Far 219).

The Eatons were, however, extraordinarily strong people who did not surrender to racial prejudice. Among them, Winnifred was a most active, ambitious woman. She started her career as a stenographer for a newspaper in Jamaica in 1896. Later she came to Chicago, where she started writing Japanese-themed novels while supporting herself by doing stenographic work at the stockyards. Most critics think that Winnifred decided to pass as Japanese because the Japanese had a more positive image than did the Chinese, who were imported into the United States as laborers on the American transcontinental railroad and represented “yellow peril” in the early twentieth century. The US also restricted the number of Japanese immigrants in 1907 but it was enacted by “the Gentleman’s Agreement,” which is in “contrast to the unilateral Exclusion Act against Chinese, who were, by clear implication, not ‘gentlemen’” (Ling, *Between Worlds* 24). Moreover, Japanese art was in vogue at the turn of the century in the United States as well as in Europe. Winnifred emerged as a half-Japanese writer with Japonism as the background. While her sister, Edith, who wrote exclusively on the experience of Chinese immigrants, had a hard time being recognized as a writer, Winnifred wrote popular fiction about Japan and gained fame and success easily.

In 1898, she published “The Half Caste” in *Conkey’s Home Journal*. *Iroquois Magazine*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Frank Leslie Popular Magazine* also published her short stories and articles on Japan before she became famous. Her first novel, *Miss Numè of Japan*, was published in 1899 by Rand McNally in Chicago, and it received warm reviews. Since then, Winnifred continued to publish a Japanese romance under the pseudonym of Onoto Watanna almost every year until 1916. Among them, *A Japanese Nightingale* published by Harper and Brothers in 1901 marked a great success. It was praised by William Dean Howells and promised Eaton’s future as a novelist. In 1901 she came to New York, and she married Bertrand W. Babcock, whom she met while she was a reporter on the *Brooklyn Eagle* in Jamaica.

Thus, Winnifred attained fame and success quite easily, but that does not mean that her life was easy. *A Japanese Nightingale*, which brought her a great success, also gave her a great trouble. Winnifred’s agent sold the rights of *A Japanese Nightingale* for a theatrical production, but David Belasco, the famous theatrical impresario, turned it down and “proceeded with his own plans for a ‘Japanese’ play” (Birchall 79). A week before the New York opening of Belasco’s Japanese play, *The Darling of the Gods*, Winnifred filed an injunction against him by accusing him of plagiarism. Belasco responded to Winnifred by charging her with libel. As a consequence,

Winnifred was arrested, though she was promptly released on bail. She surrendered her claim against Belasco.⁵

The conflict between Belasco and Winnifred was actually the conflict between Belasco and the Theatrical Syndicate, “particularly Klaw and Erlanger, who were after Belasco’s scalp” (Timberlake 226). Winnifred was merely their tool. Actually, it is hard to find similarities between Winnifred’s works and *The Darling of the Gods*. Yet, in revenge for the libel, she was accused of plagiarism by John Luther Long, Belasco’s collaborator on his Japanese play. Long claimed that her work was copied from his. Winnifred’s plagiarism is partly true, but she “countered this accusation by blandly citing her own supposed Japanese ethnicity” (Birchall 84). Her Japanese masquerade, thus, was her strategy to prove her literary “authenticity.” Winnifred was in her late twenties when she was involved with these troubles, and she had just given birth to her first child in 1903.

Winnifred had four children with Babcock while she wrote seven Japanese romances, *The Wooing of Wistaria* (1902), *The Heart of Hyacinth* (1903), *The Love of Azalea* (1904), *Daughters of Nijo: A Romance of Japan* (1904), *A Japanese Blossom* (1906), *Tama* (1910) and *The Honorable Miss Moonlight* (1912), and one non-Japanese theme novel, *The Diary of Delia* (1907). Babcock, however, was not an ideal husband. During their marriage, he turned into “a wife-abusing alcoholic” (Birchall 69). He was not only financially dependent on Winnifred but also suspicious about her

infidelity. In these years, she also experienced many deaths of people close to her. In 1908, Winnifred lost her little son, Bertie. Edward, her eldest brother, died in 1911, her sister Edith died in 1914, and her father died of cancer in 1915. The death of her family members drove her to write an autobiographical novel, *Me: A Book of Remembrance* (1915), and the story of her sister Sarah, *Marion* (1916). Her close friend, Jean Webster, who wrote the preface of *Me*, also died in childbirth in 1916.

Winnifred, however, did not lose her active spirit in those unhappy days. In 1917, she finally divorced Babcock and started a new life with Francis Fournier Reeve. They settled themselves in Calgary and Winnifred enjoyed helping run a farm and ranch. In the Calgary days, Winnifred abandoned her Japanese identity. *Sanny-San*, published in 1922, became her last Japanese novel. She also published non-Japanese theme novels, *Cattle* (1924) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925) under the name of Winnifred Eaton Reeve.

After Winnifred published *His Royal Nibs*, she withdrew from writing novels, but her ambition did not end. Between 1924 and 1931, she worked in Hollywood, where she wrote and edited numerous screenplays such as *Mississippi Gambler* (1929) and *Shanghai Lady* (1930). She also wrote full-length screenplays of her novels, *Tama*, *Sanny-San* and *Wild Seed*. Her work in Hollywood, however, brought a conflict between Winnifred and her husband Frank. Winnifred wrote to Frank:

Today most women work—married or single, and in adjusting their matrimonial affairs, that has to be borne in mind. . . . My business is as important as yours and yours as important as mine, and neither of us can sacrifice his interests for the other. (Birchall 153)

Although the experience in misogynistic Hollywood caused stress and exhaustion and jeopardized her marriage, it satisfied her desire for fame. She also succeeded in reconciling with Frank, and later returned to Canada with him. She died there in 1954.

Thus, both Larsen and Eaton are examples of mixed-race women who achieved extraordinary success in writing at the beginning of the twentieth century despite their disadvantage as “colored” women between races. Their literary and commercial success, however, does not indicate that the messages of their novels were fully accepted by society. Both women desired fame, success and money, and skillfully negotiated with the literary trends of their time. But their novels reveal that questions about racial and ethnic identity drove them into writing. Larsen was one of the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance, but her novels do not resonate with Du Bois’s idea of racial uplift. Rather, her writing reveals that she was critical of the Harlem elite’s obsession with racial pride.

Winnifred Eaton was greatly accepted by the American readers and became one of the most popular romance writers in the beginning of

twentieth century. Although Amy Ling, one of the most influential Eaton scholars, says that Winnifred was “not a challenger or protester, not a word-warrior, but a woman with her finger squarely on the pulse of her time” (*Between Worlds* 55), Eaton’s Japanese romances are more complicated works than Ling thinks. It is true that Eaton fabricated her identity to sell novels, but she challenged the male Orientalist discourse in her Oriental novels. On some levels, the works of Larsen and Eaton are too concealing, and they misguide the critics. They were indeed “passing” writers, who embedded their messages in socially acceptable masquerades.

II. PASSING NOVELS AND THE ETHIC OF RACE

Before starting the discussion of individual writers, I would like to refer to the tradition of passing novels. To discuss passing novels, it is necessary to re-examine the notion of “race.” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. starts the introduction of *Race, Writing, and Difference* with the following question: “What importance does “race” have as a meaningful category in the study of literature and the shaping of critical theory?”(2). His question signifies how “race” has come to be seen not as a biological determinant but as an ideological apparatus in literary studies. Gates say, “Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application” (5). Viewing race as “a trope of difference” makes the relation of race to discourse

clear. In other words, Gates's view provides us with the idea that "race" is the product of narratives.

Race, Writing and Difference, which was published in 1984, collects provocative essays by leading critics such as Anthony Appiah, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Sander L. Gilman, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Hazel V. Carby, Barbara Johnson, Anne McClintock, and so on. As Gates writes, "the essays collected here manifest the wide variety of critical approaches through which one may discuss complex interplay among race, writing and difference" (15). The significance of this book is in the contextualization of literary studies, African-American studies, and postcolonial studies in the frame of "race."

Thus, since the 1980s, critics have come to examine "race" in various contexts and to attempt to theorize it by challenging the essentialist notion of race. In this critical trend, "passing" has come to capture the special attention of critics. Traditionally, "passing" signifies the act of racial transgression by light-skinned "black" figures. Yet passing implies more than the act of the transgression of a racial boundary. It becomes an apparatus to question the construction of the racial boundary itself.

To discuss "passing," it is important to examine what the bodies of mixed-race person signify. Talking about African-Americans light-skinned enough to pass, Valerie Smith says:

A more general paradox or conflict exists in the very syntax of the formation “legally black yet physically white,” for the phrase polarizes the two terms and invokes ostensibly stable categories of racial difference. Systems of racial oppression depend upon the notion that one can distinguish between empowered and disempowered races. . . . Yet the bodies of mixed-race characters defy the binarisms upon which constructions of racial identity depend. (45)

The bodies of mixed-race represent the paradox of the essentialist notion of racial identity. They shake the binary system of race.

In fact, the “mulatto” body had functioned as the site of social anxiety. In the antebellum South, “mulattoes” were assumed to be inferior to the “purely” bred of both races. The racial mixing evoked “fears that mixture could lower a superior race to the level of an inferior race or, worse, that the weaker characteristics of each might combine to produce a degenerated people” (Taylor 105). Henry Hughes, an antebellum Southern sociologist who proposed the removal of all unenslaved blacks from Mississippi, writes: “Impurity of races is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. The law of nature is the law of God. The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation forbids ethnical amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest” (240).

Hughes' logic, which connects incest and miscegenation, is built upon racial amalgamation in slavery. Although sex between white slave owners and black slave women was taboo not to speak about, forced interracial sex was common in slavery.⁶ Miscegenation, therefore, often involved possibilities of incest, and the mulatto could be the product of incest.

Hughes's argument, thus, reflect the social anxiety about racial and sexual taboos. The mulatto body was, thus, not only the shameful symbol of white transgression of racial and sexual taboos in the days of slavery but a threat to the racial hierarchy, which gives moral superiority to whiteness.

The passing body was even more problematic than the mulatto body, for it challenged the stability of the notion of race, on which white society depended. Discussing the passing body, Samira Kawash writes:

In the figure of the passing body, the signifiers of race are unloosed from the signifieds; the seeming stable relation between representation and the real collapses, and representation is suddenly dangerous and untrustworthy.

(131-32)

Passing was, thus, problematic because it could destroy the boundary of race itself.

Importantly, breaking down the notion of race was dangerous not only for the white but also the black, for it could disturb "race" as a political propulsive force. African-American passing novels in the beginning of the

twentieth century are complicated in their anxiety about racial mixture and political ambivalence about race. It is true that most passing novels question the essentialist notion of racial identity and examine the validity of racial dichotomy, but no literary work depicts a passing story as a successful happy story of subverting the racial dichotomy and escaping the racial oppression. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1927) by James Weldon Johnson describes a light-skinned man who passes lives as a white man. But the protagonist feels guilty about passing, saying, “I feel small and selfish. I am an ordinary successful white man who has made a little money” (211). It is evident that he is suffering from his conscience as a black man.

To understand the ideology underlined in African-American passing novels, it is important to understand the fact that the popularity of passing novels coincides with the period of the Harlem Renaissance, the black literary and art movement. The major task of the Harlem Renaissance writers and artists was “to establish the presence and continuities of varying traditionals—folklore, group customs, beliefs, values, styles—in African-American cultural expressions” (Mitchell 5). The Harlem Renaissance celebrated a diversity of African-American racial heritage, but also tried to forge African-American identity through “the deep sentiment of race” (Locke 3). African-American passing novels, therefore, often made the light-skinned characters return to the black community and attributed the most important component of racial identity to one’s sense of racial loyalty. Thus, most

African-American passing novels supported the ethic of race based on the racial dichotomy rather than challenging the binary system of race.

Charles W. Chesnutt is an important figure in African-American passing novels. He wrote a number of passing novels in terms of the racial ethic. Among them, *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and *The Quarry* (1928) express his ethic of race. In *The House Behind the Cedars*, Chesnutt describes Rena, a light-skinned woman who passes as white but finally identifies herself as black. While Chesnutt questions the social construction of race based on the “one drop rule,” he emphasizes race as the indispensable connection between an individual and a community in this work. *The Quarry* is also a work expressing his ethic of race in the experimental idea that “white can be black” (McWilliams xiv). Donald, the hero of the fiction, loses his parents in infancy. First he is adopted by a white couple, but the couple decide to give him to a black family when they find that Donald has a drop of black blood. But later in the novel, his real “white” parentage is revealed. Donald, however, chooses to live as an African-American. The importance of *Quarry* is in Chesnutt’s claim that race is not a biological issue but a cultural and ethical issue.

Passing novels by African-American women writers are also interesting in their expression of the morality of race. The history of African-American women passing novels can be traced back to Frances E. W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Harper expressed her ethic of race

loyalty through her beautiful light-skinned heroine named Iola. Iola has a chance to pass, but she chooses to become a black American rather than pass for white. As Hazel V. Carby explains, Iola's decision of not passing is complicated by the issue of sexuality.⁷ Iola refuses to pass because she does not want to accept the protection and control of white male patriarchy. Harper's problem with the implication of "miscegenation" in passing is important because "miscegenation," which reminds African-American women of unwanted sexual relationships with white men in the days of slavery, makes the position of passing women complicated and difficult. In passing, one can escape from the racial oppression, but it also signifies the submission to white male power by African-American women.

Jessie Fauset, a Harlem Renaissance woman writer, whose works are often discussed in comparison with those of Nella Larsen, also questioned the justification of the color line through passing figures, but she gave more attention to the issue of concubinage and miscegenation when she treated the issue of passing. In *Plum Bun* (1929), Angela Murray, a mulatto heroine, decides to pass for white to gain social and economic opportunities. Angela's life project of passing, however, faces difficulties when she starts thinking about marriage with a white man. Roger Fielding, Angela's boyfriend is a wealthy white man who tries to take advantage of Angela by making her his concubine. By passing as white, Angela succeeds in getting access to white power. But when she enters the white world, she finds that she is trapped in

white male power because of her gender/sexuality. Thus, Fauset connects the issue of racial passing to the issue of gender/sexuality. Fauset, however, skillfully avoids the issue of miscegenation. She lets Angela escape from the white system of sexuality and offers her an African-American man as the ideal lover at the end of the novel.

Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) is, in this sense, worthy of note because it describes a black woman who committed not only passing but also miscegenation. In passing, Clare Kendry gains white privilege, but she is also trapped in white male power under the white racist husband. If we think that the male leaders of the Harlem Renaissance defined African-American women's role as mothers responsible for raising African-American citizens, women's passing could be regarded as more problematic than men's passing. A passing woman betrays not only her people but also the social gender responsibility of giving African-American men children.⁸ But Larsen also explores "unpassing," for even if light-skinned women remain in the black community and become loyal to their race, they are still under the gender/sexual oppression. By paralleling a woman without racial loyalty and a woman who is bound by the loyalty for the black race, Larsen's *Passing* questions the "ethic of race" itself from a woman's perspective.

It is also noted that passing can be discussed in terms of the formation of American identity. Harryette Mullen says in "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness":

The usual mechanism of passing, which I take as a model for the cultural production of whiteness, requires an active denial of black identity only by the individual who passes from black to white, while the chosen white identity is strengthened in each successive generation by the presumption that white identities are racially pure. Passing on an individual level models the cultural production of whiteness as a means of nation building and as a key to national identity. (72)

In Mullen's argument, passing is discussed in the frame of national identity. Referring to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Mullen argues that whiteness is produced through the operation of marginalizing blackness. Her discussion is significant because it not only questions the construction of race but also reveals that "whiteness" is nothing but "optic" and race is illusion. Moreover, discussing passing in the frame of nation building and national identity clarifies the production of whiteness as a means of political power. Passing as an active denial of black identity, thus, becomes a means of questioning the power structure on the national and global levels.

III. ORIENTALISM, GENDERED RACE AND RACE MAKE-UP

Winnifred Eaton's passing as Japanese opens up another dimension of "passing." In her case, "passing" does not stand on the white/colored

dichotomy. It is involved in a more complicated net of political identities. In some sense, her passing is mimicry of “passing,” for her Japanese identity does not mean full access to the white power.

To understand the meaning of Eaton’s passing, we need to examine the construction of race and ethnicity in the frame of colonialism. Although passing novels are exclusively products of the United States with its history of slavery, the construction of “race” can be traced in the colonial encounter with the colored other. Colonial narratives, which describe colonial experiences of racial and sexual anxieties, are an important field for race theories. According to Abdul R. JanMohamed, the essence of colonial literature is in the ideological construction of racial difference and the European control over the other in terms of racial difference. He argues that colonial literature functioned to place Europeans and the colonized in oppositions between “white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sexuality, self and Other, subject and object” (82).

Colonial narratives, however, are not narratives penetrated by a one-sided force. Homi K. Bhabha sees contradictory forces working in colonial discourse. He calls colonial literature which uses the fixed images of colonial others as “colonial mimicry” and reveals the anxiety hidden in colonial mimicry. Since the colonial other is “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 86), mimicry “must continually produce its

slippage, its excess, its difference” (86). In other words, colonial discourse is always threatened by the fear of assimilation with the colonial other.

As the reflection of colonial anxiety, Orientalism is noteworthy because it reveals anxiety when the West encountered colonial “others” in Asia. Traditionally, Western racial knowledge assumes that race is on the skin, which is “the sign of something deeper, something hidden in the invisible interior of the organism” (Kawash 130). Thus, skin color functions as the sign of interior difference in the Western logic. Western encounter with the colonial others in the Middle East, however, destabilized the visual logic of race, because the skin of some Middle Easterners is not necessarily dark and they can be categorized as “Caucasian.” Therefore, the West needed another strategy to differentiate and control “the Oriental,” the racially ambiguous other, in their dichotomy of race.

Quite interestingly, Western white male discourse employs genderization (feminization) and sexualization to repress anxiety about the boundaries of race and ethnicity. David Lawrence Roger discusses how the “mulatto” was feminized in American discourse:

In this sense emasculated because it subverts the hierarchical premises of the patriarchal old South, the regendered or degendered mulatto not only emerges as precursor to representations of the mulatto as effete which appear after the War and around the turn of the century, but also adumbrates

the radically feminized figures of recent critical theory. (167).

As Roger says, the mulatto's body functioned as the site of ideological control, for the mulatto's "race" was a threat to the American racial hierarchy.

It is noteworthy that the same strategy—a confusion of gender—was employed to solve colonial anxiety. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes that the Orient was defined by the analogy of the "Oriental woman" who "never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history" (6). Thus, Said argues that the Orient has been defined as the "feminine" space where the Western male power is exercised in Western colonial narratives. The feminization of the Orient, thus, can be considered as the castration of the power of the colonial other.

Although Said's discussion focuses on the "Oriental" discourses about the Middle East, it will also be worthy to examine the significance of Japonism at the turn of the century.⁹ For the Western encounter with the Japanese, the "yellow" others who emerged as a non-Western colonial power, also complicated the Western dichotomy of race. In fact, Japonism, which is understood as a Western aesthetic infatuation with Japan, is within the power dynamics of Orientalism.

As a phenomenon, we cannot deny that Japonism took the form of Western cultural and economic exploitation of Japan. As soon as Japan changed its policy of isolation and opened its ports to foreign countries in 1865, Japanese woodblock prints, decorative art and fabrics flowed into

European markets and created a “boom for *Japonaiserie*” (Wilkinson 111).

According to Endymion Wilkinson, “the aesthetic infatuation with Japan was at its strongest in the last quarter of the nineteenth century” (112). *The Mikado*, Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta, was first performed in London in 1885. English Victorian writers such as Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling and Sir Edwin Arnold showed their interest in Japan and Japanese art.

Wilkinson says that Pierre Loti, a French writer who wrote *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), was at the center of the Orientalist discourse on Japan in Europe: “Loti’s books were reprinted hundreds of times and were translated into all the European languages” (114). Painters such as Degas, Manet, Lautrec, Van Gogh, Monet and Bonnard were all interested in experimenting with Japanese techniques of life and form in two-dimensional patterns. James M. Whistler, who is considered as “one of the most important figures in Japonism” (Watanabe 211), had numerous Oriental paintings. It is also noted that the pre-Raphaelite artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his brother, W. M. Rossetti, and Burne-Jones also admired Japanese art and used Oriental imagery in their works. Oriental imagery was connected with the Western Medieval Ages, the chivalrous period that they wanted to revive in their art.

In the United States, Japan has affected American culture “in many ways—in fine arts, decorative arts, architecture, applied art, and philosophy—from 1854 to 1910” (Clark 1). In 1876, Japanese wares and

culture were presented to the American public at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (Clark 1). In the literary market, John Luther Long, a writer in Philadelphia, published the Japanese romance, *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*, in 1895. Long's most famous novel, *Madame Butterfly* (1898), was made into the play under the direction of David Belasco, and later made into an opera by Giacomo Puccini. Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, which describes a cruel Western man and a devoted Japanese woman who dies because of love for him, was a great success in both Europe and the United States. Long and Belasco also worked together on *The Darling of the Gods* (1903), which had a great success on Broadway. Eaton's *A Japanese Nightingale* was also made into a theater production and performed in New York in 1903. From 1899 to 1903, a Japanese geisha actress, Sadayacco, and her troupe made a trip to the United States and Europe to perform Japanese dramas, and their performance received great admiration.¹⁰ Perceiving that Japanese romance could be a marketable product, Yone Noguchi, a Japanese poet who lived in the United States from 1893 to 1904, also published *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* in 1902 by disguising himself as a Japanese woman named "Morning Glory."¹¹ Both Eaton's Japanese romances and Noguchi's Japanese novel were decorated with "oriental" illustrations by Genjiro Yeto, an Japanese artist in New York. "Japan" was certainly a "product" to be consumed at the turn of the twentieth century in the West.

Quite interestingly, Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912) emerged as a non-Western, non-white imperial power, destabilizing “the familiar duality of West and non-West, ‘white’ and non-‘white,’ self and other” (Ching 65). In his article titled “Yellow Skin, White Masks, Race, Class, and Identification in Japanese Colonial Discourse,” Leo Ching argues that Japanese imperialist philosophers tried to get access to white/imperial power by attributing “yellowness” and non-Western “inferiority to Chinese” (75). According to Ching, Ukichi Taguchi, a Japanese philosopher, also suggested the strategy of “race make-up” by “proper grooming and the prolonging of youthful prime” (74):

Taguchi believes that ‘wearing hats would have the advantage of not only whitening all Japanese men and women’s faces, but also ennobling their status. And putting on little pretty suits, [the men] would become gentlemen at once.’” (Ching 74)

Taguchi’s suggestion is noteworthy because, consciously or unconsciously, he asserts the performativity of race. In fact, the Meiji period was a time when Japanese abandoned kimonos and began to wear Western clothes, trying to catch up with the West. The Japanese tried to get out of “yellowness” by acting Western.

Most Japanese romances, however, tried to confine Japan in the image of feudal days by depicting submissive women (often geishas) in kimonos, jinrikishas, and houses built of wood and paper. Japan was struggling to

“Westernize” itself, but Western narratives “Orientalized” and medievalized Japan and repeatedly emphasized the difference. Wilkinson writes: “the more Japan industrialized, however, the more Westerners clung to the old topsy-turvy image of Japan as a quaint fairyland whose only traces could now be found in a supposedly exotic past” (123). It could be argued that Western narrative domination over the image of Japan was a strategy to keep “whiteness” inaccessible. Just as the mulatto body was a site of the ideological conflicts, “the Orient” was also the ideological space where the white male ideology was threatened.

Eaton’s Japanese identity and romances, in this sense, also provide us with the space to examine the white male ideology of race and sexuality. The exoticism Eaton displayed in her fiction and fashion stands on the Western ambivalence about the production of “whiteness” as a power. What makes Eaton’s works different from other male Orientalists’ writing, however, is in the fact that she wrote her Japanese romances from her ambivalent position as a woman born between “the colonizer” and “the colonized” (White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton* 13). Eaton’s “Orientalism,” thus, needs a careful examination.

IV. DRESSING RACE AND STYLIZING THE BODY

To study Nella Larsen and Winnifred Eaton, it is also important to understand that their novels emerged in the period of industrialization.

Hazel V. Carby says that Larsen's *Quicksand* is "the first text by a black woman to be a conscious narrative of a woman embedded within capitalist social relations" (*Reconstructing Womanhood* 170). *Quicksand* can be categorized in the stream of African-American migration novels. The great migration from south to north started during World War I and reached its peak during World War II. Many black wageworkers rushed into the industrial labor pool. Helga Crane in *Quicksand* is not a low wage laborer, but she is a new woman who tries to support herself outside the household. Nora Ascough in Eaton's *Me* also leaves Canada for the West Indies to support herself and eventually comes to Chicago. They are both young women who come to an industrial city to work.

As working women's fictions in the beginning of the twentieth century, the works of Larsen and Eaton share the same interest: both writers are obsessively interested in women's fashion. In *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York*, Kathy Peiss argues the importance of clothing in the culture of young working-class women in the twentieth century: "Dress was a particularly potent way to display and play with notions of respectability, allure, independence, and status and to assert a distinctive identity and presence" (63).

Larsen and Eaton's interest in fashion reflects the time when they lived. Their obsession with fashion, however, also reflects their special situation as the women of mixed-race. Importantly, the issue of "ladyhood" is

always present in their works. Helga in *Quicksand* is a materialist who loves being surrounded by nice things. Her materialism is most satisfied when she is in Denmark and is given many expensive clothes. But she realizes that Danish people see her as “attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way” (70). Helga enjoys displaying herself in an exotic dress, which makes her beautiful, but expensive dresses do not lead her to white ladyhood, which is needed if Helga wants to assimilate herself into the white Danish society. Rather, Helga is always differentiated through exotic dresses.

Nora Ascough in *Me* also has a dilemma in her dress. She adopts herself to American life by wearing ready-made clothes. But dressing cannot change her race, whatever she wears. Nora finds that people always look at her with curiosity while they look at her beautiful white friends with admiration: “people stared at me, too, but in a different sort of way, as if I interested them or they were puzzled to know my nationality” (166). Thus, both writers describe how fashion is intertwined with their “colored” race, which always prevents them from gaining access to respectability and ladyhood.

The strength in Larsen and Eaton’s treatment of fashion, however, is not only in its connection with racism. They develop the topic of fashion along with the issue of “passing” and “mimicking.” In *Passing*, Larsen probes passing through the notion of “mask” and “masquerade” by paralleling Irene, a woman of mask, and Clare, a woman of masquerade. Larsen also probes

Clare's act of wearing the white body by depicting Clare's fashion in detail through Irene's eyes. If "ladyhood" can be constructed by dressing, "white womanhood" can be also imitated and performed.

As for Eaton, she put what Judith Butler calls "the performativity of identity" in practice. She passed as Japanese by dressing like a Japanese lady and writing Japanese romances. Without trying to pass for white, Eaton chose to open up a new epistemological space of power/beauty. In *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, Nan Enstad argues how the consumption of fashion and fiction worked in tandem in working women's culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Enstad says: "Specially, working women's consumption of fiction and fashion engaged their identities as workers, as women, and as immigrants" (50). It can be considered that both fashion and fiction were the tools for poor workingwomen to create the world of imagination, in which they could be "ladies," the perfect female American citizens. Eaton, in this sense, exemplified the joint project of fiction and fashion, opening a new space for young working women's culture. Especially, Eaton's romances, which provided the image of respectable Japanese ladies, could encourage "colored" women who had been always excluded from the category of ladyhood. Although in an exotic context, it still could destabilize the white monopoly of ladyhood by connecting Asians and ladies. Thus, Eaton's Japanese romances and fashion were a strategy to challenge the white patriarchal value of society. It is also noted that Eaton's novels

allowed white women to play with the idea of interracial marriage in the imagination. In the acceptable form of colonial mimicry, Eaton challenged the white patriarchal value system.

In my argument, fashioning is discussed as Larsen and Eaton's strategy of resistance to American identity politics, which always imposed the roles of sexual Oriental others. Judith Butler's theory of "performativity" is important to frame my argument. Butler's notion of gender performativity, in which "gender" is produced by manipulating the internal essence of gender "through the gendered stylization of body" (*Gender Trouble* xv) is, as Butler suggests, adaptable to the discussing of race performativity, for "race" is also a discourse established on the stylization of the body. The stylization of the body is crucial to the issue of passing, the conscious stylization of one's body through a repressive mask or a pleasurable masquerade.

V. PASSING AND MASQUERADING

This dissertation provides an opportunity to observe the politics of racial identity, which stand at the intersection of race and gender, from the mixed-race women's perspectives. Chapter One, "Crossing, Performativity and Transgression: Nella Larsen's Resistance to Identity Politics," analyzes the function of "crossing" and "passing" in Larsen's novels in terms of race and sexuality. While examining the "performativity" of

racial identity, I argue that both “crossing” and “passing” open up the space of transfiguration of female subjectivity.

The first chapter is divided into three parts. The first section titled "Geographical Crossing and the Space of Hybridity in *Quicksand*" discusses the function of crossing boundaries and the meaning of “in-between space.” Examining the meaning of the heroine’s mobility in *Quicksand*, I discuss how Larsen used her mulatto heroine to criticize the essentialist racial ideology based on the logic of difference/sameness. In the second section, "The Performativity of Identity: Mask, Masquerade, and Self-Fashioning in *Passing*," I discuss Larsen's heroine's "active" resistance to the essentialist notion of identity by focusing on fashion. By using the idea of "wearing a white body," I also examine the heroine's stylization of the body. In the last section, "Triangular Love and the Transgression of Sexual Norms," I discuss how Larsen criticizes the construction of sexual norms and their alliance with identity politics in her novels. Throughout these three sections, I probe how crossing boundaries (passing, geographical crossing, and transgressing sexual norms) functions in the novels to examine the possibility of the terrain of a new identity that transcends the boundaries of race, sexuality/gender and culture.

Chapter Two is titled “Winnifred Eaton’s Japanese Identity and “Hybrid” Romances.” Standing on the basis of Chapter One, which examines American racial ideology based on the white/black dichotomy from the mixed-

race perspective, Chapter Two tries to apply the logic of racial hybridity to the literature of Caucasian and Asian racial mixture. The dynamics of Orientalism, race and gender in Eaton's works are examined in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, "Plagiarism or Mimicry? *Miss Numè of Japan* Versus *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*" discusses *Miss Numè of Japan*, Eaton's first Japanese romance published in 1899. One disputable issue surrounding this novel is the possibility of plagiarism. *Miss Numè of Japan* shows striking similarities to John Luther Long's *Miss-Cherry Blossom of Tokyo*. The ambiguous relation between "colonial mimicry" and "plagiarism" is examined in the comparison of these two novels. Eaton's feminist revision of Long's novel and her strategic treatments of race and sexuality in the frame of Orientalism are the focus of this section. The second section, "Passing Authorship and Autobiography: *Me* and 'Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian'" examines *Me: A Book of Remembrance*, Eaton's autobiographical novel, in comparison with Edith Eaton's autobiography titled "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian." In this section Winnifred's struggle with racism and sexism is discussed by comparing her strategies with her sister's. Throughout the two sections, I examine how Eaton resisted white male control of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality within the passing authorship.

The dissertation aims to investigate how Larsen and Eaton used "passing" to open up the space of hybridity, which challenges the cultural

borderlands of identity. Postmodern feminist theories and postcolonial theories are used in tandem to support my argument, which tries to examine how the system of racial oppression operates in mixed-race women's literature.

¹Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Trans. C. L. Markmann. New York: Grove, 1967), 116.

² Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Fronterea: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

³ For Larsen's biography, I depended on Thadious M. Davis's *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994). Larsen's life, however, is mysterious in many ways. Although Larsen insisted that her father was a black West Indian, a close friend of the Larsens claimed that "Nella's mother, Mary Hanson, told her that Nella had been born in New York and that her father was a black American chauffeur for the family for whom Nella's mother worked as a domestic" (Davis 47).

⁴ I used Diana Birchall's *Onoto Watanna: The Story of Winnifred Eaton* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2001) for Eaton's biographical information.

⁵ See Craig Timberlake, *The Bishop of Broadway* (New York: Library Publishers, 1954), 226.

⁶ Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered: the Twentieth Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1979), 43.

⁷ Hazel V. Carby, "Introduction," *Iola Leroy or Shadow Uplifted* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), xxii

⁸ As for the ideological control on African-American women in the New Negro Movement, see Anne Stavney's " 'Mothers of Tomorrow': The New Negro Renaissance and the Politics of Maternal Repression," *African American Review* 32 (1998): 533-61

⁹ See Endymion Willkinson's *Japan Versus the West: Image and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 111.

¹⁰ See Yoko Chiba's "Sada Yakko and Kawakami Performers of Japonisme." *Modern Drama* 35 (1992): 35-53.

¹¹ Diana Birchall calls Yone's work as "a parody of her (Winnifred's) work" (73). Yone watched the production of *A Japanese Nightingale* and he criticized it in his article "'Onoto Watanna and Her Japanese Work." *Taiyou* 13 (June. 1907): 18-21. See the web page at <<http://www.media.kyoto-u.ac.jp/edu/lec/edmarx/Noguchi/Watanna-Taiyou.htm>>. Yone was not only the first Japanese international poet who published books and articles in the United States but also the father of a famous Asian-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi, whose museum is on Long Island, New York. Yone, however, abandoned his American wife and Isamu when he went back to Japan. Isamu never forgave his father in his lifetime. See Dore Ashton's *Noguchi East and West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

CHAPTER ONE

CROSSING, PERFORMATIVITY AND TRANSGRESSION:

NELLA LARSEN'S RESISTANCE TO IDENTITY POLITICS

Why should the world be over-wise?
 In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask —Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask”¹

Was there something inherently wrong in ‘passing’? —Jessie Redmon Fauset,
*Plum Bun*²

Nella Larsen is considered one of the most important writers of the passing novel, a popular genre among African-American writers in the early twentieth century. Writers such as James Weldon Johnson, Charles Chesnutt, and Jessie Fauset also pursued the topic of passing and depicted light-skinned characters as the central figures in their writing. They preferred to use interracial characters because the “mulatto represents both a taboo and a synthesis, not only the product of a sexual union that miscegenation laws tried to rule out of existence but also an allegory for the radically divided society as a whole, simultaneously un-American and an image of America as such” (B. Johnson 251-52). The “mulatto” characters could be agents to analyze the paradox of color prejudice in America. But it is also true that the passing novel always stressed the heavy personal cost of “passing” by connecting it with disloyalty toward the black race and

ultimately placed the mulatto on the black side. The significance of Nella Larsen's *Passing* is, however, in Larsen's rejection of American dualistic racial politics that do not allow existence between the boundaries.

In *Passing*, Larsen describes the anxieties and guilty feelings that accompanied crossing over the racial line, but she refuses a separatist resolution to the novel. Because of this ambiguous ending, critics have tried to understand Larsen's real message embedded in the issue of passing. When African-American feminist Deborah McDowell published in 1986 the interpretation of Larsen's racial passing as the rhetorical masquerade of lesbian desire, it gave great impact to the critical re-interpretation of the text. Since then, critics have been more interested in interpreting the text not only as a story of racial transgression, but also of sexual transgression.

McDowell's "queer" reading is significant in its deconstructive analysis of the novel, which had been read as a heterosexual text. By focusing on Larsen's ambiguous treatment of race, she disclosed the hidden desire embedded in the heterosexual discourse. Her reading, which emerged in the wave of black feminist criticism in the 1980s, however, leaves us some problems to think about. Ironically, one of the problems is her desire to place Larsen's text into the tradition of African-American lesbian literature. McDowell shows her disappointment in Larsen's final evasion of a full account of lesbian desire, while she praises Larsen as "a pioneer, a trailblazer in the Afro-American female literary tradition" (xxxix), saying "Larsen closes

Passing ‘without exploring to the end that unfamiliar path in which she had strayed’” (xxxix). McDowell seems to think that Larsen’s novel is deficient because of Larsen’s lack of courage to come out as a lesbian writer. Trying to deconstruct what Adrienne Rich has called “compulsory heterosexism,” she confines the novel to the dichotomy of hetero/homo sexuality. But Larsen’s ambiguous attitude towards sexuality should be appreciated as it is, for the fact that such ambiguity cannot be reduced to a binary system is a key in understanding Larsen’s works.

In fact, Larsen’s novels are characterized by bisexuality and biraciality. As a mixed-race child born of Mary Hanson, a Danish woman, and Peter Walker, a West Indian colored man, who disappeared before her birth, Larsen herself was destined to live in between, racially and culturally.³ Although most readers of Larsen’s works presume her mulatto heroines to be “black” women, such a quick “identification” of race is problematic in reading Larsen’s works, for Larsen questions such social formations of identity and identification by describing racially ambiguous characters. Actually the ambiguous “in-between space” that Larsen’s characters occupy functions as a space to examine the epistemology of identity. Larsen’s novels interrogate our “assumption” of identity.

In *Colonial Desire*, Robert Young discusses hybridity as a disruption as well as a mixture: “Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the

same, the different no longer simply different” (26). The metaphor of the sterile mule, from which the words mulatto derives, implies not only the idea that “white and black were forever separate and distinct” (Kawash 5) but also the idea that racial mixture brings about a creature disrupting the notions of sameness and difference. A mule is like a donkey as well as a horse, but it is also different from both of them. The sterility symbolizes not only the idea of racial separation but also the impossibility of carrying a disruption of significations.

The suffering of mixed-race figures, thus, stems from the incompatibility of co-existing categories of race. The notions of sameness and difference operate at the same time, and it deprives them of the space in which they can happily settle down. Living in between races means living in the conflict of significations. It is the chaotic space of confusion of significations.

Although Larsen emerged as a writer in the New Negro movement, it should be noted that she did not share the same idea of race as the Harlem male leaders. The New Negro Renaissance was an artistic movement centered on a strong race consciousness. It tried to establish a positive African-American identity and forge a new political unity through “the deep sentiment of race” (Locke 3). Langston Hughes’ “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” claims a “New Negro” identity through the celebration of African heritage. The New Negro Renaissance was also an ethnocentric movement that

emphasized the richness of black culture in its rejection of white culture. In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes criticizes “a self-styled ‘high-class’ Negro” (56) who tries to adopt white values and imitate white culture. Although “Hughes’ statement is among the most defiant of the Harlem Renaissance” (Mitchell 3), his view expresses the Harlem political ideology clearly. George Schuyler criticized such a view of the black race, saying, “the Africamerican is subject to the same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white Americans” (52), but his was not a majority opinion in the Harlem Renaissance, which celebrated African-American culture by emphasizing racial pride and unity.

The Harlem Renaissance was also patriarchal, though it produced prominent female writers such as Jessie Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston. It is true that Harlem male leaders emphasized the importance of educating women, but they were also obsessed with constructing “black womanhood.” *The Messenger*, one of the New Negro magazines, has an article titled “Negro Womanhood’s Greatest Needs” in February 1928. John W. Baddy, the writer of this article, is very concerned with “sex-immorality” of African-American women, and writes:

Though there has been considerable improvement, sex-immorality is yet a serious problem confronting our womanhood and one with which they must grapple courageously if we are to approach a solution. . . . Let our women acquire true and

reliable knowledge of the nature and general principles of sex, of
the natural origin and development of human beings. (44)

Annoyed by “an overwhelming problem of the illegitimate child and the unwed mother”(44), Baddy strongly advocates the importance of educating women as the responsible mothers of race. He also asserts that marriage is important as “a race-improving force” (44) by quoting Lester F Ward’s words, “Conjugal love constitutes a third step in the ethical and esthetic development of race” (44). It is worth noting that the frontispiece of Alain Locke’s *New Negro* anthology is a portrait of a young black mother carrying a baby in her arms. The portrait is titled “Brown Madonna.” Harlem male leaders tried to constructed “black womanhood” in “nonsexual modest womanhood” (Stavney 545) that “Brown Madonna” illustrates.

Although it is hard to say that Larsen’s novels coincided with the masculine Harlem ideology, Larsen was praised by W. E. B. Du Bois as a representative “black” writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois praised *Quicksand*, saying, “It is, on the whole, the best piece of fiction that Negro America has produced since the heyday of [Charles] Chesnutt, and stands easily with Jessie Fauset’s ‘There is Confusion,’ in its subtle comprehension of the curious cross currents that swirl about the black American” (Davis 280). *Passing* also earned Larsen fame as a New Negro woman writer. *The Crisis* in July 1929 praises *Passing* as a work described “the psychology” of

passing: “It is a difficult task, but she attacks the problem fearlessly and with consummate art.”⁴

Probably Larsen’s works were praised because of their artistic complexity, which actually functioned to conceal her real messages. For instance, *Passing* contains a radical message challenging the Harlem Renaissance notions of racial unity and motherhood, but the death of the passing figure allows readers to interpret that the passing figure is punished because of being disloyal to the black race. Thus, Larsen skillfully opened her “hybrid” space on the stage of the Harlem Renaissance. The important characteristics in her novels are that they challenged American racial and sexual politics from a mixed-race perspective as well as feminist perspectives.

In understanding Larsen’s works, postmodern feminists’ approach to the formation of identity could provide a theoretical foundation, for postmodern feminism examines how female identity is intertwined with the other issues such as race and class. Theresa de Lauretis discusses the social formation of identity from a cinematic point of view. She argues that “women are constructed through effects of language and representation” (*Alice Doesn’t* 14). She bridges the gap between the politicized identity and individuals: “the social being is constructed day by day as the point of articulation of ideological formations, an always provisional encounter of subject and codes at the historical (therefore changing) intersection of social formations and her or his personal history” (*Alice Doesn’t* 14). For de Lauretis, the politicized

identity and the personal identity are in a dynamic process that involves constant refiguration and transformation of significations. Thus de Lauretis “opens up a space for passive determinations of subjectivity *and* the possibility of active/choice/ negotiation” (Ghosh and Bose xxii). De Lauretis’s semiotic understanding of female subjectivity provide the conceptual foundation to understand Larsen’s novels, in which the heroines are trying to find their identities, resisting the hegemonic signifying forces, which try to determine and overdetermine their identities.

Along with de Lauretis’s theory of female subjectivity, Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection is useful to an analysis of Larsen’s heroine’s psychological conflicts. Starting from a Lacanian interpretation of the formation of signs/ significations, Kristeva conceptualizes the repressed side of female subjectivity by using the notion of abjection and sees the subverting force residing there. According to Kristeva, abjection is what is “othered,” marginalized,” and “abjected” in the process of signs/significations in the stage of Language. It is abjected because it “disturbs identity, system and order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*Powers of Horror* 4). For Kristeva, abjection is understood as the subversive force to threaten the system of Law/Father/Language within the semiotic stage. In other words, Kristeva sees the dynamics of significations in the conflict between the Symbolic and the Semiotic. The notion of abjection is useful for Larsen’s

characters often function as the signs of abjection in the society in which they live.

My argument is also based on Judith Butler's view of the formation of identity, which is useful in discussing Larsen's novels. The conflict between politicized identity and subjectivity in Larsen's novels is in the complicated layers of significations that circulate through gender, race, sexuality, and class. It should be remembered that Jennifer De Vere Brody's objection to McDowell's queer reading lies in the fact that McDowell's reading disregards other key issues such as race and class. Brody says: "The iconography McDowell reads as sexual is simultaneously racial: it also expresses class positionality" (1053). I don't think that McDowell sees race as a peripheral issue in Larsen's texts, but I agree that seeing racial issues as a "masquerade" of lesbian sexuality and discussing them as if they were issues in a separate domain can be problematic, for, as Butler suggests, no single account of "construction" stands alone without the categories working as background for one another. Claiming that various laws are working together to find their powerful articulation through one another, Butler argues that race is also an important component in the formation of sexual norms and ideals:

But what requires radical rethinking is what social relations compose this domain of the symbolic, what convergent set of historical formations of racialized gender, of gendered race, of

the sexualization of racial ideals, or the racialization of gender norms, makes up both the social regulation of sexuality and its psychic articulation. (*Bodies That Matter* 182)

As Butler points out, we should note that various forces are working with one another in a signifying process of identity. Speaking about the notion of female subjectivity, de Lauretis also says:

Again I see a shift, a development, and I do hope I'm not mistaken, in the feminist understanding of female subjectivity: a shift from the earlier view of woman defined purely by sexual difference (i.e., in relation to man) to the more difficult and complex notion that the female subject is a site of differences; differences that are not only sexual or only racial, economic, or (sub) cultural, but all of these together. And often enough at odds with one another (*Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* 14).

Engaging oneself in “a negative dialectics of identity” (Gosh and Bose xxiii), therefore, requires one to negotiate signification in various layers and configurations. Larsen’s characters’ struggle cannot be understood without understanding that they are in a site of “differences” on various levels.

With de Lauretis, Kristeva and Butler as the theoretical bases of my analysis, I will discuss Larsen’s heroines’ resistance to American identity politics in *Quicksand* and *Passing*. Throughout the discussion, I would like to

probe how crossing boundaries (passing, geographical crossing, and transgressing sexual norms) functions in the novels and to examine whether it offers the possibility of a new identity terrain that transcends the boundaries of race, sexuality/gender and culture.

I. GEOGRAPHICAL CROSSING AND THE SPACE OF HYBRIDITY IN *QUICKSAND*

In *Quicksand*, Larsen questions the relation between race and subjectivity by using Helga Crane to examine American dual identity politics. Helga, a mulatto woman born of a white mother and a black father, is described as a figure split between two racial identities. In *Quicksand*, Helga's split identity is emphasized by her extraordinary mobility as a traveler. Larsen's use of geographical space is important to note, because "historically, the idea of race has a long-standing relation to the idea of geography" (Kawash 8). As passing or crossing the line signifies, the metaphor of geographical boundaries is employed to refer to the racial distinction. The geographical metaphor of race represents the idea that white and black are living in different spaces and that there is a rigid boundary between the white race and the black race. Helga's geographical movement, in this sense, signifies her ambivalent status as a mulatto woman who does not completely belong to either race. Describing Helga's constant geographical crossing, Larsen shows that the mulatto is the trespasser of the

geography of races. Although Helga does not commit racial passing as Clare Kendry in *Passing* does, geographical crossing can be understood as the metaphor of racial passing.

Throughout the novel, Helga functions as an unfixed signifier that threatens the stable relation between signs and significations of the society by her constant displacement. She is what Kristeva calls the “foreigner”: “the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, and space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder” (*Stranger to Ourselves* 1). “The foreign other” is a threatening being within society because “she/he” is not absorbed or assimilated in the significations of society. It is “the hidden face” that identity politics represses to keep the society in order. Kristeva’s notion of the foreigner can be also connected with her notion of abjection. Kristeva defines abjection as what “disturbs identity, system and order” and “what does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). It would be noted that Helga functions as abjection destabilizing the system of society by moving around.

In *Quicksand*, Larsen situates Helga, a woman of mixed-race, as a “disturbing factor” (7) for the community she lives in. She antagonizes by her white relatives; Helga is “feared and hated” (6) by them because she is an unassimilatable being, who threatens the racially segregated society by showing that a black girl can be born in a white family. Helga, an illegitimate mixed-race child of a white woman, can be also a disturbing

factor for the black community because her illegitimacy can be seen as a symbol of the black man's assault on white womanhood. Since the black violation of white womanhood was a great anxiety in the white society and it escalated into the lynching of innocent African-American men in the early twentieth century, a woman like Helga could evoke fear and anxiety in African-American communities.⁵ Thus, Helga, a mixed-race child of a violated taboo, represents what both white and black societies do not want to face.

Helga's hybrid perspective, however, provides us with an important insight into the construction of white/black society. Helga's comments on Naxos, the black middle-class community in the South, reveal the essential contradiction on which the black community stands. She perceives that a black community based on the ideal of racial uplift exists within the white hierarchy of races. Helga thinks that Naxos is "a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man's magnanimity, refutation of the black man's inefficiency" (4). She also feels that Naxos produces the human models by imitating white ideology.

Life had died out of it. It was, Helga decided, now, only a big knife with cruelly shape edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man's pattern. (4)

Helga's perception of the Naxos community is noteworthy. Although Naxos tries to educate the model African-Americans, their strong race consciousness

can be problematic, for carrying the white-made racial dichotomy means carrying the white ideology of race. Since constructing race on the color of skin is a strategy of producing and giving privilege to “whiteness,” to build the school principles centering on race means the obedience to a “white man’s pattern.” Thus, Helga sees that black race consciousness in Naxos is actually an internalization of white ideology.

Helga also has a problem with the dress code in Naxos:

Too, they felt that the colors were queer; dark purples, royal blues, rich greens, deep reds, in soft, luxurious woolens, or heavy, clinging silks. And trimmings—when Helga used at all—seemed to them odd. Old laces, strange embroideries, dim brocades. Her faultless, slim shoes made them uncomfortable and her small plain hats seemed to them positively indecent. (18)

People from “first families” (18) in Naxos hate the colorful and luxurious fabric clothes Helga loves to wear. Helga’s taste in clothes is closer to that of class-transgressive white working women who dressed “with fashion” (Enstad 78). Nan Enstad explains the tendency of display in working women’s fashion at the turn of century, saying “working women emphasized rather than denied the element of display that played a part in all clothes” (Enstad 79). For working women, dressing was the way of asserting their identities and displaying their respectable womanhood. Naxos, however, tries to

repress Helga's desire to express her identity through fashion. In Naxos's strict dress code, Helga perceives a contradiction of the middle-class black race ideology:

These people yapped loudly of race, of race consciousness, of race pride, and yet suppressed its most delightful manifestations, love of color, joy of rhythmic motion, naïve, spontaneous laughter. Harmony, radiance, and simplicity, all the essentials of spiritual beauty in the race they had marked for destruction. (18)

Thus, Helga understands that the "blackness" that the Naxos people assert is nothing but a construction modeled on white middle-class morality. By imitating "white patterns," Naxos denies "all the essentials of spiritual beauty in the race" (18).

Helga also perceives the contradiction of "race women" in Harlem when she locates herself in New York. In Harlem, Helga finds a compatible soul in Anne Gray, a brown woman who has "the face of a golden Madonna, grave, and calm and sweet, with shining black hair and eyes" (45). At first, Anne is "almost too good to be true" (45). Helga is fascinated with Anne's beauty, her agreeable manners, her fastidious taste in clothes, and her strong character. But gradually, Anne's obsession with race becomes the source of Helga's frustration. Helga is annoyed by Anne's "inconsistencies": Anne "hated white people with a deep and burning hatred" but "aped their clothes, their

manners, and their gracious ways of living” (48). Helga’s complaint about Anne reveals that black elites’ inconsistent logic of race. They assert the racial pride and uplift, but actually try to improve the race by aping white middle-class values.

Since Helga’s hybrid perspective clarifies the paradox of race ideology, Helga is seen as a threat to both white and black societies. It is also noted that Helga’s mulatto body functions as a sexual threat in this novel. Anne knows that she is lovely and “more beautiful than Helga” (95), but she is afraid of Helga’s unusual sexual charm, which may evoke “nameless, shameful impulse” (95) in her husband’s “cold asceticism” (95). Significantly, in her anxiety, Anne places Helga in “a more lawless place where she herself never hoped and desired to enter” (94-95). Since the mulatto body is the symbol of racial and sexual transgression and illegitimacy, Helga’s body evokes a great anxiety in people’s minds.

Helga, a black Danish American, who does not belong to either white or black community, thus, is always marginalized by the society and inevitably places herself in a constant dislocation. Larsen, however, describes Harlem as the important semiotic space in the geography of race in *Quicksand*. Significantly, Harlem functions as the core place of Helga’s geographical crossing. Harlem appears in the text twice, before and after Copenhagen. Helga’s journey starts from Naxos in the South; then she moves to Chicago, Harlem, and to Denmark. Then she comes back to Harlem and ends up in a

black community in Alabama. In terms of the construction of the novel, Harlem is placed between the black world (Naxos, Chicago and Alabama) and the white world white (Denmark) in this novel. There is no doubt that Larsen sees Harlem as an “in-between space,” a sort of “third space,” which can give Helga the possibility of inventing a new identity, which rejects being contained in racial dichotomy.

In fact, Larsen describes Harlem as the place of hybridity in terms of race and nationality. Harlem, which contains people of various skin-color, hair and eyes, is described as the place of confusion of racial identity based on physical appearance:

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 and blue eyes in tan faces. Africa, Europe, perhaps with a pinch of Asia, in a fantastic motley of ugliness and beauty, semi-barbaric, sophisticated, exotic, were here. (59-60)

The opposite qualities such as ugliness/beauty and barbarism/ sophistication coexist in the people of Harlem. Larsen does not think that race is determined by skin-color or Negro features. Rather, the visible features

function as the site of confusion, which makes a dichotomy of white/black invalid. Harlem is presented as the space where race is diverse, fluid, unstable and indefinable. In “The New Negro,” Alain Locke also describes Harlem as a space of diversity of nationality and class:

It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. (6)

Harlem, the hybrid space, however, is also the place that splits Helga’s identity. In Harlem, Helga is troubled with her double consciousness. To express Helga’s double consciousness, Larsen employs the narrative technique that can be defined by Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory as the novelistic hybrid, “an artistically organized system for bringing languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving—out of a living image of another language” (361). The novelistic hybrid is a double-voiced technique, in which “two points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically” (360).

One of the best examples of Larsen's hybrid narrative is her description of the Harlem nightlife, which is described by the double point of view:

They danced, ambling lazily to a crooning melody, or violently twisting their bodies, like whirling leaves, to a sudden streaming rhythm, or shaking themselves ecstatically to a thumping of unseen tomtoms. For a while, Helga was oblivious of the reek of flesh, smoke, and alcohol, oblivious of the oblivion of other gyrating pairs, oblivious of the color, the noise, and the grand distorted childishness of it all. She was draggled, lifted, sustained by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seems bodily motion. And when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present with a conscious effort; and a shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it, began to taunt her. She hardened her determination to get away. She wasn't, she told herself, a jungle creature. (59)

Larsen's narrator describes the nightlife in Harlem not only in visual terms but also in auditory and sensual images. A sequence of nouns ("flesh, smoke, and alcohol"), verbs ("draggled, lifted, sustained"; "blown out, ripped out, beaten out") and adjectives ("joyous, wild, murky") expresses the richness and

fluidity of the Harlem life. The verbs of progressive form such as “twisting,” “whirling,” “streaming,” and “shaking” express the motion in the Harlem life. This narrative of motion, however, is suddenly disrupted by Helga’s point of view, in which Harlem is defined as a “jungle” and labeled as a noisy, exotic and sexual place. Helga herself is oblivious of herself and enjoys the beat of Harlem. But the narrative suddenly turns into Helga’s other consciousness. Awakened from the intoxication of dancing, Helga says to herself: “She wasn’t, she told herself, a jungle creature” (59).

The double perspective of Larsen’s narrative represents Helga’s split consciousness. Helga loves the “joy of rhythmic motion, naïve, spontaneous laughter” (18), but her hatred of “primitiveness” shows up at the moment of ecstasy. Helga criticizes the Naxos community and Anne’s inconsistent racial consciousness, but Helga herself is inconsistent in her racial attitude. Importantly, it should be noted that Harlem was the place of contradiction. Despite its diversity, Harlem was the place penetrated by a strong racial ideology. Locke writes: “Within this area, race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentiment and experience In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination”(6-7). Harlem as the center of the New Negro Movement was the political center of black ideology. The New Negro movement celebrated the diversity of “negroes,” but it also tried to unite all under the

idea of racial pride, assuming that all blacks share the same sentiment about race.

Helga's experience in Harlem, therefore, becomes an extraordinary one. In Harlem she "passes" as black by concealing her white relatives. Traditionally, passing refers to blacks becoming whites. But Helga reverses the traditional notion of passing by pretending to be a "black" woman. Her passing is not the fabrication of identity. It is the tactic of silence. She learns it from Mrs. Hayes-Rore, "a prominent 'race' woman and an authority" (37), who introduces Helga to Anne. She advises Helga not to speak about her white relatives: "I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you . . . I'll just tell Anne that you're a friend of mine whose mother's dead. That'll place you well enough and it's all true. I never tell lie. She can fill in the gaps to suit herself and anyone curious enough to ask" (41). Mrs. Hayes-Rore, who is keenly conscious of the strong racial consciousness in Harlem, recommends that Helga should pass as black by keeping a gap between signs.

The color of her skin, however, does not make Helga a "black" woman. She realizes that race is not on the skin:

She didn't, in spite of her racial markings, belong to these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it. It wasn't merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper that made folk kin. (55).

Physically, Helga succeeds in passing as black. But mentally she fails because she cannot internalize the race into her subjectivity. Helga's conflict in identity, thus, drives her to move to another place. Her next destination is Denmark, where she believes that there are no "Negroes, no problems, no prejudice" (55).

In *Quicksand*, Copenhagen is described as the space of white capitalism. In Copenhagen, Helga experiences a materialistic life she had always wanted. Life in Copenhagen is the realization of Helga's dream: "Always she had wanted, not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surrounding. Things. Things. Things." (67). The luxurious life that Helga "had dreamed persistently ever since she was old enough to remember such vague things as day-dreams and longings" (67) can be read as the symbol of white privilege. Helga is so excited to get many new dresses in Copenhagen. Helga's desire for new expensive dresses is the desire for passing to the white world and for wearing the white body.

Dressing, however, does not provide Helga with white privilege, for dressing does not help to make her a white woman. Aunt Katrina says: "And you're a foreigner, and different. You must have bright things to set off the colors of your lovely brown skin. Striking things, exotic things. You must make an impression" (68). Gradually, Helga comes to realize that she does not turn into a white lady in her new dress. She perceives that Danish people see her "attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way" (70) and

expect her to play the role of “an exotic female Other—symbol of the unconscious, the unknowable, the erotic, and the passive” (Wall 102). Because of her mixed-race, she is always described as colored, different, exotic, sensual, sexual, and savage.

Helga’s experience in Copenhagen highlights her resistance to the white significations, which try to determine and overdetermine her identity. Significantly, Helga’s realization of the social power over her identity comes from the dresses she is required to wear. All the dresses Helga is required to wear are exotic dresses such as “the Chinese red dressing-gown” (68) and “the shining black taffeta with its bizarre trimmings of purple and cerise” (69). Axel Olsen, an artist and admirer of Helga, also plays the role of director who constructs Helga in the exotic image. The dresses Olsen chooses for Helga are “batik dresses in which mingled indigo, orange, green, vermilion, and black; dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors, blood red, sulphur-yellow, sea green; and one black and white thing in striking combination” (74). All are dresses with voluptuous, exotic, tropical, savage, and animalistic images. Most of the colors are “screaming colors” (74) which are connected with the body (“blood” 74) and with nature (“sulphur-yellow,” “sea-green” 74). “Great scarlet and lemon flowers” (74), tropical exotic flowers that do not grow in cold climates, are printed on the black shawl. He also sends Helga a coat of “leopard-skin” (74), which proves that he connects Helga with the image of Africa. Items such as “turban-like hats of metallic silks, feathers

and furs, strange jewelry, enameled or set with odd semi-precious stones, a nauseous Eastern perfume, shoes with dangerously high heels” (74) shows that Olsen connects her with the image of the East.

According to Stavney, the black woman was often “connected with the heat, fertility, and luxury of the voluptuous East, an implicit contrast to the colder, urban, modern landscape” (549) in art in the beginning of the twentieth century. Olsen’s choice of dresses reveal that he is trying to Africanize, Orientalize, exoticize, and eroticize Helga through dressing. Africa, Arabia and Asia are in the same category in Olsen’s Western point of view. Obviously, he applies white colonialist strategy of differentiating the colonial other. He needs to confine Helga’s mulatto body into non-Western space in order to prove his power over her.

Helga perceives these intentions early on, but she is not always successful in resisting the force that tries to inscribe the image of “an exotic female Other” (Wall 102) on her. A nice dress is a seductive trap for Helga, a materialist who loves “things.” Helga opens the box of dresses “in a mood of rebellion” but “gradually Helga’s perturbation subsided in the unusual pleasure of having so many new and expensive clothes at one time” (74). This can be considered as the moment in which Helga is overwhelmed by the white male power allied with capitalism. The variety of colors in the dresses functions as dangerous seductive signs, which try to confine Helga in the image of “an exotic female Other.”

The scene of these exotic garments also tells us that Olsen tries to create Helga as a symbol of excessive female sexuality. Olsen, who is “brilliant, bored, elegant, urban, cynical, worldly” (77), is one of the problematic characters in *Quicksand*. He is a great artist working in “the eccentric studio” (77). He is a passionate lover, whose behavior is almost theatrical. But he is also indifferent to Helga: “But in spite of his expressed interest and even delight in her exotic appearance, in spite of his constant attendance upon her, he gave no sign of the more personal kind of concern” (77). Larsen’s description of Olsen is somewhat ambiguous, but it would be possible to interpret Olsen as gay and someone who just wants to keep Helga as a symbol of female sexuality in order to keep his homosexuality secret from the public. When he asks Helga to marry him, he says in “theatrical tone” (87):

I didn’t want to love you, but I had to. That is the truth.

I make of myself a present to you. For love” (87)

He speaks as if he could not resist loving Helga in spite of some obstacles. But his love-obstacles are unclear, because he is not troubled about race, though it is a big problem for Helga. Helga, who has “a solid background of Herr Dahl’s wealth and generosity” (74) is not inferior to Olsen in terms of class. But if his obstacle were his sexual orientation, his language is clear. He does not want to love Helga, but he needs to make love and get married in order to deceive the public and sustain his homosexual identity in secret.

This argument is supported by the description that Olsen is “gone off suddenly to some *queer* place in the Balkans” (90, my italic) after he is refused by Helga. Just as David L. Blackmore sees the hidden homosexual desire in Brian, who is eager to go to Brazil, the symbol of homosexuality in Blackmore’s interpretation, in *Passing*, we can read the hidden homosexual expression in Olsen’s character, too. Olsen needs Helga in order to present his white masculinity in public.

In this sense, Helga’s rejection of Axel Olsen’s proposal of marriage is the important moment that highlights the tension between white male significations and Helga’s resistance to them. Helga is humiliated when she sees Olsen’s portrait of her because she finds that she is distorted into “some disgusting sensual creature with her features” (89). Olsen also insults her by trying to mold Helga into the stereotype of African women, who are hyper-eroticized in Western discourse. Olsen, who regards Helga as a passive sexual commodity available to white men, represents the hegemonic signifying force, which tries to determine the colored female identity through his representation.

Helga, however, subverts Olsen’s image of the black woman by rejecting his proposal, saying, “I’m not for sale” (87), implicitly criticizing his racism and sexism, which are allied with capitalism. Helga’s rejection of Olsen constitutes the moment of Helga’s “active/choice/negation” (Ghosh and Bose xxii) of social significations. Olsen is greatly shocked and upset by her

rejection because he has never imagined that a colored woman could turn down a white man's proposal of marriage, which would allow a colored women access to white privilege:

The man's full upper lip trembled. He wiped his forehead, where the gold hair was now lying flat and pale and lusterless. His eyes still avoided the girl in the high-backed chair before him. (88)

Olsen's physical reaction is exactly the reaction for abjection: "a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome" (Kristeva, *Power of Horror* 2). When he abjects, he is overwhelmed by loathsome feelings and his body tries to spit them out. Olsen avoids looking at Helga, because she, who rejects his significations, is the embodiment of abjection for him. Olsen is put into confusion because his symbolic space is trespassed by Helga's semiotic power.

Thus, in some level, Helga succeeds in disturbing not only the system of racial hierarchy but also the system of sexual dichotomy by engaging herself into the "active/choice/negation" (Ghosh and Bose xxii) of the politicized identity. But the rejection of Olsen's proposal also imposes a question about race and subjectivity on Helga. She realizes that one cannot escape from the politicized unity of race when she refuses Olsen:

You see, I couldn't marry a white man. I simply couldn't. It isn't just you, not just personal, you understand. It's deeper, broader than that. It's racial. (88)

Helga realizes that she is bound by "race" in spite of the fact that she belongs to neither black nor white society.

After her rejection of marriage, Helga reconciles herself in her mind with her black father. She becomes sympathetic with "his yearning, his intolerable need for the inexhaustible humor and the incessant hope of his own kind, his need for those things not material, indigenous to all Negro environments" (92). If we apply a Lacanian interpretation to Helga's reconciliation with her father, this is the moment in which Helga enters into the stage of Father/Law/ Language. Helga comes to identify herself as a "black" woman clearly after this moment.

The life in Copenhagen changes not only Helga's perception of the self but also her perception of fashion. In Copenhagen, she understands the theatrical nature of dressing:

She was incited to make an impression, a voluptuous impression. She was incited to inflame attention and admiration. She was dressed for it, subtly schooled for it. And after a little while she gave herself wholly to the fascinating business of being seen, gaped at, desired. . . . She grew used to the extravagant things with which Aunt Katrina chose to

dress her. (74)

Importantly, Helga comes to think that wearing exotic garments is “the fascinating business” (74), in which she engages herself in order to please her relatives and acquaintances. Fashion is a dangerous trap that tries to confine Helga in the image of the exotic female other, but she also comes to realize that she can gain “new existence” (74) through dressing.

Helga thus finds fashion as the means of expressing her subjectivity. She realizes that dressing allows her to perform and create the self and, consequently, gives her power to control her body. In other words, she finds that fashion is the semiotic space where signs are in play. Although one cannot undress one’s body, dresses are changeable. When Helga learns that she can “make an impression” (68) on people through clothes, she finds that she is no more “plain Helga Crane, of whom nobody had ever heard” (8). She does not need to situate herself in her blood relationship in such a performance. She can present herself through her conscious choice of her looks in self-fashioning.

When Helga goes back to Harlem, she becomes popular among people because of her “courageous clothes” (98). Helga’s “courageous dresses,” as theatrical self-fashioning, could be interpreted as the expression of her subjectivity, because this is not what is assigned by the society but what she chooses. She wears these dresses to challenge the black middle-class values, which try to mold women into the figure of nonsexual mother. By exposing

herself in “courageous clothes” (98), Helga gains the pleasure of controlling her sexuality. She becomes a performer of herself in her self-displaying fashioning. She meets James Vayle, her ex-fiancé, but she is no more a poor young woman who escaped from him, being ashamed of her parentage. Helga, who knows she is attractive, acts confidently and refuses his proposal of marriage, saying that giving birth to “more unwanted, tortured Negroes to America” (103) is sinful. She rejects the idea of motherhood the race assigns to her.

Thus, Helga seems to have attained control over her body and self. Fashion, however, does not allow Helga to stand aloof from race and her body. Helga’s “courageous” (98) fashion is soon trapped by male significations. Anderson, Anne’s husband, whom Helga secretly admires, suddenly catches Helga, holds her close, and gives her a long kiss. Helga’s desire is awakened by his passionate kiss, and she is thrown into “the mental quagmire” (106): “All night, all day, she had mentally prepared herself for the coming consummation; physically too, spending hours before the mirror” (107). Helga takes Anderson’s kiss very seriously, but Anderson hurts her by saying that he was just out of control because of “rotten cocktails” (107). Because of the unrequited love and passion, Helga comes to “feel alone, isolated from all other human beings” (109). Awakened desire also burns in her flesh “with uncontrollable violence” (109). The irony of *Quicksand* is that

Helga destroys herself by “the warm impulsive nature” (87), which she has strongly repressed.

Driven by her sexual desire, Helga seduces Reverend Green whom she met in the gospel church. Noticing his desire for her, Helga marvels: “That man! Was it possible? As easy as that?” (115). The scene in the gospel church, where religious passion and Helga’s sexual desire become one, marks the climactic moment of *Quicksand*. Helga comes to feel “an echo of the weird orgy resound in her own heart” (113). Thus, Helga’s sexual energy finds its place in the Christian institution of marriage, which eventually causes the destruction of her body.

Marriage with Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green satisfies Helga with the pleasure of sex for a while. Sexual pleasure, however, ultimately deprives her of controlling power over herself. What Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green offers Helga is not a pleasant pastoral life but a miserable rural life as a preacher’s wife. She is always pregnant and thus ultimately destroys her health. Life in the Southern rural village cuts her off from not only cities, clothes and books, but also “the sweet mingled smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly lighted rooms filled with inconsequential chatter and laughter and sophisticated tuneless music” (135). Denying her hybridity and choosing the fixed identity, she punishes the part of herself which deserves a carefree life in Harlem. She feels nostalgic for Harlem’s chaotic space, where

various people come together, chat and laugh, hearing tuneless music, but she finds that she is dying during childbirth.

In the final analysis, Larsen does not provide any solution for Helga. Race was very important for the Harlem Renaissance writers, but Larsen was aware of the danger of racial politics, which does not allow freedom to float in between without being categorized. Larsen also perceived that racial ideology was dangerous to women, for it tries to control female sexuality on the pretext of racial unity and uplift. Helga steps into the road of self-destruction by fixing her identity in the black race and by rooting herself in the rural Southern village as a black preacher's wife. When she ceases to struggle between two races, Helga's identity is determined and overdetermined.

Larsen's question of identity and the mixed-race female body, which are examined in *Quicksand*, is pursued in *Passing* through a more radical form. Although *Quicksand* examines the identity issue by describing Helga Crane's search for her *true* identity, *Passing* starts from the assumption that identity is nothing but "performative." In *Quicksand*, Larsen describes Helga's failure to gain control of her body through self-fashioning. In *Passing*, Larsen presents the passing body, which is more transgressive and subversive than the mulatto body, to interrogate the issue of racial identity. In the next section, I would like to examine Larsen's novels in terms of performativity and probe Larsen's heroines' struggle for identity through

“performance,” the visible, self-conscious, and self-creative practice of one’s identity.

II. THE PERFORMATIVITY OF IDENTITY: MASK, MASQUERADE AND SELF-FASHIONING IN *PASSING*

In recent criticism, passing is often discussed in relation to performativity, a theory of subjectivity based on the post-essentialist idea that identity is not what we are but what we do. According to Judith Butler, gender is nothing but “performative,” though its apparatus is hidden from our eyes “in repetition and ritual, which achieves its effect through its naturalization in the context of body” (*Gender Trouble* xv). Butler herself seriously thinks about the possibility of applying the theory of performativity to racial identity, and actually discusses Larsen’s *Passing* in that context.

In *Passing*, Larsen employs a double heroine, Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry, to pursue the performativity of identity by assigning to them two different roles: a woman of “mask” and a woman of “masquerade.” De Lauretis explains these similar but different terms, “mask” and “masquerade”: “the former is there to represent a burden, imposed, constraining the expression of one’s real identity; the latter is flaunted, or, if not, at least put on like a new dress which, even when required, does give some pleasure to the wearer” (*Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* 17). Passing is generally considered as the life under the “mask,” because one must mask

to hide one's racial identity and it imposes a great burden on the passer. But we should not forget that the passing figure chooses to disguise her/himself in order to get economic advantage and pleasure. Passing can be a burden but it also gives pleasure to the white body wearer. Larsen's Clare Kendry is, in this sense, a woman of "masquerade" rather than a woman of "mask."

Larsen's technique in this novel is that she reveals Irene's masked life as a middle-class black woman by making her interact with Clare, who rejects racialized identity and crosses the racial line in order to free herself from the politicized identity as a black woman.

Between Irene and Clare, there is always a tension between mask and masquerade, which function as "weapons of survival" but have "different demands" (De Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* 17). Although Irene's mask is self-contained and self-repressive, Clare's masquerade has a possibility of the transformation of identity. The tension between mask and masquerade in *Passing* is the tension between repressing subjectivity and reclaiming subjectivity under oppression.

Irene is a race-woman who works for the uplift of the black race. She is also a good mother and wife. She fits the model of the modern Negro mother described in Elise Johnson McDougald's "The Task of Negro Womanhood" edited in Alain Locke's *The New Negro*. McDougald writes: "the artist's imagination will find a more inspiring subject in the modern Negro mother—self-directed but as loyal and tender as the much extolled, yet pitiable black

mammy of slavery days” (372). As Anne Stavney discusses, the New Negro movement imposed motherhood on African-American women, for women were considered to contribute the race as “the mothers of the race” (McDougald 371).⁶ Irene is a woman who believes in “the cult of True Womanhood”(Stavney 537). She is always concerned with her children and her household. She is also an “asexual mother/wife” (Blackmore 478), the ideal type of women in the New Negro Movement.

Clare, in contrast, lacks maternity and a sense of duty for the race. She has a daughter, but she thinks that “children aren’t everything” (210) for women. She also tells Irene, “it’s just that I haven’t any proper morals or sense of duty, as you have, that makes me act as I do” (210). Clare’s lack of “proper morals” (210) drives her to pass as white, and she enjoys the life as a white middle-class woman. Although she is a mother, Clare has never lost her adolescent charm. Her “affectionate little gesture” (171) to her husband suggests that she is sexually active with her husband.

At first glance, Irene and Clare are different types of women, and their living territories do not cross. However, Irene’s temporary passing in the Drayton hotel eventually trespasses Clare’s space. Although Irene chooses the life of a black middle-class woman, she is white enough to pass. Interestingly, Irene has a double standard for passing. She thinks that passing is sinful, but she allows herself to pass temporarily for convenience.⁷ Irene’s attitude toward passing tells us her ambivalence about the race. She

is not “ashamed of being a Negro” (150), but “the idea of being ejected from any place” (150) annoys her. Although Irene denies her desire for passing, she also shares the desire for passing with Clare.

Passing describes the process in which Irene’s black bourgeois identity is destabilized by the appearance of Clare who is beautifully transformed from a poor black girl into a middle-class white woman. Irene’s identity is destabilized because Irene sees the reflection of her inner desire for masquerade in Clare’s transformation. Many critics point out that Clare functions as the shadow self of Irene; therefore we can see that Irene and Clare represent two sides of the split female subjectivity.

As Nell Sullivan points out, the mirror scene in Irene’s bedroom is important to note if we interpret Irene and Clare as “twin” women who see themselves through each other’s image. In this scene, Clare sneaks into Irene’s bedroom when Irene is looking at her reflection in the mirror of the dresser:

. . . For Clare had come softly into the room without knocking, and before Irene could greet her, had dropped a kiss on her dark curls.

Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling. Reaching out, she grasped Clare’s two hands in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: “Dear God! But aren't you

lovely, Clare!” (194)

Sullivan thinks there is a fusion of two women in the reflection of the mirror in this scene, for Irene is looking at the mirror when Clare enters and “the woman before her” can be the image of herself overlapped with the image of Clare. Irene’s exclamation, “Dear God! But aren’t you lovely, Clare!” represents Irene’s inevitable disobedience against the Law of God or social norms, which prohibit lesbian desire. At this moment, Irene’s hatred for Clare is dissolved and Irene is suddenly filled with affectionate feelings. Although Irene always “others” Clare by defining her as evil, animalistic, and immoral, Irene stops abjecting Clare in this moment of fusion and accepts her without signifying her evil. This pre-Oedipal moment, “the mirror stage” in Lacanian terms, could be understood as the moment of the semiotic subversion within the symbolic. In other words, this is the moment in which the identity fixed by social significations is destabilized and refigured.

It is interesting to note that Larsen shows a special interest in the relation between fashion and identity. Her elaborate description of her characters’ dresses in both *Quicksand* and *Passing* should be given attention in terms of identity and performativity, for her concern with dress is closely connected with her concern with race and identity. In *Quicksand*, Helga realizes the transformative power of fashion, but she fails to control her body through dress, for her dressed body is immediately caught by male significations. Helga also realizes that she cannot get out of her body in

terms of sexuality. Her body, thus, functions as the space that is doubly mapped by white significations and male significations. However, in *Passing*, Larsen sets Clare as a subversive figure who challenges the system of social significations through disguise. By her conscious self-fashioning as a white woman, Clare succeeds in opening up the space of fictional identity in reality. Throughout the novel, Irene's gaze is always projected onto Clare's make-up and dress, which serves as masquerade to give Clare a new identity.

Although McDowell says that "Clare is frequently dressed in red" (xxvii) and sees Clare as an image of flame, Clare does not appear in a red dress in the text except in the final section, where she is in "a shining red gown" (233) and at the novel's very beginning, where the image of Clare as "a pale small girl sitting on a ragged blue sofa, sewing pieces of bright red cloth together" (143) comes up in Irene's mind. These two scenes are so impressive that we often connect Clare with the color of red, which may signify passion and immorality. But if we read the text closely, we find that Clare's fashion is more conservative, elegant, and appropriate than we presume through the image of Clare constructed by McDowell's reading.

In fact, there is nothing eccentric in Clare's choice of dresses; her outfits are always appropriate to the situation, and they show that she always thinks about her performance as a middle-class white woman. In the Drayton hotel, Clare is in green "nice clothes," which are "just right for the weather, thin and cool without being mussy" (148). When Irene visits Clare's

place, Clare is wearing “a thin floating dress” of blue, “which suited her and the rather difficult room to perfection” (165). In the mirror scene, Clare throws away her blue hat and fur on Irene’s bed. At the Negro Welfare League party, Clare appears “in a stately gown of shining black taffeta” (203). Clare disguises herself as a white woman so perfectly and appropriately that even Irene, who is confident in distinguishing the passer from the whites, cannot perceive Clare’s race at the Drayton hotel.

Interestingly enough, Larsen emphasizes Clare’s “absolute” (161) beauty throughout the text. Clare’s beauty is “absolute” (161) because she is not the real but the fake who performs the concept of white womanhood. Her beauty is supported by her “acting” (182), which Irene often sees in Clare’s attitude. Irene is irritated with Clare’s acting, but she is always subdued by Clare’s theatrical charm. Irene is impressed by the fact that Clare’s appearance does not reflect any personal history:

She couldn’t, Irene thought, have had an entirely serene life. Not with that dark secret for ever crouching in the background of her consciousness. And yet she hadn’t the air of a woman whose life had been touched by uncertainty or suffering. Pain fear, and grief were things that left their mark on people. Even love, that exquisite torturing emotion, left its subtle traces on the countenance. But Clare—she had remained almost what she had always been, an attractive, somewhat

lonely child—selfish, willful, and disturbing. (201-202).

Clare keeps her adolescent charm because she has never shown her real face inscribed by her experience. Clare's ivory face is the theatrical white mask without any trace of negative emotion. Irene also speculates about Clare's perfect performance as a white woman at the party:

Clare's ivory face was what it always was, beautiful and
caressing. Or maybe today a little masked. Unrevealing.
Unaltered and undisturbed by any emotion within or without.
(220)

Irene sees that Clare's personal identity is completely hidden under her appearance. Clare is a trickster of identity. While Helga pursues the idealistic state, in which her politicized identity and her real identity correspond each other, Clare starts from the assumption that there is no "true" identity but a variety of social roles. Clare's power, which is represented in her absolute beauty, challenges the essentialist notion of identity in its subversive nature.

In spite of the detailed description of Clare's fashion, Larsen does not describe what kind of dress Irene wears. But Larsen's description of Irene tells us that Irene is a careful dresser, who pays much attention to her dresses. In the Drayton hotel, she is thinking about the dress for the bridge party:

She had settled, definitely, the problem of the proper one of two frocks for the bridge party that night, in rooms whose atmosphere would be so thick and hot that every breath would be like breathing soup. (149)

The dress for the bridge party is a problem for Irene, for she has to find clothes which fit the atmosphere of “breathing soup” (149). Irene is troubled with dressing because she needs to play the “proper” role as a race-woman through dressing where the air is hot and thick. For Irene, dresses are the mask for her social identity.

Irene’s “masked” identity is, however, destabilized by Clare, who plays white ladyhood perfectly. With the appearance of Clare, who kindles Irene’s hidden desire for whiteness, the masked life becomes hard for Irene.

Although the first part of the novel describes Irene as the embodiment of the cult of True Womanhood, Irene in the second part of the novel is no longer the model of the black bourgeois woman. In this part, Irene’s bad performance of her politicized identity is prominent. She becomes very neurotic and obsessive, and often fights with her husband and makes her children worry. As for Brian, her husband, he becomes “unhappy, restless, withdrawn” (214). His restlessness makes Irene nervous, and she suspects that he might have been having an affair with Clare. The relationship between Irene and Brian is evidently getting worse, and it gets hard for Irene

to pretend that she has a happy marriage as the wife of a black bourgeois doctor.

Significantly, Irene's awkwardness in performing the black bourgeois identity is expressed in a process of her dressing:

Irene, who had risen and was standing before the mirror, ran a comb through her black hair, then tossed her head with a light characteristic gesture, in order to disarrange a little the set locks. She touched a powder-puff to her warm olive skin, and then put her frock with a motion so hasty that it was with some difficulty properly adjusted. (183)

The black hair and olive skin signify Irene's racial consciousness. She is trying to perform the role of "the true black woman," but her maladjustment of her frock represents her mal-performance of the race-woman.

Irene, however, still tries to lead a masked life. It is noteworthy that Irene uses make-up to conceal her emotion and create the mask of the social identity. After crying, she wipes her tears and wears her social mask before the mirror:

After bathing her swollen face in cold refreshing water and carefully applying a stinging splash of toilet water, she went back to the mirror and regarded herself gravely. Satisfied that there lingered no betraying evidence of weeping, she

dusted a little powder on her dark-white face and examined it carefully, and with a kind of ridiculing contempt. (218)

The process of make-up is the process of fitting herself into social significations. In other words, Irene is keenly conscious that she is performing the socially assigned identity. Thus Irene always tries not to show her real face to the public. In public, she hides her true self in “repetitions of her smile” and “manufactured conversation” (219).

The performance of a perfect black bourgeois wife, however, suffocates Irene. Thinking that she is nothing to Brian but the mother of his sons, Irene feels “an almost uncontrollable impulse to laugh, to scream, to hurl things about” (219). The gap between her politicized identity and her subjectivity gradually widens, though Irene is reluctant to admit it. Irene’s discomfort in performing her social role is represented in Irene’s slowness in dressing. As Irene’s identity conflict becomes severe within herself, Irene takes more time in dressing. Irene finds that she cannot dress on time: “‘It’s getting on to four,’ he told her, meaning, she knew, that she was going to be late again” (215). Gradually, dressing turns to be a painful disguise for Irene. While Clare uses disguise as her masquerade, the performance of her new identity, Irene disguises just to conceal herself. For Irene, dressing is nothing but “business” (233), because she does not know any pleasure in self-fashioning and self-creating.

Irene's gaze on Clare's dresses, in this sense, expresses her hidden desire for transformation. Irene always looks at Clare, because she wants to transform herself by pleasurable self-fashioning. Standing against McDowell's interpretation of lesbian desire between Irene and Clare, Lauren Berlant argues:

But there may be a difference between wanting someone sexually and wanting someone's body: and I wonder whether Irene's xenophobia isn't indeed a desire to occupy, to experience the privileges of Clare's body, not to love or make love to her, but rather to wear her way of wearing her body, like a prosthesis, or a fetish. (112)

Berlant suggests that Irene defines her body only in "the metaphorical logics of American citizenship, which becomes the 'truth' of her body, her 'person'" (112). As Berlant points out, Irene refuses to immigrate to Brazil, the place her husband is longing for. Irene sees her political identity in a totally American context. Therefore, Irene desires a perfect American body—a legitimate white body.

Actually, Irene's gaze on Clare is not necessarily erotic. Irene looks at Clare very analytically. She examines every parts of Clare's face:

Just as she'd always had that pale gold hair, which, unsheared still, was drawn loosely back from a broad brow, partly hidden by the small close hat. Her lips, painted a brilliant geranium-

red, were sweet and sensitive and a little obstinate. A tempting mouth. The face across the forehead and cheeks was a trifle too wide, but the ivory skin had a peculiar soft luster. And the eyes were magnificent! dark, sometimes absolutely black, always luminous, and set in long, black lashes. Arresting eyes, slow and mesmeric, and with, for all their warmth, something withdrawn and secret about them.

Ah! Surely! They were Negro eyes! mysterious and concealing. And set in that ivory face under that bright hair, there was about them something exotic. (161)

Traditionally, praising female body parts is the expression of fetishistic desire. Irene's fetishistic desire, however, is not necessarily erotic desire. To understand the reason for Irene's analytical gaze, it is important to remember that racial difference between the white and the black is often attributed to the difference of body parts. Irene says, "White people were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot" (150). Irene thinks that such a way of thinking is stupid, but she is not freed from the popular myth of bodily differences.⁸ Irene examines Clare's features because she is actually nervous about physical differences between the white and the black. She believes that one can wear a white body because the belief in bodily

differences between the white and the black is nothing but fallacy. But at the same time, she thinks that one cannot escape from one's race even in the act of passing. Irene concludes that most of Clare's features are the same as a white woman's: Irene has "pale gold hair," "geranium-red lips," and "ivory skin." But Irene finds that Clare's eyes, in spite of their "magnificent" beauty, are "Negro eyes." Irene's exclamation, "Ah! Surely!" (161), shows Irene's fatalistic understanding of race.

In fact, it is Clare's "Negro eyes" that disturb Irene throughout the novel. They not only ask Irene for sympathy and understanding but also perceive Irene's hidden desire for passing: "For an instant a recrudescence of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her" (176). Irene is disturbed by Clare's eyes because they signify that Irene and Clare are sharing the same suffering as black women. Looking into her eyes also brings a sensation of fear to Irene, because Clare's eyes perceive Irene's inner self under the mask.

Irene's first meeting with Clare, in this sense, is very symbolic. In the Drayton hotel, Irene gets nervous because she finds that "the dark eyes of a woman in the green frock" (149) are watching Irene persistently. "What strange languorous eyes she had!" (150), Irene thinks, and then she gets anxious: "Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that here before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?" (150). From the first encounter, Irene is afraid of Clare's perceptive eyes, which may expose

Irene's hatred for her race. When Clare asks Irene if she has ever thought of passing, Irene denies her desire to pass promptly, saying "No. Why should I?" (160). But "so disdainful was her voice and manner that Clare's face flushed and her eyes glinted" (160). Since Irene is interested in passing, she cannot be indifferent or calm when she speaks about it. Clare eyes glint because they see that Irene shares the same soul with her.

As a matter of fact, Irene is ambivalent about her race. As a race woman, who works for uplifting the black race, she is proud of her race. That's why she married Brian, a black man who is too dark to pass. But when Irene meets Clare and Gertrude at Clare's place, she becomes uneasy and resentful. Examining her feelings, she admits that "her feeling of annoyance . . . arose from a feeling of being outnumbered, a sense of aloneness, in her adherence to her own class and kind; not merely in the great thing of marriage, but in the whole pattern of her life as well" (166). Although Irene boasts that "I've everything I want" (160), she is not confident in her adherence to the black race and a life as a black bourgeois wife. Therefore, the fact that Clare has access to Irene's life but that Irene does not have access to Clare's white world irritates Irene: "Clare had only to pick up the telephone to communicate with her, or drop her a card, or to jump up into a taxi. But she couldn't reach Clare in any way" (163).

Clare, however, is not as free as Irene thinks. Racial transgression gives her not only white privilege but also the pleasure of a new identity, but

the space of her new transracial identity is always threatened by racial dichotomy. Speaking about the experience of giving birth to a child, she says: “I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark” (168). Quite interestingly, it is also body parts that endanger Clare’s transracial space. Gertrude sympathizes with Clare and says: “It’s awful the way it skips generations and then pops out” (168). Not only Irene but also Clare and Gertrude are obsessed with body parts. Wearing a white body, then, means wearing white body parts. Clare’s body, which consists of white body parts, however, cannot be completely free from the invisible color-line. She has to worry about a possibility of carrying a baby with black features.

Hortense Spillers says that mulattos are “inscribed in no historic locus, or materiality, that was other than evasive and shadowy on the national landscape” (165). Shadowy existence of the mulatto, however, does not mean that they are free from the geography of race. Even in passing, the racial boundaries threaten their existence. Larsen’s “in-between space,” thus, is not the utopian space of fluid identity. It is the space of the endless conflict with the significations of racial ideology. Next, I would like to step into the terrain of sexuality, the locus of the most invisible personal identity, which is strictly controlled by social norms.

III. TRIANGULAR LOVE AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF SEXUAL NORMS

Since her first short story, “The Wrong Man,” the issue of sexuality is one of the main themes in Larsen’s writing. In “The Wrong Man,” Julia, a happy wife of Jim Romney, who represents “love, wealth and position” (257), finds Ralph Tyler, the man who had her as a concubine, at a dance party. Julia’s new identity as a bourgeois wife is threatened by the appearance of Ralph, because he may speak about her past and destroy the happiness she has gained by marrying Jim. In order to protect her life, Julia begs him not to speak of their relationship to Jim:

You don’t know Jim. He’d never forgive that. He wouldn’t understand that, when a girl has been sick and starving on the streets, anything can happen to her; that she’s grateful for food and shelter at any price. (260)

“The Wrong Man” reveals Larsen’s persistent concern about deceptive identity and sexual taboo. As Julia’s words express, Larsen pleads the “passing” figure (Julia is a class-passer) by asking for the sympathy for the vulnerable situation of a poor young woman.

Julia’s words echoes Helga’s reflections about her mother in *Quicksand*:

A fair Scandinavian girl in love with life, with love, with passion, dreaming, and risking all in one blind surrender. A cruel sacrifice. . . .

That second marriage, to a man of her own race, but not of her own kind—so passionately, so instinctively resented by Helga even at the trivial age of six—she now understood as a grievous necessity. Even foolish, despised women must have food and clothing; even unloved loved Negro girls must be somehow provided for. (23)

Helga's description of her mother's life reveals Larsen's position on sexuality. Larsen sees women as victims of patriarchal society and criticizes the society, which labels women who violate sexual norms as loose or degenerate.

In fact, the most prominent characteristics in Larsen's writing are in Larsen's treatment of sexual taboos. As William Faulkner wrote on the topic of miscegenation, incest and sex outside of wedlock, Larsen was also obsessed with sexual taboo such as miscegenation, adultery and concubinage. Interestingly enough, both *Quicksand* and *Passing* are full of sexual taboos. In *Quicksand*, Helga is the product of violated taboos: miscegenation and sex outside of wedlock. Helga herself is put into the context of interracial marriage when she is asked to marry by Axel Olsen. She is also seduced to have an affair outside of wedlock by Dr. Anderson's passionate kiss, though he rejects her when she is ready to commit "adultery." In *Passing*, Clare commits "miscegenation" in secrecy. Irene also imagines that Clare is having an affair with her husband.

Larsen's great interest in sexual taboo demonstrates her realization that sexuality is as politicized as race is. As Michel Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality*, sexual taboo is nothing but a cultural apparatus that enforces the heterosexual institution of marriage structured in the patriarchal system. This also means that sexual taboo can be a subversive power in a binary-gendered and binary-raced society.⁹ Larsen's treatment of sexual taboo in her novels, in this sense, is a challenge to the patriarchal social system, which tries to exclude and repress the people who do not fit in their norms. If we realize that Larsen herself was, like Helga Crane, marked as an illegitimate child by her birth, we should not be surprised that she is critical of the "construction" of sexual taboo.

Still, we should also note that sexual taboo is at the complex intersection of race and sexuality in Larsen's novels. Larsen is critical of the social construction of sexual taboos, such as miscegenation and sex outside of wedlock. But it should be remembered that miscegenation does not only signify the transgression of the color-line but also white male control over African- American women's sexuality. As Frances E. W. Harper and Jessie Fauset problematized it when they described the mulatto heroines, miscegenation means the revival of white male sexual control over the African-American women in slavery. We should also note that marriage, the legitimate sanctuary of sexuality, has also a special meaning in the African-American women's historical context, for black slave women could

not get legal protection of their sexuality in the system of slavery. Therefore, Anne, the race-woman in Harlem, never desires to enter “the lawless place” (95) which Helga’s illegitimate mulatto body represents. To fight against the social stigma which fell upon unmarried mothers, African-American women sought “legal sanction for consummation and dissolution of sex contacts” (McDougald 380).

Larsen’s criticism of marriage, therefore, is very revolutionary, for Larsen presents marriage within the black race as another trap for African-American women by describing Helga, who becomes an African-American preacher’s wife. In *Quicksand*, Larsen criticizes what is called “holy marriage.” Helga, who has trouble dealing with her sexuality, ultimately marries a preacher, because “the only condition under which sexuality is not shameless is if it finds sanction in marriage” (McDowell xxi). Helga, however, finds that marriage is the institution designed to spoil women’s health:

How, she wondered, did other women, other mothers, manage?
 Could it be possible that, while presenting such smiling and
 contented faces, they were all always on the edge of health?
 All always worn out and apprehensive? Or was it only she, a
 poor weak city- bred thing, who felt that the strain of what the
 Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green had so often gently and patiently
 reminded her was a natural thing, an act of God, was almost

unendurable? (125)

Marriage is not the sanctuary of sexuality. Rather, Larsen sees that it stands on the exploitation of female sexuality by men.

Larsen's description of the condition of African-American women in a rural area is important when we realize that *Quicksand* was published in 1928, the same year Margaret Sanger's *Motherhood in Bondage* was published. Contraception was not available to everyone in the beginning of the twentieth century because the 1873 Comstock Law, which had prohibited "obscene, lewd, or lascivious articles," included "birth control devices, as well as public discussion of their uses, within this mandate" (Chalberg 118).

Sanger, who was much influenced by Emma Goldman, anarchist, free-lover, and a cultural icon of rebellious youth in Greenwich Village, was arrested for publishing birth control instructions in 1914.¹⁰ According to Margaret Marsh, "much of the medical establishment . . . continued to be hostile to Sanger in the 1920s" (xxxi). Marsh also writes that "poor women, even as late as the 1920s, in reality possessed little knowledge of the techniques of contraception" (xxiv) and suffered from a sequence of childbearing. Although Larsen does not offer any solution to Helga in *Quicksand*, Larsen's "political" consciousness of female sexuality was as strong as female activists like Sanger and Goldman. Larsen's criticism of "legitimate" marriage is radical enough to indict Christian marriage, which many African-American women desired protection:

Shame, too, swept over her at every thought of her marriage.

Marriage. This sacred thing of which parsons and other
parsons and other Christian folk ranted so sanctimoniously,
how immoral—according to their own standards—it could be!

(134)

Larsen's criticism of marriage comes to a peak at the ending, which implies Helga's death in the labor of her fifth child.

Larsen depicts Helga's mother's second marriage to a Scandinavian man as "a grievous necessity" (23), and also sees marriage as the institution based on an unequal power relationship. In *Passing*, Larsen clarifies the power imbalance in heterosexual marriage by describing the Bellew-Clare relationship in terms of race. Clare's "miscegenation" with John Bellew, a wealthy white man, is the ultimate form of marriage as social mobility. Bellew, a white racist who hates African-Americans, does not know that Clare has "a drop of black blood." Ironically enough, Bellew calls Clare "Nig" to express his affection to her. Butler discusses this as sexualization of race because he eroticizes Clare by labeling her "Nig" (*Bodies That Matter* 171). Yet, Bellew's use of "Nig" is more important when we think that Bellew tries to strengthen his control over Clare by putting male-female relationship into the analogy of the power imbalance of slave master and female slave. Racialization of gender as well as sexualization of race is a form of control over the sexual/racial other.

Thus, Larsen shows how the politics of race and sexuality go hand in hand to take control over the sexual/racial other. The body is mapped in the geography of color as well as that of sexuality. Importantly, Larsen's *Passing* transgresses not only racial but also sexual norms. In *Passing*, Larsen also criticizes the construction of sexual politics, which is interwoven with racial politics. In understanding Larsen's strategy of criticizing American sexual politics, the examination of the Irene-Clare homosocial relationship provides us with an important perspective. As I discussed in the previous section, it is difficult to read lesbian desire in the way McDowell does, for Irene's desire for Clare is a desire to possess a white body rather than a desire to love Clare. However, there is no need to conclude that McDowell's reading is a wrong interpretation, for it is also true that *Passing* goes beyond the heterosexual frame. Both Irene and Clare have heterosexual marriages, but their emotions are not in their marriages.

In order to understand ambiguous sexuality in Irene and Clare, the notion of "bisexuality" can be useful. "Bisexuality" is often perceived by gay politics as a threat or political weakness because of its ambiguity, but as Paula C. Rust discusses in *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, it is "a challenge to categorical thinking about sexuality" (238). In its rejection of sexual dichotomy, bisexuality occupies a space different from homosexuality, which places itself in the opposition to heterosexuality. Just as Larsen describes Helga and Clare as the signs of undecidability in terms of

race, she also puts her heroines in the ambiguous “in-between space” in terms of sexuality.

In *Passing*, Larsen constructs the bisexual space by introducing the plot of triangular love. Irene becomes jealous and furious when she imagines that Clare is having an affair with Brian, her husband. Giving attention to the homoerotic tension between Irene and Clare, McDowell argues that Irene displaces her desire for Clare in her "imagination of an affair between Clare and Brian" (xxviii). McDowell's reading is interesting, but there are other ways to analyze Larsen's use of triangular love.

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire*, Eve Sedgwick sees triangular love in chivalrous narratives as the discourse constructed to strengthen male bonds, which is necessary to maintain the patriarchal system. Triangular love is a technique of bonding two men in the relation of rivalry, which is different from love but equally powerful. Terry Castle transfers this logic of triangular love to the female context in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. She says that in this "new homosocial structure, the possibility of male bonding is radically suppressed: for the male term is now isolated, just as the female term in the male homosocial structure" (72). If this logic of triangular love is applied to Larsen's *Passing*, it could be said that Larsen's intention is twofold: the construction of female homosocial structure through the relation of rivalry and the subversion of the patriarchal system of marriage through

the demonstration of female destructive power. The relation of rivalry is a way to subvert the male system from within.

In *Passing*, Irene gradually begins to see Clare as a rival. The more Irene sees Clare as a stranger, the closer the relation between Irene and Clare becomes. Irene speculates how they *were* different:

Since childhood their lives had never really touched. Actually they were strangers. Strangers in their ways and means of living. Strangers in their desires and ambitions. Strangers even in their racial consciousness. Between them the barrier was just as high, just as broad, and just as firm as if in Clare did not run that strain of black blood. In truth, it was higher, broader, and firmer; because for her there were perils, not known, or imagined, by those others who had no such secrets to alarm or endanger them. (192)

Irene emphasizes that Clare is a “stranger” and tries to keep a distance from her because she feels that Clare is very close. Actually, Irene understands Clare’s “perils” more than anyone does.

Irene remembers the child Clare “sitting on a ragged blue sofa, sewing pieces of bright red cloth together, while her drunken father, a tall, powerfully built man, raged threateningly up and down the shabby room, bellowing curses and making spasmodic lunges at her” (143-44). In this scene, there is certainly the implication of her white father’s domestic

violence and racial and sexual abuse of a girl who is mature enough to wear a red dress to a picnic.¹¹ Her white father's abuse is also implicit in Clare's hatred for her father. Irene remembers that Clare looked at her father "with a sort of disdain in her slanting black eyes" (144) when her father was dead. In Clare's talk, we also know that Clare regards her father as a white man who had seduced and "ruined a Negro girl" (159), her mother. "The perils" (192), in this account, can be interpreted as Clare's racial/sexual vulnerability as a light-skinned girl.

Although Irene was raised in a more wealthy black family, she can "imagine" Clare's perils because she is also a light-skinned woman who is sexually endangered in the racist society. Their bodies are visually white, but they are excluded from the category of white womanhood, which is under the protection of white ideology. Their bodies are racialized and sexualized by society. The relation between Irene and Clare, in this sense, is based on their sympathies for their racial/sexual vulnerability.

Quite interestingly, Irene comes to suspect the relation between Clare and Brian when she begins to have "a new friendship with Clare Kendry" (208). After the Negro Welfare League dance, Clare comes to Irene's place frequently and stays there as long as possible. Clare amuses herself with Irene's children in the playroom. Sometimes she spends time talking with Irene's servants in the kitchen. She even goes out with Brian. Thus, Clare gradually intrudes into Irene's private space. Clare's attitude shows that she

wants what Irene has. Clare tries to gain her racial subjectivity by entering Irene's private space and assimilating with her. Ultimately, Irene comes to feel Clare's presence even when she is absent: "though absent, Clare Kendry was still present" (224). When Clare becomes close to Irene not only mentally but also spacially, and becomes almost undistinguishable from Irene's self, Irene comes to be conscious of Clare as a rival who has power to transform her life by subordinating her as the shadow self. In her imagination of the affair between Clare and Brian, Irene is afraid of being replaced by Clare, her abjected double.

The significance of Irene's imagination of the affair between Clare and Brian not only sets two women close enough to be replaceable in the relation of rivalry but also makes Irene dubious about the patriarchal system of marriage on which Irene depends. Just like Helga, Irene realizes that she is nothing but a nurse for her husband's offspring:

She was, to him, only the mother of his sons. That was all.

Alone she was nothing. Worse. An obstacle. (221)

She also realizes that she has not loved Brian:

Strange, that she couldn't now be sure that she had ever truly known love. Not even for Brian. He was her husband and the father of her sons. But was he anything more? Had she ever wanted or tried for more? In that hour she thought not. (235)

The triangular relationship, thus, becomes an apparatus to show the fallacy of the monogamous patriarchal heterosexual marriage in which the female role is the breeder of children. Irene also realizes that she can always be replaced by another woman if she and Brian are nothing but role players.

The form of triangular love also provides Irene with the space to struggle for her identity. When she imagines the relationship between Brian and Clare, Irene tries to be fair because she has “no facts and proofs” (223) at all. “In all their married life she had had no slightest cause to suspect her husband of any infidelity, of any serious flirtation, even” (223); therefore, Irene thinks: “why begin now to assume them?” (224). Irene is obliged to face her own subversive abjective power repressed in herself when she has a close contact with Clare. This means that Clare’s being induces Irene to think over her identity. Through reflecting herself in Clare, Irene perceives the repressed side of herself.

Although McDowell and Butler argue that Irene displaces her sexual desire to Brian, Irene’s gaze on Brian’s features suggests that she is rather thinking that Clare desires Brian’s black body just as Irene desires Clare’s white body. Irene examines Brian’s looks very closely:

Brian, she was thinking, was extremely good-looking, Not, of course, pretty or effeminate; the slight irregularity of his nose saved him from prettiness, and the rather marked heaviness of his chin saved him from the effeminacy. But he

was, in a pleasant masculine way, rather handsome. And yet, wouldn't he, perhaps, have been merely ordinarily good-looking but for the richness, the beauty of his skin, which was of an exquisitely fine texture and deep copper colour. (183-184)

Irene's gaze falls especially on his irregular nose, his masculine chin, and his beautiful skin of deep copper color. Brian's features are "black" features, which are different from "effeminate" mulatto features. Irene's desire to possess Clare's white body is so ardent that Irene comes to think that Clare desires to possess a "black" body; that is Brian's body.

Irene's murder of Clare, in this sense, derives from Irene's fear of "displacement." At the end of Part Two, Clare says: "Can't you realize that I'm not like you a bit? Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I'd do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really, Rene, I'm not safe" (210). Clare's words are threatening to Irene because she imagines that she might be displaced from the position of Brian's wife and replaced by Clare. Irene needs to "hold fast to the outer shell of her marriage, to keep life fixed, certain" (235). Therefore, Irene decides to "do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away" (210) to get the things she wants. Irene murders Clare in order to keep her middle-class married life safe and secure. The irony of the novel is that Irene goes beyond the role of a black middle-class woman, a passive patriarchal agent represented in the image of devoted wife/asexual mother, when she kills Clare. Although Irene is afraid of being replaced by

Clare, actually it is Clare who is replaced by Irene, who finally reclaims her subjectivity in violence, the ultimate form of subversion threatening the order of society.

Thus Larsen embeds a dangerous subversive force in her text by using the form of the triangular relationship. It is noteworthy that Larsen connected the issue of sexuality with the issue of racial identity. In *Passing*, Irene cries under the burden of race:

Sitting alone in the quiet living room in the pleasant fire-light, Irene Redfield wished, for the first time in her life, that she had not been born a Negro. For the first time she suffered and rebelled because she was unable to disregard the burden of race. It was, she cried silently, enough to suffer as a woman, an individual, on one's own account, without having to suffer for the race as well. (225)

In this scene, Irene cries because she cannot put Clare, her sexual rival, in danger by revealing Clare's "race" to her husband. Irene suffers because of her loyalty to her race, which has actually "bound and suffocated her" (225) in many scenes in her life. With its homogenizing force, race requires Irene to share the suffering with Clare and to keep sisterhood with her. Irene tries to define that they are "strangers" (192), but she cannot escape from the force, which places them in the same category. Irene's subjectivity is always

influenced by race. The burden of the race is, in this sense, the burden of living under the race, which is too substantial to reject as the “construction.”

Thus, Irene kills Clare to free her subjectivity from the burden of race. The scene of murder is ambiguous, but Cheryl A. Wall interprets that “Larsen strongly implies that Irene pushes Clare through the window” (109). As if sliding signs from significations, Clare slides away and disappears in a quick and silent motion:

Gone! The soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing
scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the
whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry. The
beauty that had torn at Irene’s placid life. Gone! The mocking
daring, the gallantry of her pose, the ringing bells of her
laughter. (239)

Despite her violent act of pushing her friend through the window, Irene just thinks that Clare’s white body parts are “gone.” Only Clare’s beauty—which had attracted and disturbed Irene so strongly, is reflected in Irene’s mind.

Thus, Larsen warns of the danger of the power structures that stand on the interrelation among race, gender and sexuality. While Larsen describes the sympathy, affection and suffering which light-skinned women share with one another, she criticizes the force that breaks down the boundary of individuals. If we realize that the Harlem male ideology imposed on women the ideal types of womanhood and placed women in a constant competition in

terms of intelligence, beauty and racial loyalty, we can conclude that Irene is a victim of this ideology.¹² Irene, however, is not just a helpless sufferer. At the end, she shows an abjected power repressed under the mask of the black middle-class wife. Still Larsen skillfully keeps the ending of the novel ambiguous and distracts the readers' attention from Irene's violence.

Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing* were accepted with warm reviews, and she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for Creative Writing in 1930, the first African-American woman to be so honored. But when her literary life was damaged by the accusation of plagiarism and her private life by a divorce, she surrendered to the reality of the power structures oppressing women of color. "The two scandals, on top of her insecurity and internalized anger as a woman of color fully at home neither in white nor black America, broke her creativity" (Ammons, *Conflicting Stories* 197), and "her star then faded away as quickly as it had risen, and by 1934 Nella Larsen had disappeared from Harlem and from literature" (Wall 97).

¹ Paul Lawrence Danbar, "We Wear the Masks." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Ed. Paul Lauter et al. 3rd ed. Vol. 2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 389

² Jessie Redmon Fauset. *Plum Bun* (Boston: Beacon, 1990), 73.

³ For the bibliographical information of Larsen, see Thadious M. Davis's *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994).

⁴ See *The Crisis* (July 1929): 234, 248-49.

⁵ During 1880 to 1930, "there were 2,018 separate incidents of lynching in which at least 2,462 African-American men, women, and children met their deaths in the grasp of southern mobs, comprised mostly of whites" (Tolnay and Beck 17). Tolnay and Beck point out the relation between 'boundary crises' and the use of lynching as 'repressive justice'" (78). They write: "lynching to punish consenting sexual relations between blacks and whites also indicate a deep concern in maintaining the caste line and racial separation at all cost" (77). See Tolnay, Stewart, and E. M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995).

⁶ McDougald writes: "One cannot resist the temptation to pause for a moment and pay tribute to these Negro mothers. And to call attention to the service she is rendering to the nation, in her struggle against great odds to

educate and care for one group of the country's children" (371). Also see Stavney, 539.

⁷ In Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*, the heroine's mother passes in a "game of playacting" (19). Her husband forgives her, saying "It's just a little joke" (19). *Plum Bun* tells us that the temporary passing was, thus, relatively acceptable among African-Americans in the North, where there was little danger of lynching.

⁸ Lucius Outlaw discusses how the discourse of "science" constructed "race." See his article, "Toward a Critical Theory of "Race"" in *Anatomy of Racism* (Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990).

⁹ Judith Butler discuss this in "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix," the second chapter of *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁰ Sanger's *My Fight for Birth Control* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931) tells us about Sangers's birth control crusade. Emma Goldman was also an activist who insisted the necessity of birth control. See Bonnie Haaland's

Emma Goldman: Sexuality and the Impurity of the State (Montreal: Black Rose Book, 1993), 81.

¹¹ Jonathan Little also points out that “there are some hints of her (Clare’s) sexual and physical abuse at the hand of her father” (175) in the novel.

¹² For example, the N.A.A.C.P. (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) often sponsored beauty and popularity contests among young African-American women, and *The Crisis* printed pictures of the winners.

CHAPTER TWO

WINNIFRED EATON'S JAPANESE IDENTITY

AND “HYBIRD” ROMANCES

Pan, don't you see that you have got to decide what you will be—Chinese or white? You cannot be both.—Sui Sin Far, “Its Wavering Image”¹

What can be addressed, in the consideration of the Orient, are not other symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom (though the latter might appear thoroughly desirable); it is the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems.—Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*²

In postmodern scholarship, “passing,” which is traditionally used for crossing the racial line from black to white, is more broadly used to conceptualize a subjectivity crossing the “politically charged boundaries” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 59) of group identification. In this literary and critical trend, which tries to define “passing” as “the strategic adoption of a politically empowered identity” (Caughie 25), Winnifred Eaton is given attention as a writer who requires scholars to re-examine her literary works and achievement. Along with her sister, Edith Eaton, Winnifred has come to be discussed in terms of “tricksterism,” a strategy of challenging “the dominant culture’s power and presence” (Ammons, “Introduction” xi) through disguise and secret codes.

Passing and “tricksterism” share the same stance against hegemonic white patriarchal power, for both are the attempt to subvert identity politics from within. Both the passing figure and trickster are unfixed signifiers that reject being contained in the politicized identity. Although Eaton’s writing is different from Larsen’s, which interrogates the issue of race and sexuality by describing the torments of mixed-race women, Eaton also challenged the Western notion of race and sexuality by negotiating the geographical horizon of “the Orient.” She created an imaginative self by insisting that her mother was a noble woman born in Nagasaki, Japan, and her father was from a distinguished family in England. Eaton interwove fiction and fashion in her Japanese masquerade.

Referring to Winnifred’s Japanese masquerade, Yuko Matsukawa says: “In choosing to write as Onoto Watanna, Winnifred Eaton crosses the cultural lines to challenge what we perceive as the conventional boundaries of ethnicity and authenticity” (106). Matsukawa sees Winnifred as a “self-fashioning” (119) trickster who “opens up textual territory—an imaginative homeland . . . that facilitates her circumvention of the marginalization inherent in being a woman writer” (122). The reason for Eaton’s adoption of a Japanese persona is “almost impossible to verify because her biography and autobiography were themselves so inconstant and contradictory” (Oishi xvi), but most critics think that Eaton decided to “pass” as Japanese because the Japanese had a more positive image than did the Chinese, who were

imported into the United States as laborers on the American transcontinental railroad and represented “yellow peril” in the early twentieth century. According to Edith Eaton, Winnifred’s older sister, “The Americans, having for many years manifested a much higher regard for the Japanese than for the Chinese, several half-Chinese young men and women, thinking to advance themselves, both in a social and business sense, pass as Japanese”(Sui Sin Far 228). Eaton was one of those half Chinese who passed as half Japanese, pursuing a social and business advantage. As Eve Oishi noted, the Western cult of Japan at the turn of the century could be also a reason for Eaton’s passing, because she should have known that she could gain popularity if she wrote novels on Japan. Whatever her reason for passing, she subverted the boundaries of ethnic and national identity and placed herself into a fictional identity.

The passing of mixed-race children of Asians and Caucasians opens up another horizon in the studies of race. It reveals that the “yellow” race, which is the outside of the dichotomy of white and black, is not necessarily free from the Western geography of the color-line. They did not have any name like “mulatto” and “mestizo” because they were not the direct products of Western colonialism, which institutionalized the rape of African or Native Indian women. But if most relations between Western men and Asian women at the turn of the century were based on unequal economic power,

mixed-race children of Caucasians and Asians can be also considered as the products of white male control over Asia.

The passing of Asians however, is not simple because of the Westerner's ambivalent attitudes towards Asian countries. Among Asian countries, Japan occupied a special position, for it became the target of exoticism in European markets. Although Japan was not a colony of any Western countries, the Western discourse concerning Japan can be defined as a colonial narrative, for Japan eventually became a space of Western imaginative control.

With Japonism as her background, Eaton emerged as a half Japanese woman writer in the literary world. It is difficult to categorize Eaton, who wrote Japanese romances without visiting Japan, as a "colonial writer," but still we can label her as a writer who engaged in colonial mimicry. In fact, Eaton's Japanese romances have some problems that the narratives of "colonial mimicry" have.

One of the problems is an issue of "plagiarism," which is not as simple as we may think especially in "colonial mimicry." Homi. K. Bhabha defines "colonial mimicry" as a strategy of cultural imperialism. According to Bhabha, colonialism "repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce" (85). He explains that "in this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and

knowledge” (85). Using stereotypical images and ideas is considered as one of the strategies of colonial mimicry, which exercises its authority by confining the Oriental other in difference.

It is worthwhile to note that many Western Orientalists revised “the Butterfly narratives” (Weisbrod 3) repeatedly by borrowing from the popular myth as well as stealing their predecessors’ stories. Pierre Loti’s *Madame Chrysantheme* (1887) was used by many writers. Speaking about Clive Holland’s *Mousmé* (1895), Endymion Wilkinson says, “Holland shamelessly copied Loti, the only difference being that the author-hero, less ruthless than Loti or more hypocritical perhaps, says that he intends to bring his *mousmé*, Hyacinth, whom he has met in a tea shop in Nagasaki, back to England” (117). According to Wilkinson, “French variations on the Chrysanthemum theme such as *Poupée Japonaise*, *Petite Mousumé* or *The Honorable Picnic* abounded; there even developed a colonial sub-genre, set in Indo-China, with titles such as *Poupée Parfumée* or *Thisen*, *La Petite Amie Exotique*” (117-18).

Still, copying and plagiarizing were often overlooked in popular colonial narratives. Actually, literary plagiarism is one of the most indefinable transgressions because most plagiarists revise and arrange the text they plagiarize. Especially in colonial narratives, it is difficult to draw a line because stereotypical images and narratives are seen as public property that everyone can use freely. Edward Said argues that “Orientalism” is “a style

of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2). Western discourse on “the Orient” established itself as the “style” in a repetitious plagiarism, and the boundaries of authorship were blurred in the act of rewriting and revising.

The issue of plagiarism had troubled Eaton throughout her life: “Winnifred was always suspicious of people ‘stealing’ her ideas; she would question her agents about such claims and often warned her writer son not to show his work to anyone” (Birchall 81). She accused David Belasco by claiming that his Japanese play, *The Darling of the Gods*, plagiarized from her works, *A Japanese Nightingale* and *The Heart of Hyacinth*. She was also accused of plagiarism by John Luther Long, who was working with Belasco for the production of *The Darling of the Gods*.³ Eaton refuted the charge of plagiarism by claiming that she is a better writer than Long:

[Mr. Long] is forty-five years old, and has written a volume of short stories. I am in the early twenties and have published six novels. At this rate Mr. Long would not last me any length of time for inspirations. (Birchall 84)

Probably Eaton did not copy Long’s *Madame Butterfly* to write *A Japanese Nightingale*, which was the target of Long’s accusation. It would be reasonable to argue that both used stereotypical ideas and popular myth based on a true story.⁴ But if Long had accused Eaton’s first novel *Miss*

Numè of Japan (1899) of being a copy of his less famous Japanese romance, *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* (1895), Eaton would have to admit her literary theft, for *Miss Numè of Japan* shows a striking correspondence to *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*, in language, description, setting, atmosphere, characterization, action, plot and themes. Later Eaton herself said that she owed her success to “a cheap and popular device” and she sold her “birthright for a mess of pottage” (*Me* 153-54), but what she did not say is that her literary career had started in plagiarism.

My interest, however, is not in accusing Eaton of plagiarism. Rather I wish to examine how Eaton revised and changed Long’s novel, because her violation of literary ethics—her plagiarism—as well as the violation of ethnic ethic—her passing, gave Eaton strategies to challenge white male discourses on race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Eaton’s works require us to examine the literary strategies embedded in her popular romances. Although Eaton borrowed male discourse in order to construct her novels and depended on white male perspectives to keep her romances within socially acceptable forms, she transformed the images and stories invented by white male perspectives into female discourse, constituting an active moment of challenge and resistance to white male discourse.

My discussion of Eaton’s Japanese romances is based on Bhabha’s theory of “colonial mimicry.” Bhabha says that colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is*

almost the same, but not quite" (86). He thinks that "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence" (86). Discussing the process of differentiating the colonial subject, Bhabha says, "in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). By doing that, it can exercise its authority over the colonial other. The ambivalence of colonial mimicry, however, arises from the fact that the colonial subject is always "partial," "incomplete," and "virtual" (Bhabha 88) in its representation. The "uncertainty" (Bhabha 88) of the colonial subject threatens the Western subject with "a form of *resemblance*," which is "the most terrifying thing to behold" (Bhabha 90). Thus, Bhabha sees the force of differentiation and the force of assimilation working together in the texts of colonial mimicry and labels them as hybrid texts, which provide the space for conflicting processes of signification.

The significance of Bhabha's postcolonial theory, which is based on deconstruction as well as psychoanalysis, is that he sees colonial mimicry not only as the space of the Western colonial power but also as the space of the conflict of significations, in which the colonial authority is always threatened and challenged. Robert J. C. Young explains: "For Bhabha, hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text" (22). Eaton's works are colonial texts that

depend on the ambiguous “partial presence” (Bhabha 86) of the colonial subject. Moreover, Eaton’s mixed-race authorship makes her works hybrid texts that oscillate between her Western Orientalist point of view and her Eurasian female point of view. Eaton exercises Western power by following white male Orientalist discourse, but she also constitutes active moments of disavowal of white male perspectives and challenges American racial and sexual politics.

Along with Bhabha, postmodern/colonial feminist theorists such as those of Julia Kristeva, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak will be used to conceptualize the female subject in struggle with white male significations. These feminist theories, which try to search for the active moment of the female subject in white male colonial significations, can be useful to understand Eaton’s struggle within the symbolic economy of Orientalism.

I. PLAGIARISM OR MIMICRY? *MISS NUMÉ OF JAPAN* VERSUS *MISS CHERRY-BLOSSOM OF TOKYO*

Miss Numè of Japan was published in 1899, when Eaton was twenty-four years old. As already mentioned, this novel is problematic in its great possibility of plagiarism from Long’s *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* (1895). In *Miss Numè of Japan*, Orito Takashima has been sent by his father and the father of his fiancé to the United States to be educated at Harvard. Orito’s

eight years in the United States are omitted, and the story begins with his returning voyage to Japan. Orito is engaged to marry Numè (Plum-Blossom) upon his return to Japan, but on the ship he meets Cleo Ballard, an American girl engaged to Arthur Sinclair. Orito and Cleo are attracted to each other. Simultaneously, Sinclair and Numè are attracted to each other when they meet in Japan.

This quadrilateral love plot of *Miss Numè of Japan* resembles Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*, which also starts on the ship to Japan. In Long's novel, the quadrilateral relationship of Dick, Ruth, Nell, and Sakura (Cherry-Blossom) is the main plot. Ruth loves Dick, but she gives up him for Nell, her sister. But Dick and Sakura fall in love when they meet on the ship to Japan. The construction of this quadrilateral relationship is solidly based on the triangular relationship of Dick, Ruth and Nell, and Long treats Sakura as a new intruder, a sexual threat to his American women characters.

The difference between Long's novel and Eaton's novel is Eaton's use of Orito, a Japanese young man, in the quadrilateral love relationship. In Long's novel, Ruth is a melodramatic heroine who tries to separate Dick and Sakura because she cannot approve of Sakura, the racial other, as Dick's lover. Eaton however, describes Mrs. Davis, who is identical with Ruth in her attempt to foil the Numè-Sinclair relationship, as a secondary character, who is not involved in the love relationship. Instead of Mr. Davis, Eaton includes Orito, a Japanese man, as a romantic hero who falls in love with an

American woman, and displaces the center of the melodramatic plot from the love between white Americans to the interracial love between Japanese and Americans.

Eaton also transforms the vectors of desire when she adopts the structure of the quadrilateral love in her novel. The diagrams below (fig.1) show how the vectors of desire work in Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* and Eaton's *Miss Numè of Japan*.

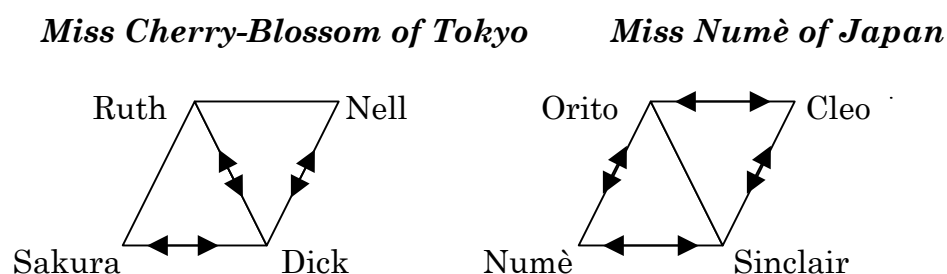


Fig.1. The vectors of desire among main characters in Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* and Eaton's *Miss Numè of Japan*.

The diagram of the quadrilateral love of Long's novel shows that his novel is a love story about Dick and his women. While Dick has plural choices of women, the female characters do not have a choice in this quadrilateral structure (Both Ruth and Nell marry other men in this story, but those male figures do not come into the love plot of the story). While Long's novel is a male-centered love story, Eaton's novel gives female characters more autonomy. Both Cleo and Numè have fiancés, but they come to love other

men, whom they are not supposed to love. The vectors of desire show that Eaton describes women as the desiring subject equal to men in their desire for love.

Thus Eaton's transformation of the quadrilateral love structure is significant in terms of Eaton's invention of "female" Japanese romance. Although Eaton does not give a happy ending to Cleo and Orito, Cleo's love for an Asian man could be subversive enough in the period when the double sexual standard was employed in gender and racial politics. As Pat Shea explains, "the motivation behind most anti-miscegenation laws was not to limit the sexual selections of white men, but to 'protect' white women and ensure the racial homogeneity of their children" (22). Although there was a strong antagonistic attitude towards miscegenation in the American public in the days Eaton had lived, Caucasian men's sexual relationships with women of other races were permitted and overlooked. The significance of Eaton's "romance" is that she challenged the male-centered discourse of race and gender in describing Cleo's attraction to Orito.

In this account, I would interpret Cleo, a white woman, as a heroine of this novel. Although the critical attention tends to go to Numè, Cleo is as important as Numè, for the dramatic moment of this story is given to the Cleo-Orito relationship, which ends with Orito's suicide. On some level, Cleo and Numè can be understood as double heroines used to examine the female subject. Numè plays the shadow self of Cleo, who wants to commit

miscegenation in her mind but cannot do it because of social pressure of the society. Interestingly, Numè, who is conventional and moderate, takes Cleo's fiancé and commits "miscegenation," while Cleo, "a coquette . . . an alluring, bright, sweet, dangerous coquette" (15), has a traditional and almost incestuous marriage with her cousin. Although Cleo has a potential to be a dangerous female character challenging the boundaries of gender and race, the role of "a coquette" is taken by Numè at the ending and Cleo becomes a character who "does not evoke much sympathy from the reader" (Shea 25).

The double plot of Numè's romance and Cleo's romance, in this sense, is not simple in its function. These two plots, intertwined from the beginning, run parallel to conceal sexual and racial taboos expressed in the novel. Because of the romance between Numè and Sinclair, the story between Cleo and Orito escapes the reader's special attention, which must evoke anxiety and disapproval. Eaton's subversive plot of the romance between a Caucasian woman and an Asian man is concealed under the Orientalist discourse, which permits the white man's sexual selection of the Asian woman in a remote setting. In this account, we can regard Eaton's adaptation of Long's interracial love plot as "mimicry," "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline" (Bhabha 86), which circulates around the white anxiety of racial purity. Eaton's romance is a strategic narrative, which challenges the Western norms of race and sexuality under the conservative disguise of the exotic Oriental romance.

To discuss Eaton's strategic narrative, it is significant to examine how her Japanese characters are depicted in her novel, for she uses Japanese characters as instruments for challenging Western patriarchal norms as well as for giving her novel an Oriental touch. Eaton's Japanese characters, however, are most problematic because Eaton depends on male Orientalist discourse when she describes Japanese characters. Eaton asserted herself as a Japanese writer when she wrote novels, but ironically, Eaton's plagiarism is most evident in her description of Numè, her Japanese heroine.

In *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*, Long constructs Sakura as the inferior and vulnerable Oriental other by stressing her awkward English as well as her immaturity in a love relationship. There is a chapter given to Sakura's inquiry about "love." Sakura asks Ruth:

Oh! loave—loave—loave! What *is* that loave? Tell me!
 Every time I as' 'bout that, they laugh, an' say 'What
 you thing?' Or 'Wait an' see. But *I have* waited, an' I have not
 seen—an' I thing I never shall, expect someone tell me." (69)

To Sakura's question, Ruth answers:

Let us begin with the fact of to-day, that every woman loves
 some man—many of them more than one. (70)

The scene of Sakura's inquiry of "love" is echoed in Eaton's *Miss Numè of Japan* when Numè asks Mrs. Davis in broken English about the Western notion of love:

“Was this luf good?” “Was it wrong to luf too many people?”

“Why must she not tell when she lufed any one?” “Did the pretty Americazan ladies luf their husbands, and was that why they were always so proud and beautiful?” “She” (Numè) “would like to luf too.”—“How would she know it?” (131)

Quite ironically, both Long and Eaton fail to employ Japanese English, in which the sounds of / l / and / r / are confused, in their heroines’ broken English. Still it is evident that both writers try to give their Japanese heroines foreign-ness by marginalizing them from the community of authentic English speakers. It is also noteworthy that both Sakura and Numè cannot articulate love correctly. Their awkward English not only signifies foreign-ness but also emphasizes their ignorance of the notion of love and partnership. Importantly, the notion of love as a contract is not given to them in their inquiry of love. Instead, topics such as female beauty and flirtation are discussed in these conversations. Sakura and Numè are kept away from the monogamous notion of love from the beginning. They are expected to be submissive lovers who accept the “Western” idea of love. Both Sakura and Numè are defined as blank pages waiting to be written by Western ideologies.

Long, however, is ambivalent in describing a Japanese woman. He emphasizes Sakura’s “foreign-ness” (“difference”) by describing her ignorance in love and the English language, but he avoids describing her as the

absolute other of the Orient. Long's Sakura is an Americanized Japanese, who always wears Western dress. Describing Sakura, Ruth says: "If you can think of a Japanese girl with her hair dressed in the most becoming modern fashion, a lemon-colored gown straight from Paris, a complexion like satin, and wearing a big yellow hat" (15). And Sakura is described as "a new element in the East" (39):

Look at her! Tall, erect, and as free in her movements as the best of your American women. That is not Japanese. And her toilettes excel those of our more modish women. She has been bred to consider color and form from an artistic point of view.

That is how all women should be educated to fashion. (38-39)

Interestingly enough, Sakura in the Western masquerade is deprived of her nationality, ethnicity and culture. There is no "foreign" appearance in Sakura. She is tall and sophisticated in a Western style. Her Japanese-ness is completely denied in this description.

Long's description of Sakura is interesting to note because it reflects the ambivalence of colonial mimicry. Sakura embodies the tension between difference/sameness as the colonial other, "a subject of a difference that *is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 86). In order to understand Long's ambivalence in describing the Japanese woman, Meyda Yegenoglu's analysis of Bhabha's theory is useful. Bhabha's theory emphasizes how colonial mimicry tries to produce "difference" in the subject of the "partial" difference

and fetishize it. But as Yegenoglu argues, Bhabha's psychoanalytical colonial theory fails to see that the difference (lack)

“poses a threat of castration and hence induces fear and anxiety in men” (29):

Given that “castration anxiety” and hence the threat it constitutes is key in the theory of fetishism, it is not clear how the perceived lack (all men do not have the same skin/race/culture) of the cultural other constitutes a threat for the colonizer. (29)

Yegenoglu points out that Bhabha fails to discuss the anxiety accompanying the process of fetishization of the colonial other. As Yegenoglu argues, the process of colonial fetishization is complicated because it is the process of disavowing a difference as well as of producing a difference.

Yegenoglu's argument is important when we examine the construction of “the Oriental Female Other” in colonial discourse. Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* offers a good example of the process of the fetishization of the Oriental female other through fear and anxiety. Loti, who contributed to establishing the stereotype of the Japanese woman in Western discourse, is threatened by the Japanese geisha with a white mask in his writing.

Although the geisha provides the stereotype of the Japanese woman in many Hollywood films, Loti's persona's encounter with the geisha is not a pleasant one, because he is anxious about the geisha who “wears over her face the horribly grinning, deathly mask of a specter of vampire” (24). The

overdressed geisha also intimidates Loti's persona because she represents the "excess of femininity" that Mary Ann Doane says men "necessarily regard as evil incarnate"(139).⁵ Loti writes: "And behold! a darling little fairy of about twelve or fifteen years of age, slim, and already a coquette, already a woman, —dressed in a long robe of shaded dark blue china crape, covered with embroidery representing bats, —gray bats, black bats, golden bats" (24). Loti's geisha is the incarnation of bats, which are connected with vampires in Western discourse. What looked like bats to Loti's persona must have been butterflies; traditionally butterflies are the typical designs for kimonos but bats are not. Still from Loti's "Western" eyes, the geisha is seen as an evil coquette like a vampire who tries to victimize and destroy men.⁶

Overall, sexual and cultural anxiety is dominant in Loti's description of Japanese women. Throughout the novel, Loti's persona is suspicious about his Japanese wife's relation with his friend. He imagines that his best friend and his Japanese wife are in love and suffers from jealousy.⁷ For Loti's persona, Chrysantheme, his Japanese wife, is always enigmatic, mysterious, concealing, cunning, untrustworthy, treacherous, and sexually loose. Therefore, to overcome cultural and sexual anxiety, Loti gives special attention to the smallness of the Japanese woman and tries to fetishize the Japanese woman in terms of physical smallness and weakness, which would remove his fear and anxiety against the Oriental other. Loti often makes the Japanese woman the fetish in the metaphor of "bird," a small fragile

creature. He also uses the image of a “doll” when he describes his Japanese wife. By repeating unhuman images and emphasizing smallness, he tries to confine the Japanese woman into the stereotype—the passive, feminine, and obedient woman.

In the case of Long, he transforms the Japanese woman into the Westernized figure to repress his sexual and culture fear and anxiety. Long eliminates Sakura’s “Orientalness,” which could be threatening, by fetishizing her as the rare beautiful object from the Orient imported into the West. Speaking about Sakura, Ruth says: “Ah! that is the unapproachable charm of such a girl: she has no sting—absolutely. She is all sweetness” (14). Ruth’s words signify that Sakura is seen as the object rather than the subject. Sakura is presented as a safe creature who does not harm the Americans. Sakura is “sweet” because she is “Westernized” and has had her Oriental stings pulled. Sakura is idolized, fetishized, and transformed into an acceptable female icon. Long’s substitution of Western dress for Oriental dress can be understood as his strategy of repressing Western male fear and anxiety about the “Oriental female other.”

Interestingly enough, Eaton’s Numè is identical to Long’s Sakura in their Western clothes. Mrs. Davis, who is identical to Ruth in her relation with a Japanese heroine, praises Numè: “She is a charm all by herself. Every movement she makes is charming, every halting word, her own strange, sweet beauty. She is irresistible” (71). Just like Sakura, Numè is seen as the

charming object of the Orient. Eaton also describes Numè as a Westernized Japanese girl. Mrs. Davis says:

“You aren’t a bit like most Japanese girls. . . . Sometimes when I look at your face I can’t realize you are a Japanese girl. You are so pretty. . . . Your face is lovely—it is a flower—a bright tropical flower. No! It is too delicate for a tropical flower—it is like your name—you *are* a wild plum blossom. Sometimes I am puzzled to know when you look best—in the sweet, soft kimona or—or in a regular stylish American gown” (69)

Just like Sakura, who does not look Japanese, Numè is so westernized that her nationality is almost ambiguous. By mimicking Long’s Sakura and presenting Numè as the object to be seen, Eaton exercises her white imperial power over a Japanese woman.

Eaton, however, does not deny Numè’s “foreign-ness,” though she makes Numè wear Western clothes. Numè is different from Sakura in her unassimilatable quality, which places her between two cultures. As Mrs. Davis wonders when Numè looks best, Numè’s Western masquerade does not completely Americanize Numè. While Sakura is placed within Western male desire and functions as an icon of ideal femininity in Long’s novel, Numè is described as a woman who cannot be understood in the Western standard of femininity. Mrs. Davis wonders when Numè looks best, because she finds

that Numè's beauty is different from the beauty of the white woman. But Numè does not fit the category of the Western imagination of "the Oriental female other" "as enigmatic, mysterious, concealing a secret behind its veil" (Yegenoglu 73). Mrs. Davis tries to define Numè's beauty with the metaphor of tropical flower, signifying exoticism, passion and sensuality, but she gives up because she finds that Numè is more like "a wild plum blossom," the flower which blooms in the land of mild weather. Numè puzzles Mrs. Davis because her beauty cannot be categorized in the Western dichotomies of white/colored and good/evil. Being out of those categories, Numè asserts her "difference" and "foreign-ness," which cannot be mapped by Western ideologies.

Actually, Numè's fashion breaks down the dichotomy between the Oriental and the Western. Numé appears "in a soft white gown, cut low at the neck, the sleeves short to the elbows" (84), but she wears no ornaments except "a few red roses" (84) on her coiled black hair. Numè's fashion is a combination of the Western dress, which exposes neck and arms, and the Japanese kimono, which does not require wearing any jewelry except ornamental hairpins. In other words, Numè wears a Western dress just like she wears a kimono.

Thus Numè functions as an unfixed ambivalent signifier, which does not belong to the Western symbolic system. Although Numè seems ultimately to enter the symbolic economy of Orientalism in her marriage with

Sinclair, an American man, it should be noted that the Numè-Sinclair relationship differs from the stereotypical Western man-Asian woman relationship, in which a Western man exercises patriarchal/colonial power over an Oriental woman. The Numè-Sinclair relationship, which is identical to the Sakura-Dick relationship in Long's novel, looks like a conservative ideological apparatus which tries keep an Asian woman in Western male significations, but Eaton's characterization of Sinclair makes their marriage different from the marriage between Sakura and Dick.

Sinclair is a character whose sexual orientation is ambiguous. He is engaged to Cleo, but he is always indifferent to her. Actually Cleo was attracted to him because he is "almost indifferent to her" (38). Although Sinclair proclaims his love to Cleo with "a wild passion" (38) during a beautiful moonlit night on a conservatory balcony, he does not know if he really loves her or if his sudden passion is due to wine and the romantic surroundings. Sinclair admires Cleo's beauty, but he does not love Cleo as a person. Sinclair is also indifferent to Japanese women: "Unlike most western men, who generally consider it their privilege when in Japan to be as lawless as they desire, he had got into no entanglements whatever" (83). Sinclair enjoys company with men more than with women. He has a close relation with a Japanese *jinrikisha*-man named Shiku. He also has a special friendship with Taylor, an English artist. Although Eaton avoids labeling Sinclair as gay, she implies a homoerotic relation between Sinclair and

Taylor: “Between the two men an inexplicable friendship had sprung up, one that partook of no confidence betwixt them, but showed itself simply in the pleasure they took in being together” (138).

In his sexual ambiguity, Sinclair is outside the Western patriarchal norms. Sinclair is attracted to Numè because Numè is neither a Western nor a Japanese woman in her appearance. He is attracted to Numè’s “girlish poise of the figure, the slim, unstudied grace of the neck, and rounded arms” (84-85). In other words, Numè’s lack of femininity and maturity appeals to Sinclair. Throughout the novel, Eaton stresses Numè’s childishness and smallness. Numè looks like a child when she talks with Sinclair at the first time. She speaks to him with “a shy artlessness that astonished him”: “You are *big*—and thad you nod lig’ poor liddle Japanese womans—still I lig’ you jus’ same” (87). Numè’s openness, innocence and awkward English characterize Numè as a child. Although Eaton’s infantilization of Numè reflects her imperialistic idea that Asia is immature like a child in its relationship with the West, desexualization of Numè can be appreciated as her strategy to displace the “Oriental woman” from male significations. Sinclair’s marriage with Numè, who does not function as a symbol of female sexuality, differs from conventional heterosexual Oriental narratives.

Moreover, they marry in Japan, a non-Western space free of Western ideologies. Long’s *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* ends with Dick’s return to the United States with his Japanese wife just like the ending of Holland’s *My*

Japanese Wife. When male Orientalist novels present a happy interracial marriage, the Oriental woman is often obliged to enter the system of Western male significations. However, Eaton's couple remains in Japan. Numè is allowed to keep her Japanese identity without submitting to Western male significations by placing herself in Japan after the marriage.

Significantly, Japan is not a gender-neutral place in Eaton's Oriental romances. Traditionally, there is an affinity between the Orient and women in colonial discourse: "woman is the Orient, the Orient is woman; woman like the Orient, the Orient like the woman" (Yegenoglu 56). The feminization of the Orient is a strategy of controlling the Orient. The feminization of Japan, however, has a different implication in Eaton's "feminist" project. It is significant to note that Eaton treats Japan as a feminine space, which reorders Western male significations. Actually, Japan constitutes a fictional space where allows Eaton to examine the Western patriarchal norms on race and sexuality.

It is in Japan that Cleo exercises her female subversive power over a man. In this novel Eaton assigns Cleo, a white American female heroine, a role opposed to Numè in its characterization. While Numè is always immature, childish and innocent, Cleo is an experienced, active, and attractive "coquette." Cleo is described as a woman who exercises power over men by her extraordinary beauty:

She could not have counted her adorers, because they would have included every one who knew her. Such a gay, happy girl as she was; always looking about her for happiness, and finding it only in the admiration and adoration of her victims; for they *were* victims, after all, because, though they were generally willing to adore in the beginning, she nevertheless crushed their hopes in the end; for that is the nature of coquettes. (15)

What characterizes Cleo the most is her abundant experience in the game of love. While Numè has no contact with men during Orito's absence, Cleo is always surrounded by male admirers. Cleo is an experienced and skillful lover, who flirts without surrendering herself to passion. It seems that Sinclair tries to escape from Cleo because he is threatened by her female sexuality, which can be a threat to patriarchal control.

Eaton's construction of Cleo as the representation of the "excess of femininity" (Doane 139) is worth noting because Cleo's Western female subject is constructed in contrast with Numè, the non-Western female subject. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes hegemonic white feminism, which describes third world women as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized" (199) in order to imply that western women are "educated, modern . . . having control over

their own bodies and sexualities, and the ‘freedom’ to make their own decisions” (199-200). Cleo, who contrasts with Numè, is the product of Eaton’s white feminism.

Cleo as an agent of Eaton’s white feminism, however, does not show her subversive power in her love relationship with a white man strongly enough to destroy her admirer. When she has Orito, a Japanese man, as her admirer, she displays her destructive power as a true coquette. Eaton’s casting of Orito, a Japanese man, as a victim of Cleo’s coquettish nature, thus, requires that we examine its implication. One of the reasons Eaton made Orito a victim of a white woman is to endow Cleo with the imperial power, the Western “masculine” power over the “feminine” Orient. Cleo is a woman; therefore she is placed in a position inferior to men in the patriarchal hierarchy. But she can subvert the gender hierarchy by crossing boundaries of race and taking control over the Asian man.

Quite interestingly, Orito is romanticized and feminized throughout the novel. Orito is described as “a youth of extreme beauty”: “He was tall and slender; his face was pale and oval, with features as fine and delicate as a girl’s” (6). Just as Song in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* says, “Being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man” (83), Orito, an Oriental, is not a complete man, who represents the power of control. Although Orito loves Cleo passionately, there is “no physical contact between the two” (Shea 22). Eaton protects Cleo’s sexuality from being touched by the man of the other

race. Orito, “a desirable person to know; a graduate of Harvard University, of irreproachable manners, and high breeding, wealthy, cultured, and even good-looking” (24), is completely castrated, and he becomes the safe Oriental object available to white women.⁸

Still the relation between Cleo and Orito cannot always be reduced into the West/Orient colonial relationship of power. Interestingly, Eaton makes the experience of the female colonial encounter with the Orient different from that of the male colonial encounter. One of the most important aspects in the white female colonial experience is Western patriarchal sexual oppression. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says, “imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 94), the colonial space is the space where Western patriarchy exercises its domination not only over the other race but also over the other gender. Cleo’s choice of Sinclair, who is indifferent to her, rather than Orito, a Japanese man who is devoted to her, proves that Cleo is also a victim of Western white imperialism, for as a white woman, Cleo is forced to choose a deceptive love with a white man rather than a true love with an Asian man.

Eaton describes the scene of Cleo’s rejection of Orito as a scene in which Cleo’s Western female subjectivity is thrown into danger. It is important to note Eaton completely suppresses Orito’s words and lets this

scene be dominated by silence, which threatens Cleo more than any accusing words:

The silence of the room frightened her. She went to a window and put her head out. A sudden vague terror of she knew not what seized her. Why was everything so still? Why did he leave her like that? If he only had reproached her—that would have been better; —but to go without a word to her! It was awful—it was uncanny, cruel. What did he intend to do? She began to conjure up in her mind all sorts of imaginary terrors. She told herself that she hated the stillness of the Japanese atmosphere. (185)

The Japanese house, which had been familiar and friendly to her, suddenly turns into an uncanny space when Cleo refuses Orito's proposal of marriage. In Kristeva's theory of abjection, "the uncanny" represents the female subversive power repressed by the Law/Father/Language. Talking about the moment of abjection, the moment of semiotic transformations, Kristeva writes: "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome" (2). The uncanny, silent Japanese setting, in this account, can be interpreted as the representation of the Orient/femininity repressed by Western male significations. This silent space is "uncanny" and frightening because this is the space of abjection, where

Orito's Japanese subversive power and Cleo's hidden desire for the violation of sexual taboos are confined. In other words, this silent space represents repressed race and sexuality, and it constitutes resistance to Western male significations.

In this regard, Cleo's rejection of Orito opens up the semiotic space, in which the uncanny emerges suddenly and threatens the horizon of significations. The uncanny space raises an objection to Cleo's cowardly compromise with American racial and sexual politics regulated by Western male significations. With silence, the space blames Cleo for giving a cruel and dishonest answer to Orito and threatens her with disastrous consequences. Thus, Eaton uses the female-ness of the Orient to question Western female subjectivity. Cleo is thrown into fear and anxiety she has never experienced before in her confrontation with Orito, the embodiment of the Orient. Cleo's anxiety is about racial and sexual subjectivity in relationship to Western patriarchy. The colonial encounter with the Orient reveals how racial politics and sexual politics are dependent on one another. By rejecting Orito, Cleo is confined to the space of silence, the space of racial and sexual repression.

Cleo presents herself as the most beautiful embodiment of white womanhood when she rejected Orito's love:

Never had Cleo Ballard appeared so beautiful as that night.

Her eyes shone brightly with excitement, her cheeks were a

deep scarlet in hue, and her wonderful rounded neck and arms
gleamed dazzlingly white against the black lace of her gown.

(187)

As if to predict Orito's death, Cleo appears in a gown of black, the color of mourning. The black gown enhances her beauty as a white woman, because it makes her neck and arms look whiter. "White womanhood," however, is not presented as something "natural" in this scene. Cleo looks theatrical more than in any other scene in this novel, because she conceals her anxiety under the mask of "white womanhood" in her black dress that hyperbolizes her whiteness. Ironically, Cleo looks most beautiful by concealing and repressing her true self. Cleo is a beautiful white woman in this scene, because she wears the respectable mask of white womanhood. Cleo even attracts Sinclair in this scene because Cleo subjected to white sexual norms is no longer dangerous and subversive.

Thus after Orito's suicide, Cleo comes to be a character without impact, and she transfers the role of heroine to Numè. At the end, Eaton presents Cleo as a woman completely tamed and repressed by white male society.

"Tom, do you suppose I can even make up—atone for all my wickedness?"

(219), Cleo says at the end. Quite interestingly, Eaton reverses what Mohanty calls the strategy of white feminism, the strategy of constructing the Western female subject in contrast with the non-Western female subject. By making Cleo a powerless character, Numè gains more power at the end.

While Cleo has a traditional same-race marriage with her cousin Tom, Numè attains Cleo's desire for interracial love in legal marriage in Japan. Japan, the female space outside Western norms, sets their marriage outside the racism and sexism.

In some degree, Eaton's use of Japan in a feminist project reflects the reality of the transgressive positionality of Japan in those days. We should note that the "Western imperial and colonial theatre is framed and firmly inscribed in the familiar duality of West and non-West, 'white' and non-'white,' self and other" (Ching 65). Therefore, imperial Japan was a threat to the Western "strategy of positional superiority" (Said 7)—the strategy of transferring the white/non-white and West/Orient dichotomy to the logic of colonial control, for Japan proved its non-Western, non-white imperial power in the victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Japan tried not only to colonize other Asian countries but also to transgress "whiteness" by proclaiming a policy of rapid Westernization and militarism. Thus we can interpret that the peculiar position of imperial Japan provided Eaton with the ideological space to interrogate the system of racism and sexism based on white male superiority.

Significantly, Eaton makes many changes and transformations to Long's *Miss Cheery-Blossom of Tokyo* and constructs *Miss Numè of Japan* as a female romance. Among the changes Eaton added, it is noteworthy that Eaton gives a strong emphasis to homosocial relationships, which cannot be

found in Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*, in *Miss Numè of Japan*. Each character has a close friend of the same gender in Eaton's novel. Cleo has Mrs. Davis as her soul mate. Numè is very close to Koto, her maid. Sinclair has a close friendship with Taylor and Shiku. Orito is also a good friend of Tom, Cleo's cousin. Sachi, Orito's father, and Omi, Numè's father, form a solid homosocial relationship and even try to make their relationship tight by arranging the marriage of Orito and Numè.⁹

Among these homosocial relationships, the female bonds Eaton described in her novel are noteworthy because they make Eaton's novel different from male Orientalist discourse, which often isolates a female character to diminish her political power. As already examined in the diagram of quadrilateral love, Long's white heroine does not have any dependable friendship with a woman, because all the women are sexual competitors with one another. As the relation between Ruth and Nell signifies, even close sisters are thrown into sexual competition in Long's novel.

On the contrary, Eaton's female characters have strong female alliances. The relation between Cleo and Mrs. Davis is one of the strongest relationships in this novel. Mrs. Davis is a character who is identical to Mrs. Haines (Ruth) in Long's novel in her attempt to foil the Numè-Sinclair relationship, but she appears as a dependable friend of Cleo in *Miss Numè of Japan* because she is not involved in the quadrilateral love, as is Mrs. Haines

in *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo*. While Mrs. Haines tries to foil the relation between Sakura and Dick because of her jealousy, Mrs. Davis does it, thinking about Cleo's happiness. The friendship between Cleo and Mrs. Davis is very special, and Cleo tells everything to Mrs. Davis. The interesting contract between Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* and Eaton's *Miss Numè of Japan* is in the scene of the white heroine's confession. In Long's novel, Ruth's confession of love to Dick is constructed as the melodramatic climax. Cleo's long monologue, which corresponds with Ruth's long monologue, however, is directed to Mrs. Davis. Cleo also confesses to Sinclair, but the scene does not have as much impact because Cleo's confession is already given to Mrs. Davis, and there is nothing new in Cleo's talk. Moreover, while Ruth talks about her secret love for Dick, Cleo confesses that she loved Orito. The Cleo-Sinclair relationship, thus, loses its meaning at the ending. And Mrs. Davis consoles Cleo by catching her "to her breast just in time for the flood of tears to come—tears that were a necessary, blessed relief" (210). The relation between Cleo and Mrs. Davis is what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg calls "the long-lived, intimate, loving friendship between two women" (169), Victorian American female bonds, in which Smith-Rosenberg tries to find lesbian connotation.

Along with the female bonds between Cleo and Mrs. Davis, Numè's relation with Koto is important not only as close female relationship but also the relationship across class boundaries. Koto was a geisha girl before she

serves Numé, a noblewoman, but Numé does not show any prejudice against Koto, a woman of lower class. Rather Numé explains to Mrs. Davis, who thinks Numé's friendship with Koto is not proper, that it is usual for Japanese upper-class women to have a maid as a friend:

Japanese ladies usually treat their maids more as sisters than as maids. . . . It is a peculiar fact that Japanese holding positions such as maid, or, for a man, perhaps as retainer or valet, or even servant, become extremely devoted to their masters and mistresses, remaining with them until they are married, and sometimes preferring to remain with them after they have married, rather than marry themselves.

(119-120)

Eaton's idealization of the relation between a Japanese mistress and a maid is important because this can be interpreted as Eaton's strategic challenge to American politics of race and class. Although Numé does not criticize Mrs. Davis's consciousness of class distinctions, she challenges her by asserting that the upper-class woman and the lower-class woman can establish a strong relationship of mutual trust and affection in Japan. If we think that Eaton suffered from racism and classism as an Asian woman of a poor family, the romanticized presentation of Numé-Koto relationship can be read as a criticism of the white-people of color relationship in the United States.

The Numè-Koto relationship also strongly implies the lesbian/gay subtext of this novel. It should be noted that Numè says that the intimate same-gender friendship is often more important for servants than the heterosexual marriage. Although *Miss Numè of Japan* is a romance that ends with marriages, marriage is not necessarily regarded as the absolute form of love in Numè's speech. In this novel only Koto and Shiku have a perfect heterosexual love marriage, but Numè implies that the relation with servant and master/mistress can be stronger than the relation in a marriage. The novel ends with the sentence: "Perhaps the most frequent visitors at the Sinclairs' are Mr. and Mrs. Shiku" (220). Thus Eaton emphasizes the tie of same-gender relationships.

Thus Eaton writes a novel that is similar to Long's in its construction but different in details. Although there are moments where plagiarism seems to be evident, Eaton's novel is best conceived as "colonial mimicry," in which significations are always in conflict. Eaton carefully mimics and revises the male Orientalist discourse based on colonial racial and sexual ambivalence. In some sense, we can say that Eaton used the ambivalence of colonial mimicry, which tries to differentiate the colonial racial other, who always threatens the colonial subject in its "partial presence" (Bhabha 86). Eaton displaced the "difference," which often intimidates the Western subject from the terrain of sexuality when she describes Numè. Numè is different, but she is not an enigmatic Oriental woman with excessive femininity. She

also displaced the sexual threat, which is always connected with racial difference, from the space of the Orient and transfers it to the space of the West by endowing Cleo with subversive power. She changed the significations of traditional affinity of the Orient and woman. Thus in Eaton's romance, the Orient functions as the space to interrogate the Western patriarchal system of control.

However, Eaton's mimicry cannot be fully conceptualized in Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry, which is based on an analysis of male Orientalist discourse. Eaton's practice also goes beyond Said's power dichotomy of the West/Orient because "his Orientalist discourse is solely male-generated" (MacKenzie 13) and does not see the ambiguous position of the white woman in Orientalism. Eaton has a Western imperialistic perspective, but her "Orientalism" differs from that of male Orientalists because of her gender. And her white feminism is also complicated with her half-Asian identity. Eaton's *Miss Numè of Japan*, thus, functions as a "hybrid" text, in which various significations are in conflict. Eaton's mixed-race female perspective, which is at the intersection of West/East, white/colored, male/female, complicates her Japanese romances. Through the tension between "plagiarism" and "colonial mimicry," and the conflict between "Orientalism" and "feminism," *Miss Numè of Japan* opens its own space for examining Western racial and sexual politics.

In the next section, I would like to examine Eaton's autobiographical novel, *Me: A Book of Remembrance*, in comparison with Edith's autobiographical essay, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian." Focusing on how these writings deal with the issues of racism and sexism, I want to dispute Amy Ling's view of Eaton as the popular romance writer who compromised with white significations.

II. PASSING AUTHORSHIP AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *ME* AND "LEAVES FROM THE MENTAL PORTFOLIO OF AN EURASIAN"

In June, 1900, Eaton was visited by Yone Noguchi, a Japanese poet who established a reputation in the United States and England by publishing English poems. Noguchi wrote of his meeting with Eaton in his letter to his friend, Charles W. Stoddard as follows:

She is a half caste woman with the name Onoto Watanna;
her mother was Japanese, father being an English; she
herself being very bright writes now and then very clever
short stories for magazines. Did you ever hear her name?
Onoto Watanna, you never heard before? She published one
book from Rand McNally & Co., last year, I believe. She is
awfully clever, but she has no sound mind and sweet
philosophy. She is woman after all! (*Yone Noguchi Collected
English Letters* 44)

Although what Noguchi and Eaton had talked about is not written here, Noguchi was impressed with Eaton's talent and sees her "awfully clever." But he looks down on her because "she has no sound mind and sweet philosophy." He attributes such a lack of sophistication in Eaton's writing to her being woman, saying, "she is woman after all." Noguchi's letter tells us that he observed Eaton through the lenses of sexism.

Still, Noguchi's letter also tells us that Eaton escaped being looked down upon as Chinese by Noguchi. Noguchi's explanation about Eaton's parentage in his letter shows that Noguchi was deceived by Eaton's fabricated Japanese identity. Since Noguchi turned into a fanatical imperial nationalist when he was back in Japan (we can find his nationalistic tendency even in his *American Diary of a Japanese Girl*, which, he wrote in his preface, was dedicated to the Japanese empress), it was lucky for Eaton that she was not to be recognized as half Chinese because Japanese imperialists like Noguchi came to have strong prejudice and antipathy against Chinese in those days.

Actually, the relation between Japanese and Chinese was especially complicated after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Historically Japan had been the weaker country in its relation with China, which had been the most powerful and advanced country in Asia for a long time. But Japan's victory marked the subversion of the pre-modern relationship between China and Japan, and announced the colonial power of

Modern Japan over Asia. The most interesting phenomenon accompanying Japan's victory is that it enforced Japan's ideological assimilation with the West, which represents "whiteness," as well as the separation from Asia, which represents "yellowness." In looking at the political situation at the turn of the century, we can see that Eaton's passing as half Japanese was politically dangerous, for the boundary between Chinese and Japanese was the space of political and ideological conflict involving the issue of "race make-up."

Interestingly enough, there is a close correspondence between the Japanese boom in the West and the consecutive Japanese victories in the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. John Long's *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tokyo* and Clive Holland's *Mousmé* were published in 1895, the year of Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War. The first performance of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* started in 1904, the year when the Russo-Japanese War broke out. It is evident that the popularity of Japanese narratives in the West had a close correspondence with political situation in those days. As long as Japan remained as a safe country for the United States, "Japan" was allowed to be the literary subject. Although "the Butterfly narratives" feminized and feudalized the image of Japan and functioned to repel Japan from accessing "whiteness," which represents the imperial power, we can also say that Japan was an ambiguous signifier floating between "whiteness" and "yellowness." Eaton's passing from Chinese

to Japanese was indeed the political act of transferring to the group with power.

Eaton's choice of Japanese identity, however, needs careful examination, because her passing cannot be fully understood in the frame of traditional passing, which is the means to access social, economic and political power. It was not difficult "for a half Chinese, half white girl to pass as one of Spanish or Mexican origin" (Sui Sin Far 227), but Eaton chose to keep her Asian identity. Ling thinks that Eaton used a Japanese identity just to gain money and support her family, but I don't think that her choice of Japanese identity was solely based upon her financial need. In *Me*, Eaton writes about how she started writing Oriental romances:

. . . one day I wrote a little story of my mother's land. I had never been there, and yet I wrote easily of this quaint, far country, and of that wandering troupe of jugglers and tight-rope dancers of which my own mother had been one. (125)

This is one of the problematic moments in *Me* as autobiography, because Eaton's mother was Chinese. Eaton wrote Japanese romances. But these words tell us Eaton was a Romantic Orientalist who wanted to write on the Orient. And it is obvious that Eaton's desire to write on her mother's land was her motivation for keeping an Asian identity. We can suppose that Eaton chose Japanese settings and identity because the image of Japan was more suitable for Eaton's romantic image of her mother's land.

In this sense, I don't think that Eaton's use of Japanese identity meant a betrayal of her Chinese ancestry. More importantly, having a Japanese identity gave Eaton a chance to write her novels from an Asian perspective and be conscious of racism and sexism. Critics often argue that Edith Eaton fought against the prejudice against Chinese in her writing. But it is not often discussed how Winnifred spoke against racism and sexism, placing herself in an acceptable social position as Japanese and using the frame of romance, a most conservative literary genre, which can easily draw the masses without making them anxious or cautious. Although Winnifred's approach to protest against racism and sexism was different from Edith's, eventually both used Asian identities to find their voice as socially marginalized figures. Edith published her stories under the name of Sui Sin Far, which sounds Chinese, and Winnifred under the name of Onoto Watanna, which sounds Japanese. Both women had been outsiders of either Chinese or Japanese cultures and communities. Both of them "passed" as Asian women in their authorship. Therefore, it is not fair to accuse only Winnifred of a deceptive identity.

But still there is a tendency to elevate Edith as "the first writer in North America to depict the ambiguous position of the Eurasian" (White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton* 1) and to see Winnifred's works as inferior to Edith's works. In discussing Edith's "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (1909) and Winnifred's *Me: A Book of Remembrance*

(1915), Amy Ling says that Edith's writing is "sincere and earnest, straightforward, and purposeful," while Winnifred's writing is "novelistic in style, filled with dialogue and vivid, at times improbable, details, and artistically organized to produce a sense of rising tension of wholeness" (*Between Worlds* 32). While Ling praises Edith as giving expression to the reality of Chinese Eurasians' experience in her autobiography, she denies giving a high estimation to Winnifred's autobiography because it is not reliable and it adopts the popular form of romance. She shows sympathy to Winnifred, saying "For Winnifred, ethnicity was not to be blamed for her cramped and deprived childhood, poverty was the cause" (37).

Throughout her discussion, Ling is ambivalent in evaluating Winnifred. She labels *Me* as what Nima Baym calls "woman's fiction" (35) and fits it into what Jean Starobinski calls "the 'picaresque' tradition of autobiography" (37). But she still regards *Me* as a novel in the category of conventional romance and places Winnifred below Edith, "a pioneer" and "a bridge between two worlds" (49), saying that "we have in Winnifred Eaton not a challenger or protester, not a word-warrior, but a woman with her finger squarely on the pulse of her time" (55).

Ling's judgment, however, requires a careful examination. In fact, it is problematic to judge autobiographical writing by the measure of "honesty," for the boundary between autobiography and fiction is actually ambiguous.

And we cannot deny that Winnifred's *Me* is an excellent work as a working woman's fiction. Defending Winnifred, Diana Birchall says: "Her work is vivid and vital, however, and particularly in her autobiographical writing she displays freshness and urgency in delineating the life of a young working woman at the turn of the century that is informing and beguiling" (xviii). *Me* is also worthy to note as a work describing the life of a poor working girl of mixed-race from a woman's perspective in the beginning of twentieth century. *Me* is often compared with Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) in its picaresque quality (e. g., Moser 362), but I think it is more like Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun* (1929) in its description of the struggle of a mixed-race girl in an urban background.

Although Winnifred displaces the issue of race and ethnicity from the central plot and focuses on the heroine's romantic involvements, it is important to note that the issue of race is always behind the issue of sexuality in this work. Just as Angela Murray in *Plum Bun* encounters the racial prehistory of concubinage in her encounter with a wealthy white man, Nora Ascough, Winnifred's persona, is thrown into danger of concubinage in her relation with Roger Hamilton, a white man of power. Although Eaton does not attribute the vulnerability of Nora to her ethnicity, it is evident that Nora's sexual vulnerability is due to her mixed-race features, which always evoke curiosity in people's mind.

Edith's autobiography, on the other hand, "focuses almost exclusively on ethnicity, chronicling the suffering Edith has endured from age four until forty simply for being Eurasian" (Ling, *Between Worlds* 35). Ling argues that Edith avoids dealing with the issue of sexuality by calling her "a very serious and sober-minded spinster" (Sui Sin Far 226) and keeping her outside the dynamics of sexuality. But a close reading of Edith's "Leaves" leads us to understand that Edith is dealing with the issue of sexuality, though she is often reserved in expressing her emotions about her experience.

In fact, Edith's autobiography is also not as straightforward as Ling thinks. Discussing Edith's "Leaves," Annette White-Parks says:

Although the form of "Leaves" is autobiographical, its voice addresses, in common with the fiction, dual reading audiences. On one level, Sui Sin Far was announcing to a general American public her Eurasian identity and protesting what people in her position were being put through. . . . On another level, she was announcing to her own family that she would not "cringe," that she rejected the coping strategies of some of her family members (Sui Sin Far/*Edith Maude Eaton* 157)

"Leaves" is penetrated by Edith's self-consciousness as a half Chinese writer. There is no surprise that Edith became very careful in treating the issue of sexuality, for it is an issue intertwined with race.

In "Leaves." Edith deals with the problem of sexuality in terms of race. Edith writes about the "Chinaman" who praised her writing in his article and gave her great joy and excitement as follows:

The Chinaman who wrote the article seeks me out and calls upon me. He is a clever and witty man, a graduate of one of the American colleges and as well a Chinese scholar. I learn that he has an American wife and several children. (Sui Sin Far 223)

What kind of feeling Edith had for this smart and educated Chinese man who showed great understanding for Edith's writing is not written here. But her first encounter with an educated Chinese man gives her a chance to think about miscegenation, which could be a reason why Edith, a half white, avoids her involvement with Chinese.

Edith's sexual dilemma as a half Chinese and a half white, is most evident in her description of the Chinese men, to whom she might have been attracted:

I also meet other Chinese men who compare favorably with the white men of my acquaintance in mind and heart qualities. Some of them are quite handsome. They have not as finely cut noses and as well developed chins as the white men, but they have smoother skins and their expression is more serene; their hands are better shaped and their voices softer.

Some little Chinese women whom I interview are very anxious to know whether I would marry a Chinaman. I do not answer No. (Sui Sin Far 223)

Edith's description of the Chinese men suggests a sexual attraction. Clearly, Edith likes their Americanized minds and Asian complexions. She gives a special attention to their skins, expressions, hands and voices. The fact that Edith did not give a negative answer to the question whether she would marry a Chinaman shows that she was more or less attracted to Chinese men. Still Edith's focus slips into the issue of race at the moment when she is dealing with the issue of sexuality. The Chinese women are glad to know that Edith has no prejudice against Chinese, but they are "a little doubtful as to whether one could be persuaded to care for" Edith, because "full-blooded Chinese people [have] a prejudice against the half white" (Sui Sin Far 223). Edith's sexual desire, thus, is locked into a racial problem.

In "Leaves," Edith also describes her experience of sexism that is interwoven with racism. A naval officer, "a big, blond, handsome fellow, several years younger" (Sui Sin Far 226) visits her in the office and says:

" . . . You look such a nice little body. Say, wouldn't you like to go for a sail this lovely night? I will tell you all about the sweet little Chinese girls I met when we were at Hong Kong. They're not so shy! " (Sui Sin Far 226)

Edith is obliged to know how the Asian woman's body is sexualized and stereotyped in her encounter with the naval officer, who treats Edith as if she were one of the Asian prostitutes with whom he had affairs in Hong Kong.

Thus "Leaves" tells us how the sexuality of a mixed woman is always interlocked with the problem of race. Edith's labeling herself as "a very serious and sober minded spinster" (Sui Sin Far 226), in this sense, expresses her strong rejection of being involved in sexual politics interlocked with racial politics. It is only by denying her sexuality that Edith gains the stance to resist racism and sexism in her writing.

Winnifred's *Me*, on the contrary, problematizes racism and sexism in the white patriarchal society by placing Nora Ascough, the heroine, within the dynamics of sexuality. Nora has many suitors and admirers after she starts to live by herself. Among many relationships, Nora's relationship with Roger Hamilton is placed in the center of this work. Hamilton, the wealthy white man who is almost double Nora's age, is a sexual trap from which Nora has to escape. In his desire to keep Nora as his mistress, he embodies exploitive white male sexuality, which tries to control the colored female body.

Winnifred, however, gives Dr. Manning in Richmond the role of sexual threat, and put Hamilton aside from it until the very end when Nora finds that he is a married man having an affair with another woman. Ling regards Hamilton as a symbol of "the sexual and economic power of the world

with which the young, inexperienced Nora must learn to deal” (*Between Worlds* 38), and writes that Nora decides to break up with him because “she makes the two discoveries . . . that he is an immoral man and that she has powers within her—namely, her imagination and writing ability—enabling her to make her way in the world without assistance” (*Between Worlds* 39).

Ling’s interpretation, however, is not sufficient. It is true that Nora is disillusioned with him when she finds that he is a married man with a mistress. But it is not in his immorality that Nora is disappointed. She is disappointed in the fact that she is inferior to his mistress, who is going to be his wife, rather than finding him a married man with many transgressions:

. . . I found myself studying the picture of that woman who was not his wife. I cared nothing about the wife, but only of that other one, the woman his wife said he still loved.

She was all the things that I was not, a statuesque beauty, with a form like Juno and a face like that of a great sleepy ox. Beside her, what was I? Women like her were the kind men loved. I knew that. Women like me merely teased their fancy and curiosity. We were the small tin toys with which they paused to play. (349)

Obviously, Nora’s trouble is in her race. In the beginning of the novel, Nora says that she is “dark and foreign-looking” but she dreams of being “golden-haired and blue-eyed” (41). Her sexual dilemma and her racial

dilemma coincide when she discovers that Hamilton's mistress is "the blond type" she always adores. She is shocked and hurt not because Hamilton is immoral but because she has to admit her failure as a lover in sexual competition. Race and ethnicity, thus, pull Nora down from the sphere of the sexual and economic power of the white world, and make her face the fact that she is nothing but the object of white male "fancy and curiosity" (349).

Nora's relation with Hamilton is also characterized by Nora's inferiority complex as a girl of the working class. Nora does not perceive Hamilton's double (actually triple) life, because she thinks that her class is a reason for Hamilton's hesitation in loving her. Soon after she is acquainted with Hamilton, Nora becomes conscious that they are in different social sets:

I realized that he belonged to a different social sphere. He was a rich, powerful man, of one of the greatest families in America, and I—I was a working-girl, a stenographer of the stock-yards.
(183)

Although Nora does not mention her family, it is evident that her consciousness of the class difference not only comes from the difference of their present situations but also from the difference of their origins. Throughout the novel Winnifred does not specify Nora's mother's ethnicity, but Nora strongly attributes her origin to her mother's race. Nora says, "I come of a race, on my mother's side, which does not easily forget kindnesses" (189). There is also a scene in which Nora remembers her siblings:

It seemed as if our heritage had been all struggle. None of us
 had yet attained what the world calls success. We were all
 straining and leaping up frantically at the stars of our
 ancestor (194)

Nora thinks that her family's struggle stems not only from their poverty but also from their ancestry. The struggle is fate because she is from Asian ancestry. It is obvious that forty year-old Hamilton has another life in Richmond because he rarely comes to see Nora and he does not try to make love to her. But Nora's consciousness as a "dark and foreign-looking" (41) girl is strong enough not to evoke any doubt in Hamilton's ambiguous attitude toward her.

Interestingly enough, *Me* stands against *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jane Webster, who writes an introduction to *Me*. Jean Webster was a close friend of Winnifred. "Winnifred admired Jean Webster and looked to her as a mentor, often asking her advice although Jean was a year younger than she" (Birchall 114). Webster, Mark Twain's niece's daughter, was a woman from a wealthy family. In Webster's juvenile romance, a white orphan girl has a financial supporter and she ultimately marries him. *Me*, however, stands against Webster's white middle-class perspective. *Me* implies that such a Cinderella story is only for white girls, who can become "society-girls" (309) by being educated and dressing neatly. It should be noted that "colored" women were always excluded from the "My Fair Lady" myth because they

could not be regarded as “ladies” in white society.¹⁰ Nora perceives the impossibility of becoming a lady by changing clothes. Webster’s advice was “oracle” (Birchall 114) to Winnifred, but she actually went beyond Webster’s romance by writing a story of a mixed-race working girl from the perspective of a working-class woman.

Indeed, clothes are closely connected with the social aspect in *Me*. Nora’s journey starts with the realization that clothes are the symbol of social status. When she wears a new “navy-blue serge dress” (14) made by her mother, her friend looks at her “with a rather wondering and curious expression” (13). Nora thinks that she looks very well in the clothes, but her American friend on the ship does not think Nora’s shapeless and probably old-fashioned dress is nice. Besides, as the ship comes near to Jamaica, Nora’s “thick and woolen” (6) clothes become too warm for her. Nora feels ashamed of her inappropriateness rather than of the heat:

I sensitively suffered in my pride as much from the humiliation of wearing my heavy woolen clothes as I physically did from the burden of their weight and heat. (15)

Discussing working-class women in the turn of the century, Kathy Peiss emphasizes the importance of clothing in the culture of young working-class women. Peiss writes: “Dress was a particularly potent way to display and play with notions of respectability, allure, independence, and status and to assert a distinctive identity and presence” (63). It is noted that Nora’s

participation in society starts with her realization of the importance of “appropriate” clothes. As Peiss writes that “appropriate attire was a requirement of social participation” (63), *Me* describes the typical experience of a young working-class woman who came to the United States at the turn of the century.

Peiss’s study of young working-class women, however, targets the experience of white women and does not see the experience of “colored” working-class women. What makes Nora’s experience special is that clothing is always complicated by the issue of race for Nora. Throughout the novel, Nora, who lacks an adequate wardrobe, borrows clothes from her friends. In Jamaica, she exchanges her Canadian clothes for the white muslin dresses of Miss Foster, a “yellow” girl with “pale blue” eyes and “a light, nondescript brown” (28) hair. Nora asks Miss Foster if she is “suitably dressed” (31) in her muslin dress. Then Miss Foster praises Nora’s appearance grudgingly and says:

“There’s only a handful of white women here, you know. We don’t count the tourists. You’ll have all you can do to hold the men here at arm’s length.” (31)

Miss Foster’s message is double-fold. She thinks that Nora in a nice white muslin dress is beautiful enough to hold many men in Jamaica. But she attributes the possibility of Nora’s popularity to the small number of white

women in Jamaica. Thus she implies that Nora cannot compete with white women in beauty, even if she dresses like a white woman.

Significantly, *Me* is penetrated by the idea that the clothes are not enough to cross the racial boundary. Nora's realization of her "racial" limitation in beauty is expressed most clearly when she compares herself with Lolly, her white friend. Lolly is nice enough to let Nora wear her clothes freely. Nora borrows "a little cream-colored chiffon frock, trimmed with pearl beads" (165-66) from Lolly, her best friend, but Nora is keenly conscious that even Lolly's nice dresses do not change her race:

Lolly was in blue, the color of her eyes, and she looked, as always, "stunning." Beside her, I'm afraid, I appeared very insignificant, for Lolly was a real beauty. I never went anywhere with her but people—men and women, too—would stare at her, and turn around for a second look. People stared at me, too, but in a different sort of way, as if I interested them or they were puzzled to know my nationality. I would have given anything to look less foreign. My darkness marked and crushed me, I who loved blondness like the sun. (166)

Even in Lolly's dress, Nora cannot get rid of her ethnicity, which rouses curiosity in people's minds. She is obliged to feel inferior because she cannot get "whiteness" and consequently she cannot get beauty.

Throughout the novel, Hamilton offers to pay for her college education and to buy clothes. Hamilton complains about Nora's blue serge suit, which she purchased for twelve dollars, saying that "it's too thin" (201), and asks her to let him buy more "decent clothes" (201) for her. But Nora always refuses his offer, because she thinks that she falls into the state of being "kept" if she accepts money from a man who does not really care for her. Lolly also assures Nora that it is "a fatal step when a man began to pay for a girl's room and clothes" (226). If we think that Nora is not just a working-class girl but a colored working-class girl, Lolly's advice is especially convincing because having financial support from a white man could only mean concubinage for colored girls in the time when miscegenation was taboo.

Actually Nora cannot cling to the myth of Cinderella because she is not a blond type. Nora thinks that marrying a wealthy man like Hamilton is impossible for her:

Only in novels or a few sensational newspaper stories did millionaires fall in love with and marry poor, ignorant working-girls, and then the working-girl was sure to be a beauty. I was not a beauty. (183)

Importantly, Nora's concept of beauty is completely based on the standard of white beauty. Like Toni Morrison's Pecola Breedlove in *Bluest Eye*, Nora cannot see herself as beautiful because she is not "white." Thus by describing

Nora's inferiority complex, Winnifred examines American body politics, which gives superiority to whiteness in terms of female beauty.

Edith, on the other hand, examines the problems she faces because of her appearance in terms of race. Edith writes that she first experienced the racist gaze on her body when she was "a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese:"

"Oh, Lord!" exclaims the informed. She turns around and scans me curiously from head to foot. Then the two women whisper together. (Sui Sin Far 218)

Edith writes how she was uncomfortable with the gaze of the nurses. Edith also writes about her childhood experience of being looked at with curiosity. She is called out by a white haired old man, and he exclaims, after surveying her:

"Ah, indeed! . . . What a peculiar coloring! Her mother's eyes and hair and her father's features, I presume. Very interesting little creature!" (Sui Sin Far 218)

Edith focuses on how her mixed-race features arouse curiosity and a wish to examine her in others. In his gaze, the old man reduces Edith's features into pieces. Edith writes how she felt bad in people's rude gaze on her body:

I had been called from my play for the purpose of inspection. I do not return to it. For the rest of the evening I hide myself

behind a hall door and refuse to show myself until it is time
to go home. (Sui Sin Far 218-19).

Thus Edith writes on the painful experience of a mixed-race child who is always exposed to people's curious eyes. Describing the experience of a small child who cannot protest against racism, Edith's writing succeeds in representing the psychological and social oppression of people of mixed race.

Rhetorically speaking, Edith's retrospective of her childhood experience is skillful enough to make the reader think that her writing is honest, sincere, and frank. But we should note that Edith avoids talking about her experience as an adult mixed-race woman. As I already discussed, she refers to her encounters with men and expresses how her mixed-race appearance had affected her sexual life. But Edith never speaks about her emotional conflict with her looks. While Winnifred writes honestly of her inferior feeling as regards white women, Edith does not write how she faced the white norms of female beauty.

The difference between Edith and Winnifred seems to stem from the difference of their attitudes for their visible identities. "Leaves" shows that Edith was negative about passing and performing the politicized identity. In "Leaves," Edith inserts the story of a half Chinese girl who passes as white. The girl's face "is plastered with a thick white coat of paint and her eyelids and eyebrows are blackened so that the shape of her eyes and the whole expression of her face is changed" (Sui Sin Far 227). Edith writes

that this girl “lives in nervous dread of being ‘discovered’” (Sui Sin Far 227).

Edith is sympathetic to this girl, who fears telling her boyfriend the truth of her identity, because she sees that passing gives people a psychological burden in exchange for economic and social advantage.¹¹ Although Edith permits passing figures, “passing” is understood negatively in her work.

In “Leaves,” Edith also refuses the idea of performing identity. She writes that “some funny people . . . advise [her] trade upon [her] nationality”:

They tell me that if I wish to succeed in literature in America
I should dress in Chinese costume, carry a fan in my hand,
wear a pair of scarlet beaded slippers, live in New York, and
come of high birth. (Sui Sin Far 230)

Who are these “funny people”? Is Winnifred included in them? The irony is that this is exactly the strategy of Winnifred’s success in the American literary market. Winnifred dressed in a Japanese kimono, lived in New York, and claimed that she comes of high birth by insisting that her mother was a noblewoman from Nagasaki.

In the photograph accompanying in the front piece of *The Wooing of Wistaria* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), Winnifred appears as a Japanese woman. Matsukawa explains that she “is ‘properly’ and ‘authentically’ dressed in a kimono and *hakama* (a Japanese split skirt sometimes worn over a kimono), an outfit associated with scholarly women of the time” (110). Winnifred, who “is facing sideways and is looking at a book

that she holds in her hands” (Matsukawa 110), is quite performative. In the picture accompanying the new edition of *The Heart of Hyacinth*, Winnifred also poses, leaning herself on a screen of Asian design. This picture looks as if it had been taken at the same time as the picture for *The Wooing of Wistaria* was taken. But a close look at this picture reveals that the clothes which resemble a kimono and a hakama are not an authentic Japanese kimono and hakama. Ling and Matsukawa also introduce the photograph, in which Winnifred, who wears the kimono “unauthentically” (Matsukawa 110), sits on the grass. Whatever the authenticity of her dressing, it is obvious that Winnifred sold the exotic image of Japan by dressing like a Japanese.

Winnifred’s creation of a Japanese identity by dressing in Japaneselike fashion is interesting if we think of Winnifred’s understanding of dressing in *Me*. As discussed above, *Me* is penetrated by the idea that dressing cannot make up race. Still, *Me* tells us that clothes can transform one’s visible identity. Although Nora refuses Hamilton’s offer to buy her clothes, she is too ignorant and innocent and is deceived by Hamilton. He takes Nora to what he calls bargain-shops and lets her buy clothes at extraordinarily reduced prices and pays behind her back. Without noticing Hamilton’s trick, Nora buys many expensive nice clothes and improves her looks. Nora’s great change in clothes makes Mrs. Kingston surprised. She says: “Nora is *wonderful!* Does it seem possible that clothes can make such a difference?” (236)

One of the important messages in Nora's change of clothes is that one can transgress the class boundary and challenge the notion of beauty by dressing, even if "whiteness" is inaccessible. Winnifred's disguise as a Japanese lady, in this sense, means the challenge not only to "the conventional boundaries of ethnicity and authenticity" (Matsukawa 106) but also to class and the notion of "lady" and female beauty. Winnifred, the "colored," cannot be a "lady" in the system of white significations because calling "colored" women ladies can be an insult to white ladies. But if she displaces the epistemological space by the act of dressing, she can be a "lady" and beauty too in an exotic sense. Winnifred's Japanese dressing, in this account, was the invention of the new category of womanliness in Western epistemology.

As autobiography, *Me* also tells us how Winnifred tried to escape from white body politics and struggled to establish her own identity. It is important that the moment of Winnifred's realization of herself as the subject comes from her rejection of being inside the white politics of female beauty. After examining Hamilton's mistress closely, Nora comes to understand the trick of beauty:

Strip her of her glittering clothes, put her in rags over a wash-tub, and she would have been transformed into a common thing. But I? If you put *me* over a wash-tub, I tell you *I* would have woven a romance, aye, from the very

suds. God had planted in *me* the fairy germs; that I knew.

(349-50)

In this moment, Nora gains the power of writing and self-confidence by stepping outside the Cinderella myth. Nora's imagination of stripping "glittering clothes" from Hamilton's mistress and putting her in rags is important if we see that her imagination reflects Nora's controlling power over dressing. When Nora stops trying to fit herself into the white norms of beauty and stands outside the Cinderella story, she realizes herself not as the object mapped by white ideologies but as the subject who participates in the political terrain of narratives. In other words, she is conscious that she can be a manipulator of ideologies in writing romances by the use of fairy germs planted in her brain. Thus she finds her power over fashion and fiction.

In *Me*, Nora starts her career as a stenographer but the novel ends with Nora's departure to New York to be a writer. On a symbolic level, Nora's shift from a stenographer to a writer means Nora's transformation from the scribe of white ideology to the challenger of white racist construction of romances. Lolly, who encourages Nora to establish herself as a writer, says that Nora should be a warrior in her life:

"Get away from this city; go to New York. Cut that man out of your brain as if he were a malignant cancerous growth. Use the knife of a surgeon, and do it yourself. Soldiers have amputated their own legs and arms upon the battle-field

You can do the same.” (355)

In the middle of the novel, Lolly says: “Nora, the only way to forget one man is to interest yourself in another—or many others” (211). Lolly, however, gives Nora different advice at the end, because she herself realizes that depending on a relationship with men cannot be a solution to the problems in life when she is betrayed by Marshall Chamber, whom she loved seriously. Through the metaphors of a surgeon and soldiers’ self-amputation, Lolly encourages Nora to restart her life by transforming herself into a warrior. Although Ling says that Winnifred is “not a challenger or protester, not a word-warrior, but a woman with her finger squarely on the pulse of her time” (55), Lolly’s words can be read as Winnifred’s feminist manifestation. Nora departs to New York to be “a word-warrior” who writes with “the knife of a surgeon” (*Me* 355).

In fact, Winnifred’s Japanese romances are more complex than Ling thinks. It is true that they depend on the white male Orientalist discourse, but they constantly displace white male significations. *Me* is also framed by the structure of conventional romance, which centers on the heroine’s relationship with a wealthy white man, but it deconstructs the myth of Cinderella and transforms the traditional female romance into female *buildungsroman*, in which a “colored” girl achieves her dream and success outside the frame of marriage.

Me ends with a scene in which Nora learns of Lolly's suicide on her way to New York. In the train, Nora chances to pick up a newspaper and reads the article informing her of her best friend's death in a hotel in Chicago. Lolly's death finalizes the collapse of the Cinderella myth in this novel. Lolly, "what men calls a 'stunning-looking' girl" (129) with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and "lovely, shining, rippling hair" of "the color of 'Kansas corn'" (130), cannot overcome her despair caused by the betrayal of her boyfriend who married "a rich society girl" (354). At the end, Lolly turns out to be a failure in her life while Nora steps to success.

Thus the final scene of *Me* highlights Winnifred's challenge to the form of romance based on white male significations. By describing Nora's independence, Winnifred opens a new horizon in the female bildungsroman. Winnifred also questions the ideology of conventional romances by describing Lolly as a victim of the Cinderella myth. Throughout *Me*, Winnifred criticizes the racism and sexism which penetrate the conventional romances that end in a white heroine's happy marriage with a wealthy, handsome man.

Me should be also given attention in terms of its abundant description of interracial female bonds. While Edith places herself as an isolated mixed-race figure who does not belong to either the white or Chinese community, Winnifred presents the possibility of a happy interracial female community. If we remember that white women such as Donaldina Cameron, a matron of the Chinese Mission Home in San Francisco, challenged racial biological

determinism by helping Asian women at the turn of century, the female bonds described in *Me* are noteworthy because they also show that female bonds functioned more or less as a critical force to racism in the white society in the days when society's adherence to the "one drop" rule and fear of intermingling dominated peoples' minds.¹²

Throughout the novel, Nora keeps close relationships with her girl friends. When Nora is in Dr. Manning's house in Richmond, she is helped by Mandy, a "black girl" (80) working as a domestic servant. Mandy is "a round-faced, smiling, strong-looking girl of about eighteen" (81). Nora asks Mandy to let her stay with her in her servant room because Nora finds that Dr. Manning tries to sneak into her bedroom at night. And Mandy offers help and comfort to Nora who is in panic. Nora, who was raised in a white environment, has racial prejudice and hesitation about black people. When she is kissed by Mr. Burbank, a black man in Jamaica, she is overwhelmed by disgust:

I felt that it was unclean, and that rivers and rivers could not wash away that stain that was on me. (56)

To escape from Mr. Burbank, Nora falls into the trap of Dr. Manning. As Linda Trinh Moser points out in the afterword of *Me*, the fact that Nora trusts Dr. Manning more than Mr. Burbank shows racist thinking.¹³ But Mandy's kindness melts Nora's racism, and Nora kisses her when she leaves Dr. Manning's house.

Estella and Lolly—white working-class girls—are also good friends of Nora. They not only become Nora’s models of the American girl, but they also facilitate Nora’s Americanization through friendship. First, Nora is impressed with Estella’s slangy speech. Through Estella, Nora acquires the vocabularies used by working-class American girls and assimilates herself into American life. Lolly provides Nora with the model of an American flirt. Lolly is a self-controlled city flirt who knows how to deal with men. Following Lolly, Nora also becomes a flirt and takes advantage of three white men by making false promises of marriage.

Nora also establishes friendship with Margaret Kingston, a white woman lawyer who is about forty to forty-five, while she is in Chicago. Margaret, who introduces herself as a woman who is keeping house “with another ‘old girl’”(212), looks like a pre-feminist and a pre-lesbian figure. Nora explains her as follows:

She was a big woman physically, mentally, and of heart.
 Good-humored, full of sentiment, and with a fine, clear brain,
 I could not but be attracted to her at once. She was talented,
 too. She wrote, she painted, she was a fine musician, and
 a good orator. She was a socialist, and when very much
 excited, declared she was also an anarchist. (212)

Although both Margaret and her housemate, Mrs. Owens, a woman about sixty, are described as “widows” living together, they look like a lesbian

couple. They treat Nora as if she were their daughter and they form a happy, interracial, women-only family. Although Margaret's political activities are not described in *Me*, her special interest in Nora shows that Margaret is a challenger of racial discrimination. She also plays an important role in saving Nora from concubinage by showing her the newspaper describing the scandal of Hamilton. In this sense, Margaret functions as Nora's protector.

The significance of these episodes inserted in *Me* is that they differentiate Winnifred's work from male-centered interracial narratives, in which Asian heroines are often isolated from the female community and connected only with their white men, their "saviors." But in *Me*, it is women rather than men who support and affect Nora. In fact, men are described as Nora's steppingstones. They help Nora in many ways, but no one of them has a great influence on her life. Winnifred herself writes in the middle of the book:

Some one once said of me that I owed my success as a writer mainly to the fact that I used my sex as a means to help me climb. That is partly true not only in the case of my writing, but of my work as a stenographer. I have been pushed and helped by men who liked me, but in both cases I *made good* after I was started. (147)

Winnifred's remarks on her success show that she had a strategy to establish herself as a writer. She admits that she exploited heterosexual

advantage and used white men as a means to help her climb in white-dominant society. Her strategy of success is similar to that of her Japanese romances, in which white male Orientalist narratives are used as steppingstones to develop female romances. Winnifred's works look conventional at first glance. But a close reading reveals that her works constantly displace white male significations with female significations and that Winnifred challenges racism and sexism in the process of displacement.

Although her passing authorship is often regarded as her strategy to gain social and economic advantage, we should note that it allowed Eaton to speak from the "in-between" space without choosing to be either Chinese or white. Her Japanese persona allowed Winnifred to challenge American identity politics by placing herself in the non-Western epistemological space of identity. Passing as Japanese, in this sense, can be interpreted as a strategy of displacing the epistemological horizon and criticizing racism and sexism from within.

Winnifred, however, was not always happy about her strategic success. Speaking about her works, Winnifred writes in *Me* as follows:

My work showed always the effect of my life—my lack of training, my poor preparation for the business of writing, my dense ignorance. I can truly say of my novels that they are strangely like myself, unfulfilled promises. (318-19)

Although Winnifred does not talk about her “unfulfilled promises” as a writer of Chinese ancestry, her words signify that she was not always satisfied with her works and her success. When she admits that her works are like herself, she must have been conscious of her passing identity, which allowed her a certain freedom but which restricted her in “unfulfilled promises” as a half Chinese writer.

After Winnifred published *Sunny-San* in 1922, she stopped writing Japanese romances and using a Japanese pseudonym. Her last two novels, *Cattle* (1923) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925), were written under the name of Winnifred Eaton Reeve. According to James Doyle, she “rediscovered her Chinese heritage” (57) and said to a Calgary interviewer in the late 1930s that she was ashamed of having written about the Japanese. But if we realize that this interview is just after Canada joined the war against Japan, it is difficult to say that Winnifred’s regret had come from a sense of betrayal for her Chinese identity. Rather her comment tells us that she was manipulating her identity in terms of politics. Japanese narratives declined when the relation between Japan and United States got worse after World War I.¹⁴ And Winnifred abandoned her Japanese identity when it lost its advantage.

¹⁴ Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995), 63.

² Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 3.

³ As for Belasco's collaboration with Long, see *The Bishop of Broadway: David Belasco* (New York: Library Publishers, 1954), chapter 18.

⁴ In *Pinkerton's Sons* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2001), Ren Saito assumes that Long heard the story of "Cho-Cho san" from his sister, Sarah, who was living in Nagasaki, Japan, as a missionary's wife (43). The model of "Madame Butterfly" is considered to be the Japanese wife of Thomas Glover, a Scottish merchant who came to Japan in 1857 and started trading in Japanese tea. He established a tea factory in Nagasaki and employed about a thousand Japanese female laborers. Later he also started to trade warships and arms to the Japanese. He is the first person who brought Western technology to Japan. Glover and his Japanese wife, Turu, married and spent the rest of their lives in Japan together. His mansion, "Glover's mansion" is a popular place that attracts tourists. As for Glover, see <<http://www.ifb.net/webit/glover.htm>>.

⁵ As for the representation of "excess of femininity," see also Gaylyn Studlar's article, "Masochism, Masquerade, and the Erotic Metamorphoses of Marlene Dietrich" in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (Ed. Jane

Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, New York: Routledge, 1990), 229-49.

Although Studlar does not argue Orientalism represented in Dietrich's roles of femme fatales, it is obvious that Dietrich embodies the notion of the "Oriental" woman in her masquerade of "excess femininity" in the films such as *Shanghai Express* and *The Devil is a Woman*.

⁶ Speaking about Loti's description of "the Oriental woman," Yegenoglu writes: "This fear of being deceived by the masquerading Oriental woman is also what characterizes Loti's representation of the Oriental woman in *Disenchanted*" (45). It seems that Loti's reaction to Japanese women was almost the same as his reaction to Islamic women. Loti's writing, in this sense, will help to conceptualize Said's "Orientalism" in a broader context of Asia.

⁷ As Loti's Orientalism and sexual anxiety, see Christian Gundermann's "Orientalism, Homophobia, Masochism: Transfers Between Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* and Gilles Deleuze's Coldness and Cruelty" in *diacritics* 24 (1994): 151-67. As for Loti's Japonism, see André Dedet's "Pierre Loti in Japan: Impossible Exoticism" in *European Studies* xxxix (1990): 21-25.

⁸ Marguerite Duras also employs this strategy in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *The Lover*. In both works, Asian men are described as sexual objects available to white women. Jane Campion's feminist film, *The Piano*, is also problematic in its use of a non-Western man for the expression of white female sexuality.

⁹ Although the implicit homosexuality represented by Japan needs more examination in a broader context, it is possible to think that one of the Western fascinations with Japan stems from the dream of the freedom of homosexuality. In fact, the Japanese samurai society allowed male homosexuality and encouraged the male bond between the master and the servant. In 1871, A. B. Mitford introduced the story of "the forty-seven ronins" in *Old Tales of Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1871). This story is about the faithful dependants, who formed a league to avenge their master's death.

¹⁰ Catherine Clinton argues how African-American women had been excluded from the category of "ladies:" "We know according the title of 'ladies' for black women whatever class or wealth was considered by white supremacists as insult to all white women" (313). If we think that Asian women also have been excluded from "whiteness," we can find an analogy between African-American women and Asian-American women.

¹¹ The passing girl Edith describes in “Leaves” is assumed to be her sister, May. See White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton*, 37-38. See also Birchall 19.

¹² In *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1834-1939* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), Peggy Pascoe writes on the contribution of mission women like Donaldina Cameron in the field of cross racial social service.

¹³ See Linda Trinh Moser’s “Afterword” in Winnifred Eaton’s *Me: A Book of Remembrance* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1997), 369-70.

¹⁴ The popularity of Japanese romances returned in the 1950s. Reflecting American victory over Japan, the narratives on Japan take the form of dominance by reducing Japanese women into submissive figures. One of the representative post-war Japanese romances is James A. Michener’s *Sayonara* (New York: Bantan Books, 1955), which was made into a film in 1957. In the first page of the book, the following comment is added by the publisher: “The Japanese woman—patient accepter, tender companion, wellspring of love . . . the most feminine woman in the world.”

CONCLUSION

IDENTIFICATION AND HYBRIDITY

“Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. It plays a part in the early history of the Oedipus complex.” –Sigmund Freud. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.¹

“I couldn’t live without America. It’s a part of me by now. For years I used to think I was dying in America because I could not have China. Quite unexpectedly one day it ended when I realized I had it in me and not being able to be there physically no longer mattered. Those wasted years when I denied America because I had lost China. In my mind I expelled myself from both.”—Chuang Hua. *Crossings*.²

“Ours is the era of the passing of *passing* as a politically viable response to oppression” (227), Carole-Anne Tyler says in “Passing: Narcissism, Identity, and Difference.” She discusses “passing” as follows:

Passing is the effect of a certain *affect*, an uncanny feeling of uncertainty about a difference which is not quite invisible, not quite unknown, not quite non- existent—a sort of life in death, in which otherness appears on the verge of extinction, dying into the self-sameness it still lacks even as it lacks difference. (227)

As Tyler says, passing means the extinction of the self within otherness.

Although it is a conscious act of identification, it carries the passing figure to

the uncanny space of identity, for passing requires one to erase the pre-passing past.

But how can one erase one's past? Larsen's *Passing* starts with the scene in which Irene receives a letter from Clare, who obscured the past by passing. After the encounter with Irene in the Drayton hotel, Clare becomes obsessed with her identity in the past. Clare writes to Irene:

“ . . . 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 freed of It's like an ache, a pain that never ceases ”

(145)

Clare's loneliness and pain come from her ex-identity. In passing, she erased her past and started to live as a white woman. But her meeting with Irene reminds Clare of the past and tears her mind.

Just like Clare Kendry in *Passing*, Winnifred Eaton also suffered from sustaining her “passing” identity. Eaton wrote an essay titled “You Can't Run Away From Yourself” and confesses her dilemma as a writer: “I was tired of writing and sick of New York. I felt like a human fly caught in the cogs of its mighty machine. An immense nostalgia took possession of me—a longing for something other than I had known. Writing became a sort of

torment—something I had literally to drive myself to.”³ She was tired of writing Japanese novels and pretending to be a Japanese writer: “I had written hundreds of short stories and eighteen novels—all concerned with Japan. I was labeled Japanese. The little oriental blood in me did not make me a real ‘Jap’ any more than the drop of French in me made me a French woman.”⁴ In her later years, she started to claim her “Canadian” identity to escape from her Japanese identity.

The burden of passing is not necessarily a guilty feeling for one’s own race. By placing one’s subjectivity in the uncanny space of uncertainty, passing figures fall into an identity crisis. By calling her life “this pale life” (145), Clare admits that her life is painful. Clare becomes a ghost haunting her past. Eaton also describes herself as soulless by using the metaphor of “a human fly caught in the cogs of its mighty machinery.” Her words tell us that she understood herself as a writer manipulated by commercialism.

Although the burden of passing is often considered as that of keeping a secret of one’s ex-identity, Clare’s “pale life” and Eaton’s “human fly” metaphor tell us that the burdens of passing are more than that. In passing, passing figures get new significations of the body. But the new sign of the body does not necessarily fill the lack of the old sign. A sense of loss in identity ceaselessly undermines the minds of passing figures.

Unpassing mixed-race figures are also not free from the dilemma of racial identity. Irene Redfield and Helga Crane, mulatto heroines of *Passing*

and *Quicksand*, choose the black identity, but they are not satisfied with their chosen identity. Irene cannot help desiring the privilege of whiteness. Helga in Denmark understands her father's longing for the black race. But she also cannot be satisfied with her role of a preacher's wife in the rural south.

Mixed-race identity is in the paradox of racial politics. Their hybridity often disturbs their full belonging to race, for the contradictory logic of sameness/difference operates in themselves. The Western notion of race, which is constructed for producing the fallacy of "pure whiteness" and giving it the privilege by differentiating whiteness with other "colored" races, is nothing but construction. The difficulty of racial identity, however, is that it is still substantial in one's formation in identification. As postmodern race theories claim, "race" could be fiction. But we still cannot escape from the process of racial identification, which makes us realize the close kinship to people of the same race.

The identity trouble of mixed-race figures looks unique and special at first glance. But actually it is not something unique. Rather it reveals that the process of identification basically stands on the conflict of significations, because the process of identification is the process of "internalization of the other" (Fuss 4). For example, queer theories criticize heterosexism as the assumption of human sexuality. In the heterosexual frame, one has to identify oneself as either "male" or "female." Identifying one's

gender/sexuality is, thus, the process of internalization of the co-existing identity, which is “the other.” It should be also remembered that Theresa de Lauretis questions the process of identification by questioning the social formation of identity from a feminist point of view. She argues the process of identification through the dynamics of significations between politicized identity and subjectivity.

The difficulty and complexities in identification lies in the fact that the process of identification is usually unconscious and deeply related to one’s subjectivity. Diana Fuss says:

Perhaps the most serious difficulty with designing a politics around identification is the fact that the unconscious plays a formative role in the production of identifications, and it is a formidable (not to say impossible) task for the political subject to exert any steady or lasting control over them. Given the capacity of identifications continually to evolve and change, to slip and shift under the weight of fantasy and ideology, the task of harnessing a complex and protean set of emotional ties for specific social ends cannot help but to pose intractable problems for politics. (9)

Fuss also argues the complex mechanism in identification:

Identification is both voluntary and involuntary, necessary and difficult, dangerous and effectual, naturalizing and

denaturalizing. Identification is the point where
 psychical/social distinction becomes impossibly confused and
 finally untenable. (10)

Fuss's argument is noteworthy because it speaks about a complex unsolvable problem in the process of identification. The anxieties of Larsen's mixed-race characters represent the complexities of identification. They suffer from the oppression of politicized identity and seek to control their subjectivities by resisting the hegemonic signifying force. But even in their resistance, they cannot be content with themselves, and they live like phantoms without belonging anywhere. Identification is not only an issue of subjectivity, and it is always involved in politics. But despite the political intrusion, it still remains the domain of subjectivity. As Fuss says, identification is indeed at the point of disruption of psychical/social distinction.

The significance of "passing" is to give light to the political process of identification. By revealing the fact that racial and ethnic identity can be mimicked though masquerading, passing disturbs the apparatus of race and ethnicity. By slipping and shifting the notion of identity "under the weight of fantasy and ideology," passing circles a question to the social category of identity.

Passing novels, however, question more than social norms of identity and race. By positing the characters in the mechanism of race, it questions

the issue of identity and race from within. As many passing novels ultimately attribute racial identity to the ethic of race, the topic of passing inevitably goes into the issue of subjective consciousness of one's identity. Thus, the theme of passing circulates in the uncanny space of identification. Fuss writes:

Identifications are the origin of some of our most powerful, enduring, and deeply felt pleasures. They are also the source of considerable emotional turmoil, capable of unsettling or or unmooring the precarious groundings of our everyday identities. These ghosts from the past can be neither casually summoned up nor willfully conjured away. They are shadow others, the phantasmal relics of our complicated psychical histories" (2).

Identifications take people to uncanny psychic space. To solve the psychological dilemma of identifications, postmodern narratives of identity provide us with the notion of "coming out." Coming-out, which is often opposed to "passing" or "being in the closet," however, does not necessarily mean freedom from the oppressive politics of identity, for "coming out is naively essentialist notion" (Tyler 237). It is "a strategic essentialism" (Spivak, "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution" 11) which operates in the realm of conscious choice, but we cannot deny that it is, to some degree, another identity fiction based on the logic of sameness and difference.

Although postmodern notions of identity start with the realization of identity as wavering, volatile, and fictional, it is not necessarily free from the anxieties coming from what Fuss calls as “the shadow others” (2).

The notion of hybridity opens up the new horizon of identification. “Hybridity cannot substitute for identity” (22), Samira Kawash says. “Hybridity in its most complex sense is in fact an impossibility: it is not something that one can be” (Kawash 22). Hybridity, which exposes the incompatibility of co-existing categories, is a constant challenge to the categorization of identity. It resists the boundary as the mark of sameness and difference. As examined in the novels by Larsen and Eaton, hybridity is also not always utopian, for the space is always threatened by signifying power that tries to put it in order. But still it allows us to imagine the possibility of the third space where significations are playing together without being bound and to resist against the essentialist notion of identity. Most importantly, hybridity can function as the space of metamorphosis of significations.

The trouble suffered by Larsen’s characters was in the strong racial oppression of African-Americans in American history. The mulatto body was the symbol of sin and guilt of white men in slavery as well as the challenge to the white construction of the color-line. Larsen’s characters cannot endure carrying the contradictory significations assigned to their bodies, because they are always trapped by oppressive ideologies wherever they go. They face

the impossibility of establishing their own subjectivities outside the political control of the self. Yet, in spite of their failure, we see their struggle for hegemonic significations. Their hybridity destroys them but it also throws acute criticism on society and requires the reconsideration of American racial and sexual politics. Winnifred Eaton's hybridity also made it possible for her to transform white male significations. Japanese identity gave Eaton a burden of false ethnic identity, but her consciousness as a half-Asian woman, allowed her to create a fictional world that challenges white male ideologies. She took male-dominant Oriental discourse back into women's hands and gave new meanings to interracial romances. And as working-colored women in the beginning of twentieth century, both Larsen and Eaton knew that fashion and fiction can create the experimental space of female subjectivity, which asks for a constant refiguration within white male significations.

Although Larsen and Eaton suffered from their mixed-race identity, Edith Eaton realized that she could only find space for her identity in hybridity, the space of impossibility. Edith writes:

. . . When I am East, my heart is West. When I am West, my heart is East. Before long I hope to be in China. As my life began in my father's country, it may end in my mother's. After all I have no nationality and am not anxious to claim any. Individuality is more than a nationality. . . . I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping

that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant “connecting link”(Sui Sin Far 230).

Edith refuses to identify herself with either races or ethnicities. Her rejection of “performing” as a Chinese woman writer, wearing a Chinese dress and a pair of scarlet beaded slippers and carrying a fan, can be understood as her rejection of ideological control of her identity. Without giving her nationality and race, she chooses to be a “connecting link” between significations.

Edith shares Julia Kristeva’s idea of cosmopolitan identity. Kristeva writes: “Let us give thought to the transitional nation that offers its identifying (therefore reassuring) space, as transitive as it is transitory (therefore open, uninhibiting, and creative), for the benefit of contemporary subjects: indomitable individuals, touchy citizens, and potential cosmopolitans” (*Nations Without Nationalism* 42). The “in-between” transitional space Kristeva suggests is the space of hybridity, in which incompatible significations exist together. Edith and Kristeva find significance in their transitory beings, which allow them independence and individuality. “In-between space” makes Edith a ‘connecting link” and Kristeva a “cosmopolitan.”

Larsen and Winnifred were not as optimistic as Edith and Kristeva. Actually as Helga’s trouble shows, “cosmopolitanism” is not as easy as Edith and Kristeva claim, for the force of identification always threatens the

subject with the logic of inclusion/exclusion. The sense of dislocation, isolation, and marginality always gives an ache to the cross-cultural and cross-racial subject. Just as “a feminist theory cannot proceed without presuming the materiality of women’s bodies” (Butler, “Cognitive Foundation” 17), cosmopolitanism cannot proceed by ignoring mixed-race bodies, which are the complex site of histories of conflict between races. Moreover, there is no single theory for mixed-race identity. Larsen was a black Danish woman living in the United States and she was different from many other light-skinned African-American women in her lack of African-American family. Winnifred and Edith were Chinese-British Canadian women living in the United States, and they did not have people of similar background outside the family. Mixed-race identity exists in an endless difference, and claims its multi-racial/multi-ethnic space. Larsen’s and Eaton’s novels, thus, keeps us questioning the notion of “hybridity” and mixed-race identity in a site of differences.

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York, Norton, 1959), 46.

² Chuang Hua. *Crossings* (Boston: Northern UP, 1968), 121.

³ See Winnifred Eaton's "You Can't Run Away from Yourself" (Unpublished manuscript. Box 3, Winnifred Eaton Reeve Fonds, Special Collections, University of Calgary Library, Calgary, Alberta, Canada). There is also another typescript in which Eaton writes: "I was tired of writing. I was sick of New York. I felt like a poor human fly caught in the cogs of its mighty machinery. I wanted to escape. I suffered an immense nostalgia—a longing for something other than I had known. Writing became to me a torment."

⁴ Ibid.

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