

The Necessity of Masquerade: Femininity in Joan Riviere and Nella Larsen

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Abstract:

*Sigmund Freud once said that the nature of femininity has long been an unsolvable and inescapable riddle for men yet for those who are women “this will not apply” since they are themselves “the problem”. This study aims to investigate this complex nature of femininity through the works of two women writers who were Freud’s contemporaries, the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere and the novelist Nella Larsen. The first part of the study delves into the figure of the women that are observed in Riviere’s seminal work “Womanliness as a Masquerade” and explores its reflections in psychoanalysis and literature in the context of historical changes. Arguing that the masquerade is the symptom and the cure of the women’s anxiety of trespassing the borders between domestic and public spheres, the essay investigates the grounds and implications of Riviere’s discourses on female sexuality and contrasts its problematic psychoanalytical assumptions with its indisputable socio-economical grounds. In the second part, the manifestations of masquerade are further elaborated in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*. It is maintained that the novel shares interesting parallelisms with Riviere’s concepts of masquerade and womanliness. The research expands on the notion of masquerade to conclude that masquerade as womanliness is a problematic solution to the trespassing anxiety and suggests that whereas the indirect nature of masquerade as womanliness may ensure small victories by*

preventing the retaliation of men, it does not empower women in the long run.

Key words: psychoanalysis, Joan Riviere, Passing, Nella Larsen, masquerade, womanliness, femininity

Introduction

“Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity – ... Nor will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem – those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem.” – Sigmund Freud, Lecture 33, *Femininity*.

Celebrated for his genuine wish to help people and find answers to the questions of sexuality and femininity, Freud nevertheless could not escape the prejudices of his time and has been condemned for perpetuating the faltering voice of the patriarch. As some critics point out, he is charged with channeling his subtle misogyny into his theories and generating a view of women that traps them into a model of sexuality which regards them as “failed men” (Appignanesi and Forrester 2000, 1). Living at a time when the distinction between public and private spheres were blurring with many women engaging in careers and receiving university education, his ideas regarding women are often regarded as reflecting the voice of the Victorian patriarch, reluctant to share his privileged position with the other sex. Considering his endeavors to give an objective voice to numerous women patients’ problems and his support for his female colleagues, it would be harsh to accuse Freud of sexism, yet it is apparent that as Appignanesi and Forrester note, he was a man of his time and many of his theories suffered as a result (1).

This seems to be one of the reasons why Riviere criticized Freud, a week after Freud’s death in her personal

tribute to him. Celebrating him for his humor and intellect Riviere (1991) nevertheless added that his “power to see new facts and to check new observations diminished considerably in him after his operation in 1924” (208). Joan Riviere who wrote around the same time, was renowned for her translations of Freud and her work as a psychoanalyst. In her seminal work “Womanliness as a Masquerade” Riviere (1929) focuses on a specific type of women that she refers as “intellectual” (303). Products of the present day necessities and changes, the women she describes have become a part of public space thanks to their careers. Yet unlike their predecessors, they display more feminine characteristics than masculine ones and seem to perform all the obligations associated with being feminine. They are outstanding mothers and wives, dexterous at housework, have satisfying social lives while also carrying out their occupational duties in a satisfactory fashion. Recounting her experiences with this type of women in her work as a psychoanalyst, Riviere claims that femininity for them is not natural but an adopted surface, a defense mechanism (306). Under the guise of femininity they veil their masculinity and ward off the anxiety of being punished by the father figure whom they feel to have castrated with their admission to professions and their following success (310-11). Supporting her analysis with the Kleinian insights regarding the Oedipus complex, Riviere presents a portrait of modern women in a patriarchal society in which values and ethics are in transition. At this point, it is important to note that as a result of the legal acts such as the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 that declared professions available to both women and men and successive world wars, women became more and more engaged in matters outside the house (Hughes 2004, 161). The transition between domestic space and public one however was by no means a tranquil one, drawing out anger and protest from many men who were probably dismayed at having to share their privileged status with women. Although the mode of

thinking of this period cannot be called Victorian, some of its ideals still lurked in the unconscious of men, revealing themselves in the chivalric and sexist attitudes towards women. Psychoanalysis is one of the areas where this outlook on women became clearly visible. It is essential to indicate that, for decades, regardless of Freud's intentions his analyses of women have been used as justifications for men to regard women inferior, stripping them off their intellectual faculties. As Mari Jo Buhle (1998) points out numerous books such as *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* by Christopher Lasch utilized psychoanalytic theories to rekindle a nostalgia for the good old days when women knew their place in the society and to castigate women back into their befitting space (280).

In *A Room of One's Own*, through her looking glass metaphor, Virginia Woolf (2004) an insight about the necessity on behalf of men to regard women as their inferior, claiming that for centuries women had functioned as mirrors through which men managed to regard themselves superior (41). By declaring half of world's population "inferior" to themselves, men acquired the advantage of a self-confident and self-assured stance in life (41-2). One might argue that the possibility of women telling the truth or their demand of a fairer share of life therefore runs the risk of the shattering of this looking glass, forcing men to recognize and come to terms with the fictiveness of their vision. Under these circumstances women, who have yet to get accustomed to their changing position in society and who might have internalized the doctrines of patriarchy may feel the need to protect themselves by adopting the mask of womanliness to distract men from their alleged masculinity. Whereas Riviere associates the need for a masquerade with women's anxiety at being caught in act with father's phallus and the ensuing penalty, here the concept of masquerade will be treated as a sign of consciousness on women's part with male notions of femininity and her active participation in exploiting

and manipulating this image to overcome her sense of unease at trespassing borders of private and public domains.

Under the guidance of the points discussed above, this study aims to investigate this complex nature of femininity through the works of two women writers who were Freud's contemporaries, the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere and the novelist Nella Larsen. The first part of the study delves into the figure of the women that are observed in Riviere's seminal work "Womanliness as a Masquerade" and explores its reflections in psychoanalysis and literature in the context of historical changes. Arguing that the masquerade is the symptom and the cure of the women's anxiety of trespassing the borders between domestic and public spheres, the essay investigates the grounds and implications of Riviere's discourses on female sexuality and contrasts its problematic psychoanalytical assumptions with its indisputable socio-economical grounds. In the second part, the manifestations of masquerade are further elaborated in Nella Larsen's *Passing*. It is maintained that the novel shares interesting parallelisms with Riviere's concepts of masquerade and womanliness.

Riviere, Womanliness and Masquerade

One of the first translators of Freud and a prominent psychoanalyst on her own right, Joan Riviere played a major role in the dissemination and understanding of psychoanalysis in Britain as the translation editor of the *International Journal* (Appignanesi and Forrester 353-54). Celebrated for her almost instinctual understanding of human psychology; and her elucidations and contributions to the theories of Freud and Melanie Klein, Joan Riviere became the hub through which psychoanalysis became internationally accessible (Heath 1986, 46).

Coming from an intellectually renowned family, of which one of the most respected members was Riviere's uncle, who

was a classics professor at Cambridge and had connections with psychoanalytic society, Riviere became familiar with psychoanalysis at a young age (Hughes 2004, 164). Suffering from a nervous breakdown upon her father's death, Riviere became a patient of Ernest Jones in 1916. Due to problems between Riviere and Jones, the analysis came to a halt, yet Jones, who was quick to realize that Riviere had a natural talent for psychoanalysis, recommended Riviere to Freud as a patient (164-65). It was during the time she spent in Vienna from 1922 to 1924, Riviere shed her role as an analysand and became fully involved in psychoanalysis with the support of Freud, whom she had impressed with her intellectual vigor and ability to transmit his ideas into English with superior understanding and elegant prose (166).

Throughout her long years of affiliation with psychoanalysis as a patient, analyst and instructor, Riviere made numerous contributions to psychoanalysis. Besides the role she played in that field, it is equally important to recognize that she was also a good observer of social movements and reforms, quick to catch up on their impact on the society. Hughes (2004) notes that like many other British women, Riviere was involved in suffrage meetings and demonstrations, and interested in movements for divorce reform and contemplated becoming the secretary of Legal Defence Society (161). Her involvement with the social movements at a time when many women found opportunities in careers involving arts and sciences that were until then predominantly dominated by men is in all likelihood account for her insight and understanding of the dilemmas facing the "intellectual woman" she addressed in her seminal "Womanliness as a Masquerade" essay.

Deriving from Ernest Jones' classification of women in his "Early Development of Female Sexuality", Riviere (1929) focuses on an intermediate type of women that falls into the homosexual group (303). In explaining this type of women

Riviere notes that although these women are mainly heterosexual in their development, they also display rather masculine characteristics, which she attributes to the inherent bisexuality in all of us. According to her, the most important determinant that affects whether a woman will turn out homosexual or heterosexual in development is the degree of anxiety they experience as a result of the conflicts between their masculinity and femininity (303).

One can argue that her subject, intellectual woman, emerges as a result of this inner conflict that is further exacerbated by the current social changes. Commenting on what makes this new type of women different from those who preceded them, it is apparent that Riviere (1929) was well in tune with her time:

Not long ago intellectual pursuits for women were associated almost exclusively with an overtly masculine type of woman, who in pronounced cases made no secret of her wish or claim to be a man. This has now changed. Of all the women engaged in professional work today, it would be hard to say whether the greater number are more feminine than masculine in their mode of life and character. In University life, in scientific professions and in business, one constantly meets women who seem to fulfil every criterion of complete feminine development. (303-04)

It can be said that while the new social order allowed women more room to express their femininity in a primarily masculine workspace, at the same time expected them to perform and accomplish traditional duties of a woman. Appignanesi and Forrester (2000) note that “the absence of a Victorian scheme of moral reference” stands as the main reason why this type of women emerged in the first place (363). Yet, I would suggest that it is because of the remnants of the Victorian ideal of femininity that women might have felt the need to hide behind the mask of womanliness. Society’s expectations of women were still relatively unchanged as can be seen from the actions of this

type of women and the sight of a masculine woman might have been particularly alarming and threatening for men at a time when women were perceived as replacing men. It can be argued that, although changes can occur overnight, the adaptation to them requires usually longer periods of time and when the changes are of the kind that threatens men's dominant place in the society, the performance of femininity can become a survival method.

After introducing the qualities of an intellectual woman, Riviere (1929) exemplifies her through one of her patients. Her first analysand is an American woman who has to face an audience occasionally because of the propagandist nature of her job. Riviere notes that regardless of the success of her performances, following them her patient suffers from severe anxiety attacks that she tries to obliterate via seeking reassurance in the form of compliments and sexual attention from "unmistakable father-figures" (304). While in private this patient confesses "feelings of rivalry and claims of superiority over many of the father figures" and bitterly rejects the idea that she is not their "equal", her public behavior indicates a discrepancy since she tries to gain their approval by flirting with them. Noting that the patient undermines her intellectual performance by her following actions, Riviere attributes the source of her anxiety and her problematic behavior to an unresolved Oedipus rivalry with the parents: her flirtatious behavior is actually an "unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father figures after her intellectual performances". Riviere indicates that the patient had strong feelings of identification and rivalry with her father during her adolescence, the extension of which continues in her adulthood (305). Through her successful intellectual performance, she identifies herself with her father and feels to have exhibited herself to in possession of the father's penis, and as a result of her symbolic castration of the father, she dreads the

punishment of him. To prevent father's revenge and to hide her masculinity, she therefore dons the mask of womanliness, offering herself as a castrated, innocent woman (305-06).

To further support her point, Riviere (1929) presents the case of an acquaintance of an intellectual lady, who despite her dexterity and technical know-how, feels compelled to conceal her knowledge and to masquerade as an "uneducated, foolish and bewildered woman" in her encounters with workmen (308). Probably afraid of offending these men with her knowledge, she opts for innocent, artless suggestions that are disguised as if they were "lucky guesses", instead of dealing with these men in a straightforward fashion (307-08).

Riviere's (1929) another example of intellectual woman is based on her everyday observations of a university lecturer who is also a wife and mother. This woman feels compelled to treat her masculinity "as a joke" in front of her male colleagues by wearing provocative clothing and acting in a flippant way. According to Riviere, this type of behavior indicates her inability to consider herself "on equal terms with men" (308).

Riviere (1929) then moves on to support her social analysis with the findings of the psychoanalysis. According to Riviere, the origin of the problem can be explained via castration complex in the Oedipal situation. The primal scene that makes her analysand aware of her lack is exacerbated by her disillusionment during weaning and suckling. This experience brings about powerful sadism directed towards both parents. Possessing the desired objects, mother and father become rivals of the girl and she is possessed by the desire to decimate her parents' loved objects which include the father's penis, the mother's feces and her children (309). Since she is fearful of mother's punishment, she directs her sadism towards her father and through her intellectual success, she becomes her father by castrating him (310). However the retribution of the mother is still feared since she was robbed of the father's penis. To placate the mother the girl replaces the father with

her “supremacy in having a penis to give back” and performs some of the duties of the father for the gratitude and recognition of her supremacy over other women while at the same time publicly cherishing “the virtues of ‘feminine’ women” in her masquerade (310-11). By stealing the desired “talisman”, the father’s penis, she robs the father of his social power, rendering him powerless and helpless (311). To mollify him, she masquerades in her “feminine guise for him, thus showing him her love and guiltlessness” (310) while performing many of his masculine functions herself – ‘for him’ under this mask of “womanly subservience” (311).

It is pointed out that the relations between the paper and the life is strong, thanks to Riviere’s questioning of the concepts of being an intellectual and a woman in the context of her time (Heath 1986, 46). In the first part of her observation and analysis of this intellectual woman, Riviere reflects her through the changing social reality surrounding her. However, as Heath suggests, the parts where she utilizes psychoanalysis to explain the problems that are rooted in the social stagnates the text and “seems to fix things for ever in the given, and oppressive, identities, with no connection through to the socio-historical realities that it also seems accurately to be describing” (56-7). Unlike Freud and many of her contemporary colleagues, she successfully observes and describes problems in the big picture. However, at the end she feels compelled to constrain and explain the behavior of this woman within the boundaries of psychoanalysis. Her implicit understanding of the problem - that is identity is relational to the social reality that one lives in - suffers as a result when she tries to explain intellectual woman’s problem through castration complex in the Oedipus situation. According to Heath, Riviere presents us the psychical and the social together yet at the same time keeps them apart, favoring the former over the latter (57). One can argue that she was subconsciously aware of their discrepancy and thus opted for a spatial distance between them in the text.

Yet, this does not prevent the parts of her psychoanalytical argument from sounding forced and almost as if juxtaposed. The end product of her aggregation feels unsatisfactory since psychoanalysis fails to answer the questions she raised.

The reason why she insists on furnishing her argument with the psychoanalytical concept of penis envy remains ambiguous. One can attribute her tendency to link women's problems to the lack of phallus to the phallogocentric and patriarchal roots of the psychoanalysis itself. Considering that many of such theories of this field were generated by men who seemed to exhibit ambivalent attitudes towards women, her adoption of the concepts regarding female sexuality that the reader might today regard as misogynistic comes as no surprise. Appignanesi and Forrester (2000) claim that it would be unfair to see women psychoanalysts "as mere pawns in a boy's game of institutional power struggles" considering the high percentage of women in this profession and their contributions as analysts and theorists (6). However, as they later point out, it is a puzzling fact that none of Freud's contemporary women colleagues denied the very existence of the penis envy, except for disagreeing with him as to the source of it (435). Even Karen Horney, one of the most blunt critics of Freud accepts it as the essence of femininity:

Every little girl who has not been intimidated displays penis envy frankly and without embarrassment. We see that the presence of this envy is typical and understand quite well why this is so; we understand how the narcissistic mortification of possessing less than the boy is reinforced by a series of disadvantages arising out of the different pregenital cathexes: the manifest privileges of the boy in connection with urethalerotism, the scopophilic instinct [the visual drive], and onanism. (quoted in Appignanesi, and Forrester 433-34)

Examining the early common responses to the theory of penis envy and its centrality in the sexuality discourses of psychoanalysis, the contemporary reader might feel confused

due to the equation of the social power of the man with his genitals and woman's social disadvantage with her lack of it. As some critics point out, many believe penis envy to work on a metaphorical level, symbolizing an "envy of the male's social privileges for the young girl: his power, his status, his capacity to dominate others" (Appignanesi, and Forrester 2000, 458). It can be said that the exaltation of the phallus and the acceptance of penis envy as the normal development path for the young girl implies internalization of the inferiority that phallogocentric society forces upon women. One can argue that this compliance is a direct result of the years of prejudice, doubt and suppression of women and by its internalization it becomes more of a self-fulfilling prophecy as in justification for the inferior position of women in society because of their lack. After all, women might have internalized men's perception of them or the apparent acceptance of penis envy might actually stand for an act. It is interesting to see that Riviere, so vigilant in her observations of the society, ignores this crucial and key point in her argument.

Yet her description of womanliness as a masquerade raises new questions. The fact that for Riviere (1929), there is no difference between masquerade and womanliness seems to call attention to the fictiveness of femininity:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (306)

By pointing out the performative nature of womanliness, Riviere poses the question of its reality. It is a mask "behind which man suspects some hidden danger" (Riviere 1929, 312).

Womanliness-masquerade is an act adopted by women as a defense mechanism to ward off possible attacks from men. When women masquerade, they do it for reasons of protection and they act in a feminine way that men expect women to behave. The essence of womanliness or whether there is an essence is ambivalent at this stage of Riviere's argument. Heath (1986) explains the complex relationship between essence and femininity as such: "The masquerade is a representation of femininity but then femininity is representation, the representation of the woman" (53). At this point one may ask whose representation womanliness is. I would argue that women's masquerade is based on their understanding of men's perception of women. The manipulation of reflection consolidates the act of masquerade, since it means women can now see the femininity which is a fundamentally male construct as something apart from themselves and can employ it to their own advantage. According to Mary Ann Doane (1991) this makes masquerade a powerful tool: "The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman" (32). One can argue then, that the act of masquerade, which involves the women's utilization of the image to reproduce their reality, implies a tacit understanding of the difference between the image and the real. Instead of giving in to misogynistic perception of them as passive, women actively exploit men's idea of what should be a woman to their own ends. By masquerading as good wives, mothers and attractive co-workers, not only do they enjoy the success outside home but also solve the problem of anxiety that arises from a feared retribution of men as a result of their visible masculinity. Thus, the feminine masquerade functions as a veiled mechanism of survival and struggle at a time of social change, when the ideas of it are yet to be embraced in their entirety by the whole society. Virginia Woolf's (2004)

comment on the spectacle of women further sheds light on the subject of masquerade and why it might be necessary:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size... That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. And it serves to explain how restless they are under her criticism; impossible it is for her to say to them this book is bad, this picture is feeble, or whatever it may be, without giving far more pain and rousing far more anger than a man would do who gave the same criticism. For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgement, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? (41-2)

The comment goes on to explain the necessity of masquerade. The fragility of man's ego, dependent on an illusory perception of woman demands persistence of the image of the latter. To ward off possible threats to his fanciful self-perception, man needs to control the specter of woman and suppress the signs revealing the make-believe nature of his social order. The shattering of this looking-glass is unacceptable and he is ready to retaliate and confiscate. Woman, aware of the his gaze and its meaning, is afraid of his retaliation since she is already a trespasser and a thief, wielding positions in society that traditionally belonged to him. In order to thwart an attack and thus reduce the level of her anxiety, she takes the indirect route of the masquerade. By reflecting back what he expects from her, she lulls him. Thanks to her masquerade, he, like a benevolent patriarch, condones her transgression under the false feeling of security and she gets to possess his power without facing serious consequences.

The efficiency of masquerade, of course, does not necessarily mean that it is the best answer to the problem of

power struggles in society. It is problematic in itself in terms of its perception of women and its deceitfulness. However, it nonetheless functions as a quick fix without dealing with the important issues directly. A more fundamental solution requires more time, space and power and most importantly a departure from the masquerade, which is yet to be accomplished.

The Experience of Masquerade in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

It's possible to see the reflections of masquerade in Nella Larsen's *Passing*. Famous for the multiplicity of its meaning, *Passing* has been celebrated for its treatment of the complex issues surrounding race, class, gender, space and identity. Under the light of the points discussed in the previous chapter, the novel's relation with the concepts of femininity and masquerade will be explored through the characters' in this chapter.

The story revolves around two women who were friends in their childhood and their reencounter a decade later. Meeting by chance at a luxurious hotel's roof cafe while both passing as white, Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry rekindle their friendship after twelve years, despite the former's reluctance. Seemingly disturbed by the permanent passing of Clare, yet fascinated and obsessed with her lifestyle and beauty, Irene becomes a part of the events that eventually lead to Clare's demise. Both women are married with children; Irene is married to a black doctor and living a comfortable upper middle class life, while Clare is married to a racist and affluent white man, oblivious of his wife's actual racial roots. Although, Irene has qualms about Clare's morality and sincerity, the story hints at the fact that Irene herself, is not morally superior to the other and both were married for social and economic security as suggested by David Blackmore (1992, 478). Despite their dissatisfaction with their married life, Irene and Clare

masquerade as good wives, loving mothers and socially and intellectually active women. After a decade of passing as a white person, Clare yearns to reunite with her racial identity without revealing the truth about it to her husband. By taking advantage of her husband's business trips to other cities, Clare eventually becomes a part of Irene's social circle. Mistrustful of Clare's beauty and manners, Irene becomes obsessed with the suspicion that her husband, Brian is cheating on her with Clare. Due to her fear that a confrontation might cause her husband to leave her and therefore end her marriage, which has become highly dependent on her performance, Irene chooses to continue masquerading as if everything is fine, while her suppressed fears threaten to erupt constantly.

The novel shares interesting parallelisms with Riviere's concepts of masquerade and womanliness. Both protagonists' lack of social power and their desire for it, which is associated with masculinity, puts them in situations where they have to put on a mask of womanliness to ward off the anxiety that ensues from the fear that their rights and standards of living might be constrained if the masculine nature of their material desires are discovered. It can be argued that this is why Irene and Clare are in constant masquerade, posing as if they are perfect wives and mothers. By becoming the embodiment of perfect woman, they reflect back what men's gaze seek and distract their male audience from their real purpose with their show of femininity. Commenting on the nature of masquerade, Riviere (1929) notes that while it is successful with men, to other women it is transparent and ineffectual (311). And in *Passing*, it is through from Irene's perspective that Clare's act of femininity and her mask becomes apparent, whereas men cannot detect it. Intrigued by the over-the-top performances of Clare, Irene notices that she always had that quality, observing that while she behaved in a self-interested, distant, and difficult way she also had "a strange capacity of transforming warmth and passion, verging sometimes almost on theatrical

heroics” even in her childhood (Larsen 2011, 2). Reminiscing about the past, Irene notices that Clare’s perhaps most theatrical act happened right after her father’s death:

Clare, who was at that time a scant fifteen years old, had just stood there with her lips pressed together, her thin arms folded across her narrow chest, staring down at the familiar pasty-white face of her parent with a sort of disdain in her slanting black eyes. For a long time she had stood like that, silent and staring. Then, quite suddenly, she had given way to a torrent of weeping, swaying her thin body, tearing at her bright hair, and stamping her small feet. The outburst had ceased as suddenly as it had begun. She glanced quickly about the bare room, taking everyone in, even the two policemen, in a sharp look of flashing scorn. And, in the next instant, she had turned and vanished through the door. (Larsen 2011, 2)

As Irene’s commentary on Clare implies, the main reason behind her masquerade seems to be getting hold of social power. Her bizarre behavior right after her father’s death suggests she is experimenting with it and observing the impact it creates. Her adult life might be seen as based on a more professional performance of her early experiences, more reliant on her show of femininity to ward off potential threats to her secret identity. To Irene, Clare’s act is transparent of course:

A waiter was taking her order. Irene saw her smile up at him as she murmured something – thanks, maybe. It was an odd sort of smile. Irene couldn’t define it, but she was sure that she would have classed it, coming from another woman, as being just a shade too provocative for a waiter. About this one, however, there was something that made her hesitate to name it that. A certain impression of assurance, perhaps. (Larsen 2011, 6)

The scene is reminiscent of the case of the woman in Riviere’s text, who has the tendency to act around workmen as an innocent, simple and ignorant person. Sitting at a racially segregated roof-café, and passing for a white person, Clare uses

her femininity to ensure positive responses from men and the success of her performance. Although Irene readily recognizes the masquerade in another woman, she seems, by and large, unaware of her act. Stuck in a loveless, businesslike marriage with a man who blames her for the failure of his dreams, Irene masquerades as a happy loving wife, a good mother and an intellectual woman. Although she does not admit of doing so, she puts on her daily mask of innocence and ignorance in her encounters with her husband, “to direct and guide her man, to keep him in the right direction” (44). Her attempt at a conversation with her husband about their son Junior’s education sheds further light on her masquerading:

What, she wondered contritely, was she to do next? She was vexed with herself for having chosen, as it turned out, so clumsy an opening for what she had intended to suggest: some European school for Junior next year, and Brian to take him over. If she had been able to present her plan, and he has accepted it, as she was sure that he would have done, with other favourable opening methods, he would have had that to look forward to as a break in the easy monotony that seemed, for some reason she was wholly unable to grasp, so hateful to him. (Larsen 2011, 46)

Instead of directly putting her idea into words, Irene indirectly suggests at it. When her husband clearly misunderstands her intention, she laments over the fact that she had chosen the wrong “opening” to introduce her subject. Unable to regard herself on equal terms with her husband, she reminds of Riviere’s patients, operating under the mask of innocence and ignorance. Abstaining from offending her husband’s fragile ego and incurring his rage, she opts for cues and openings in her attempts at communication with him that she thinks will guide him to her way of thinking by a circuitous route. The fact that she refrains from owning her idea seems to imply at his reluctance to share his power and position as the authority.

Clare seems to have a similar display of compliance and deference in her relations with her husband. Although it is highly artificial, it functions well as a defense mechanism, distracting her husband from her real intention of sharing his socioeconomic power. One of the most prominent moments of the novel when the masquerade reaches its hiatus is the scene that occurs between Clare, Clare's husband, Irene, one of their childhood friend, Gertrude Martin who due to her being light-skinned enough can pass as a white person as well. While the old friends discuss their current lives and the notion of passing, Clare's husband, Bellew who is unaware of their racial identity, joins them by calling Clare "nig" in a jocular manner. He explains that Clare who was "as white as a lily" when they first met, is getting darker and darker as the years pass by, jokingly adding that she will wake up one day to find herself turned into black one of these days (Larsen 2011, 29). Irene, shocked and offended by his remarks, is seized by an almost hysterical paroxysm of laughter, induced by the irony and absurdity of their masquerade: "An on-looker, Irene reflected, would have thought it a most congenial tea-party, all smiles and jokes and hilarious laughter" (30). Irene even notices "a queer gleam, a jeer" in Clare's eyes while she introduces her husband (29), implying that Clare is conscious of her act and presents what her husband expects from her by not contradicting with his racist remarks. She continues her masquerade as a beautiful, docile and loving wife to attain her masculine desires.

After this episode of masquerade, Irene suffers from anxiety. However, her commentary on the situation also implies that despite her anger and stress, she is amazed by the way she masks her emotions: "And all the while she was speaking, she was thinking how amazing it was that her voice did not tremble, that outwardly she was calm... It was, Irene thought, unbelievable and astonishing that four people could sit so unruffled, so ostensibly friendly, while they were in reality seething with anger, mortification, shame" (31-32). Unable to

discern her episodes of masquerade with her husband, Irene notices it in another woman's conduct, exacerbated by the fact that Clare's whole life as a married woman depends on a deceptive self-representation.

Towards the end, Irene becomes suspicious of a secret liaison between Brian and Clare just before hosting a party. Although the possibility that her fears might be true gnaws at her, she nevertheless chooses to keep up appearances and hosts her party anyway: "Hideous. A great weariness came over her. Even the small exertion of pouring golden tea into thin cups seemed almost too much to her. She went on pouring. Made repetitions of her smile. Answered questions. Manufactured conversation" (Larsen 2011, 72). Her behavior suggests that Irene is conscious of the fact that she is a spectacle, an object of male's gaze. Her manipulation of this gaze is her way of becoming a player in the game for social power. By masquerading as the perfect host, she adopts the mask of femininity, which through its fictiveness becomes a denial mechanism. Afraid of losing her socio-economic status and power in a possible confrontation with her husband, she suppresses her fears through her act.

It is apparent that masquerade as womanliness is a problematic solution to the anxiety that women feel because of their trespassing. While it functions well on the surface, it abstains from dealing with the real problem in a straightforward manner. Arising from the need for more social power, masquerade enables women to have it only momentarily. Whereas the indirect nature of masquerade as womanliness may ensure small victories by preventing the retaliation of men, it does not empower women in the long run. Doane (1991) suggests that since it is a performance based on male's gaze, femininity becomes dependent on his perspective "for its very definition" (38). It can be said that this dependency causes the experience of masquerade to become a double-edged sword. A need for a more direct strategy is even more

pronounced now, since woman runs the risk of becoming a her own joke in her masquerade as Irene points out to Gertrude after leaving the mock tea party at Clare's house: "Well, it was a rather a joke" Irene told her, "on him and us and maybe on her" (Larsen 2011, 33).

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