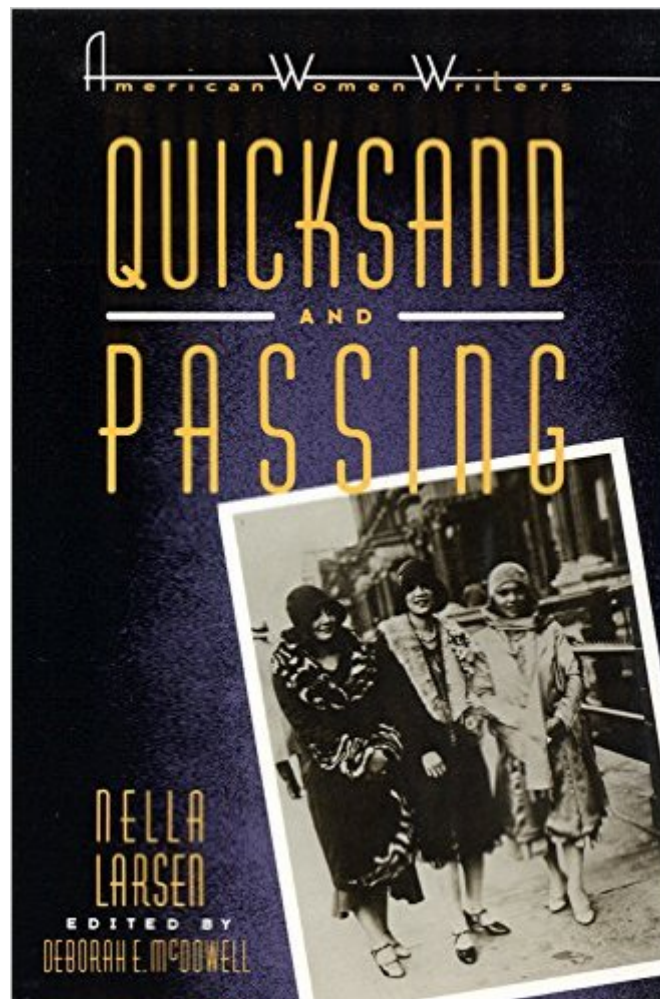


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# Quicksand And Passing (American Women Writers)



## Synopsis

"Quicksand and Passing are novels I will never forget. They open up a whole world of experience and struggle that seemed to me, when I first read them years ago, absolutely absorbing, fascinating, and indispensable."--Alice Walker"Discovering Nella Larsen is like finding lost money with no name on it. One can enjoy it with delight and share it without guilt."Â --Maya Angelou"A hugely influential and insightful writer." --The New York Times"Larsen's heroines are complex, restless, figures, whose hungers and frustrations will haunt every sensitive reader. Quicksand and Passing are slender novels with huge themes." -- Sarah Waters"A tantalizing mix of moral fable and sensuous colorful narrative, exploring female sexuality and racial solidarity."-Women's Studies International ForumNella Larsen's novels Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929) document the historical realities of Harlem in the 1920s and shed a bright light on the social world of the black bourgeoisie. The novels' greatest appeal and achievement, however, is not sociological, but psychological. As noted in the editor's comprehensive introduction, Larsen takes the theme of psychic dualism, so popular in Harlem Renaissance fiction, to a higher and more complex level, displaying a sophisticated understanding and penetrating analysis of black female psychology.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Passing and Quicksand are fine novels rich in both history and intrigue. Passing's complex representation of the "race" problem is brilliant in its subtlety. What makes the novel so rich

is Larsen's intelligent use of dialogue and her vivid imagery. The paragraph describing Chicago heat in the middle of summer is mind boggling. The friendship between Clare and Irene exposes complexities inherent in female relationships. Certainly the love triangle that develops only adds to the interest level of the narrative. It's a shame that this novel does not have a wider reading audience.

*Quicksand* and *Passing* are two incredible novellas from an under-taught and under-valued writer, Nella Larsen. I encourage everyone to read this book. HOWEVER this edition by Wilder Press is terrible. If you are a student, teacher, or someone who cares about the quality of your books, I advise AGAINST this copy. It has random paragraph breaks in the middle of sentences, multiple typos, and absolutely no extra-textual information - no introduction, no information on how the text was edited - nothing. Most importantly, it omits the epigraph - a section of a Langston Hughes poem that really sheds light on the overall themes of the novels. If you want a better quality (and probably cheaper) read, go with the Rutgers University Press edition. Buying this version of the text was a complete waste of my money, as I'll be selling it and buying the Rutgers UP edition.

I read this book years ago, in college. It made me much more sympathetic to the struggles of biracial (black and white) women, of the past and today -- I am an Asian-American female. The book is a beautifully written, but painful story of how the protagonist moves through her life in societies where she is kept down on many levels (socially, economically, psychologically, physically) -- basically her journey through the "quicksand" of classism, racism, and sexism. The book deserves a wide audience.

This book is a fast reading, simple to understand look into the life of black women during the Harlem Renaissance. These short stories give a deep glimpse into a part of history that is usually forgotten. Nella wrote of her experiences and I think that is what makes these short novels so great.

*Quicksand* is one of my favorite fictional stories. In truth, the word "fiction" can not adequately touch upon the essence of this novel. Helga Green's biographical information is nearly identical to that of Nella Larsen, and in Helga we, the readers, see a reflection of Ms. Larsen. Helga is a heroine, tragic not because of her fate, but of her resignation to her fate and inability to rise above it. Larsen realizes the bonds of racism and sexism that held steadfastly in place, whether it's in Harlem or Copenhagen. A reader may either sympathize with Helga's plight or sneer at her stupidity. But

perhaps that's what Larson wants to portray. Sometimes one is irrational when it comes to the matters of the heart or the lack of. Even the most intelligent of us. We would gasp in surprise if the same fate fell upon others but would seem resigned when we are in the same situation. *Passing* is considered by many critics as Larsen's "lesser novella." True, it is not as riveting as *Quicksand*, but it explores deeper issues of gender and the color barrier. While in *Quicksand* the relationship between Helga and Anne is at best lightly touched upon, the one between Clare and Irene is more complex and poignant. Throughout the novel, there is a tinge of homoeroticism, if you read between the lines. This is a story, not so much of the tragic mulatta (even though tragedy tends to overshadow all else in Larsen's work), nor merely of the phenomenon of passing for white, but of two women's exploration of their own gender, sexual, and racial roles in the tumultuous society of upper middle-class Harlem. Both stories written in the early 1930s period, this book features Larsen at her best. Even though the endings to both are quite anti-climatic, one should find in her stories enough food for thought and a quite thorough insight into female African American conflicts and culture during the Renaissance era.

*Passing* is an amazing narrative. A key to the success of the narrative in Nella Larsen's *Passing* is the use of a limited third-person narrator, because it allows the villain to hide. Through the voice of Irene Redfield, characterizations get meted out as she sees fit, and only by Irene's portraits of others can we arrive at her own characteristics and motivations. As Irene describes and interacts with others, she unwittingly betrays her shrewd plans. Whether done subconsciously or not, her subtle actions and inactions tattle on her, yet she keeps the narrative vague enough that she comes off as a victim of Clare. Irene paints herself as a sheep and Clare as a wolf, when in fact the opposite is true. The affair that presumably takes place between Clare and Brian seems to catch Irene off-guard. Keep an eye on Irene. Amazing narrative on several levels. The crossing of domains in this novella is outstanding. Because Irene has control of the narrative, the childhood events and characterizations indict Clare as untrustworthy instead of as a misfortunate child who overcomes great obstacles. This distrust raises questions later on when Clare all but moves into Irene's house, and Irene doesn't protest for an "obscure reason."

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