

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**INTERRACIALITY AND MOTHERHOOD**

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### INTERRACIALITY AND MOTHERHOOD

On the existential level, biracial people at least have the unique experience of living the racial realities of more than one group in the course of their innermost private lives. Lewis R. Gordon, "Race, Biraciality, And Mixed Race," in *Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader* (163)

The biracial offspring who attempts to affirm both identities faces the social reality of both identities existing on unequal terms....the biracial child stands below whiteness and, by virtue of biraciality, in affirmation of black inferiority. (162-63)

"It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it." (Larsen, *Passing* 89)

This chapter aims to explore the predicament of the biracial mothers and the resultant trauma in their children in Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins' *Contending Forces* (1900) and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) and Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Comedy American Style* (1933). With a critical analysis of the mother figures, this chapter demonstrates the tragic plight of mothers as well as daughters of mixed race heritage because of their inability and failure to fit either into the 'white world' or the 'black world'. Mothers like Sappho Clark in *Contending Forces*, Karen Nilssen in *Quicksand*, reject their mulatto children due to their inability to assert maternal love for reasons associated with society's disparaging attitude towards mixed-race people. This chapter presents how the ultimate rejection of Helga Crane by her mother is mainly responsible for her lack of self estimation and her negative attitude towards motherhood and maternity. This chapter also focuses on the courage and goodwill of a mother (Sappho Clark) who finally asserts her maternity overcoming the obstacles of interracial identity.

There is also the case of Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry in Larsen's *Passing* where Iene marries a coloured man and makes no pretence at passing and Clare marries a white man

successfully integrates into white society till her love for Black culture leads to her detection by her husband. However, the problem of skin colour looms large in their lives as their sense of self is determined by their skin colour. Irene starts wondering if her husband is attracted to her fair skinned friend Clare. Again it is skin colour which gives these women the courage to try ‘passing,’ which either gives them a momentary thrill like Angela and her mother in Jessie Redmon Fausset’s *Plum Bun*, or plunges them into a situation where the whole life is at stake like Clare Kendry in *Passing*.

In Fausset’s *Comedy: American Style*, it is a coloured mother, Olivia, who rejects her son because he takes after her father and is brown skinned. Olivia who is fair skinned but born to coloured parents, decides as a child that her dark skinned father is to be blamed for her being called a nigger by an acquaintance. She tells herself: “How could they—how *could* they have made her colored”(8)? Fortunately or unfortunately, her father dies soon after, leaving her mother to shift to another town where she can work in a mill and earn a living to support them both. It is here that Olivia who is mistaken for an Italian decides to pass herself as a white girl and tells her mother that “since the girls, and the teachers too, at school think I’m white, don’t you think I’d better be white”(12)? Her mother tries to tell her that “Colour does’nt mean anything” (12). A few years later she asks her daughter “do you mean to tell me you’re willing all your life to sail under false pretenses”(14)? That is what Olivia does with a singleness of purpose which has tragic consequences for her husband and children.

This chapter deals with the following hypotheses:

- i. that mulatto mothers face problems personally and on behalf of their children;
- ii. that it is quite harmful for a child when he/she has been placed in an interracial situation as it creates complexities and confusion;
- iii. that such children carry their complexes into adulthood as parents or as individuals;
- iv. that sometimes the colour problem becomes a fixation without any reason
- v. that it makes them colour conscious to the extent of dehumanizing them

- vi. that coloured people with white skins sometimes try to pass as white
- vii. that passing can be risky and destructive for both mother and child.

This chapter intends to discuss these novels from the perspective of interraciality and motherhood. It will specifically focus on how mothers as well as daughters of mixed race origin have to suffer through society's misconceptions and marginalization and deviate from the set rules of motherhood and maternity.

It is seen that such children have to go through the trauma caused by the absence of mothers, like Helga Crane in *Quicksand*. Clare in *Passing* has a predominantly white father and a black mother but the mother is long dead. Her father dies when she is around twelve years old. Her father Bob Kendry, despite being educated, has to work as a janitor because of his marriage to a black woman and live in a predominantly African-American locality. After his murder, Clare goes to stay with her father's aunts who are white like him. It is here that her troubles start as she is made to work very hard for her keep and often reminded of the 'sins of her parents.' On the other hand, such separation sometimes may result in a kind of problematic behavior on the part of the child though the mother ultimately accepts her child, trying to overcome the burden of Interraciality as seen in Hopkins' *Contending Forces*. Again Clare Kendry (*Passing*) who grew up without a mother behaves in a blissfully careless way as she moves through people and through life. That, however, is how the mature Clare behaves. From her accounts we see that her father's white aunts who give her shelter as a twelve-year-old never let her forget her plight and subject her to enforced labour as a way of 'atonement' for her parents' sins. It is not surprising that Clare uses this experience to run away and marry a prosperous white man as soon as she gets the opportunity.

Like the Mixed-Race men, the Mixed-Race women are generally supposed to be inferior to the thoroughbred. Torn in between races, it is difficult for mixed race women, especially mothers to overcome the dilemma resulting from racial anxiety including physical and mental abuse issuing out of colour bias. Such mother figures have to struggle throughout their lives in search of safe localities for their children. Race and colour thus appear as main factors while providing an appropriate growing environment for their children. It is quite difficult for mixed race mothers to lead normal lives as they have to carry the burden of society's neglect or marginalization. Interestingly, fair men

or women born to mixed parents still have to consider themselves coloured. In most cases they are expected to marry men or women of colour, irrespective of the colour of their own skin. Moreover, they face the problem of locating themselves within a community as they are acceptable neither to blacks or whites. Sometimes they assume a fluid identity as they try to fit in with either race/community. This, however, causes trouble for the individuals and their families as they cannot come out openly with their actions. In Chestnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, John Warwick stays away from his mother and sister (Molly and Rena Walden) for ten years after successfully passing as a white man in the South. On his reunion with them he persuades his sister (who is fair skinned like him) to pass as a white woman, despite her hesitation. This however, brings her unhappiness after the initial success in her assimilation into white society.

In *Passing* Irene and her husband, a doctor, have two sons, one of whom is dark like his father, and the other lighter skinned like his mother. Clare on the other hand marries a race conscious white man and cuts herself off from her old acquaintances. Her daughter turns out to be white but she cannot take the risk of having more children for fear that her black genes might express themselves in the child. Even as she successfully moves through America and Europe, she becomes conscious of what she is missing when she returns to America after some years' absence and meets some African American people. What is apparent in Clare's personality is the brittleness of having to mask her feelings under a show of unconcern amidst racism in society.

In such problematic situations, both the mother as well as the child has to suffer a lot. While in *Contending Forces*, the suffering of the mother is explicitly visible, *Quicksand*, on the other hand demonstrates the plight of a mulatto daughter rejected by her mother, while *Passing* shows the problems of a young girl of mixed parentage living with her white father initially in a black neighbourhood and then with her white relatives in a different part of the town. Both Helga and Clare face different problems stemming from their mixed blood; whereas Helga's rejection is personal and by her own mother at that, in Clare's case we see a young girl clawing her way back into society from a life of poverty in the margins. In both cases, it affects their subsequent roles as mothers, amidst their individual set of circumstances. While Helga's life is dreary, Clare's is full of excitement till her accidental death. The novels, including *Contending Forces*, focus on the dilemma of a woman and more specifically of a mother, who is torn between two

different identities—one imposed on her by the society or assumed publicly and other – her inner being.

*Passing* examines the plight of mixed race women as mothers and as individuals. Irene and Clare make different choices: Irene's husband is black, while Clare's is white. Irene lives with her family in New York and mixes freely with the African American crowd at Harlem. Clare who has been living in Europe for some time, returns to America and realizes that she misses the social activities of Harlem. She had long ago given up on the African American social gatherings as she was intent on passing as a white woman which she does successfully by marrying a white man and producing a daughter who is white to all intents, as mentioned earlier. After all this, however, Clare cannot cut herself away from Harlem and black society, pleading with her friend Irene to take her to numerous African-American gatherings. By passing, she feels that she has missed out on some of the common pleasures of life, denied to her by her unsuspecting, race-conscious husband.

*Comedy: American Style*, examines the plight of fair skinned coloured children and their father who have to live with their mother Olivia's antipathy towards coloured skin seen in their younger brother Oliver. Olivia goes to the extent of banishing her young son or presenting him as a servant because he has the brown colour of his grandfather. While the rest of the family rally around young Oliver and try to protect him from his mother's hatred, he finds it hard to understand her rejection of him. Finally at the age of sixteen when he realizes that his mother considers his colour a barrier to her social ambitions, he commits suicide, leaving his father, elder brother and sister shocked and grief stricken. This problem of a maternal rupture is addressed in the second chapter of the dissertation. In this chapter the mother, Olivia's, obsession with whiteness, nursed through her own adolescence and youth, and later her interference in the lives of her two older children who are even whiter than her will be discussed. Despite being coloured by birth, Olivia is convinced that God made only one race and that is white. This chapter shows how she values whiteness over all else; how even after being responsible for the death of her younger son, she continues to wreck the lives and loves of her two surviving grown up children. It shows how the undercurrents of racism affect the lives of fair skinned and dark skinned children with coloured blood. It is not just parents like Olivia interfering, but also public antipathy to the sight of a dark boy and fair girl or vice versa. Interestingly, public pressure is seen to affect relationships where young people of

coloured origin but with different skin tones, are judged against the laws of miscegenation, prevalent in some parts of the United States of America. Interraciality brings out not only the dilemmas of coloured people, especially the biracial in the white world, but also the burden of skin colour varying from person to person within the same family. This is the crucial problem in American families and in society, addressed in Fauset and some of the novels.

In *Neither Black Nor White, Yet Both: Explorations of Interracial Literature*, Werner Sollors uses the term “interracial literature” to signify texts centrally concerned with “love and family relations involving black-white couples, biracial individuals, their descendants, and their larger kin”(3). In this chapter the term “Interraciality” in terms of motherhood is used to describe the mothers of mixed race heritage. It is synonymous with what Edward Byron Reuter calls “mulatto”, i.e. “a general term to include all those members of the Negro race with a visible admixture of white blood. Thus used, the word is a general term to include all Negroes of mixed ancestry regardless of the degree of intermixture. It includes all persons who are recognized, in the communities in which they live, as being of mixed blood” (*Mulatto* 11). Based on this concept of interraciality, the mother figures in the novels will be discussed.

*Quicksand* depicts the idiosyncrasies of a mulatto child abandoned by her white mother due to her mixed heritage and colour. In *Quicksand*, Helga Crane claims that her mother Karen Nilssen has sacrificed her child (Helga) for the sake of a man and her own happiness. Helga’s mother never provided her with the motherly love desired by a child of six. Her father, whom she has never known, was a person of color whose legacy to his daughter placed her in an embarrassing situation in a male, radicalized society.

Sappho Clark in Pauline Hopkins’ *Contending Forces* is the central maternal figure representing the inner conflicting forces more clearly than the other two female characters, Grace Montfort and Mrs. Smith. The contending forces, as the title indicates, clearly present the broad cultural patterns and the inflexible reality of racial oppression in Post Reconstruction America. The maternal figures depicted by the novelist are complicated by issues of race and gender. Through the character of Sappho Clark, the novelist shows how the mothers of mixed race identity are bound to suppress maternity in an inter-racial situation. Sappho Clark, being a mixed-race mother, has to suffer a lot because of her inability to accept her child on emotional and psychological grounds.

Both Karen Nilssen and Sappho's rejection of their mulatto children can be traced to society's maltreatment of such people. While Karen Nilssen never tried to reconcile with her daughter; Sappho, on the other hand, was able to unite with her son, Alphonse. In the process of unification with her child Alphonse, Sappho exhibits as well as challenges the traditional view points of motherhood and maternity, especially in an inter-racial society.

Though *Quicksand* is basically a tragic tale of a biracial woman, we can also examine how this affected her childhood and subsequent motherhood. Like Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* the issue of motherhood and maternity is not central to Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*; a close reading shows how her white mother's rejection of her biracial daughter is responsible for Helga Crane's lack of self estimation. Helga, the daughter of Karen Nilsen and a black father from the Caribbean, suffers because of her inter-racial situation. Helga's relationship with her mother is never directly discussed in the novel. It is through her musings, cross references that we come to know about her white mother and West Indian father. In chapter four of the novel Helga Crane talks about her childhood which was unhappy. It was full of 'the savage unkindness of her step brothers and sisters, and the jealous, malicious hatred of her mother's husband' (23). She connects her sufferings with her mother's marriage when she was six. This is evident in the following lines:

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 little Negro girls must be somehow provided for. Memory, flown back to those years following the marriage, dealt her torturing stabs. (23)

The mature Helga realizes her mother's need for the protection of a man but she has never forgiven her mother for choosing overlooking the plight of her first child. As an adult, Helga suppresses her anger towards her mother, particularly for her contribution to her child's suffering. All through her life she struggles to find her own place among the people around her. This quest for identity keeps her restless and unhappy all the time.

When Helga was six years old, her mother's emotionally absent but economically supportive brother, Uncle Peter, makes clear that he does not wish to acknowledge

Helga's place within their white family, which is the only biological family Helga knows. The "malicious hatred of her mother's husband" (23) and her uncle's wife's pronouncement that she is both illegitimate and inconvenient (28) as well as her personal observations of systematic racism that preserves white supremacy, contribute to Helga's understanding that as a non-white woman, she will not find acceptance or equality in white America even though her racial ancestry is as white as it is black.

Helga is introduced to the reader as a teacher in Naxos, a southern black college. Helga is initially enthusiastic about her role as an educator at the institution whose founder had declared its mission to be educating black Americans: ". . . this was the thing which she had ardently desired to share in, be a part of, this monument to one man's genius and vision" (3). Helga is generally accepted as a member of the black community by her peers, yet she soon becomes disgusted by the community's acceptance of white social, political and economic dominance and theories of black racial inferiority. Helga's analysis of the racist speech of a white preacher, who is given a respectful and enthusiastic reception at the black school criticizes accommodation of white racism by black Americans. Helga recalls the speech made by 'that holy white man of God' (2):

He spoke of his great admiration for the Negro race, no other race in so short a time had made so much progress, but he had urgently besought them to know when and where to stop. He hoped, he sincerely hoped, that they wouldn't become avaricious and grasping, thinking only of adding to their earthly goods, for that would be a sin in the sight of Almighty God. (3)

Helga is very critical about the way the speaker tries to convince the Black people explaining their own limitations. The entire passage shows the hidden domination of the Blacks by the Whites. Calling the Black people "hewers of wood and drawers of water," (3) the white preacher is pointing out the domination of Blacks by the whites. The entire speech is in fact an indirect way of suppressing the wishes and aspirations of African American people in a world of possibilities. Helga feels very angry and offended by the beaten down attitude which has been adopted by the people of Naxos without any difficulty. Her critical views concerning the Black bourgeois community of Naxos reflects her unhappiness with the blacks trying to accommodate the racist ideas of the whites or even trying to appease the whites themselves.

Helga cannot mix freely with the people. Her consciousness of being a mulatto is mainly responsible for her sense of being an outsider and it stands as a barrier to assimilation with the people around her. Helga's critical and restless nature does not allow her to stay at Naxos and she considers herself as a misfit in that society. When Dr. Anderson wanted to know her opinion about the school, she replies:

“Well for one thing, I hate hypocrisy. I hate cruelty to students, and to teachers who can't fight back. I hate backbiting, and sneaking, and petty jealousy. Naxos? It's hardly a place at all. It's more like some loathsome, venomous disease. Ugh! Everybody spending his time in a malicious hunting for the weaknesses of others, spying, grudging, scratching.” (19)

Her reply is quite damning and she realizes that she cannot stay on and contribute to a wrong cause. She does not want to spend her time in a place full of lies and hypocrisy. Truly “belonging” to Naxos's elite requires “ancestry and connections” which Helga lacks. She then moves to Harlem in search of an identity which will help her to fit into Black society.

In Harlem, Helga needs to conceal her identity: she spends her days introducing herself as a black woman. She learns that it would be expedient not to speak about her white connections. Mrs. Hayes-Rore, her employer, advises Helga to hide her racial identity:

And by the way I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you. Colored people won't understand it, and after all it's your own business. When you've lived as long as I have, you'll know that what others don't know can't hurt you. (41).

Mrs. Hayes-Rore's advice shows that there is often suspicion on both sides. It is as if mixed people have to occupy an in-between space.

However, with the help and goodwill of Anne and Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Helga obtains a job in the Insurance Company and very soon she mingles with the people around her. She meets people having similar tastes and ideas and this makes her feel happy and content:

Their sophisticated cynical talk, their elaborate parties, the unobtrusive correctness of their clothes and homes, all appealed to her craving for smartness,

for employment....Her New York friends looked with contempt and scorn on Naxos and all its works. This gave Helga a pleasant sense of avengement. Any shreds of self-consciousness or apprehension which at first she may have felt vanished quickly, escaped in the keenness of her joy at seeming at last to belong somewhere. For she considered that she had as she put it “found herself”. (44)

In New York, Helga enjoys the life around her as the lifestyle of the people appeal to her senses. But her happiness did not last long as “she began to lose confidence in the fullness of her life” (47). Her need for some unnamable and unrecognized thing begins to haunt her constantly, resulting in “a sensation of estrangement” (47). It points to a brittle superficial contentment which is easily undermined by the ever present sense of insecurity.

She tries to convince herself that she belongs to those people, but in vain:

“Back in the privacy of her own cubicle, self – loathing came upon her. “They are my own people, my own people,” she kept repeating over and over to herself, it was no good. The feeling would not be routed. “I can’t go on like this,” she said to herself. “I simply can’t.” (55)

This shows how desperately she tries to overcome the burden of race. Due to her skin colour, she is able to pass easily as a black woman, but from inside she cannot bear the burden of being a mixed race woman.

Moreover, Anne’s obsession with race distresses her. She sees that Anne hates white people with an intensity which was likely to have dangerous consequences. Although Helga likes genuine black people, she is uncomfortable with the obsession with race in some people. She feels that “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”(78). She feels that there is something for her beyond the confines of race and racial purity. She feels a yearning for undefined things away from the priorities of coloured people and Harlem. So, she decides to move to Denmark to her white relatives.

In Denmark Helga finds it difficult to fit in with her aunt and uncle's wishes, despite their kindness. Aunt Katrina's remark clearly shows what she meant to the people of Denmark:

“And you are a foreigner, and different. You must have bright things to set off the color of your lovely brown skin. Striking things, exotic things. You must make an impression.” (68)

It seems that Aunt Katrina wants to present Helga in an attractive manner with the purpose of marrying her off. They wanted her to marry Axel Olsen, an artist and admirer of Helga. But Helga finds Olsen's motives dubious. He does not show her the respect expected from a suitor. He tells her: “you have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but...the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer”(87). This makes Helga realize that she is a curiosity, a rare object to them. Olsen views her as a typical mulatta woman looking for an advantageous position with her aunt's help.

Acknowledging that Olsen regards her merely as an exotic other, Helga refuses Olsen's marriage proposal. She tells him:

You see, I couldn't marry a white man. I simply couldn't. It is not just you, not just personal. You understand. It's deeper, broader than that. It's racial. Someday may be you'll be glad. We can't tell, you know; if we were married you might come to be ashamed of me, to hate me, to hate all dark people. My mother did that (88)

It shows how deeply Helga holds on to the bitter memory of her mother's marriage and her subsequent rejection of her coloured daughter. Helga's rejection of Olsen's marriage proposal revives her psychological wounds concerning her mother. She does not want to lay herself open to that kind of rejection at a later date. Moreover her experience with her aunt in Denmark, despite the kindness she receives, convinces her that as a dark skinned person she would at best be treated as an exotic creature, a quaint object not an individual with sensitivity. This convinces her to return to Harlem and look for a possible place there.

She refuses to marry a white man for fear of racial discrimination later. Her subsequent marriage to a black man does not solve her problems either. The marriage and the

numerous child births that follow leave her weak and apathetic: “The children used her up. There were already three of them, all born within the short space of twenty months” (133). Helga may have been unwilling initially to reproduce but she appears to have little control over the conceptions and births that her marriage amounts to. Moreover, they affect her health and her equilibrium, leaving her helpless and disinterested.

That is not to suggest however, that she does not enjoy the sight of her small children:

Two great healthy twin boys, whose lovely bodies were to Helga like rare figures carved out of amber, and in whose sleepy and mysterious black eyes all that was puzzling, evasive, and aloof in life seemed to find expression. No matter how often or how long she looked at these two small sons of hers, never did she lose a certain delicious feeling in which were mingled pride, tenderness, and exaltation. And there was a girl, sweet, delicate, and flowerlike. Not so healthy or so loved as the boys, but still miraculously her own proud and cherished possession.  
(133)

Like any other mother Helga is touched by a feeling of maternal fulfillment and pleasure. It is only as the burden of child bearing and rearing becomes too much for her that the lassitude sets in.

Initially she accepts her husband’s and his parish’s attitude of leaning heavily on fate and leaving everything to the Lord’s care:

The possibility of alleviating her burdens by a greater faith became lodged in her mind. She gave herself up to it. It did help. And the beauty of leaning on the wisdom of God, of trusting, gave her a queer sort of satisfaction. Faith was really quite easy. One had only to yield. To ask no questions. The more weary, the more weak, she became, the easier it was. Her religion was to her a kind of protective coloring, shielding her from the cruel light of an unbearable reality. (135)

Interestingly, her physical weakness removes some of her resistance to her husband’s and neighbours’ religious philosophy.

Furthermore this acceptance won her the sympathy and approval of the people:

This utter yielding in faith to what had been sent her found her favor, too, in the eyes of her neighbors. Her husband's flock began to approve and commend this submission and humility to a superior wisdom. The womenfolk spoke more kindly and more affectionately of the preacher's Northern wife. "Pore Mis' Green, wid all dem small chilluns at once. She suah do hab it ha'd. An' she don' nebah complains an' frets no mo'e. Jes' trus' in de Lawd lak de Good Book say. Mighty sweet lil' 'oman too." (135)

They tried to help all they could but her sickness prevented her from consolidating on their good work. "Actually and metaphorically she bowed her head before God, trusting in Him to see her through. Secretly she was glad that she had not to worry about herself or anything. It was a relief to be able to put the entire responsibility on someone else" (136). This was the mindset with which she approached the birth of her fourth child but unfortunately both of them were so sickly that she could only close her eyes against the sight of the child which ultimately did not survive. Despite a nurse looking after her, Helga takes a long time to return to health and as the novel ends, she is pregnant again.

Through the portrayal of Helga Crane, Larsen makes us aware of the negative aspects associated with mothering—both physical and mental. After numerous childbirths Helga is both physically weak and spiritually exhausted. She is disgusted with her husband because

"His encouragement had become a little platitudinous; limited mostly to "the Lord will look out for you," "We must accept what God sends," or "my mother had nine children and was thankful for everyone." (124)

Her husband's attitude does little to solve Helga's problems. She cannot cope with the stress and the toll on her health. She feels weak and a strange lassitude takes over her body and mind. So much so that "when... the fourth dab of amber humanity... was held before her for maternal approval, she failed entirely to respond properly to this sop of consolation for the suffering and horror through which she had passed... Instead she deliberately closed her eyes, mutely shutting out the sickly infant..."(127). The trials of successive childbirth overwhelm her and drain her of all her strength. Combined with the

housework and the looking after her children, by the time she gives birth to her fourth child, her health as well as that of her child is at risk.

*Quicksand* thus portrays the frustration and alienation of the biracial subject who feels an intense conflict between the personal and the political—a conflict between biracial consciousness and a social identity generated by the systems of hegemonic power which enforce divisions between black and white Americans. Due to society's correlation between race and physical appearance, Helga is socially assigned and at times accepts a black identity; however, this racial identity does not acknowledge her Danish heritage or her upbringing by her white mother, in a white family and in a predominately white community until the age of fifteen. Caught between two worlds and criticizing the racial prejudices, Helga finally has to accept something she had not visualized in her bachelor days.

Hopkins' writings and actions encouraged women of color—in all their various shades—to step outside the restrictions imposed by race and gender discrimination and create their own space in the world. In doing so, Hopkins shows her concern for the audience of that time. Hopkins advocates such views like female self determination, equality in society, parenting from a distance etc. that seem commonplace for today's readers but were revolutionary at the turn of the century. So we have to analyze the quality of Sappho as a mother from the same stand point.

Again it is remarkable that Hopkins has a soft corner for the mulattoes. She makes this clear answering on one occasion to a white reader of the *Colored American Magazine* who complains against Hopkins' portrayal of mixed race characters in her stories:

My stories are definitely planned to show the obstacles persistently placed in our paths by a dominant race to subjugate us spiritually. Marriage is made illegal between the races and yet the mulattoes increase. Thus the shadow of corruption falls on the blacks and on the whites, without whose aid the mulattoes would not exist. And then the hue and cry goes abroad of the immorality of the Negro and the disgrace that the mulattoes are to this nation. Amalgamation is an institution designed by God for some wise purpose, and mixed bloods have always exercised a great influence on the progress of human affairs. (Hopkins 399)

Hopkins draws attention to the laws which discourage miscegenation but which cannot prevent the birth of mixed race children in America. Such children are generally seen as illegitimate and sources of social shame, with the blame going to the black community. Hopkins points to the contribution of the whites in this so called act of shame. It appears that they want to disregard the principles of biological reproduction and simply term it a social phenomenon with the socially constructed nomenclature, mulattoes. She goes on to suggest that cross-breeding may be seen in a positive light as it suggests amalgamation of races, and a step beyond racial discrimination and segregation.

In the preface to *Contending Forces* Hopkins makes her intentions clear:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. No one will do this for us: we must develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history. (13)

This implies the necessity of judging Hopkins' character from the historical point of view. We cannot ignore the harsh realities of the racial conflict prevailing at the time of writing this novel. Hopkins herself asserts in the preface that many incidents described in this novel really took place. In order to judge Sappho as a mulatta mother, we should keep in mind these points.

We are introduced to Sappho as a beautiful, mysterious, young woman “with a story written on her face” who boards with the Smiths (89). Within the boarding house, Sappho keeps largely to herself. Her conservative nature ensures that her past history—including her mixed race identity, her rape and the birth of her child Alphonse being brought up by her Aunt Sally—remains a secret to her present acquaintances.

Sappho keeps from the Smith family her former identity of a suffering mixed race school girl of fourteen who was known as Mabelle. Her story reveals the maltreatment that she had undergone for being a mulatto girl. As narrated by Luke Sawyer (Mabelle's secret lover and a family friend), Mabelle was the daughter of Monsieur Beaubean and a “quadroon woman of great beauty” (258). Like her mother, Mabelle, as a child was very beautiful as recounted by Luke Sawyer: “I cannot describe to you the beauty and loveliness of that child. As a boy, I worshipped her, and as a man I loved her” (259). Not

only Luke Sawyer but others also admired her beauty. Monsieur Beaubean had a half brother, a white man, who seemed extremely fond of Mabelle. When Mabelle was fifteen years old, this white uncle with his accomplices viciously raped her and ultimately left her in a brothel in New Orleans. Rescued by a family friend, she was placed in a convent in New Orleans, where initially she was believed to have died in childbirth.

But in reality, it was Mabelle's persona which died to be replaced by a new one: Sappho. She was given a new identity as Sappho Clark after the birth of a son and allowed by the nuns to have a second chance at life. With this new identity of a woman without attachments Sappho arrives in Boston and takes a room in Mrs. Smith's boarding house. She becomes friendly with Dora and Will, Mrs. Smith's daughter and son.

Despite being the victim of rape, Sappho is worried that her past history would adversely affect her child, Alphonse. She, allows her aunt to bring him up without even his being aware of her identity. We learn that she keeps seen money for the child's upkeep. Sappho's apprehensions can be explained in terms of racial anxiety of mixed-race mothers.

Throughout the novel there are many incidents, exposing the deteriorating condition of the mulattoes. Reverend John Thomas' remarks, narrated by Anna Stevens, indicates much:

Suddenly he touched upon the Negro, and with impressive gesture and lowered voice thanked God that the mulatto race was dying out, because it was a mongrel mixture which combined the worst elements of two races....Let him go out and hang himself! (150)

This statement indicates the racial situation of the time when mulattoes were considered as inferior to the pure bred of races. In such a harsh situation, Sappho might not have wanted to disclose her maternity thinking about her son Alphonse's future because society was very critical about mixed race people. The trauma of the mulattoes is depicted in the story of the unfortunate Montforts at the beginning of the novel.

The first part of the novel describes the story of a Bermudan slave owner, Charles Montfort and his family. Charles relocates his family and estate to the Southern United States to avoid the gradual emancipation movement that threatens British slave policy in Bermuda. Montfort's neighbor Anson Pollock spreads the rumour that Charles' wife,

Grace Montfort has mixed blood. Based on this suspicion, Pollock kills Charles, robs and destroys his estate, then tries to force Grace into submission by whipping her with the lash he usually reserves for his slaves. Ostensively it was a matter of protecting people of pure blood against mixed blood from the Caribbean. A closer look, however, shows that Pollock wanted to take control of Montfort's assets. He also felt that Montfort's act of liberating his slaves was a bad policy for the rest of the colonial planters. It is this fear which makes Pollock divert attention to the issue of racial purity.

This case shows how people on suspicion of being mulattoes are hounded by society. This problem is crucial to American society, where both black and white discriminate against the people of mixed blood, as seen in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, where questions of black racial purity make them "shoot the white girl first" (3). That notwithstanding, the issue of racial purity allows people like Pollock to take advantage of a commercial problem. Pollock fears that there might be problems for other slave owners and so he circulates a trumped up story that Grace Montfort is tainted with mixed blood. Here, racial purity is not the issue, it is merely a matter of expediency to cover the darker politics of slavery.

Such incidents reveal the disparaging attitude of the society towards the mixed race people. Once anybody is suspected of having mixed blood, people will not allow that person to lead a normal life. Not only as a woman or mother, even as a child, Sappho was humiliated by her white uncle because of her biracial heritage. It is evident when her uncle justifies the act of brutal rape on the ground of presupposed ideas concerning mixed race women. He arrogantly refutes the allegations made against him by Mabelle's father, offering money in exchange of his misdeeds:

"Whatever damage I have done I am willing to pay for it. But your child is no better than her mother or her granddaughter. What does a woman of mixed blood, or any Negress, for that matter, know of virtue? It is my belief that they were a direct creation by God to be the pleasant companions of men of my race. Now I am willing to give you a thousand dollars and call it square."(261)

From this explanation of Mabelle's uncle, what comes out is the miserable and degrading condition of the mulattoes as well as the African American women of colour. It is hinted that they are treated as commodities to be bought, sold and enjoyed by the Whites.

Elsewhere in the novel, this commodification of the mulattoes is described when Bill Sampson, John Pollock's overseer, wins the Mulatto girl Sal in a lottery and plans to sell her.

Thus Sappho lives through destitution and desperation from her childhood through the convent to her adult life. She manages to hold a job as a typist and provides support for her son. However, she does not consider it suitable both for her and her son Alphonse to reveal her true identity to him. Sappho deliberately ignores her child from his first appearance at the church fair. He is introduced as:

...the pretty great-nephew of the seeress [Madam Frances or Aunt Sally] who, dressed in costume, represented Mercury and carried messages to the fortunate ones remembered by the mystic powers of Futurity. Alphonse was a beautiful boy about eight years old, with golden curls and dark blue eyes that looked out on life from beneath their sweeping lashes with a glance all too melancholy for one of his tender years. There are children who seem to have been born with the shadows of life heavy upon them. So it was with little Alphonse. (200)

Alphonse under the care of Aunt Sally has been led to believe that his mother is dead. That may be the reason for his depressed and miserable look. His appearance gives the onlookers the impression of a child who is carrying a heavy burden inside his heart. The absence of proper emotional care is held responsible for Alphonse's indifferent look.

Though Sappho uses Aunt Sally as Alphonse's surrogate mother, deep in her heart, she feels concern for Alphonse. She advocates parenting from a distance. She always takes care of Alphonse's material welfare. This is indicated by Sappho's visit to Aunt Sally's house. "That money will do what you wish for the boy, Aunt Sally, and.... There is no need for him to know—let him continue to think" (278-279). The fact that Sappho provides financial support to Alphonse indicates her concern for the boy. But she is ashamed of publicly exposing her son, because of society's reproachful attitude towards an illegitimate child.

Sappho knew little about the support and protection of a family environment. But the complete homely environment of the Smiths shows Sappho that a sense of family history with its ups and downs is still worth preserving. She observes Mrs. Smith describing her sketchy family background to her children. Sappho's growing comfort in the Smith

family allows her to rebuild her history. She even plans to tell Will about her child and to accept his marriage proposal.

In the meantime John Langley, who is engaged to Mrs. Smith's daughter Dora, starts looking into Sappho's background because of his strong attraction to her. He has some idea of taking advantage of Sappho and his search is fruitful as he comes up with the story of Mabelle Beaubean. Langley threatens to expose her unless she submits to his sexual advances. Langley's threats ensure that Sappho changes her mind about marrying Will. Prior to that she repulses his advances, telling him that she would only marry Will. Langley's response "Marriage!" "who spoke of marriage? Ambitious men do not marry women with stories like yours!" puts her in the picture (320). It reminds Sappho of her racial situation, that she cannot expect anything else from men like him.

After Langley's departure, Sappho thinks over the matter again. She decides to go away from Will's life confessing everything in a letter. From the letter, she writes to Will, it is clear how Sappho has changed her decision under the pressure of circumstances created not only by John Langley but society as well:

John Langley came to my room tonight, after everyone was at church. He has found my story, and has offered me the greatest insult that a man can give a woman. He has made me realize how much such a marriage would injure you. Disgrace shall never touch you or yours through me.(328)

Sappho realizes that there is no escaping her mixed blood; it will continue to haunt her and those close to her. That is why she decides to save Will from the disgrace and disdain that would be turned on him if he had married her.

She then flees with her son Alphonse to the New Orleans. With great strength of will Sappho resolves to be united with her child: "that come what would she would claim the child and do her duty as his mother in love and training. She would devote her life to him. They would nevermore be separated"(342). This gives Sappho a sense of strength despite the unhappiness over Will.

Sappho's love for Alphonse is revealed in the chapter titled "Mother love" where she is seen blaming herself for not taking proper care of her child:

She gazed on the innocent face with mingled feelings of sorrow and regret as she thought of the lonely loveless life of the child. She had been so wicked to put him from her. It was her duty to guide and care for him...her shipwrecked life seemed about to find peace....She gazed with new found ecstasy at the rosy face, the dimpled limbs, and thought that he was hers. Her feelings of degradation had made her ashamed of the joys of motherhood, at pride and possession in her child. But all those feelings were swept away....the mother love chased out all the anguishes that she had felt over his birth. (345-346).

Sappho's maternal love reasserts itself over her agonies of her past. Mother love gives her courage and to claim her child and face the odds that life might throw in her path. She behaves like a genuine mother and blames herself for not taking proper care of her child.

Sappho's misgivings continue over Will. Although she leaves him she feels compelled to do so under painful social circumstances. However, after three years, they are reunited in the New Orleans convent where Sappho was working as a governess after her departure from Ma Smith's Boarding House. Will, who has never stopped searching for her, reiterates his love for her and they are happily married.

Late in the novel, when Sappho decided to declare her maternity publicly by acknowledging her child, she does pass as white under the pressure of circumstances. That too, is not out of the context as indicated by the following words of the mother superior to Sappho:

“My child”, she said,—“ Are you still determined to pass as the boy's mother?”

“Yes mother, I am.”

“Well then, you must be Madame Clark.”

‘No’, replied Sappho hastily’

“No more deception” (351-352)

Mother superior's use of the verb “Pass” here holds dual implications, as it is typically used to describe the act of masquerading on a racial level. It touches upon fair skinned

people of coloured origin passing as white and it also points to Sappho's public acknowledgement of her motherhood and claiming her son for her own.

Though Alphonse is united with Sappho at last, we cannot ignore the fact that he had to suffer a lot due to lost childhood experience. Reborn in midlife lacking both a personal history and constant maternal care, Alphonse's consequent development and adjustment are bound to be challenging. It is evident in Alphonse's immature behavior.

“Have I said anything wrong, Mamma?” he asked anxiously.

“Not wrong my child, but mamma prefers that you never speak of the past to anyone”

“I will do just as you say, Mamma Sappho!” he cried, impetuously throwing his arms about her neck in a bearlike hug. (336)

Alphonse's reference to her as 'Mamma Sappho' instead of “Mamma” hints at the newly acquired/forged relationship and a certain degree of self consciousness. It shows Alphonse's vulnerability, his craving for love which has only recently been met with the advent of his mother, and his eagerness to please.

Sappho at first refused to pass as white but circumstances led her to change her decision. From another point of view, she is a connecting link between the white and the coloured elements in the population as she connects the Smith family with the Montfort family.

Hopkins tries to show through Sappho how mulatta mothers could reaffirm their ties with their children. Through Sappho's characterization she provides an example for mixed race mothers who find it difficult to accept their children for personal or social reasons. She holds that such mothers could still provide for their children's nurture.

In Larsen's *Passing* Irene is presented as a serious young woman with a social life committed to the betterment of the coloured people. On a visit to Chicago where she had grown up, she meets her old school friend Clare in a restaurant meant for whites. Irene was not exactly passing but when she is taken to that particular place for a desperately needed cup of tea she meets Clare whom she had not met since they were about twelve or so. She learns that Clare having married a white man has been successfully passing for the last several years. As she sits drinking tea before meeting Clare Irene reflects that

while she was not ashamed of her mixed heritage, she would hate to be discriminated against:

Irene felt, in turn, anger, scorn, and fear slide over her. It wasn't that she was ashamed of being a Negro, or even of having it declared. It was the idea of being ejected from any place, even in the polite and tactful way in which the Drayton would probably do it, that disturbed her. (150)

Irene's reflections allude to the racism rampant in society where without much noise or action one could still be humiliated because of one's race.

In the course of their conversation Clare informs her of the trauma she underwent while carrying her child for fear of her coloured blood manifesting itself on the unborn child:

I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark.<sup>1</sup> Thank goodness, she turned out all right. But I'll never risk it again. Never! The strain is simply too—too hellish.” (168)

As they discuss their fears during pregnancy, at Clare's apartment, Gertrude, a friend of theirs who had married a white man without any pretensions, adds: “Maybe you don't think I wasn't scared to death too.... They don't know like we do, how it might go way back, and turn out dark no matter what colour the father and mother are.” (72) This shows that their children's skin colour is extremely important to coloured parents who have white skins themselves. Irene, however, tells her friends of her husband's brown colour and how one of her sons had inherited his father's colouring. To Irene that is no problem but she soon realizes that whiteness and racial purity matter to some people as Clare's husband joins them.

In the course of their conversation Clare asks her husband: “What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured?” Bellew's reply catches their attention as he affirms:

“Oh, no, Nig,” he declared, “nothing like that with me. I know you're no nigger, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be.” (171)

Calling her Nig in jest because of her supposed colouring is one thing to him but having to accept a coloured or biracial wife is not even to be considered. On being questioned by Irene about his dislike for Negroes, Bellew reiterates: "I don't dislike them, I hate them.... They give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils." (172). This convinces the friends of the tight line Clare was walking and what would happen if he were ever to find out. Clare's position draws attention to the dilemma of the fair skinned, even fair haired mulattos or coloured people who may take the risk of passing as white but stand to be found out through the children they produce as in the case of Olivia in Fauset's novel. Containing their anger at such prejudice, Irene and Gertrude leave Clare's place hurriedly.

A couple of years later Clare calls on Irene in New York and pleads with her to take her in their outings to Harlem and black gatherings elsewhere. Her husband, she informs Irene was away on business. Irene, however, is not impressed:

And it wasn't, as Irene knew, that Clare cared at all about the race or what was to become of it. She didn't. Or that she had for any of its members great, or even real, affection, though she professed undying gratitude for the small kindnesses which the Westover family had shown her when she was a child. Irene doubted the genuineness of it, seeing herself only as a means to an end where Clare was concerned. Nor could it be said that she had even the slight artistic or sociological interest in the race that some members of other races displayed. She hadn't. No, Clare Kendry cared nothing for the race. She only belonged to it. (182)

When Irene tries to tell Clare to desist from taking risks she replies:

what does it matter? One risk more or less, if we're not safe anyway, if even you're not, it can't make all the difference in the world. It can't to me. Besides, I'm used to risks. And this isn't such a big one as you're trying to make it." "Oh, but it is. And it can make all the difference in the world. There's your little girl, Clare. Think of the consequences to her." Clare's face took on a startled look, as though she were totally unprepared for this new weapon with which Irene had assailed her. (196)

Clare is intent on getting the best out of both worlds leaving the worrying to others. Irene on the other hand is a natural worrier and she finds that she has enough to worry about.

She finds that “The trouble with Clare was, not only that she wanted to have her cake and eat it too, but that she wanted to nibble at the cakes of other folk as well. Irene Redfield found it hard to sympathize with this new tenderness, this avowed yearning of Clare’s for “my own people”(182). The clash of personalities is too great between them for there to be pleasant reminiscences. Clare is outgoing and even brazen in her daring as she takes on both white and black societies with her passing. Irene, on the other hand, is the steady type trying to balance domesticity and social work without putting either at risk. She wants to protect her boys as long as possible from exposure to issues of race, racism and sex. She is unhappy with her medic husband for his more pragmatic approach to things as he wishes his boys to know things as they come their way.

Irene manages her worries regarding her family and the future, through denial of knowledge and memory. On one occasion, when she develops in her mind a suspicion regarding her husband Brian and her friend, Clare, she tries to reassure herself by forcefully denying such thoughts: “Desperately she tries to shut out the knowledge from which had risen this turmoil, which she had no power to moderate or still, within her. And half succeeded” (223). She turns her mind away from the distressing thought of betrayal of trust. She tries to reassure herself without completely erasing her reservations:

And if, perchance, there were some small something---well, what could it mean? Nothing. There were the boys. There was John Bellow. The thought of these three gave her some slight relief....She wanted to feel nothing, to think nothing; simply to believe that it was all silly invention on her part. Yet she could not. Not quite. (224)

However much she tries, she does not succeed in getting rid of her apprehensions. She finds reasons to suspect that her husband and Clare are having an affair. Clare being the fairer of the two, Irene feels there are grounds for her husband, Brian, to look beyond herself to another woman.

She tells herself that she at least has the boys. As their mother she would still have a place in her husband’s life. Moreover, Clare had a husband of her own. This in no way lessens her apprehensions about her marriage. She is not secure in her role as a wife and

a mother. She dearly wanted to turn her back on her suspicions, but did not have the courage to escape them completely. Nor did she want to overlook something if it was there. Irene thus controls her perceptions and the resultant misgivings through denial.

Her self-absorption is balanced by self control. Irene's fear for the future, that she might lose her husband is a kind of psychosomatic disease which she cannot get rid of all through her life. The root cause of her insecurity is Clare's charming and eye-catching beauty. Compared to Clare's 'stately' beauty, Irene feels under dressed and unattractive in comparison. She considers herself very commonplace and ordinary standing in front of her. She assumes that her husband would prefer Clare to her.

Actually, it is Irene herself, who is unable to comprehend the inner feelings of her husband. Her suspicions lead her to see things, even indifference in her husband. She is uncertain and confused:

He was like a man marking time, waiting. But what was he waiting for? It was extraordinary that, after all these years of accurate perception, she now lacked the talent to discover what that appearance of waiting meant. It was the knowledge that, for all her watching, all her patient study, the reason for his humour still eluded her which filled her with foreboding dread. The guarded reserve of his seemed to her unjust, inconsiderate, and alarming. It was as if he had stepped out beyond her reach into some section, strange and walled, where she could not get at him. (214)

Irene can no longer understand her husband. Her doubts and suspicions weigh so heavily on her mind that she can no longer look at her husband in a normal way without the shadows influencing her perceptions. Brian may not develop such ideas regarding Irene, as nowhere in the text it is indicated that he dislikes her apart from Irene's own perception.

However, Irene's personality being what it is, she prefers safety and regularity, even predictability to adventure and the thrill of the unknown. She senses a restlessness in Brian at times and fails to appreciate it:

It was only that she wanted him to be happy, resenting, however, his inability to be so with things as they were, and never acknowledging that though she did

want him to be happy, it was only in her own way and by some plan of hers for him that she truly desired him to be so. Nor did she admit that all other plans, all other ways, she regarded as menaces, more or less indirect, to that security of place and substance which she insisted upon for her sons and in a lesser degree for herself. (190)

Irene feels that since her husband has a demanding job as in a New York hospital and a more or less comfortable home life, he should stop looking for anything which might destabilize their lifestyle. She assumes that her way of looking at things, doing things is the right one and expects her family to fall in with her plans. It is not that she expects her husband to sacrifice his career or interests for her sake. Rather she feels that she has things sorted out to suit everyone and the nothing should change the order of things. That is why she looks upon the advent of Clare as an undesirable disturbance which might cause more trouble than good.

Her telling Brian: “you’re not to talk to (the boys) about the race problem. I won’t have it” (232) rather indicates her closed mind as far as child rearing is concerned. In a way it points to Irene’s escapism. Brian responds angrily that she sometimes showed evidence of stupidity. What Irene calls protecting her sons from darker things of life, Brian calls it preparation for what is in the future. She wants to protect them from the realities of life. Though she considers herself more worldly wise than Brian, from the above conversation Brian appears more practical than her. It also suggests her insecurity as far as the family ties are concerned. Hence, her excessive control over her husband and sons.

Brian’s argument that they need to know it is angrily rejected by Irene. Their arguments about the boys’ sex education follow precisely the same pattern. Brian’s insistence that the boys need basic sexual information ‘drove her to fury’(189). Such extravagant emotion at the mention of sexual education hints at Irene’s possible frigidity as well as mental sterility. She appears to be limited in her vision and intelligence regarding common things like explaining the biological facts of life to her young sons or even apprising them about the sociological problem of racism.

When Clare observes that she finds motherhood too confining, Irene has this to say:

“Yes,” she repeated, “and the most responsible, Clare. We mothers are all responsible for the security and happiness of our children. Think what it would mean to your Margery if Mr. Bellew should find out. You’d probably lose her. And even if you didn’t, nothing that concerned her would ever be the same again. He’d never forget that she had Negro blood. (197).

Irene tries to convince Clare that responsibility and motherhood go hand in hand and that things have a sort of chain reaction. She also tries to look at things from the point of view of Bellew, Clare’s husband:

You didn’t tell him you were coloured, so he’s got no way of knowing about this hankering of yours after Negroes, or that it galls you to fury to hear them called niggers and black devils. As far as I can see, you’ll just have to endure some things and give up others. As we’ve said before, everything must be paid for. (200)

Irene tries in her way to restrain Clare from taking risks that might jeopardize her marriage, given her White husband’s hatred for blacks. After all, Clare had taken one gigantic risk when she married him without informing him of her coloured origins. Having passed as white, Clare should forego the pleasures of African American culture and music, not to say the company of such people, if the stability of her marriage depended on such discretion. Clare, however, appears to be helpless in her desire to be a part of Irene’s social world: “I would if I could, but I can’t. You don’t know, you can’t realize how I want to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh”(200). Irene gets the impression of “something groping, and hopeless, and yet so absolutely determined” in Clare eyes that she feels caught up in her need (200). Irene continues to worry not so much about the racial situation but about her husband and sons as she carries on her social engagements. Clare is quite impressed with Irene’s work contacts as she has established good friendships with talented people cutting across race barriers. She wants to be a part of that world and enjoys talking to people and impressing them with her charm and elegance.

On the fateful evening that Clare falls to her death from a sixth floor window, they were all visiting the Freeland, Dave and Felise, who lived upon the top floor of their building, when they were interrupted by a Clare’s husband. Forcing his way inside he addresses Clare: “So you’re a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!” Clare gets up from the chair and

moves back towards the window. As her husband moves nearer to accost her in a hurt and pained manner, Irene joins Clare at the window. Next moment Clare hurtles down to her death leaving everybody bemused and shocked. Irene even wonders if she might have pushed her accidentally till another witness Hazelton tells them “ I was looking right at her. She just tumbled over and was gone...”(143). It is concluded that Clare’s involuntary movement on the shock of be accosted pushed her over the edge before anybody near her could do anything.

Clare’s death brings to focus the tensions which people engaged in passing have to overcome. Irene expresses her fears on Clare’s behalf but Clare who lives the double life putting everything in jeopardy, has her own fears to overcome. It was either a case of allowing herself to be subsumed in the white community as she had done for more than a decade, or finding her individuality through renewed contacts with the world of Harlem. Given the narrowness of social perception and discrimination, people of mixed races can find comfortable footholds in neither the white world or the black world although the latter is more accommodating to the biracial. Compared to Irene who prefers a steady and more predictable life, Clare lives and dies, dangerously.

None of the biracial mothers examined so far allow skin colour—fairness or whiteness—to become the ruling passion of their lives to the exclusion of all decency. But that is what Olivia Blanchard Cary does in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Comedy: American Style*. Olivia’s obsession with whiteness and rejection of her darker skinned younger son terminating in his suicide at sixteen years of age is examined in an earlier (second) chapter. But the complications which are allowed to enter relationships simply because one’s skin colour does not meet with somebody or the public’s approval, is peculiar to the interracial or biracial situation peculiar to America. Olivia’s complicated relationship with her mother after the death of her father, Lee Blanchard, throws light on the tensions in the mind of two fair skinned women who have different ideas about race, colour and whiteness.

Olivia argues with her mother, Janet Blanchard, about passing as white, which she manages to do in a new place after her coloured father’s death when she was a small child. Her mother, Janet, who is as fair as her daughter, is proud of her coloured lineage and not in the least interested in passing as white. Olivia tells her mother: “I don’t think anybody around here *thinks* we’re colored, because nobody *knows* we’re colored. I think,

Mother... that if you really are one way and people see you another way, then it's just as easy for you to be their way as your way" (*Comedy* 11). For Olivia there is only one acceptable race and that is the white race.

Janet tries her best to make her daughter understand:

"There are many white people in the world who are no better off than we today. You're too young to understand all this just now, Olivia, but you'll find out that you'll have a much better time as a colored girl who eventually will come to know some of the best people of her group than as an ordinary white girl who will always know and go with ordinary white people." (12)

Olivia, on the other hand, prefers to keep company with white children of humble stock. She has no interest in being coloured despite what her mother tells her:

"I come of ordinary colored people myself, Olivia. I was a maid in a hotel in a summer resort when fortunately I met your dear father. He was working his way through medical school.... Now *he* was from a fine family. His father knew men like Booker Washington and John Durham. Fellows in school with him are already making names as teachers and doctors and business men. When we got on our feet we were going to Boston. We might have remained in moderate circumstances for years, but we could have mingled always with the best." (12)

For Olivia, family pride means nothing if the family is not white. Indications of how she would conduct her own married life appear in her rationalizing with her mother that if people accepted you as white, why tell the truth about your coloured identity.

We see her dark thoughts as a child while her father lay seriously ill with pneumonia and her mother attended to him with love and despair. "Olivia almost hated them both with a flaring intensity no less violent for the immaturity of the heart which engendered it. How could they—how *could* they have made her colored? How could they lead the merry, careless life that was theirs with this hateful disgrace always upon them? (8) This kind of bitterness towards her parents for producing a child with coloured blood in its veins is shocking to say the least. She blames her dark skinned father for her birth and years later she blames him again when her youngest child bears his skin colour. Interestingly, she also blames her son for being dark and does not behave with him as a mother normally would. She does not consider the fact that if she could blame her father, her son could

also blame her for passing on the same genes to him. Instead, she hounds him to his death by her aversion for coloured people with darker skin complexions. What she does in her early life continues throughout, even beyond her younger son's suicide. Tragedy does not affect her, let alone recognition of guilt over ruined lives, all because of her worshipping whiteness.

While she works at the mill in a humble position, Janet Blanchard keeps quiet about her race for fear that she may lose her only means of livelihood. Olivia uses this as an excuse or justification of her own passing. While Olivia continues to look forward to “a world which knew nothing of color,” Janet looks ahead to something else:

The thought of going again to a colored church, of playing a quiet game of whist in a decent colored parlor with its family album and whatnot; of gradually working one's way into membership of small committees, of receiving the polished, if not always grammatical, gallantries of colored men—all these things bore for Janet's imagination the same charm that the sight of fresh water might bear to a shipwrecked sailor. (14)

Through hard work she manages to get promoted to a supervisory position at the mill. By the time her daughter Olivia is seventeen years old, Janet decides to shift to Boston and live amongst coloured people as per the plan she had shared with her late husband. She threw Olivia the option of staying back and earning her living or moving to Boston and living under her care. Olivia did not want to work at any lowly job and moved to Boston with her mother. In Boston Janet starts taking courses at the University in between working hard at cleaning jobs. Gradually she acquires an education and is encouraged by one of her tutors to open a boarding house for coloured students with financial assistance from him. As the lodgers come to stay at their house, Olivia has to put up with coloured people, which does not please her much.

It may be mentioned that before they move to Boston, Olivia lets her mother know what she thinks of her prospects there:

“All of them black or brown,” she raged, “and all of them looked down on! If you think I want my children to feel toward their father as I felt toward—”

She stopped then, realizing that she had gone too far.

Janet finished the sentence for her. "As you felt toward your father! Toward Lee Blanchard the best and finest man that ever lived!" How horrible this was, she thought, to almost hate one's own child. (15)

Janet realizes how spiritually apart her daughter was from her parents. Olivia had been "spending five happy years in the company of shop-girls, soda-water jerkers, small seamstresses...who were white" (15). Her mother tries again to make her daughter address the truth:

"But," said Janet, "do you really like these people, Olivia? Or is it just because they are white? And if that is why you're so anxious to remain with them do you mean to tell me you're willing all your life to sail under false pretenses? Good heavens, Olivia, you wouldn't want to marry one of these rats, would you? (15)

Olivia, however, has no time for coloured people and later Janet finds herself informing Ralph Blake, the man she was about to marry : "My daughter, your future stepchild, is a confirmed Negro-hater. She thinks there is no health in us" (20). She adds: "she had one consuming ambition and that is to be white. I suppose the easiest way to attain to that estate is to marry white....Though I don't see how on earth she's going to accomplish it" (15). Janet's prediction turns true as Olivia finds herself single at twenty one.

Janet marries Ralph Blake, who though coloured, is as fair as her. When twins are born to the Blakes "with Janet's *mat* white skin, and with their father's thick dark hair and blue eyes," Olivia attends to them and takes some interest in them (22). What nobody realises is that Olivia was considering the feasibility of marrying a coloured man but as fair as her. She was already twenty years old and had not succeeded in drawing the attention of any white man. The twins' colour convinces her that she might as well forget her black blood. After some time she decides to marry Christopher Cary, one of their lodgers studying medicine. Christopher was fairer than Olivia but had curling sandy hair. Olivia marries him and her first two children are fair like white people. While Christopher makes no pretence about his race and mixes freely with coloured people at his workplace, Olivia tries to discourage coloured children from playing with her son and daughter. This continues through their high school and college despite the children taking care not to inform her about their friendships.

Teresa, Olivia's daughter and second child, who had been sent to college away from Philadelphia, enjoyed her freedom as she mixed with coloured people. She keeps from her mother the fact that the distinguished family (parents of her classmate in college) with which she spends her vacation was coloured. She slowly tells Alexander, her friend's brother, of "of her father's baffled efforts to establish himself definitely as a "race man":

She spoke of her own and Christopher's disgust and resentment at having to live a sham . . . which after all got them, in Philadelphia at least, exactly nowhere. . . .  
"The neighbors, I'm sure, think we are just what we are . . . colored people trying to be white . . . they see father's colored patients . . . they've probably seen mother practically driving, when we were children, our little colored friends from the door. . . .(70).

Her account makes Alexander realize her plight, how "to this eighteen-year-old girl the process had already brought misery, embarrassment and the hint of future wretchedness...how unspeakably distasteful the whole sorry performance was to such a character" (70). This shows that Olivia's peculiar behavior affects the lives of her children, not occasionally, but on a regular basis. Her interference in their daily lives leaves them open to the sympathetic understanding of their friends and neighbours but also embarrassment.

Olivia's conduct weighs so heavily on Teresa that she shares her troubled thoughts with her brother Christopher:

"Mother's not going to let me rest until I've made some of her old 'contacts' that she's always talking about. . . . I know what she's hoping. She thinks either you or I, or both of us, will marry white; and then she'll come and live with us." Christopher's eyes showed his astonishment. "You know I never thought of that! She'll never live with me. I'll show her. . . . And I won't marry any of her white girls either."

"That's just what I said. But she'll keep after me. . . . Chris, do you know," she said solemnly, "I can just feel that I'm going to be awfully unhappy. I can feel it closing in on me."

He scoffed at her, but he was impressed.

“What nonsense! What’s closing in on you?”

“Life,” she said seriously. “I feel like a fly in a spider’s web. I know I’m going to be caught and I know I’m going to hang there. I won’t have a lot of pain. I’ll just live on stupid and dull and unable to stir. Hating everything.” (44)

Seen out of context Teresa’s words may seem fatalistic, but she speaks from experience of her mother’s pursuit of whiteness. Olivia in the meantime stops Teresa from marrying her boyfriend Henry a newly qualified engineer, who is African American, on their wedding day. In the scene that follows Olivia tries to pacify her mother and requests Henry if he could agree to be Mexican instead of black. This disgusts Henry so much that he leaves Teresa and soon afterwards marries somebody else. Teresa who had loved Henry, falls ill and it leaves her without any interest in life. She had promised her younger brother Oliver that he could make his home with her and Henry after their marriage. So along with Teresa’s dreams of a future, Oliver’s hopes are crushed as well.

After Teresa recovers a little from her illness, Christopher encourages her to coach some of his friends in the French language. Her success in that venture leads him to persuade his sister to take a certificate course in French from France to establish her professionally. Unfortunately, Olivia insists on accompanying her daughter to France under the pretext of looking after her and soon after pushes Teresa into marriage with a French teacher. Teresa who had just got the news of Henry’s marriage, is devastated and allows her mother to manipulate her into marrying the Frenchman.

Teresa soon finds out what a mistake she has made. She is treated like a glorified servant as she has to wait on her mother-in-law who controls her son’s money, and do all the housework. She even finds herself repairing her old garments as she is not given money for new ones. Not wishing to share her dilemma with her father and brothers she resigns herself to whatever life has in store for her. She also learns that her husband is a racist with a hatred for Negroes. This in fact acts as the final straw for Oliver when he appeals to her for help. He feels that his sister whom he loved so much had let him down.

Having done with Teresa, Olivia, unknown to her husband and elder son, visits Marise the girl Christopher was hoping to marry, and warns her of the futility of nurturing such hopes. Marise having grown up in the same neighbourhood with Teresa and Christopher,

had experienced Olivia's vetoing her friendship with Teresa on the ground of her darker skin colour. She assures Olivia that she has no plans in that direction. When Christopher next visits her and asks her to marry him, she refuses, telling him that she does not love him enough to marry. Christopher, however, is resilient enough to carry on with his work as a doctor. He had followed in his father's footsteps and joins in his large medical practice amongst coloured people. With time he marries Phebe, another childhood friend who was brought up by her coloured mother after her white father had deserted her. Phebe who is white with blonde hair was herself rejected by her dark skinned boyfriend Nicholas, yet another childhood friend, after he heard people making racist remarks about his taking advantage of a white girl after an outing with Phebe. After Nicholas' desertion and her experience with her white admirer who when told of her coloured blood wants her not as a wife but as a mistress, Phebe is ready to fall in love with Christopher Cary. Meanwhile, Nicholas and Marise get married. Thus, it is not just Olivia's meddling which influences the lives of young mixed race people, especially her own children, it is also the social outlook towards skin colour and race which makes people who love each other think twice before embarking on marriage.

Like Sappho Clark in *Contending Forces*, *Quicksand* does not illustrate the sufferings of Karen Nilssen. It is her mulatto daughter Helga, who has to undergo mental trauma as she tries to fit into both white and black societies. Her decision to marry a black man leads her to make the wrong choice as she finds that she is not made out to be the wife of a preacher, bringing up numerous children. Our final perception of Helga is that of a spiritually and physically exhausted woman living a life of disillusionment.

All through her life Helga suffers due to her interracial lineage. She remains unhappy as a daughter, as a woman, as a lover and ultimately as a mother of unwanted children. Helga's interracial identity is seen to be a contributing factor in her restlessness and lack of firm purpose in life. Helga is presented as a lonely, alienated, spiritually broken young woman who is never at home in the world. Karen Nilssen, Helga's mother, never realized Helga's need as a child. She could neither provide her material good nor motherly love. That is why Helga is left in a world where she has to struggle a lot in search of a valid identity and meets despair and disillusionment, belonging neither to the white world nor to the black world.

Sappho, on the other hand, because of her own self determination and strength of her character, rises above the limitations imposed by society as a mixed race woman. Though her initial hesitation is natural as far as her single status and physical and mental are concerned, she none the less falls prey to the situation like Helga. Helga's restless and immature nature does not allow her to find peace and contentment in an interracial world. In both the cases maternity was neither deliberate nor welcomed. While Helga at least has social recognition amongst the black community of Alabama, Sappho is devoid of that recognition. In her case, however, mother love proves triumphant over the racial situation and allows her to unite with her son, Alphonse. Helga on the contrary tries to escape from the realities of life by thinking of imaginary suicide, unable meet the physical burden of housekeeping and child rearing.

Irene and Clare manage a little better than the sorry mess that Helga makes of her life. Despite her death at the end of the novel, Clare is seen to live life on her terms and meeting some of the challenges head on. Irene prefers security to excitement but she manages to have a decent life without compromising her identity or her integrity.

While all the women—Sappho, Helga, Clare and Irene—are forced to address issues of race amidst the risks of passing, Olivia's predicament though brought on by the social conditions, is more self nourished as she lives with it throughout her life. Against the advice of first her mother, then her husband and children, Olivia continues to feed her obsession for whiteness as she looks for acceptance in white society. Nothing or nobody is allowed to come in the way of her ambitions—not her parents, husband, children or their intended spouses. Even the shocking suicide of her young son, which is so traumatic to the rest of her family, does not stop her in her tracks. Even rude eviction by her white son-in-law from his residence, does not help to open her eyes to the reality around her. She lives with her delusions.

Thus the chapter touches upon the numerous complications in individual and family relationships caused genuinely or because of perceived insecurities and misguided obsessions in biracial situations.

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