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Unmasking the female spectator: Sighting feminist strategies in Chopin, Glasgow, and Larsen

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UNMASKING THE FEMALE SPECTATOR:
SIGHTING FEMINIST STRATEGIES IN CHOPIN, GLASGOW, AND LARSEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Unmasking the Female Spectator: Sighting Feminist Strategies in Chopin, Glasgow, and Larsen

by

Mylène Dressler

The term "female spectator" has, since its first appearance within feminist theoretical formulations, and in particular within feminist psychoanalytic interpretations of film, been the subject of contentious debate. Attempting to answer such questions as, What is a female spectator? Who does she represent? How meaningful is she as a social or textual construction?, feminist theorists of literature and film have sought and constructed a complex syntax of meanings, one which reveals the nomenclature of "female spectatorship" as a site not of looked-for, stable opportunity, but rather of multiple and unpredictable identifications. Drawing on the work of critics including Mary Ann Doane, Tania Modleski, and Teresa de Lauretis, this study seeks to explore that multiplicity through a construct of "masquerade": locating the strategic importance of female spectatorship, not only in its ability to figure female recognitions of gender as performance, but in its capacity to describe the very watching of that recognition, and the larger masks of theory that construct watching itself--and
so authorizing feminist tropes of specularization, and a female "gaze" that deconstructs specularization as local, limited, and strategic.

To this end, the dissertation is imagined as a series of "unmaskings" or textual re-visions which dramatize and self-consciously narrativize feminist "sights" of critical engagement with works by women which seek to encode female specularity. Chapter 1 offers a Lacanian analysis of The Awakening, an interpretation which is in turn challenged and complicated by the re-vision of Chapter 2, incorporating previously absent demarcations of race, class, and sexuality. Chapter 3 examines Barren Ground as a text which encodes the very watching of female textual production enacted in the first two chapters, and further as a work which expresses female visual authority precisely through such return and redress. Chapter 4, finally, reads the impulse to self-revision as itself open to a second look, offering an analysis of Quicksand which exposes the potentially "mirroring" and enclosed effects of white female spectatorship deployed as self-observation. Yet Larsen also holds out hope for the masks of female watching; masks which, when recognized, may reconstruct women viewers as diverse, distinct, and discerning.
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Introduction

Ain't Misbehavin' or, The Unruly Female Spectator:
A History and Some Strategies

"I never know if I hold a view . . .
Only if it's a view possible to hold."
--from Still Life, A.S. Byatt

In 1989, a special double number of Camera Obscura entitled "The Spectatrix," and devoted exclusively, in the words of special issue editors Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, to the "conflicting and [often] incompatible epistemological frameworks" adduced by theoretical practice on the "female spectator," and on the nature and process of a "female gaze," appeared in print with actress Theda Bara posing rapt and reflected on its cover--she is staring, mute, doubled, into a glassed mummy's case--only to be at once assimilative of and summarily assimilated by what has come to be the field of a transfixing (and some would say morbidly hidebound) feminist gaze theory. Intended as "a survey of research on and theories of the female spectator in film and television studies," "The Spectatrix" and its editors seemed most determined, at the outset, to define and so confine the very conflict unfolding on their pages. Although to their credit Bergstrom and Doane write well and wisely of "battles" within the field, of the divisiveness, confusion, and disenchantment that has frequently circulated around feminist gaze theory's most pressing and seemingly
irresolvable dilemmas--What is a female spectator? Who does she represent? How meaningful is she as a social or textual construction?--the overall tone of the issue is finally one of resolute calm, and of an almost forced and embracing order: the subject of the female gaze is to be "address[ed] . . . in an instructive and productive manner" (16-17). To this end Bergstrom and Doane lay out the straightforward and tripartite nature and structure of their editorial mission: to put forward "a comprehensive statement about the diverse positions held" and "project avenues of future studies"; to "provide a history as well as an intellectual resource guide"; and "to show the international dimensions of research on the female spectator" (17). Their introductory essay, "The Female Spectator: Contexts and Directions," includes an encapsulated (and heavily qualified) history of gaze theory, taken from Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work forward; this is followed by four "overview" articles, outlining the progress and status of female spectatorship studies in four countries, Italy, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain. The number then concludes with what is by far its longest section: the responses of some sixty feminist/film/spectatorship critics to (again four) "broad" questions in the area of female spectatorship--their essays arranged alphabetically, from Lucilla Albano to Linda Williams.²

Part of what seems to have engendered both the special
issue and Bergstrom's and Doane's heavily categorizing
impulse is of course the rather fractious nature of the term
"female spectator" itself. For indeed both the term and the
concept and, less clearly, the "presence" it seems to invoke
hang over the text as both myth and mitre, as both willful
ideological abstraction and as necessary tool, sign, mark,
of a newly invested and hard-won feminist and female
authority. On the one hand Bergstrom and Doane read the
term "female spectator" as an almost hopelessly "fractured
concept," divided ineluctably between issues of essentialism
and difference, between psychoanalytic and anti-Freudian
frameworks, and between what may "even be seen as entirely
different objects of study (e.g., the 'spectator' vs. the
'audience')" (12). Their introduction begins with a
pointedly diffuse epigraph from respondent Lesley Stern, who
describes the female spectator as a site at once permeable
and evanescent, multifarious and absent--"a slippery
character . . . shadowy to the point of abstraction" (5).
Yet at the same time Doane and Bergstrom invoke the terms of
a female spectatorship as all-too-accessible, as "overly
familiar . . . a convenience . . . misleadingly impl[ying]
that one has complete control over the very questions
[being] posed" (13). To acknowledge the illusoriness of
such control, and yet at the same time compass and harness
all the forces that seem to play out within and under the
rubric of the female gaze (and gain, of course, yet another
form of control), the editors turn to the "unfamiliar and relatively unused term 'Spectatrix' . . . to indicate the density and complexity of the matrix (or matrices)" borne within any concept of female spectatorship (13). It is hoped, Bergstrom and Doane suggest, that such a defamiliarization of identification, simultaneous with a form of semantic recognition, will work to revitalize an increasingly "tiresome paradigm"--to overcome a "kind of ennui which haunts the project of feminism film criticism at the moment" (in part the result, the editors suggest, of feminist film theory's long-fought acceptance into academe), and to reinvigorate the field with its originary spirit of "innovation." "This collection," the editors finally comment, "constitutes a refusal to allow a sense of stasis to sink in"; and its timing, they suggest in 1989, could not have been better:

[For] there is a growing awareness that feminist issues in contemporary film theory are beginning to lead to new perspectives in scholarship in other fields, especially art history and literature . . . Now that the expression "gaze theory" is gaining currency outside our field, it seems appropriate to provide an index, from within, of the history that led to this institutionalization . . . a vivid display of the diversity of positions held and an indication
that, as many of our contributors state, these
issues are only beginning to be explored. (19)

"The Spectatrix" sets itself the task, in other words,
of "waking" the sleeping (or the bored, or perhaps the
merely imperfectly preserved) mummy of feminist gaze
theory. Of at once recording and preserving the "history"
of that near-mythological being, the female spectator; and
of loosing her from the bands and integuments of a rapidly
encrusting theoretical-historical practice. For in its
appeals to order and diversity, to calm and confusion, and
to a recognizable past, present, and future, the special
Camera Obscura issue constructs itself both as the "problem"
of feminist gaze theory and as its solution: what was,
outside the journal-text, an impasse, a shroud-knot of
competing perspectives and claims, becomes within it,
carefully bound and structured, a promise of possibility--of
renewed "exploration." That the construction of the
energizing "history" presented within its pages would entail
a rather selective and purposeful manipulation of texts was
itself evident to the issue's editors: "For us," Doane and
Bergstrom write, "the impetus to organize this collection
was partly strategic" (18). History, as the framers of "The
Spectatrix" well know, is strategy--not simply the objective
naming of milestones, the setting of (perhaps dubious)
chronologies, but the patterning of workable signs, the
reading of events as texts and texts as events that produces
the past not as simple preface, but as useful and usable
preparation. If a revitalized female spectator (or field of
female spectatorship studies) arises afresh from the gaze of
"The Spectatrix," it is because she has been touched, as
with Theda Bara's filmic look, by a unique yet consciously
and conscientiously constructed organization of glances.
That another look, another constructed glance, might raise a
very different spirit or vision, is itself suggested within
the fabric of the special issue. For, "[l]ike all
intellectual histories," Doane and Bergstrom write, "[ours]
is undoubtedly too neat. . . . Other strong lines of
development appear" (13).

It will be my own task in what follows to trace out
just such another line of development. For the patterning
of a, of any, of an alternative history of female
spectatorship presents to the feminist critic not only the
opportunity to partake of what Doane and Bergstrom describe
as an already "rich" field; but a chance, in small
increments, to add to that field from a critical perspective
at once unique and attached, at once isolate from and
descriptive of its project: I, too, am a female spectator.
More than this, however, it will be my interest to engage
with one particular manifestation or representation of
female spectatorship, held rather widely even within and
among the divergent pages and opinions of "The Spectatrix,"
and attached in unexpected ways to the underlying order and "neatness" that I have suggested sustains the issue. For within and between the conflicts that characterize both the issue and the issue of female spectatorship lies a strand of theorization which suggests that the concept or fabricated construct of the "female spectator"—as distinct from actual or "real" female viewers of film, of text, of culture—functions primarily as a site of ordered representation, as a misleadingly stable gathering point for identifications (although these may, among and between themselves, be variable and shifting), and as an appeal to a kind of practicable, irresistible theoretical consensus. "[T]he textually constructed spectator," Gaylyn Studlar writes to this point in "The Spectatrix," is "methodologically attractive"—precisely because of her "theoretically well-behaved nature." "Actual spectators' responses," she continues, "are much more unruly" (10, emphases mine). Although critics as diverse, as Doane and Bergstrom point out, as Miriam Hansen and Joan Copjec have sought to break down the "insistent binary opposition" of the "constructed" and the "actual" female spectator, the notion that any theoretical representation of female visual positioning is somehow by definition static and orderly (and thus ultimately assailable) persists—if for no other reason than "theory" is itself often seen as the static, the vatic ordering of plastic possibilities. Yet what if the textual
construct of female spectatorship were itself to become unhinged—"unruly"? What would it mean to put forward a practice of female spectatorship that "explores"—at "The Spectatrix"'s invitation—the possibility of radically unpredictable, improprietary identifications? What (to rephrase Mary Ann Doane's well-known question) might it mean to misbehave as a female spectator? Or, more plainly, as a theoretician of female spectatorship? Or, more plainly still, as a theoretician of female spectatorship practicing upon and within the site of literary representations?

For if the "strategy" of "The Spectatrix" is to construct a history of feminist gaze theory from which to gather and launch "future avenues of studies . . . including . . . literature," my own strategy will be to construct a particular history of female spectatorship that will allow me to intersect, by various discursive means, with literary texts by women, and in ways that will work to dismantle an understanding of the concept or "textual construct" of the female spectator as defined, as limited—as "well-behaved." Indeed, it will be my interest to discuss the essentially strategic and therefore guerilla-unpredictable nature of the concept itself; to discuss female spectatorship, in other words, neither simply as theoretical formulation, nor yet as specific or empiric social positioning, nor even as a tentative mediation between the two, but rather as discursive strategy, as an interventionary site that
accesses numerous available meanings and locations and may be used to express or effect personal, textual, artistic, and political (feminist) ends. The insight that concepts of gendered spectatorship may be used and understood as strategic points of intervention is not of course and in itself entirely new; yet my particular project and interest will be to name and discover a versatile model or understanding of spectatorship with and through the various theoretical models that have already been constructed and/or appropriated by feminist theorists, in order to describe a theoretical space that is at once multi-valenced, multi-tongued, and recognizable. The advantages of such an understanding would include the critical flexibility to grapple with what have been some of the most important (and clearly valid) challenges to mainstream feminist constructions of spectatorship: namely, the demand to account for difference--class, racial, sexual, historical, geographical, and so on--within any reading of the or a posited "female gaze." The disadvantages would however include vulnerability to charges of critical schizophrenia, and perhaps a certain, warranted suspicion that such a reading of spectatorship, with its apparently Derridean emphasis on instability, might ultimately function to undermine feminist claims and access to location, identity, authority, power, meaning.

All this however remains to be seen. First, one must
be willing to undertake a history--"'to begin an argument,','" as Teresa de Lauretis has put it, "and so formulate questions that will redefine the context, displace the terms of the metaphors, and make up new ones."7 For in all misbehavior--as in history itself--lies an element of imagination.

*     *     *

"It is important," Doane and Bergstrom write in "The Spectatrix"'s introduction, "Contexts and Directions," "to avoid an overly linear account of the development of feminist interest in the female spectator" (6). And indeed with regard to the truth-value of any claims to historical or critical-developmental "accuracy," linear accounts of gaze theory would appear to be, at best, suspect, and at worst, simpleminded. Doane and Bergstrom do however begin their own, highly provisional inquiry and account with a careful nod to the work of Christian Metz in Langage et cinema (1971), a "rigorous" study which, in their words, first "mapped the field of cinema semiotics into the study of codes and the study of textual systems" (5). The editor's "intellectual resource guide" then moves quickly through the works of a range of feminist, film, and cultural theorists;8 and finally through the completed response essays of the journal itself, effectively placing its texts
and its meanings as both the end and the beginning, the past and the future of a cycle of constructed engagements with female spectatorship. Yet what is perhaps most curious about this "history" as it is presented by Doane and Bergstrom is its palpable discomfort with the text that has, more than any other, been recognized as the "starting point" of feminist gaze theory and of inquiries into female spectatorship: Laura Mulvey’s "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," first published in the British film journal Screen in 1975. Although Doane and Bergstrom acknowledge Mulvey as the "catalyst for considerations of sexual difference and spectatorship per se," and although they quote David Rodowick, from his own response essay, positioning Mulvey’s text as a Foucauldian "transdiscursive" which "open[ed] problematics and . . . inaugurat[ed] whole fields of investigation . . . [so that] we all owe a great deal to Laura Mulvey" (7), the prevailing tense with regard to Mulvey’s work is one of belated, and highly reluctant, admission. Time and again Doane and Bergstrom write nervously of feminist gaze theorists who feel "compelled" to "situate" their own work in relation to Mulvey’s (as did indeed many of their response essayists, some equally nervously; Judith Mayne for example begins her own reference to the text, "I hate to cite the significance [of Mulvey’s essay] for the thousandth time . . . " [231]). The editors then move plainly (if justifiably) to undercut some of the
rather storied significance of Mulvey’s work:

If we insist upon situating Mulvey’s essay as the inaugural moment—the condition of possibility—of an extended theorization of the female spectator, it must also be remembered that this "origin" is constituted by an absence. In "Visual Pleasure," there is no trace of the female spectator. (7)

Mulvey’s analysis is elsewhere summarized, with oblique disparagement, as "trenchant" (25); while Mulvey herself, in her own contribution to the special issue, an overview article entitled "British Feminist Film Theory’s Female Spectators: Presence and Absence," describes her groundbreaking work in retrospect as "quite limited" (73). That the criticisms leveled at "Visual Pleasure" are not without validity is, for the moment, somewhat beside the point; one finds it difficult to identify any other field of critical study in which such ambivalence is registered toward an originary text and author (one does not, for example, imagine the psychoanalytic theorist necessarily apologizing for a reference to Freud, however much she may disagree with him), or such dis-ease manifested around the suggestion that a specific if flawed textual "event" might have served as the basis for an already skittish theoretical discussion. The call to avoid "linearity" in "The Spectatrix" becomes after all a more deep-seated call to
eschew or at least compromise a concept of origins; and although feminists (including myself) rightly maintain an historic distrust of descriptive and prescriptive "creation" narratives, the unwillingness to acknowledge, safely and with freedom and an unrepentant regularity, the fact of a particular text's chronologically situated, generative importance begins to read like a distrust of our own powers, an extension of a patriarchal authority that might have uttered (at some lost but clearly inescapable moment), "Thou cannot create or initiate 'whole fields' of thought and inquiry." Within or against the context of "The Spectatrix," then, the construction of a linear narrative beginning, rather unapologetically, with Mulvey is itself something of an unruly critical endeavor; not one entirely excluded from the "matrices" Doane and Bergstrom imagine, and yet not entirely within these, either. For it is of course possible to construct an "overly" or even a strictly linear (though not necessarily chronological) account of feminist gaze theory, for purposes having nothing to do with accuracy or prescriptivity, but rather with strategy, approach, and narrative and textual-geographic possibility. For the purposes of my own argument(s), then, the search for a female spectator begins in 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," whatever absences it may reflect or contain, is itself, after all, irreducible presence.

The text of Mulvey's article, later incorporated into
her larger work, Visual and Other Pleasures (1989), reads at moments like the flinging down of some great stone gauntlet—and it is one of the losses of later and too-quickly dismissive accounts of her work as "monolithic" that the concentration, the sheer energy and force of her analysis (as much as its content and structure), goes unrecognized for its role in unsettling prior modes of inquiry—eventually stigmatized for a vigor that was enough to engender a still expanding and reverberating universe of discussions. Pointedly enough, however, the first sounding note of her discussion is one of annihilation. "It is said," Mulvey writes, "that analyzing pleasure or beauty destroys it. That is the intention of this essay."10 Although later critics would come to question this originary emphasis on destruction, finding in the libidinal potentialities of visual pleasure additional resources and recourses for feminist and female spectatorial resistance, the task to Mulvey in 1975 was clear: Inasmuch as visual pleasure in representational systems, including particularly mainstream cinema, is enacted within and through the female body and for the psychic consolation of the male, it must be dismantled.

Mulvey was the first feminist film theorist11 to speak authoritatively on the primacy of the "male gaze" within specular regimes—a primacy she understood as derived, in the first instance, from the particular "function of woman
in forming the patriarchal unconscious." Within Mulvey's highly psychoanalytic and solidly Lacanian account of subject formation (an account she argues is essential to an understanding of "pleasure in looking" within patriarchal culture, since psychoanalytic theory is itself a "language of patriarchy"), the role of woman is specific and "twofold." First, woman "symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of a penis"; second, she "thereby raises her child into the symbolic" (14). Once this has been accomplished, Mulvey suggests, woman's meaning-shaping power within culture is functionally "at an end"; passive and objectified, she is relegated to the position of "bearer, not maker, of meaning"—woman as marker of lack, of the very traces of signification itself. Representations within the dominant order, including particularly visual significations and "advanced representation systems" such as the cinema, would thus tend to extend and enforce this role for woman; and therefore it is not surprising, Mulvey argues, to find women objectified and iconized within classical (male-dominated) Hollywood films, where the female figure, as image, is "displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men" (21). Yet, since woman as bearer of lack "always threatens to evoke the anxiety [she] originally signified," male visual pleasure is at once sustained and assailed by the female as image, an anxiety that Mulvey suggests is ultimately mastered through "disavowal" of castration.
(through the fetishization of the image), or through "re-enactment of the original trauma" and punishment of the threatening (female) object. In either case, and as Doane and Bergstrom so rightly acknowledge, Mulvey leaves no real "room" for the female spectator—who can only, the text implies, experience in relation to dominant visual or cinematic representations either a false, transvestitive association with the implied male viewer; or a self-identificatory, masochistic recognition of the punishable figure that finally reflects her own, bodily subordination to signifying systems.

Yet Mulvey's interjection of the discourses of sexual difference into analytic debates within film theory was remarkable for its initial claims and confrontations. And despite its apparent "vacancies," the essay is still immensely valuable—particularly for my own purposes, and particularly for its ability to illuminate, in narrativistic terms, the strategic origins of the female spectator who, at this very early moment in the feminist debate around gaze theory, accomplished more (by way of shock-value) by her obvious absence, than could have been hoped through her too-ready presence within an avowedly patriarchal framework (even had Mulvey sought to include her). Mulvey herself however, somewhat chastened by what soon became apparent as her evident omissions, returned in 1979 to the scene of "Visual Pleasure" to tease out more of what might be seen or
said of this "absent" female viewer. In "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun," she proposed two, additional avenues of identification for the female spectator of dominant film. In one, the woman identifies with the "active" male hero on the screen, thereby rediscovering her own suppressed, active point of view--"that lost aspect of her sexual identity." In another, she identifies with an active female heroine who, within the plots and contexts of classical Hollywood filmwork, is generally "forced" to recognize the incommensurability of any masculine-coded "activity" with her own, inescapable femininity (Calamity Jane, starring Doris Day as a rip-roarin' cowgirl who ends in a tightly corseted wedding dress, is a notable example). Mulvey further proposed that the constrictions and oppositions between these two modes or sources of identification would work to engender a kind of "restlessness" in the female spectator, who would then experience a kind of "oscillation" between viewpoints, a palpable discomfort within her "borrowed, transvestite clothes" (33). Such a representation of female spectatorship appeared crucial in Mulvey's terms because it served to remind women of the "problem" of any attempt to represent an active femininity in patriarchal culture; it also served and serves, however, to demonstrate the difficulty of representing female spectatorship in ways that
are not strictly limited by the very patterns that seek to define and so combat a system of oppression. For in her constant emphasis on "activity" vs. "passivity," on the polarization of possibilities within culture that can only be mediated with discomfort and without the dismantling of binaries that have themselves functioned to the detriment of women, Mulvey speaks the language of her own containment. Yet it is also precisely at this point of delimitation, and from an almost textual-geographic isolation and confinement, that I am able to launch a pair of generative, directional, and multi-confrontational questions: For by what other means or strategies might we enunciate a position of female viewing that is not constricted by the binarized terms of a dominant culture? Or is the very term "female spectator" itself and necessarily a product of dominant linguistic codes, itself "a language of patriarchy"--a structurally dependent obverse?

I find one attempt to circumvent the polarities suggested within Mulvey's analyses in the work of Teresa de Lauretis, in *Alice Doesn't* (1984), her wide-ranging study of the modalities of spectatorship and of strategies of reading as they are played out within a larger call to "cultural resistance." For de Lauretis, the task after Mulvey becomes one of establishing a mode of identification in which woman's relations to narrative and filmic processes can be conceptualized outside masculine or dominant
parameters, outside a mechanism that allows the female only a transvestitive, indirect association with "active" male power (and hence, with active viewing). "How," de Lauretis asks, "can the female spectator be entertained as subject of the very movement that places her as its object, that makes her the figure of its own closure?" (141)

The answer, she suggests, lies in the fact that identification can never be thought of as "single or simple"; rather, "identification is itself a movement, a subject-process, a relation" (141). Rather than acceding in Mulvey's reading of the female spectator within dominant culture as "restless," as hopelessly torn, de Lauretis rediscovers that spectator as a locus of simultaneity, as a site of "double identification," as she who "identifies both with the subject and space of the narrative movement [identified in Mulvey as meaning-producing, hence 'masculine']... and the figure of its closure, the narrative image [the objectified and static--hence, the 'feminine']" (143). For de Lauretis, both these positions "are possible at once," and in their concurrence function to "uphold... both active and passive aims." Indeed, they constitute the only possible bridge by which women, who might otherwise "be stranded between two incommensurable entities [gaze and image]," can function as spectators in culture (144). De Lauretis' strategy is, in other words, to circumvent an insistent binarization by enclosing it: to re-
imagine female spectatorship within patriarchy not as discomfort and oscillation, but as duality, as itself a strategy or necessity of accommodation that allows women a simultaneity of subject- and object-positions. The attraction in de Lauretis' analysis lies in its apparent ability to empower, through enclosure, a spectatorship that had in Mulvey's terms been seen as divided against itself; yet the residue of discomfort persists, in my own eyes, to the extent that de Lauretis' work in Alice Doesn't reinstates the female spectator as exotic Other, as a vision of superimposition held in apparent contrast to the more singular and stable (it is suggested) relation of the male spectator to dominant forms. Perhaps this is unavoidable, given the nature and structure of patriarchy. I find myself asking, however, and with Mary Ann Doane, why a strategy of doubling, in and of itself, appears insufficient to the task of dismantling dominant specular regimes; why, as Doane writes, "it [should] be the case that processes of identification . . . are more complicated (if not convoluted) for the female spectator than for the male . . . [W]hy . . . it seem[s] essential that a masculine position appear somewhere in the delineation of female spectatorship."15

Surprisingly, Doane's strategy in The Desire to Desire (1987) is not to deny such an inevitability, but rather to reinforce it. Writing as did Mulvey from within a formal,
psychoanalytic understanding of social and subject formations, and beginning to address the potential distance between theoretic enunciations and the experience of "real" or "actual" social subjects, she suggests that although "feminine and masculine positions are not fully coincident with actual men and women," women and men as social beings are psychically aligned with and assigned to inescapably binarized localities (8). The challenge for Doane becomes not to theorize her way out of the binary itself, but to strategize a relation to it that will allow the female spectator to "view" her nominal position within the binary from on high: to step back from her constructed location in a manner that de Lauretis' analysis, with its emphasis on presence and simultaneity, would seemingly not allow.

Thus it is that in "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," Doane's first concern is to articulate the "supportive binary opposition" that underpins all spectatorial relations within dominant culture—that opposition "between proximity and distance in relation to the image." Drawing again upon the work of Mulvey, Doane identifies the female in culture as she who is most closely bound up with the image, implicated by and within its very surfaces, as object, while the "masculine" position is one of space or distance in relation to representation. "For the female spectator," Doane writes, "there is a certain overpresence of the image—she is the image" (22). This
excess of proximity is a function, Doane argues, of the female’s very different and formative relation to visible signification:

... This is represented quite explicitly in Freud’s analysis of the "subject supposed to know" ... For the little girl in Freud’s description seeing and knowing are simultaneous. ... [U]pon seeing the penis for the first time, [the girl] "makes her judgment and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and she knows she is without it and she wants to have it" ... The little boy, on the other hand, does not share this immediacy of understanding. When he first sees the woman’s genitals he begins "by showing irresolution or lack of interest" ... A second event, the threat of castration, is necessary to prompt a rereading of the image. ... The boy, unlike the girl in Freud’s description, is capable of a re-vision of earlier events, a retrospective understanding which invests the events with a significance which is in no way linked to the immediacy of sight.18

Compelled by (or mired within) this Freudian logic, Doane goes on to describe woman’s relation to representation as haunted by "the lack of a lack," by an inability to re-
vision, to fetishize away castrative threat and so create the distance or "gap" that is "so essential for the realization of the ideals of semiotic systems" (23). For this reason, she suggests, the female spectator will tend to suffer from an "overidentification" with the image: "Too close to herself . . . she could not step back, could not achieve the necessary distance of a second look" (19). To fabricate the very distance lacking at the originary moment of recognition, Doane proposes a concept and strategy of "masquerade," a "hyperbolization of the accoutrements of femininity"—in dress, in speech, in action, in performance—that would function to "effect . . . a defamiliarization of female iconography" (26). Through such exaggeration the female spectator might experience "a lack in the form of a certain distance between [her]self and [her] image," for flaunting femininity . . . holds it at a distance . . . . The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as precisely, imagistic. (25)

Yet Doane falters when she moves to examine what it might mean to "masquerade as a female spectator," particularly within the context of cinematic viewing—since the terms of her discourse and her analysis lend themselves
more readily to modes of performance and presentation than to modes of empowered, female viewing. In addition Doane herself, in a Mulvey-like return to these issues in "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on Female Spectatorship," acknowledges numerous difficulties with the concept of masquerade as a strategy-of-resistance. First, she suggests, masquerade appears to lend itself to a reading of woman more as spectacle than as spectator; second, it may function primarily as a reaction-formation designed to counter the possessive force of the male gaze, thus leaving masculinity intact as a stable and central term; and third, it appears susceptible to charges of "anxiousness," to readings of its work as compensatory and ultimately recognizable only within an appeal to feminine "propriety" as it is established and enforced within a patriarchal framework. To these considerations I would add that "masquerade" as it is presented by Doane is also easily recuperable, heavily dependent on the spectator for its effect, its efficacy, and its (mis)recognition. For although the masquerading woman may indeed "manufacture" a distance between herself and herself as image(d), the continued presence and force of a powerfully scopophilic male gaze could act to undermine the performance of masquerade—reading or misreading its parodic intent (perhaps even willfully), and thereby collapsing the very distance the masquerader had worked with some effort to
create.

I do not wish, however, to abandon Doane's concept and her strategy entirely, and in particular her search for the masquerading female spectator. For within this history, this "narrative-of-strategies" which I have begun to construct as a larger strategic site or text, Doane, like Mulvey, presents a particular and unique opportunity for reflection, restaging, and theoretic experimentation—and indeed provides the very basis and language for the larger model of female spectatorship I seek to establish. Clearly what Doane projects and proposes in her own work is a model of female misbehavior; through the "hyperbolization of the accoutrements of femininity," Doane offers the prospect of women quite literally not staying in their places—moving off to one side of their own representation, as women, intensifying feminine propriety to the point that it becomes cleft of definition, woman as more-than-"woman," as exceeding herself. In isolation such a strategy is indeed beset by numerous difficulties and limitations, impeded by other modes and shapes of resistance (patriarchy, too, is highly strategic). But what if the role of masquerader—along with de Lauretis' double-identified spectator and Mulvey's restless watcher, and many other modes and roles yet to be discussed, examined, or invented—were merely one of several, shiftingly, fleetingly, unexpectedly taken and released modes of identification, variously available to the
female spectator? What if to "masquerade as a female spectator" in fact meant to hyperbolize one, specific and patriarchically dictated "accoutrement" of femininity—namely, a womanish undecidability—to the point that the female spectator could not be entangled by her own (temporary) accommodations, her own strategic recourses? What if we came to understand masquerade itself as that which describes the various, shifting "wearings" of theoretical identity that constitute feminist explorations and revisions of specular authority? Of course the danger in such a formulation lies in its tendency to reify a dominant reading of female behavior: as unstable, changeable, untrustworthy. Yet even this reification could be escaped by yet another, lightning textual accommodation: a return to the site of female masquerade as always fixed from the position of the spectator/critic, and hence preeminently locatable.

For perhaps the "answer" to the still unresolved (in "Film and the Masquerade") question of the masquerading female spectator lies in her relation to the performance of masquerade both as a refusal of conventional image (as in, for example, Doane's hyperbolized cinematic representation) and as a refusal of location (as in my own reading of masquerade as shifting, temporarily costumed sites of spectatorship). In each case the female spectator (or spectator-critic), in recognizing the efficacy of a specific
specular strategy, becomes suddenly familiar with the power of looking; experiencing not only a sudden "defamiliarization" with herself as image, but a recognition, a sudden familiarization and an access and ascension to a position in which reading and seeing for meaning becomes not only possible, but various, a choice of identifications: I recognize exaggeration, I recognize doubling, I recognize temporary intervention, etc.. This doubled reading of masquerade--itself something of the "second look" Doane describes as so absent from female relations to signification--would appear to do away to some extent with charges of anxiousness and status as reaction-formation (since masquerade moves now beyond the reflexive to the reflective, from the singular to the multiple), and would even appear to some extent to elude the binary that would align seeing with power and possibility and being seen with passivity and circumspection (since, in the enactment of a masquerade between women, both seeing and being seen become sources of empowerment). It also comes fascinatingly close to providing what might be described as a complex and closed "circuitry" between female spectators, readers, and critics of culture and female performers, artists, and writers within that culture--a circuitry which would allow women to construct alternative and empowering cinemas, texts, and spectacles without constant reference to a male gaze, which is, in the moment of recognition, moved off-
center, off-space, off-stage—if only temporarily.

With Doane and the concept of masquerade (here greatly amplified) we can begin to construct, then, a "development" or model within gaze theory that sets or attempts to set the female spectator apart from her limited identity as "female," one that seeks not only to create distance between a spectator and her representation (in this case, on screen) but which seeks to (re)define the term "female" as that which can describe a position of productive, adaptable, and authoritative seeing. It is important to recognize however that in Doane's and in my own foregoing analysis and model, the efficacy and reliability of a gendered concept of spectator-identity does not come under duress; that is, the relative viability of such terms as "female" and "male," and the stable identities for which they speak, do not undergo the kind of revision and deconstruction carried out in the work, for example, of Judith Butler—who in Gender Trouble (1990) proposes against gendered "masquerade" a somewhat similar but ultimately divergent and radically subversive concept of "gender parody," in which the enactment of cross-sexual, drag identities and performances "reveals the imitative structure of gender itself."19 For Butler, the dismantling of oppressive social and specular regimes lies not simply in the distanciation of self from constructed and prescriptive gendered representations (in favor of new, empowered gender identities) but rather in the
deconstruction of the very concept of gender itself: "The notion of gendered parody," she writes, "does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original" (138). Butler in other words questions the very idea of gender where Doane, and I, leave it implicitly intact; and although Butler's arguments are, curiously, troubled by many of the same difficulties raised in "Masquerade Reconsidered," and although her work has been labeled as both "brilliantly" radical and "extremely conservative," it is her suggestion that terms such as "female spectator" and "male gaze" function primarily to obscure instabilities lying at the root of all gendered and sexual identities which provides the next turn in gaze--now masquerade--theory as strategic text, local narrative, and constructed history and intervention.

Writing at a time roughly parallel to Butler, Tania Modleski, while far from unhinging the terms of gender as they have dominated feminist film analysis, begins in The Women Who Knew Too Much (1988) to question the kinds of stabilities and norms assigned not only to "female" specular positioning, but to norms of "male" seeing and visual authority as these have been constructed in oppositional, feminist discourses. While acknowledging Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" as "the founding document of psychoanalytic feminist film theory," she is bluntly critical of discursive
modes that would describe the role of the "active" female spectator as functionally transvestitive, and calls for a more "complicated" reading of female spectatorship, drawing upon de Lauretis' work and upon her own analyses of Hitchcock's films to conclude that some classical films "do allow for the (limited) expression of a specifically female desire." While the latter statement would seem to place Modleski squarely in the gendered camp Butler seeks so rigorously to disband, her subsequent analysis reveals a willingness to tender a concept of gender, in and against Hitchcock's films, which focuses on radical imbalances, ambivalences, and uneasinesses about sexual and social identities. She uses the violence perpetrated against women in Hitchcock's films, for example, coupled with the director's very obvious "fascination" and "identification" with femininity, to suggest that classical filmwork can reveal an enormous "ambivalence" about gender and femininity and in the process work to subvert the very claims to masculine "mastery and authority" the cinematic texts themselves would seem to advance (3). More interesting still, Modleski, in order to release at the site of male mastery rigid norms of male (heterosexual) spectatorship, must first release and relinquish claims to stable (heterosexual) identifications among and within women. She must first, in other words, address the role of homosexual or bisexual alignments in any construction of gendered
spectatorship.

Butler, herself a lesbian theorist, writes extensively in *Gender Trouble* about the function of a (disavowed) homosexuality in the construction of a heterosocialized sex-gender system, and indeed locates the conventional representation of woman-as-object as a function not simply of male castrative fear, but as the very mechanism by which male homosexuality (as a prior identification with the father) is subsumed and forgotten. Modleski, in her own very different work, sees the access to an empowered female spectatorship as passing directly through the ravaged terrain of stable male heterosexual identity. Announcing that she is interested not only in complicating a female gaze but in "problematizing male spectatorship and masculine identity in general" (5), she goes on to argue, with other critics, that "more attention needs to be paid to women’s erotic attraction to other women" and in particular to the competitive threat this attraction represents for masculine specular authority (6). With Gertrude Koch, she argues that men’s need to "prohibit and punish" female voyeurism is attributable to their concern about "women’s pleasure in looking at other women"; and that female bisexuality (which Modleski suggests is traceable to maternity and to the preoedipal stage) challenges male hegemony not only by asserting the validity and presence of a uniquely or exclusively female desire, but by "remind[ing] man of his
own bisexuality . . . a bisexuality that threatens to subvert his 'proper' identity, which depends upon his ability to distance woman and so make her his proper-ty" (8). It is for this reason that Modleski argues rather stringently, as it happens, against Doane—suggesting that "overidentification" with the female image is "less a problem for women . . . than it is for patriarchy," and for heterosexual male spectatorship at large. Finally, the "problematization," the destabilization of "masculine identity in general" makes possible, conversely in Modleski's reading, the stabilization of one aspect of female spectatorship within culture. Noting that in classical films such as Hitchcock's the threat of male sexual disjuncture will be off-set and obscured by a more forceful assertion of "male solidarity," Modleski describes the sudden concentration of female visual energies that may be provoked by the performance of a blatantly patriarchal cinema: for "[t]he paradox is such . . . that male solidarity (between characters, director, spectators, as the case may be) entails giving expression to women's feelings of 'rage, helplessness, victimization, oppression' . . . [a] point of the greatest consequence for a theory of the female spectator" (4).

Modleski in other words uses the compensatory strategies of an anxious, male heterosexual gaze (as we can now more "correctly" modify the less descriptively termed
"male gaze") to locate a definitive nexus of responses within the female spectator, while at the same reconfiguring female spectatorship to include the taboo (within patriarchy) identity of the bisexual, thus expanding what I had previously termed a closed "circuitry" of female spectatorship, masquerade, and performance to encompass not only visual but sexual exchanges between women. Yet it would be a mistake to style Modleski, at this point in her work and within my own narrative, as radical change-agent. Although Modleski does, in The Women Who Knew Too Much, chip away at the "monolithic" corners of an implicitly heterosexual model of female spectatorship, she does not, importantly, invoke the position of the lesbian viewer of film; homosexuality in her text is in fact revealed only as attached to and within the larger (and safer) confines of heterosexuality (as preoedipally rooted bisexuality), and the female spectator, although like the male revealingly "complicated," remains in essence a conventionally referable, comfortably mainstream term. Modleski does not then fully address the gulf that Judith Butler more completely realizes between gender as "fixed" vs. gender as ungrounded, as "free-floating artifice" (6); she does not finally complicate the notion of (rather than the positioned responses implied by) "female" as a prefix to "spectator," to introduce those debates that center around the very category "female" or "woman" and its viability as a
generalized concept upon which feminism, and claims from a feminist theoretical perspective (including that for a concept of productive masquerade) can be built. For neither Mulvey, Doane, nor Modleski do, in these "early" and landmark works, confront the issue of the essentialized female spectator—they do not, that is, interrogate the axes of race, class, and sexuality which may, as well as gender, inform a "spectator's" response(s) to what might be more properly labeled a white, heterosexual, male, middle-class dominant cinema. They have not, finally—and hence this narrative has not—yet grappled with the so-called essentialist/anti-essentialist debate which has so perplexed and stymied feminism; where the concept of "essentialism" grounds those who see feminism and its projects as located in the specificity of the female body and the commonality of that body and its experiences in and across culture and cultural representations; and where "anti-essentialism" describes those (among whom Butler is extreme) who would eschew the concept of a recognizable female physical/cultural gender "essence" as incapable of accommodating, negotiating, or describing the vastly diverse experiences of women across racial, ethnic, local, class, historical, and sexually constructed backgrounds.

It is at this point that an emergent reading of female spectatorship as "unruly," as capable of occupying various misbehaving, mischievously masked or masqued identities,
various shifting and strategic locations, intersects with what is in fact a much larger issue of propriety within feminism, and within cultural studies as a whole. For despite my own claims—via Mulvey, de Lauretis, Doane, and Modleski—that female spectatorship may be constructed as a multiplicity of interventionary social and sexual sites, as an empowering cornucopia of assumed and recognized identities, it soon becomes apparent that at the center of this dislocation—in the place, the very face behind the mask—hovers an identity that is more stable, more unified, and ultimately more restricted than a strategy of unhinged viewing positions might initially suggest. That the painted face of female spectatorship has, in Modleski et. al., in fact been implicitly white—and not only white but very probably middle-class and almost certainly heterosexual—has increasingly become the concern, for example, of feminist critics who seek to expose the racial and sexual biases of psychoanalytic feminist film criticism, and who in addition seek a larger "calling to order" among white female gaze theorists, a calling to account and a recognition of approaches that, beneath facades of masquerade and sexual slippage, have in fact been more proprietary than improprietous, and which have secured an illusion of specular disruption only at the cost of ignoring the larger issue of what good or honorable behavior might mean among and between feminists as they work across racial, class,
sexual, and cultural lines.

Jane Gaines in particular, in her essay "White Privilege and Looking Relations" (1986), has taken mainstream feminist film theory to task for its constant reference to psychoanalysis as a kind of deep structure to gaze relations, one that ultimately blinds spectatorial theory to any mode of inquiry that does not specifically address (hetero)sexual difference. For Gaines, this nearsightedness has been the direct result of efforts to understand the ideological work of mainstream cinema in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of sexual difference, which has largely meant casting formal structures such as narrative and point of view as masculine, and locating the feminine, the opposite term, in the repressed or excluded. Since this theory has focused on sexual difference, class and racial differences have remained outside its problematic, divorced from textual concerns by the very split in the social totality that the incompatibility of these discourses misrepresents. 24

Gaines further argues that when feminist theorists take gender as their sole and confirming starting point, they prevent women from "recognizing" other modes or structures of oppression—and thus re-affirm white, middle-class
values. Her solution: For feminism and feminists to cease "assuming responsibility for everyone," since such "encompassing" attempts (perhaps inscribed, for example, in such a blanket term as "the masquerading female spectator") are in fact yet another exercise of racial authority; and instead to "undertake the difficult study of" feminism's own misrepresentations, of "our own 'determined ignorance'" of identities and histories that "cannot be imagined from a position of privilege" (199).

Gaines for example, and in very clear fashion, confronts the dilemma of underrepresented sexualities in mainstream feminist accounts of cinema and the gaze, pointing out that lesbians are not likely to experience the representation of the female figure by the monochromatic lights of Mulvey's (or Doane's) limited tropes of male specular desire. The "understanding of . . . visual pleasure in classical cinema as inherently male," Gaines writes, "[in fact] conceals the lesbian spectator," and denies the presence of a viewer who possesses the ability to alter "significantly . . . the trajectory of the gaze, since the eroticized star body might be the visual objective of another female character in the film with whose 'look' the viewer might identify" (200). Gaines also takes issue with "radical feminism's" monolithic view of patriarchy as the basis of all oppressions, suggesting that the notion of an "absolute patriarchy," by placing "woman" as "man's"
repressed Other, "competes" with theories of racial difference that seek to describe blacks historically othered position in white culture. She calls finally for an adoption of black feminism's concept of "racial patriarchy," which does not, as in more standard feminist notions of dominance, omit discussion of the way white women occupy positions of specular power over black women and men, and concludes her analysis with a reading of the film Mahogany, starring Diana Ross--suggesting that "normal" modes of feminist analysis would easily overlook the manner in which the film's white male character, a photographer, controls the erotic gaze that images Ross' "sumptuous" body; while "the Black male protagonist's look is either repudiated or frustrated" (207).

Yet while Gaines' account of the blindness of psychoanalytic feminist descriptions of mainstream cinema is accurate, her solutions, and indeed her own analysis, seem somewhat problematic. She does not make it clear, for example, how more privileged (white) feminists might "learn" about unrepresented others, if the history of those others "cannot [even] be imagined from a position of privilege." Her characterization of a "radical feminism" consumed with the notion of an "absolute patriarchy" also seems more divisive than connective, while her attempts to speak for and represent various groups within her text--including blacks, lesbians, the lower classes, "radical feminists,"
and whites—begins to fall into the trap of precisely that account she most wishes to avoid: that which would attempt to speak "for everyone." Finally, her analysis of the film *Mahogany* is particularly disturbing, since it appears to suggest that the central oppression of the film is that of the black male spectator/looker, who lacks the same access, the same ability to appropriate the body/image of Diana Ross as the white male photographer/looker. Is it Gaines' contention, then, that all men should possess the same right, through their look, to objectify the female body? Certainly not; and yet curiously Gaines' argument duplicates the very "obtuseness" she had hoped to eradicate from mainstream feminist interpretations of cinema, and mainstream theorizations of the female gaze. For by focusing too exclusively on race, Gaines' neglects to interrogate the kinds of assumptions, confusions, and conflagrations that can be effected whenever gender is not (re)introduced as a primary variable within textual analyses for oppression. Her strongest contribution to the question and to the present narrative and a developing model of female spectatorship becomes, then, an illustrative awareness of what it means to exclude any category salient within discussions of spectatorial representations. Is the answer then, conversely and precisely, to assume responsibility for everyone? To continue to construct a model (or models) of female spectatorship which can
accommodate itself to and express various positionalities and relations of privilege within feminism? If so, is the concept of the "unruly," the unpredictably "masked" and masking female spectator one such workable model? Or is my emphasis on masquerade and on shifting, unpredictable adaptability ultimately too impermanent, too "irresponsible," to adequately or seriously address the dilemma of a gender-based criticism functioning on behalf of multi-positioned women, individuals, and identities?

The misbehaving, masquerading female spectator may in fact provide certain access points for multifaceted discussions of race, class, and sexuality (since the positions dictated by race or class might be mischievously appropriated or undertaken, "worn," or traded, to produce specific and revealing readings or interventions); yet such a spectator also raises questions about, and intersects with debates concerning, the nature of implicitly or ultimately deconstructive maneuvers and their particular usefulness or limitation with regard to feminist theorizations, and in particular to theorizations about the efficacy of the term "female" in representing a category upon which broad political action can be based. Susan Bordo, in "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender Scepticism" has been among those feminists who have detected what she describes as "a new drift in feminism"—a "new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytical category."

Bordo identifies this
emergent tendency as a "cultural formation," constructed in part as a result of feminist appropriations of Derridean deconstructionism, which have in turn led certain theorists to criticize the category of gender as too fixed and binarized, and to focus instead on a "narrative ideal of ceaseless textual play"—an ideal which Bordo characterizes as a kind of "fantasy" of epistemological freedom, a dubious "dream of everywhere" (135-36). It was feminists, as Bordo quite rightly points out, who first challenged and dismantled the so-called "view from nowhere," the assumption of theoretical and historical objectivity that had long undergirded humanistic and patriarchal constructions of culture; feminists who by asking, as Bordo writes, "Whose truth . . . Whose nature . . . Whose tradition?" first exposed and explored the possibility that the view from nowhere "may itself be a male construction of the possibilities for knowledge" (137). While Bordo lauds as a "valuable insight" the idea that gender forms only one axis in a complex matrix of intersecting constructions, she criticizes the suggestion that ineluctable difference become the authoritative framework, "legislator" the incorrectness of those who would "stray" out of its apparently objective inclusiveness (139). And she questions the tendency to affirm difference as the only "correct" basis upon which to construct theoretical arguments, since such a tendency once again negates gender (as in Gaines) as a generalization
which is purely or finally totalizing.

In fact, Bordo argues, the Derridean deconstructionist's resolution to the drama of difference in a "dream of everywhere," in the notion of constant textual play, paradox, subversion, multiplicity, and inversion, in itself becomes another "view from nowhere," since "becoming multiplicity" is in effect, she suggests, another attempt at critical disembodiment, at philosophical transcendence—a re-enactment of the old humanistic ideal. Many deconstructionist theoreticians, Bordo further argues, while astute in recognizing that identity is far from unitary or stable, in fact "refuse to assume a shape for which they must take responsibility"—eliding and escaping, through textual and theoretical play, the very real localities and dilemmas that face beings and bodies in culture. The question remains then to what extent a model of unruly and masquerading female spectatorship, functioning now to address and accommodate differences between women, partakes of this essential absence, this irresponsible of identification; to what extent, in essence, the studied epigraph with which I began this introduction describes not a mischievous and liberating refusal of semantic/spectatorial containment ("I never know if I hold a view . . ."), but rather a stolid and ultimately conservative denial of critical and social culpability. Is it really enough, as I have suggested, to say that a concept
of multiplicitous and unpredictable spectatorship is at least and finally and purposefully grounded at the position of any individual female spectator who accesses its luminous and illuminating possibilities? What is it after all that might bind various female spectators together, as women, as they practice from varying, shifting and appropriative sites—and hence anchor a concept of masquerading female spectatorship as both textually mischievous and politically aligned, as both strategically mobile and purposefully "responsible"?

In her most recent work in Feminism Without Women (1991), Tania Modleski in fact returns to the question of location and difference, of essentialism and deconstruction—attempting to express, in more complex ways than discovered in The Women Who Knew Too Much, the "common ground" that may secure feminist theorists as they practice across races, sexualities, classes, cultures, and even textual-critical approaches. Modleski reaches out for what might be described as a conciliatory strategy by an appeal to the work of (among others) de Lauretis, finding in the reality of a shared "experience of oppression" one commonality upon which feminism (and hence a concept of female spectatorship) might rest and so negotiate its extended differences. She also proposes, again suggestively with de Lauretis, that the "'essence' of woman is, and always has been, more of a project than a description of existent reality"—"[i]n the
final analysis," Modleski writes, "it seems more important to struggle over what it means to be a woman than over whether or not to be one." Insofar as the masquerading female spectator partakes of that search for meaning, that function as "project" rather than as prescription or "description of existent reality," it would seem, then, to align and ally itself with what is most central to feminist formulations: the process or expression of diverse attempts to account for, escape, observe, return, and respond to woman's syntactically located position(s) as an oppressed class within culture.27

Yet I can go further in defending and describing a concept of unruly masquerade as potentially viable for a "locatable" feminism, by attaching once more the work of Teresa de Lauretis, this time her Technologies of Gender (1987)—a text which provides not only a kind of strategic culmination or climax for the present narrative of female spectatorship, but through which I am also able to discuss and describe the fundamental presence and absence of masquerade itself, and the conflicts inherent in any narrative, history, or theory which seeks to establish both textual mobility and political stability; both the limited constructedness of a narrative of masquerading possibilities for female spectatorship, and the potential ability of that imagined or conjured spectatorship to widely reveal, through its own performances and with distinct political
consequences, its own, studied acts of construction, 
masquerade, and organized misrule.

It is, to return to an earlier problem, de Lauretis who 
has offered one of the most complicated and thoughtfully 
articulated accounts of the process of de- or in-scribing 
the term "female" as a category of representation, as a 
construction not only within a prescriptive patriarchy, but 
within feminism and feminist strategies which further work 
to create the "female" as ideological function, as a re-
presentation. Through her notion of a "technology of 
gender" (derived in part from Foucault's "technology of 
sex"), de Lauretis discusses the ways in which the terms of 
gendered descriptions, including "woman" and "female" (and 
thus "the female spectator"), are created, described, and 
fortified by certain "technologies"—systems of prescriptive 
and generative representation which include not only cultural 
representations (such as the cinema), but even theory itself 
as it attempts to describe what are appear to be other 
forms, formulae, and (re)productive technologies. It is de 
Lauretis' insight that feminist theory is itself a 
"technology of gender," a function that re-presents gender 
and gendered forms within culture, which in fact allows her 
to move beyond anti/essentialist or de/constructionist 
impasses and into an understanding and acceptance of "woman" 
as a shifting and contradictory nomen that finally "masks" 
(in my terms) not a site of stable theorization, but a
process of constant reconfiguration. In searching for what she names and describes as the "subject of feminism," de Lauretis seeks out then "a conception or understanding of the (female) subject as not only distinct from Woman with the capital letter, the representation of an essence inherent in all women . . . but also [as] distinct from women, the real historical beings and social subjects who are defined by the technology of gender." She seeks, in other words, a "subject of feminism" who both invokes and escapes such definitions, and who is in effect a subject emerging from both within and outside the ideologies that shape feminist theoretical representations.

De Lauretis' description of a "subject of feminism" both inside and outside theoretic and feminist formulations may, with some utility and advantage, be adapted to a developing concept of masquerading female spectatorship. For if we begin to move from the "subject of feminism" to "the female spectator," or perhaps even to "the female spectator of feminism," we can begin to recognize and affirm that, like de Lauretis' elusive subject, the masquerading spectator travels both within and beyond the theories she invokes and dons, located in isolate moments of viewing and theorization as well as in her larger project and process of political/feminist reconfiguration, yet mobile and escaping in her ability to suggest the technological limitations of theory itself, and gesturing always toward an undefined
space **beyond** theoretical narrative, beyond her masked self, beyond, even, the very narrative--this narrative--which seeks to describe her possibilities. De Lauretis indicates this position or space--one that exceeds present discourses—as the "elsewhere" or the "off-space" of discourse: a term she derives from cinematic practice, and which describes that space which is implied by, but not seen within, the frame of the camera’s eye. It is a space that exists but is "unrepresentable" given the parameters of a specific sight; and it is a space which must be named and gestured toward as that which both contains the possibility of feminism, and which characterizes or makes plain its omissions. In de Lauretis’ terms, then, the "responsibility," the "location" of a feminist theoretical practice consists in the naming of its elsewhere(s): in the recognition, finally, of its own, inescapable occlusions.

It is this sense of recognition, of course, that I have already argued is so fundamental to the empowerment of female spectators. For through de Lauretis, it becomes clear that a concept of masquerading spectatorship may be seen as both politically viable and strategically effective, indeed and precisely through its very recognition of its own, fleeting possibilities and limitations--able, in its appropriation of multiple theories and approaches, its various moveable feats of viewing, both to express the efficacy inherent in each adaptation, and, in its very
diversity and multiplicity, to point to the temporality, provisionality, and limited location of each masquerading theory, and so gesturing always toward that which is not seen or which may be glimpsed only partially from one view or summation or coherence or narrative of viewpoints. This recognition—which I mark as a "sighting" or a "citing" of the female spectator in her function as a feminist strategy or concept—in turn becomes part of the process of reconfiguring and reauthorizing female and feminist critical (in)sights, and in particular of the authorization of the female gaze itself in its capacity to affirm and understand its specific and often unruly specular opportunities. I try, in what follows then, to "perform" both this unruliness and this authorization within the larger masquerade of an ostensibly "productive" narrative: in Chapter 1, by constructing a reading of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* which emphasizes and reveals the overwhelmingly powerful specular structures which may act to oppress the female as an object—rather than as a subject-in-sight; in Chapter 2, by mishievously undercutting that reading to expose its occlusions and its function as a particularly (socially, racially) situated masquerade or representation of female viewing; in Chapter 3, by seeking to address and describe the ability of certain texts by women, in this case Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, to encompass, encircle, and so validate the "watching-of-female-masquerade" as that which
may deepen and extend a workable technology of female specular identification and power; and in Chapter 4, and through Nella Larsen's Quicksand, by challenging the very precepts and pre-texts--theoretical, mobile, technological, discursive--which sustain what has become a process of repeated and "mirrored" maskings and unmaskings, and which must now, finally, reveal and return, not simply the mischievous and mobile female spectator as a radically absent strategic construct, but as a discrete and recognizable location from which particular women, including myself, strive to see, be seen, and be seen seeing--and where we are sometimes and, despite our best vigilance, unexpectedly exposed, as debilitatingly, indeed "theoretically," blinded.

Indeed, it may be through this very willingness to recognize both the liberation and the complicity of these, what I have called the masks of theory, that the concept of "unruliness" or "misbehavior" is finally re-affirmed and re-defined. For in the context of a critical attention to omission or occlusion, misbehavior becomes a willed and willful disregard for a merely blind textual disobediance, for the lure of mischief for mischief's sake (which would ignore its own embeddedness in discursive propriety), and a supple willingness to undertake, now re-phrasing and re-emphasizing Gaines, "the difficult study of [its] own determined ignorance[s]." Yet where Gaines found such
analysis potentially obstructed by the inability of one class of female spectators to "imagine" the position of another, I will suggest that it is only through imagination, through imaginative revision, redress, and return, and only through the constructed trying on and wearing of strategies and locations of seeing, and the seeking of what is not seen from those locations (the "off-spaces"), that women may be connected across texts and fields, across identities and divisions (including those enforced thorough race, class, and sexuality) in the "process" both Modleski and de Lauretis propose and describe.

And it becomes possible, too, to re-read, imaginatively, the epigraph with which I began this essay. Not simply or only a statement of absence or noncommittal, Byatt's quote from Still Life—a novel concerned intimately with seeing and representation, and whose words are here taken quite mischievously out of context—becomes variously an opportunity for engagement, a site of unruly possibilities, and a place to read and try on readings of what it means to express visual and critical authority as a woman. Reading in and moving between the spaces, the "inside" and "outside" offered by the ellipses, I would suggest that Byatt's quote implies both a taking and a releasing of viewpoint, a blurring of what it means to "hold" and to "know," a moment of simultaneous location and unlocation which I have suggested describes the self-
conscious construct of masquerading female spectatorship as both grounded and unfixed. For if reading is, as it is in this instance, largely strategic and experimental, then the strategy of unruly seeing is and must always be the layered reading of seeing through a mask that must in turn be seen. So that ultimately—and I say this quite wickedly against Foucault—we as feminist critics of the gaze may indeed be free to misbehave . . . but only when we’ve set a fine and gleeful watch upon ourselves.
Notes


2. Each respondent was asked to "outline the history of [her] critical engagement with the issue of female spectatorship"; to discuss the usefulness of the term "female spectator" in its "empirical" or "hypothetical" aspects; to address the continued efficacy or inefficacy of the term or concept; and to comment on the process of "reading against the grain" within the parameters of feminist film scholarship and theory.

3. Issue editor Mary Ann Doane, in her own response essay, in fact betrays some ambivalence about this "awakening"; arguing that the female spectator may already be an "historical concept," the product of "a particular historical moment when reading and readability (as the effects of textuality) were centrally important issues in the theorization of film" (142).

4. Or, as Teresa de Lauretis describes it in Alice Doesn't (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), as "a semiotic space constructed in language . . . its power based on social validation and well-established modes of enunciation and address" (p. 7).


6. This understanding is similar to that of Doane, who describes the female spectator as a "function . . . a concept, not a person." Doane's difficulty seems to lie however with the fact that the concept may be one which has outworn its usefulness: "I believe we are now experiencing a reification of the concept of the female spectator which makes it less productive, less generative of new ways of thinking . . . It is clear to me that the category the 'female spectator' is not eternal, immutable, or essential to feminism" (142-3). It will of course be my own suggestion that this "reification" is in no way itself "essential," but eminently reversible within a concept of mischievous female viewing.
7. *Alice Doesn’t*, p. 3 (emphasis mine).

8. Among the many works Doane and Bergstrom take recourse to are those by Laura Mulvey, Ellen Seiter, Jacqueline Bobo, Marsha Kinder, Teresa de Lauretis, David Morley, James Clifford, Patricia Mellencamp, Giuliana Bruno, and Charlotte Brunsdon.

9. The editors' references to "The Spectatrix"'s subsequent essays are interspersed throughout their introduction rather than bundled toward the end of the text; the effect is to create a fluid understanding of the history being undertaken, yet at the same to suggest the presentness and pressingness of the most recent texts available: they are themselves most near the surface of the history, closest to its end (in 1989), and to its future.


11. Or, more precisely, the first film theorist to articulate the function and status of the male gaze from within specifically feminist, psychoanalytic modes. Addresses to and descriptions of the pervasive authority of the male gaze had been undertaken as early as the late sixties and early seventies; John Berger, in his influential book *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972), based on a television series of the same name, identified for example the "essential way of seeing women" as objects intended for male "flattery": "Women are depicted in a quite different way from men," Berger writes, "not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male" (p. 64). Such early accounts were however often uncannily prescriptive, even culpatory in their descriptions; "men act and women appear," Berger writes; "[m]en look at women . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object" (p. 47, emphasis mine). Filled with pictures and descriptions of the female nude, Berger's work emerges rather more as a reflection of male authority than as its (purported) nemesis.


14. Alice Doesn't, p. 7. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text. De Lauretis' project is somewhat similar to my own in that she calls for multiplicituous strategies with which to combat cultural and specular dominance; she describes the essays presented as a series of "eccentric reading[s]," resistant confrontations with established texts and regimes (p. 5). I would suggest however that "resistance," or what Doane and Bergstrom describe in "The Spectatrix" as "reading against the grain," is, in all its various forms, but one (optimistic) source or strategy available to the eccentric, erratic, or unruly female spectator of visual or literary representations. When, for example, might quiescence become an effectively subversive tactic--or absence, or parody--strategies marshalled under the larger rubric, perhaps, of a political (rather than textual) resistance?


16. De Lauretis, too, in Alice Doesn't, had attempted to address the distinction between constructed and actual (female) subjects, using the term "woman" to identify a "fictional construct" and "women" to describe "real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined as outside of . . . discursive formations" (p. 5). The struggle to express the nature and the variable and conflicting locations of "real, historical [female] beings" even within recognizable discursive formations will become a particularly contentious area for feminist gaze theorists (see below).

17. Doane, "Film and the Masquerade," in Femmes Fatales, p. 21. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text. The essay was originally published in Screen no. 23, vols. 3-4 (1982), and has also been reprinted in Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism (pp. 41-57).


20. Like Doane's concept of masquerade, Butler's strategy of "gender parody" seems to be presented without an awareness of specifically contextual limitations—without raising the troubling question of who must recognize parody for it to exist, or, for that matter, who might actually be ill-served by performances that deny stable gender identity (for example, women of color seen, as Homi K. Bhabha records, as "not quite" women—see Modleski, below). Butler's deconstruction of gender also raises particular problems for a feminist politics. Although she argues that a gender-based politics is not precluded by the lack of stable or "true" gender identity, since gender is constructed through "acts, words, gestures, desires" and since (presumably) those organized by their acts into an (illusory) class "women" can organize to political effect, the "emptiness" at the center of her formulations (and her reliance on certain [male] deconstructionists to secure those formulations) is itself "troubling" at a moment when many feminist theorists seek to preserve political, experiential, and strategic viability for feminism in the face of totalizing deconstructive (and potentially conservative) maneuvers (see below).


23. For a complete reading of this process and its implications, see *Gender Trouble*, Chapter 2, "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Heterosexual Matrix."


26. Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, p. 20. Modleski's insight that it is the struggle toward meaning which itself characterizes feminism and so links diverse groups of women is in fact very similar to a conclusion Doane reaches in her own, later work in *Femmes Fatales*:
"[W]hat is at stake," Doane writes, "is . . . the *syntax* which constitutes the female body as a term (176, emphasis mine). Both theorists appear to reach toward an understanding of a shared *cultural grammar*, or struggle toward and through meaning as it is inscribed on the female body, as that which describes the function and nature of feminist projects.

27. Another way of describing this may be found in Diana Fuss’s work in *Essentially Speaking* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), in which Fuss characterizes "politics" itself as that which is "precisely the self-evident category in feminist discourse—that which is most irreducible and most indispensable. As feminism’s *essential* component, it tenaciously resists definition; it is both the most transparent and the most elusive of terms" (p. 36). Fuss’s suggestion is that terms such as "woman" and "female" (and hence "female spectator") are in fact constituted and constructed by a process that is essentially political—given meaning (to return to the issue of syntax) only within the context of coalitions of identities.


29. De Lauretis’ work, it should be noted, here functions as another strategic site or theoretical mask; yet the difference in her work (and in her place in this narrative) lies in her ability to record at a more formal level the boundaries of her (and other) analysis. De Lauretis begins to describe what she cannot see within current feminist practice(s); my intent is to extend this exploration of feminist "off-spaces" from *within* feminist tropes and models and practices themselves, which include and may be described by the concepts of masquerade and unruly theoretical relocation. In this sense, I appropriate de Lauretis’ work in *Technologies* for its ability to validate, from within feminism, a specific representation of theoretical possibility; and so internalize, textually, the sense of female spectatorial recognition and authorization I argue is so important in feminist understandings of masking: one feminist theoretical gaze turns and recognizes another.

Chapter 1

Edna Under the Sun:

Throwing Light on the Subject of The Awakening

If traditional readings of Chopin's novel of awakening may be said to emanate from a single source, that point of departure—and the origin of so much critical light and heat generated by the text—might be located in what Wendy Martin has described as "the primary concern of Chopin’s fiction—the celebration of female sexuality, and the tension between erotic desire and the demands of marriage, the family, and a traditional society."¹ From this shared starting point the growing number of critical reflections on The Awakening has refracted along certain, quickly established lines; these find in Edna's ending either a transcendence that "abandons . . . self . . . [in] a reaching out for, an attainment of, more self"; or a movement toward "defeat and regression, rooted in a self-annihilating instinct [and] a romantic incapacity to accommodate . . . to the limitations of reality"; or again a gesture of such impenetrable ambiguity that in this, Chopin's "most complex vision of an individual's search for selfhood . . . the reader has no sense of completion and no understanding of the meaning of Edna's total experience."² Under these split-visions the novel itself becomes interestingly refractory, stubbornly
unavailable to critical authority even as it lays itself bare (as Edna will by her end) to the peering critical function. Yet is the novel ultimately resistant to any definitive exposure of its meanings? In what light finally does Chopin ask us to see, or not to see, her heroine?

The matter of light has indeed been linked to several of the readings of the novel above, and the presence of the sun in the text in particular brought into line with each new critical bent. For Cristina Giorcelli, author of the preceding transcendent vision, the solar force of The Awakening is a "symbol of plenitude," "the most powerful symbol of intuitive knowledge," and "the beginning and end of all" (117, 124, 125). For Martin however it is overwhelmingly the "traditional symbol of male power," which is and "remains the driving force of [Edna's] life" (22). In his own argument that the novel attempts (and fails) to challenge a system of representational aesthetics, Michael T. Gilmore has associated the sun with the text's visual aspects, finding "the book's prose . . . 'one with the sunlight, the color,'" as Chopin "flecks her pages with vivid dabs of paint." For Gilmore, the novel essays an Impressionistic view of the world even as Edna attempts a similar "emancipation from the authority of natural forms." It is for this reason, he argues, that music is privileged in the text: as "an imageless art [which] is autonomous."

Gilmore in fact strikes close to what I take to be a
central issue in the novel: the impossibility of escape, not merely from the authority of natural forms, but from the realm of the visual altogether. Although The Awakening has traditionally been explored as a stirring into sexual consciousness, I would like to suggest now that the novel also and specifically addresses its title as a trope for eye-opening—for an entry, that is, into structures of seeing and being seen commonly theorized under the rubric of the "gaze" or "look," and for my present purposes best enunciated by Kaja Silverman in her formulations on Lacan. What is it that might be gained by such an approach? It is my own belief—my own particular bent of thought—that, with Edna newly viewed as a subject engaged fundamentally with the problems and realities of the gaze—problems which are given scope and shape in the novel by the presence of light and sun—her ending likewise becomes newly formulated: as one which refers not to transcendence, or defeat, or even to a hopeless ambiguity, but rather to limitation and possibility as they exist within a construct of Lacanian illumination.

In what follows, then, I chart a series of "awakenings," or versions of experience as it is constituted within the sight/site of the gaze. In the first of these, Edna appears all but unaware of her self as a being determined by the powers of looking.
"What determines [the subject], at the most profound level, in the visible," Lacan writes, "is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that [the subject enters] light, and it is from the gaze that [he or she] receives its effects."4

From the very first we are aware of Edna Pontellier's story as one which is taken up from a position well within "the gaze that is outside." It is a vision--Mr. Pontellier's--that we are given first in the novel, and the first physical detail we learn of him is pointedly scopophilic: "Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses."

As Edna's husband sets his newspaper aside and casually "look[s] about him," we are presented with a panorama from his critical viewpoint, taking in the "fresh, pretty woman" he sees in Madame Lebrun, the "lady in black" who walks "demurely" on the beach, the "sturdy little fellows" who are his children, and the obedient quadroon who follows as their nurse. We might even suspect at this early moment that Mr. Pontellier's look will dominate all that follows, a suspicion which seems borne out when he finally turns to see his wife. "He fixed his gaze upon a white sunshade that was advancing at a snail's pace from the beach" (44).

From the outset then Edna is placed within the landscape of another's, and a particularly masculine, way of seeing; yet it remains to be discovered whether the presence of the gaze in this novel is also to be deliberately and
limitedly defined as male. What is surprising for the moment is that Edna is at first curiously invisible within that space. The sunshade itself is a significant detail. It works to obstruct Mr. Pontellier's view of his wife (and of young Robert Lebrun) at a moment when we may have already ceded the force of his spectatorship; we might be tempted now to regard Edna's parasol as some form of shield, some form of resistance to her husband's overarching look. We might, that is, were it not for the fact that Chopin reminds us that a sunshade, in the society of the Pontelliers, functions primarily as an extension of that look. "'You are burnt beyond recognition,'" Mr. Pontellier frets, looking at Edna "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (44).

The shade is of course intended to preserve Edna as an object for visual consumption, and the proliferation of hats, umbrellas, tents, and gloves in the novel--employed most often in the protection of women and children--attests to the pervasiveness of this veiled looking. Madame Ratignolle, "careful of her complexion," wears "a gauze veil about her head" and dogskin gloves "with gauntlets that protected her wrists" (58), and is absorbed in the production of protective garments for her offspring. Robert Lebrun is careful to take Edna's "big, rough straw hat" and "put it on her head" before one of their walks; later his brother Victor will show a similar attention, politely
holding her parasol above her (56, 112). In a moment early in the novel Edna has passed her sunshade over to her husband, who accepts it without comment, "lifting it over his head" (45). The scene is a strangely parodic one —linking as it does the symbol—symptom and its symbol—source—and it is also another intimation that Edna may not be scrupulous in guarding herself for her husband's and society's perfect delectation.

Nevertheless Edna seems at this early stage in the novel to view herself only as an object within that society as it has already defined her. After her husband has remarked her sunburned state, Edna holds up her hands, "survey[ing] them critically, drawing up her lawn sleeves above the wrist" (45). Looking at them reminds her of her wedding rings, and she then silently requests these of her husband. At this juncture Edna's body seems only to remind her of her established role within a system of scopophilic ownership and display; she does see herself, in other words, other than she is used to being seen. And this is a role the novel will be deliberate in reinforcing throughout. Contrary for example to the terse illustrations of her husband's physical appearance, Edna Pontellier will have descriptive passages lavished upon her, details of her hair, coloring, and dress brought forward, of her "captivating" features, of her "firm, round arms" and her "bare insteps." She is described as having a body of "clean . . .
symmetrical" lines (later the painterly "living tints" of her flesh are invoked), and one which requires "feeling and discernment" in order to appreciate. What is notable here is Chopin's deftness in (re)activating the reader's gaze even as she cloaks it in a vocabulary of artistic apprehension (read, connoisseurship). Yet what we are left with is nothing more than Edna still as object-in-sight, recognized primarily for the "charm" of her physique and for "the noble beauty of its modeling" (58).

There are however embedded within these descriptions important glimpses into Edna's own way of seeing. Her eyes, we learn, are "quick and bright," "two vivid points of light," and Edna has a habit of "turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought" (46). Edna's features are depicted as having a quality of "depth" and "shadow," and it is this quality of dimensionality which sets her apart from other characters in the novel. Adele Ratignolle, far from being deep, is "flaming and apparent," described as a text which "every one might read" (57). Alcee Arobin is "not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling" (128), while even Robert, for all his purported resemblance to Edna, is unshadowed, his eyes gathering light only to "reflect" it from his "open countenance" (46). Edna alone in the novel is described as a conflicted individual, "hidden," "reserved," with "contradictory" features that betray the
tension she dimly understands to exist in her "dual life"—between "that outward existence which conforms, [and] the inward life which questions" (57). After her husband has chided her with her neglect of the children, her failure as a "mother-woman," Edna feels that shadow in her existence, "passing over her soul summer's day." "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (57). The novel, and indeed Edna herself, would seem to call upon her to cast aside this lingering shadow and to bring to light some hidden, "truer" self. But who, what might this truer self be? And which is the shadow which has intervened?

Perhaps it is that which Lacan has described as the "screen"—"that culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated" (76). The screen for Lacan, "something like a mask, a double, an envelope," is that construct which, when projected onto the subject-in-sight, grants it its identity. In The Awakening as we have seen it, such "screening" is dramatized by the intervention of apparently benign presences—sunshades and hats, gloves and veils, a multitude of tents, shawls, and umbrellas—all articles of protection which nevertheless encase, shield, and define the subject (in Edna's case, as woman, mother, wife, and possession) who without such screening would lack identity
altogether. Unlike the others, who do not detect the shadows on their existences, Edna has by the early chapters of her story vaguely intuited the images that enclose her; she seems also, however indistinctly, to have sensed that intuition may not necessarily lead to independence from such images. "A certain light," Chopin writes of her heroine, "was beginning to dawn dimly within her--the light which, showing the way, forbids it" (57).

Edna seems here to glimpse the boundaries that hedge her new insight, yet it will remain for her to learn more fully Silverman's "lesson" as it is taken from Lacan--that "it is no more possible to be seen than to see ourselves without the intervention of representation" (74). Partially awakened into the reality of images that shape and delimit her possibilities, Edna's next impulse will be a kind of flight: she will seek to establish a self apart entirely from traditional scopic forces. And this attempt will be played out in the context of Mademoiselle Reisz's musical performance.

Chopin begins the scene of the evening's entertainment at the Lebruns' in a glare of powerful light. "Every light in the hall was ablaze; every lamp turned as high as it could be without smoking the chimney or threatening explosion. The lamps were fixed at intervals against the
wall, encircling the whole room" (68). The passage seems to announce the prevalence of the gaze in that place, a presence borne out by the specular quality of the event itself, in which, among other diversions, a "little girl performed a skirt dance in the center of the floor . . . properly addressed for the occasion in black tulle and black silk tights. Her little neck and arms were bare, and her hair, artificially crimped, stood out like fluffy black plumes over her head" (69). Mademoiselle Reisz alone seems impervious to the glare of social looking; she is a woman careless of her figure, her face, her appearance. Yet she, too, with her "rusty black lace" and comic "bunch of artificial violets" functions as spectacle in the novel, and interestingly takes up positions both as looker and looked-on: "She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face . . . and eyes that glowed" (71, emphasis mine).

Edna is attracted however not to the physical woman but to her music, and is moved by Reisz’s playing precisely because it fails to conjure up images in her mind. Music in general, and in particular the playing of the mother-woman Adele Ratignolle has had a way, we have learned, of "evoking pictures" in Edna’s head; she has come to expect certain scenes to pass over her thoughts during performances, visions of "a dainty woman clad in an Empire gown, taking mincing dancing steps," or of children happily at play, or of "Solitude" figured as a naked man "standing beside a
desolate rock on the seashore" (71). Yet when Mademoiselle Reisz plays, Edna waits for these conventional images "in vain." She discovers no visions "of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair"—but only nameless, imageless "passions" which are like "waves" washing over her (72). After the woman has finished her piece, Edna can only press her hand "convulsively," so stirred has she been by what she has not seen. It is as though for the moment Edna has been able to elude the insistence of the pictorial, the inevitability of seeing which necessarily implies its converse, or what Laura Mulvey had described as "to-be-looked-at-ness."6

The moment is a short-lived one, of course, but it temporarily empowers Edna, and she finds a means to prolong her sense of freedom. Suddenly she finds that she can swim. She plunges out into the Gulf that is dark and shapeless, closely linked to the "waves" of imageless passion that have washed over her and also, presumably, to Edna's hidden, interior self. Inspired by her vision of the visionless, Edna swims farther and farther out, seeming "to be reaching . . . for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (74). "She wanted to swim far out," Chopin tells us, "where no woman had swum before"—away from herself, we might guess, and away from that self as it has been imaged as social woman. But on turning to take the measure of her distance—on turning to compare the land, sight of her envisionedness,
and the sea, which is really the not-see of darkness--Edna is struck by "a quick vision of death." For she has glimpsed now that the only place which is apart from the world of the seen, and apart from the world of the represented, is the dark house of nothingness itself; the only space where a self constructed by its images sheds that self, and its images, finally and for all.

Edna is "appalled" by her brief death-vision. Yet, sensing that what she both seeks and shuns is there, she wishes to affirm its possibility, and its solitude. On returning to shore, she attempts to give her husband some version of her experience: "I thought I should have perished out there alone" (74). But Mr. Pontellier is quick to remind her that, as long as she is living, she will never really be outside the field of his vision. "You were not so very far, my dear," he tells her. "I was watching you."

At this point it might be well to raise the question of whether seeing in this novel really is to be identified with Mr. Pontellier, or with any character or group of characters, and in particular whether we are to associate the "gaze" in this text with a male-dominated, Mulvey-esque perspective. Clearly the function of male looking is pervasive in The Awakening; nor can there be any question that the female functions here as the primary object of an extended social gaze. Yet, as I have already suggested, there are intimations that Edna may have her own ways of
seeing, and further that others (Mademoiselle Reisz in particular) may see Edna through lenses which need not be specifically defined as masculine. It seems more likely that Chopin shares with Silverman and Lacan some understanding of the gaze as "not coterminous with any individual viewer, or group of viewers," but rather as that which is, as Lacan has put it, "unapprehensible," issuing "from all sides" (59). Lacan, as Silverman has described it, "situates the gaze outside the voyeuristic transaction" -- he separates it from the "look" of the individual viewer, which is fundamentally local and focused at the eye. The gaze, now distinct from the look, is accorded an abstract status: it becomes as function reified to the extreme, and for Lacan its nature is best formulated in an impersonal phrase, "point of light."

This distinction between the individual "look" and the abstract function of the "gaze" is made apparent in the novel through the illustration of the local work of seeing, on the one hand, and through the presence of an impersonal, "unapprehensible" on the other. For not only Edna, Mr. Pontellier, and Robert are brought forward as possessors and generators of a look: Dr. Mandelet has "small blue eyes which age had robbed of much of their brightness but none of their penetration" (117); on the street "strange eyes" glance at Edna (121); Arobin's look is marked by "effrontery" (131); even a bust of Beethoven "scowl[s]" from
a mantelpiece (133). At Edna's "coup d'etat" dinner party, at least one guest betrays "blue eyes that stared" (127). Yet while the sights of individuals in the novel fracture into disparate looks, the omnipresence of the "gaze" is I would suggest figured at a single source—that of the sun. It is the sun and its "glare" (59) which come to dominate this novel, and to stand as well for something very like Lacan's "point of light" which is not fixed with any subject but through whose alienating function every subject receives identity. What is not yet clear, however, is why Edna, more than any other character, is so closely associated with this function—so closely linked to the sun in fact that she is burned by it, and yet consistently described as a being who thrives in it, reminding Dr. Mandelet of "some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (123) and prompting Mademoiselle Reisz to exclaim, as Edna enters her apartment, "Ah! here comes the sunlight!" (133)

For now it is enough to note Edna's next trajectory, her next attempt to constitute herself within sight of the gaze (or, as we may now and more specifically put it, within the field of others' looks), seems to parallel yet another Lacanian insight, here articulated by Silverman: "[A]lthough the subject has no identity without an alienating image, that image may be put in place either by the subject or by
the other" (76). Unable to maintain herself in the limitless vision-less of the sea, and unwilling to persist as she has been imag(in)ed by others, Edna now struggles to seize the structure of looking that has shaped her--to fashion, that is, her own image of self.

Crucial to her progress at this stage is her visit to the Cheniere Caminada, or "Sunny Isle," with Robert Lebrun. Here Edna, overpowered by the oppressiveness of a church which sits "in the sun's glare," seeks refuge and rest in the cottage of one Madame Antoine. Left to herself, she removes her clothing and looks at her body, but in a manner very different from that first scrutiny of her hands in the presence of her husband. "She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed then one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh" (84). Later, after her rest, she stands before a "little distorted mirror" and powders her nose, preparing herself for others' eyes and seeing herself "bright and wide awake" (85). Edna seems here to be usurping the authority of the gaze, taking upon herself the power of looking, conferring her own subjectivity, watching herself watch herself. But, as Lacan has recognized it, the gesture is a fundamentally illusory one:

It is only at a second remove [Silverman interprets] that the subject might be said to
assume responsibility for "operating" the gaze by 
"seeing" itself being seen even when no pair of 
eyes are trained upon it--by taking not so much 
the gaze as its effects within the self. However, 
consciousness as it is redefined by Lacan hinges 
not only upon the internalization but upon the 
elision of the gaze; this "seeing" of oneself 
being seen is experienced by the subject-of-
consciousness--by the subject, that is, who 
arrogates to itself a certain self-presence or 
substantiality--as a "seeing of [itself] seeing 
[itself]." (57)

Awakened to this "second remove" of consciousness, in 
seeing herself seeing herself, Edna has found a space in 
which she can seem to control her body as it is imaged, 
eliding the gaze as it is understood by Lacan and coming to 
believe that "she herself--her present self--was in some way 
different from the other self," that "she was seeing with 
different eyes" (88). Edna's new seeing of her seeing is 
important with view to the novel's progress; it will be 
closely linked with her renewed interest in her work as an 
artist, and with her gradual alienation from and final 
rupture with Mr. Pontellier. But neither advance will be 
made fully until Robert Lebrun has departed the scene, and 
it is to Robert we must now turn if we are to understand
more clearly Edna's awakening into the sight of self.

It is significant that the opening of Edna's eyes takes place within the context of her growing desire for Robert, and indeed one of the central conflicts and frustrations of the novel will be her inability to bring this desire into harmony with her search for a re-imaged, "A Solitary Self," to use Chopin's original title for her work. From our first sight of them, Robert and Edna have been linked as subjects. Robert is tied to Edna's early awakenings, proposing the swim that leads to her death-encounter (after which she feels "the first-felt throbblings of desire") and leading her to the cottage on the Cheniere Caminada where she silently re-views her body. Yet importantly he is always belated to Edna's most crucial moments, which remain emphatically solitary; it is remarkable in fact the extent to which he and Edna labor to construct elaborate, conventional fictions (the tale of the Sea-Spirit, the "Sleeping Beauty" legend) which will somehow draw him into her progress. Robert is clearly proximate to Edna's awakenings--but he is never central to them. He may serve, as the novel leads us to surmise, as the initial figure leading Edna to question her life's arrangements, yet Edna's larger desire is finally more personal, more self-centered, Chopin suggests, than the sexual longing she feels for the Creole, which is finally swept into and entangled with its mate in the hope that both might play some role in her finally-established self.⁷ Edna
even tries to associate Robert with the imageless music that has so greatly moved her: his voice, she thinks, is "not pretentious," but "musical and true" (89). But in one important respect Robert resembles those others who cast an image on her: he, too, "held his umbrella over her" (81).

With Robert's departure for Mexico Edna moves forward in her attempts to structure her own way of seeing herself, beginning "to do as she liked" and to take up more fully the role of the painter-artist. Where before Edna had been described as "dabbl[ing]" in sketching in an "unprofessional way" (55), producing a picture of Adele so unsatisfactory she unhesitatingly crumples it, Edna now takes up drawing more assiduously, showing Madame Ratignolle her sketches and telling her, "Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day" (106). She seizes on those around her who might serve as models for her work, pressing into service her children (who significantly lose interest when they realize they are the objects rather than the subjects of this entertainment); her father (who regards portraiture as something in the nature of an attack); and her quadroon servant (the least of subjects in the book, who sits for her mistress "patient as a savage" [108]). Edna increasingly sees the world in a different light, finding inspiration now in the body of a housemaid, whose "back and shoulders were molded on classic lines" (109). It is an apparent reversal of that earlier moment in the book, when Edna had been
remarked for the "noble beauty of [her] modeling." Edna, as artist, has taken on the role of looker rather than of looked-upon.

But there is a problem in all of this. How are we asked to take the role of the artist in this novel? The artist, according to Mademoiselle Reisz, is an exceptional being--one who possesses "the courageous soul . . . [t]he soul that dares and defies" (115). Such a person is closely identified with the bird she describes as "soar[ing] above the level plain of tradition and prejudice," the one who to succeed "must have strong wings" (138). Yet is there a model for such a being in the novel? Mademoiselle Reisz herself, the closest Chopin comes to an artist-figure, is "strikingly homely," and when she plays she is "ungraceful" and "deformed" (116). Even if these adjectives constitute a defiance of the socially scopic, they also savor of something twisted, weakened, abnormal. Earlier, in another revealing moment, we are reminded that, where Mademoiselle Reisz is concerned, the image of "the artist" may itself be another screen, another construct allied not with the dark lash of imageless waves but to the land, and to the visible. "Mademoiselle Reisz's avoidance of the water had furnished a theme for much pleasantry. Some . . . attributed it to the natural aversion for water sometimes believed to accompany the artistic temperament" (97).

These criticisms, if Edna is to be taken as the artist-
in-process, reflect upon that process with telling simplicity. In eliding the gaze and taking up a position of unreflective artistic looking, Edna stands in danger both of duplicating the imagistic force of the look (as she stares at others) and of recasting herself as simply another social construct (Mademoiselle Reisz’s conventional talk of artistic "wings" in fact echoes the "wings" of the self-effacing angelic mother-women). There is at least the suggestion, however, that Edna does not wish to view herself or to be viewed as the conventional artist. She insists that Mademoiselle "isn’t a musician and I am not a painter" (108), and she is presented in the text as one "devoid of [conventional] ambition" (127), as though seeking a position which will redefine or escape traditional and circumscribed roles. Yet Edna’s drawings seem themselves to be remarkably conventional—consisting at one point of a "young Italian character study"—and we might even be suspicious of the local art dealer who comments that her work is growing "in force and individuality" (134).

As it happens however Edna is not allowed to rest for long in her position as unreflective artist before she is abruptly exposed in the conventionality of her looking. At the dinner that is to mark, ironically, her personal independence, Edna stares with others as Robert’s younger brother Victor becomes a living spectacle, falling into a pose of classical splendor, becoming transformed with a
garland of roses "into a vision of Oriental beauty" (146). This performance is interrupted when, "looking at Edna" (147, emphasis mine), Victor begins to sing:

Ah! Si tu savais
Ce que tes yeux me disent--

Edna begs him to stop. It is the song Robert used to sing, and it reminds her painfully of his absence. But there is more than this at work here. To return to Silverman: "[U]nlike the gaze, the look foregrounds the desiring subjectivity of the figure from whom it issues" (71-72). It emphasizes that subjectivity as one "which rests upon lack, whether or not that lack is acknowledged." Under this formulation the scene of Victor's display is quickly transformed: not only does he look back at Edna, exposing her in her looking with a refrain which translates roughly as "If only you knew/What your eyes tell me," but Edna is caught in the symbolic relation of her own "look" to "lack," tumbling her from the place where she has illusorily assumed power over the gaze and restoring her to her position as an object-in-sight. Edna's exposed looking, in other words, is here equated with her desire (which in Lacanian terms is always an expression of lack), not only for the absent Robert, but also for that vacant, unapprehensible space in which she might be a self without the confirming work of outside images. With Victor's
mockery, Edna's deprivation on both counts is revealed--Edna who, as we have learned, has had a horror of conventional images of lack: "The sight of a wound or scar," she has told Arobin, "always agitates and sickens me" (130).

It is a strong moment, but not the strongest. For this lesson will be recapitulated with even greater violence and clarity at the childbirth scene of Madame Ratignolle. At the scene of the "coup d'état" party Edna has learned only that as she looks she exposes herself in her dual desire. At the "accouchement" of her friend, she will discover that looking also exposes the full extent to which she herself is imaged, the extent to which it is impossible for her "to see [herself] without the intervention of representation."

After Robert has returned from Mexico and Edna has found him again, there is a moment in which she believes that her dream may still be possible, that she may yet forge for herself an Edna-generated-image that will include Robert in its self-sufficient circle. "We shall be everything to each other," she tells him (168). Yet even Robert has blundered disjointedly onto the roles that look and lack play in her desire for him. Edna, once called upon to explain her love for him, has only been able to summon Lebrun as he is modeled before her eyes. She loves him, she says, because "his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square
Later Robert calls her insistence that he profess his love for her "cruel... as though you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it" (165). But Edna will not heed his words. "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not," she says. "I give myself where I choose" (167).

Yet, called away to her friend's childbirth, Edna is confronted finally and irreversibly with the limitations of her subjectivity, the manner in which even as she looks at the beloved her being is inscribed in a priori representation:

Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own experience seemed far away, unreal, and only half-remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go.

She began to wish she had not come; her presence was not necessary... But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture. (170)

Edna--following precisely that moment with Robert when
her "eye would seem most to aspire to transcendental status"
(59)--in "witnessing," in looking at her friend's childbirth
is once again and with utter finality thrown back upon the
reality of imaged existence as it is duplicated and
expressed within the visible world. Not only is she
reminded of her own, unalterable status as a mother-woman
("Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children!");
she is privy to the very process by which new selves are
brought into the world, fresh for other eyes (including her
own). She is brought to speechlessness by the power of the
spectacle, which is both one she witnesses as looker and
participates in as looked-upon. For Edna, in looking at
Adele, can only look at herself looking at herself as she is
imaged--as another woman, on the bed before her, in the
throes of a labor that is the physical, visible corollary to
her specular assignation in the world. There is no hidden,
invisible, "truer" self that she might now bring forward to
counter this visible image; in this novel, the gaze is
always outside and prior to the self, the self always
subordinate to it; the moment a child, a self is brought
into the world, it enters representation and the patterned
garments made for it, and patterns as well the being who
brought it to light.⁹ Edna then, as she must acknowledge,
has never really "possessed" the gaze. And she is left
"dazed" by the revelation of it.

With this Edna seems to be defeated, her loss
compounded (or rather, restated in different terms) by Robert's abrupt departure from her little "pigeon-house." She has not after all been able to re-imag(in)e her self. Instead, she returns to the Lebrun cottages, and stands again before the water. "But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, prickling garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun (175, emphasis mine). Edna, it would seem, has surrendered herself in this moment, given herself in complete subordination to the gaze, encapsulating her failure by shedding the clothing-screen which is only a symptom of the larger function of the symbolic, Lacanian "point of light."

Or has she? We might recall how closely Edna has been associated with the sun throughout the novel; how she has longed "to be one with the sunlight" (109); how her eyes have been described as "two vivid points of light"; how she could only find inspiration to work on days that were bright and sunny. Are these comments to be read simply as further marks of Edna's old delusion, of yet another vain attempt to elide the gaze and ally herself with the sun's omnipotent power? Or, may her last stand also be interpreted as a significant moment of conflation, one which is described in Lacanian terms by the necessary coincidence of gaze and spectacle?

We must recall as well that for Lacan the object-in-
sight—the "spectacle" which is illuminated by the "light" of the gaze as it spreads from its point outward—is always as well the source-origin of yet another "point of light"—the gaze as it is projected from another of its all-sided, many points. In this reading of the work of seeing, gaze and spectacle inevitably merge, the spectacle from its dual position taking on the "lit-up" quality of that which projects as well as reflects light. More than this, it is this "lit up" quality that enables the spectacle itself to generate a look. "Through the luminousness which imparts specularity to the object," Silverman writes, "[that object] in effect looks back at the viewer" (77).

If Edna in this moment, "absolutely alone," lit by the sun on her naked body, represents to some extent the conflation of gaze and spectacle, to whom is she looking back as viewer? One answer is simply at the impersonal gaze-force of the sun itself; in this sense Edna would achieve a kind of possession of the gaze, embracing it as it were at the site of her own illumination. Another, however, is at the reader's self. In this reading, at the moment of naked revelation which describes Edna's limitations and possibilities as a human subject, the nature of subjectivity is itself, and for and to the reader, radically exposed, confronting that reader with the nature of her/his own subjectivity. Silverman has described such a moment of naked spectacle as an "[e]xhibitionism," one which
"unsettles because it threatens to expose the duplicity inherent in every subject, and every object—to reveal the subject’s dependence for definition upon the image/screen, and his/her capacity for being at the same time within the picture, and the point of light for another subject" (77). Looked at for an instant by the figure of the luminous Edna, the reader-as-subject is likewise exposed and confounded in the inevitability of the function which is the look that gives the self: "[S]ince the gaze always emerges for us within the field of vision, and since we ourselves are always being photographed by it even as we look, all binarizations of spectator and spectacle [are revealed to us to] mystify the scopic relations in which we are held."

And there is yet one more facet to bring out from Edna’s sun-filled denouement. Interestingly enough, Lacan does allow for some freedom within that mystification, "hold[ing] open to the human subject the possibility of 'playing' with the gaze through a manipulation of the screen, a possibility which is clearly predicated upon a prior understanding of what it means to be imbricated in a field of vision" (75). Such manipulation, and an Irigarayan mimicry, is hinted at in Chopin’s novel in the figures of the mockingbird and parrot, who from the beginning of the book speak in a borrowed language. Although Edna Pontellier chooses rather to die than to live by manipulating the images that cloud her life, Chopin herself seems to partake
of this particular form of parodic agency. "Playing" to artistic end with the screens that delimit her own possibilities as a female subject-artist, she gives us back again the reality that shapes her own life, slipping the mask of her heroine onto her readers, asking them at last to see, not Edna Pontellier, but themselves. So that by the end of her novel she has tested that mask and that reality, and made them something of a challenge, the challenge which has perhaps always been embedded in Edna's ending. It is a challenge, finally, not to defeat or success, but to seeing as seen. And it leaves the reader, with Edna exposed, in the harsh white light of a page.
Notes


7. Patricia Yaeger corroborates this reading of Robert's relation to Edna in her own work in "A Language Which Nobody Understood: Emancipatory Strategies in The Awakening" (Kate Chopin, 'The Awakening,' ed. Nancy A. Walker [Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1993], pp. 270-296), where she describes Edna's new self-consciousness as "an extraordinary event that Chopin refuses to attach--except peripherally--to Lebrun" (273). Yaeger identifies Robert as part of a dominant, masculine linguistic code that works to "alter" Edna's meanings and visions--by presenting her with mythologies which will render her experiences recognizable within the prevailing social order. See below.
8. p. 137. The moment is also an interesting one in that it foregrounds the desiring subjectivity of the female spectator; it is one of the rare moments in the book where a male figure is turned into an object of female sexual and visual consumption.

9. Yaeger arrives at a similar conclusion through her exploration of the linguistic codes which dominate Chopin's novel, finding in the structures of hegemonic language the same entrapment that I locate in the field of scopic relations: "Although Edna," Yaeger writes, "initially attempts to move into an arena in which she can begin to explore feelings which lie outside the prescribed social code, finally she can only think about herself within that code, can only act within some permutation of the subject-object relations her society has ordained for her" (274).
Chapter 2

Interchapter:

Returning to the Subject of The Awakening

In the context of a larger reading of female spectatorship as a process of masquerade, as the "trying on" of various positionalities, theories, and modes of discourse in order to access both the possibilities inherent in each approach, and the limitations suggested by a specific mask or construct, it becomes important at this moment to (re)situate a Lacanian reading of Chopin's text as itself both a useful and delimited critical gaze or viewpoint—as a mask or "masque" which, in what I have argued is a particularly striking and illuminative "fit," ably reveals what are in my own reading key aspects of a novel tightly engaged with the issues and realities of female spectatorship; yet which nevertheless, in its very position as mask, and thus in its identification as a located analysis of seeing (and specifically, as a psychoanalytic perspective of scopic relations, a mode which has already been exposed in its fundamentally channeled or "blinded" aspects), must and indeed does de- and reconstruct its maneuverings as fixed, limited (particularly, as we shall see, with reference to issues of race and class), and ultimately productive of a trans- or a-historical or local description of the gaze. What is interesting about Lacan's
analysis of specular relations is, however, its apparent description of its own essentially mutable and self-implicating processes. In my own reading of his work (via Silverman), I have been particularly drawn to the insight that any "spectacle" as illuminated by the gaze inevitably reveals itself as yet another "point of light," as another position from which a gaze or look is rendered and directed --"in effect look[ing] back at the viewer" in a moment of scopic merging that "projects as well as reflects light."

In my reading of The Awakening I have used this insight to suggest and describe Chopin's sense of the reader's implication in the specular processes being depicted. Yet clearly Lacan's work, with and through Chopin (or vice versa), can and must additionally implicate the work and perspective of any critic seeking to engage with and describe the work of seeing in text--the critic, that is, as herself a located and locatable reader/spectator, caught in and illuminated by the very processes addressed in my own reading with such apparently conclusive revelation ("the harsh white light of a page"). Even more interesting, Chopin and Lacan seem to gesture, as I have suggested, to a potential area of "play" and manipulation within texts and within analyses of sight, one which offers some mobility and freedom to the reader/writer/critic of the "gaze" in its various cultural applications and imperatives. Such a sense of play does of course in many ways seem directly applicable
to and descriptive of the theory of shifting and mobile "masquerade" I am here attempting to address, describe, and illustrate.

For if the "mask" of a particular mode or theory of specular relations can be understood as itself a kind of "screen" or shelter (one which may in many cases impart a form of critical and specular identity and authority to its wearer--i.e., "I am a Lacanian theorist," "I am a feminist film theorist"), that theory and that screen must be further understood as constantly and consistently self-implicating, illuminating what is visible from its particular perspective, yet constantly suggesting what de Lauretis has described as the "off-space" or the unrepresentable--and which we might now further and imaginatively characterize not only as that which is outside the frame of a text or representation, but as that which is thrown into shadow by the particular brightness and attraction of one form of specular address, one particular theoretical "flaring." For if Lacan does indeed suggest that all is screen, location, and masked and masking perspective, the question remains what it is precisely that is obscured or moved into shadow by a (my) Lacanian analysis of Chopin's text; and further still, what Chopin herself, in an uncannily pre-Lacanian rendering of female and human spectatorship (one which would temporally situate Lacan as somewhat "Chopinian"), acts to obscure, consciously or unconsciously, in her depiction of
an all-consuming, solar representation of sight.

Edna Pontellier, as I have suggested, finds it possible to escape what is and has become apparent as a completely enclosing specular regime only through the non-representational space that is death. Yet I have also suggested that Chopin herself "survives" this movement, this impossibility, by mimicking and mirroring it, in a sense masking it, and hence throwing its ramifications and responsibilities back upon the reader. In doing so, however, I came in effect to a place in which the specificity of a female spectator was somewhat elided; arguing that Chopin ultimately describes and inscribes the enclosing aspects of spectatorial relations for all members of a culture, I implied, with and through Chopin, that the female body and the female gaze is only that most susceptible to and inflected and afflicted by the parameters of a social (and, within the text, male-dominated) order of looking. Both my essay and Chopin's text seem however to go to some lengths to ignore or at least set aside some of the salient differences between female bodies and between women within that order; and so sidestep the question of whether, in documenting Edna's particular experiences as a visual object and subject in culture, and in creating a whole-sale and whole-scale approach to the representation of specular regimes, certain experiences or positions must be discounted or discredited. What is it, finally, that allows Edna to be
so significantly and movingly represented as a suffering and emblematic "victim" or martyr within the scopic field? What is it that is in effect the shadow, the unilluminated or only partially discernible space, that outlines and so defines Edna's struggle and "inevitable" demise?

Edna, for example, would seem upon first glance and after my initial reading to have "moved" into that space which de Lauretis characterizes as the "off-space"--the unrepresentable that in its very non-existence describes that place in which an empowered sense and reality of female vision might be understood.³ (An empowered and unfettered sense of female spectatorship cannot, Chopin makes it clear, be rendered in any patriarchally conventional context of cultural viewing.) Yet it is important to note that although Edna is moved into a space of absence and non-representation, she is within the frame of the text (and so beyond it) both recorded and preserved; that is, at the height of her beauty, and in a moment of naked self-determination and annihilation, she is re-presented, and to some extent crystallized, as that being who begins, ends, and persists as an emblem within the text, as the "image" or the memory of an image of a specific and somewhat elevated female identity: that of the white, upper middle-class, conflicted late nineteenth-century American woman, captured in all the gloriousness of her fall. Edna is then clearly within the terms of this text the represented
unrepresentable; yet there are, in this work, other "unrepresentables" who, if "preserved" at all, are only registered at the margins, and not granted the kind of urgency or piquancy or effective resolution so clearly and so pointedly accorded the heroine.

There is for example the case and status of the Pontelliers' nameless quadroon maidservant: she who moves silently and obediently through the text, possessing none of her mistress' voice or authority; and who, when she "sits" for Edna (again in Chopin's description, "patient as a savage"), seems to absorb and reflect an unspoken or barely addressed racism within the culture and the text. Chopin seems here to indicate only marginally the double oppression taking place in the servant's position as an object for and before Edna's artistic hand, and as a particular female subject who, as a specularized being, is represented only to be erased ("a savage") as a woman who also happens to be black. Another marginalized, although rather more clearly defined female spectator in the novel is Mademoiselle Reisz, who although like Edna is white, and of a reasonably "acceptable" class (her position as a somewhat impoverished spinster and an "artiste" places her however on a lower social scale than the Pontelliers), is nevertheless and with some consistency belittled and demonized within the text. As I have suggested, Mademoiselle Reisz offers the possibility of another source and interest for the female
gaze. "[R]av[ing] much over Edna's appearance in her bathing suit" (99), she would seem to invoke something of the possibility of female-to-female visual and sexual exchanges, something of the "lesbian trajectory" Gaines finds so excluded from conventional and psychoanalytic interpretations of the gaze. Yet, in her depiction as near-caricature and as deformed and deforming femininity (she is "a homely woman . . . with a small weaZen face" [71], and "the lines of her body settled into ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity" [116]), Mademoiselle Reisz, and the alternative she would appear to offer, is quietly undercut by and through the novel--and her ability to help and sustain the troubled Edna radically undermined.

Adele Ratignolle however offers another opportunity for what I have described as a female-to-female visual exchange. The beautiful and luxuriant Adele clearly admires Edna, and Edna as clearly reciprocates. Lying on the beach together, the two women delicately fan each other; Edna, after a moment of confusion, allows her friend to "caress" her hand, and later "put[s] her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder" (63). The connection and physicality between the voluptuous Adele and the uncertain Edna is couched in clearly maternal terms, invoking the connection between maternity and female bisexuality explored and suggested by Modleski in The Women Who Knew Too Much, and reinforced in
The Awakening through Adele’s status and presence as an expectant mother. Yet, as we have seen, the novel’s penultimate scene works in its terrible effect to represent maternity and maternity to Edna as all that which imprisons and inscribes her as a female in culture: far from providing her with a source of feminine or female bonding or exchange, the childbirth scene recasts Adele as terrible reminder ("Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children!). Prior to this event we have also seen Adele, much as we have seen Mademoiselle Reisz, belittled and marginalized as a foolish woman in the text, represented as absorbed in trivialities and, finally, as childlike and petulant in her appeal that Edna linger pointlessly by her bedside. Within the terms of the novel, then, the maternal-bisexual would also seem to be carefully undercut, infantilized, and finally rendered unrepresentable. And that unrepresentability, that impossibility of one woman looking upon another with desire, would seem to be echoed in Edna’s inability to render her friend in drawing—and her subsequent destruction of Adele’s portrait, the rending of her beautiful friend’s represented face, figure, and attraction.

This rejection of what I would describe as a possible "sororosocial" connection between women in the text—a structure or "mask" consisting of non-sexual relations or associations, which may nevertheless function to channel
potentially or specifically lesbian desires and possibilities—is deeply connected to Edna’s final expression as a "solitary," emblematic female spectator, and is part of the larger "shadow" that I have suggested lies behind or surrounding Edna’s illuminated representation. The term "sororosocial" is constructed of course in partial reference to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who in her work in Between Men (1985) describes the "homosocial" as that which characterizes "bonds between persons of the same sex . . . applied to such activities as ‘male bonding,’ which may, as in our society, [also] be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality." In Sedgwick’s account, the "male homosocial" in culture has been marked by a disruption of the "continuum" between the homosocial and the homosexual, a disjunction of male-male desire which has in turn been mended and mediated "primarily by being routed through triangular relations involving a woman." Sedgwick insists however that, unlike the male homosocial, the female homosocial "constitutes an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations link[ing] lesbianism with other forms of women’s attention to women" (2, emphasis mine). The female homosocial, argues Sedgwick, "need not be pointedly dichotomized as against ‘homosexual’; in culture, female homosociality has in fact been directly addressed through open friendships and "love" between women. Indeed, she suggests, "its [female
homosociality's intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense."

Sedgwick's work has been invaluable for its ability to articulate the patterns of a mediated same-sex desire, for describing a terrain in which desire and expressed hostility to that desire co-exist as masks, decoys, and subterfuges. Yet her distinction between the female and male homosocial is troubling to me in its apparent repetition and reinstitution of some of the most conventional readings of female sexuality. By positing the female homosocial as part of a widely "intelligible continuum" (as opposed to the more elusive and allusive and, by implication, more interesting male continuum), one that is so obvious as to be "common sense" (to whom? we might ask), Sedgwick seems to be describing as negligible the complexity and potential subversiveness of female homosocial desire, thereby implicitly reconstituting a patriarchal value and trope of woman: she is a text which may easily be read. Sedgwick also seems to downplay or minimize the importance, fear, and consequences of efforts precisely to make a female continuum "legible," efforts which are often (as we are beginning to see in The Awakening) shrouded in or contradicted by impulses of rejection, punishment, and devaluation. Indeed, I would argue that there is much the same rift between the female homosocial and the female homosexual that Sedgwick so readily ascribes to male social-sexual
relations—and that women, and so women writers, have themselves been active in drawing the line, severing the connection, and opening the chasm—and usually under the same intense pressure from dominant cultural forms experienced by their male counterparts. Women and women writers seeking to express lesbian desire have also been forced, then, to adopt many of the mediative strategies identified in Sedgwick with the male homosocial—including that of "triangulation," the mediating of same-sex desire through shared desire for and access to a body of the opposite sex. I thus use the term "sororosocial" to distinguish my understanding of the complexity and duplicity of female-to-female exchanges from Sedgwick's rather more "accomplished" and "obvious" view of the female homosocial continuum; to articulate those relations between women which express a taboo desire, and thus must be structured with and through familial or familiar masks (mother-daughter, friend-friend, sister-sister) which in fact cover over potentially and culturally subversive, threatening, and (within the dominant order) "unintelligible" marks of same-sex desire.

The simultaneous possibility and impossibility of sororosocial triangulation is in fact explored in The Awakening—through the brief and quickly disposed arrangement and attraction between Edna, Robert, and a young local girl, Mariequita. Mariequita, "a young Spanish girl . . . with slime between her brown toes," joins Edna,
Robert, and others in the little sea-vessel that will carry them to the Cheniere Caminada. She is noticeable, like Mademoiselle Reisz, for the directness and purposefulness of her gaze: her desire is clear, and she spends the trip "making 'eyes' at Robert" (80)—focusing, in other words, on the same sexual object coveted by Edna. Edna for her part looks Mariequita thoroughly and curiously "up and down"—it is then Robert who within the text articulates the possibility of sororosocial triangulation, of mediated desire: for it is Robert who suggests to the curious Spanish girl that Edna is perhaps staring at her because she thinks she is "pretty" (81). The movement of the scene however steers quickly and almost nervously away from the potential subversiveness of a mediating male body. Edna and Mariequita's exchange is swiftly reconfigured as culturally intelligible feminine jealousy: Edna appears relieved when Robert "no longer noticed Mariequita," while the girl for her part departs in a mood of "childish ill-humor" (82).

What is remarkable about this scene is the way in which Chopin appears both to raise and then as quickly subvert and reject the possibility of a kind of specular exchange between the two women through their interest in and desire for the young, handsome Robert. Gazing upon each other with the mediation and sanction of Robert's desired body, that gaze and connection is nevertheless broken and deflected, both through the competition (militantly heterosexual) for a
male partner which culturally isolates women, as well as through the specific tropes and designations of race and class that cast Mariequita as "unacceptable" to Edna within the novel's social norms. Described in her dark look as "sly," and in her intimate appearance as ungentle (her naked feet are "broad and coarse"), Mariequita is summarily, and like the quadroon, dismissed by the text—even though she and Edna are to some extent, as women and as viewers and desirers, literally and figuratively in the same boat. Her "memory" as an inappropriate, dark-skinned outsider is then reinforced and repeated, later in the novel: in the figure of those nameless "Mexican women" whom Edna describes with jealous mockery as having sewn "pouches" for Robert.9

What we begin to see then is that the potential "off-spaces" of this text—those suggestions and identities which become unacceptable through the narrative's progress, and so become unacceptable through the narrative's progress, and so form a backdrop or contrast to Edna's heightened isolation and defeat—seem to coincide with certain negative and conventional representations of race, class, and female-to-female or lesbian sexuality; negative representations which appear to be reinforced within the text, and so act to discredit and finally disavow certain alternatives and potentially sustaining and affirmative avenues of female specular authority or pleasure. It should be noted that Rachel Blau du Plessis, in Writing Beyond the Ending (1985), has suggested that Chopin, in "hinting" at such
alternatives, opens up the possibility "that there might be some socially plausible, if marginalized, third way open to Edna."\textsuperscript{10} In this reading, the novel becomes a field of discredited but at least and to some extent represented social and/or sexual alternatives; Chopin figuring possibilities in the only (muted) voice that might have been available to her. My own sense, however, is that the novel is too willing in its acceptance and invocation of certain stereotypes associated with race, sexuality, and class (the dumb savage, the homely lesbian, the hoydenish gypsy-girl), too ready in its use of those stereotypes as contour and shadowing, as deliberately moved off-space, simply to be understood as pocketed with hints left untaken. Yet clearly, in invoking those stereotypes, Chopin makes possible their eventual deconstruction. What happens then, in the wake of such deconstruction, to the figure of Edna, dramatized and outlined as white female upper-class suffering and disillusionment? In the second look that is the shifting of the critical mask, a re-reading, how is she re-presented?

A revised reading of The Awakening, to some extent "unmasking" that which I have already presented, might examine and propose Edna as a subject ultimately identified with and sustained for a particular female spectator or group of spectators—and thus with readers and readings (and perhaps certain critical theories) that might share or
reinforce her particular cultural positioning. More than this, such a re-reading should also make clear that the novel is itself, like the theories and constructs that would seek to illuminate it, both inside and outside the larger narrative or project of female or feminist articulations of visual authority--partaking of certain delimiting tropes and cultural resources, even as it seeks to express the hope or need or availability of a more liberating model of female visual exercise (such as the one I have suggested Chopin explores through the screening or masking of visuality or visual relation itself). As both a strategy and a representative strategy of the manner in which women writers have approached the dilemma and conflict of female seeing in culture--representative in the sense that it offers itself finally as only one, possible presentation, illustration of articulation or response--The Awakening serves then as a useful starting point for discussions of critical theory and artistic constructions as joined in their function as narratives of location, as perspectival imaginations of possibility and exclusion. To the extent that one can illuminate the other, and various couplings illuminate both the seen and unseen, the process suggests the function and nature of masquerade: that which, through narrow eye-slits, reveals what may be admitted by a particular viewing or critical identity--yet which also must acknowledge the link between the mask and the blinder, as screens which
inevitably inscribe a particular circle or opening of possibility and representation.
Notes

1. Chapter 1, p. 81.

2. I leave aside for the moment that one can indeed be represented and recorded beyond death; see below.

3. See Patricia Yaeger, "'A Language Which Nobody Understood': Emancipatory Strategies in The Awakening": "[I]t is in the unmapped spaces, the spaces between words, the unspoken sites of desire that Edna Pontellier . . . resides" (278).

4. The novel also suggests that the servant is somehow lacking in a proper or more advanced sense of recognition, as without her own, discriminating gaze: she is "scold[ed]" by Edna for "not being more attentive" and letting the children play in the sun (96). The specific powers and authority a white female spectator may hold over her black counterpart is of course that addressed by Gaines in "White Privilege and Looking Relations."


7. This should not be surprising, given that in a patriarchal culture female homosexuality will be more disruptive, and hence more punishable, than male homosexuality—since lesbianism explicitly challenges the female's male-designated role as a sexual and material-economic object of exchange between men. Female homosociality in fact renders impossible male homosocial mediation through triangulation, which depends upon the shared heterosexuality of the woman. It also makes possible the use of men, between women, as objects of psychic and sexual exchange—intolerable in the ordered forms of patriarchal culture. See my account of the Edna-Robert-Mariequita triangle, below.
8. This is not to suggest that Edna and Mariequita are precisely matched in their relationship to Robert. Although they both clearly desire him, Mariequita's attraction is figured as local and physical; while for Edna, Robert represents not only physical attraction but the larger defiance of common norms of behavior, sexual and intellectual freedom. Again, however, these distinctions appear to be made along lines of class and race.

9. Pp. 159-60. The image of the purse or pouch is interesting, since its traditional connection with female sexuality may suggest not only Edna's jealousy of possible sexual favors granted to Robert, but her possessiveness toward and jealous guarding of the activities of the female sexual organ itself.

Chapter 3
The New Technology:
Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground

... something was left over, and this something watched as a spectator.

Barren Ground (1925) is a fruitful text with which to continue my discussion of female spectatorship, narrative "preservation," and theoretical or discursive "masquerades" as they function as strategies, veils, shifts, and "lightning" accommodations. Like Chopin before her, Ellen Glasgow chronicles the marks and claims of a solitary female protagonist as she experiences a growing ability and desire to see, with greater accuracy, the world and life around her. Yet, where Chopin constructs her tale as one of a female visual authority ultimately and indeed terribly submerged, Glasgow creates and compels a story of dogged spectatorial survival, of a vision sorely tested, but ultimately sustained--emerging from a sea of adversities directed, enlightened, and empowered. It is clear from Glasgow's comments on the text that she felt Barren Ground to be a highly effective form of mobile discursive strategy, a species, even, of technological advance--"a vehicle," as she put it, "of liberation." In Dorinda Oakley, the young lovesick farmgirl who rises above a bitter terrain, the waves of "ceaseless broomedge," to become a modern,
independent, and revolutionary landowner, Glasgow discovers what she herself described and anointed as "the spirit of fortitude [wherever it] has triumphed over the sense of futility" (viii)--and a heroine who, in Linda Wagner's words, consciously reconstructs her own existence as "a satisfied, well-functioning human being."²

Yet others have found in Dorinda's history only the most dependent and abject model of feminine psychic "revenge."³ Citing the character's movement from a romantic and highly sexualized youth to a middle age of stern (and clearly celibate) devotion to her lands, Glasgow biographer E. Stanley Godbold has summarized Dorinda and her career as that of a merely "mechanized being . . . drained of humanity," and, less generously still, as "a sexless Scarlet[t] O'Hara."⁴ Julius Raper has been among those to suggest that the novel's trajectory describes a fundamentally misguided "waste" of female psychic and sexual energy, misdirecting and defeating a text that is not able, in the end, to lend "structural support" to its visionary, optimistic, and forward-looking conclusion. Interestingly, the complete frame of the novel is, in Raper's account, one of mask, deceit, and subterfuge: Glasgow, he writes, "disguises [her] tale of revenge . . . as a female success story, an exemplum of survival, struggle, and triumph over circumstances."⁵ The function of this disguise is, Raper suggests, to conceal "from the casual reader and . . .
[even] from the heroine herself" what is in fact Dorinda's--
and Glasgow's--"all-consuming project": "liberation from,
and revenge against, male abuse of her body and emotions"
(79).

Raper's comments are curious, however, given what is
throughout the novel Dorinda's rather naked and obvious
desire to wreak havoc on the man who jilted her, Jason
Greylock (she first attempts to shoot him; later she covets
for years the chance to repossess his family's lands for
which, she says, "I'd give ten years of my life" [363]); and
further given Glasgow's assertion that the novel was indeed,
for her, a deliberately "liberatory" act. This is not to
suggest however that the impulse to disguise or mask is not
deeply or consciously embedded within the author's
revisionary text. Known for much of the large body of her
work for her exquisite use of irony,6 Glasgow slyly encodes
in the novel itself her sense of "literature" as a form of
liberation which both conceals and delicately or lightly
reveals, as that which can both be seen, and seen through:
literary text is, as she describes it, a singularly
"gossamer substance" (12, emphasis mine). If Barren Ground
does indeed enact or invoke the fine filaments of a veil at
the level of (or against) its larger strategic movement of
survival, that impulse to "disguise" will be, by Glasgow's
definition, both transparent and detectable. But at what
point? And by whom? If the novel is indeed a "vehicle," a
strategy, a technology or constructed pattern or model of female sustenance, what does it finally, as textual fabrication, produce? And what, from within its fertile web of associations, discard?

Like The Awakening, Barren Ground begins by invoking the gaze of a specific viewer within the text. Where Edna Pontellier's story is taken first from the vantage point of a male spectator, however (Mr. Pontellier, watching his wife come casually into view), Glasgow's novel is from the outset fixed with the gaze of a woman, Dorinda Oakley, a "girl in an orange-colored shawl [who] stood at the window of Pedlar's store and looked" (3). Although already at this early moment described as clothed in a form of blanket or wrap,7 Dorinda and her look are quickly established as central to and substantial within the unfolding narrative, her "eager gaze" opening and closing the first chapter; a page later, we are told that "[h]er eyes were her one memorable feature" (10). The prominence of Dorinda's gaze is further and specifically attached to the work and function of female heterosexual spectatorship and desire in the novel, as she distinguishes between the two males that most readily present themselves to her gaze and to her budding sexual discrimination. In the young doctor Jason Greylock, she finds a young man both "admirable" and
"attractive":

His dark red hair, burnished to a copper glow, grew in a natural wave; his sparkling eyes were brown-black like chinkapins in the autumn; his skin was tanned and slightly freckled . . . his short moustache, a shade lighter than his hair, lent mystery to a charming, if serious, mouth, and his smile . . . was wholly delightful. 8

Dorinda has on the other hand little use or admiration for her dying friend's husband, Nathan Pedlar--"a tall, lank, scraggy man, with a face that reminded Dorinda of a clown" (18). In Nathan Dorinda "saw clearly" a man with "gaunt round shoulders . . . [and] hair and eyebrows and short moustache, all the colour of dingy rabbit fur"; she wonders with brief distaste "how Rose Emily could have married him" (19). Nathan, however, possesses one strength which the narrator (though not Dorinda) is quick to note. Although the novel begins in a "benighted" place and time in Virginia, one with little enthusiasm or regard for new ideas, Nathan is very much interested in the new farming technologies--and alone among his compatriots "was not afraid of a theory," and had begun "experimenting with alfalfa" (19).

As in Chopin's text, the novel also begins at an early stage its long obsession with its heroine's body and
appearance, with "the slim, flowing lines of her figure, [and] its gallant and spirited carriage" (20). Dorinda is, however, far from the perfect or matchless beauty of conventional scopophilic appeal. She is "not beautiful," though "she had her moments of beauty" (52); she is also a disconcertingly "big woman" (22), as though somehow in excess of standard requirements, a model of strength and utility rather than of haunting, picturesque frailty. Indeed Dorinda appears in fundamental ways to be out-of-step with many of the expected norms of femininity, unsynchronized to the extent that Jason Greylock, admiring her, insists that she "wear a blue dress [to match] the colour of your eyes"; and when Dorinda protests that she has no such dress, urges her to "beg, borrow, or steal one" (66).

This moment in fact marks one of the first instances in the novel where Glasgow cites the function and importance of dress as a performative project, one that may "complete" gender identity and so work to "match" Dorinda to a male heterosexual counterpart. Unlike the opening and striking image of Dorinda's brightly colored shawl, the blue dress coordinates and streamlines her identity as a female pleasing and soothing to the male (Jason's) eye, while simultaneously submerging her own gaze in a sea of bartered blue so that her eyes (her "one memorable feature") become merely colored accoutrements, flattering accessories—like a
matched hat, sash, or purse. Glasgow is also canny in her
depiction of this synchronizing "reflex" as one which does
not necessarily come naturally or spontaneously to the
female spectator of feminine appearance. Miss Seena,
Dorinda's dressmaker, is at first taken aback by the
suggestion: "Who ever heard of matchin' material by yo'
eyes?" (69). But upon entering her strictly professional
capacity (that is, upon reconfiguring her gaze to imagine
what would be pleasing to the male eye), she concedes she
has "come to notice" an attraction that "won't be hard to
match." In this sense Miss Seena performs her function as a
"matchmaker" for Dorinda (one of many in the novel who work
or who wish to see the girl married to Jason), and as a
knowing transactor of the heterosexual bargain. Even
Dorinda's close friend Rose Emily, slowly dying of
tuberculosis, hopes fondly for a match for Dorinda with the
young doctor; yet curiously it is Rose Emily, a woman, who
has knitted the striking, contrasting, uncompromising orange
shawl—which she nevertheless feels goes "so well" with
Dorinda's dark looks.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite Dorinda's willingness to become part of this
cultural and sexual synchronization (she duly orders and
wears the blue dress), it is, however, precisely the
complicity and activity of the female gaze, in the
expression and fulfillment of a now "coordinated"
heterosexual desire, which comes to be punished within the
world and text of the novel. For her role (and indeed her pleasurable acquiescence) in heterosexual relations, Dorinda ultimately finds herself alone, pregnant, and helplessly stranded outside the legitimating bounds of marriage. Believing that Jason will nevertheless return to marry her, she is shocked when "a flash of lightning" reveals to her eyes her rival, the demure Geneva Ellgood, sitting beside him, his wife, in his carriage (158). Dorinda’s punishment appears in fact to be the blinding and double-edged sword of the impossibility of an articulated female heterosexual gaze and attraction, the female expression of female desire: having done all she could to attract and hold Jason on his (and her culture’s) terms, she is punished for the very fulfillment of her/their compact; the gaze which had first selected Jason as its sexual object is then punished as a "vehicle" (the irony of Jason’s carriage) which reveals, in a flash of specular illumination, not her conformity and happiness, but rather her transgression, and, her betrayal.

But Dorinda’s vision, though dealt a ravaging blow in this moment, is not, curiously, defeated. Although her first reaction is to confront the traitorous Jason in blind despair, narrowly missing him as she discharges a gun, her sight is afterward and almost instantly improved:

In that instant, with a piercing flash of insight, she saw him as he was, false, vain, contemptible, a coward in bone and marrow. He had wronged her;
he had betrayed her; he had trampled her pride in the dust; and he had done these things not from brutality, but from weakness."

As in Chopin's evocative text, Dorinda's sudden "awakening" is also followed very closely by a "mirror scene," a moment of reappraisal in the wake of a sudden, dramatic shift in perspective and experience. In her home again Dorinda, like Edna, studies her physical appearance minutely--and comes to recognize some important difference in her familiar self. "The line of her hair was still dark and waving; her eyes were still clear and blue; the velvety colour still flowed beneath the few golden freckles on her cheeks." "Only," Dorinda reflects, "there was something in her eyes that had not been there until yesterday" (175). As if to confirm that her sense of her own appearance has been irrevocably severed from Jason's (and perhaps from heterosexual male spectatorial) approval, Dorinda begins to increase in beauty and in stature. As she leaves the pleading, remorseful Jason, the novel deliberately records the "stern beauty in her face" (170). Later, setting herself free from him and from Pedlar's Mill by escaping to New York, Dorinda felt clearly "that she looked well . . . Though she had lost her girlish bloom, she had gained immeasurably in dignity and distinction, and people, she noticed, turned to look at her now . . . in the street."12
What happens to Dorinda in New York has been the subject of some literary debate. Critics in general have described the sudden loss of her unborn child as a pointedly fortuitous calamity, as, in fact, a thinly disguised abortion: Dorinda "aborted her child," Raper writes, "in one of the most convenient collisions between a pedestrian and a moving vehicle in modern fiction" (84, emphasis mine). Monique Parent Frazee concedes that Dorinda's release takes the form of "a welcome miscarriage," and indeed Dorinda's primary feeling upon waking in the hospital is one of palpable "[r]elief" (219). Importantly, it is immediately following the loss of her child and her subsequent and lengthy hospitalization that Dorinda experiences the loss of all "sex-feeling"; she suffers a "wave of aversion" when a handsome young doctor who has befriended her begins to make physical advances, "la[ying] his hand on her shoulder" (237). She insists however that she has "finished with all that," in what soon becomes an oft-repeated rejection of and injunction against sex, one which Godbold has tersely characterized as a "psychological maladjustment" (142). Frazee however provides a more sympathetic account of Dorinda's response, arguing that the novel's culture has itself instigated and enforced her growing sense of sexual isolation. "In Ellen Glasgow's environment and fiction," Frazee writes, "[t]he [female] body [was] experienced as an object of shame and distress in terms of physiology, [and]
could afford no legitimate pleasure to a woman" (171). Dorinda has of course already experienced her body and her sexuality as a source of punishment and betrayal; from a cultural vise in which compulsory heterosexuality is enforced yet in which female heterosexuality, its active expression and fulfillment, may be articulated only at the woman's peril, Dorinda extracts her only workable wisdom: stay clear, pull back, be "finished with all that."

There is, however, an additional and clearly related source for Dorinda's very adamant aversion and revulsion: her lack of access to technology, and specifically, to potentially liberating reproductive technologies and resources. Although, as Frazee points out, "today she would have had an abortion," Dorinda can only and within the frame of the novel recognize that she is largely unable to control her reproductive destiny, and so finds her only recourse in the abortive technology of the streets, in a passing "moving vehicle" (yet another "vehicle of liberation"). Uncontrolled pregnancy has already served as a sign and source of unwelcome servitude in the novel; Dorinda's unbalanced mother, we are told, was confronted with Dorinda and her brother Rufus just as "she was looking ahead, as she told herself, to a peaceful middle age unhampered by childbearing" (39). Pregnancy has also been depicted as a clear and present source of danger and of death. We are told the story of "a pretty, light woman, who died with her
first child" (42), and later, when Dorinda sees a much-aged Geneva Ellgood (now Greylock), she assumes it is childbearing that explains "why her health had failed" (261-62; in fact it is the absence of a baby that torments the dutiful girl, in the double bind that punishes women who either do or don't prove fruitful). While the inevitability or necessity of pregnancy dominates the thoughts of women, it is just as clear within the novel that men are seldom driven to extremes by childbirth's implications. "[M]en," Miss Seena sagely tells Dorinda, "don't ever seem to get the craze that they're going to have a baby" (450).

What critics such as Godbold fail finally to grasp, then, is the obvious point that Dorinda's complete disavowal of (hetero)sex may in fact be the clearly logical response of a woman without technological power and resources, without, that is, access to the means to control her biological destiny. This sense of near-infantile helplessness is rendered acutely and poignantly in Barren Ground immediately following Dorinda's accident, and through the description of her partly shaved (childishly bald) head. A form of castration, excising part of her cultural womanliness (her "black hair," her "femininity"), the operation to her brain (resulting from her fall and coinciding with her miscarriage) speaks plainly that Dorinda's psychic recovery is bought only at the cost of the loss of her sexuality, at the price dictated by a society
without meaningful (re)productive remedies. Yet this is not to suggest that Dorinda loses all access to physical and sexual feeling. Far from the lobotomized, coldly sexless "mechanized being" Godbold envisions, Dorinda in fact preserves a highly private sense of sensuality. Although she is unable to respond to the doctor's caresses, she is greatly moved by the musical concert to which he takes her, and like Edna Pontellier is stirred to "inarticulate" ecstasy by the suggestions of the melody:

Now it was dying away. Now it was returning. Something that she had thought dead was coming to life again. Something that she had buried out of sight under the earth was pushing up in anguish. . . . Suddenly she was pierced by a thousand splinters of crystal sound. Little quivers of light ran over her. Beads of pain broke out on her forehead and her lips. She clenched her hands together, and forced her body back into her chair. "I've got to stand it. No matter what it does to me, I've got to stand it." (239-40)

Rife with images both of birth and of sexual climax, the scene suggests that Dorinda must somehow both bear and "bear" what is happening to her, must somehow both withstand the terrific sexual pressures on her being (as a woman in culture without techno-sexual power and redress)—and bring
to light, give birth to, some alternative vision of female (re)production that will sustain her, and her pressing vitality, in the long years ahead. And it is this effort to "bear," to bring fruit to what is in social and sexual terms barren, defeated ground, which dominates the second half of Glasgow's novel.

Given her particular social and sexual context, it is not surprising that Dorinda—a woman deprived of sexual activity, and of reproductive control or consummation, through her inability to harness an appropriate sexual (contraceptive) technology—should seek an "alternative vision of female (re)production" precisely through the pursuit of new, revitalizing, technological forms and ideas. In her return to Pedlar's Mill, and in her subsequent assumption of and devotion to her family's neglected lands, Dorinda discovers a psychic relation to production that is within the terms of the novel structurally revolutionary, willfully parthenogenetic: in her work on the farm, which consists of both "ploughing" (the culturally masculine) and "bearing" (the culturally feminine), Dorinda constructs a model of production which is both self-sustaining and producing, single-handedly giving birth to her crops and fields (and echoing and realizing the faint desire she had experienced in the hospital: that "[s]he would have liked a
child *if it had been all hers*" [219, emphasis mine]). To achieve this independent parturition, this new model of female production, Dorinda uses as well all the newest technologies available to her: new crops, including alfalfa; new methods, including the "turning" under of sweet clover with lime (332); "new machinery" and inventions, including the new tractor-plough (381, 427), an electric plant for her new dairy (468), the telephone and telegraph (430), and the automobile (439). As the novel moves through what is now and quite plainly its heroine's agri-cultural triumph, Dorinda is also depicted as more and more linked to these nascent technologies, not only through her ready desire and use for them, but through their very connection to and identification with her new sense of bodily self. When she senses imminent danger, for example, Dorinda is herself described as functioning like a telegraph—noticeing "an almost imperceptible twitching of her muscles . . . and at last . . . a delicate vibration of her nerves, as if a message were passing over electric wires in her body" (432).

For Glasgow has moved to suggest that Dorinda has indeed fashioned herself as a new technology, as a new model or vehicle of "female" activity (in a world of previously "benighted" methods), as an advance suited to the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century,16 and in particular as a new, "modern," technology of gender—a confluence of genders, linking, telegraphing, and telescoping two forms of
identity: the culturally feminine and the culturally masculine. In describing Dorinda's revolutionary possibilities, her technological transformation, Glasgow appears also to have access to that sense of "double-identification" set forward by Teresa de Lauretis in Alice Doesn't; Glasgow defines a woman who can (if not without sacrifice, at least with measurable gain) absorb both "feminine" and "masculine" trajectories and narratives, and so form a "bridge" between herself and the world she both sees and responds to. In the novel, however, and by those who view Dorinda at work, this doubleness is often misread as "contradiction." "Any nerve specialist," her New York doctor-friend has told her, "could tell that you are made up of contradictions . . . Your eyes are gentle and your mouth is hard--too hard, if you don't mind my saying so" (235). Rather than a fusion or "enclosing" of possibilities (to return to my description of de Lauretis' work), Dorinda's doubleness is read as fragmentation, as an unhealthy division. Yet it is precisely her contained contrasts (versus her early, streamlined, feminine "synchronization"), precisely the new possibility of "hardness" ("You are hard, Dorinda," Jason also later tells her, "as hard as a stone" [308]) that allows Dorinda to survive, and which for Glasgow appears to represent not Godbold's cold, "mechanized . . . humanity," but rather a fine, durable, and strongly coalesced efficiency--again a new technology, and an
alternate idea of what might be recognizably workable or "female." "Why was it so difficult," Dorinda asks, speaking for Glasgow (and seemingly against her later critics), "to bring people to accept either a new idea, or a new object?"

Glasgow's "new idea" is not, however, and despite its exterior toughness or "hardness," a model that is static, unbendable, or unadaptable in its accommodations to a cultural context. For key to an understanding of Glasgow's representation of Dorinda as a new, workable "technology of gender" is an awareness of how the possibilities of performativity, and specifically of masquerade, allow Dorinda as a character to enact the double-identification that preserves her in her attempt at vigilant (and not unchallenged) psychic and physical independence. Dorinda, for example, is faced early in her return to Pedlar's Mill, and in her prospects of beginning a dairy, with the reality that men--and, wonderfully, cows--are not used to a woman working in the barns. Dorinda promptly responds by wearing her brother's overalls as she milks her herd (294), conforming outwardly to the requirement that only men pull at cows' teats (Glasgow's sense of irony at its fullest), yet with an ease and readiness that suggests she has already internalized the fact that gender, and its essentially arbitrary assignations, functions largely as a matter of constructed and exterior performances: the lesson of the
blue dress come full circle. Later, when Dorinda feels confident in her farm and her dairy, and in their burgeoning economic rewards, she just as easily sets out to consult the dressmaker, Miss Seena, on the matter of a new habit. The return to cultural femininity is, for Dorinda, simply a matter of "choice"--of pointing to a form in a fashion catalogue of feminine styles and appearances (359). Indeed, when Dorinda admonishes Miss Seena that she wants "[a]ny colour but blue," she signals that she is no longer, as in her youth, innocent to the wiles of socially enforced specular and sexual assignations. And when she appears in church in her new yet deliberately "commonplace" assemblage, she is able with some distance and surprise to note the radical differences her singular (but not "single") person can reflect and invoke: "For the first time in her life she tasted the intoxicating flavour of power. On the farm, success was translated into well-tilled acres or golden pounds of butter [for which Dorinda has already been admired "as if she had been a man"]; but here, with these astonished eyes on her, she discovered that it contained a quality more satisfying than any material fact" (367). Dorinda defines her new sense of power as that which may be "measured between the past which Jason had ruined[,] and the present in which she had triumphantly built on the ruins he had left" (368). But it is also clearly the power and satisfaction that has come with her ability to manipulate
her identity, to masquerade as both male and female, as required and according to her own desire and needs, in order to access the different types and measurements of power and success available to her in culture—be they fields flush with grain, or the still heady pleasure of a "feminized" to-be-looked-at-ness.

Dorinda’s ability to masquerade masterfully in this sense—her ability to use her body as yet another vehicle, in this case a vehicle of identity-as-liberation, as a site of gendered appropriations that allow her to see and be seen from shifting and temporary yet still recognizable and useful perspectives—is of course a version of that "masquerade" I have already described as potentially useful and adaptable to and within feminist theory. My suggestion once again is that our ability to read, recognize, and isolate the presence and alternating usefulness and limitation of various "female" masks and perspectives is in itself a strengthening, enhancing, and empowering of the female gaze—a strengthening Glasgow herself seems to dramatize in Barren Ground through the increasing power and force of Dorinda’s look and physical presence, as she recognizes herself, others, and the shifting specular and psychic positions from which she "performs" as seer and seen. Dorinda for example is described (and appears to describe herself—the narrative lines are thin here) in middle age as "exactly what she was . . . a handsome, still
youthful woman of thirty-eight, who had been hardened but not embittered by experience" (386). Importantly Dorinda is able from her "mature" vantage point (she has earlier been described as a "mature goddess" [357]) to understand what she sees and how she is seen:

Her tall straight figure had thickened; there was a silver sheen on the hair over her temples, and lines had gathered in the russet glow of her skin . . . . She had long ago ceased to worry over wrinkles. Though she clung to youth, it was youth of the arteries and the spirit. Her happiness was independent, she felt, of the admiration of men, and her value as a human being was founded upon a durable, if an intangible, basis. Since she had proved that she could farm as well as a man there was less need for her to endeavor to fascinate as a woman. Yet, as she occasionally observed with surprise, in discouraging the sentimental advances of men, she had employed the most successful means of holding their interest. When all was said and done, was she not the only woman at Pedlar's Mill who did not stoop habitually to falsehood and subterfuge to gain her end? (386-87)

The question is a remarkable one, containing as it does the recognition that the "habitual" activities of cultural
femininity (such as the wearing of the blue dress, or the deceitfulness of similarly enforced attempts to "fascinate") are themselves performances, masks, subterfuges, disguised under the stable rubric of appropriate "female" heterosexual behavior. Yet the passage is also uncanny in its ability to deconstruct its own, apparent, proffered conclusions. Has not Dorinda engaged in subterfuge to gain her end? Has not her mobile use of, her masquerade behind, "male" or "female" identities achieved her ends of power, fruition, economic security, and revenge "against male abuse of her body and emotions"? If so, what is the nature of this subterfuge? How is it "different" from the larger feminine-cultural performance she now apparently despises? The narrator describes Dorinda as wearing even her age "theatrically"; at forty-two, she can still create from a distance an important illusion—"the aspect of youth" (414). Although Dorinda has insisted that "[h]er happiness was independent . . . of the admiration of men," readers may be forgiven if they begin to wonder whether Dorinda’s (and Glasgow’s) emphasis on the continued illusion of youth and beauty, and on the success of Dorinda’s masquerading lifestyle (which continues to attract the "advances of men") is not still part of the prevailing order of specularity: the dominant insistence that women retain value only as arresting visual objects, as figures still pleasing (as Dorinda apparently yet is) to the heterosexual male eye.
Dorinda's marriage to Nathan Pedlar begins to belie this reading, however. Although clearly proud of and in love with his wife ("You look as good to me as you ever did," he tells her [414]), and although eager to accept Dorinda in her revolutionary, composite, double-identified aspect (he was "not afraid of a theory," and is still an avid believer in new technologies, including "the modern churn, and the separator" [421]), the clownish Nathan stirs no answering chord in Dorinda, who seems to marry him in part for convenience (he is like a "hired hand," she reflects), in part for safety (from the advances of other, importunate men), and in part to secure, without sexual consequence or risk, a child, Jason's son, John Abner--for whom Dorinda admits she feels a "diffused maternal instinct" (371). She has even looked on her own wedding ceremony as though it were a form of performance or a heightened illusion: "She seemed to be standing apart while she watched some other woman married to Nathan" (375). Indeed, for Dorinda the "richest and happiest" years of her life are those following Nathan's sudden death as a hero in a railway accident, years while she is, importantly, "still shapely," and while "her eyes beneath the whitened hair were still as blue as a jay bird's wing" (477).

Yet despite the reference to her still magnetic look, to the eyes that had first and fatally attracted Jason Greylock (now a broken, bed-ridden widower), Dorinda is
moving quickly beyond the pale of masculine interest. An old friend, Mr. Kettledrum, sounds the knell:

"Ah, I recollect you thirty years ago, when they used to say you had a face like a May mornin' [he tells her]. Not that you ain't a fine figure of a woman now; but as we old men get on in years, our thoughts turn backward and we like to dwell on young things. Thirty years ago you looked as if sugar wouldn't melt in yo' mouth."

He drove on regretfully. . . . (483).

Kettledrum still beats the old rhythm, pounding out the old insistence that women are only of (hetero)sexual interest when they are attractive, and only attractive when they are young. As we have seen, however, the novel is equally insistent on its own drumbeat, its own, working, technologically productive rhythms—consistently depicting Dorinda as a woman still shapely, still handsome, still vigorous, still a goddess, even as she moves, now in her early fifties, beyond those years when she could be recognized as having value for the dominant visual and sexual order. In Dorinda there appears, in other words, to be a "surplus" of specular value—an unanticipated profit, as though from a particularly abundant and hardy yield; an excess of still usable interest. Her adopted son, John Abner, comes closest to this when he tells his adoptive
mother, "squint[ing] at her over the table" (as though
before too bright a light): "Well, you're a big woman,
Dorinda . . . There's an extra dimension in you somewhere"
(495). John Abner is able to intuit Dorinda's "surplus"--
but he is not able precisely to see it, to place it; it is
merely "somewhere." To whom then, might this excess be
visible--and useful? For whom is Dorinda in all her visible
vitality being preserved, if she is already beyond what her
male-dominated culture would recognize and locate as
"beautiful"?

One logical answer, given the structure of the question
and the arrangement of Glasgow's text as I have presented
it, is of course that she is being preserved for a female
spectator, or spectators. This, after all, is what I would
suggest the novel, as itself a form of technology, a
liberatory "vehicle" or site of fabrication, produces: a
textual and specular space in which the male gaze, and
female interest in the male as specular object, is finally
so smoothly churned, so completely "separated out" (ending
with Jason's death of consumption; before he dies he has
told Dorinda, "Even now, you won't even let your eyes rest
on me" [307]), that the rich excess of a possibly
independent or alternative female physical and scopo-psychic
reality, habitually denied within dominant hetero-masculine
parameters, may be made plain, unmistakable, inevitable,
surfaced. (Glasgow had in fact already hinted broadly that
Dorinda's gaze would exceed that which could be satisfied by heterosexual looking and desire; early in the novel, making love to Jason, Dorinda feels "something was left over, and this something watched as a spectator" [117]). In this sense the novel shares with Dorinda its status as an attempt at new forms and configurations; both the book and Dorinda act in other words as new technologies, as new sites or orders of representation and production. Dorinda has of course been closely connected to books throughout her history: she is the sole remaining peruser of her grandfather Abernathy's great library of romantic (the Waverley novels) and theological (the Lives of the Missionaries) texts (46). In Barren Ground this library, and books in general, furnish ready ideas and identities, including both Dorinda's youthful and misleading romanticism, and the image which had haunted her unstable and religious mother throughout her life—that of the missionary, "dreaming" of African babies being thrown to crocodiles (44). Although the cultural conventionality of Dorinda's inherited texts and images (which are both racist and [hetero]sexist) would suggest that literature carries out a primarily oppressive function in Barren Ground, Glasgow's identification of literature as a production which in turn produces, as a construction which, as construction, reveals itself as "gossamer," as a seen-through mask or fabrication, also suggests that literary texts may be
reconstructed to produce or provide alternate or competing or redirected visions or "performances," of identity, meaning, location, and valuation.

If we begin, for example, to explore the potential of and for female-to-female specularity in the novel, and in particular the notion that Dorinda has been and is being "preserved" for a female spectatorship outside or within the text, we may begin to make connections unavailable through those readings that would construct Dorinda's narrative, simply and ultimately, as a male-identified and male-responsive revenge-plot. Dorinda's early and important relationship with Rose Emily is key. Her fondness for her friend, dying of consumption, is clearly evident—though it is pointedly and largely obscured by Dorinda's growing and distracted "thrill" at the attentions of Jason Greylock (22). Rose Emily also and as clearly serves as an admiring female spectator of Dorinda's youthful beauty, her vision in particular separated from Jason's masculine one in its satisfaction with contrast rather than conformity. "I'm glad," Rose Emily tells Dorinda, "I chose that orange color for your shawl. . . . It goes so well with your black hair" (she also admires Dorinda's "bigness" [21-22]). Much later, after Rose Emily's death and her own marriage to the widower Nathan, Dorinda returns to value and preserve her friend's image and memory:

The vision of Rose Emily illumined her thoughts
like the last flare of the sunset. How brave she was, and how brilliant! Though Nathan had loved her while she lived, after her death he had ceased to think of her. . . . Already, she felt, Rose Emily was becoming nearer to her than to Nathan. Nathan had lost a wife; but as the years passed her friend would begin to live more vitally in her memory. (278)

Rose Emily in other words also persists in the novel as a form of "excess," as that which is no longer useful or memorable to her husband, but which is valorized and preserved by Dorinda in a female-to-female visual and psychic exchange. Importantly, Dorinda’s connection to Rose Emily has also been preserved and maintained through sororosocial triangulation: for Dorinda, the text suggests, may have married Nathan Pedlar after all to gain tangible access to her lost but still-vivid friend.¹⁹

Another important nexus of female-to-female or sororosocial exchanges suggests itself in the relationship between Dorinda and her later and constant companion and helper, Fluvanna. A mulatta descended from an old friend of Dorinda’s family, the wise Aunt Mehitable (who early and alone in the novel had been able to "see" Dorinda’s undiscovered pregnancy, in the most telling moment of female-to-female recognition in the text),²⁰ Fluvanna is valued by Dorinda for her "intelligenc[e]," and for her
attractive appearance—her "pleasant brown face, as glossy as a chestnut, her shining black eyes, and her perfect teeth" (287). Fluvanna remains Dorinda’s closest companion to the end of the narrative; she outlives and persists beyond both Nathan Pedlar and Jason Greylock, presiding at the funeral dinner of one and calling the doctor after the death of the other. To some extent then Fluvanna is also "preserved" as excess within the novel, left over, when all other companions have been extracted, as a continued relationship and possibility. For in the text’s final lines, Dorinda insists to John Abner, who has hinted she may marry again, that she will not now return to another nominally heterosexual union—that she has, indeed, "finished with all that" (526). What is not suggested in Barren Ground’s optimistic and springtime conclusion, however, is that Dorinda—despite her constant and clearly too insistent denials—must then necessarily be "finished with" everything, or everybody, else.

There is however a limit to the claims the reader can make for female-to-female visual and psychic exchanges in this novel. For, like Chopin, Glasgow appears to construct specific blockages to sororosocial (and other) affirmations—even as she provides the most palpable and striking examples of and opportunities for their naming, acceptanc, and recognition. Frazee has been one critic to sense Glasgow’s refusal of potentially homosexual conclusions:
We have mentioned lesbianism before: let us hasten to say that, in all of Ellen Glasgow's writings, there is not the slightest indication, even remotely subconscious, in situations, characters, imagery, commentary, or terminology, that a republic of women would be a desirable thing.

(183)

Frazee, as should be clear from my own reading, certainly overstates the case, and in her own work appears as much prescriptive as descriptive of obstacles to homosexual readings of Glasgow's text. Yet it is clear that Glasgow, like Chopin, does set boundaries against what would be a more explicit rendering of the sororosocial bond. Dorinda's psychic and sexual connection to Rose Emily through her marriage to Nathan falls short, for example, of complete consummation; indeed, it is the loss of her heterosexuality, and her refusal to have sexual intercourse with her husband, which prevents Dorinda from experiencing fully mediated "access," through Nathan's shared body, to her old friend.22 Glasgow early on in the novel has also provided a symbolic "hint" to the boundary that will be maintained between Rose Emily and Dorinda: to reach her friend, Dorinda must pass through "a curtain of purple calico," and then a closed door (20). While Glasgow does allow Dorinda to move past these boundaries, their suggestion is that the relationship between the two women will always be significantly veiled,
separated, Dorinda inhabiting the outer space of Pedlar's store, where she works, Rose Emily the inner bedchamber, where she dies. (In his biography of Glasgow, Godbold makes much of the fact that the author kept at night a locked door between herself and her longtime female companion, Anne Virginia Bennett [196]). The fact that Rose Emily does die, and so becomes a rather tenuous object for a sororosocial gaze and desire, is also significant. Although the potential for female-to-female exchanges is produced by the novel, it is also, apparently, consumed: Rose Emily, like Jason, dies of consumption, and thus her qualities of posthumous excess and specular/sexual identification ("How brilliant she was!") are balanced by those of withdrawal, finality, and inaccessibility.

Dorinda's connection to Fluvanna is likewise stymied on several levels, primarily, I would suggest, because Glasgow remains deeply amivalent concerning, even clearly resistant to, the extension of "technological" authority across lines of race as well as of gender. Like Chopin, Glasgow reads race as a significant boundary, a locked door, to the relationships that may be formed between women. Dorinda, for example, regards the "black race" with a mixture of superiority and misplaced kindness: she "was endowed with an intuitive understanding of the negroes," Glasgow tells us, "[and] would always know how to keep on friendly terms with that immature but not ungenerous race." Dorinda reflects
that the "coloured people" of her community are as
industrious as the whites, and "that, within what their
white neighbors called reasonable bounds, there was . . .
little prejudice against them" (281-82, emphasis mine).
Those bounds however become clear in her dealings with
Fluvanna. One of the "new order" of educated "darkeys"
(253, 269), and thus herself a form of "technological"
advance, Fluvanna is nonetheless represented as a lower
order of development, depicted in the text as both admirable
and potentially shiftless. "Looking at the coloured woman,
generous, brisk, smiling, with her plump brown cheeks and
her bright slanting eyes, Dorinda asked how she could have
managed the farm without Fluvanna . . . [and i]n return for
Fluvanna's sunny sympathy . . . Dorinda . . . discreetly
overlooked an occasional slackening of industry" (469).
Fluvanna is not in other words a completely evolved
technological development; she is attached to an as yet
"immature race," and is further, as a mulatta, a form of
"double" identification not fully or even nearly sanctioned
in the novel, where the "mulatto offspring" of Jason's
drinkard father are rendered marginal and invisible, as an
unrecognized and "anonymous brood" (7).

Glasgow in other words is unable to produce between
Dorinda and Fluvanna a fully sororosocial connection, in
part because, and as in Chopin, she appears to acquiesce in
certain aspects of a dominant culture she is otherwise
attempting to transcend. Her text is, clearly, a racist one; and racism functions within it not merely as an impediment to connections between women, but as a demarcative which marginalizes one group or individual in order to increase the visibility and force of another: like Chopin, Glasgow "outlines," surrounds, and supports her white heroine with lesser and blacker shadows.21 Yet it is difficult to suggest the novel is entirely insensitive to its own machinations, since Glasgow herself, through Dorinda, is often and plainly uneasy with constructions of race, and at times very much aware of the limitations of any, specific, cultural viewpoint. In an early passage for example she describes Dorinda’s stern theologian grandfather, John Calvin Abernathy, as a man trapped within a particular temporal and geographic viewpoint: "He was merely," she writes, "like the rest of us . . . seasoned with the favorite fruits of his age" (8). Much later, and to illustrate her heroine’s sharpening insight, she allows Dorinda to catch herself in cultural and gender-bound oversimplification:

". . . Men are all like that I suppose. They don’t know you. They don’t even wish to know you. They are interested in nothing on earth but their own reactions." And she remembered suddenly that Jason had once generalized like this about women, and that she was merely copying what he had said.
How stupid generalizations were, and how
decceptive! (292)

Glasgow's interest in describing the limits of a
particular cultural (and hence viewing) position, and her
attempts to allow as well for some recognition of those
limits, complicates my reading of the novel because it
suggests that, like de Lauretis, Glasgow was fundamentally
aware of and attuned to the way texts and representations
may both transcend and partake of conventional constructions
of culture and identity. The novel in other words seems
interested to trace and reveal the boundaries of its own
technological productions, however flawed—to show, for
example, that Dorinda's rejection of heterosexuality, while
opening up possibilities for an alternative sororosocial
gaze or desire, blocks the full realization of that desire
at specific and potentially mediatory points; or again, that
constructions of race, while allowing Fluvanna to join
Dorinda in her home as helper, and so to open up
possibilities for a uniquely female-to-female survival and
exchange, nevertheless and radically limit that exchange at
the very intersection where it came possible: a
black/mulatto woman working to serve a wealthier white woman
in her home. There are, of course, other technological
limitations the novel seems less fully to address—for
example the fact that, although Dorinda becomes a successful
and independent landowner, her trajectory reinforces a cultural model that would describe female sexuality and reproduction as incompatible with other forms of productive labor, such as farming (and vice versa). Yet overall, my sense is that Glasgow moves farther than Chopin in her ability to at once describe and qualify productive alternatives for women—not only because she allows her character to survive and to thrive, but because she encloses her discussion within the larger rubric of (partially successful) attempts at reflexive vision.

It is Glasgow herself, in other words, who finally and in addition becomes the "excess" of this text: that "something left over" that "watche[s] as a spectator"—in this case as a female spectator who produces herself as a viewer striving to see from both inside and outside the text, watching its own entanglements, productions, and consumptions and attempting to carve out for herself that "off-space" that would in de Lauretis' terms characterize the possibility and final production of a feminist literary text. Indeed literature becomes in this sense a "gossamer substance": a form of detectable masquerade that can be seen through by its own producer, and by others, since in her very attempt to elucidate textual or technological alternatives she must necessarily expose the workings and the boundaries that make those alternatives possible. Again the images and terms of performance, "vehicle," strategy,
and construct occur to me; unlike Chopin, Glasgow is able to encode these images in a narrative of strategic survival and sustenance for her character, and for a female gaze, precisely because it is that gaze that is being empowered in the text--as a woman, a writer, watches her own productions, her own masked and unmasking constructions.

I can now re-read, then, the optimistic ending that Raper reads as lacking in definitive "structural support":

Yes, the land would stay by her. [Dorinda's] eyes wandered from far horizon to horizon. Again she felt the quickening of that sympathy which was deeper than all other emotions of her heart, which love had overcome only for an hour and life had been powerless to conquer in the end--the living communion with the earth under her feet. While the soil endured, while the seasons bloomed and dropped, beneficent ritual of sowing and reaping moved in the fields, she knew that she could never despair of contentment. (525)

This forward-looking ending--this scanning of boundaries ("horizon to horizon"), this sense of productive doubleness ("sowing and reaping"), this continuing sense of fruitfulness--is not, I would suggest, only or so much provided through the narrative, as it is made possible from within it, from within its very fabric(ation) as an
observable and observed attempt at the technological refashioning of gender. Dorinda, as Glasgow describes her, is left at the end of her novel with "integrity of vision" (525); it is an integrity I believe Glasgow seeks to modify, and so to extend to herself, as a female spectator of female narrative, and of the masks and technologies she envisions for her character and her text. What she could not envision, and indeed is unable to describe, is the slippery and mobile terrain a mulatta--not Fluvanna--may contain as a woman and a spectator in and along whom races mask, mix, separate, and collide. But this will be the subject of my next chapter, on Helga Crane and Nella Larsen's Quicksand.
Notes

1. Ellen Glasgow, *Barren Ground* (New York: Doubleday, 1937), p. vii. Subsequent citations are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text. Glasgow's comments on the novel are drawn from her preface to the work, written at the request of her editor.


5. Raper, "The Landscape of Revenge," pp. 94, 97, 80. The emphasis is mine.

6. See for example Wagner, who describes Glasgow as an "ironist . . . amused by the differences between the traditional concepts of woman and her own personal concepts" (p. 4).

7. I hark here again to the function of the "screen" and of clothing in *The Awakening*, which serve to protect and so "encase and define" the female subject. As we will see, however, Glasgow's sense of screening is much less constricted and confining. The early allusion to the brightly colored shawl, and later to the "blue dress," will in fact serve in my reading as references to the facility and function of masquerade, which is not attached but is rather shifting and relocatable, and so ultimately deconstructive of fixed scopophilic screens and encasements.

8. p. 13. It is interesting to note at this moment the conflation of Dorinda's and the narrator's/Glasgow's gaze; all appear united in this suspended moment of pleasure in masculine appearance. Also particularly notable is the description of Jason's eyes, which do not appear here as possessors of the look but rather as objects functioning as physical adornments.
9. The novel's model of such frailty is of course Dorinda's "rival," the flaxen-haired Geneva Ellgood, whose beauty quickly fades and who proves constitutionally unequal to the harsh demands of life (see below).

10. It is curious to see how Glasgow here subverts, through imagery, the model of heterosexual "opposites," for heterosexual attraction is here configured as likeness, while what would be a female-to-female, sororosocial, or lesbian attraction or exchange is figured through the use of matched difference.

11. pp. 168-69. Compare this statement to her earlier appraisal of Jason as a "bright vision" that she "refused to believe" as anything but resolute (p. 16).

12. The emphasis on "people" seems important here, as well as Dorinda's watching ("she noticed") of herself being watched; she has lost her early and unreflective dependence on Jason and his look, and seems able to record spectatorial approval dispassionately.


14. Glasgow's near-contemporary, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, wrestled with much the same dilemma throughout her life, and serves as something of a cultural reference point. Escaping from a marriage and from a child for whom she felt a complete inability to nurture, Gilman struggled throughout her career to remain free of too-entangling maternal bonds. "There were also," her biographer, Ann J. Lane, writes, "practical reasons for [Gilman] not wanting to marry. Ineffective birth control meant for most married women either years dedicated to the rearing of children or dramatic accommodation in one's sexual life." To 'Herland' and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman (New York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 70, emphasis mine. See also Dorinda's relations with Nathan Pedlar, below.

15. Doctors, despite their medical prowess, have of course been unable to provide Dorinda with any measure of biological control, coming upon the scene only after she has aborted her child through miscarriage; while Jason as a doctor has come to represent the tyranny and betrayal of biology in desire.

16. The novel covers a time span between the 1880s and the 1920s.
17. Dorinda is for example of a much hardier type than Geneva Greylock, who ends her life and marriage to Jason insane, drowning herself in a pond. Glasgow seems to be suggesting that the "soft," feminine type exemplified in Geneva is not fit to withstand the pressures women face in culture; more reliable and serviceable, if entailing some sacrifice, is the model Dorinda represents--adaptable, multifaceted, "hard"--a winner in the Darwinian struggle, itself an important and "new" model of environmental and social relations and one to which Glasgow was steadfastly attached.

18. p. 421. This is not to suggest that Glasgow sees in Dorinda an "ideal" representative of alternative female identity. Rather, Dorinda appears to stand as a particular if extreme response to a particular and extreme set of conditions. While not completely uncritical of Dorinda's choices, the author seeks to validate her survival and her use: as a technology that will, like most, see improvement--or perhaps even disappearance--with time.

19. The implicitly taboo nature of the sororosocial connection may in fact lie behind Dorinda's mystification as to why she is marrying Nathan (whose name, incidentally, is phonetically tied to Jason's, and so seems to convey Glasgow's sense of the redundancy of heterosexual oppositions); she does not allow herself, nor does the novel allow her, to make this desire plain.

20. This reading of recognition overlooks, however, the more troubled relation of black women to the "primitive" or "earthly" knowledge they are presumed to possess. While a sororosocial reading shifts this context to provide for a recognition, a communication, between women and across race, it does not escape difficulty on two levels: first, because it entraps women as a whole, and black women in particular, within a dominant lexicon of baser or "primitive" intelligence ("intuition," and more specifically "seeing," as non-linguistic, non-intellectual); second, because it continues to position the black woman as the willing servant or guardian of the white (Mehitable vows to tell no one of Dorinda's pregnancy). Aunt Mehitable does of course represent some power, in her ability to "read" the white woman's body. But this, in the context of the novel, may be an accident as much of age as of racial "talent": young Dorinda is not yet strong or wise enough to fool the older woman.

21. pp. 448 ff., 515. It is important to note that Nathan Pedlar, too, persists and is "preserved" within the text, in the shape and "idea" of a "hero" for the people of Pedlar's Mill. But it is an idea Dorinda seems never entirely to
grasp, or to which she fully cleaves. She does not preserve and maintain it; rather it is produced by the cultural "mill" which creates Nathan as a construct, a concept he did not sustain in life. "Already Nathan's spirit," Dorinda reflects, "disencumbered of the gross impediments of the flesh, was an influence to be reckoned with. Alive, he had been negligible, but once safely dead, he had required a tremendous advantage" (450). Nathan-as-hero is produced by the older and more conventional technology of traditional myth-making; it is not excess, but rather than which can be fully understood within the culture of Pedlar's Mill.

22. Rose Emily's death is of course already and in itself something of a "block" to explicit, sororosocial triangulation. See below.

23. Dorinda's success on the farm, for example, and her visibility as the region's lone white female magnate, is supported by the work of black field hands, black dairy workers, and black house-help.
Chapter 4

The Scene Unmasked:

Race, Voyeurism, and Nella Larsen’s Quicksand

A snowy landscape, in which the mountain looks particularly serene, has no observer; but most pictures that show the odd shapes and mutations produced by volcanic activity have some human figures: a spectacle requires the depiction of a gaze. . . .

Sight is a promiscuous sense. The avid gaze always wants more.

--Susan Sontag, The Volcano Lover¹

Because when I disobey you, the outsider, even if it is wrong, I am being what is left of myself. And that sliver of myself is now all I have left.

--Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy²

I

One of the advantages of a mobile, mischievous understanding of the female spectator, and in particular of a theory of masquerade that emphasizes and privileges the "seeing of seeing," the ability of a feminist practice to observe its own strategies, and of women writers (such as Glasgow) to record that process of self-observation, is that this practice can be used to challenge and define the very precepts and pre-texts underlying the concept of observed masquerade itself: one text, or one specific reading of a text, may be used to unveil, unmask, and watch, another. I

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have already attempted to dramatize, to "perform" this type of unmasking to some extent in my doubled reading of *The Awakening*, and further, in *Barren Ground*, to discuss the ways in which a woman writing might seek to encode and empower a definitively female recognition of masquerade in text, and more specifically, of text itself as a potential female masquerade—text, that is, as a specifically locatable, temporal, and performative "act." What I have yet to consider, however, is whether or not this very ability, this very freedom to watch-oneself-as-a-female-spectator is in effect an affect of a particular position of privilege; whether indeed Glasgow, with and through Dorinda, is able to articulate a strategy of self-observation, of studied masking, precisely because she and her character already speak and see from a position recognized as visible and authoritative: as white female spectators, as individuals who are, despite obvious sexual and gender marginalizations, accorded a provisional status of being within culture and acknowledged as possessing a recognizable and valorized location from which to participate (with some limitations) as seers and as seen. What the beautifully self-contained (and self-producing) vision of *Barren Ground* does not allow us to ask is what would happen if, for example, Dorinda did not inhabit this specific and privileged location; what would happen indeed if she lacked a functioning racial privilege (because, for example, she
was black), or, more complicated still, what would happen if she lacked access to any "stable" identification of racial location at all--because she were, like Fluvanna, a mulatta. These questions are crucial at this juncture, in part because they begin to destabilize the seeming internal "balance," the simplistically (and comfortably) "mirroring" effect of the white-female-watching-white-female-masquerade (in which I, too, as a white female spectator/critic, am complicit), and the seeming self-sufficiency of Barren Ground as it is presented in my reading, exposing some of its limitations as a strategy for and within a putatively inclusive feminist project. Yet these questions also probe more deeply into the nature and assumptions of a concept of shifting masquerade itself. For how can movements of "masking" and "unmasking," the layered folds of "watching-of-watching" be understood, by women who yet strive for stability, an authoritative place, from which to see and to be seen? To what extent do mischievous movements, specular turnabouts, take as their basis the security, the knowledge, of some place to look from or back to?

Nella Larsen seems to work precisely with and through such unresolved problems of "shifting" female locations and identifications in her two best-known works, the short novels Quicksand and Passing--articulating the very positions that Chopin (in the figure of the quadroon) and Glasgow (in the person of Fluvanna) touch upon in their own
texts only glancingly and without insight. *Passing* (1929) for example masterfully confronts the agility of, and the potential dangers to, the mulatta body (in the person of Clare Kendry) as it may be used for "masquerading" purposes, "passing" as white (but also as black) in shifting and disparate cultural and racial contexts. *Passing* as a text is also remarkable for its deft use of race and issues of racial identity to "mask" what Deborah McDowell has brilliantly read as the novel’s subversive lesbian subtext—or what I would term the sororosocial relation or triangle between Clare Kendry and wife and husband Irene and Brian Redfield. Yet despite its investments in and its canny understanding of the opportunities and pitfalls presented by mulatta masquerade, *Passing* ends abruptly in failure and destruction: in the death of Clare Kendry—and her "mobile" and "mischievous" body—in an ambiguous fall from a sixth-story window. Why, if mobility and masquerade are, as in my reading, empowering strategies, does Clare end in such (suggestively murderous) obliteration? Why is Larsen not able, or interested, to "watch" her heroine’s shifting accommodations, and so conclude from that dexterity in the advantages of an observable and sustained female masquerade?

*Quicksand* (1928) is also notable for its use and invocation of the tropes of masquerade, although these function at a less obvious and titular level in the text and thus have received less attention and discussion from
Larsen's ever-widening circle of critics. The novel is striking, within my own context, for its affinities with Chopin's work. Ann Hostetler has been among those who have located in Larsen's text important crosscurrents with and connections to *The Awakening*: "Quicksand," Hostetler writes, "marks the beginning of greater freedom for self-examination and narrative experimentation in the writing of Black American women, as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* did for white American women." In a forward to a new edition of Larsen's collected fiction, Marita Golden has movingly described her connection to Helga Crane as a "woman who has [likewise] searched for a metaphysical place in the sun." Curiously, and perhaps not surprisingly, Larsen's Helga has thus also been "accused" of many of the failings that have long been the bane of Edna Pontellier. Lillie P. Howard describes Helga as a character who "always seemed on the verge of meaningful discovery, but [who] . . . lacked the necessary mettle for real insight and for change." She adds that "there are alternatives all along the way for Helga and the reader to see," but that Helga ignores these options, apparently through "a lack somewhere in her character." Larsen's text also shares certain concerns and identifications with *Barren Ground*, particularly in its impulses away from sexuality and against the double entanglements of marriage and childrearing. McDowell has put the case of Helga Crane succinctly: "For women, and
especially for black women, sexual pleasure leads to the dangers of domination in marriage, repeated pregnancy, or exploitation and loss of status... Larsen openly castigates the price—marriage and pregnancy/childbearing—that women must pay for sexual expression (xiv, xxi, emphasis mine). But where Dorinda is able to mount a strategic response to these dangers through her re-imagination of the techno-forms of gender, creating her own, studied re-forms and response, Helga is faced with a far more complex dilemma: how to organize her responses, not only to the technology of gender, but to and within culturally enforced boundaries of race.

It is for this reason that Quicksand becomes a potentially more "complicated" novel than either The Awakening or Barren Ground, and why its constructions around masquerade, specularity, and the watching-of-watching, and in particular the potential mirror-effects of spectatorship, are destined to be both more vexed and more revealing. Critics of Larsen's work, for example, and of African American literary tradition in general, have often had recourse to complex images of "mirroring" in order to express both the overwhelming drive toward sameness and the threatening differentiation of otherness contained in specular relations within and across racial boundaries. Helena Michie, in an introduction that precedes her readings of both Quicksand and Passing, has drawn on the work of
Roland Barthes to discuss dominant cultural impulses toward and away from the "otherness" represented in the spectacle of race:

The choice between exile and absorption of the other or, more properly, of otherness . . . is articulated by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* in his entwined images of the mirror and the spectacle. In the mirror, "any otherness is reduced to sameness. . . . The spectacle or the tribunal, which are both places where the Other threatens to appear in full view, become mirrors" . . . . Sometimes, however, the otherness of the other cannot be reproduced as a mirror image of the gazer: "Sometimes . . . the Other is revealed as irreducible. . . . How can one assimilate the Negro, the Russian? There is a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes pure object, a spectacle, a clown."7

Michie, through Barthes, appears to suggest here the very dilemma presented by an overly simplistic account of the "watching" of female masquerade: for in constructing female performance as an observed spectacle, the female spectator (and perhaps most particularly the white female spectator) is tempted to collapse what she sees into a mirror--so that, as in the case of Glasgow, "otherness" becomes subsumed
within the larger image of the reflected self.⁸ The alternative, as Barthes suggests, is to assimilate or compensate for the appearance of the other through objectification/exoticization—a clearly unsatisfactory mode of response, and one which Larsen confronts directly in her work in Quicksand. Yet what is not invoked in the passage above is the ability of the other to use similar concepts of mirroring, but to distinctly different ends. In "Facing Tradition: Revisionary Scenes in African American Literature," Kimberly Benston reflects for example on the tendency of the dominant gazer—to efface or exoticize a racial other—as one which calls up in the other a corresponding desire to give presence to what has been denied or misread. "African American literary tradition," Benston writes, "is what rhetorical theorists such as Paul de Man and Cynthia Chase would call a prosopopoeia, a giving of face to an absent power. . . . In creating the features of his face, the writer composes himself as a modal per-son of a putative culture, becoming a mask through which the reader then speaks."⁹ This is a somewhat different understanding of masquerade than that I have previously imputed, for example, to Glasgow (although one perhaps hinted at in my reading of The Awakening¹⁰); rather than constructing text as a mask which may in turn be observed to unhinge its own (visible) productions, the black writer, in Benston's reading, constructs text as a masquerade in order
that it may grant visibility, validity, and stability to a previously invisible or "absent" identity and authority (one must have an identity before one can be seen), and as a mask that may in turn be worn by the reader as an (ad)dressed acknowledgment of that identity as spoken, as read and voiced "through," as seen." In this process Benston records another aspect of the mirror-like quality of specular and literary recognition, in her awareness of the simultaneous and dependent movements of differentiation and sameness between others: "the face," as she puts it, "catching its reflection in some version of the other" (99). Yet this recognition (potentially more empowering than in Barthes), this acknowledgment of self and other within black literary tradition is not, despite its investments in stability, singular. Rather, it is ongoing and productive. "Here," Benston writes, "African American identity looks on an image of being at once external and internal to itself, an echo or reflection that it must revise in order to better see itself" (99-100). Behind and between these revisions, Benston suggests, lies the possibility of and search for a recognizable identity and authority: the "unmasking [of] a self situated beyond the endlessly supplemental faces of prosopopoeia" (100).

The process of black seeing and the establishment of a recognizable (by both self and other) identity is further complicated, however, in the position of the black woman--
largely because of the historically vexed relations between visibility, identity, and black female sexuality. McDowell has been among those who have traced the disastrous consequences to black women of the long "network of social and literary myths perpetuated throughout history about black women's libidinousness," citing in particular the manner in which "the white slave master constructed an image of black female sexuality which shifted responsibility for his own sexual passions onto his female slaves" (xii, emphasis mine). Sander L. Gilman, in his work on "The Hottentot and the Prostitute," has located the "flowering" of narratives of black female licentiousness in the eighteenth century, when African women such as the "Hottentot Venus" were displayed throughout Europe to show their unusually "large" genitalia and buttocks, which were presumed to be the source of their "primitive" and insatiable sexual appetites. Gilman further suggests that by the eighteenth century black women served as visual "icons" not merely for sexuality, but for "deviant sexuality in general"--so that "[t]he concupiscence of the black [female came to be] associated with the sexuality of the lesbian."12 Given this history and this context, we might expect to find then in a novel such as Quick sand a marked reluctance to display any evidence of sexual "wantonness," and in particular of behaviors and desires that might be termed, in my reading, sororosocial: a willingness, that is,
to mask, disguise, or even subvert those connections that would continue to link black female sexuality to excess, to deviance, and to indiscriminate availability.

Indeed, and as McDowell has already and persuasively argued, "[g]iven this context it is not surprising that a pattern of reticence about black female sexuality [in general] dominated novels by black women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," leading black women writers into the cultural double-bind that would recognize their "chasteness," their identity, their "reflection" as validated (non-primitive) beings, only at the expense of the lost expression of their sexual desires (xiii). "Larsen," as McDowell writes, "wanted to tell the story of black women with sexual desires . . . but was constrained by a competing desire to establish black women as respectable." It is for this reason, she continues, that Larsen's novels are troubled by such unsatisfactory, such "unconvincing endings": unable to wrest herself free from competing claims and desires, unable to construct meaningful or workable identities without incurring radical social and sexual effacement, the author can only envision for her heroines despair, defeat, and death. And indeed Quicksand does end rather more "unsatisfactorily" than both of the texts I have previously discussed, going beyond The Awakening's apotheotic suicide, and beyond what I have argued is Barren Ground's "reconstructive" refusal of sexual activity. For
while Edna, as I have suggested, is through her suicide preserved to some extent in an off-space "beyond" the text, while Dorinda, as a survivor, is preserved as specific strategy of success "within" it, Helga Crane is preserved and observed in her ending only in complete failure and imprisonment: entrapped by her children, her husband, and a rigid and unsustaining community. What affirmation of reconstituted female spectatorship can be found here?

A positive answer, if there is one, is not ready to hand—in part because female spectatorship has yet to be fully explored as a distinct and central issue within Quicksand. While there have for example been brilliant readings of the novel's sexual, racial, and aesthetic tensions and quandaries—some of these glancing necessarily on the spectatorial—there has yet to be a definitive discussion of the role specular relations specifically play in Helga's troubled search for racial and sexual identity, and in particular in her doubled quest to be both present and absent within the specular field: her double desire, that is, both to be seen and not to be seen (and, congruently, to see and not to see). Seen because, as a mulatta, Helga has long been denied recognition and a stable visual (racial) status within a familial and cultural setting (as, for example, a culturally designated "black" woman rendered "invisible" by and within white culture; not seen because, as a woman and as a culturally designated
black woman linked (as Larsen knew) with powerful mythologies of deviant or excessive sexuality, she is tied to a long history of oppressive physical imaging and display (see for example Gilman's graphic reproductions of eighteenth-century scientific "plates" of black female genitalia, as well as Alice Walker's fictional account of female genital display and mutilation among both westerners and Africans in Possessing the Secret of Joy). Helga's mobility, and our potential understanding of masquerade within her narrative, is thus quite differently inflected than in the texts I have previously discussed; the movement here is not only between shifting or available or (re)constructed identities, or between positions of observer and observed, but between the very realms of the visible and not-visible themselves. For like Dorinda, Helga seeks to "perform" an identity or identities that will bring her into productive harmony with her visible world, or worlds (an important distinction here); yet like Edna she is plagued by the knowledge that the visible is always already, historically, and prescriptively, constructed. The difference is that Helga, unlike her predecessors (both chronologically and within my narrative), lacks, both as a mulatta and as a culturally constructed black woman, a functioning racial authority, and thus the accessible (racial) dominance and security of the white woman engaged in masked, deconstructive observances. What remains to be
seen then is whether female spectatorship and in particular the concept of female-spectatorship-of-masquerade is thus exposed as a finally untenable fabrication of dominance: whether indeed the quagmire in which Helga is left functions as "a mask through which the reader then speaks," forcing me, as a white female reader/spectator, to acknowledge not the soothing mirror of productive mobility, but rather the startling reflection of a debilitating cultural intransigence.

II

Quicksand, like Barren Ground, begins with the visual invocation of a solitary female figure. Helga Crane is depicted as sitting "alone in her room" at the black college of Naxos, bathed in "a pool of light." This opening, which Hostetler accurately describes as vivid and painterly in its suggestions (37), finds the young Helga, like the reader, engaged with a book--whose "white pages" are also revealed in the surrounding glow. The scene is thus and imaginatively constructed to suggest an initial proximity between Helga and the reader (since both are literary spectators), yet it also serves simultaneously to "illuminate" the very distinct sphere that limns her: for Helga sits perfectly isolate, "a small oasis in a desert of
darkness" (1). As if to reinforce the reader's status as a distant and perhaps even intrusive spectator of Helga's revealed image, Larsen next constructs a description of her heroine that combines images of physicality with images of voyeurism:

An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade. A slight girl of twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned, arms and legs, she had ... an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee ... with skin like yellow satin ... she was ... attractive. Black, very broad brows over soft, yet penetrating, dark eyes, and a pretty mouth, whose sensitive and sensuous lips had a slight questioning petulance and a tiny dissatisfied droop, were features on which the observer's attention would fasten. (2)

Larsen cannily conlates here the reader's discovery of Helga's description with the speculative act of the voyeur, who "would" see Helga alone in her room in a negligee, and "would," in a moment of specular alignment and satisfaction, "have thought her well fitted to that framing"--i.e., suited to the aesthetic parameters of such sensuous (spotlighted) display. What Larsen is already invoking here are
assumptions about female beauty and physicality, and black female physicality in particular (that it is "well fitted" for specular absorption); yet just as quickly she moves to undercut these assumptions, by suggesting that Helga is not at all well-suited to her surroundings. She is, we are told, anxious to escape her immediate environment, through "forgetfulness ... [and] rest from thought of any kind" (2). She is moreover unhappy with the "distasteful encounters and stupid perversities" that fill her days as a teacher at Naxos (2, emphasis mine). Most of all, however, she is annoyed with the image, the location of herself that has been provided by a visiting white preacher, who has arrived on the campus to tell the members of the college that

Naxos Negroes knew what was expected of them. They had good sense and they had good taste. They knew enough to stay in their places, and that, said the preacher, showed good taste. He spoke of his great admiration of the Negro race ... but he had urgently besought them to know when and where to stop .... And then he had spoken of contentment, embellishing his words with scriptural quotations and pointing out to them that it was their duty to be satisfied in the estate to which they had been called .... (3)
Curiously, Helga responds to the recent memory of this sermon by "pinn[ing] a scrap of paper about the bulb under the lamp's shade, for . . . she wanted an even more soothing darkness" (3). It is as though, faced with the white man's construction of her identity and location, she would rather shift herself into even greater oblivion--moving herself and her body into the realm of the invisible and the blind, where they might be freed from obvious and oppressive racial constructions. As I have already suggested, however, Helga's desire in relation to the visible is not singular, but two-fold. No sooner has she sunk into relative (darkened) quiescence than she is seized "with an overpowering desire for action of some sort," so that she "rose abruptly and pressed the electric switch with determined firmness, flooding suddenly the shadowed room with a white glare of light" (4). Like Edna Pontellier, who in an early moment had also sought a "sweet, half-darkness," and almost immediately afterward "wanted to destroy something," stomping on her wedding ring and flinging and breaking a vase,17 Helga is overcome by an impulse to violence, and gives vent to it in taking "her school-teacher paraphernalia of drab books and papers" and flinging them "scornfully toward the wastebasket" (4). And Larsen further makes it clear that this violence, this destruction, is in response to the oppressive imaging or "patterning" that has surrounded Helga: the "white man's pattern," which in turn,
with its "big knife" and "cruelly sharp edges," destroys the fabric of black life around her, subjecting teachers and students alike to the ruthless "paring process."

But as quickly as this animosity, this will to thrust herself and her anger into the spotlight appears, it vanishes. "'Well, I'm through with that," Helga says (in unconscious echo of Dorinda's earlier and different resignation), and returns to her chair, "shutting off the hard, bright blaze of the overhead lights" (5). She was, Larsen records, "like a person who had been for months fighting the devil and then unexpectedly had turned round and agreed to do his bidding." Plunging herself once more into darkness, Helga enacts in the first five pages of Larsen's text what will be the complete and repeated movement of her narrative: the struggle to be seen and to see, alternated with the will and the means to blind and efface herself, to disappear. But by morning, when a young girl turns her "amazed eyes" (in a pointedly female voyeuristic moment) on the scene of Helga's room--"[b]ooks and papers scattered about the floor, fragile stockings and underthings and the startling green and gold negligee dripping about on chairs and stool" (9)--Helga has returned to the world and to light.

As "a pretty, solitary girl with no family connections"
(5), Helga is expected to be "inconspicuous" in the highly ordered world of Naxos (8). She is a "despised mulatto" whose racial anomaly and problematic identity are compounded by the absence of an accessible or nameable parentage (her white mother is dead, her black father, however, simply "disappeared"). And indeed it is Helga's desire to make herself obvious, to "give face to [her] absent power," that has rendered her unfit for life at the college. "All her life," Larsen writes, "Helga Crane had loved and longed for nice things." She spends most of her small income on "clothes . . . books . . . [and] furnishings," and "it was this craving, this urge for beauty which had helped to bring her into disfavor in Naxos--'pride' and 'vanity' her detractors called it" (6). Women at Naxos are not expected to be conspicuously visible: they are exhorted to wear "dull attire," told that "[b]right colors are vulgar," and generally condemned to go about in "[b]lack, brown, and gray," which Helga "instinctively" recognizes as "ruinous to them, actually destroy[ing] the luminous tones lurking in their dusky skins" (18). What Larsen is here recording of course is the "synchronization," at the level of race, that I have already argued occurs in Barren Ground at the level of gender: the powerful visual obtrusiveness of blackness, like the brightness of Dorinda's blue-eyed gaze (Helga also has "penetrating, dark eyes"), is to be subsumed, streamlined into the submission of simple color
coordination, so that it may be comfortably absorbed in the mirror-gaze of, this time, white specular dominance. That this white gaze, though generally absent, is nonetheless and everywhere present on the campus—"Naxos," as has been noted many times, is an anagram of "saxon"—is made clear in the connection between physical synchronization and white assumptions of what may be visually acceptable or, in "good taste." Margaret Creighton, Helga's "intelligent" friend, nevertheless is determined to "turn what was probably nice live crinkly hair, perfectly suited to her smooth dark skin and agreeable round face, into a dead straight, greasy, ugly mass" (14). Again Larsen's suggestion is that what may be thought "well fitted" does not in fact match; Margaret's styling brings her "into line" with dominant (white) norms of female beauty, but denies the inherent harmony of her own hair and face. Yet Larsen also suggests that Helga's constant rebelliousness in matters of visual conformity, her longing for conspicuousness, for "a profusion of lovely clothes, and a goodly share of envious admiration" (11) will not, in itself, satisfy or resolve; that it may in fact blind her to other and crucial desires:

But just what did she want? ... Helga Crane didn't know, couldn't tell. But there was, she knew, something else. Happiness, she supposed. Whatever that might be. ... [H]er conception of it had no tangibility. (11)
Helga’s yearning for visual brightness is also and directly linked to the fear of sexual provocativeness that seems to haunt Naxos’ female denizens, her "elaborate" clothes, hats, and shoes, in "royal blues, rich greens, deep reds . . . [and] clinging silks," seeming in the "hawk eyes of the dean and matrons" to be "positively indecent" (18, emphasis mine). There is, at Naxos, a prime example of black visual, and thus sexual, restraint: Miss MacGooden, a "prim," "ugly" faculty member who prides herself on being a "lady," and who pointedly exhorts her female students "to act like ladies and not like savages from the backwoods."

Miss MacGooden’s other notable characteristic is that she is single and determinedly celibate, having been "given to understand [that there were] things in the matrimonial state that were of necessity entirely too repulsive for a lady of delicate and sensitive nature to submit to" (12). Although Miss MacGooden is clearly intended as an object of fun in the text, the broad connections here, between visual nonsignificance, "ladylikeness," and the absence of sexuality (or between visual significance, female "savagery," and sexual availability) are too clear to be ignored. They also form a backdrop to Helga’s growing sense of dis-ease in her sexual relations with her fiancé, James Vayle. "The idea," Helga reflects, "that she was but in one nameless way necessary to him filled her with a sensation amounting almost to shame" (8). Later she experiences
acute nausea . . . as she recalled the slight quivering of his lips sometimes when her hands unexpectedly touched his; the throbbing vein in his forehead on a gay day when they had wandered off alone across the low hills and she had allowed him frequent kisses under the shelter of some low-hanging willows. Now she shivered a little. . . . (24)

Importantly it is the visual cues, reminders, of sexual passion that disturb Helga, closing again the circle that would connect visible display with an obvious and thus proffered sexuality (although this connection is not, the text suggests, as much a dilemma for the male as it is for the female; Larsen for example only tangentially addresses the oppressive association of black men with sexual rapaciousness). James Vayle for his part, though once like Helga highly critical of Naxos, is now comfortable in his surroundings; he has "fitted," Larsen writes, into the community, achieving the "mold" or mask expected of him (his last name conjures up images of veiling, and is the first suggestion that disguises or masks will hold a negative valence in this novel), and experiences no disharmony or disjunction other than that caused by Helga’s inability likewise to conform. Helga, however, far from "Vayle-ing" her true emotions to suit her surroundings, looks back upon
her experiences at Naxos as a "revealing picture"--a recognition that brings with it further feelings of "shame" and "humiliat[ion]" (7).

These feelings, and Helga's general discomfort with visibility and sexuality, surface in her meeting with the college's president, Robert Anderson. Arriving at his office to announce her resignation, Helga is unable to see Dr. Anderson clearly until "her eyes [had] picked out the figure of a man, blurred slightly in outline in that dimmer light" (19). This exercise in visual discernment--Anderson is an attractive man of thirty-five--brings on almost immediate anxiety, as Larsen appears to connect Helga's fears of sexuality not only with visual display but with the active (avid, promiscuous) exercise of the female gaze. Helga is seized by "confusion" in this moment, and a sense of "strangeness and something very like hysteria," and must overcome "[a]n almost overpowering desire to laugh." This kind of sexual hysteria had not, however, been at all present in an earlier scene, when Helga stood before Margaret in nothing but her "night robe" (though Margaret, "plainly curious," had "darted a quick glance" at her friend [14]), suggesting heterosexuality, rather than homosexuality, sparks Helga's anxiousness--though sororosocial suggestions, too, are colored with a certain "nervousness" early in the text (as in the "darting glance" of Margaret, who is also presumably the girl with "amazed
eyes" who has seen Helga’s underclothes). Interestingly Helga is able to curb her anxiety, and even to trade gazes with Anderson;\(^8\) she even considers, under the sway of his presence and his arguments, during which she experiences a "a mystifying yearning which sang and throbbed in her," remaining indefinitely at Naxos (20). Considers it, that is, until Anderson tells her she should stay because she is "a lady" who shows "dignity and breeding." At these words, all the conflicting desires and experiences that have characterized Helga’s time at the college rise to "turmoil" within her—the term "lady" invoking not only her lack of recognizable parentage, of good (racially unmixed) "breeding," but her environment’s stifling and confusing standards of female sexuality and visibility. The scene ends in a moment curiously reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s "The Yellow Wallpaper," as Helga discovers that "[t]he intricate pattern of the rug which she had been studying [had] escaped her" (21). Like Gilman’s narrator (though under very different circumstances), Helga feels herself trapped by cultural patterns she is unable to grasp or control—yet for the moment she seems to elude them, declining Anderson’s offer to stay ("I don’t belong here") and excusing herself from his office.

Like Dorinda, Helga manages an escape to New York, though not before we have learned more of her history as an "invisible" woman. Her mother, we are told, was a "fair
Scandinavian girl" who, abandoned by Helga's father (to whom she may or may not have been married), had chosen to re-marry a white man. Even before her mother's death Helga had learned to effect a "childish self-effacement" before the hatred of her white step-father and siblings (23); though later rescued and sent to a black school by her (white) Uncle Peter, she "saw herself for an obscene sore in all their lives, at all costs to be hidden" (29, emphasis mine). Following her departure from Naxos, Helga goes first to Chicago, with a plan to seek help from her uncle—but is turned away by his new white wife, who refuses to recognize Helga as family ("And please remember that my husband is not your uncle. . . . Why, that, that would make me your aunt!"). Humiliated, Helga sets out to look for work on her own, but nevertheless knows that in order to succeed she must continue to render herself inconspicuous—and so donning "the plainest garments she possessed" (31).

Yet Helga continues to oscillate between her determination to obscure herself as necessary, and her competing desire to adorn her person with rich and attractive (attention-getting) objects. Still longing for "things," she spends what little money she has on a book and a "rare old tapestry purse" (32, 35). Hostetler has read this impulse to self-adornment (which Helga herself describes as a longing for "material security [and] gracious ways of living") as "an attempt to construct a female
identity, to use her attractiveness as power" (35); my own sense however is that Helga's desires in this area are far more complex and layered than has generally been imagined. For Helga, in her search for "rich," "elaborate," and "old" books, clothes, and furnishings (later she will be deeply admiring of a friend's magnificent antiques) is seeking not simply gender identity and power; nor only, as I have argued, a willful and genuine assertion of race/color authority; but a widely functioning social status, the reference points of an absent (family) legacy, and the backdrop of a visible and accessible (books/written) history: she had become engaged to James Vayle, she admits, because she had wanted "social background." That Helga is rendered invisible in the world precisely because she lacks such background, such history, is made clear in her interview at a Chicago employment agency. There,

[a] competent young woman, whose eyes stared frog-like from great tortoise-shell rimmed glasses, regarded her with an appraising look and asked for her history, past and present, not forgetting the "references". . . . But even before [Helga] arrived at the explanation of the lack of references, the other's interest in her had faded. (33)

Without "historical" reference points (through work, social,
and familial as well as racial and specular contacts), Helga simply "fades" from the gaze of the other; nor does it seem to matter, for the moment, that the "other" in this case is a female spectator. Yet curiously Helga does sense that it is a woman's attention she must "attract" if she is going to survive: woman whom she figures as "Fortune," and for whom she must "touch the right button, press the right spring, in order to attract the jade's notice" (37). The suggestions here are subtle and numerous, and worth teasing out. For if indeed Larsen conjures and imagines a potentially larger female watchfulness of female activity, that spectatorship is also and conventionally figured as unreliable and sexually disreputable—as, indeed, a "jade's notice." Yet that notice, potentially secured through deliberate specular "attraction" (another reason Helga may wish to make herself beautiful and obvious), and, more fascinating still, through the sexually suggestive tropes of "touching" and pressing," may also be understood as empowering, as fortuitous. So that there is again a disturbing doubleness to Helga's sense of herself as visible, as seen: she can imagine herself as attracting and observed by a proactive feminine Fate, but only within the larger and well-established cultural context of female watching as itself fickle and indiscriminate; and she can imagine a woman watching her, the female watching the female—but only, it is hinted, within the larger context of same-sex observation as sexually and morally
suspect, as jaded.

Fortune does appear, of course, in the guise of a watching woman: in the person of Mrs. Hayes-Rore, a female spectator of "direct, penetrating gaze" who unlike Helga cares little for her appearance, and so had "little time or thought for the careful donning of the five years-behind-the-mode garments which covered her."19 In Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Helga is overjoyed to find herself for the first time with a validating "reference" (36)--for although requiring Helga's services only as a short-term companion, the notable political activist and "'race' woman" offers to find her new acquaintance permanent employment and housing in New York. This generosity springs at least in part, the text suggests, from sororosocial impulses: Mrs. Hayes-Rore (with her curiously double name) announces "gently" though plainly that she is "interested in girls" (39). And Helga's gratitude is such that she later takes and holds the older woman's hand (41).

Unfortunately, however, and as suggested above, the fortuitousness of this connection is disturbed by an undercurrent of doubleness, danger, and disrepute. The women converse quite easily together until Helga reveals the truth about her interracial parentage. Then, suddenly, . . . the faces of the two women, which had been bare, seemed to harden. It was almost as if they had slipped on masks. The girl wished to hide her
turbulent feeling and to appear indifferent to Mrs. Hayes-Rore’s opinion of her story. The woman felt that the story, dealing as it did with race intermingling and possible adultery, was beyond definite discussion. For among black people, as among white people, it is tacitly understood that these things are not mentioned—and therefore they do not exist. (39)

What Helga’s revelation introduces into the narrative is of course the specter of racial and sexual transgression, a transgression which exists, I would suggest, not only in Helga’s “disreputable” past, but in the present and pointedly sororosocial relationship between the two women (one black, one mulatta), which is now negatively and nervously “masked” in response to threatened exposure by the inserted discourses of sexual and racial anomaly—which simply, as Larsen tells us, cannot exist. Mrs. Hayes-Rore, in order to diffuse this threat, advises Helga not to “mention that [her] people are white. . . . Colored people,” she explains, “wouldn’t understand it” (41). In effect she directs Helga to deny, to obscure one half of her being in order to cover over her connection not only to racial but to sexual taboos—and Helga quickly agrees, gratefully taking her friend’s “slightly soiled hand.” Helga is, in other words, allowed and able to maintain her
new relationship with Mrs. Hayes-Rore, and the (largely feminine) world into which she is about to be introduced—but only by concealing an identity which threatens to unmask that relation, and so abrogating to some extent the sustaining and "recognizing" power of the sororosocial connection itself. And this is a masquerade that Helga must maintain—though she feels "like a criminal"—as she moves into the world of Harlem, and in particular into the home of the lovely Anne Grey, with whom Mrs. Hayes-Rore leaves and settles her.

To Helga, Anne Grey—a "brownly beautiful" woman with "the face of a golden Madonna [and] shining black hair and eyes"—is nearly "too good to be true" (44-45). Between the two women "had sprung one of those immediate and peculiarly sympathetic friendships" (interesting from a sororosocial standpoint is that Anne is the widow of "a husband who had been perhaps not too greatly loved"), in part because Helga finds her new friend so "interesting" and "a vivid and remarkable person" (45, emphasis mine). The importance and attraction of Anne's vividness for Helga is also connected, Larsen suggests, to that woman's beautiful and remarkable possessions: "historic things" as Helga describes them:

Beds with long, tapering posts to which tremendous age lent dignity and interest, bonneted old highboys, tables that might be by Duncan Phyfe, rare spindle-legged chairs, and others whose
ladder backs gracefully climbed the delicate wall panels. These historic things mingled harmoniously and comfortably with brass-bound Chinese tea-chests, luxurious deep chairs and davenports, tiny tables of gay color, a lacquered jade-green settee with gleaming black satin cushions, lustrous Eastern rugs, ancient copper, Japanese prints, some fine etchings, a profusion of precious bric-a-brac, and endless shelves filled with books (44).

I quote this passage as length, in part because it describes the full extent of Helga's hunger and longing for the material and the speculatively gorgeous: what Anne possesses is of course the very visible history and social/material security for which Helga so deeply yearns. Yet the lavishness of this description, particularly in its second half, also points to yet another reading of attractive or conspicuous objects in this novel--this time as an instance of what Jane Gallop has described as female, or "clitoral," excess. Lushly female or feminine in its profusion, this sequence of "things" is also subtly linked to representations of female sexuality throughout the text, the "jade-green settee" for example linked symbolically and stylistically to Helga's green negligee, to the "jade" of feminized fortune, and to the "cool green frock" in which
Helga first sees Anne. (This clitoral "greenness," indicating both seductiveness and naivete, also appears interestingly in the "non-historical" or exoticized section of Helga's catalog—as though to describe that which is not or cannot be traditionally recognized or recorded within dominant culture.) The problem however continues to be that in order to access this visual conspicuousness, this excess, and the clearly sororosocial bond with the "vivid" Anne, Helga must efface one part of herself and masquerade as "truly" black—for Anne despises all things caucasian, and will not mix socially with whites. But even as Helga conforms to this necessity, this masking, she begins to experience "indefinite longings" (51)—longings which are specifically heterosexual in nature, suggesting that Helga in this context must suppress not only her (white) racial identity, but one important aspect of her sexual identity as well.20

It is just as Helga is beginning to notice some of the falseness behind Anne's protestations (although professing a hatred of whites, Anne despises Negro music, dance, and "softly blurred" speech, and upholds and pursues white standards of beauty and culture; her last name, Grey, calling to mind ambivalence and the conformity of Naxos women), that Robert Anderson of Naxos returns on the scene. Helga experiences a "sudden thrill" at seeing him (49), although she is already feeling "boxed up" with the negroes
of Harlem, tired of being "yoked to these despised black folk" (54-55), and contemptuous of all species of racial "uplift" (52). Importantly, she leaves Anderson on their second meeting with Anne--returning later in the hope that the two of them might discuss him together. The incident is a revealing one, betraying as it does Helga's continued anxiety over her heterosexual desire for Robert as well as her safely masked sororosocial impulse to "share" him with her friend (she returns in the evening to find them both gone). Later, she dresses carefully for a dinner-party in Anne's honor in a deliberately and sexually provocative black and orange gown\(^2\) (she has consciously decided not to wear green, since "Anne would be sure to")--but when the party moves into a jazz club, she is shamed by the music's sexual and animalistic suggestions, coopted by racist languages and structures which would equate sexuality with "jungle" desires. "[A] shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it, began to taunt her. She hardened her determination to get away. She wasn't, she told herself, a jungle creature" (59).

But it is her observation of Robert Anderson in the jazz club, seated and then dancing suggestively with another woman, which confirms in Helga her desire to escape what have quickly become mounting and nearly overwhelming sexual desires and pressures. "She had discovered Dr. Anderson," Larsen writes, "sitting at a table on the far side of the
room":

She met his eyes, gravely smiling, then blushed, furiously, and averted her own. But they went back immediately to the girl beside him, who sat indifferently sipping a colorless liquid from a high glass.

[The girl] was pale, with a peculiar, almost deathlike pallor. The brilliantly red, softly curving mouth was somehow sorrowful. Her pitch-black eyes, a little aslant, were veiled by long drooping lashes. . . . The extreme decollete of her simple apricot dress showed a skin of unusual color, a delicate, creamy hue, with golden tones. "Almost like an alabaster," thought Helga.

[Anne's] voice trembled as she took Helga aside to whisper: "There's your Dr. Anderson over there, with Audrey Denney."

"Yes, I saw him. She's lovely. Who is she?"

(60)

The scene is remarkable in that it clearly dramatizes Helga's discomfort with the activity of her heterosexual gaze, while simultaneously revealing the ease with which she is able to look at another woman: ashamed to be caught looking at Robert, she nonetheless shifts readily to an observation of Audrey Denney, who is to some extent and as
another mulatta Helga's mirror-image (indeed Helga's voyeuristic study of Audrey uncannily recalls her own description early in the novel; both women now, too, wear extremely "decollete" dresses); and Helga is further and surreptitiously connected to the girl by Anne's obvious dislike of any creature who reveals white origins or betrays a further susceptibility to association with whites. Finally, when Anderson rises to dance with the girl, it is she, and not the man, whom Helga carefully watches:

[Audrey] danced with grace and abandon, gravely, yet with obvious pleasure, her legs, her hips, her back, all swaying gently, swung by that wild music from the heart of the jungle. Helga turned her glance to Dr. Anderson. Her disinterested curiosity passed. While she still felt for the girl envious admiration, that feeling was now augmented by another, a more primitive emotion. She forgot the garish crowded room. She forgot her friends. She saw only two figures, closely clinging. She felt her heart throbbing. She felt the room receding. She went out the door. (62, emphasis mine)

Helena Michie has provided an acute reading of this scene, describing the alternate attraction and repulsion, the "shifting and often painful identification" Helga feels
with and toward Audrey Denney, an identification which Michie thematizes under the larger rubric of the "sororophobic." "Sororophobia," as Michie discusses it, is a theory and understanding of female "negotiation"—"it attempts to describe the negotiation of sameness and difference, identity and separation" that characterizes female-to-female interactions, and "is meant to encompass both the desire for and the recoil from identification with other women." Michie’s concept of the sororophobic is indeed closely linked to my own of the sororosocial; the difference, however, is that Michie’s structure is largely and deliberately "familial" and difference- or other-centered (she describes sororophobia, for example, as "a daughter of matrophobia"), while own accesses the nomenclature of sisterhood and family primarily, I would suggest, as a "mask" which covers over or palliates the frequency with which threateningly non-familial, non-patriarchal (lesbian) desires and connections can be secured between women. (Another way to put this is that Michie’s nomenclature emphasizes the phobic between women, while my own privileges the socially plausible or practicable.) In Michie’s reading of this passage, Helga "uses" Audrey to "mediate" her sexual feelings for Robert—"inse[rtng] herself voyeuristically into the scene" in order to access, through the girl, an implied but uncomfortable heterosexual desire. Michie however reads Helga’s identification with
Audrey in this process as one which also causes her "acute discomfort," since it requires her not only to identify sexually with a woman (stand in her place as the one who is engaged physically with Robert) but, it is implied, to acknowledge a shared location and desire which verges on the threateningly commingled (144-45).

My own reading of this scene is in fact somewhat different. As I have already suggested, I do not find "discomfort" in Helga's gazing at and identification with Audrey, but rather a level of ease contrasted sharply with Helga's anxieties about her heterosexual yearnings. This "sororosocial" comfort has of course been secured, as I have argued, only by the pragmatic affixing of a "black" mask that will not expose Helga as sexually and racially suspect, as one whose very body reveals explicit social and cultural transgressions. What happens then as Helga, looking at both Audrey and Anderson (their names are phonetically connected), experiences "another, a more primitive emotion"--a feeling that is strong enough, apparently, to drive her from the room? My own sense is not simply that, as in the encounter with Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Helga is "nervously" exposed in a culturally intolerable (lesbian) configuration; or that, as in Michie's (and others') reading, she is overwhelmed by a powerfully mediated and revealed heterosexual desire; but rather that she is confronted by her taboo desire for and ability to see both the man and the
woman, and more: that she is overwhelmed by her "primitive" and thus taboo desire for, and enjoyment of, the very act of voyeurism—of (sexual) watching itself.

This is of course, and most particularly for the female in culture, a far more transgressive nexus of possibilities, and one which Michie begins to hint at in her understanding of Helga as "inse[rt[ing] herself voyeuristically into the scene." Again, it is not only that Helga is made anxious by her bi- or pan-sexual "jungle" longings (which threaten to construct her, oppressively, as an indiscriminate black female savage rather than as a "lady"), but that she has experienced the sudden and frightening and powerfully inclusive activation of her own rapidly discerning, sexually excited, and multi-directional gaze. For the jazz club, which is first described as revealed in "a glare of light" (58) is in fact the site of Helga’s illumination as what might be called an "optimal" seer: in it she expresses herself not only as an adorned female object, identifying coincidentally with another of her kind, but as a voyeuse of both female and male bodies—thereby "reversing" the voyeuristically observed and pointedly singular image of her own body-text with which the novel began. That Helga is unable to sustain this unconscious reversal (as she was unable to sustain her early and violent activity) must in part be read as the result of her (and Larsen’s) fears that such indiscriminately "savage" seeing will only cast her in
the familiar cultural image of the lascivious "Hottentot"; for Helga feels clearly that she has been "misunderstood," and once again moves into "darkness." And again this is a darkness that, while removing her from oppressive and visible constructions of race and sex, nevertheless also removes her from the sexually heady position of seer, of powerful female voyeur. "[S]he found herself out again in the dark night alone, a small crumpled thing. . . . A taxi drifted toward her, stopped. She stepped into it, feeling cold, unhappy, misunderstood, and forlorn" (62).

III

What Helga has been unable to secure in Harlem is, of course, a safe and stable place from which to function both as seer and as seen. She has not yet located a realm in which she can be completely visible in her complex racial identity; nor has she been able, from the largely and precariously sororosocial vantage of her home with Anne Grey, been able to articulate her visual and sexual connections to both men and women, since these positions, too, "cannot exist" in a single identifiable (and thus visible) location. What Helga can, however, do is move: she can, that is, attempt to seek out another location that will give some scope to her previously obstructed or obscured
visual and sexual longings, as well as answering her yearning to inhabit "different, strange places, among approving and admiring people, where she would be appreciated, and understood" (57). Believing or hoping that a liberal white society might extend to her such appreciation, such a home (perhaps by acknowledging her "whiteness," which she has had to disguise in Harlem, but also by offering her space in whites' racially empowered realm—"Why, she demanded in fierce rebellion, should she be yoked to these despised black folk?") Helga travels to Copenhagen to live with her Danish relatives—a visit that also coincides, curiously, with the more distinctly hegemonic pursuit of presenting herself for marriage.23

In Denmark Helga once again finds herself gloriously surrounded by "Things . . . Things . . . Things" (67), although these accoutrements now inhabit what is a distinctly heterosexual economy: the home of her married aunt and uncle, Fru and Herr Dahl. Helga's relationship with her aunt is not however without its sororosocial connections—Fru Dahl wears "olive green" as she greets Helga at the wharf, and later "touch Helga's hand with her fingers in a little affectionate gesture. Very lightly" (79). But Fru Dahl's primary concern is that Helga "make an impression," and that she make an impression primarily in order that she be married, most particularly to the famous painter, Axel Olsen—who glides imperious in his black cape
throughout the best of Danish society, and who, as the good
Fru suggests and with unself-conscious priapic allusion,
"would be the ideal thing for you, Helga" (79).

In fact Helga submits willingly to being created as a spectacle for Olsen and for the other citizens of
Copenhagen, who are enchanted by the unaccustomed sight of a
"sorte," a black woman, dressed in gorgeously exotic
costumes and "savage" earrings and buckles, chosen by the
Dahls and by Olsen himself. Indeed, and as Helena Michie
has accurately described it, Helga has now experienced "the
two sides of the Barthean paradox": for where in Naxos she
had been effaced, "the mirror," in Sweden she becomes "the
clown, the exotic, the savage" (142). Helga for her part
"felt like nothing so much as some new and strange species
of pet dog being proudly exhibited," yet "in spite of the
metal strain, she . . . enjoyed her prominence" (70), in fact "g[iving] herself up wholly to the fascinating business
of being seen, gaped at, desired," though she knows "her
exact status" in Danish society is that of a "decoration. A
curio. A peacock" (73-74). She particularly enjoys "the
compliments in the men's eyes"—though "the women too were
kind, feeling no need for jealousy," since Helga is, of
course, so distinctly "other" from them (70). Like Dorinda,
enjoying the gazes of Pedlar's Mill as she appeared in
church in her new, "feminine" costume, Helga also appears to
derive a certain satisfaction in the power of being looked
at in what she recognizes as a particular performance or masquerade—but which in this instance is a performance of race as well as of gender.\textsuperscript{24}

There is in addition a notable distinction in that Helga, in contrast to Dorinda's more temperate behavior, becomes "excited . . . incited to inflame attention and admiration" (74, emphasis mine). Helga of course occupies a completely different place in her environment than does the heroine of \textit{Barren Ground}: functioning as "exotic," as "other," as startling "savage," her performance is both more extreme and, inevitably, more effacing. It is also important to note that although now a member of a definitively white cultural milieu, Helga is no closer than in Harlem to being "allowed" to enact an empowered racial identity or location; despite her desire to identify with whiteness, she continues to inhabit a complex and problematic mulatta space in which she is nevertheless and consistently structured as black, and within which she continues to be effaced, erased. And yet it is for this reason, I would suggest, that Helga's pursuit of her own spectacularization becomes in the end so frenzied, so inflamed, so \textit{intense}. It is as though, lacking a stable or recognizable and empowered racial (and sexual) identity, Helga constructs in response a performatively "stable" specular \textit{location}: she confuses, that is, \textit{identity} and \textit{spectacle}, power and place, attempting to create through her
very intensity as visual object a position in which she can
be secure as a recognized and visible member of culture.
The problem, however, is that the place she is allowed and
encouraged to occupy in Denmark does not escape restrictive
and oppressive racial/sexual constructions (rather, it is
their most obvious expression); nor does it allow her,
crucially, to construct herself as a seer, since she exists
primarily as an object for, rather than as a subject within,
systems of visual and social consumption.

Larsen makes both of these stumbling blocks most
apparent in Helga’s short-lived relationship with Axel
Olsen, who seems to function in the text as the very
instrument and symbol of the dominant (white, European,
heterosexual) visual order, "appraising" Helga’s "[s]uperb
eyes . . . color . . . [and] neck column" as though she were
"a curiosity, a stunt" (71). Beneath his gaze Helga feels
her face becoming "a fixed aching mask" (later, when Fru
Dahl mentions the possibility of marriage to him, Helga also
"mask[s her] face"); and, as in her first encounter with
Anderson, Helga also wants, on seeing Olsen, "very badly
. . . to laugh" (71). Yet this laughter appears more
complicated than her earlier hysteria at Naxos, since it now
combines a continued heterosexual anxiety with the contempt
Helga plainly feels for the egotistical man’s assumption
that she desires his gaze, or that she is, after all, what
he "sees." Indeed, far from seeking (an illusory)
solidarity with white specular culture through heterosexual consummation with Olsen, Helga begins now to express to her Danish relatives her horror of mixed marriages, using race in this instance to "cover over" and deflect both her continuing and unresolved sexual and racial quandaries, and, for the first time, her fear of the further and biological mire of childbearing. For Helga argues that children of mixed marriages face, as she well knows, "only trouble"--while suggesting that "giving birth to little, unprotesting Negro children" must surely be "an unforgivable outrage" (75). Later she confesses:

Marriage—that means children, to me. And why add more suffering to the world? Why add anymore unwanted, tortured Negroes to America? Why do Negroes have children? Surely it must be sinful. Think of the awfulness of being responsible for the giving of life to creatures doomed to endure such wounds to the flesh, such wounds to the spirit, as Negroes have to endure. (103)

Clearly Helga’s concern is as much for herself ("Think of the awfulness of being responsible") as it is for any unborn "Negro" offspring; yet her identification of and with black suffering—she pointedly and poignantly reveals here her belief that she can only produce black children—signals what will be the next turn in her narrative. For even as
Helga protests the horrors of being black, she has begun to long for black American culture. She experiences "discontent" and a "growing nostalgia" for Harlem, exacerbated by the hateful exoticization of blacks she witnesses during a Copenhagen vaudeville performance, which she returns to with mixed revulsion and fascination (81-85). Her own position meanwhile is further and humiliatingly exposed as radically untenable, in Olsen's "indecent" proposal that she become, not his wife, but his mistress. What Olsen's offer makes clear is the undeniable connection for Helga, in Denmark, between race, sex, spectacle, and objectification; although she later receives another offer from him, this time recast as marriage, Helga has already experienced herself as "stripped, naked" under Olsen's gaze, exposed in her vulnerable position as sexualized savage, as assumptively available other. And indeed the portrait Olsen has produced of Helga, and for which "she had never quite ... forgiven him," depicts her as not "herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature with her features" (89). When Helga calls a female servant, Marie, to give her opinion of it, the girl concurs that "[i]t looks bad, wicked. Begging your pardon, Frokken." The portrait in fact demonizes the very sexuality Helga fears, for that reason, to express. Yet more than this, I would also suggest that it frustrates and angers Helga ("Bosh!" she scorns it, "Pure artistic bosh and conceit") because it
casts her in the role of sexual and visual object rather than of visualizing subject. Constructing her as the very embodiment of sexuality, the portrait does not allow Helga to see herself as seer; constructed as a mirror of (Olsen's) heterosexual desire, it also does not and cannot answer or figure her voyeuristic desire to look upon both men and women. It does not, finally, allow the "black" female spectator to construct herself as a voyeur of anything but her own, mirrored oppression; nor does it allow the white female spectator, in the person of Marie, access to any spectacle other than that of a disturbingly "wicked" representation of highly exoticized otherness.

Or does it? Is there anything, we might ask, significant in the fact that both Helga and Marie acknowledge the painting's unfittingness? That they both express their "dislike" of it? Helga after all believes that "anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn't she" (89)—that even an imperfect or hampered look (a white look?) should be able to recognize its injustice. Marie, moreover, is able to assert a visual camaraderie with her mistress across not only lines of race, but of class; although her status as a servant to Helga encourages her, too, to be invisible, unseen, and unseeing, Marie is able to articulate a co-equal rejection of the image. Is there any, albeit small, affirmation in this of a broad female spectatorial solidarity or possibility—even across the
studied boundaries of race and class and country and culture?

IV

With Helga's return to America, the cycle of oscillation that has characterized her continually conflicted desires is brought as though to its origin, as though to a point of renewal, and repetition. Yet, as Larsen quickly makes clear, that return—the circle or cycle that Helga has completed—may not be one of endlessly revolving or shifting possibilities, but rather one of spiraling, and enclosing, entrapment. Returning to find Anne Grey married to Robert Anderson, Helga now feels herself cut off from her old friend, for "there would, forever, be Robert Anderson between them . . . [s]hutting them off from their previous confident companionship and understanding" (99). That Helga herself had in fact made this relationship possible, both through the uneasy accommodation of her double desire (in attempting to "share" Robert with Anne) and through her abrupt departure from their lives, reveals the extent to which the masking and movement of desires and identities is represented in this novel as finally unsustainable, productive, in the end, only
of exclusion and isolation (for Anne, too, has become wary
of Helga, knowing that her husband is drawn to a "lawless
place" whenever near her, a place which Anne assures herself
she, at least, would "never . . . enter" [95]. When Helga’s
desire does finally and nakedly reveal itself—as Anderson,
in an unexpected moment, holds her in a passionate and
illicit embrace—it is only to be rudely disavowed.
Following this exchange Helga experiences "uncontrollable
fancies" (105) and "voluptuous visions" (109), heterosexual
fantasies (it is implied) which nevertheless do nothing to
alter her feelings for Anne, whom Helga found she "still
liked . . . in the same degree and in the same manner"
(105). But when Anderson stiffly excuses his behavior as a
drunken foolishness, denying his, and Helga’s, desire so
that she felt "he had belittled and ridiculed her" (107),
the fragile structure, the fragile illusion that Helga might
have access to both Anne and Anderson (whose names are also
connected), and that she might somehow express her wish to
look upon both of them through existing sororosocial and
heterosexual economies, is irrevocably shattered. Instead,
Helga’s gaze is thwarted and punished: "leaving an endless
stretch of dreary years before her appalled vision" (108).
And again, Helga responds to this lack of complete identity
and location by imagining herself as spectacle—longing
"almost" for death and its "picturesque effects" (109).

Helga does not of course die. But she does, and in
terrible fashion, act to make a spectacle of herself in life. Running once again into the blinding and effacing darkness of a stormy night, she stumbles, drenched and miserable, into a mission house, where she is confronted by the hysterical wailing of the black congregation. This "performance," as she recognizes it, is almost "Bacchic [in its] vehemence," a "weird orgy" of "savage frenzy," in which "[t]he women dragged themselves upon their knees or crawled over the floor like reptiles, sobbing and pulling their hair and tearing off their clothing" (114). The mission in fact appears to allow for the very expression of "savage" or animalistic sexual energy which has so long been denied Helga, and which is now valorized within the larger and masking tropes of religious ecstasy. And indeed, and at the height of her participation in this performance, Helga experiences a "miraculous calm"—what Charles K. Larson has described as an "abandonment of the mind," and which I would suggest actually works to mimic the abandonment, the blindness, and the mindlessness of sexual climax that has not before been Helga’s prerogative.25 It is in this very mood of abandonment and blindness that Helga marries the "rattish" Reverend Green (who had spotted her in the mission with "furtive glances"); she has, as she admits, "deliberately stopped thinking," and allows herself to be taken to a "tiny Alabama town" where, she believes, "at last, she had found a place for herself" (118, emphasis
mine).

But though Helga is for a short time able to maintain
the illusion of complete abandonment, she does, finally,
awaken to the horror of what sexual mindlessness, and the
"obscuring curtain of religion" (130), have exposed her to:
the very real sexual consequences of pregnancy. "The
children," as Larsen puts it bluntly, "used her up." Near
the end of the novel, after having already given birth to
three children and endured the harshness of a woman's life
(and as a preacher's wife) in a backward community, Helga
finds herself taken to bed with a fourth child, who leaves
her ill and wasted (and who itself quietly fades and dies
"after a short week of slight living"). Suddenly "the
luster of religion had vanished [and] revulsion had come
upon her; that she hated that man [her husband]" (129).
Almost immediately Helga begins to dream of her release, yet
like Edna Pontellier also feels herself inescapably tied by
her children, whom she—with her own clear memories of a
lonely and deserted childhood—wouldn't, "couldn't desert."
Yet she continues to plot and imagine her departure, lying
(as Larsen imagines her) in bed, dreaming of "freedom and
cities . . . clothes and books . . . . agreeable, desired
things . . . " until she is well enough, barely, to rise.
"[W]hen," as Larsen suddenly and terribly closes the door on
her, "she began to have her fifth child."

What is striking about this ending, I think—quite
apart from its awful and imprisoning implications—is the uneasy, the uncanny sense it leaves me with as a reader that I have witnessed a terrible and private failure; that I have been constructed as a voyeur of defeat. Unlike The Awakening, which as I have suggested appears to conclude with an ultimately empowering and self-reflexive display of Edna’s nakedness, followed by the portrayal of her smooth escape into an "elsewhere" suggestively outside oppressive representation, Quicksand confronts me as the reader with the final image and spectacle of Helga Crane as stagnant, mired within a deeply intolerable situation and "preserved" only in the thickening tar of her own and continued cultural impossibilities. But if these final moments can, truly, be described as voyeuristic, the question remains to what extent we might connect this voyeurism to that described within the text. If Larsen does represent, as I have argued, the voyeuristic experience as that which is most habitually and conventionally denied the female spectator, and most particularly the black female spectator (as Helga is constantly and culturally constructed, and for whom mythological ties to sexual "deviance" represent a constant threat to validated seeing and desire), and if Larsen does hold out some hope (as with Marie) for women as validators of each others’ sights, what does it mean that she creates for potential female spectators, potential voyeuses of her novel, such a terrible display? What does it mean that this
gaze, in particular, seems destined to be "punished"?

One possible answer may lie in the Sontag quote from *The Volcano Lover* with which I began this chapter, and which suggests that it is precisely the unsettling, the darkly unnerving spectacle/representation—rather than any soothing, "snowy" landscape—whch most conjures, which most "requires" the image and presence of a spectator to exist for its spectacular display; which indeed most demands that spectator even as it is being produced. By this I mean to suggest that Larsen’s narrative, and the distressing images with which she closes it, actually work to "create" the very spectatorship she seeks to authorize: actually working to establish the reader, but most particularly the female reader (since it is her voyeurism that is routinely suppressed in culture) as a self-apprehensible spectator, and finally as a spectator who promiscuously "wants more," who through the novel’s abrupt and arresting ending experiences the very sexualized appetite found so reprehensible in another female reader, Helga, the reader/spectator-within-the-text. This need for a consciously created and implied female spectatorship is in fact suggested by the progress of the narrative itself: for Larsen by *Quicksand’s* end leaves no identifiable and sympathetic female spectator of Helga’s plight (Margaret Creighton, Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Anne Grey, Fru Dahl, Marie, even the Alabama nurse who has watched over Helga in her illness,
all having fallen aside)—so that she must invoke, outside the text, the very female spectatorship of female activity that has been effaced within it; must create a "jade," a female Fortune, who can observe and enclose and identify the destiny of her character. That Larsen might be most interested in creating a female spectatorship that transcends race and class barriers is suggested by the thematics of the text itself, but particularly in the encounter with Marie; indeed, the white female reader/spectator may emerge as the voyeur the author seeks most to implicate and involve in Helga’s spectacle, since it is the white female’s (my) voyeurism, always threatening to exoticize, which in this instance can be produced only at the sight/site of an unflinching recognition of despair, and hence through identification with the figure of that despair, and the desire for social autonomy that produced it—the white woman now "masking" as black. But still I might ask: Why go to such tortuous lengths to call forth, to imagine and indirectly body an absent and fortuitous "trans-racial" female spectatorship? Why not imagine a more positive route to, a happier ending for, the expression and authorization of an inclusive female sight?

Again I must return to the beginning of this chapter, and to the deliberately "other" and second epigraph with which I have headed it. Walker’s quote and her text are revealing and indeed challenging in this moment, because
they raise the question of whether textual as well as cultural optimism, or what I might describe as "obedience" to certain expectations of what may, in narrative terms, be considered "positive" or "affirming," may not in the end be more destructive of a marginal identity than any depiction of pessimism, of refusal, of the destruction of hope. What Walker's quote returns to this discussion is the inescapable fact that the term "female spectator" always threatens to elide nonreciprocal differences between women viewers and readers--reminding me that Helga's narrative does not simply exist to "conjure up" a comfortably reflected and authorized female viewing across racial and cultural lines, but to articulate the very specific and terrible oppressions of a very particular female viewer who, whatever identifications she may hold for prospective female spectators, is potentially and radically distinct from her voyeuristic audience--described in a circle of light, irreducible to the straightforward mirror-image of either black or white. To put it differently, what both Larsen and Walker appear to ask is: If I conform to an outside/ exterior model of what is right (or, in Sontag's terms, what is "soothing"), do I not continue to efface myself? If I construct a conclusion that is only "uplifting" (recalling that Helga herself has been suspicious of all forms of racial "uplift"), do I not continue to mask what is in fact an irremediable harshness? Is "disobedience" to expectation--in this case to my
expectation, the expectation and questions of a white female reader/spectator—is such disobedience not, in the end, and for both Helga and Larsen, more culturally affirming, since it "preserves" that "sliver of myself [which] is all now I have left," forcing the reader to see and read and acknowledge that finely and finally narrowed identity?

For the ending Larsen describes, like many of the early descriptions in her novel, does in some sense and importantly refuse to "fit"—indeed it has been seen as so "unconvincing," so "unsatisfactory," that some critics have been moved to conclude Helga Crane must herself be at fault, that she must somehow be lacking in "the necessary mettle for real insight and for change." Of course her ending jars and unnerves; of course its spectacle produces none of the harmony of resolution. Yet this may be precisely because it is, literally, a dis-play: a not-play in its very refusal to participate in, to perform some easy place which Helga might now inhabit, Helga who is a victim, as I have argued, not "of some lack in her character" but rather of her cultures' inability to provide a workable location in which she may exist as woman, mulatta, desirer, desired, seer, seen.

These suggestions as they now appear to me contain considerable force and challenge for my own formulations of female spectatorship, of masquerade, and of the watching of female performance, of female-watching-female. For what Larsen describes is in fact resistance to many of my claims.
She reads and reveals masking, for example, as potentially dangerous—as stultifying and potentially blinding/obscuring, damaging role-play. She also and further deconstructs my particular model of masquerade (as mobile, mischievous performance), by dramatizing its effects on and for a particular female spectator, and thus revealing its specific limitations. For Helga’s movements, her alternating "performances" seem in fact a hopeless attempt to enact, in concrete terms, the very "mobility" that I, through de Lauretis, have sought to describe and valorize: Helga’s oscillation, her movements "inside" and "outside" various cultural locations, technologized sites, while perhaps or indeed pointing to an "elsewhere," an off-space of unrepresented possibility implied by the represented, does not however translate into a meaningful location and identity for her body, or into a meaningful or sustained authorization of her gaze. What Larsen suggests is that one can’t, after all, simply keep moving; yet by exposing and unveiling the end-limits of my hopes for female spectatorial movement and masquerade, she nonetheless suggests that it may yet be the watching of this movement, and the observation of (even failed) strategies of masquerade, which hold out distinct possibilities for the authorization of female sight. What she accomplishes is, in the end, the "unmasking" of that which must always be implied in the off-spaces of theoretic technologies themselves: the places
before which theory, and imagination, are productively, and poignantly, arrested. Yet, as I have argued, it is in these places, too, that the female gaze may be finally affirmed. For I still see myself, uncomfortably, a woman, a white woman, watching; and that watching is indeed and determinedly promiscuous; and it does, in the end, want more.
Notes


8. Kaja Silverman has also delineated this tendency or movement with the term "self-same body," describing the spectator-subject's unconscious identification with objects that mirror or match the viewer's "bodily ego," and the inherent difficulty in transcending the self-same body to identify with those others outside its specular and sensational parameters (Kaja Silverman, "Political Ecstasy," unpublished paper, delivered at the Ninth Annual Symposium of Criticism and Theory, Rice University, February 5, 1993).

10. I refer to the conclusion of the first chapter: "'Playing' to artistic end with the screens that delimit her own possibilities as a subject-artist, she gives us back again the reality that shapes her own life, slipping the mask of her heroine onto her readers, asking them at the last to see, not Edna Pontellier, but themselves." I argue in other words that Chopin, too, is interested in constructing a mirror-formulation that reveals through the mask of reading both self and other; the difference, and it is a crucial one, is that Chopin, as a privileged white woman, is not faced with the task of representing a "putative [previously absent] culture." Rather, as I have suggested, her interest (and bias) seems to be in revealing the larger structures that shape specular relations between others from within specific social (white, upper class) and gender contexts.

11. I do not mean to suggest of course that white women have not, as cultural others, found it necessary to establish themselves as authoritative identities, to construct their own "absent power"; this, as I have argued, is much the struggle of Kate Chopin and of Edna Pontellier. Rather it is my (or, more accurately, Benston's) suggestion that the black writer is faced with a different and perhaps more basic effacement at the level of text: the struggle is to establish identity, a face, in the absence of an acknowledged and authoritative racial tradition. Another way to describe this difference would be to suggest that a white woman writer, such as Glasgow, may "watch" her textual masquerades as "visual" performances which deconstruct gender identity while simultaneously reconstructing a gendered position of seeing (the female spectator); while the black author of Benston's analysis must work in the first instance to construct her or his racial identity, a visible persona or personas, in order to construct the possibility of the black face/spectator (see below).


13. p. xvi. Hazel Carby however has been quick to point out that Larsen's sexual reticence was a specific feature of "black middle-class morality," and in her later work argues that working-class women had no trouble articulating sexual desire through, for example, the "blues." See Carby, "The

14. Again my suggestion is not that other women, white women included, have not been subjected to display and objectification in culture. Rather it is that black women have experienced in Anglo-European culture since the eighteenth century a particularly heinous form of visual display, and one which, as Gilman persuasively argues, was eventually used to represent the potential sexual immorality of all women, regardless of race. I also do not mean to suggest, through my allusion to Walker's text, that western or European and African traditions of black female display are identical in their purpose and expression, and may easily be compared or elided. I do however, and with Walker, want to begin to describe the cultural pervasiveness of objectifications of black female sexuality and identity, and suggest the complicated nexus of histories that may at anytime be marshalled to conflate black women with sexual licentiousness.

15. It occurs to me for example that the "mask" or masked ball has in general been associated with dominant European classes, and that the image of a woman looking through a mask at other woman maskers is one that can be readily associated with systems and displays of privilege. On the other hand, non-dominant classes and individuals have also had a long and complicated history with masked performance (see for example the history of itinerant performers and minstrels)—often performing in masquerades that directly or indirectly mimic and subvert the standards of the ruling masking classes.


17. The Awakening, pp. 102-103. Interestingly a broken vase also figures in Helga's scene of awakening from dark somnolence; but it falls on its own while she is "resting," a "slender, frail vase [that] fell from the sill with a tingling crash" (p. 4).

18. see p. 20: "His gaze was on her now, searching. 'Queer,' she thought, 'how some brown people have grey eyes. Gives them a strange, unexpected appearance. A little frightening.'" The suggestions in this moment are manifold. On the one hand Helga may be attracted to Robert and his look because he too, is "different," unsynchronized (later he will, like her, leave the college). Yet his grey eyes,
more common to whites, also suggest the authority and constructing ("searching") power of the male gaze across racial boundaries—a "frightening" power that will complicate and enter into Helga’s desire not to be seen. See the sections on her relationship with Axel Olsen, below.

19. p. 35. The connection and contrast between Hayes-Rore’s "formidable" gaze and her inattention to personal appearance is an important one, since it again suggests that Helga, in her too constant absorption in appearance, in making herself "stand out," may actually obscure her power as a seeing subject rather than as a visual object. Hostetler describes this drive on Helga’s part as one toward passivity: "Helga’s illusion in the beginning of the novel is that she can create herself through a careful arrangement and selection of artifacts... But as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that her aesthetic sense is passive: perceiving herself as an object of desire, Helga cannot express her own desires" (36). I would alter this statement to add: perceiving herself as an object of the gaze, Helga cannot express her gaze. See the section on Helga and Axel Olsen, below.

20. It is tempting at this point to draw an equation in the novel between blackness and sororosocial or lesbian desire, and whiteness and heterosexual desire, aligning marginal racial and sexual identities and dominant and "historic" ones. Larsen however is not so simplistic. Hetero- and homosexual possibilities make themselves felt, as we will see, in both the black world of Harlem and the white one of Copenhagen.

21. The same color combination, interestingly, that is both so attractive and so disruptive for Dorinda.


23. Although Helga while in Harlem thought that she might "[s]ome day... marry one of those alluring brown or yellow men who danced attendance on her," she does not act on this suggestion, even though "any one of them could give to her the things she had now come to desire, a home like Anne’s... clothes and furs..." (45). Instead she feels "distaste" when, connected to these thoughts, Robert Anderson comes to mind.

24. I should perhaps modify this statement to suggest that Dorinda too is always "performing" her race—but that this performance, since dominant, is constructed as normalized
and so is "invisible."


26. I refer to Helga as a reader in order to allude to her status at the opening of the novel, and to her implied connection with the reader of her text.
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