Theoretical Approach of the Novel “Passing”

Posted on April 14, 2018

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/theoretical-approach-of-the-novel-passing/

“Passing” is a well-known novel written by Nella Larsen in 1929. It is one of the author’s good attempts to establish women’s prestigious position in the literary world. This particular novel “Passing” can be characterized as an effective debate on the issue of racism. It is based on the narration of two women who crossed the features of colour in the 1920s.

Irene and Clare Across the Color Line

Irene and Clare are the story’s two main characters, and they help readers comprehend the main idea of racism. The specific role of Irene Redfield is crucial in the identification of the aspect of the novel’s protagonist. She effectively aligns herself with the approach of an enviable life. On the other hand, Clare is her childhood friend with whom she had lost touch for a while. Clare is the character depicted as the charming lady in the story of “Passing.” She had a light-skinned and beautiful persona that could charm anyone. The conversation between these characters of the story indicates how the feature of racism impacts lives with the consideration of different scenarios. Here, the focus is to critically analyze the relationship between the characters of Irene and Clare concerning the particular theoretical approach.

Contrasting Identities and Social Positions

Irene is the significant character of the story, providing clear indications about the crucial elements associated with the prospect of racism prevailing in society. She portrays herself as a well-educated and sophisticated woman in Harlem. On the other hand, she was depicted as a person of the society who was unwanted in the particular community as she was considered a white lady in the community who marries a white person outside their black community. Undoubtedly, it was a difficult aspect for Clare to live life with the two different standards. Her prospect for life was depicted through her skin colour. The particular character of Irene is different and reacts differently to Clare’s particular life practices. It is notable to mention that although Irene expresses a great form of admiration for Clare, all the elements are not as smooth as they look. There was the existing aspect of sexual desire related to the facet of appreciation for Clare.

The Risks and Psychology of Passing

The narration provided by Clare in the story significantly refers to the particular racist views conveyed by her white husband. Notably, the particular feature of crossing the colour line always comes up with different and complex aspects that need to be addressed to make necessary inferences about the concept of racism with the consideration of the colour tone of the skin. The different hazardous prospects of the social and psychological paradigm involve the specific practice of passing. It is observed that most women pass more often than men, and this prospect is witnessed in the case of Clare and Irene.

Choosing and Rejecting White Identity

Both the main female characters of the novel, Irene and Clare, can be classified as two female characters who are light-skinned and can adopt the feature of "passing" as white due to their skin colour. Both have the option of passing, but Irene never opted to become a part of white society. She carries on her married life with a person who is black and lives in Harlem society as a black individual. On the other hand, Clare had a different approach than Irene. She accepts the prospect of passing as white and marries a white man who has no information regarding the background of Clare. He has no idea that his wife belongs to the black community. He had an immensely racist opinion of black people as he expressed his feelings of hatred for them so often. The following words indicate his opinion about the black individuals: "I don't dislike them, I hate them… They gave me the creeps. The black devil… And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people. 'And, 'he added darkly, 'worse" (Larsen, 172). The initial phase of life is different for the characters Irene and Clare. It indicates that Clare lives the good, rich life, and Irene comes up with the aspect of white life with the consideration of the displaced feature which was not desirable to a great extent. The overall scenario transforms at that moment when Irene and Clare meet again after many years. It was the turning paradigm of their lives as it led them to the difficult life of their past. This particular facet negatively impacts both characters of the story as it ends with the mental instability of Irene and the collapse of Clare.

Identity Insecurity and Tragic Consequences

The particular narration depicted by the character of Clare provides the necessary approach related to racism in society. Different events and the prospect of feeling particularly concerned about the character of Clare indicate the different tragic aspects closely connected with the phenomenon of racism by the colour tone of people. The overall prospect of the story is an effective indication of the different features of racism which can be a source of difficulty for white and black people. The fantasies and particular adoption of Clare indicate that it can be immensely hard for someone to tackle the issues related to racism as it segregates society into two prospects. The particular approach of passing adopted by Clare also indicates that the aspect of racism can lead black people

to consider factors other than their particular community. Irene and Clare do not have an effective approach regarding their identities, creating different problems in their lives. Irene and Clare were unhappy with their identities, which also negatively appeared in their lives. They adopt the wrong choices in their lives just because they cannot approach the broader prospects of life. They choose to lie in their lives, which makes them unhappy throughout their lives. The character of Clare suffers more as she wants the complete transition of her life from the black community to the white community. She was unfaithful to herself and was not willing to show her true identity to other people, even her husband. She was immensely afraid of the sad reactions of the people based on their racist approach concerning the specific skin colour that people naturally have. A double-standard life makes it immensely difficult for Clare to lead herself toward positivity and originality in her life. Clare's rejection of her true identity becomes the reason for the extensive hate from the white people. They just wanted black people to disappear. They were unable and unwilling to accept the existence of black people in their lives. This tragic prospect happens due to the different lies told by black people. To conclude, this, it is essential to mention that the insecurity due to the aspect of racism creates different forms of psychological difficulties, which were observed in the cases of Clare and Irene.

Work Cited

Larsen, N. *Passing*. Dover Publications, 2004, https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=3yyaexALnKcC.