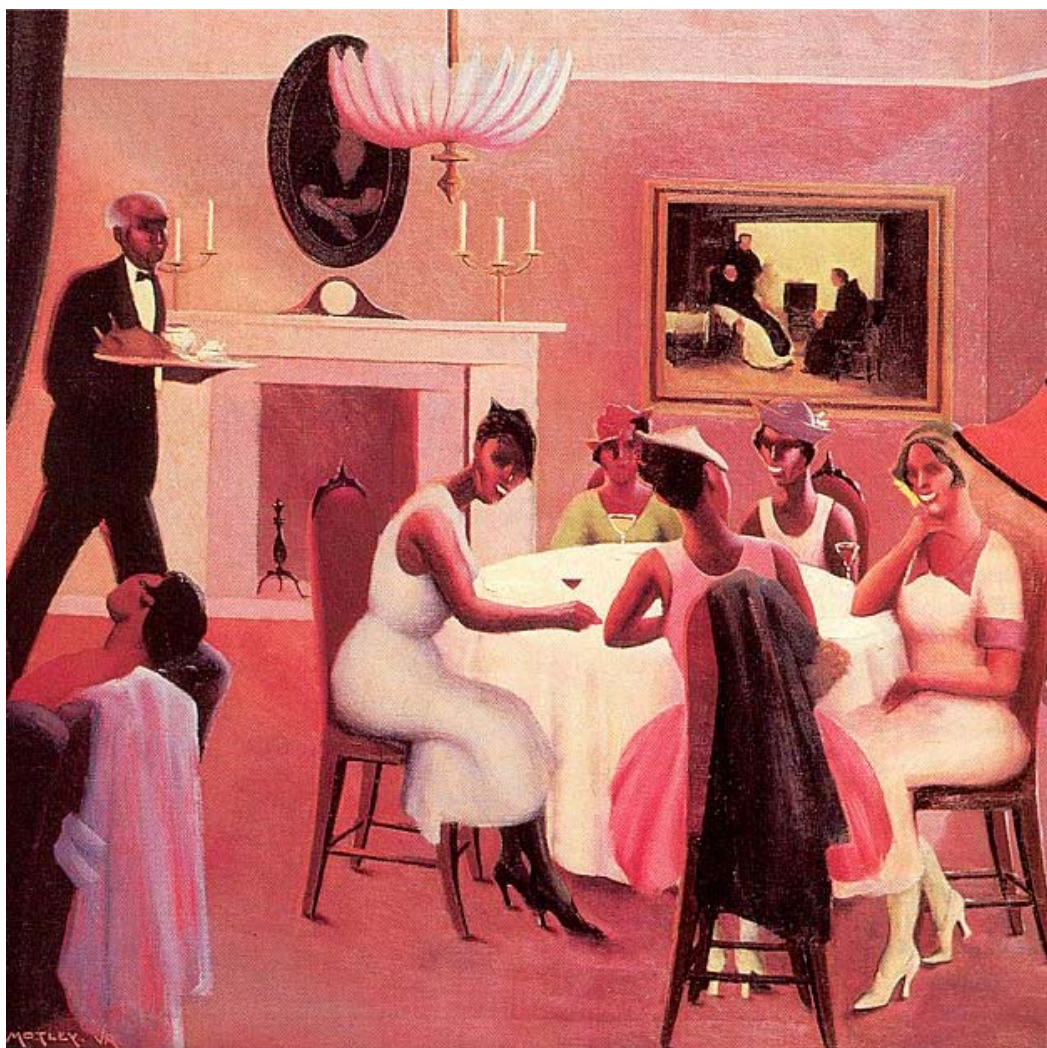


Thursday 30 May

1pm Milgate Room, AD Hope Bldg, SLLL



Archibald Motley Jr, 'Cocktails' (1926)

Louisa Kirk

Fantasy and Event in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), a noteworthy text of the Harlem Renaissance, portrays the strong and strange connection between Clare and Irene, two women who racially 'pass' between black and white in 1920's New York. The novel is often treated as a mysterious text, examined through the lens of race or read for latent lesbianism. While the complex and illusive nature of the passing encourages multiple interpretations, few scholars, if any, closely read Irene's and Clare's connection as friendship. Accounting for the force of race and the sexual ambiguity of Clare's and Irene's connection *and* reading their bond as friendship facilitates an examination of the text from another direction, offering insight into a particular kind of female friendship; one in which identification appears to lead toward a repulsive and desired merging. Drawing on the work of Sianne Ngai on female envy and Judith Butler on identification, this paper argues that *Passing* presents a friendship in which likeness threatens to turn into consuming sameness, as the basis of the friendship shifts from identification to emulation, fantasy to event. *Passing*, therefore, depicts a female friendship which negotiates blurred boundaries: race and sexuality, the self and other, want and fear.

Louisa Kirk is undertaking her PhD in English Literature at the Australian National University, examining female friendship in North American texts of the 20th and 21st century. In 2017 Louisa won the Leslie Holdsworth Allen Memorial Prize for the best Honours thesis in English at the ANU. Louisa received a 2019 Stella Prize/ANU Gender Institute internship in Melbourne, Australia.



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enquiries: russell.smith@anu.edu.au