

Passing (film)

Passing is a 2021 <u>black-and-white</u> <u>historical drama</u> film written and directed by <u>Rebecca Hall</u> in her feature <u>directorial debut</u>. It is adapted from the 1929 novel of the same name by <u>Nella Larsen</u>. Set in 1920s New York City, the film follows the intertwined life of a black woman (<u>Tessa Thompson</u>) and her <u>white-passing</u> childhood friend (<u>Ruth Negga</u>). Appearing in supporting roles are <u>André Holland</u>, <u>Bill Camp</u>, <u>Gbenga Akinnagbe</u>, Antoinette Crowe-Legacy, and Alexander Skarsgård.

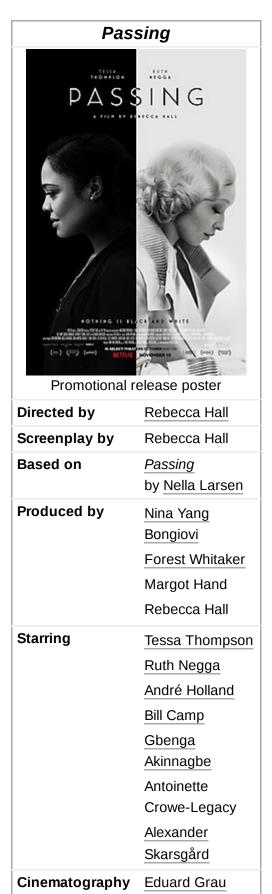
Passing had its world premiere at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival on January 30, 2021, and began a limited theatrical release on October 27, 2021, prior to streaming on Netflix on November 10. The film received acclaim from critics, who praised Hall's screenplay and direction, and performances of Thompson and Negga. The film was named one of the top ten films of 2021 by the African American Film Critics Association. [2] For her performance, Negga was nominated for the Golden Globe Award, the BAFTA and the Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Plot

In 1920s New York City, Irene Redfield, a light-skinned black woman living in <u>Harlem</u>, meets a childhood friend, Clare Bellew, by chance at a hotel dining room. While Irene is married to a Black doctor, the also light-skinned Clare "<u>passes</u>" as white and has married John, a wealthy white man from Chicago.

Clare invites Irene up to her hotel room so they can talk more openly. Clare explains that after her father died, she was raised by her two white aunts and married John very young. They are interrupted by John, who openly despises and degrades Black people, unaware of his wife's or Irene's racial background. Irene leaves the hotel, angry with Clare, and refuses to respond to Clare's letter. However, after Clare unexpectedly shows up at Irene's home and apologizes for the encounter, they rekindle their friendship.

Clare, who wishes to associate with black people again, invites herself to a dance party that Irene is organizing. Most of the guests at the party find Clare charming, including Irene's



husband, Brian. While there, Irene reveals Clare's secret to her friend, novel writer Hugh Wentworth, who seems less impressed with Clare than the others.

As time passes, Clare soon becomes involved in all aspects of Irene's life, joining Irene and Brian to all their outings. At first, Irene seems happy to have Clare around, but soon she becomes disillusioned with Clare, and starts to grow dissatisfied with her presence. Brian, also dissatisfied, attempts to teach his and Irene's children about racism in America, as Irene refuses to move anywhere else. However, Irene believes that the children are too young to learn about such things, inciting an argument between the two, further straining their marriage. Brian invites Clare to a tea party from which Irene purposely excluded her.

When out shopping with her friend Felise, who is unable to pass, Irene encounters John, and hurries away as he begins to realize the truth about his wife's racial background. Irene tries to warn Clare, but decides against it when she is unable to reach her by phone.

As Brian, Irene, and Clare are on their way to Felise's Christmas party on the top floor of a six-story building, Irene asks Clare what she would do if John ever learned the truth. Clare replies that she would move back to Harlem to be with Irene, a response which Irene finds troubling. During the party, Irene remains silent, avoiding the other guests. She opens a large vertical window to smoke. Suddenly, John angrily forces himself into the apartment demanding to see Clare, who remains calm, and moves next to Irene by the window. John accuses her of being a "dirty liar" and lunges towards her, at which point Irene abruptly puts

Edited by	Sabine Hoffman
Music by	Devonte Hynes
Production companies	Significant Productions
	Picture Films
	Film4 Productions
	Flat Five Productions
	Productions Gamechanger Films Sweet Tomato Films Endeavor Content
Distributed by	Netflix
Release dates	January 30, 2021 (Sundance)
	October 27, 2021 (United States)
Running time	98 minutes ^[1]
Countries	United States
	United Kingdom
Language	English
Budget	\$10 million

an arm across Clare's pelvis. Clare falls backwards out the window, but it is not made clear whether John pushed her, Irene pushed her, or she jumped of her own accord.

In horror, all the other guests rush outside, not knowing whether or not Clare is dead. After some hesitation, Irene slowly goes downstairs, where the police are questioning guests. Brian states that he believes John pushed Clare, but when asked, Irene asserts that she believes the fall was an accident. The film ends with the police declaring death by misadventure, Irene sobbing in Brian's arms, and Clare's body being carried away by medics.

Cast

- Tessa Thompson as Irene "Reenie" Redfield
- Ruth Negga as Clare Bellew
- André Holland as Brian Redfield
- Bill Camp as Hugh Wentworth
- Alexander Skarsgård as John Bellew

- Gbenga Akinnagbe as Dave Freedland
- Antoinette Crowe-Legacy as Felise
- Ashley Ware Jenkins as Zu

Production

It was announced in August 2018 that <u>Rebecca Hall</u> would be making her directorial debut on the adaptation of the <u>Nella Larsen</u> novel, with <u>Tessa Thompson</u> and <u>Ruth Negga</u> set to star in the lead roles. [3] Hall had begun writing the film a decade earlier upon reflecting on her own family's history. When Hall presented her with a script version, Negga decided to collaborate in making it into a film as Negga was surprised the work was not more prominent, after having read the novel and was "completely astounded" by it. [4] Thompson stated that the film would be shot in black and white. [5] <u>André Holland</u> was cast in October 2019. [6] In November 2019, Alexander Skarsgård joined the cast of the film. [7]

With less than a month to go before filming production was set to begin, Hall was still \$500,000 short on her desired \$10 million budget, and had to apply for two grants to cover the difference. Filming began in November 2019 in New York City. The film is in monochrome. Benjamin Lee of *The Guardian* praised the use of a 4:3 aspect ratio as in this film it was "both fitting and practical given a smaller budget". Into the third week of filming, the Hugh Wentworth role, originally intended for Benedict Cumberbatch, remained uncast, and budgetary realities and the tight filming timeline meant the production would need an actor who lived in New York. On November 21, Bill Camp signed on, and filming wrapped in December after a 23-day shoot.

Release

Passing had its world premiere at the $\underline{2021}$ Sundance Film Festival on January 30, $2021.^{\underline{[11]}}$ Shortly after, $\underline{\text{Netflix}}$ acquired distribution rights to the film for around \$15 million. $\underline{^{[12]}}$ It also screened at the $\underline{\text{New York}}$ Film Festival on October 3, $2021.^{\underline{[13][14]}}$ The film had a $\underline{\text{limited theatrical release}}$ on October 27, 2021, prior to streaming on Netflix on November $10.^{\underline{[15]}}$

According to Samba TV, the film was watched in 653,000 households over its first three days of release. [16]

Reception

Critical reception

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 90% of 250 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.7/10. The website's consensus reads: "While *Passing*'s delicate approach has a dampening effect on its story, debuting director Rebecca Hall makes the most of an impressive cast—and handles thorny themes with impressive dexterity." Metacritic, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 85 out of 100, based on 46 critics, indicating "universal acclaim". [18]

Kevin Maher of $\underline{The\ Times}$ gave the film 4 out of 5 stars, calling it, "a mesmerizing, deeply disquieting experience." [19] Jessica Kiang, writing for $\underline{Variety}$, wrote that the film is "unerring, deceptively delicate, quiet and immaculate, like that final fall of snow." [20] In his review for $\underline{The\ Guardian}$, Peter Bradshaw

praised Hall's direction, calling the film, "a very stylish piece of work from Hall." Benjamin Lee of *The Guardian*, gave the film a negative review of 2 out of 5 stars, arguing that it had "disappointing lack of verve" and was "inert". [10]

The performances of Negga and Thompson in particular received praise. In a very positive review for the *Chicago Tribune*, Michael Phillips gave the film a perfect score of four out of four stars, and wrote of the performances: "What Thompson and Negga accomplish on screen in this extraordinarily detailed portrait becomes a master class in incremental revelations." David Rooney of *The Hollywood Reporter* lauded Thompson for her "unshowy, beautifully internalized performance", and Simran Hans called Negga "magnetic" in her review for *The Guardian*. [23][24] In



<u>Ruth Negga</u>'s performance in the film garnered widespread critical praise.

 $\underline{\textit{Time Magazine}}$'s annual best performances of the year list, $\underline{\textit{Stephanie Zacharek}}$ named Negga's performance of the best of 2021. $\underline{^{[25]}}$

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Re
African-American Film Critics Association	January 17, 2022	Top Ten Films of 2021	Passing	5th place	[2]
Alliance of Women	1	Best Picture		Nominated	[26]
		Best Director	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Best Actress	Tessa Thompson	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Supporting Role	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
Film Journalists	January 25, 2022	Best Screenplay, Adapted	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Best Cinematography	Eduard Grau	Nominated	
		Best Woman Director	Dahasas Hall	Nominated	
		Best Woman Screenwriter	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Most Daring Performance	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
Artios Awards	March 17, 2022	Outstanding Achievement in Casting – Studio or Independent (Drama)	Laura Rosenthal and Kimberly Ostroy	Nominated	[27]
Austin Film Critics	January 11, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Nominated	[28]
Association		Best First Film	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
British Academy Film Awards March 13, 2022	March 13, 2022	Outstanding British Film	Nina Yang Bongiovi, Forest Whitaker, Rebecca Hall and Margot Hand	Nominated	[29]
		Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Leading Role	Tessa Thompson	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Supporting Role	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
	February 27, 2022	Outstanding Motion Picture	Nina Yang Bongiovi, Forest Whitaker, Rebecca Hall and Margot Hand	Nominated	[30]
		Outstanding Director	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Outstanding Actress	Tessa Thompson	Won	
		Outstanding Supporting Actor	André Holland	Nominated	
		Outstanding Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Nominated	

		Outstanding Screenplay	Rebecca Hall	Won	
		Outstanding Ensemble	Kim Ostroy and Laura Rosenthal	Nominated	
		Outstanding Original Score	Devonté Hynes	Nominated	
		Outstanding Emerging Director	Dobosos Holl	Nominated	
		Outstanding First Screenplay	Rebecca Hall	Won	
		Outstanding Cinematography	Edu Grau	Nominated	
		Outstanding Costume Design	Marci Rodgers	Nominated	
		Outstanding Production Design	Nora Mendis	Nominated	
Chiana Tila	Danamahan	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Won	
Critics Association	December 15, 2021	Milos Stehlik Breakthrough Filmmaker Award	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	[31][32]
Dallas–Fort Worth Film Critics Association	December 20, 2021	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	5th place	[33]
Directors Guild of America Awards	March 12, 2022	Outstanding Directing – First-Time Feature Film	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	[34]
Florida Film Critics	December 22, 2021	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Runner-up	[35]
Circle		Best First Film	Rebecca Hall	Runner-up	
Georgia Film Critics Association	January 14, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	D. d. Name	Nominated	[36]
Golden Globe Awards	January 9, 2022	Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture	Ruth Negga	Nominated	[37][38]
	November 29, 2021	Best Feature	Passing	Nominated	
		Bingham Ray Breakthrough Director Award	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	[39]
Gotham Independent Film		Best Screenplay		Nominated	
Awards 23, 2021	<u> </u>	Outstanding Lead Performance	Tessa Thompson	Nominated	
		Outstanding Supporting Performance	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
	February 28, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	 	Nominated	[40]
		Best Director	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
		Best Adapted Screenplay		Nominated	
		Best First Feature	Passing	Nominated	
Independent Spirit	March 6,	Best Supporting Female	Ruth Negga	Won	[41]
Awards	2022	Best Cinematography	Eduard Grau	Won	
IndieWire Critics Poll	December 13, 2021	Best Film	Passing	9th place	[42]

		Best Performance	Tessa Thompson	7th place	
		Best Cinematography	Eduard Grau	8th place	
		Best First Feature	Rebecca Hall	Runner-up	
	February 6, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Won	[43]
International Cinephile Society		Best Adapted Screenplay	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
сперпие зостету		Best Debut Feature		Runner-up	
London Film Critics' Circle	February 7, 2022	Supporting Actress of the Year	Ruth Negga	Won	[44]
		British/Irish Actress of the Year		Nominated	
		Breakthrough British/Irish Filmmaker	Rebecca Hall	Won	
National Society of Film Critics	January 8, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Won	[45]
		Best Actress	Tessa Thompson	Won	
New York Film	December	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Won	[46]
Critics Online	12, 2021	Best Debut Director	Rebecca Hall	Won	
		Top Ten Films	Passing	Won	
	January 24, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
Online Film Critics		Best Adapted Screenplay	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	[47]
Society		Best Breakthrough Filmmaker		Nominated	
San Diego Film	January 10, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Won	[48]
Critics Society		Best Adapted Screenplay		Nominated	1 1701
San Francisco Bay		Best Adapted Screenplay	Rebecca Hall	Nominated	
Area Film Critics	January 10, 2022	Best Actress	Tessa Thompson	Nominated	[49]
Circle		Best Supporting Actress	Duth Name	Nominated	1
	April 2, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Ruth Negga	Nominated	
Satellite Awards		Best Adapted Screenplay	Rebecca Hall and Nella Larsen	Nominated	[50]
Screen Actors Guild Awards	February 27, 2022	Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role	Ruth Negga	Nominated	[51]
Seattle Film Critics Society	January 17, 2022	Best Actress in a Supporting Role		Nominated	[52]
St. Louis Film Critics Association	December 19, 2021	Best Supporting Actress		Nominated	[53]
Toronto Film	January 16, 2022	Best Supporting Actress	Rebecca Hall	Runner-up	[54]
Critics Association		Best First Feature		Runner-up	
USC Scripter Awards	February 26, 2022	Film Adaptation		Nominated	[55]

Washington D.C.
Area Film Critics
AssociationDecember
6, 2021Best ActressTessa ThompsonNominated

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External links

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