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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Helga Crane's camera obscura: Nella Larsen, Garbo's face, and the modernist longing for plot

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of Nella Larsen's repeated viewings of George Cukor's 1936 film *Camille*, this paper argues that we must understand modernism's troubling of realist *Bildung* within the context of the classical Hollywood cinema and its invocations of nineteenth-century literature. Starring Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor, *Camille* is based on the stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas fils's *The Lady of the Camellias* (1848), a novel critical of the Balzacian Bildungsroman, predicating the self-possessing, bourgeois individualism of its protagonist Armand Duval on the expulsion of the consumptive courtesan Marguerite Gautier. Cukor's *Camille*, to the contrary, integrates Marguerite, through the legerdemain of classical Hollywood style, into a bourgeois liberal plot of social arrival and self-becoming. Larsen's fascination with Cukor's *Camille* offers a new way to read her first novel *Quicksand* (1928), not as a rejection of novelistic plot and its racialized promises of social belonging, but as a deeply vexed and ambivalent longing for it. Building on the speculative turn in the historiography of Black literature, film, and cinematic spectatorship—as well as recent work in asynchronic literary historiography—this essay suggests that it may have been a complicated form of desire and longing that brought Larsen again and again to *Camille*, since she would have been primed to detect the remarkable ease with which the film stylises out of existence the skepticism about *Bildung* that animated Dumas fils's novel, and the resolute impossibility of *Bildung* that her own *Quicksand* so systematically laments.

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'I believe the story is frightfully important'.

—George Cukor

In 1936, Nella Larsen attended the movies several times in New York City to see George Cukor's MGM box office hit *Camille*. Based on Alexandre Dumas fils's own 1852 stage adaptation of his novel *The Lady of the*

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Camellias (1848), *Camille* tells the story of a love affair between the young bourgeois Armand Duval (Robert Taylor) and the consumptive courtesan Marguerite Gautier (Greta Garbo) – an affair that results in the lovers’ despair and Marguerite’s death. Again and again, Larsen would have witnessed the image of Taylor clutching Garbo to him as she dies in his arms, morally redeemed and flouting, with every inch of her glamorous face, the grotesque horror of the original novel. Although critics have left this anecdote unexamined,¹ Larsen’s fascination with *Camille* affords new insight into her semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman *Quicksand* (1928). It also complicates our dominant understanding of the modernist Bildungsroman not only in terms of its narrative form, but also its media history. Reading *Quicksand* in light of Larsen’s repeated viewings of *Camille* – positioning this later moment of her life in stereoscopic relation to a previous one – allows us to see *Quicksand* differently, as not so much a rejection of the Bildungsroman, as critics typically assume, but as an extended attempt to deliver on the social and psychic promises generated by that genre’s most fundamental feature in its nineteenth-century form – plot.

Gregory Castle’s *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (2006) augured the revival of interest in modernism’s troubling of the realist novel of formation. This body of scholarship, however, remains committed to the belief that modernists sought departure from realist plot as a defiant rejection of a formally confining and ideologically pernicious aesthetic tradition.² ‘[M]odernist fiction’, Jed Esty representatively writes, ‘resists the tyranny of plot’; it finds ‘ingenious ways’, he continues, ‘to cut and split’ the “‘tape-worm of story’”.³ Michael Sayeau, Fredric Jameson, and Jacques Rancière articulate versions of this position in their recent studies of modernist narrative form and its emancipation from what Jameson calls the ‘regime of the *récit*’.⁴ Plot in the early twentieth century, however, was not a formal system insular to the novel. It was a media-historical problem negotiated among multiple media, primarily the novel and the immensely influential popular narrative cinema. I argue that taking into account the role that popular cinema played in the lives of certain modernists – including as a source of ambivalent self-soothing during times of extreme personal distress – enables us to see that their modernism had a far more complex, if vexed, relation to plot than rejection or liberation. In line with recent efforts to investigate what form can provide rather than conceal, this essay contends that some modernists longed for what Caroline Levine calls the ‘affordances’ of form. And this aesthetic crisis, I contend, is illuminated once we understand the way classical Hollywood film generated the illusions of social belonging and psychic unity that were historically the generic dominion of the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman.⁵ Larsen’s repeated visits to *Camille* – a film that through plot restores its protagonist to a narrative of social arrival from which the original novel had banished her—suggest her

fascination, if unsettled and ambivalent, with Hollywood cinema's reliance on conventional storytelling. It suggests a conflicted form of affective investment on the part of a writer otherwise committed to rejecting plot on social, political, and aesthetic grounds.

I am not making the anachronistic claim that Larsen's viewings of *Camille* influenced *Quicksand*. Rather, I want to suggest that Larsen's first novel reads differently—is thrown into relief differently—once one knows that its author, though she was reclusive, suffering depression, and struggling with substance abuse, repeatedly went to see a film that rescues its protagonist from the forms of social ostracisation and psychic strain that beset her own Helga Crane. By substituting a stereoscopic theory of history for one of chronological influence—by orienting critical inquiry in terms that create a three-dimensional space—a plot—of historical and formal traces rather than a series of consecutive events—I draw particularly on the work of Alix Beeston, Wai Chee Dimock, David Eng, Allyson Nadia Field, Saidiya Hartman, Julie Beth Napolin, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart. Taken together, these scholars have theorised modes of criticism based in a conception of history as malleable, sensuous, and affective rather than synchronic, empirical, and chronological.⁶ For them, much is lost if we limit our understanding of history to that of a series of discrete and chronological events we know happened with Cartesian certainty, and the work of criticism as the obedient charting of this history. This conventional view of historiographical criticism has indeed governed what Joseph North calls the 'historicist/contextualist' paradigm dominating contemporary literary studies, and certainly the film-historiography of literary modernism, which, since the publication of David Trotter's *Cinema and Modernism* (2007) and Laura Marcus's *The Tenth Muse* (2008), has been especially vehement about the need to radically historicise the film-literature relationship.⁷

But Dimock and Napolin show that texts have a life of their own, 'resonating' across time and space, changing, sounding, and looking different once put into contact with cultural and critical acts beyond their immediate historical context. And the labour of criticism, on this model, is to capture the text's multiple and centrifugal movements when apprehended from varying and asynchronous viewpoints—what Beeston, by way of Susan Stanford Friedman, calls the work of 'critical superimposition'—rather than to try to 'lock' the text in its immediate context.⁸ Eng, Field, Hartman, and Stewart, meanwhile, recuperate glimpses of experience and cultural production that have escaped our attention by virtue of the racialized processes of exclusion in conventional historiography. The critical account of marginalised lives, these scholars show, demand historiographical methods that decentre the empirical, since, in Hartman's words, historians of minoritarian groups are 'forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who

is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor'.⁹ Historiography, for myself and these scholars, demands informed conjecture, a recuperative, sensuous, and affective 'specula[tion] about what might have been'.¹⁰

It is with this project in mind that I argue Larsen's viewings of *Camille* are an integral coordinate in what Dimock would call the 'resonant universe', or what Eng would call the hidden 'affective history', of not just Larsen herself, but also *Quicksand* and, by extension, the modernist Bildungsroman writ large.¹¹ As will become clear, one of the primary axes linking Helga Crane to Greta Garbo is the representational problem of dimensionality, the illusion of volume that motivates both visual verisimilitude in the popular cinema and the psychic depth of the classical Bildungsroman's protagonists. Modelling this concern with depth and dimensionality, this essay reconstructs that resonant universe, or affective history, by opening up a three-dimensional historiographical architecture—plotting out a space—within which *Quicksand*, *The Lady of the Camellias*, and *Camille* rotate around and reflect evanescently against one another, in turn, shifting all their appearances.

Although Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* is a nearer historical antecedent to *Camille*, the thematic parallels between Larsen's and Marguerite's lives make it more intuitive to analyse the film through *Quicksand*—and vice versa. George Hutchinson indeed speculates that Larsen liked *Camille* because the rise and fall of Marguerite into and out of Parisian high society mimicked her own trajectory through Harlem's cultural elite.¹² But there are more complex connections between Larsen's semi-autobiographical novel and Cukor's film than thematic resemblance. Larsen's letters, which had grown especially sparse in number and evasive in content by 1936, provide no firsthand account of her impressions of *Camille*—what both of her biographers characterise as one of her 'favorite' films.¹³ However, in line with Hartman's and Field's insistence that we not allow the 'extant' to overdetermine the limits of historiographical inquiry—and with Stewart's claim that much of our 'reconstructive work' concerning early-twentieth-century Black spectatorship 'must be performed creatively'¹⁴—we can speculate as to what drew her to it, given the meditation, at the centre of *Quicksand*, on the kind of self-possessing bourgeois personality the modernist Bildungsroman would not permit itself to produce.¹⁵ Larsen would have been primed to detect the way *Camille* relies on techniques of classical Hollywood film—a mode of cultural production for which plot was gospel—to resolve the formal and subjective crises that animate *The Lady of the Camellias* and that *Quicksand* systematically stages and laments.

Travelling back to nineteenth-century France by way of 1930s Hollywood, this essay takes up Dimock's call for the 'dislocat[ion]' of literary texts from their particular moment in order to see them productively 'fall apart' into

‘new and strange’ figurations of meaning.¹⁶ I argue that knowing Larsen would go on, just eight years later, to grow fascinated by *Camille*, allows us to see *Quicksand* in just such a new and strange light. In the retrospective glow of Garbo’s image, plot in *Quicksand* emerges not as a site of negation or rejection, but of mourning. The novel mourns the unavailability of the ambition plot to its protagonist Helga Crane—and, perhaps proleptically, to Larsen herself.

A thing without thought

The nineteenth-century novel generated aesthetic equivalents for the modern autonomous individual by charting a protagonist’s moral and social development. ‘The history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are’, Nancy Armstrong writes, ‘quite literally, one and the same’.¹⁷ For the individual to secure interiority and an intelligible place in bourgeois liberal society, Armstrong notes, he must experience dissatisfaction, a discrepancy between his wants and his reality. Be it Armstrong’s ‘dissatisfaction’, Peter Brooks’ ‘desire’, or Franco Moretti’s ‘determination’, theorizations of the novel acknowledge that the genre is often preoccupied with acquisition. In the classical Bildungsroman in particular, the protagonist acquires personality as they acquire experience—hence the interdependence, in this genre, of plot and selfhood. Yet the novel’s labour is also to reconcile the protagonist’s personal trajectory to the moral, political, and socio-economic exigencies of the modern liberal state, namely, the ‘right to property and personal autonomy’.¹⁸ In the novel, to be an individual is also to have the right to own *things*.

Few in modern literature are more seduced by things than Helga Crane. ‘Always she had wanted, not money’, Larsen writes, ‘but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things’.¹⁹ From the beginning of the novel, Helga surrounds herself with material markers of the bourgeoisie. Her room is strewn with the colourful, eye-catching clothing that are both the cause and symbol of her inability to fit in at Naxos. She is drawn to her friend Anne’s home in Harlem for its surplus of interior-decorative objects. And when she establishes a stable middleclass life with Reverend Green, she articulates her happiness in terms of possession:

To be mistress in one’s own house, to have a garden, and chickens, and a pig; to have a husband ... Here, she had found, she was sure, the intangible thing for which, indefinitely, always she had craved. It had received embodiment.

This pervasive language of ownership suggests that Helga has finally found the bourgeois normative domesticity that corresponds to corporeal embodiment. She has, in other words, landed in a situation productive of the

possessive liberal individualism she realises she may have wanted all along, exemplifying the novel's generic doctrine that to have is to be. Yet, even attaining the liberal bourgeois ideal leaves her restless and discontent. The novel ends with Helga on the cusp of having her fifth child in her now loveless marriage, recognising the perpetuity of her dissatisfaction. She lacks, still, 'confidence in the fullness of her life',²⁰ and transforms, ultimately, into something on the order of a birthing machine.

For Walter Benjamin, the ritual of turning to novels is itself a life-giving form of acquisition. 'The reader of the novel', he writes, 'seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own—to devour it, as it were [...] [H]e swallows up the material as the fire devours logs in the fireplace'.²¹ By 'virtue of the flame which consumes [the characters' fate]', he continues, it 'yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about'. Novels, then, provide the reader a kind of warmth not unlike that which one feels at the hearth.

But the reader is absorbed by *Quicksand* in a different way than by the novels to which 'The Storyteller' implicitly refers. Those novels—the Balzacian, Dickensian ones—show the piecing together of a person through experiences that the novelist shapes into events. The retrospective ordering operation of plot gathers together the otherwise inchoate present, 'stick [ing]', to borrow Virginia Woolf's phrase from *To the Lighthouse*, 'the odds and ends' of experience to the 'magnet' of narrative events. Those lives—Rastignac, Pip, Sorel, Bennet—breathe warmth into ours because they allow us to imagine for the duration of our reading that our own lives are composed of such restful summits, 'swept ... clean' into a novelistic life.²² As we watch the subjectivity of another individual form over time and through experience, our own starts to fill out and become whole.

But Helga does not fill out. Barely in command of her words and actions, she seems motivated by a biomechanics beyond her control. Words 'tumble' from her 'quivering petulant lips'; she impulsively gives a 'table support a violent kick'; 'automatically her fingers adjust' the pillows on her bed;²³ and she is often surprised by her own reactions to decisions she has made impetuously. While scholars have long discussed Helga's psychic inscrutability,²⁴ they have yet to draw out its media-ecological underpinnings. Indeed, making sense of Larsen's fascination with *Camille* demands that we grow sensitive to the ways *Quicksand* itself is thinking through problems of medium. Larsen enfoldes Helga's crisis of selfhood into vital media-ecological questions about the Bildungsroman in modernity. Vibrant yet internally void, colourful yet sheer, Helga is not so much a character as she is a moving picture.

Her room at Naxos is a field of light and shadow. 'It was a comfortable room', Larsen writes, 'flooded with Southern sun in the day, but shadowy

just then with the drawn curtains and single shaded light. Large, too', she continues, 'So large that the spot where Helga sat was a small oasis in a desert of darkness. And eerily quiet. But that was what she liked after her taxing day's work'. Relaxing in the spotlight cast by 'a single reading lamp', Helga reaches for a book to quell the anger she routinely feels towards her colleagues. But soon she throws her book aside and 'pin[s] a scrap of paper about the bulb under the lamp's shade, for ... she wanted an even more soothing darkness'.²⁵ Ann E. Hostetler is right that Helga 'perceives reality in terms of colour ... tone, and hue'.²⁶ But here, it is precisely the darkness of the room that offers her shelter from Naxos's scopic regime. In total darkness, she sits 'motionless', finding tranquility at long last. She finally does 'stir', but 'uncertainly ... with an overpowering desire for action of some sort', only for 'a second she hesitated, then rose abruptly'.²⁷ Helga's sudden spasms and jolts work to establish her as not so much a human being as an image, flickering in the darkness, starting into animation and then vanishing again into obscurity. Helga seeks comfort in the darkness not because she wishes to be dark—though she will for a brief period think that such cultural darkening would cure her of her restlessness. She seeks a more soothing darkness because there she can be most herself. Helga, after all, *is* chiaroscuro—she is both white and black, a state to which she attributes her struggle to belong. But in the darkness of her camera obscura she can come to life, just as the cinematic image only becomes fully visible once the houselights are down. Helga rejects the book, instead finding comfort in a habitat evocative of a movie theatre.

Cut to 1936, where Helga's dark room finds its specular reflection in Marguerite's bed chamber in *Camille*. Garbo was known for what Luchino Visconti called her 'severe and authoritarian presence',²⁸ but the role of Marguerite demands of her a droopy, diaphanous, weak physicality. Almost always on the verge of collapse, Marguerite must count on the persons and things around her to hold her up. She is immaterial—there, but just barely. The film delivers Marguerite's vulnerability even at the level of the image itself. When Marguerite's friend Gaston arrives at her deathbed, the film links her physical vulnerability to Garbo's status as a cinematic image. The scene opens with Gaston walking into her room from the background towards the camera; the top right half of the shot is cast in Expressionistic shadow, while the bottom left half—which ends just at the threshold of Marguerite's deathbed chamber—is flickering from the shadows cast by the flames in the fireplace positioned just outside the frame. (See [Figure 1](#))

The camera stays on Gaston as he walks toward the flickering half of the shot; it then tracks to the left to capture Gaston confronting Marguerite sleeping, gaunt and lifeless. The camera stops moving, though, just at the point where it shows Marguerite in the left plane, Gaston in profile in the



Figure 1. Gaston entering Marguerite's bedchamber, from *Camille* (MGM, 1936), directed by George Cukor. Courtesy of the author.

mid-right, and the right side of the frame still flickering from the fire (See [Figure 2](#)). In maintaining the flickering shadows within the frame, the film affiliates Marguerite's ailing health with the image itself, whose flickering suggests a struggling, precarious visibility. It is as if Gaston is not watching Marguerite lie ill in bed, but witnessing the projector of the film itself malfunctioning, the arc lamp inside it flashing and sputtering. The stillness of the shot, moreover, invokes a photograph, collapsing Marguerite into a two-dimensional image. The film reminds us that we are not in fact looking at Marguerite in bed, but at a cinematic projection of Garbo, whose performance of Marguerite's weakness suggests the insubstantiality



Figure 2. Gaston approaching Marguerite's deathbed, flames from fire flickering against the wall, from *Camille* (MGM, 1936), directed by George Cukor. Courtesy of the author.

of the cinematic image itself. Marguerite is not on the brink of dying; Garbo's image is in danger of disappearing.

Larsen, too, underscores Helga's embeddedness within an optics of two-dimensionality. She calls atypically ample attention to Helga's body in terms of its volume in space. More specifically, the prose introducing Helga establishes her as not so much a literary configuration, but a flattened image unable to become fully three-dimensional. Antonia Lant has characterised the cinema as an 'utterly flat medium of presentation, insubstantial, without texture or material, and yet evoking, in a wafer, a fuller illusion of the physicality and exactness of human beings than any prior art'.²⁹ The 'perceptual wealth', as Christian Metz has put it, of the cinematic image, its illusion of material abundance, is fundamentally at odds with its actual immateriality.³⁰ Not only does the screen lack volume, but the image itself is even more sparse, ostensibly self-generating but irrevocably dependent upon another surface for its existence. Larsen's characterisation of Helga captures this duality of the image, its status as both excessively there and stubbornly not.

A slight girl of twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate but well-turned arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined.³¹

The passage yields a complex, if not inconceivable, dimensionality. Though Larsen's sentences affect rhythmic ease, a closer look at them exposes logical difficulty. The rhetorical principle of Helga's description is subtle but persisting contradiction, the self-refuting qualification of initial assertions. Her body is 'narrow' and 'sloping', but the phrase 'well-turned' suggests that her limbs are shapely, voluptuous. She is delicate but radiant, self-effacing in her sloping shoulders but well-proportioned in her arms and legs. She is at once richly variegated and silhouetted against the background tapestry. Helga is chromatically brilliant, full, and round—a depth mimicked in her sunken posture in the chair—but her 'sharply cut', 'outlined' face nevertheless collapses her into two dimensions. Her figure pops into relief, but the passage also deprives her of such volume, pressing her into a smooth surface. Her skin, moreover, is not like human skin; it is like fabric—satin, which does not have the textured, organic graininess of raw silk, but the glossy slipperiness of a manufactured sheet, a screen. That metonymic kinship sliding between Helga's skin, textiles, and the screen gets repeated throughout the novel when, on two different occasions, Larsen describes the clothing Helga drapes around her body as 'filmy'.³² Helga's filminess, though, ultimately heralds her social death, cementing the incapacity of *Quicksand* to narrate her into a self-possessing autonomous individual. By

invoking the dimensional poverty of the cinematic image, *Quicksand* expresses its own inability to deliver on the Bildungsroman's generic promise to yield a coherent, 'deep' subject. Helga's religious conversion is Larsen's last effort to provide the narrative structure necessary for the achievement of personality, and when that fails, it is as if the text admits defeat, permeating Helga's final moments with evocations of mechanical reproduction.

Narratologists discuss conversion in terms of the 'turning point'. As Angsar Nünning and Kai Marcel Sicks have argued, turning points are retrospective formations that lend order to otherwise undifferentiated time.³³ Moretti has shown that the Bildungsroman has a vexed relationship to turning points, since it sets itself against other, conclusive and formally neat, forms of causality. In Austen, for instance, it is the causal chain of numerous conversations that generates change over time; each conversation—say, between Elizabeth and Darcy, or Marianne and Elinor Dashwood—contributes to the eventual narrative outcome. The formal virtue of conversation, according to Moretti, is its nebulousness, the difficulty with which one can conclusively determine its precise part in the causal chain of events. Contrary to the amorphous novelistic conversation, the trial, Moretti explains, is decisive—such as Tamino's rite in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, which 'breaks [his] life into two parts', Moretti writes. 'Before, [...] a prince in exile—after, the true heir of his father, the king'. 'Trial, in the *Bildungsroman*', he continues, 'is instead an opportunity: not an obstacle to be overcome while remaining "intact", but something that must be *incorporated*, for only by stringing together "experiences" does one build a personality'.³⁴ In other words, because the project of the Bildungsroman is to chart the development of personality through experience, it depends on an incremental, rather than immediate and drastic, causality. While it lasts, Helga's religious conversion has more in common structurally with the trial than it does with conversation or opportunity. Her encounter with the holy rollers brings her to her knees begging for God's mercy, and fills her suddenly with 'a supreme aspiration toward the regaining of simple happiness ... unburdened by the complexities of the lives she had known'. The next day, she 'feel[s] ... utterly different from dreadful yesterday'.³⁵ Conversion, unlike conversation, starkly delimits before and after: one is reborn pious. What is suggestive about Larsen's recourse to conversion as the last significant event in *Quicksand*, is that its temporality is at odds with the project of the Bildungsroman. It provokes a form of causality too disruptive—given expression in the 'thunderclap of joy' erupting around Helga at the moment she yields to a higher power³⁶—to be compatible with the gradual, accumulative nature of novelistic events. In staging a conversion, *Quicksand* is getting desperate to secure narrative teleology.

Helga's conversion is merely a structurally dramatic version of all her previous movements through time, however. *Quicksand* begins in that hallmark of the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman, the educational institution. But unlike *Jane Eyre*,³⁷ in which the departure from the schoolhouse marks entry into the spatial expanses of formative experience, *Quicksand* does not endow that departure with semantic privilege. Instead, Helga finds a version of Naxos wherever she goes—in Harlem it is the rigidity of a high Black culture saturated with the discourse of racial uplift, in Copenhagen the cultural ignorance of the Danes, with the Reverend Pleasant Green the gendered confines of pious motherhood. Departures and arrivals, which in the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman were the thematic meat on the skeleton of narrative time, in *Quicksand* have lost narrative efficacy. She has treated all of these displacements as if she were being reborn, and so the novel has from its very beginning been alienated from its own generic temporality; hence its constant invocations of other media—not just film, but also vaudeville, theatre, and painting. And in her quasi-suicidal stupor in the final pages, when even her conversion has failed to generate her selfhood, and having just produced her fourth child, Helga detaches from the world, retreating into the privacy of her own solitary consciousness. In the 'kind darkness' of her own mind, she

could watch the figures of the past drift by. There was her mother, whom she had loved from a distance and finally so scornfully blamed, who appeared as she had always remembered her, unbelievably beautiful, young, and remote. Robert Anderson, questioning, purposely detached, affecting, as she realized now, her life in a remarkably cruel degree; for at last she understood clearly how deeply, how passionately, she must have loved him. Anne, lovely, secure, wise, selfish. Axel Olsen, conceited, worldly, spoiled. Audrey Denney, placid, taking quietly and without fuss the things which she wanted. James Vayle, snobbish, smug, servile. Mrs. Hayes-Rore, important, kind, determined. The Dahls, rich, correct, climbing. Flashingly, fragmentarily, other long-forgotten figures, women in gay fashionable frocks and men in formal black and white, glided by in bright rooms to distant, vaguely familiar music.³⁸

Despite the passage's invocation of what might seem like the optics, even spatialization, of film, Larsen likely would not have been invoking the retrospective montage sequences of cinema. Montage sequences that compress narrative time did not become a common cinematic convention until after *Quicksand* was published, with films such as *The Dance of Life* (1929) and *Say It With Songs* (1929).³⁹ Rather than a 'cinematic' passage in a vague sense of the term, then, Helga's is emphatically novelistic in the vigour with which it organises past experience into comprehensible nodes on a map. In fact, there is something too comprehensible about this retrospective sweep, an uncomfortable extremity, even artlessness, with which it assigns a

neat cluster of adjectives to each character. The Dahls are ‘rich, correct’, and ‘climbing’; Mrs. Hayes-Rore is ‘important, kind, determined’; James Vayle is ‘snobbish, smug, servile’; Axel Olsen is ‘conceited, worldly, spoiled’. The immoderate symmetry of these descriptions, the bluntness with which they predicate their subjects, rather than exhibiting the epistemic privilege inherent to retrospective narration, betrays self-doubt in its very rush to name. That is, Larsen stages the passage to appear as a formal climax in that it ostensibly marks a moment of uncharacteristic clarity for Helga who is otherwise remarkably a stranger to her own experience. But Larsen also renders it fundamentally precarious, just barely managing to assert its retrospective mastery. Larsen conveys that precarity most distinctly, perhaps, in the moment where Helga’s mind settles on Dr. Anderson. ‘[A]t last’, she thinks, she ‘understood clearly how deeply, how passionately she must have loved him’. Instead of using the preterit tense—‘she loved him’—which would have signified exhaustive knowledge of that which was the case, Larsen chooses the more epistemically modest modal formulation—‘must have loved him’—revealing the extent to which not just Helga, but also the novel, in its free-indirect-discursive fusion with her, remains opaque, uncollected.

This passage is therefore motivated by, but failing to deliver on, plot’s fundamental project in the Bildungsroman: to organise and name the past in service of creating a coherent self. Larsen’s elision of the preterit tense—a tense that as Jameson argues is the grammatical cornerstone of formal realism⁴⁰—is not a defiant act of modernist negation. It is a staging of generic failure, an acknowledgement of the inability of the Bildungsroman qua Bildungsroman to perform the epistemic responsibility enacted in its grammar, to exhibit its comprehensive knowledge of the past and to present the relevant pieces of it with certainty. But in the final paragraphs of *Quicksand*, the free indirect discourse that had frequently permeated the novel’s prose becomes constant, collapsing the distance between Helga and the narrative machinery of her story. ‘Just then. Later. When she got up. By and by. She must rest’, the prose reads with unprecedented terseness, ‘Get strong. Sleep. Then, afterwards, she could work out some arrangement. So she dozed and dreamed in snatches of sleeping and waking, letting time run on. Away’. The distinction here between Helga and *Quicksand* has become so thin, if not moot, that it is now the novel, along with its protagonist, that has abandoned itself to the passage of time, no longer attempting to wrest meaning from experience. The novel ultimately capitulates to another kind of time altogether—the infinite sameness of mechanical reproduction. ‘Hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain ... when she began to have her fifth child’.⁴¹ The diction of the final clause is strikingly, strategically, vague. Is the novel really locating the precise beginning of the fifth child’s gestation? This sort of intrusion into not the mind but

the body of the protagonist—her womb, no less—is unprecedented in this novel, reaching into uncharted territory. *Quicksand* has otherwise been markedly unable to locate the source of Helga's actions, to account for the psychic origins of her decisions, let alone her physical movements. But here, for the first and only time in the novel, Larsen makes *Quicksand*'s powers of penetration tremendously acute, allowing the novel finally to pierce to Helga's very centre. The effect of the narration's pervasion of Helga's body, though, is not to psychologise her, to render her deep. To the contrary, it cements her passage into complete automaticity. She has become exhaustively de-psychologized, her psychic interiority definitively replaced with the insides of biomechanical reproduction.⁴²

The final several chapters pull out exaggerated versions of the Bildungsroman's generic stops—narrative event as conversion, deferred significance as aesthetically clumsy retrospection—in a clamour to produce teleological narrative meaning and to generate, from Helga's disparate psychological parts, a coherent novelistic personality. In staging the failure of that project, Larsen asks whether the memory of the heat emanating from those novelistic hearths feels all the warmer for being so far away.

The man with the perfect face

Adapted to the screen by Zoë Akins from Dumas's *The Lady of the Camellias*, *Camille* generates the social and psychic promises endemic to the classical Bildungsroman, even though Dumas had exposed the hidden violence upon which they were predicated. *The Lady of the Camellias* is not itself a Bildungsroman,⁴³ but in its gothic intensities the novel subjects the terms of the genre to trenchant critique. Armand is a petit bourgeois in post-monarchic France. Unlike the noblemen with whom Marguerite usually couples, his socioeconomic success depends on securing social ties he does not yet have. In the novel, Armand's father successfully convinces Marguerite to leave Armand, because, as a courtesan, she endangers Armand's acceptance into Parisian high society. The novel ends with a series of letters from Marguerite to Armand documenting the last two months of her life as she dies alone of consumption. Finally, when in the novel Armand returns broken-hearted to his family 'to be healed',⁴⁴ we are left with the sense that his father was right and that after a long recovery Armand will return to Paris and resume the path to social distinction that all young bourgeois should. The novel thus cleanses Armand's ambition plot of disruption, leaving Marguerite formally and socially un-recuperated, her burial merely a suppression.

Camille, meanwhile, rescues Marguerite from aesthetic and socioeconomic incoherence. It uses the stylistic arsenal of classical Hollywood storytelling to perform the seemingly impossible task of convincing us, without a shadow of a doubt, that Armand and Marguerite would have lived out the rest of their days

in blissful, bourgeois marriage. Crucially, Cukor's film ends with Armand arriving at Garbo's deathbed. Taylor croons to Garbo, 'The future is ours. My whole life belongs to you. I'll take you far away from Paris, where there are no unhappy memories for either of us, where the sun will help me take care of you and make you well again. We'll go back to the country', he finishes, 'where we were happy all one summer'. The lines are banal, and thus remarkable not because of their poeticism, but because coming from Taylor, they are utterly believable. Strikingly handsome, Taylor had become a national celebrity since the year before when he starred in John M. Stahl's *Magnificent Obsession* (1935), and he would, over the course of the late 30s, come to be called the 'Man with the Perfect Profile'.⁴⁵ Far from incidental, Taylor's beauty is essential to delivering on the fantasy that M. Duval's worries are, if not unfounded, irrelevant. We do not *want* to believe that the socio-economic strictures of post-monarchic France would pose any real obstacle to a bourgeois and a courtesan marrying. Especially when that bourgeois is being played by Taylor and the courtesan by Garbo.

An international movie star since at least the mid-1920s, Garbo belonged to another echelon of celebrity altogether. To advance its ideological project—to make of Marguerite a convincing bourgeois subject—the film banks on the star system. We are no longer seeing Marguerite and Armand, but Garbo and Taylor, who have, as Stanley Cavell's might suggest, taken the roles 'onto' themselves.⁴⁶ It is with the strategic use of the close up in the last scene of *Camille*, however, that the film delivers on its most profound and illusory promise: that the future Armand describes—a bourgeois life together in the French countryside—is entirely possible. It does so by collecting her body, which in the novel transforms into raw materiality, into an aesthetically impeccable image.

In the novel, Marguerite disrupts Armand's ambition plot by virtue of her inassimilability to the framework of post-monarchic bourgeois social advancement. She also disturbs it because of the radical way Dumas embodies her. Her corpse has 'sinuous curves', her dead foot protrudes from her white shroud, and an 'odor of infection seep[s]' out of the grave when the digger opens it.⁴⁷ Anathema to the fully integrated, self-possessed body as the vessel of individual will that was demanded of and constructed by the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman, Marguerite's body is decaying, reduced to rotting material. Even more undisciplined than her dead body is her dying one. Her final letters to Armand that he reads posthumously chronicle her physical deterioration, during which her body takes on a mind of its own: 'I passed into the state of a body without a soul', she writes, 'a thing without thought'. 'I never stop spitting blood', she writes the day before a friend takes over her letters since she no longer has the strength: she has 'lost her voice, then the use of her limbs'. 'I coughed and spat blood all night. Today I can no longer speak; I can hardly move my

arms ... I am going to die, ... and if ...' The letter ends with an ellipsis. 'After this word', the narrator continues, 'the few characters Marguerite had tried to scrawl were illegible, and it was Julie Duprat who had continued'.⁴⁸ Marguerite's illness threatens to decompose the novel itself, to make illegible the very cultural technology responsible for generating aesthetic models for the possessive liberal individualism toward which a young man like Armand aspires. The novel expels her, then, not simply because she poses a threat to Armand's social pursuits, but also because her consumptive body, paying for her sexual sins, tests the capacity of the novel to psychically and corporeally integrate its subjects. She exposes the extent to which the Bildungsroman's ambition plot is predicated on the expulsion of bodies that test the genre's power to generate autonomous individuality possessive of a will and subordinate to the state.

With its final closeup, the film rescues Marguerite's subjectivity from becoming decentralised in this way, exemplifying the ideological power afforded by Hollywood style and storytelling. The final close up collects her into a coherent individual who, though dying, would have fulfilled a bourgeois ideal married to Armand in the French countryside. Armand (in profile), seeing that Marguerite is dead, leans her back into the chair as the camera dollies in from a medium to a full closeup of Garbo, lit with soft, warm back lighting (See [Figure 3](#)). Garbo's refined, regal face in closeup mollifies Marguerite's threat to Armand's ambition plot.

Above all, the closeup accentuates Garbo's whiteness, which MGM had surgically enhanced by this time in her career so that she could meet the American expectation of Scandinavian ethnicity.⁴⁹ The closeup reintegrates Marguerite into an ambition plot implicitly reserved for a whiteness so



Figure 3. Final shot of *Camille* (MGM, 1936), directed by George Cukor. Courtesy of the author.

perfected that it renders moot the socioeconomic exigencies of post-monarchic French social climbing. The closeup thus exposes the extent to which the speculative achievement of Hollywood storytelling—its ability to produce seductive images of what Lauren Berlant would call ‘the good life’—is immanently bound up with the spectacle of racial performance. Plucking Marguerite/Garbo from where she is to place her where she could be (whiter, wealthier, healthier), the patina of Hollywood style safely seals her off from the complications of class, social expectation, and sickness that have thwarted her and her lovers’ pursuit of a bourgeois existence, insulating her safely within the container of a gorgeous and liberal white self. The close up hypnotically assures us that she and Armand—or Garbo and Taylor, really—would have moved to the countryside and lived out their rural, petit-bourgeois life undisturbed and wanting for nothing.

Though Cukor likely had not read *Quicksand* (he was known to read white male modernists), Akins very well may have, considering her more capacious literary curiosity and the success of Larsen’s novel. But most strikingly, *Camille*’s opening intertitle refers to Marguerite as ‘a pretty creature who lived on the quicksands of popularity.’⁵⁰ What were Larsen’s thoughts when she would watch and re-watch this film, witness and re-witness this intertitle passing before her eyes, no doubt prompting her to watch the film in alignment with her first novel? The thinness of Larsen’s archival collections leaves us to speculate as to an answer, aided by our knowledge of the circumstances of Larsen’s life in 1936. Three years earlier, her husband, Elmer Imes, had left her for a white woman—an event from which Larsen never recovered. And though Larsen’s literary career had started off with such vitality, by 1936 she couldn’t place any of her work. By the time she was sitting in the Capitol Theater on 51st Street and Broadway repeatedly viewing *Camille*, she was suffering from depression and substance abuse, and had cut ties with close friends in the Harlem cultural world of which she had once been an integral part. Not only had the ‘Negro vogue’ of the Harlem Renaissance long ended, but she, too, was growing obscure and reclusive—smothered by the ‘quicksands of popularity.’⁵¹ And whereas, as Hutchinson suggests, Marguerite’s passage into and out of Parisian high society mimics Larsen’s own trajectory through Harlem’s cultural elite, the film ultimately retrieves Marguerite from moral and financial destitution. *Camille* uses classical Hollywood plot and its full stylistic arsenal to recover her from social and economic illegibility, reintegrating her into a narrative of upward mobility and social arrival whose internal contradictions and hidden violence Dumas’s novel had made so grotesquely evident. Larsen may thus have found herself struck by the ease with which classical Hollywood style makes of Marguerite a coherent, fully embodied and self-possessing individual—how through effects of lighting, cinematography, and the right star, it effortlessly rescues her from the kinds of social marginalisation

that not just Helga, but at that point Larsen, too, was enduring. Larsen may have been struck, indeed, by the illusion the film allows itself to entertain, and that she herself in her novel did not: that the social and psychic promises of the Bildungsroman can be authentically generated and sustained for any and all who hold fast to its tenets.

According to the conventional understanding of the modernist Bildungsroman as the negation of realist form and its attendant psychic and social promises, Helga's lack of a coherent self appears as a function of Larsen's rejection of literary tradition. It appears as Larsen's resistance to wield plot in such a way that would forge a kind of selfhood incompatible with the historical challenges of biracial female subjectivity. But if the plotlessness, or the serial narrative ruptures, of *Quicksand* are simply a refusal, then what is Helga trying to find in her dark room? And what was Larsen trying to find in hers, when she would view and re-view *Camille*, a film that transports from the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman precisely the sort of plotted coherence that Dumas's novel called into question? In light of Larsen's fascination with Cukor's film, those narrative ruptures—the way that *Quicksand's* plot is constituted by a formal iteration, unable to fully generate its protagonist—seem to express an intense, albeit ambivalent, investment in plot. Fuelled by critique and tinged with longing, this ambivalence reflects something akin to Berlant's 'cruel optimism': a knowing return to an 'object/scene' just as soothing as it is injurious.⁵²

Indeed, Larsen may have looked on the final close up of Garbo's impeccable, whitened face and found herself identifying with her—seeing in her what she was, what she could have been, what she would never be. She may have been struck by how glowing and replete Marguerite looks, how the shot endows her with that fullness of life Helga could never attain—that which Larsen would never give her, and which Larsen herself was, in 1936, well on her way to losing. Larsen may have been especially attuned to the fact that no matter how flat Garbo's image might be, it nevertheless conveys the convincing impression—and we are so ready to be convinced—of emanating an especially voluminous warmth and promise.

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Notes

1. Thadious Davis and George Hutchinson mention Larsen's viewings of *Camille* in their biographies. Thadious Davis, *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem*

- Renaissance* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1994), p. 423; George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), p. 445. I have examined the anecdote in epistolary form; see Pardis Dabashi, "Dear Nella: What Did You See?" *Modernism/modernity* Print Plus 4.3 (November 2019) <https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/dabashi-dear-nella>.
2. Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2006). See also, for instance, Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013); Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeship: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); see essays in the special issue of *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, edited by John Paul Riquelme, 'Modernist Life Narratives: Bildungsroman, Biography, Autobiography,' 59.3 (Fall 2013).
 3. Esty, 2. E.M. Forster quoted by Esty, 2.
 4. See Fredric Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 35; Jacques Rancière, 'The Thread of the Novel', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 47.2 (2014), pp. 196–209; Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).
 5. I develop this claim as it pertains to the work of Nella Larsen, William Faulkner, Djuna Barnes, Max Ophuls, George Cukor, and Josef von Sternberg, as well as the historiographical methods I discuss in this introduction, in my current book in progress, 'Moving Images: Film and the Affective World of the Modernist Novel'. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2017), *passim*.
 6. Alix Beeston, *In and Out of Sight: Modernist Writing and the Photographic Unseen* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018); Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance', *PMLA*, 112.5 (Oct. 1997), pp. 1060–71; David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Duke UP, 2010); Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015); Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Julie Beth Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (Fordham UP, 2020); Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).
 7. Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2017); see introductions to David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) and Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).
 8. Beeston, 26; Dimock, 1061. See also Michaela Bronstein, *Out of Context: The Uses of Modernist Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018).
 9. Hartman, p. xiii.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
 11. Dimock, p. 1068; Eng, pp. 183–4.
 12. Hutchinson, p. 445.
 13. Davis, p. 423; Hutchinson, p. 445.
 14. Field, p. 25; Stewart, p. xviii.

15. Davis learned of Larsen's viewings of *Camille* through correspondence with Andrew Meyer, an NYU student whose mother Mayme Frye Meyer was a close companion of Larsen's in the early 30s and attended the film with her. However, 1936 is an especially sparse year in Larsen's already narrow archives, so we are unfortunately left to make educated critical conjectures as to what drew her to it. For more scholarship than that mentioned in the body of this essay, on the speculative practices that emerge as the result of archival loss, see Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2019); Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts,' *Small Axe* 26, 12.2 (June 2008), pp. 1–14. I theorise my own critical-speculative practice at length in 'Moving Images', as well as in "Cultures of Argument: The Loose Garments of Argument," forthcoming in *PMLA* (October 2020).
16. Dimock, 1064–5.
17. Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2006), p. 3.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
19. Nella Larsen, *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen*, ed. Charles R. Larson (Anchor Books, 2001), p. 97.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 148, 78.
21. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller.: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', trans. Harry Zohn, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. (Belknap Press, 2006), p. 156.
22. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1989), p. 112.
23. Larsen, p. 71, 72, 49.
24. See, for instance, Cheryl A. Wall, 'Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels,' *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2 (Spring-Summer 1986), pp. 97–111; Claudia Tate, 'Desire and Death in *Quicksand*, by Nella Larsen', *American Literary History*, 7.2 (Summer 1995), pp. 234–60; Barbara Johnson, 'The Quicksands of the Self: Nella Larsen and Heinz Kohut', in ed. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, (U of California P, 1997), pp. 252–65. For more recent instances, see Jeanne Scheper, 'The New Negro Flâneuse in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*', *African American Review*, 42.3/4 (Fall-Winter 2008), pp. 679–95; Rafael Walker, 'Nella Larsen Reconsidered: The Trouble with Desire in *Quicksand and Passing*', *MELUS*, 41.1 (March 2016), pp. 165–92. Keguro Macharia breaks from the tendency in Larsen scholarship to emphasize what he calls 'psycho-social assessments' of Helga, in order to 'foreground [her] figurative role'. See Macharia, 'Queering Helga Crane: Black Nativism in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 57.2 (Summer 2011), pp. 254–75. Macharia thus takes a page from Hazel Carby, who argues that Helga represents 'the full complexity of the modern alienated individual within capitalist social relations'. Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), p. 170.
25. Larsen, p. 36, 38.
26. Ann E. Hostetler, 'The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*', *PMLA*, 105.1 (Jan. 1990), p. 35.
27. Larsen, p. 38.

28. Visconti quoted by Barry Paris. Barry Paris, *Garbo: A Biography* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd, 1995), p. 460.
29. Antonia Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', *October*, 74 (Autumn 1995), p. 45.
30. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Indiana UP, 1982), p. 45.
31. Larsen, p. 36.
32. Larsen, p. 133, 156.
33. Angsar Nünning and Kai Marcel Sicks, *Turning Points: Concepts and Narratives of Change in Literature and Other Media* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), Introduction.
34. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 44, 48.
35. Larsen, p. 142, 144.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
37. Jacquelyn McLendon was the first to contrast Brontë's novel with *Quicksand*. Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jesse Fauset and Nella Larsen* (Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 1995), p. 89.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 155–6.
39. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1985), pp. 73–4. The German Expressionists and Soviet filmmakers contemporaneous with Larsen did not use montage to compress narrative time either. They used montage to generate hallucinatory delusions and politicized formal disruption.
40. Jameson, *passim*.
41. Larsen, p. 162.
42. For more on motherhood and mechanical reproduction, see Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction* (New York, NY: Fordham UP, 2012).
43. The novel borrows more from the tradition of Abbé Prévost and Victor Hugo, than it does from Stendhal or Honoré de Balzac (a close friend of Dumas *fil's* much more famous father). Julie Kavanagh, *The Girl Who Loved Camellias: The Life and Legend of Marie Duplessis* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2014), pp. 4–5.
44. Alexandre Dumas *fil*, *The Lady of the Camellias*, trans. Liesl Schillinger (1848. New York, NY: Penguin, 2013), p. 205.
45. Linda Alexander, *Reluctant Witness: Robert Taylor, Hollywood, and Communism* (Bearmanor, 2016);
Jane Ellen Wayne, *Robert Taylor: The Man With the Perfect Face* (New York, NY: St. Martin's, 1989).
46. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 27.
47. Dumas *fil*, p. 39.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 194, 200–1.
49. See Michaela Krützen, *The Most Beautiful Woman on the Screen: The Fabrication of the Star Greta Garbo* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 69; Arne Olave Lunde, *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010), pp. 93–4.
50. See Patrick McGilligan, *George Cukor: A Double Life, A Biography of the Gentleman Director* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Alan Kreizenbeck, *Zoe Akins: Broadway Playwright* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

51. See Hutchinson, chapters 20–22.
52. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008); *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011); passim.

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