Postscript: Nella Larsen's Faces

Alix Beeston, Cardiff University

beestona@cardiff.ac.uk

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6356-7931

Prepared for "The Modernist Face in/as World Literature," special issue of *Journal of World Literature*, eds. Anca Parvulescu and Tyne Daile Sumner

Abstract: Reflecting on the work of the special issue "The Modernist Face in/as World Literature," this essay contemplates the deflationary logic of reading the modernist face—and the modernist literary text—as acts of interpretation defeated by the very qualities of dynamism that induce them. It does so via an original account of the face in Nella Larsen's 1928 novel *Quicksand* and the widely circulated photographic portraits of Larsen made by James L. Allen and Carl Van Vechten in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Engaging the politics and effects of Larsen's literary celebrity in her time and in the present, I argue that Larsen's photographic faces, like the face of her protagonist Helga Crane in *Quicksand*, both activate and disrupt impulses toward racial differentiation and fetishization. The modernist face/text is thus framed as an object that refuses to grant the knowledge—narrative, ideological, or personal—it seems to proffer.

Keywords: Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928), author photographs, race, Carl Van Vechten

Postscript: Nella Larsen's Faces

At the opening of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928), Helga Crane sits beneath a cone of lamplight in her private room at Naxos School. Like a painting mounted with layered mats, the young teacher is a figure doubly enclosed, starkly silhouetted against the room's swampy darkness and the richly hued fabric of her chair. "An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade," or so the narrator tells us, introducing a scene of merely prospective looking, an act of observation simultaneously performed and disavowed. We read:

> In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined, she was—to use a hackneyed word—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 the features on which the observer's attention would fasten; though her nose was good, her ears delicately chiseled, and her curly blue-black hair plentiful and always straying in a little wayward, delightful way.

An observer would see Helga thus, if they could see her thus—but they cannot, due to the perfection of her evening solitude. "To the rapping of other teachers," the narrator informs us, "at that hour Helga Crane never opened her door" (36). By disassociating from the impossible view of Helga it also affords, the narration's conditional grammar invites us to share in its fantasy of illicit, undetected entrance—not only into Helga's room, but also into Helga's mind. And that second trespass is secured via the medium of her beautiful, sculptural face, which bears the only outward signs of her inner turmoil: "The minutes gathered into hours, but still she sat motionless, a disdainful smile or an angry frown passing now and then across her face" (7).

Proceeding from the assumption that Helga Crane's face indexes her psychic state, and that the narrator can read her thoughts and feelings as such, *Quicksand* nevertheless introduces, from its first pages, a signal suspicion over the face's testimony. The novel offers a masterclass in free indirect discourse, the blending of third-person narration with a character's psychological perspective. It establishes Larsen as a modernist heir, alongside James Joyce, Henry James, and Edith Wharton, to Jane Austen and Gustave Flaubert.[1] And yet its protagonist is famously a figure of psychic inscrutability; as Pardis Dabashi has recently argued, the novel is a failed bildungsroman that foregrounds its "incapacity…to narrate [Helga] into a self-possessing autonomous individual" (57). The narrator ostensibly knows Helga when and where they shouldn't—in her locked room, in the thoughts that animate her face—and certainly better than Helga knows herself. But the narrator's confidence in reading Helga's face for desires and anxieties of which she is only unevenly or belatedly conscious is undercut within the text in subtle but insistent ways.

Phrased as an imposition, the narrator's scrutiny of Helga's face at the outset of *Quicksand* becomes affiliated, at intervals, with the intrusive gazes of those Helga encounters in the novel's various social settings—from Naxos School to Chicago, Harlem, Copenhagen, and so on. Helga is constantly being "appraised" and "studied," inspected by eyes "keen" or "intent."[2] Articulating the racial logic of Helga's apparent inscrutability—that is, in Rafael Walker's terms, her illegibility and indeed "impossibility" as a "racially liminal subject in a society that thinks in black and white" (167)—this pervasive surveillance achieves its apotheosis in the interposing vision and fetishistic mediation of the Scandinavian painter Axel Olsen, whose portrait of Helga

[1] My thanks to Pardis Dabashi for her astute reading of this essay in draft form, especially her input around Larsen's use of free indirect discourse.
[2] See, for example, Larsen 59, 65, 70, 81, 101.

depicts “some disgusting sensual creature with her features” (Larsen 119). In the much-discussed scene in which Olsen proposes marriage to Helga, Olsen’s “direct gaze” produces in her “a stripped, naked feeling” against which she “[draws] herself up stiffly” and “[hardens] her sensuous, petulant mouth” (116). Bridging back to the opening description of Helga’s face, which highlights the “slight questioning petulance” of her “sensitive and sensuous lips,” the narrator here essentially fulfills their own prediction that Helga’s lips would be among those features “on which an observer’s attention would fasten.” The narration also begs the question of whose language is *sensuous* or *petulance*—is it Olsen’s or the narrator’s? This is a function of the obfuscations of free indirect speech, “a narratological performance of the kinetic flow of a character’s thought” that masks the origins of its discourse—and that serves, as Paul Dawson has recently suggested, not so much to allow a character to “speak” for themselves as to flaunt the insight and power of the narrator (and, at a remove, the author) (182). *Petulance*, with its connotations of childish insolence or capriciousness, is hardly a neutral term, not least in the context of the discourses of racial uplift that Helga unequivocally rejects at Naxos. Derived from the Latin verb *petere*—to go, to seek, to request—*petulance* carries a sense of willful striving and impudent desire that refuses the imperatives, laid down by the white preacher whose diatribe replays in Helga’s mind as she sits in her darkened room, for Black people “to be satisfied in the estate in which they had been called” and not to “become avaricious and grasping” (37). The narrator’s description of Helga’s face is thus uncomfortably aligned with the white artist Olsen’s caricature of Helga as a “sensuous creature” *and* the white preacher’s ideology of respectability and uplift—two forms of racial discipline, on either side of the Atlantic, which enrage and alienate Helga.

Hence *Quicksand* relates, if not fully analogizes, Olsen’s painting of Helga’s face with the narrator’s earlier description of it—in words the narrator admits are “hackneyed,” clichéd,

overdetermined. It betrays the impulse towards—and the chasm between—seeing the face and knowing the person. It registers the face as a problem in both epistemological and narrative terms, that is, as a surface that collects and repels language, making and marking the poverty of description. “The minutes gathered into hours, but still she sat motionless, a disdainful smile or an angry frown passing now and then across her face”: how thinly the narrator describes the meanings of Helga’s facial expressions, her mouth’s movements fixed into “disdain” or “anger”; how little I come to trust the narrator’s labor of affective portraiture, a scopic conceit at once hypothetical and unwelcome.

*

I’ve long been fascinated by what images of faces don’t disclose. My first book, *In and Out of Sight: Modernist Writing and the Photographic Unseen*, begins with a reading of Francis Galton’s “composite portraits,” exercises in re-photography that combined standardized portraits of criminals, the infirm, and other sociobiological “types” in an effort to capture and display what Galton called “the central physiognomic type of any race or group” (10; see, for example, Fig. 1). Or rather, the book begins by staging the difficulty or even futility of reading “the swimming form of these mathematically averaged and mashed-up faces” (Beeston 1). The drama of the composite face is its failure to fulfill its pseudoscientific mandate. “The eye gropes for the residue of idiosyncrasy and individuality that Galton hoped to obscure,” I wrote out of my encounter with these murky, almost-motile faces, which strikingly instantiate Gilles Deleuze’s sense of the painted face as an overloaded composition: “a content which to a greater or lesser extent rebels against the outline” (Beeston 2; Deleuze 88). “Etched in a hazy play of joinings and junctures,” I concluded, “Galton’s photographic figurations are riven with an interpretative vagueness and instability that belies their claims to the scientific knowing and controlling of the

bodies of others through photographic mechanisms. They query, rather than codify, the discursive map of congenital essences that Galton imagines and images upon bodily surfaces" (2).

<Fig. 1>

Returning to Galton's composite faces now, several years later, I feel myself still held by their wayward, multiplicitous expressions, their eyes—eyes-on-eyes-on-eyes—whose leadenness is somehow also lively, and yet whose measure of liveliness does not comport to life. In affecting a form of knowledge they fail to deliver (much like free indirect discourse in Larsen), these faces emblematize for me the crisis of visual modernity, in which the new technologies that seemed to validate the scopic regime of monocular Cartesian perspectivalism—with its governing faith in "the truth of the body as a sight"—served paradoxically to undermine it (Jacobs 8). As Jean-Louis Comolli notes, the development of photography and the cinema constitute "the triumph and the grave of the eye. . . . Decentered, in panic, thrown into confusion by all this new magic of the visible, the human eye finds itself affected with a series of limits and doubts" (123). As I demonstrate in *In and Out of Sight*, this socio-technological episteme of visual doubt is crucial for understanding modernist literary aesthetics of sequenced assemblage and juxtaposition, wherein formal interstices and gaps register what the eye can't see and what language can't describe.

This is substantially an argument about how to read faces in modernist visual culture and literature—or how to fail to read them—although I don't think I conceived of it that way until I read Rochelle Rives's excellent new study *The New Physiognomy: Face, Form, and Modern Expression*. The modernist face, as Rives suggests, is an "aesthetic site of ambiguity linked to the distortion of modern vision," which works to resist "the physiognomic ideal of a readable and relatable subject" (2, 7). Compacting and becoming affiliated with tropes of illegibility and disassociation, the face invites a mode of reading that is homologous to the reading of modernist

literary and visual texts—a contingent, inventive practice that must reckon with its potential to be "misguided" or "wrong" (18, 15). If the face is a plot, in other words, it is modernist in a paradigmatic sense: enigmatic, dynamic, difficult, and unresolved. "One cannot ultimately 'tell' what is in a face," as Rives writes, but the face, like the modernist text, nevertheless elicits "the desire to read deeply into what we cannot read" (8, 24).

The deflationary logic of reading the modernist face/text, an act defeated by the very dynamism that induces it, is also borne out in the essays in this special issue. Ezra Pound's concept of the "one image poem" is, as Anca Parvulescu and Tyne Sumner note in the discussion that introduces the issue, the result of the poet's effort—and, importantly, failure—to translate into words the "sudden emotion" produced by the sight of a crowd of faces at a Parisian metro station. Pound's stratagem of "super-position . . . one idea set on top of another," which sought "to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective . . . darts into a thing inward and subjective," might be conceived as a literary variation on Galton's technique of composite portraiture: the construction of a palimpsestic object that attempts to record the exterior as it fleets to the interior—and to surface what the face promises and withholds (87, 89). Such a comparison is encouraged, I think, not only by Pound's use of the term *superposition*, which, as James McDougall observes, "suggests the jargon of photography (superimpose)," but also by the political affinity between Pound's well-known fascism and antisemitism and the biological racism of Galton, the father of modern eugenics. Like Galton's superimposed faces, Pound's superposed faces are, in the end, *apparitions*. They are ghosts of his own making.

Parvulescu and Sumner draw attention, too, to how Walter Benjamin's quintessentially alienated modern subject, the flâneur, is "a physiognomist, a reader of faces in the street"—and one perhaps patterned after Edgar Allan Poe's "man of the crowd," the narrator of a 1840 story who is obsessed and confounded by the uncategorizable "type" of a stranger amid London's

heaving "mob" (396, 392). The elderly man's face is a study in "absolute idiosyncrasy" (392). Meanwhile, Stephanie Trigg's essay in this issue narrates the "ugly," "plain," or anomalous girl's face—the face that fails to conform to norms of feminine beauty—as an object around which the marriage plot faulters in the twentieth-century Australian novel, revealing, much as *Quicksand*'s failed bildungsroman does, the (misogynistic) rules for reading both faces and texts within modernism's social and specular economies. In ways that correspond to Helga Crane's characterization as a figure of reticence and secrecy (there is, her colleagues at Naxos believe, "something" about her manner "which discouraged questionings," and her face is repeatedly described as a mask [Larsen 48]), Lynda Ng fleshes out—epidermalizes—facial inscrutability as a figure of racial differentiation and fetishization in Larsen's second novel *Passing* (1929). As Irene Redfield exclaims of Clare Kendry when they chance upon one another at the Drayton's rooftop bar, "They were Negro eyes! Mysterious and concealing. And set in that ivory face under that bright hair, there was about them something exotic" (Larsen 191). Similarly, Maria Siciliano consolidates a sense of a modernist tradition in which face reading is inevitably face *mis*reading via James Baldwin's fiction. "A strange smile wavered just around his face, not yet *in* his face": Tish's startling description of her father's response to the news of her pregnancy in *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) eloquently (dis)locates the meaning and affect of the face, which becomes an expanded spatio-temporal field, a galaxy in which "strange" expressions float (44). To read a modernist face/text is to read around, over, or through it.

*

Upon its publication in 1928, *Quicksand* gathered intrigue as a site of revelation—and concealment—of its mysterious author. "Unusual interest centers around this book," observed the *Chicago Defender* in May 1928, "because of the fact that so little has been and is known of the author. Many persons are of the opinion that much of her life is reflected in *Quicksand*, her first

novel" (Hutchinson 279). The notice of the novel's publication carried a portrait of Larsen, taken the previous year by the young Black photographer James Latimer Allen (fig. 2). In the early months of 1928—and coinciding with the release of *Quicksand* in March of that year—Allen included his portrait of Larsen in an exhibition at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, the home of the newly founded Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints and a hub of Harlem Renaissance intellectual and artistic life (Hutchinson 276). Displayed as one among a host of Black luminaries and circulated in the press, Allen's portrait of Larsen emerged as the image of the author most associated with her first novel.[3] It was even, in a sense, substitutable for it, since it was a portrait of the author of a novel that was received as a portrait of the author; Allen's portrait supplied the novel with the image of the author which the book was already thought to constitute. The photograph and the novel were thus enrolled to another composite portrait: another superimposition papering over a more fundamental lack.

<Fig. 2>

The author's function as an object of fascination is served by the photograph's play of shadow and detail, as well as Larsen's equivocal pose: her body angled away from the camera, her face turned toward it. All is velvety and even toned, bathed in the dreamy soft-focus of the pictorialists—but for Larsen's gaze, whose directness seems not only compounded but reciprocated in the photographer's sharpening detail around her eyes. Piercing and clear, her eyes are, for her biographer George Hutchinson, "revealing something, a quickness of perception, 'a look'" (260). As Hutchinson's tentative phrasing suggests, Larsen's photographed face, like all photographed faces, reveals *only* something, *merely* "a look"; it is a terrain of knowing circled

[3] There are two photographs that survive from this sitting; the second, a less closely framed portrait of Larsen sitting in a chair and immersed in some sewing, was also circulated in marketing materials related to *Quicksand* (Hutchinson 260, 274).

with unknowing, a penetrating eye amid a field of blur. And as Allen's portrait becomes appended and aligned to *Quicksand*, Larsen's face emerges as a sign principally for the desire to read her face as a sign. It summons and stalls the scrutiny of the public—in her time, and still today—as a species of the intense gazes that flatter and tyrannize Helga Crane. Indeed, the soft focus of Allen's portrait is cemented as a trope of the unfulfillable desire to know Larsen via her image—including the "image" that is *Quicksand*—by its use on the covers of not one but two modern reissues of her work: Dover's 2006 edition of *Quicksand* and Everyman Library's 2023 *Complete Fiction*. In each case, the original photograph has been cropped tightly about the face and appears to have been edited to augment the blurred effect—a technique that, in the Dover edition, submerges Larsen beneath an additional layer of painterly texture, querying more completely the differentiation of figure and ground and, in the process, obliterating one of her eyes (fig. 3).

<Fig. 3>

The intrigue that surrounds Larsen to some extent reflects the circumstances of her literary celebrity. Because Larsen suffered a series of professional and personal crises and drifted into obscurity and isolation in the 1930s, and because, following her death in 1969, her slim body of work was so emphatically reclaimed within the evolving canons of Black literature, women's literature, queer literature, and modernist literature, she is at once highly visible and shrouded in mystery within contemporary literary culture. She is an author whose posthumous acclaim accrues a melancholic poignancy in the light of its previous absence. In its pathological structuring around inaccessibility and remoteness, as well as its affiliations with disappointment, dislocation, and loss, Larsen's persona is also patently racialized, and precisely along the lines of the "tragic mulatta" trope that her novels renovate with such exquisite sensitivity. Hence the experience I had several years ago in teaching *Passing*, when a group of undergraduate

students—of their own volition—pulled up author photographs on Google Images in an attempt to assess whether Larsen could have passed as white. "Could Nella Larsen pass?" likewise begins a *London Review of Books* essay marking the release of a 2020 edition of *Passing* by the writer Amber Medland. "Looking at a photograph of her by Carl Van Vechten," Medland continued, "I doubt she could."[4] To search online for Larsen's image is to participate in the internet's ceaseless traffic in faces—its churn of "avatars, profiles, traces, and indexes," in Marion Zilio's terms—but the racialist impulse that defines this action also shapes the readings of Larsen's author photographs from their earliest dissemination (3). When, in May 1928, the *Baltimore Afro-American* illustrated an article about *Quicksand* with a cropped version of Allen's portrait, the image bore a caption that invited readers to attend to it as simultaneously a racial proof and a racial puzzle: "COLORED OR WHITE" (Hutchinson 282).

*

What did Larsen see when she looked at her own photographed face? What did her portraits mean to her?[5] After she sat for Allen, Larsen sent a print of her shadowy portrait as a gift to the author and theater critic Carl Van Vechten and his wife, the actress Fania Marinoff, who were at the time two of her closest friends. The print was inscribed—as can be seen in the version reproduced in this essay—with a handwritten message: "For dear Carl and lovely Fania / Nella." In March 1928, she sent one of the first prepublication copies of *Quicksand* to Van Vechten and Marinoff with almost the same inscription ("For dear Carl and Fania / with my love / Nella"); the following year, she offered the couple a more public gift in the dedication to *Passing*: "To Carl

[4] Apparently Larsen did pass on at least one occasion. In a letter she wrote to Van Vechten on May 14, 1932, she described how she and Grace Nail Johnson, the wife of James Weldon Johnson, had recently travelled south to "the best restaurant in a rather conservative town called Murphreesbourogh [sic] and demanded lunch and *got* it, plus all the service in the world and an invitation to return" (Clark 198).

[5] I echo here the difficult and revelatory questions Dabashi poses about the "affective experiences" of modernist authors, including Larsen, in the context of their experiences of cinematic spectatorship: not just "What did you see?" but the "thornier" "What did you *see* in what you saw?" (37).

Van Vechten and Fania Marinoff" (Hutchinson 273, 318). Larsen's inscription of Allen's photograph suggests that she took some pleasure in this image, or at the least that she was happy for it to circulate as a private token of her affection. To sign and send the image to her friends was to enlist it in what Beth McCoy characterizes as the transactional economy of Larsen's relationship with Van Vechten—an interracial friendship "full of conspiracy and flattery," whose intensity reflected the pair's shared determination to "sidestep or disavow a racialized conflict always on the horizon by reaffirming their individual affinities for each other" (45, 49). I see Larsen's inscription of the photograph as a means of registering how certain of its effects remain reserved from her wider audience—however much it circulates in the press or other public fora, and whatever attachments to her image may be formed by members of the public. Her inscription reminds me of the open palm of Silvina Ocampo in the photograph Massimo Leone discusses in his essay for this issue, a gesture that relates the (author's) face as a zone of refusal. Larsen's handwriting recasts the portrait as a relational object, such that the "look" Hutchinson sees in her eyes, the unplottable expression of her face, becomes referable to her address not to us but rather to her friends. The image—the face—is not "for" us, a fact that clarifies its ambiguity precisely by compounding it.

In this respect, Allen's 1927 portrait foreshadows the photographs of Larsen that Van Vechten himself would make several years later—a series of portraits, from several sittings in the early 1930s, that today constitute probably the most well-known images of Larsen. In 1932, Van Vechten learned how to use a Leica, a small, handheld 35mm camera, and discovered a passion for photography that spelled the end of his writerly vocation—but not his mission as a devoted albeit controversial patron of African American culture. He soon installed a studio and darkroom in his apartment on New York City's 55th Street, where he began a decades-long project of photographing notable Black Americans in the arts and sciences (a mirror image, in a way, of the

series of drawings of prominent—and conspicuously white—British personages on which Wyndham Lewis embarked that same year, *Thirty Personalities and a Self-Portrait*, examined by Rochelle Rives in this issue). Intended to "glorify the Negro," as Van Vechten put it in a 1959 letter to Langston Hughes, the portraits composed a visual compendium of Black artists and public figures, which was archived as part of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection established by Van Vechten at Yale University in 1941 (Hughes and Van Vechten 304). Yet these photographs are also significantly personal and private objects. Made according to the photographer's pleasure—his sitters came to his home by invitation, and he only invited people he liked—the portraits were seldom sold or exhibited. They were instead given as gifts to the sitters or to others of his correspondents in the form of postcards or 8x10 prints. As Dorothy Stringer argues, Van Vechten's decision to share the photographs among networks of friendship "mandates a serialized, segmented form of viewership, in which each image both invokes and defers the intimacy and personal identification that domestic portraiture conventionally elicits" (112). An intimacy deferred is also an effect of the images' spatial poetics, by which the subjects are flanked by theatrical backdrops and props within a compressed picture space. The Van Vechten image, much like Helga's private room at Naxos, is a very particular, constrained world—and one to which Van Vechten's camera, as much as *Quicksand*'s narrator, only feigns to grant us access.

<Figs. 4 and 5>

Harking back to the nineteenth-century portrait parlor, Van Vechten's improvisational, ironic, and anti-realist style of portraiture functions both to decontextualize and denaturalize Blackness *and* to reinscribe to Black subjects primitivist values such as "expressive intensity" (Stringer 130). How then are we to read the portraits he made of Larsen, which emplace her in a field of dense, divergent pattern (for example, figs. 4 and 5)? The busyness of the clothing she

wears and the backdrop against which she sits—fabrics printed with flowers, polka dots, or lines in zigzagging waves—signify in complex ways in the light of Larsen's acute awareness of the politics of dress in *Quicksand*, a novel that critiques the racist imperatives defining both the compulsory blandness of the women's clothing at Naxos School and the "screaming colors" in which Helga is dressed by her white relatives in Copenhagen (Larsen 103). Larsen herself, however, claimed to treasure Van Vechten's photographs of her and she took their receipt as an occasion to encourage and flatter her friend. "The more I look at the pictures the more I like them," she wrote to him in September 1932. "I am certain I never had any pictures half so lovely or so interesting" (Hutchinson 406). George Hutchinson finds it difficult to square Larsen's praise with the portraits themselves, in which, as he observes,

> Larsen looks more remote than ever. . . . Without the hint of a smile, or any attempt at "prettiness," she gives nothing away. Her hair, suddenly very thin, is drawn back over her ears in what must be a tight bun, close to the skull. The mouth is solemn and the large dark eyes, under extremely thick black brows, are ringed with shadow. Much less attractive, in a conventional sense, than any of the early photographs that have surfaced, these images are nevertheless distinctly haunting. (406)

For Hutchinson, Larsen's face in Van Vechten's portraits symbolizes what he calls her "crack-up": a period of relational, professional, and psychological turmoil that began, in the early 1930s, with the breakdown of her marriage in the aftermath of her husband Elmer Imes's infidelity and the embarrassment of a plagiarism scandal (398). What strikes me, though, is how Larsen's face, framed by her hair or her close-fitted black hat, functions as a site of relative blankness against the clashing prints of dress and backdrop. The fabrics that might be viewed as a fetishistic marker of Blackness as decorative excess (versus the "purity" and "restraint" of whiteness) also

produce Larsen's face as a a visual pause or gap in which the rhythmic competition of the patterns is suspended if not resolved. This inversion of the portrait's usual operations—whereby the face pulls focus not for its expressive detail but for its surface bareness—serves to highlight those operations, along with the desires and projections which underwrite them. Inviting me to apprehend the face as one formal element among others within the composition, Van Vechten's portraits seem to redouble the refusal implied via Larsen's habit of averting her eyes from the camera (as Hutchinson says: *she gives nothing away*). Whereas Galton's composite face rebels against its outline, to return to Deleuze's phrasing, here the outline rebels against Larsen's face. And in both instances the face is a riddle that won't solve, a failed character study, a modernist plot.

Works Cited

Beeston, Alix. *In and Out of Sight: Modernist Writing and the Photographic Unseen*. New York: Oxford UP, 2018.

Baldwin, James. *If Beale Street Could Talk*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

Clark, William Bedford. "The Letters of Nella Larsen to Carl Van Vechten: A Survey." *Resources for American Literary Study* 8.2 (1978): 193–99.

Comolli, Jean-Louis. "Machines of the Visible." *The Cinematic Apparatus*. Eds. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath. New York: St Martin's Press, 1980. 121–42.

Dabashi, Pardis. *Losing the Plot: Film and Feeling in the Modern Novel*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2023.

Dawson, Paul. *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator: Authorship and Authority in Twenty-First Century Fiction*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Galton, Francis. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1907.

Hughes, Langston, and Carl Van Vechten. *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925–1964*. Ed. Emily Bernard. New York: Knopf, 2001.

Hutchinson, George. *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2006.

Jacobs, Karen. *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005.

Larsen, Nella. *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen*. Ed. Charles R. Larson. New York: Anchor Books, 2001.

McCoy, Beth. "Speaking of Dedications: Carl Van Vechten and Nella Larsen." *Intertexts* 8.1 (2003): 37–54.

McDougall, James. "Pound's Poetry as Image Text." *ImageTexT* 2.1 (2005). https://imagetextjournal.com/pounds-poetry-as-image-text/.

Medland, Amber. "They Roared with Laughter." *London Review of Books* 43.9 (May 6, 2021). https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n09/amber-medland/they-roared-with-laughter.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Man of the Crowd." *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays*. Eds. Patrick F. Quinn and G. R. Thompson. New York: Library of America, 1996. 388–96.

Pound, Ezra. *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska.* New York: New Directions, 1970.

Rives, Rochelle. *The New Physiognomy: Face, Form, and Modern Expression*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2024.

Stringer, Dorothy. *Not Even Past: Race, Historical Trauma, and Subjectivity in Faulkner, Larsen, and Van Vechten*. New York: Fordham UP, 2009.

Walker, Rafael. "Nella Larsen Reconsidered: The Trouble with Desire in *Quicksand* and *Passing*." *MELUS* 41.1 (2016): 165–92.

Zilio, Marion. *Faceworld*. Trans. Robin Mackay. Newark: Polity Press, 2020.