The Shadow's Shadow, or Gendered Ambition in Asta Nielsen's 1921 *Hamlet*

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was the subject of at least thirteen silent films, yet Asta Nielsen's 1921 *Hamlet*, directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall, was unique on several levels, with none of the play's familiar language nor the visual icons one would expect. No film adaptation captures the tragedy's thematic ambition as masterfully through the same interrogation of light and dark that the original play realises through words. In this article, I explore the film's strategic use of chiaroscuro in tandem with props and costuming, and its continuing influence on the visual reception of Shakespeare's play.

Keywords
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Silent Film, gender, Weimar cinema

Résumé
La tragédie *Hamlet*, de William Shakespeare, a inspiré au moins treize films muets. Pour autant, la version de 1921, dirigée par Svend Gade et Heinz Schall, et produite par Asta Nielsen, était unique à plusieurs égards, dont l'absence de toute référence au texte si familier et des icônes visuels qu'on pouvait attendre. Aucune adaptation filmique ne capture l'ambition thématique de la tragédie de manière aussi magistrale, livrant cette interrogation de la lumière et de l'obscurité que le texte déploie dans les mots. Cet article analyse l'utilisation stratégique du clair-obscur en association avec les accessoires et les costumes, pour ouvrir sur l'influence encore actuelle de ce film sur la réception visuelle de la pièce.

Mots clés
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, film muet, genre, cinéma de Weimar

Like the play at hand, I begin with a question. How can we comprehend Shakespeare's plays –

the insight of his dialogue and the delight of his poetry – in silence? As film became an

increasingly accessible medium, filmmakers looked to Shakespeare for stories, trusting audience

familiarity to bring the sound and cadence of his language to the moving images. *Hamlet*, the

longest of Shakespeare's plays, was adapted into at least thirteen silent films that could make

little use of its bounty of words;[1] three *Hamlet* adaptations appeared in 1910 alone, one was

produced by August Blom of the *Nordisk Film Kompagni*, a leading company of the Danish film industry's golden age. The following year, Blom produced *Balletdanserinden/The Ballet Dancer* (1911) featuring Asta Nielsen, a new actor who appeared in 52 films before playing the lead in her own *Hamlet* in 1921, the first film she produced through her company, Art-Film (directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall).[2] Hers was the silent film era's last word on Shakespeare's wordiest hero, closing a chapter that another woman, Sarah Bernhardt, had opened twenty years earlier with *L'duel d'Hamlet/The Duel Scene from Hamlet* (Clément Maurice, 1900).

Women performing Hamlet were not a novelty of silent film, but a continuation of a long stage tradition through which directors and actors could express the character's ambiguities.[3] Nielsen's *Hamlet* complicated this tradition by reshaping the play to incorporate ideas derived from an obscure essay by Edward P. Vining that read Hamlet's 'wordy warfare' and delay (among other qualities) as evidence that Hamlet was actually a woman.[4] So Nielsen was not just a woman playing Hamlet, but rather a woman playing a woman forced to live as a man, which is more in keeping with Shakespeare's cross-dressing comedies than his tragedies. Considering the historical feminization of Hamlet, and Nielsen's adaptation of Vining's Hamlet, Lawrence Danson argues that Vining had amassed Hamlet's 'supposedly essential female traits [to prepare] for his – and, as he traces it, Shakespeare's – transition from a merely female-minded Hamlet to Hamlet as a woman in perfect fact'. Vining does go as far as calling Hamlet a woman, but 'it would be more accurate to say that Vining's Hamlet is a man emasculated by another man's competitive scrutiny'.[5] As such, Hamlet was less a subject of interpretation for Vining than a tool to convey his gender biases and inhibitions. By shifting the gender dynamics of Vining's essay and rejecting its denigration of the feminine, or feminization, as a weakness in Hamlet's character, Nielsen was able to employ Vining's premise to perform gender fluidity, and to

convey that fluidity as the means to achieve ambition and agency. Moreover, the film also drew

on, and bolstered, the swiftly developing Freudian dialogue surrounding Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

that would continue for decades to come.[6]

By 1921, Nielsen had achieved unprecedented international celebrity. She was renowned

as a master of silent performance and rose to prominence in Weimar cinema. Popularly known as

'*Die Asta*', Nielsen once insisted that words (even Shakespeare's) were superfluous.[7] Indeed, she

fundamentally embodied the ways in which the industry was inventing itself by representing the

independence and emancipation of the 'New Woman' and all it signified visually and culturally.

In *Visible Man* (1924), Béla Balázs contended that Nielsen, together with Charlie Chaplin,

embodied the unique aesthetics of film as a medium.[8] In an intriguing article on the ekphrastic

role of the 'myth' of the New Woman in Balázs's early film theory, Erica Carter argues that his

pairing of Chaplin and Nielsen reveals 'the gendered vision on which [Balázs's] influential film

theory rests'.[9] Balázs contended that while Chaplin had a broader role in representing the 'little

guy' of the American city, Nielsen's influence was far more significant. Exalting her through

descriptions that consistently use 'rhapsodic language', Balázs named her the muse of film, and

thereby rendered her an icon representing 'the quintessence of cinematic poetry'. Carter notes

that for Balázs, Nielsen's image functioned 'as both visual foil and affective trigger for a

gendered film-critical account that locates the female body on screen as the source of a

quintessentially cinematic erotic power'.[10] That a text of such influence (titled the Visible 'Man')

should focus its analysis of film on the physical presence and sexuality, and more importantly,

the precedence, of so visible a *woman* is telling, particularly because the artistic milieu from

which such films emerged celebrated a shifting gender aesthetic. The Gade/Schall and Nielsen

Hamlet is a representative film of this era; one in which the aesthetic icons did not just wield

erotic power because of their female bodies, but because those bodies were so often visually androgynous. Yet these women embodied not just androgyny, but fluid gender, and as such were less the object of the male gaze than active agents performing gender fluidly. Thus, a body on screen could visually represent masculinity or femininity, or both, and thus command aesthetic power without denigrating the one or elevating the other.

Silent film versions of Shakespeare were particularly influential to the future of Shakespearean film adaptations and the consequent reception of the source material. As Sarah Hatchuel writes, silent film 'inaugurated the movement from a verbal to a visual point of view': film aimed 'not to communicate Shakespeare's language but to tell the stories of the plays by including scenes either non-existent or only described in the original plays'. This resulted in two forms of silent Shakespearean adaptations: 'films that favoured the means of theatre and concentrated on the actors, the sets, and the mise-en-scène; and those that used the camera with the intention of cinematic creation'.[11] Perhaps in support of Nielsen's assertion that Shakespeare's language was unnecessary, Hatchuel points out that silent film was considered an appropriate medium for Shakespeare because of its movement away from the verbal. Initially, as Hatchuel argues, the rise of talking pictures marked a significant decline in film adaptations of Shakespeare because it was thought initially that 'speaking parts might not work well with Elizabethan language'.[12] Nielsen and Gade/Schall's use of Vining does make their film one of the more surprising adaptations, but it is also an innovative example of early cinematic narrative and artistry. Realizing both forms of Shakespearean silent film that Hatchuel describes, it is an actor-centred film that depended on the theatricality of physical performance; that used the elaborate traditions of *mise-en-scène*, but also creatively experimented with the new medium in ways that other filmmakers would follow for years to come.

Nielsen and Gade/Schall diverged further from the play than its use of Vining's premise insofar as – unlike other silent film adaptations – they did not include any of the play's text in intertitles and dispensed with its iconic visuals. Across a long history of production, appropriation, and adaptation in endless media and forms, it is rare to find a *Hamlet* in which Hamlet is not holding Yorick's skull, in which King Hamlet' ghost does not appear, or in which 'to be or not to be' is neither spoken, referenced, nor somehow paraphrased. Despite the significant narrative differences, and the absence of familiar visuals and references, arguably, few adaptations have captured the original play's themes as well, and few have influenced subsequent visual adaptations as dramatically as this production. For a medium that relied on visuals and performance to convey its story, the omission of such familiar signifiers seems illogical, but the original play's linguistic, thematic, and poetic dualisms materialize instead primarily through a strategic use of film's earliest artistic devices such as chiaroscuro.

On these points, David Kennedy's exploration of the intersections between scenography, performance style, and audience reception, in the development of performance criticism, offers further insight.[13] There is a clear relationship, he writes, 'between what a production looks like and what its spectators accept as its statement and value' because 'the visual signs the performance generates are not only the guide to its social and cultural meaning but often constitute the meaning itself'.[14] Kennedy further outlines the ways theatre (and later cinema) audiences decode the visual; this can occur automatically, as in knowing 'a metal circle' worn on the head conveys regency, or overtly, as in the 'metaphoric application of the visual' based 'on the similarity between the signifier and its reference'. Spectators then impose a reading that makes sense of the scene, as 'there is no phenomenological difference between an action performed with great internal justification […] and one merely aleatoric'.[15] Consequently,

spectators do not need Nielsen's Hamlet to hold a skull, or to see text on an intertitle, to construct meaning from actions, costuming, props, and scenic design. In fact, as Kennedy notes, 'how Hamlet is dressed reveals as much about the style and intention of the performance as anything' spoken and 'may well influence a spectator more than Shakespeare's poetry'. Adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's works offer 'a unique opportunity to test and refine' this because his plays challenge 'directors and designers to discover new and appropriate performance styles that illuminate the texts and yet ring true in a world almost totally transformed, both in and out of the theatre, since their composition'.[16]

Writing more specifically about silent film, Judith Buchanan discusses the sacrifices of removing the spoken word from performances of *Hamlet*, and argues that the loss is felt in the counterpoint, provocative design and engagements 'between the dumb show and its worded sequel and between various proxies of the play'.[17] Buchanan writes:

> When dumb show is not balanced by speech, the frisson of that particular interplay is necessarily lost. […] Silencing the drama necessarily invests the external 'trappings' with great prominence while placing 'that within which passeth show' by definition beyond reach. The silent movie glories in that which is amenable to being shown. Even an inner life must be given some form of visual expression, however subtly suggested or symbolically configured, to have any purchase in this medium (p. 148).

Buchanan argues for the importance and the necessary *prominence* of objects in silent film. As we shall see, in the Gade/Schall-Nielsen *Hamlet* these 'trappings', in the form of props and costuming, work in tandem with body positioning and chiaroscuro, and are further employed in a

determinedly gendered mode realized through direction and performance.[18] The play's dualisms are generated through the strategic placement and evolution of contrasting visual elements that simultaneously shift gender conventions. Headwear in particular is used in tandem with body positioning that blurs into, employs, or doubles for, setting and architecture. Moreover, the artful use of shadows, and dark or light props, in deliberate contrast to the costuming, background, or positioning of Nielsen herself, are used to suggest the female body she hides in the shadows to perform a male body. The film thereby examines and recasts the theme of ambition by locating the original play's two women, Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as the ambiguous depiction of Horatio, on a chiaroscuric spectrum through which Nielsen's gender-fluid Hamlet manoeuvres.

Headwear: 'My crown, my own ambition and my queen'[19]

Thirty-one lines of Hamlet's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 2.2, in which he equates Denmark with a prison, are not included in the play's early Quartos.[20] Possibly because this may have caused offence to Anne of Denmark, wife to James I. Hamlet's friends try to lighten his spirit by flattering him: Denmark only *seems* a prison, they tell him, because it is 'too narrow' for his 'ambitious' mind.[21] Nevertheless, the mirthless Hamlet goes on to darken dreams into shadows as effortlessly as Denmark into a prison. Initially, they trivialize his ambitions by equating them to dreams, and next dissolve them into air before ultimately rendering them 'a shadow's shadow'. This verbal doubling gives ambition a substance through a palpable darkness, only to empty it because shadows do not cast shadows. Hamlet's 'ambition' thus emerges most profoundly when he confronts the 'shadow's shadow', or rather, the shadow of a father whose absent presence shadows Hamlet's thoughts. When Hamlet first encounters the apparition, the ghost first mentions 'murder'. Hamlet repeats the word, and the ghost repeats it again.[22]

'Murder' is trebled between them and, spoken aloud, incarnates and evolves from shadow to subject, reinforcing the ghost's presence and helping to materialise the crime he announces: in threes the ghost appears, in threes he speaks with 'list, list O list' and by naming his murder 'foul' thrice in quick succession.[23] The ghost's insubstantial 'words, words, words' become Hamlet's and thus, a shadow's shadow, a substance that is not, wakes him to ambitious dreams.[24] When he next appears in the closet scene, the ghost casts a shadow once again. In attacking Gertrude, Hamlet unburdens himself, attempting to resolve the psychological dissonance between right and wrong, or as we see in the film's chiaroscuro, light and dark conceived through shadow in relation to object through two material, though still 'counterfeit,' objects, or rather, two props of images of fathers who are not: one, the dead father, present as a shade, and two, the murderous uncle who stands as a shadow of fatherhood.[25] It is this fundamental understanding of ambition that Gade/Schall and Nielsen actualize in their silent film needing no words, ghosts, or indeed, even a skull for Hamlet to ponder mortality, because dark and light, materialized through stark chiaroscuro actualizes the struggle between substantive ambition and insubstantial dreams via the shadows through which we perceive them. The irresolvable conflict between the women's substantive presence and the insubstantial fathers that burden Shakespeare's *Hamlet* find resolution in Gade/Schall and Nielsen's interpretation via the shifting light and dark visuals that viewers experience as shadows of meaning.

Like Hamlet and Horatio describing the ghost of Hamlet's father, I trace these shadows from 'top to toe' and 'head to foot' and begin with the headwear.[26] With the exception of Ophelia, to which I will return, every woman in the film wears some form of headwear (even most minor female characters and extras appear in hats) while the leading men wear their hair long and loose (with the occasional exception of Horatio, to which I will also return). Wearing

either tall, white, conical hennins or hennin-like hats, broad crown-like hats, or diadems, the women are rarely bareheaded. The film uses several elaborate long shots where women appear in crowds with their high hats distinguishing them by amplifying their presence and physically heightening their bodies. Visually, the hats evoke the surrounding architecture, transforming the women into moving pillars by which they are granted both prominence in the stability they suggest and fluidity in their mobility. The choice of hennins may have been meant to evoke the medieval, but the deliberate appearance, absence and evolution of the headwear suggests a design that speaks to the contemporary ethos of Weimar culture, rather than just convenient costuming. Mila Ganeva has studied the intricate connections between Weimar film and the burgeoning fashion industry, which, she argues, both addressed the increasing 'infatuation with appearances' through the 'transformative effects of clothes' realized most often through Weimar film's repeated use of masquerades and cross-dressing (and the resultant mix-ups). Fashion within film, Ganeva writes, 'given its distinct visuality and its obvious connection to everyday usage, can be considered one of the most pronounced forces shaping the experience of modernity for the masses'. Ganeva further notes that, much like film itself, fashion shows 'owed much to the repertoire of theatrical display'. Because 'film emerged as a new mass media early in the twentieth century, the fashion business quickly realized its potential for the distribution of fashionable images to even larger audiences'.[27] Though set in medieval Denmark, *Hamlet* represented the art, style, and design of Weimar culture. As a fashion icon, Nielsen embodied the glamour of the period and consciously used it to powerful effect onscreen.

Though we are party to Hamlet's secret from the start, within the context of the film Hamlet is a man and wears no headwear. The one exception is when she wears a fashionable hat unlike any other, and only in liminal moments when she is travelling. Broad and black with a

twisted fringe falling to one side, the hat deliberately frames her striking face in one of the film's most iconic screen shots (Figure 1, see supplementary material online). The hat also meticulously matches her clothing: stark, black, angular, sharp, and unadorned.[28] Her dark hair is styled in the popular short bob that lent itself both to the androgyny of the role and contemporary style. Such hats and hairstyles might seem to signify little more than contemporary fashion, but their significance is determined by their presence or absence. The spectator is asked to read Hamlet as male, yet her hair is carefully styled in the fashionable women's *bubikopf* while the other male characters have long, unkempt, wild hair. Similarly, the female characters of the film—Gertrude and Ophelia—have well-styled hair or are wearing headwear. That Hamlet is performed as a man not wearing a hat draws attention to her styled hair as the critical difference. The film sustains androgyny through the absence or presence of such details and through Nielsen's performance which emphasizes such details. The hair and headwear, together with costuming and props, generate contrast through chiaroscuro, but always in relation to Hamlet. In tandem, they realize a heightened gender uncertainty in the film that allows characters to move fluidly between gender roles and conventions.

This begins immediately in the prologue, which captures the aftermath of Hamlet's birth. With the King feared dead in the wars, the Queen decides that to protect the crown she will announce the birth of a son instead of a daughter. Significantly, this is the *only* moment in the film when Gertrude appears without headwear (Figure 2, see supplementary material online). In this scene, her loose hair, unkempt and dark against her bedsheets, complements her cunning expression and in this important moment equates her with the wild-haired men of the film. With this first scene, Gade/Schall and Nielsen establish how gendered ambition will be expressed through costumes and headwear because the only person wearing a hat is the midwife who is *the*

active agent of ambition in the prologue. When the scene opens, the midwife is standing beside the bed wearing a bright white crown-like hat. She then devises the gender switch, proposes it to the Queen, and thereby assumes an advisory influence that Polonius never yields in this adaptation. Positioned above Gertrude, she stands tall and central, dressed in light colours with a dark inverted chevron at her chest. The midwife holds her closely, suggests the idea, and in that moment Gertrude realises the potential and agrees. The inverted chevron evoking female power is arguably a clichéd trope, but it is relevant given how often it is repeated in this film where props and clothing visually indicate gendered shifts in ambition.

Gertrude is the major figure of ambition and agency in the film, but Hamlet is instrumental in emphasising Gertrude's ambition through the visual contrast between them. For example, Hamlet reacts with shock at the Queen's lascivious behaviour with Claudius during the wedding feast. The camera lingers on Hamlet in a shot in which several images and themes coalesce (Figure 3, see supplementary material online). She raises her white fist slowly to her chest and shuts her eyes at the truth before her, but the background is not bright to make use of the contrast as it is in many similar close-ups, nor is it empty to draw the focus to her alone. Instead, the background is dark and muted, but for two lit taper candles that are thin, ghostly shadows of the white conical hennins we see in the background and throughout the film. Furthermore, sitting in the background is a loose-haired woman, with bright white eyes staring at the viewer beyond Hamlet. She is one of the very few women we see without headwear, even in the background. As such, she is hauntingly reminiscent of Gertrude's wild-haired appearance in her pivotal moment of ambition. In effect, she becomes Gertrude's ghostly doppelgänger looking beyond the daughter she condemned to a life in the shadows. There is no need for a paternal ghost in this film because Gertrude haunts her daughter from the moment of her birth. Thus, the

active agent inspiring revenge shifts from the ghostly father who never appears, to Gertrude who is never absent.

Nielsen was a recognised celebrity by 1921 and the film makes use of this through close-ups, iris shots, and several framed shots in which she is not only alone, but fills the entire screen (as with the dramatic pastoral tableau of her first appearance which opens from an iris shot directly into a close-up of her shapely legs and arms in white, all framed by nature).[29] Hamlet, deeply hurt, sees her mother and uncle together at the wedding feast. So dramatic a scene would not have needed a background given the poignant anguish on Hamlet's face and the regularity with which the film uses close-ups of her alone in emotionally charged scenes. Instead, Hamlet blends into a background that contrasts only with the white points that the film repeatedly associates with the feminine. The wild-haired, glaring woman in the background is relevant because she recalls Gertrude in the opening scene, foreshadows Gertrude's continued haunting, and furthermore, reflects the woman Hamlet must hide in the shadows. The shot is also strangely unbalanced in a film in which each scene is rigidly designed. The scene that follows takes those ghostly shadows and gives them form. Gertrude declares an end to mourning through an intertitle, but she does not ask Hamlet to 'cast thy nighted colour off' (1.2.68), as she does in the play. Instead, Gertrude gleefully removes her own dark mourning veil, revealing a large, white, beaded, divided hennin that arches to each side evoking a crown accented with ermine.[30] Gertrude casts off the veil with a flourish, then leans towards Claudius and kisses him, but then he dips her and her bright hat dominates the screen creating a glaring white spot that blocks Claudius entirely. Through this unveiling, Gertrude is crowning herself by revealing a glorious brightness that draws the eye as she discards the darkness of her mourning veil. It is a

performative use of dark and light headwear by which she both claims the prize of her ambition

and keeps Claudius in shadows (Figures 4 and 5, see supplementary material online).

By comparison, Claudius' self-crowning is comical: Polonius hands him a crown and he

puts it on with a maniacal expression that becomes his signature in the film. Seeming more a

lunatic playing with a toy crown than a king, Claudius wears the crown only for a moment in this

scene and then never again, while Gertrude wears a variety of crowns throughout the film. Yet

the crown Claudius never wears is significant in that it appears again as the prop that gives

Hamlet the idea to expose Claudius's guilt before the mousetrap play. As in the original play, the

mousetrap play offers a shadow of the narrative we are seeing, and uses the crown to similar

effect. We witness the scenes of the play-within-the-film only in part through a series of close-

ups and long shots, and the player queen is crowned *before* the player king who appears with the

crown only briefly and in a blurry long shot. Otherwise, the crown sits unceremoniously beside

the player king as he sleeps before he is murdered. Thus, even the performative 'shadow' play of

their crowning grants the ruling agency to Gertrude over Claudius.

Yet Gertrude's ambition is most obvious in the way her headwear evolves (Figure 6, see

supplementary material online). After the prologue, *the film's* first scene shifts the agency of *the*

play's first scene when Gertrude discusses *sending* Hamlet to Wittenberg with King Hamlet

rather than pleading with Hamlet to remain in Elsinore. We have not seen Gertrude since the

birth scene, and she now wears a simple diadem as she simultaneously speaks to King Hamlet

and flirts with Claudius. Hamlet, aware of her mother's behaviour, attempts to spare her father

by manoeuvring him away from their brazenness. In Gertrude's next appearance, she progresses

to a double-stranded pearl diadem when she meets Claudius in the dungeons to retrieve the snake

they will use to kill King Hamlet. Later, in the first of two closet scenes, she is wearing a diadem

with a large gem that dominates her forehead. Still later, her diadem grows from two to four strands of pearls, which she also wears during the mousetrap play and in the second closet scene. When Hamlet kills Polonius in the second closet scene, Gertrude appears with several symbols of authority at once: crowned, she sits on a throne, but is now also wearing a heavy cape, and for the first time, around her neck a large livery collar, or chain of office. The final critical evolution to Gertrude's headwear defines the strategy of this costuming element. After Claudius dies in a fire, Gertrude dons a hat we have not seen anyone wear in the film: a high *black* conical hennin. Thus, once she seizes ambition in the birth room with her wild hair, she dons progressive crowns thereby evolving from authoritative Queen to a poisoning prolicidal witch. The pointed darkness of her hat manifests her final transformation as it now remains in the shadow of the crowns she had worn previously.

Claudius, in comparison, remains more of a stock villain: always bareheaded, grimacing in a scowl of madness, with his head and face frequently obscured. His single moment of agency is retrieving the snake that kills the King, and even then, Gertrude leads him to the dungeons and waits outside. In the viper pit, he is obscured completely by white smoke, an effect repeated at several key moments, such as when he dies in a fire. Yet in another scene, the white smoke frames the black-caped Hamlet entering the wedding feast down a white, sweeping staircase in a dramatic long shot. This chiaroscurism, where the same tool – the smoke – frames Hamlet, but obscures Claudius, demonstrates an emphatic shift to the women as agents of ambition. Claudius is blanked out repeatedly while Gertrude and Hamlet progress through symbols of agency and power. That this is accomplished on black and white film, in which smoke appears white, instead of the expected black, connects the film's strategic, and gendered, shift in ambition through a

chiaroscuro in which white is used both to obscure and crown just as black is used to reveal and revenge.

Props and clothing: 'Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!' (5.2.329)

Through elements of chiaroscuro, such as the smoke, background, and architecture, in combination with clothing and props, Claudius and Horatio, the two main male characters, are feminized via the visual dialogue of the film just as the film's women are granted prominence, agency, and ambition. In almost every appearance, for instance, Claudius wears an excessively large, overly prominent, rounded pouch that rests directly at his pelvis, or to the side of his hip. It is starkly white against his dark clothing in the dungeon scene, and repeats consistently with little variation, more generally with the men of the film, but most emphatically with Claudius (see figure 7, see supplementary material online). The exaggerated size and positioning of the pouches draws the eye in every scene, deliberately feminizing his male body with their roundness and use suggesting a womb, and their positioning supplanting the penis. This prop may be read in contrast to the use of daggers and swords that belong to the women. Like the film's use of light and shadow, props and costuming appear in contrast to each other and in direct connection to gender. Hamlet never wears such a pouch, yet as a male character, her possession of one must be noted. Hamlet meets Laertes in Wittenberg, who confides his frustration over his lack of money as he waves around his own empty pouch, and Hamlet kindly fills his from hers. We have not seen Hamlet with a pouch until this moment which suggests that the pouch's visible absence marks her hidden body, while their visible presence on the men marks their lack of agency, or rather that the men are defined by lack even in what they possess: they may have

pouches, but they are empty. Hamlet actively traverses gender because she both possesses and fills the pouch, and as we will see, uses the daggers and swords the men never actively wield.

Rather like Gertrude's crowns, Horatio's costumes also evolve. He enters the film in clothing nearly identical to Hamlet's, and in several early scenes, they are almost interchangeable. When Hamlet returns from Wittenberg at the news of his father's death, Horatio accompanies him and both wear similar hats. Earlier, during a duelling lesson, Horatio is the only student wearing a doublet with a stark white inverted chevron fringe that is repeated by another chevron in a deep neckline that contrasts with a white shirt. However, his most dramatic costume shocks with as much surprising brightness as Gertrude's wedding feast crown. Indeed, Horatio's costume during the mousetrap play is the most decorative, elaborate, and brightest costume in the entire film, and he wears it for a considerable time after the play. It also connects him tellingly to Ophelia, the only other character who consistently wears white. Horatio appears in an ermine-lined hat with a matching brocaded suit, a short-skirted tunic and white stockings. He is also the only male character, aside from Hamlet, to appear in a hat (Figure 8, see supplementary material online). He is a blaze of white, while Hamlet is dark and serpentine, shadowing the snake used to kill her father. In Claudius's presence in four different scenes, Hamlet slithers towards him from the ground to reinforce this connection, exemplifying how body positioning functions in tandem with clothing and props. Weighty with familiar symbolism and suggestion, we can sense a similar physicality in Laurence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet*. As Olivier's was the next major *Hamlet* adaptation, and the first of the sound-era, Nielsen may have influenced Olivier's performance and direction. He too slithers up from the ground to lie his head in Ophelia's lap during the mousetrap play as Nielsen does. Viewing Olivier's film after

Nielsen's feels familiar because of many such movements, along with the use of chiaroscuro and the psychoanalytical symbolism regularly attributed to the later film.[31]

The first instance of Nielsen's Hamlet slithering is the most dramatic and telling. Hamlet reveals she knows Claudius murdered her father by using a dagger to carve a small crown; the same dagger Claudius left by the viper pit that Hamlet recovers. Recognizing his dagger, Claudius understands that Hamlet knows his guilt and staggers away. Hamlet slowly stretches towards him until she is parallel to the floor. Nielsen underscores the beauty of this performative movement by remaining rigidly stretched across the floor long after Claudius has left, with the shadowy archway behind her suggesting dark wings emerging from her back, a recurrent motif to which I shall return (Figure 9, see supplementary material online). As a prop, the dagger is important in how it is used to similar, though contrary, effect as the men's pouches. Hamlet either possesses or embodies the dagger and all it signifies, thrice over: by finding and wearing Claudius's dagger, by slithering on the ground, and by taking Horatio's sword after the mousetrap play to kill Claudius. Both the dagger and sword she uses are taken from men, and though Hamlet fails to kill Claudius at his prayers, as in the play, she uses Horatio's sword to kill Polonius. The dagger, however, takes on another critical role as an object of her ambition.

Horatio and Claudius both lose phallic weapons and gain feminine props, one misplaces his dagger but gains a pouch and the other loses his sword while dressed elaborately in white (like Ophelia) and wearing a headdress like the women of the film. By taking his sword, Hamlet restores an equality with Horatio that had been apparent since their first, tender appearance in Wittenberg sitting next to each other in class in identical clothing. This is emphasized in a later scene when Horatio, who had fallen in love with Ophelia, languishes over her white veil after her death – the only white object in a dark scene in which Horatio no longer wears his beautiful

white hat. His hair is now, like the other men in the film, loose and wild in his yearning for the more heteronormative pairing, but in this scene, the feminized Horatio is looming central in a maudlin tableau that offers a gloomy end to the film's love triangle. Hamlet loves Horatio, Ophelia loves Hamlet, but Horatio loves Ophelia, so Hamlet must flirt with Ophelia to distract her from Horatio.[32] In a fit of jealously, Hamlet grabs the veil and casts it away, accidentally revealing a glimpse of her white chest and leg in the struggle. The veil's whiteness pales with the greater whiteness of her body peeking out from her dark clothes. The scene gains greater significance because it shadows Gertrude's casting away of her black mourning veil to reveal her white crown. Hamlet's own means to power and ambition is in her hidden body. Ophelia's veil fades as Hamlet's body is revealed, and thus becomes as much a symbol of ambition as the crowns Gertrude revealed.

Indeed, Vining's premise offered Nielsen and Gade/Schall the ideal means to generate a love triangle, and through it, they realized another evolution in the film's narrative. The more Horatio longs for Ophelia, the more feminine Hamlet becomes in the visual language of the film. Hamlet and Horatio began as visual equals in Wittenberg, both equally masculine, but Horatio moves through the film towards the headwear and light clothing of the film's women. The graveyard scene, however, offers a return to Hamlet and Horatio's original equality, with a more feminine Hamlet meeting a more feminine Horatio. Gertrude, in contrast, appears in black and crowned with her tall black hennin, yet Horatio, Hamlet, and Gertrude have all reached this point through Ophelia's death; as her light dims, shadows weaken. Gertrude evolves towards darkness, Hamlet towards lightness, and Horatio towards enlightenment, since at the film's end, he is the last person left alive that knows Hamlet's secret.

Although a minor character in this adaptation, Ophelia is as instrumental to the movement of the film as she is in the play. Her bright clothing, colouring, and the setting in every scene in which she appears introduce a steady light-source. She offers a purposeful visual contrast to Hamlet's presence and movement in darkness and shadows, but Ophelia does not exude conventional femininity, as one might expect of an ingénue dressed in the innocence of white – for that, we look to Horatio. Her performance is unmemorable and she does not generate direct action in the film's narrative. Indeed, her performance and positioning are static, more in keeping with the quality of light that does not shift like the shadows. Yet she retains agency in her ambition to gain Hamlet's love, failed though it may prove. She first appears sitting at a window with multiple gothic arches that recall the conical hennins. As mentioned earlier, Ophelia never wears a headdress, which isolates her from the other women of the film. However, hers is not the wild hair of the men or ghostly women (at least until her suicide). Arranged in long, perfectly balanced plaits, her hair, like Hamlet's, is carefully styled. When we see her with Hamlet, her figure is less the feminine roundness of the men's pouches than the sharp lines of Hamlet's stolen weapons. Indeed, Hamlet will use her as she uses the weapons she takes from Claudius and Horatio. Even in her objectification as a source of light, Ophelia wields ambition through the chiaroscuro of the film. Several dark lines detail her white gown, foreshadowing the snake Hamlet becomes in the next scene with Claudius and thereby visually connecting them as ambitious women. Her long plaits reach to her midriff pulling the eye downward. Her waistband meets at an inverted chevron that dips downwards from her pelvis in a single thick band, visually reminiscent of Gertrude's dress in the first closet scene. Ophelia's belt also visually echoes Hamlet's dagger to maintain a balanced androgyny between them because Hamlet is never without Claudius's dagger in Ophelia's presence, bright against her dark clothes and angled

suggestively at her waist. In contrast, the dagger is either absent or barely visible whenever Hamlet is in Horatio's presence. Reiterating the effect of the props and clothing through the intriguing balance between them, Hamlet and Ophelia's bodies shadow the surrounding architecture in their few scenes together as much as Hamlet's alone does throughout the film. In their first meeting, they progressively move towards each other, eventually forming a gothic arch, a shape the film repeatedly associates with both characters (Figure 10, see supplementary material online). Light enters many of the dark buildings of the film through arches, which generate much of the functional shades and shadows in several scenes even outside in the gardens. Simultaneously united and distant, Hamlet and Ophelia's bodies face forward as they lean towards each other creating a living arch. They are united in their androgyny, yet distant in the object and form of their desire and ambition.

Shadows

Nielsen's sublimest uses of shadowing are the moments when she most overtly conjures Shakespeare's play. In several scenes, Nielsen fades into shadows to become, in effect, a disembodied head. Her body is lost in the shadows as her prominent, expressive face floats, emphasizing the only part of her body needed – in effect, she, too, crowns herself by bringing her head into the light and hiding the body that has kept her hidden in shadows. We see this at least twice in the crypt scene, a long, protracted scene that includes more shadows than light. Hamlet enters the crypt and longingly strokes her father's tomb. Pillars light the background, and geometric patterns fall on the tomb that are visually repeated in shadowy waves from the backlit window. Hamlet weaves in and out of the dark shadows in this scene, often with only her head visible from behind, or to the side of, the tomb (Figure 11, see supplementary material online).

Horatio enters at one point, and Hamlet turns from him and the tomb stands between them. When she bows her head low, her face is hidden by the top of her dark hair and she disappears completely. This is not a scene from the play but it shadows the closet scene in its feeling of enclosure, sensuality, and moral angst. With a female Hamlet, the Freudian dynamic associated with Shakespeare's closet scene is redirected to her dead father who appears in life in the film, but never in death outside of Hamlet's dreams.[33]

There are many such examples in the film that shadow scenes from Shakespeare's play, but with a difference. For instance, when Hamlet taunts Ophelia in the Nunnery scene (3.1 in the play) and then walks away towards the shadowed arches the two had earlier formed with their bodies, she pauses on the stairs with a book – the very pose Polonius asked of Ophelia in Shakespeare's play now adopted by the 'other' woman. She stands in the shadow with only her face visible, smiling with a backwards glance (Figure 12, see supplementary material online). Later, after the fishmonger scene (2.2), Polonius appears in the same hallway as he reads a contrived letter Hamlet wrote to convince him of her love for Ophelia. From play to film, scenes shadow each other, and here, the mocking of Ophelia shifts to the gulling of Polonius. As Ophelia weakens, Hamlet strengthens in the culmination of her twofold ambitions, to avenge her father's death, and to retain Horatio's love.

Such scenic doubling is as constant in the film as in Shakespeare's play (which contains narrative, scenic and linguistic dualisms and character foils), but nowhere is this manifested more clearly than in the doubling of the closet scene. Hamlet and Gertrude share two closet scenes, and in both, Hamlet expresses her frustration to her mother at having to live as a man through body movements and intertitles. In the first, she is vulnerable, and physically dramatizes her frustration by grabbing the breasts she hides in the shadow of her male clothing with starkly

white clawed hands that contrast with her dark clothes. Gertrude storms out offering no comfort, but then the lens tightens into an uncommon shot that traps Hamlet in a column of shadows rather than the more routinely used iris shot (Figure 13, see supplementary material online). She can no more escape her ambition than the shadowed column, and in that moment at the culmination of her actions, the shadows generated by the camera trap her in a column-shot. Resolved, she embraces the shadow in the next closet scene when Gertrude possesses the several symbols of authority, leaving Hamlet appearing as she did in the crypt scene as a disembodied head (Figure 14, see supplementary material online). In the second closet scene, her body remains in the shadows while her head floats above Gertrude just before she kills Polonius with Horatio's sword – another father dying in the shadows she leaves behind. However, it is not the anger and violence of this closet scene, but the sadness and frustration of the first that Nielsen and Gade/Schall want the spectators to recall by returning to its visual motifs at the film's conclusion. As Hamlet dies, her neckline falls open despite her effort to cover herself. She does not linger, nor is she overly dramatic in her death scene. The final scene's attention is focused, instead, on Horatio's realization of her hidden body. Horatio's clawed white hand discovers Hamlet's breast and all is revealed in an instant. However, visually, the critical moment repeats the motion of *her*, Hamlet's hand in the first closet scene. The whiteness of Horatio's splayed fingers on her breast draws the eye once again through the contrast to her dark clothing, generating sharp lines of dark and light on her body (Figures 15 and 16, see supplementary material online).

Horatio discovers Hamlet's secret accidentally and acknowledges his love for her in the same instant. Given their intimacy throughout the film, he might easily have discovered her secret earlier, but this is a dim-witted Horatio, whom Nielsen and Gade/Schall use as a

handsome, bright foil to Hamlet's dark sensuality. His discovery renders the final surprise of finding a breast on Hamlet's dead body almost comical. However, that his hand on her breast shadows Nielsen's own hand in the earlier closet scene in a way leaves the film's final revelation in *her* hands. Indeed, the discovery scene has been scrutinized for the artifice of Horatio's bumbling discovery but also lauded for its provocative vision. Criticizing Danson's 'belittling' of the final scene, Ann Thompson argues that it was actually in keeping with Nielsen's performance throughout the film, and with the image her contemporary audience held:

> Nielsen was popular with female audiences as well as male ones, and while her Hamlet relates to the self-conscious sophisticated decadence of Weimar, it also evokes the concept of the New Woman, the post-World-War-I emancipated flapper. There is indeed a wistfulness in the impossibility of heterosexual pairing in the film, but there is also considerable pleasure (at least for the audience) in the sensuality of an attractive androgynous performance. Nielsen's Hamlet is no ineffectual dreamer but a woman of action and decision dominating the screen with an alert energy and ironic intelligence.[34]

Certainly, Nielsen's performance was both sensuous and androgynous, but I would add, those qualities were paired strategically with action, decision, and ambition. In effect, all the qualities Vining did *not* assign Hamlet *because* he was a woman are handed over to her and the other women.

I would like to close with a final significant motif that shadows Shakespeare's words and brings the viewer repeatedly back both to Hamlet's vulnerability and her ambition. At several moments in the film, Nielsen spreads her arms wide and then moves them inward towards her

body, evoking wings being stretched out and then drawn in (Figure 17, see supplementary

material online). Onscreen, the movement is an elegant interpretation of Hamlet's emotional

upheaval. Nielsen's motions with arms spread wide like wings are 'in action how like an angel'

(2.2.272), much as the serpentine Hamlet gained shadowy wings with the chiaroscuro generated

by the architecture, or by her dark clothing in tandem with Ophelia's light. In this instance, the

dramatic physicality of her performance connects to the text and is then highlighted by the

intertitle; image generates text, even in silence. As Hamlet longingly watches the carefree

Laertes carousing in Wittenberg, the intertitle introduces this angelic reference, not with the

language of the play, but with a cryptic message that captures the pivotal element not of

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but of Nielsen's reclaiming of Vining's *Hamlet*: '*Gehemmte Schwingen,*'

or 'Inhibited Wings'.

Foreshadows

I have offered a close reading of Nielsen's performance, examining the directorial decisions in

costumes and props in combination with lighting and how they create a surprisingly rich

complexity in this unique adaptation. Yet the film's multimodal influence goes further still as not

only *Hamlet* but also several other Shakespearean plays appear as shadows in this intricate film.

Hamlet learning of her father's death via a messenger shadows the Princess's message in *Love's*

Labour's Lost; the cross-dressed love triangle is the stuff of several of Shakespeare's comedies;

Ophelia at the window is the shadow of Juliet on the balcony (a cultural if not a textual

reference); the clown-like Polonius receiving the gulling letter is the shadow of Malvolio from

Twelfth Night; the 'ocular proof' of Horatio's love for Ophelia made material with the white veil

is a shadow of the handkerchief in *Othello* and of Orlando's bloody napkin in *As You Like It*.

Gertrude as a poisoning witch driven by ambition to murder her daughter becomes the shadow of a Lady Macbeth willing to dash out the brains of her suckling babe.

Nielsen's interpretation of *Hamlet* influenced the *visual* reception of the character profoundly, most famously in the unique illustrations of the 1928 Cranach Press's *Hamlet*. The edition's stark, black illustrations include very little of *Hamlet*'s story, but instead capture Asta Nielsen *as* Hamlet in the film's iconic scenes. Nielsen's shadowed figure on the staircase is the most faithfully imitated scene, but several of the illustrations include details from the film that I have discussed here such as Nielsen's angular posed legs, women in elaborate headdresses, sleek taper candles in the background, the dramatic scenery of the wedding festivities with the King and Queen on a dais, and, most curiously, several smaller circular and columnar illustrations that echo the iris and column shots of the film. Towards the end, there is even a shadowy winged Hamlet recalling the angel motif.[35]

The design, illustration, fashion, and architecture of the Weimar Republic through the modernist Bauhaus movement were central to the aesthetic of the Gade/Schall-Nielsen *Hamlet*. The influence of this seminal film has persisted and can be found in contemporary forms. For example, we can sense this influence in manga's visual expression of Shakespeare's texts given that the genre uniquely evokes silent film on several levels: in its use of black and white illustrations, in its text panels as intertitles, and most significantly, in the indissoluble connection between image and text. Unlike scripted sound films in which actors interpret the text written for them, actors in silent film interpreted text as image. Similarly, manga connects image with text closely, certainly more than the European and American comic and graphic novel tradition, since the illustrators are usually the writers as well. European and American writers and illustrators have long imitated manga, but one adaptation offers an interesting example. The SelfMadeHero

manga Shakespeare series is surprising in its visual interpretation of *Hamlet*.[36] Set in a future post-climate-change world, Emma Vieceli's *Hamlet* is an androgynous figure dressed in black, with streaked black-and-white hair. Vieceli's illustrations recall Nielsen's Hamlet in several instances, and we can sense this influence in both the character's image and actions. Vieceli's Hamlet imagines himself hugged by a shadow of himself in the fashion of Nielsen hugging herself in the film's crypt scene, and his neckline falls open to reveal white cleavage against his dark shirt. In another illustration, Polonius's description of Hamlet's madness is illustrated as a dark shadow choking him, and later yet again, with shadowy angelic wings.

Using Shakespeare to negotiate gender fluidity persists in performance as in text. Indeed, women have performed male Shakespearean roles on stage and screen throughout history, but there has been a dramatic increase in gender-swapped, or gender-blind, performances in the last twenty years, particularly onstage.[37] Whether the text is adapted so that pronouns, references, and names reflect the newly gendered character, or whether women perform male roles, both contribute to an increasing awareness of the gender bias in theatre and lack of strong female roles. On film, it is perhaps Julie Taymor's 2010 *Tempest* in which Prospera is brought to life by Helen Mirren that best represents this movement. Yet the stage offers more examples, most notably, the work of all-female companies, such as the UK's Smooth Faced Gentlemen, and activist company Omidaze who staged provocative all-female performances of *Richard III* (2015) and *Henry VI* (2016). Several notable examples closely evoke the dramatic influence of Nielsen's ambitious *Hamlet*, such as the Donmar Warehouse's all-female trilogy of *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV* and *The Tempest* (2012-16) directed by Phyllida Lloyd, and Glenda Jackson's *King Lear* at the Old Vic (2018). Innovative contemporary performances also echo the gender-fluid androgyny and the monochromatic staging of the Gade/Schall-Nielsen *Hamlet*, such as *Det*

Norske Teateret in Oslo where married actors Marie Blokhus and Frank Kjosås alternated the dual androgynous roles of Ophelia and Hamlet in their critically acclaimed Norwegian *Hamlet* (2014). Perhaps Maxine Peake's *Hamlet* (2014) at Manchester's Royal Exchange echoes Nielsen's film most vividly. Though Peake plays Hamlet as a man, several other characters are gender-swapped, and the staging and costuming is in stark black and white. Peake performs Hamlet's androgyny by seamlessly shifting between femininity and masculinity from scene to scene, so that spectators forget their character expectations. These are just a few examples, and in a way, shadowy references project themselves infinitely in the chiaroscuro between light and dark realized by Shakespeare's words.

Figure 1: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) Returning to Denmark from Wittenberg. Svend Gade and Heinz Schall *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 2: Midwife (unnamed actor) and Gertrude (Mathilde Brandt) after Hamlet's birth. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 3: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) at the wedding feast with woman in the background. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figures 4 and 5: The Wedding Feast. Gertrude (Mathilde Brandt) and Claudius (Eduard von Winterstein), casting away her mourning veil and confronting Hamlet. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 6: Various Screen Shots of Gertrude's headwear (Mathilde Brandt). *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 7: Claudius (Eduard von Winterstein) at the viper pit, his face obscured by body positioning and later by smoke, but the very prominent pouch resting at his pelvis. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 8: Iris shot of Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) and Horatio (Heinz Stieda) planning the mousetrap play. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 9: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) crawling on the stairs after Claudius departs. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 10: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) and Ophelia (Lilly Jacobsson) meet on the stairs. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 11: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) at King Hamlet's tomb. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 12: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) reading on the stairs. *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 13: Column shot of Hamlet (Asta Nielsen). *Hamlet* (1921).

Figure 14: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) and Gertrude (Mathilde Brandt) seated on her throne in the second closet scene.

Figures 15 and 16: Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) in the first closet scene, repeated by Horatio (Heinz Stieda) in the death scene.

Figure 17: Various screen shots of Hamlet (Asta Nielsen) with winged arm movements and intertitle.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive survey of silent film adaptations of Shakespeare, see Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Robert Hamilton Ball, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: A Strange Eventful History* (New York, Theatre Arts Books, 1968).

² *Hamlet: Drama of Vengeance*, Art-Film (Gade, 1921). The film was famously shot from two cameras simultaneously. The US export version has long been available in several formats. In 2005, a print of the original German release was restored and colourized and premiered at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival. The camera angles and close-ups of the two versions are surprisingly different as are the intertitles and illustrations. I refer to the restored version in this article and use screenshots of this version as supplementary material online.

³ 'The first Hamlet on film was a woman, Sarah Bernhardt (1900). Probably the first Hamlet on radio was a woman, Eve Donne (1923). […] Hamlet is also the role that has since the late eighteenth century most inspired tragic actresses to challenge expectations and cross gender lines. Several of the most brilliant performances of the part in our time have been by women, and the issue of Hamlet's "femininity" has fascinated artists in all media. Crossing boundaries, contesting convention, disrupting or reflecting the dominant sexual politics, this regendering of Hamlet has involved repeated investigations into the nature of subjectivity, articulacy, and action—investigations with radically different consequences depending on cultural situation.' Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film, and Fiction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

⁴ Edward P. Vining, *The Mystery of Hamlet: An Attempt to Solve an Old Problem* (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1881), Chapter VI. Vining was a close friend of Howard Horace Furness, editor of the Shakespeare Variorum. The two-volume Variorum *Hamlet* appeared just before Vining's essay, in 1877. As Howard points out, 'The fact that several actresses were currently playing the part made [Vining's] theory more viable', *Women as Hamlet…*, 22.

⁵ Lawrence Danson, 'Gazing at Hamlet, or the Danish Cabaret', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 45 (1992), 37–52, 41–2.

⁶ Several critics have noted that Nielsen and Gade discovered Vining's text through a reference in Ernest Jones's *Das Problem des Hamlet und der Oedipus-Komplex* (1911), the original German text from which the foundational Freudian reading of the play, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), emerged.

⁷ *Asta Nielsen: Die schweigende Muse – Lebenserinnerungen* (München, Carl Hanser, 1977), 68.

⁸ Erica Carter, 'The New Woman and the ekphrastic poetics of Béla Balázs', *Screen*, 55:3 (Autumn 2014), 404–12.

⁹ Carter, 'The New Woman…', 405.

¹⁰ Carter, 'The New Woman…', 406.

¹¹ Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare: From Stage to Screen* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

¹² Hatchuel, *Shakespeare…*, 15.

¹³ Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁴ Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare…*, 5.

¹⁵ Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare…*, 13–14.

¹⁶ Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare…*, 15.

¹⁷ Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film…*, 148.

¹⁸ Kennedy has noted that although stage (and film) design is a collaborative effort 'involving directors, actors, a team of designers for sets, costumes, lighting and properties […]' directorial influence increased in the twentieth century when directors 'normally held more aesthetic authority than the designer or any of the other collaborators in the visual process', 11.

¹⁹ Neil Taylor, and Ann Thompson (eds), *Hamlet* (London, Bloomsbury, 2007), 3.3.55.

²⁰ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 466-7.

²¹ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, Appendix 1, lines 14–15.

²² Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 1.5.25–7.

²³ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 1.5.22–8.

²⁴ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 2.2.189.

²⁵ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 3.4.52.

²⁶ Taylor and Thompson (eds), *Hamlet*, 1.2.226–7.

²⁷ Mila Ganeva, 'Weimar Film as Fashion Show: "*Konfektionskomödien*" or Fashion Farces from Lubitsch to the End of the Silent Film Era', *German Studies*, 30:2 (May 2007), 288–310, 292, 295, 298. Ganeva's later book length study includes a telling statement from Nielsen herself: 'In a 1919 interview for *Elegante Welt*, Danish star Asta Nielsen, who had just resumed filmmaking in Germany after the war, declared publicly her conscious involvement

in the promotion of clothes and trendy appearances from the movie screen: "I read lately that a well-made film must, at any moment, have the effect of a good fashion magazine. This fact was quickly appreciated in countries where fashion is taken seriously. Today's actresses pay special attention to this aspect of film." Indeed, Nielsen was extremely effective in launching new world-wide fashion throughout her prolific career. The distinctive hair style, the shawls, tight dresses, and hats in which she appeared in her films made many women in her audience aspire to reinvent themselves "à la Asta Nielsen".' *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture*, *1918–1933* (New York, Camden House, 2008) 113.

[28] Except for her first appearance in a bright pastoral tableau when her clothing contains elaborate, stylized white details, Nielsen wears only black in the film.

[29] Howard, *Woman as Hamlet…*, quotes Svend Gade: 'It is very hard for anyone to conceive the huge scale for Asta's personality in Germany. Wherever we went, even in the smallest towns, crowds immediately gathered round her. In every inn, the guests gazed endlessly at our table. Whenever we walked to a waiting car, our path was manned by self-appointed bodyguards', 140. Howard adds: 'During World War I soldiers on both sides pinned up Nielsen's photos in the trenches', 145.

[30] The visual suggestion also echoes the horned hat common to medieval England and France (sometimes called a butterfly hennin), while the high conical hennins were more common in France. See Valerie Cumming, Cecil Willett Cunnington *et al.*, *The Dictionary of Fashion History* (Oxford, Berg, 2010).

[31] 'Fascinatingly – and in contrast to the reverential performances by Olivier and Branagh decades later – the actress's versatility translates as proof of Hamlet's genius. She conveys mental processes through tableaux (Hamlet's fixedly reading), recurring images (a suicide's dagger), or by miming inner conflict […] she makes intertitles redundant.' Howard, *Women as Hamlet…*, 149–50.

[32] Danson suggests that the audience shares Nielsen's androgynous viewpoint: 'Making love to Ophelia, gazing at Horatio, soliciting the gaze both of men and women in her offscreen audience, Nielsen's Hamlet makes figurative androgyny into actual bisexuality, and realizes a possibility only deeply latent either in Shakespeare's play or Vining's theory'. 'Gazing at Hamlet…', 48.

[33] Freudian, and later, psychoanalytical readings of *Hamlet* proposed the many ways in which the play centres on women as a source of drama and conflict. Gertrude threatens the male-centred desire for order, which inevitably reveals that the problem lies not in the object of fantasy, but in the man who fantasizes. Indeed, Nielsen's Hamlet manifests a Freudian understanding of the play at several levels, that would have agreed with the contemporary, and very modern, understanding. For a closer reading of the connection between Vining's text and the Freudian influence on Nielsen's film see Danson, 'Gazing at Hamlet…'.

[34] Ann Thompson, 'Asta Nielsen and the Mystery of Hamlet' in L. E. Boose and Richard Burt (eds), *Shakespeare, The Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video* (London, Routledge, 1997), 214–23, 222.

[35] The Edward Gordon Craig illustrations of the Cranach Press *Hamlet* are available online at https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/hamlet-published-by-the-cranach-presse. For a detailed reading of the historical genesis of this edition and the influence of stage design on the illustrations, see Marjorie Garber, 'A Tale of Three Hamlets', *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* (London, Routledge, 2010).

[36] Emma Vieceli, *Manga Shakespeare Hamlet*, SelfMadeHero series (New York, Amulet Books, 2007).

[37] Howard's introduction to *Women as Hamlet* outlines the variety of gender blurring productions on stage and screen in recent years.

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