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To the two Hamlets of the season, add a third--a woman, this time. On Sunday evening, January 24, at eight-thirty, the Museum of Modern Art will present to its members three reels of the six-reel motion picture Hamlet produced in Germany in 1920 by Art-Film, directed by the Danish Svend Gade, and starring the famous Danish actress, Asta Nielsen. It has been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library through the courtesy of Mrs. Philip Manson. The remainder of the program, which will be given in the auditorium of the Museum of Natural History, will consist of the film by which Emil Jannings is best remembered in America, The Last Laugh. Produced in 1924 by Ufa, it has been acquired by the Film Library through the courtesy of Ufa. It was directed by F. W. Murnau from a scenario by Carl Mayer, with photography by Karl Freund. Hamlet and The Last Laugh comprise Program II, The Film in Germany--The Moving Camera, in the series of notable foreign motion pictures which the Film Library is presenting this season.

Other actresses, notably Sarah Bernhardt, have played Hamlet, but it is peculiarly appropriate that a woman should play the role in the German film. The scenario for it, written by Erwin Gepard, is drawn from a 12th-century record of Danish history and from the Shakespearean play; but its startling denouement, suggesting that Hamlet was actually a woman, is derived from a book written by an American, Edward P. Vining and published in 1881. From this book, The Mystery of Hamlet, the scenarist seems to have drawn both his characterization of Prince Hamlet and several incidents not ascribable to any other source.

In accordance with its plan for acquiring not only outstanding motion pictures but as much of their source and documentary material as possible, the Film Library advertised for and obtained a copy of the little-known Vining book, out of print for many years. To support its contention that Hamlet was a woman, the book presents an orderly array of arguments based on recorded events in Danish history and on incidents in Shakespeare's play. Among these are the birth of Hamlet just after the news is received that his father has been wounded in mortal combat with Fortinbras. As no daughter could hope to inherit the Danish throne at that time, the argument is that the mother announced the birth of a male heir. After that, the masquerade had to

be continued and the fact (assumed by Vining) that Hamlet is a woman accounts for his (her) love for Horatio, his (her) indifference toward Ophelia, and his (her) feminine characteristics such as indecision, hysteria, fear of death, reluctance to engage in physical combat except fencing, extreme sensitiveness, and predilection to fainting.

The motion picture does not in any way insist on the theory that the Prince is a woman but rather subordinates it to the action of the play so that the film is not obvious in differing from other Hamlets. The picture becomes much more interesting, however, when the spectator is aware that its principal character is played by Asta Nielsen not because she was a famous actress but because a woman was necessary in the role of this particular version of the play.

In her program notes for Program II Iris Barry, Curator of the Film Library says: "For more than a decade the German cinema drew to itself film directors, scenarists, cameramen and actors from Denmark ....Asta Nielsen today is best remembered in America for her performances in Pabst's The Joyless Street (1925) and von Gerlach's Vanina (1922) released here in 1928. It was the rare ability to mirror the more subtle feelings and thoughts without any use of gesture which brought Asta Nielsen her fame. In Hamlet there are passages where this gift is very evident.

"The historical-legendary nature of Hamlet, the involved plot, the accurate costuming, the crowds, the sombre atmosphere and--above all--the static photography are typical of a whole post-war school of German costume-films among which Passion (Dubarry) is perhaps the best known. One revolution had taken place in the German cinema when the Danish directors and players brought to it their interest in emotion rather than action, their love of landscape and history; for they had freed the German film from the gesticulatory Latin influence hitherto prevalent."

It was The Last Laugh, Miss Barry goes on to state in her notes, that constituted a second revolution in German film production which, in turn, revolutionized motion picture methods throughout the world. Of this film she says: "It broke with the past both in technique and in theory. Hitherto, a discontinuous method of pictorial narration had been in general use. Films were composed after the photographic process had been completed, by joining together the various shots taken with a stationary camera, which was shifted only between scenes.

In The Last Laugh a new and continuous method of narration was used, for here appear prolonged stretches of uninterrupted and uncut images, in which the camera itself has moved to follow the progress of the action. This film took final shape before, not after, "shooting," and was played in sets specially constructed to permit continuous action and continuous photography, with the camera mounted on perambulating trucks or swinging cranes. (A method first introduced by D.W. Griffith in the Babylonian scenes of Intolerance, 1916.) It was, actually, the joint product of four men--Murnau the director, Freund the cameraman, Mayer the scenarist and Jannings the principal actor--who together conceived and developed it as a pictorial unit, working with unusual freedom in a studio unparalleled anywhere, at that time, for its technical equipment and the ingenuity of its craftsmen."

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library was established in May 1935 by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for the purpose of collecting, cataloging, preserving and circulating noteworthy films produced in this country and abroad from 1893 to the present day. During its first season, 1935-1936, the Film Library presented two series of five programs, each approximately two hours in length. These were composed of American motion pictures and were entitled: Series I: A Brief Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932 and Series II: Some Memorable American Films. The two series were circulated to museums, colleges and study groups throughout the United States and Canada.

For its second season, 1936-1937, the Museum of Modern Art Film Library is presenting outstanding foreign films under the general title: The Film in Germany and in France, eight programs of notable motion pictures produced in those countries. The program to be given for members of the Museum of Modern Art Sunday night, January 24, in the auditorium of the Museum of Natural History, will be the second of this series. The third program will be given Sunday night, February 8, under the general title: The Film in Germany--Pabst and Realism, and will consist of a single picture, The Love of Jeanne Ney.

After their initial showing in New York to members of the Museum of Modern Art, each program will be released for circulation to museums, colleges and study groups throughout this country and in Canada. As most of the pictures in Series III are silent films, a complete musical score for each of these programs has been arranged by Theodore Huff, on the staff of the Film Library, and will be circulated with the programs.