Jennifer A. Low  
Florida Atlantic University

Print and Shifting Perspectives in the Cranach Press *Hamlet*

The overwhelming presumption in our culture is that reading Shakespeare pales in comparison with seeing Shakespeare performed. "Shakespeare" serves as a category of dramatic production, not material for armchair reading. This perception was not always in vogue, however. The Cranach Press edition of *Hamlet*, with woodcuts by Edward Gordon Craig, has been described as "the most monumental book of the twentieth century" (Orgel, 2007; 308). It offers a uniquely organic experience of the text *as* text—specifically as a *printed* artifact.

Part of what makes the volume notable is the perspective used in Craig's images. While the volume has been described as "a monodrama, in which the viewer observes the action of the play through the eyes of the protagonist" (Taylor, 2014; 48), closer observation reveals constant shifts in perspective throughout. The publisher, Harry Graf Kessler, designed each double-page spread to resemble a proscenium theater, using a two-column design so that two short inner columns of Shakespeare's text are surrounded by columns of Shakespeare's source material running outside and underneath Shakespeare's text. But Craig's woodcut illustrations frequently restructure the typographic space. Craig picks up on *Hamlet's* motifs of social performance and surveillance, shifting representation from Hamlet's perspective to an audience member's perspective, to a reader's perspective. On some pages, images of architectural elements take the place of the source material, strengthening the impression of a volume that opens to present a proscenium stage. Occasionally Craig offers a "worm-hole," a circular shape, with a character peering out from behind drapery. These images reinforce the reader's awareness of the book as a three-dimensional object. While reminding the reader of the book's thickness, they produce a disquieting sense that the characters are peering outward, reversing outside and inside as if we were in Elsinore and they were peering through a hole. And with the turn of a page, the perspective shifts again.

The images, interpolated with printed words and manifesting Shakespeare's motifs of spectatorship and self-conscious performance, seem organic to the volume. In this volume, text is print—and the woodcuts, *as* print, become part of the text. The volume offers an experience of *Hamlet* that is deeply textual, unfolding as the leaves are turned.