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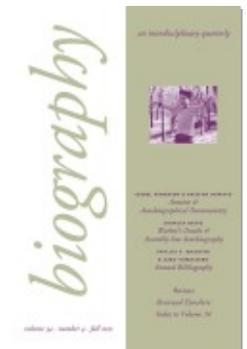
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HARRY PAYNE

Edward Gordon Craig: The Revolutionary of the Theatre as Hamlet

INTRODUCTION

In a series of writings and productions from 1900 until the First World War, Edward Gordon Craig proposed nothing short of a total revolution in the design, mounting, and purpose of theatre. Frequently he described the required process as a stripping away of unnecessary accretions to get at the heart of the theatre as an independent artform. This purification would have surprising consequences, for among the things which would have to go would be the actor and actress, the written play, and the representative scene. In its place he proposed a ritual theatre, inspired by the sacred performance theatres of ancient Greece and medieval Europe. The written play would yield to expressive movement. In place of pictorial scenery would be an abstract "Scene" constructed of movable white screens or, ideally, shifting hydraulic columns, played upon by expressive light, preferably from the sun. The actor would first give way to the marionette and the mask, abstract impersonal media, eventually to be superseded by the Übermarionette, the man so wholly in control of self and body as to aspire to the condition of the marionette. The "Artist of the Theatre," a controlling genius who could give total unity to scene and movement, would replace the actor-manager. Coterries of young men (women were not to be part of the sacred theatre) would train under that artist-genius. [For this, and what follows in this section, see "Bibliographical Note."]

Craig's heritage is peculiar for someone who seemed to want to consign the Victorian stage to a rapid death. He was born at Harpenden in 1872, the illegitimate son of Edward William Godwin, architect and stage-designer, who became well-known for his exact reconstructions of scenes for Shakespeare and Greek tragedy. His mother was Ellen Terry, then in retreat from the stage but who would soon leave Harpenden with her children in 1875, lured back to the theatre by Charles Reade. Ostensibly she wanted to help pay the bills, but clearly the theatre was her proper world. The next year she joined Henry Irving at the Lyceum, and her liaison with Godwin dissolved soon after.

Craig spent the next years in the company of his governesses, his mother and his older sister Edy. At age fourteen he was sent to boarding schools, first in England and then in Germany. His career as a student was checkered, and in 1889 he returned to his mother, the Lyceum, and the tutelage of the great actor-manager Henry Irving. As an actor Craig seems to have been more than competent; his mother would always mourn, with some justice, the actor in him who yielded to the revolutionary Artist of the Theatre. He was able to supplement his smaller parts in the Lyceum with major roles in provincial theatres. As he reached his mid-twenties, however, his ambitions shifted. He mastered the art of the woodcut, introduced to its craft by the "Beggartaff Brothers," James Pryde and William Nicholson. He managed to produce a little journal called *The Page*, largely written and illustrated by himself under various pseudonyms. There he could indulge in some imaginative and often dark woodcut designs, publish selections from his favorite poet Walt Whitman, and offer decadent musings in the manner of the 1890s.

This period from 1898 to 1903, though, is largely a tale of two collaborations in theatre design and management. With the musician Martin Shaw he founded the Purcell Opera Society, a group of amateur players who performed a series of works: "Dido and Aeneas" (1900); "The Masque of Love" (1901); "Acis and Galatea" (1902). This period represented a move into artistic freedom. His designs were free from the bonds of Victorian stage realism. Costumes were simple, lighting imaginative and evocative, movements patterned and abstract. The performances earned some critical applause but were financially troubled. Still, he moved on. He designed Laurence Housman's nativity play *Bethlehem* (1902), which startled and pleased audiences with its simple, symbolic settings. Then with his mother he formed a company which attempted more elaborate and ambitious productions—Ibsen's *The Vikings* (1903) and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

(1903). But the company failed, in spite of the fame and backing of his mother, and some significant praise for his designs.

Nonetheless, opportunities were open to a scene designer who was staking his claim far enough outside normal bounds to impress a growing number of artists and critics. In 1904 Harry Kessler, a German aristocrat and impresario, invited Craig to mount some productions with Otto Brahm in Germany. Nor was Kessler alone in his interest in Craig. In 1906 Eleanor Duse invited him to help with some productions in Italy. And in 1908 Constantin Stanislavsky invited him to collaborate on a production which eventually became the *Moscow Hamlet* of 1912. Many other offers were forthcoming, but as his fame grew he found it more difficult to work on such projects. There were always apparent obstacles. Practice became increasingly difficult as theory became obsessive. Beginning with his dialogue "The Art of the Theatre" (1905) and then in his journal *The Mask* (begun in 1908 and written largely by Craig under pseudonyms), he announced those visions of the radically transformed theatre to which he committed himself.

He generally withdrew from the public eye, though he continued to experiment with his model scene; to produce a repetitious *Mask*; to establish a short-lived private school for future artists of the theatre at the Arena Goldoni in Florence (1913–14); to found an evanescent journal *The Marionette* (1918–19), devoted to the history and mechanics of puppets; to edit old materials into new books; and to write letters and opinions on the theatre—all repetitions of his original ideas—to hundreds of correspondents, newspapers, and journals. From 1914 until 1966, he largely refused work in a world unwilling to accept his ideas, and mused on the distant future of the theatre which he always claimed to love more than anything in the world. A prolonged Victorian adolescence of preparation, a short Edwardian adulthood of rebellious fruitfulness, and a long eclipse of isolation—such was the peculiar pattern of his career.

ELLEN TERRY

The biographer's task is, in part, to understand the psychological sources of these ideas and patterns. None of Craig's individual proposals was without precedent, as several studies have shown (e.g. Dorn, Doswald, Loeffler, Olf, Payne, Senelick). But the intensity and clarity of the combination of ideas coalescing in a proposed revolutionary act sets Craig apart. Such will to overthrow the existing order cannot be simply learned in the usual way, and in Craig's case he made it

clear that his public program was inextricably bound to the necessities of a private drama, centered above all around his mother Ellen Terry and, to a lesser extent, his master Henry Irving.

The tale of Hamlet often—indeed obsessively—provided Craig with the metaphors for his quest. It is telling that in his interpretation of *Hamlet* Craig is unsure of only one character—Hamlet’s mother, Queen Gertrude. All other characters are typed in the severest way, but Gertrude is divided—vain, corrupt, seduced, yet capable of love and impeded only by the evil of the world around her. That he thought of his mother in the same terms as he thought of Gertrude we can be confident, for he tells us so in one of the most remarkable memoirs of any son about a mother, *Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self* (1931). By his account Terry pampered her son in early childhood, yet later left him to the care of governesses and then sent him off to boarding schools. Her approach to him was both indulgent and scolding. She was frequently angered by his mistreatment and abandonment of his wife and several lovers. She defended his theatrical experiments and was proud of his genius, but her regret for the actor that was lost thereby missed the whole point of his voyage out of the world of the Lyceum. A mother’s love underwrote all she did, though she never seemed to have found a way to understand and deal with her “Teddy” (Terry, Priedeaux).

Craig’s feeling oscillated over a much wider range. Characteristically he felt compelled to bring the secret into the open because of the actions of another man, George Bernard Shaw. When Shaw’s correspondence with Ellen Terry was published in 1931, he saw displayed before the public the actress he despised in long intercourse with a man he equally despised. His answer was to claim her for himself in a most peculiar and divided act of love. The premise of *Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self* (and later repeated in many passages of *Index to the Story of My Days*) is that there was a loving, caring, nurturing, homebody mother “Nelly” fighting for supremacy with the actress “Ellen Terry” whom everyone knew. Craig imagines a dialogue between these two forces within the body of the mother. The pattern is sometimes confused; Craig had trouble sustaining a clear dichotomy. The victor in life seems mostly to be Ellen Terry, the actress. The victor in Craig’s drama, though only in death, was her inner, hidden essence “Nelly”:

She died in the morning sun, which shone warm and yellow onto her. She sat up suddenly—opened her eyes—fell back and threw off fifty old

years as she fell. She became twenty-five to look at—and in truth, she became once more Nelly Terry, back again at Harpenden with little Edy and little Teddy and the one she loved better than all the world. (*Ellen Terry*, 197)

The living mother has sorely disappointed his wishes. In death “Teddy” Craig was reclaiming a mother whom the world had seduced from him.

The “Nelly” of the book was real enough, though Craig knew her only intermittently. Clearly his fondest memories were of the days when his mother had left the stage to live with Godwin—“the one she loved better than all the world”—and raise her children. Nelly was, then, for Craig the perfect mother and perfectly at one with herself. He described the daily rounds of mothering as a comforting rhythm of life. As opposed to “E.T.” his real mother “Nelly” relied not on words but on gentle, nurturing acts of waking, washing, and feeding (*Ellen Terry*, 67). The mothering of “Nelly,” therefore, like his future theatre, relied not on words but on silent, expressive rhythms.

Even when Nelly gave way to Ellen Terry, there were still parts of life that brought back these feelings of peace and harmony with Nelly. Craig could remember fondly the patterns of the evening meal, his place at the table, the rhythms of serving. So too, when he joined his mother in the company, he could recall the day's rounds, the repetitions which underlay the hectic activity of life in the Lyceum. There were still other moments when he was with his mother in ways that brought back the child's pleasures. Craig describes the carriage rides to the Lyceum as a delightful private ritual passage through familiar streets and sights, “in a magic boat for two.” He goes on to describe how quiet and uninterrupted the ride could be at those times: “It was a delicious drive with mother down to the Lyceum; it was a bit drowsy and altogether lulled one into a dream” (*Ellen Terry*, 86–87).

Even in recounting this idyll, however, Craig is aware that there was always trouble in paradise, even as “Ellen Terry” always dwelled within “Nelly.” His mother belonged to Irving. As he recounts, he rarely could enter the Lyceum by the same door as his mother—that was reserved for his mother and Irving. He was consigned, as he noted elsewhere, to the “P” (for “Prompter”) side of Lyceum. Mother and Irving dwelled “O.P.” (“Opposite Prompter”) in another world (*Ellen Terry*, 101–02). He once described a visit to that world, which he found to be a disquieting world of mirrors. People of the theatre, he says, are always checking themselves in a mirror in their dressing rooms. When they converse, they do so to mirror images. Such were

his conversations with his mother once at the Lyceum (*Ellen Terry*, 106–07).

For the cruel fact to Craig was that the halcyon days at Harpenden were short-lived, ending when “Teddy” was only three. Though he occasionally went back there to see the home he loved, he was expelled early from there to the world of the London stage, never to return. However much of “Nelly” was the essence of the woman, as Craig argued, there was a tragic flaw, which he put quite bluntly: “E.T. was always getting in the way of mother. . . .” (*Ellen Terry*, 63). In the end, *Ellen Terry and her Secret Self* is therefore a bill of indictment within an act of love. For the crimes of Terry seemed primal and many. The “E.T.” of the book is restless, constantly bustling about, either preparing for performance or preparing for sleep. She is vain, easily led away by men—G. F. Watts (her first husband), Godwin, Reade, Charles Kelley (her second husband), Irving, Shaw, James Carew (her third husband, four years younger than Craig)—all the while failing in her liaison with his father. She plays favorites, preferring the sensible Edy to the dreamer Teddy. She is a careless mother: “I don’t see how you can rock the cradle, rule the world, *and* play Ophelia perfectly, all in a day’s work” (52). She is a slave to genius, and genius is a principle of restlessness: “Genius is forever changing its rhythm, goes nowhere, and *is* something, in distinction to *doing* something” (24). She fails to give him guidance. She leaves him without a father to train him, and there were no masters at the Lyceum really to teach him. When he showed talent for acting, she sent him off to school (*Index* 32, 79).

Craig was most vivid in his rage against that side of his mother in these later writings, but they are not fabrications of old age. Indeed, both in his private Daybooks and in *The Mask*, from the period 1908–1914, similar themes ring clear. We have already seen the problem of Nelly and Ellen Terry in his version of Gertrude. So too, we see them in his public and private tirades about the role of women in the theatre during those years. In a Daybook entry, he describes how his attitude toward women had been indelibly marked by “the uppermost influence,” his mother. First of all, his mother was ideal, so he had a habit of idealizing all women, only then to be disappointed.

For there was something in all the women which somehow or other did not quite harmonize with the headlong belief which I was prepared to give. Later on I found out that my mother was herself only thinking of an ideal—her ideal. And now to each new woman who attracts me I long to unveil my thought—to beg her to unveil hers—not to cover it with

falsehood which she has supplied ever since the demand arose (Daybooks, I, 21 Jan. 1909).

Soon after he talks about mothering and its failures. "All children," he writes, "should be brought up by the man through the woman." When women disobey, the daughters suffer. He insists the "male children" do not suffer. But the price seems high: "They are cut adrift & in time find a new family—" (Daybooks, I, 21 Feb. 1909). At that time Craig was dreaming of a new family—his cohort of male artists of the theatre at the Arena Goldoni—but he certainly had yet to find it. Soon after his anger and disappointment become even clearer, in a tirade against women who fail to supply full love. This he associates both with mothering and sexual pliancy: "Whichever way women are taken they fail to a great extent except as mothers & here only a small percentage reach any high standard. If this were not true we should have many more great men than we have." Women fail, though, to supply what men really need: "Hence the whore" (Daybooks, I, 8 June 1909).

Nor were his thoughts on his mother entirely consigned to the private world of his Daybooks. Craig had great difficulty separating private and public thoughts. Indeed we can see much of the germ of *Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self* two decades earlier in *The Mask*. There he reviewed Ellen Terry's memoirs. He described them as "charming" but "entirely valueless." For Craig the book failed to give guidance for "the boy or girl who is struggling to know how to do or how not to do, who is perplexed to know if to keep on with the work or give up altogether." She supplies "amusing anecdotes" rather than wisdom, and reveals "the narrowness" that gives young men "the imperative need of escaping from the stage world, from the artificiality of the atmosphere" (*Mask* 1 [1908]: 104–05). He reviewed the book again, correcting passages which spoke ill of him, expressing suspicion that some other hand (probably Shaw's) was at work in it. And here he began again to split his mother. If we were allowed to hear the "real" woman, we would have a book that was "humane," "courageous," and "generous." (*Mask*, 1 [1908]: 180–81).

Not long after, he developed the divided vision of his mother even more fully under the guise of a review of a play in which Ellen Terry played a fairy creature. The theme of the review is "once a fairy always a fairy." He describes how once this particular fairy withdrew from the fairyland of the theatre to rear children at a scene in the country, a thin guise for Harpenden. There she learns about "washing days and babies' underclothes" and the idyllic world of rural retreat. Still she is

seduced back to the ugly world of the stage: "Back to fairyland, commanded Ellen Terry, and back to Fairy Land we all trooped, and a very delightful time we had there." Now she is back on stage, "whispering her message of beauty to the world, scattering her elfin gift, . . ." (*Mask* 2 [1909], 3-5; cf. *Theatre Advancing*, 220-21).

EDWIN GODWIN AND HENRY IRVING

In Craig's reconstruction of his life the role of Ellen Terry was, therefore, central. His father Edwin Godwin and his master Henry Irving figure less decisively. Indeed Craig frequently expressed regret that no man ever quite filled his need for a dominating figure at Ellen Terry's side—an elder Hamlet to her Gertrude.

Godwin looms as the great lost opportunity in Craig's life. Craig never openly blamed Godwin for the separation from Ellen Terry; he was more inclined to fault his mother's decision to return to the theatre as the sin which cast them out from Harpenden. Indeed he would bridle at the suggestion that his father was in any way a deserter. He also did Godwin the service of reprinting in *The Mask* several of his father's essays on the scene-design of Shakespeare's plays. To devote such space to one of the greatest proponents of realistic, archaeologically exact set-design in *The Mask*, a great *machine de guerre* against realism, was an act of unusual filial obedience. In that Craig saw no incongruence. Godwin had, he claimed, said that accessories and costume should be either "altogether right or wholly wrong." Godwin's having done things "altogether right," Craig argued, now opened the path for "purely imaginative forms," that is, doing things "wholly wrong." He reproduced Godwin's writings, therefore, as "the natural realistic link between the unimaginative and the imaginative" (*Mask*, 3 [1910]: 53-56).

Still, Godwin belonged to that history of the theatre which Craig sought to overcome. However perfect his scenic creations, it was unclear whether Craig's art of the theatre had anything to learn from Godwin's art (*Mask* 3 [1910]: 78). And Godwin, for whatever reason, had indeed left before he taught Craig what to be and how to be it. Craig saw his eventual turn from acting to total design as a form of rediscovery of his father's blood, but a rediscovery done the hard way. He speaks late in life of the "impediment" which retarded his development:

The "impediment" came from the union and separation of E.T. and E.W.G. For my father might—would—have taught me what I had to dis-

cover myself. The "impediment" was in my bones, in my blood, which cried out vaguely that an artist is . . . well, not what an actor is. The vague cry acted as a brake on me, but did not satisfy until 1907 I saw and heard clearly for myself. Fourteen years it took, and a mighty lot of blunders. . . . (*Index*, 152).

For all of Godwin's virtues and purported innocence, therefore, he was part of an impediment which made life difficult—that failure to nurture and guide of which Ellen and Godwin were the principal (but not the only) guilty parties.

The actor Charles Kelley came and left, married to Ellen Terry in 1877, separated in 1880. He stayed long enough temporarily to fill the void of male presence Craig often evokes in later life, but not long enough to teach Craig what he wanted to know (*Index*, 29, 31, 36, 48–9, 66). It was left to Ellen Terry's leading man, Irving, to become the "master" in Craig's life. That came rather late, for after some appearances as a child in the Lyceum company, Craig was sent off to various schools—another hiatus which Craig blamed for defects in his development. Once Craig returned in 1889, Irving dominated the scene as a kind and helpful, but also forbidding presence.

Irving was not a father, but he was "kind as a father," perhaps because he "knew what it might feel like having no father" (*Index*, 47). From Irving, Craig truly learned, though at a distance. Craig's memories of Irving emphasize both his nobility of soul and his towering psychological force. He once described Irving as possessed of "expressionless stone nobility" (*Daybooks I*, 22 Jan. 1909). In an article in praise of Irving's character and art, Craig professed admiration fraught with a sense of awe and distance. After fifteen years with Irving, he professed to know Irving no more or less than a boy in the gallery, as a figure both kindly and noble but also "enigmatical, mysterious" (*Mask*, 1 [1908]: 174).

Still, Irving was that person on whom Craig could call as the prototype of the male master he wanted in art and in life. In late accounts of his life he often mentions the lack of a father and the lack of masters. He expressed admiration for all those who could really dominate the scene, such as Napoleon, Rhodes, and Mussolini (e.g. *Mask* 10 [1924]: 51; *Theatre Advancing*, 81; *Books and Theatre*, 21). Nor were these reflections on the need for personal and social authority merely for public consumption. The testimony of the *Daybooks* is the same, saluting acts of authority in politics (e.g. II, 29 Aug. 1910, and III, 15 Nov. 1914). In these private ruminations he also pondered his need for authorities in the theatre and his failure to find such: "I know what the

Art of the Theatre is not . . . / Then why waste more time in the fog / Now I must learn what it is—I need masters / Where are they?" He reviewed the masters who dominated so many fields but he concluded that the theatre held "no such men / It is ignominy." (Daybooks, I, 20 Sep. 1909).

Despair about the world's failure to nurture the artist of the theatre colored Craig's vision of the world. He was convinced, though, that he found the prototype of the Übermarionette in Irving, whom he came to view as the triumph of cadence, both in voice and movement, over dramatic gesture and recitation. That same capacity for distance yet nobility, which Craig perceived as the triumph over emotion on and off stage, was the key to the next era of marionettes.

This is the theme of Craig's late work on *Henry Irving* (1930), but it can be found earlier in his private musings: In January 1909, he wrote how Irving had shown by example "the pattern leading to the great art of motion. Ecco! this is a man to love" (Daybook I, 15 Jan. 1909). In a notebook entry, which contains his deepest accounts of the religious revelation which interfused his work in the years just after 1907, he speaks of the drab era without heroes in which he had been cast. But at the Lyceum, he says, he saw heroic figures. Above all, unidentified but still clear, loomed Irving:

One figure especially stood out in such a light in those days—changing from sorrow to gaily but always in the grand manner—The face of this figure—in the eyes of this face—Age would suggest to me that it were best one took sights & sounds of this world with a good pinch of scepticism—laughing lightly & gaily at it—why? I would not have stopped to ask why in those days. I stop now—But I hear no reply. There is no reply. ("Notebook on Movement").

On other occasions, though, Craig found he could conjure up Irving's ghost. At the end of *Henry Irving*, Craig concocts a dialogue between himself and Irving. Irving dominates the scene, and Craig is reduced to childlike interlocutor. Yet the ghost works for Craig's purposes. The topic of the dialogue is largely George Bernard Shaw—as we have seen an obsession for Craig for reasons both aesthetic and personal (though Craig would not have seen the difference). Here Irving urges Shaw's obliteration from the written record, as agent of all that is corrupt and trivial within the modern theatre. Craig is happy to be the disciple of such teaching. Of Craig's work Irving professes to have heard good things, though he seems largely ignorant of what it is about. Craig expresses humility, and before the dialogue can move to

Craig's vision and possible leadership of the theatre, the cock crows (*Henry Irving*, 229–32).

The dialogue is rich in its symbolism of Craig's relationship to Irving. Irving is made to do Craig's work, providing authority for his hatred of Shaw. Indeed, Craig was always making Irving's ghost do his work. By his constant insistence that Irving was the prototype of the Übermarionette, he provided legitimacy to what might appear an outrageous act of rebellion. Just as, by peculiar dialectic, Craig quoted Godwin to justify his suppression of Godwin's art, he did the same with Irving. Irving perfected the late-Victorian stage, all the while providing the design for its abolition. Craig splits Irving in death as he did his mother: "If any one died—was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, it was Brodribb [Irving's given name]—for Henry Irving, that shadow of coming event, the Übermarionette, is still living" (*Henry Irving*, 39). Hence, Craig insisted, Irving was the agent of his own overcoming. Irving, in Craig's account, "gathered to him all the old English traditions," displayed "what was left" after rejecting the useless, and then exploited it "further than it had ever gone before." "Then," Craig claimed, "he blew it up!" (*Henry Irving*, 17). Irving would doubtless have been most surprised at this characterization. To be sure he was a master of cadence and he did help show how a single authority could dominate a production. Still, Craig's admiration of Irving justifiably might well have struck him as curiously narcissistic and decidedly double-edged.

THE REVOLUTIONARY AS HAMLET

Such was the private drama he saw in his approach to a new theatre. His mother had betrayed her calling as "Nellie" to return to the Victorian theatre, so "Teddy" would destroy it. His biological father Godwin had deserted him and made his theatrical fortune as an apostle of archaeological realism, so he would abolish such scenery in the name of the abstract "Scene." His would-be master Irving had inspired him by his cadence, but that master had remained distant from him and had uttered thousands of words, many of endearment, to the hated other self of "Nellie," Ellen Terry. Hence he would seize the love of cadence and rhythm from Irving, reject the rest of what the Lyceum represented, and then serve a new theatre as its presiding genius, all the while nurturing a cohort of new male artists in a way that had not been done for him.

His art was, therefore, an act of private rage played out creatively on the public stage. Like many who undertake such a psychological strat-

egy, he needed an all-encompassing metaphor to justify, organize, and explain his actions to himself and the world. He found that metaphor in *Hamlet*.

As Craig reflected on his career and his role in the theatre, he found in Hamlet the archetype of his experience. He had acted the role in 1896 and witnessed productions of it in the Lyceum, with Irving and Terry in the leads. He worked for four years on the Moscow production of *Hamlet* and, independent of any production, obsessively sketched designs for the play. No doubt the most striking work of design of his later years is the Cranach Press edition of *Hamlet*, planned from before the War, though not published until 1929. He was, in a word, Hamlet-obsessed. As he saw it, "Hamlet is the story of the theatre" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*; see also Senelick, Innes ch. 6). *Hamlet* could be the story of the theatre only if Craig presumed the license to rethink it that way. As we have seen, he had early pronounced the primacy of the all-powerful artist of the theatre over the poet. He therefore insisted that this artist had the right to rethink the written play to give it harmony and unity. In his speculations, notebooks, and mounting for the Moscow *Hamlet* Craig offered just such a radical rethinking. Gone was the psychologically complex Hamlet which populated the London stage during the Shakespeare revival after 1880. In his place stood Hamlet as saint and martyr, the impresario totally in control of the action who willingly orchestrates the death of many and the sacrifice of self in order to bring rest and purity to a corrupt and vain world.

Hamlet was, as Craig described him, a saint with a license to kill (*Mask* 7 [1915]: 114). In Craig's mystical formulation, Hamlet orchestrates a triumph of Fire, Imagination, Beauty, Justice, and Spiritual Law over Water, Actuality, Ugliness, Illegality, and Temporal Law (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*). He is "Not Weak," Craig noted in his notebook: "He acts as he does through nobility of soul—through love—not through weakness & who shall find fault. Even in his continual doubts he is strong—must be calm—not weep—or rage—He wears the smiling mask of the Greek ideal—All round its face it is calm & only the eyes are shining with apprehension & vision" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*). Later in that director's notebook he again insisted on the perfection of Hamlet's strength; he is "wise, active & as powerful a man as ever lived" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*).

There can therefore be no peace between Craig's Hamlet and the absolute corruption which surrounds him. He rules the action in a double sense. He orchestrates all events to their climax, and we see all

events only through his eyes. He is always present, and his thoughts guide us. No matter how small he may seem, he controls the action. He controls Elsinore, as Craig wanted to control his own scene. Hence, in two sketches of a scene for Hamlet, Craig places the very small form in spaces which threaten to overwhelm him. Yet Craig insists he will dominate the scene, though at enormous sacrifice (*Towards*, 33).

The figures which surround Craig's Hamlet are largely one-dimensional types and, excepting the players and the figure of death, they are all types of evil. Claudius is the incarnation of corruption. Gertrude is fat and vain. Polonius is the prating moralist and critic. Even Ophelia, always played for sympathy in Victorian London, is a "silly little fool neither woman nor suffragette" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. II, 2).

Hamlet loves the players because they are his agents, performing the pantomime which prepares his triumph. Indeed, even as Craig began to reject the actual production of *Hamlet* as a predestined failure, he still looked to the dumb show of the players as a *tour de force* of theatre. The players were to be "the second real *force* in the play." The play-within-the-play was ultimately where Craig and Hamlet rested their hopes: "In this Play in the Play we must catch a *glimpse* of what the Greater Theatre *might be* if money Tyranny & Intrigue did not prevent such a possibility. This must be the most perfect work of art imaginable. The Real Theatre, wise . . . deeds. The Foolish Theatre words." (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. III, 2). When Craig cut silhouette figures of the players, he imbued them with a vivacity that he denied to all other figures, including Hamlet (*Hamlet*; opp. III, 1). They represent a principle of vitality, properly controlled and harmonized by the will of the *Übermensch* Hamlet, embattled Prince and artist of the theatre.

Ironically, the other figure of force in Craig's *Hamlet* rite is the figure of Death, a "Sunlike" figure which haunts the scene during Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide in Act III. The poetry of Shakespeare is made subsidiary to a *pas de deux* with Death, heard as music and seen as a radiant marionette. Death is "calling him away and out of it all" according to Craig's stage notes, and "Hamlet is puzzled and pleased." As the soliloquy proceeds, the "golden figure of death" speaks in music which "bubbles up like a fountain between the sentences." The figure of death is repulsed. The music laughs like a "boy who sees the sea" when Hamlet talks of the "undiscover'd country," and "sighs—sighs—sighs—" when Hamlet repulses her. All the while "the shadows [sic] of the fates behind and above him now begin to close in on

him & bend over him" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. III, 1). Hamlet's fate is then sealed by his own will; Death is postponed but still to be served by Hamlet's Christ-like self-sacrifice. The tragedy is transformed into a divine comedy of the theatre. Near the end of the action Craig expects a feeling of triumph, not despair, to prevail. He tries to visualize the effect in his notebook: "In the audience the feeling must be that all is gone *well*—that the catastrophe is near and that Deliverance is with it. Ecstasy in audience by Ecstasy in *acting scene & voice*" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. V, 2).

Craig could visualize the ecstasy only so long as *Hamlet* remained a drama in his own mind. He anticipated failure in his notes, even before the production took place, as he and Stanislavsky worked—sometimes goodnaturedly, sometimes not—at cross-purposes (Senelick). He reverted to the opinion of some that Shakespeare is perfect as poetry, sullied by performance: "It is wrong to act these plays/In the worst of taste" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. I, 5). He would later even insist that he worked on the *Moscow Hamlet* just to prove his theory that Shakespearean plays do not "naturally belong to our art of the theatre," setting up an "unnatural tussle" ("Catalogue").

He was convinced, though, that the role of Hamlet could be acted in life with a purity that could not be realized on stage. In his last set of memoirs, *Index to the Story of My Days* (1957), he developed the Hamlet theme in his life often and at great length. He insisted that he was, like Hamlet, one of the "Impossibles." Hamlet just did not fit: he "lacks technique and advancement"; he "thinks aloud"; he "suspects foul play"; he "sees ghosts" and "hears voices." In general he shows very bad taste and lacks "court technique." And he tends to do nothing, unlike the "first-class" and "efficient" Claudius. People just go around pitying Claudius for having a "weakminded stepson (the very Prince of Denmark) everlastingly yapping at his heels." For Craig, the "Impossibles of 1900" were like nothing so much as Hamlet, and the world was like nothing so much as Elsinore (*Index*, 247–48).

This identification was not merely metaphoric, nor was it a concoction of later life. When one looks into his early correspondence or the director's book for the *Moscow Hamlet*, one finds the most remarkable concatenation of technical speculation and personal identification. He quite literally thought of *Hamlet* as the history of the theatre, and he had grown to assume that he rested at the focal point of the theatre's future. Hamlet's history also bore a striking analogy to his own personal history. As he recalled in the *Index to the Story of My Days* (1957), it seemed that the melancholy Prince and he "had been

together for a long and long before that." "Hamlet almost seemed to be myself. . .," he continued. The character of Gertrude and Ellen Terry seemed inseparable: ". . . this Hamlet . . . when I acted him I remember how much I loved my mother—I mean Queen Gertrude . . . but why was she so cross?" And the mystery of his missing father seemed also to draw him to the fate of Hamlet: "I exaggerated these things then and supposed my stepfather might well have poisoned him in his orchard at Harpenden as he slept. . . I needed him—and he came only in darkest visions—I sat ashamed, alone—ashamed of what?" (162–64).

The animism and the strangeness, then, of Craig's marginalia on *Hamlet* for the Moscow production bear witness to a personal identification which was deep and pursued with increasing literalness. The confusion of his mother and Gertrude in his later memoir runs through his notes on Gertrude in his production notebook. At first he expresses absolute scorn for her, as a fat and lazy person who likes to flop on couches. Later this is mollified into concern: "She is capable of being much warmer. And only the presence of the King sitting beside her makes her speak to Hamlet with insincere coldness." Still later he has Gertrude softening and even speculates, far outside the text, that her drink of the poisoned cup is a suicide (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. II, 2; III, 4; IV, 7). Hence there is nothing unusual in the curious markings "I.D." beside many of Ophelia's lines in the scene where Hamlet orders her to a nunnery (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. III, 1). For Ophelia—whom Craig insisted should be portrayed as unsympathetically as possible—was for Craig the archetype of Isadora Duncan, a recent lover whom he now scorned.

His vision of Hamlet, therefore, was a vision of himself as destroyer and reformer, exacting revenge for the sins of his mother, father, and master. For him, the question of Hamlet's madness was not one of technical interpretation or reinterpretation of a literary text. It was a question of the corruption of the world and the fate of those who would reform it altogether. "IS HAMLET MAD—IS THE WORLD KNAVISH!" he wrote in his most excited hand. Then, probably in a later entry, calm comes over his speculation: "No Hamlet is not mad. But the world may not be honest. The world says it loves Hamlet yet calls him mad—Why—Why because having admitted its love for this leader it will have to admit other things afterwards. Unless it can squeeze out of the difficulty some way—it whispers then that those things which it cannot accept are trifling lunacies in his 'noble nature' " (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*, opp. IV, 2). In earlier notes on the play as a whole, Craig wondered whether Hamlet ought to have taken on the

enterprise in the first place: "Hamlet should have gone out of the court one fine day & created an ideal kingdom of one" (Cahier . . . *Hamlet*). Hamlet could not; he was locked in the text forever. Craig could, and after a fashion, he did.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For a summary of Craig's idea of a renewed ritual theatre, see Payne. The best standard biography is the work of Craig's son Edward. The most significant studies of his practice as an artist of the theatre are those of Innes, Fiebach, Senelick, Loeffler, and Marotti. Other useful and more specialized studies are those of Bablet, Brook, Eliot, Olf, and Rood. This study expands on notions first briefly ventured in Payne (438-44). Senelick also briefly analyzes Craig's psychological relationship to *Hamlet* (24-26).

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