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GORDON CRAIG, PROPHET OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE

City University of New York

PH.D.

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GORDON CRAIG, PROPHET OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE

by

ARNOLD ROOD

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in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1980

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

GORDON CRAIG, PROPHET OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE

by

Arnold Rood

Adviser: Professor Stanley A. Wares

Edward Gordon Craig, son of Ellen Terry, the actress, and E. W. Godwin, architect and theatre practitioner, was born in Hertfordshire on January 16, 1872. The theatrical genealogy from which he descended suggested that he pursue a career in theatre. This began with childhood appearances, after which he made his formal debut with Henry Irving's company at London's Lyceum Theatre. Before he left acting in 1897, he played a variety of roles at the Lyceum as well as a number of leading ones in the provinces when the Lyceum was dark.

In 1893 he received an opportunity to direct a production in the village where he lived. This initial effort was influenced by Irving's historical-archaeological approach. At the turn of the century Craig joined the Purcell Operatic Society for which he directed and designed three works, Dido and Aeneas, The Masque of Love, and Acis

and Galatea, which, in their simplicity of design and staging and imaginative use of light, color, and movement, created a revolution much lauded by contemporary artists. These were followed by productions in London, Berlin, Florence, Moscow, Copenhagen, and New York, Craig working with such artists as Terry, Brahm, Duse, Stanislavsky, Poulsen, and Tyler respectively. Not only were these productions widely influential, but Craig gained recognition as an artist outside the theatre as well.

In 1905 Craig published his first book, enlarged in 1911 as On the Art of the Theatre which is still in print in many parts of the world. In addition, other volumes appeared. To further disseminate his ideas and those of the new movement in the theatre, he edited The Mask, the first journal devoted to the art of the theatre, and he wrote hundreds of articles for newspapers and magazines. In 1913 he successfully established a school in Florence, which was forced to close by the exigencies of World War I.

His ideas about the visual elements of the theatre combined with his experience as an actor led him to a vision of a new form of theatre in which moving setting and light on the non-verbal actor could lead to an emotional response, but a lack of technological ability caused him to suppress the vision.

Craig's contribution and value as a theatre artist is as a theoretician whose prophecies are being fulfilled only

now, and perhaps more important, his continuing ability, through his published work, to kindle the imaginations of those interested in theatre as art.

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At long last, I would like to express my thanks to Professor Arthur H. Saxon, whose influence hovers over each page.

To those friends and relations who have tolerated curtness, if not downright rudeness, I can finally answer the late Nelly Craig's frequent query, "Are you a doctor yet?" "YES!" Thanks to all of you for your loyalty, belief, and support.

Finally, but surely not least, my thanks to Edward A. Craig, Teddy, whose friendship, assistance, and guidance have been unwavering and underlie this, as well as any other, work relating to his father, Edward Gordon Craig.

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CHAPTER I

AVE!

In recent years there has been enough renewed interest in the life and work of Edward Gordon Craig to label it a "renaissance." The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary offers "any revival, or period of marked improvement and new life, in art, literature, etc.,"¹ as one of two definitions of the word. I think the word fully describes the increasing spate of books, articles, and dissertations concerning the life and work of this revolutionary in the theatre. Exactly twenty years after the publication of Janet Leeper's brief, but important, essay on Craig, the next major work, Edward A. Craig's Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, the definitive study, appeared in Great Britain and the United States in 1968. Earlier, Denis Bablet's Edward Gordon Craig was published in rapid succession in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.

Craig's ninetieth birthday, in 1962, stimulated exhibition celebrations in Florence, London, Rome, New York, and a major one in Paris, which travelled to Venice in the following year. Craig's death in 1966 led to memorial

¹The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 439-40.

exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, and London. Important publications concerning his work and the locations of it were Edward Gordon Craig: A Bibliography by Ifan Kyrle Fletcher and Arnold Rood and L. M. Newman's Gordon Craig Archives: International Survey published in 1967 and 1976 respectively.² Dissertations and theses were completed at Yale University, Ohio State University, and the University of Texas. Articles have appeared in such publications as Theatre Research/Recherches Theatrales, Educational Theatre Journal, Theatre Notebook, Theatre Quarterly, The Drama Review, Pamiętnik Teatralny, Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art, etc.

Despite the numerous events, books, and articles which have been published, not very many of them delve beyond Craig's life and/or work on specific productions. This is not to fault the good ones, but rather, to underline the need, in light of the renaissance, to deal with what Craig, himself, did not elaborate upon very much in his written or graphic work, leaving a very delicate, scarcely observable route into what may have been his most important contribution to theatrical theory in twentieth century theatre practise.

This theory surfaced very briefly in an exhibition in Florence in 1908 and did not again see the light of day until 1923 when some of the earlier etchings were published as Scene in 1923.³ This author dealt with Craig's vision

²For detailed information see the bibliography.

³Edward Gordon Craig, Scene (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923).

concerning movement in the third annual Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture in Venice in 1970.⁴ In his research for that lecture he discovered that no one had dealt very much with Craig's vision concerning movement in the theatre because the subject did not fit into the parameters of their work. He also found the suggestions and hints in Craig's work, as well as in the work of the scholars, very enticing and mesmerizing and so decided to embark on an in-depth study of Craig's thinking concerning movement, following any clues which presented themselves. The path meandered with many false starts, dead ends, and detours but he believes he has finally accomplished his goal and sets out the fruits of his labors here.

In a brief discussion of scene designing, Craig writes:

I am afraid that if I were to commit my method to writing I should write something down which would prove not so much useless as bad. For it might be very dangerous for many people to imitate my method. It would be a different thing if you could study with me, practising what we speak about for a few years. Your nature would in time learn to reject that which was unsuited to it, and, by a daily and a much slower initiation, only the more important and valuable parts of my teaching would last. But I can give you now some more general ideas of things which you might do with advantage and things which you may leave undone. For instance, to begin with, don't worry;--particularly don't worry your brain, and for Heaven's sake don't think it is important

⁴Arnold Rood, "'After the Practise the Theory': Gordon Craig and Movement," Theatre Research/Recherches Theatrales 11 (1971).

that you have got to do something, especially something clever.⁵

This author proposes to follow this sound advice and will try not to "worry your brain" nor "to do something, especially something clever." This author, in trying to discover the genesis of Craig's thoughts, found it necessary to begin with a large canvas, namely the influences on Craig, the direct and indirect influences which shaped his thinking and led him to the vision which he did not allow himself to realize during his lifetime and which, only now, with contemporary technology could be successfully accomplished.

The broad background represented by Craig's family, professional colleagues, friends, artists, and experiences exerted a very strong sway on the receptive, thirsting mind of the young artist.

In one book he listed some of the things he intended to study:

This list is to stand as a well from which I may choose some work to do which suits the mood I may be in. . . .

Read Plato. Horace--Cato 1 & 2. St. Augustine, drink these in at all opportunities. . . .

Work out Perspective with the help of books, but most from old Italian perspective drawings--see Leonardo da Vinci. . . .

Work a lime for a month, super for a fortnight--scene-shifting for a month when preparing a play--fortnight in flies--fortnight on stage.

Practice to draw with all kinds of materials . . . keep drawing whatever flies quickly to the imagination--practise and keep attempting to record what you see in

⁵Gordon Craig, "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future," The Mask 1 (May-June 1908): 62.

the mind's eye.

. . . He became involved in an ecstasy of work.⁶

"He suddenly realized that he was quite ignorant of all that he wanted to know about the arts--he must learn quickly. . . . He was going to WORK and LEARN, so that he could capture some of the new ideas which had begun to flow through his brain."⁷

In short, the author will attempt to trace those influences on Craig as an artist and, more specifically, to try to discover the sources of his vision--movement in the theatre as an additional form in theatre itself. To this end, he has pursued the thread of the vision in published works and those which are not yet generally available, such as notebooks, daybooks, letters, interviews, and conversations.

The route chosen will start with a general biography of Gordon Craig. A second section will be devoted to his directing-designing experience in which the "people" influences and his own perceptions come together to foster his thinking about "the art of the theatre." This part will begin with his very early experience in 1893 at Uxbridge, very much under the influence of Henry Irving and conclude with his last production, in 1928, of Macbeth for George Tyler in the United States.

With this as background, the study will move into more

⁶Edward Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1968), pp. 112-13.

⁷Ibid., p. 111.

specific areas relating to the vision: "Scene," and screens, "The Thousand Scenes in One Scene,"⁸ relate "The Actor and the Übermarionette"⁹ to the vision and, after discussing his various attempts to found a School for the Art of the Theatre, reach a conclusion regarding his thoughts about the sources of kinetic art in the theatre.

⁸Edward Gordon Craig, "The Thousand Scenes in One Scene," The Mask 7 (May 1915).

⁹Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Übermarionette," The Mask, 1 (April 1908).

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

As I have acquired a greater and greater interest in the life and work of Edward Gordon Craig, as my insights and perceptions into his vision have been more sharply honed with this ever-expanding interest, the amount of awe with which I reacted to one historical fact has remained constant: this man with whom I was a friend during the last years of his life, who, in one letter could write to me about Isadora Duncan,¹ in another about Max Reinhardt,² in a third about Constantin Stanislavsky,³ this man who was born in 1872, the same year which also saw the births of Aubrey Beardsley, William Rothenstein, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Max Beerbohm, "a good year"⁴ as Craig once said, is also the man whose grandparents had been born in 1817 and 1818, some fifteen years preceding Edmund Kean's death, and who were to become professional theatre people after their marriage. What a

¹Edward Gordon Craig to Arnold Rood, Vence, November 5, 1960.

²Edward Gordon Craig to Arnold Rood, Vence, December 5-6, 1961.

³Edward Gordon Craig to Arnold Rood, Vence, October 25, 1958.

⁴Conversation with Edward Gordon Craig, Vence, August 7, 1963.

span of history was covered in the one hundred and fifty years from the time of their births, both in and out of the theatre, until Craig's death in 1966! After many years of trying to learn to accept this time-span, always in wonder at it, imagine how deflating it was to read, recently, in an early biography of Ellen Terry the author's flippant treatment of what I had held in awe for so long:

Now let me show how easily, by those who care about such things, theatrical history may be traced.

Ellen Terry . . . was destined to make her earliest (though childish) successes with Charles Kean. Charles Kean had acted with his renowned father, Edmund Kean. Edmund Kean had in his childhood figured as one of the imps who danced around the cauldron in John Philip Kemble's revival of "Macbeth." Roger Kemble, the father of John Philip and Sarah Siddons, was the son of a Kemble who had been engaged by and was associated with Betterton. After "the King had got his own again" Betterton was acknowledged to be the legitimate successor to Burbage. Burbage was the first of our great tragic actors, and was the original performer of the greatest number of Shakespeare's heroes--of Coriolanus, Brutus, Romeo, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Shylock, Macbeth, Prince Hal, Henry V., and Richard III. In "Hamlet" Shakespeare enacted the touching character of the Ghost to the Prince created by Burbage; and so, in a rough and somewhat "House that Jack Built" fashion, the connection of such famous histrionic families as the Terrys can be traced back to the Elizabethan days, to Shakespeare, and the actors of his period.⁵

Now, as Ellen Terry's son, may not Gordon Craig be added to this "direct" line of descent from Shakespeare? May we not also attempt to project from Gordon Craig's thought processes what he foresaw as the theatre of the future?

⁵T. Edgar Pemberton, Ellen Terry and Her Sisters (London: C. Arthur Pearson Limited, 1902), pp. 22-23.

Gordon Craig was born to Ellen Terry, actress, and Edward William Godwin, architect, theatre critic, designer, and director at Stevenage in Hertfordshire on January 16, 1872. He made his initial stage appearance in 1878 as a non-speaking village child in Olivia with his mother playing the title role in John Hare's production at the Court Theatre. In January, 1885, Craig made his second debut, this time in a speaking role when he played Joey, the gardener's boy, in Eugene Aram with Henry Irving's company while on tour in America. This auspicious event took place in Chicago, his mother quoting a Chicago critic as saying:

His eyes are full of sparkle, his smile is a ripple over his face, and his laugh is as cheery and natural as a bird's song. . . . He has the instinct and the soul of art in him. Already the theatre is his home. His posture and his playfulness with the gardener, his natural and graceful movements, had been the subject of much drilling, of study and practise. He acquitted himself beautifully and received the wise congratulations of his mother, of Mr. Irving, and of the company.⁶

However, it was not until September 28, 1889 that Craig made his official debut with the Irving company at the Lyceum Theatre in the role of Arthur de St. Valéry in The Dead Heart, "a story of the French Revolution in a Prologue and Three Acts, by Watts Phillips, revised by Walter H. Pollock"⁷ with Henry Irving creating the role of Robert Landry and Ellen Terry

⁶Ellen Terry, The Story of My Life (London: Hutchinson, 1908), p. 280.

⁷Program, Royal Lyceum Theatre, London, September 28, 1889.

that of Catherine Duval. Of this debut Craig's mother wrote to a Mr. Shaw: "Thank you [,] my son made a very promising beginning, a little later on I will send a photograph of him & of myself . . ." ⁸ From then until he left Henry Irving's company at the end of the season in 1897, Craig played some fourteen roles in melodramas, comedies, and the classics. Between seasons at the Lyceum Craig gained additional experience by performing with various provincial companies; these appearances included some twenty-seven major roles.

In spite of this busy acting career, Craig was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the theatre practise of these days. Irving, whom Craig always admired as his master, was ending the nineteenth century as the culmination of a long tradition of historical-archaeological accuracy in production, a tradition starting with John Philip Kemble at the beginning of the century, followed by the Shakespeare revivals by Charles Kean at the Princess' Theatre and reaching its peak with Irving.

At the end of 1893 Craig had his first taste of directing. He was asked to present two performances to benefit the Building Fund of the Uxbridge National Schools. As a resident of Uxbridge (then a suburb of London) he felt he could not refuse and so he adapted de Musset's comedy, No Trifling with Love and added A Rough Diamond by John B. Buckstone along with two duologues. The invitation states:

⁸Ellen Terry to Mr. Shaw, London, October 24, 1889.

" . . . all the Costumes are being specially made, the Music specially written and the Scenery specially painted."⁹ This production was very much in the style of Henry Irving, using designs of Viollet le Duc as the inspiration for the scenery and costumes, which probably were borrowed from the Lyceum Company.

In that same year, 1893, Craig was introduced to another art. He met James Pryde and William Nicholson, who, when working together, were known as "the Beggarstaff Brothers." From them, Craig learned how to engrave on wood, his early wood engravings very strongly showing their influence. What Craig added to the technique he learned from the brothers-in-law was the feeling of light cut into the wood as one would cast a beam of light across a darkened stage. His blending of the arts had begun.

In 1893, also, Craig married May Gibson with whom he had four children but the marriage did not last.

In addition to becoming friends with Jimmy Pryde and "Kid" Nicholson, Craig became friendly with William Rothenstein, the painter, Max Beerbohm, the literator, and the musician, Martin Fallas Shaw. Through them he added to his knowledge of art and its techniques, literature and writing, and serious music; he already appreciated and enjoyed the music-halls. All these men, who became close friends, were acting as stimuli to Craig's imagination as well as filling

⁹Edward Gordon Craig to J. Paul Cooper, Uxbridge, November 2, 1893.

in the lapses in his formal knowledge. This stirring of his imagination led him to embark on a career as a publisher. In January 1898 this debut occurred with the appearance of the first issue of The Page, a monthly magazine devoted to the arts. In 1899 it became a quarterly and continued in that form until it ceased publication in 1901. Explaining the transition from actor to publisher, Craig wrote:

Being an actor, though now no longer acting, the need for appearing before the public was still curiously strong in me. Had I been training as a painter, or in any art or craft, I should certainly not have come out prematurely in any publication like The Page. But being actor-trained, I could only do my bit on a public stage--a curtain had to rise at a certain hour on a certain date, to rouse me. This curtain rising was the first number of The Page. Only a few copies were printed, and fewer were sold. I worked hard at its creation--many woodcuts, slight text. It appeared¹⁰ from 1898 to 1901--it cost next to nothing--only life.

The Page is the first demonstration of Craig's unification of the arts.

In 1899, Craig published his first book, Gordon Craig's Book of Penny Toys, which, although not of the theatre is eminently theatrical, the first of thirteen books, most of which do deal with theatre. During the same year his friend, Martin Shaw, invited Craig to join the Purcell Operatic Society as stage director. The society was an amateur group whose purpose was to present the operas of composers such as Arne, Handel, Gluck, Scarlatti, etc. in fully staged productions.

¹⁰ Edward Gordon Craig, Index to the Story of My Days (London: Hulton Press, 1957), p. 191.

The work which was selected for first presentation was Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas. The performances took place in May 1900 and with them, Craig's revolt against past theatre practise began.

In 1901, while living in Hampstead, Craig met Elena Meo, a talented violinist, who became his close, trusted companion and confidante until her death in 1957. Their liaison resulted in the births of Ellen Mary Gordon Craig, who devoted eight years of her life to caring for Craig in his final years, and Edward Anthony Craig, who acted as his father's assistant for many years before embarking on his own career as theatre scholar and designer for the cinema and stage, creating the first school in England devoted to the art of film.

The year, 1901, also included a revival of Dido and Aeneas, on a bill with Ellen Terry in Nance Oldfield, the one act comediotta by Charles Reade, and a new work called The Masque of Love which furthered the theatrical revolution started by Craig with the Purcell opera. The music for The Masque of Love was arranged by Shaw from Purcell's opera, Dioclesian, which actually was Thomas Betterton's version of the Beaumont and Fletcher play, The Prophetess; or, The History of Diocletian with incidental music by Purcell.

The profit from these performances was sufficient reason for optimism and plans proceeded for a production of Acis and Galatea by George Frederick Handel with a libretto

by John Gay, of Beggar's Opera fame.

In Acis Craig once again had successfully transmuted what might have been a stodgy, dull, unimaginative presentation into a stirring, exciting experience. Despite an enthusiastic response from artists and critics during the two week run the public did not respond and the Purcell Operatic Society found itself in the same financial position as it had been at its start in 1899. And so, the Society dispersed, secure, however, in the knowledge that it had made a great contribution in bringing something new into the theatre.

At the end of 1902 Craig designed and directed Laurence Housman's nativity play, Bethlehem. This was followed, in 1903, by For Sword or Song, produced by Fred Terry, Craig's uncle; for this production Craig designed only three scenes and some costumes. A few months later, under the management of Ellen Terry at Lily Langtry's Imperial Theatre, Craig designed and directed a production of Henrik Ibsen's The Vikings of Helgeland featuring Ellen Terry as the heroine, Hiördis, Oscar Asche as Sigurd, Holman Clark, and Conway Tearle. The play opened on April 15, 1903 and ran until May 9. The starkness of the settings and lighting, as well as the costumes, emphasized the simplicity and symbolism which had become the mark of Craig's work.

Upon withdrawing The Vikings, Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing was quickly substituted, with Oscar Asche playing

Benedick to Ellen Terry's Beatrice. Following the close of this play, Miss Terry took the company on tour.

The Masque of Love and The Vikings had been seen by Count Harry Kessler, the German cosmopolite, equally at home in the worlds of politics, society, and the arts, who also was prolific in his patronage of the arts. He invited Craig to be his guest at Weimar and to produce a play at the Grand Ducal theatre. This proposal was not to be realized, but it led to a long and fruitful relationship between the two men which was not to end until Kessler's death in 1937. The Count was instrumental in arranging for Otto Brahm, director of the Lessing Theatre in Berlin, to invite Craig to design for him a production of Thomas Otway's Venice Preserved in a translation by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In the summer of 1904 Craig left England for Berlin; he became an expatriate for the remainder of his life, although he did return to his homeland for an occasional visit.

In 1961 Craig wrote:

Now to answer you re "Venice Preserved" in Berlin. I looked forward to this when I went over from London to Berlin but alas Dr [sic] Brahm lacked something or other & allowed other peoples [sic] designers to get into studio & muddy up my designs. This I found by accident in his theatres [sic] studio which I visited with Count Kessler a true friend to my work. K. was offended (more than I was) & so a rumpus was created-- I write to the press (German) a long letter--this letter was copied by every other paper in Germany & a fine bust-up was the result. I never saw Dr [sic] B. again neither did I see "V.P." when he put it on at Lessing Theatre.¹¹

¹¹Edward Gordon Craig to Arnold Rood, Venice, December 5-6, 1961.

Craig remained on in Berlin; near the end of 1904 he met Isadora Duncan and entered into the now well-documented relationship with her. What is of greatest importance in their relationship, however, is that in Isadora Duncan's dancing, Craig saw many of his longstanding, vague, intangible, abstract ideas about movement being put into practise. Just as Duncan seemed to improvise her movement to music, Craig saw the possibility of a stage setting doing something similar, under the control of an artist, with the result that each performance could be unique.

In Isadora Duncan, Craig could see the practicality of the theories which had been stirring in his mind since his work with the Purcell Operatic Society between 1900 and 1902. In Craig, Duncan saw the theory which lay behind her new style of dancing which she had arrived at intuitively. And so, there was not only the emotional relationship but, more importantly, the mutual exchange of artistic ideas and their stimuli.

The year, 1905, became the first of a number of particularly fertile years for Craig. Meeting Duncan was certainly one of the major reasons; another, often overlooked, is that in October of that year, Sir Henry Irving, the leading actor-manager who formally introduced Craig to the stage by hiring him as an actor in 1889, died. Because Henry Irving had been his master, a statement Craig was to repeat until his own death in 1966, Craig had not been able to formalize

his thinking even though he had successfully produced a number of experimental productions based upon that thinking. With Irving's death Craig was released from the ties he had to Irving, the ties to tradition, because Irving had become, by the end of the nineteenth century, the leading exponent of historical accuracy in the visual elements of the theatre although it must be remembered that this "accuracy" was painted two-dimensionally, including shadows. As a result of these ties being cut, Craig wrote and published his first book at the end of 1905, The Art of the Theatre, in which his ideas are expressed in the form of a dialogue between a stage director and a playgoer. Undoubtedly the most important statement is Craig's conclusion that the artist of the theatre of the future would create his masterpieces:

Out of ACTION, SCENE, and VOICE. Is it not very simple? And when I say action, I mean both gesture and dancing, the prose and poetry of action. When I say scene, I mean all which comes before the eye, such as the lighting, costume, as well as the scenery. When I say voice, I mean the spoken word or the word which is sung, in contradiction to the word which is read, for the word written to be spoken and the word written to be read are two entirely different things.¹²

In recent years this has been referred to as "total theatre."

In the autumn of 1906 Craig had his first sight of Italy; he travelled with Duncan to Florence in order to work on a production of Ibsen's Rosmersholm for Eleonora Duse,

¹²Edward Gordon Craig, The Art of the Theatre (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1905), pp. 54-55.

whom he had met earlier in Berlin at the home of mutual friends. Because Craig and Duse had no common language, Duncan was pressed into service as interpreter. She claims she had to use maximum diplomacy in that role because of the strong temperaments of both artists. Duse was not allowed to visit the theatre while the setting was being constructed and painted--until Craig decided it was ready to be shown. Duse was impressed with what Craig had created, and on Wednesday, December 5, 1906, the curtain rose to reveal the unexpected scene to the surprised Florentine audience which expected to see a realistic setting according to Ibsen's description.

In 1907 Craig was inspired by the Renaissance architect, Sebastiano Serlio, to think about the application of movement in the stage-setting and began to make notes in his copy of Serlio's Five Books of Architecture. He wrote, in part:

. . . of a floor which, divided into squares, might be moveable--thereby obtaining at any time as many variations of the form of the floor . . . but a pliable floor was not all I desired--I wanted a "scene" so mobile, which (within rules) might move in all directions--tempos--in all things under the control of the one who could dream how to move its parts to produce "movements." . . . To these I added a roof composed of the same shapes as the floor--suspended cubes, each cube exactly covering (and meeting when lowered) each square on the floor. . . . We have, therefore, a room or place moveable at all parts, and all ways, within certain laws and restrictions. . . .¹³

¹³ Edward Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1968), p. 235.

Now that the idea was planted, how to nurture it so that it could bear fruit?

During the course of 1907 an artist friend of Craig's, Stephen Haweis, taught him how to use metal plates for etching. This new technique for illustrating his turbulent thinking so excited Craig, that he executed about fifteen plates in the short period of two months. This was his first attempt to record his ideas about arrested or frozen motion during the development of speechless drama, a visual symphony of movement. As many people mistakenly believe, Craig did not intend his vision of "Scene" to replace spoken drama as it had been known for centuries but to be an additional form of dramatic art which would supplement the existing forms. In the etchings Craig attempted to show a synthesis of the moving "Scene" as affected by changing light which would evoke subtle changes in the emotional responses in the spectators. When we look at the etchings we must bear in mind that they are not to be viewed as a related sequence of still-photographs but as a series of unrelated frozen moments of movement, each being analagous to the single frame of a motion picture.

Craig faced one problem with this startling vision-- he did not know how to solve the mechanical problems that such a scheme presented; how were the vertically moving cubes to be manipulated? When the etchings were placed on exhibit the next year, Craig wrote in the foreword to the catalogue:

We have constructed an instrument. By means of this instrument the artist is enabled to bring before the beholder, a sense of the law which controls our system--the law of Change. Movement will be for the sake of movement--ever attempting to create the perfect Balance, even as in Music Sound is for the sake of Sound, ever attempting to create the perfect Harmony.¹⁴

Craig concludes the foreword by writing:

That I should give an exact and laboured description of this instrument can be no one's wish--for they must realize at once that it resembles any other instrument, and that to describe an organ is not to reveal the beauty which exhales from its construction. But to those who will have understood what I have said here, I shall have given enough suggestion to assist them to the understanding of the designs themselves.¹⁵

A rather mystifying statement leaving the mechanics entirely to the imagination of the spectator but, in reality, indicating Craig's own frustration about the problem involved. Although he allowed the etchings to be published in book form in 1923,¹⁶ he seems to have set aside the vision for all time, never openly working with the concept for the remainder of his life.

However, he did shortly work out a compromise solution. Rather than the vertically moving cubes he evolved, and patented, an idea for horizontally moving "screens" which were

¹⁴Catalogue of Etchings Being Designs for Stage Scenes by Gordon Craig (Florence: Stabilimento Aldino, 1908), pp. 6, 8.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶Edward Gordon Craig, Scene (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923).

to be of uniform height, composed of any number of panels of varying widths and double-hinged so that either side could be displayed. The surfaces were to be painted in neutral colors so that changing light falling on them could create the mood of differing locales. To make the ground of his imagination even more fertile he built a large model stage with a matching set of screens which he spent hours manipulating to form ever-changing scenes for whichever play was occupying his thoughts at the time. To add to the reality he carved wooden figures, representing the characters, in varying heights so that they would always be in proportion, no matter where he placed them on the model stage.

While he was actively involved in working on the compromise vision for Scene, he realized that he needed an outlet for the tremendous outpouring of ideas regarding his "new theatre," and so The Mask came to life in April 1908. The magazine began as a monthly but soon settled into being a quarterly devoted to "the art of the theatre." In it appeared articles, foreign notes, book reviews, etc., many of which were written by Craig, himself, and with many woodcut illustrations by him. He realized even before publication of the first issue that it would not be decorous for his own name to appear as often as it would have to, and so he plunged into the use of pseudonyms ranging from John Semar (Semar being the Javanese word for a shadow puppet) as editor, to John Balance, François M. Florian (who usually

sent articles and other pieces from foreign lands), G. B. Ambrose, and Edward Edwardovich, as well as approximately sixty others. For his real personality Craig reserved the title of "Artistic Advisor" to the editor who invited Craig to be guest editor for an occasional issue. It must be noted, in all fairness, that a great number of "real" people also were contributors to The Mask.¹⁷ From its initial appearance in 1908, The Mask continued publication, with the exception of the war years, through 1929 when it became defunct. Despite the humor involved in the large number of pseudonyms used by Craig the magazine played a very important role in the world of theatre. It was the first theatrical periodical to treat theatre seriously as an art form: it served to disseminate Craig's ideas, as well as those of others, and, equally important, it served to bring into communication with each other people from around the world interested in new approaches to theatrical art.

With The Mask successfully launched and fulfilling its goals, Craig was free, in 1909, to accept an invitation from Constantin Stanislavsky to direct a play at the Moscow Art Theatre. The play selected to be co-directed by the two men was Hamlet. Craig spent the next three years working on the production and made several trips to Russia for consultations with Stanislavsky. The concept of the production

¹⁷Lorelei Guidry, "Gordon Craig's Theatre Magazine: The Mask" (Masters dissertation, Tufts University, 1963).

was rather simple: Hamlet represented the forces of good which were compelled to destroy the court because of its evil as represented by Claudius, Gertrude, and the other members of their court. Despite negative comments, the production met with great success; defenders and detractors argued about the new approach and it is undoubtedly in these arguments that lie the greatest merits of the production: in the influence it had upon contemporary and succeeding generations of workers in the theatre.

After a long hiatus, Craig was invited to become involved with the production of Ibsen's The Crown Pretenders for the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen in 1926. Despite a mixed reaction the production was well enough received that King Christian conferred on Craig the Order of the Knights of the Dannebrog for his services to the Danish Theatre.

Shortly thereafter, the American producer, George C. Tyler, invited Craig to design the settings and costumes for Macbeth. Craig sent designs to America, but did not himself come to New York to supervise their execution. Most of the designs have the letters "P. B." after his signature; this was meant to stand for "Pot-Boiler" and suggested that they were not considered very significant designs by him and had been prepared simply to fulfill a contractual agreement.

Neither of these last two productions made use of the large-scale, moveable screens with the changing light patterns upon them.

Craig did not involve himself only in the inanimate visual elements of the theatre. He was deeply concerned with the living actor as well; this being a logical extension of his own performing career. In the second issue of The Mask, in April 1908, appeared his lengthy essay, "The Actor and the ⁱⁱÜber-Marionette," in which he seems to advocate dispensing with the living actor and replacing him with a super-marionette. This was widely misunderstood even by the members of the profession who thought Craig was not only trying to do away with scene design and painting but also with actors. Craig well understood the value of shocking statements and did not hesitate to use them. In this essay he was simply attempting to shake the profession out of the complacency into which it had drifted. The misinterpretation of his essay was so widespread that he found it necessary, in the 1924 edition of On the Art of the Theatre (the book, which since its first publication in 1911, contained the essay), to clarify what he had meant. Simply, what Craig wanted was for the actor to have a well-trained body and voice (the physical materials of his art) under his full intellectual control, along with a soaring, imaginative spirit (creativity) and thus, acting could take its place as an art in itself.

Now, how did Craig intend to tie all this new thinking together into a malleable whole? As early as 1903 he intended to open a school for the art of the theatre. Although there was a little publicity, the school did not come into being

for two reasons: the enrollment was minimal and Craig received the invitation to come to Berlin. Despite the ensuing years of postponement Craig never lost sight of this goal. Through the efforts of Elena Meo, who was instrumental in raising sufficient money, Craig was finally enabled to open his school at the Arena Goldoni, an open air theatre in Florence, on February 13, 1913, Ellen Terry's sixty-sixth birthday. The start of World War I caused the major financial contributor to withdraw his support so Craig was not allowed the opportunity to fully establish his unique curriculum. Although efforts were made to secure substitute financing, the Italian government, entering the war, requisitioned the Arena Goldoni for military purposes. With this blow the School for the Art of the Theatre came to an end and with it the opportunity for Craig to formally indoctrinate disciples.

In addition to the two productions in the twenties already cited, Craig did not withdraw from his attempts to reform the theatre. He turned even more to the written word and through a number of books and hundreds of articles, as well as his contributions to The Mask, was to have an ever-widening effect on succeeding generations of theatre artists: Robert Edmond Jones, Donald Oenslager, Jo Mielziner, Peter Brook, Kenneth Tynan, Alwin Nikolais are but a few in the English speaking world whose work was influenced, directly or indirectly, by this giant. Needless to say, the same effect was occurring in most European countries as well.

In addition to being created a Knight of the Dannebrog in Denmark in 1926, Craig was accorded several other honors during his long life. In 1911 he was invited back to England from Italy to attend a dinner in his honor at the Café Royal on July 11 with William Rothenstein, the painter, in the chair. Among the guests were people from other art worlds as well as theatre, newspapermen, critics, etc. In 1938 Craig was appointed to the distinction of the Royal Designers for Industry. In 1946 he was elected to le Syndicat des metteurs en scène in France. In 1961, in the United States, Craig was made an honorary member of the United Scenic Artists. The greatest honor came to him when, in May 1956, Queen Elizabeth conferred upon Craig the privilege of being a Companion of Honour. And so, when he died quietly on the morning of July 29, 1966, he had achieved recognition, both socially and professionally, for himself and for the theatre he had loved so long and so faithfully.

CHAPTER III

PRODUCTIONS

No Trifling With Love

Craig was to enter a very eventful year with the arrival of 1893. Shortly after the turn of the year he struck out on his own by renting The Audrey Arms, a small house at Uxbridge, then a suburban town outside London. The house dates from the seventeenth or sixteenth century, or perhaps earlier.¹ The building in half-timber and brick once had been a small public house. Ellen Terry who owned it let Craig have it for five shillings a week, totalling thirteen pounds a year. Gordon Craig, years later, says:

. . . one had to go down a step or two from the street, in order to reach the floor of the bar parlour--a very small bar parlour, bare of all furniture, from which one passed into the kitchen and thence upstairs, where there were three very nice rooms and a big attic above them. [It was in the large attic that Craig's first child, Rosemary, was born.] Considering it looks such a small house, it was actually quite spacious.²

At the Lyceum Theatre, Craig took on the role of Lorenzo in The Merchant of Venice, for which he received a

¹Gordon Craig cites the two earlier dates in his autobiography; Edward Craig cites the two later ones in his biography of his father.

²Gordon Craig, Index to the Story of My Days (London: Hulton Press, 1957), p. 138.

sound drubbing from the critics, and The Youngest Knight Templar in Tennyson's Becket. On March 27, Ellen Terry on holiday received a telegram informing her that, "on the Monday after the theatres closed for Holy Week . . . I was married at a registry office to Miss M[ay] Gibson. We went to Teignmouth till April."³

The Lyceum Theatre company set off for its regular tour on September 4 lasting until the following March 17, leaving Craig and his wife completely on their own at Uxbridge. Sometime later in September the Reverend T. W. James came to call and asked Craig if he would help him to raise funds for the Building Fund of the Uxbridge National Schools. Craig readily agreed to produce two performances on December 13 and 14 at the Uxbridge Town Hall and for this he decided to use as the centerpiece Alfred de Musset's No Trifling With Love, a comedy adapted by Craig, A Rough Diamond, a comic drama by John B. Buckstone and two duologues, one by Miss Wheeler, the other by Austen Dobson.⁴ On the 16th the Middlesex and Bucks Advertiser carried a short piece:

A dramatic entertainment, in aid of the Building Fund of the St. Margaret's National Schools, was held at the Town Hall on Wednesday and Thursday, and proved in every way a thorough success, the room on each evening being well filled. The affair was kindly organised by Mr. Gordon Craig, who, besides taking a most active part himself, has secured the assistance

³Ibid., p. 146.

⁴Annotated copy of the invitation dated November 2, 1893.

of several of his professional friends, in addition to a number of local ladies and gentlemen.

. . . Unfortunately, in consequence of extreme pressure upon our space, and as there was a further performance on Friday, we are compelled to hold over a full report of the proceedings until next week.

A note by Craig, dated 1948, defines "adapted" by saying, "say 'mutilated by' but I adopted one of the many theatrical conciets [sic] of those days[.] any manager who slashed a play about, inserted lines of his own to make it 'go,' or changed it from a comedy to a tragedy was said to have 'adapted' the play. Does the same custom prevail today."⁵ Among the ladies and gentlemen who volunteered to perform were, "Mrs. Gordon Craig, Mrs. J. Fountain, Miss [Gertrude?] Millar, Miss Wortham, and Miss Violet Vanbrugh (Of Lyceum and Daly's Theatres, London), Mr. [Tom] Heslewood, Mr. Fountain, Mr. Barnett, Mr. E. Woodbridge, Mr. A. Bird, and Mr. Gordon Craig (Of Lyceum and Daly's Theatres, London)."⁶

The invitation goes on to say, "We intend giving as thorough a performance as possible, and to that end all the Costumes are being specially made, the Music specially written and the Scenery specially painted."⁷ This statement, very likely, is an example of late nineteenth century public relations. It is more likely that the costumes came from the wardrobe department at the Lyceum Theatre, with some

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

slight modifications. "The scenery was mostly damask hangings; the furniture was from a collection of old props left over from Louis XI."⁸ The music was special " . . . so, Jo, a girl friend of Edy's [Craig's sister], was called in to help. Jo, who looked more like a pretty boy, was also known as 'Jimmy' Overbeck; she was also a baroness."⁹

By the time the performances came around Violet Vanbrugh had to withdraw and was replaced as Camille in the de Musset by Italia Conti, Craig himself playing Perdican, and Tom Heslewood playing The Baron, Perdican's father. The performances were so well received, both for the visual elements and the acting, that an extra one had to be scheduled on the 15th at which time, " . . . a change in the programme was made, scenes from 'The Taming of the Shrew' (Shakespeare) and 'The Hunchback' (Sheridan Knowles) being given instead of 'No Trifling with Love,' the afterpart remaining the same."¹⁰

Although this was Craig's first production as director-designer, it seems quite obvious that in style and design it was very much in imitation of Henry Irving's historic-archaeological style. Although these few performances by Craig do mark his directing debut, his originality and genius

⁸ Edward Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), p. 88.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Middlesex and Bucks Advertiser, 23 December 1893, p. 5.

did not bloom until his next work some seven years later. However, he was beginning to stretch his wings.

Dido and Aeneas

The Masque of Love

Acis and Galatea

It is not known whether Dido and Aeneas by Henry Purcell received its first performance in 1689 or 1690; it is not known exactly who took part in the premiere nor is it known exactly how Purcell orchestrated the score for this performance. Among the facts which are known regarding the premiere are that it was the first production in England of an opera written in English by an Englishman and set to music by another Englishman. We also know that the work was commissioned for Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding School for Young Gentlewomen at Chelsea, Priest himself having been a celebrated dancing master. Although the score for the original production has not survived it is interesting to note that the libretto by Nahum Tate for this version calls for seventeen dances. The orchestration consisted of strings, harpsichord, and guitar, it is assumed. There are two stage directions which mention guitar: "A Dance Gittars Chacony" and "Gitter Ground a Dance," this instrument being used to augment the continuo. The only indication for dating this performance is a mention in Thomas D'Urfey's Epilogue (New Poems, 1690)

which places it pre-publication in either late 1689 or early 1690. The participants were, for the most part, students in Mr. Priest's school and, therefore, amateurs (there is a possibility, but no proof, that the principals may have been professionals).¹¹

Dido and Aeneas achieved its first professional production in 1700, when it was presented at Lincoln's Inn Fields by Betterton's company as part of Charles Gildon's version of Measure for Measure; the prologue and three acts of Dido being inserted into Acts I, II, III, and V of the truncated Shakespeare play. The printed version of Measure for Measure indicates differences from the original version of Dido; the seventeen dances were reduced to ten, two short episodes were added to the prologue. In 1704 the opera was removed from its Shakespearean setting and, with the omission of the prologue, was played as an afterpiece titled The Masque of Aeneas and Dido. Even then the music was not published, but the manuscript copy at St. Michael's College, Tenbury Wells is probably a copy of the 1704 theatre score.¹²

After these performances on January 29 and April 8, 1704,¹³ the opera seems to have lain dormant until the bicentennial anniversary of Purcell's death on November 21, 1895.

¹¹Eric Walter White, "Early Theatrical Performances of Purcell's Operas: With a Calendar of Recorded Performances, 1690-1710," Theatre Notebook, 13 (Winter 1958/59): 43.

¹²Ibid., p. 48.

¹³Ibid., p. 48.

London was stirred to do him honour by a commemorative service at Westminster Abbey, the Philharmonic Society to organise a special concert of his compositions, and the Royal College of Music to give 'Dido and Aeneas' to its pupils for performance at the Lyceum Theatre. The tribute was just a little late, but better late than never--if only to encourage our living composers to attempt greatness.¹⁴

It may well have been this revival at the Lyceum Theatre which brought Dido and Aeneas to the attention of the organizers of the soon to be formed Purcell Operatic Society. In 1899, Martin Fallas Shaw, as Musical Director, and Mrs. Norah Dryhurst formed the Society and invited Edward Gordon Craig to be the Stage Director. Craig had made his third debut at the Lyceum Theatre in Henry Irving's company in 1889 and continued to act at the Lyceum until 1897, which makes it entirely possible that he saw the matinee performance of Dido at this theatre on Wednesday, November 20, 1895.¹⁵

As stated in the Society's prospectus:

This Operatic Society has been formed with the initial purpose of reviving the works of Purcell, Arne, Handel, Gluck, Scarlatti, etc. It is a matter of widespread regret that the Operas of these famous composers are now no longer heard, and the chief object of this Society will be to select for stage representation their best works.¹⁶

Among the honorary members of the Society were Miss Janet Achurch, Miss Ellen Terry, Sir Walter Besant, Walter Crane,

¹⁴"Dido and Aeneas" and "Diocletian," n. p., n. d.

¹⁵Dido and Aeneas program, November 20, 1895.

¹⁶The Purcell Operatic Society prospectus, 1900.

Arnold Dolmetsch, Sir A. C. Mackenzie, Sir C. H. H. Parry, Prof. C. Villiers Stanford. Membership was to be limited to 250 people with "the annual subscription . . . [one guinea] entitling members to three half-guinea seats. Members' tickets can be dated for all or any of the performances, and will be allotted in order of application." The performances of Dido and Aeneas were to be presented on May 17, 18, 19, 1900 at the Hampstead Conservatoire.¹⁷

The Spear, of February 28, 1900, indicated that the chorus was to include thirty to forty voices, the orchestra was to be the same size as that of the original production and "the mise-en-scène will be entirely in sympathy with the spirit of the work."

In an announcement distributed on the day of performance, the objective of the Society in relation to Purcell was further explained:

It is a matter of widespread regret that the works of this famous English musician are so seldom heard, and it is the object of the PURCELL OPERATIC SOCIETY to supply this deficiency.¹⁸

It must be remembered that at the time of these performances the Boer War was still raging, so it is not too curious to find that the announcement concludes with:

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸To=night To=night Dido and Aeneas announcement, 1900.

This revival will give PATRIOTIC ENGLISHMEN an opportunity of hearing ENGLISH music, sung and played by ENGLISH musicians, and conducted by an ENGLISHMAN, and the profits of the opera will go to swell the funds of the Golder's Hill Convalescent Home for ENGLISH soldiers.¹⁹

It is interesting to note the variation in the "Fore=word" when the souvenir program was issued, which states the Society's purpose, particularly when compared with The Spear's indication that the visual elements would be faithful to the work.

The Purcell Operatic Society has been formed with the initial purpose of reviving the works of Purcell, Arne, Handel, Gluck, Scarlatti, etc. It is a matter of widespread regret that the Operas of these famous Composers are now no longer heard, and the object of this Society will be to select for Stage representation their best works. In designing the scenery and costumes of "Dido and Aeneas," the Stage Director has taken particular care to be entirely incorrect in all matters of detail.²⁰

At this period in theatrical production, after the faithfully accurate productions of such managers as Charles Kean with the assistance of George Godwin, Henry Irving with such artists as Hawes Craven, Alma-Tadema, Wilson Barrett with Craig's father, E. W. Godwin, and others,

What are called, with large-lettered pride of advertisement, "spectacular effects" on the stage, whether in opera or in the playhouse, are not only in themselves somewhat crude and childish in their appeal to the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dido & Aeneas: An Opera by Henry Purcell souvenir program (Hackbridge, 1900).

adult imagination, but they have also a confusing result upon the opera or play to which they are the scenic setting, in that they draw away the attention of the onlooker from the music or the words, as well as from the action of the characters, all of which, by consequence, instead of dominating the performance, become but a mad part of the resulting wrangle, perplexing the wits in a confusing blare to eye and ear. To the acting, to the individual action of the players, to the emotions which it is the whole province of the dramatic arts to arouse, this scenic over-elaboration is absolutely disastrous--the actors becoming but mere specks upon the landscape.²¹

For example, in the published text for his production of The Winter's Tale in 1856, Charles Kean explains that:

The architectural portions of the play have, as on many former occasions, been kindly superintended by George Godwin, Esq., F.R.S. [Fellow of the Royal Society], who has taken an ardent interest in my work, for which I feel most grateful; and my thanks are peculiarly due to George Scharf, Esq., Jun., F. S. A. [Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries] (author of the Handbook to the Greek and Pompeian Courts at the Crystal Palace), from whom I have received the greatest possible assistance and information, and whose pictorial mind has suggested many important details. The vegetation peculiar to Bithynia is adopted from his private drawings, taken on the spot.²²

In Irving's production of Faust, another typical example later in the century, we find a similar point of view:

Although the scene of Faust's meeting with Margaret is not indicated by Goethe, the St. Lorenz-Platz at

²¹Haldane Macfall, "Some Thoughts on the Art of Gordon Craig with Particular Reference to Stagecraft," The Studio 23 (September 15, 1901): 250.

²²William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, Arranged for Representation at the Princess's Theatre . . . (London: John K. Chapman and Company, 1856), p. ix.

Nüremberg is just the sixteenth-century street and place one can well imagine to have been in his mind's eye. It is well understood that in his description of his encounter with the hound he indicates his native city of Frankfort; while the students' cellar, Auerbach's Vault, was no doubt at Leipzig. The witches' kitchen may have been there too, or at Nüremberg. Wherever it was, in the same city Faust met Margaret, and it is fair dramatic license, and in perfect harmony with the poem, to lay the scene in the interesting city of Nüremberg, which even today is famous for its remains of mediaeval architecture, its picturesque gabled houses, its fortified walls, its Gothic churches, and its quiet old-world manners and customs.

The Platz is a typical example of the sincerity of the Lyceum work. It is a most pleasing and characteristic picture. On the right the noble front of a Gothic church. On the left an old inn with men drinking and waited upon by a woman you have seen over and over again in pictures of the Early German school. The church gates are opened, the citizens come in groups to worship. They are broken up into a series of pictures, all indicating design and intention of composition, the local colour of the dresses being arranged with artistic thoughtfulness. The stage-manager has this great advantage over the painter: his figures are alive, they breathe and move. In this Lorenz-Platz we are transported to the veritable Nüremberg of Albert Dürer and Gabriel Weyher.²³

These nineteenth-century scenic artists were archaeologists rather than designers.

It is exactly here, in these few performances by amateurs, that Craig created his theatrical revolution.

Dido and Aeneas . . . was the first step of a new movement which is destined to revolutionise the production of the poetic drama. It gave abundant promise that the poetic drama of Shakespeare may be rendered with something of its innate intensity, instead of being the somewhat tedious thing it has

²³ Joseph Hatton, The Lyceum "Faust" (London, n. d.), p. 23.

become--to those of us who are honest in the frank society of our conscience.

In the performance of Dido and Aeneas there was no attempt at presenting a series of realistic pictures, done from photographs taken upon the spot. The authorities on Carthage had been left in undisturbed dust, long-winded and ineffectual, upon the shelves of museums and libraries. At the rising of the curtain a very different Carthage was discovered. The spirit of each scene in the opera was carried out in a colour-scheme that essayed to convey the emotion of that scene as deliberately to the eye as the music essayed to convey it to the ears. . . . The players at once took on their full size, dignity and individuality. The result was a haunting impression . . . in which, all unwittingly, the eye helped the ear in grasping the intention of the scene.²⁴

In preparation for the task in which " . . . the music was wedded to the movement and the movement to the lighting in a harmonious whole,"²⁵ Craig at first conceived of using the Thames River at Battersea Bridge "as a background to the opera, with a moored barge for a stage and the indigo sky and distant lights as his backcloth."²⁶

However, the production scheme actually used had to be based on the physical construction of the Hampstead Conservatoire which had been selected for the performances. It had been rented from Cecil Sharp, the manager, who greatly admired Purcell's work, for \pounds 29. 3s. 6d. for the three performances and "preparation time."²⁷ The Conservatoire

²⁴Macfall, "Some Thoughts on the Art of Gordon Craig with Particular Reference to Stagecraft," p. 255.

²⁵Janet Leeper, Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre (Harmondsworth: King Penguin Books, 1948), p. 10.

²⁶Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 117.

²⁷Ibid., p. 118.

had been built as a concert hall; the stage was a series of built-up, immoveable platforms on which the performers were placed. Craig had to make use of these platforms all through Dido and Aeneas as there was no way to remove them. Another feature of the concert hall with which he had to contend was the lack of a proscenium. A proscenium was necessary to Craig for two reasons: in order to conceal overhead lighting and to achieve a "limitless 'atmospheric sky' against which his figures would move in a simple harmony of colours."²⁸

In order to accomplish these aims, Craig had a false proscenium constructed with a light bridge installed behind it. The shape of the hall and the director's needs dictated a proscenium which was half as high as it was wide (it is interesting to compare this shape with the vertical proscenium opening he planned for later productions). The overhead light bridge accommodated six lime-lights; there were less powerful electric lights on stands on either side of the stage and, at the rear of the auditorium, were two small spotlights, all with changeable color media. No attempt was made to use border or footlights.²⁹ Because this was Craig's first use of electric light " . . . (coming as he did from the Lyceum Theatre where it was forbidden on the stage) he hired the most sophisticated equipment that could be found;

²⁸Edward Craig, "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer," Theatre Research/Recherches Theatrales, 10 (1969): 11.

²⁹Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 120.

not from any old theatre at a cheap rate, but from Maskelyne & Cooke. Maskelyne at that time was giving performances of illusion--Magic etc. and based most of his tricks on the clever use of Electric Light."³⁰

The key to the entire physical production at the Conservatoire was simplicity. Other than two backdrops and a gauze in front of them, a throne for Dido, four walls (six feet high by ten feet wide) of twelve inch squared trellis covered with bunches of imitation grapes and vine leaves, a few poles and some sacks of paper rose petals, the visual accompaniment to the opera was to be accomplished through the use of simple costumes and the chorus.³¹ Craig's collaborator, Martin Shaw, has written:

It was in the simplicity, imagination, and directness of the stage setting that Gordon Craig showed his unique genius. The most remarkable of the players themselves were the chorus. . . . There was hardly a trained voice among them, the only condition of admittance being the ability to sing in tune. They had to sing their choruses crawling, leaping, swaying, running--any way that Craig fancied. How they did it I do not know, but they did. Most of them had no stage experience at all. Perhaps that was as well. . . .³²

Craig himself described the stage picture:

The first scene is made up of blue sky, green leaves, and purple flowers. It opens in a dim light that

³⁰ Edward Craig to Arnold Rood, n. d.

³¹ Craig, "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer," p. 12.

³² Martin Shaw, Up to Now (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 26.

grows, and follows the music along with the gestures of the singers. In the famous hunting scene, Act II, we see a classical picnic in progress. A dark youth holds up a cluster of purple grapes, while a half-reclining nymph stretches up after the fruit; others are circling a loving-cup among themselves, when the hunters' horns are heard ushering in Aeneas, who bears upon his spear the trophy of the chase. As a marked contrast, the witches' cave--the place to which all the wreckage of the world drifts--is painted in the coldest possible colours, with a deep blue sky at back. Huge shadows from time to time sweep over the scene. The witches are half animal, half human.³³

A fuller, more detailed, composite description of each scene may be based upon information from the souvenir program and that provided by Craig's son.³⁴

Act 1

Scene 1. Dido's Palace. The Arbour. The curtains parted to disclose Dido seated upon a pile of red cushions under the domed canopy of her throne, tended by her hand-maidens flanked on either side by the trellis of vines laden with purple grapes, which hid the chorus. Above her rose a sky of pure ultramarine; six feet in front of this stretched the gauze lit by a pink light--from some angles in the hall the effect would be lilac, from others sky blue, plus depth.

Act 2

Scene 1. A Grove--Moonshine. Act II, which was supposed to take place in a "moonlit grove," was played at Hampstead on the bare stage with green lights on the gauze against the grey cloth. (A special backing was painted for this scene in the following year when it was performed in a proper theatre.)

Act 3

Scene 1. The Ships--Departure. Aeneas' departure and the joyous chorus of "Come Away Fellow

³³To=night announcement.

³⁴Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 121-22.

Sailors" was played against the simple blue backcloth, but with yellow light upon the gauze. Aeneas decked in garlands and accompanied by his followers holding circular shields and tall red spears, ascended the orchestral platforms towards the background where three or four masts and a few ropes suggested his waiting ships.

Scene 2. Under the ground.

Scene 3. The Palace--Death. The last scene . . . was again in Dido's palace, but not in the throneroom; dressed in black, she reclined on a pile of black cushions, surrounded by her hand-maidens. The scene started in green light, which gave way to the blue backing, which in turn grew darker as the light was taken off the gauze, and against this ever-darkening ultramarine sky, she sang her death song, "When I Am Laid in Earth"; then, as the chorus got to the line "Scatter roses in her tomb," there descended from the heavens an ever-increasing rain of pink rose petals--they did not come down all over the set, but in a vertical shaft of light upon Dido alone, until they blotted her out; finally, in the deep indigo night, all that could be seen were the arms of the chorus seeming to wave her a sad farewell. . . .

For the costume designs Craig

. . . based most of his ideas . . . on the traditional conception of Greek warriors and Greek maidens, but greatly simplified the design. Aeneas was to wear a gilt helmet, a garment that looked like a short toga, and garlands of flowers for his departure; his followers were also to wear simple helmets and were to carry circular shields and long spears painted a light tone of Venetian red. The sailors wore Phrygian caps and short tunics. Dido's attendants were to be in garments made of cheap materials like mutton cloth and gauze, crosslaced at breast and hips, and in the first scene they too were to wear garlands of flowers. The witches were to be swathed in strips of grey gauze. Most of them wore slippers or sandals. Dido's beautiful hair was dressed to look like one of the Grecian heads in the British Museum.³⁵

The souvenir program for these 1900 performances indicates

³⁵Ibid., p. 119.

that the orchestra included nine first violins, three violas, four celli, and three bassi, although the article in The Spear, referred to earlier, said it was to be "the same size as that of the original production."³⁶ This same souvenir program goes on to list a chorus of thirty-nine men but no women, surely an oversight in printing.

Craig tells us that rehearsals actually began as early as 1899 and that he and Shaw chose the singers, only the two in the title roles being professional performers, "The rest were simply magnificent. They were amateurs--i.e., lovers of singing and of acting." He goes on to say how the directors proceeded.

First of all we forbade singers and chorus to come down-stage and open their mouths so that we could see down their throats as they stood all in a straight or broken line across the stage. Next, we helped them to act--not merely to look picturesque, but to enter into the spirit of the thing they were performing.³⁷

He had already written Shaw to "try and accustom the singers, chiefly the chorus, to walk as they sing, so that it doesn't become a difficulty later."³⁸

Although the production had not been widely publicized it was reviewed with considerable praise by The Standard

³⁶ Dido & Aeneas souvenir program.

³⁷ Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, pp. 228-29.

³⁸ Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 118.

(May 18); The Daily Chronicle (May 18); The Times (May 21); The Lady (May 24); The Artist (July).³⁹ Perhaps the critic of The Review of the Week best understood what it was that Shaw and Craig were trying to accomplish in Dido and Aeneas when he wrote on August 11, 1900:

For a long time the question of the representation of Shakespeare on the stage has been a burning one, solved in one way by the Elizabethan Stage Society, and in another by Sir Henry Irving; but a performance of Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas" gave hopes of a third and better solution, which, as the opera is, I believe, shortly to be repeated, may be worth a little consideration. This opera was staged by Mr. Gordon Craig, and by its simplicity, breadth of effect, and delicate strength of colour, was the work of one who added to the imagination of an artist the skill to make it visible to others. The main idea was never lost sight of, no detail was allowed to detach itself from the picture, and every touch was of importance in the gradual development of the tragedy. This was achieved by a broad simplicity of treatment applied to scenery, dresses, lighting, and grouping, and was given full value by being set in a frame of like simplicity. . . . The real triumph of the setting, was, however, in the use of light and shade; it was as carefully considered as in a wood engraving, and added immeasurably to the tragic simplicity of the whole performance. . . . If this was possible on a small stage, with little help from the art of the stage machinist, does it not point out the way for which we have looked so long--the way in which we may see Shakespeare and Maeterlinck in all their poetry? No lavish expenditure could have added to the restfulness of such a spectacle, and the complaint of want of funds may now be put aside, while we take the middle path between ugly pedantry on the one hand, and superfluous detail on the other. The main principles acted on by Mr. Craig can be applied to work on a scale as big as that of Covent Garden, or as small as that of the amateur stage; but it does demand one thing--it demands a director such as this performance had, a man who is at once an artist and a stage manager. And since such a man has been found,

³⁹The Purcell Operatic Society announcement, 1901.

why should we not see more of his work, and have other memories of harmony of colour and form--in other words, of a perfection of beauty?⁴⁰

Naturally, Craig's mother, the celebrated Ellen Terry, was most pleased with the production and the reception it received. On July 4, 1900, she wrote George Bernard Shaw about the production, telling him:

Ted had a big finger in the performance of Dido last May and if the thing could be seen for a week at least at the proper place, at the proper time exactly as it was seen in May at Hampstead, I should feel inclined to back it in a substantial manner and I know two others who would follow suit.⁴¹

Shaw in his reply indicates his familiarity with the opera but that he had not seen this production of it. He advises Terry not to finance a revival as there is only "a very tiny public" for Purcell. In a further letter, on the tenth, Shaw writes:

What have you done about Dido? I am afraid my advice was rather confused and inconclusive. What I meant to convey was, shortly, that Dido is musical and not theatrical business. The difference is that with music each performance must pay for itself, the money at the door paying all the performers and the rent, and leaving a surplus; whereas with theatre business, you invest a heap of money, and only get it back in the course of a run. Moral: Do not back Dido for a run; but if a performance costing £80 can be given in a hall holding £100, then the thing will pay if the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Christopher St. John, ed., Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence (New York, Theatre Arts Books, 1949), p. 347.

hall is full, and if it isnt, it wont. Dido might fill a hall: the thing is not impossible: thats all I can say.⁴²

Miss Terry followed Shaw's seeming sound advice and did not finance a revival; however, she actually went further; she agreed, with a release from Henry Irving, to appear for a week in a revival of Nance Oldfield, the comedietta in one act by Charles Reade. On the same program at the Coronet Theatre at Notting Hill Gate⁴³ would be the Purcell Operatic Society's production of Dido and Aeneas and The Masque of Love. The triple bill opened on Monday, March 25, 1901, and played for six nights with a matinee on Saturday. The souvenir program on this occasion indicates a more representative chorus of twenty-six women and twenty-three men.⁴⁴

The argument for The Masque states:

The Scene is a hall in a mansion. Cupid sends forth children to fetch masks, by which we are to understand that they are playing at being Gods and Goddesses--Flora, Comus, and the rest. Three groups, representing Blood, Riches, and Poverty, enter at different points; their wrists are bound, and they are dragged in, in typification of the stern mastery of Love. Their fetters are loosened. The rod of captivity becomes a maypole of merriment, whereon a solemn movement follows--"Hear, mighty Love!" At the conclusion of this chorus, we hear outside a rustling and the sound of feet, which create mingled fear and expectation. Bacchanals enter, and the maskers flee like startled fawns. A hymn to Bacchus

⁴²Ibid., p. 349.

⁴³Coronet Theatre program, March 25[-30], 1901.

⁴⁴Dido & Aeneas: An Opera by Henry Purcell souvenir program (Clerkenwell, 1901).

follows, with lively movement of hands and bodies, and an interweaving dance. While the eyes are fed, the measure of a bright country dance enchants the ear, the masque closing with the usual procession.⁴⁵

The scene for the action was "A Room" and consisted of

three walls of light grey canvas and a grey stage cloth. . . . The main colours were black and white, with little touches of colour here and there. The grey box set was filled with pools of coloured light, and the figures moved in and out of different fields of colour as they went through the beautiful movements that Craig had devised for them.⁴⁶

In general the costumes were based on traditional designs for Pierrots; masks were used for Silenus, Comus, and Bacchus.

Among the opening night tribulations, Martin Shaw recalled that,

in the Masque, the children upset the infant Bacchus in his car and while the unlucky babe (where was the L. C. C.?) hung perilously downward, howling, his attendants shrilly disputed the question who was to blame for his ungodlike position.⁴⁷

The major difference between the production of Dido at the Hampstead Conservatoire and at the Coronet Theatre was that

the stage at the Coronet was larger, enabling Ted to get even more depth into his blue sky, because there was a greater distance between the backcloth and the

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 136.

⁴⁷Shaw, Up to Now, p. 28.

gauze in front of it. Many of the critics differed in describing the colour of the background, some calling it lilac, others purple or blue--in fact, this variation in shade was achieved by changing the colour of the lights directed on to the gauze in front of the same ultramarine cloth.⁴⁸

This time many more publications sent critics to review the production, once again to lavish praise. Reviews appeared in The Times (March 27); The Daily Graphic (March 27); The Standard (March 27); The Stage (March 28); The Review of the Week (March 29); The Speaker (March 30); The Era (March 30); The Musical Standard (March 30); Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper (March 31); The Daily Chronicle (April 1); The Lady (April 4); The Sphere (April 6); The Speaker again (May 11); and The Studio (September 15).⁴⁹

On March 31, 1901 Walter Crane wrote Craig saying, "Your staging is distinctively original and artistic, and strikes quite a new note in the Theatre . . ."⁵⁰ In a letter dated April 2, 1901 William Butler Yeats wrote Craig, "I thought your scenery in 'Aeneas and Dido' the only good scenery I ever saw. You have created a new art."⁵¹ In his Ideas of Good and Evil Yeats wrote of " . . . Gordon Craig's purple backcloth that made Dido and Aeneas seem wandering on

⁴⁸Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 135-36.

⁴⁹Some Press Comments on "Dido and Aeneas" and "The Masque of Love," produced in 1900 and 1901, London.

⁵⁰Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, p. 238.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 239.

the edge of eternity. . . ."52

Martin Shaw, in his memoirs, records several critical reactions which are amusing, although it is entirely possible they are apochryphal.

One of the critics was indeed so overcome that as the curtain descended on Dido, he rushed into the bar and collapsed on the counter, murmuring "Flossie, for God's sake give me a drink! I've got purple on the brain."

In another, he writes that

one of the musical and theatrical papers had a very appreciative notice, and they sent three copies of the issue containing this, addressed as follows:

One to	Gordon Craig, Esq., Coronet Theatre, W.
another to	Martin Shaw, Esq., Coronet Theatre, W.
and the third to	Henry Purcell, Esq., Coronet Theatre, W. 53

In 1926, in a letter to the editor of an unknown newspaper, George Sampson corrected the music critic for not having been aware of these performances of Dido and Aeneas. In addition, he writes,

I saw it on a Saturday night, when the young gentlemen of Notting Hill in the gallery appeared to regard the show with astonishment, as all a wonder and a wild

⁵²W. B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil (London: A. H. Bullen, 1903), p. 152.

⁵³Shaw, Up to Now, p. 29.

surprise, and to find something exquisitely comic in the name "Dido."⁵⁴

In her book, Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre, Janet Leeper records that:

. . . Henry Nevinson, who was present at the Coronet Theatre, wrote in his note-book: "Both Dido (which the people would call Dodo) and The Masque went gloriously. Great beauty of the purples and greys and greens in the Dido against the vast background of purple eternity."⁵⁵

Perhaps the best summation of the revolutionary importance to the theatre of these productions by Gordon Craig and Martin Shaw is the statement by Edward Craig:

These two young men had given London a performance which, although on a very small scale, was proof of the existence of a new approach to the conception of theatrical presentation. It was a break with the established order--with the Irving tradition and his detestation of electric lighting. It was a break with the Gilbert and Sullivan approach to opera with its vulgar use of the very same electric light. It was a break, above all, with sham realism. It liberated the imagination of the audience but was powerful enough to guide them in the direction conceived by the designer, not only of setting but of the whole mood of the production.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, Ellen Terry's appearance on the bill was a major factor in the success, both artistically and financially, of the week's run. The profit of several hundred

⁵⁴George Sampson, Letter to the editor, March 21, 1926, n. p., n. d.

⁵⁵Leeper, Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre, p. 7.

⁵⁶Craig, "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer," p. 15.

pounds was sufficient reason for optimism and so plans went ahead for a production of Acis and Galatea by Handel with a libretto by John Gay. After several months of planning, rehearsals commenced and continued for eight months culminating in the first performance on March 10, 1902 at the Great Queen Street Theatre. On the same bill was a revival of The Masque of Love.⁵⁷

Because of the earlier excellent reviews, the financial success and the general optimism in the Purcell Operatic Society, Craig and Shaw planned on fifteen performances.

One week sufficed to show us that the Public could not be brought to see and hear it. The Press was not at all a bad press, but we failed all the same. The Publics were not sure if Acis was English or Handel Dutch--or . . . Anyhow, the piece was as good as we could make it.

One Public was not sure of the way to the Great Queen Street Theatre. Another Public was not convinced that any such theatre existed. A third Public was sure that Penley, the great comic actor, was playing there in Charley's Aunt. A fourth Public agreed, but said "he'd not be good as Acis." "Or as Galatea," said the fifth Public. A sixth Public longed to come and see and hear what we were up to, but hadn't a shilling to spare. And so on. The show lasted six nights.⁵⁸

Because of the work's mythological setting, Craig had the option of designing a traditional "idyllically bucolic 'Sicilian' landscape, or to give free play to his imagination

⁵⁷ Denis Bablet, Gordon Craig (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 48.

⁵⁸ Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, p. 241.

and follow where the music led him."⁵⁹ Quite naturally Craig chose the latter and, by so doing, had the freedom to continue to make great use of line, color, movement, and light.

The opera was divided into two acts with three scenes in the second. Once again a composite description will be utilized (the scene titles are from the souvenir program).

Act 1. The White Tent. The effect of a transparent tent was achieved by hanging hundreds of lengths of two-and-a-half-inch-wide webbing from just behind the proscenium and draping it back over a bar: the webbing was not close together and through this curtain of strips, which opened and closed as figures came and went, a simple backcloth with tones that graduated from "white at the bottom and went through pink and blue and finally ended in Indigo at the top."⁶⁰

Act 2. Scene 1. The Shadow, Scene 2. The Giant . . . the lovers are clinging together in the middle of the stage, while the huge shadow of Polyphemus hovers threateningly, about to descend on them and extinguish their happiness. Craig made full use of the power of light and shadow, so that Polyphemus became, as Max Beerbohm put it, "a real giant--the one and only real and impressive giant ever seen on any stage."⁶¹

In the caption to a drawing by Percy F. S. Spence in The Sphere we also learn that

the "back cloth" is formed of a vast dark blue cloth, and the lovers, Acis and Galatea, are discovered in the middle of the stage, which is quite dark save for a red light thrown on them. Then when the Chorus

⁵⁹Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 49.

⁶⁰Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 152.

⁶¹Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 50.

bids them "behold the monster, Polyphemus," a picture of a towering castle emerges in golden outlines on the back cloth. . . .⁶²

Act 2. Scene 3. The Grey Tent. When Acis was transformed into a fountain in the last scene, the tent of grey streamers slowly disappeared, and in the vast expanse of blue sky, a "Water God" gradually materialized in the form of a great fountain where the sparkling beads of water rose and fell. This beautiful effect--erroneously reported recently as having been "projected"--was, in fact, achieved by piercing holes in the backcloth and back-lighting them; then, by revolving large perforated discs in front of the lamps, the spots of light came and went, producing the cascade effect. . . .⁶³

Continuing his departure from the traditional,

Craig used ribbons for the costumes too--particularly for those of the nymphs and of Galatea and Damon--and, as the performers moved, these fluttered in shifting arabesques against their robes and tunics. The young shepherds were dressed in white, with little hats of brown straw that had nothing classical about them; and at one point a cluster of children's balloons was released in a pink and white cloud. This was a true modern equivalent of the pastoral spirit. . . .⁶⁴

Again Craig had successfully transmuted what might have been a stodgy, dull, unimaginative presentation into a stirring, exciting experience. Although the public did not respond, artists did, with enthusiasm. Graham Robertson, the painter and writer, concluded a long piece:

⁶²Percy F. S. Spence, "A Scene from Handel's 'Acis and Galatea' As Mounted at the Great Queen Street Theatre," The Sphere (March 22, 1902).

⁶³Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 152.

⁶⁴Bablet, Gordon Craig, pp. 49-50.

. . . Mr. Gordon Craig, the Deviser and Executor of these fair imaginings, had achieved his great object--that the Sister Arts of Music, Painting, and Pantomime should make up their little differences and cast away their jealousies, and, by a united effort, should create anew a Forgotten Art--the Art of the Theatre.⁶⁵

Haldane MacFall, the critic, wrote Craig: "It's glorious, my son, glorious, glorious!!!"⁶⁶ Yeats once again wrote Craig:

I was delighted with "The Masque of Love" in all its details, as delighted as ever, and with certain scenes of the "Acis and Galatea." Surely that second Polyphemus scene, the scene where he kills Acis, belongs to an art which has lain hid under the roots of the Pyramids for ten thousand years, so solemn it is. . . .⁶⁷

Arthur Symons tellingly comments on how the audience was drawn into the production as active participant:

The imagination has been caught; a suggestion has been given which strikes straight to "the nerves of delight"; and be sure those nerves, that imagination, will do the rest, better, more effectually, than the deliberate assent of the eyes to an imitation of natural appearances.⁶⁸

Despite this enthusiastic response the Purcell Operatic Society found itself in a somewhat similar position to the one it had been in when it was organized in 1899; but with

⁶⁵Edward Gordon Craig, The Art of the Theatre (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1905), p. 8.

⁶⁶Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 154.

⁶⁷Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, p. 242.

⁶⁸Arthur Symons, Studies in Seven Arts (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1907), p. 353.

the addition of experience.

The wonderful chorus now had no future to look forward to. For three years they had slaved for Shaw and Craig endeavouring to reproduce the beauties of Purcell's and Handel's music accompanied by Craig's "movements" and dances--all this they had done for love. They were now "amateurs" only in the literal sense of the word. It had not been a sacrifice, for they lived in a period when people made their own fun and became more familiar with the arts in the process. At that time there was no magic box to hold them by the eyes and ears until their senses were dulled by a surfeit of pre-selected entertainment. This work had been an exciting part of their lives, and, as the years passed, they must have felt proud of their efforts which had helped so much to bring a new kind of impressionism into the theatre.⁶⁹

The Harvest Home

While awaiting news from Lawrence Housman about a proposed production of his nativity play, Bethlehem, Craig read a copy of Horn's Ancient Mysteries, published in 1823, in which are described English "Harvest Festivals."⁷⁰ Hoping to find another work to keep the Purcell Operatic Society functioning, Craig and Martin Shaw designed and arranged a masque called The Harvest Home, which they hoped could be performed the following summer at various places in the countryside, even at Craig's mother's farm at Smallhythe. A prospectus was written and issued:

⁶⁹Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 154-55.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 166.

The Ceremony of an English Harvest Home is thus described by Hentzner, who travelled through England towards the close of the 16th century, and published his itinerarium in 1598. "As we were returning to our Inn" (at Windsor) "We happened to meet some country people celebrating their harvest home: their last load of corn they crown with flowers, having besides an image richly dressed, by which they would perhaps signify Ceres; this they keep moving about, while men and women, men and maid-servants, riding through the streets in the cart, shout as loud as they can till they arrive at the barn."

In the present entertainment the above description is followed with some exactness though the whole partakes of the character of a Masque.

The music is nearly all taken from the most beautiful and in some cases unfamiliar folk music. [The National Composer,] PURCELL has been drawn upon for a charming country dance, and for the kissing duet [from the Fairy Queen].

First we have a procession of harvesters [clad in faultlessly correct costumes,] who sing their way through the village to the barn with a harvest song. After the ceremony has taken place, they give themselves up to sport and play. Characteristic songs are sung by the various villagers, and the utmost good humour and merriment prevails. For the miller leaves his home by Dee side to sing and enjoy himself, and is not the poacher of Lincoln here telling of "his delight on a starry night?" Then there are the Morris dancers capering about with bells on their legs, and the Hobby Horses with an exact presentment of the dance which took the town and country side by storm in the time of the Merry Monarch,--the Swinging Songs--the Kissing Duets--the Children and their little May-pole--and so on, till you, and the dancers, and singers are tired.

The day's festivities end by a dance in which all join in to a rollicking tune called "The King's Jig," the strains of which are heard far away in the distance as the merry makers retire to their homes. The performers number from 30 to 40, and the time taken is about three quarters of an hour, or longer if desired.⁷¹

In addition to the emptiness of the Society's treasury,

⁷¹Prospectus for The Harvest Home [1902]. The words in square brackets are changes made between the "Rough Proof" and the issued version.

Craig's always practical sister, Edith, pointed out to him,

the harvest doesn't go on all through the summer you know, and you'd never be able to afford the transport for thirty or forty people all over the country for three quarters of an hour's work!⁷²

And, so, that project was abandoned.

Bethlehem

The next production designed and directed by Craig is hardly mentioned by Martin Shaw in his autobiography;⁷³ Craig, in his autobiography,⁷⁴ devotes barely three paragraphs to it; Edward Craig devotes about three pages to it;⁷⁵ Denis Bablet describes it quite concisely in four pages;⁷⁶ Laurence Housman denounced it in a handful of pages.⁷⁷ What was this awkward production? "BETHLEHEM. A Nativity Play. By Laurence Housman, produced by E. Gordon Craig, with music from various sources, under the musical direction of Martin F.

⁷²Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 167.

⁷³Shaw, Up to Now, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁴Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, pp. 242-43.

⁷⁵Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 160, 162-65.

⁷⁶Bablet, Gordon Craig, pp. 51-54.

⁷⁷Laurence Housman, The Unexpected Years (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 184-94, 251-52.

Shaw."⁷⁸ There were three scenes and seventy-five participants, no one of them having a character listed on the single-leaf program. This was because of problems with the censor. It is interesting to note that, although the program did not mention him, the music had been written by Joseph Moorat who was given credit for it in the "Final Announcement," which also indicates there were to be six performances, and in the printed text of the play.⁷⁹ Although the program calls for three scenes, the text divides the play into two acts. The text also has bound in a "Note" which states:

With the Author's consent, and with a view to obtaining a more reverent effect upon the stage, several of the speeches written for Our Lady have been omitted, or transferred to St. Joseph. In the book of the words, however, the full text is retained.⁸⁰

Housman's book, An Englishwoman's Love-Letters, had proven to be a success and he had, as a result, more ready cash than ever before so he decided to finance six performances of Bethlehem.⁸¹ Because he was a great admirer of Craig's work with the Purcell Operatic Society, Housman invited Craig to direct, to which the latter agreed provided he was allowed free rein. This, in turn, was acceptable to Housman and the

⁷⁸The program.

⁷⁹The "Final Announcement" is a four-page folder which is primarily a subscription form; Laurence Housman, Bethlehem: A Nativity Play (London: Macmillan and Company, 1902).

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Housman, The Unexpected Years, p. 184.

difficulties began. The first was that Craig threw out much of Moorat's music, inserting extracts from music by Palestrina, Sweelinck, Tenaglia, Bach, and Beethoven, upsetting Housman, who maneuvered Craig into getting Moorat's reluctant permission. The text was not altered to any great extent.

The next difficulty arose with the auditorium. Housman had undertaken to find a hall and eventually lit upon the Great Hall of the University of London, known earlier as The Imperial Institute which, however, like the Hampstead Conservatoire, had no proscenium. Craig made use of the same arrangement for the stage as he had earlier but, this time, the acoustics were very bad in the large hall. In discussing the problem with his childhood friend, J. Paul Cooper, a solution presented itself:

. . . Craig saw at once that by some device it must be cut down in size, and made less resonant. As a canvas tent was his proposed solution, I do not know why he did not haul in, for trial and approval, the tent which eventually I had to hire. Instead he sent out his stage-manager to buy seven or eight hundred yards of a blue cotton fabric softly glazed, for which I paid a good many pounds; and this, cut into lengths, he caused to be festooned over the cross-beams and iron girders of the too-spacious auditorium; and having thus constructed a dissipated sort of tent, he brought some of his actors to speak their lines in it, and so satisfied himself that reasonable acoustics could be secured. The later history of that glazed cotton fabric, which thereafter became my possession, was curious and interesting: its career of usefulness is not yet over. Most luckily for me, Craig's artistic eye (or his manager's) had chosen a blue of charming quality; and in the many years since then, all my changes of residence have had in their furnishing an ingredient of Craig's happily-chosen colour: curtains, cushions, bed-spreads, quilts, box-covers, splash-backs, dust-sheets--they

are still with me; and doubtless some of it will remain over to make my shroud and to line my coffin. And not only has it supplied me with such furnishings, but many of my friends also, to whom I have made large gifts of it when occasion called; and I am not sure that a good many Suffrage banners were not lined with it--dipped and dyed to another colour, when my sister was chief banner-maker to the Suffrage between the years 1908 and 1914. So I may say that Craig's fantastic lavishness in discovering the acoustics of London University's Great Hall, is one of his items of expenditure which I least regret--it brought me a very serviceable supply, and I have never tired of its colour or of happy meditation on its queer origin. ⁸²

Denis Bablet has superbly reconstructed the mise-en-scène:

The first scene [The Shepherds in the Fields] gave an impression of profound tranquility. A group of shepherds, dressed in rough garments (made of hessian) and sheepskins, and holding long crooks, sat under a lean-to, almost motionless until the angel appeared to them. A few hurdles were placed about the stage and the ground was strewn with vague shapes covered with sacking, to give the impression of sheep lying huddled together. The scene was a harmony of neutral tones, backed by a vast sweep of dark grey-blue sky with a few stars twinkling in it.

The second scene [The Coming of the Kings] showed a hill running right across the horizon, with a purple sky above, heralding the Three Wise Men. First came a motley procession of pilgrims, rich and poor, strong and weak. Then the three Magi arrived, one dressed in black, the second in grey and the third in white. They were followed by three groups, the first and second of which brought a burst of rich colours--black, white and purple; black, purple, green and white--while the third was a harmony of greys, this being the train of the wretched and destitute, the sick and the wicked. There were lepers, imbeciles, a murderer with blood-stained head and beard, beggars, a musician and a puppet showman. All this provided a striking example of the symbolical use of colour. Craig never regarded colour harmonies as an end in themselves, texture and

⁸²Ibid., pp. 189-90.

colour were not to be used simply for decorative purposes, they must play a part in building up the dramatic effect.⁸³

Edward Craig points out that at this point in the action,

there was another little scene, "Outside Bethlehem". . . . It was acted in front of the curtain, which was drawn apart, only a few feet, to show a view of the town, painted to look like an early woodcut. The chorus sang: "Come little town, your narrow doors undo . . ." This scene is not included in the published version of Bethlehem that appeared at the same time as the production.⁸⁴

The last scene of Bethlehem [The Cradle at Bethlehem] was perhaps the most instructive of all. Craig did not attempt to reconstruct the stable, he suggested the divine presence by the use of ethereal lighting. The stage was arranged as an amphitheatre, with the shepherds grouped around the Virgin and the crib. When Mary drew the coverings from the cradle, there was no doll inside to represent the Child, but light streamed up from its depths into the faces of those gathered round it. The divine presence was indicated by the radiant faces of the shepherds gazing at the Child. Light had never before been used like this in a performance.⁸⁵

Housman's recollection of one performance of this scene may be indicative of the relationship which developed between Housman and his director.

In the actual performances I only remember one contretemps, too comic to be called serious. In the arrangement of the lighting, there was one concealed lamp, which provided an important central effect for

⁸³Bablet, Gordon Craig, pp. 52-54.

⁸⁴Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 163.

⁸⁵Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 54.

the Manger-scene: it was set in the floor, and with its upward rays lighted the interior of the cradle in which, invisibly present, lay the Holy Child. On the departure of the Shepherds and Kings came a sleep scene, for which all lights had to be lowered--except that one. But just once a mistake was made; in the sleep that fell on mortals, Divinity also became extinguished, and a fierce whisper shocked the silence: "Here! you've switched off Jesus!" That mistake was perhaps a little symbolic of what had spiritually happened in the course of the production. We had, between us, "switched off Jesus."⁸⁶

It must be noted, in a more serious vein, that the production of Bethlehem was, in some ways, a milestone in Craig's career: it marked the last time he worked on a musical production and it was the last production in which he worked with a group of performers composed largely of amateurs.

Perhaps it might be best to let Craig himself have the last word. He writes,

M. F. S. [Martin Fallas Shaw] and E. G. C. each got payment from Housman. About this M. F. S. wrote me years later (February 9, 1938):

Yes, L. H. was quite the gent in that respect and gave us both something like £20 each--may have been £25--not that that's a living wage, even in pre-war times. Still, it's what's called a gesture. I remember very well what you did with your cheque. You changed it all into jimmy o'goblins (O to think of them--O to dream of them fills my heart with joy) and distributed them amongst the company--something like a gesture! I can recall to this day the childish grin of joy on Maggie's [Adamsen] face when she showed me the sov. You waited till the show was over (I think--almost certain--the last night). The company weren't paid and I know it was a godsend to some.

⁸⁶Housman, The Unexpected Years, p. 192.

I suppose you remember that L. H. ran it all on the profits from "An Englishwoman's Love Letters."

.....

E. T. [Ellen Terry], Fred Terry, Comyns Carr and who not, came to see the show. The old Beard [George Bernard Shaw] came too, and as is customary, was inclined to pooh-pooh the production. But when one is young one snaps one's fingers at such pooh-poohers.⁸⁷

The Vikings of Helgeland

Much Ado About Nothing

On April 15, 1903, under Ellen Terry's management at the Imperial Theatre, Craig next directed Henrik Ibsen's The Vikings at Helgeland, as well as designing the settings and costumes. The production was quite a departure from the past. Several years later, in her memoirs, Ellen Terry was to state:

I hope it will be remembered, when I am spoken of by the youngest critics after my death as a "Victorian" actress, lacking in enterprise, an actress belonging to the "old school," that I produced a spectacular play of Ibsen's in a manner which possibly anticipated the scenic ideas of the future by a century, of which at any rate the orthodox theatre managers of the present age would not have dreamed.⁸⁸

This might be an appropriate place to try to determine what caused Ellen Terry to try her hand at management. As a

⁸⁷Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, pp. 242-43.

⁸⁸Ellen Terry, The Story of My Life (London: Hutchinson, 1908), pp. 326-27.

result of the initial performances of Dido and Aeneas in May of 1900, Miss Terry became very enthusiastic about the turn her son's work had taken. She had not been happy when Craig had given up his burgeoning acting career: "I have never known anyone with so much natural gift for the stage. Unconsciously he did everything right. . . ." ⁸⁹ However, when his interest as a stage director grew, and had been demonstrated, "what more natural than that his mother should give him the chance of exploiting his ideas in London? Ideas he had in plenty--'unpractical' ideas people called them; but what else should ideas be?" ⁹⁰

With a view towards finding a play with which her son might experiment and which would also include a role for herself, The Vikings was selected.

We read it aloud on Christmas Day, and it seemed tremendous. Not in my most wildly optimistic moments did I think Hiordis, the female character--a primitive, fighting, free, open-air person--suited to me, but I saw a way of playing her more brilliantly and less weightily than the text suggested, and anyhow I was not thinking so much of the play for me as for my son. ⁹¹

As a director and designer Craig is noted for his departures from realism and historical accuracy as a style. About realism Craig has this to say:

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 325.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 326.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 325.

The modern Realistic Theatre, forgetful of all the laws of Art, sets out to reflect the times. It reflects a small particle of the times, it drags back a curtain and exposes to our view an agitated caricature of Man and his Life, a figure gross in its attitude and hideous to look upon . . . Photographic and Phonographic Realism injure the minds of the people. They thrust upon them a grotesque and inaccurate representation of the outward and visible life, with the divine essence--the spirit--the beauty of life left out.⁹²

Several years later, in a note inserted into the Rosmersholm program of the production Craig designed for Eleonora Duse, he elaborated on this theme by saying,

Realism has long ago proclaimed itself as a contemptible means of hinting at things of life and death, the two subjects of the masters. Realism is only Exposure whereas art is Revelation. . . .⁹³

With this clear understanding of Craig's objections to realism we can proceed directly to his production of The Vikings. Although the play is by Henrik Ibsen we must remember that not all of Ibsen's work was typical of realistic writing; in The Vikings there is a curious blend of romantic events with the characters involved in these events and Ibsen's attempt at realistically realizing Scandinavia in ancient times. This combination led the play to a symbolic level of interpretation which Craig chose to emphasize.

⁹²Catalogue of an Exhibition of Drawings and Models for Hamlet, Macbeth, The Vikings, and Other Plays by Edward Gordon Craig (Manchester, 1912; Leeds, 1913).

⁹³[Edward Gordon Craig,] A Note on "Rosmersholm," Florence, 1906.

Ibsen describes the setting for Act I:

The top of a high cliff, which in the background drops sheer down to the sea. On the left is a boat-shed, on the right hills covered with pine woods. The masts of two ships of war can be seen down in the creek below; far out on the right, rocks and islands. The sea is very rough. It is winter, with storms of wind and snow.⁹⁴

Craig, of course, simplified this picture:

. . . when the curtains are parted, a rocky slope, Nordish, rugged, forbidding, is viewed, the sea, an inky pool, mist-hemmed, washing at its base. From above falls a curious, sinister light which gives purplish tones to the stony surfaces and masks the faces of the players with mysterious shadows. The entire atmosphere is one of awe, of dread.⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that in Dido and Aeneas and Acis and Galatea the background had been a blue sky in depth; the background for The Vikings was to be a black sky in depth. Because of the way they were lighted, Craig's skies seemed three-dimensional; they had depth, atmosphere, one could get lost in them. Ibsen's description for the second act setting calls for:

The Banqueting-hall in Gunnar's house. The main entrance is at the back; there are smaller doors in the side walls. In the foreground on the left, the chief seat of honour; opposite to it, on the right, the lesser seat of honour. A fire of logs is burning

⁹⁴Henrik Ibsen, The Warriors at Helgeland, trans. R. Farquharson Sharp (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1956), p. 3.

⁹⁵James Huneker, Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 32.

on a stone hearth in the middle of the floor. In the background, on both sides of the door, are platforms for the serving-women. From the seats of honour, two long tables, with benches, stretch along the walls to the background. It is dark without; the log fire lights up the hall.⁹⁶

Craig altered all this completely, basing his design on the use of vertical lines and of the circle. There was a semicircular backcloth of grey hangings which descended from an invisible height and parted in the middle to reveal a single imposing doorway. On a round platform stood a circular table for the guests, with the two seats of honour in the centre background; above it hung an immense wrought-iron circle, bearing lights. The impression was one of solemnity, of a feudal world, with the candelabrum suggesting a huge iron crown.⁹⁷

For Act III Ibsen simply calls for "the hall in Gunnar's house. It is day."⁹⁸ In Craig's production

. . . the third act bore off the victory. A simple space of hall, a large casement, a dais, the whole flooded by day-light. Here the quality of light was of the purest, withal hard, as befitted a northern latitude.⁹⁹

The last act in the play takes place at "the seashore. It is evening. Glimpses of the moon are seen in a dark, storm-swept sky. At the back is a lofty, newly-made grave-mound."¹⁰⁰ At the Imperial Theatre was found

⁹⁶ Ibsen, The Warriors at Helgeland, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Bablet, Gordon Craig, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁸ Ibsen, The Warriors at Helgeland, p. 39.

⁹⁹ Huneker, Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Ibsen, The Warriors at Helgeland, p. 54.

a vast unbroken black background, a space for death (the death of Hjordis); and in front of the stage a steep slope towards the footlights, rounded at its upper edge--a kind of naked hillock where the stark drama would be played out. That was all.¹⁰¹

The costumes also emphasized the simplicity, the symbolism, the starkness of the settings and the lighting:

. . . he used dresses, in The Vikings, of eight shades of grey--he has always loved greys and browns, very low in tone; besides these, great semi-circular cloaks, all of clear colour--a blaze of it. There were also golden ornaments of delicate intricacy, trimmings in rope, and studded shields of bold and simple design, some of which, being beautiful and serviceable, have survived to this day.¹⁰²

The costumes reminded James Huneker of "crazy-quilts"!¹⁰³

Despite Craig's innovations and an impressive cast headed by Ellen Terry as Hiördis, Holman Clark as Ornulf, Oscar Asche as Sigurd, Hubert Carter as Gunnar and Conway Tearle as Thorolf, the play was a failure with the public. Plans were for it to run for some time but the lack of response caused it to be withdrawn on May 9th, less than a month after it had opened to considerable critical acclaim. William Rothenstein, the painter, wrote to The Saturday Review:

. . . never before had we seen such perfect marriage of dramatic suggestions in the foreground, background and grouping of the figures, and the actual delivery

¹⁰¹Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 60.

¹⁰²Leeper, Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre, p. 9.

¹⁰³Huneker, Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists, p. 38.

and gesture, which resulted in a perfectly noble expression of the tragedy of men's and women's lives. . . . Everything seemed terribly but simply inevitable, from the black sky, to the checked gowns of the heroes. . . .¹⁰⁴

Some years later, in his memoirs, Rothenstein recalled,

. . . so beautifully was the play staged, so nobly were the figures grouped in scene after scene, that I felt that something important had happened to the English stage.¹⁰⁵

Although he, among others, was very unhappy about the casting of Ellen Terry as Hiördis, James Huneker thought:

. . . the play had its compensations. Miss Terry's son, Edward Gordon Craig, exercised full sway with the stage, lighting, costumes. He is a young man with considerable imagination and a taste for the poetic picturesque. He has endeavoured to escape the deadly monotony of London stage lighting, and unaided, has worked out several interesting problems. Abolishing foot and border lights, sending shafts of luminosity from above, Mr. Craig secures unexpected and bizarre effects. It need be hardly added that these same effects are suitable only for plays into which the element of romance and of the fantastic largely enter. We see no "flies", no shaky unconvincing side scenes, no foolish flocculent borders, no staring back-cloths. The impression created is one of a real unreality.¹⁰⁶

Max Beerbohm, writing in The Saturday Review on April 25, was even more unhappy about Ellen Terry playing Hiördis, but thought that this self-sacrifice was laudable

¹⁰⁴Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵William Rothenstein, Men and Memories: 1900-1922, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 54.

¹⁰⁶Huneker, Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists, p. 32.

as it gave her son his first professional platform, rather than amateur groups in far-away converted concert halls, from which to launch his startling new ideas regarding stagecraft. Beerbohm felt that Craig's work ". . . has come off with flying colors."¹⁰⁷ He goes on to say that the best way to produce such a play is

. . . in the extreme manner of fantasy. Hence the appropriateness of Mr. Gordon Craig. The strange, supernatural element which he casts over every scene is justified beyond all cavil. We shudder in unfathomable darkness, in immemorial frosts. The monsters here, as monsters, become positively real to us. We are positively afraid of them. If they were presented to us in the customary realistic manner, we should merely smile at them as at animals walking on their hind-legs. It is foolish to complain, as many critics have complained, that Mr. Craig's system of lighting does not always illuminate the features of the mime's faces . . . The Vikings is a play in which nothing would be lost if all the characters wore masks.¹⁰⁸

The Times recorded that it was impressed by the simplicity and severity of the scenes, "harmonious in colouring, broad and massive in design."¹⁰⁹ In his autobiography, Sir John Martin-Harvey states that,

no one who saw it will forget the remarkable setting for the Feast-Room in Gunnar's House which he designed for Act II and in which the long cloaks of the

¹⁰⁷Max Beerbohm, More Theatres (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969), p. 562.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 654.

¹⁰⁹Leeper, Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre, p. 9.

guests . . . produced so fine and barbaric an effect
 . . .¹¹⁰

A dissenting voice was heard from J. T. Grein, not because he lacked sympathy for what Craig was attempting but because of Craig's choice of play.

This play of Ibsen is conventional, and it rebels against unconventional effects. At moments the lighting, worked from the flies, is enchanting in its weird suggestion of Northern atmosphere; at other moments the sublime tumbles into the ridiculous. . . . The costumes, too, are fantastic to a degree. . . . As to the disposition of the scenery, it simply kills the drama and the elocution of the actors. . . . Let us stick to the old methods, until an architectural genius be found to build a theatre to match Mr. Craig's mise en scene.¹¹¹

One wonders if J. T. Grein (Jack Thomas Grein), who founded the Independent Theatre of London, which was launched with the first English production of Ghosts in 1891, did not have a relatively jaundiced eye towards Craig's production because of his experience with an earlier, more realistic, period in theatrical production?

No matter what the answer to that query may be, there does seem to have been some basis for his indicating that the actors had some difficulty in the settings. Quite obviously, so great a change in the style of the visual elements of production would necessitate almost as great a

¹¹⁰The Autobiography of Sir John Martin-Harvey (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1933), p. 137.

¹¹¹J. T. Grein, Dramatic Criticism: 1903-1904 (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1905), p. 219.

change in the performers' style. This, of course, was not to be. Although she wanted her son to succeed in this venture, Ellen Terry, because of her long career (forty-seven years at the time of The Vikings) was a traditional actress. Among the others in the cast, notably Oscar Asche, "by permission of Mr. Beerbohm Tree,"¹¹² and Holman Clark were well-known members of the acting establishment.

When Ted wanted a piece of action performed in a different way to that suggested by the author, whose stage directions he had completely disregarded, the profession at once appealed to Ellen.¹¹³

Edward Craig gives an interesting insight into the kinds of problems his father was forced to confront with the actors when he relates:

In the first act there was an exciting rock structure that had to be rolled on the stage; it looked like a great landslide, at an angle between thirty and forty degrees. On this, Ted wanted Oscar Asche and Holman Clark to fight with swords, but these traditionalists, thinking of the usual broadsword technique used in Macbeth, where they delighted in prancing about the stage, said it was impossible. Ted explained that it should look more like the ancient Samurai fighting with their enormous swords; great slow movements, with sudden flashes. That, they thought, would make them look absurd--Ted, using Carter to help him, showed them how, and they were furious that it could be done so effectively.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Henrik Ibsen, The Vikings: A Romantic Drama, in Four Acts, Imperial Theatre, April 13, 1903.

¹¹³Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 171.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 170.

Craig's sister, Edith, had been hired by their mother, with no objection from Craig, to execute the costumes which he had designed.

If Edy felt that anything in the play should be changed, or if she wished to simplify a costume, she would mention it to her mother on the way to rehearsal, and the suggestions would then seem to be Ellen's.¹¹⁵

The business manager, hired by Ellen Terry for the venture, was Alfred Courtenay who,

ignoring family ties, set about his job as though this was a routine production: he wanted estimates in advance and receipts for petty cash, and even asked "Mr. Craig" to sign a contract with "Miss Ellen Terry."¹¹⁶

With all these tensions it is no surprise that this production never fully realized the concept of its director. Upon withdrawal of The Vikings, Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing was quickly substituted with Oscar Asche playing Benedick to Ellen Terry's Beatrice. Miss Terry concluded,

I singed my wings a good deal in the Imperial lime-light, which, although our audience complained of the darkness on the stage, was the most serious drain on my purse.¹¹⁷

To help reduce the amount of her loss she embarked on a tour of the provinces with Much Ado About Nothing and The Good Hope,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Terry, The Story of My Life, p. 328.

a play by the Dutch playwright, Herman Heijermans, in a translation by Edy's life-long companion, Christabell Marshall, better known as Christopher St. John.¹¹⁸ In the postscript to an undated letter to a Mr. Courtney, possibly of The Daily Telegraph, she reports,

I believe you will be glad to know that my tour with my delightful company of young people, (I'm proud of them all,) is a real success and I am getting back the money I lost at the Imperial--I don't care in the least for money but one must have the bothering stuff to do & to do & to do.¹¹⁹

Both these productions had been viewed by Count Harry Kessler whose

. . . restless and inquiring spirit brought him into contact with every aspect of German political and cultural life. He was a skilled diplomat, and something of an intriguer, but he was also a dedicated collector and patron of art; he was a distinguished publisher, but he was also an able writer, whose work ranged from a biography of Walter Rathenau to a ballet scenario for Richard Strauss. And he knew everyone, from Einstein to the Kaiser to Josephine Baker to Bernard Shaw to the now forgotten countesses who ornamented the best salons of Berlin, Paris, and London.¹²⁰

Sometime during the spring of 1903 Kessler and Craig were introduced by the artist, William Rothenstein, at the Café Royal. Kessler's appreciation and enthusiasm for Craig's work led him to invite Craig to Weimar to produce a play at

¹¹⁸Roger Manvell, Ellen Terry (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 254.

¹¹⁹Ellen Terry to Mr. Courtney, n. d.

¹²⁰Charles Kessler, ed. and trans., The Diaries of a Cosmopolitan: Count Harry Kessler 1918-1937 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. x.

the Grand Ducal Theatre. Nothing came of this suggestion but it led, in 1904, to Kessler's discussing Craig's work with Dr. Otto Brahm, manager of the Lessing Theatre in Berlin. As a result agreement was reached for Craig to design Otway's Venice Preserved, translated by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, for Brahm. Craig left for Germany on August 23, 1904, and except for several subsequent visits, was never again to live in England. Brahm's background with Die Freie Bühne opening in 1889, an imitation of Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris, was largely that of naturalism, the antithesis of Craig's symbolic approach.

After a period of disagreement between the artists the play opened on January 21, 1905 using Craig's designs for only Act II, scene 1 and Act III. (See Craig letter to this author quoted at p. 15.)

Rosmersholm

In December 1904, while still in Berlin, Craig met the dancer, Isadora Duncan, and their liaison commenced. In her autobiography Isadora Duncan claims credit for being instrumental in arranging a meeting in 1906 between Craig and Eleonora Duse at the home of Juliette Mendelssohn and her banker husband in Berlin. Because of Duse's knowledge of Craig's earlier work, she decided to give him the assignment of designing Ibsen's Rosmersholm for her to produce as

part of her repertory in Florence late in 1906.¹²¹ A large group--Duse, Craig, Duncan, Deirdre (Isadora's baby by Craig), and Deirdre's nurse entrained for Florence and the discussions began. Because Duse understood no English and Craig no French or Italian, it was necessary for Duncan to act as interpreter for the volatile artists. Because she was extremely anxious that Duse and Craig profit from working together, Duncan found she had to exercise greatly her diplomatic abilities. When Craig showed some early sketches,

Eleanora, looking rather disconcerted, said, "I see this as a small window. It cannot possibly be a large one." To which Craig thundered in English, "Tell her I won't have any damned woman interfering with my work!" Which I discreetly translated to Eleanora, "He says he admires your opinions and will do everything to please you." Then, turning to Craig, I again diplomatically translated Duse's objections as, "Eleanora Duse says, as you are a great genius, she will not make any suggestions on your sketches, but will pass them as they are."¹²²

In this vein the discussion continued.

What was Craig's concept for Rosmersholm?

The words are the words of actuality, but the drift of the words, something beyond this. There is the powerful impression of unseen forces closing in upon the place; we hear continually the long drawn out note of the horn of death.

It is heard at the commencement, it mingles with the cries towards the end.

Here and there hurries the figure of life, not merely a little photographic figure of Rebecca

¹²¹Isadora Duncan, My Life (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), p. 198.

¹²²Ibid., p. 199.

West--not even a woman--but the very figure of Life itself--and all the while we hear the soft crescendo of the Death Horn as its player approaches. Therefore those who prepare to serve Ibsen, to help in the setting forth of his play, must come to the work in no photographic mood, all must approach as artists. . . .

We are not in a house of the 19th or 20th century built by Architect this or Master Builder that, and filled with furniture of Scandinavian design--That is not the state of mind Ibsen demands we shall be in. Let us leave period and accuracy of detail to the museums and to curiosity shops.

Let our common sense be left in the cloak room with our umbrellas and hats. We need here our finer senses only, the living part of us. We are in Rosmersholm, a house of shadows. . . .¹²³

In order to execute his design, Craig faced a couple of technical problems. Because paper was the usual material for scenery in Italy at that time, Craig could not find his accustomed theatrical canvas on which to paint. He finally located some rough sackcloth which would serve the purpose. Still with no knowledge of Italian, he located some women who were hired to sew up the lengths of cloth to provide the large surfaces he needed. A second problem was to locate scene-painters who could execute his design which bordered on impressionism; the local scene-painters would not touch the job.¹²⁴

On the way back to the hotel, he noticed two youths painting the side of a house with some beautiful distemper. They were perched on the most flimsy scaffold, but seemed unaware of any danger as they sang gaily and handled their brushes in time with

¹²³A Note on "Rosmersholm."

¹²⁴Gordon Craig, "On Signora Eleonora Duse," Life and Letters, 1 (September 1928): 298-99.

their tune; they were not slopping on the colour anyhow, but stroking it on like artists. Here were his scene painters at last. The following day, he got someone to talk to them: Would they like to help this celebrated foreign artist to paint scenery? They would be delighted! They were engaged.¹²⁵

So another problem was solved. Within a week the painting was done, the scene was lit in a very short time and the setting was ready to be shown to Duse, who had been kept from the theatre by Duncan in order to allow Craig to get his work done without interference.¹²⁶

Craig's setting was a far cry from what Ibsen called for. Ibsen's description of the setting for Acts I, III, and IV is:

The sitting room at Rosmersholm; a spacious room, comfortably furnished in old-fashioned style. In the foreground, against the right-hand wall, is a stove decorated with sprigs of fresh birch and wild flowers. Farther back, a door. In the back wall folding doors leading into the entrance hall. In the left-hand wall a window, in front of which is a stand filled with flowers and plants. Near the stove stands a table, a couch and an easy-chair. The walls are hung round with portraits, dating from various periods, of clergymen, military officers and other officials in uniform. The window is open, and so are the doors into the lobby and the outer door. Through the latter is seen an avenue of old trees leading to a courtyard. It is a summer evening, after sunset.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 217-18.

¹²⁶Duncan, My Life, p. 200.

¹²⁷Henrik Ibsen, Rosmersholm, trans. R. Farquharson Sharp (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1960), p. 231.

The only difference among these acts are changes in lighting due to the changing hour of the day. Act II calls for

Rosmer's study. The door into it is in the left-hand wall. At the back of the room is a doorway with a curtain drawn back from it, leading to his bedroom. On the right, a window, in front of which is a writing-table strewn with books and papers. Bookshelves and cupboards on the walls. Homely furniture. On the left, an old-fashioned sofa with a table in front of it.¹²⁸

What did Duncan and Duse see, after a wait in a loge of the theatre, while Craig noisily completed final details?

Oh, how can I describe what appeared before our astonished, enraptured eyes? Did I speak of an Egyptian Temple! No Egyptian Temple has ever revealed such beauty. No Gothic Cathedral, no Athenian Palace. Never have I seen such a vision of loveliness. Through vast blue spaces, celestial harmonies, mounting lines, colossal heights, one's soul was drawn toward the light of this great window which showed beyond, no little avenue but the infinite universe. Within these blue spaces was all the thought, the meditation, the earthly sorrow of man. Beyond the window was all the ecstasy, the joy, the miracle of his imagination. Was this the living-room of Rosmersholm? I do not know what Ibsen would have thought. Probably he would have been as we were--speechless, carried away.¹²⁹

Duncan's description may be just a trifle florid, but it is recorded that Duse was suitably impressed with what Craig had wrought.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 256.

¹²⁹Duncan, My Life, pp. 202-03.

At the dress rehearsal the next day Duse embraced Craig before the whole cast and told them that only through his genius would actors ever find release from "this monstrosity . . . which is the Theatre of today." The younger ones tried to feel with her, but the traditionalists felt as "out of place" in these mystic surroundings as Oscar Asche had felt . . . in The Vikings.¹³⁰

On Wednesday, December 5, 1906, the curtain rose to reveal Craig's scene to the Florentine audience. Undoubtedly, the audience was expecting a realistic setting in keeping with Ibsen's description and so a silence descended during which a voice was heard to exclaim, "Bella, bella." It was that of Tommasso Salvini, Italy's great actor.¹³¹ The stage designer, Enrico Corradini, was also there and recorded his reaction.

The stage seemed completely transformed. The usual wings were gone. Here was a new architecture of great height, ranging in colour from green to blue. It was simple, mysterious, fascinating and a fitting background to the complicated lives of Rosmer and Rebecca West; it portrayed a state of mind.¹³²

The next day, Craig received a letter from Duse:

Merci--
C'est ma première parole ce matin.
J'ai travaillé hier soir dans le rêve--et
lointaine--
Vous avez travaillé dans des conditions très
pénibles, et d'autant plus je vous dis merci.

¹³⁰Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life,
p. 218.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 218.

¹³²Ibid., p. 219.

J'ai compris hier soir votre aide--et votre force--
Encore:

MERCI

J'espère que nous travaillerons encore, et avec
Liberté et joie.

--E. 133

Enthusiasm was so great on both sides that plans were made for Craig to design The Lady from the Sea, John Gabriel Borkmann, Cleopatra, La Dame aux Camélias, and a play without words by Strindberg.¹³⁴ Duse left Florence to continue touring with her company while Craig began work on The Lady from the Sea. Craig, at Duse's invitation, travelled to Nice on February 7, 1907, where she was playing. The next day he went to the Casino Theatre to see how things were going. Because the proscenium opening in Nice was so much smaller than the one in Florence, the stage manager had hacked several feet off the bottom of the set, thereby destroying the proportions and lowering the large window at the back so that the bottom sill almost touched the floor. Naturally, Craig was furious and had no hesitation in letting Duse know how he felt. She replied, in writing, saying "Ce qu' on a fait avec votre décor, on le fait depuis des années pour mon art."¹³⁵ And so Craig's design for Rosmersholm was seen by only one audience at only one performance.

¹³³ Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, p. 292.

¹³⁴ Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 88; G. M. Bergman, "Strindberg and the Intima Teatern," Theatre Research/Recherches Théatrales, 9 (1967): 14-47.

¹³⁵ Ferruccio Marotti, Edward Gordon Craig (Bologna: Capelli, 1961), p. 88.

The Hour Glass and The Deliverer

Although Craig's compromise with his vision of vertically moving cubes into horizontally moving "screens" will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter and certainly enters into the Moscow Art Theatre production immediately following, brief attention must be paid to the first actual use of the screens.

As a result of the Purcell Operatic Society's productions of Dido and Aeneas, The Masque of Love, and Acis and Galatea, William Butler Yeats and Craig became quite friendly and shared many discussions about theatre.¹³⁶ Because Craig was not capable of making his vision materialize he had developed the use of double-hinged, multiple-paneled, moving screens as scenic background for the proposed production of Hamlet in Moscow. In planning the staging he made a set of model screens to scale with which he could visualize the changing scene as well as the movement of the actors. His experiments seemed to him to be so successful that he offered a set of model screens to Yeats who has written:

All summer I have been playing with a little model, where there is a scene capable of endless transformation, of the expression of every mood that does not require a photographic reality. Mr. Craig--who has invented all this--has permitted me to set up upon the stage of the Abbey another scene that corresponds to this, in the scale of a foot for an

¹³⁶Conversations between Edward Craig and Arnold Rood, 1976.

inch, and henceforth I shall be able, by means so simple that one laughs, to lay the events of my plays amid a grandeur like that of Babylon; and where there is neither complexity nor compromise nothing need go wrong, no lamps become suddenly unmasked, no ill-painted corner come suddenly into sight. Henceforth I can all but "produce" my play while I write it, moving hither and thither little figures of cardboard through gay or solemn light and shade, allowing the scene to give the words and the words the scene. I am very grateful for he has banished a whole world that wearied me and was undignified and given me forms and lights upon which I can play as upon some stringed instrument.¹³⁷

These full-size screens, which Yeats had built with Craig's permission, were used for the first performance of Yeats' The Hour Glass and Lady Gregory's The Deliverer on January 12, 1911. Craig neither supervised the construction of the screens, nor did he ever see the production. Nonetheless, they proved practical enough to remain in fairly steady use until the Abbey Theatre fire in 1951.¹³⁸

The success of this scenic concept was unalloyed. In its reaction to the first performance, The Irish Times reported:

If the introduction of Mr. Gordon Craig's system does not mark "what the newspapers call an epoch," it has, nevertheless, many striking points of merit, and constitutes a great improvement on the old staging. Mr. Yeats has spoken of Mr. Craig's "invention," and there is apparently a patent in connection with the system. But what is valuable in the new scheme does not arise so much from any "invention" as from the

¹³⁷W. B. Yeats, Plays for an Irish Theatre (London and Stratford-upon-Avon: A. H. Bullen, 1911), p. xiii.

¹³⁸Stage Design at the Abbey Theatre: An Exhibition of Drawings and Models (Dublin, 1957), p. 13.

application of genius to the methods and details of staging. There is, in the first place, a reduction of the stage furniture to its simplest elements, so that the figures of the players stand out more prominently against the primitive background, and attention is concentrated on the human and truly expressive elements of the drama. There is next a careful design and adjustment of the simple elements of staging which still further tends to secure that effect. Lastly, there is a similar care in regard to the supplementary elements, lighting arrangements and costuming. The success of these aims is the work of the genius of an individual producer, who combines with artistic and thoughtful ideas on the principles of staging an unusual ability to deal with the mechanical problems involved in giving effect to those principles. A system will work itself out in varying and numberless cases; but the fulfillment of Mr. Gordon Craig's ideas will be according to the measure of the ability of the individual producer to deal with each new piece as it comes up for treatment.¹³⁹

The Freeman's Journal said:

It is one of the cardinal theories of Mr. Gordon Craig that any particular presentation on a stage should be a unity in which the spoken words and the acting and the setting and the colour should combine and blend to form a harmony of mood . . . vivet [sic] is difficult to pass judgment on the new system of stage setting, so hard is it to rid oneself of the tyranny of custom and to enter a world where a totally different set of canons prevails.

Mr. Gordon Craig aims at large effects and at giving a setting which suggests rather than depicts. The system which he employs seeks to achieve its aim by the use of a series of screens the full height of the proscenium, which fold and open according to the pleasure of the scene-designer. The screens are arranged according to a mathematical plan, and are destitute of any painted design. Painting interferes, according to the theories of Mr. Craig, with proper lighting effects.

The setting of Lady Gregory's play was extremely simple. The screens were placed slantwise across

¹³⁹ The Irish Times, 13 January 1911, The Mask, 3 (April 1911): 191-92.

the stage and were folded so as to suggest pillars. The lighting was from the top and the sides. One did not get, however, the sense of space which was intended by the artist. Possibly this is the fault of the construction of the theatre, the proscenium being so close to the auditorium, but it seemed to be in some measure due to the arrangement of the background. The lighting again was difficult to judge, partly because of the play, and partly because one was wandering in "worlds not realised." If one may venture, in one's ignorance, to question, why was there so much amber and so little white light? There was white light in the "Hour Glass" . . . the setting of which, by the way, was entirely beautiful and convincing . . . when the Angel enters, and perhaps in that we may have the answer to our question.

It must be borne in mind in criticising Mr. Gordon Craig's work that he is not merely a reformer in scene mounting, he preaches an entirely new theory of the theatre.

Far from pretending that his scenery can be employed in every play, Mr. Craig would banish from the stage to the study, almost every work which we call a play, and would substitute an entirely new artform based on all the conditions . . . and not merely on some . . . of the theatre.

Lady Gregory's play, written as it is, was perhaps a severe trial to which to subject a stage-setting which aims at creating a mood.

In Mr. Yeats' *Morality* the setting did achieve, better even than the simplicity of the older setting, what it aimed at. The light effects with sombre and heightened tones according to the change in mood invested the play with a new beauty.¹⁴⁰

Craig was so enthused by these reactions that he took out patents on the screens in Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and the United States between 1910 and 1912.

Before leaving Dublin, a note which appeared in the program must not be ignored:

¹⁴⁰The Freeman's Journal, 13 January 1911, The Mask, 3 (April 1911): 191-92.

The New Scenery at the Abbey

The method of decoration in The Deliverer and The Hour Glass was invented by Mr. Gordon Craig for the famous Art Theatre of Moscow, where it will make possible a performance of the full Hamlet, with a different decoration for every little scene, so rapidly can the scenes be changed. Thursday night will, however, be its first public use. It does not aim at effects of realism, but at a decoration of the stage almost infinite in the variety of its expression and suggestion, and for the first time makes possible effects of lights and shadow various, powerful and delicate. Mr. Craig has given us the right to make use of his patent in Ireland, with the generosity of a great artist, and because he respects our work and ambition.¹⁴¹

Hamlet

Craig's relationship with Shakespeare's Hamlet began publicly in 1885 in the United States when Craig made his debut in a speaking role and served as a walk-on in Hamlet and other plays. After this initial contact with the play, Craig went on, during his acting career, to perform the title role in five different productions. The first occurred in 1894 with the W. S. Hardy Shakespeare Company. In the week preceding the early September opening in Hereford three plays were rehearsed; the opener, Romeo and Juliet, for two days, Hamlet for three, and The Lady of Lyons for only one because it did not enter the repertoire until the second week. Rehearsal conditions were far from what Actors' Equity would

¹⁴¹Quoted in Liam Miller, The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats (Dublin: The Dolman Press, 1977), p. 168.

find acceptable today:

We saw our stage three-quarters filled up by a big tank full of water. This was because Miss Ida Millais--probably related to the great painter--was performing in some melodrama called, I imagine, Ida's Escape or the Last Leap; for in the last act she, the heroine, had to jump from a big rock into this tank of water, which splashed up, of course. And then the villain jumped in after her and the hero jumped in after the villain, and finally she came up drenched and the body of the villain floated down to the green room. I think we were all fairly brave, looking at this damnable tank and realizing that we had only a yard or a yard and a half of stage in front of it in which to go through all the hither-and-thither of the five acts of Hamlet and the five acts of Romeo and Juliet.¹⁴²

For these performances of Hamlet Craig wore a costume which had been loaned to him by his mentor, Henry Irving. The Beggarstaff Brothers (William Nicholson and James Pryde) designed a poster which Mr. Hardy found quite shocking in its simple modernity.

For his benefit performance with another company, at Paisley in 1895, Craig chose to appear as Hamlet, the program for the benefit bore a wood-engraving by him, obviously one of his early attempts in this *métier* of which he was to become a master.

Following a season with the Sarah Thorne Company at Chatham, Craig was invited to form a company with which to produce and play Romeo and Hamlet in London in 1896. His last acting appearances as Hamlet were for the Ben Greet

¹⁴²Craig, Index to the Story of My Days, p. 154.

Company in 1897, the last year Craig was to perform at all. He played the role after only a few hours rehearsal during the day, replacing an actor who had become ill very suddenly.¹⁴³

Gilbert Coleridge recalled some years later that Craig's performance remained, "because of its youth, intellect, faultless elocution, and in particular its air of impromptu, the finest in his memory of many great performances of the part."¹⁴⁴ E. F. Spence wrote, "To this day I remember vividly his admirable work in the first act! I think none of the scores of Hamlets seen by me have been so good in that part of the tragedy."¹⁴⁵ The Era saluted Craig as the "diligent student of the new school of acting as opposed to the stilted, ranting delivery and often mechanical methods of the old."¹⁴⁶

One of his earliest extant drawings for the theatre is for the fourth scene of Act III of Hamlet attributed to 1899 in which there is none of the nineteenth century/Henry Irving influence.

. . . there is not a single archaeological detail or "historically correct" decorative motif. It is a harmony in grey-blue and bistre, a composition of bare walls, vertical lines, vaguely indicated hangings, patches of light and shadow; on the prompt side the figure of the Ghost can just be perceived with its

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁴⁴ Sunday Times (London), 19 August 1923.

¹⁴⁵ Edward F. Spence, Bar and Buskin: Being Memories of Life, Law and the Theatre (London: Elkin Mathews and Marrot, 1930), p. 251.

¹⁴⁶ The Era (London), 25 July 1896.

back to the light. All the lighting comes from above or from the side, casting bright patches on the stage; Craig makes no provision for lighting from below, he has no footlights. This design already reveals his predilection for rectangular surfaces, vertical parallel lines, and the expressive play of light.¹⁴⁷

The major, and undoubtedly most important, contact with Hamlet was the production with Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre. In the spring of 1908 Stanislavsky wired Craig inviting him to Moscow. In his reply Craig indicated he would like to co-produce Hamlet for the Art Theatre. During the following three years Craig worked on this production, planning the mise en scène, designing the settings and costumes, for which he made several trips to Russia for continuing discussions with Stanislavsky and his assistants.

The key to Craig's interpretation was that Hamlet was not romantic tragedy nor historical drama but a symbolic play in which there were clashes of principles, exemplifying the tragic contrast of one man against the universe. Stanislavsky captures Craig's vision of Hamlet when he writes:

Craig widened to a great extent the inner contents of Hamlet. To Craig, Hamlet was the best of men, who passed like Christ across the earth and became the victim of a cleansing sacrifice. Hamlet was not a neurasthenic and even less a madman, but he had become different from other people because he had for a moment looked beyond the wall of life into the future world where his father was suffering. After he came to know the life of tortures and suffering on the other side, the actuality of life changed in Hamlet's mind. He looked deep into earthly life in order to solve the mystery and the

¹⁴⁷Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 33.

meaning of being; love and hate, the conventionalities of court life, began to mean altogether different things to him, and the problems too difficult for a simple mortal which were placed before him by his murdered father brought him to confusion and despair. If all could be settled by the murder of the new King alone, Hamlet would not have tarried a minute, but the crux of the matter lay not only in the murder of the King. In order to lighten the sufferings of his father it was necessary to cleanse the entire court of evil; it was necessary to carry fire and sword throughout the whole kingdom, to destroy the harmful, to repulse the old friends with rotten souls, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; to save those pure of soul like Ophelia from earthly ruin and immure her, safe at last, in a monastery. It was necessary to think that Hamlet, as the best and most suffering man on earth, raised to heaven after his earthly deeds, would there meet his liberated father. These inhuman tortures made Hamlet some sort of superman in the eyes of the simple mortals who lived the humdrum life of the court among the little cares of life; a man unlike any other, and therefore insane. Speaking of the court, Craig understood the whole world.¹⁴⁸

To help recreate more fully what the Moscow Hamlet looked like, let me turn for assistance to Kaoru Osanai who, in September 1913, wrote about the production which he had seen:

There were no cut-out trees, no painted canvas, no sculptured pillars, no arched ceiling. Everything there was represented by screens. The screens were either painted pale yellow ("cream" would probably be a more accurate translation) or gilded with gold. They could be folded many times to the desired width, and furthermore each piece was made detachable. Thus, the screens could be made into a corridor which could turn diagonally, a wall which could stand up straight or pillars which could stand apart from each other. That is to say this staging consisted only of a group of straight lines running parallel to the

¹⁴⁸Constantin Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, trans. J. J. Robbins (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1924), pp. 513-14.

stage and another group of straight lines crossing the stage at a right angle. I repeat that the color used was either completely pale yellow or completely gold--I believe Craig painted one side of the screens cream and the other gold so that he could reverse them when he desired.

For which scenes did he use the pale yellow and for which the gold? There seemed to be a well organized system for it. The pale yellow was always employed for an outdoor scene, the exterior of the building, the house of Polonius, etc. The interior of the Elsinore palace was always presented in gold. When the pale yellow was in use, it could be changed into grey, blue, and yellow by changing the light. When the gold was employed, a wide beam of strong light was thrown downward from the ceiling crossing the space diagonally. It never lighted up the whole stage with dazzling brightness--the intention, rather was to create the effect of tarnished gold.¹⁴⁹

Osanai, after this general description of the setting, and the use of color, goes on to describe most scenes in the play in considerable detail, presenting not only the arrangement of the screens but the kind of lighting used for each, emphasizing the simplicity of the setting and the sparse, but effective and carefully thought-out, lighting plot.

In this production Craig made the first major use of his "Screens." As early as 1905 in The Art of the Theatre Craig recorded his interest in movement as the origin of the theatre and stated that it was with movement, scene, and voice that future theatre masterpieces would be produced.

Thus began a series of experiments with what was to become "The Thousand Scenes in One Scene." (Imagine what he

¹⁴⁹Kaoru Osanai, "Gordon Craig's Production of Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre," trans. Andrew T. Tsubaki, Educational Theatre Journal 20 (December 1968): 589-90.

could have done if he had had electronic control available and not been afraid to make use of it?)

Many people think that the screens were Craig's substitute for contemporary scenery. In one sense they were, but in relation to the moving "Scene" they were not. His idea for "Scene" was based upon up and down movement which required a stage with a vertical opening. The screens called for movement from side to side in a horizontal stage opening. He was familiar with the latter, more traditional shape which required no mechanical knowledge. This allowed him to use them in public. However, it was the vertically moving "Scene" which remained his secret ideal.¹⁵⁰

For a number of years during the first decade of the century he worked with model stages constantly moving closer to the realization of the compromise theory.

Just as in the 1899 Hamlet drawing, the "Screens" further revealed, now as a maturing artist, Craig's " . . . predilection for rectangular surfaces, vertical parallel lines, and the expressive play of light."¹⁵¹ Craig considered light as important to the scene as a couple in perfect accord, " . . . the relation of light to this scene is akin to that of the bow to the violin, or of the pen to the paper."¹⁵² Nor was he overlooking the actor: "Being one, the Play, Actor, Scene, has to be kept before us and seen and heard as

¹⁵⁰Arnold Rood, "'After the Practise the Theory' Gordon Craig and Movement," Theatre Research/Recherches Theatrales, 11 (1971): 88.

¹⁵¹Bablet, Gordon Craig, p. 33.

¹⁵²E. Gordon Craig, Scene (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 25.

one--or we shall look from one to another and lose the whole."¹⁵³

With this all too-brief background of the thinking behind the "Screens," it is easier to understand the negative criticism of the production of Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre. The production could not take place as conceived, namely, that the changing of the settings, as an organic part of the production, equal in importance to the movement of the actor, was to take place in full view of the audience. It became apparent at the final rehearsals that this could not be done. Not only was the stage of the Art Theatre "raked" which made it difficult for the screens to move as conceived and planned, but sufficiently lightweight materials were not available to the theatre technicians of the time. In an interview with David Tutaev of the BBC in 1960, Craig was asked about this.

Tutaev: I asked Craig, somewhat diffidently how these screens stood up to the performance. Did they in fact fall down?

Craig: No, they didn't--nothing of the kind. Probably at rehearsal some silly ass of a carpenter gave it a shove and of course it would fall down. Well, that's the sort of thing. You want your stage quite level.

Tutaev: When pressed, however, Craig was ready to admit that these screens were perhaps not ideally suited to the Moscow Art Theatre stage.

Craig: Well, their stage wasn't level. It was

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 23.

the wrong thing to take it in there. It's like taking God Almighty into a music hall.¹⁵⁴

In Craig's time there was no formal education, nor strict union control, as there is today, for stage designers. The designer was an artist who submitted his sketches to the various heads of back-stage shops who, in turn, were responsible for translating these sketches into applicable form. This lack of technical knowledge was to plague Craig from the production of Dido in 1900 all through his career, in actual production as well as in the realization of his ideas and dreams.

Later, in the same interview, Craig attempted to explain to Tutaev the stylistic difference, after many years' hindsight, in the co-directors' approach to Hamlet:

All the time that we were talking, Stanislavsky was thinking in terms of Chekhov. I was thinking in terms of Shakespeare, and those are the two opposite poles. His scenes in Chekhov were rooms, say, a room with a wind blowing at a window and moving the curtains, with a door that slammed--made a special sort of sound--everything was for the day of today. Real people. Now, with Shakespeare there's nothing real at all. I can't exaggerate that too much. We spoil Shakespeare, have done so for years by trying to make it fit into a real house, a real room and real people. Nothing of the kind! It is a great dream, and if we can get that feeling which is in dream and in music then we are near to Shakespeare. And that's what I was trying to do up there. And of course that was running counter with Chekhov and Stanislavsky.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴David Tutaev, "A Great Nurse: Gordon Craig Remembers Stanislavsky," Theatre Arts, 46 (April 1962): 19.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Despite the negative comments, Stanislavsky concludes his account by saying,

The production of "Hamlet" met with great success. Some people were enthusiastic, others criticized, but everybody was excited, and debated, read reports, wrote articles, while the other theatres in the country quietly appropriated the ideas of Craig, publishing them as their own.¹⁵⁶

The Pretenders

Hamlet was followed by a long hiatus not to be ended until Craig became involved with the production of Ibsen's The Pretenders for the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen in 1926.

In August of that year Craig received a letter from Johannes Poulsen, director of the theatre, telling him that there were plans to present The Pretenders later that season in honor of his own and his brother Adam's twenty-fifth anniversary on the Danish stage: Johannes to play Bishop Nicholas, Adam to play Earl Skule. Craig was invited to design the decor and costumes for the production; Poulsen was to direct. The letter went on to say,

You will have at your disposal a big theatre . . . it holds 1,700 people, the footlights are 44 feet, and the depth of the stage is about 70 feet--a complete staff of actors and actresses, and besides an opera staff and an Orchestra, numbering 80 men, which is the best north of Berlin. . . . Furthermore we have

¹⁵⁶ Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, p. 523.

a turning stage, round horizon, and one of the best and newest lighting systems in Europe. . . . Finally every year the Crown pays the deficit, which amounts to about 50,000 English pounds.¹⁵⁷

What may have decided Craig to accept this invitation was the desire to help honor the Poulsens by contributing to their anniversary, or it may have been the possibility of working on the stage, newly equipped by Adolf Linnebach, one of the prominent lighting men of that time, or, very possibly, that any deficit would be absorbed. Whatever the reason, Craig agreed and, after working on the play, went to Copenhagen in October. Part of his intensive preparation seems to have been, possibly as the result of having been away from actual stage work for so long, the formulation of a modus operandi for arriving at a concept for a production. He wrote later, explaining this procedure:

In preparing a production, I proceed in an illogical manner and try to perceive things feelingly rather than thinkingly. . . . I reach out and touch a play with my left hand, as it were, and try to receive the thing through my senses, and then make some note with my right hand which will record what it is I have felt. Though I have found that I have often had to revise the first impression received by the left hand and passed through to the right one, I continue to employ this method because I have so often found that this sensitive way of touching a piece--when it is a real piece--is more illuminating to me than to stop and begin thinking over it at once. Thinking comes afterwards. Thinking is for

¹⁵⁷Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 321.

practical purposes. I think out a method of making clear to the spectators what I have felt and seen.¹⁵⁸

Craig found the stage of the Royal Theatre to appear even larger than he had expected from the measurements Poulsen had sent him. Because there was only a month left for preparation, he hit upon a novel idea and that was to make maximum use of the theatre's equipment: to make use of projections for all the larger scenes taking place in the open and, for the smaller, interior scenes to use the Italian kind of setting known as luoghi deputati, commonly used in the middle ages.¹⁵⁹ This idea resulted in a permanent unit setting of a series of platforms and steps which was surrounded by a cyclorama on which projections could be played. On the platforms were placed, as needed, a series of short moveable screens. The suggestion received a warm reception and the work proceeded. On November 8, Craig's son Edward received a letter from his father telling him that, "the scenes, today, surpassed my hopes . . . all the Theatre tricks do . . ." ¹⁶⁰

Ibsen's first and second acts were combined into one. Ibsen's setting for Act I, Scene 1 calls for,

¹⁵⁸ Edward Gordon Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926 (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1930), pp. 7-8.

¹⁵⁹ Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 322.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 323.

The churchyard of Christ Church in Bergen. In the background the main entrance of the church faces the audience . . . the churchyard is crowded with people and many are perched on the trees and church walls.¹⁶¹

For Craig's first scene,

. . . all we had on the stage, besides actors, was a dozen or so grave-stones--not another thing. . . . On to the back-cloth or cyclorama that hung behind, we projected the columns of the church.¹⁶²

The second scene of Act I is described by Ibsen as,

a room in the King's Palace. In the foreground on the left is a low window; on the right the entrance door; at the back, bigger doors leading to the King's Hall. A table stands by the window; also some chairs and benches.¹⁶³

The second scene in Act I was produced . . . as a small pavilion, in which Ragnhild and Margrete play, only with the addition of a smaller pavilion in which one saw an old woman sitting spinning wool.¹⁶⁴

The second act takes place in,

the Banqueting-hall in the King's Palace at Bergen. In the middle of the back wall is a large bow-window, and along the wall a raised dais with seats for the women. Against the left-hand wall is the King's

¹⁶¹Henrik Ibsen, The Pretenders, trans. R. Farquharson Sharp (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1960), p. 3.

¹⁶²Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, p. 16.

¹⁶³Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 10.

¹⁶⁴Mogens Hyllested, "The Pretenders: Copenhagen, 1926," Theatre Research/Recherches Theatrales, 7 (1966): 121.

throne, raised a few steps from the floor. In the centre of the opposite wall are lofty entrance doors. Banners, standards, shields and weapons, mingled with many-coloured draperies, hang on the walls and the carved roof. The hall is set with tables bearing flagons, drinking-horns and beakers.¹⁶⁵

This is the scene which was added to the first act in 1926.

To accomplish his purpose, Craig removed the two small pavilions and replaced them with,

. . . the council chamber, or whatever the room may be called. It consisted of a Baldacchino held up by four pages . . . gold and red--and it shone with a good deal of added light. Everybody acting in this scene kept strictly within the confines of this narrow baldacchino (20 feet wide by 6 feet deep)--the reason being, that I wanted to prevent a lot of unnecessary movement and give the stiffness of a crowded ceremonial meeting . . . it was backed by a troop of immense soldiers, with black and yellow banners, raised up a foot higher on a step, who served as a wall.¹⁶⁶

The first scene of the third act (the Bishop's death) is described by Ibsen as,

a room in the Bishop's Palace at Oslo. The entrance door is on the right-hand side. In the background a small open doorway leads to the chapel, which is lit up. A curtained door in the left-hand wall leads to the Bishop's sleeping apartment. Further forward on the same side, a couch. Opposite to that, on the right, a writing-table with letters, papers, and a lit lamp.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Ibsen, The Pretenders, pp. 19-20.

¹⁶⁶Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate IX.

¹⁶⁷Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 43.

Craig claims to have designed this scene after he had made it on the stage. "It consisted of eight small screens rising one behind the other . . . and a pallet bed."¹⁶⁸

The following scene, in the same act, is

a room in the Palace. The entrance door is at the back; in each of the side walls, smaller doors; in the foreground, on the right side, a window. A lighted lamp is hanging from the ceiling. Close to the door on the left is a couch, and farther back a cradle . . . ¹⁶⁹

Craig did not publish a design for this scene but, about it, he said, " . . . though it should take place in a bedroom-- consisted of a bed only."¹⁷⁰

Act IV, Scene 1 takes place in,

the great hall in the palace at Oslo. . . . In the foreground, on the left, is a throne on which Skule is sitting, richly appavelled in purple robes and wearing a crown. A table, at which the guests are seated, stretches from the throne to the back of the hall.¹⁷¹

For this scene Craig prepared a design which was almost an exact copy of the scene he used in The Vikings in 1903 for

¹⁶⁸Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XVII.

¹⁶⁹Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 60.

¹⁷⁰Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XVIII.

¹⁷¹Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 72.

the second act: the banquet hall in Gunnar's house. When he started work in Copenhagen this design was laid aside and what was used

. . . consisted of from eight to ten long tables which were covered with white and silver cloths and spread all over the stage structure, with some curiously looped-up hangings on poles and a silver crescent moon against a pale blue sky. On one side, a large seat was set for Skule.¹⁷²

The act continued on

a street in Oslo. On either side, low wooden houses with porches. In the background St. Hallvard's Churchyard, enclosed by a high wall with a gate. On the left side, at the end of the wall, the Church, with its main door standing open. It is still night; after a little, daybreak begins.¹⁷³

Craig's description parallels Ibsen's in calling for a street in Oslo during the night, ". . . showing the lighted-up windows of many small houses which were rather cunningly made out of practically nothing."¹⁷⁴ The sketch for this scene shows two undulating rows of irregular fencing with the opposing forces at them. There is an indication that the windows were very simple, illuminated cubes on invisible

¹⁷²Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XVIII.

¹⁷³Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 91.

¹⁷⁴Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XIX.

stands.

Ibsen divided the fifth, and last, act into three scenes. The first takes place in

a room in the royal palace at Nidaros. On the right, the entrance-door; further forward on the same side, a window; a smaller door on the left. It is night-fall.¹⁷⁵

The second scene is

a forest on the heights above Nidaros. The moon is shining, but the night is cloudy, so that the background is only visible indistinctly, and at times scarcely visible at all. Tree trunks and fragments of rock are lying around.¹⁷⁶

The last scene is

in the courtyard of the convent at Elgesaeter. On the left side lies the chapel with an entrance from the courtyard; the chapel windows are lit up. Along the opposite side of the courtyard are some low buildings. At the back, the convent wall with a massive gate which is bolted. It is bright moonlight.¹⁷⁷

Craig's design for the first scene was very simple.

It consisted of a window open to the sky. The side of the window was defined by the two pale blue curtains only. There was a window-sill and a step.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵Ibsen, The Pretenders, p. 97.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁷⁸Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XX.

For the second scene Craig has left no record. He states very simply, "This was followed by another short scene of which there is no design here since there was nothing to design."¹⁷⁹ The last scene shows a series of curved, picket-like fences disappearing over the platforms towards the horizon. In the background is a ground-row of a group of buildings seen in the distance. A note on the sketch says, "A mist to rise all over."¹⁸⁰

The opening performance took place on the evening of November 14, 1926. According to Mogens Hyllested, the critical reception was far from enthusiastic. In his article about this production one of the critics has been recorded as objecting to the settings because they were a ". . . mixture of more or less abstract décor and very naturalistic properties."¹⁸¹ The same objection was raised against the combination of the costumes with the stage setting: ". . .the costumes . . . are quite naturalistic, and they must have looked very strange against the abstract settings."¹⁸² On the basis of this reaction, one can only conjecture whether, aesthetically, "naturalistic properties" and naturalistic

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XXVI.

¹⁸¹Hyllested, "The Pretenders: Copenhagen, 1926," p. 121.

¹⁸²Ibid.

costumes could not be effective if combined with "abstract décor" with discretion by an artist. However, it must be noted that the properties, at least, were not completely naturalistic. Craig's design for the laden banquet tables in Act IV, Scene 1 are, without doubt, two-dimensional, although painted in a naturalistic style. His note to the design says,

Two designs for pieces of scenic stuff which were rapidly slipped across the screens in the banqueting scene, and as easily slipped off. Each screen seemed to be holding heavy baskets of fruit, bottles, glasses and other Café de la Paix affairs of state.¹⁸³

Could it have been that the northern climes were not yet ready for Craig's ideas?

Before Craig left Copenhagen the members of the Royal Theatre company sent him a message which read,

The artists of the Royal Danish Theatre, who under your leadership have performed "The Pretenders", by Henrik Ibsen, hereby wish to salute you as their master and to thank you for the enrichment which your mind and imagination have brought to the common task of dramatic performance on this occasion. In Stanislavsky's words, we trust that you may have perseverance to fulfill your mission of beauty.¹⁸⁴

Johannes Poulsen wrote about Craig in part,

¹⁸³Craig, A Production Being Thirty-two Collotype Plates of Designs Projected or Realised for "The Pretenders" of Henrik Ibsen and Produced at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen 1926, plate XXXII.

¹⁸⁴Ashley Dukes, "Gordon Craig's Designs for Ibsen's Pretenders," The Mask, 14 (July-August-September 1928): 128.

I have known the work of Gordon Craig for many years, but Gordon Craig himself I have only known for a few years. I find him one of the most charming and genial men that I have ever known. He is good and kind, like Hans Andersen, he is quite unselfish, like Tolstoi. He does not care a bit for money. His mind is that of a great philosopher. He can work himself to death for an idea; he can get out of his mind with rage, worse than any Italian nobleman, and after a moment he is as gentle as the blue sea on a summer's day. He is infinitely good and unable to do a single being any harm. He has a sixth sense for that which is true, genuine, and beautiful in art which is given to only a few persons in each century. As every judge of character will understand from this, the fate of such a man is always to be utilised by others to their profit and not his. The European theatre and even the American film has had success and earned money on his ideas while he himself has had to walk about in his old grey suit, with empty pockets. He has always, just like Socrates, been poor, but while others have filled their own little pockets, Gordon Craig has written his name in ineffaceable types on the sky of the European mind.¹⁸⁵

There must be something to be said for the work of such a man as Craig whose artistic peers can salute him with such effusion. These tributes, perhaps, reached the epitome when "King Christian of Denmark conferred on Craig the Order of the Knights of the Dannebrog for his services to the Danish Theatre."¹⁸⁶

However, when all is said and done, it might increase our insight into the importance of Craig's productions and

¹⁸⁵ Enid Rose, Gordon Craig and the Theatre: A Record and an Interpretation (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1931), pp. 192-93.

¹⁸⁶ Edward Gordon Craig: Artist of the Theatre 1872-1966. A Memorial Exhibition in the Amsterdam Gallery. Catalogue by Arnold Rood with an Introduction by Donald Oenslager (New York: The New York Public Library, 1967), p. 50.

the foresight of his vision if we look to Arthur Symons who, in discussing the new art of the stage in an article dated 1906 gives us an indication of his own perception and sensitivity as well when he writes:

But there are those who prefer Wagner's music in the concert-room to Wagner's music even at Bayreuth. Unless the whole aim and theory of Wagner was wrong, this preference is wrong. I should like, at least as an experiment, to see what Mr. Craig would make of one of the operas. I am not sure that he would not reconcile those who prefer Wagner in the concert-room to this new kind of performance on the stage. He would give us the mind's attractive symbols of all these crude German pictures; he would strike away the footlights from before these vast German singers, and bring a ghostly light to creep down about their hoods and untightened drapings; he would bring, I think, the atmosphere of the music for the first time upon the stage.¹⁸⁷

The fulfillment of this seeming prophecy becomes all the more striking when one recalls the productions of Richard Wagner's operas at the Bayreuth Festival by his grandsons, Wieland and Wolfgang, since 1951.¹⁸⁸

Macbeth

Perhaps it was the knighthood conferred upon him in Denmark, perhaps it was the success of The Pretenders in Copenhagen, perhaps it was the heady response to once again

¹⁸⁷Symons, Studies in Seven Arts, p. 359.

¹⁸⁸See Arnold Rood and Glenn Loney, "Gordon Craig's Ghost Walks at Bayreuth; Wagner's Grandsons Fulfill Some Prophecies," Theatre Design and Technology 29 (May 1972).

working in an actual theatre or, on the other hand, it may have been a succession of blows in his personal life--the departure of his chief assistant, his son Edward, in the spring of 1927, the death of Isadora Duncan in the fall of 1927, the death of Adolphe Appia in February 1928, and, perhaps the greatest shock of all, the death of his mother in July 1928--just before the initial meeting with George C. Tyler that helped Craig decide to accede to Tyler's desire for Craig to work for him.¹⁸⁹ It may have been for any of these reasons, or any combination of them that made Craig receptive. What cannot be overlooked is that Macbeth had occupied a central place in Craig's dramatic literature affections for many years. He had played the title role with the Sarah Thorne company in Chatham in the spring of 1896. He had certainly seen Henry Irving's production at the Lyceum in 1888, with his mother assaying Lady Macbeth.¹⁹⁰ During the season with Sarah Thorne he started making notes about the play to which he made additions in 1897, 1908-09, 1910, 1911, 1922, 1923, 1928-29, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1938, 1960, and 1961.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹Paul Sheren, "To G. C. the Best from G. C.: Edward Gordon Craig Designs Macbeth for George Crouse Tyler" (Undergraduate thesis, Princeton, 1967); "Gordon Craig's Only American Production," Princeton University Library Chronicle 29 (Spring 1968); "Edward Gordon Craig and Macbeth" (Ph.D. dissertation, New Haven, 1974).

¹⁹⁰Manvell, Ellen Terry, p. 190.

¹⁹¹William Shakespeare, Works, ed. W. A. Wright (London and New York, 1892). Interleaved with notes and illustrations by Edward Gordon Craig. This is the copy referred to by Paul Sheren as the "White-cover Macbeth," now located in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

In the first issue of The Mask Craig contributed the start of an article titled "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future," which continued in the next issue. In the continuation he deals with the scene and movement. As an example he uses Macbeth and writes,

In what kind of place is that play laid? How does it look, first of all to our mind's eye, secondly to our eye? I see two things. I see a lofty and steep rock, and I see the moist cloud which envelops the head of this rock. That is to say, a place for fierce and warlike men to inhabit, a place for phantoms to nest in. Ultimately this moisture will destroy the rock; ultimately these spirits will destroy the men. Now then, you are quick in your question as to what actually to create for the eye. I answer as quickly . . . place there a rock! Let it mount up high. Swiftly I tell you, . . . convey the idea of a mist which hugs the head of this rock.

.

But you ask me what form this rock shall take and what colour? What are the lines which are the lofty lines, and which are to be seen in any lofty cliff? . . . Go to them, glance but a moment at them; now quickly set them down on your paper; the lines and their direction, never mind the cliff. Do not be afraid to let them go high; they cannot go high enough; . . . and remember that on a sheet of paper which is but two inches square, you can make a line which seems to tower miles in the air, and you can do the same on your stage for it is all a matter of proportion and nothing to do with actuality.¹⁹²

With this concept in mind, imagine the consternation when, in 1908, Herbert Beerbohm Tree invited Craig to submit designs for settings and costumes for a production of Macbeth at His Majesty's Theatre? The success of Tree's production

¹⁹²Gordon Craig, "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future," The Mask 1 (May-June 1908), p. 61.

of Henry VIII delayed any further work on Macbeth during which time Tree's close advisors actively denounced the impracticality of Craig's work leading Tree and Craig to a very bitter parting.¹⁹³

Very likely Craig's designs upset Tree's conception by the departure from the Irving tradition of historically accurate, painted, two-dimensional settings of which Tree was the successor. Nevertheless, Tree did not present Macbeth as visualized by Craig, not even when he finally produced the play in 1911.

In accepting Tyler's proposal, reluctantly, as Tyler had already hired Douglas Ross as director. (Ross had appeared in a number of Tree's Shakespeare revivals before World War I.) This meant that Craig was to supply only designs for settings and costumes, although there were meetings with Ross at Craig's home in Genoa, but the antipathy between these two men did not allow Ross to acquire any understanding of Craig's vision. As a result, Craig signed most of the designs, "C. p. b." or, Craig--pot-boiler, losing all interest in the future of the production, refusing to come to the United States to supervise the construction, painting, and lighting of the play. This introduction of Craig's "First Designment for the American Theatre"¹⁹⁴ was not at all

¹⁹³ Joseph Harker, Studio and Stage (London: Nisbet and Company, 1924), pp. 175-76.

¹⁹⁴ Souvenir program, Annual Presentation of Famous Masterpieces (Direction of George C. Tyler), season of 1928-29.

successful and was the last production to which Craig put his hand in any way.

It might be of interest to record that Craig's thoughts about Macbeth did not end with this American production nor in the text he had been illustrating and annotating since 1896. In an interview broadcast on the BBC Third Programme December 25, 1960, Craig spoke of Macbeth:

Macbeth--it is the first scene of the First Act that has always fascinated me. I've done, in a book manuscript the six different ways of doing that scene, but only the other day I came to what I thought was the best. Shall I tell you how it is? As a rule, thundering voices, "When shall we three meet again?" Flash of lightning, thunder and all that passed her. Basta! Instead of that, a quiet room, a big bed, Lady Macbeth asleep. And behind the curtain, you see a movement. At the beginning it grows, this movement--one, two, three--and then the gentle voices whispered, "When shall we--" they have been making a charm over her. They have been doing their wicked business. Then they say, "When shall we three meet again?"--very quiet, and they answer very quietly, and it goes on until the end of the thing. They call, "Fair is foul and foul is fair. Hover through the fog and filthy air," and at that moment, you hear from the distance the pipes of the Scotch bagpipes playing. The return of the army. Lady Macbeth makes a single movement--a pain. This goes on more and more--these bagpipes. And they steal away from the room and are gone . . . Very quiet indeed.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Transcribed by the author.

CHAPTER IV

"SCENE"

In September 1940 at St. Germain-en-Laye Craig added a lengthy note to his MSS Book 12. He wrote:

I ought to add that the "Scene" is really only for use when a tragedy is to be performed - and then not to be OVER-WORKED.

A very few screens - a very few "extra pieces" & provided you know what you are doing - what you want - & how to set about the job - you will then find the screens will work well.

Tragedy is so little concerned with sitting down or standing up - the man sits or stands but makes no to do about it and we hardly know whether he is standing or seated . . . & in tragedy these & like little happenings have not to be too marked or we shall soon pass out of the realms of tragedy. There are a thousand trivial happenings which belong to life yet which we no longer mark when a large - tragic happening purges our senses of them all - & this is why it is an error to give prominence to these trivialities when acting a tragedy.

So the scene must act, as the actor acts - it must cease fussing - cease from distracting the attention to its details -

"Empty space"? you query - no not empty since the tragic deeds & words sounds & movements fill up the space - - pack it tight.

And emptiness is not in the "Scene"

There is light . . . there is shadow & both clearly indicated. Besides I have written elsewhere that here or there during the course of the tragedy some essential piece ("extra pieces" I have called them in my notebooks) . . .

.....

Design carefully - & only in the grand mood of the tragic poet . . . & this is very difficult to do

By skilful lighting you can improve your scene - by Stupid or "pretentious" (ie Effective) lighting you can spoil your scene.

But whatever lighting is given to it unless your screens are perfectly placed you will not be able to get a good result.

And in like manner your "extra-pieces" (whatever it be & however you light it) unless it be perfectly designed you will not be able to get a good result. It is now many years since I set up my model stage with its screens - cream, gold, silver or black, but I carry them in my head all the same & know them better & better - their faults are many, their qualities few - but these few are perfect.

The door from the study into my bedroom is 1/2 open I happened to look up & if you happen to look up in the room you are now seated in, you'll see my screens very often.

But you'll only value them greatly if your thoughts are about the tragic experience.¹

Even as late as this in Craig's life (he was sixty-eight years old) his thinking returned repeatedly to the "screens," sometimes referred to as "scene," but never a reference to his vision of movement. Of course, it may be conjectured that Craig may have been ruminating on the course of World War II which was then a year old; he could have been wallowing in self-pity because he was once again trapped by war; the lifelong pursuit of an ideal continuing to be out of reach may have been his preoccupation. Whatever may have been uppermost in his mind at the time will probably never be known with certainty. Nevertheless, what is of interest is the continuing avoidance of allowing thoughts concerning his own earlier vision to see the light. Let us now turn back to the beginning of the century and attempt to

¹MSS Book 12.

discover what this vision was, its development and how it was suppressed and its eventual emergence in another shape.

From very early on Craig was deeply concerned with the notion of "movement" in the theatre, movement of light, movement of the setting, movement of the actor, movement for the sake of movement alone. Naturally, these ideas did not shape themselves at once; they evolved, germinated over a relatively long period of time. It can be documented that as early as 1902 Craig concerned himself with movement as a concept. Certainly in the Purcell Operatic Society productions, and his other early stage works, Craig showed himself to be moving towards something new and adventurous in the theatre.

He and Elena Meo, whom he had met in 1900, visited different locations in London in order to watch changing patterns of light on architectural structures. While Elena moved about in these naturally lighted settings, Craig drew the resulting effects in his notebook.² These sketches were put aside and did not appear until 1905 when they resulted in a series of drawings called The Steps about the first of which he generalizes:

. . . I think that [Shakespeare] might have told us that there are two kinds of drama, and that they are very sharply divided. These two I would call the Drama of Speech and the Drama of Silence, . . . that is to say, dramas where speech becomes paltry and

²Edward Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), p. 161.

inadequate. Very well, then, if we pursue this thought further, we find that there are many things other than works of Nature which enter into this Drama of Silence, and a very grand note in this Drama is struck by that noblest of all men's work, Architecture. There is something so human and so poignant to me in a great city at a time of the night when there are no people about and no sounds. It is dreadfully sad until you walk till six o'clock in the morning. Then it is very exciting. And among all the dreams that the architect has laid upon the earth, I know of no more lovely things than his flights of steps leading up and leading down, and of this feeling about architecture in my art I have often thought how one could give life (not a voice) to these places, using them to a dramatic end. When this desire came to me I was continually designing dramas wherein the place was architectural and lent itself to my desire.³

Craig, also referring to these drawings as "Moods," further details the description of this first drawing, of four, by saying:

. . . it is light and gay, and three children are playing on it as you see the birds do on the back of a large hippopotamus lying asleep in an African river. . . . It is simply technical, and until seen it is valueless. But if you can hear in your mind's ear the little stamping sound which rabbits make, and can hear a rustle of tiny silver bells, you will have a glimpse of what I mean, and will be able to picture to yourself the queer quick little movements.⁴

In the second mood:

You see that the steps have not changed, but they are, as it were, going to sleep and at the very top of a flat and deep terrace we see many girls and boys

³Edward Gordon Craig, Towards A New Theatre (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1913), p. 41.

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

jumping about like fireflies. And in the foreground, and farthest from them, I have made the earth respond to their movements. The earth is made to dance.⁵

In the third we find:

Something a little older has come upon the steps. It is very late evening with them. The movement commences with the passing of a single figure--a man. He begins to trace his way through the maze which is defined upon the floor. He fails to reach the centre. Another figure appears at the top of the steps--a woman. He moves no longer, and she descends the steps slowly to join him. It does not seem to me very clear whether she ever does join him, but when designing it I had hoped that she might. Together they might once more commence to thread the maze. But although the man and woman interest me to some extent, it is the steps on which they move which move me. The figures dominate the steps for a time, but the steps are for all time.⁶

In the final mood:

The steps this time have to bear more weight. It is full night, and to commence with, I want you to cover with your hand the carved marks on the floor and to shut out from your eyes the curved fountains at the top of the steps. Imagine also the figure which is leaning there, placed over on the other side of the steps--that is to say, in the shadow. He is heavy with some unnecessary sorrow, for sorrow is always unnecessary, and you see him moving hither and thither upon this highway of the world. Soon he passes on to the position in which I have placed him. When he arrives there, his head is sunk upon his breast, and he remains immobile.

Then things commence to stir; at first ever so slowly, and then with increasing rapidity. Up above him you see the crest of a fountain rising like the rising moon when it is heavy in autumn. It rises and rises, now and then in a great throe, but more often regularly. Then a second fountain appears.

⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

Together they pour out their natures in silence. When these streams have risen to their full height, the last movement commences. Upon the ground is outlined in warm light the carved shapes of two large windows, and in the centre of one of these is the shadow of a man and a woman. The figure on the steps raises his head. The drama is finished.⁷

It is important to note that in these descriptions, Craig is not only describing movement, but also intensities and changes in light, in setting, in sound.

In 1906 Craig drew A Study for Movement about which he writes:

One can understand that people have something to do with movement, and that the moon has something to do with movement. What steps have to do with movement, except as the recipients of movers, is not as clear to me on one day as it is on another day, and here I feel inclined to speak right against these steps. The design has, I think, some feeling of movement in it, but when I come to think of the way some dancing school may probably plump a big flight of hard steps at the end of their room and make poor girls run up and down them, posing like the dreadful things we want to escape from, then I curse anything so material as steps in connection with movement, and regret that I ever made any record suggesting a connection between the two things.⁸

In the same year Craig drew yet another Study for Movement, about which he writes:

Here we see a man battling through a snowstorm, the movements of both snow and man being made actual. Now I wonder whether it would be better if we should have no snowstorm visualised, but only the man, making his symbolical gestures which should suggest

⁷Ibid., p. 47.

⁸Ibid., p. 61.

to us a man fighting against the elements. In a way I suppose this would be better. Still I have some doubts; for, following that line of argument in its logical sequence, then, would it not be still more near to art if we had no man, but only movements of some intangible material which would suggest the movements which the soul of a man makes battling against the soul of nature? Perhaps it would be even better to having nothing at all. . . .⁹

In these studies for movement the genesis for Craig's ideas can be seen: movement of scenery, movement of performers, and, possibly most important, light as the source of movement. To explain the continuing emphasis in his work on the visual elements in theatre, Craig writes:

As I have written in my book "On the Art of Theatre," the artist of the Theatre of the future will create his masterpieces out of action, scene, and voice. That was in 1905, and the future to which I referred is still before us, and therefore anybody, who can go into the matter more thoroughly than I did, is still free to alter that and to show that it can be created out of something different . . . something finer, simpler. My reason for mentioning it here, is to call your attention once more to something which some of you at times overlook when speaking of my work. That is to say, I am not concerned alone with what is called the "scenic" part of the art. I would like you to remember that I have clearly stated that action and voice are the other two parts which I am studying. Action and voice cannot be satisfactorily treated by means of the written word or diagrams, whereas scene to some extent can be so treated.¹⁰

After meeting Isadora Duncan at the end of 1904, in Berlin, Craig saw in her approach to her art the substantiation of many of his own ideas concerning theatre. After a

⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

couple of years travel with Duncan as her business manager, as well as lover, Craig was struck by the thought that

it might be possible for an audience to derive an emotional experience from the movement of plastic forms as well . . . from three-dimensional structures . . . He would use movement to express ideas in time and space.¹¹

As Isadora seemed to improvise her movement to music, Craig saw the possibility of the visual elements doing something similar, resulting in each performance being a unique one.

The year, 1905, proved to be a very fruitful year leading to a number of others, equally productive. Henry Irving's death, the "Master's" demise, in October gave Craig the tremendous impetus he needed to free the ideas stored up, awaiting release from the past. By December The Art of the Theatre was published in German and English, shortly to be followed by a Dutch edition, the first recorded statement of his soon-to-be revolutionary ideas.

In 1903, to help him in his work designing Much Ado About Nothing for his mother, he bought Serlio's Book of Architecture in six volumes, which he later, in Berlin, had re-bound into five, Books 1 and 2 as one volume, interleaved and annotated.¹² He found this "one of the best guides to my work." Some of the woodcuts caught his fancy, particularly

¹¹Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 234.

¹²Edward Gordon Craig, Index to the Story of My Days (London: Hulton Press, 1957), p. 254.

those showing simple architectural units rising from a floor drawn in perspective.

In place of painted scenery, he visualized scenery made of screens with two-way hinges, thus providing a plastic medium with which scenes could be composed in any shape and of any size, limited only by the size of the folds of the screens; and with the assistance of electric lights and projectors, he would colour and decorate them impressionistically.¹³

After he arrived in Berlin he discovered a copy of Manfred Semper's volume on theatre in the series Handbuch der Architektur, published in Stuttgart in 1904. What fascinated Craig in this work was the section about the Asphaleia system of hydraulically operated stage elevators, which was particularly well illustrated. Combining the Asphaleia system with Serlio's cubed floor he realized that he could add the element of movement so that, in 1907, he made notes in his copy of Serlio:

The squares on pages 19 and 20, Book 2, gave me the idea of a floor which, divided into squares, might be moveable--thereby obtaining at any time as many variations of the form of the floor, . . . But a pliable floor was not all I desired--I wanted a "scene" so mobile, which (within rules) might move in all directions--tempo--in all things under the control of the one who could dream how to move its parts to produce "Movements." . . . To these I added a roof composed of the same shapes as the floor--suspended cubes, each cube exactly covering (and meeting when lowered) each square on the floor. . . . We have, therefore, a room or place moveable at all parts, and all ways, within certain laws and restrictions. . . .¹⁴

¹³Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 233.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 235.

As we shall soon see, these notes led Craig to his vision of abstract movement as another viable form of theatre, not replacing the actor, nor replacing text but adding another form, an extension of this art form.

Craig first thought to use wood engraving as the means for recording his ideas concerning the moveable cubes. However, in 1907, in Florence he met the artist, Stephen Haweis, who showed him how to use a waxed etching plate. Within a couple of days Craig had acquired sufficient technique and practise that he ventured to work without supervision, and in the space of a couple of months, had executed some fifteen etchings, recording fifteen moments of arrested motion, there being no relationship between individual plates. Each one represented a frozen moment in a sequence of movement, similar to a single frame of a motion picture.

Now that the vision was clear, Craig sought, unsuccessfully, to find the means of executing it three dimensionally. Not having sufficient technical ability, he was unable to do this. The etchings were exhibited at the Libreria Antiquaria T. De Marinis & C. from January 4 to 20, 1908.¹⁵ Craig wrote a foreword to the catalogue in which, it must be noted, each etching was listed as a movement in numerical sequence. In the foreword Craig demonstrates his technical mystification:

Of the twenty designs which I show here, fifteen are to be looked at as studies for one of the main

¹⁵The invitation.

divisions of the Art of Revelation. Being, as they perforce must be, but motionless studies of that which moves, they can but give the faintest shadow of my intentions; maybe then, these intentions shall become clearer by the help of a few words. I serve the Art of Revelation. These designs are concerned with the third division of the Art, which is to be called Motion, or Balance.

.....

The most important is that movement which is at the Roots of this Art of Revelation, must be translated through Inanimate Forms. I speak here of movement in an actual, not in an imaginary sense. Impersonal movement in an actual sense exists in no modern art nor can it justly be said to belong even in its imaginary sense to any other art.

This appears to me to be corroborated to some extent by the other two divisions of the Art of Revelation--by Architecture and by Music. By Architecture, which not only in fancy but also in actuality alone produces pure form: by Music which not only in the abstract but in the concrete alone produces pure sound.

.....

We have constructed an instrument. By means of this instrument the artist is enabled to bring before the beholder, a sense of the law which controls our system--the law of Change. Movement will be for the sake of Movement--ever attempting to create the perfect Balance, even as in Music Sound is for the sake of Sound, ever attempting to create the perfect Harmony. The Imitation of Nature has no part in this art. The mood and the thought of the artist passing through this Instrument shall raise by it one mutable form after another, living only a moment; ceaselessly, if imperceptibly, changing; arriving at last at its final and definite state--only to fade--to re-form itself once again, and again--an infinite progression.

.....

Craig concludes the foreword:

That I should give an exact and laboured description of this Instrument can be no one's wish--for they must realize at once that it resembles any other instrument,

and that to describe an organ is not to reveal the beauty which exhales from its construction. But to those who will have understood what I have said here, I shall have given enough suggestion to assist them to the understanding of the designs themselves.¹⁶

In 1908 Craig issued some thirty portfolios, each containing a dozen of the etchings. He repeated this in 1910 and then there was a long hiatus until the concept of the vertically moveable cubes was allowed to come under public scrutiny.¹⁷ In 1923 Scene appeared as a book, containing sixteen etchings from the two portfolios.¹⁸ Although the introduction is interesting, it is obvious that Craig has not yet been able to develop "the instrument" he refers to in the 1908 catalogue. All reference is then suppressed and makes only one brief appearance, privately, before it disappears completely. Shortly after the publication of Scene, Craig's son Edward, his imagination sparked by the etchings, built a model in which the cubes were able to rise and fall by aid of a set of simple pulleys. When Craig saw this in operation he was very excited at the prospect of the functioning model. Young Edward assured his father that the concept was feasible in a modern theatre. His source of this most apropos piece of information was a friend, then

¹⁶Catalogue of Etchings Being Designs for Motions by Gordon Craig (Florence, 1908), pp. 4, 6, 8, 10.

¹⁷Ifan Kyrle Fletcher and Arnold Rood, Edward Gordon Craig: A Bibliography (London: The Society for Theatre Research), p. 16.

¹⁸Edward Gordon Craig, Scene (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923).

studying hydraulics at the University of Genoa. Craig lost his temper, became furious at his son for revealing his vision away from the house, and collapsed with a near-nervous breakdown. "My model, which had given him so much joy followed by so much anguish, was hidden away in the back of the cellar, never to be seen again."¹⁹ Nor did the vision ever again see the light of day.

¹⁹Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 317.

CHAPTER V

SCREENS

As we have seen, Craig was not able to execute his vision of a moving setting capable of creating emotional responses in audiences. Despite the paucity of technical knowledge the concept would not leave him. He was led to a compromise: rather than the vertically moving cubes he hit on the scheme of horizontally moving screens, screens which were to be of equal height, composed of a varying number of panels of different widths. These were to be painted a neutral color so that changes could be effected by light, or perhaps, projections. So enthused was Craig by this substitute that he built a large model stage and a series of screens for various plays. To further stimulate his imagination he carved figures, also in scale, so that wherever he placed the figures they were in perfect proportion to the screens.

Because it can be easily misunderstood, it must be reiterated that Craig's vision for Scene was based upon up-and-down movement in a vertical proscenium opening; the compromise Screens called for side-to-side movement in a horizontal proscenium opening, the traditional shape of the stage opening with which Craig was familiar from his earliest

childhood, and which required no additional technical knowledge than that which he already had. It was the latter which Craig did allow to become known, although the former was the ideal which he had in mind.

The first professional use of the moveable screens, as we have already seen, was at the Abbey Theatre in 1911. This first full-scale use of screens came about as a result of Craig letting Yeats have a set of model screens which the poet found inspiring. Craig granted permission for a large set to be built and used, although it must be underscored, not under Craig's supervision. The first time screens were used with Craig on hand was for Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre, opening a year after the success in Dublin.

In Towards A New Theatre, published in 1913, Craig reproduced some of the designs he made between 1900 and 1910 and commented upon each. What is of interest is that the last plate is not a design, the only exception, but a photograph of the last scene of the Moscow Art Theatre Hamlet as seen on the model stage. The title is "SCREENS--as employed for a large stage scene" while the comments about it on the facing page are headed, "SCREENS showing their arrangement for the last act of 'Hamlet'," as is the manuscript for this last comment. The manuscript bears a note in the upper left hand corner, "MP. [Madge Pemberton] This MSS you keep for future reference Any mss I send keep in special box & enter

Date when recieved etc & whether copied."¹

[The last design. (m)] The end of the book & the beginning of a new chapter in scenography. I hope to see the day when the Theatre will again become the Theatre.

At present it pretends to be the Theatre - & therefore any pretender is welcome within the pasteboard citadel and only pretence is estimated as genuine -

The whole conspiracy is against art [,] against truth [,] & in favour of pretence.

Emotions are pretended, aped, not transformed by the magic of the artist into firm & beautiful shapes & patterns -- into poems.

Emotions are taken as they are -- reflected in a mirror which is held rather low down -- for the arms are getting tired -- & this reflection we call art.

This reflection is the merest pretense of art - & worse it is a pretence & a parody of Life -

Life has become under the modern kind of tyranny a very little thing easily pretended -- put on & off like a pair of tennis shoes

[15 - 30 30 love - game -

(MP: What are the exact terms used in Tennis - I forget

write me out a fancy game employing all the terms used & put it in here - later I can cut. Be particular to tell Dent to send me a proof.))²

And the Theatre is recording today for future ages -- & for our children [']s children & their children [,] the facts of our infirmities [the original "y" corrected by Craig to "ie"] -- that our Imagination is sterile [,] & our Emotions tame [;] that our hands are clumsy [,] & our voices faint [changed from "dreary"].

Some to [-] day consider it their duty to comfort the age by assuring us that this is all as it should be [,] & that if the Imagination & Emotions of an age are weak [,] the art of the age must faithfully chronicle the fact for future ages.

An amazing pointofview.

As if any age [eye (t)] can find time to linger

¹Unpublished manuscript. Reproduced here maintaining original punctuation and spelling. Variations from the published text will be indicated by square brackets, "t" = text, "m" = manuscript.

²This note to M. P. is emphasized by a large "X" in the left margin.

Narcissus [-] like on the edge of destruction --
 wooing itself & its inc[s]ipidities [;] glorying
 in a silly reflection of a sillier reality --
 The Imagination & the Emotions are not for purposes
 of mimicry -- they are for creation [.] When the
 Imagination & the Emotions can, through art, create
 the age [,] how should it stoop to mimic it [?] --
 [These two should always speed ahead of their times,
 calling all the ages to compete in the (crossed out in
 m)]

Art is useless after events: it must precede them --
 it must create them. When we elect a King [,] I think
 we do so with some art. When we celebrate his
 [C]oronation [,] I am sure we use no art at all --
 when we record that [C]oronation [,] our journalists
 have to bear the brunt. They are ordered to the front
 to fabricate by the use of false emotions & no
 Imagination [,] a true record of an event which was
 both childish & inadequate --

[Were Imagination ordered to the front, it would
 first of all create a coronation ceremony which would
 inspire even the King himself, and our records after
 the event would inspire the people. (t)]

When we build a city [,] art is not reckoned with
 ["called upon" is crossed out (m)]. After the city
 is there [,] some records [,] photographic & calli-
 graphic [,] are taken of it. These records serve
 but as a laughing [-] stock & a warning to future
 ages, recording the folly of blundering at the
 beginning [,] & taking infinite pains when it is
 too late [:] recording how th[r]ough fear we omit to
 face facts about nations [,] cities [,] peoples [,]
 even our own lives ["even schools" crossed out (m)]
 [,] because it seems so costly -- no other reason.
 [-- (t)] & how we are forced in the end to pay a
 thousand times the price for what we could have had
 [,] had we but trusted our Imagination & our Emotions.
 That the men of the theatre will reali[z]e this if
 none others will is my hope -- & let them remember
 this [:] that their art [,] - the art of the theatre
 [,] - is perhaps the sole art which is still part of
 our life & is not only ["some how" crossed out (m)]
 deeply rooted in the heart of the people -- ["not its
 'popular' side" crossed out (m)] its Imaginative [,]
 its universal heart is the people[']s heart.
 ["Popular["] is a word which has lost its meaning --
 & to[-]day implies vulgarity, & that alone. ["to
 vulgarise is supposed to imply popularity." crossed
 out (m)] But we are sure, are we not, that the true
 sense of the word ["Popular["] implies an Ideal.
 [A marginal pencil note "Explain a little - what deal -"
 has been crossed out (m)] We are sure of this[.] otherwise

[,] had we not given up the game of Life [,] centuries ago. [?]

Preaching never did that, & never will [.] [Problem discussion never did it & never will (m)] Only by Imagination & through the men of Imagination can such endeavour be awakened in the people.

The people know . . . [.] there is no need to lie to them - [;] there is less reason to waste millions of money lying to ourselves.

There are [certain (m)] journals [,] large & mighty, lying daily to themselves [.] They tell themselves that they are mighty & that they are guiding [governing (t)] the people.

They are being fooled by the people -- let them know it. If the people dislike tyranny of all kinds [,] how then shall they be fooled to like this [cheap (t)] new tyranny [?]

["When will the active men" crossed out (m)]

There is only one power which commands to[-]day [,] as it has always commanded in the past - [.] it is the Imaginative [P]ower. [It is this which I call Royal. The Imaginative Power holds both the King and the People, the Rich and the Poor, in the same embrace -- for these are its children. It holds them and regards them without preference -- but is prejudiced always in the favour of Beauty. It punishes -- it forgives; to be quite true, it always forgives -- while punishing. It is the only good Power. (t)] Every man has a share of it -- an equal share -- & some families have held it more precious than gold [,] & others have sold it for a share in a mine.

Those families to whom it is precious still predominate [,] - and are joined [bound (t)] together by the strongest & most lasting bonds that nature ever made or ever will make. [Long live this King of Kings. (t)]³

Now, why should this extended piece of material be included here? The sole reason is to demonstrate that, as was the case with the exhibition of etchings in Florence in 1908, Craig once again shows that he does not know what he is talking about when it comes to matters technical. The

³Edward Gordon Craig, Towards A New Theatre (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1913), pp. 85-87.

passage quoted most recently waxes almost poetic in its language usage, but when it comes to communicating any exact meaning, there is not much substance.

I believe the reason Craig so latched onto the compromise idea of horizontally moving screens was because of having solved a purely "technical" problem. In his reaction to W. B. Yeats' enthusiasm for the model screens, Craig took out patents on them in Great Britain (1910), Italy (1910), France (1910), Germany (1911), and the United States (1912). When one studies the drawings one can only wonder that any patent office would be willing to patent such a simple device: double-sided flats mounted on castors which are concealed by a skirt of cloth reaching to the floor. These may be double hinged and grouped in varying widths. In the complete specification Craig states:

My invention relates to apparatus for producing scenic effects on the stage and is particularly adapted for use in the representation of "poetic drama."

In the representation of such plays the producer has hitherto been obliged to choose between the alternatives of either employing scenery formed and painted so as to produce the illusion of the actual scene intended by the playwright, or using plain curtains as a background. Many persons have come to the conclusion that the latter method has certain aesthetic advantages and it has the material advantage of cheapness and easy transport.

The object of my invention is to produce a device which shall present the aesthetic advantages of the plain curtain but shall further be capable of a multitude of effects which although not intended to produce an illusion shall nevertheless assist the imagination of the spectator by suggestion.

My device is further intended to combine the artistic variety and mechanical advantages of painted

scenery with the portable nature of the curtain.

My invention consists in the use of a series of double jointed folding screens standing on the stage and painted in monochrome -- preferably white or pale yellow. The screens may be used as background and in addition to this use may be so arranged as to project into the foreground at various angles of perspective so as to suggest various physical conditions, such as, for example, the corner of a street, or the interior of a building; by this means suggestion, not representation, is relied upon and nevertheless variety is obtainable. The device possesses the great advantage that the variety of effect is obtained from a very simple apparatus which may be readily transported from place to place and easily arranged and moved on the stage. Moreover this device is to all intents and purposes self-supporting and, unlike scenery or curtains, does not require to be suspended from above.

The screens may be mounted on any suitable arrangement of castors and provided with struts or other suitable means for retaining the screens in their arranged positions.⁴

⁴Edward Gordon Craig, Improvements in Stage Scenery: Provisional Specification, Complete Specification, No. 1771 A. D. 1910 (Redhill, 1910).

CHAPTER VI

"THE ACTOR AND THE ÜBER-MARIONETTE"

One must remember that Craig was a trained and experienced actor and concerned himself throughout his career with the problems of the actor. Between 1889, the date of his London debut with the Lyceum Company, and his withdrawal from acting as a career in 1897, Craig appeared in Charles I, The Corsican Brothers, Cymbeline, The Dead Heart, Eugene Aram, Hamlet, Henry VIII, King Lear, The Lady of Lyons, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, Nance Oldfield, The New Magdalen, Olivia, Othello, Ravenswood, A Regular Fix, Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, She Stoops to Conquer, Taming of the Shrew, Tosca, and Two Roses, in some cases in differing roles in different productions. This thorough grounding as an apprentice in an art form for which in those years there was not too much preparation, other than by experience, explains Craig's continuing interest in the performer.

The controversial and lengthy essay, "The Actor and the Über-Marionette," which first appeared in the second issue of The Mask in April 1908 probably best serves as the definitive statement of Craig's thinking on the subject. In it Craig seems to be suggesting that the living actor be replaced by a marionette, a super-marionette, totally under the control

of the manipulator, who, of course, must be an artist. In the essay he makes the point that, in the other arts, the painter, sculptor, composer work with materials which are foreign to each: the sculptor in stone or clay, the painter with canvas and paint, the composer with paper and ink. On the other hand, the actor (I assume Craig would also include other performing artists) works with his own body as his material.

Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is an enemy of the artist. Art is the exact antithesis [sic] of Pandimonium [sic], and Pandimonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents; Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials.

He continues:

The whole nature of man tends towards freedom; he therefore carries the proof in his own person, that as material for the theatre he is useless. In the modern theatre, owing to the use of bodies of men and women as their material, all which is presented there is of an accidental nature. The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice, all are at the mercy of the winds of his emotions; these winds which must blow for ever round the artist, moving without unbalancing him. But with the actor, emotion possesses him; it seizes upon his limbs moving them whither it will. He is at its beck and call, he moves as one in a frantic dream or as one distraught, swaying here and there; his head, his arms, his feet, if not utterly beyond control, are so weak to stand against the torrent of his passions, that they are ready to play him

false at any moment. It is useless for him to attempt to reason with himself. . . .¹

Craig continues to develop this theme and claims that man is not a material of art because of his desire for freedom, which results in a lack of discipline. Man, at the same time, is also very emotional, which results in a lack of reasoning ability. However, Craig does say:

But I see a loop-hole by which in time the actors can escape from the bondage they are in. They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture. To-day they impersonate and interpret; to-morrow they must represent and interpret; and the third day they must create. By this means style may return. To-day the actor impersonates a certain being. He cries to the audience "Watch me; I am now pretending to be so and so, and I am now pretending to do so and so;" and then he proceeds to imitate as exactly as possible, that which he has announced he will indicate.²

Later on in the essay, after expanding on the foregoing thoughts, Craig concludes:

The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure--the über-marionette we may call [sic] him, until he has won for himself a better name. Much has been written about the puppet--or marionette. There are some excellent volumes upon him, and he has also inspired several works of Art. To-day in his least happy period many people have come to regard him as rather a superior doll--and to think he had developed from the doll. This is incorrect. He is a descendant of the stone images of the old Temples--he is to-day a rather

¹"The Actor and the Über-Marionette," The Mask 1 (April 1908): 3.

²Ibid., p. 5.

degenerate form of a God. Always the close friend of children he still knows how to select and attract his devotees.

When anyone designs a puppet on paper, he draws a stiff and comic looking thing. Such a one has not even perceived what is contained in the idea which we now call the Marionette. He mistakes gravity of face and calmness of body for blank stupidity and angular deformity. Yet even Modern Puppets are extraordinary things. The applause may thunder or dribble, their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused; and, though drenched in a torrent of bouquets and love, the face of the leading lady remains as solemn, as beautiful and as remote as ever. There is something more than a flash of genius in the Marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The Marionette . . . appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization.³

Craig, for a considerable time, allowed his thinking to dwell on the marionette as a predecessor of his "über-marionette." What seems to be the reason is the marionette's self-control, its discipline. Under the pseudonym of Adolf Fuerst, one of many, Craig develops the idea of discipline in the performer:

Two of the most salient characteristics which chiefly impress us in them are their simplicity and their calm. The gestures which seem so varied, so complicated as to necessitate the most elaborate mechanism are produced by means amazingly simple, while a marionette "greenroom" between the performances . . . forms a welcome contrast to the real theatre, . . . as tranquil a spot as can be found. Each little figure, strangely human in its repose, hangs upon its nail in the dim light, gazing before it with eyes as inscrutable as those which yet meets ours from under the quiet brows of the gods of Egypt and Etruria. It is their silence, their passionless gaze, their profound indifference which give so supreme a dignity

³Ibid., p. 11.

to the frail little bodies tricked out in gauze and tinsel. As in the fallen descendant of a great family some one trait may yet remain to recall a noble origin, so does that impassive gaze, that air of seeing beyond all the transitory and the accidental, still proclaim for the marionette his kinship with the grave stone images of the ancient eastern world. And when, in more than his former dignity and dowered with more than his former gifts, the puppet returns to our stage in the form of that Uber Marionette [sic] whom Mr Gordon Craig has created, bringing with him his supreme quality, that of perfect obedience to the hand and mind of the master whom he serves as material, with him will come that Renaissance of the Art of the Theatre of which the first hints are even now beginning to appear.⁴

Using another pseudonym, Edward Edwardovitch, Craig continued his demand for discipline. In 1910, resorting to the dialogue form he had used in 1905 in The Art of the Theatre, he wrote:

Let the temperament of each actor develop for all that temperament is worth, and let the sense of discipline be developed in every actor in proportion to the force of his temperament. Do not let temperament be an excuse for absence of discipline. It is this which is killing the modern theatre.⁵

When "The Actor and the Über-Marionette" appeared in 1908, and for many years thereafter, it caused great controversy and consternation, particularly among actors who felt Craig was desirous of replacing the living actor with a marionette. They also thought he wanted to dispense with

⁴Adolf Fuerst, "A Note on Marionettes," The Mask 2 (October 1909): 76.

⁵Edward Edwardovitch, "Ladies, Temperament and Discipline," The Mask 3 (July 1910): 15.

the designers and scene painters as well. Of course this was not the case. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Craig envisioned a new form of theatre which would be an addition to all existing forms. He saw it as an alternative. Nevertheless, enough ruckus was created that in the 1924 edition of On the Art of the Theatre he felt it necessary to clarify what he had meant in that essay (included in the book). He writes:

. . . I no more want to see the living actors replaced by things of wood than the great Italian actress of our day wants all the actors to die. Is it not true that when we cry "Oh, go to the Devil!" we never really want that to happen? What we mean is, "get a little of his fire and come back cured."

And that is what I wanted the actors to do-- some actors--the bad ones, when I said that they must go and the Über-marionette replace them. "And what, pray, is this monster the Über-marionette?" cry a few terrified ones.

The Über-marionette is the actor plus fire, minus egoism: the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality.⁶

Because he had no company of his own over an extensive period of time, Craig was never able to explore fully the potential of his acting theories.

⁶Edward Gordon Craig, On the Art of the Theatre (London: William Heinemann, 1924), p. vii.

CHAPTER VII

SCHOOL FOR THE ART OF THE THEATRE

In preparation to discuss The School for the Art of the Theatre, I wrote, among others, to David Lees, Craig's photographer son. His response arrived in March 1977, and in reply to my request for help, he wrote: "EGC and his schools: [the final consonant underlined in red] this plural leaves me a bit surprised, for I have always known of just one school, that being 'The School for the Art of the Theatre' started at the Arena Goldoni in Florence, on March 1913." He then goes on to refer to A Living Theatre which is primarily concerned with the School in Florence. He concludes the paragraph by writing: "As for the schools-- in the plural--as I said in the beginning, I know of no other school beside this one."¹

My response to Mr. Lees informed him that there was an earlier attempt by Gordon Craig to start a school, namely The London School for Theatrical Art, in 1903, at the Trafalgar Studios. Probably as a result of the critical and artistic response to the productions of the Purcell Operatic Society, Dido and Aeneas in 1900, The Masque of Love in 1901,

¹David Lees to Arnold Rood, Milano, March 11, 1977.

and Acis and Galatea in 1902, Craig's enthusiasm led him to think that the way to continue the interest and ability of this core of hard-working amateurs would be to start a school in which he could train them, and others, to be polished actors. Near the end of February 1904 announcements appeared in the news columns in The Morning Post, The Daily Mail, and The Pall Mall Gazette which were quite similar in content. The statement in the last read:

Mr. Gordon Craig, while preparing Ibsen's "Vikings," "Much Ado About Nothing," and various other productions which have been under his direction in the last three or four years, has been able to devote some time to the formation of a school for the study of the Art of the Theatre, from which he intends to develop a qualified company of actors, singers, dancers, scene painters, costumiers, illuminators, and other skilled craftsmen, so that finally they may be fitted to produce together creditable examples of their art.

The school will in some few respects differ from other London schools of dramatic art. For instance, Mr. Craig does not propose to train his students so that after two or three terms they will be able to accept London or provincial engagements. His purpose is to prepare them with opportunities to exhibit their powers under his direction.²

The final version of the prospectus, which had gone through two earlier states, listed Craig as the Principal and added to the release to the press:

The tuition will be of the simplest character. During the first term the students will be expected to study each branch of the art, and that branch in which they are most proficient by nature will be thoroughly developed and at the same time they will be made

²The Pall Mall Gazette, 23 February 1904.

familiar with the other branches. In no case will one craft be developed at the expense of the others.³

In addition, the Midsummer and Michaelmas Terms were listed as well as the fees, based on those of the Royal School of Music, the Slade School, and other such ones.⁴ In a letter dated February 1904, Ellen Terry wrote her son:

I'll send you any letters I get, re - tuition, but they dont come now as they used . . . I'm sure you'll find it very difficult to get 20 pupils who will pay yr terms - so don't rush into any expenses of printing or room - 5

How well the mother knew the son!

Despite enquiries about the school the only person known to have attempted to become connected with it officially was Maud Douie who had appeared in the Purcell Operatic Society productions. Also, during 1904, Count Harry Kessler arranged for Otto Brahm to invite Craig to Berlin to design his proposed production of Otway's Venice Preserved. The coincidence led Craig to accept the more concrete proposal leading him to abandon the idea for the school, temporarily, and he left for Berlin on August 23.⁶

³Prospectus, second state, The London School of Theatrical Art [1904].

⁴Edward Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), p. 181.

⁵Ellen Terry to Gordon Craig, February 24, [1904]. Quoted by Edward Craig to author.

⁶Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 183.

Another letter to Craig which I received a copy of considerably later perhaps due to the less than efficient postal service in the United States. The letter was sent from Los Angeles, California, and is dated October 15, 1913.

Mr. E. Gordon Craig,
 Director of School for Art of the Theater,
 7 John Street, Adelphi W. C.
 London, England

Dear Sir,
 Will you please send me the following information regarding your School for the Art of the Theater:--

1. How long is the course?
2. Tuition.
3. Dates of semester.
4. Subjects included.
5. Credentials required.

I have become a great admirer of your ideals as revealed in "The Mask" and the wonderful volume on "The Art of the Theatre," and can conceive of no greater joy than watching their fulfilment in the school in Florence.

I have taken a four years' course in Expression in Cumnock School of Los Angeles which included a varied range of subjects [?] voice culture, gymnastics, Dramatic mime, etc.

Sincerely yours,
 Miss Rosalie Budington,
 1005 Alpine Street,
 Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.⁷

Across the slight margin, written in Craig's hand, is the terse comment: "answered Oct. 28th." Because there does not seem to be an extant copy of the reply to Miss Budington I will attempt to comment on the topics of her concern and provide some background.

⁷Rosalie Budington to E. Gordon Craig, Los Angeles, October 15, 1913.

However, before we reach the Florentian school we must briefly note two other attempts of Craig's to establish a school after he left England. After he had established the Théâtre des arts in Paris, the founder, Jacques Rouché, was anxious to have assistance from "one of the greatest innovators of our age."⁸ Lengthy negotiations ensued with Craig making even greater demands on Rouché; when agreement seemed to be within reach Craig returned the contract unsigned. Rouché felt that the cause of this blatant rejection lay in something Craig had said at one of their meetings:

Let me close your theatre for five years, let me found a school for actors, a school for designers, a school for costumers and stage hands. Otherwise, in a few weeks I will be able to achieve only the second-rate, some mediocre things which you could realize without me.⁹

Shortly before meeting Rouché in 1910 Craig had written in his Daybook I:

The stage needs a school, it needs many schools. Practical and technical schools--schools for the theory and for the experimental study of the Art of the Theatre. We are all too ignorant. For instance can anyone on the stage today tell us what is Language and where it comes from--what its history? Can anyone on the stage tell us what is Light? Whence it comes--what its power--No--yet these two things, Light and Language, are greater and lesser parts of our material of the modern theatre.

⁸Jacques Rouché, L'Art Théâtral Moderne (Paris: Édouard Cornély et Cie., 1910), p. 49, author's translation.

⁹Edward Gordon Craig, De L'Art du Théâtre, trans. Geneviève Séligmann-Lui (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), p. xvii, author's translation.

They are both great factors of our new theatre of tomorrow.
Where is the school then?¹⁰

In September 1908 he leased the Arena Goldoni, located in the Via dei Serragli to which he moved The Mask offices and planned to use as his studio. It was here also that he eventually established his School for the Art of the Theatre. However, before we reach that point, there was yet another attempt to found a school. In 1909 he received an invitation from Stanislavsky to co-direct a production at the Moscow Art Theatre; they agreed on the perennial favorite, Hamlet, and several trips were made from Florence to Moscow within the next three years. Almost a year before Hamlet opened, Craig wrote Stanislavsky, February 20, 1911:

Will you give me my school in Florence?

If you will do so: I will give you and demonstrate to you within a year (1) the principles of movement of the human body--(2) within two years I will give you and demonstrate to you the principles of movement on the scene of single figures and of massed groups of figures--(3) and within three years I will give you the whole principle of governing action, scene and voice; (4) after that I will give you the principles of improvisation or spontaneous acting with and without words.

Will you do this for me that I may do this for you?¹¹

Unlike with Jacques Rouché earlier on, the negative reaction did not create a breach in the ongoing work and the

¹⁰ Denis Bablet, Edward Gordon Craig, trans. Daphne Woodward (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 97.

¹¹ Autograph letter signed in the Moscow Art Theatre Museum, quoted in Bablet, Edward Gordon Craig, pp. 157-58.

suggestion may have influenced Stanislavsky in his creation of the Moscow Art Theatre Studios.

On July 16, 1911 a dinner to honor Craig was given at the Café Royal in London with William Rothenstein in the chair; toasts were proposed to the King, of course; by Rothenstein, seconded by W. B. Yeats, to the guest of the evening, who replied, for the critics by Roger Fry with E. F. Spence replying and for the assembled guests, strangely composed of more artists than theatre people, by Frederick Whelan with the reply from Michael Lykiardopulos, secretary to the Moscow Art Theatre.¹²

This testimonial to Craig and his work again led him to think about a school. To this end an English Advisory Committee was formed, under the chairmanship of William Rothenstein, consisting of artists, critics, musicians, theatre historians, and other workers in the theatre well enough known to avoid listing here. The aim of the school as announced in a prospectus marked "for private circulation only" was that:

The school will aim at doing, and discovering the means of doing, what is left undone by the Modern Theatre. It will aim at infusing the life of imagination into every art and craft connected with the theatre. To achieve this experiment is necessary, experiment the thorough nature of which is impossible in the actual conduct of a theatre,

¹²Dinner to Mr. Edward Gordon Craig, Café Royal, Sunday, July 16, 1911.

and only possible in such a foundation as is now proposed.¹³

How were these lofty aims to be carried out?

A body of picked men will take charge of the School when it is erected, and conduct researches into every aspect of the three elements--sound, light, and movement--of which the Art of the Theatre is composed. They will be furnished with a stage and all implements and appliances necessary for the stage. They will invent more and better implements and appliances. They will publicly and privately produce plays, and they will be constantly in touch with theatres all over the world, which, by a system of co-operation will have the benefit of all that is discovered and created in the School in return for their support. There will be men continually being trained in fitness to serve the Art of the Theatre and sent out to every country in the Western world to spread the ideas of the School and to supervise Productions, and to reconstruct and regenerate theatres. The School will, it is hoped, by the thoroughness of Art--with its economy of means and directness of purpose--combat and destroy the expediency of commerce, with its vagueness and nullity of conception and its looseness in aim. The School will be an engine, an organism by which imaginative men and artists will be able to break down the barrier, which, so unhappily for the world's peace and welfare, exists between themselves and unimaginative men. The School, it is hoped, will, while being a practical and working institution, exercising a living influence on the Art of the present, create in course of time a solid basis upon which the workers of the future will be able to build a vital and supreme Art. The Repertory Theatre movement has done, and is doing, a valuable pioneer work, but it is only by the foundation of a School that there can be created a truly National Theatre which is an organic and living member of the body politic.¹⁴

¹³Prospectus, School for the Art of the Theatre, [1911].

¹⁴Ibid.

The prospectus was signed by William Rothenstein as Chairman, E. Gordon Craig and Gilbert Canaan; St. John Hutchinson was the honorable treasurer. In this prospectus the Executive Offices were located at Ellen Terry's home in King's Road. As further, more elaborate prospectuses were issued, the address changed, ending at 7 John Street, Adelphi, which strangely enough, was next to the architectural offices that Craig's father, E. W. Godwin, had occupied in 1874.

Following Craig's return from Moscow after the opening of Hamlet, a printed letter signed by William Rothenstein and Prof. Sauter was circulated. It read:

Dear Sir, At a meeting of the Advisory Committee held on June 14, 1912, it was decided to dissolve the Committee. Before this proposal was made it was decided to invite the individual members of the Advisory Committee to allow their names to be added to the Honorary International Committee which is to assist Mr. Gordon Craig in the furtherance of his work which is developing in a practical direction elsewhere. We hope that you will allow your name to appear on the list of the International Committee, and ask you to be good enough to send us an early reply on the enclosed post card.¹⁵

Along with the letter and reply card, a statement of accounts was enclosed showing a balance in hand of £10 8s. 9d.

It was strongly felt that the School would need to be subsidized in some fashion, that more than printed words on paper was needed to spur interest and involvement. At about this juncture Elena Meo Craig entered the picture

¹⁵Printed letter from English Advisory Committee, June 14, 1912.

forcefully. From September 19, 1912 until June 3, 1913, there were a considerable number of meetings of what came to be called "The Society of the Theatre affiliated to the Gordon Craig School for the Art of the Theatre" whose aim was "the promotion of the Art of the Theatre." Present at the frequent meetings in various combinations were Holbrook Jackson, Elena, Elsie Fogarty, Craig himself, Mortimer Menpes, Ernest Brown, Henry Slonimsky, C. W. Holliday, B. Treharne, P. G. Konody, Haldane Macfall, Lovat Fraser, Ralph Hodgson, Anthony M. Ludovici, John Cournos, Ambrose Heal, and Ernest Marriott who were to be joined by Kenneth Bell, Francis Bickley, A. D. Flower, A. H. Christie, and Ezra Pound.¹⁶ As is common with such organizations, there was much talk and very little action. In The Minute Book for The Society we finally find an entry: "The meeting called for Feb. 20, 1913 was adjourned owing to there not being sufficient members present to form a quorum." To this Craig later added a note: "Oh--Oh--England." Later on we come to entries reading, in quick succession,

April 4th. 1913 Present: Messrs Hodgson, Marriott, Treharne!!!! Adjourned.

April 16th. 1913 Present Messrs Marriott and Treharne. Adjourned.

Last Meeting June 3.-1913 - present. Prof. Sauter, Ralph Hodgson, Lovat Fraser, Haldane Macfall, G. P. Konody [sic], J. Cournos, H. Slonimsky, Mrs. Craig. Proposed by Mr. McFall [sic]--Mrs C write to Mr Craig suggesting that the Society be

¹⁶Manuscript, "Minute Book of The Society of the Theatre, Adelphi Chambers 7 John Street London WC."

made a publicity departement [sic] (or bureau) for the School seconded by Mr Konody--and carried. Prof. Sauter proposed--the [sic] the society should not suspend as suggested by Miss Fogoty [sic] but should go on slowly--offices given up--and meetings held at members rooms--then when Mr Craig was ready with news from the school it should burst like a bomb--that also was passed--. EC. Two meetings have been called since but no response--except from Prof. Sauter. Mr Lovat Fraser--Mr Mcfall [sic]--Elena Craig. So nothing was done--July 1913. 17

By March 1913, the Honorary International Committee had superceded the English Advisory Committee and was composed of representative members from England, Ireland, Germany, Russia, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Japan, and France. Among the thirty-eight members the theatrical world was now quite heavily represented: Ellen Terry, Albert Rothenstein, William Poel, J. Martin Harvey, Yeats, Lord Dunsany, Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Salvini, Carlo Placci, Alexander Hevesi, Yvette Guilbert, Sarah Bernhardt, Jacques Rouché, etc.¹⁸

To further his own attempts Craig wrote his mother:

School

Please

write to JP Morgan and ask him to be on my committee Say that it is being formed already and that Earl of Plymouth. Countess Bendendorf. Duchess of Leeds. Duchess of Sutherland and Lord Dunsany are being invited to join it; and that we are confidently expecting favourable replies. Mention these names if you can BECAUSE these men like JPM always want to know who they are jogging up against. Dont forget he is a subscriber to the Mask & should know by now that our aim and scheme is a big and a good

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Preliminary Prospectus, School for the Art of the Theatre, March 1913.

one. Love from Ted. Would a note to Miss Costa Green help Morgan to act quickly. I think so.

Along with the letter was a sketch of a letterhead showing a full committee followed by the executive committee with the note:

The above is to give you an idea of my plan. A large and swagger committee & a small executive. It is the usual thing I believe but remember JPM will only be asked to add his name and to help with funds--not to be bothered in any way else.¹⁹

Elena proved indomitable. She was determined that the School should be birthed and launched a one-woman campaign to raise money and committees be damned. She approached many people of wealth and influence and received either a small sum of money or a polite refusal. There was one exception, as there is to so many rules, in this case, Lord Howard de Walden. Because of his interest in the arts, opera in particular, he found Craig's work fascinating and agreed to provide half the financing for the School provided the other half could be raised from other sources. Elena's further attempts in approaching wealthy friends of de Walden's did not prove as fruitful but she came up with a new idea--why not start the school with half the estimated funds and try to gather further monies while the School was functioning? Craig realized that Elena's thinking was sound; de Walden agreed and provided £5000 to start the school with, £2500

¹⁹ Edward Gordon Craig to Ellen Terry, n. p., n. d.

for each of the following two years to keep it going. An American attorney, William Gable, contributed a full-size printing press out of friendship for Craig. A fitting date for the announcement to the press, Craig thought, would be February 27, 1913, Ellen Terry's sixty-sixth birthday.²⁰

In the announcement he wrote, in tribute to her:

Whatever I am, or may be, I owe to the inspiring influence of my mother; could anything be more appropriate than that I should join her name with the announcement of the project? . . . in other words I bring it to Her as a birthday offering, fully recognizing that I owe its fulfilment largely to her unwavering and helpful encouragement.²¹

The preliminary prospectus issued in the next month gave more specific information to the reader. Following the listing of the Committee there was a lengthy quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche's The Will to Power which lays great stress on discipline. Then there is a brief description of the Arena and reasons for locating in Italy. The formation of the School is outlined:

The School is in two divisions. . . .
The First Division will be composed of salaried experimental workers selected by the director to work with him and study his methods and from these workers will be chosen the staff for teaching the Secondary School. . . .

The Second Division will be composed of paying students who after undergoing the full course will

²⁰Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, pp. 282-84.

²¹Quoted by Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 284.

become eligible for an appointment in the First Division. This Second Division is not an integral part of the whole plan but it has been added in the interests of the workers in the First Division, so that it may in time yield for them a few reliable fellow-workers.²²

Among the subjects to be studied were gymnastics, music, voice training, designing, scene designing and painting, costume designing and making, modelling, fencing, dancing, mimodrama, improvisation, stage managing, lighting, history of the theatre, theory, marionette designing, making and performing, model making, and Italian. Exams were to be given at the end of the first year in each course ". . . and those found to be unfitted for the work will discontinue their studies." During 1913-14 there were to be three terms lasting about twelve weeks.²³

Now, because Craig continued to think of this project as a "school" he felt it had to be made a proper school by having a set of rules for the students to follow. These were set out in a small booklet which was to be issued to each of the students. On the second page a stern warning was italicized: "These Rules are printed exclusively for the Students in the School, and are not to be shown, nor in any way made known, to any person outside the School." Following sections on "Workers in the School, The Work of the School, Hours, Properties [referring to tools, notebooks and sketchbooks,

²² Preliminary Prospectus, March 1913.

²³ Ibid.

not props], Order, Exercises, Discipline," we come to a section headed "Discretion":

CRITICISM OF THE SCHOOL OR ITS MEMBERS IS NOT ALLOWED, AND ANY BREACH OF THIS RULE WILL NOT BE LIGHTLY REGARDED.

Every member of the School in each Division is expected to mind his business and be discreet, not to babble outside the School of what work is going on inside the School nor to express any "opinion" concerning that work.

No member of the School is to write to anyone outside the School news concerning it, or express his or her "opinion" of the work being done, or of other members. "Opinions" are wanted neither inside nor outside the School.

Discretion, silence, and attention to work are expected. When outside the School, rather than talk of its work, methods, personalities and results, the student should wear a mask of ignorance. He will not prove the School a good one by chattering about it to outsiders, or even to friends and relations.

"I do not know" is the one reply to make to the inquisitive, and for relations the best answer is, "When results are to be seen you shall be the first to see them."²⁴

The very next section is headed Communications and is also worthy of note:

No member of the School may write or convey any communication whatever to any Journal or Journalist without written permission from the Director.

No member of the School is allowed to send to anyone outside the School any photograph or drawing of anything concerning the School or the work being done there.

Any student receiving any communication whatever, written or otherwise, from persons connected with any Theatre, Institution or Journal--manager, actors, teachers, tradesmen, artists, journalists or other press men--in fact, from any person or persons outside the School, in which a proposal or suggestion is made

²⁴ Rules: School for the Art of the Theatre, Florence, 1913, pp. 6-7.

that he should supply news of the School or its affairs, projects or experiments, or divulge any ideas or designs of the School, or its Director's methods and programme (or any part thereof), for any purpose or motive whatever, is expected to inform the Director without a moment's delay. Whether the student be urged from high or low motives to give information, he is expected to refuse to comply.

He may not even say that he will bring the matter before the notice of the Director.

Outside persons wishing to help the School can apply to the Director without introduction.²⁵

Following this section there are others concerned with Italian Studies, Vacation Studies, Scholarships, Business and Members Leaving the School, the whole concluding with: "I have read and understood these rules, and accept them willingly and will abide by them loyally," after which there is a space for the student to affix his signature. Obviously, Craig expected to prevent even a shadow of an idea from escaping the silence of the former convent.

In June 1910, Martin Shaw had loaned Craig a book which was to have " . . . a considerable effect upon his attitude towards the way he looked upon his pupils in his 'School'."²⁶ The fictionalized biography is The Forerunner: The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Dmitri Merejkowski, translated from the French by Craig's friend, Herbert Trench. Among the major ideas expressed in the book is that Leonardo

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²⁶ Dmitri Merejkowski, The Forerunner: The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci, trans. Herbert Trench (London: Constable and Company, 1909), endpaper note by Edward Craig.

was the product of, and eventually headed, a workshop and the concept of strict discipline in such a workshop. Among Craig's annotations is one which reads: "Pupils should not be critical of their leader's methods."²⁷ This may well help explain Craig's emphasis in the Rules on strict obedience and discipline.

As you will recall, the preliminary prospectus of March 1913 indicated that "the First Division will be composed of salaried experimental workers selected by the director to work with him and study his methods and from these workers will be chosen the staff for teaching the Secondary School." Who were these workers to be and where would Craig find them? The first to be found, during an exhibition of Craig's work in Manchester in 1912, was Ernest Marriott who faithfully attended The Society for the Art of the Theatre meetings as well as redoing some of the Moscow Hamlet models and general secretarial work. The second was an accountant friend of Marriott's named Meadmore. Because the pressure of paper work involved became so great that Dorothy Nevile Lees could no longer cope with it a secretary named Anna Tremain Lark was hired. Very soon others followed: Leslie Brown who was an electrical engineer and a photographer; Leigh Henry who was a capable musician able to teach "sound," as well; Geoffrey Nelson, an artist with architectural inclinations; Richard Dennys who rejected his studies in medicine because

²⁷Ibid., note by Gordon Craig copied by Edward Craig, p. 40.

of his love for the theatre; Nino Meo, Elena's brother, whose Italian was quite good, acted as Craig's personal assistant. In addition, there were three other men about whom very little is known: Clugson, Perkins, and Jones. One of these three gave up when he realized that the Arena Goldoni was not a "school" as the word was generally defined. Before the School had started at the Arena Goldoni, Craig already had, for assistance on The Mask, Michael Carr from California and his Dutch wife and Sam Hume, also from America, who was an excellent model maker.²⁸

Even W. B. Yeats was enthusiastic to join the School but his ardor was cooled when Craig wrote him:

My school is not for the likes of you I fear. You could learn nothing there. What you've learnt you've learnt already--and how much you've learnt about the theatre is positively appalling. Now we shall learn from you about fairies and red dogs. My school will lead me and all of us in a place right out of the theatre--right out and sprawl us on some queer shore. . . .²⁹

At last we come to Miss Budington's question about "subjects included." What was it Craig planned to concentrate upon? The heading for a table, in Craig's hand reads: "General suggestions for the weeks [sic] work."³⁰

²⁸Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life.

²⁹Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats 1865-1939 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), pp. 269-70.

³⁰Manuscript notes.

He indicates there are two main areas of study: Practical, defined as light and Theoretical, defined as shadow. These areas are further broken down into voice, scene, and movement. For example, practical voice includes the study of gymnastics, plain song, reading aloud, oratory, sight with further subdivisions. Theoretical voice gymnastics (feeling--condition of body), masks and sound, plain song, reading (quickness of comprehension) avoids imagination, alone and with others, oratory (this without movement and masked), sight (feeling--condition of soul). He does a similar table for scene and movement, as well. He then elaborates on defining the week's work by saying: "There are 8 hours a day for 5 days & 3 hours for 1 day. That is 43 hours each week to be divided evenly between the different studies."³¹

Perhaps, the most concise and specific statement to be made about what was to be studied in the School was that of Edward Craig:

First and foremost came MOVEMENT: "The movements of the Elements and Man." To help with this, he even thought to make use of films, because he had seen motion pictures showing the growth of plants and the formation of clouds which he had thought most beautiful. Connected with movement would be DANCE--ceremonials--posture, etc. Connected with dance would be MIME. Next on his list came LIGHT--the lighting of static objects with moving light such as reflections from moving waters, projected colours, and so on; then the effect of light on moving objects, as when figures emerge from shadows, exist briefly

³¹Ibid.

in the light, and disappear again into the darkness.

Connected with the above would be experimental work with his SCREENS. The use of gauzes, scene-painting, the study of optical mixtures as demonstrated by Seurat in order to get greater depth of colour and three-dimensional effects. Then there would be experiments with MARIONETTES of all kinds and sizes, in his ever-lasting quest for animated figures which could be controlled by an artist; connected with this, there would also be experiments with MASKS. All of which meant that the past must be studied too, for he had written, "Never copy the old but never forget the old--for there is always some good to be found in it." He considered therefore that it was more essential to establish a library and a museum in which would be preserved everything that they could find relating to the theatre's past history.³²

At Memphis State University there is a notebook relating to the School with its contents ranging from 1913 to 1925. Within its covers there are a number of suggestions for lectures to be delivered by Craig to the worker-students. There is one which is particularly appropriate, even today:

Movement and voice are not crafts nor arts. The moving of a marionette is a craft. The playing on a pipe is a craft. The movement & voice of the human body are natural gifts & should be practised by everyone--not actors or dancers but waiters - shopkeepers - everyone. It should not be a thing of special wonder to see a man or woman speaking well -

Fine movement & speaking comes through a very ordinary & natural way of seeing & feeling: A foolish training in early childhood often upsets our natures. But we can recover--if we will.

Imitate nothing - it leads nowhere. See - feel & be & that leads everywhere.³³

³²Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 289.

³³Manuscript Notebook relating to the Florence School 1913-1925, p. 5.

In another set of lecture notes he discusses "On the work. My scholar."

When all you see - hear - & do & experience suggests to you its place or mood in your work then you will be about to begin.

To go to tea, theatres, walks, to hear music, see pictures, to see ships, carts, people, tragic things, funny things & to experience sorrow & joy and for all this to be outside & disconnected with your work that is very bad - & quite fruitless.

To do, see, hear or experience all these things - in fact all things - in relation with/to your work - that is my scholar. Also my scholar avoids no experience, experiences all things - and selects, crushes conceit out of him, avoids no difficulty, never gets nervous, never yawns, nor whistles, nor fidgets. Sings yes! Dances yes! Always finds a way to overcome difficulties, always finds time & a way to help his fellows where help is really needed, & to help me where I really need it.³⁴

As one studies Craig's notes, printed statements, public pronouncements the more clear it becomes that he had not really envisioned a "School" in its usual definition, so common to us all.

I think that had EGC started his "school" in 1950 instead of 1912 he would have called it his "workshop". In those days such a title would have been demeaning. A "workshop" was for workmen workmen were not gentlemen!!! While today we accept "workshop" as something more practical than school. At "The School" it was a case of follow my leader. There were no "masters". Only Marriott was capable to teach others . . . & perhaps Nelson. EGC could NOT teach. His attitude was "do what I say not what I do" but he could generate excitement and make some of them believe in the impossible!

³⁴Ibid., p. 6.

To this note Edward Craig then adds: "I was his pupil until 1927! Gosh--was I glad to leave school. All the same he opened windows in ones [sic] mind and the light poured in."³⁵

In the School notebook there are notes for other lectures which, more than likely, were indications of what Craig himself would have liked to study such as the relationship of movement and music, light in comparison to sound, light and movement, music and light movement, scene.

If we can now think of the "School" as a "Workshop" it becomes easier to understand the experiments which took place involving the use of screens on a model stage, experiments involving masks, marionettes:

An experimental marionette, eight feet high, was made by the carvers, and attempts were made at manipulating it . . . on the day it was finished they hurriedly rigged it, suspending it from a platform twenty feet up and, as Craig arrived, the giant figure bowed, and with slow gestures, addressed him in Italian, wishing him good luck in all his enterprises.³⁶

One is reminded of Robert Edmond Jones' visualization:

For the American premiere of Stravinsky's Oedipus Rex in 1931, he placed the opera-oratorio's singers in the orchestra pit. In the immense darkness of the empty stage of the Metropolitan Opera House, floating high above the robed chorus in eerie light, archaic supermarionettes pantomimed

³⁵Edward Craig to Arnold Rood, July 14, 1977.

³⁶Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 292.

the slow movement of the ancient drama of Oedipus.³⁷

At the beginning of 1914 Craig and his assistants began work on a tremendous model for Bach's St. Matthew Passion which he had first heard in 1900 when Martin Shaw played it on the piano while singing through it and explaining the dramatic action involved. The visual inspiration resulted from a visit to the Ticino Area where the Romanesque church, San Nicolao, was located in Giornico. It included some unusual architectural features:

. . . a chancel raised above a crypt with three aisles which led out from the nave and at a slightly lower level. A double stairway spanned the mouth of the crypt and led up to the altar. The place was a revelation to Craig; he had never seen a church built in this way. The chancel, the crypt and the floor of the church surely symbolized the Christian universe--heaven, hell and the earth. It was an arrangement reminiscent of the stage for the mystery plays, with its "mansions."³⁸

What did the model look like?

Taking the architecture of the church at Giornico as his inspiration, Craig departed from the Italian-style stage and chose another, directly connected with the auditorium, like the chancel with the nave of a church. He set up a permanent stage structure on two principal levels, the lower stage, or "crypt" to be used for the "terrestrial" parts of the drama and the upper stage, or "chancel" for the "celestial" parts. But he moved away from the church architecture, in the same way that, he thought, Bach had begun by taking his scheme from the Church and had afterwards gone beyond it. Craig's final structure had nothing

³⁷ Donald Oenslager, Stage Design: Four Centuries of Scenic Innovation (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 235.

³⁸ Bablet, Edward Gordon Craig, pp. 169-70.

Romanesque about it; the "crypt" had no vaulted ceiling and no pillars with capitals; these had been replaced by square columns and a lattice. The upper "chancel" was no longer enclosed in itself; Craig added several levels, culminating in a broad stairway with steep-sloping walls on either side, which led up into space.

Striving in his search for an art of movement, to create an impression comparable to that produced by the gradual progression of Bach's music in the Passion, Craig discovered a new solution, a permanent structure comprising many different "places."³⁹

May I recall to mind Jacques Copeau's and Louis Jouvet's Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in 1919 and Norman Bel Geddes' settings for Joan of Arc in Paris in 1925, his project for Dante's Divine Comedy at Madison Square Garden in New York in 1921 and his production for Eugene O'Neill's Lazarus Laughed in 1927. These few examples should remind us of further settings and spaces influenced by Craig's Passion model.

Within his church-cum-theatre the great religious drama would take place as follows. Out in the Auditorium, where one might perhaps expect to find a conductor on a podium, would stand the Evangelist, St. Matthew, telling the story. On either side of him, but about twenty to thirty feet away and almost invisible in their grey all-concealing garments, would sit or stand the solo singers recreating the voices from the past. Between the Evangelist and the solo singers, but at a lower level, some special members of the chorus would be gathered.

The darkness in the auditorium would slowly be relieved by the appearance of light in the blue sky. We would see steps going up and up, and on them we might discern sleeping figures; they were another part of the chorus. As the story was being unfolded by the Evangelist and the voices from the past we would see the action taking place in the various

³⁹Ibid., p. 171.

houses, or luogi deputati running across the bottom of the scene, or stage. A light, perhaps a pale green light, would come up in one place to reveal a gathering of disciples, die down and come up as a pink light elsewhere, revealing Pilate and the priests, and slowly, as the story continued, we would see the action being mimed--it was essential that only mimes and not actors should be used; these silent figures with their gestures carefully regulated to the tempo of the music were to be like the dead re-enacting the past. The chorus on the steps above would sometimes rise and move to emphasize or comment on the dramatic moments. . . .

The huge orchestra was to be hidden behind the "houses" and distributed around the theatre, as had been done once before in the 17th century for Monteverdi in Parma.⁴⁰

On June 28, 1914 a shot was fired killing an archduke affecting even this small patch, the Arena Goldoni. By August 5, Craig found it necessary to close the School--the worker-students had all left and before long Craig learned that Ernest Marriott, Richard Dennys, and Nino Meo had died in the war.

Craig tried to busy himself at the Arena but to no avail; not only did the world situation prey on him but funds had run out. Letters to de Walden remained unanswered, in part because de Walden's secretary had never approved of the School and he now used de Walden's military service as the means for reducing communication. Ultimately a letter did arrive from de Walden who was in service in Egypt:

Dear Craig, I am very sorry that I have not answered you before but we have been kept pretty

⁴⁰Edward Craig, "Gordon Craig and Bach's St. Matthew Passion," Theatre Notebook, 26 (Summer 1972): 149-50.

hard at work preparing ourselves for the invasion of this country. . . . I have no money myself, being now in a position where little is needed.

I am afraid that all the arts must go short for a while now, as there is one long-neglected art to absorb everyone's energies. . . . I don't know whether you are still endeavouring to carry on the school during the frenzy, but I am afraid it will be a difficult business.

I will endeavour to do what I can to help you, but Heaven knows how destitute we shall be if this little trouble continues for some years.⁴¹

Craig was given notice that the Arena was to be requisitioned by the Italian military authorities in December 1916. A final appeal must have been sent off because de Walden wrote Craig on October 11, 1916:

I am very sorry indeed to hear of your unfortunate condition and the impending fate of your workshops, but it is quite out of my power to save it at present. I have all my work cut out to keep my own affairs straight under existing conditions, especially as it is impossible to foresee how long they may continue. Surely America, which is reaping enormous profits out of this present cataclysm, would be better employed in giving assistance itself than the recommending the unfortunates involved in it to do so. Indeed when I think of the colossal insolence of it I am almost amused.

I was in half a mind to express an unsweetened opinion for delivery to your American friends, but it is not their fault.

No one can regret the present circumstances more than I do, but you must remember that I have had to close down practically everything in which I was interested, with the added prospect of probably being closed down myself, in an abrupt and unseemly manner, before the affair is over. However it is the misfortune of our age, but I am not going to make any complaint about it. But it is quite out of my power to alter the state of Europe.

⁴¹Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 295.

In a rather bitter comment at the bottom of this letter, Craig added a note before forwarding it to Elena: "This is Lord H de W's reply. My friends are never insolent - but my enemies try to be - & fail. I am considering my reply to him. It is not English this sort of thing!"⁴²

As the closing of the School in August approached, Craig occupied some of his time by writing marionette plays, frequently under the pseudonym Tom Fool. I will not embark on this tempting tangent but must refer briefly to one which is relevant. At the end of May he composed one called School or Thou Shalt Non-Commit (An Interlude for Marionettes) [sic] by Gordon Craig, not using the usual pseudonym. In it the Master, after an interruption from one of the boys, continues his lecture:

. . . It is not the duty of the teacher to mark each little failing of the pupil . . . rather is it his duty to disregard such, while correcting real offences. But to proceed. You come here to learn to fit yourselves for the arduous task of living in England. I have said that to be non-committal is the whole essence of the Englishman's duty, his life, his daily actions. When a year can pass without any one of you having committed anything, then indeed you may say of that one, "He is an English gentleman." I shall now touch lightly on a few practical everyday rules, which can be safely followed and put in daily use. The most serviceable are the following: To hum and to haw; to hesitate; doubt always. Question the questioner . . . I need not say that you must never give a direct reply. The non-committal answer is for use at all times, and the more you employ it the fresher it becomes. . . . 43

⁴²Howard de Walden to Gordon Craig, October 11, 1916.

⁴³Gordon Craig, School or Thou Shalt Non-Commit, typescript, May 30, 1916.

In 1945 when the script was typed, Craig bound it in brown paper and retitled it School - a tomfoolery on the Atom bomb. And so the lofty dreams for the School at the Arena Goldoni came to an end.

Craig transferred his base of operations to Rome on the advice of friends where he met a number of politically and socially important people. On May 12, 1917 he wrote to Elena, in part: "This week I have entertained 2 Princesses, 1 Prince, 1 Ambassador, 1 Ambassadors and suite, 1 Legate to the Pope, 3 Countesses, 1 Marquis, 8 Artists, 6 ordinaries, 1 Count - and a gentleman."⁴⁴ The entertainment consisted of performances on his model stage making use of the moving screens and colored light.

During the late teens there was an upsurge of interest in Craig's graphic work as well as in his theatrical endeavors. As a result of this interest, friends in Rome formed a committee under the leadership of Alfredo de Bosis⁴⁵

. . . with the aim of forwarding and carrying to a successful issue the experiments of Mr. Gordon Craig, the scheme has been formulated of founding in Rome a School of Scenic Art, in which, with the assistance and cooperation of various artists, he may realize his art concepts. . . .⁴⁶

The prospectus, in English and French, then outlined financing

⁴⁴Craig, Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life, p. 300.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁶Prospectus, [1920].

for a three-year period and concluded with a pledge of support of the idea and funds. Distributed with the prospectus was a folder listing Craig's accomplishments. However, this attempt came to naught.

One more visit must be made to the Arena Goldoni, which was roofed over and became a cinema, which it still is-- the Florence newspaper La Nazione contained an article in its issue of June 9, 1975 about placing a plaque on the building in commemoration of Craig's founding his School for the Art of the Theatre at the Arena in 1913.

We have now come full circle and I must recall Miss Rosalie Budington who provided the impetus for this chapter. I hope I have presented a full reply to her queries of October 15, 1913 but must add one further comment. It is very likely that Craig's reply to her letter offered her cause for optimism. In the "out-of-order" manuscript notes there is a page headed "2nd Division. Women in the School"; Craig writes:

If at the end of the 1st year[']s work I find that the women working in the school have worked well [,] but if [,] at the same time I find they have chattered about each other, and have behaved like cats--or have spoiled the men--or have failed to understand what is needful then out they must go--all of them. & the school goes on its way without them & their sex.

If I prove them unworthy it will be a great grief to me. But it shall never be said that women were excluded & not given a chance in this work.

Let women learn sense first--rare & common [,] then they may become good executants.

I find the women have behaved the best.
This at the end of 2 years.
Feb. 1915.
EGC.47

⁴⁷Manuscript notes, p. 21.

CHAPTER VIII

VALE!

We have come full circle; it is now time to take a summary view of the long life and career of Edward Gordon Craig, whom I have titled, "prophet of the 20th century theatre," and attempt to justify the use of so mighty a noun.

We have seen from the outset of his life that he was steeped in theatre and theatre practise, not only by environment but also by heredity. His maternal grandparents, Sarah and Benjamin Terry, were itinerant actors from the time of their marriage in 1838, they themselves having been born in 1817 and 1818 respectively, some fifteen years before Edmund Kean's death. Craig's parents, Ellen Terry and Edward William Godwin, were both theatre people; Terry as an actress much more widely known than Craig's father, who, despite his training for a career as architect, was interested in theatre as avocation, serving as critic in Bristol for many years before coming to London where he became friends with James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde, and with them, was a pioneer in the Aesthetic Movement. In London, Godwin also did archaeological research for theatre producers and designed a number of plays himself, Claudian and Hamlet for Wilson Barrett, an outdoor production of As You Like It for Lady

Archibald Campbell and John Todhunter's Helena in Troas at Hengler's Circus. Because Terry and Godwin separated when Craig was three years old, we need not place much emphasis on Godwin's direct influence on Craig's life, but certainly Terry, who became Henry Irving's leading lady in 1878 when Craig was only six years old, by which time he had made his first debut, as a non-speaking peasant child in John Hare's production of Olivia featuring his mother in the title role, was most prominent. In 1885 Craig made his speaking debut in a role on tour with the Lyceum company in Chicago to be followed by what must have been considered his official debut at the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1889. Then followed eight seasons as an actor at the Lyceum and several provincial companies during the off-seasons from the Lyceum. With the Irving company, Craig gained considerable experience from acting with his mentor and his mother in many roles in the classics and in melodrama; during the provincial engagements Craig acted major roles in both the classics and in popular plays of various kinds. By doing this he gained considerable experience, the only way to learn the art as there were no schools for theatre. Certainly, he also gained much knowledge of theatre practise from observing Irving who was meticulous in the mounting of his productions, particularly the Shakespeare plays, reaching the summit of nineteenth century interest in archaeological historic accuracy. This approach stood Craig in good stead when he came to direct his own first

production at Uxbridge, where he and his young bride were then living. Although all was promised to be new, it is fairly certain that Craig raided the scenic and costume storerooms at the Lyceum for this production.

The very end of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of Craig's vision of a theatre-to-be. He became associated with the Purcell Operatic Society led musically by his friend, Martin Fallas Shaw, by which time he had also become friends with James Pryde, William Rothenstein, William Nicholson, Max Beerbohm, and others, thereby receiving a broad base in many of the arts other than theatre: painting, wood engraving, music, literature, etc. Unquestionably, his work with the Purcell Society on the three musical productions, Dido and Aeneas, The Masque of Love, and Acis and Galatea proved to be the most important and influential in his entire career. Not only were the settings and costumes evocative and suggestive in their simplicity, but this simplicity was achieved through the artistic use of color, line, and form, a complete turnabout from the Irving tradition: they also made imaginative use of lighting to help create atmospheric depth, rather than two-dimensional. Above all, the keynote of these productions was simplicity; the noun cannot be used too frequently to describe them.

Parallel to these operatic productions, Craig found another outlet for his amplified view of the arts. From 1898 through 1902 he edited The Page, a journal devoted to

the arts. Craig, himself, provided much of the material under a variety of pseudonyms with frequent contributions from contemporary artists as well as literary selections from the classics. When one peruses the rare copies of The Page today, one becomes sharply aware of the relationship among the arts, be they studio forms or performing ones. Obviously, work on this journal contributed to Craig's later idea of one person in absolute artistic charge of a stage production.

It was natural, then, and not too far a cry to start The Mask, a periodical devoted to the art of the theatre, not a popular magazine to puff contemporary performers, but a journal truly devoted to the art of the theatre, the first of its kind. In it Craig once again resorted to pseudonyms, so much so that it could be treated as a game to determine the identity of real people and that of imaginary ones, from the editorship of John de Bras Semar, the Balinese born critic who came to England to head the periodical, occasionally inviting Craig to guest-edit an issue. Semar became so real that a Mr. Levenson Levis (Craig) wrote a biography, which has not yet been published, to a wood engraving of a middle-aged, bearded Semar. Under the Semar-Craig leadership, The Mask became the spokesman for the new movement in the theatre from its very first issue in 1908 until its demise in 1929, with the exception of the war years.

As we have seen, Craig thought in terms of a "school"

in which he would be able to train incipient artists, not just craftsmen, of the theatre. Again we see evidence of the one-man-in-charge syndrome. In the case of the school in Florence, the First World War and its requirements caused the school to close before it could achieve the blossoming of Craig's ideas concerning it.

However, when it came to the later productions, Craig seemed to manage always to create insurmountable demands so that, frequently, even when the plays reached fruition, they never represented an accurate picture of what Craig had envisioned. Surely, the cause for this may very well have been Craig's lack of technical knowledge; we have seen how he welcomed the possibility of patenting the compromise screens, the one time he was able to present his own solution to a technical problem. In all other instances, he had to rely on others. In addition, I am convinced that many of Craig's projects and schemes did not reach fruition for a much more basic reason, a fear of failure; if the project was not realized how could Craig be held accountable, and so, there were the opportunities proffered by Reinhardt, Duse, and others which came to naught simply because Craig's anger, or his endless demands prevented their flowering.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Craig's ideas concerned with simplicity, light, and movement are very much in evidence in all theatrical forms to be seen today.

Certainly, there have been no scenic artists in this century whose work has not been influenced by Craig's thoughts and designs. We, today, cannot escape from his concept of total theatre. It may be possible in our time, through advanced engineering techniques, the development of light-weight materials and imaginative use of film, to put into execution even the most utopian flights of Craig's fancy--the vision, "Scene."

When all is said and done, perhaps Craig's broadest and ever-present importance and influence is not that many of his books have been re-issued in facsimile in recent years, but that so seminal a work, On the Art of the Theatre, originally appearing in 1911, is still in print, and being read, in both the United States and Great Britain, and continues to appear in new modern translations in various other parts of the world. The work, the thoughts, the ideas, the language still excite and stimulate the minds of many people, both young and old, who are engaged in the art of the theatre.

APPENDIX

As has been seen in the foregoing pages, Gordon Craig cannot be considered an ordinary, simple man. Despite his felicity in the use of words to rouse readers' responses in many books and hundreds of articles,¹ Craig did not find it easy to share the vision which we have seen hinted at in the foreword to the 1908 catalogue for the exhibition of etchings in Florence; very likely fear caused him to express explicitly the need for secrecy in the printed rules for The School for the Art of the Theatre at the Arena Goldoni in 1913, in addition to which, the thoughts about the moving "Scene," which had been so much part of his thinking for so long, was not even considered for the curriculum; some years later, he almost had an emotional breakdown when he discovered that his son had enough technical ingenuity to create a simple mechanism, an "instrument," which was practical and demonstrated that the vision could work.

Unfortunately, I am not qualified to analyze the sources for these suspicions, fears, concerns, mysteriousness which so frequently appear in Craig's published work, and infrequently in manuscript material. On the other hand, I have had the good fortune to be referred by Edward Craig to

¹Ifan Kyrle Fletcher and Arnold Rood, Edward Gordon Craig: A Bibliography (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1967).

a little manuscript notebook now in the Department of Special Collections at the University of California Library in Los Angeles. It is only here that Craig shared his otherwise unrecorded ideas regarding his vision of movement in the theatre.

This little, soft-covered notebook, so much like those used by school children in elementary school, is packed with ideas. On the cover, Craig has indicated that he made entries in 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911, 1913, 1914, and 1920, to which he added a note in 1955: "Theatre--vague--clear--crazy--bad--good." So many of the ideas expressed in this notebook led to elaborations on them in published works that I shall not include them here. However, what is unique is Craig's consideration of the source of movement, recorded on Tuesday, November 17, 1908:²

LIGHT. All is clear suddenly -- the only secret mysterious profound truth is the simple light. & the Heart of that -- The Sun. Where I sought for motion I was meaning Light. The Sun is our only God -- In movement our ceremony & the priests -- the rays -- waves -- vibrations atoms of Light itself --

Without light Sun-light all would be Hell. Sun purifies -- yet warms everything -- comforts & creates. The sun is the God of movement & life -- growth.

Our love for that God need never cease. We show our love for him in our ceremonies to his glory. We can perform more wonderful & more moving ceremonies in his honour than any other people. We perform these only in the day.

²To try to capture the feeling of Craig's style, the author has been faithful to the spelling and punctuation in the manuscript.

Is the moon the symbol of Death? Ceremonies are also due & willingly performed. These are performed only at night.

The sun symbolizes Joy -- The moon sadness -- (silence yellow; blue speech) Yet the absence of the moon at night leaves us in fear -- & when the sun does not shine by day we may leave all things & retire into our selves. Let us make sure to absorb enough sun for light & warmth.

Obtain every book on the Sun on Light . . . Look at every picture of the Sun & of Light.

The Ancients wrote & drew understandingly of both. The Artists attempt to destroy these works of the demons calling themselves Scientists, these dry unbelieving blind beings. . . .

The ceremony of the 365 days & nights. The processions of wild flowers -- thoughts -- trees -- animals -- Rocks -- streams -- birds -- frogs -- winds -- colours -- grasses -- metals -- elements.

Not the sign of a real man in such processions or the act of a man --

For what does man need but a rest from regarding himself -- that has made him in love with himself & now he lies like Narcissus all the day looking at a grey reflection in a dark glass.

A ceremony (I would make it compulsory that daily -- at home -- this ceremony should be performed. Morning & evening.)

Sun on water, colour, form. Sun in darkness & in light. The Beam against the ripple. The Reflection -- A ceremony for men.

The moon. A reflected light. A solemn -- smaller -- ceremony. Perhaps performed by women -- certainly for women. . . .³

In a second "illumination" dated November 5, 1911, Craig carries us closer to the vision not only by reiterating

³MSS. A².

that light is the source of movement, but that the progress of creation is forwarded through distinctive movements. In the third "illumination," which is dated 1913, there is a more dramatic description of Craig's concept of light and movement and the relationship of these two to the theatre event itself:

The old parched atmosphere -- the sweetest cradle of the world -- the old Theatre -- all now passes -- Now we come out into the fresh air -- That pretty artifice left behind. I loved it better than all the others did -- The old Theatre. Its smell its sounds Paint & Powder -- a bustle of people in haste -- real human beings concerned about pasteboard & tinsle -- & themselves -- appearing dressed up with their dear faces disguised. The bell rang -- the curtain rose -- the audience watched -- once keenly, now strangely -- The poor old Theatre had passed before they closed the doors.

I have closed the doors -- & its eyes. It is lowered into a trap -- now it is gone. I came out into the open air.

It is quite dark. The night air is warm -- so still.

Many men follow me -- we wait in silence -- we prowl around the empty space --

Each man goes his own way & waits.

For what is each man waiting.

For long we have spoken of what is to come -- For years -- for ages -- we have spoken of it.

Long time we have prepared to know how to act when it should come -- and now only one night has to be lived through before that which towards which time hastens us will appear.

God is coming.

So many men told us so many things we hardly know which was true -- Now we feel we shall see the truth -- shall we be able to see & live -- yes, to see, but

never to understand --

To be aware of the truth -- but no more -- How should we ever understand. So many men told us so many lies. We were well deceived -- Those lies were so easy to understand.

"That is God" cried the Priests to us --

"That bronze figure. That stone Diety --"

"That man, he is god" cried others

"He was born of a virgin how can he be other than God"

We could well understand that --

"He suffered for you he is god"

"He saved you by his Death"

How touched we were by this -- We could well understand it --

"To die for me that was kind -- that was good."

"I well understand a god who saves me" -- now we are about to see & feel the truth. God neither dies for us -- nor saves us. God shall destroy us -- & shall give us birth again -- We shall be as imortal as he is while he is imortal. Is he imortal -- we shall soon see -- we shall soon feel -- But "Proof -- Proof" ("Proof -- Proof" suggests arches long curving passages of them as in Colloseum)

A great wind rises in there -- echoes as man raises his universal & eternal moan.

We shall have Proof.

Proof will be given.

Tomorrow --

The night is as black as pitch -- wait -- at the first signs of sun the false dawn proof shall begin to rise. Thousands of men & women draw together in the dark. A great ring of steps forming a giant circle & on these steps 50 thousand men & women are waiting, each one has received a promise of proof. They are waiting in the new Theatre. No one utters a sound -- It is like the moment before some dreadful catastrophe -- It is

more awe-full -- For this is the moment when a terrible hope has been awakened in the hearts of 50 thousand men born in doubt & nourished by deception.

The night is so dark neighbour can hardly see neighbour -- But the night is warm & the watchers are seated or standing in their places dreading one final disillusion. Will the god speak -- or walk -- Is it a man -- a woman -- a girl perhaps -- Is it an idea. Is it one -- or is it many. Is it visible -- will it move -- can it perform miracles -- does it feel -- can it tell me from you -- will it harm me & do you good. Is it perhaps something in me & in you -- or is it above us all -- will it terrify us or shall we smile when it comes -- where will it come from. If it is a reality -- a truth -- why does it delay why is it not already here.

What bells are those -- only the city bells -- nothing but the bells of the city clocks after all -- how strangely they sounded -- startling.

Now all is quiet again -- what is the time -- The clocks told 4 o'clock -- It is almost morning then -- what are those sounds Like a faint huge whisper Like dream thunder.

False Dawn --

Look there -- Look there, Down there -- A light -- a lantern -- no two -- no three -- four 8 -- 16 -- many -- Oh what a number of lights -- little pale almost lifeless lights filling the centre of the circle -- where we sit -- So faint -- so grey -- these lights -- they move round & here & there -- some fade & go out, others increase: They have increased to ten times their number -- the whole circle is glowing with them -- they seem like lights from the underworld --

"Lights from the underworld --

"That is what they are" cries a voice very quietly & solemnly

-- And one by one they begin to fade. -- to go out -- The false dawn dies with them --

False dawn you have cause to die -- for the truth is near --

"Attend" cries a voice Suddenly another cries

"God" --

A sudden flash -- unexpected -- glorious -- & the sun has shot (sent) one ray of its immortality upon the very centre of the circle.

Everyone in the lower ring is upon his knees -- everyone else is on his feet.

Many rays shoot from behind us in to the sky -- one ray caught comes down into the circle.

It plays upon a large crystal basin in which the coldest water lies motionless.

Already many have seen & felt and many too are calling aloud "Proof -- Proof --"

The circle widens --

More in the centre draw back. Around the crystal basin we see offerings of fruit flowers -- & other gifts. The ray of sunlight increases broadens -- becomes fierce. Hardly anyone can look now -- most faces are covered by hands -- many have fallen back upon their seats & their heads are turned away. The force of the Ray becomes terrific -- Suddenly a cry goes up. "The water is all gone -- and another

"The Crystal bowl is burning."

Those who can still see what is happening behold a great conflagration -- The offerings have been devoured -- their ashes are left -- Everyone sits or stands amazed -- The Force of God is seen is felt.

A hundred men in white are bearing a silver sphere upon their shoulders. They move in the arena swiftly & place that which they carry in the centre of the circle. Within this silver sphere something moves -- slowly for the ray has been darkened.

The movement slowly creates a flash which sweeps those seated or standing upon the steps -- It grows quicker & quicker as the force of the suns rays play upon the sphere -- Round & round the circle a flash like a burning streak sweeps -- ever faster & faster --

Everyone must cover his eyes -- most now are turning away -- now all lie prone upon the steps. The swiftness

of God is felt.

"No man hath seen the face of God & lived" cries the voice of an old servant of the Immortal God

God is here

God always was here

always will be.

God is the sun!

Now veils are drawn tender & cool veils -- & everything is bathed in even & gracious soft light --

The gentleness of God is felt.

300 voices of men & women are chanting praises to God -- Fountains begin to burst out from the ground. They raise their waters higher & higher . . . sprinkling the veils which droop -- the water again -- The voices rising higher & higher. Many white birds are loosed & raise themselves in to the air & fly towards God, out through the masses of the veils -- All the heads of the spectators turn to follow them -- The birds have led the way -- The 1st ceremony is over.⁴

Craig signed this "illumination" and dated it at Florence, May 8, 1913, he noted that "one o'clock is striking from an old clock tower in the city" and concludes, "This is the 1st ceremony in Praise of the God of all things -- the Creator of Light & Motion -- the symbol of our Art."

⁴Ibid.

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