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The Shadow Puppets of Elsinore: Edward Gordon Craig and the Cranach Press *Hamlet*

James P. Taylor

“To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the Actors and Actresses must all die of the plague ... They make Art impossible.” (Eleonora Duse, quoted in Symons 336)

This provocative statement by the acclaimed late nineteenth and early twentieth century Italian actress Eleonora Duse is the epigraph for one of the most controversial theories of the modern European theater. In “The Actor and the Über-marionette,” first published in 1908, the English stage director, designer, and theorist Edward Gordon Craig boldly calls for a new theater, one which relies on non-human elements as its primary means of expression. “The actor must go, and in its place comes the inanimate figure—the *Über-marionette* we may call him, until he has won for himself a new name” (Craig, “The Actor and the Über-marionette” 11). In putting forth this theory, Craig argues for the “noble artificiality” of the marionette, a set of characteristics that can be controlled by the director of the theatrical production (Craig, “Actor” 11). This “noble artificiality” stands in stark contrast to the human actor, whose ego and emotionalism place him beyond the director’s control. Throughout his life’s work, Edward Gordon Craig continually strived for this directorial control, which he believed was essential to the creation of sublime theatrical art.

Figure 1: Edward Gordon Craig. Mourners in Composition. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 155. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Paradoxically, it was by abandoning the stage for book illustration late in his career that Craig achieved his ultimate goal. As the illustrator of the 1929 Cranach Press *Hamlet*, Craig was given complete artistic control over every aspect of the “stage” production and he banished the human actor from the theatrical setting. Craig’s woodblock prints of the play’s figures and settings, rendered in starkly beautiful black and white silhouette, are immediately recognizable as shadow puppets of a most sophisticated nature. As such, they transcend the role of narrative illustration, and become instead an almost complete “production” in marionette form. Silent, obedient, and eerily evocative, these shadow puppets of Elsinore create a visual world of the play that is as beautiful and severe as the text itself. They mark a significant high point of Craig’s long, influential, and sometimes controversial career.

Count Harry Kessler published the Cranach Press *Hamlet*, with a German translation by Gerhart Hauptmann, in Weimar, Germany, in 1929. (An English version was published in 1930.) This remarkable volume has been considered since the time of its printing one of the most important books of the early twentieth century. Printed with utmost care using the finest of materials and techniques, the Cranach Press *Hamlet* is a nearly flawless rendition of one of Shakespeare’s greatest plays. By seamlessly combining innovative book design and illustration with careful historical and critical annotation, the book brings the play to life in ways rarely before imagined (Orgel 290).

Figure 2: Edward Gordon Craig. Photo courtesy of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate. Reproduced with permission.

Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) was one of the most important personages of the modern European theater. Over the course of his long career as a stage designer, director, and author, Craig developed a body of artistic work and writings that inform and shape Western theater practice to this very day. The son of the revered Victorian actress Ellen Terry and the celebrated Victorian architect E.W. Godwin, Craig had strong bloodlines for work in both the stage and the visual arts. Craig’s childhood and early adult years were spent as a successful actor, most notably at London’s famous Lyceum Theatre, the star of which was his mother’s longtime partner, Sir Henry Irving. By 1890, Craig was “hailed as the most promising” English actor of his generation (Innes 3). Despite such acclaim, Craig gradually turned away from acting, and began the process of dynamic transformation into a stage designer and director. This transformation led in turn to his assumption of the self-appointed role of outspoken prophet for a radically innovative theater of the future (Innes 3).

Although his life was not as dynamic, and his career was not as controversial as that of Edward Gordon Craig, Count Harry Kessler (1868–1937) was a nonetheless a compelling figure in early twentieth century European culture. Born into a minor aristocratic family of German, French, and English descent, Count Kessler was an exceptionally cosmopolitan man. A lawyer by training, Kessler was both a sophisticated connoisseur of art and literature, and an unfailing supporter and friend of numerous artists and writers. When Kessler’s planned vocation as a career diplomat failed to come to fruition, he used his cultural connections to obtain the position of Director of the Museum for Arts and Crafts in Weimar, the political and cultural center of early twentieth century Germany.

Kessler began the publication of fine art books at Weimar in 1913. Despite publishing only a handful of books, Kessler's Cranach Press quickly established itself as one of the most important constituents of the German book art movement of the early twentieth century. This group of book artists was greatly influenced by the private press movement, which flourished in England during the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras. Closely aligned with the English Arts and Crafts movement, the private press movement and its German counterpart had developed in response to the proliferation of poorly designed, mass-printed books that occurred as a result of the industrial revolution. This new generation of book artists called for the design of books to be as aesthetically pleasing as any work of art. This call harkened back to the time when nearly all books were exceptionally well designed, hand-made of the highest quality materials, and lavishly illustrated.

The Cranach Press strived to emulate this model of the book as an aesthetic work of art in all of its publications. To this end, Kessler employed some of the most important book designers of his day, and commissioned drawings and illustrations from a number of prominent artists. New typefaces were designed and cut, the books were printed on specially made paper, and bound with intricately crafted bindings. The high standards of achievement sought by Kessler are clearly evident in the Cranach Press *Hamlet*, and in its striking companion volumes; *The Eclogues of Virgil* (1926), illustrated by the French artist and sculptor Aristide Maillol (Brinks 85–110), and *The Song of Songs of Solomon* (1931), designed and illustrated by the English artist Eric Gill (Brinks 146–79).

Craig and Kessler first began their collaboration on the Cranach Press *Hamlet* in London in November 1911. At the time, Craig was in the midst of planning his production of *Hamlet* for Konstantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, which was produced the following year.

Kessler called on Craig, who showed him both the model for *Hamlet*, based on Craig's newly developed system of movable screens, and the proposed costume designs for the production. Kessler was greatly impressed:

The effects which Craig showed on the stage [model] were manifold and grand. Magnificent, however, and truly inspired were the drawings and prints he produced afterwards. He has made prints on paper from his wooden figures [from the model], which can take their place beside the most beautiful woodcuts of the quarter century, so perfect is their balance between line and meaning, between inner fire and fascinating decorative effect. (qtd. in Newman, "From Page to Stage" 127)

Two days later Kessler again called on Craig, this time to discuss possible joint projects with the Cranach Press:

[I] showed him the trial proofs for the Virgil on our paper and suggested that my Press might publish a book on this paper, with his figures and woodcuts. I thought perhaps a play by Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Macbeth*, with prints from his wooden figures, and other woodcuts, which would represent the effect created by the screens on his stage ... Craig accepted my proposal but said, 'If we are to do something, why not *Hamlet*?' He asked me too whether I thought it possible to use outlines of the screen configurations in the text. He proposed to recreate the stage effects by printing rectangular blocks in different tones of black and grey. (qtd. in Newman, "Stage" 127)

Kessler told Craig to set his own terms, and once these were agreed upon the collaboration began. It was the start of a process that would come to fruition with the publication of the Cranach Press *Hamlet* nearly twenty years later.

Figure 3: Edward Gordon Craig. Model of Hamlet Greeting the Players. From the Moscow Art Theatre *Hamlet*, ca 1912. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

By the time Craig and Kessler began their collaboration in 1911, Craig had formulated many of the theories of theatrical production that were to make him such an influential figure in the modern European theater. Craig first set forth these ideas in a brilliant 1905 essay, "The Art of the Theatre: The First Dialogue." At the core of the essay is Craig's profound statement that the theater is a unique art form equal to all of the other arts; poetry, music, visual art, and architecture.

Figure 4: Edward Gordon Craig. From *Scene*, 1910. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Figure 5: Edward Gordon Craig with a Marionette, Florence. 1914. Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of the Theatre*, 2004, page xii. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

This newly equal art form, he asserted, has its own particular aesthetic principles, and its own particular means of expression. As is the case with the creation of a work in the other arts; the creation of a work of theatrical art must be the product of a single creative individual, the stage director (Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre* 137–81).

In the “The Actor and the Über-marionette” (1908) Craig further refined his views about the theater of the future:

Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is the enemy of the artist. Art is the exact antithesis of pandemonium, and pandemonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents. Art arrives only by design. Therefore to make any work of art it is clear that we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of those materials. (Craig, “Actor” 3)

These ideas form the theoretical foundations for Craig’s greatly beloved, and greatly misunderstood, übermarionettes. Craig had always been interested in puppets: he explored this interest in a fascinating 1912 article. In “Gentlemen, the Marionette!” he extols the virtues of the marionette: among these virtues are “noble artificiality,” silence, and obedience. These traits are in sharp contrast to those of human actors, who are “real,” outspoken, and generally disobedient (Craig, “Gentlemen” 95–7). Craig also praises another most essential quality of the marionette, that of innate spiritual expressiveness:

There is only one actor—nay, one man—who has the soul of the dramatic poet and who has ever served as the true and loyal interpreter of the poet. This is the Marionette ... You have come across him in some deserted cathedral in Italy or even in England ... There you will have seen him hanging upon the Cross ... He is interpreting the Drama of the Poets—Man and God ... Or you have caught a glimpse of him in some temple in the Far East, enacting a more serene drama ... Or in the arms of a child you have seen him, interpreting the little hearts and the larger dreams of love! (Craig, “Gentlemen” 95–7)

Figure 6: Edward Gordon Craig as Hamlet. Poster by The Beggarstaffs (J & W) for W.S. Hardy Company, 1894. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. Public domain, Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39716295>

It is not surprising that Craig chose *Hamlet* for his collaboration with Kessler and the Cranach Press. The play had long been the subject of his artistic musings. As a boy he had seen many times the notable Henry Irving/Ellen Terry production of the play at the Lyceum Theatre in 1885. A highpoint of his own acting career had been his portrayal of the title role in London and the English countryside in 1896. Craig frequently referred to *Hamlet* in his early writings, and used scenes from the play as he conducted experiments with his system of mobile screens in a model theater in Florence beginning in 1907. As a director who came to be known for his desire to control all of the elements of a production, it is highly possible that Craig was also greatly intrigued by the way that Hamlet controls events as they unfold over the course of the play.

It is also not surprising that Craig's illustrations for the Cranach Press *Hamlet* are in the form of woodblock prints. Kessler and Craig were most interested in an essential unity of text and illustration. The printing processes used for the metal typeset text and the bas-relief woodblock print are quite similar, producing text and images of the same quality and impression. This desired unity was amplified by Craig's nearly life-long obsession with the woodblock medium itself. Woodblock printing, a difficult process whereby the artist cuts the design into the end grain of a block of wood before printing, can be a most expressive medium. In many ways this artistic process mimics the work of the lighting designer in the theater. Artists engaged in each media work in a dark-to-light direction in the creation of the final composition, relying heavily on *chiaroscuro* to communicate the meaning and the emotional quality of the work. Keenly aware of these similarities, throughout his career Craig turned to the woodblock print as a way of illustrating his specific ideas for productions and his more general ideas about theatrical practice.

Figure 7: Edward Gordon Craig. *The Cranach Press Hamlet*, 1930, pages 104 and 105. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

The Cranach Press *Hamlet* is strikingly innovative in its design. Craig and Kessler conceived of each double page as the scene of a play in a traditional proscenium theater. The graphically light text of Shakespeare's play is at the center, on the "stage." On either side of the text, and at the bottom, are margin notes, much more graphically dense, which form the architectural "proscenium" of the bibliographic "theater." Craig's illustrations are generally placed strategically within the same frame as the text, and serve to illuminate the action in a most dynamic manner.

Kessler originally intended for Craig to write the margin notes, but the artist declined, citing the extreme difficulty of the task. Instead Kessler published the early literary sources of the text: the *Hamlet* story in the Latin chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus and the *Histoires Tragiques* of François de Belleforest. The precise location of text, notes, and illustrations was as much an artistic consideration as the illustrations themselves. Craig and Kessler shared responsibility for such work. The end product of their painstaking efforts is a nearly flawless composition, with text, notes, and illustrations each in perfect harmony with one another (Newman, "Stage" 127–30).

Figure 8: Edward Gordon Craig. *Ophelia in Cloisters*. *The Cranach Press Hamlet*, 1930, page 72. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Craig's illustrations for the Cranach Press *Hamlet* comprise an exquisite body of work. Designed over a twenty-year period, they are the product of a dynamic synthesis of Craig's fertile imagination, his considerable artistic abilities, and his well-developed theories of direction and design. Coming late in his career, after his most significant realized productions, the illustrations are justifiably some of Craig's finest artistic creations.

Some ninety illustrations accompany the English version of the text. These images can be categorized by generic type: independent figures and initials, single-block scenes, and multi-block compositions, also known as composite blocks (Newman, "Stage" 132–39).

Figure 9: Edward Gordon Craig. "T" Initial-Gravediggers. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 142. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

The fifty-one independent figures and initials make up the largest set of images, and are the most diverse in terms of date of creation. The earliest of these illustrations are nineteen figures made between 1907 and 1912, before Craig and Kessler began their collaboration. These images began their artistic life as small bas-relief sculptures which Craig had cut out of thin planks of wood to serve as model figures for his experiments with his model theater in Florence in 1907.

These figures were part of a larger group of similar figures from the same period, which Craig affectionately called his "White Figures".

Figure 10: Edward Gordon Craig. Ophelia, "White Figure," not used in the Cranach Press *Hamlet*. In Craig, *Black Figures*, 1989, page 105. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

One day, seemingly on a whim, Craig and his son Teddy tried using one of the white figures to make a wood block print. To their surprise and joy, the process worked exceptionally well. All of these white figures were subsequently inked and printed on paper, and became known as the “Black Figures.” These were the evocative prints that had so impressed Kessler in his first meeting with Craig in London in 1911. Craig then made a second group of twenty figures out of cardboard to illustrate his ideas for the staging of the Moscow Art Theatre *Hamlet* in 1912. These figures were re-cut as wood blocks for the Cranach Press *Hamlet* once the book project began. The remaining twelve figures were created directly as woodblock prints when Craig and Kessler resumed their collaboration after World War I.

Figure 11: Edward Gordon Craig. *Hamlet and Daemon*. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 70. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

As was the case with the Moscow production, Craig conceived the Cranach Press *Hamlet* as a monodrama, in which the viewer observes the action of the play through the eyes of the protagonist. Despite this strong central idea, Craig nonetheless created a number of fascinating illustrations of the main character for the publication. Illustrated above is an iconic image of Hamlet with a shadow figure or *daemon*, which accompanies the text for Act 2, Scene 1, the beginning of Hamlet’s “lunacy.” The idea of the character’s *daemon* had been conceived by Craig early in his career, and became an important component of the Moscow *Hamlet*. In the illustration, we see a brooding Hamlet, shadowed by a mysterious *doppelgänger* who is both a physical extension of the character and a haunting manifestation of Hamlet’s tortured soul.

Yet another intriguing illustration of the protagonist accompanies Hamlet’s soliloquy at the end of Act 3, Scene 1. Hamlet’s profound indecision about his course of action in avenging his father’s death is expressed in poetic form:

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them ... (Shakespeare 74)

Figure 12: Edward Gordon Craig, *Doubt*. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 74.
Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Entitled *Doubt*, the illustration reveals Hamlet dynamically posed with his back to the viewer, in resolute opposition to a turbulent “sea of troubles.” Rich in literal and figurative meaning, Craig’s image elegantly captures the poetic spirit and splendor of this critical moment of the play.

Evocative illustrations of the ghost of Hamlet’s father comprise another subset of the independent figures. The presence of the supernatural in a number of Shakespeare’s plays had long held Craig’s interest, and he writes eloquently on the subject in his book *On the Art of the Theatre* (1911). The Ghost of Hamlet’s father was of particular intrigue:

... for that ghost ... who moves aside the veils at the beginning of the great play, is not a joke; he is not a theatrical gentleman in armour, [nor is he] a farce of a figure. He is a momentary visualization of the unseen forces which dominate the action and is a clear command from Shakespeare that the men of the theatre shall rouse their imagination and let their reasonable logic slumber. (Craig, *On the Art* 265–66)

Craig ultimately created five independent images of the ghost, and the ghost is also present in appearances to Hamlet, Horatio, and the fearful guards in a number of other scenes. As he is depicted in the Closet Scene (3.4), the ghost is an eerie, emaciated figure, wrapped in his burial shroud, hauntingly beckoning to Hamlet from the other side of the spectral plane.

Figure 13: Edward Gordon Craig, *Ghost with Bone*. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 110.
Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Figure 14: Edward Gordon Craig. *Hamlet Greeting the Players*. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, pages 62 and 63. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Craig was also greatly interested by the play-within-the-play that is such an important part of the plot of *Hamlet*. He was enthralled by the metatheatricality of these scenes, and gave them a great deal of his artistic attention both in his early thinking about the play, and in the Moscow production. This attention is clearly evident in the Cranach Press *Hamlet*, as a proportionally large number of illustrations are devoted to these key moments in the drama.

The illustrations of the Players are among the most elegant of the Cranach Press *Hamlet*. Richly imaginative and highly decorative, these figures stand out in sharp relief from the austere and restrained images that are predominant in the remainder of the text. After his first meeting with Craig in London in 1912, Kessler referred to the “inner fire and thrilling decorative effect” of Craig’s prints (Newman, “Stage” 127). Surely the Player illustrations were among those to which he referred.

The single block scene illustrations are the fewest in number of the three types of illustrations. Engraved on single wood blocks, they feature black shapes highlighted by finely inscribed white lines. Typically illustrations of key moments of the play, these images have a very strong narrative component. Many of these scene illustrations were “among the most memorable of the Moscow production, and are some of the finest in the book” (Newman, “Stage” 137).

Figure 15: Edward Gordon Craig. *Actor* (left) and *Bird Dancer* (right). The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, pages 86 and 87. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Figure 16: Edward Gordon Craig. The Court Scene. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 12. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Craig's illustration of the Court Scene (1.1) is the most dramatic of the scene illustrations. Almost a direct copy of the Moscow *Hamlet*, this full stage picture reveals a contemplative Hamlet reclining in front of the newly married King and Queen and their court. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the royal figures, seated on a raised dais backed by large circular throne. Focus then flows towards the lower left of the composition, where Hamlet is seated. The figure of Hamlet is especially dark, having been double printed with black ink to heighten the emphasis of the composition, and to establish a sense of alienation from his surroundings. The members of the court, situated between Hamlet and the King and Queen, are treated as a solid mass, in much the same way as they were when covered with a single gold cloth in the Moscow production. The overall effect is of a decadent and melancholy grandeur.

Figure 17: Edward Gordon Craig. Lights, Lights, Lights! The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 94. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Another compelling scene illustration is found at the end of the play-within-the-play (3.2). Entitled *Lights, Lights, Lights!* this image reveals King Claudius emphatically ending the Players' reenactment of his murder of Hamlet's father. Unlike the relatively static image of the Court Scene, this illustration is full of dynamic movement. Again employing the use of double printed black images, Craig creates focus on the King and Hamlet caught in the midst of remarkable confusion. This illustration is clearly the most kinetic of the book illustrations, and affirms Craig's commitment to stage movement as one of the essential elements of dramatic creation.

Figure 18: Edward Gordon Craig. Horatio Reading Letter. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 134. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Craig's composite block illustrations are arguably the most innovative of the entire publication. Created specifically for the Cranach Press *Hamlet*, these images are a combination of abstract geometric shapes, and simple yet evocative figures. The geometric shapes were produced by a series of moveable blocks, which printed vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines of various thicknesses and densities. These shapes functioned more or less as "stock scenery" and could be manipulated by Craig and the Cranach Press printers to fit the spatial parameters of the text and the margin notes as they completed the layout of the book (Newman, "Stage" 138–39).

These complex illustrations are essentially scenographic images, with a figure or figures placed in a particular scenic context. The abstract geometric shapes are the functional equivalent of Craig's Screens, with which he had conducted his early experiments in space and movement in Florence beginning in 1907, and which comprised the scenic elements of the realized Moscow *Hamlet* of 1912. While some of the illustrations are reminiscent of the Moscow production, the majority are new compositions. From the large-scale illustrations found early in the play, to the smaller and more intimate compositions for later scenes, Craig's abstract "scenery" provides a nearly perfect counterpoint to the simple yet expressive figures.

Figure 19: Edward Gordon Craig. Ophelia with Window. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 126. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

The scale and proportion of the composite block illustrations are also quite noteworthy. The ability to fluidly change the size of the stage picture had long been an artistic concern for Craig, and the relative freedom of the printed page enabled him to manipulate scale and proportion seemingly at will. This manipulation is clearly seen in Craig's illustration of the mad Ophelia inside a window of the palace at Elsinore. Here the artist contrasts the same linear scenic blocks employed in other illustrations with figures of a much smaller scale. The result is a large and imposing space which eloquently underscores the dramatic tension of the text.

Figure 20: Edward Gordon Craig: Hamlet Writing. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 69. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

The composite block illustrations are further remarkable in their extraordinary clarity and precision. Woven together by the common thread of the linear "scenic elements," these images have a stylistic unity that is considerably more sophisticated than Craig's illustrations for the individual figures and scenes. This unity reveals Craig at the height of his artistic powers. It is logical that these illustrations are among the last that Craig produced for the Cranach Press *Hamlet*. All of his previous work as a designer, director, and theorist had been an essential prelude to their creation. Craig had finally achieved his goal of replacing distracting scenery with theatrical space that harmonizes with the thoughts of the poet.

Figure 21: Edward Gordon Craig: Grave Scene-Hamlet and Horatio. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 155. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

While it is possible in conclusion to view Craig's beautiful, strange, and evocative images for the Cranach Press *Hamlet* as narrative illustration of the highest quality, this approach greatly underestimates their value of a broader theatrical nature. Elegantly rendered in white lines and black silhouette, the illustrations can be easily seen as shadow puppets of an exquisite nature. As such they are reminiscent of both the relatively crude but entertaining shadow puppets of the European popular theater, and the intricately designed and beautifully performed *wayang kulit* shadow puppets of the classical theater of Indonesia.

Figure 22: *Wayang kulit* figure.

Public domain. Wikimedia Commons. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wayang_Kulit_-_Museum_Wayang_02.jpg

In *Black Figures*, a book of Craig's graphic works published in 1989, the English scholar L.M. Newman explores this important conceptual framework:

Although from an operational point of view, Craig's figures are not strictly speaking either puppets or marionettes, Craig sometimes described them as such, and as objects they conform to the puppet aesthetic Impersonal, each figure avoids the realism of the actor and his swaying passions. It plays one part, being an emphasis and essence of the character it is intended to reflect, and may often portray not an individual, but a generalized and universal state of emotion. Like the screens, the figure challenges the spectator to complete his being through his own imaginative power. (Newman, "Introduction to *Black Figures*" 20)

It is in the magical transformation from narrative illustrations to silent and obedient marionettes that the greatest theatrical value of Craig's imagery for the Cranach Press *Hamlet* can be found.

Figure 23: Edward Gordon Craig. *Hamlet with Skull*. The Cranach Press *Hamlet*, 1930, page 150.

Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

After many years of struggle, Craig had at long last created his übermarionettes, which he considered to be the most essential component of his radically innovative theater of the future. As the artist himself states in the previously unpublished preface to the *Black Figures* book:

What is it, you think, that held me with my eyes so fixedly on these ghostly creatures? I believe it was that, small as they were, I saw them as the übermarionettes of which I had been at such pains to write in 1907 and 1908 ... Yes, I do believe they were notes, as it were, sketches, of the noble übermarionettes everyone pooh-poohed and I so grievously loved ... No more my white starving figures of 1907 and 1908 but glossy skinned fellows and girls whom now and again I take out from their box and stand them up to look at them. Not much changed: if black's no different from white, not a whit changed. I stand them up and think of the years and of that lost continent, my Theatre. They are the signposts which leading back through the phantom forest of trees, passing back from Black to Grey to White point us the way to the worth-while Theatre—the Theatre of dreams—where we hear a still small voice saying: our little life is rounded with a sleep ... (Craig, "Black Figures" 33–34)

Epilogue

In 1926, Edward Gordon Craig received an unexpected invitation from the noted Danish actor Johannes Poulsen to design a production of Henrik Ibsen's *The Pretenders* for the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. This commission was a welcome opportunity for Craig: he had not realized any of his stage designs since the Moscow *Hamlet* in 1912. Craig traveled to Copenhagen to supervise the designs, which were received with great acclaim by the Danish audiences and critics. Craig was to publish a monograph devoted to the designs; the following is from the book's epilogue:

One day, shortly after the opening of the production, Johannes Poulsen invited Craig to accompany him, his wife, and some travelling companions on a day trip to visit the Castle of Hamlet at Elsinore.

Craig was delighted to take such a trip: he had long dreamed of visiting the actual place that had been such an important part of his artistic life and musings. Enroute to Elsinore, the party stopped at an inn for a grand lunch, which had been previously arranged by the warm and effusive Poulsen. The room where the lunch was held looked out over the misty sea to the Castle of Elsinore. Over lunch (and wine), Craig grew increasingly apprehensive about taking the trip to the castle. He eventually shared this apprehension with Poulsen: "Is it necessary that we go to Elsinore? ... With these oysters here and this wine, this warm room, and the beautiful view of the Castle of Elsinore outside in the pleasant rain ... we can just imagine the wonders of the place, which I do not feel I should like to visit just now?" (Craig, "A Production" 20–21).

Poulsen roared with laughter, and thought Craig's response to be great fun. However, for Craig, this sudden decision not to visit the castle was a most serious matter. Having long kindled the Castle of Elsinore and its inhabitants in the fires of his imagination, he did not want to have this imaginary world shattered by an encounter with the real life place, which had held real-life people. This incident is telling of Craig as an artist, and as a man. Throughout his long career he greatly preferred to live a life of the imagination, always in search of his theatre of dreams. Craig ended his epilogue in a matter of fact but hopeful way: "This I how I missed going to Elsinore. But I shall go there some day yet ... I feel sure" (Craig, "A Production" 21).

By all accounts Edward Gordon Craig never made the actual trip to Elsinore. However, he did travel to that mysterious and magical place many times in his imagination, through the splendid illustrations of the Cranach Press *Hamlet*. Craig's strange and evocative images, the Shadow Puppets of Elsinore, remain for us the silent, obedient, and noble reminders of his imaginative journeys.

Figure 24: Edward Gordon Craig. Design for Ibsen's *The Pretenders*, Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, 1926. Craig, *A Production*, 1926. Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library, Claremont, California. Reproduced with permission of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

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