Gordon Craig and English Verse

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Abstract: Throughout his life, Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) had an (apparently) ambiguous attitude towards dramatic literature: on the one hand, he claimed a complete independence from playwrights for stage directors, on the other hand, he kept working on texts by great poets, most notoriously Shakespeare, thinking about the best way of producing such texts. English verse is a challenge for Craig, since its rhythmic pattern partly predetermines the sonic features of the performed text and, as a consequence, seems to deprive stage directors of some of their prerogatives. This paper therefore investigates Craig's relationship to versified writing, either as a playwright (as in the *Masques* projected by him in his early career, or his cycle of puppet plays entitled *Drama for Fools*) or as a theoretician, particularly in unpublished texts from the 1930s (Creating a Theatre, 1935-1937 ; A Note on Sanity in Stage Production of Shakespearean Plays, 1937-1940), in which Craig delves deeper into English verse drama and advocates an unexpected approach, most certainly too radical for the time in which he conceived it.

Résumé : Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) a entretenu toute sa vie une relation (en apparence) ambiguë avec la littérature dramatique : d'un côté il revendiquait l'autonomie totale du metteur en scène par rapport au dramaturge, de l'autre il n'a cessé de travailler sur des textes de grands poètes, à commencer par Shakespeare, et à réfléchir aux moyens de monter ces textes. Le vers anglais présente un défi particulier pour Craig, puisque par son carcan rythmique il prédétermine en partie la façon dont le texte va sonner sur le plateau, empiétant ainsi sur les prérogatives du metteur en scène. L'article examine donc l'attitude de Craig face à l'écriture versifiée, que ce soit en tant qu'auteur (lorsque Craig se fait lui-même dramaturge, comme dans certains projets de *Masques* du début de sa carrière, ou dans son projet plus tardif de cycle marionnettique intitulé *Drama for Fools*) ou en tant que théoricien, notamment dans des textes inédits des années

1930 (Creating a Theatre, 1935-1937 ; A Note on Sanity in Stage Production of Shakespearean Plays, 1937-1940) où Craig approfondit sa réflexion sur le vers dramatique anglais, et propose des approches inattendues, trop radicales sans doute pour l'époque à laquelle il les a formulées.

Keywords: Edward Gordon Craig, diction, rhythmic patterns, playwriting, Original Pronunciation

Mots-clés : Edward Gordon Craig, diction du vers, schéma rythmique, écriture dramatique, prononciation restituée

The scholarly discourse on Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) usually insists on his rejection, or at least distrust, of the dramatic text, and his lack of interest in actors' skills in delivering it. Christopher Innes, for instance, writes that "for Craig, theatre is the equal of literature, but a very different form of art that can reach its full potential only if it is no longer subordinated to the written word" (112), and Olga Taxidou asserts that "his theories have little space for ideas and formulations on acting as a creative process. Fighting certain aspects of the old actor-manager system and defining his own role as the all-powerful director left no room for theories on acting" (124-125). Although Craig was obsessed with the idea of running a school for the Art of the Theatre, actors' formal training in declamation is assumed to have been absent from his preoccupations: "Craig veut bien sûr se démarquer des écoles d'interprétation qui forment les acteurs à la déclamation et aux clichés gestuels" (Warnet 266). When scholars are strongly biased against Craig, this preconception can even lead to such definitive condemnations as: "[Craig's] vision epitomised a theater that ever more valued technology and stagecraft and simultaneously disparaged the human contributions of actors" (Falocco 20).

One of the most delicate of those "human contributions" lies in the art of speaking verse. Since Craig is assumed to have had no liking for

the declamatory aspects of acting, he is all the more assumed to have shown no interest in verse-speaking techniques. Although commentators generally acknowledge Craig's taste for poetry, they rarely discuss his opinions as to how to deliver poetic lines; and when they happen to do so, it is in a negative way that records how he did *not* want verse to be spoken, rather than how he *did* want to hear it: "Stanislavsky discovered […] that […] as soon as verse was attempted the actors […] lapsed into declamation. In an attempt to clear up the difficulty, Stanislavsky acted some passages from his own roles before Craig, using different methods […]. None of this was to Craig's liking" (Bablet 154).

While it remains true that Craig never was *primarily* concerned with verse-speaking techniques, the generally received (and most often tacit) assumption that he had no, or only very little, interest in them needs to be somewhat qualified. The objective of this contribution is to draw scholars' attention to little known primary sources that alter to some extent the conventional perception of Craig as a stage director and theoretician who focused exclusively on the visual dimension of the stage and despised traditional acting skills, and more particularly the art of speaking verse. Craig's attitude to this aspect of actors' training underwent a drastic change after 1930: this essay therefore discusses first Craig's opinions on verse-speaking and verse-writing prior to that date, and introduces in its second part a handful of texts that Craig wrote in the 1930s and that show how his ideas had evolved by then.

Pre-1930 period

Craig started his career as an actor. In 1894, at the age of 22, he played the leading role in *Hamlet,* but he never expressed his views as to what it meant to him to play such an important part written in iambic pentameter, and never bothered to declare whether he felt it was different from playing in prose.

As a reader, he was very fond of poetry, but his favourite poets were Walt Whitman and William Blake, and neither's prosody can be compared with the metres traditionally used in verse drama.

As a stage director, he never really had to meet the verse drama challenge: he only directed operas and masques and translations of plays originally written in other languages than English; he co-directed *Hamlet* with Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), but it was in Russian translation. *Much Ado About Nothing,* the only Shakespeare play he directed in English (in 1903), happens to be mainly in prose. Laurence Housman's (1865-1959) play *Bethlehem,* directed by Craig in 1902, is in verse, but Craig added a considerable amount of music to it, and cut many of the speeches. As Christopher Innes puts it, "In a play of just over 600 lines (before cuts), yet with a performance time of almost two hours, the musical and visual elements of the production clearly overwhelmed the poetry" (83).

As a set, costume, and mask designer, he contributed to the 1912 production of William Butler Yeats's (1865-1939) play *On Baile's Strand* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, but there is no evidence that Yeats solicited his advice as to how the text of this play, which is partly in prose and partly in verse, should be delivered on stage.

As a teacher, Craig deliberately and explicitly excluded verse-speaking from his programme. He wrote in *The Mask:* "In speaking we avoid Hamlet's 'To be or not to be.' We read a paragraph from a newspaper… or a prose passage from a book on the Theatre which speaks of some interesting development in the Art of the Stage" (Craig 1914: 231).

As a theoretician, he developed the notion that poetic drama is inferior to silent drama. In an article published in 1912, he complained that "speech has usurped the place of action in Stage-Drama." The use of words, he opined, lends itself to "argument […] between the creator, the seer and the on-looker" while silent action is preferable because it is "open to such an infinite variety of interpretations." As a conclusion, he expressed his confidence that "ultimately words will be silenced in the purest form of Drama" (Craig 1912: 188-189). Which did not prevent him, however, from including in *The Theatre—Advancing,* in 1919, a very brief article devoted to "The Voice."[1] It begins with a forceful assertion: "Poetry cannot be beautifully spoken by English speakers. Even the best of them veneer the sounds with a slight mono-

tone." Craig goes on hinting that his countrymen are actually afraid of poetry, and that they hide their fear behind "sanctimonious faces and voices", sounding like priests at "a baptism or a burial." He blames "the theatre with its sing-song reciters" for such cowardice, and calls implicitly for actors who would not be afraid to look straight into the blazing "truth" contained in poetry, and who would be able to discover another way of delivering verse lines (Craig 1919: 260).

Ironically enough, it is as a playwright that Craig displayed, during that period, most interest in verse drama. In the first years of the 20th century, Craig was obsessed with the idea of reviving the tradition of masque, a form of performance which he thought epitomised the very essence of the Art of the Theatre, as the verbal element did not prevail in it, but all components were at an equal level of importance: text, music, dance, scenery, lighting, costumes, and acting. He wrote several scripts for masques, most of which remained unproduced. These scripts are interesting, as they display the characteristics that Craig was looking for in plays that would no longer be regarded primarily as literary dramas, but rather as pretexts for stage creations. For instance, the masque script titled *Hunger,* written by Craig in 1902-4, displays a complex alternation of forms: 1. pantomime, 2. prose, 3. a procession, 4. prose (firstly improvised as in Commedia dell'Arte, then written), 5. a song and dance, 6. prose, 7. verse, 8. pantomime, 9. prose, 10. a song and dance, 11. prose, 12. verse, 13. prose, 14. a song and dance, 15. pantomime, 16. a song, and 17. pantomime.

In this script, all pantomime passages are accompanied by music, and all sung passages are in verse. These songs are strongly reminiscent of the nursery rhyme style:

> The dog that swallowed all the soup
> The dog that bolted all the meat
> The dog that in the pudding—whoop!
> What shall be done to him
> What shall be done to him… (Craig EGC-Ms-A-49: 15v)
> The metre used in the first spoken lines in verse is more accentual than syllabic, and rhymes play an important role as a marker of verse-writing:
> Pride of the earth, sweet noblemen,

Beautiful ladies, tell me when
The earth will be found
To be kind and round
And the sun to shine and feel warm again. (Craig EGC-Ms-A-49: 25r)

The core of the script consists of a soliloquy delivered by a pauper whose children are starving. Most of this soliloquy is in prose, but as the dramatic acme approaches, it shifts suddenly to verse, when the father urges his children to stab themselves to death right in front of banqueting courtiers:

Now—This is the way we meet the Foe.
Weapon held in the right hand—so,
Slash, and stab to the left, and thrust.
Follow my actions—children must.
Right and left, and left and right,
Twist the weapon and win the fight.
Stab—and do it with all your might. (Craig EGC-Ms-A-49: 30v)

After this violent action, the pauper's soliloquy shifts back to prose. Craig does not use here the traditional metre of tragedy, the iambic pentameter, but turns to a four stress tetrameter, the lilt of which is in sharp contrast with the horror of the situation.

The last song in the script is written in regular trochaic tetrameter, except for three incomplete lines, in which stage directions explain that music and action are supposed to fill the metre, and two catalectic lines at the end:

Shall we show you how the peasant
How the Hungry worn out peasant
With the Lords and Masters present
Carries home his dead… (*Long note for action.*)
See! 'tis so. (*All follow her actions.*)
So the peasant
In the winter, in the dead time,
Lifts each priceless perfect body.
Six to hold a little baby,
Thirty carrying a man,
Thirty kneel to lift a man. (Craig EGC-Ms-A-49: 33r)[2]

Craig's avoidance of the established blank verse is obviously intentional: this text is to be sung, and its metric scheme has to be rather lyrical than tragic. An annotation facing this song in the manuscript shows that Craig is eager to shun a tragic atmosphere at all costs: "Never forget this: all this must have a smile and a *glow* about it. It must not grow grey and pathetic. It must warm up till it becomes a *triumph*!!" (Craig EGC-Ms-A-49: 32v) The choice of an unexpected metre is part of the playwright/director's strategy aiming at creating the right dramatic mood.

During World War I, Craig began to work on an ambitious project, titled *Drama for Fools,* and consisting of a cycle of 365 plays for marionettes (only seven of which were published by Craig in his lifetime). He never finished that cycle, but he worked on it almost until his death. Only one of the plays that Craig managed to put in definitive shape contains versified parts. It is *The Gordian Knot,* published by Craig in 1918; here, Craig introduces verse only for the sake of rhythm, as a mere display of meaningless phonemes arranged in a metric scheme. The plot of the play confronts a young and brilliant genius with a crowd of old and tired conformists who can but follow always the same traditional path, as they are unable to imagine anything more innovative. These conformists go literally in circles, chanting:

> Round around about around,
> Out about around abound,
> Bound abound around about,
> Bout out and abound arout. (Craig 2012: 244)

A subsequent variant of this couplet is even more meaningless. The rest of the play script is in prose.

At this point, readers can rightly wonder whether the topic was worth tackling or not: Craig's declarations on verse-speaking, verse-writing and actors' training in declamation prior to 1930 are virtually non-extant. Had Craig died in 1930, scholars would have been right in assuming that the art of speaking verse was of no value to him. Only after 1930 did Craig develop an interest for these matters; but the main sources in which he expressed his views remained

unpublished in his lifetime, and were not exploited by scholars after his death.

The 1930s

In 1930, Craig had his book on Henry Irving (1838-1905) published by J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. The celebrated actor-manager, who had run the Lyceum Theatre in London from 1878 until his death, had taught Craig all the basic theatrical skills, and Craig venerated him, although Irving epitomised the Victorian theatre that Craig contributed to destroy. In his book, Craig devoted two pages to the criticism made against the way his mentor used to declaim verse:

> Ever since I can remember, theorists have said that Irving mutilated the rhythm whenever he came to speak verse. When asked how Irving might have improved, these theorists would either begin to caterwaul unctuously […] or they would mutter as paterfamilias does at evening prayers […]. In short, they were unable to utter six words beautifully, yet would be instructing one of the best verse speakers of the age. (Craig 1930: 67)

To such criticism, Craig simply replies that Irving "never deliberately mutilated or wrecked the rhythm" of verse (Craig 1930: 68), but, unfortunately, he does not bother to provide any detailed information about Irving's technique of verse-speaking.

In the years 1934-6, Craig began to write a very interesting essay, titled *Creating a Theatre,* which he left unfinished and unpublished.[3] His initial plan was to write a trilogy that would have comprised: 1. Creating a Theatre, 2. Creating Actors, and 3. Creating a Poet. He commented on his plan in the following terms: "This is the order of procedure—a natural order and one which should be productive" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-69, fascicle 3, 1r). As a matter of fact, however, the text he titled *Creating a Theatre* is mainly about creating actors. Through an incredibly demanding training programme, Craig wishes to restore the technical skills of touring companies from the past, which were able to play a different show every night. He reckons that "Henry Irving in 1857-1859 […] played 429 different parts in about 782 days" and he wishes to train 20th-century actors so that they could do the same

again. Although he admits that times have changed, he argues that "the job (the art of becoming an actor) remains the same. The job must be learnt. Practice—continual exercise—alone will teach it" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-69, fascicle 3, 2r). As a consequence, he wants his actors to work on five distinct plays per week during the first year of training. Rehearsals will be overseen by a prompter who "will sometimes beat on the ground: —*Bim,* —*Bim,* —*Bim,* —*Bim,* —*Bim*; in which case they have to take up […] taking care to stress the syllable on which the thump falls" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-69, fascicle 6, 6r-7r). At this point, Craig introduces a development, in the form of a footnote, on verses that do not seem to adhere strictly to the iambic pentameter scheme. He quotes a line from *Hamlet*: "Peace, break thee off, look where he comes again" (I,1, line 38), and although he admits that actors would spontaneously tend to pronounce it: "*Peace,* break thee *off, look* where it *comes* a*gain*", he insists that the correct stressing of the syllables is: "Peace, *break* thee *off,* look *where* it *comes* a*gain*." He finds it extremely important that actors should first learn to observe strictly the rules of metrics, *before* they feel entitled to break these rules and enjoy the same freedom as apparently poets and playwrights have enjoyed:

> This correctness has to be learned, and after it we can learn where to break. But if we imagine that we have Shakespeare's facility and understanding of how and where to break, before we know how and where to stress, we shall be taking a short cut […]. [M]etres were invented when Dance and Verse and Song went hand in hand. Unless you know first to keep the beat of a dance […] you will never learn how to step off the beat, or when, or why. And because Shakespeare knows how to do it, and the great dancers know how to do it […] that is no reason why we should learn to break the metre before we have learned to make it.
>
> […] I am sure that to follow the blank verse metre strictly, even at the cost [of] many other things, would recapture something of great value, which today seems to be disappearing more and more. (Craig EGC-Ms-B-69, fascicle 6, 7r)

Such a passage is trickier to analyse than it may seem, as Craig does not explicitly state what kind of effect he hopes to achieve through such experimentation. It is most probable that he had no preconceived

idea as to what the outcome would be. As the motto of *The Mask* says, "After the practice, the theory": Craig is not theorising here for the sake of pure theory, he wants to *hear* these experiments before he can draw any conclusion. But one must bear in mind that in those years, Craig was rather isolated in France; he had no disciples around him, no English-speaking actors at hand who would have been willing to make these experiments for him. It is therefore impossible to jump to the conclusion that Craig is calling here for a mechanical, inflexible delivery of iambic pentameter. At the end of his development, Craig highlights the distinction between two notions, rhythm and metre:

> If the actor of Marcellus is a man with a strong sense of metre, without having been taught he will, by the grace of nature, speak them [*i.e., these syllables*] in the way in which Shakespeare meant it to be spoken; and then he will very probably (though not certainly) stress the word "peace" instead of "break" and "look" instead of "where".
>
> There are two things, rhythm and metre. Rhythm we may call the magic thing, metre is a distinctly pedestrian thing; and here we have to learn to walk before we can run—and certainly before we can leap and gambol. (Craig EGC-Ms-B-69, fascicle 6, 7r)

In other words, actors have a natural tendency to convey the meaning of sentences, at the expense of the metric pattern of verse. During their period of training, Craig wants them to fight against this natural instinct, and to master to perfection the art of adhering strictly to that metric pattern, even if this obscures the meaning of the text. But the final aim is not, I think, to impose such an absurd treatment on the audience; rather, in a dialectic perspective, this mastery will be used as a springboard for the most talented trainees to explore new ways of declaiming verse, not necessarily returning to the 'natural' and spontaneous way that the apparent meaning of the text had initially hinted to them. Those results are unknown to Craig himself, as long as he has not had an opportunity to conduct with actors of flesh and blood the experimentation he is calling for.

Craig addressed the issue of verse-speaking again in another essay that he wrote in 1937 and revised in 1938, 1939 and 1944. It is titled:

A Note on Sanity in Stage Productions of Shakespearean Plays. It follows a dialectic purpose similar to Craig's approach to the metric pattern of blank verse in *Creating a Theatre*: Craig investigates what can be reconstructed from the theatrical practice in Shakespeare's time, not so much for the sake of mere archaeological reconstruction, but rather in order to impose constraints on actors and stage directors so that they can reform their own way of making theatre in the 20th century. Once again, the result of such a process is unknown to Craig, as long as the experimentation he describes has not actually taken place.

This essay is divided into three sections: 1. The Place, 2. The Voice, 3. Movement, Action, Acting, Costume. Naturally, it is in the second section that Craig expresses his opinions on verse-speaking. Craig's line of thought can be summarised as follows:[4] contemporary scholars criticise actors who ruin the rhythm of English verse, but they themselves are unable to speak verse convincingly: therefore, actors cannot take them as their models. Contemporary poets are unable as well to declaim their own verse satisfyingly, and actors cannot take them as their models either. The only solution for actors is to follow their instincts, although theoretically "there must be the one and perfect way of speaking the words of [Shakespeare], but it is not recorded, this perfect way" (Craig 2017: 178). For lack of archival evidence, it is "lost and broken, the very swing of the verse, *the very sound of every word*" (Craig 2017: 176; the italics are Craig's). The task is even more difficult for contemporary actors, as their Elizabethan predecessors, Craig insists, did not have *one* style of acting that fitted all playwrights, but adapted their style to every single playwright: Shakespeare's lines should not be spoken the same way as Webster's, Kyd's, or Marlowe's. The ultimate challenge for contemporary actors is to return to "the speaking both the verse and the prose *as the Elizabethans heard it*" (Craig 2017: 179; the italics are Craig's). Craig is convinced that this challenge is simply impossible to meet; however, the attempt itself is worthwhile "in some school of experiment", as "something might come out of such tests" (Craig 2017: 179). Such experiments should be based on the work of scholars who study the Elizabethan pronunciation of English. Craig enthuses for historical phonology, and calls

for "a dictionary giving us, word for word, the correct Elizabethan pronunciations" (Craig 2017: 181).[5] Such training would be necessary, but not sufficient, as it would only lead to mastering the *correct* pronunciation of every single word, while acting demands something more than mere correctness. Once actors have come to master that correct pronunciation, they will have to learn how to add 'dramatic fire' to it. "A hundred different changes are rung on these correct tones" (Craig 2017: 181).

In the passage in which Craig asserts that poets are unable to speak their own verse, he provides the example of William Butler Yeats, which is interesting because for once, Craig lingers on the type of verse-speaking he definitely cannot stand. He reports that whenever Yeats spoke verse, "it seemed so pedantic, so reserved, even woebegone." Craig complains that he "couldn't hear the verse for the words, couldn't hear the words for the crooning." He is particularly irritated by the sing-song quality of Yeats's delivery: "when he speaks verse he seems transformed into the clergyman. It's up and down and down and up, and 'Oh, my dear brethren'" (Craig 2017: 179). In his opinion, the main requirement for being a good verse speaker consists of a complete lack of lyricism: "They say Tennyson could speak his own verse. I wonder. I'll tell you who I think could speak verse: Daniel Defoe. He is so all that is not lyrical in what and how he writes" (Craig 2017: 179). And when it comes to mentioning explicitly the names of actors who, in his opinion, are excellent verse speakers, his choice is rather surprising: "I can grow warm hearing a line of verse *however it be spoken,* and I can grow mad hearing it spoken by Michoels, [or] Friedland" (Craig 2017: 179; the italics are Craig's). Surprising, because Solomon Mikhoels (1890-1948), from the Moscow State Jewish Theatre, acted exclusively in Yiddish, and Zvi Friedland (1898-1967), from the Habima company in Tel Aviv, acted exclusively in Hebrew. Most probably, Craig never heard either delivering a line of English verse; but he presumably heard them speaking verse in Yiddish and Hebrew. Although he could speak neither of these two languages, he seems to have been sensitive to their prosody.

Craig's unexpected interest in historical phonology and what we now call Original Pronunciation, or 'OP', goes far beyond a mere archaeological hobby. The objective here is a quest for more expressiveness through the use of 'exotic' sounds, so to speak. In his book on Henry Irving, Craig already insisted that one of the elements that made his mentor's acting particularly appealing was the peculiar way in which he pronounced certain English words ("Gud" for "God", "god" for "good", "ritz" for "rich", etc.). Whereas many criticised Irving's oddities of utterance, Craig claims, on the contrary, that "his tendency was to enrich the sounds of words—to make them expressive rather than refined" (Craig 1930: 63), and he is convinced that Irving's pronunciation was actually closer to the Elizabethan pronunciation than to the received pronunciation of Victorian English, which should have led critics to respect him rather than deride him: "how strange it is that it is always for preserving the best that men lay themselves open to the attacks of their fellows. For this [*i.e., the way Irving pronounced English words*] is the old English speech, and Irving brought back to us something of the ripe old sounds" (Craig 1930: 65). Craig is interested in those "ripe old sounds" indifferently for verse and prose, but it is well known that the impact of OP is particularly important when it comes to verse drama, as it makes it possible for lost rhymes to sound again as rhymes.[6] David Crystal writes that the actors who experimented with OP under his direction made "repeated reference to the process of discovery—how OP had helped them to get closer to the metre, how it helped them find fresh phonetic echoes and rhymes within and between lines" (167).

The last text in this brief corpus consists of annotations on an article by Austin Clarke (1896-1974), titled "Verse-Speaking and Verse Drama." This article was published in 1937, but Craig's annotations are not dated; he probably jotted them down in 1937 or 1938.

At that time, the Irish poet Austin Clarke had not become yet a major successor of William Butler Yeats as a verse-playwright. He was about to co-found the Dublin Verse-Speaking Society in 1938 with Robert Farren (1909-1984); the Lyric Theatre Company of Dublin

would follow in 1944. In this article, Clarke attacks "the Yeatsian cult of aestheticism" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83: 8), and advocates a new form of verse drama, along with new methods of speaking verse, methods that will involve "tones and inflections which are beyond the present range of the ordinary actor" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83: 10).

Craig was both intrigued and frustrated by Clarke's assertions. Frustrated, because he felt Clarke refrained from revealing important truths about the craft of speaking verse.[7] Intrigued, because Clarke's ideas fuelled his own reflections on the issue, and obliged him to pose the following questions, which he left unanswered:

> 1. Do we need verse drama—if so, why?
>
> 2. Can verse drama be what Greek verse drama was—what we suppose it was? A music-dance-drama, with the text written in verse. But before answering consider *how* was this verse spoken?
>
> 3. Why, if we can do this again, were the Florentines not able to do more in 1600 when they created the 1st Italian form of *opera* […]?
>
> 4. [C]an verse be spoken so as to be dramatic—can verse drama be acted dramatically so as to be rhythmic and lovely like verse?
>
> 5. Is it the result obtained by the C[omédie] Franc[aise] that we hope to achieve? Then our Public must first come to enjoy verse, to respond to it, for this it does not do and has never done, I imagine. […] [The English public] finds in prose all the thrilling sounds and emotions which the Frenchman finds in verse drama. (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83)

Craig rejects forcefully the idea that a contemporary play script should be entirely in verse, and that only verse drama should fill the stage throughout a show. Instead, he calls for dramatic progression based on a rigorous succession of various forms of performance: "*Verse drama. Why?* All verse. Verse, verse, verse, will we nill we? What a notion, what folly, what an utter misunderstanding of the value of verse, say I. Prose, verse, song, dance: this crescendo" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83; the italics and chaotic punctuation are Craig's). Clearly, Craig is turning again here to his ideal of a masque around 1900. Although his *Hunger* script is much more complex than this basic pattern, on the whole it can be said to follow it. In Craig's view, contemporary

full-length verse drama is sheer nonsense: but verse passages are an important link within a dramatic chain that goes from the prosaic exposition of a plot to a non-verbal, choreographed climax.

Conclusion

Although Craig's interest in the topics of verse drama and verse-speaking is limited to a decade only, during that decade he developed an original line of thought and made important statements that can be summed up as a series of advice notes to playwrights and actors. His advice to playwrights can be reformulated as: avoid full-length verse drama; instead, be careful to use verse at strategic points only, and not to undermine the intrinsic value of verse. His advice to actors can be summed up along the following lines: strive to respect the specific style of each single playwright from the past; first master the 'correct' way to speak verse, *e.g.* by training to adhere strictly to the iambic pentameter scheme, *then* try to act the part "and at the same time to speak the verse as it should be spoken" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83); avoid "sing-song" and "crooning", do not sound like a clergyman; add an exotic flavour to the speech, *e.g.* using OP; get acquainted with obsolete techniques, experiment with radically new ones; first learn the rule; then, and only then, learn how to best break the rule.

Craig's apparent obsession with a rigid adherence to the iambic pentameter is certainly the most surprising, possibly even shocking aspect of his verse-speaking theorisation, and the least likely to be accepted in contemporary practice. Giles Block, the 'Master of the Words' at Shakespeare's Globe in London, writes that, whenever Shakespeare substitutes an iamb with a trochee, "we mustn't worry […] that, for a moment, we have lost that powerful emotional iambic rhythm […]. Shakespeare will always revert to the iambic: it is his default setting. But […] these few trochees bring variety" (30). Craig would undoubtedly have agreed that they do; but he urges actors and directors to experiment with the rhythm of speech and the Shakespearean text, and to never take anything for granted.

In a sense, Craig's views on verse-speaking are not incompatible with his distrust for the dramatic text, which was mentioned in the Introduction and on which all Craig scholars agree. Imposing a rigid and inflexible beat to the iambic pentameter tends to turn verse drama into a sheer flow of sounds comparable to music, and colouring it with OP tends to substitute the received text with some text in a foreign language, so to say. The audience is no longer expected to *understand* the uttered words, but simply to get drowned in the hypnotising, regular flow of odd-sounding syllables. This is a theatrical experience quite different from what we are used to, and assuredly, such a revolutionary director and theoretician as Craig wished we could make new and refreshing experiences, and shake up our routine.

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1 This article is dated "London, 1908", but it does not seem to have been published prior to its inclusion in Craig's book of essays *The Theatre—Advancing*.

2 The song is sung by the pauper's daughter, hence the phrase "*her* actions."

[3] Three sets of typescripts of portions of this unfinished essay are held at BnF, ASP: EGC-Ms-B-69, EGC-Ms-B-157, and EGC-Ms-B-166. A fourth one is held in the Edward Gordon Craig Collection of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, MS-00960, Container 8.10.

[4] Craig's arguments are not presented here in the exact order in which he expressed them.

[5] Craig adds angrily: "How is it that [such a dictionary] is not used to train the modern actors of Shakespeare to speak the speech as *he* pronounced it?"

[6] In *A Note on Sanity…,* Craig is fascinated to discover that in a ballad written in 1613, "might" rhymes with "eight" (Craig 2017: 180).

[7] Along with his annotations, Craig began to draft a letter to Clarke, which he never sent: "can you not […] tell me (for no one wishes more than I to solve the problem) how exactly one should proceed to master the craft of verse-speaking. Unless I have missed something in your article […] you do not tell me, step by step, the way to learn (or teach) the craft" (Craig EGC-Ms-B-83).