Finding Aid for the Edward Gordon Craig Notes and Drafts for a Plea to George Bernard Shaw, 1929-1931

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Edward Gordon Craig Notes and Drafts for a Plea to George Bernard Shaw

Date (inclusive): 1929-1931

Collection number: 170/512

Creator: Craig, Edward Gordon, 1872-1966

Extent: 3 items, including a proof with holograph notes and two typescript drafts

Abstract: The portfolio contains a notebook and two typed manuscripts that trace the development of the essay entitled, "A Plea to G. B. S." in Ellen Terry and her Secret Self (1931; republished as Ellen Terry and her Secret Self, Together with a Plea for G. B. S. in 1932). Edward Gordon Craig's essay "A Plea to G. B. S." is addressed to the British playwright Bernard Shaw, and responds to a preface Shaw had written for his published correspondence with Dame Ellen Terry, a prominent actress and Craig's mother.

Language: Finding aid is written in English.

Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library Special Collections.

Los Angeles, California 90095-1575

Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Restrictions on Access

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Edward Gordon Craig Notes and Drafts for a Plea to George Bernard Shaw (Collection 170/512). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

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Biography/History

Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) was the second of two illegitimate children born to the actress Ellen Terry and the architect Edward William Godwin. Like his older sister Edith, Gordon Craig followed his mother into drama. He attended Southfield Park School in Tunbridge Wells, Bradfield College, and Heidelberg College in Germany. Craig became a member of the Lyceum, London, the theatre associated with Henry Irving, where he received training as an actor and began his career in stage design and production. Although Craig's radical ideas would prove highly influential, his English productions were commercial failures. In 1904, he left England for the continent, where he wrote several influential pieces on stage design including "The Art of the Theatre" (1905; republished as "On the Art of the Theatre" in 1911) and "The Actor and the Übermarionette" (1907). Craig's belief in the potential of abstract scenic and lighting design, his studies of movement, and the moveable screens that he created played a prominent role in dramatic experimentation in the early twentieth century. He died in 1966 in Vence, France.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was born in Dublin, Ireland. He moved to London in 1870, where he tried his hand at writing novels and became involved in progressive politics. Among his many projects, he helped to found the Fabian Society, an organization dedicated to transforming Britain into a socialist state. Although Shaw had been writing plays since 1891, he first became a recognized figure in English drama when he was named drama critic of the Saturday Review in 1895; he soon emerged as perhaps the most important British playwright of the early twentieth century. Among his most famous works are "Arms and the Man" (1898), "Mrs. Warren's Profession" (1898), "Man and Superman" (1902), and "Major Barbara" (1905). Shaw's interest in Ellen Terry dated from her performance in "New Men and Old Acres" in 1878; after he penned "The Man of Destiny" with Ellen Terry in mind in 1895, their correspondence became more intense. Shaw received numerous awards and accolades, including the 1925 Nobel Prize (which he declined).

Scope and Content

These materials document Edward Gordon Craig's response to Bernard Shaw's participation in the publication of his mother's correspondence, in addition to Shaw's bitter rivalry with the actor Henry Irving. In the 1890s, actress Ellen Terry played a series of virtuous women at the Lyceum alongside Henry Irving; however, Shaw thought that her talents were
being wasted, and the playwright and the actor engaged in a very public struggle over her. After Terry's death in 1928, her
daughter Edith ("Edy") Craig decided to publish her mother's correspondence with Shaw. Shaw agreed to turn over Terry's
letters to Edy and write a preface. Edward Gordon Craig, who, unlike his sister, was not one of his mother's executors,
objected to the publication of the letters, and urged Shaw to withdraw his support. Shaw refused, and further upset Craig
by using his preface to attack Irving, the man who had served as Craig's mentor. The notes and typescripts in the portfolio
are Gordon Craig's early drafts of his published response.

The portfolio has the following three parts: Notebook: Miss Ellen Terry and Mr. G. B. Shaw, their correspondence; Draft
essay: On the publication of the Correspondence of Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw, and on Mr. Shaw's Preface to that
publication; Draft letter: First copy of a letter to George Bernard Shaw.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Genres and Forms of Material
Manuscripts.

Related Material
Bound Manuscripts Collection (Collection 170) . Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research
Library.
Edward Gordon Craig Papers (Collection 1006) . Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research
Library.
Rudolph Holzapfel Collection of Edward Gordon Craig Material (Collection 1482) . Available at UCLA Library Special
Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.
Dame Ellen Terry Papers (Collection 643) . Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research
Library.
Edith Craig Papers (Collection 1003) . Available at the UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

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**Notebook**

**Scope and Content Note**
The notebook consists of Craig's annotated proof copy of Shaw's introductory essay to the
Terry-Shaw correspondence. In it, Craig responds to a number of specific claims made in
Shaw's preface. This item is also noteworthy for containing a complete copy of the rare Shaw
proof; this proof is usually identified by the title Very private: preface to be attached to the
correspondence of Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw should it ever be published. At the top of
the first page of the proof, "private, of course, except to trusted friends" has been written in
red ink (apparently in Shaw's hand) and "E.G.C. 7.9.29" has been written in black ink (this
proof lacks a formal title page). The notebook is composed of 47 leaves with 4 leaves of
notes lain in; 1 newspaper article ("William Archer's Advice to G.B.S." from News Chronicle,
June 2, 1931) lain in; and 1 article ("G.B.S. Letters to Ellen Terry" from Daily Express, April 8,
1930) tipped in. Craig makes reference to both of these articles in "A Plea to G. B. S."

**Draft essay**

**Scope and Content Note**
Draft of a brief essay (3 leaves) by Craig entitled, "On the publication of the Correspondence
of Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw, and on Mr. Shaw's Preface to that publication." The content
is similar to the short introduction that opens "A Plea to G. B. S."
Draft letter

Scope and Content Note

A lengthy draft of a letter to Bernard Shaw (16 leaves), which shares some content with "A Plea to G. B. S." although it differs in taking the form of a direct address and in lodging many more specific complaints against Shaw's preface. It is possible that the letter is not a draft for "A Plea to G. B. S.", but an actual letter from Craig to Shaw. Craig accuses Shaw of lying when he initially claimed to have no interest in publishing the Terry-Shaw correspondence; he also takes issue with Shaw's characterization of Irving and of Victorian actors in general. At the top of the first page of the letter, the author has typed the following note in the same red ink: "First copy, 31st May, 1931; Revised, and recopied 7th June: Put into letter form, and recopied 14th July." The typescript appears to be incomplete.