



**Shakespeare in Woodcuts: A Study of Select Illustrations from The Cranach Press
Hamlet (1928, 1930)**

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Abstract

This paper discusses select rare woodcut illustrations of Edward Gordon Craig, an English modernist theatre practitioner, a stage director and illustrator. In 1929, a special illustrated edition of *Hamlet* was published by Cranach Press in Germany where Craig had used a set of rare woodcut designs that he had crafted for Stanislavski's *Hamlet* (1911-12). The publication of the 1929 *Hamlet* bore cultural and artistic significances in the history of book art and adaptation of Shakespeare. It was a deep expression of the Arts and Crafts Movement, launched by William Morris and John Ruskin, which resisted the mechanization of traditional book-making industry. These illustrations were also reminiscent of Craig's personal aesthetics of the *Über-marionette*, a theory of transcendence established on dramatic arts. These woodblock carvings are black and white silhouettes that 'transcend the role of narrative illustration, and become instead an almost complete "production" in marionette form' (James Taylor). Apart from bearing personal attachment to Craig, this publication also marks a landmark in the arena of Shakespeare adaptation because it remains unchallenged in the way it symbolizes and controls the inner detailing and drama of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through illustrative art.

Keywords: Shakespeare adaptation in Woodcut, Woodcut *Hamlet*, Cranach Press *Hamlet*, Edward Gordon Craig, Arts and Crafts Movement.

