

LINDSAY NEWMAN

The Black Figure prints are, of course, remarkable not only for their vision but for its technical expression. Like all true artists, instead of imposing his will upon the material, Craig sought to free the shape within it, and an advantage of using woods softer than box is that on printing they retain part of the film of ink, reducing the density of black. A huge range of tones is present in Craig's black, helped not only by the wood, but by his practice of adding a dash of vaseline to the ink and by the paper on which the figures were pulled. The light permeates their fibres, so that the figures are at the same time illuminated and yet seem to melt into the paper, creating an image of subtle colour. Indeed, there are times when black appears as a light value and white as a shadow.

When Lindsay Newman penned that incisive analysis of Edward Gordon Craig's craftsmanship and vision, in the introduction to her 1989 edition of the theatre designer's Black Figures, a book that stands among her finest work, she was saying a lot about herself. For these words not only display the accuracy and economy of expression that made her the historian of stage design and print we celebrate today. Her toned and tender tribute to paper, wood and ink also reads like a self-portrait in light and shade. Our friend and colleague had the same ability to fuse imaginative vision with technical perfection as she attributed to her hero, an ability to create for everyone who encountered her 'an image of subtle colour', and a comparable talent for transmuting blocks of blackness into light. Light permeated her, too. For though LMN, as she became, spent much of her time in stacks of libraries, or storerooms of museums, had her share of sorrow, and took to shielding her sight as carefully as the rare collections she preserved, among these black figures and guarded archives, as she showed us, the dark was light enough.

Born on All Soul's Day, Lindsay, like Hamlet, the character who fascinated Craig, and so loomed over her life's work, learned not to stand 'too much i'th'sun'. This might not have been her destiny, because at school in Essex, and then King's College, she was electrified by the stage, and star-struck enough to take the two-year Stanislavski course at The Questers – now the Judi Dench – Theatre in Ealing. We can picture young Lindsay Mary Bouvet, as she then was, like Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face*, torn between the limelight and the bookshelves. Why she turned from acting perhaps had causes like those to which she ascribed Craig's exile from the stage: 'It was because there was the urge to stand alone, drag no one else in to spoil the absolute unity and control, that the idea that he might best serve theatre by retiring from the stage began, for Craig could work only with people he trusted, and fear of failure haunted him'. Such psychological empathy, which might have made her an actress, went instead into a writing style that carried the 'distanced elegance' she admired in Craig's. But anyone who glimpsed her, in a crisp trouser-suit, at the service-desk during her thirty-four year stint in Lancaster University Library, could see how LMN remained a diva.

There is a photo of a radiant thirty-something Lindsay, in winged specs and mini-skirt beside Philip Larkin at the opening of the Lancaster library, which shows the hopes and caliber of the brave new campus world she graced. Winnie Clark, her long-time companion there, recalls that the 'fierce concentration, work ethic, and sheer speed' with which she operated made her both daunting and inspirational; but one junior, Jane Vicary, remembers how the 'terrifying *froidueur*' of the 'brisk and chic' LMN, who 'suffered no fools', masked the shyness of a 'vivid benefactress', who would load the team with the redcurrents she grew, and subvert officialdom with 'a glint of humour from behind upswept glasses, and the curl of a smile at "what fools these mortals be" – including herself'. Mary Gavagan, of Lancaster's Scott Gallery, 'never met anyone so

widely known by their initials’, yet ‘without free tips from LMN’, would have had difficulty beginning her career. Historian Jeffrey Richards comments that as he curated a railway exhibition, there was no detail she did not correct; but when I mounted a Shakespeare show, she produced Tudor maps and manuscripts from the basement like rabbits from her hat.

There was a hint about LMN of the white witch her French ancestors would call a *sage*. There must have been a period when no archive in Europe or the States escaped the spell she cast over the papers of Craig and his long-suffering sponsor, Harry Kessler. She had *the eye*: the instinct of a born collector, from which, Emma van Straaten reports, the V & A benefited, along with booksellers and printers like Simon Lawrence and Michael Taylor. There is genius in research; and Dr. Newman flaunted it grandly in her *magnum opus*, *The Correspondence of Craig and Kessler*, with footnotes to put the Warburg Institute to shame. Publications gave her global fame, with lectures in Florence, Leipzig, Milan and Paris, ceremonies when a sense of drama was as valued as fluent French and German. Her French roots nourished the show on Gwen Raverat she put on with David Steel. That internationalism was prized, as well, in Fleet Street’s St Bride Library, which LMN helped revive, after retirement lent her scope for new causes, and where she gave her last lecture in 2006, on the Black Figures, to launch her final exhibition, ‘From Stage to Page’. An essay on Craig’s designs for Hofmannsthal’s *The White Fan* was her exquisitely printed swansong; for she remained a true European, like her beloved Kessler, and the last time I saw her, in her Kingston study, she kindly invited me to the mansion she dreamed she owned in Paris. Like Craig, at the end she was ‘insulated by make-believe’. But who of us today can say her continental dream was false?

Keith Sturgess, Drama Professor at Lancaster, writes to say the idea Lindsay lived in an ivory tower was wrong. In fact, her lectures thrilled students, and if she avoided shows, it was because ‘she abhorred crowds’. So, she came to a rehearsal of a *Merchant of Venice* staged as a camp satire, with gondoliers crooning ‘Just one cornetto’. Next morning, LMN wrote to tell the cast she had seldom seen anything more beautiful. That innocent talent to be amused never left her, for ‘What a spirit she had’, marvels Eve Leckey, ‘Magnificent in facing illness’; while other friends, like Mary Rosenberg, praise her gift for giving, despite her pose of austerity: ‘I will never forget the lovely books she gave me’, swears Jean Blanquet. She gave so freely of time and guidance’ to Fiona Close-Thomas; and from 12 to 26, Benjamin Morrell relished her company as ‘a blessing’. For Larissa and Slava Soskin, her generosity equalled the ‘everlasting value’ of her scholarship. Lorna Harmsworth speaks for us all when she records the privilege of ‘simply knowing Lindsay’. But a word must finally be said for some special friends in Lancaster. The Peacock Saga transfixed the university for years, as LMN fought to protect the fowl that proudly strutted the campus, wrote an elegy on the death of ‘haughty’ Pollux, organised an exhibition ‘In Praise of Peacocks’, and printed a 15-page manual on their welfare. ‘We are their servants, not they our pets’, this text concluded. For though Lindsay Newman surely shared Gordon Craig’s belief that his Black Figures ‘point the way to the only worth-while Theatre – the Theatre of dreams’, what she taught us, at the story’s end, is that ‘In dreams begin responsibilities’