**Kessler, Harry Clément Ulrich (1868-1937)**

Harry Kessler was an artistic patron, publisher, theater producer, and writer who acutely influenced the development of modernist culture across Europe. His personal diaries, which chronicle 57 years of his life over 15,000 handwritten pages, document his extraordinarily wide-ranging connections to artists, literary figures, and politicians, and are one of the most significant first-hand accounts of the modernist era. His collaborations with numerous artists, including architect Henry van der Velde and theater visionary Gordon Craig, together with his founding of The Cranach Press, revitalized Weimar as a center of intellectual culture in the early decades of the 20th century.

After moving to Berlin in 1893, Kessler became involved with the influential Art Nouveau journal *Pan*, serving on its board of directors and acting as an editor during its five years in print from 1895-1900. Kessler’s first publication on culture appeared in this literary and artistic journal, alongside the writings of Richard Dehmel and Friedrich Nietzsche and visual contributions by Henry van der Velde, Max Liebermann, and many others. His involvement with *Pan* and its contributors, namely Henry van der Velde, led to his appointment as the director of the Grand Ducal Museum of Arts and Crafts in Weimar in 1902.

In an effort to rejuvenate German theater, Kessler invited Gordon Craig to Weimar in 1904 to stage avant-garde productions in conjunction with Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This opportunity allowed Craig to complete his most influential work, *The Art of the Theater,* published in 1905 with an introduction by Kessler. Among other theatrical endeavors, Kessler financed and coordinated the efforts of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Richard Strauss, and the Ballets Russes into *The Legend of Joseph,* a ballet that received its premiere in Paris in 1914.

Kessler went on to found the Cranach Press at Weimar, which produced some of the most exceptional publications of the fine-press printing movement including an edition of Virgil’s Ecologues illustrated by Aristide Maillol (1927), an edition of Shakespeare’s Hamlet illustrated by Gordon Criag (1929), and an edition of the Song of Songs with illustrations by Eric Gill (1931). Although Kessler’s activities turned increasing political in the 1920s and 30s, resulting in his exile from Germany in 1933, his patronage of a remarkable variety of artists and intellectuals remained constant. Called “probably the most cosmopolitan man who ever lived” by W. H. Auden, Kessler’s artistic endeavors in Germany, France, and England placed him at the intersection of modernist culture and politics throughout his life.

**References and Further Readings**

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Kessler\_Image 01: Harry Graf Kessler, 1898. Klassik Stiftung Weimar/ Fotothek.

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