

Critique de Hamlet

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Hamlet in Paris Times Magazine

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Traditionally, *Hamlet* has never fared very happily in France. Though many a good French writer has tried to translate that least Gallic of poems, the first to make a first-rate job of it was Hamlet-like André Gide. Last week Gide's translation was superbly presented on the stage. Long before all the brilliance of Paris rose to cheer the play's swift, incisive three and a half hours, it was clear that tradition was dead & buried. From now on Hamlet was going to be happy in Paris.

The tone, in large measure, remained Elizabethan. Costumes were sober; the dim-lighted sets were mainly just drapes of black and grey, so readily shifted for change of scene that the play flowed pauselessly as fate itself to its blood-slippery conclusion. The cast, down to the minor roles, played with assurance and conviction. Head & shoulders above



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TRANSLATOR GIDE

"Ainsi se brise un noble coeur."

this excellent support stood the Hamlet of Louis-Jean Barrault, onetime pantomimist and cinemactor, and a brilliant renegade from the *Comédie Française*. Barrault's Hamlet was real, immediate, full-bodied, and above all intelligent.

But however excellent the production and performance, the essence of great dramatic poetry is verbal, and the bottom of this play's new success was that André Gide had kept the greatness of great words in a new language. Samples:

O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
(Chair trop massive, Oh! Si tu pouvais fondre,  
T'évaporer, te résoudre en rosée!)

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
(Oh! Quel rustre je suis! Quel esclave informe!)

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night,  
sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!  
(Ainsi se brise un noble coeur. Bonne nuit, gentil prince.  
Que le chant de cohortes d'anges te conduise vers le repos!)

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