

BERNHARDT/HAMLET

FRANCE IN THE 1890's:

- Greetings: Curtsies and handshakes seem to be the way of the land in the 1890s. La bise -- or the air kiss on the cheek -- seems to have lost popularity (according to the following article) in the 14th century. This was due to the plague, and the greeting known as la bise didn't reappear until after WWI. Apparently it was the bourgeoisie who were most resistant to "la bise" because they believed it to be common, an opinion which lasted well into the mid-20th century.

<https://www.thelocal.fr/20171108/whats-in-a-kiss-the-story-of-the-french-bise>

- Photos/Video of Paris from the Lumiere Bros (late 1890s):

<https://mymodernmet.com/lumiere-brothers-1890s-paris/>

GENERAL/MISC:

[Mucha Foundation](#)

A recent interview with playwright Theresa Rebeck:

<http://www.playbill.com/article/why-theresa-rebecks-bernhardt-hamlet-keeps-getting-more-relevant>

Fencing with Laertes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_v_dP8s-8

A voice recording of *La Samaritaine* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjyB18FVGNc>

-p.1: visage: a person's facial expressions

-p.2: John-a-dreams: A daydreamer

-p. 5: Hecuba: A queen in Greek mythology, mother to 19 children, including sons Hector and Paris, and prophetess Cassandra. Also a play by Euripedes in 424 BC.

P. 10: "altar of Venus". Shakespeare's sonnet, Venus and Adonis:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/venus.html>

-p. 17: Lorenzaccio is a French play of the Romantic period written by Alfred de Musset in 1834, set in 16th-century Florence, and depicting Lorenzino de' Medici, who killed Florence's tyrant, Alessandro de' Medici, his cousin. (One of the many male roles played by Bernhardt).

-p. 57: Becherovka <https://becherovka.com/en/about>

Pronunciation: bek-kur-OHV-kuh liquor.com/video/10-spirits-becherovka/#gs.67iv9q

-p. 98: **EUGENE MORAND** and **MARCEL SCHWOB**. Morand was a playwright who wrote a play called *Izeyl*, that premiered in 1894 and starred Bernhardt. The two were collaborators on occasion in the following years as well.

<http://www.wv1plays.com/2015/05/sarah-bernhardt-and-les-cathedrales.html>

- Marcel Schwob: A French writer of mostly short stories. He's been called the precursor of Surrealism. Wrote, in 1894, *The Book of Monelle* (a gathering of literary and personal ruins written in a style that evokes both the Brothers Grimm and Friedrich Nietzsche), which many considered the bible of the French Symbolist movement.
- *Morand (who is called Paul in the following article) and Schwob were the writers who, in fact, did the prose translation of *Hamlet* for Ms. Bernhardt:
https://www.jstor.org/stable/370991?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

SARAH BERNHARDT: "A single minded will to conquer"

- Born the illegitimate daughter of a courtesan, an unknown father, and she was Jewish.
- Battled stage fright for her entire career (found ways to use that in performances)
- Started her schooling at a private school, followed by a Catholic school (in which mom had her baptized a Catholic); later attended Comédie-Française, most renowned theater at the time.
 - -Founded in 1680. Oldest theater company in the world
- Her first big success was at the Theatre Odeon. She played Zanetto in *Le Pasant*. This was the first of many male roles she was to play. **"It's not that I prefer male roles, it's that I prefer male minds."**
 - She played this role many times, including a performance in front of Napoleon III. (The two were rumored to be lovers at one point).
 - In 1870, when Paris was under siege by the Prussians, Sarah (a pledged Bonapartist) turned the Odeon into a field hospital, herself becoming a nurse.
- She later was a lover with Victor Hugo. Hugo was 43-years older than Bernhardt. The two were known as "The Goddess and The Genius".
- Prided herself on her ability to conquer men
- Played Phedre in *Phedre* by Jean Racine. Many called this the greatest performance of her career, one which made Oscar Wilde to note about Sarah. **"How vain and dull the common world must seem/ To such a one as thou."**
- 1st American tour in 1880, where she commanded \$1000/show and 50% of all box office receipts over \$4,000. It was the first of nine U.S. tours and she made 900,000 francs (roughly 5 million dollars at today's rate)
- Three years later, on the verge of bankruptcy and forced to hold a public auction
- A talented sculptress

- English actress Ellen Terry said of Bernhardt: ***“No one plays a love scene better, but it is a picture of love that she gives, a strange orchidaceous picture rather than a suggestion of human passion felt by ordinary human people.”***
- Very big on self-promotion, with an unconventional fashion sense



- Maybe one of the first celebrity product endorsers (makeup)
- A funeral fit for royalty. To get an idea of her world renown:
<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/funeral-of-sarah-bernhardt>

FRENCH FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE 1890s:

Some takeaways:

- The women’s fight for equality was slow and difficult in France.
- French religious, legal, and political structures created impediments to a women’s rights movement more severe than those in Britain and America
- 97% Catholic, meaning they adhered to the importance of obedience to authority
- Third Republic (1871-1940) still limited progress to women’s rights. Many of the Feminists during this time limited their demands in fear of upsetting a shaky regime
- ...were still developing their first large feminist organizations and just beginning to educate the French nation about feminist grievances. Indeed, even today, two hundred years after the French Revolution, many of the issues raised by the feminists in this anthology are still at the heart of debates.
- Did not earn the right to vote in France until 1945 (even though law signed into effect in 1944). New Zealand was the first nation to give women these rights, in 1893

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/women-19th-century-early-feminists>

BERNHARDT/DUSE RIVALRY:

-A brief bio of Eleonora Duse (pronounced do-zay, or so the internet tells me), who found fame in the 1890’s: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eleonora-Duse>

-Considered a rival to Bernhardt, thanks in large part to their different acting styles. (And Duse was playing all of the roles Bernhardt previously starred in.)

-Stylized acting of the time (Bernhardt) vs a new, internal contemplative style of acting (Duse)

- Acting, at the time, was more about postures and poses, with ideas that an actor should never turn their back on the audience, should always address another actor or the audience, and should declaim all lines w/authority -- not sotto voce --
- Duse went against all of this.

-Duse performed as Ophelia in 1878. *"Her way of acting is the truest and most natural that can be imagined."*

-In 1882, the theater Duse worked for, Teatro Carignano, was leased to Bernhardt's company for a month.

- Sarah was performing Camille. Duse attended all of the performances.
- Sarah's manager noticed Duse acting from her seat. (He also later was Duse's mgr.)
- Duse was enamored with Bernhardt, not only because of her star power but because of her business acumen. ***"A woman achieved all of that."***

ALPHONSE MUCHA:

Czech painter who leapt to fame in Paris in 1895 when his poster *Gismonda* (1894) for the superstar Sarah Bernhardt heralded the birth of the distinctive 'Style Mucha' and established him as the pre-eminent exponent of French Art Nouveau

CONSTANT COQUELIN

- One of the greatest performers of the age.
- An actor of unusual range and versatility.
- He could play classic roles (Figaro), lovers/poets (Cyrano, of which he originated), and old schoolmasters.
- Toured America with Bernhardt in 1900 ***[Still trying to see if he indeed was in Hamlet or not]**
- Was working on creating a character for Rostand's new play when he passed away in 1907
- Find out more here:
https://www.theatredatabase.com/19th_century/coquelin_aime_001.html.

CYRANO:

Act II, scene 4, which involves the reading of pages from *Cyrano*. This scene from *Cyrano* takes place about halfway through the play. *Cyrano* has already been writing letters from Christian to

Roxane for awhile now. In relation to p. 85, here's how the dialogue originally appears in *Cyrano*:

CHRISTIAN: Your throat...If only I might... kiss it--

ROXANE: Christian!

CHRISTIAN: I love you so!

ROXANE (makes as if to rise): Again?

CHRISTIAN (desperately, restraining her): No, not again-- I do not love you--

ROXANE (Settles back): That is better

CHRISTIAN: I adore you!

ROXANE: Oh!-- (Rises and moves away)

CHRISTIAN: I know; I grow absurd.

ROXANE (Coldly): And that displeases me As much as if you had grown ugly.

EDMOND ROSTAND:

- Best known play was *Cyrano* (premiered when he was only 29 years old.)
- A full biography of Rostand wasn't even available in English until 2003, 85 years after his death.
- Son of a well-to-do and cultured family.
- 1st play was *The Romanesques*, a variation on the themes of *Romeo and Juliet*. (This was later adapted into *The Fantasticks*.)
- Never again met the success he had with *Cyrano*. Eventually retired to the country, struggled with marital stability, and passed away at age 50. For more: <https://www.gradesaver.com/author/edmond-rostand>

HAMLET:

-There seems to be a consensus that the character of Hamlet is between 25 and 30 years old, with many leaning towards 30.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/hamletsage.html>

LOUIS:

MAURICE: Son of Sarah Bernhardt

- Born in 1864. (Died in 1928)
- His father was Prince de Ligne from Belgium. The father didn't acknowledge Maurice as his child until Maurice was in his 20's. And this was only because Maurice was engaged to a Polish princess. Maurice's response: "I'm a Bernhardt."
- Habitual gambling problem, always owing money. His mother usually paid off his debts.
- Spoiled shamefully by Sarah. Nothing was too beautiful for Maurice.

- Nearly died as an infant in a fire. Sarah, who was afraid of fire, rushed into the building to save her only son.
- Love playwriting and fencing. In fact, Maurice took part in many duels, taking quick offense when someone said something disparaging about his mother.
- Very close with his mother

ROSAMOND: (Rosemonde Gerard)

- Wife to Rostand. A poet and writer in her own right.
- Sacrificed her own talent and career to support her husband.
- Best known for these lines (taken from a poem she wrote:
*Car, vois-tu, chaque jour je t'aime davantage,
Aujourd'hui plus qu'hier et bien moins que demain.*

Translation: (For, you see, each day I love you more,
Today more than yesterday and less than tomorrow.)

- Two sons with Edmond, Maurice and Jean.
- Later wrote a play -- later also a film -- with Maruice called *A Good Little Devil*. Mary Pickford starred in both.

SARAH BERNHARDT THEATRE:

Originally **Théâtre de la Ville** (meaning the City Theatre), the theatre in In 1899 was renamed Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt after the renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt, who produced there from 1899 for nearly two decades. She opened with a revival of one of her great roles, Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca*. Other productions included a revival of **Edmond Rostand's** *La Samaritaine* and the premiere of his *L'Aiglon* in which she played Napoleon's son (the **Duke of Reichstadt**). Another well known breeches part was the title role of **Marcel Schwob's** adaptation of *Hamlet*. After her death in 1923 the theatre continued under **her son Maurice** for several years. After his death in 1928 the theatre kept the name Sarah Bernhardt until the **Occupation of France** by the Germans in World War II,¹ when the name was changed to Théâtre de la Cité because of Bernhardt's **Jewish** ancestry.



TIMELINE:

- 1844: Sarah born
- 1864: Maurice born
- 1880: Sarah's 1st American tour
- 1883: Sarah declares bankruptcy
- 1890: Edmond and Rosamond wed (April)
- 1895: Edmond's 1st play with Sarah, *La Princesse Lointaine*, premieres. (April)
- 1897: *Cyrano* premieres
- 1899: Bernhardt buys her own theater, at age 55. Signs 25-year lease
- 1899: Bernhardt's *Hamlet* premieres

