

Historical Glossary

- ★ **Becherovka:** Becherovka, also known as Becher's Bitter, is a traditional Czech herbal liquor with a gingery/cinnamon flavor. In 1900, Alphonse Mucha collaborated with the brand to create a promotional poster, enthusiastic to work with a brand that aligned with his Czechoslovakian roots.
- ★ **Breeches/Breeches Roles:** The term "breeches role," originating in the 17th century English Restoration, refers to the practice of a woman playing a traditionally male theatrical role. The concept arose in 1662, when King Charles II reopened theaters following the English Civil War and decreed that women would perform on professional stages for the first time in the nation's history. Subverting the old custom of young boys playing women's roles in the theater, women began performing in traditionally male roles for comedic or dramatic effect. The breeches, or trousers, that women donned onstage for these roles were considered alluring for male patrons, as they highlighted the actresses' legs in a way that would be deemed inappropriate outside the theater.
- ★ **Richard Burbage:** Richard Burbage (1568-1619) was a famous English actor, best known for his friendship and collaborations with William Shakespeare. The two were both members of an acting company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which first produced many of Shakespeare's works. Burbage was a frequent leading man for Shakespeare, originating such iconic roles as Romeo, Lear, Othello, Richard III, Macbeth, and Hamlet himself.
- ★ **Camille:** *Camille* refers to Sarah Bernhardt's signature role as Marguerite Gautier in Alexandre Dumas' 1852 play *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias). The play centers on the tragic romance between a young courtesan and a bourgeois man named Armand Duval. When the two fall in love, Marguerite gives up her way of life to be with him, before ultimately deciding to return to it in an attempt to save his reputation from the risk of being associated with her. Her harrowing death sequence, as she succumbs to illness in her lover's arms, quickly became an iconic staple in Bernhardt's repertoire. Biographers report that she performed in the role over 3,000 times throughout her life, both on stage and in film. (Fun fact: during Bernhardt's brief marriage to a Greek aristocrat named Jacques Damala, the people of Paris frequently referred to him as "La Damala aux Camélias")
- ★ **Cyrano de Bergerac:** *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand is one of the most enduringly successful French plays of all time. The play follows its titular character, a swordsman and brilliant poet with an unusually large nose, as he helps his handsome yet inarticulate friend Christian court a woman named Roxane. The tragic love story unfolds as Cyrano writes beautiful love letters to

Roxane in Christian's name, all while he pines for her in secret, feeling unworthy of her affection due to his appearance.

- The play premiered on December 28, 1897, at Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in Paris with Constant Coquelin playing the lead role. *Cyrano* was an instant success, receiving over an hour of applause and 42 consecutive curtain calls on its opening night.
- The play's dedication reads, "I wished to dedicate this play to Cyrano's soul, but since his soul has now passed into you, Coquelin, it is to you that I dedicate it."

★ **Duse:** Eleanora Duse (1858-1924) was an Italian actress and Sarah Bernhardt's most infamous rival. Although Duse looked up to Bernhardt as a young actress herself, the two were constantly pitted against each other by the press due to their conflicting acting styles. Whilst Bernhardt represented the more grandiose and gestural traditional acting style, Duse was praised for her subtlety and naturalism. Their rivalry came to a dramatic head in 1895, when the two starred in concurrent productions of Hermann Sudermann's play *Magda* across the street from one another. Critics jumped at the opportunity to use one woman's portrayal of the title role to detract from the other's, with a particularly scathing comment from George Bernard Shaw calling Bernhardt's "childishly egotistical."

★ **Gismonda:** *Gismonda* refers to the four-act melodramatic play by Victorien Sardou that follows a widowed duchess who vows to marry the commoner who saves her son from a tiger. The play premiered at Sarah Bernhardt's Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1894, but it was her January 1895 revival of the show that sparked her famous artistic collaboration with Czech painter Alphonse Mucha.

- Differing accounts of the story say that Mucha was either a temp or merely doing a favor for a friend at the Paris printing firm Lemercier & Compagnie, when Bernhardt approached during the Christmas season of 1894. Despite the quick turnaround (the show opened on January 4), Bernhardt, being unhappy with the existing promotional materials for her upcoming production, requested a new poster to advertise the show. Due to the holidays, the firm's professional artists were away with their families, so Mucha was saddled with the task that would end up launching his artistic career into global renown.

★ **Herodotus:** Herodotus refers to the Greek historian and geographer who wrote the book *Histories*. *Histories* is cited by scholars to have both thematically and narratively influenced William Shakespeare's major works, such as *Titus Andronicus*, *Coriolanus*, and *Macbeth*.

★ **Holinshed:** Holinshed refers to Raphael Holinshed (1529-1580), an English chronicler best known for his work compiling, editing, and writing *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (commonly known as "Holinshed's

Chronicles”). Scholars point to Holinshed’s Chronicles as a primary historical source for Shakespeare’s English history plays and tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

- ★ **Sir Henry Irving:** Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) was a famous English actor whose 1874 portrayal of Hamlet at London’s Lyceum Theatre ran for a record-breaking 200 consecutive nights. His performance was praised for its sense of realism and psychological interiority, defying more traditional acting trends of the time.
- ★ **Edmund Kean:** Edmund Kean (1787-1833) was a famous English Shakespearean actor who achieved great success performing *Hamlet* as a regular part of his repertoire. He first played the role at age 14 at the York Theatre, returning to it as an adult beginning in 1814 at the Drury Lane Theatre in London. His performances were critically divisive due to his emotional realism and brooding intensity in the role.
- ★ **L’Aiglon:** *L’Aiglon* refers to the six-act historical drama written by Edmond Rostand for Sarah Bernhardt in 1900. The play follows Napoleon Bonaparte’s son, called “the Eaglet,” as he bears the weight of his ailing health, his political responsibilities, and his father’s legacy. *L’Aiglon* premiered on March 15, 1900 at Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, with Bernhardt herself playing the title role of Napoleon II. The show received immediate commercial and critical acclaim, in large part due to Bernhardt’s subversive performance in the role.
- ★ **La Samaritaine:** *La Samaritaine*, which translates to “The Woman of Samaria,” refers to the religious drama written by Edmond Rostand that premiered in 1897 at Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris. The play was inspired by the Gospel of John and tells the story of Photine, a Samaritan woman played by Sarah Bernhardt, who has a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, leading her to convert to Christianity and share his teachings with the people of Samaria. *La Samaritaine* marked Rostand and Bernhardt’s second artistic collaboration after the failure of his 1895 play *La Princesse Lointaine* (The Faraway Princess).
- ★ **Lorenzaccio:** *Lorenzaccio* refers to the 1832 French historical play by Alfred de Musset. With inspiration drawn heavily from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the play recounts Lorenzo de Medici’s assassination of his tyrannical cousin, the ruler of Florence, and his subsequent fall from grace as he fails to establish a fair government for Florence in the aftermath. Despite being written as a closet drama, Sarah Bernhardt staged and starred in the first production of *Lorenzaccio* in 1896 at her Théâtre de la Renaissance. Her portrayal of Lorenzo de Medici became one of the many iconic “trouser roles” she inhabited throughout her career.
- ★ **William Macready:** William Macready (1793-1873) was a famous English stage actor best known for his work playing iconic Shakespearean roles such as Iago,

Lear, Othello, and Richard II. His portrayal of Hamlet, which premiered at London's Drury Lane Theatre in 1834, was famous for the more refined and intellectual sensibility Macready brought to the role.

- ★ **Medea:** *Medea* refers to one of the most iconic tragedies in theatre history. Conceived by Euripides in 431 B.C.E. Athens and famously adapted by Seneca in 50 C.E. Rome, *Medea* follows its titular character on a journey to carry out revenge against her unfaithful husband, Jason, who leaves her for a princess. Despite this revenge plot, including the murder of Jason's new wife, father-in-law, and their shared children, all of Medea's acts of violence are carried out offstage in Euripides' version of the play, which Sarah Bernhardt performed in 1898 at her Théâtre de la Renaissance.
- ★ **Eugène Morand & Marcel Schwab:** Sarah Bernhardt commissioned French writers Eugène Morand (1853-1930) and Marcel Schwab (1867-1905) to write a new French prose translation for her production of *Hamlet* in 1899. After its premiere on May 20, 1899 at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt in Paris, Bernhardt brought the production on multiple European and American tours. Morand and Schwab's translation was praised by critics for bringing a fresh, psychologically-driven approach to the lead role. Their *Hamlet* rendition had a runtime of over 4 hours, retaining more of Shakespeare's original text than any other adaptation at the time.
- ★ **Plutarch:** Plutarch refers to the Greek-Roman philosopher who famously wrote a series of biographies titled *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (also called *Parallel Lives*). These biographies are frequently cited by scholars as sources for Shakespeare's later Roman plays *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.
- ★ **Mr. Shaw:** George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was an Irish critic and playwright, most famous for his 1913 play *Pygmalion* (later adapted into the musical *My Fair Lady*). Shaw served as one of Sarah Bernhardt's loudest and most consistently negative critics for the majority of her career, claiming her acting to be superficial and self-important (additionally going so far as to develop the term "Bernhardtian" to critique the work of other actors). Shaw also served as a key player in the rivalry between Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse, using his famous 1895 essay "Duse and Bernhardt" to publicly endorse Duse's performance in Hermann Sudermann's play *Magda* while harshly criticizing Bernhardt's.