

# The New Criterion

## Theater

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### Antique Romans & the Dane

by [Kevin D. Williamson](#)

On Jude Law in *Hamlet*, the Atlantic Theater Company's *Two Unrelated Plays* by David Mamet, Collaborative Stages's *House of Yes*, and *The Retributionists* by Daniel Goldfarb.

T. S. Eliot called *Hamlet* the “*Mona Lisa* of literature,” and he suspected that “more people have thought *Hamlet* a work of art because they found it interesting than have found it interesting because it is a work of art.” In his brief notes on the play, “Hamlet and His Problems,” Eliot argued that the great temptation is to take Hamlet the character, rather than *Hamlet* the play, as the relevant question at hand. Which is to say, Eliot saw *Hamlet* endure into the age of psychology.

Shakespeare had no language for psychology and, having art at his disposal, needed none; in our own leaden times psychology has largely supplanted art and religion, and so the temptation to treat *Hamlet* as an exercise in psychoanalysis—one that marginalizes the remainder of the drama—is near irresistible. Every performance of *Hamlet* ...

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