

Hamlet at St Donats Arts Centre

The Bard is nearly out-paced

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

I USED to play a game. I re-wrote synopses which were designed to shorten well-known plays and operas.

Thus a starving painter in a garret is visited by a consumptive young lady who drops her key which he immediately finds and gives back to her. Thank you, she says. Goodnight Rudolfo. Goodnight Mimi. End of *La Boheme*.

So in *Hamlet*, the Prince and Horatio go out in the dead of night to await the reappearance of the ghost. But it never turns up.

Cold and tired, the Prince and Horatio return to bed. End of *Hamlet* the play.

As it happened, the production of *Hamlet* by the Actors Touring Company could not have been further from such a synopsis.

For that ghost scene in which the dead king reappeared as part ghost, part elephant man, was both psychologically violent and physically exciting and provided, as so few productions do, the all-important motivational force for the rest of the play.

Another such pivotal scene in this production was the brilliant mime of the travelling players; a virtuosic tour de force which provided a crucial psychological pivot for Mark Brickman's interpretation of the play.

This is a fast-paced staging in which Red Army guards, a ghost as Commendatore and a punk Hamlet as angry young man (well played by Louis Hilyer) followed each other in quick succession.

There were as a consequence inevitable misfits when the production stumbled over Shakespeare's wordy speeches when the pace of the action demanded shorter dialogue.

Nevertheless the ATC production of *Hamlet* illuminated the narrative strands and psychological motivations to an exceptional degree.

In addition Tam Dean Burn as Claudius and the ghost held the attention, when given the opportunity, by digging beneath the surface of his characters and communicating greater expressiveness than one normally finds in them.

No prizes for identifying the well-known speech not in its customary position in this stimulating production, which continues at St Donats until Saturday.