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"ENCLOSED" AND "OPEN" FORMS

IN MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

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John Dearnley Dawick

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ABSTRACT

This study examines structural patterns in plays by Pinero, Shaw, O'Casey, Eliot, Arden and Pinter, and proposes that there are, in broad terms, two types of play structure - "enclosed" and "open" - which may be usefully differentiated for this purpose. The first type is characterised by its precise articulation of the action within a regularly-shaped, often symmetrical framework, and the second by its juxtaposition of strands of action or thematically illustrative episodes within a comparatively loose framework. It is contended that a polarity between these types of structure is demonstrable in modern English drama and has been a significant factor in its development.

Part One of the study examines Pinero's social dramas and Shaw's disquisitory plays, analysing the contrasting methods of theatrical patterning used by these writers and discussing why they used these methods. Shaw's opposition to the deterministic effect of Pinero's "well-made" structures is emphasised, and his development of a much more fluid technique whereby the play was allowed "to write and shape itself" is considered in some detail. Part Two of the study considers later modifications and developments of the structural approaches exemplified in the plays of Pinero and Shaw. In the first chapter of Part Two, plays by O'Casey and Arden are analysed to show how these writers have used "open" structure techniques, comparable to those of Shaw, to express broadly similar points of view. In the other chapter to Part Two, plays by Eliot and Pinter are analysed to show the contribution of these writers to the development of a new type of "enclosed" play, as precisely articulated as Pinero's but without the explicit causality of the "well-made" play. It is suggested that this type of structure, while basically "enclosed" in character, represents a partial synthesis of "open" and "enclosed" form.

PREFACE

The aims, scope and methods of this thesis are set out in the introductory chapter. Here I wish simply to note several features relating to the presentation of material in this volume, and to acknowledge assistance which I have received.

The nature of this thesis has required a large number of citations from the plays which I discuss. Documentation of these in the text would be wasteful of space; I have, therefore, adopted the practice of noting in parentheses the page numbers of the editions I have used. The editions are described fully at the end of the chapter in which they have been cited. I have also listed all notes at the ends of chapters (see Contents), partly for the sake of presenting a relatively uncluttered text, and partly to facilitate cross-reference between notes. Thirdly, the "scenario graphs" are bound into the text facing the pages where they are first discussed (see Table of Figures). The use of right-hand margins enables the reader to refer easily from them to the discussions.

I would like to thank Professor S. Musgrove and Mr. S. Black, of the English Department at the University of Auckland; Mr. G. Rowell, of the Drama Department at the University of Bristol; and Professor R. G. Frean, of the English Department at Massey University, for their generous assistance and advice at various stages of my research and writing. I would also like to thank Mrs. Martine McComish and Miss Ann Muschamp, of the Illustrator's Department at Massey University, for drawing the final copies of the "scenario graphs", and my wife, Anona, for her typing.

Some of the discussion on Pinter and Shaw in Chapters 5 and 3 has appeared in Modern Drama XIV, 37-46 (May, 1971) and XIV, 276-287 (December, 1971).

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