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THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA  
THE DARK COMEDY  
THE DRAMATIC EXPERIENCE  
SHAKESPEARE'S STAGECRAFT  
CHEKHOV IN PERFORMANCE  
THE CHALLENGE OF THE THEATRE  
(*Dickenson*)

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*Drama, Stage and  
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## *Prefatory note*

*Drama, Stage and Audience* is another attempt to embrace the most embracing of all art forms. It tries to shine the light on the sources of true theatrical excitement, what it is that creates a moment of life on the stage, what it is that generates energy in living theatre.

My first choice of a title was, indeed, *Dramatic Perception*, since, of course, any power in a play derives from the activity of perception in its audience. The book is a reminder that drama is not made of words alone, but of sights and sounds, stillness and motion, noise and silence, relationships and responses. Yet: these relationships and responses are not those between characters, rather those between actor and audience. Drama study insists, therefore, that we think of a particular social situation, a here-and-now – or (imperious demand!) a there-and-then recreated in the imagination to be a here-and-now. It should come as no surprise that most of the discussion turns on the work of the man whose dramatic stimuli are the richest: Shakespeare.

The script on the page is not the drama any more than a clod of earth is a field of corn: it is essential constantly to return to this. The words of *Hamlet* are merely signals for communication, in which (heresy, still, to some) the unspoken can be as important as the spoken, in which the nighted colour of the Prince's costume can be as urgent as the stroke of a poetic image. Thus, the criticism of drama must imply a study of stimulus and reaction, but this is a social study concerned with all the vagaries of human social behaviour.

As a genre, drama can never be on a par with the story or the poem. Thus Northrop Frye's 'simple' basis of generic distinctions in literature, which he finds in 'the radical of presentation,' suggesting that the genre is marked as dramatic when words are acted in front of a spectator (*Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 246–7), assumes in the theatre the primacy of language. That this is radical is obviously untrue to any playgoer. When the spectator sees words acted, it is immediately apparent that something beyond the words, the primacy of the occasion, is paramount.

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What that occasion is, whether the presence of the actor and what he does, the constitution of the audience, the nature of the play-house, or the role of the theatre in its society, it is our duty to find out before criticism can begin.

Some passages in this book have been taken or adapted from articles previously published in the following periodicals: *College English Association Critic*, *Comparative Drama*, *Costerus Essays in English and American Language and Literature*, *Educational Theatre Journal*, *Genre*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Speech and Drama*. I wish in addition to acknowledge by name some of my former students who contributed to the ideas which shaped this book: Gorman Beauchamp, Patricia Cornett, B. G. Cross, Elliott Denniston, Peter Ferran, Daniel Melcher, Barbra Morris, Michael Neuman, Bruce Sajdak, Douglas Sprigg.

J.L.S.