A CRITICAL STUDY OF
CHRISTOPHER FRY'S POETIC PLAYS

ABSTRACT

Thesis submitted for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

ENGLISH

BY

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
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ABSTRACT

In the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century three dramatists, namely Yeats, Eliot and Fry, occupy a more prominent and distinguished place than such others as Stephen Phillips, John Masefield, Lascelles Abercrombie etc. Whereas the plays of Yeats and Eliot have drawn considerable critical attention and they have been assessed and evaluated with regard to their achievement as dramatists as well as with reference to their contribution to the concerted endeavour of a host of dramatists to revive poetic drama in an age of prose and reinstate it to its pristine glory. Fry has been assessed as a mere bold landmark in this movement. His plays, as a composite unit, have not been studied. There aren’t many book length studies on all the plays of Fry discussing their various dramaturgical components. Majority of the studies on individual plays have concentrated on whether his brilliant verse is dramatically ‘in character’. The present study has been undertaken with a view to analysing all the aspects of his individual plays thematically, technically and stylistically to determine whether Fry had a glow-worm type of brilliance only or he had intrinsic merits of a literary dramatist. Moreover, the movement of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century cannot be completely ignored in any serious study of his plays.

Our analysis of Fry’s ten plays in the present study amply establishes that he is a greater craftsman than the other two stalwarts in the revival of poetic drama or to be more precise verse drama, in our age of prose, i.e. Yeats and Eliot. He learnt considerable lessons from the mistakes made by his predecessors in forging a theatrically viable verse form for drama, which could be well-received by the audience, used for a long time, to hearing realistic prose dialogue in commercial theatres. Fry kept well in his mind Yeats’ precept that the theatre should provide intellectual entertainment
rather than titillating dramatic experiences of an ephemeral nature. This is why he does not avoid abstractions and explorations of spiritual experiences in the human psyche. Even his most successfully crafted play, with a novel technique, i.e. *A Sleep of Prisoners*, uses expressionistic types as characters with apparently incoherent interactions with a deeper unity and quite often staccato utterances strewn over with fine lyrical blossomings.

Though Fry did not abandon Yeatsean philosophic incursions into his themes, but he was careful to avoid Yeats' esotericism and stick to conventional human and religious transcendental concepts. He knew it only too well, which both Yeats and Eliot had ignored, that drama should have human values too even though the themes might be professedly religious as we have seen in his religious plays.

Fry enthusiasts have hailed him as a great innovator of a novel verse form for drama in the last century. Of course, we have echoes in his plays of Yeatsean terseness and austerity in his verbal medium and of Eliot's conviction of rejecting the Shakespearean blank verse tradition, he falls short of Eliot's use of the ordinary language moulded in a rhythmic pattern of verse libre which can resonate with the deepest stirrings of human emotions. Eliot achieved this at least in his *Murder in the Cathedral*. Fry's verbal medium in his religious plays shows an evenly distributed variety suitable to different characters with occasional ritualistic cadences, lyrical effusions, hymnal simplicity and even uncouth rusticity. But his verbal style in the Festival comedies is characterized by brilliance, which sometimes is too dazzling. The irresistible and unbarraged flow of words, besides sweeping the audience perforce, may become counter productive as their interest in the happening on the stage may be misdirected. Very often the unfamiliar similes, metaphors and puns prove obstructive rather than conducive to the effect of immediacy, which is the hallmark of dramatic dialogue.

Fry has demonstrated in his seasonal comedies that verse can be a viable medium of comedy, even in a realistic comedy, which had
traditionally used only prose as its medium. Fry’s poetry, as we have seen during the analyses of his plays, is rich and even extravagant to the extent of being verbose. His comic characters are the most ingenuous inventor of dazzling words and other verbal and figurative devices. Thomas Mendip in *The Lady’s Not For Burning*, the Duke and his son in *Venus Observed* and Tegeus in *A Phoenix too Frequent*, are the memorable creations of Fry in this regard. Where Fry’s achievement in regard to the verbal medium is substantial, no doubt, one sometimes feels that the dramatic personae’s verbosity tends to take precedence over the intrinsic dramatic concerns.

But Fry himself has defended his verbal style vis-à-vis his themes and purpose that in his comedies language, mood, atmosphere and themes are inseparably blended. For example, the brilliance, verbosity and occasional pomposity of the verbal medium in *The Lady’s Not For Burning* are in keeping with the season, the themes, the traits of characters and the entire mood of the play. Where the mood, the season, the atmosphere, etc. are not properly integrated the brilliance of the language is diluted considerably, such as in *A Yard of Sun*. However, language is both Fry’s strength as well as weakness. There is no denying the truth that his verbal style on several occasions becomes deficient in the effect of immediacy. One, however, does not feel that Fry’s language is under any pressure of emotions, feelings or thoughts for expression. His poetry does lack the rhythmic modulations we find in Eliot and seems to be too artificial and made up to sudden shift of emotions or turns of situations. This perhaps explains why Fry’s type of poetry did not attract followers. In the 1940’s and early 1950’s it looked as though the verse plays of Fry might establish a new mode of modern poetic drama. But the airy exuberance of Fry’s imagery and the wit (half boisterous, half wistful) displayed in his handling of characters and situation proved in the end to be more of a fashionable exhibitionism than a wholly successful confrontation of the problems involved in producing a drama that was both artistically effective and contemporary in feeling.
If we look at Fry’s creation of major dramatic personae, we are bound to conclude that Fry’s achievement in this regard cannot be overestimated. His characters mostly float over the surface reality of human existence. They only occasionally demonstrate inner stirrings arising from a conflict. In the religious plays the major characters are either embodiments of concepts and ideas or they are being inspired by supernatural forces. Moses in *The Firstborn* has the potential of developing into a complex human character, which is only temporarily glimpsed at the moment when he realises that the curse on the firstborns will not spare the innocent Ramses. The role of the deus-ex-machina leaves little room for the development of a credible living character.

In the seasonal comedies, we have human issues and human characters. But the thematic issues are so loudly pronounced that the characters are polarized on the sides of opposing ideas. In *A Phoenix too Frequent* and *The Lady’s Not For Burning* the opposing ideas are death wish and urge for life. The characters from the beginning of these plays belong either to the negative or the positive camp as far as their initial attitude to life is concerned. Dynamene and Thomas appear as obsessed with death-wish because they have a benighted vision about the joys of living. Contrasted with them are Tegeus and Jennet who can see that life, in spite of patches of clouds of hardships, is worth living. They are symbolical of the Life Force. These contrasted pairs collide and the negative side of the attitude to life is fully won over by the positive urge for life. These pairs of characters in their verbal interaction fail to demonstrate any deep emotional involvement or inner conflict. Somehow these characters are unable to enlist our sympathy for them on account of their confrontation with the mysterious forces affecting human predicament. Even in *Venus Observed* where Fry has used a theme with a powerful potential for probing deep into the human psyche, the amorous confrontation between the youth and old age lacks emotional dimensions.

However, Fry tries to exploit the enormous potential of portraying the Complexity of the character of Henry Plantagenet in his
history play, *Curtmantle*. But here, too, he fails to exploit the dramatic potential of the complex relationship involving human, political, religious and spiritual values. When the characters interact, they appear more as windbags than living human beings.

To try to evaluate Fry’s achievement as a verse dramatist only with regard to his verbal medium will be less than doing justice to his dramatic artistry. Unlike many of his predecessors, who endeavoured to restore poetic drama to its pristine glory, Fry realized that drama to be successful on the stage should have clear cut and logically developed story element and that whatever the intention of the dramatist, the artist’s concern should be entertainment. It was for this reason that all his plays have substantial story content, which is easily comprehensible. The only play which is likely to present some problem is *A Sleep of Prisoners* where the technical experiment is not transparent to make us comprehend the unity of vision which is achieved through a progression of the successive dreams on the line of ascendancy of the perception of divine design of redemption for humanity and the instrumentality of suffering to purification. Here the spiritual significance is akin to what Eliot has presented in *The Waste Land* and is only, too, well known to a student of Indian philosophic and spiritual systems.

One test of Fry’s intrinsic worth as a great dramatist is that his serio-comic plays, on which his reputation solidly rests, give the audience a unique dramatic experience when performed on the stage. If one ventures to merely narrate the dramatic action the listener will get only the husk without the taste and flavour of the kernel, which is a composite artifact, created by all the dramaturgical components of a play. Even though Fry does not have any significant line of followers in their attempt to revive poetic drama in the prosaic age of ours, he has shown the path which future revivalists of poetic drama will hopefully follow.
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of Ms. Shazia Rizvi on *A Critical Study of Christopher Fry's Poetic Plays* is the outcome of her own research on the subject carried out under my supervision.

It is a fairly satisfactory and original effort.

(Rahatullah Khan)  
Reader in English  
(Supervisor)
PREFACE

In the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century three dramatists, namely Yeats, Eliot and Fry, occupy a more prominent and distinguished place than such others as Stephen Phillips, John Masefield, Lascelles Abercrombie etc. Whereas the plays of Yeats and Eliot have drawn considerable critical attention and they have been assessed and evaluated with regard to their achievement as dramatists as well as with reference to their contribution to the concerted endeavour of a host of dramatists to revive poetic drama in an age of prose and reinstate it to its pristine glory. Fry has been assessed as a mere bold landmark in this movement. His plays, as a composite unit, have not been studied. There aren’t many book-length studies on all the plays of Fry discussing their various dramaturgical components. Majority of the studies on individual plays have concentrated on whether his brilliant verse is dramatically ‘in character’. The present study has been undertaken with a view to analysing all the aspects of his individual plays thematically, technically and stylistically to determine whether Fry had a glow-worm type of brilliance only or he had intrinsic merits of a literary dramatist. Moreover, the movement of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century cannot be completely ignored in any serious study of his plays.
In our analysis of the plays we have tried to demonstrate that Fry, who had learnt his lessons from the failure of his predecessor, successfully exploits the hitherto untapped potential of comedy to present the serious human issues which had been the concern of tragic drama only. He was a great optimist and hence this form of drama was more conducive to the fulfilment of his dramatic intention. Fry’s plays confirm the old belief that instruction or edification through drama can best be conveyed if a play is entertaining. The main source of entertainment in Fry’s plays are a bundle of eclectically selected devices from the past dramatic conventions, such as suspense, wit, quick repartee and above all the brilliant language with the richness of choicest words strange collocations and figurative devices. Fry’s uniqueness lies in his serious concern with mystery embedded in human life and the cosmic and divinely ordered universe, which has been presented in a mood and atmosphere suffused with laughter and occasional frivolity.

The study has been arranged in six chapters. The first chapter deals with the relevant information affecting the growth of Fry’s dramatic imagination, influences on his mind shaping his concept of poetic drama, a brief history of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century and a statement about the purpose of the present study. The second chapter contains in its different sections analysis of Fry’s religious plays. The third chapter contains, again in separate sections, analysis of Fry’s five
serio-comic plays The fourth and fifth chapters, respectively, are
devoted to the study of Fry's only tragic, play *The Firstborn* and his only
historical play, *Curtmantle*. The final chapter (on conclusion) gives an
estimate of Fry as a dramatist At the end a select bibliography has been
given.

In the preparation of the present study I owe immense gratitude to
my Supervisor, Dr. Rahatullah Khan, Prof S Waqar Hussain Chairman,
Department of English AMU, and other teachers I am thankful to the
staff of the Mualana Azad library AMU, British Council, New Delhi and
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My aunt, who helped me acquire primary and secondary materials
from England, deserves special mention here The help and practical
cooperation besides love and moral support, which I received from my
parents and my loving brothers Imran and Ahetsham can't be expressed in
words. Finally I am also grateful to Mr Fazal Khan who did the typing
work with more than professional interest.

(SHAZIA RIZVI)
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Chapter: I

Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Though Christopher Fry, born in 1907, belongs to the main stream of the revival of poetic drama during the last century. Recognition to him as a dramatist of some intrinsic and theatrical worth came only after the Second World War when his play, *The Lady's Not For Burning*, was premiered at the Arts Theatre Club in London in 1948. However, before the War three of his religious plays had already been performed and one of them was published, too. In fact, despite his being interested in the theatre since his childhood, Fry took to writing of plays with the critical applause he received after the success of his *The Lady's Not For Burning* not only in England but across the Atlantic, too. The play won the prestigious ‘Shaw Prize’ for the best play of the year. The theatre critics and reviewers were very generous in their praise of Fry whom they described as a contemporary Shakespeare because of a number of resemblances between the devices used by the great Elizabethan writer of comedies and Fry. However, these reviewers did more discredit to him and helped raise his reputation by showing merely superficial resemblances between Fry’s alleged slavish imitation of Shakespearean devices and Shakespeare’s masterly use of the same. Before we attempt to show how the Fry enthusiasts are clearly classifiable between two opposite camps, praising as well as debunking him for the same dramaturgical traits, it is relevant to give a brief biographical sketch of Fry to demonstrate those factors which shaped his dramatic genius.
Fry was born at Bristol on 18 December 1907 in a family with religious background. His father, Charles John Harris was known as a Christian socialist. He worked as a lay-preacher in the parish of St. Agnes where he gave all his time and attention to the needy people. When he died Fry was only three years old and his elder brother was nine. His mother and aunt, both religious women, brought up Fry and his brother. During his early childhood his aunt used to read out to him passages from Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which entered deep into the recesses of his mind. The religious environment of Fry’s early life and his interest in music and the performing arts shaped his mind suitably for a professional stage career. He was sent to the best Bedford Modern School for his early education. Fry did not find formal schooling likeable to the inclination of his mind. He recalls his dislike for formal English studies, which we quote below:

> I remember myself at the age of ten or eleven being mildly interested in some of it, though some things about it seemed very eccentric. An extraordinary mount of fuss was made about triangles, for instance, though so far as I could see, triangles hardly occurred in the world at all --- so there were times when my attention wandered---- I hadn’t seen that --- education – a world that means a leading out-- would lead me out beyond any thing I could have dreamed of.\(^1\)
But Fry took a keen interest in writing and precociously enough he wrote a farce when he was only eleven, a poem when he was twelve and at the age of fourteen in acted an unpublished verse play. His first play *Youth and Peregrines*, not yet published, was written when he was seventeen, a year before he left his school. This play was eventually produced in 1934 when Fry was director of Wells Repertory Players at Tunbridge Wells. After leaving it, he took up a teaching job at school and then left it for a career in acting and did some roles in small amateur theatres. He kept on changing his acting theatres—first, Limpsfield, Surrey, and then Bath where he joined the Citizen House. He was uncertain during his early career of acting about the stability of this profession and then for the sake of sustaining himself he reverted to teaching once again. This was a period of uncertainly, despair and inability to choose for himself. He has expressed this feeling in his dedication of *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951) to Robert Gitting who constantly encouraged him to write plays. Fry until the outbreak of the Second World War took up all sort of odd jobs, but all related to the theatre from composing music, writing reviews to acting, and even writing plays, specially the Festival plays which were quite often commissioned.

After he was discharged from his duties in the War, Fry gave himself over to the writing of poetic plays. In the meantime, he had assimilated the Bible, Bunyan, Shakespeare, and the Greek and Roman myths. Besides these, the influences of Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, Browne, Bergson, Wordsworth, Chekhov, to name only the most significant ones,
all combined to give unique fibre to the style of his plays, which were to appear during the forties and fifties of the last century. The style of Fry's post-war plays is chiefly witty, metaphorically opulent, hyperbolic, and rather too brilliant. The style becomes the main source of entertainment. Its irony, functional bombast, comical rhetoric, witty repartee, occasional lyricism and sometimes deliberate ambiguities are a pointer to Fry's assimilation of the stylistic tradition of drama from Shakespeare, through the Restoration play-wrights to the nineteenth-century stalwarts like Ibsen, Wilde and Shaw. This, however, is one side of the story of Fry's indebtedness to his predecessors. The other side of the story relates to his anxiety for the revival of poetic drama in a way it can entertain the popular audience in a commercial theatre. Here a cursory glance at what has already happened in this direction will be quite relevant.

We know that poetic drama in England has had its efflorescence during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Besides profound poetic elements and a most flexible blank verse tradition drama aimed at providing entertainment by catering to both the emotional and intellectual aspects of the artistic pleasure derived by the audience. The themes, though relevant to the contemporary reality of life, were primarily of universal nature, dealing with humanity at large without being bound by topical and temporal boundaries. Characters were lively, pulsating with human warmth of emotions, urges, impulses and sentiments without ignoring man's essential existence in a defined milieu. The fullness of the complex facets of human existence constituted of both the light and more
dark sides of cosmic reality of which man is a microscopic manifestation, is to be seen in all the plays of Shakespeare and even in those of the lesser dramatists. But after the Restoration of monarchy when the theatres reopened, poetic drama, under various influences --- native and continental --- could not show up its earlier face of vitality and exuberance. Though dramatists like John Dryden did make efforts to write in the verbal traditions of poetry --- in his case it was the heroic couplet--- poetic drama could not grow up again. There came a yawning gap of over a century when conscious efforts were made by almost all the major Romantic and Victorian poets to revive poetic drama. As we know all these poet- dramatists, Wordsworth down to Tennyson and Browning, were outsiders in the sense that they did not have any contact with or experience of the theatre. Besides this, it was a period of stardom and control over the author by the theatre managers who failed to make these major poets dance to their tunes of theatrical whimsies. The chief cause of the failure of these poet- dramatists was that they did not have any desire to reach out to the popular audience to propagate their ideas. They were the poets who were mostly concerned with expressing their own feelings, emotions and responses to the world outside their psyche for the fulfilment of their imaginative urge to express.

After a brief spell of the popularity of dramatists like Shaw and Wilde and the influence of Ibsen and the other realists, serious and concerted efforts were made by a group of dramatists, headed by Stephen Phillips, during the first three decades of the last century. Phillips was
hailed as the saviour of poetic drama and was lucky to have the support of the well-known actor, Beerbohm Tree. Phillips had in him the true spark of a poetic genius and a talent for acting. But his alliance with Tree, a great lover of glamour, rhetoric and declamation, proved disadvantageous to Phillips in whose plays we find that essential dramatic elements are subordinated to spectacle and rhetoric. His plays, mostly imitative of the Elizabethan and Jacobean models, have elements to offer theatrical thrills, no doubt, but they do not show any novelty in the manipulation of the verbal medium for proper poetic and dramatic effects. Besides this deficiency in the poetic medium, Phillips’ lure for the remote and the exotic in the choice of his stories led him away from the immediate reality which the popular audience, now nourished by realistic drama, would have on the stage.²

Among the other poetic dramatists of the period the notable ones were James Elroy Flecker, John Drinkwater, Lascelles Abecrombie, and Gordon Bottomley. All these dramatists were seriously seized of the problems involved in writing poetic plays, which could viably compete with the realistic drama in the commercial theatres. Their belief that presenting life from a remote past or history would appeal to people already beset with problems arising from the fast growing industrialization and urbanization somehow did not prove true. Besides this, the continuance by these dramatists of the already worn out and exhausted Elizabethan blank verse tradition was bound to be anachronistic in an age which wanted to see the different facets of its own immediate realistic
image in literature written in a language resembling their colloquial
rhythm. A need to forge a new poetic rhythm for verse drama was well
realized by most of these dramatists who wrote before the advent of Yeats,
Eliot and Fry on the scene.

Of these three illustrious poetic dramatists, Yeats and Fry were
directly connected with the theatre while Eliot wanted to use the theatre to
reawaken the spiritual conscience of people in whose ears the tune of
"God is dead" was humming all around. We will first briefly talk about
Yeats’ and Eliots’ efforts in reviving poetic drama and then will take up
Fry’s own contribution to this major literary movement in English during
the last century.

W.B. Yeats, like T.S. Eliot, was essentially a poet. But both had
stated in detail their points of view about drama in general and poetic
drama in particular. The chief difference between the two poets was that
Yeats was a romantic poet, not averse to the expression of the poet’s own
feeling while Eliot was a classicist, professedly in favour of objectivity
and ‘escape from personality’. Thus while the former may be said to be
not a suitable talent for playwriting which demands objectivity, the latter
tried to be objective and detached even in his poetry. Again, Yeats had the
advantage of being actively involve in theatre, but Eliot did not have any
such privilege. But paradoxically, Yeats who wanted to reach out to a
popular audience in a commercial theatre ended up with desiring a private
elitist theatre which may be attended by a very small group of intellectuals
only, while Eliot starting with a select audience of devout Christians,
endeavoured to reach out to a larger, popular audience. For both Yeats and Eliot, who had reacted against the slice-of-life realism of twentieth century prose drama, there was an urgency to device potent directions and give a new impetus to the already failed endeavours of the Georgians to reinstate poetic drama to its earlier glory. They gave serious thoughts to the various issues involved in this direction. These issues were the right verse rhythm and form, subject matter, character and the audience's interest. They discussed these issues throughout their dramatic career while they kept on testing their theoretical convictions in their actual play-writing.

In Ireland, the dramatic renaissance was an offshoot of the national movement known as the Celtic Revival which itself was the product of the general movement for freedom from the British rule. In drama this movement was manifested in a "rebellion against the domination of the contemporary English social problem play-----Irish drama was essentially a drama, in reaction to the intellectual prose plays then being written for the London stage by Henry Jones, Arthur Pinero, and George Bernard Shaw." Nicoll has remarked that the situation in Ireland for the revival of poetic drama was more favourable than it was elsewhere:

The new Irish drama was apparently an extension of English drama --- but its atmosphere, theme and sentiment was largely Irish and national. The imaginative realism, which has always characterized the Celtic races, that passionate and dreamy poetry, that only half-ashamed belief in the fairy world, the
people of the Mist, all gave a particular tone to the plays at the abbey Theatre.

There is no exaggeration if we state that the Englishman or the Frenchman discarded the old before he could establish the new institution, the Irishman was, says Dickinson, “hampered by no heavy theatrical machinery that could hang like an incubus on his efforts. The poverty of resources compelled the development of virtues that have been most serviceable, the virtues of a true amateur spirit, etc. Yeats and Synge, too, have been vocal on the essential poetic sensibility of the Irish nation.

Yeats’ crucial statements about poetic drama are contained in his Explorations and his famous essay on “The Tragic Theatre.” It is not relevant to the purpose of the present study to go into details about explicating Yeats’ theory of drama. It will suffice to mention that his theory of drama was essentially the theory of tragic drama where the greatest emphasise was to be laid on the austere rhythm of the verse and artistic unity which would be a subtle blend of scenery, rhythm, movement and emotion, akin to the lyric unity of Pater. Yeats wanted poetic drama to be concerned with the utmost straining of the human soul against obstacles, which threaten its unity. Such art is passionate art and in such moments, the man merges into his mighty passion “purified of all but itself”. “Amid the great moments, when Timon orders his tomb, when Hamlet cries to Horatio, ‘absent thee from felicity a while,’ when Antony names ‘of many thousand kisses the poor last,’ all is lyricism unmixed passion, the integrity of fire.” Tragic drama deals with archetypal figures,
the symbols of humanity, where the hero 'greatens' till he, transcending
his physical existence, becomes, an image of the anima mundi and the
spectators, too, undergo a similar transformation.

Through Yeats would prefer in poetic drama the presentation of
heroic figure of legendary or historical roots, he does not altogether reject
the immediate reality. It is true Yeats wanted drama to give intellectual
excitement and spiritual liberation to the audience. Hence, he was
naturally opposed to the modern commercial theatre, which entertained the
audience by presenting a true mirror of the superficial aspects of life. In a
letter to Frank Fay he has regretted the "effeminate" growth of modern
drama because of the age's "over-development of the picture-making
faculty." However, he concedes that in poetic drama "the real world is
not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places
we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, that remind us of
vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the
edge of trance." Yeats' final position regarding his views on poetic drama
has been unambiguously expressed by Chiari:

A play for him ---- was a poem to be apprehend as a hole and
not through any structure of plot and character. A play, like a
poem, is more what it is than what it says ---- like a symbolist
poem, the play moves from the real to its transmutation into
essential image, which embody reality in movement as if it
were a highly stylized dance.

Yeats' practice has by and large been in conformity with his views
and with his romantic proclivities towards symbolic, philosophical and
exotic elements Whatever the measure of success of Yeats may be in
regard to his efforts to revive poetic drama, one thing is clear that he was aware of the difficulties involved in writing plays which should be both entertaining and aesthetically satisfying and poetic in rhythm. He consciously experimented with the verse form, from the languorous rhythm of *The Shadowy Waters* phase through a terse and restrained style of the *Plays for Dancers* to a colloquial rhythm in his Cuchulain plays. He also experimented with dramatic technique, which culminated in his fatal decision of adopting the technique of the Japanese Noh plays to treat in dramatic form materials drawn from Irish myths and legends. Because of this his plays became increasingly abstract, obscure, and esoteric and hence not fit for commercial theatres. William L. Sharp has rightly commented on Yeats' failure as a successful dramatist: "Yeats' difficulty in becoming a successful playwright is not surprising or unexpected. His own view on the public theatre precluded success, and it would have surprised Yeats as much as anyone if at anytime in his career he had achieved much widespread popularity."¹¹ In this regard, he contrasts well with T.S. Eliot who made rigorous efforts to install poetic drama on the larger commercial theatres to be attended by the popular theatre-goers.

Eliot was not a man from the theatre, though early in his career he felt as if "he aspired unconsciously to the theatre."¹² Eliot's career as a poetic dramatist starts with the choruses of *The Rock* and reaches its acme with his first major play, *The Murder in the Cathedral*. He was from the very beginning convinced of the superiority of poetic drama over prose drama. But he was also, in the context of the twentieth century, aware of the insurmountable difficulties involved in writing verse plays. The human
soul, says Eliot, "in intense moments strives to express itself in verse. The
tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and
superficial, if we want to get at the permanent we tend to express in
verse". Eliot discusses in detail the various difficulties involved in
writing verse drama in the modern age. Bernard Bergonzi has succinctly
summarized what Eliot has said in various articles, lectures etc. about
these difficulties: "----- the insistence that poetic drama should be both
stylized and capable of appealing to a wide audience, that the dramatic
and the poetic should be one, though a modern audience, like an
Elizabethan one, might appreciate what was offered at different levels of
understanding; and that the poetic drama should utilize and transform
popular dramatic forms-----".

The biggest problem Eliot grapples with is the choice of suitable
verse rhythm. He is against using the Elizabethan blank-verse rhythm that
no more has the potential of being further exploited. Eliot, in a letter to
Ezra Pound; has made his point of view clear: "If you write a play in
verse, then the verse ought to be a medium to look Through and not pretty
decoration to look At." He was also against the mixing of verse and
prose in a play as the Elizabethans had done. He wanted a verse form,
which should be close to the modern conventional speech rhythm of the
common man. Eliot says, "what we have to do is to bring poetry into the
world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves
the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world
totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated." He
goes on to elaborate his point of view when he says that this poetry rooted
in the living speech of the people should endeavour towards the state of music and have the intensity of expressiveness to articulate "those vague, indefinite feelings which we can only detect so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus ----." Besides verse being capable of expressing the intensest feelings, it should vary in accordance with the various characters of different levels of consciousness, education, etc.

Eliot’s experiment with verse in *The Murder in the Cathedral*, which met with a tremendous success even in the commercial theatre, encouraged him to write more plays in verse because this would be the best way to propagate his religious and spiritual ideas. Eliot decided to treat of secular themes, using living characters. The dramatic mode he chose was of social comedy and he made a crucial decision, i.e. to put his verse on a thin diet. The result was that poetry gradually disappeared from his poetic plays and what looked like verse was no different from poetry. His obsession with religious and spiritual issues continued all his life and when he decided to write secular drama in verse, his human concerns were rather deficient. In fact, Eliot’s concern with spiritual life has been both his great strength and weakness. It is his strength because this led him to write great poetic passages of spiritual exploration. But it proved to be his weakness because such passages tend to obstruct the movement of the dramatic action. Though Eliot, too, like Yeats failed to achieve what he had desired in regard to the revival of poetic drama in a prosaic age, the
concerns, efforts and discussions of the various issues involved in the problem will remain notably significant.

Though Fry was an insider in the theatre and knew that it was a place primarily for entertainment, his purpose of poetic drama was not basically different from that of Yeats and Eliot, i.e. intellectual excitement and spiritual experience and edification. He, too, believed that poetic drama has the capacity to reveal the deep spiritual reality of man and that of the larger cosmic and divine reality around him. He states his point of view as follow:

The flight of poetry from the theatre between the Jacobean and the Restoration eras was due to the fact that 'the accent of life' changed from the adventuring soul to the body's welfare. God was changed from being, as it were a magnet attracting the steel of the spirit, to the absentee boss of a welfare state. It happened almost in a night. When the sun rose in the morning it was no longer Apollo but Mammon. Fry proved to be a successful dramatist because, unlike Yeats and Eliot, he tried to strike a balance between the aesthetic and didactic interests of the plays. This he did by making the edification part of his plays flow naturally from his poetical plays rather than according it any explicit primacy over the other dramaturgical elements, Fry's unique contribution, which is likely to influence the future course of drama in England, will remain to be his experiment with serious comedies where universal issues and great problems of man's existence can be expressed through a healthy laugh.
Fry's comedies do not fit in with any definition of this genre in a neat and clean manner. Eric Bentley has suggested that the term tragicomedy would be more appropriate because his serio-comedies are in fact tragedies with happy ending. Fry himself in his essay on "Comedy" has stated:

*I know that when I set about writing a comedy the idea presents itself to me first of all as tragedy. The characters press on to theme with all their divisions and perplexities heavy about them; they are already entered for the race to doom, and good and evil are an infernal tangle skinning the fingers that try to unravel them ... Somehow the characters have to unmortify themselves to affirm life and assimilate death and persevere in joy.*

As far as technical innovations are concerned, Fry fully reflects the use of modern dramatic devices and conventions such as expressionism, surrealism, and the tricks of the music-hall comedies. His two plays *A Sleep of Prisoners* and *Curtmantle* show his conscious experiments with dramatic technique which has been quite successful though not very highly esteemed by many a critic. His other plays follow broadly speaking the conventional dramatic technique of logically developed plots, rounded characters--serious but funny--and brilliant verse, characterized by wit, humour and a lot of cerebral strength. In the Fry's plays, the biggest handicap is lack of seriously pursued studies already available. Sporadic articles are available here and one can get brief assessments of his place in the general movement of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth
century in books of histories of modern drama. Fry himself has supplied some clues to his dramaturgical strategies and dramatic intentions in some of his articles and interviews.

The present study has the primary aim of a close textual study of Fry's plays to enable us first to assess him as a dramatist and only secondarily place him in the stream of the movement of the revival of poetic drama which has been the concern of almost all the assessments of Fry's plays.
REFERENCES:


4 Ibid; p.392.


6 See J.P. Frayne, ed, *Uncollected Prose* (Macmillan, London, 1970), p.193. and Synge's Preface to *The Play of the Western World* where he has said the following: "In countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form --- In Ireland for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent ---etc."


10 Ibid.


17 Ibid; p.82.


Chapter II
Religious Plays.
Section: I
THE BOY WITH A CART

Christopher Fry was a true follower of T.S. Eliot in projecting his religious sensibility in all his plays, and patently explicitly in his three plays written between 1938 and 1951. These plays are *The Boy with a Cart* (1938), *Thor, with Angels* (1948) and *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951). Like Eliot’s *Choruses of the Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, these plays were written for special occasions and audience who were religiously inclined. But as Eliot had the comfort of writing his religious pieces for devout Christians who would compulsorily sit quietly in the theatre to listen to whatever is uttered on the stage, Fry had his eyes fixed on the basic concept of a theatre, i.e. it should provide entertainment as well. While Eliot had at the back of his mind only Christian audience, Fry aimed at a secular audience who could favourably respond to religious ideas and values which cut across sectarian religious boundaries and embrace humanistic, spiritual, moral and ethical values. Since Fry was a man of the theatre, associated with and interested in the stage activities from his boyhood days, he knew it only too well that human elements in drama can better communicate spiritual and religious ideas than abstract, dehumanised dramatization of particular religious faith or ideal. This is why even in his earliest play, *The Boy with a Cart*, we find a lot of human interest. The religious theme emerges gradually as the story moves on. Even dialogues are varied, ranging from the colloquial prose through persuasive poetry to highly
chanted lines on the pattern of the *Choruses of the Rock*. This variety in the dialogue is in keeping with the differentiation in the various dramatist personae, either as individuals or as a group.

*The Boy with a Cart* has a tiny story element, which begins on the pattern of a secular thematic concern and develops and concludes as a drama of faith. It is the story of a Cornish shepherd boy who is rendered orphaned by the circumstances of life, with no prop left for him and his old mother to be looked after by her only shepherd son, namely Cuthman. His father dies leaving his old wife helpless and frightened by the harshness of existence without the support of a breadwinner. His house and property are taken by his creditors and he is forced to leave the village for some uncertain destination where he can work and sustain himself and his broken-down old mother. He make a cart to carry his mother on their journey to some 'green pasture.' He fastens the cart to his neck with a rope and pulls the cart with his mother in it through different, unknown rough roads and hostile environments. The rope breaks on the way which Cuthman replaces with the one that he make of 'withies' collected from the river bank which they chance to reach. So far the story has moved on like any other dealing with the hardships of survival by ordinary, poor folk in a rural setting. But it is at this point that a divine vision enters in his mind and he resolves that destination would be where the 'withies' break and it is there that he will settle down with his mother and work for a single aim in his remaining life, i.e. build a church where people could gather for prayer to
God. The ‘withies’ break at Steyning in Sussex. Cuthman decides to put up his tabernacle there and work day and night to build a church. In his struggle to achieve his aim a number of difficulties come in his way. But eventually the task he had undertaken is accomplished.

The plot outline of the play thus narrated shows Fry’s effort to write a religious play, not of a heroic stature and high ideals where distinguished dramatis personae are needed, such as Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. Fry prefers to concentrate on the life, issues, concerns and aspirations of ordinary human folk where the events and their attendant causes and consequences are familiar, ordinary and immediately convincing. Whatever happens to Cuthman is admirably convincing and familiar. No high ideals are taken up for thematic treatment; no impressive personages are brought on the stage to decant their high sounding resolves or lofty ideals, political, economic or religious, Cuthman remains monolithically humble with the inner strength of his faith providing him the necessary sustenance. He never feels disheartened by adversity raising its head against his spiritual endeavour. In fact, hardships fortify his inner spiritual strength, which derives from his un-wavering faith in God.

Before we proceed to have a close look on the text of the play, it is relevant to remark here that *The Boy with a Cart*, though Fry’s earliest effort at play writing, remains an epitome of the dramatic devices drawn from Old Drama and the New which he uses in his mature comedies Fry does not believe in the generic categorization of plays. Hence, in a deftly
handled manner he blends the comic, the serious, and the grotesque, which he believes to be the textural fabric of life at the cosmic as well as human and mundane levels. His manipulation of the verbal medium shows both his merits and demerits as a dramatic craftsman. Like his seasonal comedies, The Boy with a Cart also achieves a fusion of tone and atmosphere, naturalism and symbolism, the mundane and the spiritual, the auditory and the visual and the phenomenal and the mysterious, the factual and the miraculous, and above all the mundane and the spiritual. Thus, the dramatic tapestry that emerges is of richly varied but integrated textual constituents.

The use of chorus throughout the play performs all the functions of ancient drama, besides lending poetic and spiritual flavour to the entire play. The play was first performed at Coleman’s Hatch, Sussex in 1938 and was well received. It was later revived in 1950 at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

Both the worldly and spiritual dimensions of the thematic concern of the play is contained in the opening lines of the chorus which is constituted of the people of South England:

*In our fields, fallow and burdened, in grass and furrow,*

*In barn and stable, with scythe, flail, or harrow,*

*Sheep shearing, milking or mowing, on labour that’s older*

*Than Knowledge, with God we work shoulder to shoulder,*

God and man, joint labourers in sustaining the created universe, working in perfect harmony, have created an atmosphere, which is characterized by life, vitality, fecundity and a general sense of all pervasive joy in human life as well as in nature. The prime mover in the life of the created universe,
which comprises flora, fauna and the humans, is the invisible God whose creative and harmony-lending hands are manifested in the general well-being all around the place. The same divine hand and plan are discernible in “the story of Cuthman”, where we see “the working together of man and God like root and sky.”

Having established the presence and working of God in the conduct of the activities in the life of the humans and nature, through a rich variety of auditory and visual images, the chorus introduces the protagonist of the play, namely Cuthman, and sums up his dramatic life in the play, concluding in a highly theatrical manner, in the fashion of the opening chorus of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*:

“If follow him now as he runs in the meadow”\(^2\)

At the mention of the above concluding line of the chorus, Cuthman in a theatrically effective manner, “enters running.” He encounters two neighbours whom he wanted to avoid as he has returned bored from the hills where his father’s sheep are left to be looked after by God. This is because Cuthman felt hungry and returned home for dinner even without a relief sent to him by his father. The neighbours inform Cuthman of his father’s sudden, sad demise, which he would not believe. Their conversation with Cuthman shows the latter in a disconcertingly desolate state. Worse than him is his old mother with none now to tend to her. “Root and Sky” have broken and “will not mend with prayers.” “Death has whistled home”. Cuthman’s bewailing the death of his father has a touching pathos at the
poor boy's being left now propless, bereft of the affectionate protection and care of his father. Cuthman's faith in the charitable generosity and benediction of God to this created being ostensibly receives a terrible jolt. The chorus become skeptical about Cuthman's continuing now with his vibrant faith in God:

How is your faith now, Cuthman?
Your faith that the warm world hatched,
That spread its unaccustomed colour
Up on the rock, game and detached?

Cuthman is an ordinary human and must learn and experience the co-existence of warmth and cold, joy and pain, and the truth of mortality. But will this experience weaken his faith in God? Will he now question: "Is God still in the air and in the seed?" Cuthman is broken down, no doubt, but not pessimistic in his belief that God's will prevails. Instead of analysing his situation causally he decides to turn to God alone:

Let me see now with truer sight, O God
Of root and sky; let me at last be faithful
In perception, and in action that is born
Of perception, even as I have been faithful
In the green recklessness of little knowledge.
Grant this, O God, that I may grow to my father
As he grew to Thy son, and be his son
Now and for always.
The sense of mystery envelops Cuthman’s newly acquired perception when he narrates how the circle he had drawn to keep the sheep from straying away, has “broken and the sheep wander.” “They pull the branches of the myrtle under:/ Nibble the shadow of the cypress, trample/ The yew, and break the willow of its tear.” This behaviour of the sheep, through a natural phenomenon, appears to Cuthman as though they, too, were disturbed with pain at the sad demise of their elder shepherd. The entire rhythm of life-human as well as cosmic - seems to have been disturbed. This lends a cosmic dimension to the event and helps shape Cuthman’s spiritual personality in a way that he may work now onwards for the cause of religion and service to God and humanity.

As the saying goes, misfortunes never come alone. At an increased pace, through a dramatic narrative, other calamities, as it were, waiting in wings, are communicated to Cuthman in a quick succession. His mother is sick. The sheep are “foot loose and green and hungry” and are likely to be “lost in sundown, and no bell weather.” His “home is sold over his head,” leaving him “no roof over his sorrow, nor a patch of ground to know his name in.” He is entirely destitute, and left in the world with the responsibility of tending to his grieving mother. The chorus succinctly comments on the present predicament of Cuthman, which is compounded by both mundane and religious parameters:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Out of this, out of this first incision}
\textit{Of mortality on morality, there comes}
\textit{The genuflexion, and the partition of pain.}
\end{quote}
Between man and god; there goes the mutual action

The perspective to the vision.6

The neighbours, who are portrayed as lower consciousness with limited vision of the exclusively mundane type, would not understand the stirrings in Cuthman’s deeper psyche. Hence despondent as they are at Cuthman’s future, they are puzzled at Cuthman’s not opening up his mouth to explain to the outside world his future course of action. Cuthman’s acquiescence into divine dispensation and his acceptance of “pain’s patient benediction” have already been clearly discerned by the chorus:

Out of this out of the dereliction
Of a mild morning, comes the morning’s as motive,
The first conception, the fusion of root and sky;
Grows the achievement of the falling shadow,
Pain’s patient benediction.7

The next movement of the dramatic action will be the fructification of “pain’s patient benediction.” The mother, whose condition has so far been communicated to us through the minor character’s narrative of their sympathetic concern for her and her son, appears on the stage to be pulled by Cuthman in the cart that he himself has made. Cuthman tries to console his mother out of the agony of leaving the place where she respectably stayed so long with her husband and in the company of amicable neighbours. The mother’s nostalgic reminiscing of her past8 endows the play with profound human feelings and the sense of fellowship with other people around her. The spiritual or religious import of the play’s primary theme is temporary silhouetted by everything exclusively human in a
worldly sense. Cuthman's mother rationalizes the calamitous and ignomous situation she has been caught in and agrees to her son's proposal to go away from the place "to see the world." Their journey into the wider world will be mercifully over-looked by God who gives His believer's strength through their willing acceptance of calamity. Cuthman through his resolve born of his inner conviction and faith symbolically becomes God's chosen one to further His design of proliferating faith through congregational gathering in places of worship. In his role as God's agent, Cuthman presents a striking parallelism with Eliot's Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* Cuthman's "setting off on his journey with his mother, as presented in the stage direction, marks the end of the second movement of the dramatic action. This movement can be described as Cuthman's period of incubation of his eventual emergence as a Saint.

Cuthman's Journey through the terrifyingly desolate and hostile, stony landscape across different countries has been narrated by the chorus in an idiom which most effectively creates the effect of awe and terror. This narration involves the vision of Persifal's arduous journey to Chapel Perilus in the legend of Fisher King. Cuthman's unflagging perseverance, resolve to continue his journey against odds of nature and his mother's instinctive fears of imagined dangers, assuaged by her son's consoling her of God's protective and guiding benediction are quite effectively, through a deftly modulated dramatic narrative, been presented by the chorus in the manner of the second chorus in the Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. The combination of the 'stony' images and those of darkness concretises the terror and
dangerous difficulties involved in Cuthman's quest of his destination of which he does not as yet has any clear perception. His profound faith in God and complete surrender to his invisible guiding hand are the only causal factor in sustaining his perseverance in his resolve to move on. The earlier frightened mother, too, gathers strength of spirit after reminiscing how sturdy she has been all her life in plying the daily chores of life and how her uncle used to shower accolades on her tireless limbs as if they were "made of rope." This reminiscent mood of the mother temporarily revitalizes her so as to believe, as she says, "I begin to think that I'm really made of rope."

At this moment the rope round Cuthman's shoulders breaks, and his mother is rolled on to the ground."9 This coincidence has a complex symbolic implication and, with a reference forward to the rope being replaced with one made of withies, it has a significant function in the further movement of the dramatic action. The rope, in the mother's reminiscing, is a conventional icon of physical life on earth. The mother's thinking that the rope that she is may continue indefinitely is rebutted by a reminder of man's morality through the sudden breaking of the factual rope.

Fry refused to believe in any idealization of a value, be it spiritual, mundane or philosophical. He takes life as it is. This is why his presentation of an idea also has a human appeal and is conducive to the production of the dramatic effect of immediacy. This argument is supported by what happens immediately after the mother is tumbled out of cart rolls on to the ground. Instead of sentimentalising this tiny but symbolically meaningful and
dramatically significant event, the dramatist presents another true facet of life, i.e. lack of sympathy among humans. "The mowers at work in the field "nudge each other" and "laugh at an old woman who has had a misfortune". The mother's reprimanding the mowers for their unsympathetic behaviour only makes them "given an even louder roar of laughter". She in anger curses them-"one of these days you'll laugh for too long, you'll laugh yourselves into trouble." The curse fructifies soon in the form of rain, which falls only on the crop gathered by the mowers. The mowers' deriding the misfortune of the old mother is miraculously punished by nature. This low comedy, while being throughout realistic and human, is reminiscent of some of similar farcical happenings manipulated by the magical tricks of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus.

Cuthman's journey continues with a new rope made by withies he manages to collect from the nearby river. While Cuthman went down to the banks of the stream to cut willow shoots a sudden vision dawned on him. He makes a new resolve now after the uncertain hazy course of his journey becomes clear and purposeful. He narrates his spiritual experience to his mother thus:

------- I felt the mood
Of the meadow change, as though a tide
Had turned in the sap, or heaven from the balance
Of creation had shifted a degree.
The skirling water crept into a flow,
The sapling flickered in my hand, timber
And flesh seemed of equal and old significance
At that place, and then, I tell you, Mother,
God rode up my spirit and drew in
Besides me. His breath met on my breath, moved
And mingled. I was taller then than death.¹¹

This encounter with the divine vision breeds immediately as a new resolve in Cuthman which tantamount to a mandate from God Himself. He “will go as far as the withies take us” He will set up House again where the “withies break, or God breaks them.” He will make his mother comfortable there and in that strange field, he says,

“I shall build my answer in plank and brick,
Labour out my thanks in plaster and beam
And stone.”¹²

He will build a Church to pray in where the withies break. This will be in keeping with the cosmic or universal rhythm of life: “Breaking and building in the progression of this world go hand in hand”. This philosophy stated here does not have any direct or indirect allusion to any sectarian or denominational religion but is derived from universal pragmatism. Cuthman resolves to build a Church with his own skilled labour.

The climactic point of the drama of Cuthman’s Journey reaches when at Steyning, “the last laborious track is trapesed and the withies at his neck untwist and break.”¹³ Cuthman’s journey’s end has reached. He with his mother settles down at Steyning where people are nice, sympathetic and
cooperative. Nature, too, has the abundance of her beauties to offer. Cuthman’s mother finds her good old days pleasantly revived. Cuthman spends all his time and energy in building the church. Though small hurdles sometimes appear, like the two villagers taking away the oxen given to Cuthman for the building work of the church by his noble-souled farmer-employer, but with the active cooperation of people, the cosmic elements and God’s blessings they disappear miraculously. The hurricane episode, lifting up the woman obstructing the church work, is again in the spirit of the low comic genre of the morality play tradition type. Even the last hurdle i.e. “The king - post has swung out of position’-removed by the direct, miraculous intervention of God who appears in the shape of a carpenter and shifts the king post to its position. The church will touch even the hearts of the people who are engrossed in their materialistic pursuit. Here is the final speech of the chorus with which the play ends:

We also loom with the earth

Over the waterways of space. Between

Our birth and death we may touch understanding

As a moth brushes a window with its wing.14

As averred to in the beginning of the present section, our brief analysis of the play presented above firmly establishes that Fry was first and foremost a man of the theatre. Unlike Eliot, he conceived of stage as a means of entertainment by presenting life and ideas with artistic honesty. His objectivity of vision of life is unambiguously clear. He neither idealizes
it nor does he decry the dark side of life. Life is neither only serious nor only ludicrously light. It is a rich blending of both, besides those of the ridiculous, repulsive, divine, mundane, and charitable as well as selfish concerns. To present life with all its facets requires an artistic sincerity, which Fry, has in ample measure. From the very beginning of his dramatic concern Fry firmly believed that drama, in order to be interesting, should have sufficient human appeal. We find that Fry, in portraying his characters—both major and minor— is admirably in control of his dramatic material. Cuthman, the symbol of faith in God and an instrument of divine service of humanity is a thoroughly human figure with profound filial feelings and restrained response to the crooked realities of life. His mother, only a subsidiary dramatis personae, is shaped into a lively and human creature with heart that thrives on love and respect for each individual. Fry's remarkable achievement in this early play is discernible in his forging out a richly decorative verse loaded with images drawn from a variety of sources. This type of verse must have pleased the audience who had a prolonged fare of either second—rate exhausted blank-verse tradition, or the Eliot type of dramatic poetry starved on a thin diet to be undistinguishable from ordinary prose. Fry freely uses prose dialogue for his minor characters, which makes them appear more convincing, and for dramatic narrative the main burden of the drama of the play is borne to a considerable extent by verbal medium.
REFERENCES:

   All subsequent references from the text are to this edition
3. Ibid; p. 13.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid; p. 16.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid; p. 23.
11. Ibid; p. 27.
12. Ibid; p. 28.
SECTION: II
Thor, With Angels was first performed at the Canterbury Festival in June 1948. The play is more explicitly and in a pronounced manner religious. The religion in this play is unambiguously Christianity. But unlike Eliot’s Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, it does not have any propagandist tone over-riding human elements. Fry’s Christian values in this play are at the core of all human ethical, moral and religious systems. This Christianity is based on love and sympathy and upholds God’s design of sustaining His creation through mercy, forgiveness and compassion. In Thor, With Angels Fry demonstrates a more complex and mature craftsmanship in all its dramatic elements; plot, characterization, dialogue and emotional effect, than what we had noticed in The Boy with a Cart. The plot moves with suspense and mystery to an expected but probable end. It begins with suspense, which is sustained, until it is resolved at the end. Though the story element is slender, it very well fills the dramatic time with audience’s unflagging interest. The characters are incisively drawn; they are individualized and full of human flesh and blood, acutely conscious of themselves and the race to which they belong and gods to whom they own their allegiance. The dialogue throughout is full of those dazzling brilliances for which Fry has won wide accolades and which has invited adverse comments as well by a number of critics when the play was first performed and eventually published in 1950. The locale and time of the dramatic action clearly hints at the playwright’s artistic intentions. The
action takes place in country of Kent during its pre-Christian era when England was under the control of the low-German invading pagans. This remoteness of the action on Jutish Farmstead (A.D. 596) conduces to bringing greater historical credibility to the story and helps sustain and make acceptable the strains of mystery and certain irrationality in the ethos of the dramatic world. Though the canvas of life presented is scanty, yet it has a rich variety and distinctiveness. The play from the beginning until the end presents a serious theme, which threatens to be gruesome and dark. But it has abundant streaks of humour and light moments to enliven it out of morbidity or even the slightest depression. Though the play ends with the cruel end meted out to a noble character, it is difficult to call it a tragedy conforming to the traditional definition. It is not a comedy either or a tragi-comedy. Fry calls it simply “a play”.

The main plot moves round the circumstance leading to the conversion of a Jutish warrior of Kent to Christianity. This warrior, Cymen, has enough potential in his soul to expose a liberal humanistic Christianity, which is fructified in his emergence as a true Christian through a mission, headed by St. Augustine of Canterbury. Cymen is a buccaneer and returns home with his warrior son (Quichelm) and brothers-in-law (Tadfrid and Osmer) from a battle with the Saxons in which he accepted defeat just at the point of victory because of a mysterious flash which unnerved and unmanned him. In the midst of the fierce fighting on the battleground, while Cymen was making a decisive move to victory, he
is confronted by a Briton slave fighting for the Saxons. The Briton was surrounded immediately by the Jutes who would kill him. But Cymen, being mysteriously impelled by a flash of light rescues and in frenzy breaks his own sword. The Briton, Hoel, is brought back as a captive. While all the members of the Cymen family are clamouring to offer Hoel as a sacrifice to their Gods, Cymen continues being puzzled with the mystery of the flash of light. Cymen’s young daughter, Martina gradually gets amorously attracted towards the Briton who has been left under the guard of the lazy but mentally alert Colgrin, the steward of the Cymen Household. Cymen is suddenly called away by the cry of the people over the “wolves invading the flock”. In the fierce fight with the brutes the Briton shows exemplary courage, which draws appreciation from the people. But the members of Cymen’s family consider this bravery of the Briton as a result of his being possessed by the devil. Hence, it becomes imperative that he be scarified to the gods at the earliest opportunity. The opportune moment arrives when, Cymen is away to welcome St. Augustine and his mission at the command of the king, his brothers-in law finding that their niece is in love with Hoel, tie him to a tree with his arms outstretched and kill him by piercing a spear into his chest. Cymen returns home a completely converted religious man to preach his people the gospel of love and sympathy. But to his consternation he finds that the captive Briton, a Christian, whom he would have accepted in his fold, has already been sacrificed for a superstitious belief.
The story narrated above though thin in content as far events are concerned, has been artistically structured in a way that it vibrates with well-patterned undulations and sustains our interest through as extended but convincingly sustained suspense. The plot, in its dramatic narrative about the event outside the stage action before the opening of the main thread of the story, has a tremendous effect of immediacy, simultaneously creating a sense of mystery and suspense. The focus of the dramatic interest in the initial movement of the plot is whether or not Hoel be sacrificed to the gods as an atonement for the blasphemous deed of Cymen in rescuing the Briton from the murderous assault on him by the Jutes on the battlefield. This crucial interest is dramatically developed through the creation of a complex set of feelings and emotions produced in the hearts of the different characters. The dominant dramatic experience is one of the senses of mystery.

The play opens with the appearance of Cymen’s elder son, Quichelm, who “hammers at the farm door” to wake up the steward, Colgrin fast “asleep among the straw” within the farmstead of the Cymen family. Colgrin’s initial image shows him as the lazy but nimble-witted guard of the family with a fine flare for vituperative language. “The posy of words” used by both Quichelm and Colgrin is an early example in the play of how Fry creates his desired dramatic and theatrical effects through an admirable command of summoning a multitude of unfamiliar words
with a superb auditory impact. Here are some of the words used by the two characters:

Colgrin: Frog-man, fen-fiend, werewolf, owl, elf...

Quichelm: You scrawny old scurfscratcher.... Runt of an old son's litter, you slop-headed, pot-scourer, buckle-backed gutsack...

Quichelm—Colgrin talk about the family members creates an effect of immediacy, eliciting audience response to and detached involvement in the drama almost at once. Quichelm in his reply to his mother's queries about the outcome of the war functions as a brief chorus. But the choice matter-of-factness is interestingly mixed with Quichelm's periphrastic verbal confounding of his mother. Quichelm informs his mother that his father is bringing an unwelcome prisoner, "a Briton slave who fought for the Saxons." He narrates the situation thus:

Like a madman, he saved his Briton when we'd have killed him:

Burst in among us, blaspheming against Woden,

Broke his sword in the air—he swore it broke

Against a staggering light—and stood roaring,

Swaying in a sweat of wax, bestraddle

Over the fallen Briton. And then, as though

The beast which had bragged in his brain had leapt away,

Became himself again,

Only in a fury with the light which broke his sword.
The mother Clodesuida, and her daughter, Martina, after hearing Quichelm’s account of how his father rescued the Briton and even blasphemed their gods are filled with supernatural fear of their destiny-controlling deities’ wrath at helping heathens. They even “haven’t enough cattle to placate them,” the stir of apprehension thus created gets intensified at Quichelm’s mystifying reference to “the worst” in what had happened. But this part of the narrative is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Cymen and kinsmen, which is as suspenseful to “the staring” Clodesuida and Martina as for the audience. Clodesuida, instead of showing any sign of pleasure at her husband’s return from the battlefield gives vent to her disappointment at his defeat and worse than his displeasing the gods. She considers the inexplicably awakened “guilt, forgiveness and humanity” in her warrior husband as symptomatic of “madness.” His “madness” is illustrated in her brother Osmer’s narrative of Cymen’s behaviour on the battlefield in rescuing the Briton and debunking blood shed in the name of espousing a superstition-ridden religious belief. “The gods can go and beg for blood! / Let’em learn of us,” he shouts in the midst of his frenzied retrieval of the Briton from the “down coming swords” of his fellow warriors, fighting against the heathens (i.e. Saxons). Osmer’s belief that the gods must have felt angry at Cymen’s conduct and words is envisioned in the concretised wrath of these deities:

*From that moment,* ---

*The sky turned round, Ceaulin’s men broke through,*
Thor, in the scarlet dusk, swore and swung,
And Woden rode in rancour, as well he might,
And trod upon our dead.\

Clodesuida and the other kinsmen believe that it was the trick of some devil, which propelled Cymen to do what he did. The damage can be rectified through undergoing some severe penance, like “standing in the winter sea/Till his clothes freeze to his flesh.” Clodesuida feels that “It’s more decently religious/To offer a sacrifice, than to offer himself to an early grave.” However, the wrong done to the gods can be rectified but the mystery of “the devil that damned him to its own design” should be unwrapped first. In a query about this by Osmer, Cymen blames the forefathers of his race who, fired with ambition of capturing a prosperous territory, transferred their “mirage” into the minds of their posterity to settle down on the cursed land that Britain is. Cymen’s extended exhuming his racial disappointment goes thus:

I stack my curses on those first rich rumours
Which fetched us here, rollicking with ambition.......
Here we live in our father’s mirage
Cities, they’d heard of, great with columns
Gays cities, where wealth was bulging the doors,
And the floor were sagging with the weight of gold.
... So here we live.

And choke in our father’s mirage. Dreams they were,
As well we know...

Cymen's disenchantment is a pointer to yet another dimension of the theme, which has not been developed. It is characteristic of Fry's plays to interweave in the main thematic structures, significant minor issues to lend complexity without blurring the clarity and simplicity of the major thematic thrust.

The burden of curses that the Jutish community, including Cymen, can be lifted by "obliterating the cause of sin," that is the Briton. All the Jutish community now clamours for the immediate sacrifice of Hoel to placate the outraged pagan gods. The solution, thus suggested, seems simple and supported by logic ("in fact his death was given to him in battle yesterday; this merely the formal ceremony which was overlooked"—argues Tadfrid). But Cymen declares that he is in the grip of mysterious fear, which must be disentangled:

I say I fear myself, or rather
That not-myself which took my will
Which forced a third strange eye into my head?
So that I saw the world's dimension altered.
I know no defence against that burst of fire.

He turns to Hoel for help in unwrapping this nagging mystery in his mind:

You can tell me; what flagged away my strength,
What furtive power in your possession
Pulled the passion of my sword?\textsuperscript{7}

Hoel’s undigested rejoinder is crucial to the main religious theme of the play:

\textit{It was my grand father who knew him well.}

\textit{The One God, he’s called. But I can’t remember}

\textit{The details...}\textsuperscript{8}

Cymen’s indecision to kill Hoel at the clamouring of his wife and kinsmen creates a familial rift. But his reluctance to “do the undeed” continues lest at the crucial moment of plunging into action “the misshapen fire should again burn him,” and pursue him constantly as a “walking wound in his strength.” Hamlet-like he remunerates with skepticism:

\textit{Alive}

\textit{He’s ours; dead who knows to what}

\textit{Unfriendly power he will have given himself?}\textsuperscript{9}

The mood of the situation changes because of the cooperation of nature: “the sun puts down/The midst at last and looks out across the day./Here comes the burning sea of honey/Over the grey sand of our defeat.”\textsuperscript{10} Cymen’s depression is gone and he proposes toast to the “sun that makes us men.” Cymen feels that his strength has come back and he determines to “sand fear sprawling and set his foot on the neck of the dark and get the gods again” “Throwing Hoel to the ground and putting his foot on his neck,” he declares jubilantly:
Glory of life, I live!

We'll drink to our restored prosperity;
The sustaining sinews of tremendous Thor:
The unwearing, turbulent, blazing loins of Woden!

We raise our cups and drink to the power of the gods.

He proposes the toast which anticipates the dawning of true religious light in his soul and mind eventually the wording of which creates a fresh ripple in his mind and in those of his kinsmen: “Let us love one another.” He utters these words which are the kernel of Christianity “his cup falls from his hand. He stands trembling.” This event confounds everybody present in the farmstead. The confusion becomes terrifying when Cymen “makes to kill Hoel, but his sword is against Quichelm.” While his kinsmen believe that it is “battle-blindness” and excessive exhaustion and fatigue, Cymen feels in his soul the mysterious operation of truly divine design where enmity and distinction between one individual and the other are dissolved:

It seems,

All one. There no distinction

And my enemy.

My own flesh. My sword. Knew you. Deny it:

My sword understood. Distinction has gone!"

Like as mystery hogs the imagination of Cymen. This mystery can be comprehended only through the spiritually vitalized eyes, which can see, admire and cling to what God has endowed man and the cosmic
universe with. Hoel and Colgrin can perceive this in their respective vision of life as worthliving and clinging to as well as leading it “horizontal and absolutely unconscious in bodily sloth. Within a short span of dramatic time we have seen, in a single situation, a variety of moods and feelings expressed by the different characters, which harmoniously fuse with the sounds and colours of nature.

The plot moves further when Martina, through her conversation with Hoel, discovers that he is a Christian, which is worse than being a heathen. She also mentions that:

*We have a Christian queen, though we, try to keep it Dark, and in one of our prayers to the gods we say Give us our daily bread and forgive us our Queen.*

The religious message in the above line is unambiguously transparent, which is toleration. Hoel’s frustration with man’s cruelty to man, while God remains helpless, is voiced in a serio-comic temper, which he narrates to Martina about his dismal, personal as well as racial predicament:

*After my father was killed*

*The Saxons kept me to work for them. My father Had always said what can one god do Against the many the invaders have? And he remembered earlier gods who still Harped on the hills, and hoped they would rally again. But they were too old. They only raised*
Infatuated echoes, and wept runnels.\textsuperscript{14}

Martina, though involuntarily attracted towards Hoel and essentially kind-hearted, must hate the Briton because of his nativity. After this brief encounter between Martina and Hoel, which is developed in amorous infatuation later in the play another slight but significant episode of Merlin being secretly sheltered by Martina is brought before us by her being interrogated by her mother about her serving food to a very old man discovered by her from a caved-in quarry. Martina gets comforts in Merlin’s telling her about her future. Hoel suddenly feels a revival of hope and spirits at the discovery of another Briton who prophecies to him that the British race “who’re lost and scattered” will be found again, because “It’s an old custom of the earth from year to year.”

The scene change when Cymen unexpectedly appears on the stage inquiring about Hoel. He is informed by his wife that Hoel is safe in the barn, “talking to an old man of his tribe” who, she says, is either a sorcerer or “some brewer of trouble” and who along with other non-Jutish folk need to be got rid of. While Clodesuida is to rid the land those “things which are not ourselves,” Cymen’s problem is much larger and deeper: It is to “rid the brain of uncertainty, rid the heart of its fear.” He told Hoel that the old man is Merlin, who introduces himself as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I pluck at my roots}
\textit{But they won’t be fetched away from a world, which possesses me}
\textit{Like an unforgettable woman who was once my own,}
\end{quote}
There is a long conversation between Cymen and Merlin, which is preparatory to the former’s conversion to Christianity. Hoel’s confession that Cymen’s fury which got submerged in his mercy for his enemy allowing his mercenary adversary a lease of life, further agitates the confused mind of Cymen who continues to be non-plussed, uncertain and indecisive, because certainty and decision are the bane of a clear vision of mercy and forgiveness.

This brief situation, when Cymen confronts Merlin presents the intensest tension in Cymen’s mind, which threatens the very equilibrium of his mind. Fry’s deft craftsmanship is discernable when at the climactic close of the situation a different episode is brought in with as great an urgency of an outer life as that caused by the dissonance in the mind of Cymen. Anna, Colgrin’s wife enters in great excitement to inform Cymen that the savage wolves have invaded the field and are playing havocs with the crops and the cattle. All the menfolk, including Hoel, but excluding the lazy Colgrin rush out to deal with the situation caused by the wolves. Colgrin’s explaining his cowardly staying back to his wife is nothing but a comic effrontery. But, it shows the alacrity of his mind:

*All the more reason*

*Why the other half of the arrangement should stand.*

*If the horse gets out of the stable doesn’t mean*

*The stable is justified in following.*

*I’m a man who can be relied on.*
In order to fill up dramatic time, in absence of scene division of the play, Fry cleverly makes Merlin comment on dissonances created by humans and nature, leading to eventual harmony and fruitfulness against a historical perspective which lends the significance of timelessness to the already thickly patterned thematic scheme of the play.\(^8\)

Merlin’s exposition of the cyclic historicity of life, civilization and faith is brusquely interrupted by the entry of Clodesuida, an eye-witness to the fight between the humans and the savages, who, through an array of visual images of the scuffle between Hoel and “grimmest and the greatest” wolf, eulogizes the Briton with a sense of surprised awe. The effect achieved is not less than observing the action actually taking place. It will be relevant to quote it in some detail to have the unique experience of Fry’s handling of his verse dialogue:

(The wolves

\textit{Are beaten off. But the Briton killed the grimmest,}

\textit{The greatest; with his hands, with his hands as bare.}

\textit{As mine; met and mauled the scavenger, with a grip}

\textit{Under the blood and froth of the jaws, he shook}

\textit{And choked the howling out of its fangs}

\textit{And forced it to a carcase. It was horror}

\textit{And hope and terror and triumph to see it.}\(^9\)

Hoel’s strongest opponent, Clodesuida, now changes her attitude to him. Instead of her earlier clamouring for his sacrifice she now comtemplates
of rewarding him for his extraordinary bravery and concern for the Jutish folk. However, her brothers and elder son, through their argument, try to convince her that Hoel's bravery was inspired by his devilish spirit. Once again the Jutish pagans put up a joint front in their demand for the sacrifice of the Briton on the altar to placate their gods, the manifestation of whose anger was exemplified by the wolves on the lives and property of the people.

A suspenseful situation is now created when Cymen declares that seeing the pressure of his people and being himself convinced of the need, he "will sacrifice." At this, as soon the kinsmen "come back to easy breathing and a chance of pleasure", Cymen demands a white goat for sacrifice. In his prayer to the gods, which is preparatory to sacrifice, Cymen broods over the futility of such rituals to overcome fear:

What do I do by sacrifice?

The blood flows, the ground soaks it up,
The poisoned nightshade grows, the fears go on,
The dread of doom gropes into the bowels,
And hope, with her ambitious shovel, sweats
To dig the pit which swallows us at last.
The sacrifice is despair and desperation.  

Cymen asks a big question about such practices, as sacrifice and hatred for the practitioners of other beliefs, sustaining a religious sect:

By what stroke was the human flesh
Hacked so separate from the body of life

Beyond us?²¹

He blames such gods as are made to exist by his people who discriminate between their own human creations as well as the gods themselves:

You make us to be the eternal alien

In our own world! Then I submit. Separation

To separation,²²

In a state of hopelessness he offers himself as sacrifice if gods need it so compulsorily. But he gets no response from the gods and wonders:

Is separation between man and gods

So complete? Can't you even bring me to silence?²³

Cymen's vision has by now mellowed enough and reached maturity where his conversion to humanistic Christianity is imminent. Fry, we have seen earlier in the present section and will see later in other plays, too, is a master-artist in creating climactic peaks in the general movement of his plots. Cymen's prayer to the gods before the sacrificial altar presents such a significant climactic point in the contour of the plot structure. At this climactic point, a messenger enters to announce the command of the king of Kent that Cymen should join the "general assemblage of all householders to receive the person. and words of Augustine, Exponent of the Christian god." Even if Cymen "finds it unpleasant at least "sir and give the appearance of playing attention out of consideration for the queen,"
who is a Christian. In the midst of general disapproval by his wife and kinsmen of the King's proposal, Cymen declares his decision:

*Time makes my way and I go on with time*

*What is contrives what will be. Yes I shall come.*

The mystery of the flash of light on the battlefield clears away like a thin cloud. He says to Hoel,

*Your god has come, perhaps,*

*Or lies in wait on the lips of a man from Rome.*

*Strange. As though a spirit in your, like*

*A wild fowl hiding in the mere of your flesh,*

*Heard the sound far off and flew up clamouring*

*Rousing a spirit in me. We're in the path*

*Of change. And I must go to meet the change,*

*Being unable to live unaltered.*

Hoel is naturally puzzled by change in Cymen:

*I wonder*

*What it was that came and wielded your father and left me.*

Cymen’s kinsmen declare the severance of their allegiance to him and plan to sacrifice the Briton while their Chieftain is away meeting the mission led by Augustine. Initially they are somewhat hesitant because of Cymen’s instructions not to harm the Briton. But the dramatist presents a lovemaking scene between Hoel and Martina, which starts, develops and
climaxes into Martina kissing the Briton. This not only infuriates the kinsmen but also provides them as honourable excuse to kill Hoel. Inspite of Martina's screaming protest they tie him to a tree with his arms spread and pierce him to death. As contrasted with the killers' hatred born of their narrow religious fanaticism acceptances of death as a harbinger of his union with the one God.

After the situation of violence following the amorous meeting of two human lovers, another situation characterized by calm and hope, is brought in. Cymen returns with the restoration of the calm of mind born of a new vision of religion, which is humanistic Christianity. He confesses to his wife:

*Clodesuida, a peaceful heart to you now.*

*I am well; I have seen our terrible gods come down*

*To beg the crumbs which fall from sins, their only means of life. This evening you and I*

*Can walk under the trees and be ourselves*

*Together, knowing that this wild day has gone*

*For good.*

Cymen has now fully understood the true meaning of sacrifice which is the prerogative of God above and which he arranges for the welfare of his created beings:

----------Sacrifice

*can only perfectly be made by God*
And sacrifice has so been made, by God

to God in the body of God with man,

on a tree set up at the four crossing roads

of earth, heaven, time, and eternity

which meet upon the cross.28

This Christian concept of sacrifice darkens the entire notion of pagon sacrifice demanded by the gods themselves, which is founded on violence and cruelty by man to man.

The play closes with Cymen’s consternating despair at the sight of the dead body of Hoel and his preaching the Christian gospel of forgiveness, mercy and compassion to his benighted kinsmen:

the sacrifice of God was brought about

by the blind anger of men, and yet God made

their blindness their own saving and lonely flesh

welcome to creation ........

we are afraid

to live by rule of God, which is forgiveness,

mercy, and compassion, fearing that by these

we shall be ended. And yet if we could bear

these three through dread and terror and terror’s doubt,

daring to return good for evil without thought

of what will come, I cannot think

we should be the losers.29
As the curtain is being drawn we find that Britain is now impregnated with Christian faith.

As they carry Hoel away, Cymen, Clodesuida and Martina following, the voices of Augustine's men are heard singing.\(^{30}\)

The above analysis of *Thor, with Angels* has amply demonstrated that Fry's dramaturgical concern in this play was not to propagate any specific religious faith. He was equally concerned with presenting human concerns as well. His anxiety, like Eliot, to forge a novel verbal verse medium for drama is discernible throughout the play. The verse has the requisite to suit the particular feelings, ideas, moods and situations of the play. Fry's concern with a conscious shaping of his verse is so pronounced that sometimes it becomes undramatic. Merlin's enigmatic statements, though in keeping with his status as a dramatis personae, become quite often obtrusive and inhibit the smooth flow of the dramatic action. His longest speech, running into sixty or so lines, on sleep\(^{31}\) is an example of this type. Fry, perhaps, forgot that speeches in drama are said by the characters only once and if they are not transparent and lucid their dramatic function of communication will hindered. Notwithstanding this minor flaw the play makes a gripping reading and a successful stage piece.
REFERENCES:

1. Ibid., pp 56-60
2. Ibid., p 60
3. Ibid., p 64
4. Ibid., pp 65-66
5. Ibid., p 67
6. Ibid., p 67
7. Ibid., p 68
8. Ibid., p 69
9. Ibid.
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14. Ibid., p 81
15. Ibid., p 82
16. Ibid., p 88
17. Ibid., pp 88-89
18. Ibid., p 90
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20. Ibid., p 94
21. Ibid.
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23. Ibid., p 96
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26. Ibid., p 108
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30. Ibid., pp 101-102
SECTION: III
A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

_A Sleep of Prisoners_ was first performed in Oxford at the University Church on 23 April 1951 and in London at St. Thomas’s Church on 15 May 1951. It was described by the _Church Times_ as a “great religious play.” It is the story of four prisoners of war locked up in a church in enemy territory. If we look at the play in terms of a conventional drama it will be found lacking in what Eliot calls outer drama of a play, i.e. external events and situation which support and sustain the inner drama of deeper spiritual or psychological import. Even the characters here are not humanized as they are in the two religious plays we have analysed. Human relational concerns in the worldly sense are not touched upon. The fibre of the verse also is quite thin and lacks the brilliance of that of _Thor, with Angels_. There is no attempt as in _Thor, with Angels_ to enliven a dramatic situation with humour. It is the most serious of the three religious plays. The play, soon after it opens in a conventional manner, becomes a series of dreams to project the inner responses of the prisoners to the conflicts set up by confinement. The structural design of the play is novel and ingenious in as the dreams are not narrated or shown through mimes but are actually dramatized. Besides this technique, Fry uses only Biblical characters and stories as a part of what Eliot called the mythical method. The use of this method lends the dimension of timelessness to the issues and
concerns of humanity such as those of life and death, love and hate, blindness of man and providence of God, Good and Evil, etc; which have always characterized human existence. Fry has dramatic intention in writing this play clear in a letter to his friend, Robert Gettings, which is prefaced to the published version of the play:

*In A sleep of Prisoner* I have tried to make a more simple statement, though in a complicated design where each of four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the other, and each, in his own, dream as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be. In the later part of Corporal Adams' dream the dream changes to a state of thought entered into by all the sleeping men, as though, sharing their prison life, they shared, for a few moment of the night, their sleeping life also.¹

The play opens on “the interior of a church turned into a prison camp. “The initial situation show “prisoner, Peter Abel, in the organ loft, playing ‘Now the day is over’ with one finger, and another David King looking at the memorial tablets on the wall.” David, soon on his appearance, is shown as hot-tempered and inclined to be cross with Peter. They will appear again in Adam’s dream as Cain, the wicked son, and as Abel the good one. These two characters are soon joined by the remaining two prisoners. Adams and Meadows who appear beset with their present predicament caused by the war. The reference to the war is modern history,
which has been used in combination with Biblical past, showing Fry’s conscious use of the mythical method which Eliot used his *The Waste Land* to make his themes acquire universal significance of timelessness.

Peter narrates the history of the sons of David from the English version of the Bible, which has been kept in the church, now turned into a prison camp. He advises everybody to keep his cool in their state of new existence because of the war. David is infuriated with Peter at the latter’s attitude of acceptance and religiosity. He makes a physical assault on him threatening to do him in. While Adams intervenes politely to disengage David, Meadows is more harsh and mater-of-fact:

*If you don’t get your hand away
 You’ll wish you never had’em-----
 I see the world in you very well, Tisn’t
 Your meaning, but you’ve a clumsy, wall-eyed bulldozer
 You don’t know what you’re hitting.*

David comes out of his role as Cain in his fury and attends on Peter with all brotherly feeling and tenderness, Adams is inclined to endorse David’s behaviour of brutality because of the stain on his nerves, too, caused by the on going war. Before the initial situation of presenting the four character’s worldly image, the play proceeds to slip into the domain of dream. We are told that David is no ordinary prisoner; he is the Biblican King of Israel. The rest of the
worried by the pain, which accompanies creation and believes that
"Pain warms us to be master: pain prefers us. Draws us up." Cain
decides to resolve the issue between his brother and himself through
the result of the game of dice to which Abel is made to agree. The
First Man (Adams) watches the game between his sons and
comments:

Sir, my sons are playing, Cain’s your man.
He goes in the mould of passion as you made him.
He can walk this broken world as easily
As I and Eve the ivory light of Eden.
Frets for what never came his way,
Will never reconcile us to our exile----
Sir, let the future plume itself, not suffer.³

The dream projection by the three prisoners of their true self
is abundantly clear in the quote. David in the dream figure of Cain
asserts: “Keep me clean of God, creation’s crooked.... I as the body
was first presumed. Cain kills Abel when he loses in the dice.
Adams who watches the killing helplessly realizes the consequences
to which he is instrumental, too:

Pinioned here, when out of my body
I made them both, the fury and the suffering,
The fury, the suffering, the two ways
Which here spadeagle me-----
My heart breaks, quiet as petals falling
responsibility which has replaced love and forgivingness with cruelty and hatred:

When I was young the trees of love forgave me
That was all. But now they say
The days of such simple forgiveness are done
Old Joe Adam all sin and bone.⁵

Meadows warns Cain of the first crime by man which cannot be forgiven and will bring punishment on him:

Cage of the world
Holds your prowling. Howl, Cain, jackal afraid
And no where, Cain, nowhere
Escape the fear of what men fear in your
Every man’s hand will be against you,
But never touch you into quietness.⁶

What can Cain do? All that he has got in him is given by his Creator. He, the representative of future humanity, has to learn the purpose behind God’s dispensation of opposing passions to man. He sees God’s design which can bring him pain only because he is only one half and lacks what the other half, Abel, has been endowed with:

The punishment
Is more than I can bear. I loved life
With a good rage you gave me. And how much better
Did Abel do? He set up his heart
Against your government of flesh.
How was I expected to guess
That what I am you didn't want? 7

“David twists as though he felt a branding iron touch” and exclaims,

God in heaven! The drag!
You're tearing of my life still living
This can't last on flesh for ever. 8

This is the end of the first dream. In the second dream David King changes to David, King of Israel and is ready for “dream’s coming him.” Peter changes to his rebellious son, Absolm and Adams into Joab. David sees a nightmare vision in which to his wonder his son, “who was boy enough looks like a thief.” Adams explains the vision to him as portent of danger to the security of his kingdom:

Because

He steals your good, he steals your strength,
He riddles your world your until it sinks,
He plays away all your security,
All your labour and suffer to hold
Against the enemy. 9
To David’s questioning Peter’s behaviour, the latter shows an obdurate defiance: “your enemies are friends of mine” Peter argues with his dream-figure that he should abjure enmity and blood-shed and work for reconciliation and fellow-feeling. “What is a little evil here and there between friends? Shake hands on it....” His jeering tone infuriates David who asks Joab to instruct his son into the marshal art so as to be able to defend his kingdom against the evil design of his enemies. Peter, in his belief in universal brotherhood, join the enemy side and makes his father believe that he has been betrayed. David orders Adams to attack the enemy at noon. The attack envisioned by David has been described in the stage direction thus:

Adams walks down the channel steps and crouches, keeping a steady eye on his wrist-watch. Adams gives a piercing whistle. Peter leaps up and hangs on to the edge of the pulpit. Adams cuts him down with a tommy gun. He cries out. David starts up in his bunk Peter and Adams to fall to the floor and lie prone.¹⁰

David’s dream suddenly breaks and the dreams of the play returns temporarily to the world of reality in Meadow’s complaint against the hostility of nature--“the howling wind outside, playing ducks and drakes with a flat moon”---and the discomfiture caused by the place of confinement itself--“This building’s big for lying with your eyes open”--which would not let him have a quiet wink.
David relapses into his dream again to see, as it were, the conclusion of the story he was seeing enacted. Joab kills Absolm and reappears before David to report to him that, as described by him, the victory has been achieved. The job being done, "I've done my best. I can't be held responsible for everything"--- Joab leaves David with loneliness of victory. David has now become a "prisoner of dream, like the world has got us all," as he walks in his dream with a red army blanket hanging from his shoulder.

David now is transformed in the third dream into Abraham and Peter and into his son, Isaac whom he intends of sacrifice as a proof of his devotion to God but who is saved by divine intervention. The story has been enacted with all its details recorded in the Bible. Only comic episode of the donkey, which is the dream figure of Meadows, has been added. Abraham asks Isaac to carry wood and coil of rope, which he has got for the sacrifice. On his way to the altar Isaac is fascinated by the life on the earth. His "clinging hold of the light" which his father has decided to take away has a ring of rue in it. Abraham explains to his son God's design in man's offering sacrifice:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God dips his hand in death to wash the wound,} \\
\text{Takes evil to inoculate our lives} \\
\text{Against infectious evil.}^{11}
\end{align*}
\]

As the father and son reach the hilltop, the sacrificial spot, the former tells his son that the creature to be sacrificed is his own
young boy, Isaac says that he has "come only a short way into life and can see great distance" with all the beauties of the created world. Abraham tells his son that his decision to sacrifice him, though "against my heart," has been taken for the general welfare of humanity. The obedient son agrees to his father's wish and desires that the knife fall on him quickly so that "thoughts of life coming to cry" do not come. As Abraham raises the knife, Adams appears as the dream figure of the Angel and conveys to him God's "new instruction" to spare the human sacrifice and instead substitute it with a ram's killing. The Biblical story ends here and Fry adds to it the rather dispensable comic episode of the donkey-man, who takes the tried Isaac back home.

As the dream donkey-ride is over, "an aeroplane is heard flying over the church", as it were to toll back the dreamers to the harsh world of reality. As Meadows and Peter retire to their bunks to sleep with their heads covered, Adams is discovered "asleep, lying flat on his bunk, looking down over the front of it." Adams is the last in the succession of dreams. His dream enacts the story of the Biblical furnace of King Nebuchdnezzar to which were offered Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego, the "three blind mice of Gotham" Adams, David and Peter are the dream figures who pass through the fire of furnace. But they are not destroyed. On the contrary the film of worldliness which had hindered their perceiving the design of God, is burnt in the flame so that they can see the providence of
God to the humans who are honest and selfless. The explanation and commentary regarding the purification of the human soul through divine providence are offered by Meadow's who appears as a figure seated outside the scene of the blazing furnace. For example, he explains the meaning of honesty as a pre-requisite for the purification of the soul, after man has achieved "patience and love":

Not to say we do
A thing for all man's sake when we do it only
For our own. And quiche eye to see
Where evil is. While any is our own
We should fine words unsoundly. 12

The three prisoners see the operation of the divine design in making men fit for the job through undergoing purification by abjuring hatred and dividedness and being one with love, sympathy and fraternity. While David with his purified vision finds "in the stresses of this furnace" a new vitality and strength, Peter perceives the reality of the purifying flame:

Look, how intense
The flames are men: all human. There's no fire!
Breath and blood chokes and burns us. This
Surely is unquenchable? It can only transform. 13

David perceives the existence of evil but can now assert the we should hate the deed and not the doer. Adams wonders,

Strange how we trust the powers that ruin
And not the power that bless.\textsuperscript{14}

Meadows moralizes on the advantages of being on the side of good which Peter subscribes wholeheartedly in detail later:

\begin{quote}
Good has no fear; \\
Good is itself, whatever, and bravely \\
It grows, and makes, and bravely \\
Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong: \\
Stronger than anger, wiser that strategy, \\
Enough to subdue cities and men \\
If we believe it with a long courage of truth.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

All the four prisoners are in the same state of mind and share each other’s vision of the providence of God and assert in unison, as it were, that there is an imperative necessity of man’s surrender to the rule and design of God and his realization of the divinely beneficial nature of the virtue of love, sympathy and brotherhood. In fact, the final vision is a summation of all the central ideas of the earlier three dreams as well. The four prisoners’ participation in the play’s prevalent mood of acceptence of the religious tenets of existence towards the close of the drama is more in the nature of sermon than of any dramatic action. There is pervasive symbolism throughout the play, which becomes obvious as the final curtain is drawn on the stage. The confinement of the prisoners in the closed walls of the cell brings to our mind the idea of man’s confinement to worldly life after the universe was created consequent upon the fall of man.
The prisoners' dilemma, miseries and their predicament are symbolical of those of humanity in general. The reality of evil and good, love and hatred, violence and sympathy, which constitute life on earth, is presented in the events enacted consciously as well as in those of the dream sequences. The solution to the human problems of miseries and anxiety is most effectively presented in the dream sequences of Marshal Adams. Thus, though the play comprises disparate dreams, there is a subterranean development of the whole drama of the play. The prevalent frustration and darkness with which the play begins and which continues until the first part of the final dream are symbolically resolved into a life of hope and peace when the play ends with the call of the bugle and the prisoners' fall into a peaceful sleep.

Our analysis of the three religious plays in the foregoing sections has amply established that Fry's artistic instinct gets the upper hand in treating strictly religious themes. Even in the last play analysed above, where the religious and moral elements threatened the dramatic elements to be subordinated, Fry has been successful in keeping the audience's interest in the play unflagging.
REFERENCES:

1. Fry, Plays (Oxford University Press, London, 1972), p. 4. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.
2. Ibid; p. 11.
3. Ibid; p. 21.
4. Ibid; p. 23.
5. Ibid; p. 24.
6. Ibid; p. 25.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid; p. 27.
10. Ibid; p. 31.
11. Ibid; p. 37.
12. Ibid; p. 52.
13. Ibid; p. 54.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
Chapter: III
Seasonal Comedies
Section: 1
SEASONAL COMEDIES

As we have averred to earlier, Fry, in life as well as in art, did not believe in categorization or polarity as far as the light and dark sides of human existence are concerned. These facets without being opposed to each other, in fact, coexist. This is why his plays, excepting *The Firstborn*, defy any attempt to be categorized as any of the traditionally established sub-genres of drama. The plays we have analyzed in the preceding chapter are all grave in import. They show miseries, suffering and frustration. In *Thor, with Angels*, even death takes place in the most violent manner. Brutal assaults are made by one character on the other in *A sleep of Prisoners* and Cuthman shows stoic endurance of heaps of miseries and hardships. But these plays bristle with the bright light of the life of hope and its fructification. The situations and dialogue there abound in wit, humour and all the brilliance of human mind.

Fry believed that comedy could convey human predicament and all the shades of existence better than one of the traditional tragic forms. In his letter of Robert Gitting, referred too earlier, Fry has said, "----- progress in the growth of vision: the increased perception of what makes for life and what makes for death. I have tried, as you know, not altogether successfully, to find a way for comedy to say something of this, since comedy is an essential part of man's understanding". He has written four serio-comic plays, which he calls comedies of season. The first seasonal comedy *The Lady's Not for Burning*, his most popular play ----- was written in 1949 and his last seasonal play, *A Yard of Sun*, appeared in 1970. These four comedies cover the four seasons ---- Spring, Autumn, Winter and Summer-
respectively. Fry’s concept of the seasonal comedy is characteristically his own. It is, he says, a comedy if mind in which ‘the scene, the season and the characters are bound together in one climate.” Language also has to be part of the mood, by being highly colloquial, grave, racy, halting or suitable for a somber and ruminating mood, etc. Besides, the four seasonal comedies mentioned above, Fry wrote his most effective one-act play, which is a subtle blend of comedy, seriousness, threatened tragedy-and its seriously reversed comic solution. This play was the first successful theatrical achievement of Fry and is entitled. *A Phoenix too Frequent.* But it is not a part of the seasonal comedies, because here the flavor of any season is not presented as it is done in the four comedies mentioned above. Both thematically and from the point of view of a newly invented form of drama, which we propose to call serio-comic plays, it fits in with the structural pattern and vision of life that we find in the four seasonal comedies. This is why we have included this play in the present chapter and will present its analysis first.
A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT

was first performed at the Mercury Theatre, London, on 25 April 1946 and revived on 20 November 1946 at the Arts Theatre, London. It was well received at its first production and brought Fry to the attention of a wide circle of theatre-goers and play-readers during the 40’s of the last century. The play abounds in the characteristic features of Fry’s comedies- i.e. the vitality, the flexibility, the vast comprehensive range of verse, a fusion of the serious and comic, an interest-sustaining plot with suspense, mystery and wonder of human existence, a firm faith in carpe diem, and an affirmative view of life in the created universe of God which He has so richly endowed with varied beauty and loveliness.

The play is a slight piece as far as its content is concerned, and depends almost exclusively upon its lively verse dialogue, wit and humour for its sustained interest. Though the play, on the surface of it, appears simple, its texture is enriched by the brilliant parade of poetry, paradox, wit, humour and intellectual discourse with a subtle fusion of irony. The dramatic situation is set on a summer’s night in Ephesus and the story, as mentioned by the dramatist himself, is from Petronius’ tale, as narrated in Jeremy Taylor, of an Ephesian matron who is determined to starve herself to death on her husband’s tomb, but who was led to change her mind on the appearance of a young corporal of the guard. Petronius’ story itself has an ironic slant, which is retained in its dramatic rendering by Fry. In Fry’s version of the Roman satirist, we find that the playwright brings death wish
and desire to live in opposition with each other where the latter instinct
triumphs over the former.

The mood and atmosphere of the dramatic action are visually realized
in the opening stage direction:

An underground tomb, in darkness except for the very low light of an
oil-lamp. Above ground the starlight shows a line of trees on which
hangs the bodies of several men. It also penetrates a gate and falls on
the first of the steps which descend into the darkness of the tomb.

There are only three characters in the Play: Dynamene, a young, pretty
widow who has come over to her husband’s tomb to starve herself to death
so that she can join the company of her deceased husband in the other
world; Doto, her loyal maid who out of her loyalty has accompanied her
mistress to the cemetery; and Tegeus, a Corporal on duty as guard of the
corpse hanging by a tree in the vicinity of the tomb. Not much happens in
the play by way of events except the narrated occurrence of the missing
corpse towards the end of the play, which functions as a comic anagnorisis.
The play focuses more on the creation of a complex mood and a somber
atmosphere than on interaction among characters and things happening in
tangible forms. Significantly, for the sake of economy and tightness of the
dramatic structure, the play opens, with the choric soliloquy of Doto, uttered
in the thick darkness of the night, which is intensified by the low light of the
burning oil lamp, scarcely showing her face. The pervasive silence, which is
broken by Doto’s soliloquy, is palpably realized with a supernatural aura
created by the intermittent hooting of an owl. Doto complains of her failed
love affairs in the past time which she reminisces, at it were to get over the
tedium of compelling herself to fast in sympathy for her starving mistress
and sitting in the lonely darkness with "Dynamene, leaning asleep beside a
bier". Doto's soliloquy gives us a glimpse into her mind and philosophy of
life.

'All that I ask
Is don't keep turning men over in my mind,
Venerable Aphrodite. I've had my last one
And thank you----He smelt of sour grass
And was likeable. He collected ebony quoits.\(^3\)

Doto believes that life does end one day, but while one lives one should
embrace joy rather than sully it with a self-imposed torture, as her mistress
is doing:

'Honestly, I would rather have to sleep
With a bald beekeeper who was wearing his boots
Than spend more days fasting and thirsting and crying
In a tomb.

But life and death
Is cat and dog in this double-bed of a world.\(^4\)

In a brilliantly comic verbal parade of her sense of humour, she mentions the
simplicity of her deceased master in a world, which contains crookedness,
too.

'My master, my poor master, was a man
Whose nose was as straight as a little buttress,
And now he has taken it into Elysium
Where it won't be noticed among all the straightness.

Doto's choric soliloquy, pervasively comic and with an ironic slant, introduces the predicament of her mistress, herself and virtues of the deceased master, along with the idea of the reality of life and death and a strong instinctual inclination for carpe diem.

Dynamene is awakened by the hooting of the owls. The cries of the owls interrupt her fantastical dream of her encounter with her husband who appeared before her in the image of a ship. Fry's acute sense of details about a human envisioned in terms of a ship is as fantastic as the dream dreamed by Dynamene:

He was the ship. He had such a deck, Doto,
Such a white, scrubbed deck such stern prow,
Such a proud stern, so slim from port to starboard
If ever you meet such a man with such fine masts
Give your life to him, Doto. The figurehead
Bore his own features, so serene in the brow
And hung with a little seaweed. O Virilius,
My husband, you have left a wake in my soul.
You cut the glassy water with a diamond keel.
I must cry again.

Dynamene's dreaming of her husband, reproduced above in full detail, presents a number of significant points, which are integral to Fry's philosophy of life communicated in his serio-comic plays. Here we find a
total absence of any abstract or any abstract ideology relating to erotic, social relational or sentimental values. The reality of physical existence and human desires for the pleasures of life are amply demonstrated as a rational approach to natural worldly life. Doto, in an ironically comic rejoinder to her mistress' dream, remarks, "you might/find yourself in bed with him again/In a dream, madam." In the entire narrative of Dynamene's dream and Doto's interlocution there is no hint of any pretence or hypocrisy in the thoughts of the starving widow or in the authorial approval of the legitimacy of her worldly or fleshly desires. In fact, the various human limbs envisioned in the different parts of the ship are a pointer to the desirability and validity of physical virility, strength and beauty, a sine-qua-non for worldly life. Fry, unequivocally, subscribes to the validity of the physical needs of worldly life. Denial of natural human instincts and desires, either necessitated by superstitious conventions and ideologies or self-imposed, is comically castigated by the dramatist. This has been done in a subtle manner in Doto's witty rejoinder quoted above as well as in Dynamene's ending her dream narrative with the emphatic 'must', (I must cry again) connoting her endeavor for self-imposed denial.

After the narrative of the vision of Virilius as a ship, Dynamene and Doto continue their conversation about the other world from which, as Hamlet says, no traveller ever returns to inform us about the real nature of that world or even whether it exists at all. Doto's disbelief in the life after death for which one may aspire at the cost of the tangible pleasures and pains of the real life in the real world of our existence is clear in her statement that she has only heard from people about the soul's first
encounter with Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding hell’s entrance. The reality of life cannot be explained away by the superstitious beliefs in “the shapes and shades” to which soul is transformed after it leaves its usual abode which is the human body. The philosophical meaning of soul does not interest Fry and this has been conveyed through Doto’s skepticism. Even Dynamene, while bewailing the loss to the world of “the coming man” with considerable promise of blossoming into the perfect creation of nature asserts that death is an insult to life which is the most precious gift of God to the created universe. There is a strong echo of Hamlet’s famous apostrophe of man as the best of all the creatures created by God in Dynamene’s long speeches of mourning the loss of Virilius.⁸

> What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express And admirable! In action how like an angel!........ The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals, and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust.⁹

To Dynamene Virilius was the very emblem of “animation” that has to fall as a victim of the mysterious operation of the universe:

> What a mad blacksmith creation is

> Who blows his furnaces until the stars fly upward

> And iron Time is hot *******

> *******the masterpiece

> Looms out of labour.¹⁰
Dynamene’s philosophic pragmatism is subtly juxtaposed by Doto’s unsentimental, practical wisdom, which has a tinge of the comic, without the touch of a sly satire:

_ I shall try to grieve a little, too._

_ It would take lessons, I imagine, to do it out loud._

_For long. If I could only remember_

_Any one of those fellows without wanting to laugh._

Dynamene’s asking Doto to cry on her own grief, if she has any, and we know that her loss of several lovers does not disturb her practical mind at all, shows the hand of the clever theatrical craftsman that Fry is. It facilitates her encounter, in the dreadful darkness of the night, with Tegeus who “comes through the gate to the top of the steps.” Doto is surprised at the appearance of a man at the most unexpected place and time. Her exclamation at sighting Tegeus obliquely hints at his being the symbol of light and life, in a place, which is dark and where death is being contemplated. To Tegeus’ several queries, establishing him as one belonging to the mundane world, Doto’s witty and sharp-edged replies show how Fry can blend the philosophical, the mundane, the comic, the serious, the ironic, the intellectual and the emotional elements into a dramatic situation, in a sparklingly brilliant dialogue that the reader or the audience is at once compelled to announce: ah! It’s a unique theatrical experience. It was this novel dramatic experience which Fry thought would revive poetic drama in the middle of the last century. It is relevant to quote Doto-Tegeus conversation in some detail to support what we have just averred to above:

_TEGEUS-_ What’s going on here?
DOTO- Grief. Are you satisfied now?

TEGEUS- Less and less. Do you know?

What the time is?

DOTO- I'm not interested.

We've done with all that. Go away. Be a gentleman.

If we can't be free of men in a grave

Death's a dead loss.

TEGEUS- It's two in the morning. All

I ask is what are women doing down here

At two in the morning?

DOTO- Can't you see she's crying?

Or is she sleeping again? Either way

She's making arrangements to join her husband.

TEGEUS- Where?

DOTO- Good God, in the under world, dear man. Heven't you learnt

About life and death? 12

In a serio-comic manner there is growth in the intimacy between Tegeus and Doto. In their conversation a whole gamut of human issues are brought in perfunctory statements, ranging from the explicability of love, mystery of life and death through "soul and the other troubles" (i.e. body) and Doto's uninhibited assertion of her espousal of "Change" in human relationships in her yielding to the temptations of fleshly existence. A sort of comical conflict is briefly presented in Doto's wavering between surrender to temptations of the body and the vow for self-denial. This
conflict has a unified structure of its own. It begins with Tegeus asking for Doto’s permission to eat his supper. He invites her to share the supper which the latter turns down equivocally, though in the name of “utter contempt”: “your supper and your knees/That’s what’s making me cry/I can’t bear sympathy/And they’re sympathetic”. Doto, in a comical manner, resists the temptation of the “little new rolls”. But Tegeus, offer to her to share a few drinks with him proves too much for her tenuous resolve. She does not mind “a drink for the road” i.e. her intended journey to the other world. Moreover, the drink will wash down “the dust in her throat” and “there’s no point in dying/ of everything simultaneous”.

The plot, in an imperceptible manner, moves on to another strand of the story relating to the cause and occasion of Tegeus’ presence there. Since Tegeus’ bit of the plot acts as a catalytic agent in precipitating the authorial vision of life, for the sake of probability Tegeus’ reason for being there near Virilius’ tomb must appear convincing. In a deftly structured situation, with a beginning, a middle and an end, Fry presents the Tegeus’ affair in a most casual manner. Tegeus, while offering a drink to Doto, mentions that he has brought two bowls, one for himself and the other for his relief who should arrive in the morning to replace him as a guard of the “hanging corpses”. As the drink has started working on the minds of Tegeus and Doto, the causes of the hanging of the six corpses on the trees given by Tegeus in a remarkably precise language with pointed edges, the futility of death for petty disputes, in a mildly satirical manner, is exposed. But, as it is usual in Fry’s dramatic technique, an issue is raised, oblique hints are made and then it is left there. In fact, it is the creative responsibility of great art – be it
literature or the sister arts – to raise issues and at most hint at a solution only suggestively and not work our loudly the conclusion of the issue.

The situation further develops into Tegeus and Doto being drawn towards each on the rails of affirmation of life and carpe diem. Tegeus now finds life “unambiguous” and the hitherto nourished despair in his mind is banished by the touch of human warmth reviving life. Doto’s death-wish is transformed into a desire to be kissed by Tegeus so that she could “go moistly to Hades”. After the fertilization of desire to live and rejection of the negative approach to life, the Tegeus - Doto affaire structurally concludes. A smooth switch over to now Tegeus - Dynamene encounter is introduced in a deftly maneuvered manner in Tegeus’ rejoinder to Doto’s speech about her desire to renounce all dark aspects of life and enjoy the present without negating the reality of death: “hers is the way, / Luminous with sorrow”. The rich semantic pregnancy of this statement about Dynamene is unfolded in the succeeding situation when Dynamene wakes up again.

Dynamene enquires about the man Doto has been talking with, Doto tells her in a highly suggestive language, that the man is a “honeysuckle”, a corporal of the guard on his nocturnal duty of guarding the six corpses. Dynamene’s response to this man’s unexpected appearance is unwrapped in oblique irony as what she says symbolically means the opposite of it: the man has come to guide her to life and not death:

*A messenger, a guide to where we go.*

*It is possible he has come to show us the way*
Out of these squalid suburbs of life, a shade,
A gorgon, who has come swimming up, against
The falls of my tears (for which in truth he would need)
Many limbs to guide me to Virilius."\(^{14}\)

Dynamene first chides Tegeus for mocking her predicament by coming over
"in a place of mourning where light itself is a trespasser". Ironically
Dynamene, unwittingly endows Tegeus with the attributes which are
contrary to negative existence. She tells Tegeus.

------nothing can have
The right to entrance except those natural symbols
Of morality, the jabbing, funeral, sleek.
With-omen raven, the death-watch beetle which mocks
Time – the spider – the worm – etc.\(^{15}\)

Tegeus is "approaching Spring in a colourless landscape of winter thought".
At Dynamene's reprimanding Tegeus for trespassing into the former's
domain of grief where all thoughts and objects of this world are "a desired
oblivion" the Corporal feels embarrassed and apologetic and prepares to
leave the place at once. Doto requests him to hang on for sometime and in
the meantime Dynamene can have some drinks to revive her spirits. In order
to avoid blasphemy and not break her vow, she can have her drinks "on the
steps" away from the tomb. Dynamene finally yields to the temptation
offered by Doto:

I might be wise to strengthen myself
In order to fast again; it would make me abler
For grief. I will breathe a little of it [wine]\(^{16}\)
Dynamene’s yielding to the temptation of the worldly desires draws her nearer to Tegeus who uses images of love, fertility and the allied objects in his response to Dynamene’s exclamation at the “exquisite bowl”, from which she is going to drink the positive wine of life.

*Do you see the design?*

*The corded god, tied also by the rays*

*Of the sun, and the astonished ship erupting*

*Into vines and vine-leaves —.*

Dynamene continues her conversation with Tegeus while drinking. They talk about Virilius’ body and soul, life and death, thoughts and instincts, hope and promise, existence and the mystery of the world, flora and fauna, and various aspects of light and darkness and of nature. The talk, apparently disjointed, about the whole gamut of varied subjects performs at least a two-folder function: First, it is a pointer, to the participants’ inclination towards life and to the rejection of denial of the positive aspects of worldly existence. Secondly, it registers a growing intimacy of amorous nature between the two interlocutors. The climactic point in the conversation reaches when Dynamene says, “It was kind of you to come,” to which Tegeus’ prompt response is “it was more than coming I followed my future here”. There is a double entendre in the use of the world “future”, with one meaning, which Dynamene grasps, and the other one for the reader.

Dynamene, in her tipsy state of mind, continues with her vision to Tegeus as a messenger from the underworld, as a supernatural creature. Her conviction about the supernatural reality of Tegeus is strengthened when the latter, without being informal by anybody, evinces knowledge of
Dynamene’s name. She even “sees little Phoebuses’s rising and setting in his eye”. Ignoring Doto’s explanation – that Tegeus knew her name by looking on her brooch – she continues her divine envisioning of Tegeus’ identity who must have descended from his godly abode at Olympus to play “practical jokes” on humans, and wonders:

---haven’t we at all

Developed the gods were born? Are gods

And men both to remain immortal adolescents?¹⁸

Tegeus rightly remarks that it is Dynamene herself who is “making him into whatever she imagines.” Dynamene’s self-restrained earthly urges are catalyzed by Tegeus, which is clear from her declaration:

I shall call you Chromis. It has a bread like sound

I think of you as a crisp loaf.¹⁹

The conversation, developing their amorous intimacy, continues for quite sometime when they suddenly realize that they could “see a thin dust of daylight blowing on to the steps”, which turns out only “the moon’s daylight”.

After the lovers have ensured that Doto was asleep they talk about their just aroused intimacy in a less enigmatic or periphrastic manner as they have done so far. Tegeus confesses that his encounter with Dynamene has bred in him a new confidence and purpose in life, which has been a tiresome burden on him. Though Dynamene advises Tegeus, her envisioned symbol of life and vitality, to go away from the place where she has thrown her lot and which is fit for only “the spider, raven and worms, and not for a living man”. Tegeus thankfully acknowledges his debt to the place:
It has been a place of blessing to me. It will always
Play in me, a foundation of confidence
When the world is arid.²⁰

Dynamene now would not talk about her proposed journey. Hence she and Tegeus, to while away the time, begins to discuss disparate topics like “finding a reason for living”, the concept of progress, etc. in the midst of this conversation Tegeus declares his love for Dynamene in unequivocal terms. They now feel another need of bodily existence, i.e. the need to eat. Eating sometime will sober down the effect of the drinks taken on empty stomach. Dynamene has now decided to discuss nothing but her Chromis. Her interest in knowing more about him brings in the idea of their birthplace affinity. Tegeus was born at Pysea where Dynamene may have seen his boyhood, while playing with her mates. Tegeus imagines that he, too, must have met her as a girl and “seen her playing at hiding in the cave”. As the lovers feel closer to each now, their being separated for so long must have had the hand of fate in it:

How did it come
Our star could mingle for an afternoon
So long ago, and then forget us or tease us
Or helplessly look on the dark high seas
Of our separation, while time drank
The golden hours? What fate is that.²¹

Dynamene’s repetitive use of “Time” focuses on this rapacious agent in human destiny. But as averred to earlier, Fry does not dilate upon even the traditionally held serious issues of life. He only mentions them in realistic and starkly unsentimental terms.
Tegeus from now on grows increasingly eloquent in expressing his new romantic mental framework:

_Wasn’t I born_  
_In love with what, only now, I have grown to meet?_  
_------I was born entirely_  
_For this reason -------to fill a gap_  
_In the world’s experience, which had never known_  
_Chromis loving Dynamene_.

_Dynamene’s growth of love is no less eloquently expressed:_

_Chromis, you boy,_  
_I can’t look away from you. You use_  
_The lamplight and the moon so skillfully, _  
_So arrestingly, in and around your furrows_.

_------- ------ ------ ------- ------- -------
------- dear Chromis_  
_Absurd, disconcerting Chromis. You make me_  
_Feel I wish I could look my best for you -------_  
_To be showing some beauty for you, to put in the scales_  
_Between us. But they dip to you, they sink_  
_With masculine victory._

At the acme of their ecstatic romantic verbal interaction, lest the situation should look idealistic, Fry brings it to the level of realistic love. Tegeus proposes.

_Let me unload something of my lips longing_  
_On to yours receiving._
The resultant ecstatic stage of the romantic minds are naturally blinding, echoing the situation of Cleopatra’s wooing scene in Shakespeare’s great tragic play and that of the Hyacinth girl in the Hyacinth garden in Eliot’s famous dramatic poem, *The Waste Land*. In the state of ecstasy, differences and contraries are obliterated. Dynamene, therefore, does not know “where she is going” perhaps to death. Tegeus tells her that there is no difference between life and death:

*Call me*

*Death instead of Chromis. I’ll answer to anything*

*It’s desire all the same, death in me, or me*

*In death, but Chromis either way.*

Dynamene in her sobered down mood after the drink, comes down to the mundane world and feels that her acceptance of Tegeus’ love would be betrayal to her deceased husband who must be waiting for her to join him in Hades. Besides this, she will feel embarrassed before her friends. Here Tegeus’ intelligently and most cogently argued point of view leaves Dynamene a little relieved and convinced. Tegeus argues that if he “had been her husband, he would never dream of expecting” her to join him in Hades. On the contrary, he would “remember her body descending stairs in the floating light”.

He “should say, ’I have left my wealth warm on the earth, and hell, earth needs it ----- was all taught her of love so poor that she will leave has flesh and become shadow’’. He further argues that her and Virilius’ love for each other was “infused with life, and life infused with their love” She should “repeat her husband in love, repeat him in life and let him sing in her blood
for ever.” Dynamene’s resolve to die is visibly shaken, as she feels “susceptible to two conflicting norths.” She feels as if she has “the constitution of a whirlpool and actually twirling”. Dynamene feels the compulsive force of instinct for life. She only wants to escape being “an entertainment to her friends” for going back on her vow. Tegeus, the very emblem of carpe diem, rejects what will happen in future and what people will think of them and seize firmly the moment in the present not to allow even the few pleasurable moments of life in the fleshly domain of our existence to be wasted:

That’s for to-morrow. To-night I need to kiss you, Dynamene. Let’s see what the whirlpool does Between my arms; let it whirl on my breast. O love, Come in 27.

Dynamene’s death-wish is completely overcome by her strong urge for life. She feels “all one again” with life. She confesses,

I am there before I reach you; my body Only follows to join my longing which Is holding you already. 28

Fry establishes the divine sanction of fleshly life, without denying the reality of death. Human existence is, in fact, an amalgam of body and soul, life and death, the fleshly and the divine. This amalgam is what is called ‘creation’, where fortune, chance and mystery are integral to human existence. Tegeus, on being asked by Dynamene, tells her how in the dark he chanced on the light of life that Dynamene is.
It is at this juncture of their love-making that the plot of outer drama is given a sudden push when Tegeus wakes up to his immediate worldly concern. “The whole business of guard had gone out of his mind.” Kissing Dynamene, Tegeus leaves the place to check on the six bodies hanging by the tree. As Tegeus goes away, leaving Dynamene alone, Doto wakes up, still tipsy, imagining that she had gone to Hades. Doto now finds her mistress a changed woman for whom “void is space again; And space has life again.” she accepts the advice of her mistress to return to the world of flesh and blood and abjure the thought of rejecting life. Doto now sees a new beauty in the moon as she leaves the place of mourning.

As Doto leaves Tegeus re-enters with a crest-fallen face. He, in ruminating moon, starts analyzing human destiny and the role fate plays in man’s seeking to be happy. Joy may be nothing but the parent of doom; creation and destruction may be inextricably joined together; “indulgence, not fulfillment, is what the fate permits”. His talk is as enigmatic to Dynamene as it is suspenseful to the reader of the audience. Like Dynamene, the audience is surprised at the sudden change in Tegeus’ whole attitude to life, from buoyant optimism to despair. The suspense, however, is cleared as Tegeus narrates how during his courtship of Dynamene one of the six corpses has been stolen. For this happening, Tegeus will be held responsible under provisions of martial laws. The punishment will be court-martial and eventual execution. Tegeus would prefer to kill himself to be the missing corpse. He would still make his death worthwhile by “dying on a wave of life”, i.e. in the embrace of Dynamene. But Tegeus’ self-slaughter, says Dynamene, would be an “offence to truth” which is life. Tegeus wants to
avoid the ignominy of being hanged to keep up the pride of his love for Dynamene. He philosophizes on the pragmatic reality of life:

> Since everything in the lives of men
> Is brief to indifference, let our love at least
> Echo and perpetuate itself uniquely
> As long as time allows you.\(^{29}\)

Dynamene emphatically rejects man-made laws, like court-martials, which can only undermine divinely sanctioned truths, the kernel of which is, "love is the only discipline," where Dynamene and Tegeus are "the disciples of love." Thus, Fry brings in a number of fresh issues to our notice before the crisis in the outer drama is resolved. Tegeus' predicament, as he is caught in a tight corner, is of a man, who seems to have been caught irretrievably between the cross-currents of life and death, which characterize human existence. The cross-currents are real and there is no point to wish either of them away.

Dynamene, who has now awakened to the reality of life, shows the presence of her mind, which is the product of her newly, perceived pragmatic view of life. She suggests to Tegeus:

> My husband --- can be other body ---
> He has no further use
> For what he left of himself to lie us here.
> Is there any reason when he shouldn't hang
> On you holly tree? Better, far better, he,
> Than you who are still alive, and surely better
> Than idling into corruption.\(^{30}\)
Tegeus' surprise at this suggestion only brings out Dynamene's mellowed philosophic perception of an attitude to life, which is impeccably rational and solidly pragmatic and realistic:

--- I loved

His life not his death. And now we can give his death

The power of life --- wonderful!

Isn't so? That I should be able to feel

He moves again in the world, accomplishing

Our welfare. It's more than my grief could do.31

In a language, with highly symbolic suggestiveness, Dynamene proposes to "celebrate" life with "some wine unfinished in this bowl." She fully surrenders Virilius (death), to her Chromis (life). The curtain falls as Doto reappears "with the bottle" and toasts to the both Masters, the dead and the living ones.

The above analysis of the play has amply demonstrated that Fry is always in full control of his dramaturgical apparatus where the proportion and integration of the different elements of the drama of the play are kept within conscious artistic control. The arrangement of the plot, growth of the different characters with their own conflicts and their resolution, unambiguously worked out vision of life without the least touch of ideology and sentimentalism, and the brilliant use of language, capable of sustaining our interest through wit, humour and irony have been done with superb art artistry.
REFERENCES:

1. Fry, "The Lady's Not For Burning," World Review (June 1949), p. 29
   All subsequent references to the text are from the paperback edition of the play
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., pp. 7-8
6. Ibid., p. 8
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., pp. 9, 11-12.
9. Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act II, Sc. ii, ll. 296-301
10. Fry, Plays, op. cit., p. 12
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 13
13. Ibid., p. 17.
15. Ibid., p. 22.
16. Ibid., p. 23.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 28.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 30.
21. Ibid., p. 34.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 35.
24. Ibid., p. 36.
25. Ibid.
27. Ibid., pp. 37-38.
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29. Ibid., p. 47.
30. Ibid., p. 48.
31. Ibid., p. 49.
SECTION: II
THE LADY’S NOT FOR BURNING

*The Lady’s Not For Burning* is Fry’s first seasonal comedy and was premiered on 10 March 1948 at Arts Theater, London. The season chosen for this play is Spring. Fry himself, in an article on the play (*World Review*, 1949), has explained his dramaturgical strategies in the play, which also clarifies his notion of a seasonal comedy:

> I have endeavored to make the words and deeds of the characters move all the time with the sense of particular moment at which they are said or done, so that one can be aware continually of the April afternoon, for example, with scents and sounds of it, or of the April evening and night as the play goes on; moreover to make these scents and sounds an essential part of the action, conditioning the words of the characters.¹

Here the scene, the season and the characters are bound together in one climate. The dominant mood throughout the play is one of holiday. The characters seem to be floating on the relaxed waves of life of abandon. There is a pleasurable atmosphere of utter relaxation and welcome irresponsibility. No intrusion of irony or satire is allowed in the play. The dialogues have been endowed with a more brilliant dazzle and are more colloquial, contingent upon the expediency of the needs of interpersonal interactions, than we had noticed in the preceding play. Like *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, here, too, dialogues are varied in keeping with the individual attributes of the
different characters, but when the characters are made to appear deliberately confused, language responds to this contingency by being enigmatic and deliberately circumlocutory, especially in the speeches of Thomas Mendip who eventually emerges as the most significant character. Unlike the preceding play, here we have plenty of events and even farcical situations suiting the mood of the season.

*The Lady's Not For Burning* is Fry's successful, popular, and well-structured full-length play, with sizeable body of dramatis personae and multiple threads of plot, interwoven in a highly skillfully structured hilarious comedy. Fry has been praised as well as debunked for the exuberance, extravagance and brilliance of the verbal medium of the play. His most positively affirmative view of life is best exemplified in this play. Though the basic conflict between death-wish and urge for life, which we saw in *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, is the starting point and the central thematic fulcrum on which the action of the play rests, it has none of the preceding play's facade of seriousness and threatening despair which was worked out and eventually dissolved into the light of life, hope, joy and affirmation of all that the earthly existence yields to man. The opposition between death-wish and urge for life starts melting away early in the play as the two urges come face to face with each other.

*The Lady's Not For Burning* is set in the medieval age "Time 1400 either more or less or exactly. The main story is concerned with Thomas Mendip, a discharge soldier and Jennet Jourdemayne, a young, pretty and rich woman. Mendip claims to have killed one Matthew Skipps and wants to be
hanged for his murder. Jourdemayne is chased by the townsmen who take her to be a witch. She, too, approaches the Mayor and the judicial authority of "the small market – town of cool clary-" the locale of the dramatic action to be saved from the attack of the witch-hunters who believe that she has changed a man into a dog. The Mayor is puzzled by the two opposite appeals of the petitioners. He however, orders these two petitioners to be kept in a prison room together so that during their conversation the truth of their claims - i.e. Mendips's claim of being murderer and Jennet's assertion of being innocent - may be established. Mendip, on first seeing Jennet in the Mayor's office, is drawn to wards her beauty and truth. After a few hurdles in the way of developing amorous relationship between them, they decide in favour of the pleasures of the fleshly world and the confusion is cleared when Skipps, who was supposedly killed by Mendip and changed into a dog by Jennet appears on the scene. The other thread of the story relates to the two nephews of the Mayor, namely Nicholas Devize and Humphrey Devize and a young, pretty woman, Alizon Eliot. Alizon's engagement with Humphrey, which has been arranged by the latter's mother-Margaret Devize - is going to be celebrated in the evening of the day, in the afternoon of which the confusing episode of Mendip and Jennet began. Both the brothers - Nicholas and Humphrey - put forward their claims for the hand of Alizon. Nicholas eventually gives up his claim over Alizon as he gets lecherously drawn towards Jannet. He even tries to seduce her in the prison room but is thrashed up by Mendip. As the time for the celebration of the festive event in the family of the Mayor approaches guests start trickling in, including Mendip
and Jennet, Alizon elopes with the Mayor's clerk - a foundling - namely Richard. Thus, the two stories intermingle and are concluded on a note of celebration of life and joy.

Even the mere narration of the skeleton story given above amply promises an interesting theatrical fare. Fry has mentioned that he got the idea of the plot from a reported news item in February 1947, which gives the version of a convict who falsely confessed to a murder. "In the past I wanted to be hung it was worthwhile being hung to be hero, seeing that life was not really worth living." The news item suited Fry's dramatic intention well. Like the play, analyzed in the preceding section. This dramatic piece, too, dramatises a conflict between death - wish and urge for life, represented respectively by Mendip and Jennet. Like some of the plays of Shakespeare, *The Lady's Not For Burning* begins with the exposition and initial complication of the subplot, and the main plot begins towards the middle of the first Act, and shows the direction to which it is going to develop by the end of this Act. However, the cases of Mendip and Jennet, relating to the main plot, are mentioned in the opening situation of the play. But before it develops in any clear-cut direction, we are shown the strong penetration, into the drama, of the action relating to the sub-plot.

As the play opens in the house of Hebble Tyson - the Mayor of the town - we are shown his clerk, Richard, busy with accounts, ignoring Mendip's calling his attention who showers on him his first salvo of brilliant
...figurative language with which the play is replete throughout: He calls him “a piece of calculating clay and goes on to air his ire on the “dammed world.”

I've never seen a world
So festering with damnation. I have left
Rings of beer on every alehouse table
. . .
From the salt sea-coast across half a dozen counties.
But each time I thought I was on the way
To a faintly festive hiccup
The sight of the damned world sobered me up again.²

Richard perfunctorily uses the word “damnation” with out meaning anything, merely as a phatic exclamation Mendip picks up this term to comment upon himself, the world, and what is going on in the town in the name of witchcraft:

Damnation’s pretty active there this afternoon,

Licking her lips over gossip of murder and witchcraft;

There’s mischief brewing for someone.³

In the above example, we notice how Fry uses language cleverly to propel the dramatic action. Mendip seizes an opportunity to introduce the other strand of the main plot and leaves the matter there without elaborating it any further, thus creating a curiosity in our mind about the identity of this “someone.”

Richard proceeds to talk in a business-like manner when he asks in a cliché of politeness Mendip’s name and business.” Mendip’s reply to Richard’s simple query is baffling as well as incomprehensible to the latter.
But it contains the summary of his disenchantment with fleshly life and the reason for his wish to end it, besides giving him an opportunity to narrate his humble origin in this world and “the glory of his childhood” To Richard’s can I have your name”? Mendip’s prompt and witty reply is “It’s yours,"

_It’s no earthly_

_Use to me. I travel light; as light_

_That is, as a man can travel who will_

_Still carry his body around because_

_Of its sentimental value. Flesh_

_Weighs like a thousand years ------_

Richard’s uncomplicated mind can arrive at one conclusion only in his response to Mendip’s reply quoted above, and that is that “he is a little dreunk.” Richard in his conversation with Mendip mentions a strand in the sub-plot. He says that Mendip has come at an importune moment when the Mayor and his family are “expecting company - a girl.” Again, like Mendip’s “someone”, the identity of the girl is not disclosed. Because of the Mayor’s being very busy with the afternoon affair of the “company,” he would not see anybody. Mendip quickly, tells Richard the purpose of his seeing the Mayor, which will not take much of his time. It is simple: he only wants to be hanged. At this extraordinary request Richard is naturally contused and would not take Mendip’s words seriously and rightly considers him tipsy because “who ever would want to be hanged”?

Mendip claims to possess a superior mind with his being different from the common folk. But he goes on to assert that the whole humanity has
a death-wish, because they know that "Life is the way/We fatten for the Michaelmas of our particular gallows." For dramatic economy, the talk about death—wish and Mendip's request to be hanged cannot be further prolonged. Hence, the theatrically and dramatically effective entry of Alizon Eliot is effected at this juncture now of Richard's bafflement.

Allison's beauty is nearly bewitching. The simpleton that Richard looked so far goes into a sort of trance:

_O God. God._

_God. God. God. I can see such trouble!_

_If life sending a flame to nest in my flax?_

_For pity's sake._

Thomas chimes in with Richard when he exclaims at the sight of Alizon; "Sweet pretty noose, nice noose." It is Allison's entry, which begins in the freshness, flavour and abandon of the Spring season. Her staggering steps into the Mayor's house and describing the light of the "sunshine in which the white doves are paddling," the "trees as bright as a shower of broken glass," the sun and the rain clashing together like the cymbals clashing when David did his dance and above all her own "April blindness," all point to the pervasive April mood outside the Mayor's house. Even inside the Mayor's house, the morose Richard is electrifyingly charged with an April mood and the protagonist of death—wish is temporarily given a jolt to be inclined towards life. Significantly, Fry in order to establish the mood, atmosphere and situation of Spring season, brings in focus first the dramatic

*action of the sub-plot.* This is because it is much easier to create the mood
of relaxation and pleasurable irresponsibility through exaggerated, humorous situations than do it through presenting a conflict between two serious issues of human existence, which is the chief concern of the main plot. At Alizon's hesitation to speak out her purpose of visit to the Mayor's house because of the presence of a stranger that Mendip is, the latter assures her,

I breathe,

I spit, I' am. But take no further notice.

I'll just nod in at the window like a rose;

I'm a black and frosted rosebud whom the good God

Has preserved since last October.

Alizon abruptly announces to Richard that she "is going to be married to Humphrey, almost at once." In their mutual introduction Alizon and Richard tell us about the antecedents of their life from their birth. We are told by Richard that "he wasn't born, he was come across" and was brought up by a priest. Alizon's circumstances of life are described by her in a highly humorous tone and sparkingly witty language for the true flavour of which we need to quote it in some detail:

I am quite usual, with five elder sisters. My birth
Was a great surprise to my parents, I think. There had been
A misunderstanding and I appeared overnight
As mushrooms do. My father thought
He would never be able to find enough husbands
For six of us, and so he made up his mind
To simplify matters and let me marry God.
to note that all the characters in the play are endowed with the gift of the gab, wit, humour, and are without and touch of rancour or causticity in their physical or verbal behavior.

However, when Margaret asks Nicholas to fetch in Humphrey and is insistently told by him that he has killed him, he is discovered in a comic shape, lying “prone in the rain.” Even Margaret’s threatening gesture to Humphrey lying in the mud is expressed in a comical, Melapropian verbal medium: “one day I shall burst my bud of calm, and blossom into hysteria.” The atmosphere of near madness is all pervasive: Nicholas insists that he has killed Humphrey; Humphrey is living in mud obviously disinclined to get out of it; Alizon ignoring Margaret’s command to Humphrey is actually dead. Nicholas adds to the spring madness of the atmosphere by describing his mock heroic fight in epic terms:

We fought for possession

Of Alizon Eliot. What could be more natural?

What he loves, I love. And if existence will

Disturb a man with beauty, how can he help

Trying to impose on her the boundary of his two bare arms? pandemonium, what a fight!

What a fight? Humphrey went hurtling

Like Lucifer into the daffodils

When Babylon fell there wasn’t a better thump.  

As Nicholas and Richard go out to fetch Humphrey in, Margaret is left alone with Mendip who explains to her the cause of the din of sells and
cuckoo cooing outside in the street. It is the commotion created by a witch-hunt, says, Mendip. Mendip expects Margaret to feel a bit concerned about people chasing and hooting a woman in the street. That will show that there is still some “civilization” left in this. But Margaret on her part “is trying hard to be patient with her sons.” One should not “expect her to be Christian in two directions at once.” As Nicholas and Richard are trying hard to “persuade the body (Humphrey) to stand up,” who is “lying on his back picking the daffodils,” Margaret gets ready to look “composed, sufficiently placid and unmotherly “when Humphrey, who now” looks like a shock of bedraggled oats,” is brought in. Mendip now, after watching the Devise family’s rigmarole, was exasperated to know when the Mayor was expected to arrive. His impatient query is superceded by the comic situation created by Humphrey being “carried by Nicholas and Richard holding a bunch of daffodils in his hand.” His explanation to his mother as to why he has been carried in, besides being comical, is also indicative of the general mood of irresponsible and pleasurable abandoned in which he, too, is steeped.

_Mother, I didn't knock myself down. Why
Should I pick myself up? _ Daffodils
For my wife?_

There is a brief unconcerned sort of altercation between the brothers’ “official” claims over Alizon. While Nicholas, echoing Synge’s Christi’s bravado in _The Playboy of the Western World_, threatens Humphrey “to kill him a second time,” the latter asserts his claim on the ground of the “official” arrangement and “what is official is incontestable.” As the Chaplain is heard,
off-stage, “tuning his string” on the viola for the approaching prayer, Humphrey, prepares “to lie down” again, as if unable to keep steady under the weight of the intoxicating effect of Spring season. During the claims and counterclaims by the two brothers to be irrelevant, repeated demand for his own exit from this world and reminder to the Devizes to “the baying of those human blood hounds out in the street,” chasing the supposed witch, are completely ignored. Being fed up with the “April anarchy” in which the Devizes are caught, Mendip gets ready to go out and find the Mayor himself.

The plot gets a fresh impetus when “Hebble Tyson, the Mayor, afflicted with office” and suffering from catarrh, eventually puts in his appearance. Tyson looks ridiculous, blowing his nose and looking for his handkerchief. Mendip is happy to see the Mayor because he is “about to become his gateway to eternal rest.” Tyson’s ridiculous behaviour appears all the more so when he, to project his competence, tries to attend to two cases simultaneously — one Mendip’s and the other Alizon’s, While he admires Alizon’s beauty and dress, in the same breath he rejects Mendip’s request to be hanged:

\[
\text{Out of question}
\]

\[
\text{It's a most immodest suggestion, which I know}
\]

\[
\text{Of no precedent for. Cannot be entertained}
\]

\[
\text{I suspect an element of mockery}
\]

\[
\text{Directed at the ordinary decencies}
\]

\[
\text{Of life.}^{10}
\]
Mendip continues his appeal to the Mayor saying that he is sick with this life and wants "to sleep off." Hence, he should be put on the waiting-list for his gallows with a note recommending preferential treatment. Tyson believes that by making such an "unorthodox" demand, Mendip, thinking of "gallows as a charitable institution, only" "wishes to draw attention to himself" But Mendip is not "a fool and quite understands the rules." That "no crime, no hanging." He didn't expect the Mayor "to do him a favour for nothing." He assertively confesses,

I managed to do _ in

A rag _ and _ bone merchant at the bottom of Leapfrog Lane''

Tyson is convinced that Mendip is "utterly unhinged" and Margaret opines that "they're all in the same April fit of exasperating nonsense;" Nicholas, too, had asserted he hadn't." Mendip refuses to be slighted like this. If one murder is not enough, he had, in fact, killed another man, too "a quite unprepossessing pig-man with a birth mark". Which he didn't think, "worth mentioning," Tyson by now is totally non-plussed.

Tyson's confusion becomes worse confounded when Nicholas rushes in to inform him that "there's a witch to see you." It is Jennet who appears on the scene. While Mendip admires Jennet's beauty, Nicholas feels bewitched: "curious crooked beauty of the earth. Fascinating." Tyson's inadvertent query to Jennet "what is the meaning of this"? - Invites a prompt rejoinder from Mendip: "that's the most relevant question in the world." This exploration of meaning in existence constitutes an essential component of Fry's thematic
concern in all his plays. However, this significant thematic strand is not overly developed but runs subteraneously throughout the play.

Jennet’s request to Tyson is the opposite of that of Mendip. She wants to save herself from the chasing mob who has taken her to be a witch. She has managed to come over to the Mayor after great physical hardships, climbing over as many as eight walls to escape the fury of the mob. Tyson tries to evade Jennet’s explaining the truth of her position under the cover of legal procedure, repeating ridiculously and monotonously: “This will be gone into at the proper time.” Margaret, curiously “feels the rustling - in of some kind of enchantment already.” Tyson decides that “She will have to be put in charge.” It is Mendip who can see through the design of the Mayor’s plan:

*He can see she’s a girl of property*

*And the property goes to the town if she’s a witch;*

*She couldn’t have been more timely.*

When Jennet feels a bit relaxed, she tries to assure the Mayor of her innocence and of the mob’s misgiving about her. Margaret, misunderstanding Jennet’s conversation with the Mayor, is led to believe that she, too, like Mendip, wants to be punished, as if “death has become the fashionable way to live” with the present generation. Jennet, in clarifying her own position, very dramatically and precisely, narrates all that she has done to be entitled to be called a proper witch. Tyson’s confusion further increases by Mendip’s interrupting the conversation between the Mayor and Jennet with his incomprehensible and apparently irrelevant and quite often cynical remarks. However, Jennet’s most reasoned argument in her defense is
obstinately rejected by Tyson who orders her immediate arrest and removal of Mendip from the town. Tyson’s unreasonable decision provokes Mendip into bursting out with verbal explosives:

*You bubble - mouthing, for - blathering*

*Chin-chuntering, chap-flapping, liturgical, Turgidical, base oldman. What about my murders?*¹⁴

His long verbal tirade¹⁵ is a succinct commentary on the true nature of the persons of the Devize family. He could read on Tyson’s forehead the signs of a fornicator and lecher. Nicholas is a “congenital generator” and his conduct later in the play as well as that of Tyson bear this impression out. To Mendip, Jennet is an “exquisitely mad young woman,” mad because she expects of the Mayor which, because of his character, he is incapable of giving. Jennet being impressed by Mendip’s outbursts, feels that he is doing all this to save her life. Mendip disappoints her by saying that he is not on her side of life but if she so wishes, she can come over to his side of life. The opposition between the two sides of life - death wish and urge to live - is clearly brought out before the first Act ends.

The plot movement registers a further complication when Humphrey rushes in to announce that “there’s a sizeable rumpus,” “a kind of bloody revolution” at the rampant “tale about drowning a pig-man and murdering old-Skipps, the rag-and-bone man”. Jennet is surprised at Skipps’ being reported as having been changed into a dog by her. Tyson in his impatience and confusion does not allow any discussion about the Skipps affair, triggering a serious and confusing contradiction, which needs to be “gone
into,” as Tyson says, “at the proper time.” The contradiction in the two versions of Skipps episode, says Chaplain, is “life all over.” This as usual with Fry, mentions in a tantalizing manner, a serious characteristic of existence itself which, in a deftly artistic manner, is not elaborated and worked out, but is nevertheless, integrated with the frivolity of the story as well as the pervasive Spring mood of the play.

Mendip, in his “whisper in Humphrey’s ear”, informs him that “the Day of Judgement is fixed tonight” when Humphrey’s engagement with Alizon is going to be celebrated. Mendip’s prophecy has a symbolical dimension, i.e. new creation; a new perspective of life, a new hope is in the offing, which the play’s further movement will work out. Mendip’s philosophical explanation of the Day of Judgement, running into twenty-three lines couched in comical imagery, is too much for Tyson’s mind. The Mayor’s repose to Mendip’s long exposition, which is quite incomprehensible to his small mind, produces a comic effect, when he dismisses it by his refrain, “this will all be gone into at the proper time.”

Tyson now suspects that Jennet and Mendip are guilty. But before they are tried for their respective crimes as per the procedure of the law, they are to be kept in prison. Since the time for the prayer, before the already fixed nuptial engagement celebration is approaching fast, Tyson orders that Jennet be kept in confinement of the cellar and Mendip be taken away into some other prison. Jennet’s supplication for compassion is ignored by everybody. Only Mendip, inspite of his strenuous resistance, has felt to be gradually drawn towards her. He implores the Mayor to hang him “before it is too late.”
But when the taking up of his case is postponed until “a proper time,” he feels that his death-wish might get a jolt to move in the direction of urge for life. The first Act ends at a climactic point in the structure of the main plot, when Mendip tells the Mayor,

*M. Mayor, hang me for pity’s sake,*

*For God’s sake hang me, before I love that woman!*17

Act II opens in the same spirit and Spring mood of indolence. The opening stage direction goes thus:

The same room; about an hour later. The Chaplain in a chair,
sleeping. Tyson surrounded with papers. Edward Tappercoom,

the town’s Justice; mountainously rolling up and down the room.18

Tappercoom’s way of speaking pompously is in keeping with his inflated personality and is conducive to comic effect. The Justice and the Mayor are seized of the two cases — i.e. Mendip’s and Jennet’s. Tappercoom takes Mendip’s story as “cock-and-bull murders for which there isn’t a scrap of evidence.” But inspite of “the purest cajolery to coax him to deny” his murders, he insists on having committed several other crimes as well, such as “petty larceny, abaction, peculation and incendiarism.” But as far as Jennet is concerned she can be punished as she is wealthy (because her property would be confiscated) but “on the other hand she is quite affectingy handsome,” says Tyson, and “humanitarian” consideration may be shown to her. Tappercoom warns Tyson against his lecherous inclinations towards her. The problem before the Justice is that despite great pressure of
persuasion, Jennet would admit nothing and Mendip won’t stop admitting.

While Tappercoom and Tyson are occupied with the two cases, Margaret enters “without her placidity” to look for the tongs to help out “a log the size of a cheese” which “has fallen off the fire.” Tyson immediately connects “the blazing log” with the supernatural presence of a witch. While the Chaplain suddenly wakes up from his dreaming of “Jacob’s ladder” and Tyson is a bit nervous at remembering what Mendip had said earlier that the Day of Judgement is imminent, Tappercoom pretends to hide his discomfiture under the cover of high-sounding rhetoric. “The whole thing’s a lot of amphigourious/Stultiloquential fiddle-faddle.”

Before Tappercoom and Tyson decide of the proper course of action, Margaret hurriedly comes in again with the news that “the town’s gone mad. They’ve seen a shooting star.” “The number of people gone mad in the street is particularly excessive.” Her description of the behaviour of the people outside as having been overtaken completely by a frenzy, and indulging in a confused violence, draws a picture of utter chaos stirred by supernatural happenings in the firmament as if God Himself is angry. Tyson brushes aside the phenomenon of the shooting star as “one of those quaint astrological holus-boluses.” Tappercoom dismisses it as “an excess of phlem in the solar system.” Margaret’s anxiety is that such a disturbance will spoil the celebration planned for the evening. However, the Mendip Jennet problems deserve the immediate attention of the Mayor and the Justice who must find some way out of the present situation. The case of Jennet seems clear and
simple to them. Tappercoom, who asserts not to be in a hurry at jumping at a conclusion in any matter, has now formulated a theory in his mind. It is better to quote his own words:

*It's my belief the woman Jourdanayn*

*Got hold of the male prisoner by unlawful*

*Supernatural soliciting*

*And bewitched him into a confession of murder*

*To draw attention away from herself.*

The Chaplain, who comically uses more words irrelevantly, wonders why Mendip should nourish death-wish in his mind. It may be that “he finds the world not entirely salubrious.” But “he might be wooed from his aptitude for death by being happier.” This, the Chaplain suggests, can be done by “inviting him to partake of the festivities this evening.” Tappercoom does not approve of this suggestion on the ground of civilized decency and propriety. However, Tyson has a “train of thought” to unfold which was first interrupted by Chaplain’s bibulations, eventually concretizing into his suggestion mentioned above, and a second time by the intrusion of Richard who has gulped a few drinks put out for the guests to overcome his “feeling low” “about the prisoners and the row in the street that’s getting out of hand,” the prisoners and most importantly, because of “certain inner things.” The “certain inner thing’s” relate, in fact, to his infatuation for Alizon, which is shown in the final Act of the play. Tyson punishes Richard for his impudence put in their appearance. Tyson’s disclosure of his plan is interrupted a third time when Nicholas and Humphrey, who have been with the prisoners, appear
on the scene. Nicholas is happy in his pain on his forehead, which has been hurt by a brick pelted at him when he was addressing a crowd in the street on “world affairs.” He sees beauty in the red colour of the blood on his forehead as if the gash was “a splash from the cherry-red river that drives my will. Tyson is angry with his nephews and feels that “the brick was divinely delivered and richly deserved.” To Tyson’s query as to why they “have attempted conversation with the prisoners,” Humphrey replies that as the Town council it was his duty to “grasp whatever concerns the welfare of the population,” though his real errand was “business of the flesh” - i.e. his lecherous attraction to Jennet. Nicholas asserts that his reason for going to the prisoners was “business of the soul.” Thus, we see that that the events of different types - concerning the Chaplain Richard, Nicholas and Humphrey - which we have mentioned above, contribute to the general spring season anarchy of the town.

However, finally, the curtain is drawn on the suspenseful strategy, which Tyson has been attempting to unfold. His plan is to bring the two prisoners together into the Mayor’s room and leave them alone, while he, the Chaplain, Humphrey and Tappercoom will “remain unobserved in the adjoining room with the communicating door ajar”. This will bring the “hypothetical devil” (Mendip) into conversation with the witch. There will be a “dialogue of Hell, perhaps, and conclusion, / Or one or other by their exchange of words / Will prove to be innocent or we shall have proof/Positive of guilt.”20
The plot-movement now gains a fresh momentum to reach its climactic point. When left alone, Mendip and Jennet engage themselves in a conversation, starting with the season of regeneration and new birth personified in the images of Persephone, which he opposes to Jennet’s talk of depression and tiredness. The time is twilight, which Mendip describes in images of rebirth or renewal of beauty in the sky. Mendip tries to stop Jennet from talking about the future. He advises her not “to be so serious about such a mean allowance of breath as life is”. He explains his philosophy of carpe diem as follows:

*We’ll suppose ourselves to be caddis-flies*

*Who live one day. Do we waste the evening*

*Commiserating with each other about*

*The unhygienic condition of our worm-cases?*

*For God’s sake, shall we laugh?*

--- *since laughter is surely*

*The surest touch of genius in creation.*

Mendip’s homily to Jennet here is realistic and without any touch of cynicism. Their conversation new veers round their respective alleged crimes. While Mendip says that his confession of his crime was sheer honesty (which Jennet calls hypocrisy), Jennet describes the genesis of her own alleged guilt to her father who had the ambition of being a successful alchemist. He died a “deluded man”, though the success of his experiment was accidentally discovered only posthumously. But it was of no use for Jennet or anybody else because they could not know the exact constitution of the solution.
prepared by her father, which, when “spatted over some copper coins two
days later/By impregnation had turned into solid gold.” After her father’s
death she preferred “loneliness to the companionable suffocation of an aunt.
“She spent her time with her pets and used to “dine indoors” with her
peacock on Sundays. Her maid who saw it “told all whom she met/That the
Devil was dining with me. “Mendip laughs this story away by remarking that
people here take Mendip to be the Devil who has in his toil a witch, and his
voice has not the remotest resemblance with the cry of the peacock. Mendip,
in a long speech,^23 explains to Jennet the contradictions, illusion and reality,
paradox and mystery, logic and irrationality, which constitute our existence
where it is futile to look for exact “cause and effect.” Jennet gets ready to allow
tears to flow from her eyes because she finds Mendip not quite of here own mind and
amenable to sympathize with her predicament. But Mendip would not like to drown
in the flood of her tear: “May God keep you/From being my Hellespont. “Mendip is
captured in a nice amorous enigmatic situation:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ p}e\text{r}e\text{r}, \ I \ d\text{n}\text{’t} \ k\text{now} \ w\text{hich} \\
I\text{s} \ w\text{orse; } t\text{o } h\text{ave } y\text{ou } c\text{rying } o\text{r } t\text{o } h\text{ave } y\text{ou } b\text{ehaving} \\
L\text{i}k\text{e } C\text{a}t\text{h}e\text{r}i\text{n}e \ o\text{f } A\text{i}x, \ w\text{ho } n\text{e}v\text{er } w\text{ept} \\
U\text{n}\text{ti}l \ a\text{ft}e\text{r } s\text{he } h\text{ad } b\text{e}e\text{n } b\text{e}e\text{hed}.^24
\end{align*}
\]

Mendip grows eloquent in his hyperbolic expansion of the image in the
above quoted lines; when he goes on to say that after Catherine was beheaded
“the accumulation of tears of a long lifetime/Burst from her eyes with such
force, they practically winded/three onlookers and floated the parish
priest/Two hundred yards into the entrance hall/Of a brothel.^25 There is such
an irresistible charm, unbridled flow, and exquisite liveliness and lucidity in
the verse used by Mendip that we get the gradually emanating fragrance of a
new life which is in the process of coming into existence. Fry's handling of
verse here is remarkably unique, not heard on the English stage either before
or after him during the last century.

Mendip's infatuation for Jennet imperceptively grows further. He
insists upon envisioning her as mystery while Jennet asserts that she is "an
unhappy fact fearing death. "She, too, is drawn towards Mendip, she blames
him for this attraction:

You've cast your fishing net
Of eccentricity,
Caught me when I was already lost
And landed me with despairing gills on your own
Strange beach. That's too in human of you.26

When Mendip, being conscious of Jennet's growing concern for him,
protests and warns her, she retorts, "you are making yourself/A
breeding-ground for love and must take the consequences." It is now Jennet's
turn to remind Mendip of his own philosophy of carpe diem: In a little while
neither of them may exist and be altogether transmuted into memory.
Mendip-Jennet conversation about life and death, joy and pain, transitoriness
and hope for longevity, which Richard has been listening to while scrubbing
the floor, brings to his mind his own amorous predicament, and "a tear
rolling out of his eyes" can be seen. Thus the two stories of the sub-plot and
main plot are brought closer to each other because of the fear of the non-
fructification of the love of the two pairs.
Jennet now picks up extra strength in asserting her amorous right over Mendip who has once again fumed his cynical consideration of his own worth and place in the created universe. She says that she will accept Mendip as the prized gift for heart irrespective of whatever he may be, good, mediocre, bad, or evil. Even if he is corruption incarnate, she “will most willingly harvest corruption.” She goes on:

\[\textit{You are Evil, Hell, k the father of Lies; if so}
\]

\[\textit{Hell is my home and my days of good were a holiday.}
\]

\[\textit{Hell is my hill--------.}^{27}\]

The eaves-droppers hear the lines quoted above, and interpreting them out of the context jump, jubilantly, over the conclusion that their mouse-trap has succeeded because “the woman has confessed... The town can go to bed.” Tappercoom orders that “faggots will he lit tomorrow at noon” to burn Jennet, the witch, alive. He delivers his sentence on Mendip, too, who has just become violent because he feels cheated at not being hanged and Jennet being awarded death sentence through “graft”:

\[\textit{Found guilty}
\]

\[\textit{Of jaundice, misanthrophy, suicidal tendencies}
\]

\[\textit{And spreading gloom and despondency. You will spend}
\]

\[\textit{The evening joyously, sociably, taking part}
\]

\[\textit{In the pleasures of your fellow men.}^{28}\]

Mendip would accept Tappercoom’s judgement only if “this lady (Jennet) shall take her share to-night of awful festivity.” Under threat from Mendip and recommendation from the Chaplain and Humphrey, Tyson, finally
accedes to his "most unorthodox request." Jennet, by the end of the second Act, appears composed and reconciled to her lot. But she would, at no cost, let the few moments of her "caddis-fly" existence slip out to be shrouded in talks of death or gloom of any sort.

The second Act apparently seems to have concluded the main plot. Jennet is to be punished on the faggots while Mendip is to be acquitted. But the suspense of the sub-plot, whether Richard's amorous attraction to Alizon will fructify, remains to be resolved. We are convinced of Jennet's innocence. The reason for people's taking her to be a witch, based on a wild rumour, was clarified by Jennet in her narration of her life's antecedents in her interaction with Mendip in the second Act, when for strategic purposes they were arranged to spend sometime by themselves. Hence her being punished unjustifiably will not be in the fitness of artistic propriety of the play. In order to resolve this tangle Fry uses the ancient conventional design of *dous-ex-machina*, which performs a two-fold function in this play. First, it resolves the complication with an element of pleasant surprise, and secondly, it helps sustain the Spring mood of the play until the last moment.

The third and final Act of the play is laid in the same room as the preceding one. The time of the action is "later the same night." Thomas enters grudging his predication in a hostile world, which he wants to leave. Humphrey, who was already there "at the window of the room in which Jennet is, would like Mendip to be away while he would try to carry out his lecherous plan of seducing the girl. Humphrey - Mendip conversation is interrupted by the hurried entry of Nicholas whose mind is so much affected
by "the most asphyxiating enjoyment that eve sapped his youth this night" that he "wants to commit an offence." But because of "the abysmal poverty of mind" that he has, "he doesn't know what offence to commit." Nicholas is in the perfect grip of April mood of intoxication. In Humphrey-Nicholas conversation we find a clear hint that both the brothers are no more interested in the hand of Alizon whose engagement celebration is in full swing now. Margaret puts in her appearance, and appears terribly concerned and worried at her sons being away from the party and the guests left to themselves to enjoy the delicious dishes and drinks laid out for the party. Humphrey refuses to join the celebration as "he is officially sick and actually bored/The two together are as bad as a dropsy". Margaret fails to persuade Humphrey to accompany her to the celebration. But as Jennet appears, ready for the "last silvery night" of her life when she has "sixty years to use up almost immediately", brilliantly shining in the dress and jewellery lent to her by Margaret, both Humphrey and Nicholas altercation on the matter of who would right fully escort her to the celebration room.

Mendip makes effort to save Jennet from the faggots next morning. He asks Tyson to "cry off the burning". Being rebuffed by Tyson, he requests him at least to allow him bail into his garden," where "he can himself useful and catch mice for an owl." Tyson is bewitched by Jennet's beauty as she goes into the dancing room. His conversation with Tappercoom brings out the hitherto closely guarded longing of his heart:

TYSON:  

_We must burn her,_
Before she destroys our reason. Damnable glitter
Tappercoom, we mustn’t become bewildered
At our time of life. Too unusual
Not to be corrupt. Must be burnt
Immediately, burnt, burnt Tappercoom

**TAPPERCOOM:** Are you trying to get rid of temptation,
Tyson? A belated visit of the wanton flesh
After all these years years?²⁹

The Chaplain, too, does not escape being charmed by Jennet’s gaiety. Tappercoom is more pragmatic and advises Tyson: “Tomorrow, remember, you’ll have her property/Instead of your present longing for impropriety.”

Richard-Alizon story which is part of the sub-plot is now taken up. Alizon for the first time confesses to Richard that “I’ve come to be with you.” They are allowed sometime to be alone as Mendip “disappears into the garden” to “mouse for a small Dutch owl.” A dramatically effective situation is created when Richard and Alizon, through their amorous conversation in a lonely place, confess to each other love and promise to be together. They decide, “to forgo custom” and elope. While Richard slips inside the room “fetch his savings,” he encounters Margaret who is feeling exasperated at the general effects Jennet’s charms have produced on people:

*How am I to prevent?*

*This girl, condemned as a heretic, from charming us*

*With gentleness, consideration and gaiety?*

*It makes orthodoxy seem almost irrelevant.*³⁰
The action of the play is now moving at a fast pace. While Richard is getting ready to slip out of the house to elope with Alizon, Margaret is looking for the celebration, and Nicholas and Humphrey are continuously following Jennet with their lecherous intention wrapped up in the grab of amorous inclinations. Jennet returns with the two brothers, completely exhausted at the dance in the celebration, anxiously looking for Mendip lest he should “still make for death” because of his being “sick of the world.”

Richard “is upset to see his escape cut off,” as Nicholas asks him to bring some more canary bottles which he and Jennet would like to drink privately before Margaret “calls him back to evaporate into duty.” Nicholas goes to the cellar to help Richard carry the bottles. Humphrey, finding himself alone with Jennet, proposes to her that if she aggresses to principle of “give and take,” i.e. to share his bed to-night, he being on the council could entangle her case in legal procedure in such a manner that the burning of her tomorrow will be postponed. And “once postponed, a great congestion of quibbles can be let loose over the council table.” Jennet for a moment weighs the consequences of the choice between “sleeping with Humphrey and tomorrow sleeping with her father.” She vacillates for a moment, giving an impression of a conflict. At the climactic moment of his drama of official lechery, when Humphrey goes intensely impatient to extort a ‘yes’ from Jennet, “Thomas climbs in through the windows.” Mendip threatens Humphrey with “making him the climax to his murders,” so that latter “can die a martyr to the cause/Of bureaucratic pollution.” Jennet reprimands Mendip for being officious in her matter of choice because he is not
concerned with her at all. At this Mendip confesses "the disastrous truth" that he loves her. He goes on to say:

Nothing in the world touch me
And you have to come and be the damnable Exception.\(^{31}\)

Mendip and Jennet talk about and argue out at length the reality and relationship of body and soul and affirm that the sanctity of both is a part of human existence. So far as their love is concerned, if Jennet is burnt tomorrow Mendip would have no further motivation to live on. As the two lovers conclude their conversation, Nicholas, who had been locked inside the cellar by Richard as a device to be able to run away to join Alizon waiting in the dark outside, gets reconciled with the situation:

I imagine it's all over with us, Humphrey,
I shall go and lie with my own thoughts
And conceive reciprocity. Come on, you boy of gloom.
The high seas for us.\(^{32}\)

Richard and Alizon, who had run away, Suddenly, reappear to report that they had seen old Skipps on their way out. This disclosure abruptly resolves the complication of the outer drama: Mendip's claim to have killed Skipps and the townsman's allegation that Jennet had changed the same old man into a dog vanish like a thin cloud, making the atmosphere perfectly clear. Tappercoom, who has been summoned from his bed, breathes a sigh of relief and goes back quickly "to be a burden to his bed." Mendip, who was just declared by the town Justice as "deflated", feels "overblown with the
knowledge of his villainy.” Margaret gets reconciled to Richard and Alizon’s finally sneaking out of the place to be together, away from this world of constriction of diverse types. The play ends at a note of stark realism about “the hypocrisy, porcous pomposity, greed, lust, vulgarity, cruelty, trickery, shame and all possible nitwittery” which characterize existence in this world.

But with this dark side of the reality of life exists the bright side of will and urge to live and enjoy life. Mendip’s grasp of the reality of existence shows the mellowness of this perception of worldly truth:

*Glimmer, as you will, the world’s not changed.*

*I love you, but the world’s not changed Perhaps*

*I could draw you up over my eyes for a time*

*But the world sickens me still.*

The play ends with the complete surrender of death-wish, howsoever real it may be, to the urge for life. Mendip declares: “I shall be loath to forgo one day of you/Even for the sake of my ultimate friendly death.” The curtain is dawn at the cock crowing of the advent of dawn and the lovers wishing each other “good morning.”

Our analysis of the play above has firmly established Fry as a dramatist who has artistic attention constantly fixed on both the stage and poetic drama as a viable literary genre in an age of prose and extreme scientism. The plot moves with a carefully modulated developed of both the outer drama and the inner drama. The outer drama relates to the various happenings in the play on the physical plane, while the inner drama concerns itself to the genesis, growth and final fructification of love in the two pairs-
Richard and Alizon; Mendip and Jennet—comprising respectively the sub-plot and the main plot. Suspense is sustained until the last in both the stories. Both the stories as well as the incidents of the outer drama remained soaked in the April mood of a mysterious intoxication throughout. Characters, all individualized, behave in consonance with the general mood and atmosphere of the play. A variety of themes branch out of the two stories, which are integrated with main drama of the play. The verse is brilliant, quite often rather too dazzling, which remains a singular achievement of this play.
REFERENCES:

   All Subsequent references to the text are from this edition
2 Ibid, p 117
3 Ibid
4 Ibid, p 118
5 Ibid, p 120
6 Ibid
7 Ibid, pp. 121-122.
8 Ibid, pp 126-127
9 Ibid, p 130
10 Ibid, p 133
11 Ibid, p 134
12 Ibid, p 139
13 Ibid, pp. 139-140
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid, p. 143
16 Ibid, p. 148
17 Ibid, p 150
18 Ibid, p. 151
19 Ibid, p. 156
20 Ibid, p 162
21 Ibid, p 164.
22 Ibid, p. 165
23 Ibid, p 169
24 Ibid, p 170
25 Ibid
26 Ibid, p 171
27 Ibid, p 174
28 Ibid, p 176
30 Ibid, p. 194
31 Ibid, p 202
32 Ibid, p 204
33 Ibid, p. 211.
SECTION: III
VENUS OBSERVED

_Venus Observed_ is Fry’s second comedy, written in the mood of and steeped in the atmosphere of autumn. It was first produced by Sir Laurence Olivier at the St. James’ Theatre, London, on 18 January 1950. The response of the theatre critics and audience to the premiere production of the play was highly favourable. In fact, _Venus Observed_ shows greater artistic maturity in Fry’s handling of the thematic issues, character delineation and the verbal medium. The fusion of the seasonal mood and atmosphere with the other dramaturgical components of the play is more convincing and sharp-edged than that in the preceding play. Characters are more distinctively portrayed and the dialogue is more dramatic with sparkling wit, minus the dazzling brilliance of _The Lady’s Not for Burning_. The two aspects of the main theme-positive and negative attitudes to life—are more clearly, vividly and unambiguously presented than in the first seasonal comedy. There is greater artistic restraint, reserve and mellowness here.

The autumnal implications are clearly shown in the setting and characters. The dukal mansion where the action of the play is set is at a stage of decay and the characters, excepting the pair of young lovers, are in the afternoon of their life after they have had the pleasures of their youthful days. And significantly the play begins with the most important event of a solar eclipse. This implication of decay and decline in the physical surroundings and characters is corroborated by the autumnal phenomena in nature as well. There is mellowed gaiety and exuberant ebullience pervading the entire play without
allowing witless farce to intrude inspite of the apparently ludicrous situations on certain occasions. The profoundly serious archetypal theme of the love of the old for the young, threatening to be disastrous to the general gaiety, is treated with commendable artistic restraint so that Fry’s philosophy of life - human existence as a blending of both, dark and light aspects - is affirmed realistically. The whole play is cast in the framework and mood of a Shakespearean romantic comedy - i.e. love at first sight, difficulties in the way of the lover’s eventual union, and finally, resolution of all the difficulties, making the play end in compromise, reconciliation and union of lovers.

The opening situation of the play is set in “a room at the top of a mansion: once a bedroom, now an observatory”. The Duke of Altair and his son, Edgar appear conversing about the former’s decision to settle “in a resignation of monogamy” in the afternoon of his life after having sown quite a number of wild oats in his youth. This decision of his father the son has to play the important role of acting the Paris of ancient Greek mythology to declare who of the three old flames of his father - Hilda, Rosabel and Jessie - will be his new mother. The Duke with inextinguishable amorous desire is exhausted with his old habit of philandering. He tells his son, who is embarrassed by his father’s suggestion, about his amorous predicament,

Because I see no end
To the parceling out of heaven in small beauties,
Year after year, flocks of girls, who look
So lately kissed by God
They come out on the world with lips shining,
Flocks and generations, until time
Seems like nothing so much
As a blinding snowstorm of virginity,
And a man, lost in the perpetual scurry of white,
Can only close his eyes
In a resignation of monogamy. 1

Edgar is surprised at his father’s extra-ordinary desire of his son choosing one woman out of the many who have “at some time been implicated in the joyous routine of his life.” The father’s decision is “a compliment to the freshness” of his son’s mind who would be performing, like the Paris of Troy, “an act of poetry.” Why should Edgar feel embarrassed and uncertain about his judgement because he won’t have any prejudice against the three contenders whom he does not know. The Duke encourages his son with reference to Paris who “had no trouble/ Choosing between the tide-turning beauty; /Imponderable and sexed with eternity. / Of Aphrodite, Hera and Athena.” The time fixed for “the judgement of Paris,” as the duke’s Agent (Reedbeck) has already arranged is “eleven twenty-nine when we’re to have the total eclipse of the sun” to observe which the three ladies have been invited. In the darkness of the total eclipse of the sun at noon “all women will be as one” and all that Edgar has to do is to give the apple kept by the side of the spectroscope to the woman he wants to his mother to be. The Duke cannot take a decision because he cannot “decide which were his vintage years of love.”
Before the first movement of the situation is finally concluded, another strand and an important one for the structural complexity of the dramatic action is introduced with an unexpected suddenness. Captain Fox Reddleman, the Duke’s butler, enters with a telegram for Reedbeck. The telegraphic message is that Perpetua, Reedbeck’s beautiful daughter (“a rose from the world’s rock”), who had gone away with her mother to America ten years ago, is returning today before lunch, probably at a time when she also could join the invited company to see the eclipse. Reedbeck is excessively excited at the proposal of meeting his daughter after the lapse of a decade. The Duke leaves the stage and goes out to change for the occasion of the eclipse, advising Reedbeck to “suddue himself, otherwise he’ll capsize in disappointment.” One should be prepared to expect the worst. This marks the second movement of the initial dramatic situation of the play. Perpetua’s expected arrival soon will certainly lead to some complication.

Reedbeck’s excitement is interrupted when his son, Dominic, suddenly appears and insists upon having a serious dialogue with him. In this third movement of the dramatic situation, we are led to more disturbing complications. Dominic’s dialogue “isn’t going to be pleasant.” He confronts his father with the question he has asked him several times: “why are we so rich ---- where did our money come from”? Reedbeck is merely the bailiff of the Duke and his wealth is vastly disproportionate to his real income. Reedbeck’s accounting for his wealth, coming from legacies, is apparently a cock-and-bull story and invites Dominic’s direct allegations: “You’ve stolen
the money, steadily and consistently”, which is known to every body around them. The amassing of money has been made through fraudulent practices, in such an unsubtle manner, that his journey to jail is almost a forgone conclusion. Dominic in a bitter tone and out of disgust denounces his father for his “pathological lust for climbing” “the top of the ladder of prosperity and his “unrelieved, wicked cupidity”. He is frightened at the thought of being called “the son of a convict, “which is a certainty. Reedbeck has no defence except that the arrival of Perpetua deserves a cheerful welcome. As the plot of the play develops further we find that the brief situation just described constitutes an important strand in the complex structure of the dramatic action.

The three movements described above occupy twenty four minutes of the stage time: the play began at five past eleven and the guest were invited to arrive at eleven twenty-nine to watch the total solar eclipse from the Duke’s observatory. The father-son dialogue is, therefore, theatrically interrupted by the announcement of the arrival of Miss Rosabel Fleming, one of the old flames of the Duke and an invitee to the occasion, as well as a competitor in the contest where Edgar will act as Paris of Troy. In quick succession other invitees alias competitors arrive on the scene. Obviously, the three competitors have not met each other earlier. However, they are all united by the bond of their recognizing the present observatory which used to be the bedroom of the Duke where sometime or the other all the three ladies, during their youth, have shared a pleasant time with their lover, the Duke. The company assembled exchange pleasantries of introduction. Edgar is introduced as the Duke’s
“extension in time” but until his father is dead, he is “really a redundancy”. The perfunctory and interpolarity statements by the Duke during the exchange of pleasantries mostly of a phatic nature point to a number of issues basic to human existence. Such issues are the reality of the eventual end of man's bodily existence, the ravages of time on the beautiful surface of physical life, man's delusion to clutch to the past with an urge to revive, it etc.

The eclipse has begun and the Duke proceeds to explain the ongoing phenomenon of nature as follows:

*Observe how Sol Salome

*Almost hidden by the head of the Baptist moon

*Dances her last few steeps of fire ———

*Observe.

*The copulation of Jove, magnificent in

*Mid air,*

The Duke, as an interlocutor, describes the event as it progresses and its impact upon the “tricked and fuddled” birds of the night, such as the “usually phlematic owls” and the bats with their “flickering flight”. In the midst of the ongoing event on which everybody, except Rosabel, is concentrating her attention, Edgar tries to give the apple to the distinctively indifferent Miss Fleming. Rosabel feels a sense of suffocation at the whole-contrived arrangement of the Duke and gets ready to leave the place. The Duke intervenes and reminds Rosabel, “you used to love this room at night.” At this
Rosabel's suppressed anger at and disgust with the Duke burst forth in a long speech of denouncing the habitual philanderer that the Duke has always been:

*How can you tell who loves, or when or why they love,*

*You without a single beat of heart*

*Worth measuring? You sit up here all night*

*Looking at the stars, travelling farther and farther*

*Away from living people, I hate your telescope!*

*How can you know and what, if you knew, can it mean,*

*What can the darkest bruise on the human mind*

*Mean, when nothing beats against you heavier*

*Than a fall of rain?*[^3]

From this point on, the central event of the eclipse gets eclipsed by the argument between Rosabel and the Duke about the latter's infidelity to the true feeling to others and selfish disinterestedness in others' feelings and sentiments. The Duke's reply to Rosabel's allegations of inhumanity against him, to which Hilda also subscribes, only provokes her to expose him further.

The Duke clarifies his position thus:

*I've behaved according to my lights of love*

*Which were excellent and bright and much to be*

*Remembered. You have all of you been my moments*

*Of revelation---- I wish I understood why*
You want to behave like skeletons in my cupboard.⁴

To this clarification by the Duke Rosabel's rejoinder is as apt as it is scathing:

*Your moment of revelation! I only wonder*

*What we revealed. Certainly not*

*What goes on in other hearts than your own*

*That's as remote to you as a seaside-lodging house*

*To a whale⁵.*

The Duke now wants to assuage the anguished anger of Rosabel by his apologetic explanation,

*Rosabel, why pick on me to be*

*The villain! I'm a Roman in a world*

*Of Romans, and all creation can recognize me*

*As genus Man⁶.*

The Duke's defence of his "inconsistency" and his assertion of his benignity in giving pleasure to Isabel in the past in "the refuge of his head" further embarrasses and even humiliates Isabel who regrets to have come over to the occasion: "where have I got myself now? Into such /An embarrassment, if I could vanish. I should vanish,/And even then transparently kick myself". Edgar, having known Rosabel's feelings decides to take back from her the apple he gave her a few moments ago, and instead gives it to Jessie who is the least sensitive of the three women.
This face to face encounters between the Duke and Rosabel subordinates the main purpose of the whole arrangement to a serious issue of humanizing the Duke. With the exit of Rosabel from the scene, this movement of the plot seems to be concluded. But before this happens another movement sets in quickly when the eclipse is over and “the shadow lifts from the sun, and the light falls on Perpetual Reedbeck.” Edgar’s response to the sight of Perpetua is one of wonder - struck exclamation --- “God be praised. / The sun again” --- which is the first step in his journey of romantic love. The Duke’s response to Perpetua is concluded in a cleverly worded speech of welcome, where a potent hint of his being a rival with his son is given. The Duke addresses Perpetua as follows:

You have made your father as happy as if his heart
Were breaking. And isn’t it likely you’re going to make
others happy as well? We have only autumn
To offer you, England’s moist and misty devotion,
But spring may come in time to reconcile you
If you’ll wait so long.?

Both the Duke and his son are eager to offer Perpetua the best that is available in the house - wine, cider, and biscuits. Edgar is fascinated, like his father, by Perpetua’s beauty and vivacity and envisions her in the image of Venus emerging from the sea. During the conversation about Perpetua’s journey and home-coming, the Duke asks his son to offer the apple to Perpetua,
the meaning of which is too well known to him. Edgar’s rivalry for the favour of Perpetua is now firmly asserted when he refuses to oblige his father.

He says,

Anything except an apple, father.

I will offer her

The cloudy peach, the bristling pineapple ---- etc.

-------but not, as God’s my judge, an apple.\(^8\)

The confirmed amorist that the Duke is, he is not going to be cowed down by his son. He retorts to Edgar’s refusal by saying,

Then, as Paris abdicates, I must offer

The sweet round robin fruit myself.\(^9\)

He “holds an apple between his fingers,” Perpetua “has whipped a very small pistol from a pig skin holster at her belt. She shoots and shatters the apple. There is an incredulous, shaken silence.” She realises immediately that she has done something thoughtless. Rosabel and Hilda who had gone away return after having heard the pistol shot. Perpetua narrates to the company gathered the circumstances which led her to posses a weapon. She along with other students at the College had formed a society for iconoclastic activities. It was known as the Society for the Desecration of Ancient and Modern Monumental Errors, the member of which, including Perpetua, being considered unsafe for democracy, were put in a prison. Being released from the prison she “came home to England simply to trace herself, in her own way.” Isabel is impressed by the
courage of Perpetua who had endeavoured to destroy all that she loathed. There is a subtle hint here that she, too, would follow the courageous example of Perpetua. The curtain falls on Act one with the booming of a gong from below, announcing that the luncheon is ready and the company should move to the eating venue.

By the end of Act one the future course of the dramatic action and the thematic issues have registered a complex development, promising friction, confrontation and a possible defeat or victory of the participants in the drama of the play. The Duke and Edgar are going to vie with each other for the amorous favour of Perpetua. Rosabel would not let her humiliation go unavenged. Perpetua’s story has enkindled in Rosabel’s mind an idea that a courageous person should destroy what he or she loathes and she has already said that she hates the Duke’s observatory and telescope. The love theme where a young girl is pursued by an old man and a young man, if seriously developed is bound to end in tragedy on the pattern of the Irish mythical story to Deirdre treated by both W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge in their plays or else it may end happily on the pattern of a romantic comedy where the infatuation of the old man may prove for sometime as a hurdle which can eventually be removed by way of his withdrawal from the race.

The second Act of the play consists of two scenes. Scene one is set in “the temple of Ancient Virtues beside the ducal lake, in the affair of the Reedbecks. Dominic tell Perpetua how their unscrupulous, “crooked father, has been consistently cheating the Duke of his money, which when exposed, is sure
to land him (Reedbeck) into prison. Dominic is not so much worried at the hardships and discomfiture his father will experience in the prison cell as the loss of face to the whole family in the society where he and his sister would be looked down upon as the progeny of a convict. The only way out to save their father from infamy and the family from loss of face is that Perpetua should somehow manage herself to be “agreeable to the Duke” who “being much in that mind at the moment / Might, with any luck, be inclined to marry her.” This will save the family from the imminent crisis because “no gentleman would incriminate his father-in-law.” Perpetua feels that her “carefree hours are already numbered” and so are “her freedom of choice and her individual day”. She cannot now afford to be any longer “woman after her own heart”. Dominic offers solace of a pragmatic nature to his sister, after feeling relieved by this matrimonial arrangement “Coronet’s no martyrdom, particularly / When it sits on a man whom women find easy to like.” Dominic dismissing Perpetua’s melancholy at contemplating as to “how many women have stood perplexed and plagued in this temple, reassures his sister that “every thing is better now”. There is only one small snag in the whole arrangement,

-----there is still the anxiety

*Whether you can prepossess him before he strikes.*

The first movement of the action is extended when Reedbeck arrives and boldly counteracts his daughter’s allegations of fraud and dishonesty with a comical effrontery. Reedbeck argues that “the reason [for cheating the Duke]
was the fading charm of the world. The banquet of civilization is over." He goes on to expand his argument in a lively rhetoric as follows:

\[ I \text{ care so much for civilization,} \]
\[ \text{Its patrician charm, its grave nobility.} \]
\[ \text{He [the Duke] cares so little. Therefore certain escentric} \]
\[ \text{Means have had to be take for splendid ends.} \]
\[ \text{Church and state, in a way agree} \]
\[ \text{In justifying such a course of action} \]
\[ \text{A kind of casual taxation ---Its true I have overlaid the law} \]
\[ \text{With a certain transposition; we might} \]
\[ \text{Call this process Reedbequity. But what} \]
\[ \text{A gain to the world}^{12} \]

Reedbeck, unblushingly, admits that he never felt the need to take the Duke into confidence. He asserts "I've never believed/ In the equal distribution of property. / I only think if I can have more beauty in my hands than in his." He has no sympathy with his son's moral righteousness or concern for social respectability. When Reedbeck learns from Dominic the matrimonial plan the brother and sister have agreed to save their father, he bursts into anger and piles up choicest epithets of vituperation to denounce his son's "unprincipled" behaviour. His use of vituperative epithets is reminiscent of a similar command of the verbal medium by Thomas Mendip in The Lady's Not for Burning. Here are some instances of it:

\[ \text{You're a vain,} \]
Vexing, incomprehensible
Crimping, constipated duffer----
You spigoted, bigoted, orperculated prig!13

This showering of angry words on his son is, for the show of etiquette and decency, suddenly interrupted by the entry of Jessie who has come over to write a letter to her octogenarian father who expects letters regularly from his daughter, though he never reads them.

The second movement is related to the Duke-Perpetua venture at the amorous game which Edgar, too, joins later. In the midst of the argument among the Reedbecks, the Duke puts in his appearance, "carrying a bow and quiver". He wants Perpetua to "come out and play" before the sunset. Perpetua wouldn't mind being trained by the Duke in the art of archery. The Duke alludes to Artemis (Diana) in his praise of Perpetua and the latter responds in the same metaphor when she says, "come and judge what a huntress I should make, /What a rival for Artemis, and what Actaeon/Would have if I pursued him." The Duke "begins to instruct her in the use of the bow, holding it with her, and speaking low into her ear, so that Reedbeck and Dominic cannot hear." He whispers into her ear his invitation to her to be trained in watching the infinite through the telescope to-night. The plan is to be kept as a secret because "there's a little tension today, /Already, nerves perhaps not ready to accept/The quiet session of scientific study/You and I propose." Perpetua readily agrees to the proposal and will decline Edgar's offer to take her to the All Hallowe'en in the night to participate in the dance.
Edgar puts in his appearance with a bow and quiver, declaring clearly that he is rivalling his father in respect of wooing Perpetua. He shoots an arrow, which narrowly escapes his father. When the Duke tries to reprimand Edgar for his mischief, the latter confesses unambiguously that he was rivalling him on the possession of Perpetua. The son reminds his father that he has had his gay time in the past and should now leave the field to the younger generation:

You've had

A long innings, and a summer of splendid outings

And now I must ask you, father, not to monopolize

Every heart in the world any longer.\textsuperscript{14}

The Duke knows that the situation is that of "the generations joining in a life-and-death struggle." However, he assures his son that he should "take nothing for granted,/Not even my flair for breaking into love." Edgar shouldn't become "apprehensive fat too soon/" His father reassures him,

\textit{The field,}

If not entirely yours, is not entirely mine:

I am as innocently there

As an old warhorse put out of grass:

My equine equability is pastoral to a fault.\textsuperscript{15}

Edgar finds it difficult to shed off his apprehension because, he says to his father,

But when you're grazing you're irresistible;
Buttercups and daisies fall to your fetlocks in swathes;
I've seen it happen. And between this morning's eclipse
And this afternoon you've lost the autumnal look
Which was such a comfort to me; I see you have
The appearance of a very mild March day.”

In such a situation, the young Edgar is bound to feel depressed and even desperate. He implores his father “to forgo yourself this once [and] suspend your animation for a few short months for my sake.” Edgar’s request to his father makes the latter voice issues relating to human predicament in his worldly existence, which is characterized by man’s desire to shun solitariness and seek comfortable companionship and renewal of vitality whenever it tends to ebb. The flora and fauna do not find any difficulty in their regeneration of vitality. Why should man, the Duke being representative of the ebbing humanity, be treated differently. The Duke concludes his long analysis of human predicament by remarking that “it is all academic,” and declares to Edgar that “the field is still open.”

The second situation, which was continually punctuated by Jessie’s comical interruptions with her ridiculous problems of writing a letter, ends with Perpetua agreeing to see Edgar’s horses in stables. The third situation is relatively brief but has an explosive potential, which is worked out later in the play. This situation relates to Rosabel, who has returned to the Duke’s palace and, as Bates suspects, has “been snooping about the east wing all the afternoon.” She might be up to something evil because, according to Bates’
evaluation, she “is an undesirable character.” Rosabel has known the Duke only too well. She apprehends that tonight might be the turn of the newly arrived Perpetua to participate in the Duke’s “experiment” with the telescope. She asks the Duke point-blank in an insinuating tone:

_When do you mean to show her [Perpetua] how to observe_
_The stars through your telescope? Is it to-night?_17

The Duke informs Rosabel: “I’m washing my hands of all the sky to-night, /and I’m going early to bed.” Rosabel, having ensured that the Observatory will be “unpopulated” tonight expresses, in an aside, her mischievous planning, the nature of which is not disclosed. She says to herself,

_Now I know why all day long_
_Life has been tilting and driving me towards_
_To-night I’m not myself any more,
_I am only the meaning or what comes after dark._
_If I have the courage._18

Rosabel has been obsessed with one thought in her head, “persevering like some running or a race track”. To which she has clung seriously. She is determined to make the Duke human, no matter what means she has to use:

_Nothing matters_
_Except that he should be made to feel. He hurts_
_Whoever he touches. He has to be touches by fire_
_To make a human of him, and only a woman_
_Who loves him can dare to do it._19
She needs to gather courage to achieve what her heart is set on. Perpetua's instance is an instant source or her courage: to go to war on things you hate. She needs to open the Duke's "eyes on to the distances that separate him from other people. The first scene ends with her disclosing plan to achieve her aim:

To-night, no one is there,

' You'll see, I shall send his Observatory

Where Nero's Rome has gone: I'll braze a trail

That he can follow towards humanity!\textsuperscript{20}

We know that disastrous consequences Rosabel's plan can have, because tonight the Duke and Perpetua, in a clandestine manner, will have their telescope session up in the Observatory, which nobody knows. The scene thus ends at a note of fearful suspense. Though we have presented the three movements above in a simplistic manner, they in fact, keep on interlacing like warp and woof in a dexterously contrived texture. Jessie's letter-writing episode, spread all over the scene, provides the artistically necessary punctuation in the three situations described above and enlivens the mood of the dramatic action whenever it is threatened to be too serious.

Scene two, set in the Observatory room, shows "the duke lying on a daybed in the dark. Enter Perpetua. The light from the corridor follows her a little ways into the room. She stands uncertain." A long conversation, enwrapped in a periphrastic and nearly enigmatic language, goes on for more than three quarters of the scene. This sounds and means like a sex-duet. The Duke narrates to Perpetua how his wife, whom he loved dearly, left him alone in the
world while giving birth to their son: "one life put the other out. It was Edgar’s mode of entrance” into the world. He has always desired to love someone who could take the place of his deceased duchess and is optimistic that Perpetua would fulfil his long-cherished desire. Perpetua, however, warns the Duke to “be sure or nothing”. The Duke then veers his conversation about All-Hallow’s Eve. The convention in the Duke’s family has been that the mirror kept there was used in the past ‘to show shadows of husbands or girls who sit and cob their hair” before the magical mirror, while eating an apple. In deference to the Duke’s desire Perpetua sits before the mirror and stares into it. She tells the Duke that she saw the image of his son. The Duke interprets Perpetua’s glimpse as her seeing the youth in the aging Duke. But Perpetua’s uncertainty about her relation with the Duke - “it remains for me to love you”- though like a wet blanket on his burning amorous passion, will not deter him from pursuing his breed any hesitation in her mind; “age after all, is only the accumulating or extensive childhood.”

Perpetua suddenly changes the topic and enquires from the Duke whether he knows her father’s deed in regard to misappropriation of his funds. The Duke confesses that he knew it all along but kept silent lest Reedbeck should leave him and deprive him of the occasion he is enjoying: “Swarming stars and solitary Duke/ would have been unvisited to-night.” Perpetua becomes increasingly frank and firm. She would not hesitate to incriminate the Duke: “How happy do you feel to know you tried/for a bride by this conspiracy of silence The Duke is sure that Perpetua, too, is happy to be ready to take a
husband to make that silence absolute.” Perpetua candidly admits that she never “made a pretence or loving” the Duke. Rather she would be glad to love Edgar, why, she does not know. The Duke droops in despair seeing the “end of himself coming sooner than he had expected.”

The strange charm of being alive breaks off

Abruptly, with nothing determined, nothing solved,

No absolute anything ------

I'm back among the fragments.

He tries to console himself with his lot being a part of the design of nature: “How nature loves the incomplete. She knows/ if she drew a conclusion it would finish her.” The Duke is so disheartened that he is no more interested in showing other stars to Perpetua through his telescope. The stars seem to be falling: “while I love you without being loved they’re sure/. To be restive,” the Duke remorsefully says.

It is at this point that it is discovered that the house has caught fire. Both the Duke and Perpetua panic for safety, which seems to be impossible. The Duke wants Perpetua to confess her love for him before they are consumed by fire - “Perpetua, quickly, love, before/The even chance is out of patience with us”. Perpetua would prefer death, “fair and broken,” to surrendering herself to the arms of the Duke. But as the chances of their rescue recede with the fire becoming more and more ferocious, they are overtaken by fear of death. The Duke says, “I love myself, /and I shall be sad to say good-bye to myself.” Perpetua in her state of desperation declares, “I love you:/ Between the
giddiness I love you.” This confession of love is out of fear rather than out of any consideration for the wishes and feelings of the Duke. The Duke, in the moment of desperation, becomes increasingly romantic: he feels that the fire will unite him with his love permanently:

-Out of the world like snow. And so

- The phoenix and the turtle did.

- Pain took them, too, and welded them,

- And melted them, and made a union

- Of beauty born and beauty reft away\(^2\)----

But they will not be allowed “perfection” in their union because “the kind world intervenes.” Reddleman, the once lion tamer, shows his courage and saves the two trapped “lovers” from destruction by fire. The rescue operation has been presented through superb verbal artistry, which visually shows the tension, nervousness, panic and the frightened state of the trapped victims. The last portion of the scene has all the features of a thriller at its climactic point. The scene ends without a clear explanation of the cause of fire.

The final Act is set in the Temple of the Ancient Virtues. The time is still the same night and the dramatic situation is presented in the dark where Isabel can be seen sobbing through the light from the burning house reflected in the lake”. Dominic hears the sobbing of Rosabel and tries to comfort her in her despair. He reports to her that no one is hurt in the fire; only miss Fleming is not “accounted for” Rosabel discloses to Dominic that she is Miss Fleming and is so ashamed of herself that she wishes she were dead. This is because it is
she “who started the fire. She did it deliberately.” But she did not know that the Duke and Perpetua were there in the house. She only wanted to destroy the Duke’s observatory. She is so over-taken by remorse that she does not feel to have the courage to face the Duke. However, the Duke puts in his appearance suddenly, “carrying things salvaged from the fire and over his shoulders a string of Chinese lanterns.” Rosabel confesses to the Duke that she started the fire, but she didn’t know that the Duke or any living soul was there in the Observatory. Her act, she admits, was impelled by “the violence of a long unhappiness” which has rocked her. Her only purpose was “to destroy the Observatory, to make you [the Duke] human,”

To bring you down to be among the rest of us,

To make you understand the savage sorrows.

That go no below you.23

She has decided to give herself up to law as a token of expiation for the “vile” deed that she has done Duke is truly touched by Rosabel’s remorseful thoughts.

The situation now changes when Perpetua impatiently implores the Duke to hear her confession. She proceeds thus,

To-night, when we seemed

Closely, and only us of all the living

Would, attended by a dragon breathing out

Almost certain death.24

--- Found that fear could seem

Like love to a silly girl, who now knows
It was fear and not love.\textsuperscript{25}

She apologizes to the Duke for this impression of love she gave him in the midst of the blazing fire. The Duke readily forgives her by philosophising the human predicament, which is the consequence of man’s being tied down, from that moment of his origin, to flesh which is subject to a variety of “tossing, turning, foundering irreconcilabilities, etc. The third situation retakes to Reedbeck who has appeared “all worked up” to confess his sins and expiate. The Duke discloses to Reedbeck, to a great relief to the guilt-ridden conscience of Dominic, that he has already “legalized” the irregularities committed by him in his handling and managing his estate. Now is the turn of Perpetua to confess to Edgar that “this afternoon we were lying to you.” When she declined his offer to take her to the All Hallow’s dance. But as, it worked out, “never was a lie less happy for everyone. Edgar would not bother about what has happened in the past: the past is past. The Duke shows the first sign of his being humanized when he enquires from Hilda how her husband was after the accident he had met with. He also advises the chronic moralist, Dominic, that he “should not think more of the sin than of the sinner.” Finally, the play ends with the Duke’s declaration that he will settle in monogamy with Rosabel when she “is disengaged from custody” after six months. Thus in the manner of a romantic comedy the play ends with everybody reconciled and contented.

The analysis of the play presented above amply demonstrated Fry’s professed dramaturgical strategies. The play begins with autumnal mood of somberness. In the middle it picks up some flamboyance in the romantic affair
of the triangular love and finally ends at a note or subdued gaiety and all-round reconciliation. Throughout the play there are serious concerns and comic streaks are provided by the two domestic servants - Reddleman and Bates ---- whose mutual animosity continues to be a source of light moments. Jessie’s behavior throughout is replete with humorous innuendoes. A variety of thematic issues have been raised and interwoven in the larger fabric of the romantic theme. The issues touched are all realistic in nature, such as man’s efforts to shun loneliness, his greed, hate, revenge, moral righteousness, filial feelings, revolt of the younger generation against the monopolizing nature of the older generation, the need for compromise and reconciliation, etc. Fry’s unique achievement in this play is his masterly handing of characters, endowing them with distinctive individuality, and of dialogue which is highly dramatically and thematically effective and in consonance with the intellectual equipment of each individual character.
REFERENCES:

   All subsequent references to the text are from this edition

2. Ibid., p. 166
3. Ibid, p. 169
4. Ibid, p. 170
5. Ibid, p. 171
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, 173
8. Ibid, pp. 176-177
9. Ibid, p. 177
10. Ibid, p. 182
11. Ibid, p. 183
12. Ibid., p. 185
13. Ibid, p. 190
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 204
18. Ibid, p. 205
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid, p. 205
21. Ibid, p. 217
22. Ibid, pp. 220-221
23. Ibid, p. 228
24. Ibid, p. 231
25. Ibid, p. 236
SECTION: IV
**THE DARK IS LIGHT ENOUGH**

_The Dark is light Enough_ is Fry's 'winter comedy' first produced by Peter Brook at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 30 April 1954. It dramatises an imaginary incident in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49. Like the other seasonal comedies here also the mood and atmosphere of the winter season pervades the entire play. The epigraph shows the literal winter cold season that forms the background of the dramatic action. The mood of the play and its implications are manifested in the portrayal of the dark passions of the human heart. Such as hate and cruelty, which are not without a streak of the light of hope and optimism epitomized in the large-heartedness and humanity of the central character. This darkness crossed by the ray of goodness of the heroine is amply hinted at in the epigraph from J.H.Fabre:

_The weather was stormy; the sky heavily clouded; the darkness ----- profound ----- It was across this maze of leafage, and in absolute darkness, that the butterflies had to find their way in order to attain the end of their pilgrimage._

Under such conditions, the screech owl would not dare to for sake its olive - tree. The butterfly goes forward without hesitation So well, it directs its tortuous flight that, in spite of all the obstacles to be evaded, it arrives in a state of perfect freshness, its great wings intact. The darkness is light enough------!
In this play, Fry does not begin with a stage direction, giving details about the setting and locale. He has only mentioned in the bottom of the list of characters: “An Austrian country-house near the Hungarian border; the winter of 1848-49.” He proceeds in the characteristic Shakespearean manner of exposition where through the conversation of the characters we are introduced to the setting, time, and the main thematic concerns of the play. The play deals almost exclusively with one character, namely Countess Rosmarin Ostenburg, whose Austrian country-house is situated near the Hungarian border, a centre of calm amid the storm of the Hungarian Revolution, which is being ruthlessly suppressed by the Emperial forces of Austria. The Countess’ place is not affected by this conflict, when the play opens. The other characters belong to her household who look after the Countess’ who has not been keeping good health and, only manage the humanitarian activities to which she has completely given over herself. One major activity of the Countess’s weekly routine is that on every Thursday she holds her social parties, without fail, which she has always been organizing for the promotion of intellectual culture and good cheer.

The play opens “before light in the morning” of a thursday when Jekob, Belmann and Dr. Kassel - all responsible for the upkeep of the Duchess’ affairs and health - are anxiously discussing the sudden and mysterious driving away by the Duchess, all alone, without bothering about the bad, cold weather. The danger in her driving away on the snow covered path is two-fold: one is the extremely cold weather which her
fragile health cannot stand, and secondly, she might lose her way and stray into the direction where the trouble on account of the Austro-Hungarian war is going on. Perhaps she does not know that “the Hungarian troops are advancing”, although “with a son-in-law in the war Ministry,” she might know what is going on along the Austro-Hungarian border. The mystery of her going away deepens when Dr. Kassel wonders how the Countess can be away from her palace on a Thursday when, she knows, people will be coming, as they have always done, for socializing and intellectual edification. The truth is that “in more than twenty years / She has only once before failed her Thursday, / when her son Stefan was born.”

After the bit of information given to us by the family doctor and the two keepers of the palace - Jakob and Belmann - Stefan the Countess’ only son, arrives worried and anxious. The news of the Countess’ departure early in the morning, in a most inclement weather and “in the direction of a war,” has spread quickly all over the county and even beyond it. Stefan has been riding the countryside the whole day asking every person he could find about his mother. On arrival at home he discovered a letter lying “face-downwards” addressed to Dr. Kassel. The letter is from the Countess who has instructed the doctor that ‘when the evening comes” and the Countess is “still not with him,” he should “make her excuses.” However, Belmann is hopeful that “she will condescend to appear in her own time.” He refers to the virtues of the Countess as a reply to Jakob’s skepticism about her safety.
You know the Countess has the qualities of true divinity

For instance: how apparently undemandingly

She moves among us; and yet

Lives make and unmake themselves in her neighbourhood.

As nowhere else. There are many names I could name

Who would have been remarkably otherwise

Except for her divine non-interference ------

She has a touching way

Of backing a man up against eternity

Until he hardly has the nerve to remain mortal.

We have by now got a fairly comprehensive picture of the central character before she puts in her appearance. The other character to be introduced in absentia is Count Peter Zichy who has only been referred to in passing by Dr Kassel earlier. Stefan, who has informed his brother-in-law (Peter) about his mother’s mysterious disappearance, describes him as follows, to justify his action

To me Peter treads the earth more surely

And reassures more instantly

Than any other man. So instinctively

In the morning panic, I sent a message

To Peter and my sister in Vienna.

Though Peter is a Hungarian, he serves in the Austrian Government. His interest in the family of Rosmarin is deep. He is “the great protector of the
family. /If you call to him, he puts his own world down / And takes yours up, almost before you realize/What made you need him.”

Stefan adds to the exposition of the situation, which is prevalent outside the Countess’ palace. Because of the revolution “the peasants are saying-their dogs haven’t stopped barking/Since before sunset. They hear the shake/Of marching in the earth.” The servants continue their conversation about the Countess and extend the exposition by their choric narration of how the Countess had “conscripted the little daughter, Geld, then aged seventeen, into a marriage with that rag of hell, Richard Gettner.” She had thought that the marriage would change his soul and transform him into a good human being. But Richard continued to be an “invertebrate, self-drunk drunken, shiftless, heartless, lying malingerer.” He was always “unreliable when he was drunk, / Irresponsible when he was sober / Useless to any world, sober or drunk ” It was “an act of dark night/To marry her (the Countess’) daughter to him” But, continues Belmann his choric commentary, thank God the Church has dissolved that marriage and Gelda is married again to “Count Peter the sturdy ”

The conversation among the house-hold members now veers round Richard Gettner, after the tension and anxiety created by the Countess’ mysterious disappearance have loosened by the reported return of the Countess. Richard has joined the Hungarian army, as “the great lover of his country’s enemies” that he is. Belmann is most unflattering in his commentary on Richard:
Indeed, loving

_The enemy is almost the only commandment_

_He's never broken. Whoever hates his race,_

_His Emperor, his culture, or his mother_

_Wins – well not his heart, which is apparently_

_Only locomotor,_

_But all the enthusiasm of his spleen._

In the meantime Gelda arrives, full of anxiety, with the report that her husband, too, will be arriving soon. This is quickly followed by the appearance of Richard and we are told by the Countess that she had gone out alone in the morning to retrieve Richard who has been lying in a barn for three hours to escape being arrested by the Hungarian army because he has become a deserter. Gettner is a selfish man and would not mind using any means to save his life from the Hungarian firing-squad. Since he knows that no one would come to his rescue and it is only the Countess he could believe, he sent for her. He would “have prayed and begged and bullied her to fetch him” even if there had been three times more danger to her life than actually it is. He knows it fully well that his coming over, for a hide out, to the palace of the countess is a potential danger to all those who are there. The Hungarian army would not let Richard go away with sensitive military secrets connected with the on-going conflict.

Jakob, Belmann and Dr. Kassel believe that the Countess has “innocently” made a mistake by fetching and harbouring a man who would
spell disasters for all of them. But the Countess clarifies their belief or suspicion by plainly admitting that she has invited the danger purely because of her firm faith in "the brotherhood of man." She elucidates her philosophy of life where she is perfectly "unconcerned and yet reasonably fond." Even when the imminent arrival of the Hungarian troops led by Colonel Janik, is reported, the Countess is firm not "to throw away the gains of the day," i.e. Richards' security. She puts Gettner in the bell-turret with the rope ladder drawn after him: Gettner is completely overtaken by the instinct of self-preservation and begs of everybody not to give him over to the Hungarians.

Colonel Janik and Peter are the only characters to be introduced and brought into the story, which has by now become quite complicated and suspenseful. It is pertinent here to offer a few comments on the dramaturgical strategies adopted by Fry up to this point of climax in the first Act. Fry delays the appearance of the major participants in the drama until they have been adequately portrayed through the conversation of the minor characters. They appear when the stage for presenting the dramatic action has been fully prepared. Though the minor characters indulge in a functionally choric conversation they have been etched out distinctively and with clearly defined individuality. The mood of winter is kept up and the cold darkness becomes menacing up to the point of the entry of Colonel Janik in search of the Austrian Gettner in the Hungarian army who has deserted in the midst of the military conflict between Austria and Hungary.
Colonel Janik, without caring for any civic courtesies and chivalry, on arrival at the gate of the Countess’ palace, asks her as to where she has hidden the deserter. Captain Gettner has been seen being brought to the Countess’ place in her own sleigh. The Countess would not tell any lies to Janik and would rather defend Gettner’s action which, of course, would sound unconvincing to anyone, having acquaintance with the rules and procedure of serving an army. Janik explains his position with full clarity and candidness which is replete with threats: Captain Gettner has “broken his oath to the Hungarian Diet” by deserting in the field. He, “by information he possesses has become too threatening to the cause of the army and the country. Janik declares to the Countess, “For your one man/I have many, Countess, I’m here / To arrest him.” He advises her to “abide by her neutrality and bring him out,” otherwise the Colonel has the means and will to “find him” himself. The Countess with perfect equanimity of her mind assures the Colonel that she or any men would not be “an obstacle to the needs of a more true and living world / Than so far I have understood.” She only wants to know,

*Only tell me what is in this war you fight
Worth all your dead and suffering men.*

The Countess, in her longest speech in the play, argues with Janik about the futility of war, hatred, revenge and false rationale for cruelty and killing in the name of ideology. She asserts man’s right for freedom and the need for brotherhood, sympathy and love. The Countess finally ends her long speech with her refusal to allow Janik and his soldiers “to invade
the liberties of this house.” This deepens the suspense of the situation further.

Janik has already made his plans strategically sound. He has taken Peter in his charge while the latter was on his way to the Countess' palace after receiving the news from Stefan of her disappearance. Janik is confident that this plan of taking Peter a hostage would be conducive to “a peaceful understanding” with the Countess. He tells the Countess that if she gave up Gettner to answer for himself she would free Peter and no further action would be taken against this house. To his bargaining suggestion, the Countess’ heroic reply is “Colonel, no man is mine to give you.” There ensues afterwards a brief argument between Janik and Peter in which the latter tries to bring home to the former the need for amity between neighbouring nations for mutual benefit. The virtue of love and fellow-feeling as contrasted with hatred and cruelty is emphasized by Peter, as it had been done earlier by the Countess.

Both Janik and the Countess hold to their points of view. Hence, Peter has to go as a prisoner with Janik. Since Gettner does not want to die by surrendering to the army he had chosen to work for, Peter graciously accepts his place with the acquiescence of the Countess who would keep her promise to the cowardly Gettner to protect him. This completes one movement in the slow resolution of the complication in the plot. The suspense only shifts from Gettner to Peter. The other movement of the resolution part of the complication begins when Stefan embarks upon another strategy. He asks his sister Gelda, to fetch her ex-husband.
Gettner from his hiding and persuade him to do what Janik wants. This is because, perhaps Gettner would not harden his heart against her. Since Gelda's husband's life is in danger because of the humanitarian obstinacy of her mother, she and the people around her feel she should not have any hesitation in persuading Gettner as suggested by her brother.

The plot movement, for a moment promises an expected result. But it tilts in a different direction when Gelda expresses her Hegelian dilemma: she loves Peter and is faithful to him. But once she loved and was faithful to Gettner and she would loathe being instrumental in persuading him to die for the sake of her present husband. Peter agrees with his wife when he says to her that he "should be sorry to see/A dead man cross their love." But he is not even the least despondent because he feels that he is at present the victim of time and circumstances. He is hopeful that "in the order of things, when events will have it, he will come stolidly home." When Janik goes out with Peter as prisoner, everybody is displeased with the Countess' decision and they all feel that "no good will ever come of Gettner." The Countess has nothing to argue any further and can only wait to see whether her decision fructifies into a result she had hoped to reap. This aspect of the theme is developed late, and the first Act ends at this crucial juncture in the movement of the plot.

The second Act opens in the stables where Gettner has been hiding. In a chance fighting between the Hungarians and the wandering regiment of the Austrian Dragoons the former, have "to lick their wounds." They have taken shelter in the house of the Countess with the "many wounded,
and some dead” The Countess and her people have been compelled to live in the stables to provide shelter to the routed Hungarian soldiers. The opening situation shows us Stefan and Gettner in concretion in the stables. Stefan blames Gettner for his cowardly clinging to life, which has brought the present trouble to the Rosmarin family. Stefan who would himself lay down his life if that can help the situation loathes Gettner “setting great store by his life.” But Gettner would never agree to end his life for whatsoever cause it may be. Gelda puts in her appearance in the midst of this conversation between her brother and ex-husband. Gelda narrates the situation in which the family has been caught presently, and all this because of Gettner. The house has been turned into “hospital, headquarters, barracks, armoury, pandemonium.” And “in the middle of the swarm, immovable / As a queen bee, our mother is standing/Fascinated and appalled.” Gelda fears that “without knowing it she (the Countess) may break her heart.” She asks Stefan to go and persuade her.

The next movement of the situation begins when after the exit of Stefan, Gelda and Gettner are left alone to converse. The conservation begins with Gelda’s simple statement that Gettner cannot hope to stay in hiding at the Countess’ place indefinitely. They talk about mutual trust between Gettner on the one hand and the Rosmarin on the other. Gelda reassures Gettner that he can trust her and her mother. The talk, in the manner of a flash back, veers round to their past relationship in which Rosmarin had played a significant role by uniting them in the nuptial bond. Gelda feels that she did have a feeling that as wife of Gettner she
loved him and that feeling is not yet dead. This is why she is concerned so much about the safety of her ex-husband. Her present husband Peter, too, is interested in Gettner’s escape from death. A sort of courtship situation develops between the ex-wife and ex-husband, which culminates in their kissing each other. Thus the suspense about the security of Gettner is considerably thinned out, though not fully guaranteed.

There is a sudden twist to the movement of the situation just described above. Stefan reappears to advise Gettner that “if you still / Want to save yourself for better things / Make yourself scarce. The Hungarians are coming-----” Gettner climbs into the loft. In the meantime we are shown the generosity of the Countess who arranges to provide for the necessities of the timid, wounded and starving soldiers. Janik is overwhelmed by the large-heartedness of the Countess and seizes the opportunity to convince her that she should side with the down-trodden for whom the revolution has been started. The Countess, for once, does not believe in violence and war as a means of improving human lot. She prophetically says that “we gain so little by the change / When the down-trodden in their turn tread down.” Changing sides may be beneficial and good. “But then deserters all, we should change sides.” Janik is so moved by the Countess’ generosity that he kisses her hands and apologizes for the trouble he and his soldiers have brought to her. But he knows that ‘apology isn’t repentance.” He admits that “to take your house is bully’s work, certainly / But it has a slight flavour of victory for them (the soldiers) / To offset the day’s mishap.” The Countess does not want to
lose her gain of the previous day when she ventured successfully to fetch Gettner from the barn. She thinks that it is an opportune occasion to ask Janik “To give Richard Gettner his liberty to do / More with good.”

However, Janik would not accept the woman’s logic in matters related to military rules in allowing absolution to Gettner for desertion. But he can assure the Countess that he won’t search for him, but he should keep out of his way. Janik also agrees to the Countess’ desire to her son-in-law. There is a rapid succession of brief movements. Gelda and her mother converse briefly about the circumstances, which made the latter, decide in favour of the marriage of her only daughter with Gettner. However, even though Gelda didn’t protest then, the Countess, who is a believer in the essential goodness of man’s nature, “knew / Richard was no brute and nor / Pursuer of evil, but more like one enraged / Because he thought that good rejected him.” This flash-back is interrupted by the comical behaviour of Jakob and Belmann who appear with a big picture taken out of the house to be kept in the stable, lest it, besides corrupting the taste of the soldiers, should be destroyed by the soldiers’ rough touching of it. The situation registers a new movement when, in response to the Countess’ desire conveyed to Janik, her son-in-law is brought to her for a meeting.

The meeting between Peter and Rosmarin has its own development, climax and denouement. Peter narrates his experience of the morning’s event when the Austrian Dragoons surprised the Hungarians in a chance encounter. He recounts the incident as follows:
In the fight with the Austrian Dragoons this morning

I became the very passion I opposed, and was glad to be.

I borrowed a sword out of someone’s useless hand

And as long as the fighting lasted

I was, heart and soul, the revolution.¹¹

At this unexpected behaviour of Peter who fought with his own men, against brutal blood-shed, Janik “thought he had won me (Peter) over. But on the way back I convinced him otherwise.” Peter realized the truth of the outcome of the ongoing conflict: it is disastrous for both Austria and Hungary. He tells Rosmarin that her” fetching Gettner in has faced him with a knowledge he was lacking / Which in a way altered nothing / And altered it thoroughly.” Belmann’s interruption at this juncture sheds more light on the philosophic nature of the Countess’ approach to the reality of existence:

-----how apparently

Undemandingly the Countess moves among us:

And yet lives make and unmake themselves

In her neighbourhood as nowhere else.¹²

The countess proposes to change the subject of their conversation, from the immediate reality to “something quite immaterial.” Her attention is diverted to the sentimental reference by the 1st Guard, who has escorted Peter to the Countess’ place at the behest of the Colonel, to his wife’s letter. But this light moment is brusquely made short-lived when Gettner is
seen climbing down the ladder from the loft where he was kept in hiding. The Colonel’s Guards who recognize him, get ready to arrest him. But they desist from doing so because they are told that the “Colonel had made a different bargain.” Gettner is fully drunk and even reprimands the Guards. Peter shows a perfect understanding in placating the indignation of Stefan and the menacing gesture of the Guards. He says, “if he can drink himself /To safety, let him.” Gettner in his spirited mood altercates with the Guards who feel that we should not come out of his hiding in the interest of his own safety. The Countess intervenes and assures everybody present there that if Gettner wants to be “among us”, no offence would be committed.

The situation now complicates when Gettner declares in the presence of Peter that he has “a very interesting wife” here who for a turn of a leaf, would love me.” He declares that “he’ll embrace her in open court / And you all see the truth of it.” Peter politely but firmly advises the drunken Gettner to “move away from Gelda.” In reply to this, Gettner “kisses Gelda” who “makes no move.” Peter describes this behaviour of Gettner as “extortion by pathos” and threatens to show him the road if he does not behave decently with his wife. Gettner reminds Peter that Gelda was once married to him and asserts that she “has an idea to love him” and that was “reason enough to kiss her in the sight of this congregation.” Gettner challenges Peter to ask Gelda about the truth of his assertion. The climax of the situation reaches when Gelda herself declares, “I think I told him so.” Peter enigmatically responds with his rejoinder, “It could be
I can see it could be," as if to patch up the bruised situation with the façade of peace.

A contrived resolution is suggested by the Countess to tide over the tedium of "the time at a stand-still." And it is the role of music when everybody present there has shown his inability to sing and / or dance, the two Guards come forward to perform it as much for their relaxation as in deference to the wishes of the Countess. The Guards take off their belts and pistol-holsters and lay them on the ground. As the music and dance are on, Stefan, "makes his way to the holsters, takes out the pistol and puts them in his pocket while everyone's attention is on the dance." He pushes Gettner away from the company outside the stable-yard. Gettner, by "smacking his hand across Gettner's face," makes him lose his temper and takes him outside to engage him in a duel, as once he had suggested to Gettner in the preceding Act. In the midst of the song two pistol shots from outside are heard. The Guards make a rush for their pistols, which they find, are missing. Gettner is conspicuous by his absence. So Stefan is immediately suspected of taking away the pistols. Gettner admits that his accidental shot has killed Stefan who fired first. However, Stefan is soon reported to be alive, though hurt. Since Dr. Kassel luckily was near when the incident of shooting occurred he has already given Stefan the necessary medical aid. Dr. Kassel informs the Countess the despicably inhuman attitude of Gettner towards the wounded Stefan:

_This precious idiot_
Saw Stefan fall and went nowhere near him.

Belted off like a madman

As it has been said earlier by everyone, even the Guards now realize that Gettner is “no use to any of us” and deserves to be arrested and brought before the Colonel, otherwise he may “land us in any more trouble.” Against the general, unanimous opinion, the Countess shows her keenness to again protect Gettner. This time the argument she gives is that she does not want her son to be the cause of Gettner’s punishment. She continues to argue that we should not hate the sinner because like all humans he, too, deserves our prayer for his life. Hence there is as much need to pray for Stefan’s life as for Gettner’s because both are human creatures inspite of one of them (Gettner) having dark passions in himself. To the Countess’ super-human magnanimity is opposed immediately the despicable callousness of Gettner. The Countess is almost fainting and, ignoring everybody else present on the spot, she requests Gettner as follows:

Richard let me have your arm to lean

My body sometimes tells me

I’m not here forever

This shows the Countess’s unrelenting resolve not to give up Gettner as beyond transformation. But Richard persists in his callousness. Even while “the Countess almost falls” “he makes no move.” The Countess’ breath revives again and she repeats her resolve not to abandon Gettner, with which the second Act comes to an end.
The danger to Gettner’s safety is not yet over and the Countess’ obstinate persistence in magnanimity does not seem to fructify into any worth-while results. Hence the plot of the play retains all the potential to move. Even Gelda’s confession of love for Gettner and Peter’s being taken away again in the enemy’s charge are a strand of the plot-structure which needs to be interwoven with the general movement of the story in the final Act. One thing is clear and that is that the winter mood of the play is sustained with always the ray of optimistic hope flickering. We have seen that even in the midst of the mood and atmosphere of winter embedded in the setting and the events of the play so far, there has been intermittent springling of light moments, especially in the language and behaviour of Belmann and Jakob.

The final Act opens a week later than the first Act. It is on a Thursday. The difference between the two Thursdays is that on the preceding Thursday she had the courage and strength to ride out in a dangerously adverse weather and on the second Thursday she has a clear premonition that the end of her life has come. At the political front also a sudden change has come over: the Hungarian Revolution has ended in a rout and the Austrian Empirical Government has re-asserted its existence in cruel reprisals against the Hungarian army. The third strand of the dramatic situation is that Gelda once again reassures Peter of her love and fidelity to him, which had temporarily wavered in favour of her earlier husband, Gettner. The fourth strand is that Janik, now a fugitive, is readily granted shelter by the Countess even though it involves greater danger to
her mansion and people than what it had had earlier when she insisted upon harbouring Gettner even at the cost of the security of Peter’s life. The final strand in this Act is Gettner’s conversation, which, throughout, had appeared difficult in spite of the uninhibited benevolence of the Countess. Thus all the strands of the plot which had been weaving and interweaving throughout the first two Acts are finally put together to allow the structure of the dramatic action to end in a unified and cohesive manner.

The locale of the action is the same as before, i.e. the stable-yard of the Countess’ mansion, to be more specific, “the Act opens with a conversation between Gelda and Stefan who has been advised complete rest in bed after the gunshot he received in the preceding Act. Stefan is worried about the anxiety of his mother at his condition and wants to appear before her to convince her that he is all right. This may help the mother who herself is ill But Gelda convinces Stefan that

\[\text{You will make it harder for her, not easier,}\]

\[\text{When she sees you looking more frail and paler}\]

\[\text{Than she ever dreamt you could.}\]

“Keeping to bed”, therefore, will be “as much for her sake as for himself.” Stefan agrees to his sister’s suggestion and alleviates the anxious worries of Bella who has day and night been attending to both, the convalescing son and the ailing mother. Even in her illness, the Countess has not forgotten her human concerns for her attendants. She has asked
Gelda that she should ensure that Bella is made to sleep because she has been awake, attending on the son and the mother, for several days. Bella is unhappy with "how they’ve broken this poor house to pieces" and blames Gettner for it. The reference to Gettner immediately furthers the action by the information that he has gone away. We are also informed that the revolution is over. The action picks up at a fast pace when the mention of the revolution being over is at once followed by the appearance of Peter who reports the latest on the aftermath of the failed revolution. Her reports to Gelda that he is not so much worried about the Hungarian’s, "loss of the liberties they were beginning to gain lately", but about the loss "of the humanity we took of God two thousand years ago." He goes on to narrate his concern as follows:

The Government is shooting and hanging
Every Hungarian of note who fought in the war
They’re holding contemptuous, contemptible
Courts-material on the field, and executing
Men, one after the other - men
Whose families have given generations
Of service to the Emperor.¹⁶

Peter feels tormented at the thought that he might have perhaps prevented this mindless massacre if he had not left Vienna in response to Stefan’s letter about the Countess’ disappearance. Peter is upset by the thought that he is betraying someone every moment. Hence, he must hurry back to Vienna.
Before Peter leaves, Gelda makes a frank confession about her relationship and attitude to Gettner vis-a-vis those of himself. “Only in a wandering,” as it were, she thought that a “right thought, or at least an excusable” one had overtaken her mind, and that was to “put out a lifeboat for Richard” out of her “curiosity, pride and ambition.” She had had “a longing to discover what conversions could he made by love.” But then “we all began to sink. And it was Stefan / Who rescued me when he nearly died for the truth; / You and I are the truth.” Both husband and wife reaffirm their love and fidelity to each other, but for Peter the immediate concern was a larger humanity rather than his personal one. He must leave immediately for Vienna to see if he could stop the Austrian government from “celebrating victory by executing every considerable officer they can lay their hands on.”

Gettner, the alleged cause of trouble has now gone away. The revolution is over. Peter returned to Vienna with reassured love and fidelity, which was temporarily, strained. Stefan, who escaped death narrowly, is recovering fast. The other household members, “after living this marooned sort of life for so many days can welcome a return to normal.” It seems as if the wintry dampness and gloom are dissipating and the mood is going to he enlivened. It is Jakob who comments on the pragmatic philosophy of life on the earth:

One always thinks if only
One particular unpleasantness
Could be cleared up, life would become as promising
As always it was promising to be

But always it was promising to be.~

The next anxiety, which is going to change for the old one, is the illness of the Countess. Dr. Kassel, who has been in charge of the Countess' health, firmly believes that Rosmarin has no chance of argue well against the doubts of her body, declares the doctor, she cannot survive beyond a day or two. The portrayal of the Countess' personality is further enriched by what Gelda, Jakob and Belmann say about her: "suddenly wrinkled forehead, but laughing eyes"; "a still willing spirit," "a great spirit" with "a great ambition."

The plot movement undulates upward when, to Dr. Kassel's pleasant surprise and Belmann's sight of fascination, the Countess is seen "descending the stairs" and rejects the doctor's offer of physical support to her. Her strength, she insinuates, is revived at her remembering that today is Thursday, which may be her "last Thursday" she desires that "so many years of meeting deserve to end / In a rare parting." She knows that her end is close and that is why she is not only being respected but reverential to her illness in defying the advice of her daughter and physician to rest. When, on her inquiry about "the news of the world she's leaving." She is told that Gettnner has left on a horse-back, the horse being Xenophone, she is upset because the poor horse has got "a saddle gall." She can only sigh for the pain Xenophone must be experiencing at the moment, because she doesn't have any strength to go in pursuit of him
Thus even the animal world comes within the ambit of her large humanism.

The Countess makes her last-speech about the reality of life, before the plot makes a further and final movement to a conclusion:

In the pleasure and conversation of these evenings.
The argument, philosophy, wit and eloquence
Were all in the light of this end we come to.
Without it there would have been very little
To mention except the weather. Protect me
From a body without death.  

As we get anxious about the end of the Countess' journey on this earth, the plot gathers in the remaining threads of the structural fibre of the dramatic action. Colonel Janik enters as a fugitive for shelter ironically in the same place where he had so politely dispossessed its benevolent owner, i.e. the Countess while the other countrymen of the Countess have turned vengeful, she is, as every ready to shower her charitable benevolence on whosoever needs it. The Colonel is most humbly apologetic for using the Countess' mansion "without civility" three times. The Countess ignores his apologies as unworthy of any attention and opposes them with her request to sing the song of "Pretty Thomasina" which his soldiers sang once to her. She is forgetting the tune of the song, a few bars of which Janik sings for her. Even at this juncture of a few last moments left in her life when she is philosophically attuned
to undertake her final journey to the other world, she has not forgotten her responsibilities and duties of this world. Against the advice of her people she announces her decision to “harbour” Janik in her mansion to protect him from being arrested by the Austrians to execute him. Her commanding tone in her decision to walk on the path of charity and humanity remain with her until the last moment of her life. This is clearly evident in her command to the hesitating Janik to put himself in hiding in her house without showing any sign of diffidence. The colonel is directed by the Countess to take shelter in the same place in which Gettner had taken to escape his arrest by the Hungarian soldiers. In order to cut short Janik’s expression of dangerous apprehensions at the Countess’ decision to provide him a shelter, she asks him to “put her in mind of the song again.”

The final movement of the plot begins with the return of Gettner. Gettner, on his journey to “nowhere in particular,” was repeatedly pestered with the query from people all over the different places of the county of Rosmarin whether she was dying or was dead. People have been in tears while making their enquiry from Gettner, which compelled him to return. The countess is over whelmed with happiness at hearing how her people love her. She wants half an hour’s private conversation with Gettner where nobody else should be present. In the conversation that ensures, we notice a change in Gettner. He is repentant on being the cause of so much trouble to the Countess. He eventually gets fascinated by the magnanimity of the Countess and feels that there could be “no living without her.” He even proposes to marry her and declares that he now loves her. He believes that
the Duchess loves him too. The Duchess, with a perfect balance of mind, shows her resolve for detachment, the stage of philosophic disinterestedness, which is the hallmark of a yogi described in the Bhagwatgita. To Gettner’s delusion that she loved him she retorts coolly. “Tell me, Richard, what complication of logic/Made you think I loved you”? Her self-sacrifice and voluntarily undergoing suffering on account of Gettner should not mean her womanish sentimental inclination towards him, because “we’re elected in love.” The Countess’ concept of love is obviously transcendental with a profound spiritual implication Gettner gets the realization of the truth that he “was an exercise in Charity for the Countess. The Countess’ store of charity is available to all humans as it was to Gettner. Being overtaken by self-pity, Gettner has no recourse except to undertake the journey he had just taken. The Countess begins to sing her swan song as the Austrians are reported to be heading towards her mansion looking for Janik. The final curtain falls on this swan song of the Countess.

The above analysis of The Dark is Light Enough has amply demonstrated that this play is the most serious of Fry’s seasonal comedies. Though the atmosphere and mood throughout the play are those of winter, the play is neither depressing or gloomy nor does it have any pessimistic note anywhere. Fry has superbly succeeded in creating a protagonist of Shakespearean proportions. The entire play centres round the creation of the superhuman personality of the Countess. Her character has emerged as multidimensional, a unique blend of the worldly, the spiritual and the
philosophical. Besides the creation of the memorable figure of Rosmarin, Fry has shown that he can handle a subdued and sombre verse, shorn of the flourishes and embellishments of his Spring comedy's to correspond with the mood of the play.
REFERENCES:

   All subsequent extracts refer to this edition.
10 *Ibid.* p. 120.
SECTION: V
A YARD OF SUN

*A yard of sun* is the long-awaited summer comedy that completes Fry's seasonal quarter of plays. The three-seasons —Spring, Autumn, and Winter— have already been treated receptively in *The Lady's Not For Burning, Venus Observed* and *The Dark is Light Enough*. In *A Yard of Sun* there is the usual vein of the serio-comic but the dramatic concern is more directed to the ease, warmth and depth of humanity, which has lent it a richness of texture. The drama of the play, though against the background of the aftermath of the Second World War, is concerned primarily with human existence and with how to make it worthwhile and lovable inspite of a past of disaster. The disastrous past, that is the Second World War, has deliberately not been dilated upon. The War is, in fact, symbolical of ushering in renewal of warmth of human relationship. The story centers round a single family. Though there are two families involved they have always lived as one unit in their concerns and caring for each other. The jacket-cover introduction to the play in its first published version in 1970 by the Oxford University Press sums up the skeleton events of the play as follows:

*The scene is Siena, on the eve of the Palio, in July 1946. The war is over, and the central theme is renewal. Angelino Bruno's three sons return home: One, a rebellious young doctor, from fighting with the Partisan; one, a luckless Black shirt, from the losing army; a rogue, from making a fortune in Portugal by selling wolfram to all*
comers. An older man comes home from a concentration camp; a young jockey, hired to ride in the Palio, finds in the ex-prisoner the father thought dead. In the heat, as the excitement of the Palio grows, emotions respond to the atmosphere of fiesta; and the climax of the race brings with it a resolution of at least some of the strains of coming to terms with peace again.

The play, in fact, is much more complex than the above skeleton narration of the major events shows. It penetrates deep into the human psyche and raises a number of issues which human existence has to reckon with. It is shorn of the verbal prodigality of the earlier seasonal comedies. Even the summer mood is not dramatically affected in the behaviour of the characters. Summer here is at most symbolical and connected with the central theme of renewal, which is also the significance of the biannual recurrence of the Palio. Stewart Perowne, in his “A Note on the Palio”, has said that “the Palio, the accounts of which relate it to the year 1347, (so-called from the painted cloth representing the Madonna which is the prize), restores to us twice a year, on the 2nd July and the 16th August, not only the galvinic hazard of the hippodrome, but the dazzling liturgy of life as well.”

The locale of the dramatic action is “the courtyard of the Palazzo del Traguardo Sienna,” and the time is July 1946. The play opens with a conversation between the “stocky, busy-browed man of middle age”, namely Angelino Bruno, and his son, Roberto. The son, a doctor who has
been busy attending to a neighbour’s (Rosa Levanti) old father all night, is complaining that there is no water in the tap and he badly needs to wash himself in the morning. The water taps of the Palazzo have gone dry because of the sudden cloud burst last night which has thrown the systems of water supply and sewage out of gear. Fry’s flavour for narrating the most dismal situation in a lively and witty manner is early noticeable as soon as the play opens. Roberto’s description of Rosa’s father not “wanting to die till the weather improved” and keeping himself alive “while the storm lasted” and then “noticing the silence,” “looking up and making off, just before day light,” and Angelino’s describing the storm when “the heavens emptied their pots,” are two such early examples of Fry’s masterly use of wit and lively humour to take off pain attached to a sad situation.

Roberto’s revolutionary nature of a social reformist is seen in his fuming over even small things, like the tap not functioning:

We have no water when there’s a drought, and then
We have no water when there’s a flood you see
The hopeless way this town is organised.

Angelino’s choric comment on his son’s irritable nature is directed to disclosing to us that he has always been ill-at-ease with the Partisans with whom he and his fellows have fought in the war. Roberto and his fellow fighters hold a regular Reunion once a month after which he has always found that earth isn’t – good enough for him.” As soon as Robert blames“
the city fathers” for the bad environment, his father assents that “the environment is in for a transformation” as he is “opening up the Palazzo again” for some “high quality” occupants who are expected to arrive soon at the time of the Palio. He warns Roberto against raising his usual “classvendetta” and keeps to his ideological world of philanthropy. He has almost spent all his money on him with a hope that he would “make his (Angelino’s) future” but he refuses to “attend anybody who can afford to play him.” He is elated at the bright prospect close at hand when

*We have rich cows coming to be milked*

*And they’ll introduce us to other rewarding udders...*

After we have been introduced to Angelino and Roberto, the next member of the Bruno family to be introduced is Luigi. The father is as disappointed with his doctor-son because of his socialism as he is with Luigi because of his failed career as a politician. But Luigi is contrasted with Roberto in as much as he is elated at the prospect of the dawn of a “new world with new men, like Adam looking out on the first garden” while his brother continues with his attitude of despair and skepticism of a new start after the war. Luigi pulls up Roberto for “seeing life through a rifle-sight/And only hear it through a stethoscope,” never “allowing that life ever knows her own business.” He goes on to elaborate his point of view:

*But nevertheless there are times when she (life) manages To fight her way out of our raping clutches, And today is one of them. Not quite a virgin,*
Luigi is elated at the thought that “since we cleared the war off our premises,” it is the first Palio, and then this parish this time, “has got the best horse” they have ever had and the best jockey, too. It should ‘lift’ the heart of everybody in the parish. Luigi and Roberto altercate on what they did during the war the former killing with the Blackshirts and the latter healing the wounded. The third son of Angelino, namely Edmondo, too, is mentioned as a blacksheep of the Bruno family during the angry exchanges between the two brothers.

Then we are introduced to the other family, i.e. that of the Scapares: the mother, Giosetta and the daughter, Grazia. Grazia, whom Angelino is frantically looking for to help him in preparing the palazzo for the noble guest, had gone out to buy sundry items for the kitchen. She returns, all excitement at the preparations for the horse race the next day, where she noticed people so enthusiastic as if they had “decided to go up in a balloon.”

Another strand in the story of the Scapare family is brought, in when Alfio puts in his appearance looking for some clue to his lost father. He has come over to Siena as a jockey from Naples hired by the Dragon district, a competing participant in the forthcoming event. Luigi warms Alfio that since he is going to compete for the Dragon district an old rival of Siena, his identity as such may invite trouble to his security by the local
people. To his enquiry about his father, Alfio is told that his “father has another family here ------ / A woman not your mother ------ a woman known / In these parts as his wife.” He was guided to the Palazzo by no other than his own half-sister, Grazia. His father lived here. He joined the ‘M’ division at Bracciano during the war and “from there he deserted and made his way back home” to look after his wife, Giosetta, who was ill, and his daughter, Grazia who was in her early teens. He remained in hiding during daytime and worked on his olive-grove during the night for providing living for his family. But later “some Fascist big-mouth” betrayed him from among his own people and he was arrested and taken away where nobody knows. Nor does anyone know whether he is dead or alive. Alfio becomes impatient, after hearing the sad history of his father’s fate, to know who it was who betrayed his father. This remains, almost until the end of the play, a big suspenseful mystery.

While Angelino was trying to explain the Scapare episode to Alfio, Giosetta felt that he was not painting him in favourable colours because he mentioned that Alfio’s father never cared for him. This infuriates Giosetta who narrates Angelino’s caring for his three sons, who reduced him to penury because his too ambitiously regarding the talent of his sons, especially his “business thief” Edmondo. Giosetta’s angry tirade throws sufficient light on the characters of his three sons’ his own predicament in his struggle to pursue the myth of success, as well as on the character and personality of Giosetta herself who so far has remained rather silhouetted.
She is all warmth and love and her angry words do not disturb the Brunos even the least “Her curse is never altogether fatal” and the two families -- -- Brunos and Scapares ----- have always “survived well and still limp on “

Giosetta feels drawn sympathetically towards Alfio whom she kisses. But Grazia’s behaviour appears somewhat enigmatic to Alfio as well as to us. Her behaviour, before her knowledge that Alfio was half-brother, was friendly. Now she says that she feels “jostled” by the thought “of a double father,” Alfio’s as well as hers. When Alfio declares that if only he knew the betrayer of his father he would certainly “make him feel sorry” Anyway he is determined to “dig him out” after the race is over. At this Grazia refuses to have anything to do with him and goes away, leaving him and goes away, leaving him as well as a suspense as to why she is avoiding any reference to her father’s betrayer. However, her behaviour appears such as to suggest that she is faced with some sort of psychological turmoil in her mind, which is demonstrated in the tug of war between her being drawn to and trying to withdraw from her half-brother. Giosetta’s interest in Alfio and his mother grows in her curiosity to know about their past after Cesare Scapare left them Alfio sentimentally informs her that his mother has always been ill and he needs money for her treatment. That is why he has agreed to be hired as a jockey by the Dragon district.

The situation now advances in the direction of the main concern of Angelino, i.e. his completing the preparations in the Palazzo for the stay
of the wealthy person who is expected to arrive soon. There is a scuffle, leading to a physical combat, between the two brothers over the issue of water. It is at this moment of fighting on a trivial issue that "a beautiful woman, Ana-Clara, enters through the arch," enquiring about the place known as the Palazzo del Traguardo. Roberto tries to discourage the lady from lodging here because there is no water supply available for the day. But Giosetta has already surrendered her share of the water supplied by the town authorities for use by the expected guests. Ana-Clara does not mind the situation of water crisis at all and wants to feel relaxed, chatting with people, sitting outside the Palazzo apartments until her husband, too, arrives.

Luigi is pleased to learn that Ana-Clara has come over not by chance but deliberately as planned before-hand by her and her husband. Though she has not seen any occasion of the Palio celebration, she has lived the experience of the thrill it brings to people and has fully absorbed in her perception the significance and meaning it has for people. Luigi narrates the historical background of the Palio and its relevance and significance to the present times, which it had had four centuries ago! In the Palio, he says, people celebrate

*Excitement, violence and rivalry,*

*With the Mother of God as Carnival queen.*

Ana-Clara perceives in the Palio,

*What I fancied I saw common life,*
Particularly the common male, glorified!

Striped, pied, blazoned and crested.

Pausing and advancing like courting sunbirds.

Indeed, the whole deliberate procession

‘Like an unhurried lovemaking.’

She goes on to narrate the impact of the race on humans:

At last when the corporate body has been tautened.

Absolutely to expectation’s limit

There comes the violent release, the orgasm.

The animal explosion of the horse race,

Bare-backed and savage.

Now the situation is ripe for the entry of the expected guest, who turns out to be Edmondo, the declared “black sheep” of the family, even mentioning of whose name was banned in the family. Angelino I overwhelmed with joy and profusion of satisfaction at seeing his ‘thievish’ son turned so marvellously rich and so interested in his family and parish. For the family, he has brought all the wealth they need and for the parish, he has arranged Combriccio, the jockey, to ensure his people’s victory at the race. The horse for the race is superb anyway. Edmondo obviously has earned his fortune by the war trading with all countries, friendly or otherwise, while his people made sacrifices and suffered during the war. Scapare’s whereabouts are still not known Against this experience of suffering Edmondo has come over to make his family happy once again.
The idealistic socialist that Roberto is, he wouldn’t like to have any traffic with the like of his unscrupulous brother, Edmondo.

When Roberto meets Ana-Clara a second time, his attitude towards her is ambiguous. He feels attracted by her suave temperament and balanced composure as well as human touch. But he cannot resist feeling that there must have been an ulterior motive in marrying a man like Edmondo. He fails “to size her up” Ana-Clara, from her husband’s side, keeps on clarifying her husband’s position by saying that the Brunos have never been absent from his mind. His human concerns had never left him. He has not forgotten even Giovanni Levant from whom he had fraudulently “borrowed” all his father’s savings deposited with him, reducing his father to a state of penury. He has brought him rich gifts. But alas! he died only last night, thus frustrating Edmondo’s dream of giving him a surprise. At home his dreams have already received a “reception” from his big brother. The first Act ends with Roberto’s expression of uncertainty over his possible attitude to Ana-Clara, who has advised him not to jump to any hasty judgement on her until he has known her better. So far we have seen that the drama of human feelings and issues has started getting deeper and deeper, though the outer drama of the horse-race is not neglected at all.

Act two, set in the courtyard, opens a day later in the evening, in a relaxed mood Angelino and Giosetta are conversing about how, luckily,
normal life has once again returned and Angelino’s dream of a happy life seems to him to be fructifying. Angelino wonders whether after her “hopes gave out for Cesare,” Giosetta would he able to live alone. Giosetta takes out a piece of paper from her pocket and reads out a message that Cesare is alive and freed from the concentration camp. This news puts Giosetta at par with Angelino as far as joy from family reunion is concerned. It is all God’s mercy to the two families, acknowledges Angelino. However, Giosetta has not told Grazia about this news lest it should turn out to be untrue. In the meantime, we are informed that Grazia is busy being photographed to see if she “could have a career modelling fashions,” a plan, which we learn later, prepared by Edmondo.

The news about Cesare mentioned above continues fomenting a number of questions and apprehensions in Giosetta’s mind. She is not sure whether with the return of Cesare, her old normal life, too, will return. The greatest hitch is her relationship with Cesare, which has not been formalised into matrimony by the Church, and she lived with him only as his mistress, though recognized by the people around her as husband and wife. In a ruminating mood she speak out the uncertainty and apprehension in her mind to Angelino:

*If we could have married, it might have felt
Something solid, divided and come together.*

*In the early years whenever I went to confession
And had to call our love a sin*
I felt I was being unfaithful to him with God.  

Giosetta’s reminiscing the circumstances of Cesare’s life gives us a vivid picture of an unhappy man: “his wife has always been an ill woman, almost / From the day they were married,” And “when Cesare was there it seemed to be /Hardly more than a fear of being made love to. / He got it in his head he was crucifying her, /And hated the life in his own body. /It was like having a foul tattoo-mark on him/Which he couldn’t get rid of. He began to avoid/Good innocent people (what he imagined were)/As though his presence was insulting them:/Children in the street, even his son. His mind/Lost its way altogether. He even felt/The sky draw away from him.” In such a psychological state of mind, he, as it was, “ran for life” here, and has been happy, though not always “Questions would come rolling over him” every now and then about his wife and son and about his own role and God’s will in the whole matter. “It was then he would go drinking.” Giosetta’s smooth moving narrative shows how Fry’s command of the dramatic verbal medium has matured. The portrayal of Cesare’s past could not have been more precise, effective and moving than the narrative of Giosetta to which Angelino acts as a non-participating interlocutor and audience. Besides portraying Cesare, Giosetta’s narrative throws abundant light on the profundity of her own heart’s human and sentimental concerns.

While Giosetta was busy reminiscing Cesare’s past, Grazia was occupied with her being photographed for a modelling career. She is
declared by the photographer as a perfect genius for the profession with all the traits for the job present in her body and mind. It is at this juncture, when Ana-Clara feels elated by the plan of her husband for Grazia that Roberto puts in his appearance. Learning from Ana-Clara that Grazia is being experimented for seeing whether she can profitably be inducted in the profession of modelling fashions, Roberto becomes furious and even threatens to kill Edmondo who sold this idea to Grazia. He orders the photographer to pack up and become scarce. He believes in one's looking one's true self to the world and not wear various persona for material gains, which is Edmondo's philosophy of life. This little episode, apparently inconsequential, throws light on Roberto's firm conviction on his philosophy of life which he preaches, and which he himself practices, that one should be true to oneself, both in appearance and behaviour. Roberto and Ana-Clara then indulge in an inconsequential discussion about projecting their individualistic personalities to the people, their true and pretended concerns, etc., which somehow is not dramatically integrated with the structure of the play. Even Roberto's concern to keep Grazia intact in her own true self does not give us any strong hint of his personal or emotional involvement with her, which becomes clear only towards the end of the play.

The story of the Palio is taken up again. Edmondo and Luigi return from the practice-run and report that Cambriccio fell off the horse because of "some sort of vertigo" and got kicked on the head. He is still
unconscious in the hospital; thus he is out of the race. This means "the finish of our bright hopes," moans Angelino. Like a true business venturist, Edmondo asks the Brunos not to panic. He would find a substitute. Angelino is compelled to look at the turn of the situation in terms of the mystery of life:

What a minefield

Life is! One minute you're talking stroll in the sun,
The next you legs and arms are all over the hedge
There's no dignity in it.⁸

Roberto, in his cynically skeptical manner, is not inclined to sympathise with Edmondo for the abortive end of his efforts. He candidly tells Ana-Clara:

Wretched for Edmondo!

He arranged the whole thing for his own prestige,
But the parish has to suffer for it. Of course
You're not concerned with them, the real victims,
Only the blow to poor Edmondo's variety.⁹

He wants to haul up Ana-Clara so that she can see the truth. He had thought that she was born and brought up in an uppish family. But to silence his nagging her, she takes the "wind out of Roberto's sails" by informing him of her squalid slum - existence reality during the early part of her life. She narrates to him her "careerist" journey from one hand to another till she feel in the lap of Edmondo. Roberto _ Ana-Clara
conversation, after the above disclosure of the truth about the latter’s life, now veers round to a love – making encounter realised most effectively verbally. It is pertinent to reproduce the whole text, the summary of which will take away the whole charm of the situation:

**ROBERTO:** I never saw a woman whose eyes were so transparent.

*Every half thought flies past there naked.*

*At first, I thought you were over-bred, but now You’ve proved me wrong. What is it that puts your ears back?*

[ANA-CLARA is silent for a moment]

**ANA-CLARA:** Can anyone be at perfect ease with life?

**ROBERTO:** With life, or with himself - which do you mean?

*I suppose life is willing, when we can find What it’s groping for. This afternoon I felt* 

*Somehow that we seemed to belong to each other,*

*And to all the rest of them as well.*

**ANA-CLARA:** You see?

*You are understanding at last why I was happy.*

*We belong to each other.*

**ROBERTO:** While the illusion lasted.

**ANA-CLARA:** You don’t give truth a chance to declare itself.

*Poor foetus in the womb, condemned as illusion! It had the kick of life for me, I may say.*
Your hands were capable and kind. They made
The worst things - in a way serviceable.
Without touching me, you took me in your arms
And lifted my body across a new threshold.

Exactly as you meant to.

ROBERTO: How do you know that?
Did you see any professional negligence?

ANA-CLARA: No; your concentration was part of the love-making.
An oblique seduction can be very successful.
This one was.

ROBERTO: I could feel you charging my body From any distance,
what are we to do?

ANA-CLARA: Are you asking that seriously?

ROBERTO: Don’t breathe on me, or I shall break.

[if they were not in a public place they would kiss]

The above love - duet seems rather too abrupt, though we have had
some tenuous insinuations at the first-time meeting between Roberto and
Ana-Clara when the latter had exclaimed, “I believe it; he makes an
incision with his eyes”. (p.31), Later, the latter had wondered, “I can’t
altogether size her up” (p.49). This thread of the plot is again left to yield
place to the other story of the substitute jockey for the imminent big event
on the success on the success of which so much emotional, patriotic,
personal is at stake.
Roberto suggests a viable solution. Luigi can take Cambriccios' place as he is the “nearest thing to a cavalrmen / in this parish of foot – sluggers.” Moreover, his victory at the race, will “pull in the votes at the next election,” Angelino, too, feels that Luigi, considering the strength that he has, can do the job. Luigi himself looks at the occasion as “a great political plat-form.” Only Edmondo has to feel of his suitability. However, Edmondo has another plan, which “successful” businessmen quite often adopt. He would make sure that Alfio participates in the race but loses it. He will “make him listen to money.”

The horse-race thread of the plot is left here to take up the Roberto – Ana - Clara episode mentioned above a bit further. She “looked at the new moon / Through a closed windows,” which is a bad luck. To change its evil effect all the people should “bow to heaven and wish,” As all the people wish, Edmondo comes forward to guess what was there in each individual’s wish. He says that Roberto “was probably wishing he could steal his wife.” This shows Edmondo’s suspicion and perhaps is based on his knowledge that his wife had earlier passed through several hands. This light-hearted conversation about the superstition of Ana-Clara unobtrusively changes to a heated discussion between Edmondo, the successful businessman and Roberto, the idealist socialist reformer. The discussion between the rightist and leftist ideologies between the two brothers reaches a pitch where Roberto “leans across the table and grabs Edmondo by the shirt”, and threatens to kill him. The immediate issue was
Edmondo’s argument in favour of Grazia opting for the profitable business of modelling fashion. Roberto shows extraordinary concern for Grazia whom he considers to be “best one of all of us, / Who has lived these years without a mark against her ” He would not like her to be dragged into “the welter’ of greed’s” by appearing “into a rehash of the old tribal dance / Designed to show their beads and feathers.” Grazia’s perfunctory rebuttal ---- “It isn’t time” ---- again appears enigmatic because it seems as if she is not prepared to accept Roberto’s estimate of her goodness. Before this issue could be thrashed out by Grazia’s response to Edmondo’s plan, another episode occurs which takes us to two threads of the plot simultaneously, i.e. the horse race and the identity of the person who betrayed Cesare Scapare.

Alfio has been “assaulted, beaten up, stripped and shut in a cellar,” by what he believes were Edmondo’s men. He appears before Edmondo in an angry mood protesting against his wrongful confinement and brutal treatment meted out of him. Edmondo placates him and puts forward to him the offer of huge money as a price for his losing the race. If he rejects this offer the threat is plain and that is that he will be returned to his captors who consider him as an enemy of Siena. Alfio first vehemently rejects the offer for his betraying the people who have hired him. But there has been going on in his mind a strong struggle, which is manifested, in his strange surrealistic behaviour after a few drinks given him by Angelino. His behaviour is described in the stage direction as follows.
Alfio gives a Neapolitan gesture of succumbing to fate: the base of the palm of the hand strikes a glancing blow on the forehead, ricocheting off to describe an arc in the air, the gesture finishing above the head and to the side, palm upward to the sky; the shoulders are shrugged, the head on one side towards the flung arm; the other arm bent upwards, the hand palm upward, the fingers spread; the mouth drawn down the lips pursed.\textsuperscript{11}

Alfio explains his predicament, which involves a terrible upheaval in his psyche. He candidly tells Edmondo that his unfavourable circumstances have given him [Edmondo] “an unfair advantage over him,” otherwise he would never be able to buy him. He confesses, “the pain my mother is in all time/Plays right into your hands. I need the money.” The doctor has said that his mother can be helped only with a new drug, which can be had from America “at a price.” He surrenders to Edmondo’s temptation only for the sake of his mother. After this surrender Alfio feels as if he is facing a crisis of his identity: “I don’t know who I am any more.” He has been reduced to a level where he feels that he is” not fit to be with other people.” Roberto’s remarks at this finale of the episode is cynical, though true: “to the conscience-haunted night that we deserve,” his people can toast. Grazia, too, faces the problem of identity crisis. She wants to run away from the place and live in a place where no one knows her, and even follow the profession of modelling, constantly changing her persona. She
feels so burdened with a sense of guilt at not helping Alfio out with disclosing to him the betrayer of his father. That would have saved Alfio from getting into the present trouble of being caught by the people in the street. She frankly confesses, to everybody’s utter surprise, that it was she who betrayed her and Alfio’s father. She babbled about Cesare’s hiding here to Rosa Levanti “who could never keep quite about anything.” Grazia committed this silly mistake out of her childishness. No one present in the Palazzo yard will blame Grazia and she gets everybody’s sympathy. Roberto rationalizes, for Grazia’s sake; the Cesare’s arrest was because of the collective responsibility of all of them. Moreover, this is how life moves and that is why “the world’s name is Hazard.” Roberto, in a bid to lift up the spirit of Grazia, tells her that her father is arriving soon. Grazia, hinting at her clandestine attraction for Roberto, “suddenly embraces” him before leaving with her mother for the railway station where she would continue waiting for her father in every train till he actually comes. No one has ever seen “such a daylight in the face” of Grazia as it was now.

The news of the imminent arrival of Cesare gives another twist to the main story of the horse-race. Since Alfio’s father may be in for the horse-race, he would like to show his father off how worthy a son he has fathered. Therefore he would like to be freed from the pledge he gave to Edmondo a few moments ago. Alfio’s sentiments get endorsement from everybody including Edmondo’s wife. Edmondo feels disappointed with his own people whom he wanted to help within the ideological parameter.
of his business world. He accuses everybody for frustrating his ambition of making his native place proud and prosperous once again. He even blames his wife of being drawn towards Roberto. Alfio's wished to show off his skill and prowess to master a brute animal will give him a sense of belonging and identity. This sense changes into firm resolve after Cesare has arrived, though the latter does not recognize nor is he introduced to his son.

After Edmondo, in disgust, has left the place to see if he can arrange for another competent jockey as a challenge to Alfio's skill, Roberto and Ana-Clara being left to themselves, converse about their present relationship, future prospects and Edmondo. Ana-Clara was mature enough to have guessed the love between Roberto and Grazia, which had escaped the notice of everybody. She gathers it from Roberto's vehement defence of Grazia's good nature and his strongest possible opposition to her being taken away from him to be another and perhaps many different persons — all-unreal — as a model. She confesses that for some time she was certainly drawn towards him. "There was the scent of sapphire-coloured blood / that sauntered in my veins." She doesn't know whether it was "love or confusion." Roberto can only satisfy himself with the thought:

*God protect me from a woman's intuition!*

*It's the one incontrovertible proof*

*Of spontaneous generation.*
So far as her present assessment of her husband's personality is concerned, she find, that Edmondo is

*Terrified of losing*

*The self-confidence that worked his wonders*

*Afraid of seeing himself in the old mirror.*

*And know, I can see, afraid of Cesare's shadow.*

*And the war he hasn't experienced. Afraid*

*Of losing the person he has worked so hard.*

*To make a reality.*\(^{13}\)

As far as she herself is concerned Ana-Clara knows that it is her husband who can give her what Roberto is incapable of giving:

*He gives me the patience I need.*

*To make my mistakes, which you would never give me;*

*And the leisure I need to realize myself,*

*How far my mind unhounded, and my free sensed.*

*Will take me, which you would never give me.*\(^{14}\)

Now the dramatic action moves fast, as Alfio enters to announce his resolve to forget his deal with Edmondo and ride on his horse according to his free will. A new suspense is created regarding the possible result of the Palio, because Edmondo has not succeeded in finding a suitable substitute of Cambriccio and Luigi will have to do that job, without the least knowledge that Alfio has finally rejected the deal with Edmondo.
The horse-race is on and its end is signified through the auditory and visual effects produced by the noise and gunshot outside and the “dark stage light striking on rippling banners.” The outcome of the race is kept in abeyance by Cesare Giosetta conversation about the former’s experience of his journey back home. The two seem to be perfectly at ease with life with no anxiety for the defeat or victory of the Parish in the Palio. Cesare’s proposal to settle down at Naples with his wife and son, though a bit unsettling first for Grazia is accepted as an amicable finale to his life-long struggle. Grazia can marry Roberto with her father’s permission. Edmondo, after the victory of the Parish - not because of Luigi’s competence but because of the horse’s agility - prepares to leave. He gives a proposal to his father get the Palazzo converted into a restaurant, which the latter rejects. Angelino says,

*I like to enjoy*

*A glittering prospect, but not to the extent*

*Of letting it take you over body and soul. 15*

The play ends with Edmondo’s entourage leaving the Palazzo, which looks empty of all ambitions and futile prospecting. Towards the end of the play, a number of events are crowded and crammed in a short space of dramatic time. Issues of life, humanity, code of conduct, etc, are all broached up. The serio-comic view of the play is asserted in the ludicrous outcome of the horse-race and the grotesque reunion of son and father given in the last stage direction.
Alfio grins, and gives the extravagant Neapolitan gesture he
Gave before, but this time ironically. Cesare makes the same
Gesture in sympathetic reply. The others are laughing.\(^{16}\)

Alfio’s Neapolitan gesture is a comical commentary on human existence, which is as ironic as enigmatic. But if we contrast it with a similar gesture when Alfio had yielded to the temptation of Edmondo and brought an identity crisis over himself, we can say that the second time gesture is a restoration of his confidence of a success in the re-gaining of his identity and fructification of his quest. The play on the whole is tightly structured with inter-lacing threads of the plot being woven into a deftly designed structure. The characters are all individualized, pulsating with warmth, optimism and humanity. The style throughout is a verse to look Through, as Eliot says, and not to look At. But what is lacking in the play is an adequate creation of Summer mood and its interaction with the overall dramaturgical fabric of the play as Fry had done earlier with his other three seasonal comedies.
REFERENCES:

   All subsequent references to the text are from this edition
2 Ibid; p.4
3 Ibid; p.6.
4 Ibid; p.32.
5 Ibid; p.33.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid; p.55
8 Ibid; p.64.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid; pp.67-68.
11 Ibid; p.81.
12 Ibid; pp. 94-95.
13 Ibid; p.93.
14 Ibid; p.94.
15 Ibid; p.108.
16 Ibid; p.110.
Chapter: IV
**THE FIRSTBORN**

Fry's only play, in the tragic structural and thematic mould, *The Firstborn* is both conceived and executed on an ambitious scale. Though the play is Fry's early attempt at playwriting, his mature craftsmanship is discernible here in all its dramaturgical components —plot, theme, character and style. The dramatist has used eclectically structural devices from Greek, Medieval and Elizabethan drama and has treated themes which have recurred in the tragedies of the past, such as the issues of individualism, the force controlling the destiny of nations and humans before which man's effort appear ineffectual vis-à-vis human aspirations which give this force meaning and significance. There is no confrontation in this play between evil and good. Rather we notice here a Hegelian conflict of the type Sophocles has presented in his *Antigone*. There are two forces, which in their own rights and within the domain of their own logic are valid, but when they collide in a wider perspective they make incompatible demands on each other. One force is vindicated in victory in its defeat and the other in defeat in its victory. The overseeing force of destiny plays a role we find in Greek tragedies. Pride leads to fall in the characteristic Medieval infusion in the theme. And character is destiny, an Elizabethan thematic strand, is interwoven in the complex structural design of the play. The use of contrasts in characters, setting and perspective leads to the clarity of vision presented in the play, which though exploiting a well-known story, has relevance to the modern times.
In his "Foreword" to the second edition of the play in 1951, Fry has narrated the circumstances of his beginning work on this play and its subsequent, delayed completion and frequent revisions based on its performances. He says, "this play------ (was) begun as long ago as 1938 though not finished until 1945 after four years when circumstances made me neglect it--------"¹ It was first published in 1946 and broad-cast by the B.B.C. in 1947. Its first stage performance was only in 1948 at the Edinburgh Festival. After this production, the play underwent extensive revision by the author and the revised version was staged in London in 1952 and the third revised version, which we have in print now, was produced in New York in 1958. Emil Roy has observed,

*The first and second versions, Fry, made extensive 'alterations and cuts' which squeezed the fact out of many of the verbose speeches and toned down Moses' self-inflation, such as 'I could be Pharaoh in Median' Fry also dropped a long scene in which Tensret, the Pharaoh's daughter speaks rather cynically of her father's opportunism, casting a few more cuts and changes between the second and third versions of the play, he was mainly concerned with stressing Moses' impact on Ramses, the Pharaoh's doomed firstborn, a fleeting motivation which escaped most of his auditors. Since writing the play Fry has commented wryly he has been learning "too reluctantly that neither audiences nor critics are clairvoyant."²*
The source of the story of *The Firstborn* is recognizably the first twelve chapters of *Exodus*. The outline of the story has three major stages: the first is the miraculous freeing of Moses from the Nile and his preservation by the Pharaoh's daughter, the second is his exile; and the third is his return to free the Israelites from the oppression of another Pharaoh. The Biblical story narrates the encounter between a semi-divine culture hero and a woodenly obdurate and proud trickster. Fry has selected from the sprawling Biblical story only a few climatic days and situations, which are dramatized within an enclosed, and claustrophobic setting alternating between only two significant locales. The action moving and developing between these two settings arrives at its ironic conclusion, which is the birth of Israel's freedom from the death of Egypt's best hope. In the original Biblical story Moses remains in exile for forty years. But Fry has reduced this period for his drama to ten years which, as Emil Roy has said, "goes along with the change in Moses from the tongue-tied octogenarian of the Bible to a passionate spell binder of around fifty." The authorial dramatic intention of portraying Moses' Character is clear from Fry's own statement in the "Foreword" to the play mentioned above:

*The character of Moses is a movement towards maturity, towards a balancing of life within the mystery, where the conflicts and dilemmas are the trembling of the balance.*

The play, as our analysis of it below will show, has a true tragic atmosphere, charged with tension, suspense and predicament, even though its catastrophe is occasioned by the Will of God. There is no doubt that the divine intervention is caused by human action but human efforts cannot
regulate or alter it. Though in his attempt to justify the appropriateness of the title of the play, Fry has said that it is Ramses who is the central figure in the play but we believe after a careful perusal of the play that it is Moses whose character and perspectives are prominently shaped and projected by the text of the play. Fry has argued thus:

This play has a title, which at first may seem to quarrel with most of the action, since the chief protagonist is Moses. But, I hope, after a little acquaintance, the figure of life, which Ramses presents, will be seen to take a central place from his first existence to the end.\textsuperscript{5}

But our perspective of Ramses' Character is different. He is significant, no doubt, as a catalytic agent in bringing out the humane traits of Moses' heart as well as in showing his firm faith in God and in his own determination. But the central focus of the thematic concerns and perspective of vision will be distorted if we consider Ramses as the central concern of the play. However, this is only a minor flaw in the play, which does not detract from the solid merits of Fry's craftsmanship so evident even in this early play.

The play opens on "the terrace of the palace of Seti the second, at Tanis on a summer morning of 1200 B.C. The terrace looks out upon an incomplete pyramid. The first sound to be heard is a scream coming from outside the open ground of the palace. Two women from the royal family are discovered on the terrace conversing about the screams frequently. These women are Anath, sister of the Pharaoh, and Teusret, the Pharaoh's daughter. Anath, who has had a long experience of such recurrences, says
that the scream is from people on the death of someone: it was “a password to a grave.” These people have been steadily working, informs Teusret, “at father’s tomb.” Anath regrets the waste of human energy to satisfy human vanity: “Their sweat would be invaluable to the farmers in this drought/What pains they take to house a family of dust.” She is unhappy with the royal vanity of pride in perpetuating the memory of its men:

*What shall we do with all that air to breathe*

*And no more breath? I could as happily lie*

*And wait for eternal life in something smaller.*

The conversation between Anath and Teusret, after its choric introduction of the important strand of the plot i.e. persecution and oppression of the Israelites by the Pharaoh moves on to the narration of the past of the person who is going to be the central concern of the dramatic action. It is Moses who was accidentally found floating in an ark on the Nile after the pronouncement by Anath’s Pharaoh father and Teusret’s grandfather, that all Israelites be exterminated. The royal order was not “out of spite, but necessity” of the defence of the realm. Anath picked up the little life from the water and raised it in defiance of the royal decree. This little life grew into the valiant Moses, “Egyptian from beard to boots” and “a soldier of genius.” Known later as a great “conqueror and peacemaker” for Egypt. After his return from the conquest of Abyssinia, he once went out to inspect the city being built at Pithom. There an incident happened. An officer, who had accompanied him, seeing a labourer “idling or resting,” out of his silly zealousness to impress upon
Moses his worthiness, beat the workman, a Jewish bricklayer, to death.
The sight turned "Moses and his world turtle." It was as an inward life
scrapped his eyes clean".

_The General of Egypt, the Lion and the Prince_

_Recognized his mother's face in the battered body_

_Of a bricklayer; saw it was not the face above,_

_His nursery, not my [Anath's] face after all_

_He knew his seed. And where my [Anath's] voice had hung till then_

_Now voices descending from ancestral Abraham_

_Congregated on him. And he killed_

_His Egyptian self in the self of that Egyptian_

_And buried that self in the sand.^

The narrative about Moses up to the present time is completed in
the dramatized version of the conversation where Teusret has been
replaced by another interlocutor, i.e. Seti. Their conversation tells us that
after the above-mentioned incident Moses got embittered and being
discarded by Egyptians went into exile in Midian. Seti asks Anath the
whereabouts of Moses in exile, because he needs him badly to defend
Egypt against the imminent attack by Libya. He believes that Moses'
loyalty to Egypt has not died out even though he has been in exile now for
a decade. Moreover after having lived a hard life in exile he may be
persuaded to come over to Egypt, if invited, to be wrapped up in glory and
position again. Anath knows better than any one else. She dissuades Seti
from nourishing any hope of Moses' return to the royal fold.
As contrasted with the elaborate choric introduction of Moses, Ramses' presentation is brief in a dramatised form. He appears as a young man, under training for taking over the reins of Egypt soon. His speech, in an unworried manner, introduces us to the wide-spread drought under which the entire realm is reeling. However, he gives us a piece of news about a tall man heading towards the palace, who to the great surprise and satisfaction of Seti and a concerned anxiety for Anath, is correctly guessed to be Moses. This is soon followed by the entry of Moses with his brother Aaron who has told the former of the miseries of the Israelites in Egypt. To Seti's annoyance and disappointment, Moses' return is because of his concern for the Israelites rather than his love for or loyalty to Egypt. He bluntly rejects Seti's offer of the royal position and asserts, "The prince of Egypt died the day he fled." He declares his newly found identity as follows:

That Prince of Egypt died.
I am the Hebrew
Smitten out of his shadow of that prince,
Vomitted out of his dry lips, the cry
Whipped off the sanded tongue of that prince of Egypt.\(^8\)

The purpose of Moses' return, though not immediately comprehensible to Seti, is clear and well defined. It is the voice of his blood weeping for its own kinds on the soil of Egypt groaning under the tyranny of the Pharaoh which has forced his legs to tread on Seti's soil again. He warns Seti against his obduracy and makes his brother recount the first hand experience, well documented, of the miseries of the Hebrews. Seti, in his
pride and arrogance, refuses to pay any heed to the miseries being inflicted on the Israelites who, according to him, are not legitimately entitled to any human treatment. “Am I to compose the epitaphs for every individual grave of this trying summer?” Only he would care for those who have any purpose or meaning for him.

To Seti’s tyrannical attitude to the downtrodden, Moses opposes his conviction of individualism, which alone can ensure maturing of any civilization.

_It is the individual man_  
_In his individual freedom who can mature_  
_With his warm, spirit the unripe world._

Moses asserts his humane individualism in his demand for “justice for my people.” Seti dismisses Moses’ angry retort on the ground that the latter’s attitude has coarsened because of his long exile. He tries to win back Moses’ favour by a carefully orchestrated diplomacy of politeness blended with authoritarian threat. Moses’ threatening retort is stark, bare and categorical: “I hope that none of us will sleep again until we can sleep.”

By the end of scene one of the first Act Ramses is brought in more importantly in the stream of the main plot involving a confrontation of Moses with the pharaoh. Inspite of Anath’s dissuasion, he insists upon finding Miriam’s tent where Moses and his brothers Aaron will be lodging after they have rejected the offer of royal hospitality. Thus the first scene, developing from the choric introduction of the protagonist to his actual appearance on the stage, ends with a foreboding of possible unhappy consequences. The whole scene taken as a single extended dramatic
situation is in the nature of a Greek tragedy, which normally begins at a climactic point. Here the climactic point has been worked out with its own beginning, middle and an end. The scene ends with the suspense whether Ramses will be able to work for a solution of the threatened confrontation. So for the element of divine intervention has not come on the surface. The general devastating drought has not been accredited to divine displeasure. Fry has already outlined the major theme of the play, which is broad humane humanism constituted of the dignity of life and man’s individual freedom, integrity of a nation, and man’s faith in the divine order of the created universe. Characters are all finely and clearly etched with information antecedent to their appearance before us.

The next scene is set in Miriam’s tent. Brother and sister meet after a long gap. The sister is not pleased with the return of her brother. Like the women of the chorus in Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, Miriam does not want her miserable status quo to be disturbed at all. She has been suffering for long and now is inured to the pain of existence; outside Miriam’s closed, claustrophobic world there is the larger world of political reality. People have already started taking sides at the news of Moses’ return: “Egypt loves and hates you [Moses] inextricably”. Moses knows it too well that Egypt does not love him but is “afraid to be without him”. The Egyptians “love him from the bottom of their greed.” Moses is so much torn within by the sufferings of his people that he has fully identified himself with the pain they have undergone or are still undergoing. Miriam is so used to and reconciled with her stifling, enclosed environment by shutting her eyes on the city of Egypt, that she is not
prepared even to listen to Moses' inquiry about his people, dead or dying, because she thinks that he may prove to be a "dangermaker" for her family. She wants to keep her son to herself and forget about the Israelites dead or suffering. Moses explains to Miriam what she owns to her people and what his own purpose to return is like:

You have gone
With the dead after all, but you pretend not to see them.
Miriam, we have to speak to them with our lives.
Death was their question to us, and our lives
Become their understanding or perplexity.

As Moses-Miriam discussion proceeds we already notice a transformation in the personality of the once Egyptian General. He feels the presence of the Israelites' God in him whom all the Hebrews have to support. When Miriam despairs- "We've no more spirit to support a God" – Moses voices his newly gained perception

We have a God who will support the spirit,
And both shall be found-----
I am there, beyond myself;
If I could reach to where I am.

There is a figure-in-speech followed by a figure-in-action, when at Aaron's hope, "something will soon open a way to action," Ramses puts in his appearance unannounced. He is the young hero-worshipper of Moses whom he always looked up, right from his childhood, as "the immense and affable God in General's uniform." He has come over to him not as an emissary of his father but on his own to meet his old hero whom he has
always adored. But he seizes the opportunity to persuade Moses that if he accepted the offer of friendship with his father, he will be in a position to serve the cause of the Hebrews by eliciting some leniency from the Pharaoh. Moreover, after sometime Ramses himself will become the Pharaoh, which will be a great advantage to Moses' cause. Moses' acceding to the Pharaoh's call for his return to the cause of Egypt's safety will be doubly beneficial both for Egypt and for the Hebrews. Moses shows the clarity of his perspective of the situation in which he has thrown himself after full inner deliberations:

*Egypt and Israel both in me together*

*How would that be managed? I should wolf*

*Myself to keep myself nourished.*

Moses would not “clank to Egypt’s victory in Israel’s bones.” He declares to Ramses that “we’re not enemies so much as creatures of divisions.” Thus one more climatic situation is over with Moses’ frank rejection of Ramses formula of compromise. At this point another, both theatrically and dramatically effective situation is brought in Shendi, Miriam’s son rushes in completely exhausted and rendered sapless by the scorching heat, being pursued by the Egyptian overseers. He has only been watching the striking Hebrew bricklayers. For this crime the overseers appear to punish him. But Ramses shows his authority, exonerates Shendi of any complicity in the strike, and sends the overseers away. This act of justice and kindness by Ramses prompts Aaron to persuade Moses to use him as an instrument for the cause of the Hebrews. But, Moses' strategies are based on a different foundation:

*To confront ourselves, to create within ourselves*
He believes in divine strength for his triumph—"a power participating but unharnessed, waiting to be led towards us" will not use Ramses for his purpose but stay out in his conviction that "Good has a singular Strength / Not known to evil." The second scene ends with Moses' rejection of Ramses as a conduit to manipulate the triumph of the Hebrew cause.

Following the usual pattern of the alternating settings, the next scene is located in "a room in the Palace, giving on to the terrace of scene one." The scene has three distinct movements relevant to the development of the plot further. The first is Ramses' consent to his father's proposal of getting him married to Phipa, the beautiful, intelligent and immensely rich daughter of the King of Syria. This alliance between two royal families is necessitated also by Egypt's need of its own territorial safety at a time when Moses is not favourably inclined to rejoin the Egyptian forces as General. The news of Ramses' proposed marriage brings joy to the childlike heart to Teusret who immediately gets busy in arranging for a celebration of the occasion. The second movement of the situation in this scene is Ramses' proposal to his father to provide a commission to his nephew by which he "could come at Moses." Since his father's needs of Egypt's security are desperate ------ "The land is rocking. He'll take hold even of grass" ------ he agrees to give the proposal a serious consideration. Throughout the first two movement Teusret's contrapuntal innocent
interruptions show how Fry can most effectively blend the serious and the trivial into a harmonious whole.

The third movement is of a serious and ominous nature. Even though during the first two movements Moses has not been present on the stage his presence was felt in the concerned talks of Ramses, Seti, and Anath about the matters relating to the matrimonial and commission to Shendi issues. In the final movement of the situation of this scene, Moses gatecrashes upon the Pharaoh family assemblage. He is “bearing in his arms a dead Israelite boy” whom, he alleges, Seti has killed. He throws the accusations of tyranny and brutality on Seti in an ominously threatening tone. He demands of Seti to let his people be led “peaceably into the wilderness for a space, to find their god and so become living men at last.” The god of the Israelites, asserts Moses, is “the inimitable patience who has not yet struck Seti down.” Moses holds a mirror to Seti to behold the situation his country is in:

You know well enough invasion is probable,

Unrest is in and out of doors, your southern half

Splits from the north, the lords at your table

Are looking down at their hands. And flowing through all

Is the misery of my blood. Let that be clean

First, and then your flesh may heal.13

At Seti’s insinuation that Moses is “a man without laws,” the latter elaborates his own laws of nature and humanity, which have divine sanction? At this moment, Moses feels that he is infused with divine inspiration, strength, courage and mandate to do what his God wants him
to do for the Israelites. His declaration is accompanied with "a long distant cracking sound of thunder" and the curtain to Act one is drawn as "from horizon the sky is beaten into thunder." The thunder is a signal to divine intervention in favour of the Israelites and an ominous warning to proud and obstinate Pharaoh.

Act two, Scene one is set in Miriam’s tent. Moses and Aaron are discovered discussing the plan of leading the Israelites in groups out of Egypt. Aaron in the midst of the discussion “feels the earth quiver, hears a roar and a building collapsing” and sees “the dust like a cloud” going higher than the city. Moses remains undisturbed, perfectly cool and unconcerned at this extraordinary behaviour of the cosmic elements, as if he knows it beforehand. Similarly, he pays no heed to Miriam’s reporting that the water of the Nile has changed into blood and the Egyptians who have drunk it are vomiting. But the wells from which the Israelites are drinking have clean drinkable water. Moses has been “waiting without expectation” to happen this. He says, “surely, I already knew/We with our five hare fingers/Have caused the strings of God to sound./Creation’s mute-head is dissolving -----/ Our lives are being lived into our lives.” Aaron is puzzled at Moses’ vision of God bent upon punishing Egypt.

The second movement of the situation relates to Shendi and Miriam. The mother is elated at the elevation of her son to the position of an Egyptian officer who will bring a better living condition for the long-suffering mother and the son. They want to remain confined to their narrow world of material comforts without caring for the plight of their own men. This is why Shendi and Miriam refuse to accept Moses’ advice
to his nephew to reject the commission. As contrasted with Moses’ vision and ideology, Miriam ——- Shendi’s attitude may appear self-centred but it is convincingly human and natural.

Aaron rightly suspects motives in the Pharaoh’s appointing Shendi as a officer, because we know that Ramses had earlier suggested this diplomatic move to his father to win back Moses to his side. But Aaron is confident of “out moving motives to their advantages.” In the meantime Moses’ warning given earlier to the Pharaoh against a probable attack on Egypt by Libya and the break off by the south from the north has been reported by Shendi to have fructified. The next movement in the situation of the scene occurs when Anath unexpectedly appears in the tent opening. She has come over to Moses to help the Egyptians out of the present curse on the country. She assures him that if he came over to the palace, the Pharaoh would favourably talk to him about letting “the Hebrews make their worship or whatever he wants of them.” But there may be some conditions to be fulfilled for the discussion of which Moses is required to see the Pharaoh who “is sitting, pressing his thumbs together, wedged inactive in between his decision and pride.” The scene ends with Moses agreeing to the suggestion of Anath, Shendi getting ready to join his new assignment and Miriam still puzzled with “how the water could be blood.”

The next scene opens in a room in Seti’s palace with Anath describing to her brother about another disaster, which has overtaken the city of Egypt. It is the invasion by locusts, which has completely ruined the flora and fauna of the kingdom and left the people groaning under a death like situation. Anath apprehends that the wailing people will
certainly blame the Pharaoh for inviting this curse of pestilence on them.

A long conversation ensures between Anath and Seti about the latter's attitude to the demand made by Moses for his people. Anath blames Seti for having tricked Moses seven times by breaking his promises to him. Each time he broke the promise, the people of Egypt suffered a plague starting from the plague of frogs through the earthquake and the Nile water turning into blood to the present plague of locusts. She elaborates to the Pharaohs his misdeeds out of his pride and obstinacy in regard to his treatment of Moses and his clan which have completely ruined the country:

The land is naked

To the bone, and men are naked beyond the bone

Down to the barest nakedness which until now

Hope kept covered up.¹⁴

Anath's purpose of her long tirade against her brother is to jerk his consciousness out of the present state of obdurate pride and humanise him. She has come to believe that the plagues are somehow caused by some mysterious power of God operating through Moses. Seti dismisses this belief as Anath's confounded superstition and asserts that all is happening to his people and country is because of the vagaries and aberrations of nature. However, Anath will not exonerate the Pharaoh from his behaviour of a trickster. She, in order to help her brother out, personally went to request Moses to meet the Pharaoh. Pharaoh put one condition after the other for allowing the Israelites to go out for the worship of their God, which Moses rejected and no deal could be struck between him and his
erstwhile General whom he needs desperately. Seti believes that by his cunning diplomacy he will be able to win back Moses to undo the repeated defeats, which his armies have been receiving at the frontier with Libya. He tells Anath about his foxy strategies:

\[
\text{Even before Moses} \\
\text{Had gone three steps from the palace there came the news.} \\
\text{Of another defeat. Fate has taken a hammer} \\
\text{To chip and chip at our confidence.} \\
\text{But while I still have Moses to come at my call} \\
\text{I have not lost him. And while he needs my help} \\
\text{He will continue to come. And he is tired} \\
\text{We'll make a bargain.}^{15}
\]

Anath warns Seti against this madness and advises him to realize that “it isn’t me who make the bargains/In this life, but chance and time.”

After Anath, it is now the turn of Ramses to protest against his father’s “refusing Moses again.” Seti sticks to his obstinate resolve and tries to convince his son against any truth about the magic of Moses’ person. Moses, he declares, is only making a business out of these curses. Seti’s obstinacy makes Ramses belligerent who openly defies his father’s decision to get him married to the daughter of the Syrian King. The angry exchanges between father and son are interrupted by the groaning cry of men outside the palace. It is the cry of people groaning under the behaviour of Shendi, the newly appointed Officer. Ramses narrates as follows what everybody is saying out there in the streets about Shendi:

\[
\text{Shendi outstruts them all,}
\]
Ramses, is overtaken by self-remorse by getting Shendi appointed. His intentions were noble and aimed at bringing about a compromise between Moses and his father. He is discouraged by the way things done in good faith "twist themselves into foul shapes." He completely surrenders in despair to the situation and decides not to meddle with state affairs any longer. Inspite of Anath’s encouragement he withdraws from his resolve to be a rebel against his father to chasten his pride. A compromise worked by despair is reached between the son and the father.

The next movement of the scene starts with the sudden arrival of Kef, a Minister to Pharaoh, whoreports that the “Libyans have annihilated the reinforcing fifth Division” of the Egyptian army. At this moment when Seti’s anxiety to safeguard the integrity of his country has reached the climax of desire, Teusret suddenly appears to announce that “Moses has come again.” Moses, all anger and fury, is walking like a lion breaking the spears of the sentries and shouting for Seti. Seti tries to play another trick on Moses. He wants his overseers to be more brutally exacting on the Hebrew labourers so that their agonized groaning may compel Moses to compromise with Seti.

Moses this time has not come as a human leader of his people. But as an agent of his people’s God. He is “now only a name and an obedience. /it is the God of the Hebrews, a vigour moving/in a great
shadow who draws the bow/of his mystery, to loose this punishing
arrow/Fathered with my fate.” While Moses is elucidating to Anath God’s
plan for His created universe “a sea of cloud, blind-black/is pouring on to
the beaches of the sun.” The stage suddenly grows dark Moses, after this
miraculous in nature, warns Seti through his interlocutor, Anath, that it is
he alone who “can let the sun free again.” Throughout the situation
Ramses remains a helpless looker on and Teusret a nervous witness to the
happening, which she is too simple to comprehend.

The alternating pattern of the setting continues. The first scene of
the last Act of the drama is set in Miriam’s tent at night, mystifyingly
mentioned by Aaron as “the midnight of Moses.” For this “midnight,”
preparations have been made: lamb’s blood has been daubed three times
over the entry.” There is something in the mind of Moses, which will
happen tonight, but the nature of this happening is not disclosed to
anyone. Aaron informs Miriam, who has returned to the tent to sleep, that
Moses has passed a curious order: Everybody has to eat lamb’s meat,
seasoned with bitter herbs, which is Moses “characteristic way of
achieving unity among us, before the event.” When the blood splashed
three times over the doorways dries up, “it means freedom” which will
happen tonight. Miriam considers it as Moses’ madness. Aaron, on the
contrary, considers this madness as “a kind of extended sanity.” Although
inspite of being Moses’ lieutenant, he does not know anything about his
plans. Moses has been busy “manipulating man upon man into
consciousness, though perhaps they don’t know of what they’re
conscious.” The situation in nature, too, augurs well the coming event:
Iherc's such brightness,

Such a swinging stillness, the sky has transfixed itself;

As though it hung with every vigorous star

On some action to be done before the day breaks.\textsuperscript{17}

We are left in suspense about Moses’ plan when in the thick of night Shendi rushes back to fetch his mother to the comfortable life of the officer’s quarters. The mother had left her son’s new place because of his cruelty perpetrated on the Hebrew labourers, the news about which has spread all over. Shendi accuses Moses for compelling him to behave so cruelly with the Hebrews because he has been instilling in their heads the idea of freedom. Moses being too preoccupied with the vision in his mind, pays no heed to what Shendi has been talking about. He, however, sternly advises him to obey his order to get for the journey of the Hebrews to freedom tonight. When Shendi declares Moses’ talk of freedom as mere raving and gets ready to go the latter discloses emphatically:

\textit{Stay where you are. Do you deny voice}

\textit{To that power, the whirler of suns and moons, when even}

\textit{Dust can speak, as it does in Moses now?\textsuperscript{18}}

He then unambiguously discloses God’s plan tonight communicated to him alone.

\textit{To night, at midnight,}

\textit{God will unfasten the hawk of death from his}

\textit{Grave wrist, to let it rake our world.}

\textit{Descend and obliterate the first born of Egypt,}

\textit{All the firstborn, cattle, flocks and men.}\textsuperscript{19}
night itself. Seti announces his abdication to his son who unlike his father, may rule over Egypt with a generous and human heart. He has also given permission to the Israelites to go in wilderness with their leader, Moses.

But Seti’s changed heart shows itself too, late. The loom of life and death has been loosened and cannot be reversed now. The hawk of death let loose by Moses tragedy so here, too, the protagonist can start a course of action and think he is guiding its direction for some time, he cannot arrest its inexorable movement. Moses in the last scene, suddenly remembering that the hawk that he has released will not spare Ramses whom he loves, had rushed out in desperate move to save Ramses. In the meantime the royal inmates of the Palace have started hearing a wild cry ripping the darkness down in the city. In the midst of “a tortured gale of crying through the streets.” Seti ironically endowing Ramses with the Pharaohship of Egypt is feeling relieved and for the first time talks of “love as the dominant of life, to which all our changes of key are subdued in the end.”

From the palpably thick darkness of the night appears Moses on the terrace, breathless. In desperation he asks everyone present there to “draw themselves like swords for Ramses.” He informs Seti that “death is mounting with a growing storm of cries to your window, to come to Ramses “ and that it was he who loosed it. He wishes he could deflect it now. Seti, for a moment refuses to believe Moses. But finding his words suffused with sincere concern for Ramses he wants to know from Moses what can he do. He has given over all that he stood for, including his own person, to Ramses. Moses frets frantically to “hold Ramses even with our
lives.” Like the Tamburlaine of Marlowe he even prepares to be equal to this wrestler (death) against me, Moses feels that this situation has turned out to be the culmination of the justice that he has been fighting for. Only “good has turned against itself and become its own enemy.” He wonders whether “truth is only punishment” “What must we say to be free of the bewildering mesh of God?” the tragic course of action concludes with Ramses’ death at the moment when the beauty of Syria arrives to greet the corpse of her groom. Moses, before the curtains falls, gets ready to lead his people to build a nation for themselves and wishes well for Egypt:

The morning, which still comes
To Egypt as to Israel, the round of light
Which will not wheel in vain
We must each find our separate meaning
In the persuasion of our days
Until we meet in the meaning of the world.

Moses eventually emerges as the Carlylean “great man,” “building a new spiritual community on the ruins of an old one. “This has an echo of Yeats’ vision, too, of a new civilization to be built on the debris of the present civilization. The thematic concern of the birth of a new civilization of the foundation of the ruin of an old one has a recurrent archetypal pattern throughout the entire history of mankind. Though the play has a Biblical theme it has an ominously modern echo from the concentration camps and mass genocide of World War II. Besides this Moses’ championing the cause of humane individual and man’s right to live as man has a contemporary relevance, too
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1 Fry, *Plays* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 50. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.
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20 Ibid; p. 128.
21 Ibid; p. 141.
Henry the Second (1133-1189) who ruled over England for thirty-five years has had, perhaps, most eventful history among the English kings. He took over the reins of England when the country was already beset with a civil war and there was a situation of chaos. Henry II is known in history as one who has been in constant conflict at the family front, at high relation with the French crown, his barons and the church. He worked ceaselessly and unyieldingly to provide England with a system of law and direction for stable future governance of the state. Because of his complex personality, vision of state governance, and eventful political career, Henry II drew the attention of many a writer to draw on his life's history as source for their creative writing in different genres. The last known among the works in the dramatic genre are Tennyson's *Becket*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Anouilh's *Becket* and Fry's *Curtmantle*. These four dramatists tapped the historical resources of Henry's life in expediency with their artistic needs and intentions. For example, Tennyson, following the Shakespearean convention of a chronicle play in five Acts and with a sub-plot, the stories of the main plot and sub-plot being properly developed, remains concerned only with the superficial aspect of the historical material. Eliot was more concerned with the Christian idea of martyrdom than the events in the life of King Henry and Becket and used the historical material as an outer drama of the play. Anouilh's *Becket* belongs to the theatre of situation. It is Fry's play,
Curtmantle, which can be said to belong to the theatre of characters where the dramatist has tried to achieve a fine balance between events and the progression of the protagonist's character portrayal.

Fry has made his dramatic intentions clear so far as the choice of the source material is concerned. In his "Foreword" to the play he says that Henry Plantagenet during his boyhood saw England seething in the agony of an eight-year long civil war fought between his mother and Stephen of Blois. "At the age of twenty-one he was king, and the wealthiest ruler in Europe. At fifty-six he was dead, the sword of state pawned, his heart broken." But, Fry goes on to say, quoting from Winston Churchill's The History of the English-speaking Peoples, Vol. I, "he had laid the foundations of the English common Law, upon which succeeding generations would build. Changes in the design would arise, but its main outlines would not be altered." Fry ponders over the enormity and richness of the source he draws on for his play. He says,

Between these two dates, there is a seething Cauldron of events, conflicts, purposes, errors, brilliance, human endurance, and human suffering, which could provide, in those thirty five years, all that we need for a lifetime's study and contemplation of mankind. No single play which could contain more than a splash from the brew. What to use and what to lose out of this feverish concentration of life? How
far should fidelity to historical events be sacrificed to suit the theatre?\textsuperscript{3}

Fry in the concluding sentences of the above extract has in fact raised a vital but fundamental issue faced by all creative writers who use actual facts of life around us or facts of recorded history as the source for their themes in drama or any other form of creative discourse. We can recall here the flexibility Aristotle allows to writers in the selection and treatment of their corpus for shaping it into artistic artifacts. Fry, a dramatist well-versed in the theoretical and practical conventions of this genre, has his own clarity of perspective to determine his adoption of the dramaturgical strategies in \textit{Curtmantle}. He says,

\begin{quote}
If a playwright is rash enough to treat real events at all, he has to accept a double responsibility: to drag out of the sea of detail a story simple enough to be understood by history people who knew nothing about it before: and to do so without distorting the material he has chosen to use, Otherwise let him invent his characters, let him go to Ruritania for his history.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

Fry is against making “a misleading simplification” which may give us the security of “knowing, of being at home with facts” and even calling it reality, or truth but such an approach is bound to confuse us.

In the present play, Fry has put up before himself a twofold problem to resolve; one was to select, and re-create the historical material;
and the other was to adopt a suitable dramatic technique for the presentation of his vision of life which can be squeezed from the enormous mass of historical materials relating to the life and career of Henry Plantagenet. Fry explains his strategies as follows:

"Though it [the play] follows chronology, it is not a chronicle play. The form it takes is one of memory and contemplation. The stage is William Marshal's mind, as though he were remembering the life of Henry; and the deviations from historical accuracy are on the whole no greater than might occur in a man's memory. The episodes are telescoped, but nothing in the play is entirely invented. Even the incident of the old woman and her feather bed is on record."

Fry started work on *Curtmantle* as early as 1951 and could complete it after ten years in the form of its Dutch translation which became the first production of the play on 1 March 1961 at Stadsschouwburg Theatre in Tilburg, the Netherlands. Its English version was performed on 9 October 1962 at the Aldwich Theatre, London, and later had its world premiere in the same year at the Edinburgh Festival. John Whiting, writing in the *London Magazine* on its production in Edinburgh hailed it as "Fry's greatest achievement". There is no doubt that Fry in this play, as in other plays of his, makes a bold departure from the convention of realistic theatre. He uses Marshal's mind as his theatre where in his reminiscing the panoramic career of Henry Plantagenet is
unfolded. This unique device of memory gives the dramatist certain amount of freedom in organising, selecting and presenting the events and situations without the constraints of the logic of the stage and quick transition from one time and place to another.

Fry has said that his main thematic concern in the play is two-fold: one a progression towards a portrait of Henry, a search for his reality, moving through versions of 'where is the king?' to the unresolved close of 'He was dead when they came to him.' The other theme is Law, or rather the interplay of different laws: civil, canon, moral, aesthetic and the laws of God; and how they belong and do not belong to each other." The themes required the conflict of a dialectical nature, where ideas are pitted against one another in opposite pairs. "Ideally," remarks Emil Roy, "Henry II, his queen Eleanor, and Thomas represent Empire, Love and Heroism." This is indicated in Eleanor's exhortation to Henry and Thomas:

Together, we might have made a world of progress
Between us, by our three variants of human nature
You and Becket and me, we could have been
The complete reaching forward.

Henry tries to impose a unity upon the "interplay of different laws," mentioned by Fry in the "Foreword." In this effort he is opposed first by Thomas, then by Eleanor, and finally, in a most disastrous manner, by his rebellious sons. This theme of law is treated through the formal structural
patterning of the Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies. Then there is an inner movement of the other theme "Progression toward a portrait of Henry, a search for his reality" which is presented through Henry’s attempt to “force an idealized rigidity of being on Becket, while retaining complete freedom of choice for himself” which ironically leads him to attempt to unite in Becket the State and Church which results in dividing them. This sets in motion an inexorable course of action, which inevitably ends in a terrible disaster for Henry. Before we proceed to analyse the test to substantiate the above statements about themes and structure of the play, it is relevant to quote what Fry has said about Henry’s personality, as a tissue of Paradoxes which reduces his attempt for his search for unity, law, and harmony to conflict anarchy, and chaos:

He was simple and royal (his nickname of ‘Curtmantle’ derived from the plain short cloak he wore) direct and paradoxical, compassionate and hard, a man of intellect, a man of action, God-fearing, superstitious, blasphemous, far-seeing, short-sighted, affectionate, lustful patient, volcanic, humble, overriding. It is difficult to think of any facet of man, which at some time he didn’t demonstrate, except chastity and sloth.

Fry begins his play with a Prologue, where Marshal acts as chorus. Very succinctly, he describes, what he himself had witnessed, how Henry sweated to impose order on the chaos that he had inherited when he
ascended the throne. The choric narrative deserves to be quoted in full to enable us to have a proper glimpse of the person's concerns who is going to appear before us as the protagonist of the drama:

*Who can recall now the full devastation of the time when young Henry Plantagenet first came into his Kingdom? Henry Curtmantle, we sometimes called him, with his cloak as short as his need for sleep. His energy was like creation itself; he was giving form to England's chaos, an England that, after eight years of civil war, had no trade no law, no conscience. Up and down the land he went, sparing neither himself nor us who were hauled along after him. Order was being born out to the sweat to those days and nights: a time of pugnacious reality that still plays in my mind - beginning and ending, as it did in his thoughts also with the people he governed.*

The prologue shows long span of Henry's day-and-night efforts to set things right in his kingdom. He has been personally on the move from one place to another to "find out true state of the courts of law and the administration of his Kingdom". The common folk feel that the outcome of the King's indefatigable efforts in "grinding forward, day after day through miles of mud" without rest or sleep in "Law and order" in the state which didn't exist when he took over the reigns of the country One
of the characters in the Prologue, a Huckster, in passing avers to the contradictory traits in Henry's personality. For example, he would be cruelly exacting with a person in his pursuit of his purpose of setting his state right, but when such a person dies of the strain working with the king, Henry "would weep like a sweating cistern". The Prologue has given us the antecedent situations to the dramatic action, which is going to unfold itself without the intervening conventional curtain between the Prologue and the opening scene of the play. The Prologue ends with a question by a seeker of royal interference with delayed justice, "where is the king? The Play, in fact will show, by way of answer to the above question, Henry's prolonged struggle to know himself and the reality of existence. It will also show the predicament of the people whom Henry wanted to civilize by establishing laws and their administration and procedure, but who may again relapse into another type of chaos and anarchy following his defeat and death towards the end of the play.

Act one, covering the period 1158-63, opens with Marshal reporting about the return of Chancellor, Becket, from France, after his successful diplomatic mission there in getting the marriage between young Henry and baby Margaret fixed. This negotiation will bring to England, in dowry, the country of Vexin. Henry, Eleanor and all the people of England are happy with this success engineered by the diplomatic ingenuity of Becket. Marshal here is both acting as chorus, reporting the event, which has taken place in the French court, as well as an eyewitness to whatever has gone
on in the past. Then the panoramic narrative of reporting slides into a
dramatic narrative when Becket and Henry appear on the scene and the
former narrates his diplomatic interaction with the Louis of France.
Henry's amorous cunning combined with his statesmanship and working
of a superstition in Louis' mind has already brought half of France to be
part of his sovereign territory through his marriage with Eleanor.

Becket-Henry conversation regarding Becket's visit to France, takes
in its ambit Louis' predicament. We learn that he has been worried at the
endless line of daughters, which Eleanor bore him as his wife. It was a
situation of a sort of curse on the reign of Louis who may not have a legal
inheritor to his throne for want of a male issue. Henry, first of all, had
already made Eleanor "suffer his amorous invasion" then he convinces
Louis his divorcing Eleanor might rid him of the curse, which Merlin had
predicted. Thus, the double-pronged strategy worked and eleven years ago
Henry married Eleanor, which made him the richest ruler in Europe
because of the wealth she brought. Besides this, she has already given to
Henry a line of four sons to perpetuate the family of the Plantagenet.
While this talk about marriage and progeny is going on Becket is dragged
in a humorous chastisement for his resolve to chastity: He would not
marry and is "content to be one man, and not the human race." This light-
hearted conversation changes when Henry fumes over "those cosier-
clutching monkeys" for subverting his effort to establish one common law
for all under the secular dispensation of the administrative system. He
shows to Becket documents about the church acquitting the reverend
canon of Lincoln of rape and murder by awarding him a show of
punishment through lenient expiation after confession. Henry will impose
“one justice not two” to “make a fair and governable England.” His
harshness towards the church’s administration is well founded and well
intentioned:

The church will soon

Turn every criminal into priest, to avoid the gallows.

And the other honest, poor damned sons of Cain

Who get slewed into crime in a five-minute passion

Are hanged by the neck.11

Eleanor and Becket jointly try to divert Henry’s mind from this
unhappy situation and the entire issue of the conflicting authorities of the
State and the Church. They talk about Henry-Eleanor amorous encounter
leading to their happy marriage. This relaxed conversation at its climax of
light-heartedness is suddenly given an ominous twist when Henry
discloses his plan of offering Canterbury Archbishopship to Becket in
addition to his responsibilities as Chancellor which help him in realizing
his ambition of making church a collaborator of the secular, civil authority
vested in the King. At this proposal, Becket is silent and “stands frozen”
The King draws a mirror to Becket’s mind to see that the offer was
coveted by him in the innermost recesses of his psyche. Hence, was no
scope of any pretence of surprise:
Your air

Of astonished innocence doesn’t convince me. Don’t

Pretend you never considered the chance of this

In one of your forward-looking silences

As soon as you knew that Theobald was dead?¹²

Becket warns Henry of adverse consequences of such a move. He cites the case of Louis who tried to do a similar thing by “insisting on his Chancellor for a bishopric against the nomination of the charter” and who had to give in when the Pope intervened with anathema. Henry, with a ridiculous argument, brushes away Becket’s apprehension when he retorts” Louis can get only daughters, and I get sons: / Even on the same wife.” Becket suggests “Foliot of London and six or seven other besides, who by / Their learning, integrity, piety, loyalty / And cast of mind, are a better choice for Canterbury.” But Henry would prefer one who is better for England and personally loyal to him. Becket is naturally the only choice because he is his old long-tried friend, Tom, and has administrative acumen, “grasp of the law, charm of persuasion” and “like-thinking with his own thought. Becket voices his ominously discordant note:

One thing is simple

Whoever is made archbishop will very soon

Offend either you, Henry, or his God.¹³

This is because “there is a true and living / Dialectic between the church and the state/which has to be argued for ever in good part.” As
Chancellor, Becket can be the tongue of the State and as Archbishop he has to be the tongue of the Church. The two tongues cannot be one. Henry argues that the truth is that both the State and the Church are for the welfare of the people, which he and Becket as Chancellor have been striving to establish. The argument goes thus:

HENRY:  
...Together we have understood
The claims men have on us
And how to meet them. Whatever your office
This truth is unalterable, the truth being one.

BECKET:  
The truth, like all of us, being of many dimensions.
And men so placed, they stake their lives on the shape of it.
Until by a shift of their position, the shape
Of truth has changed.14

Becket’s perception of truth is as valid as Henry’s concept of it in the fervour of his zeal for the redemption of the nation out of the existing anarchy and for establishing a system of common law to lead the nation on the path of future prosperity, solidity and stability. The thematic dimension of the argument about truth expands as the element of mystery in human life is broached upon by Becket. He expresses his apprehension that if the King’s proposal is executed it may have a divisive effect not only in terms of personal relationships between him and his mentor but also in terms of administration of the nation. This will force the whole Kingdom,

Into a kind of intrusion on the human mystery,
Where we may not know what it is we’re doing,
What powers we are serving, or what is being made of us.
Or even understand the conclusion when it comes.¹⁵

Henry’s rebuttal to Becket’s hesitation is based on his best intentions for England’s welfare, to give it “incorruptible scaffolding of law/To last her longer than her cliffs.”

A major movement of the plot is concluded with Becket agreeing to the King’s proposal. Marshal, as chorus, describes the simple but glittering ceremony at Canterbury where the Chancellor was consecrated as the Archbishop, arousing high hopes in the minds of the people. The whole nation, says, Marshal, with hopeful suspense looks at the occasion as a harbinger to better and lasting stability for England.

Another thread to the story of Henry’s progeny is introduced when Marshal’s choric commentary is interrupted by the clandestine entry of Blae, a whore, who has borne as an illegitimate son to him. The King does not repudiate royal paternity to the “spring of Plantagenet the whore has got.” On the contrary, he takes an immediate decision of raising this child under the care of the chancery so that he can make a chancellor in twenty years. He speaks up his mind in this regard to Marshal:

We’ll see what life come out of that churn-up
Of rain and Hereford mud and boredom and semen
And prostitution."¹⁶
The first Act of the play draws to a close with clear hints of troubles in Henry's career. Becket has resigned as Chancellor, because Chancellor and Archbishop are two persons, two realities. Becket is "one man, not two." He has been given the spiritual charge of the kingdom, which he wants to carry in good earnest. He will endow the Church with spiritual authority it had lacked hitherto. Henry interprets it as contradictory powers of the State vis-à-vis the Church and wants Becket to ensure the Church's obedience to the throne. He uses harsh and even blasphemous remarks against the Pope and the entire paraphernalia of rituals in the churches. Foliot, who had been summoned by Henry to come over to act as his confessor, objects to the King's verbal abuse of the church's glory, authority and practices Becket-Henry discussion ends in an open confrontation between the King and the Archbishop who refuse to owe mutual obedience demanded of both. The first act comes to a close with Henry changing his plan to send his illegitimate son to the chancery and recall from there young Henry out of Becket's care lest he, too, should be infected with the influence of Becket's attitude to the King. The curtain falls on Henry in a state of intense anger "as though squaring up for a fight." The nature of the fight and its consequences are dramatized and narrated in the next two Acts of the play.

Act two, covering the period 1663-70, opens on a gloomy, murky morning. Becket with the Bishop has come to meet Henry. Eleanor predicts a "chilling prospect" of the outcome of this meeting in her caution
to Becket: “It’s a hard, subtle terrain/You come to cross in Henry, Becket
/Please heaven some good comes out of it.” She as well as Becket has lost their earlier cheer and zeal for warm life: Becket because of his exclusive pursuit of the path of God and she because of Henry’s preoccupation with his troubles which have made him arrogant, obstinate and vindictive. Eleanor feels increasingly alienated from Henry’s affairs. She says,

The only way I can have any part in life
Is to stand and be the curious onlooker
While two unproved worlds fly at each other.”

She exhorts Becket to “be sure to draw blood to lift her spirits” and cautious him that “the ground his feet / Has become the sand of the arena” where he “is matched with the bull” that Henry is.

The figure-in-speech in “the bull” is followed at once by figure-in-action when Henry puts in his appearance accompanied with courtiers. Ignoring all formalities of greeting, he questions in plain, unflattering terms the Church’s obstructive attitude to his formulating the canons of common law based on customs established by the need and experience of many generations. Henry’s declaration is that “clerics, for crime against the common law” will be answerable to the King’s court. There is a heated argument between Henry and Becket about secular severity of punishment to check crimes and eliminate criminals versus leniency by the church by way of forgiveness and mercy to allow erring humans a chance of being reclaimed in the body polity of the kingdom. Henry in his argument
becomes increasingly more and more exacting on the freedom arrogated by
the church to itself. He holds that all those living in his kingdom-claries,
barons et al-will hence-forth be subjugated to the King's authority which
is determined to impose common law, based on customs, on all.

Becket refuses to accept custom as Truth. To Henry's assertion that
"these customs are the truth of the men whose lives shaped them," Becket
gives an anti-existentialist reply, which has the authorial endorsement,
too,

*What a man knows he has by experience.*

*But what a man is precedes experience.*

*His experience merely reveals him, or destroys him;*

*Either drives him to his own negation,*

*Or persuades him to his affirmation, as he chooses.*

*And this truth is not custom.*

This truth, Becket asserts, is "not under the law, but under grace" and
what Henry perceives as "the freedom of the State under the law, is only
an enslavement of the other state of man, in which and in which only, he
can know his perfect freedom." Becket's stand is clear and firm, i.e. to
obey the King in everything unless it should threaten the will of God, and
the laws and dignity of the Church". Henry's argument, in the face of the
coherently presented point of view of a high intellectual quality, sounds
rather naïve and even sometimes womanish. At the refusal by the Church,
represented by the Bishops and the Archbishop, in a united voice to
surrender to the authority of the State, Henry fumes as if gone mad in an explosive state of anger.

In an expression of roaring anger Henry orders the withdrawal of the old immunity enjoyed by the clerics who from now on will be treated like any other citizen in matters of rights and duties in consonance with the common Law. The Bishops feel trapped because of their loyalty of Becket. Becket, too is threatened with the possibility of “rotting out his life in a dungeon” if he does not reconsider his decision to oppose the king’s promulgation of the common Law sanctified by the “experience of many generations” of men. As the Bishops show signs of fear, Becket softens for a moment and tells the King:

Still with anxiety, but hoping, trusting

That you mean to command nothing against my conscience

I will give you the yes you ask for.19

The Bishops’ “exhalation of relief” at this relenting step by Becket is soon drowned in a deeper despair when the Archbishop promptly refuses to set his seal to “the customs of the Kingdom codified” as law. As Foliot, despairingly, moans on behalf of his fellow Bishops--- “where are you leaving us? Fairly lying between the hammer and the anvil,” Becket himself feels as if burdened by self-responsibility and alienated: “now indeed I am alone”.

Henry tightens his grips over Becket further when he diverts him of his Chancellor ship, which will require him to “pay back every penny he
received from the estates and castles which were his then”. He will also have to “make good the sums he spent on his war in Toulouse” which he fought more in the service of recommending him to himself and the King than in the service of the State. Besides these, Becket will have to “pay the country back what he had from all the vacant seas and abbeys while he was Chancellor”. Thus being relieved of the entire worldly and material burden on his conscience he can purchase his exclusive service to God and the Church. Obviously, Becket cannot find sureties for so much. He seems to lose his usual courage to counter the stratagem of Henry. Henry announces that Becket will be tried for disobedience of the State. Eleanor clearly perceives in this conflict a confrontation of two personalities rather than two distinctly opposed ideologies. She speaks out for both “the man who makes the world” (Henry) and “the man who makes himself the church” (Becket) a wise and useful formula for harmony and progress in the State. “Together / We might make a world of progress. / Between us by our three variants of human nature; / you and Becket and me” But blinded by their individual hurt ego, as Henry and Becket are, they would not be able to visualize the wider canvas of the country’s welfare suggested by Eleanor.

Henry, perceivably ignores Eleanor completely, thus sowing the seed of her future alienation from himself. He leaves the place allowing Marshal and Eleanor to ponder over the immediate situation. Marshal the clairvoyant can see that “the Archbishop is badly goured,” but he has yet
to discover "what wounds have been made on the King", Eleanor's perception of the situation is much clearer than Marshal's who is the all-seeing eye of the whole drama:

\[
\begin{align*}
We & \text{ are not going to see the great issues contending,} \\
Nor & \text{ the new spirit of England being forged in a fire.} \\
We \text{ shall see the kicks and blows of angry men,} \\
Both & \text{ losing sight of the cause.} \\
The \text{ high names} \\
Of \text{ God and the State are now displaced} \\
By \text{ hurt pride, self-distrust, foiled ambition,} \\
And \text{ the rest of our common luggage.} \\
When \text{ the glorious battle turns into the vendetta} \\
The \text{ great issues, no longer controlled by men,} \\
\text{Themselves take over command.}\end{align*}
\]

This situation comes to an end with Henry's going out in "the diminishing light" and Eleanor expressing her unhappiness at being ignored by Henry.

Another situation, which marks a climax, is brought in a quick succession "when the light returns, Foliot and Bishop's are standing on one side. Enter Becket with his cross-bearer" The Bishops are surprised at this behaviour of Becket, which they consider to be foolish. This is an open confrontation with the King. But Becket declares that it "is a man at war with himself." The Earl of Leicester enters to announce "the verdict of the trial" of Becket. Becket contends that no trial has been conducted He
was brought here on a pretext, not a charge.” However, in spite of Becket’s protest--- “no trial can have no sentence,”----- Lincoln announces the Verdict holding Becket guilty of perjury and being a traitor to the King. When Becket leaves asserting his ecclesiastical authority, forbidding Lincoln “to give sentence,” ----- there is a general commotion in the court where people adopt threatening gestures at Becket. Marshal, intervening in the confusion, reports three-quarters of the town have followed Becket here and they are showing their idolatrous loyalty to him in an overwhelming manner. Henry feels further let down by the people who care nothing about his giving “them a world that’s comprehensible”, and in idolatry would care for a man who promises them “a world beyond them”. But he would not give up his efforts to bless his people with better daily lives. Henry’s apparent defeat in his triumph over nailing down Becket because of people’s idolatry to the Church is soon followed by another bad news for him: Louis France has, at last been blessed with a son, an heir to his throne. People in Paris are frenziedly rejoicing over the prospect of the heir to act as “a hammer to the King of England” Henry may console himself with the foolish hope that the “son may die yet.” The character of Henry in the above situations shows him at miserable ebb: a manipulator of law, and a self centred man, evinced respectively in his trial of Becket and in his response to an heir being born to the French throne One feels puzzled at Henry’s vaunt of establishing law for his people and to achieve this his subserting of the same law.
Henry's troubles now accumulate at a faster pace. We have already had hints of Eleanor's growing alienation from him because of her being completely ignored in all matters. Now at the news of Louis' son Eleanor's expression of happiness as "the merest common civility" annoys Henry to whom the newborn heir to the French throne signals "a troubled future." Eleanor does not hide her despair at the treatment of Henry to her as only "an occasional whore" after she has fulfilled his ambition of raising a line of Plantagenet rulers. She sacrificed her own birth and blood allegiance for the sake of Henry. But for him order of the world of his, after his posterity is safe, is the only concern and even his order is threatened with imminent anarchy. She even tried to put up with Henry's philandering --- "no man in the kingdom has enough fingers to count your women" ---- but he still continues to play his amorous tunes "on that Welsh harp, Rosamund de Clifford. However, Rosamund's story is not elaborated as Eleanor Henry argument is interrupted by the entry of Marshal and Foliot.

The King, in the wake of the future heir to France being born, announces his plan to crown young Henry as the crown of England and Richard can have Poitou and Aquitaine, the Queen's lands. He wants his sons to succeed as a united force while he is still alive to guide and oversee their performance. Foliot has his doubts about the success of the King's plan. And there is a snag: the Archbishop may not be prepared to
crown the boy. Henry is determined to have his way in materialising his "well drawn plan for a hundred years of peace" for England.

Another momentous event takes place. Becket secretly sneaks out of England and out of the clutches of Henry and has been well received by Louis. Within a month of Becket's arrival in Paris it is given out to the whole of Europe that "Louis was the man who protected the kingdom of God, and Henry the man who was trying to destroy it." Marshal's choric comment on the situation goes thus:

A day went on, the streets were choked with rumours.
The man Becket was at large and the world rocked ---
But the King made his way as before, forcing new roads ahead of him ---- there were other things to concern us. Today we've crowned the dark secret of the future. The young eagles are coming into their inheritance.21

We are quickly shown another pageant of the court returning from the Church after young Henry's coronation. The brief conversation among the four brothers gives ample inkling into their lack of unity forged by love and affection. To economize on dramatic time and space, the dramatist makes Marshal give his evaluative assessment of Henry's efforts so far:

Each time he made a bold move to clear the way ahead,
The ground became more dangerous than ever. When he thought he had finally disposed of Becket, the name of Becket was breathed out like fire all over Christendom. And now when with Love and trust, he stations the boys as sentinels to the Angevin World, the ground seems to crack where he stands. 22

The legitimate sons fall out and even draw swords at each other. Howsoever Henry may blame Eleanor as the “evil genius” in trying to thwart his effort to change England’s anarchy into order, his hopes for the same reposed in his progeny are visibly threatened by their mutual envy, jealousy and ill will. In response to Eleanor’s prophetic “you will be alone,” Henry though upset, shows his desperate resolve in his declaration: “By Christ’s blood, I’ll give them the city of law/Even if I have to make it by fearful means.” But destiny seems to wish otherwise and fulfill the prophecy:

From the devil we came, and to the devil we’ll go

Brother against brother, the sons against the father. 22

However, Roger, the illegitimate son seems to be more loyal to his father when he chides his brothers for sabotaging whatever their father has so painstakingly built up and for not keeping peace among themselves. He intervenes in the brothers’ physical scuffle and even sustains a serious injury. Fry in presenting Roger in a positive light of loyalty is only
preparing him for a humane role he will play in the life of Henry when he will be alienated from everybody.

Henry temporarily feels as if his troubles will never end. He does feel that he is losing heart but strongly suppresses such feelings by an iron will to go ahead with his task until his mission is completed. Even though “the whole of Europe is snailing at him” and “Louis is up in arms and off to invade Normandy,” he will follow a path of peace and will be in “a mood for wooing.” He will solicit Louis’ mediation in bringing reconciliation between him and his self-exiled Archbishop whom he has always revered and whose honour, dignity and safety he would guarantee. He would, of course, expect of Becket to “treat him with tolerable respect” in front of “these men who are watching us from their places.” There does not seem any guile in Henry’s desire for a patch up with Becket up to this point.

A conversation ensues between Henry and Becket, which goes on for some time in a cordial and reconciliatory atmosphere. Both of them feel the need of burying the past and work closely together for a better England. But an element of doubt enters in Becket’s mind when the King declines to accompany Becket to England. He says that Becket can safely return to England not caring much for his “old weakness for riding in triumph.” Becket, however, has an intuitive premonition of his death and tells Henry: “Something tells me I am parting from you/As one you may see no more in this life.” Henry truly dismisses Becket’s misgiving, if any,
about the honesty of his intentions, Marshal explains Becket’s misgiving in terms of his “trying to find a success beyond human argument.” This aspect of Becket’s behaviour has not been given any prominence, whereas it forms the central thematic concern in Eliot’s treatment of Becket in his *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Before Act two ends three important episodes are presented through reports from Foliot and a messenger from England. Foliot reports that on arrival at the English coast Becket was given such “a rapturous welcome” by people all the way from Dover to Canterbury as if he was “the lord of Spring making his progress on the winter roads.” This rousing welcome “so buoyed him up,” that he “struck his note in his most uncompromising key.” “Excommunication for all who took part in the crowning” of young Henry. Henry feels terribly let down by Becket who, he thought, would now follow the way of peace. He rages at this news brought by Foliot and in extreme anger and disgust wishes that Becket were dead:

*Who will get rid of this turbulent priest for me?*

*Are you all such feeble lovers of the kingdom?*

*[Four men, silently touching and beckoning*

*Each other, leave the stage.]*

When his anger cools down he starts, in a sober manner, to discuss possible ways to getting rid of him without discussing the manner of it, which is clearly expressed in his,

*As he insists on being the sickness of the kingdom*
It's up to be the physicians, to diagnose
The sickness, consult and cure.  

Henry suddenly discovers that the four men, who were in attendance on him, have suddenly disappeared. He fears that his angry words “might have been given/A more violent meaning than you [the king] meant to give them.” These people, under the garb of their fealty may have an ulterior motive of “working off some score of their own.” Henry asks Foliot to run after these men and over-take them to bring them back so that they may not harm the body of Becket in the name of the King’s instigation. Henry feels torn within at the unintentioned act, which he apprehends, might be done in his name and tarnish his image. He feels deeply anguish at the way the wheel of life moves for the humans:

It is infamous
Thus, life is infamous, if it uses us
Against our knowledge and will. 

The second Act ends with the news of the happening, which Henry had not intended and which he tried to avert i.e. the murder of Becket. Henry naturally feels completely shattered at envisioning the image of his being formed by the people: “they have made the King’s name death. It is treason to breathe now.” Henry has now reached another landmark in his career when he loses interest in human interaction and life itself. It is significant to note that by the end of this Act he is accompanied only by
Roger and Marshal. It is a pointer to his complete alienation, which will be narrated and dramatised, in the final Act of the play.

Act three, covering the period between 1174-89 opens with Marshal's choric commentary on Henry's mind after the murder of Becket. It goes as follows:

For three years, I watched him, in his hunted mind. Three years also, without a Queen: for the Queen was Following her own fancies in Poitou, shaping her own dream of Civilization. Alone, Henry tried to shake free of the shadow of Becket, going at last on a desperate pilgrimage of penance Canterbury.37

There follows then Henry-Foliot conversation about the King's penance through "the discipline of roads," lashing with whips by seventy monks, some of whom are bound to be severe with their whips because the memory of Becket's violent death is still fresh in their minds. Thee King will endure this if it can free him of "the world's loathing" and his own "self-sorrow." Marshal's mental stage quickly changes to Eleanor's Court of Love at Poitou, Eleanor, the young queen Margaret, Coustance (Geoffrey's wife) and the three legitimate sons --- Richard, Geoffrey and young Henry --- have assembled to constitute the Court. They discuss and hold a mock trial of love in and outside the nuptial bond and announce a judgement of not being unanimous. This episode introduces a mood of relaxed life contrasted with the ideology-ridden world of ambition and anxiety of Henry.
The next situation which unfolds itself in a quick succession shows the sons' bitterness against their father and their open defiance of his authority in regard to their respective claim to the throne. Henry's intrusion upon Eleanor's world is rudely protested against by the latter. Henry, has no illusion about his wife's rule in disintegrating his royal family and ruining whatever he has achieved to establish the rule of law in his kingdom. The ugly situation reaches its climax when the King orders the arrest of Eleanor who will be taken back to the world of Henry. Geoffrey and Young Henry remind the King of Merlin's prophecy about internecine dissension in the family of the Platagenets -- "brother against brother and the sons against the father." Henry's griefs are now more related to his family than to the trouble in the aftermath of Becket's murder. The sons chase Henry from town to town in collaboration with the French forces led by King Philip, Marshal's remarks on this dismal situation deserve to be quoted in some detail:

*Ordeal by generation. This, then was to be the end of the universal argument: the ambition for the world transformed into private grief ****-

- The streets were like furrows; or scars, rather; and we were driven out, leaving dead men slumped on the walls until at last we withdrew here, into Le Mans, the king's birth place.*

In order to hold back the chasing French army and Richard's men Henry had asked Marshal to "fire the houses beside the river and destroy cover. But the wind veered, and the flames leapt roaring through the ramparts,
and took hold of the city." All the people of the city have either run out of it or are consumed by fire. Henry once again realizes that whatever he does with good intentions ironically brings a result opposite of what he had planned or desired. For example, "he meant the fire" he set to save his people. But it has destroyed his people and his native city which has been his own beginning and which he loved from the innermost core of his heart.

The French army and Richard's men are closing in on Henry and a few of his men. Even John who has earlier been with him for weeks is not to be seen. The King wants to have a tactical retreat into the woods to divert the attention of the advancing French army. But Suddenly the last straw on the camel's back appears in the form of his physical weakness; mentally broken down he has already been. His use of 'cannot' at the encouragement by Marshal and Roger to get up to ride inside the woods sounds pathetic indeed when we recall his ceaseless riding all over his kingdom to achieve his goal. Philip and Richard now stand before the completely debilitated King. Both of them feel victorious in their vengeful pursuit: Philip for the humiliation of his father by Henry and Richard for being denied the crown of England. Henry "drops on to all fours." He accepts his defeat and humiliation and agrees to all the terms and conditions Philip puts up before him. The final stroke falls on Henry when Richard informs him that John has joined his side. He falls on to the goose feather bed Marshal had helped an old woman to retrieve from the burning city.
Marshal and Roger try to console the King recounting what he has achieved in thirty years of his eventful career. Henry in high fever becomes delirious imagining that he is already in the company of his dead father. Roger attends to him with full filial devotion which brings some fleeting solace to Henry's bruised mind at having brought to life a worthy son, though in a heat of passion loosened on an "unfastidious whore." He offers him the Plantagenet leopardring which Roger is unwilling to accept because he is still hopeful of the life of Henry. Then two more brief events take place before the play ends. The first is the arrival of monks for a grant of their rights, which Henry says can be given only by going through the proper procedure of law. This angers the monks who curse him to suffer because of what was done to Becket. The second event has more of a symbolical significance than the factual occurrence. When Roger has gone away to call back the monks to absolve the King of their curse, the refugees who have been sitting there strip the body of the King naked, after he has "fallen back and is silent." taking away the gold he was wearing on his person. The final vestae to our eyes is a naked dead king lying on a hurdle—a king who has always endeavoured not to have a single naked man in his kingdom.

The story of Henry's eventful career presented in our analysis above is in the nature of a medieval tragedy, which depicts the fall of a personage from the height of power and prosperity to a wretched condition. This fall in a medieval tragedy used to occur either as a nemesis for sin or moral iniquity or the operation of the role of fortune. All these factors are present in the present
play. What Fry has added is his human elements --- the operation of lower passions governing and guiding human behaviour. But Henry’s character has been kept clean of these lower passions, which we notice in his legitimate sons wife and Philip of France. Roger, the illegitimate son finally shines as the most humane character in the play.
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   All subsequent references to the text are from this edition
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
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5. Ibid, p. 174
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15. Ibid, p. 200
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18. Ibid, p. 218
19. Ibid, p. 222
20. Ibid, p. 226
21. Ibid, pp. 234-35
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24. Ibid, p. 249
25. Ibid, pp. 249-250
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27. Ibid, p. 255
28. Ibid, pp. 262-63
Chapter: VI
CONCLUSION

Our analysis of Fry's plays in the foregoing chapters amply establishes that he is a greater craftsman than the other two stalwarts in the revival of poetic drama or to be more precise verse drama, in our age of prose, i.e. Yeats and Eliot. He learnt considerable lessons from the mistakes made by his predecessors in forging a theatrically viable verse form for drama, which could be well-received by the audience, used for a long time, to hearing realistic prose dialogue in commercial theatres. Fry kept well in his mind Yeats' precept that the theatre should provide intellectual entertainment rather than titillating dramatic experiences of an ephemeral nature. This is why he does not avoid abstractions and explorations of spiritual experiences in the human psyche. Even his most successfully crafted play, with a novel technique, i.e. *A Sleep of Prisoners*, uses expressionistic types as characters with apparently incoherent interactions with a deeper unity and quite often staccato utterances strewn over with fine lyrical blossomings. As we have seen the four characters in this play are soldiers imprisoned in a church confinement. Naturally they use a military version of the English language. But this language is liberally and functionally spiced with irony, pun, inversion, cliches etc, and is responsive to the outer and inner character traits of the dramatis personae. However, there are judiciously spread over patches of lyricism all over the play. A single example quoted below will support our observation:

_Morning comes_

_To a prison like a nurse:_
A rustling presence, as though a small breeze come,

And presently a voice---------

The dark pain has gone,

The relief of daylight

Flows over me, as though beginning is

Beginning.

Though Fry did not abandon Yeatsean philosophic incursions into his themes, but he was careful to avoid his esotericism and stick to conventional human and religious transcendental concepts. He knew it only too well, which both Yeats and Eliot had ignored, that drama should have human values too even though the themes might be professedly religious as we have seen in his religious plays.

Fry enthusiasts have hailed him as a great innovator of a novel verse form for drama in the last century. Of course, we have echoes in his plays of Yeatsean terseness and austerity in his verbal medium and of Eliot's conviction of rejecting the Shakespearean blank verse tradition, he falls short of Eliot's use of the ordinary language moulded in a rhythmic pattern of verse libre which can resonate with the deepest stirrings of human emotions. Eliot achieved this at least in his *Murder in the Cathedral*. Fry's verbal medium in his religious plays shows an evenly distributed variety suitable to different characters with occasional ritualistic cadences, lyrical effusions, hymnal simplicity and even uncouth rusticity. But his verbal style in the Festival comedies is characterized by a brilliance, which sometimes is too dazzling. The irresistible and
unbarraged flow of words, besides sweeping the audience per force, may become counter productive as their interest in the happening on the stage may be misdirected. Very often the unfamiliar similes, metaphors and puns prove obstructive rather than conducive to the effect of immediacy, which is the hallmark of dramatic dialogue. We can cite the following two examples of exchange between lovers in *The Lady’s Not For Burning*:

**THOMAS.** Just see me

*As I am, me like a perambulating*

*Vegetable, patched with inconsequential*

*Hair, looking out of two small jellies for the means*

*Of life, balanced on folding bones, my sex*

*No beauty but a blemish to be hidden.*

*Behind judicious rags, driven and scorched*

*By boomerany rages and lunacies which never*

*Touch the accommodating artichoke*

*Or the seraphic strawberry beaming in its bed---*

**JENNET.** By a quirk

*Of unastonished nature, your obscene*

*Decaying figure of vegetable fun*

*Can drag upon a woman's heart as though*

*Heaven were dragging up the roots of hell.*

The tapestry of verbal medium is sometimes made complex when, to hide some vulgar innuendoes, Fry, in the style of an Elizabethan
dramatist, uses double entendre. One can look at Tegeus’ hinting at the sexual act, while talking to Dynamene in *A Phoenix too Frequent*:

> We concertina ------taking each time
> A larger breath, so
> That the farther we go out
> The farther we have to go in.

Fry’s verbal inventiveness seems to be inexhaustible. For this he uses epigrammatic and pithy sentences, strange collocations, witty and ironic remarks and startlingly new comparisons, etc. We can give a few assorted examples of this aspect of his verbal artifact: ‘opposite corruptions, the world and the grave’; ‘unex-purgated persons’; ‘benighted brothers in boredom, let us unite ourselves in a toast of ennui’; ‘my equine equability is pastoral to a fault’; etc. Fry possesses an ingenious fertility in heaping up vituperative words, which reminds one of Falsaff. Reedbeck’s abusing of his virtuous son in *Venus Observed*, and the description of Richard Gettner in *The Dark is Light Enough* ------- “that inveterate, that self-drunk drunken, shiftless, heartless lying malaringer” ------ are the best examples. In fact, the verbal medium remains one of the chief sources of the comic in Fry’s plays.

Fry has demonstrated that verse can be a viable medium of comedy, even in a realistic comedy, which had traditionally used only prose as its medium. It is relevant to quote here Raymond Williams’ remarks:

> Mr. Fry’s work is not really a part of the revived tradition of poetic drama. It is to be related not so much to the poetic drama of Yeats
and Eliot, as to a particular tradition of comedy, in which, in our country, the most successful practitioners have been writers in prose.¹

Fry’s poetry, as we have seen, is rich and even extravagant to the extent of being verbose. His comic characters are the most ingenuous inventor of dazzling words and other verbal and figurative devices. Thomas Mendip, the Duks, his son, Tegeus, and Jennet, are the memorable creations of Fry in this regard.

Where Fry’s achievement in regard to the verbal medium is substantial, no doubt, one sometimes feels that the dramatic personae’s verbosity tends to take precedence over the intrinsic dramatic concerns. J. Chiari’s remarks in this context are apt to recall:

Far from trying to conceal it as Eliot tried to do, or to use it as a purely utilitarian Instrument it becomes on the contrary, poetry for poetry’s sake and sometimes poetry as decoration and virtuosity. The result is that most of his characters talk alike, exhibiting the same verbal brilliance and trying to outshine one another in puns, conceits and verbal displays. So that, in the end, speech is less an expression of character than an explosion of verbal fireworks prompted by occasions and situations. The words seem to hover above the characters who do not evolve, and are like figures clad in glittering garbs, singularly lacking, at times, in emotions or human substance. This is of no importance in comedies of situation
in which verbal wit and exuberance of language inevitably carry the play forward in a dazzle of words.²

Chiari argues that such poetry proves to be a serious handicap when the theme and purpose of drama is serious. Fry himself has defended his verbal style vis-à-vis his themes and purpose that in his comedies language, mood, atmosphere and themes are inseparably blended. For example, the brilliance, verbosity and occasional pomposity of the verbal medium in *The Lady's Not For Burning* are in keeping with the season, the themes, the traits of characters and the entire mood of the play. Where the mood, the season, the atmosphere, etc. are not properly integrated the brilliance of the language is diluted considerably, such as in *A Yard of Sun*. However, language is both Fry's strength as well as weakness. There is no denying the truth that his verbal style on several occasions becomes deficient in the effect of immediacy. One knows that in drama a word, a phrase or a sentence is uttered only once and as soon as it is uttered, it should produce the desired effect of communication. It is a different matter altogether when the play is read from the printed pages because here the reader can go back again to the words if they fail to comprehend immediately. One, however, does not feel that Fry's language is under any pressure of emotions, feelings or thoughts for expression. His poetry does lack the rhythmic modulations we find in Eliot and seems to be too artificial and made up to sudden shift of emotions or turns of situations. This perhaps explains why Fry's type of poetry did not attract followers.
There is a considerable justification in what Marius Bewly has to say about this aspect of Fry's dramaturgy:

*His plays are written in verse thoroughly lacking in style, whether one interprets "style" in a tightly critical or in a loosely fashionable way. Under the surface smartness the verse is thoroughly conventional and academic. It has, it is true, an appearance of originality, but this is partly because this kind of verse fell into such absolute neglect after the first war that most theatre-goers have forgotten that verse dramas with high-pressure poetry were once highly esteemed, if not widely produced, in this century.*

David Daiches has adopted the same negative attitude towards Fry's experiment with a novel verse form. He says that "in the 1940's and early 1950's looked as though the verse plays of Fry might establish a new mode of modern poetic drama. But the airy exuberance of Fry's imagery and the wit (half boisterous, half wistful) displayed in his handling of characters and situation proved in the end to be more of a fashionable exhibitionism than a wholly successful confrontation of the problems involved in producing a drama that was both artistically effective and contemporary in feeling." Professor Daiches' appraisal of Fry's achievement is only partially true as far as his seasonal comedies are concerned. But as our analysis of his only tragic play, *The Firstborn*, and history play, *Curtmantle* are concerned the issues raised are as archetypal
as they are contemporary and there are no verbal superfluities or exhibitionistic elements either in imagery or diction.

So far as the choice of themes is concerned, we have seen that Fry’s primary concern is human and not abstract ideas. Even in his religious plays, human elements are given their due place. Cymen and Cuthman, for example, are human creatures and not embodiments of abstract religious values or ideas. There are also human emotional situations in these religious plays. However, the emphasis in all these plays is on love, mercy, forgiveness and suffering as a means of redemption. Humanity can never be given up by the divine creator, howsoever fallible it may be. All these religious plays hold out a positive hope for humanity inspite of the belief in the Original Sin.

In his other plays, Fry professedly endeavours to explore the mystery of human existence, which he believes can best be done through comedy. His efforts in this direction are laudable, no doubt. But he forgot the simple truth that the “proper study of mankind is man.” This needs the creation of human characters, which are endowed with the attributes so eloquently praised by Shakespeare’s Hamlet: “what a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!”. If we look at Fry’s creation of major dramatic personae, we are bound to conclude that Fry’s achievement in this regard cannot be over estimated. His characters mostly float over the surface reality of human existence.
They only occasionally demonstrate inner stirrings arising from a conflict. In the religious plays the major characters are either embodiments of concepts and ideas or they are being inspired by supernatural forces. Moses in *The Firstborn* has the potential of developing into a complex human character, which is only temporarily glimpsed at the moment when he realises that the curse on the firstborns will not spare the innocent Ramses. The role of the deus-ex-machina leaves little room for the development of a credible living character.

In the seasonal comedies, we have human issues and human characters. But the thematic issues are so loudly pronounced that the characters are polarized on the sides of opposing ideas. In *A Phoenix too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not For Burning* the opposing ideas are death wish and urge for life. The characters from the beginning of these plays belong either to the negative or the positive camp as far as their initial attitude to life is concerned. Dynamene and Thomas appear as obsessed with death-wish because they have a benighted vision about the joys of living. Contrasted with them are Tegeus and Jennet who can see that life, inspite of patches of clouds of hardships, is worth living. They are symbolical of the Life Force. These contrasted pairs collide and the negative side of the attitude to life is fully won over by the positive urge for life. These pairs of characters in their verbal interaction fail to demonstrate any deep emotional involvement or inner conflict. Somehow these characters are unable to enlist our sympathy for them on account of their confrontation with the mysterious forces affecting human
predicament. Even in *Venus Observed* where Fry has used a theme with a powerful potential for probing deep into the human psyche, the amorous confrontation between the youth and old age lacks emotional dimensions. We can find numerous instances in literature of the exploration of the amorous predicament of the hopeless but tenacious infatuation of the old for the youth, which provide stirring theatrical and dramatic experiences, charged with deep emotions. But in *Venus Observed* the Duke’s or for that matter his son’s attraction towards Perpetua is not the result of their emotional involvement. Devoid of any emotional dimension the love rivalry between father and son has more a look of dispassionate wrestling competition than a worthwhile conflict. Even Perpetua, in first agreeing to be wooed by the Duke to save her father’s reputation and then crossing over to the side of the son for a final matrimonial setting without any demonstration of bafflement, constraint or relief, appears to be a wooden character rather than a dramatically developed living character.

However, Fry tries to exploit the enormous potential of portraying the complexity of the character of Henry Plantagenet in his history play, *Curtmantle*. Here there are clearly two levels of the dramatic action as suggested by T.S. Eliot for any serious play: One is the outer drama and the other and more important one is the inner drama of the play. The outer drama consists of the historical events during the most eventful career of the King, and the inner drama consists of a series of closely linked themes, such as Henry’s search for self (“who am I”, he asks towards the end of the play), Merlin’s curse working against human will to do good, rebellion
by the younger generation against the older one, friendly and filial betrayal, wife's abandoning of her husband, and above all the growing alienation of the protagonist finally being reduced to total defeat and ruin. Henry II has been presented as a very epitome of mankind, possessing all contradictory facets of character, which constitute human nature. In this play we hear much about historical events causing physical and mental anguish to the King, but we seldom see the King in action. Somehow the new experiment Fry made with his dramatic technique is not wholly successful as regards portrayal of dramatic characters.

The conflict between Henry and his friend, Chancellor and Archbishop, Becket is again pregnant with great possibilities of highly effective dramatic situations calling forth high sentiment and eloquent verse. But Fry fails to exploit the dramatic potential of the complex relationship involving human, political, religious and spiritual values. When the characters interact, they appear more as windbags than living human beings. What Dryden has to say about long speeches in French classical tragedy quite aptly applies to the speeches of Henry and Becket when they interact with other:

Their speeches being so many declarations, which
tire us with length; so that instead of persuading
us to grieve for their heroes, we are concerned for
our own trouble, as we are in tedious visits of
bad company ------ To speak generally, it cannot be
denied that short speeches and replies are more apt to move the passions and beget concernments in us than the other.  

Inspite of the above observations which may apply to quite a lot of Fry’s long speeches put in the mouths of his characters, the truth remains that Fry’s artistic forte lies in his poetry with all the colours and fragrances of his varied imagery, pomp, and sound. His poetry can be held as a singular contribution to the revival of poetic drama. However, when Fry tries to restrain the dazzle of his verse and curb its exuberance, as he does in *A Yard of Sun*, it becomes pedestrian and even muted. Its movement also affect the dramatic action and makes his character appear rather lifeless.

To try to evaluate Fry’s achievement as a verse dramatist only with regard to his verbal medium will be less than doing justice to his dramatic artistry. Unlike many of his predecessors, who endeavoured to restore poetic drama to its pristine glory, Fry realized that drama to be successful on the stage should have clear cut and logically developed story element and that whatever the intention of the dramatist, the artist’s concern should be entertainment. An audience spends money and time to be entertained and not only to be instructed. It is needless to emphasize that the aesthetically satisfying dramatic experience is simultaneous with the ongoing action on the stage and not in a contemplation after the audience returns home. It was for this reason that all his plays have substantial story content, which is easily comprehensible. The only play which is likely to
present some problem is *A Sleep of Prisoners* where the technical experiment is not transparent to make us comprehend the unity of vision which is achieved through a progression of the successive dreams on the line of ascendency of the perception of divine design of redemption for humanity and the instrumentality of suffering to purification. Here the spiritual significance is akin to what Eliot has presented in *The Waste Land* and is only, too, well known to a student of Indian philosophic and spiritual systems. The other play in which Fry tried another type of experiment with a chronicle play material is *Curtmantle*. Inspite of some weaknesses in the play which we have averred to earlier, it sustains the interest of the audience in the dramatic action, which alternates between Marshal’s narrative and the theatrical action on the stage. This play is expansive because of the nature of the dramatic source corpus, no doubt, but it has considerable variety so far as theme and characters are concerned. Fry’s artistic honesty lies in his impartiality with all of his dramatic personae in the play. Even the sons who align against their father have their valid reasons. So does the father have against his sons and wife. Their perspectives are all clear well defined and intrinsically valid.

Of the serio-comic plays, *A Yard of Sun* is perhaps the most insipid inspite of its having a properly developed story line. Here the characters do not emerge as if they were endowed with sufficient human attributes. The other two plays ----- *The Lady’s Not For Burning*, and *Venus Observed* ----- are remarkably interesting dramatic pieces with serious themes developed through lively and invigorating mood and atmosphere.
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The characters are sharply etched out and highly individualized. Ideas are carefully subordinated to human interests. However, the most interesting composition remains Fry's tiny one-act play, *A Phoenix too Frequent*. Eleazer Lecky's comments on this play are worth recalling:

*Dynamene not only turns her death wish into a wish to live but saves Tegeus' life letting him substitute her husband's body for the one he had failed to guard while making love to her. Even more paradoxically, Tegeus, who begins by admiring Dynamene's devotion to her husband, soon perceives that, in his own interests, he must alter that devotion. Fry has but a short time in which to accomplish these reversals.*

One test of Fry's intrinsic worth as a great dramatist is that his seriocomic plays, on which his reputation solidly rests, give the audience a unique dramatic experience when performed on the stage. If one ventures to merely narrate the dramatic action the listener will get only the husk without the taste and flavour of the kernel which is a composite artifact created by all the dramaturgical components of a play. Even though Fry does not have any significant line of followers in their attempt to revive poetic drama in the prosaic age of ours, he has shown the path which future revivalists of poetic drama will hopefully follow. His path is clear and defined: drama should have its primary concern with human issues and with entertainment of the audience; the verbal medium needs to draw on the enormous resources of various fields and verse while close to the colloquial rhythm should have certain amount of stylization lest it should sound too pedestrian and banal to be poetic.
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