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FRY'S IMAGERY

A STUDY OF CRISTOPHER FRY'S FIGURATIVE SPEECH AND ITS DRAMATIC VALUE

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INTRODUCTION

I

IT is becoming a generally accepted principle among modern critics, that any investigation of a literary order should start considering the work of art as an integral and undivided whole. The false notion which established a separation between the idea the author wished to express, and the way or style in which he expressed it, has proved absurd when intended to further any serious understanding of good literature; it is being replaced by the emphasis which is now given to the fundamental principle or idea, which is the soul of the body of words, and to which all the elements of composition (plot, characters, background, ideas, images, language itself, meter and rhythm) are finally conditioned.

According to this conception the language of literature and its style are inseparable, just as a person's being and his idiosyncrasies form an undivided whole we call individuality, and at the best, when polished and developed, personality.

It is this fundamental principle that explains the wide difference we may observe between such plays as ŒDIPUS REX, *a deeply human conception of life, in which man is seen in all the perspectives reason and pathos can afford;* BÉRÉNICE, *the aristocractic and highly rationalistic play of Racine, where conflicts are discussed by the laws of a highly organized society; and* TRISTAN UND ISOLDE, *the rebellious conception of an age of romantic and discontented people, where human*

condition is analyzed with the opposite principle of Neoclassic tragedy: love and passion confusing and invalidating the dictates of reason.[1]

Though the three works may be mentioned as examples of what is considered as an integrated artistic perfection, the view of life the authors reflected in them, has infused itself throughout their elements, and language has been forced to express the way of action the authors wished to represent. Thus Sophocles made use of discoursive logic and sensuous images in the constant succession of his dialogues and choral speeches; Racine cast his tragedy in the unique meter of the French alexandrine with its perfect equilibrium of twelve syllables divided by a central pause — a form which nevertheless proved flexible enough within its invariability to express different modes of experience; and Wagner required, for the expression of the dark passional utterances of his lovers, besides abundant imagery of a sensuous kind, the flexible and highly suggestive language of music, whose thousand tones lend themselves to convey a thousand different emotional moods.

The language of art, and therefore the author's style, is not a fancy dress on a naked body, it is not something accidental to it; on the contrary, it partakes of its intimate nature, it cannot be replaced, it is inevitable and necessary.

Maybe it will be relevant here to touch on how the artist forces language to adjust itself to the fundamental idea of his work, which is no other than his way of feeling.

All critics agree in ascribing to the literary artist a greater sensibility than to the ordinary man. The incidents of daily life produce a deep and particular impression on him, because he discovers in them a significance which is not perceptible to others. The quality of this discernment, in the case of a lyric poet — I shall later deal with the dramatic one — is such, that it provokes a perturbation in his whole being, and an irresistible desire to express it in words, so as to provide an outlet for his overflowing emotional stress, and prevent it from remaining inarticulate. Otherwise it would never go further than the elementary utterances of a savage which lack the integrated perfection of the work of art. It is evident that much thinking is required in order to organize impressions and to subject them to the control of

1 See Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, for a complete analysis of these plays.

meter and rhythm, so as to convey to others the peculiar quality of an emotion, in the most precise, universal, economic and concrete way. The presence of these characteristics constitutes good style. It may be argued that this is not true of all good poets; that many, for instance, appear vague or wordy in comparison with others. In that case it is necessary to enquire whether vagueness and verbosity are real defects or the result of a personal way of experience which could not have been described clearly because it did not occur to the poet in a completely definite way, — e. g., some semi-conscious states between sleep and vigil — or a manifold richness of sensations which cannot be expressed in a simple way, because it has awakened many associations in the poet's mind. In so far as an artist succeeds in forcing words to express the individuality of his emotion, he attains one of the greatest achievements of literary art, good style, and writes a poem which is as perfect as it can be, though its theme be common and unimportant.

Here we are confronted with another question. Is good style individual style? I think it is, since it is the result of applying an elaborate artistic technique to the expression of an individual way of feeling, or at least, to a personal assimilation and interpretation of someone else's experience.

One of the chief devices an author has at his disposal when expressing his personal ways of feeling is metaphor. According to the traditional rhetoric, metaphor, as well as its more explicit equivalent, the simile, were considered ornaments in speech. Young students were taught Logic, the science of correct discoursing, and their attention was called to its handmaid, Rhetoric, which embellished the bare rational structure, and led to persuasion and conviction. Thus a writer or an orator in the midst of an argument, would try to convince his audience by drawing an analogy from a different range of circumstances; but the poet's ways are not always as those of the logician, and he is often unconscious of the act of comparison implicit in his metaphors. These, for him, are only the definitions for the new qualities a poet spontaneously discovers, they stand as symbols of his impressions, they are the only adjectives — because they explain the quality of an object — which could have possibly described his percep-

tions, or as Shelley put it, "the way of marking the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuating their apprehension". [2]

Therefore, as the poet is constantly discovering new qualities, he is always in search of new ways of expression, a fact which accounts for the creation of new words, the use of those already existing with a different meaning, and the disregard of the rules of grammar and logical speech, to which some poets are liable precisely because these do not conform to their way of experience. Besides, writers and critics lay a great emphasis on the keenness of the poet's senses, because his sensuous perceptions are the stock a writer disposes of when wishing to define his ways of feeling.

What I have said so far, also applies in general to the novelist or to the playwright though with one essential difference, that instead of giving individual expression to every particular emotion, the objective artist organizes his rich nucleus of accumulated perceptions in one great work of literature, the style, plot and characters of which are in keeping with the sense of life he has discerned in all his previous contacts with reality. Thus all the elements of his composition become symbols of a complex system of emotions. [3]

The fundamental purpose of this introduction consists in explaining briefly what I hope the analysis of the images in Christopher Fry's plays will reveal.

In his most valuable work on drama, THE IDEA OF A THEATER, *Mr. Francis Fergusson wrote: "The process of becoming acquainted with a play is like that of becoming acquainted with a person. It is an empirical and inductive process; it starts with the observable facts, but instinctively aims a grasp of the very life of the machine which is both deeper, and oddly enough, more immediate than the surface appearances offer."* [4]

Thus I will take an element of style, which has been traditionally reffered to the poet's activity: metaphor and the other forms of images which are akin to it, and through their analysis I will try to give an interpretation of Fry's plays. The method has proved useful in a

2 Quoted by Moody Prior in *The Language of Tragedy*. Chapter I, p. 12.

3 Of course, there have been remarkable exceptions in which a lyric becomes a condensed expression of an exceedingly rich and long accumulated range of emotions.

4 p. 11.

study of Shakespeare's works and personality, as well as in that of other authors, because the functions of images in plays are manifold.

In the first place, we have to distinguish between two classes of images: those of a transitory kind which are used to add emphasis or brilliance to any given moment in the play, and those of a more important order, which are related one to the other and have a cumulative effect throughout the play. These latter are usually called "recurrent images" or "key images", because of their consistency with the determining elements of drama.

One of the functions of figurative speech in general, and of "key images" especially, is that of giving dignity and generality to a play, because in its very nature, metaphor has the power of expressing the quality of an object in an entirely different range of existence. The repeated use of images in a play, especially when they are of a stately and transcendental order (such as nature and heavenly body images in KING LEAR), *produces an enlargement of the dramatic perspectives. A host of associations occur to the reader's mind, the characters acquire cosmic import, and a series of new implications are introduced into the dramatic structure.*

When the author chooses to lay emphasis on a certain emotion or idea — the Romantics thought images should be introduced for the sake of passion;[5] *and others subordinate them to their didactic purposes, he may constantly keep it before his audience by means of the creation of a whole scheme of equivalent images, which, like an endless succession of opposing mirrors, reflect an object. Or he may use them as principle of decorum, by which I mean the manners and speech which are proper to a character. The Elizabethans, for example, who represented all the different ranges of people from kings down to the lowest classes, saw that their images were in keeping with the condition of those who uttered them. Decorum may also refer to the mood or circumstances of a character in any given situation, as differing from those of other characters. Images in this respect may serve to give individuality and complexity. Thus Shakespeare makes a highly dramatic use of them in* ROMEO AND JULIET,

5 In the Preface to *The Cenci* Shelley wrote: "In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter." Quoted by Moody Prior in The Language of Tragedy, p. 244.

where the lovers' images as compared with the other characters (Capulet's for instance), are of a far more complicated order. With this Shakespeare also stresses the conflict of the tragic characters and introduces order and motivation in his plays, so that those images of light which are associated with the lovers' happiness at the beginning of the play, are made to emphasize the tragic error and its recognition at the end, thus showing the whole ironic reversal of the action.

It is clear that in order to achieve this, the images introduced have to be of a dynamic order, always pointing forward to the unfolding of events, sometimes anticipating what is to come, others reminding us of things past, and always exceedingly flexible and precise so as to avoid waste of words and express the infinite variety of emotional shades the author is wishing to convey.

Then, figures of speech lead us to discern that quality of life which is sometimes called the philosophy or moral view of a writer. Who can help ascribing to Shakespeare a disgust of the wicked ways of man, after analyzing his animal images in KING LEAR, *in terms of which he managed to describe the unnaturalness and perversity of the whole situation? Objective and impersonal as the author may be, we can grasp much of his personality through the careful analysis of his figurative language.*

Finally, and this is the last important use of images I have to mention, figures of speech are a wonderful way of creating atmosphere. A consistent scheme of images is the psychological background for a character to move in, and one cannot but sense spiritual putrefaction in HAMLET *after so many images are drawn from sickness and corruption.*

Though images are so useful in the development of dramatic structure, it is evident that when they are not required as necessary and inevitable to the other elements of composition (plot, characters, atmosphere, etc.), they give a play many implications which the author did not even think of, and the audience is left with a sense of inflation on one hand, and no dramatic idea to justify and support it on the other. Then figurative speech becomes a sort of loose dress on an exceedingly thin and destitute body.

Another danger, which is akin to the former, lies in the pictorial or musical use some writers are bound to make of images. Though it is evident that words have a musical value, this should never imply

a sacrifice of their intellectual meaning; in spite of the poet's efforts, the harmony of words will never be as suggestive as the harmony of sounds; then, speech may be musical, as long as it is precise and faithful to its primary purpose of expressing the author's way of feeling. [6]

As regards the propensity to imitate the technique of painting, its danger lies in the need the poet has of a great number of sensuous perceptions of a visual order to express spiritual matters in a physical and concrete way — that is what I mean by concretions in this work. For example, when in THE FIRSTBORN *Anath is led to think of Moses by the incidents of the day and becoming suddenly aware of his presence in the Palace she says: "He has stood all day under my brain's stairway."* [7] *The appeal of these images is not only to the eye, but to the mind, because the dramatist is not aiming at a mere description of physical objects, spiritual ones being the purpose of his work. There should be a perfect fusion of the spiritual and material elements of the image, so that as in the case I have just quoted, both will profit by the analogy, the spiritual element (expectation), becoming less elusive and imprecise, and the material element (the stairway), less tangible and more subjective. A pictorial technique distracts the reader from the main issues of the play. When all the emphasis is laid on the minute description of a sensuous perception, style becomes ornamental and artificial.*

II

After a long spell of experimentation in all sorts of dramatic forms, the world seems ready to give a hearty welcome to the poetic revival of the theater. It is true that during the last hundred years the symbolists wrote plays in poetic prose, but their characters could not be considered as human beings; they rather seemed haunting

6 In this respect, J. Middleton Murry has said: "Every art has its peculiar qualities; an artist in language must do everything in his power to realize the unique possibilities of that medium before he summons in the aid of another medium. Music is a superb and self-sufficient art; its unique possibilities are utterly beyond the range of spoken language. The writer who allows himself to be distracted by the musical possibilities of language is like the dog who dropped the bone for the watery shadow."
The Problem of Style, p. 87.

7 Act. I, Sc. I.

ghosts in a dreamy atmosphere. That is the case of Maeterlinck's PÉLLEAS AND MÉLISANDE, *where the author, in his eagerness to create an atmosphere of vagueness and mystery purposely avoided climaxes and often left events in suspense, that we might give free rein to our imagination. The symbolists' style was admirably suited to express certain elusive ways of experience, but it lacked vitality, intelligibility and freshness, and made no appeal to the majority.*

The general tendency of realism and naturalism was to do away with figurative speech, because it was not "true to life", and figurative speech often avenged itself by leaving realistic plays destitute of deep poetry, significance and universality. Concerned with the minutiae of everyday life, their implications are in danger of being as narrow as the scene they have portrayed, and there is no reason why a large scheme of images should be developed. [8]

Expressionism opened the way to the most fanciful devices of stage, but it cut the wings to the poetry of words and perpetrated an invasion into the grounds of the stage technician, i.e. O'Neil in THE HAIRY APE. *Under such conditions, the dramatist needed no great concern for style, the effect of the play depending primarily on something accesory to the playwright's business: light, sound and other stage devices. Consequently, it was impossible for the author to foresee what his work might become in the hands of the producer; whether it would mean more or less than what it was intended to say. Finally, there came T. S. Eliot and his pupils, i.e., Auden and Isherwood, who have been trying to vivify poetic drama by means of unusual conventions such as, chorus, personifications of abstract concepts, unusual rhythms, images and meters.*

Compared with the plays of the expressionists, Fry's appear more affiliated to the general dramatic tradition, because their great

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8 See how Chekhov, one of the outstanding representatives of naturalism criticised those who corrupted this tendency as well as realism: "I regard the stage of today as mere routine and prejudice. When the curtain goes up and the gifted beings, the high priests of the sacred art, appear by electric light, in a room with three sides to it, representing how people eat, drink, love, walk and wear their jackets; when they strive to squeeze out a moral from the flat vulgar pictures and the flat vulgar phrases, a little tiny moral, easy to comprehend and handy for home consumption; when in a thousand variations they offer me always the same thing over and over again — then I take to my heels and run, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, which crushed his brain by its overwhelming vulgarity." (Quoted by Raymond Williams in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, Part I, Number 3).

appeal, just like in the drama of the past, is secured through poetic speech which has always been one of the most natural means of communication among people. It sufficed the Elizabethans to convey all sorts of experiences in spite of their lack of scenic resources. In Fry's plays no great demands are made on the stage, words themselves being capable of producing almost any desired effect; and then, free rein is given to the poet's imagination and to the superabundant suggestiveness of images by the nature of the plots themselves, which, as we shall see, avoid a minute description of unimportant realities.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR

CHRISTOPHER Fry is now a middle-aged man. He was born in Bristol in 1907. His father was an architect and a philanthropic Anglican lay-preacher who died when Christopher was three years old. At the beginning of her widowhood, his mother, a most religious woman of Quaker stock, ran short of money, but wishing to give her children a good education, managed to open a boarding-house. Christopher was sent to Bedford Modern School and received extra tuition from a strict aunt, who seemed to have had a great influence in arousing the boy's interest in words and symbols, for she used to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to him in a loud, sounding voice.

Fry's first connection with the drama took place when he was almost six years old. At that age, he played the rôle of King Alfred in a school pageant. Later, at eleven, he wrote a farce, and a verse drama at fourteen; but his first work to be produced was written at seventeen and called *Youth and the Peregrines.*

Fry's calling for the stage was strong and decisive from the very beginning. Just after finishing school he became a schoolmaster, but failed in finding this profession compatible with his wishes; he soon gave it up, and started as a sort of odd-job-man who undertook whatever work he came across "provided it had connections with the stage".[1] Thus he began to acquire that knowledge of the theater which has always proved to be most useful to playwrights. At this

1 Derek Stanford, *Christopher Fry Album* p. 8.

time, he also profited by his natural gifts for music, and composed several songs and a musical comedy, *She Shall Have Music.*

The year 1932 is a land-mark in Fry's career. His poet-friend, Robert Gittings invited him to spend two months summering in "The empty Rectory of Thorn St. Margaret" in Somersetshire. Nineteen years later, in an open letter to Gittings which precedes and serves as a dedication to *A Sleep of Prisoners,* Fry looks back on his distant experience at Thorn as a most fruitful and transcendental one in his dramatic production, and thanks Gittings for having encouraged him and believed in his talent when he had "showed no sign of writing".

Although the immediate result of the sojourn at St. Margaret was only a play, *Siege,* which has never been staged, Fry became more confident that one day "the words would come", and so, in fact, they did.

In the meantime, and wishing by all possible means to enlarge his knowledge of the theater, which seemed to be the proper background for his talents, first he managed to get the position of director of the "Tunbridge Wells Repertory Players", and later, of the "Oxford Playhouse". This not only provided an opportunity for the staging of *Youth and the Peregrines,* a "fantastic triviality" that "must stand or fall by its youngness",[2] as the author put it, but also showed plainly Fry's talents for various occupations, since he succeeded in securing for his company the first performance of Shaw's *A Village Wooing,* acted the male lead in it, and wrote the music for both plays.

During this spell of work at Tunbridge and at Oxford, Fry met a journalist, Phyllis Hart, whom he married, and one of his leading ladies, Mrs. Pamela Brown, who was later to perform a rôle especially created for her; Jennet Jourdemayne's in *The Lady's not for Burning.*

After this period of "aurea mediocritas" there ensued years in which the Frys lived hand to mouth, six years of war in which Chirstopher worked as a theatrical producer and playwright. The later minor works written at this time are *Open Door,* a piece which dramatized the life of the founder of Dr. Barnardo's homes, *The Tower*

2 Quoted by Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry Album,* p. 11.

and *Thursday Child,* all pageants which were not published but achieved success in the stage.

In 1937 Fry was living in Colman's Hatch, a small village in Sussex. Then, a new chance was offered him to use his talents by the vicar of the place, who asked him to write a short play for a local pageant. The result was *The Boy with a Cart,* a short bucolic piece which tells the story of Cuthman, Saint of Sussex. Besides its poetic value to which I shall make reference further on, this play is remarkable because it was Fry's first work to be printed in 1939. The matter of publication, as Mr. Derek Stanford judiciously comments, is a most important one for the poetic dramatist, because however brilliant the production of his plays may be, the full significance of his poetic language cannot be fully grasped unless it be "slowly and deliciously savoured by the reader". [3]

When the second World War broke out Fry had already started writing *The Firstborn,* but he had to put it off and enlist in the Forces. He was sent to a non-combatant company which consisted largely of undergraduates, graduates, and students. There, although far more accomplished than most of his comrades, he distinguished himself for his steadiness, "forbearance, lack of hasty judgment" and "personal kindness". [4] He proved to be an excellent friend to many young men, some of whom have become conspicuous personalities in the post war, either as writers, critics or painters. Moreover, he was one of the chief entertainment providers, and never took on airs of self-importance. These merits were soon acknowledged and he was awarded two brass buttons and put in charge of his Section. [5]

Referring to the experiences of those days in "Christopher Fry Album" Derek Stanford says: "The simplest sing-song or smoking concert was never beneath him, and never too much trouble. Whether he was called on to render a tap-dance, to devise a charade or stage-manage a whole show, he was gaily able and forthcoming. There was nothing of the 'superior' person about him, nothing self-consciously dedicated to the 'higher-life', though all things he undertook were elevated by him"... "It was definitely not in any studious avoid-

3 *Christopher Fry Album,* p. 16.
4 Ibid., p. 20.
5 *Christopher Fry Album,* p. 20.

ance of company we recognised his talent. On off-duty hours he was seldom by himself though he often went with a group of friends to a café or writing room where they would read together." [6]

In 1944 Fry returned to Shipton-under-Wychwood, a little town in the Cotswolds where his wife and child awaited him, and where he has chosen to make his country home ever since.

The choice of Shipton as a living place by the poet is not without significance. It is neither a typical old town, nor a modern one, but has traits of both. As relics of the past there stand The Court, a mansion dating back to Tudor days and surrounded by mystery; The Shaven Crown Inn "with its massive archway", an ancient monastic hostelry where the poet may be seen from time to time drinking a glass of beer; a church with an early English tower and spire, and, adjacent to it, the Prebendal House, originally a dependency of Salisbury Cathedral. Modern times are represented by a "gasometer", the modern quarter, the railroad station and a small factory. Besides, the town has a deep rustic flavour. Going from the station to the Shaven Crown Inn, travelers walk across fields covered with the classic English buttercups in spring, and clusters of trees are to be seen everywhere; but the poet's favourite spots are a quiet lake and "the Barrow".

This is how Stanford, recollecting his first-hand impressions of Shipton describes them: "Down through an avenue of limes, I walked one brilliant June morning with the playwright and a friend. On either side of us what had once been gardens basked in the lush indulgence of ruin. Roses, half-reverting to their wild-briar state, breathed out an aroma of rare civilisation — invisible whiffs of a once exquisite culture. In between knee-high grass we found the semblance of a path to the lake — a beautiful oval of leaf-fringed water enclosing within the frame of its mirror (which a bankside ring of trees provided) the white waxen ghosts of extended water-lilies... Different as the actual landscape is, I found myself irresistibly reminded of the Duke's garden in *Venus Observed,* with its lake and its Temple of the Ancient Virtues"... "looking at the diverse foliage about me I imagined the season put forward several months

6 *Christopher Fry Album*, p. 19.

till Perpetua's description of the leaves before their fall would hold good for Shipton as well as for Stellmere Park".[7]

Having paid a visit to Fry's cottage, in which modern improvements mingle with exquisite old pieces of ornamentation, and where a grand-piano is to be seen in the living room, Stanford proposes to take us "uphill some quarter of a mile or so from the cottage: Struggling over uncultivated ground, we reach at last to a smoother eminence, a certain flat level of roughly circular shape. This hilltop — a favourite place of composition with Fry, and an out-of-door centre of inspiration to him — is locally said to be a barrow"... "Whether it was once a burial ground or marked the ramparts of a Roman camp is something history has never decided. Archaelogists have left things undisturbed, and helmet or skull, as the case may be, continue their unmolested sleep. Whether this raising of the earth be the work of an early people who felt the need thus to commemorate their dead, or of Rome's hard bitten imperial agents who brought us culture by military compulsion the barrow has a strong fascination for Fry."

"Sprawled out beneath the sun on this brackened vantage-point, one sees the indented terraced chequer of pasture-land, corn-land, untilled field and hill. Certainly if the barrow could yield the same perspective of time as of space, the scene would be rich with reanimated history"[8]

Stanford, it may be noticed, has touched on an interesting point in ascribing to Shipton's landscape a general influence on the poet's work and in finding his choice of this locality relevant to Fry's personality and tastes. This, in spite of the great independence and detachment of Fry's dramatic backgrounds, because disconnected as the work of a poet may be from the world about him, personal and original as his impressions may prove, he cannot fully escape a reflection of his surroundings; — there is nothing in the mind that had not passed through the senses. Furthermore, Fry's readers soon become aware that their author, like Isaac in a *Sleep of Prisoners* is "a boy for the sights". The point may be pressed still further in referring to Oxfordshire at large: "those who have stood on Cotswold soil" — Stanford says — "while nightfall slowly deepened around them, will re-

7 *Christopher Fry, Album*, pp. 28 and 29.
8 *Christopher Fry, Album*, p. 31.

cognize the experience in Thomas's words to the witch in *The Lady's not for Burning:*

> Out here is a sky so gentle
> Five stars are ventured on it. I can see
> The sky's pale belly glowing and growing big,
> Soon to deliver the moon. And I can see
> A glittering smear, the snail-trail of the sun
> Where it crawled with its golden shell into the hills.
> A darkening land sunken into prayer
> Lucidly in dewdrops of one syllable,
> *Nunc dimittis.* I see twilight, madam." [9]

Woolmarkets, as the one mentioned by Edgar in *Venus Observed* abound in the Cotswolds, and the Cool Clary in *The Lady's not for Burning,* is very like Campden or Burford.

Furthermore, Fry himself said in the *Radio Times* that "the seed" of *A Sleep of Prisoners* "was sown by his seeing in Burford Church a name and a date carved on the font: 'Anthony Dedley Prisner 1649'". [10] It may also be relevant to say that Oxfordshire, unlike other counties in England, remained faithful to the Jacobite cause, and that the Young Pretender often went there disguised. Violent changes, such as the sweeping away of the Stuarts, seemed to have taken place in a more gradual and less drastic way. Thus, in this county, both the natural and the historical perspectives suit the poet's love of traditions, and reassure his faith in the peaceful evolution and continuity of mankind.

While serving in the army, Fry was unable to continue writing *The Firstborn,* but he had an opportunity to stage the first part of it in Liverpool. Besides, several poems of his appeared in anthologies and literary magazines, such as *New Road* and *Life and Letters.*

By 1946 *The Firstborn* was completed and published, it was broadcast in 1947, and staged in 1948. Although it ranks among

9 *Christopher Fry, Album,* pp. 23 and 24.
10 *Christopher Fry, Album,* p. 24.

Fry's greatest works it did not attain so great a success as the comedies. Among these, *A Phoenix too Frequent* was first performed in 1946, and hallowed as "a poetic prank", "a classic trifle" and a "little gem of the stage".

In 1948 Fry was asked to write the second of his festival plays, *Thor with Angels,* which was performed in Canterbury Cathedral. This, together with the first performance of *The Lady's not for Burning* in the "Arts Theatre" and John Gielgud's production of it at "The Globe", finally brought Fry into the public eye. In spite of the critics' suspicion regarding his work, the public has been giving it an increasingly hearty welcome, both in Europe and in America.

In the summer of 1948 he was invited by the B.B.C. to travel in the Continent; the impressions of his journey were broadcast. In 1950 *Venus Observed* was first staged, just while other plays of his were running in the London theaters. In that year too, the debut of *Ring Round the Moon, Fry's* translation of Jean Anouilh's *L'Invitation au Château,* was a big success.

In 1951 Fry issued his third Religious Festival Play, *A Sleep of Prisoners,* and lately in 1954 there appeared the last of his comedies, *The Dark is Light Enough.* His work has been translated into foreign tongues, especially German, in which it is said to be easily read. His plays have been staged many times, not only in his country but also in Amsterdam, Copenhague, Berlin, Frankfurt, New York, Washington and Mexico City.

The poet's emergence into fame, has not, in fact, changed the kindness and unaffected simplicity of the man. Besides his house at Shipton, he now keeps another one in London, because of the many matters he has to attend to there. Again his choice has been significant. He lives in Bloomfield Road, W. 9, near Regent's Park Canal in a pleasant house that commands a view of the rippling water and "the leafy islands below". There, the bustle of modern London does not break the poet's communion with nature; in fact, this charming nook of London has been the headquarters of many a poet before. Browning found in the many-hued water of the Canal something akin

to Venice, Ruskin and Edmund Gosse also lived here, and Verlaine made it the subject of one of his poems; nor has it now failed to be the abode of artistic talents, painters and draughtsmen have taken refuge within its suburbs. It is this unbroken tradition what appeals to Fry in London, just as in Oxfordshire. It is this love of the past slowly unfolding into the present what must be taken as a clue to his personality. This, to some extent also explains his preference for old stories as the subject matter for his plays, as though by freeing himself of the constraining "thruthfulness to life" of modern realism and of its trifling details, he might be able to take a panoramic view of what is really significant and permanent in human life.

THE BOY WITH A CART

THE Boy with a Cart is an exquisite short bucolic piece which strikes one as something altogether different and independent of the general current of modern realism. Among the other works of Fry it also stands apart. The poet, whose individuality of thought and expression have come out so strikingly in "Venus Observed" or in "A Sleep of Prisoners" is taking the first steps in his brilliant career, and has not, as yet, coined a style fully his own, nor an altogether personal technique. He leans on T. S. Eliot's with whose *Murder in the Cathedral, The Boy with a Cart* is evidently related.

From the very first page we are given a clue to the understanding of the play. In a lyrical piece which is prior to the appearance of Cuthman, the chorus explains how they, the humble and unpretentious People of South England

> have felt the grip
> Of the hand on earth and sky in careful coupling.

It is on this light that the story of Cuthman should be approached, because it is an account of

> The working together
> Of man and God like root and sky.

The theme of *The Boy with a Cart* has an almost naïve simplicity. The poet asks us to believe the unquestioned facts lying at the basis of his play. We watch his boy as he suffers and labors, plans and fulfils. We see how a youth becomes a man and a fond dream

is changed to splendid reality, because both a man and a church are being "built together".

As the story opens, Cuthman, the son of a Cornish shepherd, is just about to know of his father's death. The news strikes him unawares at the end of a bright morning when he had "king'd" himself "on the rock" and "sat" "in the wind." His father's sheep had given him no trouble, for after committing them to God's care, he left them to graze alone "the unhedged green". When two neighbours arrive to announce his father's death to him, Cuthman fears they may think he has neglected his work, and therefore tries to avoid them with enthusiastic speeches on the wonderful workings of Nature, and fervent protests of faith in the Divine Providence. But this, of course, does not turn the neighbours away from their all important business of breaking the sad news to him, and as they withdraw, Cuthman suffers a moral crisis which reminds one of *Murder in the Cathedral*. In fact, there is a hint of that underlying and fatal sense of evil one finds in Eliot's plays. Scepticism is also expressed in a questioning form:

> What sin brought in the strain, the ominous knock,
> The gaping seam? Was it a boast on the rock,
> The garrulous game?

Cuthman regrets his lack of understanding in failing to give ears to the warning of Nature, and the chorus asks Cuthman whether his faith is as strong as ever.

This we might consider as the first movement of the play, the moment of greatest tension being that of Cuthman's realization of his grief; but there comes a reaction, and

> out of the dereliction of a mild morning, comes the morning's motive,
> The first conception, the fusion of root and sky
> Grows the achievement of the falling shadow
> Pain's patient benediction.

In fact, Cuthman's realization of his grief seems to bring home to him the value and significance of life; he has "stayed too long with the children" and has contented himself with appearances; now

he must live a truer life, one in which "perception" naturally leads to "action", in which man attains his full moral size.

Consequently, Cuthman returns to his mother, and despite the neighbours who find him unpractical, he gets down to do "something after his own heart". This is a rough cart in which he seats his mother and starts out of the village "to see the world" without a definite direction, except his confidence in God who will look after them if they go wisely and faithfully.

Mile after mile, "stone over stone" they trundle "stumble and trudge" until they come to a field where mowers are at work. Here the rope with which Cuthman pulled the cart breaks, and his mother is rolled on to the ground. The incident strikes the mowers as being humorous, and they make open fun of it. The old woman feels it deeply and turns angrily on them. In the meantime Cuthman withdraws to make a new rope by the riverside. Then heaven takes his part against the mockers by letting rain fall unexpectedly on dry ground and ruin the crop. Cuthman, who is picking withies in the sun, has a clear intimation of the will of God, and learns that he is to continue his trip and build a church where the withies break. This happens when he reaches Steyning and finds all things according to his wishes. Here Fry makes free use of coincidence, for the rope breaks at the very moment they reach the town, and no injury comes to the mother from it; she finds the place very much to her taste, and a friendly neighbour welcomes them at once and finds a good job for Cuthman. Furthermore, nearly all the villagers begin to help in the building of the church. The only fly in the ointment is that there are two neighbours, brothers, Alfred and Demiwulf who complain of the strangers' intrusion and of the neighbours' cooperation with them, which has put an end to "sociability" in the town. "We can't even put up a shove-ha' penny team against Bramber" they complain.

In order to hinder Cuthman's work they prevent his using the two oxen he had employed. When asked to return them they deny his rights as regards the animals. Full of religious zeal and supernatural force, Cuthman proceeds to yoke the two afore mentioned brothers, and when Mrs. Fipps, their mother, interferes, a gale puts an end to her grumbling and complaining against Cuthman by carrying her off five miles and dropping her in a pond.

Towards the end of the story Heaven favors Cuthman with another miracle; the church building is almost finished, but an unsurmountable difficulty is on the point of spoiling the whole work. The king-post swings out of position and the villagers' efforts are as nothing to make it go into place again. While Cuthman wanders and mourns in the silent church,

> hungry for hammer blows
> And the momentous hive that once was there,

Jesus comes to him and lifts the king-post to place.

The end of the story is a joyous expression of pantheistic faith and rejoicing in natural knowledge, for as the chorus says:

> Who shall question then
> Why we lean our bycicle against a hedge
> And go into the house of God?
> Who shall question
> That coming out from our doorways
> We have discerned a little, we have known
> More than the gossip that comes to us over our gates?

"The Boy with a Cart" — says Derek Stanford — is written in a form of brief episodes... loosely strung together without any elaborate connecting mechanism... Characterisation and plot were elementary, and the presentation of incidents was more narratory than dramatic."[11] Its chief value lies in its first-class poetry, which is largely conveyed by means of images.

Of the 226 images contained in the play, almost half come under the heading Nature, or make reference to it. Nature is *personified* or spoken of in terms of *bodily action,* for example "the crying hedge" (p. 20), "Rain riding suddenly out of the air" ..."falling on to the tongue of the blackbird," ..."the dazed valley/ Sings it down." (p. 19). It is associated with *domestic images* and *daily life objects:*

> I looked up and saw the full moon standing behind a tree.
> It was like a strange man walking into the room at night
> [without knocking. (p. 12)

11 *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation,* (pp. 94 and 99).

It is used when speaking of *time:*

> We pull
> Down the weeks and months like a bough of cherry (p. 30)

and *death:*

> thin as a draught through the crack,
> Death has whistled home. (p. 7)

But above all, Nature contributes largely to that sense of *pantheism* which pervades throughout the play, since the opening lines (which I have already quoted) [12], and later,

> God guide the hammer and the plane
> As the root is guided (p. 29),

till the end,

> The Spring shall hear, the Winter shall be wise
> To warning of aconite and freezing lily,
> And all shall watch the augur of a star
> And learn their stillness from a stiller heaven. (p. 39)

A sense of fusion, collaboration between heaven and earth, and unity in the universe is the basic idea of the play, and in this light, the fact that Cuthman receives his chief support from God, his dutiful co-operation with a Superior World is not an isolated instance in the play; on the contrary, it is reinforced by the natural background, where things occur in no other way than through the help of God.

Furthermore, this element infuses a sort of candour and simplicity in the play, which are all essential to its understanding. Nature is responsive to events and conditions in people's lives; for example this passage, in which, by means of associations of painful or harsh things with Nature, the general idea of Cuthman's difficult plodding in search of a better place is conveyed:

> Stone over stone, over the *shaking* track,
> They start their journey: *jarring* muscle and *aching*
> Back *crunch* the *fading* county into

12 See p. 21.

Dust. Stone over stone, over the *trundling*
Mile, they *stumble* and *trudge:* where the *thirsty* bramble
Begs at the sleeve, the pot-hole *tugs* the foot.
Stone over stone, over the *trampled* sunlight,
Over the *flagging* day, over the *burn*
And *blister* of the *dry* boot, they *flog* their way
To where the *journeyless* and *roofless* trees
Muster against the *plunging* of the dark:
Where the *shut* door and the ministering fire
Have *shrunk* across the fields to a dog's bark.
No floorboard mouse, no tattling friend; only
The flickering bat *dodging* the night air,
Only the stoat *clapping* the fern as it runs.[13] (pp. 15-16)

Analyzing the images, one notices that the emotions aroused, in this case those of fear and amazement, are suggested by repeated referrence to violent movements. This is in contrast with the end of the same passage, in which the ludicrous fact of Mrs. Fipps "Strutting in a storm" is described with a domestic image: "Zigzag like a paper bag, like somebody's hat".

On the other hand, when Fry wishes to restore peace after an upheaval, he resorts to images which convey a sense of slowness or tranquility. Thus, on p. 20, after the chorus comments on the frightful effects of sudden rain, there comes a short paragraph which serves to introduce Cuthman and his mother. They have been by the river, and do not know of the terrible downpour which has just fallen. Therefore, rain is not spoken of in terms of violent movement; now,

The intercepted drops
Fall at their leisure; and between
The threading tunnels on the slopes
The snail drags his caution into the sun.

In this sense, since images serve as a connecting bridge between different kinds of scenes and relax tension, Fry makes a dramatic use of them.

A different use of images as regards supernatural experiences

13 Italics are mine.

occurs on p. 21, when Cuthman knows of his vocation. In a subtle way which avoids blunt straightforwardness he describes his interview with God:

> 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 effect of these words in describing the unusualness of the experience is perfect; but probably, the best piece of poetry is that in which Cuthman tells about Jesus appearing to him in the church:

> I was aware of some one in
> The doorway and turned my eyes that way and saw
> *Carved out of the sunlight* a man who stood
> Watching me, so still that *there was not*
> *Other such stillness anywhere on the earth,*
> *So still that the air seemed to leap*
> *At his side.* He came towards me, and *the sun*
> *Flooded its banks and flowed across the shadow.*
> He asked me why I stood alone. *His voice*
> *Hovered on memory with open wings*
> *And drew itself up from a chine of silence*
> *As though it had longtime lain in a vein of gold.*
> I told him: It is the king-post.[14] (pp. 38 and 39).

Fry uses three elements to describe the vision: light, stillness and unworldly harmony. The images, besides elevating and dignifying the speech, convey a sense of grandeur, beauty and deep tenderness, and set us in a proper mood for the miracle that ensues.

Elemental as the dramatis personae in "The Boy with a Cart" may be, they do not lack characterization, and this is chiefly done by means of images. When Cuthman says:

> Each morning my father buckles himself to,
> Like a leather strap, and at night comes to the fire
> His hands bare with well-water to tell
> The story of Jesus. So he will talk tonight,

14 Italics are mine.

> Clenching his hands against Gethsemane,
> Opening his hands to feel the Ascension
> As though after dry weeks he were feeling
> The first rain. Every evening I have watched,
> And his face was like a live coal under the smoking
> Shadows on the ceiling, (p. 5)

he has not only said that his father was a water-carrier, but has described with feeling and economy his familiar background and a man of faith, to whose size he wishes to grow.

Cuthman's mother is often prone to complain, and she is something of a humorous character. The images she uses have ludicrous implications and usually refer to domestic objects, as though to remind us that she is "always lagging" a little behind Cuthman's thoughts, and that we must not look for any subtle intricacies about her. (p. 23).

But of course, most images refer to Cuthman himself, and they show his deep intimacy with nature, his delicate feelings, his spiritual crisis, his faith and confidence and his moral growth throughout the play, since "he is out of his swaddling clothes" till he builds his "answer in plank and brick" and a church "struggles into the air" by his desire." (pp. 12, 22, 23).

In a way, "The Boy with a Cart" may be considered as an apology for the country-people, for those "who have to catch up, always/ To catch up with the high-powered car" (p. 39). With his deep sense of what is essential in man, Fry has detected a fountain of wisdom springing from rural life, or rather from earth and sky. "We — say The People of South England —

> 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. (p. 40)

Unlike what could be expected of play relating the life of a saint, images of a purely religious kind are rather scarce. The play does not express dogma, but a sense of wonder releasead by the mysteries of Nature. This attitude is better interpreted by what is called natural religion.

THE FIRSTBORN

THE Firstborn has an especial appeal for the student of literature because it is Fry's only tragedy, and one of the few in which a modern dramatist has suceeded in supporting the internal conflicts of his character on an important and well known external action.[15] Moses, the protagonist of the play, is the historical character the world knows as the leader of the Jews against an oppressive power. The conflicts arising from this leadership would have been enough to create a dramatic plot which would have largely been outside the caracter. Fry has gone further, and by dealing with what the individual psychology of Moses might have been, he has opened the way to a whole range of internal conflicts. So it is not only the quarrel with the Pharaoh and the liberation of the Jews that we find in *The Firstborn*. It is, from beginning to end, the inner struggle of the Hebrew leader.

In *The Firstborn*, Moses is by all means a dilemmatic character. Throughout the study of the figurative speech, we shall find how Fry has laid the sources of tragedy both within and witout his character. The personal conflict of Moses is conditioned, in the first place, by the particular circumstances of his education. Fry stresses the fact that Moses was subject to two different and violently opposing influences: the Hebrew and the Egyptian. In the long run, the former becomes more powerful, but the latter has also left a definite impression. Moses cannot help feeling linked to Egypt. His childhood spent in the royal house projects unto his present, and Moses feels the sting of the past.

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15 Quoting F. L. Lucas, Derek Stanford has remarked how in the modern theater "the plot takes place more and more inside the character." Often the conflict occurs "before the action is committed," events then having a secondary importance. This is not the case in *The Firstborn* in which both elements have been given due consideration. *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation*, by Derek Stanford. Chapter Five, p. 113.

Another important source of conflict is the nature of the character himself. He has been endowed with an unusual gift for spiritual perception, uncommon ambition and great personal attractions. The first makes him realize the magnitude of the evil lying at the bottom of the Egyptian tyranny. Under pleasant appearances of political zeal and welfare, there lies an awful reality of injustice and oppression. Moses must have this wrong righted. But in order to do so, he must rely on nothing except Good's inherent force. He definitely avoids whatever may prevent an open fight against Evil.

On the other hand, and because of his keen insight, Moses feels that he is confronted with a scheme which is beyond human strength. He debates between a burning spiritual desire of liberation and his own physical incapacity to attain it. It is the clash between soul and body, between the ideal and the facts of everyday reality that makes man feel distorted and at quarrel with his own nature.

Finally, his personal attractions and his uncommon gift for strategy and leadership are also a source of trouble. Moses is the sort of man in front of whom people cannot remain indifferent. He must be loved or hated, admired or despised, regarded as a blessing or as a curse. The other characters draw to him in search of help or affection, and he remains cold; he wishes to advise and to help and is misunderstood. Through this mess of opinions he must find his own way and carry out his mission, which is not only his, but God's. And here lies the core of all the dilemmas of Moses. There comes a moment in which he opposes the Divine Will. God chooses to liberate Israel through the sacrifice of what is most precious to Egypt: the Royal Firstborn. Moses comes to feel as an assassin for the part he has in that scheme, and questions whether that is the way he shall always be regarded. He realizes he has failed to foresee the purpose of the plague.

This attitude is what makes of *The Firstborn* a tragedy of error and not of circumstances. Fry has given due importance to the latter, but has also investigated the character's personal conflicts. Thus he presents to us a play which stands midway between those two main classes I have mentioned, under which, according to Lucas, all tragedies are comprised. [16]

16 Lucas fundamented his studies on *The Poetics*. See *Tragedy* (Plot).

THE OUTLINE OF THE PLAY

The Firstborn is divided into three acts which consist of two or three scenes each. It is 1200 B. C., the time when the people of Israel suffered slavery in Egypt. When the curtain rises on the Royal Palace at Tanis, an Israelite worker, engaged in the construction of Seti the Second's tomb misses his footing and falls. A grave is dug for him in the sand at once. This incident, which is a highly dramatic one, motivates the exposition which ensues. The Pharaoh's sister, Anath, is greatly vexed by the whole affair, and since the victim is a Jew, she immediately associates him with her adopted son Moses. She tells her niece Teusret about her finding and adoption of him, his military exploits and his sudden flight to Midian, brought about by the killing of an Egyptian officer whom he happened to find beating a "Jewish bricklayer". Almost while Anath delivers this confidential information, Seti comes to her asking about Moses. He needs him to fight against the Lybians and affirm the security of Egypt. The royal heir, Ramases, whose popularity and unaffected simplicity disgust his father, returns to the palace after a morning spent fowling. He says he has seen two strange-looking Jews in the marshes, one of whom, at least, was a foreigner. This is only the last fact in a development which prepares the arrival of Moses, for at this point, he appears with his brother Aaron at the foot of the royal stairs.

Moses remains indifferent to Seti's hearty welcome. The dramatic tension rises as he speaks of his people who suffer slavery and forced labor under Seti's regime. His great claim, against the Pharaoh's power is the dignity and worth of the individual human being. Seti assumes this attitude to be the result of the stifling heat, and proposes to talk to Moses later. An element of suspense is introduced which is responsible for the high tension which prevails at the end of the scene, for Ramases is greatly impressed by the newcomer and wishes to visit him, in spite of Anath's warnings against his doing so.

At the beginning of Act. I Sc. II new characters are introduced.

Moses meets his sister Miriam in her tent. Her cordial welcome soon turns to sourness and reproach, because she dislikes the idea of the liberation of the Jews by Moses. Compared with the uneasiness and fear of past days when Hebrew leaders came to her tent secretly to plan revolt and were killed for it, slavery and hard work seem almost pleasant to her. She is afraid of trouble and endeavours to justifiy her indolence. But Moses disapproves of this attitude and explains why sorrow and death are significant in the prosecution fo a noble purpose, viz., the liberation of the oppressed. Prompted by this purpose Moses does not know yet what the means to its realization are, and feels himself trapped within his own shortcomings. Here a new interest is awakened, because Ramases appears in the tent-opening calling Moses "uncle" and proposing to serve as a mediator between his father and the Hebrews; but Moses must condescend to the Pharaoh's wishes first, gain his confidence and convince him of the advantages of freeing Israel. This plan, though very sensible, is immediately rejected by Moses. His personal conflict is that Egypt and Israel can never meet in his blood.

The interview is interrupted by the arrival of Shendi, Miriam's son. He is feverish and raving with the tremendous heat which has just caused the working Jews to strike. Shendi is afraid of the Egyptian overseers. He knows they will come to fetch him. This creates a tension which points forward to a minor climax when they break into the tent, and falls when Ramases intervenes and they withdraw leaving their victim unmolested.

This incident is interpreted by Aaron as a most favourable augury for the Hebrew cause. Ramases is the means to action Moses was looking forward to. But it does not solve the conflicts of Moses, because he refuses to use the Prince.

Act I Scene III is in the Palace. Seti has ordered the marriage of Ramases to the Syrian Princess Phipa, a most profitable alliance for the security and welfare of Egypt. On the other hand, Ramases tries to persuade his father of the advantage of winning the goodwill of Moses with something like a commission for his nephew. Teusret entertains the bridegroom-to-be with a ceremony. So far, there is almost no tension, but it rises suddenly when Moses comes in bearing a dead Israelite boy whom he ironically lays at Seti's feet as a symbol of what his rule means to the Hebrews.

When Seti says: "You know it wasn't done by me", Moses assails him with this biting argument:

> It was done of you. You'll not
> Escape from yourself through the narrows between
> By and Of.

The Pharaoh replies that such sacrifices are necessary to the development of civilization. Then Moses argues that his people, too, have a right to build their own civilization. The adversaries engage in violent discussion like two wrestlers in the ring; but the claim of Moses is based on the laws of nature, and at the end, which is a climactic one, the sky cracks with thunder and Moses asks whether Supernatural Powers have overheard men's affairs.[17]

In Act II Scene I, the atmosphere is one of restlessness and stupefaction. Strange events are occurring which make Aaron and Miriam feel displaced in the world they were familiar with. The Nile water has turned into blood. This Moses understands to be the answer of the Infinite to the needs of the Hebrew cause. In a state of mad excitement Shendi breaks in to announce that he has been made an officer, just like the Egyptian ones. Miriam is overwhelmed with joy, but Moses, who can see farther, suspects trouble and advises his nephew to refuse his commission. This only originates a new conflict, because Shendi turns against his uncle assuming him to be jealous of his welfare. Anath comes to fetch Moses, for the Pharaoh, frightened by the plagues, is likely to set the Hebrews free. But in the second scene of the same act, we find that this interview has only been the beginning of a weary hide and seek.

This scene takes place in the Palace again. Anath deplores the general situation and throws the blame of Egypt's breakdown on Seti. Seven times has the Pharaoh broken his promises of letting the Hebrews go, and about as many times have the plagues swept over Egypt. But Seti denies responsibility. He does not believe in the intervention of a Supreme Power and regards himself, just as every-

17 So far we have dealt with what Aristotle called the beginning and middle of a tragedy — a situation the consequences of which are precise, though its causes be not very obvious. The middle part is that in which the causes and effects are evident.

one else, as victims of ill luck and of a coincidence of such calamities as human beings are subject to.

The dramatic tension rises gradually, still more when Ramases arrives and begs his father to comply with the demands of Moses. But the Pharaoh remains like adamant. He chides his son and reproves his dissentient opinions; furthermore, he makes evident his intention of using him as an instrument for the fulfilment of his purposes. On his part, Ramases decides to follow his own plans, but amidst the defence of his argument he is compelled to bend to his father's will. At this time too, the play reaches a climax. An Israelite is heard crying under Shendi's whip. The effect is so discouraging to the young heir, that he gives up his pretensions and resigns himself to the Pharaoh's policy.

Moses comes to the palace again, and Seti refuses to see him. There is nothing the Hebrew leader can do for Egypt, since its lot now lies in the Hands of God. As he withdraws, a new plague, darkness, spreads over the sky. The end is a semi-climactic one.[18]

The first scene of Act III takes place in Miriam's tent. Moses, it appears, had ordered every Israelite to sacrifice a lamb and daub his door with its blood. Aaron has just finished performing this ceremony when Miriam, who had been lodging with Shendi at the officers' quarters, returns home, unable to endure any longer the sight of her son whipping the Jews. Aaron tells her about the exodus of Israel that night, but she says it is all madness. Shendi comes to call his mother back. Moses joins the group too, and both he and Aaron endeavour to convince mother and son to stay in the tent, since death threatens every firstborn outdoors. By now, the dramatic tension is high. Moses suddenly realizes what the plague means to the Royal heir. In a state of mental distress and bewilderment he leaves for the Palace. Shendi rejects the Hebrew in his blood and breaks through the tent-opening, but is unable to go any further because a furious sand storm blocks the way. When Aaron drags him in, it is too late; he has heard the noise of "The rending apart and shuddering to of wings." In a supreme effort to recover his Hebrew self, he breaks away into the dark, followed by Miriam. The end is a climactic one.

18 The third act corresponds to Aristotle's third part or conclusion, that is,

In Act III, Scene II, Anath and Teusret sit in the royal terrace watching "the dark for bridles." The young Princess looks forward to Phipa's arrival as a relief, a sort of magic charm to undo all evils. Seti decides to renounce the throne to Ramases as a desperate measure to secure the safety of the dynasty. Just as the Pharaoh hopes to have closed every door to catastrophe, crying and lamentation are distinctly heard in the streets. A dramatic tension higher than any other we had felt before is created and increases as Ramases becomes aware of Death coming beside him. Moses arrives breathlessly. He calls up everyone's life and strength to avert the mortal stroke. Nevertheless, Ramases crumples under the grasp of Death, just as Phipa crosses the Palace gateway and her arrival is greeted with trumpets. Thus the play reaches its most powerful climax.

As the stars begin to fade, Aaron stands at the head of twelve hundred thousand Israelites ready to follow their leader. Moses bids farewell to Egypt and to Anath, resigns himself to his fate, and having the intimate persuasion that the death of Ramases was meant to give life to others, he refers the solution of many intricate questions to a further interview, when both he and Anath "meet in the meaning of the world."

Though Fry has drawn the outline of his play from the Bible and makes reference to God as to a Superior Being and a Mysterious Force upon Whose Unfathomable Will the fate of man finally depends, the view he has of the main issues of the play has a human motivation. The Scriptures are concerned with the ways of God and with the ways of man as the latter are identified with the former. The Firstborn is largely concerned with the human will as it differs from God's, how it would change its course and finally how it subdues itself to a mysterious fate. Thence a feeling for human affairs and affections which have no reason to be in the Holy Book, because there, the lot of man rests unquestionably and confidently on the Superior Will.

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a situation which is the result of the middle part and which does not create a new conflict.

MA. ENRIQUETA GONZALEZ PADILLA

IMAGERY IN THE FIRSTBORN

In the following lines I shall endeavour to show how the different groups of images contribute as necessary and inevitable to the development of action, character and atmosphere.

Animal images may be divided into these groups: *Hard-working* animals, such as Moses talking of a power "Participating but unharnessed" (p. 32); Seti, "a pack-horse" loaded "to the last inch" (p. 63); the Israelites, compared to "blindfolded oxen", because they "also do the thing" they "cannot see" (p. 20). *Despising,* for instance, Shendi comparing Moses to a "fox" whose tail is "on fire" (p. 74), and thus illustrating his own meanness and misinterpretation of his uncle.

Contrasting with this view, in the royal household, where the braveness and military talent of Moses are recognized, he is identified with an animal that causes admiration: a lion. Seti knows that Israel, as represented by Moses is good match for his power: "Egypt is hard ground/Under his lion's walk", he says (p. 63). Teusret "saw him walking like a lion" (p. 63), and Ramases, in his youthful devotion for the Great General kept a buckle of his uniform: "the lion head" (p. 24).

The most remarkable images of *voracious animals* are intended to convey the sharpness of insoluble problems under the stress of dilemma. Such Moses:

> Egypt and Israel both in me together
> How would that be managed? I should wolf
> Myself to keep myself nourished. (p. 24)

or when wishing to express the force of evil which lurks under pleasant appearances:

> They tell me centuries of horror brood
> In this vivid kingdom of fertile mud. Do you think
> If we swung the rattle of conversation
> Those centuries would fly off like so many crows?
> They would wheel above us and come to feed again. (p. 24)

When the plagues sweep over Egypt, allusions are made to "glutted

jackals" and "vulture bearing boughs", and then, a concentration of *foul animals* is called up to create an atmosphere of disease, pain and utter distress.

It is remarkable to see how Fry has managed to make these images reflect the moral condition of his characters: "You tricked Moses — says Anath —

> And that night your promises
> Plagued our ears with a croaking mockery,
> With an unceasing frog-echo of those words
> Which had meant nothing...
>
> Our bodies and our brains can all become
> Slutted with lice between afternoon and evening...
> we became the dungheap, the lusted of flies
> Our pleasantness was fly-blown." (p. 56)

Thus a fusion of the moral and the physical worlds is achieved.

On three different occasions *birds* are associated with death and become a sort of *ill omen*: first, in the opening scene, when "a scare of birds" seems to be the only noticeable consequence of an Israelite's death. Second, dead birds coming out of the lynx's mouth in Miriam's dream, right before Shendi arrives sick in the tent. Third, Ramases' account of his killing a bird on a holiday, and the sombre reflections aroused by the incident:

> I watched his nerves flinching
> As they felt how dark that darkness was.
> I found myself trying to peer into his death.
> It seemed a long way down. The morning and it
> Were oddly separate,
> Though the bird lay in the sun: separate somehow
> Even from contemplation. (p. 9)

As it is, there is an evident anology between the bird and Ramases, and the whole incident anticipates the tragic end.

Other bird images, we shall see later, express *paradox* and *dilemma,* or a sense of injustice:

> We have a wildfowl quality of blood,
> Moses, temptation for sportsmen. (p. 22)

says Miriam recalling her brother of the bitter experiences of her

life. She is referring to "progrom", an organized massacre of a body or class, in this case, of Jew workers.

Art images are usually associated with pain, horror, fate or disillusion, for instance:

> Hell is old
> and you yourself sitting in sunlight
> Embroidered on it with your needle. (p. 65)

In order to convey the uneasiness of a secret meeting in her tent, Miriam uses a *music* image. She tells how everyone would become suddenly cold and shivery "As though a dagger had sung into the pole" (p. 20). Ramases also speaks of himself in terms of music, a series of images which, besides illustrating character, serve as a pathetic interlude between moments of high tension in Act II, Sc. II:

> My mind had lutes and harps and nodding musicians
> Who drowned my days with their casual tunes. They have [been
> Paid off by this honest hour. And now I hear
> My voice raised in deathly quiet. It's insufferable
> That my voice, without the accompaniment of good fortune,
> Should be so out of key, so faltering,
> So cracking with puberty. (p. 64)

Personifications have an important rôle in the economy and enlargement of the play implications. A large group refers to Egypt which is shown playing, loving and hating, suffering, sick, broken and distressed. Also Israel, Syria and Lybia are personified: "As lean as Israel" (p. 25), "gay Syria" (p. 80) as opposed to sad and unhealthy Egypt. This contributes to the tragic character of the play and makes us feel that the fate of nations is involved. The characters are symbolic of large human groups. Seti is identified with what he presumes to be Egypt's welfare; but he is really a dictator and subordinates all other things, even Ramases, to this fundamental purpose. This constitutes his tragic error:

> Under my final seal you shall take Egypt...
> And when they come, the factions

> The whorers and devourers, roaring over
> The rocks of the dynasty, they'll only find
> Perpetual Egypt. (p. 82)

Moses pursues social justice:

> I have business with Egypt, one more victory for her,
> A better one than Ethiopia:
> That she should come to see her own shame
> And discover justice for my people. (p. 15)

But in the tragic reversal Moses feels that Israel's liberation is achieved at the expense of Egypt: "Triumph I know; But Egypt broken was mother of my triumph" (p. 89). His victory brings no rejoicing, only suffering.

Other characters also share a public responsibility. Thus Anath:

> Teusret, we all, you will find,
> Belong to Egypt: our lives go on the loom
> And our land weaves. (p. 34)

A remarkable group of images is that of *Death personified* as it appears in the last scene: Death "a wrestler", "pushing through the gate/ Shoulder to shoulder with the bride", "mounting/ With an increasing terrible wake of cries to come to Ramases", "passing through" the hair, and "Feeling for the skull" of the young heir. The vividness and force of these images contributes largely to create a dramatic tension right bofore the dénouement.

Personification is also used in other miscellaneous groups of images: *Life* talking to Miriam "In most difficult words" (p. 22), or harnessing men "to its purpose" (p. 41); *fate* taking "a hammer/ To chip and chip" at Seti's confidence" (p. 58); "cunning pride", packing the characters "into a daily purgatory of apprehension" (p. 62); *time* "preparing" for the Jews "with a timely unrest" (p. 50), or heaping "age" over Seti "With a bony spade" p. 81); *time* seen as birds in Ramases' speech "Flocking to the banner of Tuesday" and "Looking about for Monday" (p. 9) which avoids, as time always does, the grasp of those which would have it quiet; *good* "strong enough to break out of the possessing/ Arms of evil" (p. 32); *eternity,* bearing witness to final hope (p. 89); *chaos,* giving its

"verdict" (p. 22); *Nature*, giving men "civilization in return for being understood" (p. 41); "the sky, hanging with every vigorous star/ On some action to be done before daybreak" in a night of great expectations (p. 72), all these and other elements are personified when wishing to illustrate character, create atmosphere, express complex emotions or clarify those statements which critics regard as the author's philosophy or metaphysical view.

By means of these images too, Seti's view of Moses is made evident when he wishes to have him back and misunderstands the whole affair:

> His deed lay down, knowing what it had lost him.
> Under the boredom of thorn-trees his deed cried out
> For Egypt and died. (p. 7)

A feeling of repentance which did not exist at all is expressed by the image.

A very remarkable image in this group is that in which Moses explains to Seti the consequences of pursuing a "perfect civilization" without regard for the individual human being:

> What have we approached or conceived
> When we have conquered and built a world?...
> What then? We have only put a crown on the skeleton.
> (p. 15)

Here Fry reveals a humanistic view of life, because of his great respect for man's welfare and improvement. He thinks all efforts to achieve civilization should rouse from the individual and be finally referred to him. This cannot be done unless freedom is secured for every human being. Civilization is the natural consequence of individual welfare. This might be regarded as the political message of the play, and to a certain extent reveals an attitude of protest against totalitarianism or any other form of government in which the State restrains individual freedom in an attempt to achieve other aspects of national preponderance, whether political, commercial or military. This view is supported by the fact that the first part of *The Firstborn* was staged in Liverpool while Fry was in the army during the second world war, and that although unable "to add a single

line'' to the unfinished manuscript of his tragedy, he used to spend a long time pondering over it while his company was stationed at Pershore in Worcestershire.[19]

The idea common among the English of a war fought between liberty and oppression, viz., free England against totalitarian Germany, might have impressed the poet and influenced him in his choice and interpretation of a biblical theme which reflected a similar situation.

Of course, individual freedom is not an absolute value, since political and social intercourse would not be possible without some elementary retraints to it.

Abstractions and concretions are some of the readier devices of Fry's dramatic technique: subtle emotions, hidden motives of human action, depths of thought or anticipation of future events are conveyed by the masterly stroke of an image. On one hand, by means of concretions, the spiritual and intangible is given "a local habitation and a name";[20] on the other, abstractions raise the play above the concerns of everyday life and give it human and universal significance. See for example how Moses' behaviour is given motivation in the images used by Anath in p. 6:

> 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 face after all.
> He knew his seed. And where my 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 remarkable fact about these images is that besides informing the readers of the events in Moses' life before the play, they make this information something essentially dramatic, — we are aware of a conflict of forces within Moses — and they are in keep-

19 See Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry, Album* (p. 20).
20 Shakespeare, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream.*

ing with his personality as seen by Seti [21] and as we are to see him when he appears for the first time.

Later, by means of these images too, we are made to understand the paradox of death and life. Speaking of those who passed away before him Moses says:

> Death was their question to us, and our lives
> Become their understanding or perplexity.
> And by living to answer them, we also answer
> Our own inpermanence. (p. 21)

Such views are proper to the philosophy of *The Firstborn* and are one of the fundamental ideas Fry has expressed in it.

They are proper to the play, because they are in keeping with the dramatic situation. We are in Act I, Sc. II. Miriam asks what is the meaning of recalling those who have already died. Their names bring back to her a past of sorrow and disappointment, their death has quenched her enthusiasm. As far as she can see, and speaking in terms of the material world, their sacrifice remains unproductive. But Moses regards their death as the precious spiritual heritage one generation hands to another. He thinks there is positive worth in the sacrifice of people who ruled their life and death according to some ideal, because those who come after them are impressed by the example, and may fulfill what their predecessors only planned. But men sometimes fail to perceive the spiritual heritage, and the ideal behind it does not influence their lives. Sometimes, confused by changes in circumstances they fail to see they have any obligation to sacrifice themselves in order to consummate a movement or ideal which, they consider, is not applicable in those changed circumstances.

What the importance of this image is we realize at the and of the play. The joy of Moses is mixed with sorrow, because God has found the sacrifice of Ramases necessary to the liberation of the Hebrews; but he is comforted by the thought that death becomes a source of life for those who begin to enjoy freedom.

This is only one of the many paradoxes a careful analysis detects in Fry's work. Because of its very nature, paradox, a form

21 See *Personifications.*

of thought in which elements of a contradictory order are brought together and become closely related, is exceedingly apt to express Fry's attitude towards the universe. His position is firmly established on the awareness of the importance of spiritual and mysterious values. It is one that rejects materialism as a reasonable explanation of existence, and looks beyond the world of actual phenomena for the origins or causes of existence. It is also one for which the universe, man, the coexistence of contending forces is far from bein clear — hence a sense of dilemma. Moses debates and ponders over many intricate problems for which he can find no solution. There is a whole range of images which, by means of painful and even violent implications or by vivid contrasts, convey the quarrel of Moses with existence. Main among these is the struggle with himself, his dilemma of flesh and soul.

Like most ambitious, far-reaching minds, Moses has a feeling of personal dissatisfaction. His soul feels crushed and hurt within the limitations of the body; it would go farther than the body can take it,

> I... the inconsiderable
> Life, born of such distances of suffering,
> And yet my spirit
> Paces the condemned cell, the human body,
> Incapable, weaponless, fettered with flesh, drinking
> The moisture of the walls. (p. 22)

Another important view is the perplexity Fry's characters are put to when they realize the coexistence of positive qualities which are identified with harmony in the universe such as beauty; with others which they consider a symptom of disorder and chaos, such as evil of any kind, especially cruelty. On one hand, they delight on the masterpieces of Creation, on the other, they revolt against pain, sorrow and death. The universe appears infinitely complex to them. As a result, life also seems incomprehensible. Such is the case of Thomas in *The Lady's not for Burning* as we shall see later, and of Moses in *The Firstborn,* with whom I am concerned now. Here, the symbol of dilemma is a bird of prey, in which Nature has united uncommon beauty together with the greediest appetite for death. (pp. 27, 28).

By means of concretions Moses refers to fate and to the transcendency of one deed in man's life. Bewildered at the unexpected turn affairs have taken when Ramases is mortally threatened by the last plague, Moses feels that if the boy dies, he will always bear the brand of an assassin:

> Does one deed
> Become our immortal shape? (p. 76)

Other important images among abstractions and concretions are those in which Moses speaks of himself as the instrument of a terrible Superior Power, the existence of which the classics would recognize as essential to tragedy. He represents God as drawing

> the supple bow
> Of his mystery, to loose a punishing arrow
> Feathered with his fate. (p. 65)

By this, he does not only mean the great catastrophe befalling the stubborn Egyptians, but also that the freedom of Israel will be achieved at the expense of his own personal sacrifice; viz., his relinquishing of a brilliant future as a general of the Egyptian army, and his devotion to a cause the outcome of which is still uncertain. Then, he refers to "the sound/ Of God" making "the crucial interchange of earth with everlasting" (p. 73), that is to say, to the Divine Powers transcending the sphere of the merely human and asking such questions that cannot be answered without reference to a life after this, in which all mysteries will be clarified. Finally, on p. 74, he confesses himself to be the "go-between for God":

> by the welding of what loved me and what harmed me
> I have been brought to that stature which has heard.

Egypt and Israel hate and love Moses: this duality of feelings has been the cause of personal grief, and has given him a wider outlook on life, so that he has been able to hear and understand what was incomprehensible to others.

Daily life images in this play are not very abundant, but a few are really very expressive. I will only comment on two which throw especial light on the characterization of the play.

These are Aaron comparing Moses to a "a gate without a key", which will "open when he will" (p. 24). In fact, Moses has a superhuman size which often makes him incomprehensible to Aaron, dangerous to Miriam and despicable to Shendi. He has "touched upon unknown truths" as Moody Prior would put it, and remains remote from his relatives.

Another image, a war one, shows Moses' awareness of something beyond explanation, and is an echo of Fry himself:

> Shall we live in mystery and yet
> Conduct ourselves as though everything were known?
> If, in a battle upon sea, we fought
> As though on land, we should be more embroiled
> With water than the enemy. (p. 47)

Sea images are associated with disaster and personal disintegration. Thus Seti to Moses:

> There is something shipwreck
> About you that will not do for peaceful places. (p. 13)

Moses is compared to *fire*:

> Your name runs like fire. (p. 18)

This is an expressive symbol to suggest how the Hebrew leader brings light to Egypt and how his fame spreads quickly causing pain to many.

On page 65 we find:

> the innocent as well as the guilty...
> the small farmer and the singing fisherman
> And the wife who sweeps; tomorrow's boy as well
> As yesterday's, all must go to your fire like sticks.

Here Anath refers to the crowd of people involved in Moses' scheme: "the innocent", like Ramases, and "the guilty", like Seti, the humble people whose lives have been ruined by the plagues, even the unborn children and the old people, says the Princess, are consumed as hurriedly and indiscriminatingly as sticks in the fire of an all-embracing purpose.

Anath's actual condition as contrasted with her youth is stated in this image:

> what a girl of fire
> I was, before I made these embers. (p. 3)

which expresses how of Anath's love and enthusiasm which she had in her youth, nothing is left but the memories of days gone by.

Miscellaneous Nature images usually convey a violent or painful movement. For instance, Anath's.

> I thought he (Moses) was a dust storm we had shut outside.
> Even now I sometimes bite on the grit. (p. 7)

which is very effective in respect to Anath's great sorrow and disappointment in losing Moses, and helps us to understand her outlook on life, always facing the past.

Seti speaks of a wind which "has hurled his throne under Ramases" (p 81); hail is said to be "Hard, metallic... beating with the ferocity of brainbright anger" (p. 56) and "the sand is rising and living" (p. 71).

The wilderness stands for solitude, oblivion and lack of love, that love which was impossible between Moses and Anath: "the air stands ready in the wilderness to take you in" (p. 88); "You have nothing now except the wilderness" (p. 89); but it is also said to have "wisdom" and lies on the way to peace (p. 88).

Besides Teusret's song, to which I shall make reference later, there are other *imaginary images,* some of which convey a sense of the supernatural and mysterious. For example, "God... Found and parted the stone lips of this/ Egyptian twilight in the speech of souls (p. 73); "Our strategy is written on strange eternal paper" (p. 47); "Behind/ The door that shuts us into life there is/ An ear" (p. 43).

Religious images in *The Firstborn* are exceedingly few. In fact, I only find one which might be considered as religious. It is used by Seti: "The purgatory may save you/ From damnation" p. 62), and illustrates his all-important purpose of sparing no pains in order to defend the country from what he believes to be an absolute disaster.

Images drawn from *sensuous perceptions* have a decidedly disquieting or painful quality: "a pair of women with their nerves uncovered" (p. 2); a "drum of despair" (p. 13); "The thick of Chaos" "smelt in the air" (p. 22); "The terrace crackling with dying locusts" (p. 54); "black coincidence" (p. 50); "eyes the colour of anger" (p. 63); "a wild cry that ripped the darkness" (p. 81); "the noise of breaking lives" (p. 83); "the crying of our past" (p. 89), and others, which reinforce the development of the tragic action and are in keeping with images of sickness and pain.

I will now turn to the more interesting subject of *key images.* These, in *The Firstborn* are drawn from light and darkness, bodily action, sickness and pain and are much related among all these different groups. Their use is one of the distinguishing characters between *The Firstborn* and the rest of Fry's work. I shall endeavour to explain what different connections they have with the main issues of the tragedy.

Darkness is associated with a whole range of subjects: *with death,* as when Ramases tells about the bird he killed in the marshes:

> At last he could feel the uninterrupted darkness
> Of and addled egg. (p. 9)

a passage which should be related to the last scene of the play, when Ramases says:

> What is it Darkness? Why are you coming now?
> For whom this time? (p. 83)

The last words prove that there is a conscious analogy between the two scenes.

In the anxiety of a fight which he fears will be no good Moses says:

> More life!
> The dark
> Is already beside us. (p. 85)

and when Teusret announcing Phipa's coming uses the same image,

> The dark's not dangerous
> Now,

Ramases replies:

> But still dark. (p. 86)

Also a *moral death* is referred to as something dark:

> I am the Hebrew
> Smitten out of the shadow of that prince

says Moses when explaining how he killed his Egyptian self (p. 12).

Darkness and pain are akin. The pyramid, which is a material cause of suffering, is referred to it. Early in the play, Anath, who is conscious of the pains endured by the Hebrew labourers, says that

> It will cast a pretty [22] shadow when it's done. (p. 1)

Moses explains how he heard his "blood weeping", "The sobbing at night below the garden" (p. 13). When animal images are intended to convey pain or anguish they are associated with blindness or shadow. [23] Shendi compares his life as a bricklayer in the maddening heat of the sun to "the appearance of hell" (p. ..8).

Error, superstition and disaster are dark or blind. Moses:

> A man has more to be than a Pharaoh.
> He must dare to outgrow the security
> Of partial blindness. (p. 14)

In Act II, Scene II, Seti blames Anath for being afraid of the plagues because her "mind" is

> hung
> With a curtain of superstition. (p. 58)

When darkness covers the sky in the same scene, we find these images:

> A sea of cloud, blindblack,
> Is pouring on to the beaches of the sun,

22 With the meaning of large or considerable.
23 See Animal Images.

and an allusion to Seti's moral blindness again:

> The hand of God has gone across his eyes
> And closed all life upon itself. Egypt
> Goes inward, by a gate which shuts more heavily than sun-
> Leaving man alone with his baffled brain. [set,
> Only Seti can let the sun free again. (pp. 66, 67) [24]

Thus the dark is an ill omen which points forward to catastrophe. Thunder, which is akin to it, is found many times serving a similar function, for instance at the end of what may be considered as the prologue (first part of Act I, Scene I), just before Moses appears:

> Seti.—Was that thunder?
> Anath.—They're dumping new stone for the pyramid.

If we remember that it was the pyramid that brought Moses back to Anath's mind, we realize how consistent is the use of figurative speech.

By consistency here I mean that all images in the prologue are made to correspond with those in the following scenes, so that there is no waste, all loose ends being carefully tied up so as to give the impression of a closely integrated whole.

Thunder is also heard "cracking" at the end of Act I. Then it is made to symbolize *the alliance of Moses with the Divine,* which at times seems perplexing to the Hebrews:

> What league have we the human with the greater
> Than human? Am I given the power
> To do what I am?
>
> (From horizon to horizon the sky is beaten into thunder).

Throughout the play, *Moses is associated with darkness,* as when wishing to avoid talking about him Anath says:

"We'd better find our morning again and use what's left," (p. 3), an image we find recurring in the last scene:

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24 This scene is the peripety. In the Aristotelian sense, that is the central part of tragedy in which a character's action turns against himself as a result of the tragic error (hamartia), which prevents him from discerning what is convenient for his salvation. Under the circumstances, the tragic hero does exactly what he should not have done to avoid catastrophe. This is the case here, where Seti, by insisting in keeping the Jews, unchains the plagues and brings about his son's death.

Seti. — You found us in the morning
Leave us with what remains of the night. The day
You found us in is over. (p. 88)

Miriam finds her brother incomprehensible and almost unwholesome, and refers to him as to a "dark mind" (p. 53). Later, when the gulf between them has become unsurmountable she tells Aaron:

If you want to ferret in unlighted places
Penetrate into the mind of Moses. (p. 68)

In this scene, which is the I in Act III, darkness becomes a sort of omnipresence; all the characters are aware of it. Now, more than ever, they identify it with Moses.

Aaron. — I have become
Almost docile to his darkness... this midnight of Moses
(I call it to myself his midnight) will clarify
Into right.

The concentration of images of darkness in Act II, Scene I, is worth mentioning because it creates *a highly dramatic atmosphere.* Throughout this scene darkness has a double value, since it serves to express both the tragic expectations of the characters and their anticipations of freedom and new life. In the first case, it makes us feel the imminence of death; in the second, it is identified with the lamb's blood and stands like a way full of mystery and uncertainty, but leading to light.

as the night turns
A different life pitched above our experience
Or imagining, is moving about its business. (p. 73)

But the two meanings are hardly separate, and this double implication of the symbol is a clue to the play, since freedom, according to the idea of the play, cannot be attained except through pain, death and sorrow.

Scene I in Act III is intimately related to Scene II. The use of darkness images in both is a cumulative one which starts by what one might call a simple hint, and gradually becomes more definite and terrific. It culminates in Shendi's death with the cry of "Shadows, eagles!" in his lips (pp. 78, 79).

Continuing this cumulative development, in Scene the II darkness slowly becomes indentified with death. Before Ramases says, "What is it, Darkness? Why are you coming now?" (p. 83) we find Teusret watching the dark with an apprehensive eye (p. 80). "I know you dislike me to be afraid of it", she says. Anath's "That was a wild cry that ripped the darkness" (p. 81) is the next step in specifying that great calamity which at the beginning of the scene was something vague and indistinct.

Light images are opposite in their meaning to those of darkness. *Freedom, remembrance, fame and peace are bright;* for example, when Aaron says that Moses "manipulated/ Man upon man into consciousness", the image suggests a sort of enlightenment of those who were living in slavery (p. 70). Ramases compares his "memory" of Moses to "a man speaking... On a noonday terrace" (p. 23). It is interesting to see how for him, Moses is bright, since he identifies him with the maturity he lacks in his adolescent self: "you/ Are clear and risen roundly over the hazes" (p. 27); not like Anath or the others, with frustration, trouble or a calamity of some sort.

Often *light and darkness stand side by side offering a very effective contrast.* For example, when expressing a supposed duality in Moses: "I become oblivious to day and night" (p. 25). Allusions to Phipa are intermingled with references to the dark. "Tonight. She must dismount into a light/ Of welcome" (p. 80). "But still dark./ And we have to enact/ A daylight for this unsuspecting beauty." (p. 86). *Beauty and love,* we shall have occasion to corroborate in *The Lady's not for Burning* and in *A Phoenix Too Frequent* suggest themselves to Fry as something bright. There are akin symbols in this description of Phipa and that of Jennet in *The Lady's not for Burning,* (Act III) but of course, the latter lacks the deep pathos and hopelessness which are due to tragedy.

> Teusret. — Ramases, she has come so gifted for you
> With a fable of rubies, and pearls like seeds of the moon.
> Doesn't their brightness come to you? Do they glimmer
> Nowhere into the cupboards of your sleep? (p. 89)

Light and darkness images are used as a principle of order in the

dramatic structure. There is an image which stands as a landmark in the development of the play. It belongs to the peripety (Act II, Sc. I) when "Seti twists to have his way". It is Anath, with her penetrating eye who recognizes and defines the tragic error:

> Oh
> The gods, how we fumble between right and wrong,
> Between our salvation and our overthrow,
> Like drunk men with a key in the dark who stand
> At the right door but cannot get out of the cold. (p. 62)

In the tragic reversal of the play, light, which had stood for something positive is seen as life contrasting with death and powerless in front of it,

> What's that movement? The light touching his ring (the ring of Ramases).
> Is that all that light can do? Here are his eyes.
> Play here, as you did. Why will you waste on a stone? (p. 87)

But in the catharsis, at the end of the play, it recovers its former symbolism. It averts the dark and brings consolation.

> Anath.—What is left
> To call to me?
>
> Moses.—The morning, which still comes
> To Egypt as to Israel, the round of light
> Which will not wheel in vain. (pp. 89, 90)

Body and Bodily Action images are abundant. They serve to describe *God,* "The God of the Hebrews", "the whirler of suns and moons" (p. 74), who keeps "dearly retained in his palm, the soul" (p. 66), who "Has stooped beside Israel" and "wept" the life of Moses "like a tear of passion/ Onto the iniquity of Egypt" (p. 66).

These images also show *Moses* as seen by the other characters. As joy and surprise coming to a young girl's life: "And when I found my hands and crowded him/ Into my breast he buried like a burr" (p. 4); but more frequently as something which must be left aside because it has hurt someone or is dangerous:

Anath.—Leave him alone to bite his lips. (p. 8)

and Miriam, jealous of the foster mother:

A king's daughter
Swallowed him and spat out this outlaw. (p. 20)

Most images of *sleep* refer to Ramases. Early in the play he is found saying:

Either you must sleep like to dead
Or something violent must happen. (p. 8)

In her sleep Teusret cannot find him (p. 33), and in the last scene, Seti speaks of giving him "dreams" with "both hands" (p. 81). As he says this he is not aware of the tragic irony of his words; then, he also tells him:

You have slept into a throne and an empire
While time has begun to heap age over me. (p. 81)

So when Anath calls him "my pharaoh of sleep" (p. 87), because he is dead, we feel that Ramases has finally come upon that state which fate had assigned to him since the very beginning.

Other images in this group help to create and emphasize the *atmosphere of oddity and estrangement* brought about by the plagues:

Something unnatural has come awake
Which should have slept until time was finished. (p. 44)
Creation's mutehead is dissolving. (p. 46)

But most images in this classification have a painful character, and so they should more properly be included in the next group.

Pain, Sickness and Health images are to be found throughout the play since the first scene. They help to define *death,* which is seen in a bird's "flinching nerves" (p. 9), in Phipa's supposed "great sighs" which leave no more air "to breathe" (p. 87), "in a tortured gale, a gale of crying moving through the streets" (p. 83), in someone's cry which is "password to a grave" (p. 1).

Then, many images which refer to *Moses* have much of the painful and deadly about them: no one could "sting him out" of Anath's arms (p. 4); he is "the Hebrew... Whipped off the sanded tongue of that prince of Egypt" (p. 12); there is a "crippling ghost" that intrudes between him and Seti; and many others, especially those expressing dilemma. [25]

Then, Moses is also spoken of in terms of sickness and health. Anath has an attitude towards him which reflects the feeling for someone whose adoption has been fondly remembered and bitterly regreted; but on the whole, she advises her relations to avoid him:

> I would rather infect him (Ramases) with something less
> Than the blood of Moses. [dubious

She tells her brother.

Since Moses has unchained the plagues which poison Egypt, Shendi makes this remark:

> I beg your pardon if he no longer
> Rates himself as a man after living through
> The pestilences as though he owned them. (p. 72)

For Miriam and Shendi, the tragic error consists in this misinterpretation of Moses. Suffering makes them nearsighted, instead of renderring them more penetrating and capable of understanding like Anath and Teusret, or elevating their life above everyday realities in search of mystery, like Moses. It turns them cold, indifferent and sceptic; they have nothing to hand their fellow-men but meanness and spite:

> how can we be so scrupulous
> In a life which, from birth onwards, is so determined
> To wring us dry of any serenity at all? (p. 72)

For Aaron, who although lagging behind the thoughts of Moses, faith in his brother is the only hope of salvation, the madness of Moses seems to be a kind of "extended sanity." (p. 70).

25 These I have mentioned under different classifications: animals, abstractions and concretions.

On the other hand, ever since the first interview of Moses with Seti a current of pain, sickness and health images is introduced. *Israel's blood,* Moses tells the Pharaoh is heard

> weeping... Under your shoes, under your smile, and under
> The foundations of your tomb. (p. 13)

It is a "misery" "flowing" through the sick body of Egypt. "Let that be clean/ First," says Moses, "and then your flesh may heal" (p. 41). But Seti will not take advice; he finds slavery necessary to the welfare of his country, and thus the disease, which had been latent emerges to the surface, and Anath feels it:

> You tricked him (Moses), and that feculent moment
> Filthied our blood and made of us a nation
> Loahsome with boils. You had stirred up the muck
> Which the sweet gods thought fit to make us of
> When they first formed man. (p. 56)

For Moses, exodus of his people is equivalent to childbirth:

> —When do they say
> The mountains last had rain?
> Miriam.—Nine months ago.
> Moses. — It's time for parturition. (p. 19)

The fact that Egpyt is always feminine and often symbolized by Anath contributes to give consistency to these images.

I want to refer now to the remarkable technique of the first part of Act I, Scene III which might be properly called Teusret's, since she has infused her youthful sensibility into the poetry and tender pathos of these lines. There is a development starting when the curtain rises on the Palace which points forward to a culmination when Teusret sings. The pervading note is one of doubt and vague apprehension. Symbols serve to emphasize the melacholy of the constant flow of life.

In the first place, we find Ramases worried by the passing nature of time:

> What is this 'now', the moment we're now crossing?
> Can this truth vanish?

The counterpart of these reflections is Teusret herself; she is also restless, eluding those who seek her. The feeling is one of emptiness:

> Ramases.—Where is she?
> Anath. —Everywhere.
> Put your hand in one place, she is already
> Beating her wings in another.

Her strange dreams anticipate the end.

> The door on the other side of the room is always
> Closing behind you, and the room is empty — I never
> Come to you,

she tells her brother, thus suggesting the separation between the living and the dead.

So far, Teusret, who is unconscious of the symbolism of her dreams, has found life gay and uncomplicated:

> I had a riddle to ask you. Fareti
> Taught it to me.

The news of Ramases' betrothal is her first sorrow; she fears things will look painful in the new perspective.

> He will be changed. The days will be different
> And I shall be the same. How shall I be happy then?

Seeking to give an outlet to the overflowing emotion within her, Teusret chooses to entertain the bridegroom, and flowers are proper to the occasion. They stress the tender note between herself and her brother. The way Teusret speaks about them somehow reminds one of Ophelia, because the latter also resorts to flowers in her grief and makes them symbolic: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts." [26] Teusret says:

> What is he bridge to be crossed, I wonder
> From a petal to being a wing or a hand?

Flowers, like time pass quickly:

---

26 Hamlet Act IV; Sc. 5.

They're shattering already.

Teusret needs music, another analogy with Ophelia; but can she "remember the key?" that is to say, the way to follow under the different circumstances? The song which ensues is admirably in keeping with the character and the occasion, and exceedingly suggestive in its impreciseness. This we realize as we disentangle its various threads and recognize the leading images we have been studying in such expressions as,

> Step over this shadow and tell me (*shadow,* death, Moses);
> And my heart will make a ring
> Sighing in a circle (*ring* for the bride; *sighing,* pain, death)

and especially the last two verses:

> O fortune, fortune
> So changed against the sun,

which emphasize the ironic reversal, since Ramases dies just when Phipa is almost at the door, that is to say, when he was supposed to have reached the utmost happiness.

Another instance of imagery accumulating and serving the dramatic ends of the play we find in Act I, Scene I. The prologue paves the way for Moses. It creates an atmosphere of expectation. The rest of the scene, the agon or conflict, portrays him to us in a way which is thoroughly consistent with what we have learned about him. Allusions to death, heat, darkness, pain, light or bodily action are correspondent throughout the scene, and up to the end, where Anath's

> Do you remember, Teusret?
> A man fell from the pyramid — only this morning.

gives us a precise idea of all the things that have happened in such a small space of time.

In *The Firstborn* more than in any other play except maybe *A Sleep of Prisoners,* Fry has succeeded in giving his characters human and universal significance. This is probably due to the fact

that this is his only tragedy, and therefore, he has dealt here with the subjects which have always been regarded as the most general and transcendental in literature: sorrow and death.

The theme of the play is much akin to the early religious forms of drama, such as Sophocles', in which some critics [27] have traced the reproduction of a ritual sacrifice. Thus, in *Œdipus Rex* we find a scapegoat, Œdipus himself who cognizant of his situation of husband and son of the same woman, must undergo expiation to save his people from the wrath of the gods.

In *The Firstborn* there is also a victim, Ramases, whose immolation is necessary that Egypt may avoid the plagues and that the Israelites achieve their freedom. Nevertheless, the victim in *The Firstborn* is a purer and more innocent one than Œdipus. He is not the material doer of the damage nor is he to be blamed for his lack of understanding, although both expiate their parents' sins. Therefore, the grief and pathos in *The Firstborn* is a deeper and more piercing one.

In many ways, Anath may be said to be the counterpart of Tyresias, the soothsayer. Being blind and destitute of worldly power, he has developed an inner sight which makes it possible for him to foretell the future, though not to change it. Anath too, has closed her eyes to the joys of this world, but sorrow has given her wisdom, and though no such clear prophet as Tyresias she instinctively knows what is going to happen, looks beyond pleasant appearances, warns, advises, but cannot avert catastrophe.

Seti's place is intermediate between Layus and Œdipus. Like the former, he has a personal blame because he enslaves the Jews and forces them to lead an inhuman life; but he resembles te latter because he is a victim of fate. He rules tyrannically because his father did so, because he thinks that is the only way of saving Egypt. Even in his political zeal Seti is like Œdipus. The King of Thebes is willing to defend the welfare of his city, and when told by Tyresias that he is the one who brings about punishment rages and dismisses the soothsayer.

Teusret too, because of her interest in her brother's affairs and

27 Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater.* pp. 13-42.

her devotion to him reminds one of the Antigone in the Sophoclean plays.

Moses is by far the most complex character in *The Firstborn*. His functions, if we choose to insist on the religious ritual, are akin to Creon's. He is the go-between for God and men; therefore, he is a priest. He has been appointed by God to perform a sacrifice and liberate his people. With unyielding perseverance he must eliminate all evil, till justice be done to the oppressed and conditions of moral health prevail. But that is only one side of Moses; the other one has no parallel in *Œdipus* Rex because the relations of Moses to the other characters are of a very peculiar order; his breeding and his vocation to leadership are unique. He was the Jew among the Egyptians, saved by the Pharaoh's daughter whom he loved as a son. Then, he led the Egyptian army, and returning victorious, children hailed his name and beheld him with admiration. One of these was Ramases. Moses is aware of the honesty and nobility of the Royal Heir. His sorrow is greater because he realizes that the man in Ramases is not ripe yet, and because the heir's life was taken when he was only a brilliant promise. In fact, if we analyze the character of Ramases, we find that he is a youth hesitating between child and man, confused within himself in search of his definite personality. He has just made the adolescent's discovery of the meaning of time, and ponders over it. He wishes time stood still, feels its passage means less life, maybe death approaching. It is no common sympathy that brings Ramases to Miriam's tent in Act I. It is rather an effort to affirm and clarify his own personality through the friendship of one stronger than himself. Ramases remembers the military exploits of Moses. The Hebrew leader represents an ideal of strength and courage that kindles the youth with enthusiasm. Out of his admiration spring confidence and generous offerings. All these Moses cannot encourage nor accept, but he certainly understands and appreciates; hence his distress when he realizes the purpose of the plague. At that moment, the priest and the man meet and struggle in Moses. So far, though his mission had already been a difficult one, he had overlooked personal motives and cast his lot definitely on the Hebrew side. Now, that he realizes who the victim will be he feels the sacrifice unbearable. Moreover, he does not understand why such a sacrifice should be necessary. Thence his revolt

against the Divine scheme, his effort to avoid the consummation. That is why Derek Stanford has said that *The Firstborn* is the conflict between freedom and authority. The human freedom acting, loving, preserving in its own way. God's authority leading men to obey His Will, choosing precisely that victim, and thus opening the door to purification and new life.

The very nature of his conflict, that intermediate position between God and man, his self-sacrifice and resignation gives Moses a superhuman size. Anath, Seti, Ramases and Teusret also are upon this level, because transfixed and elevated by grief. Aaron represents the simply human category. Sometimes, his functions are akin to those of a chorus, summarizing events, commenting, showing fear or suspicion, giving information, for instance at the beginning of Act III, Scene I, where he shows what the average Israelite may think of Moses.

Miriam and Shendi lie below the human level. They are mean people, easily put out of the battle-field either by joy or sorrow. They lack convictions and spiritual equilibrium.

A quality which strikes us about *The Firstborn* is what Derek Stanford has called "the sense of the behind life".[28] As we read the play, we get an intimate knowledge, of the characters' life before their actual condition. In this respect, imagery has also been most useful to Fry. It is enough to give two specimens at random:

> small-talk
> Has to block a draught up ten years old. (p. 11);
>
> Ten years long he has lugged
> This dead thing after him. (p. 7)

This gives the characters an extra-dimension. The images are the leaves of an old photographic album, which open and lead into the past.

28 Derek Stanford, *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation*, p. 116.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING

I

THE OUTLINE OF THE PLAY

THE action represented in *The Lady's not for Burning* takes place in the little market town of Cool Clary at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The author is not specific about the date, and bases, so to speak, the plot of his play on a convict's confession to a false murder in February 1947: "In the past I wanted to be hung. It was worth while being hung to be a hero, seeing that life was not really worth living." [1] The counterpart of such hero in Fry's comedy is Thomas Mendip, a discharged soldier "in his late twenties perhaps" whom we find breaking into the Mayor's house in a typical April afternoon.

Since the very beginning, in his talk to Richard, the Mayor's clerk, Thomas strikes us as an exceedingly eccentric fellow. He declares he is weary of life, and desires by all means to be hanged so as to get rid of the bothersome load of the body.

This obsession being the pivot of his feelings and thoughts, he has developed an open-mindedness and cynicism which are in deep contrast with the idiosyncrasies of other characters. This is made evident when Alizon Eliot, an unsophisticated girl who is hoping to marry Humphrey Devize, the Mayor's nephew, arrives from the convent and talks about her engagement. "Men — she says — are strange.

1 *The Lady's not for Burning*, p. 2.

It's almost unexpected to find they speak English." Richard feels drawn to her very soon, and tells her about his origin, how he "wasn't born", but "come-across" by a priest "in a poor-box".

Humphrey's brother, Nicholas, full of mud an dishevelled comes to welcome Alison and starts complimenting her. The stars, he says, have favoured him with predictions of a sure and immediate marriage to his brother's fiancée. This, of course, has caused a fisticuffs between Humphrey and himself; and Nicholas, who is in a showy and pompous mood, easily describes it as a world affair comparable only with the fall of Babylon.

Soon after this, Thomas meets Margaret Devize, the young boys' mother. He addresses her in a way she cannot understand, for she is frivolous and superficial, and the reflections of Thomas deal with the iniquity of mankind and the hopelessness of expecting the world may improve. With these matters Margaret has never been concerned, nor does she care to be, busy as she is thinking whether Humphrey, who had been knocked down on the flower bed by Nicholas in the famous fisticuffs I have just referred to, and who is now being carried in, will find her "composed, sufficiently placid and unmotherly" as though she had taken no interest in her son's affairs.

As soon as Humphrey comes in, rivalry for Alizon starts anew, and when Thomas, exasperated by everybody's disinterest in his hanging makes to the door to fetch the Mayor, the latter comes in, "afflicted with office" and "blowing his nose". His presence, nevertheless, does not become the "gateway to eternal rest", as Thomas had supposed, for the Mayor has a fine speech to oppose the soldier's pretensions:

> Dear sir, I haven't yet been notified
> Of your existence. As far as I'm concerned
> You don't exist. Therefore you are not entitled
> To any rest at all, eternal or temporary.

Behind the comic effect one senses the shot of Fry's irony aimed against the morosity and incongruity of the law.

Discussion between the Mayor and Thomas goes on, interrupted every now and then by noisy and humorous explosions of the former's catarrh. Finding his arguments ineffective, Thomas invents false murders which he declares having perpetrated against two villagers:

one is hardly worth mentioning, he says, but the other is sure to draw attention, since Skipps, the victim, a rag-and-bone merchant, is very well known in town. Nevertheless, the Mayor will not listen, and Thomas ends the scene explaining the reasons of his uncommon loath of existence:

> I've been unidentifiably
> Floundering in Flanders for the past seven years,
> Prising open ribs to let men go
> On the indefinite leave which needs no pass.
> And now all roads are uncommonly flat, and all hair
> Stands on end.

This, to a certain extent, reflects a modern situation; that of soldiers in the post-war. The lack of ideals and weariness they experience before they return to normal life.

In the last part of Act I, an unexpected visit is announced: a witch has come to see the Mayor. If she is a witch, says Nicholas, there has never been such an exceedingly attractive young witch in the world. Nicholas is eager to let her in, in spite of his mother's objections who is shocked to think of the idea.

In the scene which ensues, Jennet Jourdemayne, for that is the witch's name, makes an appeal for protection. She has been the victim of public superstition and misunderstanding; of people who believe she has changed "a man into a dog", assuming her to have dealings with the devil. The whole affair is so absurd, that in spite of her fear Jennet is led to laugh at it. Yet, she ignores that she has come among superstitious people, and what is worse, that her beauty and her property are terribly dangerous and disturbing. As she comes in, Margaret can "almost feel the rustling-in of some/ Kind of enchantment"; as to the Mayor, Tyson, he knows that "her property goes to the town if she's a witch." Furthermore, she used such graphic terms in describing the tricks she is accused of, that she unwillingly led the Mayor to look for unorthodoxy and witchcraft in her words. If she is not a witch, says Tyson, she would fain be one, for she intentionally delights in diabolical imaginations. Therefore, she must be burnt.

This puts Thomas on the verge of despair. Affairs are complicated when Humphrey announces that a minor revolution is taking

place in the street. It seems that Thomas, before coming to Tyson's house, had been spreading all around the tale of his murders. People say he is the Devil, and easily associate him with superstition: "He's got a girl in his toils, a witch called Jennet."

When the Chaplain, a timid romantic fellow comes in, gossip has gone further: "It is hard to imagine/ Why the poor girl should turn Skipps into a dog." Taking advantage of the fact that he is being identified with the Devil, Thomas whispers into Humphrey's ear that doomsday will take place within the next twenty-four hours. Tyson finds no better solution than to send the "hypothetical" devil and witch to prison.

By this time, Thomas has, even against his will, begun to feel deep sympathy for Jennet. He tries to cheer her spirits by assuring her that life "isn't worth the candle" and ends the act begging the Mayor to hang him, before he falls in love with her.

In Act II we find Tyson and the town's justice, Tappercoom, perplexed at what they think to be an extraordinary behaviour of the prisoners. They have put Thomas to torture, and nevertheless he has not stopped confessing he is a murderer; as to Jennet, nothing can persuade her to confess that she is a witch.

The brawl in the street has turned out to be a sort of public protest against Satan and the witch, and a preparation for the day of Judgment. The crowd, says Margaret, have just looked at "a shooting-star" falling somewhere right over the Mayor's house, and have taken for granted that it is a heavenly sign of catastrophe.

Wishing to be a help of some kind, the Chaplain, who has just awaked from a placid dream, proposes to lead Thomas to a denial of his guilt by means of more human proceedings. He suggests that he be invited to join the party in which Alizon's engagement to Humphrey will be celebrated that very night.

But by this time a plan has developed in Tyson's mind. He sends Richard to fetch the prisoners to the room. Nicholas and Humphrey, it appears, had been sitting with them in jail for a long time. Very likely, the two brothers wished to be with Jennet, and were feeling jealous of each other. Now both come in. Nicholas has a gash on his forehead. "The young fool climbed on the wall and addressed the crowd." But the crowd were not in a mood for speeches, and just

as the orator encouraged them to the public discussion of world affairs, he was hit by a brick.

Tyson now draws attention to the execution of his plan. Tappercoom, the Chaplain, his elder nephew and himself, will eavesdrop in the adjacent room, as the prisoners, suspecting nothing, make a clear breast to each other in the Mayor's office.

It is done as proposed. Thomas beholds the sky through the window and is almost sunk into ecstasy at the beauty of the sunset. Jennet cannot think of anything else except her fears. How she longs for her world, the "wild soft world of half a day ago!". Her thoughts are fixed on the fire awaiting her the next morning. This is precisely what Thomas cannot understand. How can she "be so serious/ About such a mean allowance of breath as life is? Why waste it complaining? Better laugh. But Thomas' laughter is not that of the man who wishes to forget death in pleasure. It is rather that of the sceptic, who instead of fighting for the conquest of his "hopping greeds and passions" mocks man and creation. He does not fight against evil any more, because he assumes it to be unconquerable. But Jennet has not such despondent, sceptic views. On the contrary, she professes to be practical and to find joy in living. Her father, she says, was an alchemist of distinction who gave time and countless efforts to the purpose of changing the matter of the world. He never saw his fond dream realized. But Jennet does not consider his plans utterly vain, for after his death, while dusting the laboratory, she happened, by a series of strange coincidences, to throw certain mixtures on some copper coins, which some days later proved to have been turned into solid gold. Nevertheless, this most wonderful occurrence was to her hardly worthy of notice, since the way it happened was quite unpredicted and not worth while investigating.

But on the other hand, a young girl like Jennet, living all by herself in a house which had belonged to an alchemist and speaking French to her poodle, was almost as much as people could see without smelling witchcraft. "Then — says Jennet — you must know

> I have a peacock which on Sundays
> Dines with me indoors. Not long ago
> A new little serving maid carrying the food
> Heard its cry, dropped everything and ran,

Never to come back, and told all whom she met
That the Devil was dining with me."

All this Thomas finds fairly clear; what he will never be able to do is to regard nature, heaven and hell, the universe at large, as plain, endless successions of cause and effect. He senses a mystery behind the facts of everyday reality, a mystery which escapes human understanding and arouses from his consideration of man's way of life. Man lives because others die. He destroys other creatures to perpetuate himself. How can he then feel at ease?

Jennet does not care for such mysteries. Ever since she met Thomas she cannot help feeling a growing affection for him, which worries the soldier to the point of alarm. He endeavours to convince Jennet of the uselessness of entertaining a love for him. Man is worthless, he says. Thomas seems to forget the immortality of the soul, and fixing on the material shortcomings of humanity declares that he is nothing but "best of beasts", bound to end in corruption. This only leads Jennet to a warmer confession of her love, in such terms, that the eavesdroppers assume it to be an evident confession of diabolical witchcraft. Accordingly, she is condemned to the fire, despite the protests of Thomas who demands "fair play/ For the criminal classes", and roars and rages when sentence is delivered on him:

Found guilty
Of jaundice, misanthropy, suicidal tendencies
And spreading gloom and despondency. You will spend
The evening joyously, sociably, taking part
In the pleasures of your fellow men.

This Thomas is finally forced to accept under condition that Jennet too, be invited to the festival.

Act III takes place later the same night. Unable to join his fellow men, Thomas calls Humphrey and Nicholas to join with him in "a toast of ennui". There is an atmosphere of tedium pervading the first part of Act III which is broken when Jennet, who had been dressing for the ball, appears "bright with jewels, and twenty years exquisitely out of fashion". The moon too, shines bright, and Thomas

does not fail to notice how there is something more romantic and less matter of fact as regards Jennet. Is it death, or otherwise the subtle work of love what has raised the lady above her "Essential Fact?" Jennet herself is not quite sure. "But you mustn't hinder me —she says —

> not now. I come
> Of a long-lived family and I have
> Some sixty years to use up almost immediately.
> I shall join the sucking pig.

At the sight of their dazzling prisoner, Nicholas and Humphrey feel thoroughly revived. Leaning on one's arm, and escorted by the other, Jennet passes on to the next room, just as the Chaplain begins to play his merry viol.

Thomas comes across Tyson and recriminates him for his cruel purpose of burning Jennet. The old man is evidently troubled. He has suffered an emotional upheaval because of the girl's attractions, and wishes to burn her at once so as to avoid temptation.

Ever since he met Jennet, Humphrey has cared little or nothing for his fiancée. So Alizon, who has been feeling lonely and neglected, approaches Richard, and finds he is the "warm ground" where she should plant her affectionate thoughts ever after. The young people confess their love, and decide to elope before anyone stops them.

Soon after this, Jennet enters, followed by Nicholas and Humphrey. Nicholas goes to the cellars to bring some wine, and in the meantime, Humphrey promises to save Jennet from the fire if she complies to a dirty proposal of his. The temptation is hard on the girl, but the answer is no, definitely no. Analyzing the motives of her decision, Jennet finds she is not led by an ideal love of chastity, but by a wish of serving the purpose of her own self and of creation, which is not likely to call creatures into being and endow them with sincere emotions just for the pleasure of seeing them dissolve into emptiness.

> I seem to wish to have some importance
> In the play of time. If not,
> Then sad was my mother's pain, sad my breath,
> Sad, sad my alacritous web of nerves,

To be shaped and sharpened into such tendrils
Of anticipation, to feed the swamp of space.
What is deep, as love is deep, I'll have
Deeply. What is good, as love is good,
I'll have well. Then if time and space
Have any purpose, I shall belong to it.

Jennet's position is a pitiable one indeed, and hereupon, Thomas, who had been in the garden, breaks in preaching pessimism. But Jennet checks him. What right has he to come "moralizing" now and saying whether she should be burnt or not?

You have only said
'Die, woman, and look as though you liked it.'
So you'll agree this can hardly be said to concern you.

But the fact is that Thomas is really concerned. He loves Jennet and is forced to confess "the disastrous truth". Yet, Jennet will not be contented with this. What is the good of love, if love will not draw a man away from death?

Events now start marching Jennet's way. Richard and Alizon return to announce they have met Skipps, he whom Thomas had murdered and Jennet had turned into a dog. Soon afterwards, everybody is thoroughly convinced that Skipps is perfectly alive and free from witchcraft. Jennet is allowed to return to her cell or to leave the town, and of course, where she goes, Thomas will go too.

Only another
Fifty years or so and then I promise
To let your go.

she tells him. The eccentric soldier has been caught in "the unholy mantrap of love". Somewhere in this sickening dirty world he must make a home for Jennet. "Am I an inconveniece to you?" — says she — "As inevitable as original sin", he answers as they start life together. On their depart, Thomas prays that God may have mercy on him and his beloved.

II

THE IMAGERY IN THE PLAY

In my analysis of the imagery in *The Lady's not for Burning* I will endeavour to point out how the different groups of images, whether drawn from light, fire and darkness, daily life, domestic subjects, human body or personifications, abstractions and concretions, contribute largely to the development of the main issues raised by the play, which are:

a) Gloominess, despondency, evil and damnation.
b) Hope, love and desire for life.
c) An Apriline atmosphere.
d) Humour and wit.

a) *Gloominess, despondency, evil and damnation.*—It is evident to all hearers of *The Lady's not for Burning,* that the idiosyncrasy of the main character, Thomas Mendip, as well as the nature of the plot itself, a discharged soldier with an intense loath of life "falling in with a witch-hunt", easily give rise to a current of sinister or otherwise gloomy and despondent thoughts which can be traced throughout the play.

This is sometimes made in terms of *animal images. Insects* convey a sense of the ephemeral human life. If we suppose we are "caddis-flies", says Thomas in his talk to Jennet in Act II,

> Do we waste the evening
> Commiserating with each other about
> The unhygienic condition of our worm-cases? (p. 49)

Jennet draws on the same image, when after having swooned at the news of her burning, she comes to and tells Thomas:

> Preacher to the caddis- fly, I return
> To live my allotted span of insect hours. (p. 60)

Thomas has a liking for *filthy* or *voracious animals* which help to emphasize his view of life, a contradictory and damnable affair which goes on by "pain and death" (p. 57). Thus he speaks of a "wholesome cat", the eyes of which behold a bird with a hellish gleam (p. 13); the witch-hunters he refers to as "bib-and-tuckered bloodhounds" (p. 16), and later, contrasting with the almost unearthly beauty of the sunset, he listens to "the howl of human jackals" (p. 48).

But the animal image which could be given as a *clue* to Thomas' arguments is drawn from *birds,* and conveys a sense of a useless and weary effort for improvement:

> A world unable to die sits on and on
> In spring sunlight, hatching egg after egg,
> Hoping agains hope that out of one of them
> Will come the reason for it all; and always
> Out pops the arid chuckle and centuries
> Of cuckoo-spit. (p. 13)

Images from *heaven and heavenly bodies* are made to reflect this attitude. Thomas speaks of "the wild music of the spheres" (p. 19) and complains that for a long time he should have been

> Propped up at the bar of heaven and earth, between
> The wall-eye of the moon and the brandy-cask of the sun.
> (p. 18)

that is to say, wearily delayed as a man is a bar, in the long succession of days and nights.

Several *body images* are in keeping with these views: whenever Thomas was

> on the way
> To a faintly festive hiccup,
> The sight of the damned world sobered him "up again".
> (p. 3)

So he cannot find pleasure in life.

> Flesh
> Weighs like a thousand years, and every morning

Wakes heavier for an intake of uproariously
Comical dreams which smell of henbane. (p. 4)

Something poisonous.

Life... is the way
We fatten for the Michaelmas of our own particular
Gallows. (p. 5)

This image is in keeping with the idea of hanging which is always present in the mind of Thomas, as the only adequate end for man. He pictures himself hanging as ripe fruit from a tree — the gallows — and thinks of life as a preparation for such hanging. The reference to "Michaelmas", St. Michael's feast on September 29, is in keeping with the rest of the image, for Michaelmas also means autumn or harvest season.

Thomas also talks of "a cosmic yawn of boredom" (p. 33), he says the world is festering with damnation" (p. 3), and in spite of having been reconciled to existence the world "sickens him still" (p. 94).

In terms of *sensuous perceptions* we find that "a nosegay of private emotion" (love), "won't distract" Thomas from "the stench of the plague-pit", by which he means the nasty world (p. 56).

Daily life images also contribute to this development. "There's mischief brewing for someone" in Cool Clary's local (p. 3). His cynicism is made evident when he says that two murders are enough to win him "the medals of damnation" (p. 28). Hopeless of finding kindness or understanding among men, he throws his "last poor gamble/ On the human heart" (p. 14).

But the group of images which reflect Thomas' views better is drawn from *Biblical or religious subjects.* Thomas is keenly aware of the evils which befell mankind after the first sin. A specimen of men beset by lusty passions is Humphrey, whom Thomas threatens with this image:

I'll knock your apple-blossom back into the roots
Of the Tree of Knowledge where you got it from. (p. 84)

In Act I, the gloomy hero spreads alarm by saying that he is the Devil, and that Doomsday is due that very night. Hence such images

as Judgment "Not funny for the goats" (p. 32), and Thomas identified with "Evil for once/ Not travelling incognito", (p. 50), which illustrates his idea of man; a worthless being guilty of all sins and worthy of being compared with the Devil.

These images also become the Devize brothers, especially Humphrey, who having been knocked down by Nicholas "Went twinkling like Lucifer into the daffodils" (p. 12). He is "Purgatory-colour", which is a kind way of saying that he is not quite good (p. 8). It is relevant of this character's personality to point out how he uses a sinister image in describing such and innocent affair as his engagement to Alizon:

> The stars flicker and flicker, like hell's
> Light they flicker. (p. 16)

he says, when asked what is the astral verdict upon his marriage.

Fire in this play is seldom thought of by Fry as something painful, very likely because the play has not a tragic issue. Otherwise, it would have been necessary to anticipate the catastrophe, like in *The Firstborn*. But fire is evidently related to damnation. Thomas is

> the true phenomenon
> Of acknowledged guilt, steaming with the blodd
> Of the pimp and rag-and-bone man. (p. 28)

and later he explains that Damnation is "a flame who's got finality", because it does not trick men like Hope (p. 34).

Since we are talking of fire, it may be well to see what connections it has with Jennet and her charm, as well as with other rather sinister images.

Both brothers are drawn to Jennet by the threefold magnetism of beauty, witchcraft and fire. The girl, in spite of herself, contributes to this attitude. In describing the sort of black magic tricks she is accused of, she mentions several filthy animals, like "gnats", "cobwebs", "mice or beetles which might preach/ Demonology" (p. 24). Ever since she appears for the first time, Nicholas associates her beauty with fire and the devil:

> She is the one, of witches she's the one
> Who most of all disturbs Hell's heart...

Satan's latest
Button-hole. (p. 21)

But the most relevant use of these images occurs towards the end of the play, when Jennet's burning is imminent. Then Humphrey says:

You have bewitched me. But not by
scents
Of new-mown hell. For all I know you may
Have had some by-play with the Devil. (p. 80)

So there is a dramatic link among the following: witches bewitch men; bewitching deserves fire; fire is in hell; men feel the burning of passion. The fact that Jennet is going to burn contributes to make her more mysterious and attractive.

b) *Hope, love and desire for life.* Opposite to these views of damnation, there is a current of hope and positivism which makes for life and opposes love to death. In order to grasp all its connections, I find it convenient to follow the chronologic order.

We may say that the beginning of this development is Thomas' invitation to Jennet to "go down to the dinner of damnation" on his arm, whereupon she replies: "I dine elsewhere", thus meaning that she does not share his despondent views. (p. 29).

When trying to persuade Jennet of the uselessness of life he compares Hope to a "hell-cat" (p. 34). Then he advises her to bid farewell to pleasure and expect nothing of the world:

Kiss your illusions for me before they go. (p. 35)

In Act II, the brilliant speech of Thomas on sunset[1] has the effect of reminding Jennet of the tragic imminence of death, which approaches with the dying sun. The contrasting views of the characters are made evident in terms of *light and darkness* images. Jennet identifies darkness with distress:

If I try to find my way I bark my brain
On shadows sharp as rocks. (p. 49)

1 See p. 26 of this work.

whereas light stands as a symbol of peaceful, undisturbed existence:

> The morning came, and left
> The sunlight on my step like any normal
> Tradesman. (Ib).

Jennet would wish to delay the receding light whose absence means less life:

> The light draws off
> As easily as though no one could die
> To-morrow. (Ib).

At the same time, this image is full of irony. Fry's characters are prone to ask why should nature remain indifferent to death's awful business.

Thomas regards the universe as a large, mysterious and contradictory affair. He cannot understand how Jennet can be able to sweep away all its dilemmas, viz., the fact that evil should be so powerful in a world which makes beauty manifest. She lacks the perception of these paradoxes which Thomas believes to be the corner stone of philosophy. Since they are the basis of knowledge, something positive, he refers to them as something brilliant. He speaks of a world who plays

> Heaven off against hell, hell off against heaven,
> Revolving in the ballroom of the skies,
> Glittering with conflict as with diamonds. (p. 53)

Thus the quality of beauty which Thomas has perceived in the universe is also conveyed.

But Jennet can little understand of this. Therefore, these things suggest to her as "the clutch of chaos" (p. 54).

Disagreement also becomes evident as regards love. The human race, according to Thomas, is damned. It does not deserve to live. Why should men encourage its perpetuation through mutual esteem and love? "That is the sort of thing — he says — that causes sunspots, and the lord knows what other infirmities in the sky." (p. 56). But Jennet feels her desire for life instinctively leads her to seek refuge in the love of Thomas, and justifies her love for him in terms of light:

If you're afraid of your shadow falling across
Another life, shine less brightly upon yourself. (p. 56)

And at the end of the same paragraph she makes evident that the opposing principles of the play are love and death:

But what are you afraid of, since in a little
While neither of us may exist? Either or both
May be altogether transmuted into memory
and then the heart's obscure indeed.

In the last lines of the act, Thomas, who reconciles himself to life for a few hours under condition that Jennet also be invited to the engagement party, unconsciously makes a fusion of dark and light images which anticipates the denouement, because it suggests his departure with Jennet before dawn:

We should be like stars now that it's dark.
Use ourselves up to the last bright dregs
And vanish in the morning. (p. 61)

Darkness and light stand here in perfect equilibrium, which makes us look forward to an understanding between the characters.

In Act III light images are reinforced. Just as with the legendary beauty of marvelous Phipa, Jennet is described as a figure out of some old romance. Glimmering with jewels and turned more brilliant by the possibility of fire, she suggests to Thomas, who is in love with her in spite of himself:

Off she has gone,
Away to the melting moody horizons of opal,
Moonstone, bloodstone; now moving in lazy
Amber, now sheltering in the shade
Of jade from a brief rainfall of diamonds.
Able to think to-morrow has an even
Brighter air, a glitter less moderate,
A quite unparalleled freedom in the fire:
A death, no bounds to it[2] (pp. 65, 66)

Humphrey and Nicholas are dazzled by Jennet's beauty: "I

2 Notice how death is described as a sort of liberation by Thomas.

have a sense of daylight", "It seems we're facing east", they say when Jennet comes into the room (p. 67).

In order to seize the real effect of light images in Act III, it is relevant to remember that the characters had talked of nothing but boredom before Jennet entered, and how fire did not appear brilliant to Thomas when she was not present; on the contrary, it served him to illustrate his life weariness:

> If only I had been born flame, a flame
> Poised, say on the flighty head of a candle,
> I could have stood in this draught and gone out
> Whip, through the door of my exasperation. (p. 63)

Images of this sort create an atmosphere against which, by contrast, the girl's beauty is given new lustre.

The last scenes of the play, although a collaboration of events is required to compel Thomas to desist from his death pretensions, emphasize the triumph of love as a fundamental human emotion, and as a preserving force of mankind. Light images easily flow to define the sort of feelings Jennet has aroused in her lover:

> I was nicely tucked up for the night
> Of eternity, and, like a restless dream
> Of a fool's paradise, you, with a rainbow where
> Your face is and an *ignis fatuus*
> Worn like a rose in your girdle, come pursued
> By fire, and presto! the bedclothes are on the floor
> And I, the tomfool, love you. (p. 85)

Love is also associated with music, and its emotional complexity is better conveyed by images in which both light and harmony are suggested:

> But the word (love) is an arrow
> Of larksong, shot from the earth's bow and falling
> In a stillborn sunrise. (p. 85)

The play ends in a note of light. Thomas hails the new day, and for the first time gives up the idea of damnation:

> let me wish us both
> Good morning.—And God have mercy on our souls.

Sea and things related with it are another source of recurrent images. They complete the effect of light and darkness symbols. In Act II, Jennet feels lost and shipwrecked in a sea of fear and misunderstanding. She turns to Thomas as her only hope:

> You've cast your fishing-net
> Of eccentricity, your seine of insanity
> Caught me when I was already lost
> And landed me with despairing gills on your own
> Strange beach. (p. 55)

This proves that she is aware of the soldier's strange views, but loves him more on that account.

Frightened at the possibility of Jennet's tears which are a mark of interest in his lot, Thomas uses a sea image:

> In the name
> Of all who ever were drowned at sea, don't weep!
> (p. 54)

This expresses his fear of love, which, if encouraged, would deliver him to the tide of what he regards as a useless affection.

In Act III, the prisoners' feelings become slowly identified. Thomas is aware of a queer feeling growing within himself. That is an increasing sympathy for Jennet.

> I must shorten my sail. We're into a strange wind. (p. 68)

and then, back from a short excursion in the garden, he suffers a sort of emotional crisis:

> I've been cast adrift in a raft of melancholy. (p. 73)

The light effects produced by the moonlight falling as a "main" over "The little oyster-shell of this month of April" cause an ecstasy which Thomas readily associates with Jennet. But his longing for death persists in spite of his admiration for beauty, and frightened at love and life he says:

> I shall go
> Back into the garden and choke myself with the seven
> Sobs I managed to bring with me from the wreck. (p. 74)

Towards the end of the play the sea image is again associated with disaster. Humphrey, for instance, makes it expressive of his failure in winning Jennet's interest, when he tells Nicholas:

Oh go and drown yourself
And me with you. (p. 87)

But as the play has not a tragic issue, the sea image and its painful implications disappear altogether in the final scene.

c) *The Apriline atmosphere.*—Fry himself was aware of such an atmosphere as this when, in an article for "Theatre Newsletter",[3] he spoke of "four comedies for each of the seasons of the year, four comedies of mood". What this denomination means to Fry is that "the scene, the season, and the characters are bound together in one climate."

This is precisely what happens in *The Lady's not for Burning.* Here, the scene is a large room with a window looking unto a garden, where trees, flowers and birds are in profusion, and through which a view of sunset, or the starry sky and the full April moon are there; the season is spring, and most characters, especially the leading ones, are still within the bounds of youth.

In that article too, Fry laid emphasis on "the theme within this mood", that is to say, on the correspondence between the plot and the other elements of the dramatic composition, and that peculiar background.

As we have already seen, this is a play in which the problem of remaning alive and reconciliation to existence are solved in terms of love. Thomas refuses to renew his vital springs, to adapt himself to the circumstances forced on him after the depressing experiences of war. Love urges this renovation. Spring, we all know, is a period of regeneration and new birth. Therefore, it is not a mere whim of the author's fancy that an Apriline atmosphere, "the indomitable/ Perseverence of Persephone" should embody the plot.

The analysis of the imagery corroborates this point. The first time the possibility of love occurs in the play, the images are strikingly in keeping with the character which utters them and with the

3 Quoted by Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation,* p. 57.

season. The atmosphere is created by images of light and love. Alizon, the bride to be just in from the garden, describes the scenery she has beheld outdoors:

> Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
> And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass.
> (p. 6)

Doves, we know, have always been symbolic of love, and were consecrated to Venus.

Then, light and music, love's retainers in Fry's imagery follow in the train:

> Out there, in the sparkling air, the sun and the rain
> Clash together like the cymbals clashing
> When David did his dance. (p. 6)

Richard too, contributes some images. Touched by Alizon's beauty, he is led to say:

> Is life sending a flame to nest in my flax?
> (Ib.).

Notice how flame and nesting are in keeping with another passage in Act III, when Alizon shelters in the "warm ground" of Richard's love, and how they are also suggestive of spring, when birds make their nests.

There is an image in which, in a more explicit way, Fry has associated love and spring. Richard is evidently getting infatuated with Alizon: "Things happen" to men, he says,

> Machinations of nature;
> As April does to the earth. (p. 9)

Fry reinforces the love theme with the Alizon-Richard subplot. In the development of the main plot we find analogous symbols. Thomas is making himself "a breeding ground for love and must take the consequences" (p. 56). He asks "Why should we hawk and spit out ecstasy/ As though we were nightingales" (p. 74). Both he and Jennet make reference to the moon. She says once it was in a "high dazed state of nimbus love" (p. 25), and he compares it to "a veneer"

of Venus "on the planks of time" (p. 67), and thus many other images which constantly create a fresh and youthful atmosphere.

d) *Humour and wit.*—Like most authors of comedies Fry allows himself to make laughing-stock of his characters. That is the way he has dealt with Margaret, whose frivolous and childish nature does not permit her to grasp the transcendental aspect of affairs; with the Mayor, who being the symbol of sound judgment and respectability because of his position, is driven by a ridiculous wave of superstition; with Nicholas and Humphrey, whose mutual rivalry and unchecked instinctive tendencies lessen their worth and deserve little besides laughter or scorn; the weaknesses of these people who are supposed to be models of society, are shown and made fun of. Hence such despising images as the comic compliments of Thomas to the Mayor:

> You bubble-mouthing, fog-blathering
> Chin-chuntering, chap-flapping, ...
> Turgidical, base old man! (p. 28)

Wit is one of Thomas' main traits. It is in keeping with his shrewdness and accounts for the liking the other characters have for him in spite of his despondent views and mocking attitude. It also explains, to some extent, the popularity the play has achieved with the public; but I do not think it was the main purpose of the play; that is why I have directed my analysis towards other aspects which, I think, are more important to it; hope and despair, love and death.

A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT

AS regards the theme of most of his plays Fry has been said to be fond of the ready-made. This holds good with *A Phoenix Too Frequent,* which is Fry's interpretation of a tale by Petronius. The theme, therefore, goes many centuries back into the past; but the poet has managed to give it actuality by means of a painstaking psychological study of the characters and by resource to one of the most universal subjects in literature, viz., the struggle for life. Thus, the theme of *A Phoenix Too Frequent* is akin to that of *The Lady's not for Burning.* Both show the conflict between love and death; but whereas in the latter death is desirable as the most convenient way of solving the riddles of existence and escaping from the corruption of the world, in the former the protagonist looks forward to it as a way of perpetuating conjugal affection, as a means of observing convention, and avoiding the criticism and ridiculing of society.

A Phoenix Too Frequent is a one act play which takes place within the precincts of a Hellenistic tomb. Here, at two in the morning, a youthful soldier in charge of watching the hanged bodies of six malefactors finds two women lying beside the sarcophagus of Virilius, an Ephesian citizen dead two days before. Tegeus, for that is the soldier's name, is greatly intrigued by what he sees, and starts questioning Doto, a servant and devoted waiting maid, as to the origin of so strange an occurrence. She tells him how her lady Dynamene, Virilius' widow, lies asleep at another corner of the tomb, waiting to follow her husband to Hades, and how both have come to lament and starve to death in the tomb. This is what we might call

the end of the exposition, for in a previous scene we had heard Dynamene deploring the death of her unmatchable husband.

The more Tegeus learns about the situation, the more interested he becomes in it. His life experience had turned him sceptic towards the existence of love and faithfulness, and now, he feels surprised beyond every expectation at the sight of a young and beautiful woman who manifests both qualities. At once, she becomes to him the symbol of purity, self-denial, and the way to a new perspective of the world.

Having brought his food with him, he invites Doto to partake of it. At the beginning, the servant, who has basked in the compliments paid to her mistress, feels very like a superior being to accept anything so common as food; but soon, her vital instinct finds its way through the demands of pride and self-respect. She is led to accept a draught of Tegeus' wine. Having had no food in two days, this turns her gay and talkative. Wine gives her the hiccups, the noise of which awakenes Dynamene.

At first, misled by Doto's account of the stranger, Dynamene thinks he is a six-body supernatural being intended to serve her as a guide to the next world in search of her husband; but having become aware of the thoroughly human nature of the intruder, she turns on him severely. This leaves her in so weak and even exhausted a condition, that she is led to accept a little wine, solely for the purpose of making herself "abler for grief".

Soon a new draught, meant to be the last and a toast to Virilius' memory ensues. Wine renders Dynamene sociable, and Tegeus, who feels drawn by the widow's beauty, is only too glad to stay talking to her. A current of sympathy is established. We are on the way to a new situation.

Dynamene gets interested in her companion and asks his name. This provides new matter for conversation. She does not want him to know what she is called, but he suddenly utters her name. Again Dynamene thinks she is dealing with an unearthly being — a god of Nature this time — and can already perceive the lustre of a supernatural fire in his eyes. Doto makes her realize that the soldier has read her name on her brooch. Detection of her error only serves to make Dynamene feel more confident towards her companion. She readily finds a new name for him: Chromis, which contrasting with

the supernatural airs she had assumed him to have a minute before, reminds her of food.

The inquiry of each other's self brings Dynamene to discover the splendid physical attributes of Chromis. This is as much as the soldier can bear without feeling that a sentiment beyond mere sympathy or admiration is growing within him. But he knows she is following her husband, and though it be painful for him to leave her and content himself with memories of the wonderful woman he met in the tomb, he offers to leave her at once. Almost unconsciously, Dynamene prevents him from doing so and changes the subject.

They, or rather, he, talk about the meaning of life. Does progress really exist, or is it only a weary movement of humanity leading nowhere? If it is all nonsense, there must be something worth knowing and living; that is virtue. Since Dynamene symbolises it, Tegeus cannot help loving her. A further affinity increases mutual attraction. They discover that he was born in a part of the country where she once spent a holiday. Tegeus traces his fate from that day onwards, and decides that he was and has always been meant to love Dynamene. Both rejoice in being young, though not so young as they would wish. Besides, Dynameme is conscious of Tegeus' sense of wonder as regards herself, and feels exceedingly happy to hear how he admires her. Finally she realizes that she loves Chromis, and for the first time, she has to choose between the fulfillment of her vow to follow her husband, and Chromis' love which is not possible without love of life. The play has reached a climax.

Tegeus makes use of every argument to convince Dynamene that she should give up the idea of dying. Though at the beginning he had been led by her faithfulness and self-sacrifice, he now tells her that the love inspiring these is meant for this life and not for the other. Virilius has no right to expect Dynamene to join him in Hades; on the contrary, conjugal affection should be a vital force leading her to remain alive and perpetuate him in a new love.

A dead man is surely no good match for a living one, and Dynamene is readily convinced. Yet, a feeling of self-respect and above all fear of her friends ridiculing her if they get to know what has happened, makes her reluctant. But this too, is soon overcome by the prevailings of her heart, and love makes its triumphant entrance in the tomb. Nothing, it seems, can stand between the lovers.

Yet, a loose end has to be tied up, and there are more obstacles. Tegeus is suddenly reminded that he is on duty of watching the corpses, a fact he had completely forgotten during the eventful half an hour he had spent in the tomb. He goes out to take a look at them, and in the meantime, Doto, who had been sound asleep awakens. Dynamene tries to get rid of her at once. The malicious servant soon guesses what the new situation is and leaves her lady to her new fate. Tegeus returns breathlessly. Love and happiness are over, he says. While staying with Dynamene someone has come and stolen one of the bodies to bury it secretly. This, according to military regulations, means that the guard will be hanged to replace the malefactor. Therefore, Tegeus decides to kill himself in the tomb to save Dynamene the hideous look of his body hanging on a tree.

Dynamene is desperate. She revolts against laws and regulations. After many vain attempts to dissuade Chromis, she asks him whether she should join him in Hades, or following the advice he had given her little before, stay in the world trying to perpetuate Virilius and Chromis in a new love.

Tegeus disapproves of these proposals, and against his own conviction wishes Dynamene to remember him always, to keep the memory of his love always fresh and to fight endlessly against indifference. But soon afterwards, he realizes that his demand is a selfish imposition, and releases Dynamene of all love duties towards him. Suddenly, Dynamene has a brilliant idea. Putting honour and convention aside forever she finds a solution: Virilius will help them. His corpse can hang on the place of the robbed body. For a minute, Tegeus is shocked at the idea, but it is Dynamene's turn to use subtle arguments:

> How little you can understand. I loved
> His life not his death. And now we can give his death
> The power of life. Not horrible: Wonderful.

Of course the end is a happy one. We are confronted with a situation which is exactly the opposite of the opening scenes. As the curtain falls Doto drinks to the health of "Both the masters".

THE IMAGERY IN THE PLAY

The different kinds of images in *A Phoenix Too Frequent* can be said to deal with one of the following ranges of closely associated subjects:

a) Sorrow, death and indifference.

b) Hope, love and life.

c) Philosophic views or conclusions.

d) Miscellaneous subjects.

It will be the purpose of the following analysis to show how symbols contribute to the development of these main categories.

NATURE

Foul animals, those which can live in a lonely, dusty and dark atmosphere are the only ones Dynamene finds a proper company to her grief. They have much of the deadly about them, and she is conscious of it. She mentions the worm, the spider "Weaving his home with swift self-generated/ Threads of slaughter" (p. 16), the beetle, and among birds, the raven, the ominous bird poets have made the symbol of death and irretrievable loss.

Contrasting with these views, her return to life and gaiety is associated with a melodious bird. Wine is said to be like "a nightingale/ Sobbing among the pears" (p. 19). "Sobbing" here introduces a note of tenderness as a prologue to the love scenes which will soon ensue, and the bird itself, which is a nocturnal one, is in keeping with the hour which is favourable to love confessions. Later Tegeus under the stress of emotion is led to compare himself to a bird visiting Dynamene.

On the other hand, the image of a bird hatching eggs seems to suggest Fry a sense of weariness, of useless and prolonged effort. It was so with the cuckoo in *The Lady's not for Burning* and it is

found serving the same purpose of emphasizing despondent and sinister thoughts in *A Phoenix Too Frequent.*

> Our names, They make us broody, we sit and sit
> To hatch them into reputation and dignity
> And then they set upon us and become despair,
> Guilt and remorse. (p. 21)

The idea is that people take great pains to acquire a good name, reputation, etc., and those things which have been conquered through unendless labours, become fetters when people find that life's pleasures still beckon to them. Dynamene had imposed upon herself a death, which, according to the opinion of herself and others, might have been that of a loving wife, and now she finds it hard to keep up to her purpose and to waste the love of Tegeus.

Another significant animal image is Doto's comparing life to "cat and dog" (p. 1). Here we find again the sense of duality, the dilemmatic apprehension of the world we have been tracing in Fry. Doto is a vigorous woman who has experienced lots of pleasure in life, and now, on the way to death, she feels her peace of mind disturbed by vital feelings and instinctive desires.

Among *growing thing images* there is a speech mixed with classic allusions in which Fry has depicted in words the artistic motives decorating Tegeus' wine vase:

> The corded god, tied also by the rays
> Of the sun, and the astonished ship erupting
> Into vines and vine-leaves, inverted pyramids
> Of grapes, the uplifted hands of the men (the raiders)
> And here the headlong sea, itself almost
> Venturing into leaves and tendrils... (p. 17)

The main purpose of these images is not rhetoric, nor a mere imitation of the painter's technique, though we grasp through the description a clear idea of the fancy and stylization of the drawing; but since the vase has been decorated by Tegeus and he himself delivers the speech, he reveals to us as a man of sensibility, refined taste and culture, able to grasp the subtle intricacies of Dynamene's situation and to appreciate her beauty. Besides, the allusion to grapes and

vine-leaves is a symbol of Bacchus, god of fertility. Chromis offers life in wine, whereas Virilius can only give death.

The loved one is associated with flowers. So Tegeus identifies Dynamene with the "yellow bog-iris" (p. 24), and thinking how she must have looked as a girl, he compares her to "an early flower" (p. 27). At the beginning of the play, when Dynamene believes in having bidden farewell to the world once and forever she says:

> Now I keep no flower, except in the vase
> Of the tomb. (p. 3)

that is to say, only for her husband.

Separation causes a spiritual withering of the soul. That is how Tegeus expresses the sorrow of leaving Dynamene on p. 24.

A Phoenix Too Frequent deals chiefly with the struggle between the pursuit of faithful, sterile, ideal love in death and the positive vital desire for life. The latter is supported by instinctive tendencies, the promptings of which are likely to lead human beings away from the fulfilment of any other previous vow. Dynamene revolves between the two. That is why, almost at the point of breaking her fast and drinking the first draught of wine she says:

> Oh, how the inveterate body,
> Even when cut from the heart, insists on leaf,
> Puts out with a separate meaningless will,
> Fronds to intercept the thankless sun.
> How it does, oh how it does. And how it confuses
> The nature of the mind. (p. 17)

And here again, just like in *The Lady's not for Burning*, the instinctive vital force contending with the dictates of reason is better expressed by means of the *sea image*:

> When the thoughts would die, the instincts will set sail
> For life. And when the thoughts are alert for life
> The instincts will rage to be destroyed on the rocks. (p. 18)

And later, when prompted to choose between love of Tegeus or faith to her husband, Dynamene says:

Chromis, it's terrible
To be susceptible to two conflicting norths.
I have the constitution of a whirlpool. (p. 31)

But when she has surrendered to his wooing and there is no conflict, the sea image loses its violent implications: "So long, my haven", says Tegeus when parting from Dynamene just for a few seconds. As she has become his refuge place in a world of uncertainty "haven" is exceedingly expressive. (p. 84)

Miscellaneous nature images serve to emphasize:

a) *Grief.* So Dynamene says that she is

cloistered
In a colourless landscape of winter thought
Where the approaching Spring is desired oblivion. (p. 14)

The allusions to the cold, and the lack of colour make use feel how lively emotions have lost significance to Dynamene.

b) *Life.* Towards the end of the play Tegeus calls the widow "My spring" (p. 34). Wine "purls with summer" and is "warm", because it gives new force (p. 19). It is also said to have "a twin nature" "moon and meadow (Ib.); but both these elements are related to love: the former, because it gives light, and the latter because associated with flowers and singing birds.

c) *Hope, true respect and admiration.* So Tegeus says: "This place (the tomb where he has found Dynamene), wil always play in me, a fountain of confidence when the world is arid". (p. 24).

LIGHT AND DARNESS IMAGES

In *A Phoenix Too Frequent* more than in any other play by Fry our attention is immediately drawn to a central and all-embracing love theme. This is probably due, first, to the fact that there are only three characters, and second, that we are not led aside from the main conflict by implications of a different order, such as the witch-

hunt, or even the emphasis Thomas lays on his own views in *The Lady's not for Burning,* for example. So, there are less threads to disentangle in this play. Love is the all-important question since the very beginning; hence, the primacy of light and darkness images which in Fry's figurative speech are all one with love and its opposites.

The use of these images is parallel with the development of the action, and throws much intelligence on the psychology of the characters.

The first time Dynamene talks in the play, her speech is for the purpose of emphasizing her grief. Her present condition seems more pitiable as compared with the happy moments she spent with Virilius. She feels lonely and unprotected. Her thoughts invariably lean towards the new abode her husband has gone to, where she will soon follow him. She is in a romantic mood — melancholy being the prevailing note at the moment — and therefore, finds nature responsive to her emotions:

> the sun itself
> Trails an evening hand in the sultry river
> Far away down by Acheron. (p. 5)

When Virilius lived all was very different. Then Dynamene, who was conscious of her beauty, used to rejoice in her husband's admiration:

> I would walk
> Up and down largely, as it were making my own
> Sunlight. (p. 6)

As soon as Tegeus gets acquainted with Dynamene's situation, he starts making use of the light image to define the wonder and surprise she inspires him. One of the images suggests how he has found a new perspective of the world:

> Her's the way luminous with sorrow. (p. 13)

In the scenes that follow, light images serve to define the nature of the lovers' emotions. One of them is the idealization of each other, a mutual sense of wonder. For instance, when Tegeus says:

If I seem to be frowning that is only because
I am looking directly into your light: I must look
angrily or shut my eyes. (p. 23)

It is relevant to notice how Doto, standing apart from this current of infatuation makes an ironic remark — the contrast is comic — to call her lady down to reality. When Dynamene assumes Tegeus to be a supernatural being endowed with the light of "little Phoebuses", Doto replies:

They're not little Phoebuses,
They're hoodwinks, madam. (p. 22)

In fact, the sort of love Dynamene and Tegeus are involved in may be defined with that word: "hoodwinks"; otherwise no common sense creature would ever misconceive a human being to the extent of believing him to be perfect.

The love emotion between Chromis and Dynamene is all-absorbing. This is what this brilliant halo of light seems to suggest:

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. (p. 29)

For the lovers, *light* also conveys the feeling of necessity created by love. Light exists as long as they remain together. Thinking of the possibility of parting from Dynamene, Tegeus says that "daylight would be his grave" if he had left her in the tomb's "unearthly night" (p. 25).

Dynamene is so dazzled by the manly beauty of Tegeus that she comes to think poorly of herself. She would wish to look her best for him, but deplores being

a drab
Of melancholy, entirely shadow without a smear of sun.
(p. 28).

On his part, Tegeus confesses having found the only woman capable of being his ideal, as compared with whom, all other women lose significance. This uniqueness and supremacy of the loved one is also expressed in terms of light. (p. 29).

The irony of the play lies mainly on the fact that although Tegeus is led to love Dynamene because of her faithfulness to her husband's memory, later, he would try to dissuade her from keeping her purpose, so that love between them becomes possible. In doing so, he is not aware of the incongruity of his views, and listens solely to his love desire which he identifies with the vital instinct. Then, of course, he resorts to the light image:

> I should remember your body
> Descending stairs in the floating light, but not
> Descending in Hades...
> Was all I taught her of love — I should say, so poor
> That she must leave her flesh and become shadow? (p. 31)

While Dynamene wavers between Chromis and Virilius she is still, "still as the darkness" (p. 31).

Grief, which was bright when related to virtue or faithfulness, is dark when meaning simply sorrow or loneliness. Since Virilius is dead, "the eye of the one-eyed world is out" (p. 6). Towards the end of the play Tegeus fears Death because

> It can snuff the great
> Candles of creation. (p. 42)

and thus put an end to both life and love.

MISCELLANEOUS IMAGES

Sensuous images have more or less the same symbolism attached to darkness and light images. White, opaque colours in general, stand for melancholy, distrust, lack of hope. The opposite of these is no definite colour, but brilliancy, which symbolizes life. So Tegeus explains how, in his search for life's reason, in his contempt for the corruption of the world where he had found no fidelity, he had begun to see the world

> mildew, verdigris,
> Rust, woodrot, or as though the sky had uttered
> An oval twirling blasphemy with occasional vistas
> In country districts. (p. 12)

The scent and flavour of wine brings back of whole range of associations to Dynamene, and these are symbolic of her coming back to life (p. 20).

The most important *art images* in Fry are drawn from music. Life suggests to him a poor musician who plays on people as though they were instruments; Fry makes puns with the double meaning of play, because men are the victims of fate and subject to its tricks. (p. 21).

On the other hand, the ever changing variety of life, its rich emotional content, the multiplicity of its impressions, give Doto the effect of

> a baritone singing
> In mixed company with everyone pleased. (p. 4)

Unlike Tegeus, Doto has always taken life as it comes. She has no great pretensions, and somehow, has always found a new interest. Not even death appears to her to be utterly unpleasant. We feel she is eager to know what Hades must look like.

Progress for Tegeus does not mean improvement. He is acquainted with the main philosophic doctrines among the Greeks: Sophism, Stoicism, Platonism, but has found none satisfactory, since they all have failed to produce a simultaneous and significant development of all the "areas of soul", that is to say, of the different aspects of the personality. For him, man is still displaced, bewildered, in the world. Progress in one direction is achieved at the expense of retrogression in another:

> We concertina, says Tegeus, taking each time
> A longer breath, so that the farther we go out
> The farther we have to go in. (p. 26)

The most important *daily life images* are meant to express Fry's contradictions and dilemmas of existence. For example, on p. 6, Dynamene compares creation to a "mad blacksmith", who having been able to produce wonderful work both in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, "blows his furnaces" till

> the masterpiece
> Looms out of labour.

This, for Dynamene, means the ending of life in death.

The only war image in the play emphasizes the need to defend what is honourable, sincere and uncorrupt. In finding Dynamene's faithfulness Tegeus has come upon "a bastion of love" which he would fortify with "a moat of tears" to "save the world" (p. 12).

In spite of their contradictory view of life, Fry's characters are endowed with a sense of humour. This Dynamene expresses when she tells Tegeus:

> A humorous ploughman goes whistling to a team
> Of sad sorrow, to and fro in your brow
> And over your arable cheek. (p. 29)

Other daily life images are ironic, like the nose of Virilius which was "as straight as a butress" now not being noticed in Hades, which suggests how death puts an end to men's glories and conceits. (p. 1). Or humorous, as Dynamene's comparing Tegeus to "a crisp loaf", whereupon he replies:

> And now
> You'll insult me because I'm not sliceable. (p. 22)

A clothes image, Dynamene's fidelity being compared to

> a ribbon to bind the unruly curls of living. (p. 12)

serves to express the admiration of Tegeus for Dynamene.

Body and bodily action images deal with love which is often symbolized by the traditional reference to the heart. So Tegeus' courtship comes to Dynamene "with a charm, like trust indeed, and eats out of her heart" (p. 29). It also "lifts and carries" her (Ib.). She is the "smile" of his soul (p. 34), the "dance" of his heart (p. 39). These images serve to convey the sense of pleasure brought about by love. But since it has also caused a projection of all the self's feelings on another person, the sufferings of the loved one are a cause of grief, of death:

> when you look pale
> You take the heart out of me. (p. 41).

The course of time worries the lovers because it is consuming their happiness. It has already "drunk" many "golden hours". (p. 28).

A few of these images serve the purposes of philosophy. Since Fry's characters think there is a disorder in the universe, they speak of "nations and rebellions" being "spat out to hang on the wind" (p. 6), and ask whether "gods and men are both to remain immortal adolescents" (p. 22).

Miscellaneous body images are descriptive; for instance, when Dynamene remembers her husband to have been one who "made the world succumb to his daily revolution of habit" (p. 3); or humorous, as when Doto thinks she has reached Hades, where she has no doubt been

> gulped as easily as an oyster. (p. 34)

Sickness and health images are few but very expressive. The most pertinent one shows the world as a breeding ground for "corruption", whereon Dynamene's virtue acts as "balm". (p. 38).

Allusions to *classic mythology* are very numerous, and many are meant either to create the background of the epoch the characters are living in, or to produce a humorous effect, like Tegeus' oaths on p. 16, or Dynamene's false assumption when believing the intruder to be "a gorgon" (p. 13). But in fact, these allusions are not images, since they are not meant to be the symbols of thoughts or feelings. Classic images, therefore, are very few. The most remarkable ones show death as a "journey", as a "road", where one must encounter a difficult "crossing" (pp. 10 and 24).

Personifications, abstractions, and concretions also serve the purposes of the main dramatic issues we have been studying; for instance, the morals or philosophy of the play. Some of these images show how man is not satisfied in his search for happiness, his existence being full of uncertainty, hardship and disappointment. So Tegeus says:

> At the best we live our lives on loan
> At the worst, in chains. (p. 39)

Seeing how death is likely to spoil the pleasure he had got in meeting Dynamene, he is led to exclaim:

> joy is nothing
> But the parent of doom. (p. 38)

Several other images in these classifications are related to death or grief. Dynamene says she has been left "walking about" among her "ambitions like a cat in the ruins of a house" (p. 4). A tomb is described as "the squalid suburbs of life" (p. 13), and Tegeus speaks of a "crystal of grief" (p. 15).

But the largest number of images refers to love. Sometimes they express how the lovers hope to have fulfilled their mission in the world through mutual affection:

> I was born to fill a gap
> In the world's experience, which had never known
> Chromis loving Dynamene. (p. 28)

Because of love

> the void is space again;
> Space has life again. (p. 38)

Then, love imbues them with extraordinary life, almost with immortality.

> Though you go
> To the limit of age, it won't be far to contain me. (p. 41)

Fate is said to be "hesitant" (p. 28). The lovers' fate in the works of Fry is ascribed to the stars' decision, but here in *A Phoenix Too Frequent* the stars are personified. (p. 28).

Nature and Perfection are personified and associated with love, because the former "winds her furtive stream all through" men's reason, (p. 24) thus making herself evident in the working of instincts, and the latter would "flay" (p. 30) Tegeus if ever Dynamene could be more beautiful than she is. Dynamene, therefore, represents for the young lover the summing up of beauty.

Finally, a few images have a comic effect; for instance Doto's definition of men:

> You sex of wicked beards
> It's no wonder you have to shave off your black souls
> Every day as they push through your chins. (p. 9)

(As Fry is not writing a historical nor a realistic play he does not care whether the Greeks shaved daily or not). The humour in this

image does not depend only on the image itself, but on the fact that Doto does not live up to those views, being as she is delighted to have met with food, wine and the opposite sex on her lonely way to Hades.

A Phoenix Too Frequent may claim to be considered as one of the best comedies in modern times. It has movement, irony, humour, deep thought and fine characterization, all within a well-proportioned brevity and a style which impresses with its brilliancy and originality, and, furthermore, because of its consistency to the dramatic idea of the play.

The way the author has dealt with his characters is both ironical and indulgent. Without failing to bring out the exaggerations and contradictions to which lovers are addicted, he has shown how these are but the results of human nature confronted with love and death. Besides, there is an equilibrium of forces in the play. To the romantic elevation of the lovers who live in an ethereal world of their own, Fry has opposed the facts of everyday reality, and Doto's common sense.

Dynamene and Tegeus impress us for their vast range of feelings which are and will be as long as man exists: just as in *The Lady's not for Burning,* the protagonist is a soldier whose philosophic views show the low spirits of post-war Europe. But Fry has faith that mankind is not an exhaustive entity, and therefore, resorts to the fundamental human emotions as a spring of spiritual renewal.

THOR WITH ANGELS

IN a way, *Thor with Angels* holds a unique position among Fry's works. The great dramatic concern raised by man's displacement in the world which is common to almost all Fry's plays, is resolved here in the light of the Christian doctrine of Redemption through sacrifice. Of no other play can this be truly and absolutely said.

The action takes place in a Jutish farmstead in England. The time is 596 A.D., the very date in which the Roman missionaries, under the leadership of Augustine, first set foot in the British isles.

The play opens with a scene in which the young warrior Quichelm returns home. He is welcomed by Colgrin, an indolent servant in charge of watching the farm and defending the women while the men are away waging war on the neighbouring tribes. Quichelm's sister Martina, and his mother Clodesuida, come forth asking for news of the battle and of the other relations, who soon arrive at the farm. They are Cymen, husband to Clodesuida and lord of the house, Tadfrid and Osmer, his brothers-in-law, and Cheldric, his younger son.

The atmosphere of this meeting is one of discomfort. Cymen has brought with him a war prisoner, Hoel, a Briton who fought for the Saxons and whose life he spared on the battle-field, against all advice, and, what makes it worse, against the will of the gods, who avenged themselves by letting the Jutes suffer a defeat at the hands of the Saxons.

In acting thus, Cymen was led by a strange unknown force which broke his sword at the very moment when, blind with the fury of the battle, he would have killed the Briton. This force has so far

remained unidentified, and Cymen has superstitious fears that he has been influenced by an old enraged fiend of Britain into assisting his prisoner against death.

Besides, the occurrence has disturbed him greatly, and Clodesuida can hardly recognize the overbearing, merciless barbarian who left for war, in the bewildered, downcast Cymen who has returned home speaking of humility and forgiveness.

Urged by his relatives who fear some dreadful mishap may befall them if they do not rid themselves of the prisoner by offering his death to the war divinities, Thor and Woden, Cymen still refuses to allow the Briton to be killed, for Hoel has become the focus of a mystery. As long as he lives Cymen has some chance of penetrating it, but if Hoel be dead, "who knows to what/ Unfriendly power he will have given himself?"

At this moment, the sun shines brightly across the sky eliminating darkness and mist. Cymen's heart is filled with hope; for a moment, he seems to recover his self-assurance and to have overcome his mysterious fears. He raises up his cup of mead in a toast to the gods, but most strangely the words occurring to his lips are those of Jesus' commandment: "Let us love one another."[1] Enraged by what he imagines to be a new trick of the fiend, he dashes forth, holding his naked sword to kill the Briton, but he fails again, for he finds it against Quichelm, his own son whom he now regards as an enemy, very like in the Gospel: "The enemies of man are those of his own house."[2]

Cymen withdraws to rest. So as to relax the tension created by these events, Fry now introduces a light comic scene between Colgrin and his wife Anna.

In the next scene the prisoner is brought in touch with Martina and gives information on his past. He appears to be a Christian acquainted with the mystery of the Holy Trinity, though he has forgotten almost all about his religion.

A new interesting thread in the plot is the apparition of Merlin, the well-known wizard and magician of King Arthur's times. He is supposed to have been rescued from death by Martina. who has kept

1 John XIII-34.
2 Matth. X-36.

him hidden in an old crumbling tower in the farm. Hoel's voice reached Merlin, and he comes out to meet the Briton, one of his own race. Merlin is an exceedingly old man almost deprived of sight, who has the gift of foretelling the future, and is readily regarded by Clodesuida as a dangerous heathen whom Cymen should do well to avoid. Yet Cymen hopes to find in the words of the old soothsayer a key to his mystery. But Merlin answers him in a way he cannot understand at the time. In fact, Merlin — we shall see later — is the voice of the philosophic ideas of the play. His speech is full of brilliant expectations of hope and renewal, in spite of death and defeat, as well as of recollections of Arthur's Christian land. That golden age seems to be about to return, as spring returns yearly to the world.

At the moment, there seems to be little hope of such a renaissance. Anna breaks in with the news that a pack of wolves has fallen on the cattle. Everybody runs out to watch or help, except Merlin, Colgrin and Ana. Again the wizard falls into one of his prophetic rhapsodies and talks of Romans arriving in the land.

The fight being over, Clodesuida comes in to tell how Hoel has killed the biggest wolf with his bare hands. She thinks they should reward him. But this tide of enthusiasm in soon ebbed, for Tadfrid and Osmer assume the wolf-raid to have been a punishment inflicted by the gods who have been tricked out of the Briton's blood. The dramatic tension rises. Cymen is bewildered. He has lost faith in the gods, yet he still fears them. Finally he agrees to sacrifice a goat instead of killing the Briton. As he performs the ceremony, he becomes obsessed by a feeling of emptiness in religion, a complete separation and estrangement between the gods and men. The sacrifice appears deprived of significance. It is an act of reconciliation which does not block the gulf between two irreconcilable parties. In a fury, he dashes forth and throws the stones of the altar:

> Separation
> To Separation! Dedicated stones
> Can lie asunder until the break is joined!

As everyone waits trembling for the outcome of this dreadful deed, Cymen hears his name called in the distance. By a masterly touch of technique, Fry solves the climax introducing the theme of

the Christian religion in an open way. A messenger arrives to demand Cymen's presence to a meeting of the King's chiefs and lords-of-the-land with the Christian missionaries. It is evident that the news are the answer of the One True God to the demands of a perplexed mind in search of peace. As Cymen departs to hear the Gospel for the first time, he unconsciously takes leave with an almost Christian formula: "the silence/ Be gracious unto you and give you peace."

But the other men do not share his feelings. There is only one question open to their superstitious minds: should they make it up with the gods? The Briton has been the cause of trouble. It is evident that he must die. They decide to kill him as soon as a reason for doing so can be made plausible to Cymen in justification for disobeying his orders of keeping the prisoner. A chance offers itself soon. Martina's eye has caught Hoel's. The incident of the Briton's fight with the wolf could hardly fail to arouse the girl's sympathies. The brave and needy hero whom she has tended and fed attracts her attention, and in spite of herself Martina is drawn to her enemy. Mutual affection overcomes the barriers of race, social standing and religion.

But Fry intends to profit by the love theme as a means of making the outcome a pathetic one, thus strengthening the point of his play: the need and value of sacrifice. As Martina kisses Hoel's brow out of pure sympathy, the opportunity so eagerly looked for is at hand. The prisoner has bewitched her. The men spring forth and fall on their prey. Regardless of Martina's protests, they tie the victim to a "three with his arms spread" and impale him when Cymen has almost arrived.

Cymen's message is one of love and peace: Man's "lonely flesh/ Welcome to Creation". He has heard of the one perfect sacrifice reconciling man and God: the death of Jesus on the cross. Not even the sight of the impaled Briton can break Cymen's hope. Sorrow now walks hand in hand with peace. God can turn man's evil to good, and so Cymen hopes He will make a fruitful sacrifice out of Hoel's death. By forgiving his relations, Cymen, the new Christian, opens the way to God's rule of mercy and compassion. The end is an anti-clamactic one, for tension is relaxed in an atmosphere of hope and forgiveness.

NATURE

One of the leading sources of imagery in *Thor With Angels* is Nature. Just as in *The Lady's not for Burning,* Fry has made the plot and the feelings of his characters reflect on an outdoor atmosphere of which they are deeply aware. Allusions to the damp, misty weather of England which pervade throughout the play, are the symbols of a mental condition of discomfort, bewilderment and religious awe. Thus, when Clodesuida fears something queer has happened to her husband and cannot guess what it is, she tells Quichelm: "Why do you talk to me in a kind of cloud?", whereupon he retorts: "Mother, we breathe cloud. It's the chief product of this island" (p. 3).

Cymen throws the blame of his defeat on a strange unidentified power which he assumes to be

> Some ancient
> Damp god of this dooming island, who spat
> The fungus out of his mouth. (p. 9)

He curses the land his fathers found and conquered for him, "the slaver on the mouth of its winds", "the voices rasping/ Out of decaying rafters, out of every cave/ And every hole in the yellow sodden hills." (id), which confuse and mislead him. He especially complains having been a victim of

> the sudden sting of one
> Of the island gods, the down-and-out divinities
> Moping, mildewed with immortality,
> Cross-boned on weedy altars. (p. 10)

In terms of nature, *Thor with Angels* may be defined as the search for peace through the mists of superstition.

Animals reinforce this current of superstitious thought. Colgrin assumes Quichelm to be a "Frog-man" or a "fen-fiend". (p. 1). The warriors' arrival is anticipated by the cows' "facing north" (p. 2), and Martina felt trouble brewing when she saw the house "crowned with crows". (p. 3).

On the other hand, Merlin and his views are expressed largely in terms of Nature images:

> His beard was twisted like mist in the roots of an oak-tree,
> Beaded and bright with a slight rain, and he was crying
> Like an old wet leaf. His hands were as brown as a nest
> Of lizards, and his eyes were two pale stones
> Dropping in a dark well. (p. 21)

If we analyze the symbols in this most poetic description, we find that Merlin participates in the characteristics of the landscape. His painful condition is suggested to us by the water images, which give us all the impression of tears; his beard, "twisted in the roots of an oak-tree", stands for old age; whereas his hands, "as brown as a nest/ Of lizards" make us realize that they are weather-beaten, and that therefore he has led a neglected outdoor existence. The whole description gives an effect of utter dejection, but also of character symbolising a natural wisdom unconquered by death.

Solitude is associated with filthy animals, which are personified to indicate that they are the only companions of the lonely Merlin. He expects nothing but the slow

> solemnities of a tortoise
> Or a grudging goodnight from the dark lungs of a toad.
> (p. 23)

But return to sociability is conveyed by means of a bird image:

> And then your voice alights on my ear. (p. 23)

Merlin speaks of life as of a river on the surface of which his own existence is like a bubble

> smiling
> Inanely at the sun until it dissolves. (p. 24)

This image is expressive of Merlin's feelings. He is just within an ace of death. Besides, it also illustrates the pleasure he gets in life:

> I merely float, in a desultory, though
> Delighted, kind of way. (id.)

Merlin is also aware of men's desire for life. This world exerts a

powerful attraction on us, and though we are aware that its pleasures are ephemeral and unworthy, our eyes

close upon it like a flower
Closing on a globe of dew. (p. 29)

But the most relevant images in this classification are those dealing with Merlin's recollections and prophecies. The magnificence of days gone by when Merlin held a distinguished place in Arthur's court is conveyed by flower images. Merlin beholds himself walking "Between the dog-rose hedges" of his manhood (p. 28). He has a deep sense of Nature. For him, the achievements of Arthur's knights could be properly symbolized by

Joseph's faithful staff
Breaking into scarlet bud in the falling snow.[3] (p. 28)

There are three significant elements in this image: *the Christian tradition,* since Merlin is referring to a Christian society; the *scarlet bud* which stands for spring and new life, and the *falling snow* meaning that winter has come to an end. Though Arthur's golden age is gone, Merlin says that such miracles as that of Joseph's staff are commonplace:

staves of chestnut wood
And maywood and the like perform it every year. (p. 28)

This expresses Merlin's confidence in a renewal of men's life and institutions, and anticipates his prophecy of the arrival of the Roman missionaries.

In his prophecy, the old Magician compares Nature to human beings and finds that the process undergone by both is analogous:

I'm too near-sighted now
To be able to distinguish one thing from another,
The storm-swollen river from the tear-swollen eyes,
Or the bare cracked earth from the burnt-out face,
Or the forest soughing from the sighing heart.

3 Joseph was preferred to many other young men who sought the honour of becoming spoused to the Virgin Mary, because his staff, unlike that of the other flowered within three days.

The effect of such comparisons is one of generalization from which Merlin draws a conclusion:

> What is one is in the other, a mood
> Of rage which turns upon itself to savage
> Its own body, since there's nothing except itself
> On which anger can alight.

Yet the world is not at an end. Life remains latent and springs forth in due time, just as Nature reviving after winter. A similar revival is about to occur in England. The savage rule that the invaders had imposed on the island because they felt afraid, will be followed by the kind, loving, and merciful rule of Christianity. The coming of the missionaries coincides with the beginning of spring:

> the men of Rome
> Returning, bringing God, winter over, a breath
> Of green exhaled from the hedges, the wall of sky
> Breached by larksong. Primrose and violet
> And all frail privileges of the early ground
> Gather like pilgrims in the aisles of the sun. (p. 33)

This speech should be related to a later one, where Merlin exposes his philosophic views,[4] and where the dreams out of "the slumbering rock" are identified with human, animal or vegetable life, and are finally compared to a wealthy stream emptying into an infinite sea: God and the other life.

Several nature images throw light on the characters. Clodesuida's for example, show the superstitious, unperceptive woman she is. She is on guard against Merlin, who may be "as fatal as a toadstool". Incapable of realizing the meaning of her husband's spiritual concern she tells him: "It's you who churn up the air; the air itself/ Is as unruffled as ever" (p. 30). For the vulgar mind things usually appear simpler than they actually are.

In his miserable condition of slave and prisoner Hoel feels the sting of the desire for life, even though it be under the most squalid conditions:

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4 It may be found on p. 45 of *Thor with Angels.*

I want to live, even
If it's like a louse on the back of a sheep, skewering
Into the wool away from the beaks of crows;
Even like a limpet on a sour rock
I want to live! (p. 17)

Another remarkable nature image is that of the victim compared to fruit hanging on a tree. This is the way Hoel is referred to, so that there is a marked analogy between him and the Divine Victim hanging on the tree of the cross. By this we are made to understand that sacrifice is not only acceptable to God from Jesus Christ — who is God too — but also from mankind, that the fruits of salvation may be achieved. This is one of the most significant symbols in the play, for it shows the action on a double level: the human and the divine.

BODY AND BODILY ACTION

Body and bodily action images are often concretions of abstract thoughts. The most remarkable facts about many of them are that they reflect violence and discomfort, and continuously remind us, first, of the social milieu: a barbarous group of warlike Jutes still deprived of refinement in their everyday relations; second, of the misunderstanding between the characters; third, of the conflict Cymen is confronted with in his search for the nature and reasons of his defeat.

As specimens of the first group we have Quichelm's compliments to Colgrin: you "buckle-backed/ Gutsack" (p. 1), which conveys an idea of distortion. Of the second, Cymen's: "Tell her I am (mad) or you'll strangle yourselves/ With an unspoken truth" (p. 7), or "Spit some words at me instead, and gurk/ Away your grudge." (id.), which is expressive of an atmosphere of discomfort and disapproval in which the subordinates are eager to blame their defeat on their chief. Of the third, the most transcendental, for on Cymen's conflict lies the root of the dramatic idea of the play, a number of allusions to violent bodily movements, as when Quichelm describes his father's behaviour at battle:

Like a madman, he saved this Briton when we'd have killed
[him:
Burst in among us, blaspheming against Woden. (p. 4)

which shows Cymen subject to a supernatural power.

The painful implications of many of these symbols are worth considering because they complement the effect of fire, light and shadow images. When Cymen becomes aware that he cannot escape the obsession of his conflict he says:

This walking wound in my strength can walk on,
Wake me in the morning, see me to bed. (p. 13)

Merlin's interpretation of Cymen's mystery is one of the keys to the play's basical philosophy, which is one of redemption through sacrifice, that is, the Christian way. No one wins all who has not lost all; no one receives everything who has not given everything; die that you may live; suffer that you may rejoice; sleep that you may wake. This world is all give and take, an endless succession of loss and finding, "quest, and conquest and quest again" (p. 27).

This paradoxical situation is reflected by Nature, and Merlin's natural images are associated with pain, body and bodily action. For instance, when he tells how

the world feels in springtime the stab of the spear
And the spurt of golden blood,
Winter's wound-in-the-side, the place where life begins."
(p. 27)

It is as though Nature were tired of life and suddenly felt a prompting to let it flow again with renewed strength.

Other bodily images are expressive of Hoel's wavering between death and life, hope and discouragement:

I might by now
Have been wading in the sway of death,
But I'm blinking at the light; my head swims with it."
(p. 16)

"Swims", suggests to one all kind of movement, and therefore, expresses admirably an indefinite situation.

By means of these images too, Hoel expresses his piercing grief:

> Here I lie —
> Hanging on to what was once my country,
> Like an idiot clinging to the body of his dead mother.
> Why don't you hack me off her? Why don't you? (p. 16)

The merciless, revengeful, tyrannical, undiscriminating gods are described by these images: they shoot so "carelessly" against heathens that "the blow" may fall on the faithful.

> The skirts of the gods
> Drag in our mud. We feel the touch
> And take it to be a kiss. But they see we soil them
> And twitch themselves away. (p. 26)

The purpose of these images is highly dramatic because they make evident the fear and cruelty of the barbarian religion, and indirectly emphasize Christianity's rule by love.

The images used by Tadfrid and Osmer right after the Briton has killed the wolf show a marked superstitious tendency, and are designed to lessen the value of Hoel's feat:

> by what muscle, except a devil's
> Could he elbow himself between our gods and us? (p. 36)

They also express the anger of the gods and show them bottling their ire to spring on men and take awful revenge .

All this time Cymen wavers between his traditional religious beliefs and his own personal conflict. He feels mankind is irretrievably lonely. There is an immense gulf of separation between the gods and men. He needs help, advice to find his way again through life, but the gods remain indifferent. This lack of communication is most painful and bewildering:

> I know well enough
> The weight of the silence that's on our shoulders now.
> (p. 35)

Finally Cymen decides to placate the gods. He kills a goat; but as he offers the victim separation between the divinities and himself

becomes more evident. Cymen addresses the gods in a way which shows well how deep is his resentment against their cruelty:

> Goaders, grappling gods,
> Whose iron feet pace on thunder's floor
> Up and down in the hall where chaos groaned
> And bore creation sobbing. Boding gods,
> Who broad in the universe consume our days
> Like food, and crunch us, good and bad,
> Like bones. 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 later,

> By what stroke was the human flesh
> Hacked so separate from the body of life
> Beyond us? (pp. 37-38)

Notice how the effect is secured through allusions to painful or violent body movements.

The outcome of all this is an attitude of rebellion. As Cymen throws down the stones of the altar he exclaims:

> I am alone, without hope;
> The outlaw, no longer the groveller on the knee. (p. 38)

Merlin makes another remarkable use of body images in his last speech — which I have already referred to among Nature images. In this speech the author gives an interpretation of Plato's philosophy of ideas.

Plato's Idea is not a symbol, but something real, having an existence of its own as something absolute and beyond the bounds of space and time. It is an archetype or eternal model of things, a principle of being and of knowledge. Therefore, all things partake of its nature, and once it has been known by the intellect, all those things whose paradigm is the Idea, may be known.

What we see, touch and hear, the realities around us, are but phenomena, having a limited and transient existence. The one pervading, non-conditioned and transcendental reality is the Idea.

According to Plato, while men live in this world they may attain but an imperfect knowledge of Ideas, because they do not know things in their essence but through sensorial perceptions. Our senses do not grasp the ontological nature of things, but their appearances and likenesses. A state of "pure noesis", that is to say, of perfect knowledge, can only be attained after death.

This is more or less what Fry has said in Merlin's last speech. The Idea is represented by a supreme loving "will" in "a slumbering rock", out of which dreams grow and shape. The phenomena of this world, whether human, animal, vegetable or of any other sort, are but shapes of those dreams, and conform as perfectly as possible to the "shape of the dream/ In the ancient slumbering rock". All this enormous variety of shapes is reduced to one, because all beings are subject to death. Then dreams are over, and beings free of "the throes of sleep" which are but imperfect forms of life. Here "the dream wakes in the open eyes of the sea of the love of the morning of the God", which means full life, perfect knowledge, "pure noesis". (pp. 45, 46).

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The purpose of light and darkness images in this play is analogous to that of Fry's other works. In general, we may say that light stands for all positive things: — life, power, glory, mercy, peace — and darkness for discomfort, confusion, indecision, defeat, evil and death. Thus Cymen describes how his fathers were deceived by a brilliant and false portrayal of a rich and promising England: A land where

> eels
> Reeled in bright mud. Flocks were fair
> And cows, like pendulous fountains of alabaster,
> Went lowing over land where silver skulked
> Waiting for skill; a land where summer days
> Could call to one another across the night
> Under the northern pole... (p. 10)

But it was all a mirage, an ephemeral illusion wherein he, for one, is floundering. The other side of the picture is his own account of a bleak, cloudy and misty land where he has been tricked by an ancient vanquished god as we have seen when dealing with Nature images.

Distrust is dark. The suspicious Tadfrid and Osmer are compared to "thundercoloured bulls" walking in a "resentful march" "with no moon" (p. 6). Thor swearing and swinging "in the scarlet dusk" (p. 8) brings about *defeat*. The *superstitious fears* of the characters are emphasized by darkness images:

> What else but a power of the dark would send him (Hoel)
> Scudding into the teeth and talons
> Of a probable death, for us, his enemies? (p. 36)

Light is the best defence against the working of evil spirits. Thus Cymen is invited to hear the words of the Roman missionaries outdoors, where "the sun in the sky suffers all for all" (p. 39). Merlin's vision of the slow evolution of man and society, including religion, also profits by these images. As he speaks of dreams coming out of "the slumbering rock" (p. 45) we are led to think of darkness. It is even more so when he says that dreams will come to an end in the "sea of the love of the morning of the God" (p. 46). Men's ambition to conform to "the shape of the will/ Of the slumbering rock" is in fact, the story of their efforts to improve their own lives and achieve perfection. But their actions towards this goal are not always straightforward. Man is subject to mistakes and has to correct his errors. Often he is deceived and led aside in his search for perfection, yet at times, too, "by a spurt/ Of light" he manages "the clumsy approximation" (p. 46), but does not remain static, still endeavouring to perfect it.

According to Fry's views, religions are subject to this process. Christianity appears as the last step in a long development:

> The shape shone
> Like a faint circle round a moon
> Of hazy gods, and age by age
> The gods reformed according to the shape,
> According to the shape that was a word,
> According to Thy Word. (p. 46)

"Thy Word" means Jesus' word, the word of Him who took upon himself a human body and preached to men, that they might know the Will of the Father in Heaven.

Yet Fry's interpretation of the matter is not orthodox nor scientific in every respect, for the fact is that men did not reach Christianity as the result of an evolution, or at least, not such an evolution as Fry suggests when he says that the "gods reformed according to the shape", that is to say, religions coalesced until the belief in many gods finally became the belief in one God, and there arose Christianity. Monotheism has always existed, as it is proved by the Bible, by historians and investigators [5] even if this religious attitude had not been kept uncorrupt but by a small group of people at the beginning of time and through many centuries. Yet, in one respect Christianity may be considered as the product of an evolution, since it is supported by all the pure Hebrew religious beliefs, so that the *New Testament* is the complement of the Old one. The Messianic expectations going back as far as the *Genesis* come to be fulfilled in the *New Testament,* where Jesus does not change, but improves and completes the Jewish Religion. Besides, the belief in the Holy Trinity as accepted by Fry in *Thor With Angels* cannot be regarded as the conclusion of human reasoning. It is one given to man through revelation. Its truth, unlike that of the existence of God, cannot be satisfactorily demonstrated to the intellect, though it is not absurd either, and needs the assistance of faith, man's confidence in the Divine Word, to be believed.

One of the outstanding uses of light and darkness images is that in which they are associated with Hoel, the Briton, and therefore, the material cause of trouble. His foes speak of him as "the black-

5 In his comprehensive work *Manual de Historia Comparada de las Religiones,* Dr. P. Guillermo Schmidt, a recognized authority in the scientific study of the history of religions says: "Cierto número de autores atacan principalmente el que el ser supremo de la cultura primitiva fuera un verdadero único dios, y la religión que le contiene, un verdadero monoteísmo. A eso se puede replicar que existe un número suficiente de tribus en que el carácter a todas luces monoteísta de su ser supremo aparece aún macroscópicamente con suficiente claridad". Then he mentions several tribes the age of which is greater than any other human group, and which can be found in every Continent. He observes that when belief in several gods appears in any of these tribes, it is a result of the primitive monotheistic conception, and due to circumstances of social or economic life, or otherwise to a diversification of the wide personality of the one supreme being in several subordinate figures. Chapters XV and XVI.

haired enemy'' (p. 15). When Cymen says: ''I'll set/ My foot on the neck of the dark'' (p. 13) he actually steps on Hoel. Osmer suggests that the prisoner be sent ''where the moles/ Can teach him to dig in the dark'' (p. 12), and Tadfrid's ''His brows are marked/ With the night already'' is an anticipation of the Briton's lot.

There is great consitency between these images and the other issues of the play, for Hoel symbolizes to Cymen a dark and deep mystery which he cannot penetrate. Besides, since he is marked by death, and death is dark in Fry's imagery, it is quite relevant that he should be referred to by such images as these.

The experience Cymen has undergone in sparing the Briton's life, and the hidden motives lying behind such behaviour are expressed by light and darkness images. On one hand, since an attitude of humility, kindness and mutual love opens the way to an altogether different conception of the world which had so far remained obscure to Cymen, it is only natural that he should think of his discovery as the development of ''a third strange eye'' (p. 11), and identify the force which led him to spare the Briton to a ''staggering light'' (p. 4) against which his sword broke.

On the other hand, the nature of the problem is very complex in itself, having no precedent in Cymen's life, and eluding all satisfactory explanation on the grounds of a barbarous religion and institutions. Cymen regards it as a deep mystery urging him to an immediate investigation,

> every
> Moment shall have spears addressed to that dark
> Which lies in wait for my will. (p. 13)

Besides, Cymen is feeling deeply disturbed and terribly discomforted. Hence the painful implications of the light image.

> No sleep came.
> An occasional shadow across my bed from a cloud
> Of weariness, but the glare of the brain persisted.
> Where is the Briton? (p. 24)

From this to the *fire* images which are numerous there is only one step. They have violent implications. They are meant to express the exhaustive, penetrating power of this unknown force of mercy

which threatens to extinguish both the physical and the spiritual strength of its victim, as when Cymen exclaims: "I know no defence against that burst of fire" (p. 11), and later,

> What peace can we have until I know
> Whether or not the same mishappen fire again
> Will burn me? (p. 13)

The general current of images by which Hoel is associated with the dark can be traced up to the end of the play. Martina would wish him to become her "personal shadow" (p. 47); and Osmer calls him "black pawn of the devil's game" (p. 49). In killing him the four men hope to set the house "Free from fear and guilt and the working of darkness" (p. 50). This is intensely symbolic, because of the dramatic idea of the play: death, a sacrifice, is necessary that man and God be reconciled.

The implications of other images are akin. The Briton says:

> Death, be to me like a hand that shades
> My eyes, helping me to see
> Into the light. (p. 50)

which reinforces the Christian philosophy of losing all for finding all. Death, the apparently complete darkness, becomes the way to everlasting light. It rids men of uncertainty and leads to safety and peace of mind.

The root and symbol of man's reconciliation with God is Jesus, who though dead on the cross, appears to Cymen as a piercing ray of light from God.

> I saw the cross-road tree,
> The love of the God hung on the motes and beams
> Of light. (p. 52)

The characters Fry has dealt with in *Thor With Angels* are akin to one another. More than developed characters in the dramatic sense of the word, they serve to create a background of fear, superstition and ruthless savageness. This is true of Tadfrid, Osmer, Quichelm, Cheldric and Clodesuida who hardly differ among themselves. Merlin does not strike us as a human being, nor is he intended to do so, for

he moves in a supra-human level between the past, the present and the future, where one aspect of the evolution man undergoes in surveyed. We have seen how Fry thinks of Christianity as a stage in the development of religion.

Hoel is a character partly human and partly symbolic. As elements of the former we find his courage, his affections and his desire to live. As a symbol, he embodies a spiritual conflict which is resolved by understanding the value of mercy and sacrifice.

Martina stands somewhat apart from the other characters. She is not affected by superstition the way the others are, because her religious belief and devotion are not so deeply rooted. She gives more credit to Merlin's prophecies than to ritual sacrifices. Then too, she is apt to deal with her fellow beings in a more humane and sensible way. She has been introduced for the sake of pathos, as we have seen before. Yet her character is not largely developed, and we have to turn to Cymen for the outstanding figure in *Thor With Angels.*

An analysis of Cymen's character convinces that he bears the marks of Fry's dramatic heroes: perception and a deep personal conflict. Because of the former, he senses that here is something beyond a mere whim in showing mercy to an enemy. Yet, what this something is, he cannot, realize; thence the conflict which assails him and prompts him to search. He is confronted with an investigation of his own self, and of the fundamental principles which direct humanity. He does away with superstition because it cannot explain the nature of his problem; it is fictitious and he needs truth; it is cruel, and he has been touched by mercy. His mind is open to change, not rooted to tradition; dynamic, not static like those surrounding him. Because it is more exhaustive, it is also more complex.

Colgrin and Anna are humorous characters which serve to relax dramatic tension. They are light food after a heavy meal of philosophic reflection. The most remarkable trait of Colgrin's personality is indolence, set as a contrast to Cymen's curiosity. Some of his remarks have a universal significance, for they express a desire which is prevalent, for instance, when he says: "The best life is led horizontal/ And absolutely unconscious" (p. 17). That is, we enjoy laying aside responsibilities. Colgrin, like Doto, is the sort of person who does not worry about involved philosophic matters. He is the

"voice of unpretentious life", chiefly concerned with physical existence.

In choosing the theme of *Thor With Angels* to resolve the conflict of man's existence in terms of Christianity, Fry has followed the bent of his philosophic views, namely, the paradoxical apprehension of the world. [6]

In fact, Christianity might be defined as the religion of paradoxes. One of its most important mysteries, that of man's Redemption, brings man and God, the creature and his Creator nearer to each other than they had ever been before. The fact that Christ united in one person both natures, the human and the divine, so as to be able to offer His Father a worthy sacrifice, is one of the most paradoxical matters that can be posed to the intellect.

Christ in the cross in the supreme denial of what men consider worthy of their ambitions: comfort, power, glory, wealth; and yet, His Sacrifice is the only possible way to a safe, peaceful and permanent possession of all these things. Those who follow Him come to know peace in renunciation, power in humility, glory and fame in retirement. Cymen's last speeches are full of confidence in this God who knows so well about human sorrows and ambitions.

On the other hand, Cymen feels no Christian deserves that name who does not care for his fellows. He accepts responsibility in the griefs of others:

> while I leave one muscle of my strength
> Undisturbed, or hug one coin of ease
> Or private peace while the huge debt of pain
> Mounts over all the world...
>
> I have no right or reason
> To raise a cry against this blundering cruelty
> Of man. (p. 53)

Thus the message of the play has great social importance.

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6 See my study of *The Firstborn*, 50, 51. Also the *Lady's not for Burning*, pp. 78, 82.

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

A *SLEEP of Prisoners* is Fry's most original as well as most symbolic play. In his foreword to his friend Robert Gittings to whom this work was dedicated, Fry speaks of his desire of finding "a way for comedy" apt enough to express how "progress is the growth of vision, the increased perception of what makes for life and what makes for death". Without boasting of having achieved this purpose in *A Sleep of Prisoners,* he says he has looked forward to something of the kind in the development of the complicated pattern of his play. Actually, we are confronted with a very clever piece in which Fry has found a way of expressing much of the anxieties of our age, as well as of the philosophic views he is concerned with.

The play consists of four dreams and what we might call an introduction. In many respects, the latter is a key to the understanding of the other four. It provides a psychologic motivation and puts us in a proper frame of mind for the following scenes.

As the curtain goes up, four prisoners of war, locked in a church, are found trying to adapt themselves to their strange prison camp. Private Peter Able has already discovered the organ and shows his abilities in playing popular tunes, such as 'Three Blind Mice'. Private David King explores the religious precincts. The other two, Corporal Joe Adams, and Private Tim Meadows prepare themselves for a long night rest.

What we are most interested in is the mood of the characters. Able's frame of mind has a humorous and ironical bent, and allows him to adapt himself easily to the circumstances. He inspects the

precincts with the lively enthusiasm of a fourteen-year-old boy in a land of adventure. He does not seem to be worried about imprisonment, isolation or monotony. Besides, he shows his high spirits openly, regardless of the feelings of his comrades, who are anxious concerning the change just come into their lives. David King's nerves especially, are on edge. Able's imperturbable good humour causes first, his disapproval, and then his rage. The outlook, he says, is dark: "Has anybody thought what it's going to be like/ Suppose we stay here for months or years?" (p. 2). The watching eye and the guns of the guards seem to be on him all the time. Every now and then, he drops Able a warning, as when the latter, having come across a Bible on the lectern, reads the names of the wives and children of David, King of Israel. Then Private David says:

> You know what Absalom
> Said to the tree? 'You're getting in my hair'
> And that's what I mean, so shut up. (p. 4)

Peter, nevertheless, has made up his mind to carry fun to the limit. He climbs the pulpit and starts a speech. In a flash of blind fury David leaps on him and nearly strangles his comrade. Adams forces him to release his victim. Confused and ashamed, David goes to his bunk. Peter is carried to bed and soon falls asleep. Meadows and Adams stay commenting upon the incident. King's violent reaction has shown an aspect of his personality worthy of exploration. Events lead them unconsciously to wish they had reached a better understanding of the human psyche. Meadows, the oldest, is especially curious of such knowledge:

> there's strange divisions in us,
> And in every man, one side or the other.
> When I'm not too good I hear myself talking away
> Like Tim Meadows M.P., at the other end of my head.
> Sounds all right. I'd like to know what I say.
> Might be interesting. (p. 9)

In other words, Meadows wishes to see beyond mere appearances, to dive into the troubled sea of the subconscious of which dreams are valuable indicators. As the last words die on the lips of the prisoners, sleep overcomes them. Meadows is the first to have a dream, the

subject of which is the story of Cain and Abel in which he himself, plays God's part.

In his choice of the other characters, the author has taken advantage of the use of an analogy among names, for he has assigned the rôle of Abel to Able; King stands for Cain, and Adams for Adam.

One of the most striking features of the dream is a pervading atmosphere of displacement. This becomes evident from the very beginning, when Adam appears before God blemished by sin, deprived of peace, fearful of the future. Yet, his attitude is not one of humble recognition of his guilt. He does not assume his situation to be, as in the Bible, a justly deserved punishment of a previous act of pride. On the contrary, he feels he has been taken at a disadvantage and resents it. As he talks to God he excuses his guilt by saying that it was "Too dark to see" (p. 10), and that "The road kept on dividing/ Every yard or so" (p. 11). Peace and happiness were lost to him as soon as he knew they were his. His relations to God are so strained, that Cain allows himself to make the introduction: "God: man. Man: God." (p. 12).

Adam's position in the dream is that of a witness. He suffers and endures, but is "unequipped" to act. The active characters are Cain and Abel, who represent two contrasting and violently opposing types as regards spiritual matters. Cain is the man of this world, steeped in earthy matters, beset by greedy passions, subject to and content with the rule of instinct which is that of the flesh, as is exemplified by this image,

> Flesh is my birthplace. Why shouldn't I speak the tongue?
> (p. 16)

Such a character as this, which is generally known as a "philistine", is not only satisfied with coarse pleasures, but is ambitious and prone to succeed in worldly business, so that he may boast of being the man of the future.

Abel is what Sören Kierkegaard [1] has called "Knight of Infinity", because of his infinite dislike of the world. This type of man —

1 Quoted by Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation*, Chapter I, pp. 32, 33.

much harder to find than the philistine — has been endowed with penetrating spiritual insight. He has seen the world, touched upon its pleasures, known its delusions, and drained its cup of sadness; therefore, he knows the vanity of all such things. From disappointment to disappointment, from failure to failure, his ambitious heart does continuously seek and object worthy of being loved. His mind knows no peace in its search for truth, in its eagerness to penetrate the mysteries of life. Yet, the more he endeavours to find the key to his perplexities, the more bewildered he becomes, for his intellectual arrogance is an obstacle against his finding the truth. Thence arises a feeling of displacement, unsatisfaction, and a mental attitude of agnosticism: man cannot fully comprehend the mysteries of life.

The core of Meadows' dream is the clash between these characters, which is most clearly seen in the analysis of the figurative speech. As Cain censures Abel for his lack of interest in earthy matters, Abel illustrates the fundamental question of the purpose of man's existence in a series of images, mostly personifications and abstractions:

> Day and night, the sun and moon
> Spirit us, we wonder where. Meanwhile
> Here we are, we lean on our lives
> Expecting purpose to keep her date,
> Get cold waiting, watch the overworlds
> Come and go, question the need to stay
> But do, in an obstinate anticipation of love. (p. 13)

To such a charatcer as his, man does not appear to be the king of creation, nor are all things presumed to be created for man's benefit. That, in his opinion, would be a terrible futility, since they cannot give him satisfaction, nor are they regarded as means to reach a perfect, everlasting existence after death. Creatures are simply man's "pain-fellows":

> Other lives, forbear
> To blame me, great and small forgive me
> If to your various agonies
> My light shoud seem hardly enough
> To be the cause of the ponderable shadow. (p. 14)

This *light* is the life of man, unable to penetrate the *shadow*, the mysteries of existence, and according to Able, no justification for inflicting death on other creatures.

The question is so perplexing, that both brothers agree to take it to the "High and Mighty". They play dice. Adam watches and asks God to favour Cain, because,

> The other boy
> Frets for what never came his way,
> Will never reconcile us to our exile. (p. 15)

Yet, Abel has the higher throw. Cain rages and blasphemes. He says he has been cast on the mould of passion, and wonders why he should not live according to its laws:

> Life is a hypocrite if I can't live
> The way it moves me! (p. 16)

In a fury with his brother, whom he supposes to have worked hand in glove with the supernatural, he leaps forth and murders him. Adam watches, makes as if to help the victim, but is "wheeled by an unknown force back against his bunk". Thus Fry wishes to express man's helplessness against fate. Nature images emphasize Adam's pathetic situation:

> 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 spreadeagle me. (p. 17)

Here, in this duality, lies one of the tragedies of man.

God hears Abel's blood crying to Him from the ground. All the images convey ideas of fear, death, despair, extreme physical pain: "Cage of the world/ Holds your prowling. Howl, Cain, jackal afraid"... "Every man's hand will be against you,/ But never touch you into quietness"... "cross at the double/ The bursts of open days between the nights". Compared with this endless anguish, death loses significance: "it has come/ An act so small, my enemies will do it/ Between two jobs". It is a rest anxiously desired: "God, let me sleep." (pp. 18, 19, 20).

David's dream is his own reaction to the events. He is now King David, in the Bible, surrounded by "fools", lonely and deserted in a war against fierce enemies. In the dark, which is now the symbol of danger, he sees a lurking shadow: Peter, who stands for rebellious Absalom.

The conflict lying in this dream is that of responsibility against levity. The King endeavours throughout to impress on his son a sense of duty. The atmosphere is one of imminent danger, unless "fools" are made to realize that playing time is over. Men have to be in earnest. Images reflect these conditions. The frivolous, easy-going Absalom is described as a playful boy:

> The world's back
> Is bent and heavily burdened, and yet he thinks
> He can leapfrog over. (p. 2)

David's desire to make his son aware of his duties would be, if carried out, a sort of enlightenment: "Who can put eyes in his head?" (p. 23). Yet, it is also a painful task for both master and pupil, because it puts an end to the unworried enjoyment of childhood. That is why David says:

> I tremble like an earthquake
> Because I can't find words which might
> Put the fear of man into you. (p. 23)

Responsibility is awareness of death and sorrow, it is a fear. Absalom feels he is being dragged into a "nightmare" (p. 24).

Fry follows the biblical outline. Absalom turns a deaf ear to his father and joins the enemy. David watches him go away carrying "No light with him" (p. 24). He climbs the pulpit and hangs from its edge, as though it were a tree. Adams, now General Joab, cuts him down with a tommy gun, and the victim falls with a cry. David wakes up startled and goes to take a look at Peter's bunk. He returns and starts dreaming again. This second part offers us a deeply human question. The King watches Adams drag Peter back to bed. He asks:

> — Joab, is that you?
> What are you bringing back?
> Adams.— The victory.

David. —Are you sure it's the victory, Joab?
Are we ever sure it's the victory?
So many times you've come back, Joab
With something else. (p. 26)

This is the question people have asked after a war, when evaluating their so called victories. That "something else" amounts to so many bitterly regretted losses, that the heart can hardly rejoice in the triumph. David stands as the symbol of those who had to sacrifice what they loved most dearly.

In Private Peter's dream, the author has endeavoured once more to explore the problems of the human psyche. The conflict with which the characters are confronted now, is that between faith and the need for sacrifice, a theme we find reflected in the story of Abraham and Isaac. Inasmuch as Peter is now the protagonist and the dreamer, images reflect an attitude of confidence, hope and love of life, as well as a critical consideration of death and life.

Isaac, Private Able, lies in prison when Abraham, Private King comes to fetch him. The pale light of morning reaches him "like a nurse" (p. 28). In a soft, picturesque style, Isaac describes the effects of growing light:

The hills roll in and make their homes,
And gradually unfold the plains. Breath
And light are cool together now. (p. 29)

"Dark pain" recedes, and gives way to peace and relief.

Throughout, one can trace these light and darkness images with contrasting meanings. Peter clings "hold of the light" (p. 30), for he climbs the mountain with a merry heart. Light profusion is like a promise of longevity: "There's more light than we can hold... You and I are both/ Immeasurably living." (id.). Right after he has been told of the sacrifice, his human logic argues against a premature death: "Surely there's no need for us to be/ The prisoners of the dark? Smile, father./ Let me go" (p. 32). Finally, his salvation is also emphasized by a light allusion: "The knive can drop/ Harmless and shining" (p. 33).

Images serve to create an atmosphere of war: "the great cities come down like avalanches" (p. 29). Natural beauty soothes the pain of piercing wounds, "the hay-silver evening is like a thin veil over/ The long scars from the nails of warring hearts" (p. 30).

Abraham's attitude breathes hope and resignation. He clings to the Divine promise of a large progeny, as shown by some *time* images: "Time gives the promise of time in every death/ Not of any ceasing." (p. 29). "I am history's wish and must come true" (p. 31). Suffering, which is not only Abraham's but a universal calamity, is shown as a preserving vaccine:

> God dips his hand in death to wash the wound,
> Takes evil to inoculate our lives
> Against infectious evil. (p. 31)

From this viewpoint death is necessary for the pursuit of the ends of the world. Isaac will lie down "to sleep/ For a better waking." (p. 32).

The end of the dream presents us with some images worth considering. Adams, who appears as the dream figure of the angel, shows the way Peter should be unbound and set free:

> David. — Shall I
> Undo the cords?
> Adams.— These particular. But never all.
> There's no loosening, since men with men
> Are like the knotted sea. (p. 33)

Peter, therefore, remains prisoner of men's opposing ambitions and pursuits. His coming back to life is a return to war and trouble.

Liberation renders Isaac pensive. With that peculiar sense of mystery Fry's characters possess, he questions why should a ram be sacrificed as an offset for his life, which has just been spared.

> Chance, as fine as thread,
> Cares to keep me, and I go my way. (p. 34)

What would have happened if I had died? he asks as he sees the "stars tremble in balance" "Between the day and the night". No

doubt exactly the same, for the world remains absolutely indifferent in the matter of death.

The last dream is the most symbolic and comprehensive of all. All the characters, except Meadows, start dreaming the same thing simultaneously. Corporal Adams finds himself "salt and sick on a raft" (p. 37). He drifts above shoals of fish, whose flashing movements remind him of "the war in heaven", and suggest glittering airplanes dashing across the sky. This is how I interpret the words "Angelfish and swordfish, the silver troops." (id.). Soon, such animal hosts become identified with crowds of men: "God, have mercy/ On our sick shoals, (souls), darting and dying" (id.). The atmosphere is one of loneliness, lack of hope and uncertainty. Not even *light* makes for hope; on the contrary, its use, in relation to something which is not confidence and relief serves to make man's strangement more impressive:

> The air is bright between us.
> The flying fish make occasional rainbows,
> But land, your land and mine, is nowhere yet. (p. 37)

David joins Adams. It is evident men are definitely lost, for there is "no rudder" (p. 38). Discomfort is emphasized by a *water* and *body* image: "I'm soaked to the skin" (id.). The characters feel at war. They blame their enemies for having marched them "thirty miles in the pouring rain" (id.).

Peter comes to them reeling and exhausted. For a moment he is identified with a "half-seas" man (id.) on the point of being carried away by the waves. By and by Fry shifts from this sea allegory to a biblical one. Peter reads an apparently incoherent passage in the Bible, but it is clear that he has hit on the story of Nebuchadnezzar and his three Jewish prisoners: Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego who were condemned by the king to die in a fiery furnace. The three soldiers are identified with them, though not directly, through an image to make their helplessness more impressive. They are "Three blind mice" (p. 40), which conveys a sense of insignificance and complete ignorance in relation with the heavy trial with which they are confronted. Up to the end of the dream images serve the dramatic

purpose of expressing the ideas and feelings of the characters. These feel imprisoned; they ask why it should be that "the open air/ Feels like a barrack square" (p. 42). They feel everything is out of place, unusual. They do not know the ground they are standing on. This is symbolized in the change of their names:

> black morning
> Christens us with names that were never ours
> And makes us pay for them. (p. 40)

As it is, even recognition among themselves becomes impossible. They are aware of the tragic imminence of death. There is a pervading fear symbolized by "the monster" (p. 41). Since the author does not insist much on it, I assume it to be the expectation of torment. Men's trial is a matter in which supernatural powers are involved: "eternity's in earnest" (p. 41). Nebuchadnezzar is identified with God when the prisoners, who are under close inspection, ask whether the king "is that him with one eye" (p. 42).[2]

Misunderstanding between the Divinity and men is also a feature of this part of the dream when Peter asks: "What bastard language/ Is he talking?" (p. 43), and he actually refers to God. The whole affair is so painful, that the prisoners come to think of it as an awful nightmare from which they anxiously wish to wake:

> O God in heaven, we're bound
> To wake up out of this.

Hostile powers play "their game/ In the dark" (p. 43); the characters realize that their feet and hands have been tied. This is the most critical moment and the author resorts to an image in order to emphasize the mental anguish of his characters:

> O, how
> Shall we think these moments out
> Before thinking splits to fear. (p. 43)

As the "heat" and "glare" of the fire is almost on the prisoners, they bid farewell to life:

2 Until a few years ago God used to be represented by a watchful eye within a triangle.

Chuck down
Your wishes for the world: there's nothing here
To charm us. (p. 44)

At this moment the dream takes a new turn. The characters have got over the worst. They find themselves living amid the encircling flames. In a way, they find that grief, as symbolized by *fire* is a sort of liberation:

But the cords
That were tying us are burnt: drop off
Like snakes of soot. (p. 45)

That feeling of personal disintegration they had experienced when called by new names and their feeling of displacement disappear: "We're men who speak/ We are men who sleep and wake" (p. 45). It becomes evident that it is fear of pain more than pain itself what makes men suffer.

Now, time is ripe to deliver the message of the dream. Amidst the blazes the characters perceive the shape of a man. It is Meadows, sitting on his bunk. *Light* images play an important part. The first sound uttered by this character is a cock crow, the voice of the morning's herald. Besides, a cock is alert always, it is the symbol of watchfulness, and Meadows' message is precisely to the point of showing the others that now, more than ever, men have to use their moral strength, their spiritual insight if they are going to master their destiny. They need "quick eyes to see/ Where evil is" (p. 46) and honesty to confess their shortcomings. Thus they will achieve a sort of moral purgation. Besides, they have to keep together, for no one can get out of the fire alone and defeat sorrow. The characters realize that what they had assumed to be fire is not really such, but the breath and blood of numberless human beings, "choking" and "burning" each other, that is, abusing their fellows, committing the sin of man against man. Yet, hate is no cure for such illness. Men have to elevate their hearts. They have to be patient and enduring, however hard patience and endurance may seem. They have to imitate and excel the wisdom of past times. Only thus will the spirit profit by its "wings," "unused,/ Folded in the heart" (p. 47).

In the last lines the author points forward to the vast panorama

where Good rules "beyond all tilt of wrong" (p. 48). To the incommensurable grief and doubt of man he opposes faith in God. The human fate projects largely, on the Infinite: "The human heart can go the lengths of God" (p. 49), and a host of images reinforces the meaning of his message:

> Dark and cold we may be, but this
> Is no winter now. The frozen misery
> Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
> The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
> The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
> Thank God our time is now when wrong
> Comes up to face us everywhere,
> Never to leave us till we take
> The longest stride of soul men ever took.
> Affairs are now soul size.
> The enterprise
> Is exploration into God.
> Where are you making for? It takes
> So many thousand years to wake,
> But will you wake for pity's sake?
> Pete's sake, Dave or one of you,
> Wake up, will you? Go and lie down.
> Where do you think you're going?

The last words of my last quotation serve both for the dream and for the scene of vigil which ensues. In order to achieve this, Meadows, who delivers it, does not drop figurative speech altogether. He goes on talking in a sort of symbolic, universal way which is in keeping with the images the author has been using:

> It takes
> So many thousand years to wake,
> But will you wake for pity's sake?

It is evident that in *A Sleep of Prisoners,* Fry asks us to adapt ourselves to a number of dramatic conventions. That is probably one of the reasons why his play failed to please a large number of

French theater-goers when it was first performed in Paris last year. The prisoners pass from consciousness to dreamy existence without any change of background. In the last dream, the four are supposed to dream the same thing. There is a minimum of stage devices and make-up. The play demands complete attention and vivid imagination. It is the sort of work one does not get to know or to appreciate fully at a glance. Its effect is secured through poetic speech, which is largely based on imagery and wordplay. Therefore, an analysis of its figurative language is essential to the understanding of the general meaning and message of the play.

VENUS OBSERVED

THE plot of *Venus Observed* has been described as the "polygamist's predicament".[1] The situation the author portrays is that of the man who, after twenty years of widowhood, decides to remarry. Being much of a Don Juan, he is perplexed in his choice of a wife, several women having, to him, equal claims upon his preference; therefore, he puts the matter before his son Edgar, who, like Paris in the classic days, will bestow an apple upon one of three handsome women — "All of them at some time implicated/ in the joyous routine" of his life. These will meet that very day in he observatory room of the ducal mansion at Stellmere Park.

The Duke of Altair, the protagonist, is devoted to astronomy, and has timed his party to coincide with a total eclipse of the sun. In the opening scene, besides his son, who will be the arbiter, there is also present his agent Reedbeck. The latter receives a telegram announcing to him the arrival of his daughter Perpetua, who has lived in America many years and is now returning home. While Reedbeck rejoices in the approaching meeting, Dominic, Reedbeck's son, comes in great distress to have an intimate talk with his father. Reedbeck, it appears, has been defrauding the Duke. He has raised the rents and has appropriated the increases to his own use. Dominic, who has come straight from Cambridge, can think of nothing beyond the great shame befalling the family when the defalcation comes to light and Reedbeck is condemned to imprisonment. The accusations are interrupted by the arrival of the guests. They, in order of appearance

1 Outlined by the "Ottawa Journal" as mentioned by Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation*, p. 86.

are, Miss Rosabel Fleming, an actress, a susceptible woman, who soon finds herself very ill at ease; Mrs. Jessie Dill, an attractive widow with an exceptional capacity of adaptation to her surroundings; and Mrs. Hilda Taylor-Snell, well-bred and judicious, whom the Duke refers to as the Athena of the party.

While the moon takes her course eclipsing the sun, the apple is given to one, and then to another of the guests, till Rosabel's uneasiness reaches a climax in a violent series of recriminations which make evident on one side, her love of the Duke, and on the other, her resentment against his long indifference.

The eclipse being over, the sun-light falls on Reedbeck's daughter, Perpetua, radiant with youth and beauty. Reedbeck is overcome with joy, and the Duke himself envisions unforeseen happiness at the horizon. Holding the apple, he graciously offers it to Perpetua, who, unpremeditatedly, takes out a pistol and shoots the fruit from within the very fingers of the supplicant.

Amazed at her own reaction, she explains how she had belonged to a society for "the Desecration of Ancient and Modern Monumental Errors", and had got into the habit of destroying whatever she hated. This was dangerous, and as a consequence she was imprisoned. Now, liberated but a short time, she unconsciously regarded the apple as a threat to her freedom, to her independence of action and thought.

Yet, the afternoon of the same day, Act I, Sc. I, the newly-arrived Venus does accept the apple more than she herself would have foreseen. Dominic meets her in The Temple of the Ancient Virtues, by the ducal lake. He puts the matter of Reedbeck's peculation before her, and suggests that she marry the Duke to absolve the thief, for no man is likely to send his father-in-law to jail.

Accordingly, Perpetua does not only acquiesce with the Duke when he suggests that they go shooting in his possessions, but also accepts his invitation to look at the stars in his observatory that very night. The Duke's love affair with Perpetua causes Edgar much anxiety, in that he also is infatuated with the girl. A sort of competition starts between father and son when the latter shoots an arrow over the Duke's head, and hits the very gold of the target. Then Edkar asks his father to step out of his way, and his father refuses, whereupon Edgar asks Perpetua to a popular dance in a neighbour-

ing town in which All Hallowe'en is most amusingly celebrated. Remembering her appointment with the Duke, she refuses the invitation, but agrees to take a look at the ducal horses, of which Edgar is exceedingly fond.

So far, the fact of the nocturnal meeting in the observatory has remained a secret. Rosabel has her suspicions, but is told by the Duke that the place will be deserted. The unhappy lover hears this, and a mischievious scheme begins to take shape in her mind.

In Scene II, the Duke makes an explicit declaration to Perpetua of his love for her, and asks her to marry him. There is an old mirror in the observatory; the Duke remarks that it is All Halowe'en, the only night in the year in which mirrors show the image of future husbands to girls combing their hair in front of the glass, and suggests that Perpetua herself tests this tradition. Though he stands in front of the mirror while the young woman stares at it, she discerns no other image than Edgar's. She then realizes that it is folly to marry the Duke without loving him, and confesses to him the motives leading her at first to respond to and letter to reject his wooing. His agent's peculations are not unknown to the Duke. For many years before he has been aware of and has overlooked them; but Perpetua's rejection is another matter. The Duke feels deeply disillusioned. Here the smell and noise of burning wood reaches the observatory; no doubt, there is a conflagration below, the outcome of Rosabel's scheme. The stairs are on fire; there is no escape. In the giddiness of these minutes, the Duke, who knows they may die in the flames, begs Perpetua's love once more. She is in despair and evinces a love which is not love, but a desire for life. When all hope is gone, the Duke's butler, and his footman, Reddleman and Bates, who had been lion-tamer and burglar respectively, reach the observatory offering to rescue the Duke and Perpetua. Reddleman wishes to carry them down the burning stairs; Bates, to lead them down a ladder he has placed against the front wall of the house. Bates' plan is safer; therefore the Duke trusts Perpetua to him and follows Reddleman, for he has not the heart to disappoint the lion-tamer.

Act III, says Derek Stanford, "might well be described as the Act of Forgiveness".[2] In the Temple of the Ancient Virtues, where

2 In his work *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation,* Chapter III, p. 79.

all the characters gather after the Duke and Perpetua's rescue, Dominic comes in apologizing for his unfairness in wishing his sister to lose her freedom and marry a man she did not love. Reedbeck arrives breathlessly to confess his sins to the Duke; for he, and no one else is responsible for two unhappy people being trapped in the flames. Rosabel tells the Duke that she set fire to the house and gives herself up to the police; and Perpetua is ashamed to say that there is no love as she had declared to feel in the roaring flames.

The Duke proves to be magnanimous. He announces to Reedbeck that there is a document legalizing his theft and assigning to him certain percentages of the ducal rents. He turns to Perpetua and absolves her and himself of this love quest in which the heart tricks us in our purposes, or carries us further than we would go. Finally, in the closing paragraphs, after having watched how his loved one is drawn to Edgar as to her true centre, the lonely Duke sits by the lake beside his agent, and proposes to marry Rosabel in six months' time, as soon as she is disengaged from custody. An enviable peace comes upon him, for he has found his true place in the world.

In *Venus Observed,* I intend to deal with the images in relation to the characters, which is one of the most profitable investigations that can be made of a play. I will analyze particularly the light and darkness symbols, which, once more, prove to be recurrent, and essential to the dramatic idea of the play.

One of the most remarkable facts about *Venus Observed,* is the way its characters face and solve the problems of their own existence, what Fry has called "the battle of the gap",[3] and which we may explain as the question of man's adaptation to this world. This question is by no means new in Fry's drama. Almost all his plays are in some way or another based on this problem. But here it is not only the protagonist who is concerned with it; it is almost every character, from the Duke down to the servants, because they all experience a feeling of displacement and are intent on the search for their own personal completion. Therefore, they are real characters, in the ab-

3 In "Theatre Newsletter". Mentioned by Derek Stanford in *Christopher Fry, An Appreciation,* Chapter III, p. 83.

solute sense of the word, for they have an interior life which to a great extent accounts for their individual outward traits.

I shall deal with them separately, examining their reactions through these evidences of the personality which are the recurrent images.

At the beginning of the play, a number of Reedbeck's allusions are drawn from *light* or *shadow*. They are intended to emphasize, when *light*, the joy of his daughter's arrival, and when *darkness*, his fear of ill news or that Dominic may spoil this unique happiness — rarely found "in the world as we know it" (p. 5) — with his bothersome claims as to the respectability of the family. So, when the Duke advises Reedbeck to "expect the worst" that he will not be disappointed, he answers readily: "Not at all, oh, no, not at all,/ No shadows of that sort" (p. 6).

The contrasting attitude and the misunderstanding between father and son is made evident when Dominic's inquiries lead him to ask his father what money they have got by honest means, such as legacies, whereupon Reedbeck answers:

> Don't let's talk of death.
> I've a heart this morning as light as a nebula.
> But you, you sombre boy, you can't even
> Sputter up a few sparks when I tell you
> Your sister's coming home! (pp. 7, 8)

The image is more effective in that "light as a nebula", which although explicitly referred to weight conveys also an idea of light.

Perpetua's arrival, her affectionate compliments to her father, the hearty welcome granted her by the Duke, puff up Reedbeck so much, that he fears he may burst "like a frog" (p. 25). There are no light images here as regards the Reedbeck-Perpetua relation, for Fry has chosen them to stress the note of the Duke's infatuation with Perpetua — the most important issue of the play; nevertheless, we may say that at this point, Reedbeck feels completely satisfied, and it is important to bear this in mind to understand his uneasiness when he comes to his son and daughter at the beginning of Act II and suspects that Dominic has revealed his weaknesses to Perpetua. Then his sole preoccupation is the fear of losing his daughter's respect and

affection, and thereby, his own personal equilibrium. That is why he says:

> Have you something that worries you? I believe
> I've made you discontented with me, on a day
> Which should have turned out so glorious, and now
> I don't know *where* we are. (p. 38) [4]

Fatherly love, we may say, is the clue to Reedbeck's personality, his way of reaching completion.

When asked why has he been stealing from the Duke, it is important to remark how Reedbeck resorts to a light image, so as to put it in a pleasant way, for he says, "The reason was the fading charm of the world" (p. 36), which in Reedbeck's terms (notice the humour of the situation) means that he lacks the money to live with elegance and at his ease, as some noble patrician of ancient times might have done; and we believe him, for though somewhat of a rogue, he has a love of nice things, nice manners and nice words. [5]

It is necessary that danger threaten his beloved daughter, in order that Reedbeck may realize how the charm of the world fades definitely when not accompanied by honest, loyal proceedings.

The Duke is one of the roundest, most complex characters created by Fry. It may be well to consider, so as to understand him better, that dim-lit background upon which his many-sided personality is projected.

Just like *The Lady's not for Burning, Venus Observed* is a "comedy of mood", the pervading atmosphere not being now spring but autumn, with its cloudy days, falling leaves and first chilly winds, which announce that winter will soon be there. One could quote many lines in which this autumnal atmosphere is stressed and puts a note of loneliness and oblivion on the main character, and, what is even more important, is identified with him, as though he and the landscape outside were subject to the same processes. That is the case in that image through which the Duke invites us to look back on his long spell of widowhood:

4 Italics are Fry's.
5 It is in this bold confession of his ambitions where the humour lies.

for years the frost has lain
On my stubble beard. The swallows and other such
Migratory birds have left me months ago. (p. 11)

But it is not only what we may call the negative aspect of autumn what Fry wishes us to be aware of in relation to the Duke. It is also its rich harvests, its big, round and juicy apples, its soft and gentle beauty glorifying the landscape. That word "stubble", in the image I have just quoted, suggests that a rich crop of wheat has already been gathered, and in the opening scene the Duke makes use of one of these agricultural images thus showing himself like a sort of gatherer, engaged in selecting the best grapes for his wine. Are they Rosabel, Jessie or Hilda? "Who am/ I, he tells his son, to decide/ Which were my vintage years of love?" (p. 1).

Besides, standing as he is on the threshold of old age, the Duke thinks of autumn as a proper time for remembrance, the remembrance of past joys. That is what is implied in his apology of his party when accused by Rosabel of unearthing emotions which would much rather lie buried:

So Rosabel believes when the cold spell comes
And we're compelled to enter this draughty time
And shuffle about in the slipshod leaves,
Leaves disbanded, leaves at a loose end,
We should merely shiver and be silent: never speak
Of the climate of Eden, or the really magnificent
Foliage of the tree of knowledge,
Or the unforgettable hushed emerald
Of the coiling and fettering serpent:
Pretend we never knew it, because love
Quite naturally condescended
To the passing of time. But why should we, Rosabel?
(p. 22)

Yet this is not the mood in which we find the Duke throughout the play. Perpetua, coming to him like a breath of spring — several characters speak of her in terms of birds and flowers [6] — foments in

6 See pp. 27, 28, 14 of the play.

him a mental evolution. In Act II he is not the ageing man warming himself with the embers of half extinguished loves. Though he is still aware of his years, he has lost the "autumnal look" (p. 51) as regards melancholy and retirement, and Edgar, responding to the horse image his father has begun to compare himself with, exclaims:

> when you're grazing you're irresistible;
> Buttercups and daisies fall to your fetlocks in swathes.
> (p. 51)

But in order more fully to appreciate the Duke's personality, one has to have resource to the light images, for in spite of the autumnal mood their implications are wider, though at times parallel to the other Nature images.

Just as Reedbeck seeks to complete his personality through paternal love, the Duke seeks to do it through sexual love. In the play no one is more aware than he of man's estrangement and uneasiness, which is a fundamental concern, since all mankind is subject to original sin; and all its activities in one way or another may be said to be efforts to conform itself to creation. This sense of displacement has a philosophic depth in the Duke. He asks himself what the meaning of existence is:

> what
> Is a man? Edgar, what is a man? O
> My man-child, what in the world is a man?
> Speaking for myself, I am precisely that question:
> I exist to know that I exist
> Interrogatively. (p. 52)

Man is led to ask this question, the Duke proceeds, precisely because he does not adapt himself to his existence. All creatures in general go peacefully along, never caring why or how they should live. They all adapt themselves without question to this great whole of creation: all, except Man. Of all beings, he feels discontented, unsatisfied, lonely. Here the Duke reaches the point of his reasoning: liberation of loneliness through love, the unravished possession of

> a complete, unsolitary life,
> Where happiness leaves no room for the restless mind

And I, as unlaborious
As a laburnum tree, hang in caresses of gold. (p. 53)

Now that we have considered, however briefly, this fundamental speech which gives us the clue to the Duke's personality, we may turn to the analysis of his *light* and *darkness* images, and make sure that they are all in keeping with his philosophic attitude.

Right at the beginning of the play we come upon a image which, to some extent, justifies the critics' assertion that the Duke is or would like to be a polygamist. *Light* and *blindness* are relevant symbols, the former in emphasizing the beauty and attractiveness of young girls; the latter, in expressing the impossibility of being loved by them all:

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. (p. 2)

While the eclipse party lasts, the Duke appears as a selfish man. That is at least the way in which Rosabel and Hilda regard him. His behaviour to the former seems unfair to the latter, as conveyed by an image:

you certainly seem to have been
Coruscating on thin ice. (p. 22)

But the Duke justifies himself in terms of *light*:

I've behaved according to my lights of love
Which were excellent and bright and much to be remem-
[bered. (p. 22)

Edgar's choice of Rosabel as his father's future wife does not content the Duke, who, still anxious for happiness, hopes "the cloud that hangs" over his "sunshine" will soon glide away, just like a cloud moving away from the sun at that moment.

For some hours the Duke comes to feel that the cloud has definitely avoided him. In Act II, Sc., I, the sun shines brightly on him; nevertheless, it is a setting sun — for old age is already at the door — and the Duke hurries to make the best of it. His invitation to Perpetua is exceedingly symbolic:

> Daylight is short, and becoming always shorter.
> But there's the space for an arrow or two between
> Now and the sunset. (p. 59)

It is relevant to point out how the Duke is aware of his age but profits by it. He does not deceive himself to the extent of feeling young, though he is certainly revived, and shows his age as the ideal time in a man's life. That is how I interpret these lines:

> Take notice
> Of the excellent marksmanship of the year, whose arrow
> Singing from the April bow crossed over the width
> Of summer straight for the gold, where now, if you look,
> You will see it quivering. (p. 39)

This year symbolises the Duke, who, looking back on the past years of his life, claims experience as a valuable gift in the conquest of the loved one.

Scene II presents a whole range of *light* images. As Perpetua comes in, the Duke, who had been resting in the dark, lights on oil lamp recalling God's creation of light before any creature was called into being. Within the economy of the play, this reference is symbolic of the Duke's desire for life, illuminating the loved one on her arrival, and thus reviving his life sources.

The allusions to "Endymion" and to "Senator Saturn" (also at the beginning of the same Scene) are both related to *light* images. The latter, especially, may be said to symbolize the Duke, for the planet remains solitary, unable to grasp the brilliant ring that whirls round it. Ever since his wife's premature death, the Duke has vainly sought to grasp happiness, as though it were the ring, and to find another love which might fill the emptiness of his existence.

Perpetua's refusal to marry the Duke is reflected in the images, with a note which we may even call pathetic, for the Duke, who is

sadly disillusioned in his love quest, turns his telescope unto the open heavens, and finds that the stars are falling:

> While I love you without being loved they're sure
> To be restive. (p. 70)

The second part of the scene, from the fire alarm onwards, presents an aspect of the Duke we had not known yet. It is the brave, generous character able to keep his head in the face of danger, showing human understanding and sense of poetry even in the most critical moments. Unlike Perpetua, who is all fear and trembling before the fire, the Duke thinks of everything, his love, himself, and the firemen. Dying with Perpetua amid the dancing flames suggests to him an act of perfection. It is the achievement of that rare and poetic union of "the phoenix and the turtle", which after being consumed by fire, left "time brimming" and light "beating with one heart" (p. 73).

Perpetua's love for the Duke, though a false assumption on his part, throws a note of "jubilation" on his misfortune. "So much I delighted in — he says — is all of ash" (p 81), and by this he means his observatory, where he had spent many a pleasant hour observing the stars, segregating himself from the people below and growing more selfish within his intellectual aloofness. But the Duke knows this world can afford compensation. Perpetua's love can satisfy an ambitious heart:

> the lost world of walls and stairs,
> Where I could cosset ghosts for their melancholy
> Charm, has let the daylight into me
> With a straight left of love. (p. 82)

If it had not been for the fire, no such rich gift would have ever been granted.

Yet the Duke does not know that it is premature to rejoice. It is now that his spiritual strength is going to be tested, not against danger, but against sorrow and disappointment. Just as light and darkness images (p. 88) flow out in his speech emphasizing the beauty of love born in the fire under menace of certain death, Perpetua says that it was fear and not love that motivated her confession.

But the Duke does not lose heart. His philosophic conclusion shows that he has learned what love's *light* amounts to:

> I forgive even
> The unrevealing revelation of love
> That lifts a lid purely
> To close it, and leaves us knowing that greater things
> Are close, but not to be disclosed
> Though we die for them. (p. 89)

Yet, such a disappointment was necessary that the Duke might find peace. He now pursues Rosabel's love with a heavier, but safer pace. He knows he is an autumnal Duke and will never try again to kiss the brilliant face of spring, for as he tells Reedbeck,

> how marvellous it is to moulder.
> Think how you would have felt when you were lying
> Grubbing in your mother's womb,
> With only a wall to look at,
> If you could have seen in your embryonic eye
> The realm of bryony, sloes, rose-hips,
> And a hedge's ruin, a golden desuetude,
> A countryside like a drowned angel
> Lying in shallow water, every thorn
> Tendering a tear. Think, Reedbeck,
> Think of the wonder of such glimmering woe;
> How in a field of milk-white haze the lost
> Apollo glows and wanders towards noon;
> The wind-blown webs are brighter,
> The rolling apples warmer than the sun.
> Heavens! you would have cried, the womb
> Echoing round you: These are the heavens, and I
> Reedbeck, am stillborn. Would you not? (p. 98)

The last speeches of the Duke do not imply the achievement of such happiness as he had longed for. They lack the vivid enthusiasm of the passionate moments. The pervading note is now resignation. Yet, as the Duke has learned that all things in this life are limited and incomplete, such resignation is enough to make him at peace with the world. His marriage to Rosabel will be a means of preserv-

ing the precious possession of the interior life, which is not reached till man has learned how to suffer and to forgive.

Perpetua's character has been purposely left vague by Fry. She is supposed to be as any girl, "Perpetua/ Perpetual" (p. 65), the average young woman in a man's life. Yet, when analyzing her personality one finds a characteristic trait: her love of independence. she shoots the apple because, she says, "it appeared to be, in a misty way,/ Like a threat to my new-come freedom". (p. 31).

When persuaded to marry the Duke, what she laments most is the loss of her priceless liberty. This is the only time that this Perpetua, who is all flowers, birds and light, is associated with the fading hues of autumn, which somehow become symbols of her melancholy (p. 34). She hails the Duke with a smile which "Will be like the glint of handcuffs" (p. 38).

Towards the end, experience teaches her that no person can expect to be absolutely independent and wrapped up in himself. She has stood between the Duke "and the sun" (p. 89), caused pain, and therefore lost liberty:

> I move, and the movement goes from life
> To life all round me. And yet I have to be
> Myself. And what is *my*[7] freedom becomes
> Another persons' compulsion. What are we to make
> Of this dilemma? (p. 96)

Such a dilemma *Edgar* cannot solve, for he has his own heart to consider. There, as "a phantom of delight", she has unexpectedly gleamed. Perpetua's love is the target leading Edgar to develop and affirm his personality. He gradually emerges from his father's shadow and comes out to shine with a light of his own. The incident of the horses, the brilliant description Edgar makes of them in Act II, Sc. I, is not mere rhetoric, but a proof that he too, has his own intricacies of mind and heart, his own personal mystery to attract and dazzle a girl's imagination.

Rosabel is mostly referred to by *darkness* and *fire* images. In the eclipse party, her uneasiness is parallel with the eclipse of the sun, and increases with the advancing shadow till she suffers a sort

7 Italics are Fry's.

of nervous attack and suffocation, coincident with the moments of total darkness.

Once more, in Fry's imagery, *shadow* proves to be symbolic of lack of love, of indifference, for this is precisely what Rosabel senses in the Duke's relations to her. In former meetings, it appears, she had fallen in love with him, and so she has remained, but the Duke is no longer infatuated. His way of dealing with his former friends has something of the cold indifference and detachment of a connoisseur. He is complacent to them, but by no means tender nor affectionate, and Rosabel is resentful:

> What can the darkest bruise on the human mind
> Mean, when nothing beats against you heavier
> Than a fall of rain? (p. 21)

When she hears how Perpetua used to break whatever she disliked, Rosabel assumes her failure with the Duke to be the result of cowardice. She must become as daring as the young girl who is making such a success of herself. Alone with the stars for too long, the Duke has come to suffer from a sort of moral blindness which prevents him from seeing "the distances that separate him/ From other people" (p. 58), and Rosabel must have the courage to bring him down to live among his fellows: "I'll blaze a trail/ That he can follow towards humanity!" (id.). Most significantly this decision is clad in *dark* robes. Rosabel will burn the observatory at night. The *dark* becomes with her a sort of obsession.

Rosabel is a most impetuous woman, probably the product of lessons she learned in the theatre, being, as she is, an actress. In Act III she feels hell is the only proper place for her. (p. 78). After a pathetic appeal (p. 81) to the Duke in which the pervading note is a desire to obliterate that, which will remain like a stigma on her memory, she takes refuge against remorse in the justice of the law, and ignores that the Duke, whom she thought incapable of understanding, realizes her love for him, and forgives the burning of his precious belongings.

The other characters have also a gap to fill in their existence. That becomes evident in *Dominic's* concern for morals and conventions which is his way of achieving perfection. He fails at the end and comes to feel he is a terrible sinner, because in spite of all his good-

ness he is unable to offer his fellows a touch of sympathy. He leaves the stage perplexed at the dilemma of right and wrong that caused him to commit a sin against his sister's freedom.

Hilda, who is a married woman, is far from being satisfied with her husband. In an image which is all gray she compares him to

> the flat horizon
> Which is not so much an horizon
> As a straight ruled line beyond which one doesn't look.
> (p. 46)

As though she said: dullness personified. Yet, this woman who describes her husband in such poor terms, appears later in the play feeling glad of being his wife, for after she has seen him suffering from an accident, she has made the precious discovery of his individuality, which brings a touch of light to raise her out of boredom:

> In the beginning was Roderic; and now
> Haunting the same shell, were a childhood
> And a manhood, half a hundred years
> Of sights and sounds which once echoed and shone
> And now may only exist in him. (p. 92)

How much there is to see and study, even in the dullest human being! It is something in which an understanding dramatist such as Fry is greatly interested.

Even Reddleman and Bates, the servants, have a gap to fill. The humorous conflict between them is more than a comic implication of the play; it is a desire to achieve satisfaction through the predilection of their master. Also their former professions, burglar and lion-tamer may be called expressions, however twisted, of a desire of ascension or power. The fire offers both a wonderful opportunity to fulfill their ambitions. Reddleman comes out of it glorified: "His illuminated/ Lordship" (p. 83), "his incandescent majesty" (p. 84), for he has discovered in it an unmistakable analogy with his lions. All the glorious days passed in the circus have been recalled, and the lion-tamer is now the tamer of flames, through which he goes in and out just to show that he is as brave as in the good old days. This is his peculiar way of feeling self-satisfied.

Only Jessie, in whom Derek Stanford detects a "touch of the

elevated barmaid''[8] is the only character who seems to be pleased with herself. That is due to the fact that the animal has a greater part in her than the spiritual. She does not care whether she is loved by the Duke or not, the only thing she knows is that his house is nice, that she has been invited to it, and is enjoying herself. Her behaviour on several occasions[9] is almost childish. That is why she is liked. Simple-hearted Jessie is unable to think ill of any one.

This character fills a necessary place in *Venus Observed.* She appears in moments of dramatic tension and relaxes it, thus helping Fry to keep his play within the limits of comedy.

It is this great variety of characters that gives *Venus Observed* a distinguished place among Fry's works. In no other play, except *The Firstborn,* had he succeeded in creating so many individualized characters with such a deep interior life. In *The Lady's not for Burning,* for example, the characters were differentiated chiefly through their outward traits. Not that this differentiation is lacking in *Venus Observed,* but the characters, except Thomas, had not such important dilemmas there as they have here. Above all, the ''battle of the gap'', the problem of man's displacement on earth was not so essential to them, and this is the core, the dramatic idea inspiring Fry's dramatic works.

8 *Christopher Fry, Album,* p. 96.

9 See her somewhat humorous remarks during the eclipse party, and the writing of a letter to her father in Act II, Sc. I.

CONCLUSIONS

IN his work, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot,* Mr. Raymond Williams has dedicated some pages to a critical appreciation of Fry's drama. After paying it a few commonplace compliments on the success it has achieved on the stage, he turns to the more important question of its claim to greatness and literary value. Focussing solely on *The Lady's not for Burning* and on *Venus Observed,* as though they were the only works written by Fry, he draws the general conclusion that his comedy is one "of incident and phrase" that "his verse is not, in the traditional sense of poetic drama, dramatic at all". In *The Lady's not for Burning,* he says, "there is a certain concern with death, but Mr. Fry has an essentially genteel eschatology" and the theme of man's displacement in *Venus Observed* "is offered diffidently, almost casually".

Such images as Alizon's

> Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
> And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass,

which she uses in her first speech in *The Lady's not for Burning,* do not seem to Mr. Williams anything else than successful "contrivances" and "romantic incidentals".[10]

I have permitted myself to quote from this author at large, because he is characteristic of a very large number of Fry's critics. Even those who are more understanding and have welcomed his plays as a great promise in the poetic revival of the theatre, have usually failed to realize what is the dramatic idea to which his poetic speech is related.

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10 Pp. 262 to 268.

In *An Experience of Critics,* Fry describes his own picture as it emerges from newspaper cuttings and literary reviewers: "I see a man reeling intoxicated with words; they flow in a golden — or perhaps pinchbeck — stream from his mouth: they start out at his ears; they burst like rockets and jumping crackers and catherine-wheels round his head; they spring in wanton sport at his feet and trip him; but trip him or not, he loves them: let them all come, go where they may; let them strangle sense, flood the stage, break the dams of form: facility shall have its day." [11]

That Fry has a talent for the use of language is a fact no one pretends to deny. It is evident that few playwrights have such an extensive vocabulary, such an extraordinary capacity to coin new expressions, such imagination, flexibility and grace in their use of the language. This is enough to keep the audience entranced whenever a performance of his plays is given; but if those critics who despise him for having nothing to offer in the theater but a rich stream of figurative speech, had taken the trouble to study his work conscientiously co-relating images and seeing what their cumulative development is, they would have been surprised to see that it is not mere rhetoric and that there is much besides verbal pyrotechnics.

In fact, such an analysis as I have undertaken in the foregoing chapters, though avowedly imperfect in many respects, suffices for me to say that Fry's figurative speech is functional, and essentially related to rich and complex dramatic ideas from which it springs, and which require a profusion of images to their clear and complete expression.

In proving my point I shall make reference to the demands Mr. Moody Prior has imposed on dramatic speech in his work *The Language of Tragedy.*

Fry's use of verse is functional because *verisimilitude is not the criterion of his plays.* — Early in this study I stressed the fact that Fry's plays are not what realists call true to life. They lack verisimilitude, in the sense that they do not aim at a reproduction of daily experience. When the plot does not belong frankly to a past age as in *The Firstborn,* there is something static and universal in it which applies to all times. This fact justifies Fry's use of verse instead of

11 P. 23.

prose, because the nature of verse, its repetitions, rhythms and alteration of the normal order of words is enough to make dramatic language unlike everyday speech, and therefore eliminates one of the most important conditions of verisimilitude.

Once verse becomes the form of the play, the way is open for the dramatist to exert his imaginative faculty. This is chiefly achieved by resource to figurative speech, which, as I said in the introduction, favors an enlargement of the dramatic perspectives. [12] Such an enlargement as this is required by Fry, *because of his philosophic or moral views.*

One cannot study Fry without stressing the point that he is a metaphysical writer. I say metaphysical, because in dealing with such questions as time, life, death, love, sorrow, good, evil and the purpose of man's existence, he has looked beyond the surface of momentary experience and has endeavoured to find in what lies their fundamental significance.

Thus Thomas, in *The Lady's not for Burning,* does not regard his war experiences as a separate manifestation of sin or cruelty, but relates them to a vast depressing panorama of mankind, in which evil is seen as an essential element in human nature. From this he draws his gloomy conclusion that man is worthless, does not deserve to live and should not reproduce his race. Cymen, in *Thor with Angels,* is imbued with a feeling that kindness and forgiveness are the proper relation between men, whether friends or foes, a problem which emanates from his sudden feeling of mercy towards an enemy. The Duke, in *Venus Observed,* poses the question of man's estrangement as a universal concern — the result of his personal feeling of unsatisfaction — and looks forward to love as the best way of adapting himself to existence. The contemplation of a dying bird in *The Firstborn* turns Ramases' curiosity to the essence and accidents of death. Dynamene's position between Virilius and Chromis makes her realize the contending duality in man: instincts against thoughts. The trial the four prisoners undergo in the last dream of *A Sleep of Prisoners,*

12 "In a richly poetical play the dramatist draws from so wide a range of impressions for his figures and gives to individual words so many special and intensified accents that by the accumulation of associations and implications the simple action of the play seems to reach out the most remote boundaries of human experience". Moody Prior in *The Language of Tragedy,* p. 13.

leads them to realize that pain is not a personal, but a universal concern. Thus, if I referred to every important character in Fry's work I could prove this change from the particular to the universal, this search for first causes and final purposes, which, if emotionally apprehended by a metaphysical poet, must needs demand a vast range of associations to achieve its effect of generality and importance.

I propose an experiment, towards which I ask the reader to examine again Meadows' closing speech "Dark and cold we may be", which I have quoted on p. 136 of *A Sleep of Prisoners*. Suppose we do away with images and express its content in prose and straightforward speech. It would be reduced to such commonplace statements as: we must be brave and have faith in God, in spite of suffering, for the time has come when men can be more powerful than evil. All the universal far-reaching effect of the speech, the sense it conveys of an anxiously awaited spiritual renewal, the raising of man's fate to touch the bounds of Infinity, are lost. Passages like these are to be found in Fry very often, and it is evident that imagery fills a fundamental place in them.

The awareness and philosophic treatment of such questions as life, death, love, etc., often makes Fry's drama one of *dialectic forces*. We have seen how Moses is an essentially dilemmatic character, how the plots of *The Lady's not for Burning* and of *A Phoneix Too Frequent* are two aspects of a struggle between love and death; that of *Thor with Angels* one between mercy and cruel revenge, that of *A Sleep of Prisoners*, one between the Knight of Infinity and the philistine, or of carefree enjoyment against duty, or of the problems of human logic pondering what the need for sacrifice should be; the plot of *Venus Observed* one between displacement and spiritual satisfaction. These contending forces are the very soul of Fry's plays, and accordingly, in every one of his works the dramatist has created whole ranges of images, which are opposite in meaning, to convey the clashing implications of his dilemmas. It will be enough to remember how light and darkness serve to emphasize the two contending forces, whether they be life and death, love and indifference, understanding and confusion, confidence and distrust, happiness and grief, peace and quarrel, admiration and contempt.

As the action advances, the symbols develop too, always docilely bending themselves to express action, define character, or create atmosphere.

On the other hand, the clash of contending forces does not always lead the characters to a clear understanding of the universe. Human logic analyzing such problems as God's choice of Ramases — what Egypt priced most dearly — to free the Israelites; or the glorifying beauty of sun or moon light falling on a world which is all sin and malice — the way Thomas regards nature — dashes to pieces against a heavy wall of mystery. "I know I do not know" says Abel in *A Sleep of Prisoners,* voicing Fry. The playwright stands perplexed before the vast and complex dilemmas of creation, a creation which delights in making life spring from death, in placing the most beautiful beside the most horrible. How can these puzzling matters be conveyed without resource to a vast range of associations? Fry "drunk with words" is Fry drunk with mystery, a man who cannot find, like the rationalists, a cogent reason for all things, for whom all the inventiveness of man in matter of figurative speech falls short with the almost infinite variety of involved relations and qualities he has discerned in the universe.

This dilemmatic apprehension of the world also accounts for Fry's use of pun, wordplay and other complicated verbal devices. These, because of their ambivalences of meaning, are proper to the expression of mystery. They are not, as some critics have said, a way of displaying wit or verbal facility. In this respect, it may be well to remember Thomas' speech to Jennet in Act II, where his sense of wonder at the potential power of the seed is conveyed:

> Nothing can be seen
> In the thistle-down, but the rough-head thistle comes.
> Rest in that riddle. I can pass to you
> Generations of roses in this wrinkled berry.
> There: now you hold in your hand a race
> Of summer gardens, it lies under centuries
> Of petals. What is not, you have in your palm.

What Thomas has detected is a paradox. The small and the large, the scarce and the plentiful are made to touch.

Besides, Fry's use of imagery is justified whenever he deals

with *supernatural matters.* That is the case in *The Boy With a Cart,* where reference to miraculous interventions is an important issue of the play; and even more so, in *The Firstborn,* where the scheme of liberating the Jews falls in most respects beyond the human scope and is undertaken by God. If it were not for the grandiose implications of the images when describing the God of the Hebrews, we would not be made to feel that He has a power over all natural elements, and can dispose of human life and fate at His Will. We are impressed by the plagues because the play has already been raised beyond everyday possibilites.

Another fact to be mentioned in favour of Fry's dramatic use of figurative speech, is how he has managed to make the same range of images bear relation to several different subjects, which have to be associated if the play is going to have unity and concentration, but which would have remained dissociated in the reader's mind if it had not been for the links of symbolism. In *The Firstborn,* darkness is associated with moral and physical death, pain, superstition, uncertainty, error, disaster, and throughout with Moses, so as to stress the fact that he is related to all these, and considered to be responsible for the situation in which most of these elements appear as characteristic traits.

Connections among different ranges of images also help to give the play concentration. In this respect, I must say that one of the most difficult problems raised by an analysis of Fry's figurative speech is that of determining to which category do most images belong, because many bear relations to several important subjects. For example, when in *Venus Observed* the Duke says:

> an old dim-sighted mirror
> And a shaded lamp for one genial moment
> Raised me out of the falling leaves.

where light, darkness and personification in the first metaphors of the image up to "moment", are equally important, thus signifying that love, or no love between Perpetua and the Duke depended upon the decision of the mirror and in the second part, the allusion to autumn in the "falling leaves" recalls the age of the suitor. Thus the image does not only apply to the particular moment in which

it is used, but bears relation to plot and character, and is both functional and poetic.

An important aspect of Fry's philosophy is *continuity.* At the beginning of this study I called attention to the fact that this could be traced in the poet's love of traditions; also in the way several aspects of his plays are applicable to ancient and modern times. Imagery detects another remarkable aspect. This is not continuity in the sense of a past which evolves into a present, but in the way in which human beings and other natural phenomena undergo the same changes. What is found in one realm occurs also in the other. This is seen in Fry's comedies of mood, *The Lady's not for Burning* and *Venus Observed,* where renovation or decline as the case may be, exist both within and without the chararacters; also in *Thor With Angels* and in *The Boy with a Cart,* where a parallel between the return of spring and the return of Christianity, or cooperation between heaven and earth, and heaven and man are important traits in the dramatic structure. The effect of natural images in these plays is not only the creation of a proper atmosphere, but the projection of the action upon a universal level.

Another important question raised by the study of figurative speech is whether it is a principle of individualization and decorum. In this respect, I find that the use of abundant and varied imagery of that sort which critics find merely rhetoric and artificial, because it seems to be incidental and to bear no relation to action or atmosphere, is justified sometimes, by the social standing of the characters. The Duke for example, is an aristocrat, very like a medieval nobleman, a good conversationalist and gallant with women. Reedbeck has been educated in the rhetoric tradition, and cares much for etiquette; on other occasions the use of images is explained by peculiar circumstances of education and character. Perpetua has been to a University and lived abroad, a fact which has an immediate effect in an enlargement of vocabulary and a liking for original expressions, which is quite common among students. Tegeus is well acquainted with philosophy, which means he has acquired wide knowledge. In *The Lady's not for Burning,* the largest number of images belongs, by far to Thomas, and rhetoric serves him admirably to mock the world and draw attention to himself.

I have not mentioned the other plays because two of them, *A*

Sleep of Prisoners and *Thor With Angels,* must be considered as "drames". *The Firstborn* is a tragedy. The more serious treatment of dramatic subjects has had an effect in a lessening of rhetoric for the sake of humour or caricature, which is one of the best uses to which it lends itself. These two are inherent in comedy, but have a reduced scope in "drame" and tragedy. In the latter, the leading characters have that elevation of soul which Aristotle demanded of its heroes, and cannot possibly be ridiculed nor mocked in the way Thomas mocks the people about him. They would lose dignity. Besides, the manifold implications of rhetoric images would draw attention away from the necessity and fataliy of the tragic action, they would make us expect that the play might develop in many different ways, and would result into a loosening of tension.

The similes in Fry's imagery as compared with his metaphors are exceedingly few. This supports the thesis that he does not use his imagery with an ornamental purpose, but applies it to the definition of the objects he is describing. Moody Prior says that "such explicit figures as the simile, by virtue of the fact that they are so constructed as to call attention to their nature as ornaments of discourse, convey more immediately an impression of artifice, particularly when they appear in any considerable number". [13]

The ordering of images in Fry is often parallel to the development of the action. In the tragedy and in the "drames", the number of pain images is greater, by far, than in the comedies. In *The Firstborn* the imagery reflects a feeling of hopelessness and complete disillusion, whereas in the comedies the ordering of figurative speech, even when expressing discomfort or anxiety always maintains the possibility of a happy ending. In the "drames" images serve to emphasize the heavy trials the characters are confronted with, which they will overcome if they have understanding and endurance. This is clearly seen, for instance, in a comparison of fire symbols. In *The Firstborn* Moses, as identified with fire, is a cause of pain and disaster. In *Thor With Angels* and in *A Sleep of Prisoners* fire makes Cymen or the soldiers suffer terribly, but does not lead to a tragic ending. It acts as an incentive to their moral or critical powers. But in the comedies it has a different function, in *The Lady's not*

13 *The Language of Tragedy,* p. 170.

for Burning, it is not related to pain at all, and in *Venus Observed* the destruction of the observatory brought Perpetua's confession of love, and resulted in an approachment between Rosabel and the Duke.

Thus, although the same range of symbols is found in different kinds of plays, their employment is dramatic, for they are used with discrimination.

Since light and darkness are natural elements, the most important range of images in Fry is *Nature.* An analysis of his imagery proves that he has an intimate knowledge of country sights. In some plays the season, or the unsophisticated natural atmosphere of *The Boy with a Cart,* have a genuine rustic flavour, and manifest keen observation of the ever changing landscape, especially of its light and shadow effects, climate, animals, growing things and heavenly bodies. Nature as seen by Fry in his plays, is not the savage force threatening to destroy men. It is rather the familiar, even friendly background which farmers and people living in small towns know so intimately. An important exception in this respect is *The Firstborn,* where violent forces and voracious animals are called forth to give the play majesty or painful implications, and to emphasize the catastrophic effects of the plagues.

A natural element, the sea, is usually adverse to men in Fry's imagery.

This resource of the playwright to natural sights and impressions contributes to vivify his speech, to give it a universal appeal, a quality of "felt life".[14]

The other very important range of images in Fry is personifications, abstractions and concretions, which are justified by the philosophic bias of the poet's mind and become the only way of expressing the mysteries with which his characters are concerned.

In their consideration of life, we may say that Fry's characters are more conscious of its pains than of its pleasures. Unsatisfaction

14 "felt life" is a term used by Mr. G. Fraser in *The Modern Writer and his World.* He regrets how "the centring of the English theatrical world in London and the demand for plays of intellectual topicality has tended to prevent playwrights on the whole from exploring the more solid and settled, and therefore richer and more rewarding atmospheres of English provincial life" (p. 151). These are charges that cannot certainly be levelled against Fry.

is a characteristic trait with many of them. Precisely because they have high standards of perfection, refined sensibility and understanding, they regret not finding that which would fulfill their ambitions, and give them unravished spiritual content. This is the main problem Fry has endeavoured to solve in his plays.

Fry's religious attitude is not specifically that of any known religious congregation, though it is evident that he is well acquainted with the biblical and Christian traditions. One of the facts which have impressed him most is the loss of peace and happiness through the first sin, which condemned men to all sorts of physical and moral pain. Those characters who have failed to find satisfaction in the world, are especially concerned with this fall of mankind. Since they disregard the fact that man is responsible for the original sin, they concentrate only on its dreadful consequences, and tend to think ill of Divine Justice and Providence.

On the other hand, the heavy trials the characters are confronted with as we have seen in *The Firstborn* and in *A Sleep of Prisoners,* and the designs of the Divine Will are received under protest, and give rise to several bewildering questions, for the characters ask what is the need of sacrifice.

It would be wrong, however, to think of Fry as showing only a negative resentful attitude against God. In all those plays in which relations with God are of importance, there can be traced a current of ideas fed by resignation, confidence, love and sympathy between God and man. At the end, this attitude is more powerful than is resentment, to the extent of forming the message of the play, as in *A Sleep of Prisoners* and in *Thor With Angels.* In other plays where this relation is not so important, as in *The Lady's not for Burning,* there is a final note of reconciliation between man and God.

Distrust and dissatisfaction make Fry fall within the current formed by war and post-war dramatists. The horror men lived in those awful days shook their moral and philosophic principles to the core. Pessimism chilled even the most enthusiastic. A balance and readjustment of spiritual values had to be made, but many of those whose faith was not firmly established left the army in a state of utter scepticism and dejection. This is what Fry observed: what he, to some extent might have felt and what his plays portray. Tegeus, Thomas, the four prisoners, are the representatives of this attitude.

Yet, what Fry has aimed at is not the expression of a sombre post-war attitude. On the contrary, his plays embody ideas of hope and renewal, and show faith in God, awareness of responsibilities and resource to the fundamental springs of human life, especially love, as a cure against distrust, mysanthropy, and loathing of life.

Finally, Fry's view as regards social or political matters is one of respect for the individual and cooperation among people. Good, when practiced without concern for others, is selfishness. The whole of his plays make manifest his desire for a better understanding and sympathy between man and his fellows.

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