CHAPTER VI.
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GENERAL COMPARISONS.

(a). Introduction.

(b). Fry and T.S. Eliot.

(c). Fry and W.B. Yeats.

(d). Fry and Auden and Isherwood.
(a). Introduction.

In this chapter, it is proposed to compare the plays of Christopher Fry with those of the other playwrights of the present century who experimented mainly in the field of poetic drama, with a view to determining the exact nature of his achievement.

One finds a large measure of difference between the poetic plays of Elizabethan age and those of present century. The dramatists of the Twentieth century had realized futility of employing Elizabethan rhythms and had understood the importance of a language, disciplined and brought nearer to the spoken idiom of the people. As Allardyce Nicoll observes, "Those interested in the poetic drama came to realise that the Elizabethan blank verse has gained its power precisely because it was related to the ordinary speech of Shakespeare's age. They gradually were compelled to acknowledge that the Elizabethan prose utterance was far more richly patterned and less logically directed than the ordinary prose of later times and that consequently the Shakespearean blank verse might almost be regarded as a kind of heightened speech closely and intimately related to what he and his audience heard in the world around them.

With this discovery they further were driven to admit that the imitation of Shakespearean, Marlovian and Fletcherian cadences such
as had prevailed hither to was working against rather than for the revival of poetic drama. That is the reason why Eliot decided to follow the ascetic rule of keeping his verse on 'thin diet' so that he could explore the possibilities of verse drama by employing rhythms closer to the contemporary speech. In addition to this, these dramatists also attempted to use a contemporary setting thereby presenting a drama of contemporary people speaking contemporary language.

Poetic drama in general aims at an organic unity, crystallizes the meaning into imagery and also tries to lift the action to a plane of universal significance. To put it in the words of Issacs, "The vehicle of poetic drama is verse, its mechanism is imagery, its substance is myth and its binding structure is the musical pattern which gives an over-all unity to every tiny fragment of what is in the end a musical symphony." While this is generally true of the work of all modern poetic dramatists, one can perhaps make certain useful distinctions. Thus, the plays of Auden and

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Isherwood may be said to be largely political in spirit, whereas those of Eliot are mainly religious, and Yeats's predominantly legendary, symbolic and heroic. Fry's poetic drama is different from all these and has its own individual spirit.
Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot.

An important dramatist who tried to revive poetic drama in the thirties was Eliot. His main accomplishment was his successful endeavour to evolve a form of verse as a vehicle of poetic drama approximating closely to modern speech rhythms. He aimed at giving expression to modern life and its problems—problems that were not social but mainly spiritual—for Eliot's main concern was with the spiritual hollowness of the modern world which he exposed by an appropriate use of ancient parallels. As the early drama had its roots in religion, so also the plays of Eliot are primarily religious in spirit.

To start with, both Eliot and Fry wrote plays for the Church. As Donany Dobree puts it, "Both write plays in verse, both have written directly Christian plays for production in Canterbury Cathedral; both write secular plays on a basically religious foundation which by no means precludes comedy." But basically Eliot was essentially a poet who became a dramatist and tried to widen the scope of his examination of modern life by turning from poetry to poetic drama. Hence what he presents in all his plays with the exception of *The Murder in Cathedral* is a secular story.

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with a contemporary setting. Commenting on Eliot's plays, G.S. Fraser points out that Eliot "wanted to invent a kind of verse that would be speakable, with out self consciousness, in a play with a modern setting to an ordinary audience by ordinary actors. He wished to invent plots which would be interesting in themselves but which would also allow him to put across a Christian vision of the world without appearing didactic or sentimental." Fry too tries to present his view of the world without appearing didactic and sentimental but his total world-view differs substantially from that of Eliot.

The leading themes in the plays of T.S. Eliot are martyrdom, sin and expiation and a search for self-recognition. As Geoffrey Bullough points out Eliot's "prevailing themes covered points of conscience, moments of spiritual self-realisation, repentance and renunciation. At times he touched religious allegory." He wanted to project through his characters the spiritual void which he found in the modern European life and the sense of personal helplessness of man. Commenting on Eliot's plays M.C. Bradbrook points out that, "In all the plays, what has been sought is the release from solitude

4. G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World (London, 1976), p.120.
and from a sense of guilt that goes with it. For Harry it is the 'solitude in the voided desert', the self is reduced to an eye watching. For Celia too it is 'an awareness of solitude'.

When one reads the plays of Eliot, one feels that the playwright's prime concern is with spiritual values. Becket in Murder in the Cathedral, Harry in The Family Reunion, Celia in The Cocktail Party and Colby in The Confidential Clerk — all seem to belong to one spiritual fraternity, and perhaps differ only in degree. They are all in quest of a higher life. This quest is enacted against the background of the modern waste land which has witnessed the nervous breakdown of the modern man particularly after the wars; the uprooting of religion resulting in the decay of moral as well as social standards and the modern man's retreat into a shell, feeling the agony of solitude. But the technique with which he presents them is similar in almost all his plays; the contemporary society is projected and a classical myth is woven into the action thereby giving a new dimension to it. For instance, the Orestes myth is at the heart of The Family Reunion, the Alcestis legend is re-enacted in The Cocktail Party with significant

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variations; The Confidential Clerk is based on Euripides's Iph and The Elder Statesman has rightly been described Eliot's Oedipus at Colonus.

Fry's general themes, as seen earlier, are the mystery and joy of existence and the regenerative power of love and life, which can overcome existential alienation and despair. Comparing Eliot and Fry, Gerald Keales points out that, "Fry finds God in this world and Eliot finds Him most surely in withdrawal—into martyrdom or into Eggerson's garden in The Confidential Clerk. It is not surprising then that where Eliot is often admired Fry is enjoyed and where Eliot is rejected out of hand—by those who cannot accept his theology—Fry is often accepted for a religion that can be translated. This is to say that Fry makes a sharp contrast with Eliot in his total world-view. The point of difference is that Fry celebrates the world and through it sees God, whereas Eliot tries to see God mostly in withdrawal from the world, Eliot inclines towards martyrdom and asceticism, whereas Fry believes in deep human love and participation in the world as a way to spiritual salvation. It is true that in his later plays Eliot does seem to turn from withdrawal to acceptance of life and the world. As

Gerald Weales points out, "The themes occur in three forms: firstly
the need for the purgation of evil; secondly, the need for the soul
to divest itself of the love of created beings; thirdly, the
aim to arrive at the experience of the Divine, by the rejection of
images in the Negative way— If Eliot's heroes choose the
'negative way' there is at least the suggestion particularly in the
last two plays that the affirmative way is a possibility, that the
way of the Chamberlaynes in The Cocktail Party and of Lucasta and
B.Kagan in The Confidential Clerk is as acceptable although the
acceptability is of different order— as that of Celia and Colby.

Eliot first presented only the 'negative way' in his early
plays as is clear from the martyrdom of Backet and Harry's final
decision to quit his country-home to 'follow the bright angels';
but in The Cocktail Party, one sees him accepting life and the
worldly values and it has even been suggested that the example of
Fry was in some way responsible for this change. As Akileswar Jam
notes, "Eliot has come round to see the validity of the affirmation of
life to use a phrase which Charles Williams has used to Dante as
being also a way to salvation, which Fry had celebrated with infinite
gusto and excitement in A Phoenix too Frequent and The Lady's not for
Burning... The important point is that in writing

P. 189.
The Cocktail Party, he found it necessary to build his dramatic plot based on the theme of affirmation of worldly life. In other words he came to realise and the plays of Fry lent an immediate context to his realisation, that drama which works primarily through changing patterns of human relationship could not be constructed effectively on the foundation of negation of the worldly life.

The admission of affirmation in the frame work, the dramatic theme and the use of faculty of 'intuition' rather than understanding are not the only things that suggest the indebtedness of The Cocktail party to The Lady's not for Burning.9 But one has to note an important point of difference between Eliot and Fry here. In The Cocktail Party Eliot does not affirm so much as rather acquiesce in life and makes Edward and Lavinia accept life almost grudgingly. Edward and Lavinia—one incapable of love and another unlovable—are forced to patch up a broken marriage and to make the best of a bad job. Surely this is no full-blooded acceptance of life. But Fry's presentation of life in his plays is never like that, it is always enthusiastic, whole-hearted, and filled with a tremendous amount of gusto. One cannot possibly accept the view that The Lady's not for Burning led Eliot to accept—though grudgingly—worldly life in his plays. Of course The Lady's not for Burning was written

earlier than The Cocktail Party and it is possible to say that Eliot was aware of Fry's treatment of the subject and the reasons for the success of The Lady's not for Burning. But it would be rash to claim more for Fry in this direction.

Another important difference between Eliot and Fry is seen in their respective use of language. Eliot, the pioneer in modern verse drama, had realised that the main area of weakness in early 20th century drama was the quality of the verse. David E. Jones analysing the early modern efforts at poetic drama, points out that "Most attempts at reviving poetic drama have failed in the very first requirement; the poetic idiom employed has not been sufficiently alive. It has usually been a pale imitation of Elizabethan blank verse and consequently a wholly artificial language without roots in the idiom and rhythms of living speech... Yet it is in precise this particular that poetic drama has gone astray since the 17th century." Quoting Eliot, he further says, "It is primarily that their rhythms of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except in poetry reciter." Eliot had there realised at the very beginning of his dramatic career the necessity of disciplining his poetry which resulted in

11. Ibid.
revitalising the rhythms and the idiom of dramatic poetry. He aimed at a form of verse in which everything can be said. He points out that "people are prepared to put up with verse from the lips of personages dressed in the fashion of some distant age, they should be made to hear it from people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours using telephones and motor cars and radio sets." But in doing so he leaned in the direction of making his verse extremely bare, spare and unadorned. This was not, of course, as Eliot himself says, "the versification of the dialogue in Murder in the Cathedral has therefore in my opinion, only a negative merit; it succeeded in avoiding what had to be avoided but it arrived at no positive novelty," but the signs became clear in his next play, The Family Reunion. As Frederick Lumely observes, "His aim in The Family Reunion was to explore the possibilities of verse play when applied to every day life and to find a rhythm close to contemporary speech". He therefore decided to curtail his verse to subordinate it to the exigencies of the ordinary business of life, a task which Eliot could not be expected to have accomplished in one experiment and which was in fact to lead him to The Confidential Clerk." In his last

13. Ibid., p.34.
two plays, viz. *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman*, the verse at places does have an anaemic look. In contrast with this, Fry, especially in his earlier work, has revelled in the use of a colourful style. As Allardyce Nicoll points out, "Fry's distinction is that he makes his dramas float on a constantly moving foam of words and the appeal his works make to audiences in the early fifties most certainly was due to the fact that ears long wearied by the metallic and reiterative prose utterance of the current realistic plays of the time were suddenly made aware of a new music... Moreover as Fry advanced in his dramatic career he has tended to make his words firmer, was intimately related to current speech patterns, while still leaving himself the opportunity of moving from this to richer forms." Fry's exuberance with words has its own rationale. He wants to stress certain unusual things rather than merely say them in an unusual manner. For example, the Duke in *Venus Observed* asking his son to select a bride for him sees from the incoming visitors or Thomas Hensip in *The Lady's not for Burning* openly asking the Mayor of the town to hang him— to give expression to such fantastic situations the playwright perhaps feels that ordinary language might not be sufficient, so a certain heightening of language is indispensable.  

Since Fry's plays were eminently stageable, his exuberance with language naturally swept the audience off its feet. As Frederick Luncy puts it, "Such a bacchanalia of words and thesaurus of fine phrases have not been heard in our language-starved theatre for many a century. No wonder at the enthusiasm of the rejoicing, the sincerity that made many compare his plays with the tradition of the Elizabethan masters. It proved, there was a large public ready to support any worthwhile attempt to find a way towards poetry and imagination." Fry's richness of language was also particularly welcome in the drab and dismal post-war atmosphere. As Ifor Evans points out, "The rationing of food and clothes, the limitation on travel, the denial of light and colour, indeed the absence of all variety in life led audiences to welcome with exceptional readiness, the romantic excitement, that the Shakespeare's plays would provide. Fry's success was largely due to the fact that he seemed the living and contemporary counterpart to all the exuberance—all that he wrote was in vivid contrast to the plain prose of realistic drama."


G.S.Fraser makes the same point, when he tells us: "One doesn’t expect our age to produce the copious and florid talent. I associate the early impact of Fry’s plays upon me with the bleak and austere years after 1945 and in that sparse time his lavish and careless abundance of episode and epithet, his festival spirit may have been one of the factors in his success."

Both Eliot and Fry try to give expression to existential thought in their works. A recurrent theme in Eliot’s poetry and drama is the common existential preoccupation with death. Eliot’s heroes make a choice in the plays and it is an existential choice. Becket, Harry, Celia and Colby—all of them in a heightened moment of crisis—have to choose a way of life. This conception of choice is fundamental in existentialist reflections on human nature. This choice is mainly a Kierkegaardian conception, for he felt in opposition to Hegelian Idealism that life is full of choices and action. As A.O. George puts it, "The Kierkegaardian conception of ‘choice’, the conception of the necessity for decision and action recurs in the themes of Eliot’s poetic drama. Other common notes of Existentialism may also be discovered in his writing, that his insistence on the value of the human individual, his revolt against idealism, his preoccupation

with the problem of language as a medium of communication, his use of myth in poetry, his emphasis on faith, on the importance which suffering has in human life, his horror of the common unregenerative mass of meaning mankind and above all his awareness of the presence of a crisis in our civilisation which causes general anxiety in the minds of men. Among other recurrent ideas and motifs in Eliot are guilt, solitude and loneliness, as Bradbrook points out, "In all the plays what has been sought is the release from solitude and a sense of guilt which goes with it. For Harry it is 'the solitude in the crowded desert' when the self is reduced to an eye watching. For Celia too, it is an awareness of solitude."

As already discussed, some of these existential ideas appear in Fry also, but the main difference is that Eliot's solution to the existentialist dilemma is purely a theological one in plays like The Family Reunion. Whereas Fry's solution is entirely secular, as already made clear in this enquiry.

Eliot and Fry differ in another major respect, viz. the use of myth. Eliot with his classical learning sought to see ancient parallels to contemporary situations as in The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman.

Fry on the other hand uses a similar strategy only in two plays: The Firstborn and A Sleep of Prisoners and it is significant that his source for both is the Bible and not any classical writer. And when he borrows a classical legend as in A Phoenix too frequent, his emphasis is not on parallelism between the ancient and the modern, as in Eliot. It is obvious that Eliot's strategy is the more complex one— but his themes need this complexity, while Fry's vision is more simple and in monochrome.
The plays of Yeats generally deal with ancient legends since he never showed any interest in representing the busy contemporary life around him. The legends of Ireland and its heroic age, the myth of Cuchulain, life-in-death and death-in-life—these are the themes of Yeats. One of his objectives in his 'legendary' plays is to acquaint contemporary Ireland about its past glorious and heroic age. He stands aloof like a tower in the field of poetic drama, because his objective in revising poetic drama is entirely different from that of others. His experiments in the Irish Abbey theatre indicated in which another direction modern verse drama can progress successfully. As Bradbrook observes, the Irish playwrights "developed a great common theme, the past and future of Ireland from an inherited tradition of bardic poetry and reached back to late medieval times." They were to a large extent successful in bringing out the rhythms of a living language capable of evoking the elemental emotions and urges of man.

Yeats's experiments in poetic drama appear to be inimitable unlike those of Eliot's because Yeats established a form which was highly personal and esoteric.

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Yeats's first poetic play, *Countess Cathleen* was published in 1892 and it was followed by *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1914), *The Shadowy Horses* (1903), *The King's Threshold* and *Co. Sligo's Strand* (1904), *Dardennes* (1907), *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921), and other plays.

Yeats's interest in Irish myth and legend was not merely a concession to a narrow patriotism. For him this material was an expression of certain basic human urges with which he found himself perfectly attuned. As Priscilla Thouless points out, "It is essential to Yeats that he should deal with legendary and mythical material, not because of the picturesque quality this possesses, but because it is to him the symbolic expression of the deep unconscious stream of living by which human working life is enriched. In his great poetic plays Yeats has cut himself off from any attempt at the realistic presentation of the world and confined himself to the world of legend."22

Yeats's plays can be specified in three groups: (a) plays presenting various Irish legends; (b) those dealing specifically with the Cuchulain myth; and (c) plays employing the Japanese Noh technique. His objective in writing the first two employing the types of play was, perhaps to acquaint his people of Ireland of their past heroism and glory. In his poem *Easter 1916* he bemoans...

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the slackness and lack of heroic qualities among his people and they later expresses his surprise when revolted in 1916 and refers to it as 'terrible beauty'. Perhaps this thought of their lacking in heroic qualities was one of the reasons for his glorification of the heroic legends of his country in his plays. Apart from these legends, Yeats was attracted by the Cuchulain myth, for it gave him ample opportunities once again to stress the handedness of his country, while the elemental overtones in the myth also appealed to his mystic nature.

The plays employing the Noh technique are typical of Yeats's abiding interest in the intrincacies of certain esoteric doctrines. He was attracted to this form mainly for three reasons—first, the subjects treated by the Noh dramatists were also legendary, secondly, he found in these plays an attempt to achieve a subtle relationship between music, dance and speech, and thirdly, their use of mask suggested new ways of presenting character on the stage.

Yeats belongs to the symbolist tradition. His association with Arthur Symons reportedly brought him under the influence of the French Symbolists, who by exploring the unconscious mind, evoking feelings use symbols which sets a train of associations of ideas into motion. To Yeats symbolism of course means different things at different times but it was always a living power in
his mind. As Toulouse says, "the vital imaginative symbolism in Yeats is that in which his heroic figures of ancient legends stand as symbols of the deep imaginative life of mankind." Yeats makes use of this symbolism mainly for convenience since his plays deal with the heroic figures, the legendary lovers and the lost spirits. In many plays the subject matter itself is symbolic as, for example, in the four plays for dancers.

One sees in these plays solitary birds like hawk and heron and animals like dog symbolically representing the subjective and objective types which in turn reflect introvert and extrovert types of the mind. These symbols are meant to carry the weight of cryptic meaning. Yeats in his plays tries to transport the spectator from his real world to that of a world of fantasy.

The plays of Fry also belong to the broad genre of imaginative drama, but it is clear that their general spirit and tone are poles apart from those of Yeats. As already seen, Fry too uses a great many symbols in his plays— but most of them are archetypal symbols like the seasons, the phoenix, etc. Their significance is immediately plain even to an ordinary play-goer. They have none of that ecstatic mystical quality which Yeats's complex symbols possess.

Yeats has very little in common with Christopher Fry excepting the fact that both of them try their hand in the same genre, viz. imaginative verse drama. The major themes of Fry are obviously far different from those of Yeats. Apart from this, Yeats always escaped from the world of real life to that of legend, myth and symbol. One never finds a contemporary setting in the plays of Yeats. Some plays of Fry namely, Thor, with Angels, The Firstborn, The Lady's not for Burning, and Courtmantle come nearer to those of Yeats in this respect. These plays of Fry do have a distant, romantic and medieval setting.

But there seems to be a large measure of difference. By setting a play in the distant past, Fry only hopes to get the necessary freedom to handle action along non-realistic lines.

Yeats employs ancient Irish legends to evoke a nationalistic spirit and deals with strange myths esoterically. Fry's use of this material is mainly in the direction of driving home the idea of the unending continuity of life and its indestructibility.

As regards style Yeats progressed from a 'romantic' style to an expression approximating to colloquial speech. As John Rees Moore says, "At first Yeats tried for a concentrated language full of emotional tension, gradually he worked to bring his poetry closer to passionate normal speech. Blankverse seemed already too modern
a form to express Ireland's Heroic age, the stories of Delird and
Cuchulain. Yeats wants a 'magical' style not in any sentimental
sense but for a specific purpose, on the one hand to exercise as
far as possible the prose association, increasingly dominant in
language since the Renaissance, on the other, to call up, by subtle
use of rhythm, an older collective experience in which all minds
became part of a single mind. But there is no where in Yeats
the grand prodigality of expression of Fry. A heroic character
like Thomas Manrip with something of a cascade in his speech is
hardly to be encountered in the plays of Yeats,

As far as the dramatic values are concerned: Yeats never
concentrated either on character or on plot. In fact, he wanted to
evolve a drama in which the poetic words was all-important and
'theatre' of no value. As Rajan puts it "Yeats' characteristic
approach to experience is through the fundamental forces that give
experience its quality, rather than through the dispositions of
plot and nuclei of character. His is a symbolic art with dance
on the surface, reflecting the rhythms below, the immediate pattern
suggesting the fundamental geometry. His deepest concern is with

24. John Rees Moor, Masks of Love and Death. Yeats as a Dramatist.
rather than with men, where as Shakespeare was concerned equally
deeply in both... it remains among the other things a formidable
testimony to the difficulties of writing poetic drama in our time.\(^{25}\)
Fry on the other hand respects the traditional dramatic values,
such as plot and character and all his plays are eminently
stage-worthy. Perhaps this cannot be said of all Yeats's plays.

In the field of poetic drama Auden and Christopher Isherwood occupy an important place. Auden's plays are mainly political in outlook and as Richard Hoggart points out Auden "interested himself particularly in loneliness, anxiety and fear, in 'the lost, the lonely, the unhappy'". One can see in Auden's plays the reflection of the disillusionment and despair of modern man who had to pass through the horrors of war. Unlike realistic drama, the plays of Auden and Isherwood are unmistakably related to the period of Nineteen Thirties of England. But still they soar above the period and as Raymond Williams puts it, the "they 'have a more than temporary importance and can be usefully looked at as experiments in a kind of verse drama based mainly on expressionism which is quite different from the line that was to be followed by Eliot."  

Apart from his early dramatic pieces which include the Charades, Paid on Both Sides and The Dance of Death, Auden has in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood written The Dog Beneath the Skin, The Ascent of F6 and On the Frontier. The three plays

together form one unit, and represent Auden's political views. Though there are variations, the main theme in the plays is politics. All the three plays are provocative and topical. Oedipus, a reaction ary bourgeois country and Westland which symbolically suggests the atrocities of Fascist state—are two imaginary states that form the setting of the plays written in collaboration with Isherwood. The mass political executions and the insanities of the Fascist state are portrayed there. The setting of the plays obviously Europe, particularly of the war period.

Among allied themes are the theme of quest, the body in search of the soul, the ascent of a mountain signifying an attempt at awareness—while existentialist ideas are stressed throughout. One finds constant references to 'the unhappy', 'the sick-souls', 'the self-imprisoned', 'the time-obsessed subsisting on aspirins and weak tea'. One also encounters here the neurotic loneliness that one finds in Eliot—‘an awareness of solitude and loneliness in a crowded desert’. The very title of the play 'The Dance of Death' and the dancer representing death with its urge for violence and the death-theme in Paid on Both Sides remind one of the existential death-wish of the European Man; Auden's fascination for the phenomenon of the 'anxiety' and 'dread' of the modern man reflects his connection with existential thought. But the plays of Auden also
show the influence of Marxism, Freudianism and Christian theology. For instance in his early play *The Dance of Death*, though the title appears existential the emphasis on the theme of the death of the Capitalist class indicates the early Marxist hold on Auden. His strong condemnation of Fascism is only a corollary of his socialist sympathies. But Auden is also drawn more to psychology. In this respect one recalls the Freudian symbolism in the final scene of *The Ascent of F6*.

Auden does not belong to any symbolist tradition but makes use of obvious symbols which are easily recognisable and which by their force and suggestion help towards order, clarity and unity. In this connection one can think of the suggestive symbolism in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* in which the ‘dog’ symbolically suggests the self-abnegation of one who wants to understand his predicament and tries to escape from it. Even the lunatic asylum symbolises the insanities of the Fascist state with its hysteria, its cult of the leader, and its racist theories. Similarly the very ascent in *The Ascent of F6* is a symbol of the act of aggression. Ransom’s four companions symbolise the four faculties namely intuition, feeling, sensation and thought. The final scene of the play brings out the more crude Freudian symbolism with its Oedipus complex.
One finds in the plays of Auden a balance between suggestive symbolism and myth and direct caricature and propaganda. He does not seem to care much for the traditional dramatic values. Sometimes in his plays one gets the impression that each scene exists for itself for the usual development of character and conflict appear to have no place in them. What Richard Hoggart has said about one of the plays holds good with certain inevitable variations for all the plays of Auden. Talking about The Dog Beneath the Skin as he says: "it is a boisterous and lively play, sometimes, witty, often careless and boyish. It is a period piece attacking rather obviously the abuse of the times; it has not and is not intended to have any characters, nor any relationship between characters, the action does not develop but in Brecht's terms 'each scene exists for itself' and the course of events is curved. Also the central figure gets out from home is caught up in several allegorical incidents and comes back. The scenes are presented in the manner of revue, boldly at high speed and with theme songs," 28

Auden's plays have a strong didactic colouring. As John C. Blair points out "Auden characteristically presents the conventional trappings of drama without the traditional development of character

and conflict. His mode involves another sort of drama that is abstract and allegorical rather than naturalistic. As Monro Spears remarks over the plays Auden and Isherwood wrote for the stage are 'fables, modern morality plays'; they are intended to appeal to the minds and not the emotions of the audience.**29** Auden's characters are essentially personified attitudes of mind suited to his expressionistic technique of presenting the states of mind, while rejecting the old tradition of Shakespeare and his blank verse in reviving poetic drama, bothYeats and Auden took to different traditions namely Japanese Noh technique and German expressionism respectively. Auden and Isherwood also tried to incorporate certain features of lower forms of drama into their plays.

As Allardyce Nicoll points out, they "believed that the pantomime, the music hall and the revue were the popular theatrical forms of our time and they tried particularly in The Dog Beneath the Skin to make use of them for their own purpose. The writing is uneven, there is no attempt at characterisation (Auden indeed argued that types rather than characters are desirable in poetic drama)."**30**

Even a casual reading of the plays of Auden makes one think that
the words farce, extravaganza, libretto and oratorio can be applied
to them. Because the characteristic features of all these can be
found in his plays, They are marked by boisterous humour, extravagant
gestures, absurd and ludicrous shows. One finds, farcical, fantastic
and musical composition with an operatic touch in them.

When one thinks of the language of Auden's plays, terms like
doggerel, pidgin English, a telegraphic style, ellipses, declaratory
prose immediately come to mind. In the plays the verse is almost
laconical but has some surface brilliance. Because of his unusual
handling of the language replete with ellipses, odd constructions,
experiments with new forms, certain private references and lines
made up of fragments, his verse often becomes obscure.

A comparative study of Auden and Isherwood on the one hand
and Fry on the other reveals some significant areas of difference.
First, Auden's preoccupation with political and social questions
has no parallel in Fry. Secondly, though both handle existentialist
themes, Auden (at least in the plays) endorses the dark view of life
taken by the Existentialists, while, as shown in the previous pages,
Fry does not subscribe to Existentialist despair at all. Furthermore,
Auden is ironic and satirical in his approach to his subject and
even his wit is tinged with satire, while Fry's wit is purer as it is...
free from all political and social satire, Auden's technique is perhaps more experimental, though, as seen earlier. Fry too is an experimenter in his own way, but Auden cannot match Fry's sheer brilliance of style and his colourfulness in the use of language. Finally, Fry's plays are definitely more stageworthy than the palpably didactic dramas of Auden and Isherwood.