Copy of the questionnaire sent to Mr. Christopher Fry.

1. One at times gets the feeling that you are most serious when you are gay and flippant when you are serious—Would you agree?

2. Would you agree if we say that you try generally to apprehend the truth or unity appearing to exist beneath the contradiction of things?

3. What is your reaction when it is said that you appear 'in the image of a wordsmith'?

4. Can we say that your work as a whole aims at an exploration into God?

5. Would you accept the view that there are traces of existential thought in your plays?

6. Can we say that in your plays you try answer the questions such as what makes for life and what makes for death?

7. Is it your endeavour to see reality in terms of amusement that makes you use an ornamental language?
Dear Professor Sarna,

Thank you for your letter. I will answer your questions as well as I can, though a writer isn't necessarily an authority on what he has written. It is what the work is to you that is important.

1. This applies, to some extent, to the comedies, but not to all plays (not for instance, to Curtmantle, The Firstborn, A Slee of Prisoners, except here and there). Eleanor makes a comment on the relationship of grave and gay on the first page of Act-II of Curtmantle.

2. Yes, the unity of difference is important and the interplay of differences to achieve truth. See the argument between Henry and Becket about 'Truth is one' and 'Truth has three dimensions'. Order without difference is ungenerative.

3. Any writer is a 'word-smith' since he works with words, just as a musician is a 'note-smith' since he works with notes. But words are also thought and meaning, and (just important) the sensation of living, out of which understanding can come.
4. 'Exploration into God', (though I put the phrase into the mouth of a character in *A Sleep of Prisoners*) is too immense a claim, rather an effort to tune into the directive which 'makes for life'—which also answers your question 6.

5. There are many kinds of existentialism, but in so far as I believe in the individual search ('It is the individual man in his individual freedom who can mature with his warm spirit the unripe world') and not in generalisations and labels. Yes. But the Sartrean philosophy that man only exists when he has made himself exist is nonsense. (Becket: that a man knows he has by experience but what a man is proceeds experience.)

7. I question the word 'ornamental' which suggests that the words are being used as embellishment, but I have tried always to keep them to the purpose, part of which is to reflect the polyphony we live in.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Fry.
Dear Professor Sama,

I am so very sorry to have taken so long to answer your letter. These have been rather hectic weeks. A revival of The Lady's not for Burning at the 'Old Vic' in London has been the cause (it opened just over a week ago). I'm glad to say that the audiences are evidently happy with it— I wondered how this 30 years old piece would seem to the young—and the critics are in disension about its virtues and failings as they always were. It's quite like old times. The next thing is a revival of A Sleep of Prisoners by the Chichester Festival Theatre company in September.

As for the biographical details you ask for, it would be better to wait, if you can, until the publication on Oct 19th by the Oxford University Press of a history of my family, called Can You Find Me, which includes in some detail my memories of the first eleven years of life. It will put right for you any mistakes in the Stanford book ('I wasn't, for instance, brought up by two aunts').

With best wishes, and apologies again for the long delay in replying to your letter.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Fry.