CHAPTER II.
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Leading Themes in the Plays of Christopher Fry.

(a). Introduction.

(b). Existential Themes.

(c). 'Religious' Themes.

(d). Secular Themes.

(e). Conclusion.
Introduction.

It is proposed, in this chapter, to study the leading themes in Christopher Fry's plays with a view to finding out the pattern underlying his dramatic oeuvre.

The principal themes in Fry's plays can be broadly divided into three categories, namely existential, religious, and secular. Though one attempts a categorization for the sake of critical convenience, an intensive analysis shows that almost all his plays uniformly celebrate the powers of life and its glorification. As Prater Eugene says, "His basic themes are mystery of life, the joy of living and the regenerative power of life." As already stated, though though Fry is generally said to be a poetic dramatist trying to revive religious drama, his basic urge for the glorification of life and the celebration of its powers is very much perceptible in all his plays, including his religious plays written for special religious occasions. An effort is made in this chapter to analyse all his themes subject-wise: namely, existential, religious, and secular. But in all these themes one can perceive the joyous affirmation of life. Though the themes can be analysed under different heads the main theme running below all of them is the felicity of being alive and the continuing vitality of life in the midst of decay and death.

Fry wants to assert very unobtrusively the eternal truth
that in spite of all its sorrows and evils, there is something
enthralling in life. Fry's view of life is born out of his minute
observation of it, nourished on his upbringing, sustained through
faith and re-lived in his own expression of it in his plays. He
tries to understand the mystery of existence, and while doing so,
he affirms life, assimilates its multiplicity, stresses the need
to hope, and tries to rekindle faith in the war-torn heart of modern
man. And life is celebrated with all its colourful multiplicity
in his grand prodigality of expression. The canvas on which he
works is so vast that it includes legend, history, religion,
science and myth. Though he gives expression to different themes
in his plays, the solid foundation on which they all stand is his
strong, unflinching faith in life; all his plays are so organically
related to one another that they do not seem to be the disconnected
happenings in the mind of the author. They constitute an organic
vision of life which views every dawn in the faith that 'the day's
come round to see things turn into gold'.
(b). Existential Themes.

As a result of two devastating wars, man in the twentieth century lost faith in himself as well as in life. When he lost hope, life appeared to be meaningless and not worth living. Many artists who lived through this experience, endeavored to give a powerful expression to these ideas in the theatre. It was in this atmosphere that existentialism had an immediate impact on their minds and found artistic expression in their works. Christopher Fry who joined the non-combatant forces at the time of the war might have had a first hand experience of the war. And 'praying open ribs to let men go on the indefinite leave which needs no pass', would have had its influence on the mind of the dramatist, and hence the existential ideas in his works. But Fry does not accept Sartre's atheistic existentialism. Sartre, explaining his philosophy says, "Atheistic existentialism, which I represent is more coherent. It states that if God does not exist there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept and that this being is man or as Heidegger says human reality." Fry feels that the individual man, with his warm spirit can mature this unripe world, unlike Sartre he believes in the existence and omnipresence of God.

3. Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism and Human Decision."

Fry has given full expression to the modern man's experience of the existential dilemma. To quote Akhilashwar Jha, "The only new post-war dramatist who gave significant expression to the contemporary experience in the theatre was Fry; his medium was verse but essentially his sensibility was akin to Anouilh's... Most characters in Fry, begin with the rejection of the world and showing an incapacity to enter into any relationship with it... Dynamo, Tegons, Thomas, the Duke, Perpetua and the Prisoners in the Church. The death-wish manifest or latent, provides most often the main dramatic motive to the action in the plays of these two dramatists. They desire death in order to realise in the dying moments the sensation of having lived." The death-wish and the rejection of the world are prominent in Fry's early comedies. As Jha says, "It is evident that Fry begins with the idea that man is fundamentally good. But the traumatic experience of the war, for a time shattered Fry's belief in man's fundamental good: close to the existential dilemma... the experience of war continued to affect his dramatic plot, characterisation and themes." One can easily isolate these existential themes, particularly the death-wish in Fry's early comedies.

5. Ibid., p.111.
Fry's characters reveal several aspects of the death-wish. It may be due to a personal loss as in the case of Dynamene in A Phoenix too Frequent, who longs to die at the death of her husband. It may be due to loss of faith in life, particularly after having undergone a traumatic experience in a war as in the case of Thomas Mendip in The Lady's not for Burning or it may be due to an agonising loneliness which ultimately lands one in despicable despair as in the case of the Duke in Venus Observed or it may be due to the spiritual confusion after a war-experience as in the case of the four prisoners in A Sleep of Prisoners.

A Phoenix too Frequent, The Lady's not for Burning, Venus Observed and A Sleep of Prisoners project these existential themes.

The theme of A Phoenix too Frequent is based on Petronius's tale of the widow of Ephesus who decides to die upon her husband's tomb in the company of a faithful waiting maid. The heroine Dynamene is driven to this extreme step when she loses her husband. A personal loss leads to this death-wish which gradually wanes away in her later, when she confronts a live soldier, Tegusa, who is renamed as Chronis. After meeting Doto, the waiting maid, he comes to know that her mistress Dynamene is making arrangements to join her husband; sympathising with her he says,

"I've had thoughts like it, Death is a kind of love
Not anything I can explain."

Surprised by Dynamene's pledge he feels that the world is fast 'becoming an arena of broken faith'. His conversation with Doto disturbs Dynamene from her sleep. The news that he is a kind of Corporal on a 'five-hour shift with six bodies' interests her considerably. She considers him a messenger and a guide to lead her to death. On further enquiry about the bodies, when he tells her that they are hanging outside, she understands that he is only a mortal and not a supernatural being, considers him a cheat and he has to swear by Horkos and Styx to prove his innocence. She consumes a little wine to revive her spirits which make her confess that

"how inveterate body
Even when cut from the heart, insists on leaf." 7

Tegus was born in a part of the country where Dynamene spent some of her childhood days; this further leads to their discovery of an unmistakable affinity. Even before this could happen, Tegus feels that her person and sacrifice will leave their trace upon his mind as clearly as the shape of the hills around his birth-place. She renames him as Chromis for the crisp and bread-like

sound of the name, he with his 'renewed faith in human nature' ventures 'a step towards interrupting her perfection of purpose'. With his unending zeal for life he tries to create in her 'the desire to find a reason for living' and persuades her to accept his love.

"Tell me
What is your opinion of progress? does it, for example, exist? Is there ever progression without retrogression?
Therefore is it not true that mankind can more justly be said increasingly to regress?
As the material improves, the craftsmanship deteriorates and honour and virtue remain the same, I love you Dyanna."

Added to this, his reference to his birthplace Pyza where she played once on a holiday, gives a strange chance to her to visualise his boyhood for a moment; but still she is not easily convinced; her existential melancholy does not fade away. Her response to his confession of love is:

"You are so
Excited, poor Chronie, what is it? Here you sit
With a woman who has wept all claims
To appearance, undecent in her oldest clothes.

With not a trace of liveliness, a drab
Of melancholy, entirely shadow without
A smear of sun."

She feels flattered by his devotion and says that she wishes that she could look her best for him, to which he answers, determined to brush away her shadowy melancholy with his sunny speeches.

"If this is less than your best, then never in my presence
Be more than your less.

I come a journey from the wrenching ice
To walk in the sun."10

But she replies,

"Chromis

Where am I going? No, Don't answer. It's death
I desire, not you." He is quick with his retort:

"Where is the difference? Call me

Death instead of Chromis."11 Still she is not won. She tells him that she is going to her husband to which he replies.

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10. Ibid., p.36.
11. Ibid.
If I had been your husband, would never dream
of expecting you. I should remember your body
Descending in Hades. I should say 'I have left
My wealth warm on earth, and hell, earth needs it.'
Was all I taught her of love', I should say, 'so poor
That she will leave her flesh and become shadow?
Wasn't our love for each other' (I should continue)
'Infused with life, and life infused with our love?
Very well, repeat me in love, repeat me in life,
And let me sing in your blood for ever.'

These life-soaked words finally transform her and she is won from her
death-wish, and responds to his love. Just then reminded of his duty
when his lips like 'two singing birds' are coming to rest on 'the
white branch' of her throat, he hurries out of the tomb as a parole
that he would return before his implanted kiss on her lips becomes
dry. He returns, but dried of spirits, for a body hung outside is
missing and under 'section six, paragraph three in the Regulations'
he is doomed to die. But she asks,

"Who are they who think they can discipline souls
Right off the earth? What discipline is that?
Chords, love is the only discipline
And we're the disciples of love, I hold you to that."

She now boldly asks him to hang her husband's dead body outside in lieu of the missing one. The dominant theme, the existential death-wish and the temporary rejection of the world is well brought out here, as Martin Browne points out, "Cynane's determination to die reflected a strong surge of the death-wish through the younger minds of western Europe, as can be seen in the French dramatist of the post-war period. This play was a portent of hope as well as a delicious comedy."14

Almost a similar theme is stressed further in The Lady's not for Burning. The theme is simple—namely a temporary rejection of life and the world, a feeling that life is not worth living and a strong desire to die. The protagonist in the play has a strong desire to get himself hanged. He loses faith in life because of his personal involvement in war for seven years. His

"Floundering in Flanders for the past seven years

Flaring open ribs to let men go

On the indefinite leave which needs no pass."15 makes him feel that life is not at all worth living. All the values in life are uncommonly flat for him and hence his unorthodox desire to get himself hanged. So too the heroine is driven to despair when she,

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is unjustly branded as a witch and condemned to die and hence loses all faith in mankind. The play is worked out in terms of these two aspects of existentialism. The dramatist makes an attempt in the end to enforce the values of life, but the death-wish is the prime motive of the action of the play. Thomas Mendip, with his memories of long campaigns in Flanders is sick of life through a "surfeit of death". He is like any other soldier of the two wars who returns home (if alive by chance) with sadness, full of sickness, and of the existential anguish, rejecting the "world."

"... I've never seen a world
So festoring with damnation." He feels that the whole world is wanting to die like him,

"How do you know that out there, in the day or night
According to latitude, the entire world
Isn't wanting to be hanged?"

After having become disgusted with the world in general and himself in particular he fabricates a story of murders, just to substantiate and justify his wish to be hanged. He comes to the house of the Mayor demanding the ultimate punishment. He meets the clerk Richard

17. Ibid., p.119.
who turns a deaf ear to his demands. There comes a young girl, Alison betrothed to Humphrey Devize, a nephew of Hebble Tyson, the mayor. But Nicholas, brother to Humphrey takes a fancy to her. Meanwhile the whole market town Cool Clary is alarmed by a witch-hunt. And right into their midst walks Jennet Jourdainayme who is mistaken for a witch by the people. Nicholas describes her,

"If evil has a soul it's here outside

The flower of sin, Satan's latest

Button-hole."

Unable to understand all this the Mayor asks 'What is the meaning of this?' to which Thomas answers 'That is the most relevant question in the world.' Later one sees Margaret wondering at Thomas' insistence on hanging exclaims,

"Has death

Become the fashionable way to live?

Nothing would surprise me in their generation." This is an apt summing up of the existential death-wish of the war- torn modern man.

The presence of Jennet makes both Humphrey and Nicholas ignore Alison. But the Mayor and others try to convict her and burn her, for thereby they can share her property. Jennet thinks that Thomas

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19. Ibid., p. 137.
20. Ibid., p. 139.
looking to be hanged just to save her, but she never admits
that she is a witch and Thomas never stops claiming that he is
responsible for the murders. Tapperoom exclaims,

"Though we administer persuasion
with great patience, she admits nothing. And the man
won't stop admitting. It really makes one lose
all faith in human nature." Just to solve this riddle they
decide to keep Jennet and Thomas in a room and they listen to
their conversation standing behind the door. Thomas asks Jennet,

"Are you going to be so serious
about such a mean allowance of breath as life is
we'll suppose ourselves to be caddis-flies
who live one day." His poetry on nothingness exerts a
powerful charm on her and she tells him,

"You are making yourself
a breeding-ground for love and must take the consequences." But he continues his philosophy with his "bacchanalia of words",
expressing his disbelief in humanity,

"Half this grotesque life I spend in a state
of slow decomposition; using

22. Ibid., p. 155.
23. Ibid., p. 172.
The name of unconsidered God as a pedestal
On which I stand and bray that I'm best
Of beasts, until under some patient
Moon or other I fall to pieces, like
A cake of dung.  

With this grand prodigality of expression
she is won and she confesses in a witty manner that she loves him.

"You are Evil, Hell, the Father of lies, if so

Hell is my home and my days of good were a holiday

Hell is my hill and the world slopes away from it

Into insignificance."

This grand vociferous confession

of love is taken for granted by the eaves-droppers to be her

confession and they condemn her to death by burning. But Humphrey,

who is affected by her bewitching beauty, makes a suggestion to her

that every official decision can be subjected to official

questioning, and that since he is on the council, he can postpone

the moment of the execution, provided she allows him to come to

her cell at night which she refuses. One is reminded here of the

incident in Measure for Measure where Angelo, the Deputy asks

Isabella to sacrifice her virginity, if she wants to save her

brother Claudio from death. Richard and Alizon who have eloped,

return to inform them that Skipp who was said to have been murdered

or changed to a dog, is neither murdered nor made a dog. This solves all the complications and Jennet and Thomas take this opportunity to run away.

It is Thomas who gives expression to most of the existential ideas. Talking of tedium, he says,

"O tedium, tedium, tedium, the frenzied Ceremonial drumming of the humdrum; Where in this small-talking world can I find A longitude with no platitude." 26 Giving expression to existential melancholy he remarks,

"I've been cast adrift on a raft of melancholy The night-wind passed me like a sail across A blind man's eye." 27

Though he is sick of the world he feels that "something condones the world incorrigibly." 28 In the end Thomas goes out with Jennet, saying that

"I have to see you home, though neither of us Knows where on earth it is," 29 once again stressing the theme of homelessness and uncertainty in the world. Another existential thought vis. accepting existence on faith is expressed by the Chaplain.

27. Ibid., p. 189.
28. Ibid., p. 190.
29. Ibid., p. 212.
"To me, since everything astonishes me,
myself most of all—when I think of myself
I can scarcely believe my senses. But there it is
All my friends tell me I actually exist
And by an act of faith I have come to believe them."  

The thought here is similar to the existential faith advocated by Marcel, the theistic existentialist and philosopher. R.V. Das explaining Marcel's philosophy, says, "Faith is implicit in every judgment of existence which assumes some reality going beyond the present immediate experience. The existence of external objects is affirmed by an act of faith. The certainty which accompanies my body-consciousness seems to be communicated to my awareness of other bodies with which my body comes in contact. The existence of others also is accepted on faith."  

Hansanthropy and dry rationalism which reflect the death-wish and temporary rejection of life are at the core of the play. But the dramatist, after focussing attention on these aspects of existentialism goes beyond all this and tries to suggest certain remedies. Both Thomas Mandip and Jannat Jourdeymant get reconciled to life as well as to the world and the prime force that brings them together.

So also in *Venus Observed*, one of the themes depicted is the restlessness of the mind of the modern man, affected with the existential emptiness of the war. The protagonist here is more mature than his counterparts in the earlier comedies. He may not like to take refuge in the death-wish, but tries to find out an answer to the questionings of his restive mind. And this search for a way out is one of the factors of modern existentialism. Commenting on these factors of existentialism, Radhakrishnan says, "the different factors emphasised by the modern existentialists are indicated here: knowledge, sense of good and evil, insecurity, fear, anxiety and a search for a way out." Modern man is affected with this sense of blankness and loss of identity. The ultimate answer to this problem is that one has to transcend oneself and become aware of the eternal. The themes of loneliness, solitude, an emptiness of the mind and a search for a way out of this, are stressed by the Duke in *Venus Observed*. In this connection Stanfold says, "This confession, taken in conjunction with the Duke's remarks to his son on the nature of man:

*The note, my son is loneliness

Over all the world

Men move unhoming and eternally

Conceived, a swarm of bees who lost their queen*

helps us to see him in a more human light to comprehend the

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restless gap in his life: the anguish behind his urbanity, the dissatisfaction behind his veneer. He tries to fill this restless gap with amorousness, trying to cover up his anxiety and blankness with hedonism. He asks his son Edgar to select a wife among the three ladies who have been 'implicated in the joyous routine of his life, one time or the other'. When Edgar asks whether he loves them equally, he replies,

"Equality is a mortuary word, just choose
Shall I be happy on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays,
Or on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays? Some such difference is all that your choice involves." 34

Edgar is not able to decide properly and adding to this confusion, Perpetua enters the field making the father and the son rivals to her love. The Duke even justifies his claim to her thus:

"The field
Is not entirely yours; is not entirely mine,
I am as innocently there
As an old warhorse put out to grass
My equine equability is pastoral to a fault." 35

33. Stanford, op.cit., p.78.
35. Ibid., p.199.
Dominic, 'the conscience-nudging, parent-pasting and guilt-corroded child' of Redbeck, tells Perpetua to accept the Duke, just to save Redbeck from punishment for his embezzlement of the Duke's money. But later knowing from the Duke that he has legalised whatever her father embezzled, she tells the Duke that she has only fear and no love for him. In the meanwhile Rosabel Flemming in utter disgust sets the observatory on fire which brings him down to the earthly level. He then expresses his anguish thus:

"What in the world is a man,
Speaking for myself, I am precisely that question
I exist to know that I exist
Interrogatively... ... ...
...
...
What is the mark of the question?
What is the note of this interrogation?
Loneliness. The note my son is loneliness.
Over all the word
Men move unheeding and eternally
Concerned; a swarm of bees who have lost their queen."36

These lines express the idea of 'man's estrangement' in the world.
At last, after his observatory is consumed in fire, which symbolically also suggests the extinction of the flares of hedonism and the birth of wisdom in him, he leaves the field open to Edgar

and settles on Rosabel. He reconciles himself to his fate and in a cool and placid manner says,

"I've achieved the rare and benevolent place
where the irl of the lonely human state
in quite unknown and the fumbling fury
we call our life." 37 He gets an awareness and an enlightenment
and says,

"I forgive"

... ...

All the friction of this great orphanage
where no one knows his origin and no one
comes to claim to him. I forgive even
the unrevealing revelation of love
that lifts a lid purely
To close it; and leaves us knowing the greater things
Are close, but not to be disclosed
Though we die for them." 38

After this new-found awareness he decides to marry Rosabel "to share two solitudes". He frees himself from this restlessness and existential anguish becoming aware of his position and reconciling to it.

Again, In a Sleep of Prisoners Fry tries to formulate a design out of the chaotic existential experience of modern life. Though

38. Ibid., p. 237.
the play was written for a performance in a church, it very vividly portrays this existential dilemma. The play portrays a series of interlocking dreams dreamt by four prisoners of war "in which each of the four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each, in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be." The action of the play is contemporary and takes place some time during the World War II and involves four British soldiers: Corporal Adams, Private Meadows, Private King, and Private Able, who have been captured and temporarily interned in a church which has been turned into a prison. With the violence of modern war as the background the action presents the efforts of these four ordinary soldiers to come to grips with reality and resolve their dilemmas.

First, Meadows has a dream in which he sees himself as God and Adams as Adam. Cain's killing of Abel figures in the dream, with David as Cain and Peter Able as Abel. Violence as a fact of human nature and its hold on the man are brought out by this dream. The second dream is dreamt by David King, himself as King David and Peter as Absalom. Violence committed as a matter of political necessity is further stressed here. The third dream is dreamt by Peter: he is Isaac about to be sacrificed by Abraham and David is Abraham. The fourth dream is that of Adams who dreams of being

cast adrift on the ocean; he with other three as prisoners and
victims thrown in fire and Meadows appears as the fourth figure.

Fry wants to present through all these dreams men's conflicts
in the modern world. As William Spanos has noted "The contemporary
relevance of this conflict is clearly suggested by Joseph Wood
The two alternatives of modern man he asserts are, (1), the animal
pursuit of survival which ultimately entails the negation of values.
(2), the pursuit of the inner life which ultimately ends in the
extinction of the human species. This is as Krutch observes in
the 1956 preface, the diagnosis of existentialism (pp. XI-XIII). It
is within the framework of this dilemma of modern man that Fry
shapes the contemporary action of A Sleep of Prisoners." 48 The first
three dreams portray man's pursuit of survival and the last dream
refers to the need of an inner life, stressing the efficacy of
good and a necessity to confront the problems of life and empha-
sizing that violence does not lead anywhere. Apart from this some
of the factors emphasized by the modern existentialists, namely a
sense of good and evil, fear and anxiety can also be seen in the
dreams. The existential dilemma and the conflict runs through the
play along with the ostensible religious theme.

40. William V. Spanos, The Christian Tradition in Modern British
Thus the existential theme is effectively treated in _A Phoenix too Frequent_, _The Lady's not for Burning_, _Venus Observed_, and _A Sleep of Prisoners_. But in all these plays the protagonists are not worsted by the existential dilemma and its anguish. Though they temporarily reject life and the world, ultimately they are made to accept life, after arriving at an awareness and an understanding of existence. Though Fry presents existentialism in all these plays, yet he manifestly goes beyond existentialism and arrives at a sunny reading of life. This fact very much explains how he is essentially committed to a fruitful acceptance of life.
Some of Fry's plays deal with religious themes, for they were written for special religious occasions. Fry is generally considered by many critics as a religious dramatist simply because he makes use of religion as a subject matter. Though many of his plays deal with Biblical characters, scenes, motifs, etc., he presents them with a contemporary colouring and by and large, uses religion as a means to achieve the end of celebrating his faith in life. An intensive analysis of these plays definitely reveals that the frequent labelling of Fry as a religious dramatist is less than fair. On being questioned whether his work as a whole aims at an 'exploration into God', he answers that, "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'.\textsuperscript{41} This clearly explains how his religious themes are only aspects of his essentially secular themes. Fry's attempt at religious themes only serves to bring to light that which makes for life. It is once again a stressing of the importance of life.

Fry is preoccupied with this world and never advocates renunciation of it. He feels that living in this world is a necessity for all and one should do one's duty. This almost

\textsuperscript{41} Christopher Fry, "Personal Correspondence", April 10, 1975.

\textit{Vide, Appendix-1.}
approximates with the Hindu ideal of doing one's Dharma irrespective of the consequences, preached by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the battle field of Kurukshetra. As long as one lives in this world, one can't but live through life with a necessary courage in existence, in spite of the myriad forms of evils and violence that one confronts in life. As said earlier, the Biblical characters and motifs from the books of Exodus, Genesis, and Daniel in Fry basically serve to stress the idea of how man, ever since his barbarous past has been committed to violence and how it is time he believed in the powers of good and the sanctity of life. The special occasions for which these 'religious' plays have been written gave an immediate context to the dramatist to stress the above said ideas. Fry makes use of religion as a force which asserts the importance of life and hence the plays written for religious occasions are not strictly speaking specifically 'religious' in spirit.

Fry's Church dramas written for special religious occasions are

*The Boy with a Cart*, *The Firthborough, Thor, with Angels* and *A Sleep of Prisoners*.

*The Boy with a Cart* is Fry's first published play, and was written at the request of the vicar in the Sussex village of Colman's Hatch. The theme is quite simple. The play narrates how the boy Cuthman comes to the village of Steyning and builds a church. The Chorus of the people of England, which finds in the story of Cuthman, 'the working together of man and God like root and sky'
soms up the whole theme in the beginning itself:

"It is there in the story of Cuthman the working together of man and God like root and sky; the son of a Cornish shepherd, Cuthman, the boy with a cart. The boy we saw trudging the sheep tracks with his mother mile upon mile over five counties; one fixed purpose biting his heels and lifting his heart. We saw him; we saw him with a grass in his mouth, chewing and travelling; we saw him building at last a church among shorthoberryes."42 This simple story is suffused with miracles: when the neighbours come to tell Cuthman about the death of his father, he tells them how once he drew a circle round the sheep and went to dinner keeping his crook against the rock and how none of the sheep broke through the circle. After learning of the death of his father he starts his journey. He constructs a cart to carry his mother, and when the rope round his shoulders breaks at one place and she rolls on to the ground, the mowers in nearby fields burst into peals of laughter. His mother unable to bear this insult, curses them that they would laugh too long and into trouble. He once again resumes his cart-pulling, with the rope of withies tied tight from the cart to his shoulders. In the

meanwhile, the field where the mowers work, is thoroughly flooded much to their dismay, when it rains unexpectedly. Cuthman decides to build a church where the withies break; as he tells his mother.

"The Church

And I shall be built together; and together
Find our sages' significance, breaking and building
In the progression of this world go hand in hand
And where the withies break I shall build."43 The withies break at Steyning. The people in Steyning are good and he finds a job and starts building the church. Two young brothers Albred and Denwulf once hide his bulls, to interrupt the church-work. Cuthman yokes them together saying,

"One day I took a crook
And drew a circle in pasture; and today
I drew a circle here to guard the church.

A circle of a stronger faith than I

Could ever have mastered them."44 When their mother approaches Cuthman to reproach him, she is carried 'zigzag like a paper bag' miles away by a tornado. In spite of all this, the work seems to stop when the king-post is swung out of its position. When Cuthman is alone, there comes a Carpenter, with whose touch the king-post swings back to its position and the work is completed.

44. Ibid., p.39.
Since the play was written for a religious occasion, the predominance of miracles in it can be easily explained. But Fry uses the miracles only to drive home his ideas: viz. to create faith in man, faith in the powers of good and their ultimate deliverance from evil. It is difficult to arrive at any definite conclusions on Fry’s attitude towards miracles here, for he never comments on them nor does he give an impression of believing them completely. But they come quite handy to him to demonstrate how good ultimately triumphs over evil as seen in the play, in the sudden flooding of mowers’ field and in the taming of the wicked brothers along with their mother. Thus the play is an assertion of faith stressing the deliverance of man from evil. The incidents in the play too reveal the ultimate emergence of good. Like the other plays of Fry, it presents man’s pilgrimage from uncertain grounds of existence filled with fear and doubt to a new and happy land of stability and certitude.

The very title of the play itself is highly suggestive. Cuthman’s cart has a specific purpose— it is to carry his aged mother who has seen better days. The Boy does not want her to spend her last days as a beggar. He wants to see her settled in comfort, which in the end is accomplished when she even marries an old man of the village. These developments emphasize the strong secular note in the play. The following speech of the Mother also stresses this:
"We've been settled in Steyning for six months as though we have lived here all our lives. Every one has been very kind. Cuthman is earning quite good money from the gentlemen we met on the first evening we came. We live in a very nice little cottage. There are rather too many steps but we can't expect everything. Everyday I put a clean apron and the neighbours tell me that they liked the look of me at once. We are already very respected......"45

In spite of the miracles therefore, the play is rightly entitled The Boy with a Cart and not The Boy who Built a Church, for, the cart leads not only to the construction of Church but also to the founding of a hearth and a home.

The Firstborn reminds one of Milton's axiom that,

"Just are the ways of God

And justifiable to man."46 Fry himself points out in the foreword to the play that what he has attempted in the play is to link "the ways of man and the ways of God with a deep and urgent question-mark."47 Through the protagonist Moses, Fry wants to focus attention on the balancing of 'life within the mystery where the conflicts and dilemmas are the trembling of the balance."48 The thematic implications of the play go beyond the struggle of Moses against the Pharaoh and his ultimate deliverance of the Israelites.

As Stanford points out, "the poet's main triumph in creating this

48. Ibid., p.50.
play was to show the Egyptian-Israelite struggle as something more
than a passing phase in the behaviour of a great power towards a
small minority civilisation." Though Stanford does not specific-
cally say what that 'something more than a passing phase' is, it
is possible to suggest that Fry wishes to present in this play
the perpetual and the universal struggle between good and evil;
the temporary suppression of good by evil and the ultimate triumph
of good.

The struggle of Moses should not be viewed as a purely
religious one, simply because it is from the book of Genesis; as it
has been said earlier, a religious occasion naturally demands a
story from the Bible. It must be viewed as a semi-mythical or
semi-historical subject where the universal struggle of good and
evil forces has been treated and the ultimate triumph and
deliverance of good from evil has been hinted at. The Biblical story
of Moses, provides a suitable framework in the presentation of
this universal theme.

Soon after Moses arrives from Midian, his struggle against
Seti starts. He meets Seti with Aaron, the God-given spokesman to
him ("and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and he shall
be 'even' he shall be to thee instead of a mouth and thou shalt
be to him instead of God."50) Together they try to make the Pharaoh

49. Derek Stanford, Christopher Fry: An Appreciation (London, 1951),
p.115.

50. Exodus, 4:16.
understand his 'merciless mischief', demanding justice for his people. Moses tells Seti, almost admonishing him.

"It is the individual man
In his individual freedom who can mature
With his warm spirit the unripe world.
They are your likeness, these men, even to nightmares
I have business with Egypt, one more victory for her,
A better one than Ethiopia:
That should come to see her own shame
And discover justice for my people." 51 Later talking about
mystery Moses says,

"... there is little difference
Between ourselves and those blindfolded oxen
We also do the thing we cannot see,
Hearing the cracking pivot and only knowing
That we labour." 52 Moses expresses his doubts and even queries whether good can overcome evil at all:

"But still I need to know how good
Can be strong enough to break out of the possessing
Arms of Evil, I am there beyond myself
If I could reach to where I am." 53

But later, he sheds his doubts and stresses the power of good over

52. Ibid., p. 74.
53. Ibid., pp. 76-7.
"SoraeUtwsre# »t beyond oisr scope? is a power Participating but unharnessed, waiting To be led towards us, Good has a singular strength Not known to evil, 54 and in the end Moses adorns the setL " .. .. Deny Life to itself and life will harness and ride you To its purpose, 55 and he further brings out his faith in life and God: "The door that shuts into life, there is An ear, am I given the power To do what I am? What says the infinite eavesdropper? 56 at the death of the firstborn of Egypt the long-felt longing for deliverance is complete The death of the first born gives a fresh lease of life to the Israelites. So also the life of Ramses after his death goes to resurrect Moses from his spiritual death. Thus the play stresses the theme of life and death and good and evil. In the end Moses leads his people into the wilderness wondering at the way of life: "I do not know why the necessity of God Should feed on grief; but it seems so. And to know it is not to grieve less but see grief grow big

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55. Ibid., p. 95.
56. Ibid., p. 129.
With what has died and in some spirit differently

Near it back to life."37

Similarly, in *Thor*, with *Angela* the Canterbury Festival play.

Fry is once again concerned in establishing the power of good. The violence represented by the heathen religion and its gods, Thor and Noten is slowly replaced by the patience and benevolence of Christianity. The dramatist avers that one should be generous enough to return good for evil; men must learn the importance of love, forgiveness, mercy and value of sacrifice. The protagonist is made to realise how violence is to be eschewed and compassion cultivated. Though it shows Cymen the heathen-chieftain getting converted to Christianity at the advent of St. Augustine; the play actually is something more than a conflict between one religious system and another--namely paganism versus Christianity. The play has a larger thematic significance in that it demonstrates the superiority of one value system over the other, like compassion over violence, love over hatred and good over evil.

After his battle with the Saxons, Cymen comes home with Noal a Saxon slave, whom he has saved in the encounter, impelled by an unknown but strong and strange power:

"Like a madman, he saved the Briton when we'd have killed him; Burst in among us, blaspheming against Woden;

Broke his sword in the air he wassure it broke
against a staggering light and stood roaring,
swaying in a sweat of war, bestruckled

Over the fallen Briton."58 This is how Guichelm, who believes
in utter violence, describes the incident. Cymen's sons and his
brothers-in-law consider him even mad and want him to sacrifice
the Briton to appease their blood-thirsty gods. But Cymen wishes
to find out from Hoel the force that struck him. He questions
Hoel to let him know how his strength is 'flogged away', and Hoel
expresses his ignorance, for, God works through him without his
knowledge. Later Cymen, goaded by his wife, sons and brothers-in-law
makes a desperate bid again to kill Hoel, but miraculously enough,
he finds himself turning the sword against his own son, saying
unwittingly, "Let us love one another". He exclaims later:

"... it seems
all one, it seems all one. There's no distinction,
which is my son."59

He decides to solve this mystery, at any cost:

"I'll ask the louse

In the filthy shirt of a corpse, in the bottom of a ditch
If I can learn that it is I've learnt to dread."60
Later, breaking the altar he questions his gods to no avail. He is summoned to meet St. Augustine. In the meanwhile Noel is crucified, charged with snaring Martina with magic. Cymon returns home with the newly proclaimed religion, but finds Noel killed, much to his dismay. He then exhorts others thus:

"... we are afraid

To live by rule of God, which is forgiveness
Meroy and compassion, fearing that by these
we shall be ended. And yet if we could bear
These three through dread and terror and terror’s doubt
Daring to return good for evil without thought
Of what will come, I cannot think
We should be the losers. Do we believe
There is no strength in good or power in God."

Thus the play finally stresses the power of good in the world. As said earlier, here again Fry is not interested simply in establishing the superiority of Christianity over paganism. He is obviously trying to show how man’s religious ideas change through experience of life. The following speech of Cymon demonstrates this. Cymon feels that love instead of hatred must be the dominant force in life. This is why he feels that he should not kill Noel, the prisoner. He says,

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"If we kill him and bury him

I shall fill my lungs with relief and forget my fault
And the flame will be on me while I whistle at a clear sky
No! This walking wound in my strength can walk on,
Wake me in the morning, set me to my bed;
He shall stand between me and the door so that his sea shadow
Falls across everything I do. So every
Moment shall have spears addressed to that dark
Which lies in wait for my will. Alive
He's ours; dead, who knows to what
Unfriendly power he will have given himself?
Scowl at your own stampede of panic,
Not at me, look; the sun puts down
The mist at last and looks out across the day
Hare comes the burning sea of honey
Over the grey sand of our defeat.
We'll salute the sun that makes us men."

This speech clearly indicates how the dramatist strives to
demonstrate the superiority of one value system over the other
in the play.

In A Sleep of Prisoners Fry further tries to reaffirm his
faith in the good powers in the world. The play was commissioned

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by the Religious Drama Society, for the Festival of Britain. In
the dedicatory letter to Robert Gittings in the play, Fry says,
"Progress is the growth of vision, the increased perception of
what makes for life and what makes for death." As this quotation
suggests, the play, in spite of its strong Biblical colouring is
ultimately a life-oriented play. The plot of the play has already
been outlined earlier. The dreams of the four prisoners are about
Biblical characters and actions but their thrust is again in the
direction of emphasizing the universal idea of the triumph of
good over evil. This theme is stressed in the following dialogue:

"Men, strange how we trust the powers that rain
and not the powers that blazes.

David... But good's unwarded,
as defenceless as a naked man.

Enoch. Inexorably. Good has no fear.

Good is itself, whatever arises,
it grows, and takes, and breaks.

Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong
stronger than anger, wiser than strategy.

Enough to subdue cities and sea

If we believe it with a long courage of truth."63

The Biblical parables are a means to comment on the roles of
good and evil in human life. A close analysis of the dreams stresses

the theme how good slowly and unobtrusively wins over evil. In the first dream, Cain wants to kill Abel, which he actually does. We see his direct involvement in the murder. In the second dream, King David wants to get rid of his natural son Absalom; he gets him killed but he does not do it by himself. In the third dream of Abraham and Isaac, the killing itself is averted. In the fourth dream, the evil attempts of Nebuchadnezzar are stalled by a divine intrusion, thus making the characters feel the efficacy of good over evil. All the four dreams together stress the progressive diminution of evil forces and man's slow but steady understanding of good in the world. A Sleep of Prisoners again makes clear the effort of the dramatist 'to tune into the directive which makes for life.'

To sum up, in all these plays that deal with 'religious' themes -- namely The Boy with a Cart, The Firstborn, Thor, with Angels and A Sleep of Prisoners, Fry primarily aims at an interpretation of life. Faith in life, the eternal struggle between good and evil, love and patience and sacrifice, human violence under the influence of evil and the final triumph of good --- these are the themes that are projected by the dramatist through these religious or Biblical stories. One can therefore say that though these religious or plays are ostensibly religious, (for they deal with religious or Biblical stories) they have an equally strong secular orientation also. Fry with his basic urge to celebrate life views religion as an
aspect of life, for religion and life are inseparable. His primary objective is to understand that which makes for life, and religion is one of the ways through which he can interpret life and perhaps not the only way.

One can even say that since Fry was specifically asked to write plays for certain religious occasions, he had naturally to deal with themes which were religious in nature. This does not ipso facto mean that he is a religious dramatist. As already shown, the main theme in these plays is not so much the assertion of Christian faith but the assertion of faith in the values which make for life. The Boy with a Cart, which opens with the information that Cuthman’s father is dead, in the end closes with Cuthman settling happily in a village with his widowed old mother, who even marries an old man called Tom. Similarly, in The Firstborn, the deliverance of Israelites is accomplished only after the death of the firstborn and with the death of Ramesses, Moses feels that a part of himself is dead; because for Moses, Ramesses represents his own boyhood. When Moses feels that he ‘followed a light into blindness’ it is his ‘spiritual death’, and from this, he gets resurrected only when the life of Ramesses goes to him, which, as Fry suggests, is hinted at in the end. To quote Fry himself, “In the last scene he suffers a momentary spiritual death (‘I followed a light into a blindness’) at the moment when the
firstborn's physical death creates the Hebrew's freedom, and his resurrection from that, to become the great leader, though only hinted at as the curtain falls, carries with it something of the life of Rameses. In Thor, with angels Cymen the protagonist is forced to eschew the violence of his gods Thor and Útgarth whose religion denies life and he finally embraces a life-restoring religion. Thus all these plays assert an unshakable faith in life—a theme basic to the drama of Christopher Fry.
(d). Secular Themes.

The plays with manifestly secular themes are

The best is Light from Hell; Curtmoh and A Yard of Sun. An analysis of these plays again underscores how Fry's main theme is life and its glorification. A close study of the plays reveals how Fry's celebration of life assumes different forms, namely his zest for life and the sheer felicity of being alive; his faith in love; his rejoicing at faith as a means of asserting life; his enjoyment of nature; his lively interest in human nature and its oddities and finally, the pleasure he takes in handling the language.

First, the zest for life perceptible in every line that Fry writes and every character of his, has abundant desire for life. In A Phoenix too Frequent when Dynacane wants to die, simply because her husband is dead, her new lover tries to cheer her up thus, almost injecting life into her blood:

"If I had been your husband, would never dream
Of expecting you, I should remember your body
Descending stairs in the floating light, but not
Descending in Hades, I should say 'I have left
My wealth warm on earth and hell, earth needs it.
'Was all I taught her of love', I should say, 'so poor
That she will leave her flesh and become shadow?
Wasn't our love for each other' (I should continue)
Infused with life and life infused with our love?
Very well, repeat me in love, repeat me in life
and let me sing in your blood for ever." 65 The same heroine.

when her lover gives himself up to despair, repeats to him these
life-soaked words with an added vigour, stating that they can
even transform death into life:

"How little you understand, I loved

His life, not his death--- he can give his death---
The power of life." 66

In Thor, with Angels, Noel feels that life is for living and
not to be thrown away and says,

"I want to live, having a life in me

Which seems to demand it." 67

Roses warns Seti in The Firstborn:

"Deny

Life to itself and life will harness and ride you
To its purpose." 68

Fry seems to suggest through Richard Guttner,

"I'll honour myself by continuing to live
And honour you by hoping you live indefinitely." 69

66. Ibid., p.49.
In Curtain's King Henry, the protagonist wants to create life from the utter chaos into which he found himself when he set on the throne. Marshall in the prologue to the play says,

"His energy was like creation itself, he was giving form to England's chaos; and England that after eight years of civil war had no trade, no law, no conscience,"70 and again,

"Law and order is the outcome. Haven't you got a memory for the smoke and ruin this land was? Mad and murderous and leaderless, bleeding away like row-heat."71 To such a land the protagonist of the play tries to give:

"an incorruptible scaffolding of law
To last her longer than her cliffs."72

It is almost like trying to escape create an empire out of nothing; once again creating life out of the shambles, out of destruction, out of death. Fry's latest play, A Yard of Sun takes this quest for life as a theme itself. What one finds in the play is a reconstruction of life after the wars. Life has been smashed into smithereens during and after the wars. The protagonist endeavours to reshape it to some acceptable form though not to its original grandeur. Thus, Fry's abundant zest for life is amply registered in all his plays;

71. Ibid., p. 181.
72. Ibid., p. 201.
Secondly, Fry’s celebration of life can be seen in his glorification of love, love not only between man and woman, but also filial love, parental love, loving kindness to animals etc. In *The Boy with a Cart* Cuthman wants to see that his aged mother does not end her days as a beggar; he says,

"It wouldn’t do at all

To end your days as a beggar in the place where you’ve always been respected— it wouldn’t do

To end them in a little hovel that some one would let us have in a corner of one of their sheds; living on their left overs and

Perhaps a good meal at Christmas."\(^{73}\) Thus he fulfils his filial obligations. The same old lady marries an old man in the play; she says, "Usually my intuition is most acute; things say themselves to me. But oddly enough nothing said to me, ‘one day that dear man is going to be your husband’."\(^{74}\) At such an old age what they require is not marital pleasure but companionship and loving kindness.

Love in its pristine glory can be seen in Fry’s spring comedy, *The Lady’s not for Burning*, a play which celebrates the apotheosis of love. Here the protagonist smitten with a death-wish is slowly forced to abandon it in favour of life in the shape of a woman.

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74. Ibid., p. 43.
The protagonist Thomas Kendrick, a soldier, who is vexed in 'praising open ribs' in Flanders prefers to get hanged, but gets hooked by the angling rod of love:

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

Later his lady-love Jennet Jourdemayne threatens that,

"You are making yourself
A breeding ground for love and must take the consequences."

and at last she confesses her love for him in a very strange and unorthodox manner:

"That is to be done? Something compels us into
The terrible fallacy that man is desirable
And there's no escaping into truth; the crimes
And cruelties leave us longing and campaigning
Love still pitches his tent of light among
The suns and moons; you may be decay and a platitude
Of flesh, but I have no other such memory of life.
You may be corrupt as ancient apples, well then,
Corruption is what I most willingly harvest.

76. Ibid., p. 172.
You are Evil. Hell, the Father of lies; if so
Hell is my hill and the world slopes away from it
Into insignificance: I have come suddenly
Upon my heart and where it is I see no help for."
Non by this forceful declaration of love, the protagonist
explains,

"I shall be loath to forgo one day of you
Even for the sake of my ultimate friendly death." 77

So also in *A Phoenix too Frequent*, Tegus, the soldier
exposes the meaninglessness of Dynasene's death-wish and convinces
her of the importance of life and wins her heart thus:

"Smile of my soul;
My sprig, my sovereign; this is to hold your eyes,
I sign my lips on them both; this is to keep
Your forehead: do you feel the claim of my kiss
Falling into your thought? And now your throat
Is a white branch and my lips two singing birds
They are coming to rest." 78 But when this castle of love
seems to collapse she says,

"Love you, for death to have you?
Am I to be made the fool of courts martial?

78. Ibid., p. 212.
Who are they who think they can discipline souls
right off the earth? What discipline is that?
Chromia, love is the only discipline
And we're the disciples of love. 80

In The Firstborn one sees the love of Rameses, the son of the Pharaoh
for Moses—it is almost like hero-worship though it is not worked
out by the dramatist to its full dimensions:

"I used schoolboy's worship like myrrh
and Cassia to perpetuate you;
The immortal and affable god in general uniform
who came and went between wars, who filled the schoolroom
and I could call him uncle. So when the memory
Broke its wrappings and stood speaking like a man
On a noonday terrace, I decided to come near." 81

But Moses knows the limitations of this love, and so he says,

"You and I
Rameses, like money, in a purse
Ring together only to be spent
For different reasons." 82 Nevertheless he also knows that,

"Love is the dominant of life
To which all our charges
Of kay are subdued in the end." 83

82. Ibid., p. 80.
83. Ibid., p. 77.
One can see in Fry's plays a humanitarian love for animals too. In *The Dark Is Light Enough* the Countess expresses her concern, once she knows that a horse with a severe gall on the neck has been taken for a long ride.

"I wish he hadn't taken Xenophon
Xenophon, got a saddle gall
I hope Richard will notice and think of him"

Only if any of you hear of Richard
Ask after Xenophon."84

Thirdly, the celebration of life through joy of faith is very much perceptible in Fry's work. As already seen, many of Fry's characters express their faith in life and in the efficacy of good powers in the world. *The Dark Is Light Enough* is nothing but a complete demonstration of faith in life. The protagonist the Countess staunchly believes in life and saves Richard Gettnar who is an unreliable and irresponsible drunkard and even risks her life for him. In spite of her failing health, she goes out on a winter morning and brings back Richard Gettnar in her sleigh, even exposing the house to a thorough ransacking by the troops of Col. Janik. She not only has faith but while demonstrating it, also instills it into others.

"Your fetching Gettnar in,
Has faced me with a knowledge I was lacking
Which in a way has altered nothing
And altered it thoroughly"85 - says Peter in the play.

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85. Ibid., p. 124.
Pry seems to suggest through the Countess that one should live life with abundant faith in it, in spite of the gloomy surrounding darkness which the very title 'The Dark is Light Enough' appropriately suggests.

Pry seems to suggest, in *A Sleep of Prisoners*, his unflinching faith in the efficacy of the powers of good.

"Good has no fear
Good is itself, whatever comes
It grows, and makes and bravely
Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong
Stronger than anger, wiser than strategy
Enough to subdue cities and men
If we believe it with a long courage of truth,"

To live with fortitude, one should have faith both in life as well as in God. In *The Boy with a Cart*, Cuthman says,

"I was as empty as a vacant barn
It might have been because my stomach was empty
That I was suddenly filled with faith." again,

What is rustling in the grass?
What shakes in the tree? What is hiding in
The shadow? And Cuthman said, 'God is there
God is waiting with us.'

88. Ibid., p.22.
of God also sustains the faith in life.

In The Firstborn the whole story of Moses is a demonstration of the celebration of life through the joy of faith. The play is not a mere dramatization of a biblical story; its main theme is the importance of life. As Fry himself tells us in the Foreword to the play, "The figure of life which Rameses presents will be seen to take central place, from his first entrance to the end. The character of Moses is a movement towards maturity, towards a balancing of life with in the mystery." The play closes with the spiritual resurrection of Moses with the life of Rameses going to his. In the end he expresses his strong faith in life.

"What does eternity bear witness to
If not at last to hope." 89

The same idea is stressed in Thor, with Angels too and Cymon says if one is

"Daring to return good for evil without thought
Of what will come, I cannot think.
We should be the losers." 90

Apart from this glorification of life through the joy of faith one sees Fry celebrating life through the enjoyment of nature also. An artist particularly a poet- is endowed with 'an organic sensibility', a capacity to receive powerful impressions through the senses.

The dominant sense which Wordsworth terms as 'the most despotic of senses' is sight. It is sight that usually plays a predominant role in enjoyment of nature. Nature also yields auditory pleasure to an ear that is keen even to the whisper of a breeze. The grandeur and beauty of a mountain-torrent appeals to some, whereas its sound registers a deep and indelible impression on others. These auricular impressions can be as powerful as the impressions of sight. Enjoying nature through the sense of touch which is also termed as the 'measurably muscular sense' is another way of responding to natural beauty. The boyhood experiences of Wordsworth are monumental examples of it. Apart from these, the sense of smell, and the sense of taste have also their role to play in the enjoyment of nature. The poet's capacity to retain the felt thoughts and impressions of nature in the 'deep well of unconscious' and recall these whenever occasion demands it, is very well exemplified in the verse of the romantic poets. Though one does not find any such sublime heights of poetic glory in Fry, he is certainly endowed richly with sensibility and one gets in his plays a truthful recording of his own reactions to and impressions of nature. Fry's enjoyment of nature is not merely through sight (though it has a predominant role to play in his work), ear and touch it is through ear and touch too.

Fry's appreciation of nature is often revealed in his stanzas drawn from the natural world e.g. in A Phoenix too Frequent.
Tageus says to Dotto,

"It's regeneration to see how a human cheek
can become as pale as a pool."\(^91\)

he later compares his

"... interest in music
To the sudden melodious escape of the young river
Where it breaks from nosing through creases and ringsups."\(^92\)

In The Boy with a Cart, the Chorus observes,

"Cuthman's life is puffed like a dandelion
Into uncertain places."\(^93\)

And in The Lady's not for Burning Thomas says,

"I'll just nod in at the window like a rose
I'm a black and frosted rosebud whom the good God
Has preserved since last October."\(^94\)

again in the same play, the simile in

"... he is as voiced
As a hen's hind feathers in a wind."\(^95\) is picturesquely realised

\(^92\) Ibid., p.33.
\(^94\) The Lady's not for Burning, Plays (London, 1977), p.120.
\(^95\) Ibid., p.181.
his love for Jennet thus:

"If she is true to herself the moon is nothing
But a circumambulating aphrodisiac
Divinely subsidized to provoke the world
Into a rising birth-rate —-- a veneer
Of sheerest Venus on the planks of time
Which may fool the ocean but which fools not me."96

Later Thomas Mendip describes his situation thus:

"I've been cast adrift on a raft of melancholy
The night-wind passed me like a sail across
A blind-men's eye"97

In the same play Jennet describes Titania as

"Vexed by a cloud
Of pollen, using the sting of a bee to clean
Her nails and singing, as drearily as a gnat...."98

Alison tells Richard,

"It sounds as though the night air is riding
On a creaking saddle."99

Jennet hurrying to go out says,

"I shall have to hurry
That was the nickaxe voice of a cock beginning
To break up the night."100

97. Ibid., p.189.
98. Ibid., p.140.
99. Ibid., p.191.
100. Ibid., p.212.
In Thoe, with Angels, Merlin is described thus:

"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 net

Of lizards, and his eyes were two pale stones

Dropping in a dark well."

All these above examples bring out Fry's enjoyment of nature through sight, sound and touch. Apart from this Fry's very idea of

'seasonal' plays, each representing a season itself points out how

nature plays a predominant role in his plays, in glorifying life.

Next, one can never forget Fry's interest in human nature

and its oddities, which is a part of his zest for life and his

keen interest in its abundant variety. His characters like

the Chaplain, Zeppertoom and Tyson in The Lady's not for Burning,

Readlock in Venus Observed, Colgrim in Thoe, with Angels and

Bullman and Jakob in The Dark is Light Enough, reveal his interest

in the oddities of human nature.

Hobie Tyson, the mayor of the small market town of Cool Clary

in The Lady's not for Burning appears always afflicted with the

cares of office and is constantly blowing his nose and searching

for his handkerchiefs. Equally amusing is the Chaplain, with his viel

which he refers to as his love. He always hesitates before he speaks and believes that he is exists because others say he does.

Tappercome the town's justice is a rogue who ever waits for an opportunity to grab the property of others, he tells Tyson:

"You'll have her property
Instead of your present longing from impropriety
After her house, now I come to think of it,
Will suit me nicely,"

Feedback in *Venus Observed* belongs to the same category. He embezzles the Duke's money and when the propriety of his action is questioned, he says in self-defence:

"I care so much for civilisation,
Its patrician charm, its grave nobility;
He cares so little, therefore certain eccentric means have had to be taken for splendid ends,
Church and state in a way agree
In justifying such a course of action
A kind of casual taxation. I hope I explain
Quite clearly. It's true I have overlaid the law
With a certain transposition, we might
Call this process Realbequity;"


His coinage of a new word—'reef-beguilty' for his activities is a capital stroke of irony. Colgrim in Thor, with Angela is also a master of this kind of funny logic. He is in charge of a prisoner and when wolves attack the sheep, all the males including the prisoner rush out; when questioned by his wife, why he has not gone, he replies that he is guarding the prisoner and when told, that the prisoner too is gone, he says:

"If the horse gets out of the stable it doesn't mean
The stable is justified in following
I'm a man who can be relied on,"108 — a very convincing way to cover his cowardice.

Lastly, the plays of Fry impress one with his joy in handling the language. Fry's style will be discussed later; suffice it is to note here some prominent examples of Fry's sheer delight in words as in:

"You bubble-mouthing, fog-blowering
Chin-chuntering, chap-flicking, liturgical
Turgidical, base old man."105

again,

"The whole thing's a lot of ambiguous
Stultiloquial fiddle-faddle."106.

106. Ibid., p. 153.
In The Lady's not for Burning, Jennet refers to her father's alchemy thus,

"When I was dusting the laboratory
I knocked over a crucible which knocked
Over another which rocked a third, and they peared
And spattered over some copper coins which two days later
By impregnation had turned into solid gold."107

Thomas Kempis disbelieving it says, "it is a fact."

Emperors

Would be colonizing you, their mistresses

Patronising you, ministers of state

Governamentizing you—and you

Would be eulogized, lionised, probably

Canonised for your divine mishap."108

In A Phoenix too Frequent, Tagesus-Chromis swears thus.

"I swear, I swear by Horkos and the Styx
I swear by the nine acres of Titypus
I swear the Hypnotic oath, by all the Titans
By Yocos, Eakos, Lapatos, Kmos and so on.
By the three Hebatonchaires, by the insomia
Of Sisiphone, by Jove, by Jove and the dew
On the feet of my boyhood, I am innocent
Of mocking you."109

108. Ibid.
It is hardly surprising that particularly after two wars and when most drama was prosaic, dull and drab, these plays of Fry, revelling in words and sounds impressed the theatre-goers powerfully and almost swept them off their feet.

Apart from the main theme of celebration of life, these plays also stress cognate themes like charity, law, peace and renewal. The Countess demonstrates this twice, once by sheltering Richard Gettner and a second time by hiding Col. Janik; on both occasions in extremely trying circumstances. Apart from this, the dramatist seems to suggest that even though the world is shattered by the war, one still finds hope for life. The very title is suggestive of this. To a world plunged into darkness by violence hatred and disharmony, the dramatist seems to hold a flicker of light to guide humanity on to the path of charity.

Fry presents the story of the Countess Rosmarin Ostenberg against the background of winter and snow in his winter comedy, The Park Is Light Enough.

The play centres round on an imaginary incident which takes place in the Hungarian revolution against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848-49. The Countess Rosmarin whose Chateau is on the Hungarian border naturally has friends on both sides and this makes her extend charity without discrimination first to an Austrian
deserter from the Hungarian army and later to a colonel of the Hungarian forces after the Hungarian defeat.

Richard Gottner, her one-time son-in-law deserts the Hungarian cause and hides himself but the Countess brings him home to save him. The Hungarians search for him because the information he possesses may be useful to the Austrians. The Countess shelters him not because she has a high opinion of him, but because she has a reverence for life—any life. He is 'simply what any life may mean to her'. She spells out her philosophy of charity thus:

"If I were going to live for ever
This would be the way 'unconcerned
and yet reasonably fond"110 when she says

"Don't distrust me, Richard
I hope I shall do better
Then throw away the gains of the day
To the first indignant animal who comes."111 She therefore refuses to surrender Gottner, preferring her house to be ransacked rather than betraying him. When Col. Janik tries to reason out things with her, she advises him and lectures to him

111. Ibid., p. 58.
on peace. Perhaps taking his cue from this Gerald Beales argues rather simplistically that the play can be viewed as a pacifist parable, but one finds more than merely a pacifist theme in the play. Col. Janik produces Peter, her present son-in-law before her, holds him in ransom and forces the Countess to hand over Gettnar to him. Even then she refuses to do so. During his sanctuary, Gettnar attempts to make love to his ex-wife Galda, the daughter of the Countess. Later in his drunken mood he comes down the stairs and involves himself in a bloody encounter with the conscience-troubled Stefan—the only son of the Countess. Gettnar disappears later, taking the fast-galloping horse Xenophone—an ungrateful act which the Countess regrets all the more because Xenophone has got a saddle gall. By some strange coincidence, so many people accost Gettnar on the road inquiring about the Countess, she they fear, is dead. So Gettnar returns to her, only to find her alive. He strongly believes, since she has saved him that she must be in love with him and by a 'strange kick of conscience', he asks her to marry him. But she tells him categorically that she doesn't love him. Then he questiones her whether he is only an exercise in charity.

"Will you tell me, then, what I meant to you?

A penance you gave yourself? Was I
An exercise in charity
Which is proving unfortunately fatal?
Isn't it a sort of insolence
To do for me what you care so little about
What in God's name was it I meant to you?"to which she answers
"Simply what any life may mean."112

In the meanwhile, the Hungarian cause is lost and Colonel Janik is in danger. But the Countess undertakes to hide him also from his pursuers. As the Austrians hammer at her door for Janik, she passes away, but inspired by her example Gettner undergoes a metamorphosis almost amounting to a spiritual resurgence and prepares himself to save Janik as the Countess was prepared earlier to save him.

With this the regeneration of Gettner is complete. Truly her 'touching way of backing a man up against eternity' is twice demonstrated.

The character of the Countess thus demonstrates how in this war-torn, neurotic world, where faith has no place, there is still a possibility of regeneration through charity. Like the 'one-eyed fool' in the blind world of The Cocktail Party, the Countess lights up the darkness of the world around by her charity. The play further explains the importance of life, however insignificant a man is. To the Countess Gettner is nothing but 'a drunken, self-

drunk, shiftless heartless lying malingerer; nevertheless she tries to save his life because she has reverence for life. Gertner too stresses the importance of living in:

"... any worm can have me for an we equal.
Rather than I should have no life at all." 113

In Curtmantle, Fry seems to stress the importance of law as a significant aspect of faith in life. Chaos results in the disruption of life and without any order normal life cannot go on in the world; hence the establishment of law is very much essential for the smooth running of life in the world. Order and law give the necessary faith to man to lead his life without any fear. The establishment of civil law always lends support to moral laws which in turn give birth to aesthetic law and finally affirm the law of God. These are some of the ideas suggested in Curtmantle.

A portrait of Henry the King and the establishment of law form the core of the play. As Fry himself points out in the Foreword to the play "the play has two themes; one a progression towards a portrait of Henry, a search for his reality, moving through versions of 'where is the king' to the unresolved close of 'he was dead when they came to him'. The other theme is law or

rather the interplay of different laws: civil, canons, moral, aesthetic and the laws of God; and they belong and do not belong to each other.

The play presents both the themes effectively. The thirty-five year long reign of Henry is recapitulated by Marshal to bring out a portrait of Henry and his ceaseless efforts to create order out of chaos and anarchy, that loomed large in the kingdom before he came to the throne. William Marshal refers to his unsparing efforts in the prologue thus: "His energy was like creation itself; he was giving form to England's chaos, an England that after eight years of Civil war, had no trade, no law, no conscience. Up and down the land he went sparing neither himself nor us who were hauled along after. Order was being born out of the sweat of those days and nights."

In his foreword Fry quotes Winston Churchill who says, "He (the King) had laid foundations of the English common law upon which succeeding generations would build. Changes in the design would arise but its main outlines would not be altered." This sums up Henry's achievement succinctly. He had to labour to dispel the anarchy created by the civil wars between his mother Matilda and Stefan. In the Prologue the King's Barber says, "Law and order is the

outcome. Haven't you got a memory for the smoke and ruin this land was? Mad and murderous and lawless, bleeding away like raw meat."115 This is an obvious reference to the eight-year civil war. Henry's endeavour to establish law in the country is effectively portrayed by Fry. Henry wanted to put an end to the 'ecclesiastical courts' which administered a special law of their own called 'common law' the chief source of which was the decrees of the Popes. The best way to make his reforms acceptable to churchmen was to have an archbishop of his own; hence Thomas was brought in, which later resulted in a bitter conflict between the King and the Archbishop. This is the crux of the problem.

Henry refers to his work, thus:

"What isn't well already
Is getting down, on to its knees to be cured
God's light, there's no anarchy to come worse
Than I've already transformed into good government
Unless they drive me to a harrowing of hell."116

Later admiring Bocket he says,

"I should like to know if there's anything
Our dear friend here of the ten talents

116. Ibid., p. 190.
He makes Becket the Archbishop of Canterbury much against the latter's will. But when a Bishop is acquitted, he shouts at him:

"They can reverse the acquittal. The sheriff has sworn the man is guilty. They can pass him over to the secular arm, where a man is known by his crimes and not by his credentials. God's seat I mean to make a fair and governable England, one justice, not two. The Church will soon turn every criminal into a priest, to avoid the gallows; and the other honest, poor damned sons of Cain who get slowed into crime in a five-minute passion are hanged by the neck." This fiery speech of Henry expresses his ardent desire to establish justice, for he wants, "to give England an incorruptible scaffolding of law that lasts her longer than her cliffs." But Becket from whom he expects least resistance, now stands in his way and argues that he has the 'spiritual charge of the kingdom.'

118. Ibid., p. 192.
119. Ibid., p. 201.
This Henry cannot stomach. He tells Becket:

"Contradictory power is what you propose,

There is hardly one thing I have reached out for
In these last months, which haven't been obstructed
From Canterbury. But I see you, Becket:
You mean the Church to be answerable for nothing
Except itself, and yourself to be answerable
Only to the old would-be infallible Italian
Who rattles his keys of heaven and hell which ever
Way expedience turns him." 120

This leads to an open confrontation which later makes Becket leave the country. When he is tried for his financial lapses during his tenure as Chancellor, Henry thunders thus:

"Why should a man make God my enemy
And the enemy of a maturing nation
As this man does." 121

and later again:

"Either there are laws for every man
And he is only or there are no laws for any man
The day is vital and the world can't stand still
To be cheated, even under cover of God." 122

Until his death he struggles to establish law and order, and

121. Ibid., p. 225.
122. Ibid.
the time of his death, Roger sums up his achievement thus:

"Sir, believe what you’ve accomplished.
Your laws are fixed on England, grumbled at
Like the weather, but like the weather accepted
As a source of strength, the people have become
Their own law, in the twelve men representing them

Unparalleled in Christendom, their new nature of the island."

His ceaseless efforts to shape a chaos into an empire are after all fruitful; but this is accomplished at his own cost, for he is progressively isolated; Eleanor tells him:

"I'll tell you something certain about the future
You will be alone." His efforts to strike out order have earned him numerous enemies. As his queen ironically observes,

"You who struggle for order everywhere
Except in your own life."

Commenting on Henry’s life as a journey, Woodfield says, "Henry’s life as a journey is established in the prologue, in which Ansty pre-figures the Ring in his quest for truth, law and order, and the action exemplifies the restless desperate quality of Henry’s search." From the beginning in his fiery enthusiasm to establish

124. Ibid., p. 223.
125. Ibid., p. 231.
order he alienates people. The remarks in the prologue, "He was
dead when they came to him" might be interpreted to mean that
his people never understood him, and by the time they understood
him, he was dead. This is what makes Henry a tragic figure. Commen-
ting on his loneliness Woodfield says, "Henry is successfully
separated from or deserted by friends and family, except his Kent,
Marshall and his Cordelia, Roger, until he dies completely isolated.
He descends from the role of a quasi-divine ruler to that of an
expelled Pharaoh, ritualistically stripped of his possessions
in the Catalogue of reparations demanded by Phillip and in the
actions of the two peasants who strip his body."127 This progressive
segregation is seen thus, first in his agony at the cooling of his
friend:

"Tell me how a man who has seen eye to eye with me
can suddenly look at me as if he was blind."128 and

Later in his estrangement from his subjects:

"Henry, have you never heard men mock at me,
with a contempt for what I do, enlarging
The errors, belittling the purpose, refusing
To nourish the attempt."129

127. J. Woodfield, "Christopher Fry's 'Curtmantle': The Form of Unity"
129. Ibid., p.244.
Then comes 'the loss of his sons."

What did I do to lose them? First their love

Then their lives? First Godfrey, then young Henry.¹²⁰

The last and final 'unkindest cut' that he receives is from his last son John when he joins the rising sun, Richard. At last he is stripped of his regal powers by Phillip of France and his clothes, by the refugees.

Thus his dedication and utter neglect of himself in sacrificing himself for his country, perhaps make the dramatist even consider Henry more saintly than Becket himself. Explaining the genesis of the play, Fry says, "when writing about Henry II and Becket, it was not Becket's sainthood born of Church-and-state politics that chiefly concerned me nor the evaluation of Henry's Customs of the Kingdom; it was the degree of self-deception in Becket's thrust and the whole anguish of Henry's parry, so that I was driven to ask myself whether by his dedicated suffering for an ideal (his passion in a religious sense) Henry was not the more saintly of the two."¹³¹

But Henry's rigid 'saintliness' ultimately results in tragedy. It is possible to consider this as further evidence of how in Fry,

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¹³¹ Christopher Fry, "Theatre and History", Essays and Studies, 1977
forces that make for life are of supreme importance, and the secular ideal is of paramount significance.

Fry's latest play, *A Yard of Sun* stresses ideas like the indestructibility of life, what makes for life and how life goes on whatever happens. How life, incorrigible and obstinate, still hangs on in the world in spite of a devastating war, and how it limps back to normalcy is well brought out by the dramatist here. The play deals with peace after war and reconstruction after destruction. One can say that the central theme is renewal and every attempt is made by the characters in the play to emphasise the need for peace in a war-shattered world. As Stanford remarks, "The play is about prospects of reconciliation, hope and harmony for humanity as a whole." 132

The play is set in the immediate post-war Siena of July 1946. The two families, that of Angelino and Cesare Scapare are shown trying sincerely to reconstruct what the war has shattered. One is reminded here of the last plays of Shakespeare in which long-lost children are reconciled to their parents. In *A Yard of Sun*, one finds a kind of a family reunion. The sons of Angelino Bruno and Cesare Scapare, come home, in search of their fathers, but

both got disappointed and go back. In between their arrivals and departures, the prospects of reconciliation are explored and a hope of harmony is sought for. Edmundo, the last son of Angelina, who was once considered the black sheep of the family and renounced by his father has made a fortune in Portugal by selling wool. He now comes back home with a wife. His two elder brothers are Roberto, a social revolutionary and a doctor who offers his services for people for nothing and refuses to attend on any who can afford to pay him; and Luigi (once a member of Mussolini's Blackshirts), who earns his bread by 'reporting football matches in the local papers as though they were grand opera'. They are both radically different in temperament from Edmundo. The war-torn world with all its ills is loathsome to Roberto, but to Edmundo it is profitable. He says, 'it is not bad to have made a good life in a world gone crazy'. The war with its concentration camps, its gas chambers and all its ills has cracked the nerve of Roberto but to Edmundo,

"It all worked like sap in a happy tree.
And the old war-god wasn't averse to me either
When I saw how to handle him."

But Edmondo’s efforts to dominate and buy people with money fail ultimately and he is made to realize the limitations of his world-view. At last disgusted and disappointed Edmondo leaves the house with his wife Ana-Clara who makes a suggestion in the end.

"Suppose Edmondo started a clinic here?"

How do you think Roberto would feel about that?"134

The play closes with this suggestion that the Palazzo can be changed into a clinic. This seems to be accepted by all; thereby the dramatist perhaps wants to hint at the idea that after the war, the whole world is sick and hence the need for a clinic. In the family of Cesare Scapare, his son Alfio, a jockey from Naples comes to Siena, hired by the Dragon district, to take part in a horse-race, when his jockey Cambricchio is wounded in the practice run Edmondo bribes Alfio to win him to his side. Cesare Scapare comes home secretly from a concentration camp, finds his daughter and her mother (he is not legally married to this woman) safe. He recognizes Alfio and hints at a revolution and a transformation and his experience at the concentration camp only increases his faith in humanity:

"I never set so much value on us as I do now.

Heart, mind and vision; all we can call human

---

Not wolf, jackal, vulture and pig.
In the camp, you don't know what utopias
we built out of some flicker of humanity. 135

This brings us to the title of the play. Though Derek Stanford
sees only summer heat in the title, since it is a summer comedy, it
is manifestly something more. Stanford says, "A Yard of Sun is
in fact, a reference to small sketch of street in Siena; equally
however it may point to the short space which man occupies on
earth and the brief duration of his tenancy. One can perhaps
fancifully read into the title some of the implications of Tolstoy's
grim story, How much land does a man need—enough to bury him—and in that famous passage from Hobbes concerning the life of man:
'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. A Yard of sun, likewise
is but a little space; but A yard of sun possibly suggests that
the small measure of our existence is not without its beauty and
glory and warmth— even if that warmth includes the warmth of
anger, division and violence. 136 But one cannot possibly accept
this view because from the study of his earlier plays one can
maintain that whenever Fry uses the word 'sun' he always suggests
a little hope and cheerfulness. For example, in A Phoenix too Present.

Dynamene, referring to her condition tells Teseus:

"Here you sit

With a woman who has wept away all claims

To appearance, unbecoming in her oldest clothes

With not a trace of liveliness, a drab

Of melancholy, entirely shadow without

A smear of Sun."137 These lines clearly indicate that 'Sun' here is something opposed to that 'drab of melancholy', something suggestive of hope and good cheer. Hence 'a yard of sun' does not perhaps mean even fancifully a stretch of land to bury a man. (Actually, to bury a man, a yard of sun is not necessarily required, a yard of shadow too is enough.) The phrase 'a yard of sun' is best interpreted as indicative of a hope, of reconstruction after destruction, life after death and peace after war.

One can not close the play without making a reference to the epigraph quoted by Stanford:

"What should we find at home? How much of ourselves, had been eroded, extinguished? Were we returning richer or poorer, stronger or emption? we did not know, but we knew that on the threshold of our homes; for good or ill; a trial awaited us and we anticipated

137, A Phoenix too Frequent, Plays (London, 1977), p. 34.
it with fear... soon to-morrow, we should have to give battle against enemies, still unknown, outside ourselves, and inside, with what weapons, what energies, what will power?" This sums up the predicament of Edonzo in the play and partly reflects the thoughts of Alfio and his father Cesare Scarpia. Thus the play reflects the efforts of the modern man in the direction of the reconstruction or reassembling of the shattered image of life smashed to embers, too during the war.

One can see further ramifications of some of these secular themes in Fry's plays, like the cyclic pattern and the arrival of Spring effecting renewal. For example, in The Lady's Not for Burning which is a spring comedy, the winter-like death-wish vanishes at the arrival of Spring, which is almost synonymous with the life-force. Thomas Hendip is forced to reconcile himself to life, abandoning his death-wish. So also in A Phoenix too frequent it is again the spring-like life virtually that dominates the whole play. In Thor, with Angels a Jutish farmer is moved to Christian faith; Spring is seen soothing away winter:

"the man of Rome

Returning, bringing God, winter over, a breath


(This epigraph does not somehow figure in the printed text of A Yard of Sun (London, 1970).)
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
A ship in the full foliage rides in
Over the February foam and rests
Upon Britain.

The Dark Is Light Enough, the winter comedy suggests that spring
cannot be far behind. When the mantle of the Countess descends
on Octavius when she passes away, he is changed less from his state
of winter to a spring-like spiritual resurgence. So also in
Venus Observed the Duke in the autumn of his life realises his
ture position and a spring-like realisation dawns on him making
him reconcile himself to old age.

In A Sleep of Prisoners too the powers of faith and good are
stressed and compared to spring. We hear Meadows saying in the
fourth dream,

"The human heart can go to the lengths of God
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."140
Similarly in A yard of Sun summer suggests the revival of fallen spirits and renewal of hope. Thus the theme of the cyclic pattern suggestive of the ever-continuing vitality of life is present in all these plays.

Though it is possible to divide the themes in Fry's plays into certain categories as existential, religious and secular, one finds a strong basic idea that unites all these themes and -- and that is life and its celebration. One can liken all these different themes to different daisies of various hues made into a garland by a central thread which in this case is the theme of the glorification of life. Every play of Fry is built on the solid, rock-like foundation of the joyous acceptance of life. Fry's unshakable faith in life can be seen in every line that he writes.

Conclusion.

Fry's plays glorify the joy of living and the regenerative powers of life. A consistent theme that courses through all his plays is that of life as a self-justifying phenomenon that does not let man fall a prey to despair and the death-wish but instills an optimism and a will to live in him.

An intensive study of the themes shows that they can be broadly divided for the sake of critical convenience into three categories namely, Existential, 'Religious' and Secular themes. The different factors of existentialism namely knowledge, a sense of good and evil, fear and a gnawing death-wish have been illustrated in *A Phoenix too Frequent*, *The Lady's not for Burning*, *Venus Observed* and *A Sleep of Prisoners*. But as said earlier, Fry goes beyond existentialism, in making his protagonists ultimately accept life unequivocally which of course speaks of his firm commitment to life.

*The Boy with a Cart*, *The Firstborn*, *Thor, with Angels* and *A Sleep of Prisoners* are plays that mainly project 'religious' themes. It has to be borne in mind that Fry cannot be labelled as a religious dramatist because he uses religion as a means to achieve his aim of championing faith in life and denouncing the rejection of life and the death-wish. Thus his religious plays aim primarily at an interpretation of life rather than at the
projection of a dogma they make an effort "to tune into the directive which makes for life. All his 'religious' plays stress ideas like faith in life, the eternal struggle between good and evil, love and patience and sacrifice, the futility of violence and the final triumph of good over evil—in short, the varied spectacle of life and its problems and their solutions.

The Dark Is Light Enough, Courtmantle and A Yard of Sun deal with obviously secular themes and celebrate life and its glorification. This glorification further can be analysed into various kinds. The establishment of law, reconstruction after the war, reconciliation and reunification of a divided family— are some of the themes that find expression in these plays. The cyclic pattern of Spring, Summer, Winter and Autumn and the idea of spring as a life-force driving away a winter-like death-wish also appears in most of the plays.

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Vide, Appendix-1.