CHAPTER III
CHAPTER III.

Technique, Structure and Setting.

(a). Introduction.

(b). Structure.
   1. Plays with a simple structure.
   2. Plays with a complex structure.
   3. Plays experimental in structure.

(c). Setting.
(a). Introduction.

Fry's technique is both traditional and experimental. He tries to explore the traditional legends and also uses the Chorus. He often presents a contemporary action and integrates the remote past with it, which suggests the contemporary expressionistic dramatic practice. One can see him establishing a timeless frame of reference through the traditional use of myth. As Rudolf Stein puts it, "Turning to Fry's dramatic technique, we are more surprised by the simplicity of his methods. He does not strive after originality or experiment for the sake of experiment in this sphere. In The Boy with a Cart the traditional legends concerning Cuthman are strung together rather artlessly. Eliot's early methods appear in the use of The People of South England." Fry along with many other modern dramatists, tries to project the contemporary experience in the light of myth or weaves it into the past, integrating both the past and the present. As J.L. Styan points out, "Many attempts have been made in recent years to establish a timeless reference through the traditional use of myth, whether Greek or Biblical. It is outside character and more in structure that the past and future are recognisable in the present.

particularly .... such plays as Giraudoux's Tiger at the Gates, Anouilh's Antigone and Fry's A Sleep of Prisoners operate in this way and we are familiar with excitement of discovering how closely the ancient formula may match contemporary experience. Fry's technique of reading the contemporary experience by projecting into it Biblical myth and integrating it with the past, is highly successful in many of his plays.

Structure, which is generally determined by the nature of themes, is a means to achieve the end of expressing various themes and projecting them in proper perspective. That is how the structure of a play becomes complex onto the author goes deeper into the theme. For example, in his dedicatory letter to Robert Gittings in A Sleep of Prisoners Fry says, "In A Sleep of Prisoners I have tried to make a more simple statement though in a complicated design where each of four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be."

The traditional distinctions between comedy and tragedy do not exist for Fry. Drama which holds a mirror to life, present both happiness and unhappiness together. That is why, when Fry thinks of comedy, first the idea presents itself as a tragedy to him. To quote

---

Fry himself: "The bridge by which we cross from tragedy to comedy, and back again is precarious and narrow. We find ourselves in one or the other by the turn of thought, a turn such as we make when we turn from speaking to listening. I know that when I set about writing a comedy, the idea presents itself to me first of all as a tragedy.\(^3\) Since all his plays aim at the celebration of life the structure in each play is designed to project this important theme that runs below the surface in all the plays. In his examination of Fry's plots Rudolf Stamm maintains that, "Almost all of these are simple, not to say slight if we abstract them from the plays themselves. He has a way of picking them up, here and there casually, from the Bible, from Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* .... He is certainly no great inventor and planner of complicated plots. We might even complain of a certain dearth of action in his plays; a serious drawback in drama which is compensated by the vitality of the language. A common feature of all his plots is the presence of what is unusual, startling, irrational and even miraculous.\(^4\) This view is acceptable only as far as the early plays of the dramatist's are concerned; because a close study

---

of the later plays reveals that the structure becomes complex and sometimes experimental too.

All Fry's plays—though each preserves its individuality—taken together, bring out, "man's pilgrimage from the uncertain grounds of a rootless existence torn by fear and doubt to a spiritually satisfying level of consciousness." Each play can be considered as a link in a chain and all the plays taken together assume one single organic body stressing life and its importance.

---

(b). Structure.

Before analysing the structure of the individual plays, one should take note of certain general aspects of Fry's plots. A common feature of his plots is the presentation of something unusual, irrational, startling and even incredible in the beginning of the action. Most of his opening scenes are highly dramatic. A widow bent on dying in a grave, falling in love with a Roman soldier—-a situation reminiscent of the famous lines in Richard III:

"Was ever woman in this humour wooed?"  
Was ever woman in this humour won?"

or a middle-aged man asking his son to select a bride from a forthcoming trio of guests; or a boy dragging his mother about in a cart; or a young man running into the streets asking the mayor of the town to hang him—-All these are unusual, and startling situations, which capture the attention of the audience immediately.

Modern drama—particularly Fry's plays—obviously cannot be analysed in terms of exposition, development and denouement, in the old traditional manner, as Bert-o-States points out, "With the advent of Absurdity we can no longer analyse a play in terms of Exposition, development and conclusion; It is more accurate to say that exposition has become development and conclusion as well....."

What one sees in Fry's drama is an organic thematic development which must be viewed in terms similar to those of music. The development is symphonic. As Stanford points out, "The gravest charge levelled against Fry by the critics is that of a deficiency in plot. As Mr. Binns suggests this results from an addiction to one single species of a plot-development such as the plays of Pinero observe—and which the critics would have us apply without exception, to all types of drama. Because Fry's plays do not conform to this mechanical notion of plot, with its hints of predestination we must not deny their possession of it altogether. To put the matter shortly we can say that in the plays of Pinero, plot is developed logically, whereas in Fry's plays the development is symphonic. In other words, each play contains a number of leitmotifs or themes (in the musical sense of the term), which appear, reappear and combine." Drama conceived as a poem is an idea stressed by Fry himself. He says, "The dramatist must view the world of his play and the people of that world with great precision; the poet-dramatist with the greatest poetic precision. The whole structure depends upon it, what scene follows another, what character goes and what character enters, where description or landscape become part of the action or where it needs a bare

---

change. The poetry and construction are inseparable, who understands the poetry understands the construction, who understands construction, understands the poetry, for the poetry is the action and the action— even apart from the words—is the figure of the poetry: 9 It is in this light that one has to view the structure of the plays of Fry.

For the purpose of analysing the structure of Fry's plays, one can visualise a three fold pattern in them namely (1) plays with a simple structure; (2) plays with a more complex structure involving a main and sub-plots; (3) and plays that are experimental in structure.

One can include The Boy with a Cart, Thor, with Angels, A Phoenix too Frequent, The Dark Is Light Enough and The Firstborn in the group of plays with a simple structure, because in these plays the dramatist deals with his themes in a broad and general way. To the second group of plays (those with a two-plot structure) belong The Lady's not for Burning, Venus Observed and A Yard of Sun. These plays have a complex structure because of their multiple plots which are handled in a subtle manner. Here Fry presents many characters with numerous incidents thus enlarging the scope and range of his drama. In the third group of plays that are

experimental in structure may be included A Sleep of Prisoners and Curtmantle.

(1). Plays with a Simple Structure.

The Boy with a Cart, Thor, with Angels, A Phoenix too Frequent, The Dark is Light Enough and The Firstborn are plays with a relatively simple structure. In these plays, the dramatist deals with his theme in rather general terms. The plays have a limited scope, with few incidents and characters. In the five plays taken for discussion, the first three, viz. The Boy with a Cart, Thor, with Angels and A Phoenix too Frequent are actually one-act plays. The one-act play is a modern art form and demands perfect concentration of action, and hence the dramatist has to exercise great discipline in handling this form.

The Boy with a Cart opens with The People of South England who serve as a chorus and they bring out the theme of the play in the beginning itself. The introduction of the Chorus is an elementary device and a dramatist writing for the first time for the stage is generally at home in using it. The People of South England in the play, in their relaxed mood, reflect the significance of the action. The play deals with a popular legend in a straightforward manner.

The play contains just four incidents— the breaking o' the rope of withies; the flooding of the mowers' field; the yoking of
the two recalcitrant brothers and their mother being blown off; and in the end Jesus appearing and setting right the king-post—and the connecting link is provided by the Chorus. Since the incidents are few and un-complicated and since they are just reported, the plot is quite simple. As John Ferguson points out, "the breaking of the rope, the episode with the sawers, the yoking of the recalcitrants and the tormented Mrs. Phipps, while they do not add to the essentials of the story are part of the legend, excellent theatre and serve to remind us that the drama is not played out within a purely human dimension. It is this in fact that gives the work its essential unity. And each incident starting from the breaking of withies to the king-post swinging back to its right-position throws light on the main theme of man's faith in himself and in God. The Chorus connects the incidents into a unifying whole. Conceiving on this John Ferguson adds, "And at last he [Cuthman] is granted the vision and the aid of Jesus. This vision provides the unifying theme for the play, but it does not itself serve to bridge the gap between episode and episode. To solve this difficult task, Fry provides a Chorus of the people of South England. The Greek Chorus similarly helped to provide

continuity of action. It is interesting to see him at the beginning of his career going back to the Greeks for dramatic technique.\footnote{11} This brings out how the Chorus employed by the dramatist is useful for the furtherance of action in the play.

The only complication in the play— if it can be termed that way— is the king-post falling out of its position. And at the divine intervention— a deus ex machina— the king-post swings back to its position, thus resolving the complication quickly.

The Boy with a Cart is thus a play extremely simple in structure.

In A Phoenix too Fragment the dramatist introduces only three characters, of whom one is of minor importance. So actually only two characters who figure in a limited number of incidents project the theme of the existential death-wish and life's ultimate triumph over it. The three unities of time, place and action are strictly observed in the play. One does not find either a supernatural element or the chorus in the play as in The Boy with a Cart. The myth of the Phoenix, which is woven into the fabric of the structure of the play, projects the theme with a touch of irony. The incidents in the play— Dynasmon resolving to die, Tegens entering the underground tomb, his confrontation with her, their falling in love with each other, the missing of a body resulting in a complication

\footnote{11}{John Ferguson}
and replacement of it by Dynamene's husband's body, and their happy union— ensure a rapidity of movement which sweeps the audience off its feet. A lady preparing to die in an underground tomb sounds almost absurd, but the situation is made eminently credible. The economy of incident and swiftness of movement make for a simple, unified structure.

Thor, with Angels too is a one-act play. As already noted, Fry is concerned here with man's rejection of violence and acceptance of love. The contrast between the advent of Christianity which stand for love and graces and the mellowing of the pagan gods that represent violence and death, form the core of the play. The supernatural element in the play as in The Boy with a Cart stresses man's need for faith, as Stanford points out: "Thor, with Angels employs no chorus. Its harmony or intensity of language being spread evenly over the whole play, in terms of poetry, philosophy and drama it is both a more absorbing and serious work." It may be considered to be serious in the sense that the dramatist here stresses the importance of certain values in life: how man should embrace love, patience and sympathy instead of hatred, violence and antipathy.

Just like A Phoenix too Frequent the play maintains a fast tempo of action. The incidents in the play—Poel being brought as a slave

12. Derek Stanford, op. cit., p.100.
by Cymen, his lunging at Noel to kill him, the incident of the wolf-killing, Cymen breaking the altar of his Gods, killing of Noel and finally, Cymen’s pair and preaching of new religion—
are full of exciting action; and each incident is more dramatic than the other, and Noel’s crucifixion in the end is almost strikingly reminiscent of Christ’s crucifixion. Most of the incidents in the play are dramatised in contrast with the earlier plays where many situations are only reported. The one character that dominates the entire action of the play is Cymen. The title Thor, with Angels could well also have been “Cymen, with Angels”, for it is Cymen who represents Thor before the action of the play starts. The play has just one act, because it has only one dominant character and a single theme projected at a fast pace through a few dramatic incidents.

Gerald Weales argues that “the play’s chief defect is that the death of Noel is so completely symbolical that the audience is not given time to feel any regret for the destruction of an eminently likable character; the death is metamorphosed too quickly into a text for Cymen’s last speech.”¹³ What Fry intends in the play is to show Cymen’s gradual discovery of certain new values in life which are forgiveness, love and mercy and compassion.

The death of Beel shows the belief of the Jutes in their pagan
gods and their utter incapacity to live by the rule of Christian
god. Cyren's last speech is intended to stress the resurgence of
Christianity and the necessity of man's belief in life-giving
forces and it certainly achieves this purpose, as one cannot
accept the charge of Gerald Woakes.

The Dark is Light Enough is a full-length play in three acts,
each presenting just two incidents. Act One presents the Countess
sheltering Gottner and Col. Janik who has Peter as prisoner, demand-
ing that she should hand over Gottner.

Act Two presents Col. Janik searching the Countess' house for Gottner;
and Gottner shooting Stefan.

Act Three presents the Countess' guests and Gottner hiding Col. Janik
from the Austrians.

Though the play has a more extensive structure than that of
the one-act plays, the plot appears to be almost equally simple.
It is designed to be a winter comedy and the winter mood is
appropriate to the theme of the play. There are only two important
characters; the Countess and Richard Gottner. Gottner represents
winter, as 'spring cannot be far behind', when winter comes, so
also Richard Gottner changes towards the end into something new
from his earlier state of "irresponsible when he was sober/ Useless to any world, sober or drunk." The six incidents in the three acts are aimed at in highlighting the characters of Gettner and the Countess.

The play has one theme that is extending charity to all even in trying circumstances, which has been sufficiently demonstrated by the Countess. The single theme has several aspects like, pacifism, fellow-feeling, an idea that the dark is light enough symbolically suggesting that the little faith that is in the world is sufficient, and the certainty of the arrival of Spring after Winter-- all these ideas merge in confluence into one, that is the affirmation and faith in life. To express all these ideas one act is not sufficient, as was the case with The Boy with a Cart and Then with Angels. Hence the need for a three-act structure, though the plot remains as simple.

C.S. Fraser is of the opinion that, "it is a weakness of the play that existing merely to illustrate the perfection of the Countess' character, it is not properly in Aristotle's sense 'an imitation of action', it lacks dynamic thrust." This is rather a sweeping claim because many characters do undergo change.

---

and this change is specifically suggested in the play e.g. Peter, the Countess’s son-in-law says how he is changed:

“It’s an odd chance, Rosamari
But your fetching Gettner in
Has faced me with a knowledge I was lacking
Which in a way has altered nothing
And altered it thoroughly.”

As Belmann, another character says,

“Lives make and unmake themselves
In her neighbourhood as nowhere else.”

 Apart from this, Gettner is changed in the end, as he prepares himself to protect Col. Janik, the very man who came in search of him. At the same time, one must concede that the spiritual awakening in Gettner is so sudden that the audience is not given sufficient time to accept it as something entirely credible. It is this that makes for a certain lack of complexity in the play, though as seen earlier, it tries to deal with several aspects of the theme of regeneration through charity.

The Firstborn deals with Moses’ struggle against the Pharaoh and his ultimate deliverance of the Israelites. To put it in other

17. Ibid., p.125.
words, the death of the first-born results in life to the Israelites. So also the death of Rameses results in the resurrection of Moses from his spiritual death. So it is once again life sprouting out of death.

The play is swift in movement. Things happen in quick succession, starting from the labourer falling down to death. Incident follows incident at a quick pace—Pharaoh requesting Moses to save Egypt after his arrival from Midian; Shendi being saved at the instance of Rames; Rames' political marriage; Moses' admonition of Seti; Egypt being plagued and Seti's refusal to release the Israelites resulting in the death of the firstborn; Moses rushing to save Rames; Moses' spiritual death and resurrection and the ultimate deliverance of Moses' people. All these incidents cannot be naturally compressed to a single act, hence the need for three acts with several scenes in them. Since the dramatist chooses a story from the Bible, it does not give him any liberty to create a new character or invent a new situation, hence the play is limited in scope. The one dominating character is Moses.

It is generally felt that Moses' affection for Rameses is not fully realised in the play. In answer to this charge Fry says, "The critics felt, very reasonably, that the affection between Moses and Rameses had been so barely touched... Now I had not imagined
any such personal affection on the part of Moses. In the play he meets Ramses for a bare five minutes, is touched by his hero-worship, recognises the boy's sincerity and humanity and that is all. What I hoped I had shown and had not was that to Moses the boy represented Moses' own boyhood, when he was prince of Egypt, represented also that love for Egypt when Moses couldn't shake off even while he was fighting her. Commenting on this, Derek Stanford points out, "to me, it does not seem a substantial error. In either case (sympathy for or love of the young prince as an individual or as heir-apparent representing Egypt) the necessity, the sacrifice and the sense of loss remain. The tragic denouement is no wise interrupted." But it is possible to suggest that the general dissatisfaction voiced by critics is not altogether unjustified. This lack of subtlety of motivation in the play again argues for the kind of sort of complexity that one finds in all these plays of the first type.

To conclude, the plays with a simple structure are

---

A Cart, A Phoenix too Frequent, Thor, with Angels, The Dark Is Light Enough and The Firstborn. The first three are one-act plays and the latter two are three-act plays. In all these plays the dramatist, as has been discussed, deals with his themes in a rather general and broad manner — a fact which definitely restricts their range and scope.
2. Play with a Complex Structure.

The structure in *The Lady's not for Burning*, *Venus Observed* and *A yard of Sun* is complex. These plays deal with multiple themes which are handled by the dramatist in a more subtle manner than is in evidence in the previous plays. The plays, each of which has more than one plot, abound both in incident and character, thereby enlarging the scope range and scope of Fry's drama.

The Lady's not for Burning presents a fastidious misanthrope who ultimately gets reconciled to life and to the world, and an uncompromising rationalist who in the end accepts life with all its mystery and existence. The pivotal force that brings them together is love. The plot is so designed as to bring out the two opposed views of life of Thomas and Jonnet and to show how in the end, when they are united, their opposing world-views are fused to generate a third way of life. As Fry himself states, "I set out to write a play which would be first cousin to an artificial comedy. I had just finished writing a tragedy of character and action and I wanted a change of air. Most, if not all artificial comedies are concerned with a material world..... I could see no reason though writing such a comedy why I should not treat of the world as I see it-- Everybody in the play(except at first the heroine) even the old drunken rag-and-bone man takes the state
of affairs for granted and talks and makes jokes on these terms...

They (Jennet and Thomas) start by having two opposing views of life; they end by fusing them and creating a third view.20

The play has three acts. Act One introduces all the characters in the play, Thomas Mendip, Jennet Jourdainne, Richard, Alison, Humphrey, his brother Nicholas, the Mayor and his friends, the Chaplain and Justice Toppecombe.

The incidents in Act Two lead to complications and Jennet is condemned as a witch and is to be burnt. In Act Three one finds an easing of the complications—leading to the denouement—the eloped couple Richard and Alison return bringing with them Matthew Skippe physically who is supposed to have been changed into a dog by Jennet, and whom Thomas Mendip claims to have murdered. This results in the final freeing of Thomas Mendip and Jennet.

The play has two plots, one main and the other a sub-plot and it is interesting to note that to some extent the sub-plot anticipates the main plot. It is Alison and Richard who drive Thomas to accept Jennet, in the sense that they return from their elopement just to save Jennet from being burnt and make Thomas

---

relinquish his death-wish and start his life afresh. As Derek Stanford points out, "we see how minor-themes (or sub-plot as orthodox dramaturgists would call it) influence the major-theme. Those the 'hero' or principal male, sadly out of love with life, more than once taken heart and decides to give both life and love a further chance from witnessing the courtship of Alison and Richard. This initial suggestiveness of the minor theme or plot is an unusual device in drama, but it is certainly true to life. What the critic wishes to stress here probably is that the incidents in the main plot are suggested or anticipated by the incidents in the sub-plot. For example Thomas Endicott's leaving the town unobserved with Jennet is hinted at in Richard's going away unobserved with Alison. Both the pairs, Richard and Alison in the sub-plot and Thomas and Jennet in the main plot stress the importance of the forces that make for life.

The time of the action is '1600 either more or less or exactly. This brings us to a seeming anachronism. In Act Two when the eccentric Chaplain says:

"I know, I am not

A practical person; legal matters and so forth

31. Derek Stanford, op. cit., p.213.
Are Greek to me, except of course

That I understand Greek. 22

Commenting on this seeming anachronism, Clarence L. Mulishock points out, "The Chaplain would have been an extraordinary personage to have known Greek in 'the English market town of Criel-Ciary' or in any other part of England in 1400 or either more or less or exactly. . . . For several decades after the introduction of printing from the continent in fact there was not enough Greek type in England to print a Greek quotation and the first printing of Greek book by an English printer was in 1543." 23 But this criticism smacks of pedantry since the time of action is '1400 either more or less or exactly' and the intention of the dramatist is just to secure a medieval setting since it is congenial for creating an atmosphere of witch-hunting.

The action of the play slowly reaches a point of culmination when 'the lady' is threatened with burning. This becomes still more imminent when she rejects the offer of Humphrey. The situation appears to have reached a point of no return. At this juncture

the characters in the sub-plot are brought into their midst to solve the complications; Richard and Alison find out the rag-and-bone merchant Skipps who is neither murdered nor changed into a dog and bring him physically and show him to the Mayor and others and thus save Jennet. Apart from this, Richard and Alison also seem to exert a salutary influence on Jennet and Thomas, who begin by life-rejection but end with life-acceptance, inspired by the zest for life shown by the other couple. Thus the sub-plot and the main plot are complementary to each other and the two together stress the theme of the importance of life.

The minor characters—the Mayor, the Chaplain and the Justice enlarge the range and scope of the play, as already noted the dramatist's interest in human nature and its oddities is well brought out through them.

Like The Lady's not for Burning, Venus Observed too is complex in its design. Quoting Fry himself, Stanford says, "In Venus Observed the season is autumn, the scene is a house beginning to fall into decay, the characters most of them are in middle life. But what I'm most concerned to talk about is the theme within this mood and the pattern or plot within the theme." 24 This clearly points out the intended design of the play.

---

24, Derek Stanford, op. cit., pp. 57-58.
The play has three acts. Act One presents three incidents: the Duke asking his son to select a bride from the trio of the visitors, the entrance of Perpetua which leads to a complication, and the shattering of the apple with its symbolic overtones.

Act Two presents Rosabeck being questioned by his children and Dominic requesting Perpetua to marry the Duke. Scene Two presents the Duke's observatory and his clandestine meeting with Perpetua and her confession of love.

Act Three presents the Duke's getting reconciled to his old age, leaving Perpetua to marry Edgar.

Act One serves as exposition, introducing all the characters. After the introduction of all the characters, the dramatist presents Perpetua, who complicates the issue between the Duke and his son for both vie with each other for her. When she shoots the apple, she indirectly plants the seed of the idea of getting the observatory on fire in the mind of Fleming, thus leading to the denouement: because when his observatory is set on fire, the Duke understands his position and reconciles himself to it.

The play has two plots. The main plot deals with the Duke and his amorous connections with women and in the end his reconciling himself to his old age, hoping to marry Rosabel Fleming. The sub-plot deals with Rosabeck and his 'conscience-nudging' son.
Dominic. Readbeck, who is adept in embezzlement, in the end realizes the folly of it and the conscience of Dominic gets satisfied when the Duke legalizes the money accumulated through the embezzlement. The sub-plot broadens the scope and range of the play, for it throws light not only on the main theme but also on the follies and foibles of the characters. Readbeck's financial corruption is an echo of the Duke's moral corruption and finally, just as the Duke is given a chance to reform, so is Readbeck. This provides a dramatic connection between the two plots. The idea of corruption and the idea of opportunity to reform--are common to both the plots.

In the main plot, the Duke asks his son to select a bride for him, but once he meets Perpetua he wants to marry her. But Edgar, who is also drawn to Perpetua, is made to wait, until Rosabel burns the observatory, which convinces the Duke that he should settle for Rosabel and that his youth is not perpetual. The major characters in both the main plot and the sub-plot are old, for they represent the autumn season, but Edgar and Perpetua represent Spring. Thus the theme of the perpetual cyclic pattern of autumn giving place to spring through winter is stressed. For instance, the protagonist, the Duke describes himself as:

"... for years the frost has lain

..."

On my stubble beard: The swallows and other such
Migratory birds have left us months ago. But

He adds,

"We have only autumn
To offer you, England's moist and misty devotion
But Spring may come in time to reconcile you
If you'll wait so long."

But, at the same time just as autumn should give way to spring through winter, the Duke makes way for his son Edgar, 'his extension in time'.

As in The Lady's not for Burning it is once again the sub-plot that anticipates the main plot, but this time it is done in an even more subtle manner. As already noted, Perpetua when she shoots the apple, virtually gives the idea to Fleeming to burn the observatory. That is to say, the incident of shooting the apple has its wider repercussions in the action. Apart from making Fleeming burn the observatory, which in turn makes the Duke realize and reconcile himself to his position, the very act of apple-shooting symbolically suggests the extinction of his hedonism, because the apple is not an ordinary apple, it is a wife-choosing apple.

26. Ibid., p. 173.
Rudolf Stamm is right when he says, "This is the most striking example of how plot and setting, characters and ideas, mood and imagery, all spring from one and the same creative impulse in Fry's best work." 27

Fry's latest play to date, A Yard of Sun, has an equally neat and balanced design. Commenting in general on the plays of Fry, Emil Roy says, "the plays contain three part movement, an attempt at reconciliation, the failure of the attempt, the rise of a new society paralleling the protagonist's shift in interest from death to life." 28 Though this kind of a categorization is not uniformly applicable in toto to all Fry's plays, it is a just description of the structure of A Yard of Sun. We see in it an attempt at reconciliation and its failure, and the play closes with a suggestion of renewal.

The play has two plots. The main plot presents Edmondo's arrival and his efforts at a reconciliation and the failure of his efforts and his disappointed departure. The sub-plot is a reflection of the same process. It brings out Alfio's search for his father and his disappointment, for he is compelled to lose the race.

a hint at peaceful transformation and renewal when we are informed that the Palio is to be changed into a hospital. The playwright's skill lies in dovetailing the plots in such a manner that they complement each other.

The play has only two acts. Act one introduces the main characters. The main incidents in it are the arrival of Edmondo and Alfio, the difference of opinion between the brothers causing a crack in their harmony, and Roberto's taking a fancy to Edmondo's wife. Act Two presents Angelino proposing to Giosefetta, the arrival of Cesare Scapare, the family reunion, the departure of the disappointed Edmondo and Alfio and the final suggestion of peace.

Roberto is supposed to marry Grazia, the illegitimate daughter of Cesare Scapare and Giosefetta, but when he takes a sudden fancy to Edmondo's wife, this results in a complication. Similarly, when Cambraccio is wounded in the practice-run, Edmondo loses the hope of winning the race. But he bribes Alfio to work for him. These incidents throw light on the theme of the moral decadence of the modern world. The complications are resolved when Am. Clara, the wife of Edmondo, shows Roberto his place, making him go back to his Grazia and when Alfio is bribed by Edmondo not to win the race thereby giving a chance to Luigi who now takes the place of Cambraccio.

The escape of Cesare Scapare from the concentration camp and his coming back to the house to meet his anxious 'wife' and daughter...
Alfio's attempt to get the necessary amount—though it is a bribe—to buy the costly medicine to save his mother; Angelino Bruno's proposing to Giosetta and in the end the oblique suggestion that the Palio may be converted into a hospital—all these incidents throw light on the theme of the indestructibility of life.

Alfio in the sub-plot is just a reflection of Edmondo in the main plot. Both come in search of a reconciliation and both return disgusted. In both the plots the characters aim at a reconstruction but get disgusted; but the dramatist does not leave it there; the final proposal to convert the Palio into a hospital hints at the regeneration to come in the future.

Several incidents indicate the moral decadence of modern times. Cesare Scaparo lives with Giosetta without marrying her, and even begets a child; Roberto takes a sudden interest in his brother's wife; Alfio accepts a bribe; Edmondo indulges in corruption and Ana-Clara changes lovers before finally settling for Edmondo. These incidents widen the range of the play and give a larger scope to the dramatist to throw light on different aspects of modern life.

Thus, in _The Lady's Not for Burning_, _Venus Observed_ and _A Yard of Sun_, the structure is complex, since multiple themes are presented and the plays are rich both in incident and character, thereby enlarging the scope and range of Fry's drama.

A Sleep of Prisoners and Curranville are plays experimental in structure.

A Sleep of Prisoners marks a departure from the earlier plays in the matter of structure. As pointed out earlier, it is a series of interlocking dreams by four prisoners of war in which each enacts for the others, through successive Old Testament stories, a response to violence which registers a crisis of feeling in the minds of the characters. The theme of the play as noted earlier is to bring out the different facets of violence and war's adherence to it from the distant past and to the present and how the forces of good slowly vanquish the forces of evil. The central device of the dream enables the dramatist to integrate the past and the present and thus lend a contemporary relevance to his story.

As Derek Stanford puts it, "In it (the play) Fry has welded contemporary experience and Biblical material into one dramatic whole, 'from which he elicits certain truths of conduct.'" To make the audience understand what the characters dream is a difficult undertaking. If Fry was writing a novel he could have narrated the dreams. But here each of the dreams has to be enacted. So when a character dreams, the dramatist has to make the other

characters get up from their sleep enact that dream and this must be done four times, since four characters dream. For all practical purposes when they enact the other man's dream they are supposed to be sleeping. Another curious factor is that all the four characters dream only Biblical parables, not one of them dreams of the war or anything with which they have been in actual touch. One possible explanation for those homogenous dreams is that the place of their incarceration happens to be a church.

The use of the dream-technique is reminiscent of Expressionist drama. As Rudolf Stamm points out, "A Sleep of Prisoners is his (Kry's) first experiment with a kind of expressionistic technique. The atmosphere of the empty church, where four prisoners of war spend a restless night is powerfully evoked. The plan of making the four men re-enact in their dreams the murder of Cain, the stories of David and Absalom, of the sacrifice of Isaac and that of Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego and of distributing the dream-roles among them, so as to give their natural peculiarieties, a metaphysical meaning is ambitious and its execution except in the all too difficult last part of the play, highly successful."30 The dramatist carefully chooses such stories from the Bible, where violence is shown, e.g. Cain's killing of Abel etc., and the prisoners dream them. Apart from stressing the idea that whether it is the past or the present man has not learnt to eschew violence, the dreams perhaps suggest the continuity of race memory.

In view of this one finds it difficult to accept William Spanos's charge against the play. He says, "The particular point of view of each dream is not sufficiently clear. The first three seem like repetitions of the same theme rather than the developments in the understanding of each dreamer. As a result the resolution in the last dream appears to be arbitrary despite Fry's insistence that the play moves from division to unity." A close look at the dreams makes it clear that each dream is organically connected with the others and all the four soldiers finally realise that they have believed in the powers of destruction and it is time they believed in powers of good. Such thought must have gone into the design of the play. The dramatist has carefully selected such parables from the Bible as would stress this theme. Even in the four dreams which form the core of the plot, one finds a progressive deterioration of evil forces in the world. This is done methodically and systematically. For example, violence in its full dimension is shown in the first dream, when Cain kills Abel with his own hands. In the second, it is lessened to the extent that King David gets Absalom killed, instead of himself committing the crime. In the third, the sacrifice of Isaac at the altar is averted. In the

fourth the powers of good are stressed when Adam dreams of Shadrac, Meshac, and Abednego and their experience of God when they are thrown into the fire by Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, there is no repetition but the progressive development of the central idea.

The technique here is similar to the dovetailing of the past and the present in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*; and though it does not perhaps come up to the level of these masterpieces, it remains a remarkable example of experimentation.

In *Curtmantle* the dream-technique is replaced by something similar; a reverie. As Fry himself points out in the foreword to the play: "The form it (the play) takes is one of memory and contemplation. The stage is William Marshal's mind, as though he were remembering the life of Henry and the deviations from historical accuracy are on the whole no greater than might occur in a man's memory. The episodes are telescoped, but nothing in the play is entirely invented."32 One gets an impression as though Marshal is sitting in an arm-chair, with his eyes closed, and is recapitulating the entire reign of Henry II and the role the King played in it.

As Derek Stanford points out, "the structure of *Curtmantle* is curious. It bears some resemblance to Shakespeare's chronicle plays

and it is just possible that the panoramic sweep of historical film has had some influence on its unfolding."\textsuperscript{33}

The theme of the presentation of Henry’s character is brought out structurally in a series of episodes linked by history and the controlling consciousness of Marshal’s memory. The other theme of law serves to reflect the conflict between Henry and Becket who represent the state and the church respectively. Though they are based on the same historical material, in 	extit{Curwenstantle} the action starts much earlier than that of Eliot’s 	extit{Murder in the Cathedral}, in which Becket is already an archbishop while in 	extit{Curwenstantle} he is only a chancellor to begin with; Henry’s reign extended from 1154 to 1189. The decade between 1153 to 1163 is covered in Act One; the period from 1163 to 1170 in Act Two; that from 1174 to 1189 in Act Three. Between Acts Two and Three, there is a gap of four years.

The conflict between Henry and Becket is fully realised with all its dramatic potentialities. As said earlier, the controlling framework of the play is William Marshal’s mind and he performs a choric function, while as his name suggests he marshals the facts in order before the audience.

Fry uses suggestive devices to explore and reveal the inner reality and unravel the states of mind of his characters. Like the

storm scenes in *King Lear* the storm-setting of the prologue indicates the chaotic state of the kingdom and the stormy state of mind of the protagonist too. Commenting on this Woodfield points out, "Another structural means of exploring the inner reality is through the use of expressionistic and cinematic devices which reject the surface reality in favour of stylized or even distorted presentation of the stage action and its setting."  

The conflict between Henry and Beckett is brought to a climax and shown to the audience through expressionistic devices. For example in Act Two when Henry suddenly leaves the stage, full of anger which is 'like an explosion of madness', the stage direction reads: "He leaves them in an uproar. An unnatural light begins to penetrate the fog. Faces are distorted by it. Shadows gesticulate at a great height above the head of the Court, who rage against the PRIESTS, some advancing towards them waving axes. The BISHOPS harry BECKET in extreme anxiety."  

The climax of the conflict between Henry and Beckett and the impending doom is shown thus through these devices. The incidents, viz. Beckett's departure for France, the coronation of Young Harry, the death of the Princes, Becket's

---

arrival and the break-down of the seeming reconciliation between Henry and his friend--- are all shown as in a flash-back. The action in the play is continuous except on two occasions: once at the end of Act One, when Henry wishes to confront Becket and secondly in Act II when Becket's death is reported. The memory device invests the incidents with a certain immediacy and long forgotten incidents are filled with human warmth.

Fry's attempt to give an acceptable form and dramatic unity to the barren facts of history is as successful as Gerty's attempt to give a form to England's chaos. This Fry achieves by merging time, place and the sequences of the play into a unifying whole.
Setting.

The setting in the plays of Fry can be studied under three heads: first, the physical setting of the plays and the time of action; secondly, the social setting and thirdly, the seasonal symbolism which is a special characteristic of Fry's drama. The physical setting can be considered further by distinguishing between the plays set in England and those set in the other countries. The time of action of the plays can be considered under three heads: as Anglo-Saxon, medieval and modern. Thor, with Angels, The Boy with a Cart, The Lady's not for Burning, Curtmantle, Venus Observed and A Sleep of Prisoners are set in England. A Yard of Sun and The Dark Is Light Enough are set in Europe, i.e. in Italy and Austria respectively. A Phoenix too Frequent is set in Ephesus, an ancient Ionian city, and The Firstborn in Egypt.

It is significant to note that the physical setting of the plays has a direct bearing on the themes of the plays. Many of Fry's plays are set in the open air which contributes much to the highlighting of their themes. In some of the plays even if the action takes place inside the four walls, attention is frequently drawn to the sights outside. As Rudolf Stamm says, "an important aspect of Fry's plots is their open air quality. The Boy with a Cart and Thor, with Angels have their setting in the open air. The Firstborn has its terrace scene; Venus Observed, its acts in the part,
and even when Fry takes us into rooms, he has much to say of the sights through the windows. The room in which The Lady's not for Burning takes place is a good instance of this. But our sense of the sun, of meadows and trees does not spring from the setting of the scenes alone. It permeates the whole fabric of the plays, their descriptions, similes and metaphors. The atmosphere of April belongs as inevitably to The Lady's not for Burning as that of autumn to Venus Observed. The latter may properly be described as an autumn of his life, and autumnal imagery abounds in it. This is the most striking example of how plot, setting, characters and ideas, mood and imagery all spring from one and the same creative impulse in Fry's best work. The pervasive open-air quality points to the fact that man and the universe is Fry's great theme and not his man-made surroundings. This characteristic quality has its justification in the fact that since Fry celebrates the glorification of life, he quite often sets his plays in the open air, for nature is a major source of life. Natural objects like rivers, hills, the green grass and rain are constant reminders to man of the perpetual and continuous movement of life.

Plays set in England.

The time of the action of these plays is Anglo-Saxon, medieval or modern. Thor with Angels is set in the distant past in Anglo-Saxon times. The place of action is an old Jutish Farmstead. All the elements in the physical setting, the man returning from the bloody battle with a prisoner, the terrible pack of wolves, the altar of the blood-thirsty Thor and Woden, the very killing of Hoel the prisoner—emphasise the role in the play of violence, the forces of evil and blind and superstitious beliefs.

In The Boy with a Cart, the time of action is medieval. The place where the action takes place is South England and the characters are mowers and shepherds and the protagonist is seen moving on the road with his cart in which his mother is seated. The mower's field, the sudden rain, the sheep and the hills, the barn, the grass etc., not only emphasise the rustic setting but also stress the idea of man's roots in Nature. The very opening lines of the play,

"In our fields, fallow and burdened, in grass and furrow
In barn and stable, with scythe, flail or barrow
Sheep-shearing, milking or mowing or labour that is older
Than knowledge."

make one feel the importance of the setting as in the play. The shepherds and mowers are also close to nature.

The Lady's not for Burning is set in medieval times. This medieval setting is helpful to the theme in the sense that it has a direct bearing on the motif of the witch-hunt. The setting helps create a convincing and realistic atmosphere for the witch-hunt and witch-burning.

In Curtmantle the setting is once again medieval England. One is reminded of the open-air quality of the play when in the prologue Marshal says, "Up and down the land he went, sparing neither himself nor us, who were hauled along. Order was being born out of the sweat of those days and nights." The prologue is set in storm and darkness, which symbolically suggest the chaotic condition of Henry's England and his struggle to hammer out order from this disorder. Venus Observed is set in Stellmere Park in England. The free use of pistols, telephone and telegrams in the play makes it clear that the time is modern. The action takes place sometimes in bed-room converted into an observatory in the Ducal mansion and at other times in the Temple of the ancient Virtues in Stellmere Park. We are informed that this temple was constructed

"by the third Duke of Altair for his wife Claire
For her use when she played the part of the Delphic Oracle.

---

A way she had of informing the Duke of her pregnancy.

which she did on twenty-seven separate occasions.39

The setting of action in the bedroom appropriately helps stress the

hedonism of the Duke and when it is burnt down it suggests the

extinction of this weakness in him. It is significant to note that

the bedroom has served as an observatory also. Once it is burnt

don it not only puts an end to the profligacy of the Duke but

also draws him away from his star-gazing and makes him come nearer

to the people around him; Rosabel Fleming's intention in burning

the observatory was exactly this. She achieves this objective, but

something more is also wrought by the conflagration. The Duke

thereafter arrives at an awareness of himself and reconciles

himself to old age. Thus, the setting of the action serves to throw

light on the theme of the play.

In A Sleep of Prisoners which is also set in England, the time

of action is modern, sometime after or during the Second World War.

The action takes place in the interior of a Church which has

temporarily been turned into a prison-camp. The war background

suggests the theme of violence which is central to the play. The

very physical setting of the play— that is the church—is also

symbolic. The church obviously signifies faith and the fact that

the soldiers are interned in the church during a war is highly suggestive. This clearly means that man may have to take shelter in faith when he is in the midst of violence. Thus the setting and the background stress the theme of violence and the ultimate refuge in the forces of good.

Plays set in Europe:

The Dark Is Light Enough and A Yard of Sun are set in Austria and Italy respectively. The action in The Dark Is Light Enough takes place in a country house on the border between Hungary and Austria near Vienna and the time of action is mid-nineteenth Century. The war background stresses the idea of the darkness of man's thirst for violence. The setting of the play in a country other than England stresses the point that man is basically sane in his thirst for violence whether he is English, or Austrian or Hungarian.

The setting in A Yard of Sun is modern, sometime after the Second World War and the place is Siena, the city capital of a province in Tuscany, central Italy. The background of the palio with its climax of the horse race is intimately connected with the attempt of the characters to come to terms with themselves after the war. The horse-race and all the excitement and fun, and the bustle and noise after the winning, clearly reflect the attempts of the people to have their damped spirits revived after war.
The ebbing and flowing of the emotions of the people seen against
the background of the horse-race reflects the post-war mood of
relaxation, and as already noted, the suggestion that the palace is
to be turned into a hospital points at a post-war healing of wounds.

Plays set in other countries.

A Phoenix too Frequent is set in Ephesus, an ancient Greek
city of Asia Minor, near the mouth of the Cayster River (modern
Kucuk Henderes in West Asiatic Turkey). The place of action is
an underground tomb near Ephesus. The time is ancient. The action
of the play starts at midnight and by the time it is early morning
the play is over. The night and day symbolically suggest death and
life. The physical setting of the play too—the underground tomb,
a soldier guarding the six bodies hanging on trees and the time
midnight—is a constant reminder of death which in turn reflects
the existential theme of the death-wish. Apart from this, the
phoenix legend signifying resurrection also stresses the theme of
how life sprouts out of death. This remoteness of setting in both
time and place creates the distancing which is necessary for securing
credibility for so strange a plot.

Ancient Egypt happens to be the place of action for The First-
born. The action of the play takes place in the summer of 1200 B.C.
The physical setting of the play with its plague and thunder throws
light on the theme of violence and evil forces.
2. Social Setting.

An interesting feature of Fry's play is the extensive range of its social setting. Almost all classes of society are well represented in them, including the middle class and the working classes. Aristocracy figure prominently in 

*The Firstborn*, *Venus Observed*, *Thor*, *with Angels*, *The Dark Is Light Enough* and *Curtsmetic*. *A Phoenix too Frequent* The Lady's pet for 

*Earning A Boy with a Cart*, *A Sleep of Prisoners* and *A Yard of Sue* deal with the middle and the working classes.

Moses, Henry the King, the Duke, the Countess, Cymon the 

chieftain, --- all represent aristocracy. In *The Firstborn*, the 

characters Moses, Aneth, Seti the Pharaoh and Rameses--- all belong 

to nobility. The Pharaoh's decision to get his son Rameses married 

to the Syrian Princess, to strengthen the kingdom indicates how 

marriages in aristocracy are made not in heaven but in the royal 

courts, Rameses's initial refusal to marry the girl but ultimate 
capitulation in the larger interests of the country is an equally 

authentic touch.

In *Venus Observed* the life of the Duke who devotes his days 
(and, of course, nights) to philandering is not uncharacteristic of 

his class. So is the contempt shown by Reedman, the Duke's butler 

and Bates, the Duke's footman for the lower classes. In *The Dark Is 

Light Enough*, excepting the Countess, the other characters, viz. 

a Colonel, a representative of a Coût, a doctor--- represent the 

middle class;
Curtmantle is panoramic in its sweep for the royal protagonist comes into contact with people from different stratas of society: right from an archbishop to a beggar. All sorts of people belonging to different classes are brought in, one time or the other in the play.

The Boy with a Cart, A Phoenix too Frequent, The Lady's not for Burning, A Sleep of Prisoners, and A Yard of Sun deal with people who belong to middle and working classes. The Boy with a Cart is full of shepherds, mowers, and builders. In The Lady's not for Burning the characters—a mayor, a justice, a merchant, the daughter of a scientist, a chaplain, an orphaned clerk—represent mostly middle class people. The four prisoners in A Sleep of Prisoners are common soldiers and the characters—Roberto, Alfon, Josefa, Gisette, the photographer—in A Yard of Sun once again represent both the working as well as the middle classes. This wide range of the social setting in Fry is again suggestive of the fact that his basic theme is life—life with all its teeming variety and width of range and scope.

3. **Seasonal Symbolism.**

Seasonal symbolism is another characteristic feature of the setting of the plays of Christopher Fry. Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter stress the cyclic pattern of life, death and life again. Having this in view, perhaps, Fry has written four plays, each representing a season and all taken together symbolically suggest...
the cyclic pattern in the life of man too. The Lady's not for Burning
A Yard of Sun, Venus Observed and The Dark Is Light Enough are set
against a season each and are designed to represent the spirit of
Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter respectively. This fact itself
conclusively establishes Fry as a secular dramatist and clearly
demonstrates his strong commitment to life and its celebration. An
intensive consideration of the setting of each play further
demonstrates this point.

The Lady's not for Burning represents the Spring season which
stands for renewal, beauty, love, joy and music. In the play one is
always made conscious of the sun, meadows and of trees and of the
sights and sounds of spring. The chanting of the Cuckoo, a bunch of
daffodils and 'the wild music of the spheres' are all cases in point.
As Spring suggests the rejuvenation of life, so also the atmosphere
of spring in the play stresses the desire for life brushing away
the death-wish, the setting here is thus complementary to the theme.
True to the spring setting, the chief characters both in the main
plot and subplots are young and as spring suggests life they also
start their life afresh after marriage.

A Yard of Sun, true to its title, represents summer. The
audience is constantly reminded of the summer heat and warmth which
symbolically suggest cheerfulness. A Yard of sun implies a bit of
cheerfulness to the people who return from concentration camps and a hope to the war-torn world. Again, the palace to be turned into a hospital at the end, is also a 'yard of sun'—a place for health and life to the diseased.

Venus Observed stands for autumn; the characters in the play are in the autumn of their life. The Duke's self-description:

"For years the frost has lain
On my stubble beard— the swallows and other such
Migratory birds have left me months ago."

faithfully reflect the autumnal setting, throwing light, at the same time, on the protagonist, who with his white beard is also in the autumn of his life. The migratory birds symbolically suggest the theme of loneliness; for his woman had left the Duke when he became old. But autumn is also the season of maturity, of mellow fruitfulness. And the Duke's arrival at spiritual maturity in the end is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the play.

The Dark Is Light Enough is meant to be winter comedy and it is set in winter, which suggests death. Hence the death of the protagonist, the Countess in the end. But if 'winter comes' spring cannot 'be far behind'. This is also suggested by the fact that Richard Cettner who had earlier represented the dark forces, undergoes a spiritual transformation towards the close of the action. The

winter setting is stressed throughout the play. The Countess goes in search of Gettnar before sunrise, braving the snow; the troops of Col. Janik kick off the lumped snow from the heels of their boots at the Countess' gates, and the Countess says, "Do shut the window; it's very cold. You will give us all pneumonia." But the play does not end on a 'wintry' note, in spite of the death of the Countess. The setting of winter and the background of war stress the darkness of the world; but at the same time, we are assured that winter would finally give way to spring and that darkness is light enough.

This scrutiny of Fry's setting leads to another conclusion. There is a certain imaginative element in Fry's setting, whether it is ancient or modern. This is perhaps because Fry is deeply aware of the mystery of life itself. He himself once said, "We are plunged into an existence fantastic to the point of nightmare; however hard we rationalise, however firm our religious faith, however closely we dog the heels of science or wheel among the stars of mysticism, we cannot make head or tail of it." It is this mystery of human existence that perhaps makes for this imaginative element, for Fry's final commitment is to life and the quality of human existence.

***************