CHAPTER V.
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TECHNIQUE & DIALOGUE.

(a). Introduction.

(b). Verse.

(c). Dialogue.

(d). Diction.

(e). Imagery.
(a), Introduction.

There were many attempts in the modern age—of course, attended with little success—at poetic drama prior to Eliot and Fry. The playwrights who earlier tried to revive poetic drama were oblivious of the fact that a living language is indispensable for drama. Their language was simply an imitation of the language of Shakespeare or the Elizabethans which was completely out of place in the context of the 20th Century. The first modern dramatist who gave serious thought to language in drama was Eliot. He felt that the language of verse drama must be nearer to the contemporary rhythms of the spoken idiom of the people to whom the plays are addressed. This resulted in Eliot’s case in disciplining the language to such an extent that it was fed on ‘a thin diet’ following an ‘ascetic rule’. Fry too, like Eliot is very much concerned with the language, he is no doubt conscious of Eliot’s experiments with the language, but his handling of the language is far different. His is a rich and exuberant language, colourful and witty. His experiments with language can be explained in one way—that he is he wants to give expression to his sense of the wonder and the mystery of life and the world. Referring to the question of the use of verse in drama, Fry himself asks, "...... why verse? Why this formality of syllables? Why this unnatural division of
sentences into lines." and feels that "Some of us find, like the donkey, that communication with our fellow being is something not easily achieved." and later answers his own question, "I have no answer to satisfy you if you believe that human nature or human personality is divided into two parts of whatever proportion, the prosaic and the poetic. I think we live always with a foot in each camp or rather that there is no moment when we can safely say that we belong entirely to one or the other. There is no moment when we can certainly say that even our apparently almost insignificant actions have not a significance greatly beyond ourselves. It's this tension between two meanings which verse conveys favouring sometimes one, sometimes the other." Fry also stresses the need for the mingling of the rhythms of both prose and verse in drama. He says, "the prosaic or colloquial can be rhythmically just sufficiently charged to resolve into the implication of verse at a moment's notice, even halfway through a sentence, and back again, without disturbing the unity of the speech, in the way that the spirit and the flesh work in ourselves without noticeably casing us in half. The writer's

2. Ibid., p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 129.
responsibility is to know when he can safely break free of this and relax for contrast into the rhythms of prose. Fry's experiments with the language are of different types. His reply when accused of being merely a word-smith is, "Any writer is a 'word-smith', since he works with words just as a musician is a 'note-smith' since he works with notes. But words are also thought and meaning and (just as important) the sensation of living out of which understanding can come." He further answers the charge that his language is ornamental thus: "I question the word: ornamental which suggests the words are being used as embellishments; but I have tried always to keep them to purpose, part of which is to reflect the polyphony we live in."
(b). VERSE.

Though Fry is mainly a verse dramatist, on occasion, he makes use of prose also in a few of his plays. One finds prose used in certain scenes in *The Lady's not for Burning*, *The Dark Is Light Enough*, *The Boy with a Cart* and *Curtmantle*. In *The joy with a Cart*, most of the speeches of the mother of St. Cathman are in prose. In *The Lady's not for Burning* in the third act towards the end, the conversation between the 'rag-and-bone' merchant Skippes and Edward Tapperoxum the Justice, is in prose and it runs to about forty-five lines. In *The Dark Is Light Enough*, in Act One, the servants Bella and Willi, the soldiers and the doctor speak in prose. In *Curtmantle* the use of prose is very conspicuous and it is in this play that one finds the maximum number of prose lines. The play opens in prose and also closes in prose. The entire Prologue is in prose. Henry uses prose while speaking to Elae in the first act, to the Bishops and Foliot in the second act and towards the end in the third act. Marshal, while talking to the audience, always does it in prose. One finds in the play a total number of about 620 lines in prose of which Marshal speaks 220. It is curious to note that of the 300 lines that he speaks in all, 220 are in prose and only the remaining 80 are in verse.

In Fry's plays as in Shakespeare's, whenever the lower characters appear, they speak generally in prose. (For example,
servants, soldiers, beggars and drunks etc use prose.) Secondly, whenever information is to be given to the audience, it is always done in prose. For instance, Marshal's cons Gerry is Curtmantle. Thirdly, Henry in his dying moments speaks in prose almost in a halting manner which of course reflects his physical condition. Lastly, one does not find any cleavage between verse and prose, because characters sometimes switch over from prose to verse and vice versa. This is possible because the verse sounds contemporary and in spite of his imagery Fry's verse approximates to actual living speech.

Like most modern dramatists, Fry mostly makes use of free verse, though as seen already, some of his dialogue is in prose. As he himself says, "A reader need not be particularly worried that I break off a sentence before it reaches the end of the page and continue it on the next-line with a capital letter. That is no one's business but my own, and every man is free to think of the writing as verse or sliced prose or as a bastard offspring of the two. It is in the long run--speech written down in this way, because I find it convenient and those who speak it may also occasionally find it helpful." [7] Iambic pentameter being the basic foot in English rhythm.

7. quoted by Derek Stanford, op.cit., p.197.
the general movement of Fry's lines is of course lambic, with
necessary variations, as Rudolf Stamm points out, "The verse used
in the dialogue is very free mixing/lambic and anapaastic feet and
permitting a variable number of stresses on each line. It is a very
free blank verse that is quite natural to the author who never
permits it to interfere with the normal rhythms of the spoken
language. In 'poetry and the Theatre' Fry defends this metre,
after saying that he wondered at one time whether the loose
alexandrines of Robert Bridge's 'Testaments of Beauty' would not
meet his requirements. 'But I didn't wonder for long. It seemed
to me when as it seems to me now, that the five-foot line was
as likely a basis for common speech as any other was, is and ever
shall be and it has the advantage of being there already. It is
in our blood and though we have seen that this can also be a
disadvantage and if not properly captured can make us talk like
lines of print: It sets us free at least of contrivance. 'We do
not have to be aware of our form and as I have said, the less
self-conscious we are when writing for the theatre, the better.'5

Fry, however, does not stick to the five foot line but
uses considerable variation in line-length according to the needs

8. Christopher Fry, Adam-International Review XIX, 1951, quoted by
of meaning and expression. Take the following passage for example:

"Richard sometimes reminds me of an unhappy
Gentleman, who comes to the shore
of a January sea, heroically
strips to swim, and then seems powerless
To advance or retire; either to take the shock
of the water or to immerse himself again
in his warm clothes, and so stands cursing
the sea, the air, the season anything
except himself, as blue as a plucked goose.
It would be very well if he would one day
plunge; or dress himself again."

The only line which conforms to the blank verse pattern in the passage is: The sea, the air, the season, anything. All the rest are either longer or shorter. This gives a certain flexibility and naturalness to Fry's verse in contrast with the stiff, formal and dated look of the verse of the Victorian and Georgian verse dramatists.

Dialogue in a play is a part of action, since it is through speech that the action is brought out. The thoughts and emotions of the characters are made explicit through the dialogue. As Altenbernd and Lewis say, "Dialogue itself is, in a sense a form of action and the talking and the accompanying action are so integrated or fused that they seem one." Dialogue has many functions in a play. A dramatist makes use of it to further the action, to comment on themes, to reveal character, to describe a setting and to refer symbolically to things.

In Curtinuble, which from the point of view of action, is a 'chronicle play', Henry's actions are continuously explained and commented upon through dialogue between various characters—e.g.:

Barber: That's his whole plan and purpose. Find out the true state of courts of law and administration of his kingdom, is what he is after; so come up on them unawares in what he does.

The dialogue here tells us what the king is going to do. Similarly, the following dialogue hints at future action. The Huckster, while

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talking to the Juggler, indicates the shape of events to come.

The Buckster: He'll march us all to death to get his law
and order, though I'll say this, he's sorry
for you when you're dead. 12

This not only stresses the theme of law and order but also indicates
the death of Backet as a result of his confrontation with the king.

Dialogue is often used for stressing the themes of the plays.

In A Phoenix too Frequent, the central concern of the play is
suggested through a dialogue thus:

"Dodo: Haven't you learnt
About life and death.

Tecute: In a manner, yes, in a manner

The rudiments." 13

In The Firstborn, in the very opening lines, the casual dialogue
between Anath and Tecurot introduces the theme of death and its
inevitability.

"Anath: What is it, Tecurot?

Tecurot: Did you hear it too?

Anath: Some man is dead. The scream was a pass word to a grave.

Look there. Up go there birds." 14


Again in a casual manner, Moses while talking to Miriam brings out the mystery of existence:

"There is little difference
Between ourselves and those blindfolded oxen
We also do the thing we cannot see,
Hearing the creaking pivot and only knowing
That we labour."\(^{15}\)

Again the following dialogue stresses the theme of hope:

"The wilderness has wisdom
And that does eternity bear witness to
If not at least to hope."\(^{16}\)

Similarly in The Lady's not for Burning, the very opening dialogue throws light on the theme of the mystery of life with its queer mixture of the material and the spiritual:

"Thomas: Soul!
Richard: and the plasterer, that's fifteen groats------
Thomas: 'Hey Soul!'
Richard: for stopping the draught in the privy------
Thomas: Body
You calculating piece of clay."\(^{17}\)

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16. Ibid., p. 140.
In the same play the following dialogue brings out the dominant theme of the death-wish:

"Richard: He says he wants to be hanged sir.

Tyson: Out of question

It is a most improper suggestion which I know
Of no precedent for; cannot be entertained
I suspect an element of mockery
Directed at the ordinary decencies
Of life."**18**

Yet another passage stresses the theme of life and its meaninglessness:

"Tyson: What is the meaning of this?

What is the meaning of this?

Thomas: That is the most relevant question in the world."**19**

In the end when they are released Thomas tells Jennet,

"I have to see you home, though neither of us
Knows where on earth it is."**20** This indicates succinctly the existential theme of homelessness.

In *Thor, with Angels* the speech of Merlin stresses the central theme of man's gradual discovery of God in terms of the revival

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19. Ibid., p. 137.
20. Ibid., p. 212.
of Springs:

"The men of Rome

Returning, bringing God, winter over a breath

of green exhaled from the hedges, the wall of sky

Drenched by dark song."

And the concluding lines stress

the theme of sacrifice and faith in powers of gods:

"We are afraid

To live by rule of God, which is forgiveness

Mercy 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."

Similarly, in A Sleep of Prisoners the following dialogue stresses

the central theme of the power of Good:

Adam: Strange how we trust the powers that ruin

And not the powers that bless.

David: But good's unguarded.

As defenceless as a naked man.


22. Ibid., p. 109.
Good is itself, what ever 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."  

In Venus Observed the Duke talking to his son, stresses the main theme of loneliness:

"But what is the mark of the question?
What is the note of this interrogation?
Loneliness. The note my son is loneliness.
Over all the world
Men move unhoming and eternally
Concerned, a swarm of bees who have lost their queen."  

and further when his son competes with him, he stress the idea of man's alienation in this world:

"Thank you, but I know, your wish to remove me
But if being alive is a question, heaven bent
For an answer, and the question is a man's
Estrangement in a world."  

25. Ibid., p. 201.
The Duke after finally achieving 'the rare benevolent peace', stresses the sense of the mystery of life, which is a leading idea in Fry's drama:

"I forgive even
The unrevealing revelation of love
That lifts a lid purely
To close it and leaves us knowing that greater things
Are close, but not to be disclosed
Though we die for them." 26

Dialogue reveals characters in two ways: (a) a character describing another character, and (b) a character revealing itself through its own words. In The Dark Is Light Enough Selman, a minor character, while talking to other characters sums the personality of the protagonist of the play, viz. the Countess:

"She has touchingly way
Of backing a man up against eternity
Until he hardly has the nerve to remain mortal." 27

The following dialogue brings out the influence of a character on other characters: Peter tells the Countess:

"By your fetching Gattner in
Has made me with a knowledge I was lacking
Which in a way has altered nothing
And altered it thoroughly."

Gattner's whole character is summed up aptly in the following passage:

"Richard Gattner, that invertebrate
That self-drunk, drunken, shiftless, heartless
Lying malingerer, Richard Gattner

... ... ...
Unreliable when he was drunk
Irresponsible when he was sober
Useless to any world, sober or drunk."

Sometimes, when a character speaks about another character, light is thrown both on the speaker and the subject of his remarks. When the Countess talks of Gattner thus:

"I know
Richard was no brute, and no
Pursuer of evil, but more like one enraged
Because he thought that good rejected him"

29. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
or as if an instrument were lying
Thrummed by the wind refusing any hands
Which might moisten the strings into a true sound.*30
and continuing further, adds
"Richard sometimes reminds me of an unhappy
Gentleman, who comes to the shore
Of a January sea, heroically
Strips to swim, and then seems powerless
To advance or retire, either to take the shock
Of the water or to immerse himself again
In his warm clothes, and so stands cursing
The sea, the air, the season, anything
Except himself, as blue as a plucked goose."31  her words
reveal as much the Countess' generosity and open-mindedness on the
character of Richard Gettner.
Secondly, a character reveals itself through its own words. As
Fry himself feels; "Words and actions are not unrelated. Once
illuminates the other and the full significance of actions can be
explored only by words."32

30. The Dark Is Light Enough; Plays (London, 1971), p. 120.
31. Ibid.
In Curtmante the character of Henry is excellently shown through dialogue. Talking to Becket he says that he wants to give England an incorruptible scaffolding of law to last her longer than her cliffs.33

This is a direct statement of the King's one ideal in life which constitutes at once the strength and the weakness of his character. Again, the conflict between the King and Becket is well portrayed through dialogue. Becket challenging Henry says:

"Becket: What is the worth of kingdom

If the head of its church has no spiritual authority?

Henry: What is the worth of spiritual authority

If the lives under it are lived in anarchy?"34

Apart from throwing light on character, the dialogue also effectively suggests the setting of the plays. Referring to the setting of The Lady's not for Burning, Fry himself says, "I have tried to make the words and the deeds of the characters move all the time with a sense of the particular moment at which they are said or done so that we can be aware continually of the April afternoon, for example, with the scents and sounds of it, of the April evening.


34. Ibid., p. 209.
and night as the play goes on; moreover to make these scents and
sounds an essential part of the action, conditioning the words
of the characters. "35 Fry even feels that the setting influences
people. He says, "In everyday life, our moods and the words and
doods that spring from them, are often evidently governed by the
atmosphere or the weather or the season of the year. Nothing is
absolutely itself everything carries with it a proportion of its
neighbourhood."36 Since the symbolism of seasons in Fry's plays
has already been fully discussed earlier it is hardly necessary
to illustrate here how the seasons are described in terms appropriate
for the mood and time of each play. To recall only a few examples:
The Lady's not for Burning is full of lively descriptions of Spring:
"Coming in from the light, I am all out at the eyes:
Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass
Out there, in the sparkling air, the sun and the rain
Clash together like the symbols clashing
When David did his dance— I've an April blindness.
You're hidden in a cloud of crimson Catherine-wheels."37

35. Christopher Fry. "Comments on John Gielgud's production of 'The
36. Ibid.
In contrast, the very opening dialogue in *Curtsmante* brings out the sombre setting, appropriate for the mood of the tragedy:

"**Barber:** We're on the edge of the marsh. It's the noise of the frogs, you can hear.
**Wife:** What is it?
**Barber:** The croaking of frogs.
**Juggler:** Men are getting rough where I've just come from.
**Barber:** Who's beating the drum?
**Juggler:** Since the lantern over here
Will you? I've got blood coming out of me.

**Barber:** (moving towards the Huckster) Give us a chance to sleep.
**Huckster:** I'm discouraging away the evils of the night.
**Barber:** Discourage the drum for one."^38

Apart from manifestly symbolic description of setting, the dialogue at times carries symbolic overtones also. Perhaps the best finest example of this is to be found in *Venus Observed*. Consider the following dialogue between the Duke and his young son Edgar:

"**The Duke:** I should like you to offer Miss. Readebeck, an apple.
**Edgar:**

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Edgar: Anything except an apple, father
I will offer her
The cloudy peach, the bristling pineapple."

The fruits mentioned here obviously carry symbolic overtones. The apple as noted earlier, is a symbol of maturity, since it is a typical product of autumn and it is suggestive that the Duke should be associated with it for he is in the autumn of his life. Young Edgar, on the other hand is associated with the peach and the pineapple among other type of fruits. 'Peach' also means an attractive girl and pineapple is a tropical fruit—both indicate the strong passions of youth (note the adjective 'cloudy' and 'bristling' which qualify the two fruits).

A possible charge against Fry's dialogue is that it is hardly realistic, since almost all the characters talk in the same witty, colourful and exuberant fashion. True that his dialogue is sometimes not in character, e.g. Doto and her mistress both talk equally wittily. In the following two speeches both Doto and Dynasene describe the same person—viz. Dynasene's husband. It's curious that both of them describe him equally colourfully, though they use different images:

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"Note: My master, my poor master, was a man

whose nose was as straight as little buttress

and now he has taken it into Elysium

where it won't be noticed among all the other

straightnesses."40

"Dramenes: He was the ship, he had such a deck; Note

Such a white, scrubbed deck, such a stern prow

Such a proud stern, so slim from port to starboard."41

But this is because Fry is not working in the realistic dramatic
convention. His aim is not to hold a mirror to Nature and if he
does so, the mirror is always either concave or convex. Writing an
imaginative drama, he naturally stylises his dialogue.

41. Ibid., p. 8.
(a). DICTION:

Pry is a great lover of language. He considers words almost as living beings, who have their own complexions and personality. Consider the following discussion between Tegenus and Dynanose on the quality of the new name of the soldier:

"Dynanose: Do I know your name?
Tegenus: Tegenus.
Dynanose: That's very thin for you.
Tegenus: It hardly covers your bones. Something quite different.
Altogether other. I shall think of it presently.

Dynanose: Darker vowels, perhaps.
Tegenus: Yes, certainly darker vowels.
And your consonants should have a slight angle
And a certain temperature. Do you know what I mean?"42

and again later,

"Dynanose: I shall call you Chronis. It has a breadlike sound.
I think of you as a crisp loaf."43

When one considers the diction of Pry the most conspicuous thing that strikes one about it is his wit. Since Pry wants to

43. Ibid., p. 28.
present his view of the world as an attempt to understand the mystery of our existence and does not want merely to concentrate on the follies and foibles of human behaviour as the writer of the comedy of manners does, one does not find much of satire and irony in his plays. His aim is not to expose the faults and foibles of human nature but to laugh at the incongruities of life and the world.

When one thinks of defining wit and humour, one cannot but note the fact that definition of each slightly borders on the other. Referring to these confusing words Fowler says, "No definition of the words is offered, but for each its motive, or aim, its province, its method or means, its proper audience are specified. The constant confusion between sarcasm, satire and irony as well as that between common between wit and humour seems to justify this mechanical device of parallel classification." In a tabular statement he points out that the motive or aim of humour is discovery; its province is human nature and the method is observation and the audience is of those sympathetic. The aim or motive of wit is to throw light on things; and its province is words or ideas and the method is surprise and it is addressed to an intelligent audience.

Humour in Fry's plays is of different types. Humour of situation, or action or farcical humour; secondly, humour of character; thirdly, humour of words. A very good example of humour of action is to be found in *Venus Observed* when Feedback, influenced with anger, shakes his son Dominic, who falls sprawling on the floor; just then Jessic enters and asks Dominic:

"How do you do?"

Please don't bother to get up."

Similarly, in *The Lady's Not for Burning* Margaret asks her son Nicholas to fetch Humphrey and the following dialogue ensues:

"Margaret:   * * *  * 
Nicholas will fetch him.
They're inseparable, really twin natures, utterly
Brothers, like the two ends of the same thought—
Nicholas, dear, call Humphrey.

Nicholas: I can't. I've killed him.
Margaret: Fetch Humphrey, Nicholas dear.
Nicholas: I've killed him dearest
Mother.
Margaret: Well, never mind. Call Humphrey, dear."46

Humour of character has already been discussed earlier. As for humour of words Fry creates humour by use of terms of abuse and high-sounding words and play upon words. In *The Lady's not for Burning* Thomas curses Tyson in these words:

"You bubble-mouthing, fog-blathering
Chin-chuntering, chap-flapping, liturgical
Turgidical, base old man?" 47

Similarly, in *Thor*, with Angela Colgrin attacks Guichelm as:

"Frog-man, fen-fiend, were-wolf, oul, elf
Or whatever unnatural thing you are
Croaking in the voice of Master Guichelm" 48 to which Guichelm replies with,

"Smut of an old sow's litter, you slop-headed
Pot-scorcher, come here, you buckle-backed
Gutsack." 49 In the same play Cymen refers to Merlin in this way:

"You're a hideous old wileacre
of sheepbitten kake." 50

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 98.
In *Venus Observed* the Duke abuses Dominic using strange words.

"My dear conscience-nudging
Parent-pesting, guilt-corroded child."

again,

c

You

Ice-cold, donkey-witted douche of tasteless water."

The humour in all these cases arises out of the strange compounds,
the sound and feel of which create a ludicrous effect.

Among examples of the use of high-sounding words are the
following: Toppercorn referring to the witch-hunt atmosphere as,
"The whole thing's a lot of amphiourious
Stultiloquial fiddle-faddle."

In the same play the
following speech of Thomas aptly demonstrates the use of such words.

"Why should these omnipotent combinations
Go on with the deadly human anecdote which
From the first was never more than remotely funny?
In the time has come for tombs to tip
Their refuse: for the involving, ivy, thebrier.
The convolutions of convolvulus
To disentangle and make make way

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For the last great ascendancy of dust
Sucked into judgement by a cosmic yawn
Of boredom, the last Trump
Is timed for twenty-two forty hours precisely.  

It is difficult to say where Fry's humour shades off into wit and
where his wit develops a humorous dimension, for sometimes they are
inextricably mixed together and it is only a certain emphasis
that may indicate the difference.

Wit in Fry's plays appears mostly in the form of word-play,
comic comparisons and daring flights of fancy. Fry's word-play takes
the form not much of punning as of frolicking with synonyms and words
similar in import and pursuing an idea to its logical
linguistic limits until the exercise becomes highly diverting in itself.

In The Lady's not for Burning talking about her father's
alchemy Jennet says:

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

\* Underlining is mine.

55. Ibid., p. 167.
What is to be noted in this passage is Fry's by-play with verbs which convey virtually the same idea, viz. 'knocked', 'rocked', 'poured', 'spattered'. The following passage indicates a different strategy:

Emperors

Would be colonizing you, their mistresses
Patronizing you, ministers of state
Governmentalizing you, and you
Would be canonized, lionized, probably
Canonized for your divine mishap.56 (underlining mine)

One should note here how the idea suggested in 'colonised' is pursued through its logical connections in other structural contexts in similar verbs like 'patronizing' and 'governmentalizing'. In the same play, when Nicholas is hit with a brick, Tyron says,

"I believe that brick to have been divinely delivered
and richly deserved."57 The adjectives 'divinely' and 'richly' here add a strong touch of wit to the meaning of the nouns.

Apart from this play upon words, the dramatist takes pleasure in twisting quotations, rendering them witty, for example, in A Sleep of Prisoners. Peter tells Sleepy Meadows,

57. Ibid., p. 161.
"Sorry if I disturbed you

I'll go back where I came from, and if I can

I'll keep it to myself. Poor old Meadows:

Try thinking of love or something,

Amor vincit omnias."

The last line is a twisted revision of the Latin quotation "amor vincit omnias", meaning 'love conquers all things', by twisting 'omnia' into 'insomnia', the meaning is utterly changed administering a shock of surprise. Again in the Lady's Not for Burning, Thomas disbelieving the alchemy of Jennet says:

"Tell that to some sailor on a horse

If you had such a secret, I

And all my friends flock, my incubi

Succubi, irps and cacoecous, would have leapt out of our bath of brimming brimstone, crying

Eureka, cherchez la femme!"

Here the word 'eureka' is a Greek word, meaning 'I've found it' (the exclamation of Archimedes at his famous discovery); the second quotation 'Cherchez la femme' is a French expression, meaning 'look for the woman' implying the powerful but secret influence of


Underlining is mine.
women in many matters in the world. These two quotations are used here in a startlingly different context which creates an effect of delightful surprise.

Similarly, in *Venus Observed* Readbeck's comment is a good example of word-play:

"By day

The brandishing sun inciting the earth

To revolution and rotation."

The humour here arises out of the play on word 'revolution'. Likewise, in the same play the lines of Hilda addressed to Hereward are

"Hereward, you certainly seem to have been
coruscating on thin ice."

Here there is an obvious pun upon the expression 'skating on thin ice.'

In *A Phoenix too Frequent* a similar play upon words is found in the speech of Togmus:

"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 progress?"

Underlining is mine.

Secondly, in Fry's plays one finds a number of comic comparisons of sons either direct similes of implied metaphors. In *The Lady's Not for Burning*, Thomas gives a description of himself:

> Just see me

As I am, no like a perambulating

Vegetable, ... ... ...

... ... ... ...

... I fall to pieces like

A cake of dung." \(^{63}\)

In the same play Nicholas refers to himself as being "compounded of explosives/ like the world's inside," \(^{64}\)

Later in the play Margaret describes her sons thus:

> They are inseparable; really twin natures, utterly

Brothers like the two ends of the same thought." \(^{65}\)

Thomas Mendip speaks about himself and Jannet like this:

> We should be like stars now that it's dark:

Use ourselves up to the last bright dregs

And vanish in the morning. Shall we not


\(^{64}\) Ibid., p.125.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., p.126.
Suffer as wittily as we can? Ho, come
Don't purse your lips like a little prude at the humour
of annihilation. 65

Apart from these similes one finds a number of startling metaphors
too in his plays; as a matter of fact one comes across more metaphors
than similes in Fry. His love of metaphor is obvious from the way
he makes Thomas Randip in The Lady's not for Burning say, "What a
wonderful thing is metaphor." 67 In the same play, Thomas replies
to Jennet's question of where she should lodge her application in
the Mayor's office,

"Into Pandora's box with all the ills
But not if that little hell-cat hope's
Already in possession, I've hoped enough
I gave the best years of my life to that girl
But I'm walking out with Dummation now, and she's
A flame who's got finality." 68

In Venus Observed the dialogue between the Duke and his son who is
apprehensive at his father's advances to Perpetua uses a sustained

67. Ibid., p. 119.
68. Ibid., p. 150.
comic metaphor admirably:

"Now listen Edgar, take nothing for granted
Not even my flair, for breaking into love;
You are apprehensive far too soon; the field
If not entirely yours, is not entirely mine
I am as innocent here
As an old war horse put out to grass
My equine equability is pastoral to a fault."

and Edgar replies in the same vein, continuing the metaphor.

"But when you're grazing you're irresistible;
Buttercups and daisies fall to your fetlocks in showers;
I've seen it happen; And between this morning's eclipse
And this afternoon you've lost the autumnal look
Which was such a comfort to me; I see you have
The appearance of a very mild March day."

In *Phoebe*, too, *Ereclu* *,* Dynamene compares her dead husband to a ship:

"He was the ship. He had such a deck, Doro,
Such a white, scrubbed deck, such a stern prow,
Such a proud stern, so slim from port to starboard.

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70. Ibid.
If ever you meet a man with such fine masts
Give your life to him, Duto,71

In The Lady's not for Burning, Thomas he makes a strange comparison.

"A world unable to die sits on and on
In spring sunlight hatching egg after egg,
Hoping against hope that out of one of them
Will come the reason for it all; and always
Out pops the acid chuckle and centuries
Of cuckoo-spit.72

All these similes and metaphors impress us by the evidence they provide of the seemingly inexhaustible powers of invention displayed by the dramatist and his ingenuity. Apart from these comparisons, one is also impressed by the flights of fancy of Fry's characters.

For example in A Phoenix too Frequent Duto tells Tegeus:

"You sex of wicked beards
It's no wonder you have to shave off your black souls
Everyday as they push through your chins."73

Similarly in Thor, with Angels, Cymen, when questioned to explain what flogged away his strength says:

Some ancient
Damp god of this dooming island, who spat
The fungus out of his mouth and caught me napping
I curse this kingdom, water, rock and soil;
I accuse and curse the croaking of its boughs
And the slaver on the mouth of its winds; It makes
A fool of me...

It is quite a lengthy speech taking Cymon to dizzy heights in his
flight of imagination. In The Lady's Not for Burning, when Jeant
explains how she is mistaken for a witch, Thévenot giving his imagina-
tion free rein:

"It really is
Beyond the limit of respectable superstition
To confuse my voice with a peacock's. Don't they know
I sing solo bass in Hell's Madrigal Club?
-- and as for you, you with no eyes, no ears,
No senses, you the most superstitious
Of all-- (for what greater superstition
Is there than the mumbo-jumbo of believing
In reality?)-- you should be swallowed whole by time
In the way that you swallow appearances.

Horns, what a waste of effort it has been
to give you Creation's vast and exquisite
dilemma, where altercation thrums
In every grainule of the Milky Way,
persisting still in the dead-sleep of the moon,
And heckling itself hoarse in that hot-head
The Sun...

Fry's dictionary thus sparkles with wit and humour, which gives us
continuous shocks of amused surprise. There is virtually no passage
in Fry's plays which does not suddenly bring home to us the sense of
the wonder of language, when it is handled by a writer who loves words
and possesses both a fertile imagination and a strong comic sense.

(e). IMAGERY

An image, one can say, is a picture made out of words; it might be a simile or a metaphor. It aims at "an illumination of thought by a comparison between two basically dissimilar objects or ideas, which are suddenly seen to be in some way related, in a flash of imaginative insight." Imagery is used as an effective instrument of expression for it supports the theme, structure and character i.e., action in a work of art. As Caroline Spurgeon puts it, imagery is, "the little word-picture used by a poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate and embellish his thought. It is a description or an idea which by comparison or analogy states or understands with something else transcends to us, through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the 'wholeness' the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives, or has left what he is telling us." An image is far superior to an ordinary description, because it can create an atmosphere, convey emotions in a way, no precise and accurate description can do. It increases

the dramatic concentration. Commenting on the use of imagery, Una Ellis-Fermor points out, "Strong emotional experience is stored in the brief space of an image, with its release illuminates powerfully the emotions, the reflections, the inferences which it is the purpose of the passage to evoke. There is thus an artistic economy in imagery hardly to be equalled by that of any other kind of verbal expression, with the possible exception of music." Apart from this, an image can reveal the thought of the spiritual experience which ordinary language fails to convey effectively. One can even say that it is an integral part of the action and thus essentially dramatic in function. Images are most useful to the dramatist, to reveal a character and sometimes to analyze the states of mind of the characters. They also suggest the dramatist's preoccupation with the universal in relation to the particular or individual aspects of human action.

Fry's imagery is fully functional right from his first play, The Boy with a Cart. The imagery here is eminently in character as it is in keeping with the psychology of the simple farmers and shepherds in the play. Thus the chorus of the people of South England.

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describes the setting of the sun as "The day is pulled up by the root and dries...../ The things of the daylight are drawn and slack," and many of Cuthman's images like "I could close As the daisy closes" and I was as empty as a vacant barn are those which only a person in his station of life could have used.

As Rudolf Stamm points out, "he(Fry) knows how to control his punning and his image-making faculty has created too many delightful things to be denied the quality of originality......... it is no small achievement to use imagery spontaneously and without too much self-consciousness in an age when so much theorising by poets and critics concerning the nature and function of similes and metaphors is going on." Commenting on Fry's imagery Louis MacNiece says:"It is a great feat to have invented a language of images which works for all the characters all of the time. This is now rare in experimental plays where the high moments and flat-moments, the high-brow characters and the low-brow characters usually

80. Ibid., p. 28.
81. Ibid., p. 19.
just do not tally with each other.\textsuperscript{63}

The main body of Fry's images falls into four groups—
namely Nature imagery and Religious, Metaphysical and Symbolic
images.

\textbf{Nature Imagery.}

Before studying Nature imagery in Fry's plays, it is
necessary to note the urgent reasons for the persistent use of
nature imagery in them. Fry, as said earlier, glorifies life and its
powers in all his plays. Nature is an essential part of human life.
It is a force behind the sustenance of life; it is the active-force
for life and also a setting for human life. Since Fry's primary
interest in his plays is life and its forces he is justifiably
preoccupied with nature and its objects. This is the reason why all
his plays plays abound in Nature imagery.

Fry's nature imagery reveals his constant and acute
observation of the forces of external nature. His nature images
are drawn from the Sun, the Moon, stars, and comets, sky,
plants, flowers, grass, meadows, planets, trees, gales, ocean ground, rain,
apples, bees, primroses, and violets, buttercups and daisies, swan,

\textsuperscript{63} Louis Macnicke, "The Critic Replies", "Comments on John Gielgud's
Production of "The Lady's Not for Burning" (Christopher Fry)",
lake, louse on the back of sheep, wet leaf, swallows, crows, nest of lizards, dog, spider, sap in the tree, brazen leaves, perambulating vegetables, weather etc.

These images may be arranged in a definite and meaningful order like images pertaining to seasons, to agriculture and vegetation, animals and birds.

The use of symbols in Fry's seasonal comedies has already been discussed. There are a number of images pertaining to the four seasons of the year and as already noted, the four seasonal comedies, The Lady's not for Burning, A Yard of Sun, Venus Observed and The Dark Is Light Enough represent Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter respectively. These plays contain nature descriptions which are appropriate to the seasons concerned. For example, in The Lady's not for Burning Alizon makes a pointed reference to Spring.

"I've an April Blindness
You're hidden in a cloud of Crimson Catherine-wheels."

In A Yard of Sun, a remark of Grazia reminds one of Summer:

"For the traveller's Return, and pots of gold, and the sound of the world, flying into the sun, whatever we ought to celebrate." 95

94. The Lady's not for Burning, Plays (London, 1977), p. 120.
In *Venus Observed* the following dialogue reflects autumn:

"The Duke: And the leaves are falling, what shall a robin do then?
Poor thing?

Jessie: Sit in this barn, and keep himself warm,
and tuck himself up alone in the east wing.
Poor thing?"

In *The Dark Is Light Enough* the following image used by Settaker refers directly to winter:

"I know the snow tonight
Comes down as white and soft as a bishop's hand."  

Apart from these images of seasons, one finds also numerous images drawn from agriculture and vegetation. In *The Boy with a Cart* one sees number of these images like,

"Rain is low against the ground
And grows like a weed."

"I had done more damage with words than down pour
Did the crops."

"You want to use me like
A borrowful of turnips."

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In *Thor, with Angels* the description of Merlin is a fine example of nature imagery, drawn from vegetation:

"His beard was twisted like a mist in the roots of an oak tree
Beaded and bright with a slight rain and he was crying
Like an old wet leaf. His hands were as brown as a nest
Of lizards and his eyes were two pale stones
Dropping in a dark well." 91

In *The Lady's not for Burning*, Jemmet even makes a reference to an agricultural instrument,

"I shall have to hurry,
That was the picturesque voice of a cock, beginning
To break up the night." 92

In addition to these, the dramatist also draws a number of images from animals and birds too. In *A Phoenix too Frequent* Doto describes life as:

"Life and death
Is cat and dog in this double bed of a world." 93

In *Venus Observed* the Duke while talking to Redbeck, describes

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the sky as "a blue sky buffaloid/ By cloud, the sun approaching its
eclipse."94 In Thor, with Angels, Cymen speaking about his land
says:

"The orchards rang with fruit, the hills moved
With grain like a lion's mane."95 In the same play Meel
yearning for life declares:

"I want to live, even
If it is like a louse on the back of a sheep skewering
Into the wool away from the beaks of crows,
Even like a limpet on a sour rock
I want to live."96

Cymen demands from Merlin an answer:

"But give me an answer
If, as you imagine, our gods have no care
Whether we win or lose; what Cuckoo power
Is it that usurps the nest of my soul."97

96. Ibid., p. 73.
97. Ibid., p. 83.
In *A Phoenix too Frequent*, Tegus tells Dynanene,

> And now your throat
> Is a white branch and my lips two singing birds—.*98

In *Thor, with Angels*, Cymen tells Hoel,

> As though a spirit in you, like
> A wild fowl hiding in the more of your flesh,

> Heard the sound far off and flew up clamouring
> Rousing a spirit in me.*99

In *Venus Observed* the Duke observes when his observatory is burnt,

> so much I delighted in
> In now all of ash, like a dove's breast feathers
> Drifting dismally about the garden.*100

**References**

2. Religious Imagery.

Apart from nature imagery, one finds much of religious imagery in the plays. This is because of Fry's early religious training and also because some of his plays were specifically written for religious occasions. Fry's religious imagery is mostly descriptive, because as already pointed out, he is basically committed to life and not to religion. Fry is not concerned with religious dogma nor committed to it. Eliot is concerned in his plays with a quest for spiritual values but Fry's utmost concern is with human life in his plays.

In The Boy with a Cart, Cuthman talking about morning finds that,

"the chancelled larches
Sing like the Lenten choirboys." 101

Similarly in The Lady's not for Burning when Jennet asks Thomas Mendip "Am I inconvenience? To you", he says, "As inevitably as original sin." 102 In A Sleep of Prisoners, the dream of Meadows, Adams as Adam refers to Cain as:

"He can walk this broken world as easily
As I and Eve the ivory light of Eden." 103

In a Phoenix too Frequent, Poto's comment upon men is,

"It's no wonder you have to shave off your black souls
Every day as they push through your chin."

In Thor, with Angels, Colgrin describes the noise made by Quichelm.

"There's an infernal clatter, what's the matter
Roof, straw in the nostrils, that's bed
Who's blaspheming in the thick of the mist?" again
comparing Quichelm to a devil he says:

"There's not a devil
In the length of the land could pick such a posy of words."

In the same play, Cymen talks about the mystery that prevented him from killing Nozd thus:

"the skirts of the Gods
Drag in our mud, we feel the touch
And take it to be a kiss, but they see we soil them:
And twitch themselves away."

Merlin compares the flowers to the pilgrims:

106. Ibid.
107. Ibid., p. 82.
Primrose and violet
And all frail privileges of the early ground
Gather like pilgrims in the aisles of the sun. 108

In The Lady's not for Burning, Humphrey is described thus:

"Pandemonium, what a fight
What a fight; Humphrey went hurtling
Like Lucifer into the daffodils." 109

In the same play, Nicholas describes Jennet in the following words:

"If evil has a soul it's here outside
The flower of sin, Satan's latest
Button-hole. Shall I ask her in?" 110 again Thomas speaking of damnation observes,

"I've hoped enough
I gave the best years of my life to that girl
But I'm walking out with damnation now, and she's a flame who's got finality." 111

110. Ibid., p. 136.
111. Ibid., p. 150.
One revealing feature of Fry's religious imagery is that a
great many of his religious images are drawn from hell, Satan, infer-
nal clatter, pandemonium, devils and ghosts etc. Now, since the
basic theme in Fry is the glorification of life, all these dark
images are evidently used in a light-hearted manner, and not with
a view to making your flesh creep. This is another pointer to the
fact that his religious imagery is mostly a kind of poetical strategy
rather than a strong ideational element in the plays.

METAPHYSICAL IMAGERY.

Many of Fry's images are reminiscent of those in
the verse of the 17th century Metaphysical poets, because like
Donne Fry is basically witty. With his witty and intelligent play
on words, one sees him bringing dissimilar objects together. A study
of this metaphysical imagery reveals that it is drawn from various
spheres of life, both from human world and the world outside,
like mathematics, astronomy and astrology. Then in an image,
'two heterogeneous ideas are violently yoked together', it cannot
but cause eye-brows to be raised. Some of Fry's religious imagery
itself has a typically metaphysical quality, e.g. in The Firstborn
God is referred to as:

"What says the infinite eaves-dropper?" and also as

"God the jailer, God the gun
Watches me exercise in the yard."  

Again in *The Lady's not for Burning* one sees God being described as a clock-maker:

"The brain is a delicate mechanism, Almighty
God more precise than a clock maker
Grant us all a steady pendulum."

Such images bring to memory John Donne's characterization of the Sun as "Bawse old fool, unruly sunne."

In *The Lady's not for Burning*, Jennet's description of her scientist-father is a fine example of metaphysical images related to science:

"When he was born he gave an algebraic
Cry: at one glance measured the cubic content
Of that ivory cone his mother's breast
And multiplied his appetite by five
So he matured by a progression, gained
Experience by correlation, expanded
Into a marriage by contraction and by

Certain physical dynamics

Formulated me."116

There are likewise a number of homely images which once again remind one of the frequent use of this kind of imagery by Donne.

e.g. In the Firstborn anath referring to life in general says that we are:

"Like drunken men with a key in the dark who stand

At the sight door but cannot get out of the cold."117

In the same play anath describes Moses as:

"he blows about my brain

Like litter at the end of a public holiday."118

again,

"He has stood all day under my brain's stair-way."119

In Venus Observed Jesse refers to Reedbeck who is very happy at the arrival of his daughter, as

"he sits and purrs

As though the morning was a saucer of milk."120

118. Ibid., p.57.
119. Ibid., p.63.
In the same play Rosalba, annoyed with the Duke, chides him as:

"And you whip
Your impervious umbrella of satisfaction."

In A Phoenix too Frequent Dynanme, angry at Tegus's intrusion into the tomb, tells him:

"The hooves of your conscience will pinch for ever
If life's dignity has only self-protection."

again referring to her dead husband says,

"his brain was an ironing-board
For all crumpled indecision."

Some of the metaphysical images are drawn from Astronomy. For example, in A Phoenix too Frequent, Tegus observes Dynanme's exhaling in the following manner:

"What a sigh she gave then
Down the air like a slow comet."

Similarly, in The Lady's not for Burning, Thomas describes Jeane as

"If she is true to herself the moon is nothing
But a circumambulating aphrodisiac

123. Ibid., p. 24.
Divinely subsidised 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. 125

again,

"We should be like stars now that it's dark
Use ourselves up to the last bright drag
And vanish in the morning." 126

Similarly, in Venus Observed Feedbeck, at the news of his daughter's
arrival says,

"I've a heart this morning as light as a nebula." 127

In The Firstborn Anath denies her influencing Moses as:

"Am I a planet
To be so influential." 128

As it has been said already, since Fry is basically a man of wit, one
finds in his plays innumerable metaphysical images such to the
amusement and amusement of the reader.

126. Ibid., p. 177.
4. SYMBOLIC IMAGES.

Apart from these images, one also finds a few images which are definitely symbolic in import. Though one does not find these to be as numerous as Nature and metaphysical images, the symbolic images significantly stress the themes and reveal character. When the same image is purposefully repeated this recurrent imagery acquires symbolic dimensions, for example in The Boy with a Cart, the image of 'sky and root' representing man and God is repeated quite often, stressing the theme of man's relationship with God:

"He have felt the joint action of root and sky of men
And God when day first resubs the hills."129 again

"It is there in the story of Cuthman the working together
Of man and God like root and sky."130 and

"In the shade they found a protected place, aground
Where limbs and prayers could stretch between a root and
Root, between root and sky."131 similarly

"Death and life were knotted in one strength
Indivisible as root and sky."132

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130. Ibid., p. 9.
131. Ibid., p. 22.
132. Ibid., p. 45.
This iterative imagery has its bearing on the theme of the play, in the same manner in which Shakespeare's plays display meaningful image clusters.

In Fry's plays the images of 'ice' and 'sun', like winter and spring generally signify death or a death-wish and hope and life respectively. For example, In A Phoenix too Frequent when Dynamene says:

"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,"

She means by 'shadow without smear of sun' only a death-wish or death, without any prospect of life. Similarly when Tegeus says,

"I come a journey from the unmelting ice
To walk in the sun," he means to live a life full of hope and cheerfulness. Even in the very title of the latest play, A Yard of Sun Fry seems as already noted to suggest the ideas of hope and cheerfulness after the devastation of war.

133. A Phoenix too Frequent, Plays (London, 1937), p. 34.
134. Ibid., p. 36.
To indicate the relative importance of images of different types in the plays, a comparative study may be made by taking two plays (both are one act plays), namely, *A Phoenix too Frequent* and *Thor, with Angels*, one a comedy and the other a 'religious' play. In *A Phoenix too Frequent* one finds a total of about 122 specific images, out of which nature images are 66, religious images 34 and metaphysical images 22. In *Thor, with Angels* a 'religious' play one finds a total of 158 images, out of which are 84 nature images, 52 religious images and 22 metaphysical images. As a matter of fact, one finds in *Thor, with Angels* more nature images than those in *A Phoenix too Frequent*. This comparison furnishes additional evidence for the view that Fry is basically committed to life.