The little world of Christopher Fry: A study of some of the allegorical features of "The Lady's not for Burning".

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THE LITTLE WORLD OF CHRISTOPHER FRY

A Study of Some of the Allegorical Features of 

The Lady's not for Burning

Submitted to the Department of English of Assumption University of Windsor, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

by

Neal F. McTeague

1956
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Approved by the Committee of Graduate Studies:

C. Plowley  ESB

Mary Manley

Parmice Flood
ABSTRACT

Widespread criticism of Christopher Fry's The Lady's not for Burning, has found the poetry to be "an ornament on the meaning" of a rather weak drama. The playwright has answered such criticism with the statement that the poetry (or verse) and the drama (or construction) are inseparable. With this view as a premiss, I have examined the various parts of the play - the action, the characters, the setting, and the imagery - in order to ascertain the principle of unity or inseparateness. Each feature of the play points to some aspect of the medieval concept of man as a microcosm. Within this frame of reference, the characters as 'humours' can be grouped into three classes of society corresponding to three levels of the microcosm. The three acts have a similar structural correspondence. The verse abounds in direct allusions to the four elements or to their qualities, and specific reference is made to each aspect of the cosmological view: the chain of being, the tripartite division of the cosmos, the music of the spheres and man as a
world in himself. This study, therefore, is a
description of the microcosmic framework of
Fry's first full-length comedy, an interpretation
of the action inherent in the verse and the
construction, and an account of the allegorical
significance of the play as a whole.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Miss Mary Manley, Ph.D., director of this study, I am deeply indebted for her untiring aid, and inspiring zeal. To Rev. C. P. J. Crowley, C.S.B., Ph.D., and to Rev. R. G. Miller, C.S.B. Ph.D., I am most grateful for their perspicuous remarks and valuable suggestions, made while reading the manuscript. I wish to acknowledge also the many hours of wise counsel that my teacher and esteemed friend, Mr. Patrick Flood, M.A., has so kindly granted to me.
Christopher Fry's career as a playwright began with the production in 1937 of a religious play, The Boy with a Cart. Between that year and 1946, when his first secular play appeared, the long one-act A Phoenix Too Frequent, he wrote and produced dramatizations of biblical incidents. Audiences and playreaders were familiar with his thought-provoking verse dramas when The Lady's not for Burning was performed in 1949 at the Globe Theatre by a brilliant cast headed by John Gielgud. This, his first three-act comedy, was a resounding success and Fry attained a unique place in the contemporary theatre, becoming "probably the most discussed playwright of today" after the appearance of three dramas of major importance: Venus Observed (1950), A Sleep of Prisoners (1951), and The Dark is Light Enough (1954).

The acclaim of the critics has been for the most part a tribute to Fry the poet rather than to Fry the dramatist. Straining to voice their admiration for his "richness of imagery and surging eloquence", they have stressed his lyrical powers in such phrases as "cartwheeling leaps of language", "glorious profligacy", and shimmering magic."
Audiences and readers also responded to the elegance and colour of atmosphere as well as to the coruscating verse of these post-war plays. However, although Fry's dramas achieved popular success, acknowledgement of their poetic splendour was tempered by criticism of the author's dramaturgy. One reviewer declared that Fry gave his actor nothing to do while he spoke fifty words: "Words are enough to make poetry... but they are not enough to make plays." When the verse was considered apart from the action of the drama (and it should never be so considered) it was vigorously attacked: "But surely one comes to feel that rather too much of the colour and the richness is external, and that the exuberance is not so much intensification as a defect of precise imagination."

Adverse criticism was directed at his imagery because "...(the images) are surely striving after effect... They have the air of contrivance... they add so little but a vague diffusion of fancy."

Criticism of this kind is challenged by the modest request of the author: "... I think what I am most anxious to do here is to ask that criticism should look more deeply into the nature of a play,
and to pursue the reason for its nature, rather than to try to force it into a category to which it doesn't belong."

My purpose in this study is to look more deeply into the nature of The Lady's not for Burning, and I have endeavoured to follow the gratuitous advice of the playwright: "If criticism is to be understood and profited by, writer and critic must start with the same premiss." Fry clearly and concisely states his premiss which is so essential to this study that it may well be quoted here: "As comedy is not a drama with laughs, so a verse play is not a prose play which happens to be written in verse. It has its own nature...The poetry and the construction are inseparable. Who understands the poetry understands the construction, who understands the construction understands the poetry, for the poetry is the action, and the action - even apart from the words - is the figure of the poetry..."

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1 C. Fry, An Experience of Critics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 25-6
2 Ibid., p. 26
3 Ibid., pp. 26 - 7
It is apparent from this statement that Fry stresses the essential unity of poetry (or verse) and construction (or action). I propose therefore to examine the structure and the verse of The Lady in order to discover what has so far eluded the critics of Fry's drama, and to follow the operations and epiphanies of the play as these unfold its deeper significance.

In a close reading of the text I noted the numerous and purposive allusions to the four elements. This led me to consider the fifteenth-century *dramatis personae* in the light of the medieval doctrine of the four humours. Within this frame of reference such traits as Thomas Mendip's melancholy (or 'accidia'), and Mayor Tyson's affliction, 'catarrh', took on such new significance that it seemed logical to trace a relation between all the characters and the humours. Further research in medieval physio-psychology brought out clearly the structural pattern, and the symbolic features of imagery, setting, characters and action. I found that the characters as humours could be grouped into three classes of society corresponding to the three levels of the medieval and Elizabethan
view of man as a microcosm. This study therefore is an attempt to relate the characters to the humours in the light of the doctrine of the relation of the microcosm to the macrocosm in order to discover the 'inner sense' or unifying dramatic principle of this play.
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I

THE CHARACTERS IN RELATION TO THE HUMOURS

In the search for the unifying principle or 'inseparateness' of the poetry and the construction of *The Lady's not for Burning* we must take setting, characters, dramatic situation, and imagery as clues. The scene of this spring comedy is "a room in the house of Hebble Tyson, Mayor of the small market-town of Cool Clary", and the time is "1400 either more or less exactly." 1 The characters are drawn from various levels of small-town society: the officials - Mayor, Justice, Councillor, and Chaplain; a family group consisting of Margaret Devise, sister of the Mayor, and her two sons; and four individuals whose lives are changed during the course of the one day over which the action extends. One other character, Old Skipps, around whom the conflict centres, is frequently referred to by name early in the play and his sudden appearance in Act III provides, but not by chance, the denouement and happy ending.

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The core of the dramatic situation is the false accusation of witchcraft against Jennet Jourdemayne, orphan daughter of an alchemist. She is pursued by a mob of townsfolk for the alleged crime of having turned Old Skipps, a rag-and-bone man, into a dog. A returned soldier, Thomas Mendip, in his late twenties perhaps, war-weary and bitter at the world, accuses himself of the murder of Old Skipps with the aim of diverting attention from the persecution of Jennet to himself. Moreover, he hopes that, convicted of murder, he will find his "gateway to eternal rest"²(p.17).

All this occurs in the spring of the year when the elements come into great conflict. This is alluded to by Alison, the other young girl in the play, a mere child in years "fresh from a convent", on her first appearance:

Out there, in the sparkling air, the sun and the rain
Clash together like the cymbals clashing
When David did his dance. (p.4)

These seemingly casual allusions to air, sun, and rain may be taken as a point of departure in our study of the play's inner meaning. They open the door to Fry's little world - a reality obscured by the

²C. Fry, The Lady's not for Burning. References to the text of the play will be placed after the excerpt in each case.

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"domestication of the enormous miracle." We must bear in mind that the characters are not of our time but of an age when the "dull eye of custom" had not closed on a wonderful metaphor, that of the microcosm and its relation to the macrocosm. An important feature of this doctrine was the function of the elements, three of which are alluded to by Alison. Before we examine that doctrine and the system of cosmology derived from it, we shall note how the four elements constitute an integral part of the structure and the verse of *The Lady*.

In a general way *earth* is represented by the garden adjacent to Mayor Tyson's office and it has a significant function in Act I in connection with Humphrey Devise. From this garden Thomas, the soldier, nods in through the window when he first appears and describes himself as "a black and frosted rosebud."

*Water* in the "heathen rainfall" is said to be "properly April"; it is used by Richard, the Mayor's clerk, when commanded to scrub the floor as penance for disobedience, and it is evident in the tears shed by some of the characters. Alison alludes to the "sparkling air", and Margaret Devise finds it necessary to remind her son Nicholas (and the audience) that the room is
full of air "so trim/ And fresh." To Mayor Tyson this is an obnoxious element for he is a victim of its draughts. Fire, the fourth element, burns from a torch-light in Act III, and in a sense hovers over the play inasmuch as death by burning is the doom threatening Jennet, the alleged witch. In addition to this use of the elements in relation to the setting and in general to the characters, there are numerous allusions to the properties of each of the four. An example occurs when Richard sees Alison for the first time: "Is life sending a flame to nest in my flax?" (p. 4). Later he says to Nicholas: "You have mud in your mouth." (p. 8). Another instance is the reply of Nicholas to Alison that he is certainly "mixed" for he is "Compounded of all combustibles/ The world's inside" (p. 9). Four of the characters allude to the rain pouring on Humphrey "prone in the flower-bed", and then Thomas observes that "The soft rain is raining...Out in the street" and calls attention to the witch-hunt (p. 12). Nicholas assures his mother that he can love his brother Humphrey "wet as well as dry", and Alison is sure "that yellow and wet/ Whistling is a blackbird. The hot sun/ Is out again." (p. 13). In Act II Jennet tells Thomas about her late father's experiments in alchemy and her mishap
after his death in knocking over a crucible:

What it was I split, or to what extent,  
Or in what proportion; whether the atmosphere  
Was hot, cold, moist or dry, I’ve never  
known. (pp.52-53)

Perhaps these instances suffice to point out  
how Fry has incorporated the elements of the sublunary  
sphere of the cosmos into the poetic pattern of the  
play. Our next problem is to consider how he uses the  
elements to indicate the humours of the characters. A  
brief account of the contemporary interpretation of  
medieval cosmology will provide the perspective for  
Fry’s use of the humours in characterization.

Investigations of the early Greek cosmologists  
into the nature of the universe led to the development  
of an elaborate system of metaphors which persisted as  
popular belief until the advent of modern science.  
According to these theories, all things in nature were  
compounded of the four elements, and from their con­  
stant state of flux new beings came into or passed out  
of existence. Tillyard provides a simplified descrip­  
tion of the elements as they were thought of towards  
the close of the middle ages:
Heaviest and lowest was the cold and dry element, the earth. Its natural place was the centre of the universe, of which it was the dregs. Outside earth was the region of cold and moist, the water. That solid land should thrust itself above the waters was merely one of the many instances of an extrinsic cause making a thing depart from its own intrinsic nature. Outside water was the region of hot and moist, the air. Air though nobler than water was not to be compared with the ether for purity. Just as angels took their shapes from the ether, so the devils took theirs from the air, their peculiar region. Noblest of all is fire, which next below the sphere of the moon enclosed the globe of air that girded water and earth. It was hot and dry, rarefied, invisible to human sight, and was the fitting transition to the eternal realms of the planets. In this region meteors and other transient fires were generated. These, as transient, could not come from the eternal region of the stars.

To the physiologists of the middle ages and the renaissance man's physical and mental make-up was determined by the particular blend in him of four liquids and it is well known how contemporary authors made use of the theory to mark character types; instances of this abound from Chaucer on, even into the eighteenth century.

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4 Ibid., p.61.
The Greek pioneer in medicine, Hippocrates, and Galen, a Roman physician writing in Greek, made elaborate use of the theory in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Medieval medical lore held that food, digested in the stomach, produced a substance known as 'chylus', a viscid, white, milky fluid which, conveyed to the liver, undergoes a second concoction resulting in four vital liquids or humours. It was believed that the qualities of these humours could be identified with those of the four elements. The doctrine can be illustrated by tabulation:

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<th>Elements</th>
<th>Humours</th>
<th>Common Qualities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Melancholy</td>
<td>Cold and dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Phlegm</td>
<td>Moist and cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Blood</td>
<td>Hot and moist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Choler</td>
<td>Hot and dry</td>
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The mixture of these humours in the individual was his temperament (mixture), or his complexion (folding together), or his disposition (arrangement). Perfect balance of the humours in an individual produced a perfect man, but when one humour was present to excess,

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6Tillyard, Elisabethan World Picture, p.63.
the mental qualities corresponding to this humour were also excessive and the individual would be sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, or melancholy in temperament. These terms are still current in spite of a different physio-psychology. By the sixteenth century the literary use of the word 'humour' had a psychological connotation - the idiosyncrasy which notably coloured a man's mind or temper revealing itself in external caprice or mannerism. The literature of the period abounds in characters modelled upon the predominance of one or another of the humours.

Fry's adaptation of this convention is clearly in the tradition of medieval physio-psychology which may be considered as a frame of reference for analysis of The Lady. We shall find that all the characters can be associated with one or another of the four humours. As a result of this investigation we should be able not only to see the characters and

the action in a new light but also be aware of the author's ulterior motive in using a traditional dramatic convention.

Although the title indicates that "the lady" is the central character, we may begin to examine the characters as humours by considering first, the retired soldier who precipitates the dramatic situation. Thomas Mendip is cynical and caustic about life in general and war in particular: he informs the Mayor, who, without any investigation "is perfectly satisfied/ He hasn't killed a man":

I've been unidentifiably
Floundering in Flanders for the past seven
years,
Prising open ribs to let men go
On the indefinite leave which needs no pass. (p.20)

Even apart from the echo of 'the melancholy Dane'\(^8\) the passage reveals a major cause of Mendip's misanthropy which he tries to drown "In a mumping pub where the ceiling drips humanity" (p.18). According to sixteenth century authorities, melancholy had many facets both in its normal and abnormal forms. There is

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\(^8\)Cf. *Hamlet*, III, i, 76-77.
the heavy sadness of Antonio in the first act of
The Merchant of Venice as well as the pensive, inert
melancholy of Hamlet. However, the type of which
Mendip is a victim is akin to that described by Bright:

The perturbations of melancholie are for
the most part, sadde and fearefull, and
such as rise of them: as distrust, doubt,
diffidence or dispaire, sometimes furious,
and sometimes merry in apparaunce through
a kind of Sardonian, and false laughter, as
the humour is disposed that procureth these
diversities...

The "black and frosted rosebud" as Thomas describes
himself when nodding in through the window of the
Mayor's office during much of the first act, may be
considered analogous to something planted in the earth
of the garden outside. Later, he will be found guilty
"Of jaundice, misanthropy, suicidal tendencies/ And
spreading gloom and despondency" (p.61), a state of
mind clearly depicting him as the melancholic type
described by Bright. His arrival at the Mayor's
office in Act I is for the purpose of obtaining the
conviction for self-accused murder, "I only want to
be hanged" he tells Richard, the Mayor's clerk when
seeking an interview. He had previously given the boy

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9Timothy Bright, A Treatise of Melancholy,
(n. p.: 1586), p. 99, quoted by J. B. Bamborough,
The Little World of Man (Toronto: Longmans, Green and
his myopic view of life:

I've never seen a world
So festering with damnation. I have left
Rings of beer on every alehouse table
From the salt sea-coast across half a dozen counties,
But each time I thought I was on the way
To a faintly festive hiccup
The sight of the damned world sobered me up again. (p. 1).

As a "last gamble on the human heart" he falsely accuses himself of murdering a rag-and-bone picker, the alleged victim of Jennet's witchcraft. With a flicker of chivalry Thomas demands the death sentence in order to save the 'witch' who, he supposes, is some sobbing old grandmother. During the first act he broods near the window, feverishly rebukes Margaret for her heartlessness at the sound of bells announcing the witch-hunt by the mob, treats Mayor Tyson with scorn and sarcasm when the latter refuses to listen, "I don't want to be bothered with you./ You don't belong to this parish." (p. 19), cleverly play-acts the Devil to his own advantage, and finally, finds himself, after a sight of the youth and beauty of Jennet, wavering in his determination to die. He makes, however, one last bid for death, before Hope, "that little hell-cat", gets possession of him: "Mr. Mayor, hang me for pity's sake/ For God's sake hang me, before I love that woman!" (p. 35).
In the second act Thomas masks his love, venting his absurd, splenetic opinions on the world and humanity in general together with a few pointed jibes at Jennet's imperturbability. Tappercoom, the Justice, diagnoses his ailment as melancholia and favours the Chaplain's idea of curing this soul-sickness by a "sentence" to sociable entertainment. Thomas is ordered by the Justice to spend "The evening joyously, sociably, taking part/ In the pleasures of your fellow-men." (p. 61). Such diversion was commonly prescribed by physicians as a remedy for excess of the melancholic humour.\(^10\)

Thomas, however, finds the remedy distasteful for in Act III he leaves the social gathering to join the brothers Nicholas and Humphrey in celebrating as "Benighted brothers in boredom". For Thomas it is all "tedium, tedium, tedium. The frenzied/ Ceremonial drumming of the humdrum." (p. 64). For Nicholas, "This is a night/ Of the most asphyxiating enjoyment that ever/ Sapped my youth", and Humphrey manages to drawl out

"I'm more than ready for the Last Trump." Thomas has but one suggestion: "Let us unite ourselves in a toast of ennui./ I give you a yawn: to this evening...To mortal life, women,/ All government, wars, art, science, ambitions,/ And the entire fallacy of human emotions!" (pp. 67-68)¹¹ "As they painfully yawn several times, Jennet's entrance disturbs the "heavy snowfall of disinterest" and Thomas is amused by the brothers' wrangling as to which of them shall escort Jennet to the dance in the next room. He observes that "They have impeccable manners/ When they reach a certain temperature." His own temperature rises, when, provoked by Humphrey's lecherous proposal to Jennet, he becomes momentarily choleric and roused by chivalrous love he threatens Humphrey with violence. In this feverish state Thomas confesses his love to Jennet although he will not yet give up his wish to die. In his pride he cannot bear the humiliation of admitting that in Jennet he has found a motive to live. She had already discerned that pride is the root of his

¹¹There may be conscious reference here to The Cocktail Party where Edward and Celia drink a toast to "the Guardians" (Act I, scene 2), and to "the libations" by Reilly, Julia and Alex (Act III).
misanthropy:

If you're afraid of your shadow falling across
Another life, shine less brightly upon yourself,
Step back into the rank and file of men,
Instead of preserving the magnetism of mystery
And your curious passion for death. (p. 57).

Now she listens dispassionately to his avowal of the curious passion for love, if not for life:

You force me to tell you
The disastrous truth. I love you. A misadventure
So intolerable, hell could not do more.
Nothing in the world could touch me
And you have to come and be the damnable exception. I was nicely tucked up for the night
Of eternity, and, like a restless dream
Of a fool's paradise, you, with a rainbow where
Your face is and an ignis fatuus
Worn like a rose in your girdle, come pursued
By fire, and presto! ..................
And I, the tomfool, love you. (p. 87)

When Jennet reminds him that he still means to be hanged, he tells her that she has said she'd rather burn than be seduced by Humphrey. With more logic than Thomas can command, she tells him:

My heart, my mind
Would rather burn. But may not the casting vote
Be with my body, And is the body necessarily
Always ill-advised? (p. 86).
Now he reminds her "That, loving you, I've trodden the
garden threadbare/Completing a way to save you."
And again she counters his protestation with feminine
logic and frankness: If you saved me/Without wish-
ing to save yourself, you might have saved/Your
trouble." (p.89)12 As the dénouement approaches and a
search is being made for Alizon, "the little / Fair-
haired girl", Jennet suggests that she and Margaret
"as two dispirited woman/Ask this man to admit he
did no murders", and Jennet proceeds to hold the
mirror up to nature:

There was a soldier,
Discharged and centreless, with a towering
pride
In his sensibility, and an endearing
Disposition to be a hero, who wanted
To make an example of himself to all
Erring mankind, and falling in with a witch-
hunt
His good heart took the opportunity
Of providing a diversion. O Thomas,
It was very theatrical of you to choose the
gallows. (p.91)

The simplicity of language and the speech-rhythm of
this passage stand out in relief against the self-

12Throughout the play, and especially in
speeches of Thomas and Jennet, by spirited repartee,
metaphysical conceits, word-play and the use of
natural imagery suggestive of emotional states, Fry
is consciously or unconsciously 'Elizabethan' in style.
dramatizing rhetoric and attitudinizing of Thomas and the high-flown imagery proper to the rather enigmatic character of Jennet in an earlier portion of the play. Thomas still refuses to lower his towering pride:

"She is jealous, because of my intimate relations/
With damnation. But damnation knows I love her." Even when Jennet is cleared of suspicion by the sudden appearance of Old Skipps, Thomas persists in his sour attitude toward life. Only at the last, conquered by the reality of her love for him, does he admit:

And I shall be loath to forgo one day of you,
Even for the sake of my ultimately friendly death. (p.97)

Fry has skilfully and artistically balanced these two temperaments one against the other. While Thomas is a miserable man desiring death, Jennet is a happy person seeking life. Her sanguine nature is directly contrasted with his melancholy. Although she has lived alone in her late father's house, she has no morose symptoms. She is young and beautiful, gay and optimistic even when victimized by ignorance and malice. With her poodle to which she speaks French, and the peacock with which she dines on Sundays, she has led a frivolous existence, but she objects to a scolding from
Thomas "for keeping myself to myself and out/ Of the clutch of chaos." (p.54). She sees no way out of perplexity except "on a stream of tears", and when Thomas begs her not to weep, - "May God keep you/ From being my Hellespont", she finds it necessary to remind him that "What I do/ With my own tears is for me to decide" and ends with a taunt: "I had no idea you were so afraid of water." (p.55). In Mayor Tyson's office she modestly apologizes for the intrusion and for her ruffled appearance. The townsfolk have accused her of such "a brainstorm of absurdities/ That all my fear dissolves in the humour of it." Unlike Thomas she asks protection, not punishment, "I have come/ Here to have the protection of your laughter." (p.24). But her naïveté is dissolved by Tyson's doubt of her innocence. He has her put under arrest in order that all might "be gone into at the proper time." In the first act, then, she appears so guileless, gladsome, and gracious that she is easily identified as the sanguine type.13

In the second act Jennet as a prisoner has lost some of her sprightly charm and can no longer take heart in laughter, for "horror is walking round me here/ Because nothing is as it appears to be." (p.51). As "the daughter/ Of a man who believed the universe was governed/ By certain laws" Jennet has lived by "What I touch, what I see, what I know": but now she is aware of "nothing, I think, except flakes of drifting fear/ The promise of oblivion." (p.56). However, her basically sanguine nature and her incipient love for Thomas save her from melancholy. Moreover, she has already divined that pride is the cause of his misanthropy. Finally, when love overwhelms her to the point of urging him to live for her sake, her optimism points to the prospect of salvation for them both, - redemption through joy:

You may be corrupt as ancient apples, well then
Corruption is what I most willingly harvest. (p.59)

At the end of this long speech full of images that range from "the roots of hell" to "Love still pitches his tent among/ The suns and the moons" there is a drop in the natural level of deep emotion, "I have come suddenly/ Upon my heart and where it is I see no help for." Thomas can only groan "We're lost, both
irretrievably lost" before the officials enter to de­
clare sentence of death for Jennet.

Even on the surface, without going at present
into possible deeper meaning of the lines, we recog­
nise in Jennet's expansive and tender disposition two
salient features of the sanguine nature. However, her
frank, spontaneous confession of love is misconstrued
by the eavesdroppers - Tyson, Tappercoom, and the
Chaplain as evidence of witchcraft. Incapable of
grasping the meaning of hyperbole when she says to
Thomas: "You are Evil, Hell, the Father of Lies; if
so/ Hell is my home and my days of good were a holi-
day;" (p.59), the three officials are unanimous in re-
garding her as an agent of the devil:

Tappercoom: The woman has confessed. Spargere auras
Per vulgum ambiguias. The town can go to
bed.

Tyson: It was a happy idea, eh, Tappercoom? This
will be
A great relief to my sister, and everybody
Concerned. A very nice confession, my dear.

Chaplain: And sin, whatever we might prefer, cannot
Go altogether unregarded.

Tappercoom: Young Devise
Had better go and calm the populace.
Tell them faggots will be lit at noon.
(pp. 59-60)

Thomas reacts violently to their verdict:
Oh, the corruption
Of this town when only the rich can get to
kingdom-
Come and a poor man is left to groan
In the full possession of his powers. And
she's
Not even guilty! (p. 60)

Jennet faints, and at this point references to the elements takes on rich significance: the Chaplain calls for air, Tyson for water, while Thomas pleads that they use no fire: "But no fire, do you hear? No fire!" In order to understand the symbolic values of these words, it must be recalled that Jennet as the sanguine type possesses the moist and hot qualities of air. Her collapse is the result of extreme grief caused by the verdict and her fear of what Thomas in his violence may do. An intense experience of such passions would cause the system to become cold and dry, like earth, and restoration comes from the application of heat and moisture. The Chaplain's cry "Air! Air!" is prompted by the fact that air contains both these restorative qualities. The Chaplain again knows the

14See above, p. 7.
16See above, p. 7.
remedy, as when he had suggested social diversion as a cure for Thomas' melancholy. It is ironic, however, that the bungling Mayor, who had just ordered the fearful fire to be lit the next day, should now call for water. Thomas takes advantage of what seems to be the merciful reaction of the Mayor and pleads that Jennet be spared fire. That he has succumbed to her love for him, in spite of his ungenerous and ungallant response, is clearly evident by the acceptance of his own "sentence" to social diversion provided that Jennet be allowed to join in the merry-making:

Gentlemen, I'll accept your most inhuman Sentence. I'll not disturb the indolence Of your gallows yet. But on one condition: That this lady shall take her share to-night Of awful festivity. (p.62)

When Tyson and Tappercoom in consternation raise objections, Thomas threatens that "the Lord/Chief Justice of England shall know you let a murderer/Go free."

Jennet, however, fails to relish the absurd proposal that her last night on earth be spent in dancing:

Do you think
I can go in gaiety tonight
Under the threat of to-morrow?

[17See above, p. 12.]
Yet with some degree of courage common to the sanguine type and with some persuasion from Thomas, "Shall we not suffer as wittily as we can?", she yields:

I am such
A girl of habit. I had got into the way
Of being alive. I will live as I can
This evening. (p.63)

When Thomas rather grimly resolves "And I'll live too, if it kills me", Humphrey, as a minor official, puts in a word for Jennet: "If you're going to let this clumsy-/Fisted cut-throat loose on the house to-night,/ Why not the witch-girl, too?" The Chaplain, of course, agrees, "I should like to see them dancing", whereupon Mayor Tyson solemnly declares:

We have reached a decision.
The circumstances compel us to agree
To your most unorthodox request.

Thomas has a double-edged retort:

Wisdom
At last. But listen, woman: after this evening
I have no further interest in the world.

Jennet, her thoughts fixed on the faggots of the morrow, reminds him "My interest also will not be great, I imagine/ After this evening."

The curtain falls on Act Two with the love-problem and the life-and-death-problem both unsolved. Jennet, "an unhappy fact fearing death", has told
"I care whether you live or die" but he has assured her that he wants to be hanged because "I owe it to myself. "But I can leave it/ Until the last moment."

In Act Three when Thomas tries in vain to persuade the officials to "cry-off the burning", he encounters "the yellow-snow" of Tyson's soul for the Mayor is determined that a girl who has been overheard talking of Hell and the Devil must be a witch:

Worthless creatures
Both; I call you clutter. The standard soul
Must mercilessly be maintained. No
Two ways of life. One God, one point of view.
A general acquiescence to the mean.
(p. 71)

When he bids Thomas "go where you like" the now bewildered misanthrope declares "That's nowhere in the world. But still maybe/ I can make myself useful and catch mice for an owl." The officials continue to talk of Jennet; her beauty disturbs them. Tyson "won't have evil things/ Looking so distinguished." The Chaplain is dismayed because he has treated his "angel", the beloved viol, irreverently, "I was trying to play a dance...I shouldn't venture beyond religious pieces." (pp. 72-73). The Justice reminds Tyson of Jennet's material assets: "And to-morrow, remember, you'll have her property,/ Instead of your present longing for
impropriety." Her house, he declares, will suit him nicely. Behind their glitter of office is the greed for worldly goods, for which they would sell their "standard souls.

Following this scene of corruption posing as civilization, - Justice Tappercoom advises Mayor Tyson to be "Calm and civilized. I am civilized." - the play lights up in the idyllic love blossoming in the hearts of the childlike Alison and Richard. I shall discuss them later, for they belong to a world unmarred by the threat of, or the desire for death. Their world is an earthly paradise and their love is the "redemption of joy".

Jennet meanwhile has left the good food, wine, and music of the party, most satisfying to her sanguine nature, to seek Thomas, fearing that even on such an "open-hearted night" - the moon is full -"he still might make for death." Before finding him she has to face the dilemma of a choice between her body's death in the next day's fire or her soul's death in yielding to the base desires of Humphrey. He has escorted her to the dance, triumphant over his brother Nicholas, but only to take advantage of his official position to promise her freedom if she will admit him to her prison that night. As he bargains with her, she sees that his
passion is a fire as real and destructive as the flames in which she is doomed to burn the following day. Both have the consuming power that fire has for air in the cosmos. The flames would wholly destroy her and free her from "being cornered by a young lecher" with "the manners of a sparrowhawk" (p.84). Yet, she ponders, would not choosing the faggots be a "bodily blasphemy, a suicide?" It might be "The maniac pitch of pride. Indeed, it might/ Even be sin." However, she is by nature practical, with a passion for "the essential fact" as she had once told Thomas; so, now she weighs the moral hazard involved in Humphrey's offer of freedom against the price of sacrifice of chastity, "Woefully, woefully sad my wondering brain." She is proffered lust and she prizes love:

What is deep, as love is deep, I'll have
Deeply. What is good, as love is good,
I'll have well. Then if time and space
Have any purpose, I shall belong to it.
If not, if all is a pretty fiction
To distract the cherubim and seraphim
Who so continually do cry, the least
I can do is to fill the curled shell of
the world
With human deep-sea sound, and hold it to
The ear of God, until he has appetite
To taste our salt sorrow on his lips.
And so you see it might be better to die.
Though, on the other hand, I admit it might
Be immensely foolish. (p. 85)

But, the lady's not for burning in either case. She is
saved from the spiritual death by the timely arrival of Thomas, climbing in through the garden window and threatening Humphrey:

I'll knock your apple-blossom back into the roots
Of the Tree of Knowledge where you got it from.

Jennet adroitly depolmes the chivalry of Thomas by her challenge:

And by what right, will you tell me,
Do your long ears come moralizing in
Like Perseus to Andromeda? (p.86)

She reminds him: "You, if you remember, failed/ Even to give me a choice" and concludes that "you'll agree this can hardly be said to concern you."

Her thrust has the desired effect, for his resistance is broken by the cool sarcasm; he is forced to tell her

The disastrous truth. I love you. A misadventure
So intolerable, hell could not do more.
Nothing in the world could touch me
And you have to come and be the damnable Exception. (p.87)

Now she must influence him to give up his theatrically chivalrous designs to rescue her by claiming responsibility for the disappearance of Old Skipps. With truly Elizabethan word-play she asserts:
If you saved me
Without wishing to save yourself, you
might have saved
Your trouble. (p. 89).

He suggests that they elude Humphrey and Nicholas and talk "where there isn't quite so much insect life". She explains to him something of what her thoughts were while sparring for time with Humphrey: "My heart, my mind/
Would rather burn. But may not the casting vote/
Be with the body" as if to stress that she would purge or purify her heart and mind, but may not her body be spared from the fire? (p. 88)

Her fears of physical death are dispelled when the innocent young lovers who had run away to be happy together, return with Old Skipps to Tyson's office and find that the phlegmatic old Mayor has fallen asleep after the dance. Nicholas and Humphrey have given up their pursuit of Jennet, and Justice Tappercoom, convinced by the arrival of Old Skipps that Jennet is no witch, advises her to steal out of town before daybreak. She persuades Thomas to accompany her, for, sanguine as always, "I must be/ Out of this town before daylight comes, and somewhere/ Who knows where, begin again."
(p. 97) She has assured him "only another/ Fifty years and then I promise to let you go", but he, still incredulous that anyone can be so optimistic in a world fester-
ing with damnation, cautions her:

Thomas: Do you see those roofs and spires?
     There sleep hypocrisy, porcous pomposity,
     greed,
     Lust, vulgarity, cruelty, trickery, sham
     And all possible nitwittery - are you
     suggesting fifty
     Years of that?

Jennet: I was only suggesting fifty
     years of me.

Thomas: Girl, you haven't changed the world.
     Glimmer as you will, the world's not changed
     I love you, but the world's not changed.
     Perhaps
     I could draw you up over my eyes for a time
     But the world sickens me still.

Jennet: And do you think
     Your gesture of death is going to change
     it? Except
     For me.

Thomas: Oh, the unholy mantrap of love! (pp.96-97)\(^{18}\)

Thomas yields as her love overcomes his fear, and he
tells her "I have to see you home, though neither of us/
Knows where on earth it is." He assures her that he
knows he cannot change the world: "I know my limita-
tions./ When the landscape goes to seed, the wind is

\(^{18}\) The thrice-repeated 'fifty years' and
'the world's not changed' pinpoint the vices and
crimes of humanity which sicken Thomas and make him
court death. Satire on modern society is as much a
feature of this comedy as of Jonson's comedy of humours.
On the pessimism and sombre melancholy of the fifteenth
century, cf. J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages
(New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954), Ch. II.
obsessed/ By to-morrow". Jennet is reminded that
the morrow is peril when she hears "the pickaxe voice
of a cock, beginning/ To break up the night" Before
they escape she puts one more question to him: "Am I
an inconvenience/ To you," No longer seeing the world
as hell, but rather as a purgatorial experience, in
which redemption by joy is possible (and yet clinging
to a shred of self-love), he replies:

As inevitably as original sin.
And I shall be loath to forgo one day of
you,
Even for the sake of my ultimate friendly
death. (p.97)

He has finally cast his vote for life on earth with
love. The play ends with his prayer, "And God have
mercy on our souls." We are now aware of the conflict
between two diametrically opposed temperaments. Instead
of longing for annihilation of the body in order to es­
cape from "the festering damnation of the world"("when
the landscape goes to seed"), the pessimism of melancholic

\[19\]Within the scope of this study it has not
been possible to call attention to the wealth of
Fry’s literary allusions, but it should be noted that
these lines state the theme of Shelley’s Ode to the
West Wind. The following quotation echoes Hamlet,
I, 1, 149-55: "I have heard the cock...Awake the god
of day", and the anagogical interpretation of this
passage and of Fry’s may well be to suggest redemption
through the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord. Cf.
Matt. xxvi, 34 and 75. It should also be stated that
Fry’s comedy is set in the month of April on the
"open-hearted night"of the paschal moon.
Thomas has been polarized by the optimism of sanguine Jennet ("the wind is obsessed by to-morrow"). Although this conflict is close to the heart of the play, we must now discuss briefly the temperaments of other characters in relation to the basic scheme.

The innocent lovers, Richard and Alison, present no difficulty in the task of identifying their dominant humours, Fry has taken care to mark this childlike couple explicitly. When Thomas first sees Richard busily computing figures in the Mayor's office, he calls to him through the window: "You calculating piece of clay." (p.1). Later, he says that the boy is "still damp from the cocoon" (p.3). When Alison enters she sees Richard as hidden in a cloud of crimson Catherine-wheels" (p.4). These images derive respectively from the elements of earth, water, and air. Since all of them concern Richard we may conclude that in him is a mixture of melancholy, phlegm and blood.20 He is deficient in fire. Nowhere in the play does Richard show

20See above, p. 7.
signs of the fiery passion of anger. He is a "green boy" who meedly accepts a penance from Tyson for disobedience. Although he falls in love at sight with Alizon, there is in him no evidence of Humphrey's lust or of Nicholas' struggle to possess her. Richard perceives Alizon as "a flame to nest in my flax" (p.4). Indeed, Alizon is precisely that. She enters from above, from the air, taking two steps down: the first brings her to the level of water, and the second to the earth. Talking aloud to herself she recalls the counsel of the "substantial nun" who had guided her to the Mayor's office:

Two steps down, she said. One, two,
The floor. Now I begin to be altogether
Different - I suppose. (p.4).

Alizon is a rare, delicate, gentle girl "mercifully without spots", the incarnation of innocence, purity and grace. Although "of fire", she is not choleric; her fire is that of the high ethereal region. Her fire must not be confused with that of Nicholas who is "composed of all combustibles/ The world's inside."

This infernal fire makes him brash, bellicose and boastful, and he probably represents the abnormal humour of

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21 Cf. Tillyard, Elizabethan World Picture, pp. 36-7. Alizon's nature would seem to be that of the fifth element, ether, according to one theory.
"furious melancholy arising from choler adust". In this way he is the opposite of his brother Humphrey, "Like the two ends of the same thought" (p.10). The latter is "very nearly black" and "swart", and as Alizon said of him, "When he dies it may be hard to picture him/ Agreeable to the utter white of heaven" (p.6). The lazy, sluggish Humphrey, knocked into the mud by Nicholas, expostulates:

My dear Mother, I didn't knock myself down. Why Should I pick myself up? (p.14)

Later Thomas will also knock him down, yet he is never provoked to anger. Nicholas describes himself quite aptly: "But I was conceived as a hammer/ And born in a rising wind. I apologize/ For boasting..." (p.8).

Later in the play, he tells of "Hammering the door and yelling like a slaughter-house/ Until the cook came and let me out" (p.88) His pugnacity is the antithesis of the torpid temperament of Humphrey whom Nicholas at different times calls "dismal coprolite", "blastoderm", "boy of gloom." Of the earth characters, Humphrey is the most earthy, in his conversation, appearance, and lecherous conduct.

22Babb, Elizabethan Malady, p. 37.
Tyson is characterized by phlegm, associated with the element of water. He is identified by his "Tiresome catarrh" (pp.17 & 71), an affliction considered to be a manifestation of an abnormal or corrupt humour, caused by the humour rising directly from the liver to the brain without passing through the heart. Tyson's stupidity is characteristic of the phlegmatic complexion. These physical and mental traits in him are further stressed by his complaint that he is a "victim to air" (p.70). This abnormality has its counterpart among the elements, for water is also a victim to air. In Tyson's ineffectual puttering, his total inability to deal with situations for which he has no guiding precedent, and his reiteration to set phrases and platitudes, we have evidence of the phlegmatic humour in the scheme of the play.

Margaret Devize, the mother of Nicholas and Humphrey, is "the other end" of the phlegmatic type. In her emotionless, static existence she complements the slow, prodding dullness of her brother Mayor Tyson. Complacent apathy characterizes her in speech and action.

Towards her sons she displays no sign of maternal interest, undisturbed by Nicholas' statement that he has killed his brother or by the blood on his head when Nicholas was hit by a brick hurled by one of the witch-hunting mob. She is as indifferent to Jennet's plight as to Thomas' rebukes for her callousness. Her one concern is the success of the party at which she was expecting to announce the engagement of the marriage she had arranged between Humphrey and Alizon. Completely self-centred, she is incapable of tenderness and indifferent to suffering. Her disposition is epitomized in one of her comments: "One day I shall burst my bud/ Of calm, and blossom into hysteria." (p.10). Such a negative character can only be classified as the phlegmatic type.

Both the Chaplain and Justice Tappercoom have 'warm' temperaments. The former is boyishly emotional in spite of his middle-age, and the latter, somewhat younger, has not lost the zest proper to healthy youth. The Chaplain's whimsical proposals to solve the problems facing Tappercoom and Tyson are tender and ironically humorous. His choler, having lost its irascible fire, is adjusted and nothing appears but the
hopeful and hilarious aspects of his complexion. He alone perceives that Thomas "might be wooed/ From his apitude for death by being happier", and although apologetic, "I am afraid/ I appear rhapsodical" (p. 42), he goes on to suggest that if they invite Thomas to share in the evening's festivities, his melancholy might be cured. Tappercoom's sanguine qualities are evident in his heartiness, his nonchalance in regard to duties, and an appetite for wine that may be responsible for his rotund appearance described in a stage direction: "Edward Tappercoom, the town's Justice, mountainously rolling up and down the room."

Forthright in speech, he cautions Tyson to "avoid lechery" when the latter finds his "humanity" awakened at the sight of Jennet's youthful beauty. Reluctantly, Tappercoom leaves the party when Old Skipps is brought in as proof that Jennet is no witch bothered with details of official routine: and he refuses to be disturbed

I'm too amiable to-night
To controvert any course of events. (p.92)

When Skipps, with unsteady gait, for "He floats in the heaven of the grape" roars continually "Alleluia!",

Tappercoom bids someone "take him home to his hovel" and drops into racy prose:

He'll wake your guests and spoil their pleasure. 
They're all sitting half-sunk in a reef of collars. 
Even the dear good Chaplain has taken so many glassesful of repentance he's almost unconscious of the existence of sin. (p. 94)

When Tappercoom advises Jennet to steal out of town before dawn, he may perhaps have in mind the legal claim of her property as he had once hinted. However, it is a gratuitous suggestion and may be taken as another mark of his sanguine nature.

Now that we have analyzed Fry's characters in the light of the humours, we may well ask why the author resorted to a medieval convention. Before attempting an answer, we may note as significant the fact that Fry's comedies are not composed in the manner and method of modern photographic realism. It would seem that Fry believes that scientific progress has divorced man from the world of wonder and forced him to live under "the dull eye of custom." As a result man has become blind to the mystery and
to the miracle of nature, to the meaning of world-order, the "chain of being", according to the traditional metaphor which "served to express the unimaginable plenitude of God's creation, its unaltering order, and its ultimate unity." It would also seem that Fry feels the need of restoring to wonder the drama and joy which have been washed out of the theatre by the upsurge of realistic prose technique. Perhaps the answer to the question lies in Fry's words:

But there are times in the state of man when comedy has a special worth, and the present is one of them: a time when the loudest faith has been faith in a trampling materialism, when literature has been thought unrealistic which did not mark and remark our poverty and doom. Joy (of a kind) has been all on the devil's side, and one of the necessities of our time is to redeem it. 26

Fry's method of redeeming joy includes, on the technical side, the use of verse in his dramas. As for the matter and the relation of this to the humours of the characters in The Lady, we must examine the structure of the play. It should be noted, however, that in using psychology as the basis of the

25Tillyard, Elizabethan World Picture, p. 25.

26C. Fry, "Comedy", Adelphi, XXVII (November, 1950), 29.
inner structure, Fry revives a view of man in relation to the cosmos which, until the nineteenth century, had been considered a marvellous analogy, a kind of poetry in itself. Early in the play, we find the poet adapting Aristotle and rejoicing in the perception of the similarity of dissimilars: "What a wonderful thing is metaphor". More wonderful, however, is the construction of the play on the expansion of a single metaphor. What that metaphor is and how it functions in the play is the task I now take up.
II

THE HUMOURS IN RELATION TO THE MICRO COSM

For his first comedy, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, Fry used as the basis of the plot a story of the Matron of Ephesus, which "was got from Jeremy Taylor who had it from Petronius." In setting, plot, and characters, it belongs to antiquity, and against this backdrop Fry ingeniously resorted to one of the popular symbols of that age, the phoenix. The mythical bird adequately embodies Fry's theme (rebirth from grief and despair to joyous living) and the symbolism enriches the action with pointed significance. The


28 The legend of the fabulous bird which lived five hundred years or longer, consumed in fire by its own act and reborn from its ashes, is reported in a tale by Hesodotus (Histories, ii, 73). It is a symbol of the Resurrection in a long poem by Lactantius Firmianus in the 4th century, *De Ave Phoenice* which influenced the Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Phoenix*, attributed to Cynewulf. In *Cymbeline*, i, v. 19, an allusion to "the Arabian bird" connotes the rare virtue of Imogen. Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 1. 1699, also compares Virtue with the Phoenix. The rebirth theme associated with the phoenix is a heritage from heathen nations according to L. N. Neinhauser, "The Legend of the Phoenix", in *The Catholic Educational Review*, XIX (1921), 129-141.

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setting of his second comedy, *The Lady's not for Burning* is medieval England and in appearance "the characters are as much fifteenth century as anything." This rather casual stage direction may obliquely refer to the contemporary relevance he intends the play should bear. The medieval frame of reference here was an even greater challenge than the use of classical devices in the first play where the symbol of the phoenix is a potent structural factor. In a similar way the action of *The Lady* is entrenched in the popular traditions, institutions, and perspectives of the late middle ages, - witchcraft, alchemy, physico-psychology, and traditional Catholic doctrine concerning sin, hell, the devil, temptation, virtue, and grace. Underlying his treatment of these matters in the medieval conception of the relation of the microcosm to the macrocosm. A discussion of this correspondence is basic to an understanding of Fry's purpose.

Towards the end of the first act of *The Lady*, Thomas Mendip, having been accused of being the Devil, jocularly tells Humphrey that the Day of Judgement is fixed for that night, and Margaret's comment, that she was sure it would come in autumn, elecits
from Thomas this view of the genesis of man:

Consider: vastiness lusted, mother,
A huge heaving desire, overwhelming
solitude,
And the mountain-belly of Time laboured
And brought forth man, the mouse.
The spheres churned on,
Hoping to charm our ears
With sufficient organ-music, sadly sent
out
On the wrong wave of sound; but still
they roll
Fabulous and fine, a roundabout
Of doomed and golden notes. (p.33)

Here we have specific reference to early Greek cosmology, especially to the theories of Pythagoras:29 man is a product of the cosmos, the spheres move in a harmony inaudible to man. Earlier, Thomas asked,

"Who benefits, before God, By this concatenation of existences...?" This last phrase introduces the medieval and Elizabethan notion of universal order imaginatively described as "the vast chain of being."30


30 Cf. Tillyard, Elizabethan World Picture, p. 61, citing the Pythagorean doctrine as preserved by Photius, the Byzantine lexicographer, in his life of Pythagoras.
Alizon's words, "Men, to me, are a world in them­elves", allude to the microcosm, 'the little world of man'. Jennet, when faced with seduction by Humphrey, reasons: "My heart, my mind/ Would rather burn. But may not the casting vote/ Be with my body?" (p.88). She is thinking in terms of the three-fold division in man which corresponds to a three-fold division of the cosmos. These allusions to the cosmos, the chain of being, the tripartite division, and to man as a world in himself, indicate Fry's use of the medieval and Elizabethan theory of the correspondence of microcosm to macrocosm as a framework in the structure of The Lady. A synopsis of that theory is essential at this point: Each of the three regions of the universe had a precise function: the upper and superior part, the celestial or angelical, was a sphere of fiery ether, (as in Dante's and Milton's cosmography) which dominated the universe. Beneath it was the region of the stars ruled by the sun. Lowest of all was the sub-lunary sphere with the earth as the centre according to the Ptolemaic system. In the microcosm, the head, seat of the intellectual faculties and the rational soul, designated as the 'animal spirit', was the counterpart of the angelical portion of the macrocosm.
The heart, the "sunne of man's body", was the seat of the irascible and concupiscible passions and known as the 'vital spirit', corresponded to the stellar region in the universe. In the lowest part of the body, the stomach, was located the 'natural spirit', in control of the processes of nourishment, growth and reproduction, and this represents the sublunar region.  

According to the doctrine of 'the chain of being', man "sums up in himself the total functions of earthly phenomena. (For this reason he was called the little world or microcosm.)" With his double nature man's unique function was that of "binding together all creation, of bridging the greatest cosmic chasm, that between matter and spirit...(his) key position...greatly exercised the human imagination."  

This is the world of wonder upon which Fry has focused his comic vision, and the pattern of the microcosm can be traced in *The Lady* by noting the three-fold

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33 Ibid., p. 60.
grouping of characters. In the play there are, as in the universe and in man, three levels of creatures: an upper, middle and lower. First, there are the officials-Mayor Tyson, Justice Tapperoom, Councillor Humphrey Devize, and the Chaplain, representatives of State and Church, responsible for the exercise of authority and maintenance of order in the little town of Cool Clary. By an ironic inversion, they correspond to the celestial region and to the intellect. The second group consists of Thomas and Jennet, and Richard and Alizon, who, in the course of the action are brought together as couples and look forward to happiness through love and marriage. They are the counterpart to the heart in the microcosm and to the stellar region in the macrocosm. A third group comprises Margaret Devize, her son Nicholas, the mob citizenry, and Old Skipps; these are the sublunary level, the earth, and parallel the lower functions in man. Of this citizen group which we shall now examine, those on stage, Margaret, Nicholas and Old Skipps, may be taken as representative of those off stage, - the mob, which has, however, a significant function in the play, as we shall see.

In Act I, Thomas talks of drinking in the local pub. There, among the mob, "damnation's pretty
active", in fact, damnation has been "Licking her lips over gossip of murder and witchcraft; / There's mischief brewing for someone." (p.1) Thomas has been so sobered up by "The sight of the damned world" that he comes to the Mayor for a death-sentence, the soul's delivery from his body:

Flesh
Weighs like a thousand years, and every morning
Wakes heavier for an intake of uproariously comic dreams which smell of henbane.
Guts, humours, ventricles, nerves, fibres
And fat - the arterial labyrinth, body's hell.
Still, it was the first thing my mother gave me,
God rest her soul. (p.2)

This speech implies the association of the local society with the lowest element in the microcosm and the lowest or sublunary part of the universe. Later, as church-bells announce that the witch-hunt is on, the townsfolk gather to carry out their nefarious designs and Thomas describes what is taking place off-stage:

If we listened, we could hear
How the hunters, having washed the dinner things,
Are now toiling up and down the blind alleys
Which they think are their immortal soul
To scour themselves in the blood of a grandmother. (p.13)
The image suggests the fallen nature of man expelled from Paradise suffering the effects of original sin; it points to physical needs being satisfied in "hunting" and "dinner things", to the darkened intellect in "blind alleys", to the will directed to evil ends in "scour themselves" - a ritual for the purpose of destruction of evil and cleansing in the blood of the victim.

About all this, Margaret, the only woman in the citizen group, is fatuously complacent, a state of mind which may perhaps exemplify England's unconcern in the condemnation of Joan of Arc in the fifteenth century. Margaret gives her own profile: "You really mustn't expect me to be Christian/ In two directions at once" - she cannot be patient with her sons and sympathetic towards the hunted Jennet.

The mob assumes something of a major role when Humphrey reports "a sizeable rumpus... A minor kind of bloody revolution" occurring in the street as they cry for the death of Jennet, now seeking refuge in the Mayor's office. Then the Chaplain enters to apologize for being late for prayers and explains:

But life has such
Diversity, I sometimes remarkably lose
Eternity in the passing moment. Just now
In the street there's a certain 
boisterous interest 
In a spiritual matter. (p.31)

In the passing moments of the play our sense of time is suspended now and then by the immediacy of the situation. Here, for example, we think of another "boisterous interest" that led the mob without to clamour for the death of One within, and bumbling officials could "lose eternity in the passing moment."

The Chaplain's next words have relevancy beyond the context: "Sin, as well as God,/ Moves in a most mysterious way." His logic is also lost on his obdurate colleagues: "If he is the doer of the damage/ Can it be she also?" He is powerless to prevent his "flock" from "employing/ Fisticuffs over this very question." The mob continues in its role of agitator, disputing whether Thomas as the devil, or Jennet as a witch, has caused the disappearance of Old Skipps.

In Act II Margaret reports excitedly on the rebellious spirit and the frenzied actions of the crowd in the street. In spite of the hilarious tone, one senses the tragic futility of violent demonstrations and public revolts. The "blood in the gutter from somebody's head", the use of "words/ That are only fit for the Bible", the "groans and screams" as
they saw, in the midst of the tumult, "the star fall over our roof", - all this portrays the chaos that prevails in the sublunary sphere when human passions are not governed by reason.

The only other mob incident, also off stage, is the party in Act III, "the few who could bring themselves/ To bring themselves" to celebrate the expected engagement of Humphrey and Alizon. Perhaps these guests represent the modern mob of the social whirl:

They're very nervous
And need considerable jollying, Goose liver,
Gold larks, cranberry tarts and sucking pig,
And now everyone looks as though they only
Wanted to eat each other. (p.65)

As Margaret thus describes her guests we can understand that Thomas finds participation in the festivities less a "cure" for his melancholy than an aggravation of the malady. For him it is "tedium, tedium tedium. The frenzied/ Ceremonial drumming of the humdrum." When Jennet appears, radiant, in a gown lent to her by Margaret, "one of my first gowns which has hung in the wardrobe/ Four-and-twenty unencouraging years", she is no longer a menace but rather a delightful consternation, charming some with her "gentleness, consideration and gaiety", though
disturbing to the Mayor ("I won't have evil things/
Looking so distinguished").

The last we hear of the guests is Tappercoom's
comment on their comatose state after the night's
revelry. Old Skipps has finally appeared in the flesh
brought to Tyson's house through the efforts of
Richard and Alizon. Only these innocent, spiritually-
minded young lovers have enough sense of responsibil-
ity and selflessness to act for the sake of truth and
charity. Although the fact that the rag-and-bone man
is alive, and not a victim of diabolism or witch-
craft, should be a relief to the whole community, he
proves to be a cause of further annoyance to the
officials. No one knows what to do with him. Justice
Tappercoom bids someone "take him home to his hovel"
before he wakes the guests" all sitting half sunk in
a reef of collars."

Such is the state of society as represented
by the sublunary characters. Cloyed with pleasure,
to the point of "a kind of somnolent inattention",
they are "almost unconscious of the existence of sin"
as Tappercoom says of them.
The officials, the head of the microcosm, are anything but enlightened rulers. In Act I, Mayor Tyson reveals his stupidity and irrational fears which unfit him for office; he "merely festoons the room with his presence". When, in Act II, he consults with Justice Tappercoom, he assumes the role of a political potentate toiling under the weight of life - death urgencies. The sanguine Justice jovially tests with a nonchalance that effectively counter-points Tyson's fumbling investigation:

Tyson: Ah, yes,
     Jourdemayne; what are we to make of her?
     Wealthy, they tell me. But on the other hand
     Quite affectingly handsome. Sad, you know.
     We see where the eye can't come, eh, Tappercoom?
     And all's not glorious within; no use
     Saying it is. - I had a handkerchief.
     Ah yes; buried amongst all this evidence.

Tappercoom: Now, no poetics, Tyson. Blow your nose
     And avoid lechery. Keep your eye on the evidence
     Against her; there's plenty of it there.
     Religion
     Has made an honest woman of the supernatural
     And we won't have it kicking over the traces again,
     Will we, Chaplain?

Meanwhile, the Chaplain sleeps "In the Land of Nod",
ironically dreaming of "Jacob's Ladder ... made entirely
of diminished sevenths". When he awakes, however,
he proves to be more perspicacious than his colleagues.
His suggestion as to how to deal with Thomas contains so much good sense that Tyson, absorbed by a plan which "Is almost certainly forming itself in my head", pays no heed to it while Tappercoom merely questions it:

So
You suggest, Chaplain, we let him bibulate From glass to glass this evening, help him to A denial of his guilt and get him off our hands Before daybreak gets the town on its feet again? (p.42)

By this time, "An idea has formed" in Tyson's mind and in spite of the Chaplain's caution that "Nothing/Is altogether what we suppose it to be", Tyson plans to bring the prisoners from their cell to his office so that the officials may eavesdrop:

A hypothetical Devil, Tappercoom, Brought into conversation with a witch. A dialogue of Hell, perhaps, and conclusive. Or one or other by their exchange of words Will prove to be innocent, or we shall have proof Positive of guilt. (p.47)

As we have already seen, the officials misapprehend what they "only observe"\footnote{\textbf{34} The following version of one of Fry's favourite themes adds to the Chaplain's proviso, points to the "madness" of the officials and enlightens the "wisdom" of Jennet and Thomas: What appears Is so unlike what is. And what is madness To those who only observe, is often wisdom To those to whom it happens. Cf. C. Fry, \textit{A Phoenix Too Frequent}, p. 31.} and sentence Jennet to burn.

\footnote{\textbf{34} The following version of one of Fry's favourite themes adds to the Chaplain's proviso, points to the "madness" of the officials and enlightens the "wisdom" of Jennet and Thomas: What appears Is so unlike what is. And what is madness To those who only observe, is often wisdom To those to whom it happens. Cf. C. Fry, \textit{A Phoenix Too Frequent}, p. 31.}
and Thomas to live "joyously".

When Jennet appears in Act III as "The all unhallows Eve to his poor Adam", Tyson suffers a "belated visit of the wanton flesh". His burning desires drive him to distraction: "We must burn her/ Before she destroys our reason". (p.72) Mellowed with wine, Tappercoom ridicules the tearful Tyson: "Are you trying to get rid of temptation/ Tyson?" The Justice is untroubled by lust which, for him, is a matter of "Hey nonny yes or Hey nonny no." Instead of Jennet's person, he covets her property and so motivated, he cunningly calms Tyson:

You must wait
Until to-morrow, like a reasonable chap,
And to-morrow, remember, you'll have her property
Instead of your present longing for impropriety.
And her house, now I come to think of it,
Will suit me nicely. (pp. 73-4)

The Chaplain, meanwhile, snivels over his debasement of his art: "I've treated her with an abomination/
That maketh desolate". His innocent "sins of sound" counterpoint the malice of the representatives of the state. Later Humphrey corners Jennet with his treacherous bargaining. Like his uncle, the Mayor, young Devize is a contemptible lecher; both threaten Jennet with fire: he with his flaming passion, Tyson with his
sentence of burning, dictated by fear and lust. As their humours symbolically suggest, the Councillor and the Mayor have fallen to the lowest levels of earth and water respectively. The sanguine-tempered Justice and the 'adusted' Chaplain, saved from such bodily degradation by their respective loves of wine and of music, are more spirited types. The Chaplain's fancy to have Jennet and Thomas dance together, and Tapperooom's rather gratuitous suggestion that Jennet escape from the town, are important factors in the resolution of the conflict. While these two aid the salvation of Jennet and Thomas, Tyson and his nephew work for their downfall and perdition. With the officials, Fry has skilfully achieved further contrapuntal balance which pervades the play.

In our examination of the citizenry and officialdom we have noted their respective correspondence to the lowest and highest levels of the tripartite divisions of the microcosm and the function of this parallel in the characterization of individuals in each group. We shall now see a
similar relationship between the middle group of characters and the second region of the microcosm. The two pair of lovers are the counterpart of the heart, the "king of the middle portion of the body."\textsuperscript{35}

If man is the nexus, in the chain of being, between matter and spirit, then the heart may be said to be the link between body and soul. It is in itself a micro-microcosm, an "inland sea" of wonder, mystery and paradox. Fry has chosen this plane of the triple hierarchy for the protagonists Thomas and Jennet, and for the significant roles played by Richard and Alizon. These four, in speech and act, develop schematically the chief concerns of human existence: love and hatred, hope and despair, joy and sorrow, happiness and affliction. As the play ends with the union of the lovers we see a happy reconciliation of these opposites.

Each of the four has a characteristic "humour". Thomas, as we have seen, is splenetic, melancholy, world-weary, even cynical. Jennet is his opposite, the buoyant, sanguine type. They complement each other and this blend suggests harmony. Alizon had been, as a mere child, placed in a convent. Her father, fearing he

\textsuperscript{35}Tillyard, \textit{Elizabethan World Picture}, p.65.
could not find a dowry for his sixth daughter, "made up his mind/ To simplify matters and let me marry God./ He gave me to a convent." (p.6) When "husbands fell into my sisters' laps...he looked round and found me/ Humphrey Devize." Alizon is led to the Mayor's garden by "a substantial nun" in order to meet her prospective husband. Her appearance seems to Thomas Mendip a "Revelation" and to young Richard "a flame". Her talk is of "light", "doves", "sun", "sparkling air", "April blindness", and "crimson Catherine-wheels." The imagery connotes her youth, innocence, blithe spirit, and a baffling mysterious charm. When Richard describes himself as "Purgatory-colour", Alizon remarks, "It's on the way to grace." (p.6) Richard tells her that he has no family:

All I can claim as my flesh and blood
Is what I stand up in. I wasn't born,
I was come-across. In the dusk of one Septuagesima
A priest found an infant, about ten inches long,
Crammed into the poor-box. The money had all
Been taken. Nothing was there except myself,
I was the baby, as it turned out. The priest,
Thinking that I might have eaten the money, held me
Upside down and shook me, which encouraged me
To live, I suppose, and I lived. (p.5)
This orphan, attracted by Alizon's beauty, is equally sensitive to Jennet's: "She is lovely. She is certain to be good." Like Alizon, he has none of the irrational fears which the others, Thomas excepted, have of the 'witch'. These two innocents, the Miranda and Ferdinand of The Lady are disposed to see all things as good. They, too, are tested during the course of the action, for Alizon must avoid the attentions of both Humphrey and Nicholas, while Richard, for disobeying the Mayor in refusing to fetch a constable to arrest Jennet, has to do penance and scrub the floor. Like Alizon, he is concerned about Jennet's safety: "And all/ The time I find myself praying under my breath/ That something will save her." (p.75)

Thomas, though cynical about most things in life, sees the Power behind the cosmos: "Tides turn with a similar sort of whisper."

In Act III a new dimension enters the play when Alizon leaves the party to find Richard. Their talk of the little things of nature, crickets and the golden humblebee, and of the high workings of grace, the saints and "our father God", is a revelation of the candour of their souls. When she tells him that she is not able to love "the others" because of what they
mean to do to Jennet when morning comes, he reminds her, "But there are laws/ And if someone fails them-" whereupon she interrupts with, "I shall run/ Away from laws if laws can't live in the heart." (p.76) Her spiritual insight is keener than his, for he is "a green boy" as the others see him, and "the to-and-fro fellow" as he describes himself. She leads him to see their destiny as a vocation:

Richard: Do you come to me
Because you can never love the others?

Alizon: Our father
God moved many lives to show you to me.
I think that is the way it must have happened.
It was complicated, but very kind.

Richard: If I asked you
If you could ever love me, I should know
For certain that I was no longer rational.

Alizon: I love you quite as much as I love St. Anthony
And rather more than I love St. John Chrysostom.

Richard: But putting haloes on one side, as a man
Could you love me, Alizon?

Alizon: I have become
A woman, Richard, because I love you.
I know
I was a child three hours ago. And yet
I love you as deeply as many years could make me,
But less deeply than many years will make me. (p.77)

For Alizon, all in life "has come to one meeting
place" in love, and for Richard, happiness is "newly born." Before turning to practical things—of his savings and of the old priest who found him as the one to help them find happiness in marriage, - he asks:

"Shall we make the future, however much it roars/ Lie down with our happiness?" While he fetches the savings, she will wait at the gate and "I can have a word with the saints Theresa and Christopher:/ They may have some suggestions." His whispered Prayer is, "No disillusion for her, safety, peace,/ And a good world, as good as she has made it!" (p.79)

The strange workings of the human heart are unfolded in the course of the play. Alizon, promised in marriage to Humphrey, "has found her way to Richard", the foundling who loved her at first sight. Thomas, although desperately seeking death, has begun to see in Jennet a reason to live, while she, threatened with death by burning and with seduction by Humphrey, is saved from the former fate by the charity of Richard and Alizon. Running away to be married, they risked their happiness to return with Old Skipps, whom they came across and brought back to prove the innocence of Jennet: "We had to come back, you see, because nobody now/ Will be able to burn her", as Alizon explains. (p.92) The ironic contrast presented by the
juxtaposition of the incidents is not unlike the waves of paradox that often engulf the heart of man. Considered singly, the desires of each individual seem to pull in opposite directions and offer little significance. But when we see the situation in its totality, we identify Thomas and Jennet as "two ends of the same thought", or the twinned vision of the same nature, and a richer meaning becomes apparent - the phoenix-ness of spring wherein death is the law of life. If the Thomas-Jennet coupling expresses the complexity of the mystery, the Richard-Alizon union is the key to the simplicity of the ultimate solution.

The phoenix theme is also brought out in the imagery at several moments of the play. When Jennet and Thomas are left alone to talk for the benefit of eavesdropping officials bent on evidence of guilt, their conversation is in riddle-like terms. The rain, Thomas remarks, has the "holy scent" of baptism; yet it is only a "heathen rainfall" not a supernatural rebirth but the natural rebirth of a spring garden: "And palingenesis has come again..." (p.49). The metaphor of fertility is used again as he described the heavens:

I can see
The sky's pale belly glowing and growing big,
Soon to deliver the moon.
The aura of twilight is further enhanced by his allusion to "A darkening land sunken into prayer" as he quotes "Nunc dimittis." The aged Simeon, in the twilight of his life, holding in his arms the new-born Saviour, looked forward to rebirth through grace. Two worlds meet in "the darkening land" at the end of day as at the end of life, twilight is the link between life and death.

The sudden threat of death has cast its shadow "sharp as rocks" over Jennet's life. She is lost as "The light draws off", unaware that she must lose her life in order to find it. Thomas would have her laugh, for laughter "is an irrelevancy/ Which almost amounts to a revelation". Once more the rebirth is alluded to just as certainly as "the pale belly of the sky", an irrelevancy, is "Soon to deliver the moon", a revelation.

When Jennet describes her simple, lonely routine of life, since her father's death, Thomas berates her in one of the most profound passages in the play. He proves to her that she has "no eyes, no ears, / No senses" and is incapable of perceiving "Creation's vast and exquisite/ Dilemma! where altercation thrums", across the heavens, while here, "each acorn drops/
Arguing to earth, and pollen's all polemic. And she has missed the "contradictory" and the "cabbalistic" nature of a universe which is "Glittering with conflict as with diamonds:"

We have wasted paradox and mystery on you
When all you ask us for, is cause and effect!-
A copy of your birth-certificate was all you needed
To make you at peace with Creation. How uneconomical
The whole thing's been. (p.54)

Is it not ironical that the death-seeking Thomas should be the one to perceive the wonder and mystery of the world, while Jennet who longs to live is content to lead the dead life under "the dull eye of custom"? Why should he wish to die? Why should she want to live?
This inversion adds to the tension that exists between the two characters and makes their unity all the more desirable. Thomas and Jennet must be seen as two halves of a whole, each incomplete until actualized by love.

Such were the circumstances of the birth of love between Thomas and Jennet. Before it can blossom forth, love must germinate in the suffering that awaits them, symbolized by the "Aprilness" of earth. It is the mystery of life and death that we hear in the background.

Over their meeting in the third act, during the
course of the party, hovers imagery of the moon, along with "a strange wind" and "moors of mortality". This seems to symbolize the change in "that inland sea, the heart-", for Thomas questions as she rhapsodizes about the mysterious beauty of the night sky: "Where has the girl I spoke to this evening gone/ With her Essential Fact?" (p.68) When Humphrey and Nicholas appear, quarreling about the right to escort Jennet back to the dance, and she leaves with the former, Thomas is aware of a new "angle of experience", "Like the heart going out of me, by which it avoids/ Having to break." For the first time, we detect a change in him; he is humbled, the scales have fallen from his eyes, and with new vision he sees that

There it is,
The interminable tumbling of the great grey main of moonlight, washing over
The little oyster-shell of this month of April:
Among the raven-quills of the shadows
And on the white pillows of men asleep:
The night's a pale pastureland of peace,
And something condones the world, incorrigibly.
But what, in fact is this vaporous charm? (pp.74-75)

The world seems bathed in a new light of hope casting out the darkness of despair, "the raven-quills of the shadows." In this symbolic chiaroscuro we are aware that as the festering damnation fades away he sees the
world "as a heaven in the eye." For the first time he loses confidence in the worth of his own intelligence:

Why should we hawk and spit out ecstasy
As though we were nightingales, and call these quite
Casual degrees and differences
Beauty? What guile recommends the world
And gives our eyes the special sense to be
Deluded, above all animals? (p.75)

Suddenly he turns to self-censure and aware that he might yet be won to Jennet's point of view — a passion for the Essential Fact — he sees the futility of trying to reconcile the conflicting moods:

I shall go
Back into the garden, and choke myself with the seven Sobs I managed to bring with me from the wreck.

The long, lyrical flight is one of the key speeches of the play, a kind of poetic overture to the final movement. It is an instance of the labyrinth of symbolism in which Fry revels. Thomas sees the human predicament in terms of light and shade. The raft of melancholy upon which he has been cast adrift is an analogue of man's Fall — cast out of Eden to roam the world with darkened intellect and weakened will. The "night-wind" has passed "like a sail across/ A blind man's eye", and suddenly the dark is light enough. As the moon bathes the night in a trembling grey light, so a ray of
hope floods over Thomas' "little oyster-shell" - the microcosm. The discord of light and dark has been resolved in the grey tones of moonlight. By daylight the world was "festering with damnation", but now, "The night's a pale pastureland of peace". The "vaporous charm" of the "open-hearted night" (of the paschal moon) has wrought the miracle of love.

The change from despair to hope gives Thomas insight into the meaning of Richard's praying under his breath that something will save Jennet from the next day's fire, and he tells the boy: "Tides turn with a similar sort of whisper." This figure expresses Fry's theory of comedy: "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 a thought; a turn such as we make when we turn from speaking to listening." 36

The turn Thomas makes from despair to hope, and Jennet from preoccupation with the Essential Fact to wonder at the world's beauty is more spectacular but not less dynamic than that of Richard and Alizon from adolescence to adulthood. His decision to

36 Fry, "Comedy", Adelphi, p. 28.
"forgo custom and escape" with his new-born happiness has its parallel in her quiet awareness that "God moved many lives to show you to me". Their love seems to have its source in a higher region than that of Thomas and Jennet. A sense of the sublime haunts the scenes in which Alizon appears; the supernatural slips naturally into her speech when alone with Richard as if pure spirits hovered round her: "We must never leave each other now, or else/ We should perplex the kindness of God." (p.78) If we are right in finding the elements as the structural framework of The Lady, Alizon represents the ether, a fifth element according to Aristotle, the farthest from earth and the nearest to heaven. She is angelic rather than emotional or merely rational and her chief concern seems to be that no act of theirs should conflict with God's will. As Jennet leads the rationally motivated Thomas to reconciliation with life through the power of human love, so Alizon gives Richard deeper insight through love, but on a higher plane - the splendour of grace and Divine Love. The conflict between reason and sense-perception is resolved in the love of Thomas for Jennet,

whereas the love of Richard and Alizon is attributed to Divine Providence and traces a pattern of humility, reverence and prayer. Jennet comes to love Thomas because he makes himself "a breeding-ground for love", and although he is "corrupt as ancient apples" she loves him and wants his love. Alizon tells Richard, "We cleave to each other, Richard/ That is what is proper for us to do." For her, it is not only a matter of following the heart's desire, but also an act of the will, a moral obligation which must be fulfilled. Thomas, struggling in his conflict of self-love with the new desire for Jennet, thinks of his yielding in terms of loss: "We're lost, both irrevocably lost." Richard, on the contrary, sees love as salvation: We're lovers in a deep and safe place/ And never lonely any more." (p.78)

We must recall that Jennet has to face the dilemma of temptation of safety by yielding to Humphrey's passion or to death by burning at the stake. She wonders if time and space/ Have any purpose" in human existence; if so, she will "belong to it." If not, she will give life a purpose. She wishes "to have some importance/ In the play of time" and concludes that -
the least
I can do is to fill the curled shell of the world
With human deep-sea sound, and hold it to
The ear of God, until he has appetite
To taste our salt sorrow on his lips. (p.85)

This is not the despair of Thomas, but rather the longing of "that inland sea, the heart." In this dilemma, the futility of life almost leads her to think it "might be better to die":

Then sad was my mother's pain, sad my birth,
Sad the articulation of my bones,
Sad, sad my alacritous web of nerves,
Woefully, woefully sad my wondering brain,
To be shaped and sharpened into such tendrils
Of anticipation, to feed the swamp of space. (p.85)

The word 'sad' echoes like the gong of the "bell of longing which calls no one to church."

The suffering of the human heart is the "salt sorrow on the lips of God." Perhaps this is the real angle of experience, when the tragedy of life is distilled into light, when the dark becomes light enough. Somewhere in the "Heart" beyond the power of human understanding lies the mysterious redemption which Fry has chosen to dramatize. This belief in the power of the heart he has clearly stated in A Sleep of Prisoners:

The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.

For Thomas and Jennet the long stride of soul begins
when they face the morning light together at "The pick-axe voice of a cock." He has saved her from the threat
of burning in the flames of a lecherous passion; Richard
and Alizon have saved her from a fire lighted by the
stupidity of authorities and the malice of a mob.
Thomas knows that she hasn't changed the world, it
"sickens me still", but neither can he change the world
by making "an example of himself to all/ Erring mankind", as she once challenged him: "O Thomas,/ 'It was
very theatrical of you to choose the gallows", words
which seem to sum up the entire surface plot of the
play. Now, his tower of pride is toppling through
"the unholy mantrap of love". His conversion is com-
plete: "I know my limitations" is the corollary to the
confession of his love. He will see Jennet "home",
though neither of us/ Knows where on earth it is."
With a prayer that God will have mercy on their souls, he is reconciled to a dark world.

The foregoing analysis of the structure of the play according to the threefold division of the microcosm distinguished three levels of action: that of the citizens, officials, and lovers corresponding respectively to the lower, higher and middle parts of the body. It seems well to note here that the external structure is also a threefold arrangement, not only vertically, but also horizontally. Act I is related to the lowest level of the cosmos: it contains a preponderance of the allusions to the four elements and to their primary qualities. More than the other two acts, it is marked by a flux resembling the unceasing conflict occurring in the sublunary region of the macrocosm which corresponds to the 'natural spirit' in man. It sets the problem or dramatic situation which must be later solved on one of the higher planes. Act II has already been designated the officials' act for they ironically represent the intellectual or rational plane, the 'animal spirit'; it is further characterized as such.
by the weighty rationalizations of Thomas in his scene with Jennet. It remains for Act III to parallel the middle region of the microcosm, the heart or 'vital spirit', by the resolution of the problem through the "vaporous charm" of love born under the full moon of the "open-hearted night."

The locus of conflict in each act (Mayor Tyson's house is the setting of the whole play), shifts from the level of the stomach to that of the head, and finally to resolution in the heart. Within each locus all three levels of character are present; as the three acts constitute a single play, the three levels of action form one plot, just as the levels of the microcosm are one man. If we have broken up the wonderful little world of man, we must now try to put together what we have taken apart for the sake of analysis of human moods and emotions as represented by 'humours'.

III

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE ALLEGORICAL STRUCTURE

A conspectus of the action leads to the conclusion that the microcosmological structure is the framework of an allegory of mankind. Fry, as a Christian artist, whose plays prior to The Lady, were dramatizations of religious themes, studies human nature as fallen and redeemed. This realistic vision of mankind depicts the perversity, paradox, and mystery of life; therefore, we have inversions and complexities in the action of the play (a "figure of the poetry"), and in the poetry itself. The microcosm presented in the structure as I see it, is not a dead metaphor abstractly conceived, but a little, living world fraught with an inconceivable maze of miracle and mystery:

Jennet: Is that a world you've got there, hidden under your hat,

Thomas: Bedlam, ma'am, and the battlefield
Uncle Adam died on. He was shot
To bits with the core of an apple
Which some fool of a serpent in the artillery
Had shoved into God's cannon. (pp. 25-26),
(italics added)

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Within this world of bedlam presented by the concept of the microcosm there plays a free association of images and allusions frequently with contrapuntal effect.

Sometimes the antithesis is that of life and death:

Thomas: Life, forbye, is the way We fatten for the Michaelmas of our own particular Gallows. (p.3)

Or it is that of body and soul:

Humphrey: Now, please, we're not going to confuse the soul and the body. (p. 84)

The antithesis may be between act and potentiality:

Thomas: Nothing can be seen In the thistle-down, but the rough-head Thistle comes. (p.56)

Often it is any or all of these symbolically presented in chiaroscuro:

Alizon (about Humphrey): He's very nearly black.

Richard: Swart.

Alizon: Is that it, When he dies it may be hard to picture him Agreeable to the utter white of heaven. (p.6)

The function of the microcosmic structure is to provide a fountain-head for these allusions as well as a line upon which Fry hangs his scintillating dialogue. Only by such 'metaphysical' expansion of the hyperconceptual metaphor of which the play is an extension could Fry go to "the motive mysteries under the
soul's floor." To follow him by logical interpretation is an acknowledged impossibility and the following remarks must be taken as sign-posts or mere indications of what seems to lie behind the creative imagination.

Melancholic Thomas is the most rational character. His desire for death is the result of his rationalization. Oppressed by the weight of the flesh "like a thousand years" upon his dry spirit, and longing for the soul's delivery, he is as sensitive and thought-obsessed as Hamlet. He, too, wishes "that this too solid flesh would melt/ Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!" Opposed to Thomas is the sanguine figure of Jennet, untroubled by thoughts beyond immediate sense satisfaction. Although her life has been lonely and dull, she wants to live as much as Thomas wants to die. Like winter and summer, these two meet in the year's spring, when life and death "Clash together like the cymbals clashing/ When David did his dance."

Their conflict is resolved under the full moon of April, the Paschal moon, symbol of the supernatural life-death mystery when "the combat strangely ended" in the Death

and Resurrection of Our Lord. Every human experience represented by these antitheses (body-soul, love-hatred, despair-presumption, sin-sanctity, life-death) is figured in the persons of Thomas and Jennet. Their union, brought about by the charity of Richard and Alizon would seem to signify the transformation of nature by grace, the "new mixture" of which St. Paul speaks.

There are grounds for this interpretation of the guileless young lovers as grace-filled souls. They are instruments of Providence in restoring moral order to Cool Clary by thwarting the evil designs of mob-citizenry and officialdom. We may see Richard and Alizon as symbols of good tending to perfection and preventing the waste of good by triumph over evil. In Act I Richard, describing himself as "Purgatory-colour" is seen by Alizon as "on the way to grace" and this grace he is to find in her. To Thomas she appears as "Revelation", to Richard "a flame", to Margaret as "mercifully without spots". On her

40 Victimae Paschali, sequence of the Mass for Easter.

41 I Cor., v, 7-8, epistle of the Mass for Easter.
first appearance Alizon speaks to Richard about "white doves", "a shower of broken glass", "sparkling air", "a cloud of crimson Catherine-wheels." In concept and colouring this symbolism is traditionally associated with the Holy Spirit. In Act 11 Richard and Alizon do not come together. Moreover, Richard drank some of the wine set out for the guests because

I was feeling Low; abominably; about the prisoners, And the row in the street that's getting out of hand- And certain inner things. (p.43)

We may assume that the penance of scrubbing the floor cleanses him from "Purgatory-colour", for in Act 111 Alizon comes to him a second time, because "God moved many lives to show you to me." Their mutual love symbolizes the action of grace on the well-disposed soul. After the avowal of their love,

42 The action here is mainly the officials' debate about the fate of Thomas and Jennet and their eavesdropping conspiracy in order to obtain evidence of guilt. Thomas describes the situation as "the local consignment/ Of fear and guilt."

43 Cf. T. S. Eliot, Gerontion: "In the juvescence of the year/ Came Christ the tiger."
Richard, who had been found in a church poor-box by a priest, tells Alizon:

I'll take you to the old priest who first found me.
He is as near to being my father
As putting his hand into a poor-box could make him. (pp. 78-9)

As characters these two alone are irreproachable in every respect. Every word of theirs, as well as all that is said about them, marks them as little children ready to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Their sacramental union represents symbolically human nature redeemed through the power of sanctifying grace.

We have already noted the association of the mob and the officials with the extreme levels of the universe. We must now see them as an allegorical figure of fallen human nature. These two groups are impenetrable to the supernatural, wholly given to cupidity as opposed to charity. They may be likened to the "Earthly City" in contrast to the "Heavenly City" according to the exegesis of St. Augustine. In word and deed the officials have the characteristics of fallen man unresponsive to grace. In consequence of original sin man's lower nature rises in rebellion

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44 Cf. The City of God, Bk. XIV, Ch. xxviii.
against his rational powers. The imaginative concept of this fact appears in Tyson: the phlegm boiling off his inflamed liver and condensing as catarrh around his cold brain, is the physiological counterpart of the psychical disorder in the microcosm. As a result, Tyson's rational functions are restricted to preserving "the ordinary decencies of life." When Thomas presents a problem beyond the routine of petty duties, Tyson tries to ignore its existence and "doesn't want to be bothered." When Jennet comes to him for protection from the "irrational fears" of the mob, she finds to her horror that the head of the community is a victim of the same ignorance and irrationality. Utterly incapable of dealing with the complexities of life, he reduces matters to a mathematical formula:

The standard soul
Must mercilessly be maintained. No
Two ways of life. One God, one point of view.
A general acquiescence to the mean. (p.71)

This false ideal is the "steady pendulum" by which his limited mental movements oscillate, and it leads him finally to lock himself up with his convictions. When Fry has him admit that he is a "victim to air", the allusion is not only to his chronic ailment but also to his moral corruption, for the Mayor finds Jennet, who has the hot, moist qualities of air, so
appealingly beautiful that he suffers from a "belated visit of the flesh." Later, in the glamour of a party dress she becomes "The all unhallows Eve to his poor Adam." (p. 70). Inflamed by unholy desires, Tyson is driven to distraction: "We must burn her/ Before she destroys our reason." By such strokes of characterization Fry gives flesh and blood to the concept of the fallen intellect and the enslaved will in human nature.

As Tyson, Mayor of the town, is ironically paralleled with the head in the microcosm, so Justice Tappercoom can be associated with the faculty of impaired judgement. Upon overhearing the conversation in which Jennet confesses her love for Thomas, he makes an erroneous official pronouncement and declares "The woman has confessed". However, Fry saves the jesting, jovial Justice from the moral obliquity of Tyson by having Tappercoom decree wisely in the case of Thomas whom he sentences to a night of social diversion for the 'crime' of "spreading gloom and despondency". Tappercoom is flawed but not diseased. He is not lecherous but covetous:

And her house, now I come to think of it, Will suit me nicely. (pp. 73-74)

In the scale of moral values, greed is more reprehen-
sible than lust, but the Justice has redeeming qualities which save him from sinking to Tyson's level. His sanguine temperament makes him more tolerant than the petty, phlegmatic Mayor, although as two of the villains of the piece, there is not much choice between them. While the peevish Mayor avoids the mirth of the party, the Justice imbibes freely, becoming as heedless of duty as indulgence in wine and laughter can make him. His decision brings the play to an end: Jennet is to leave town quietly under cover of darkness before the other officials come to their senses after the night's revelry. However, there is guile in this liberal gesture for he spares himself the onus of carrying out the inhuman sentence on the 'witch' and protects his own interests in the matter of her property.

Both Tyson and Tappercoom are more than mere symbolic figures of lust and greed, or of inert will and impaired judgement. They are keen characterization, even caricature, of officious fools. Through them Pry thrusts the rapier point of satire into the thick hides of corrupt political leaders. The direct self-revelation of vice, of total incapacity for leadership,

45 Cf. Sum. Theol. II-II, 154, a. 3, sedcontra; ibid. 118c.
and the veneer beneath which these evils operate to
the detriment of society, are brought out in all three
acts. Tappercoom is the epitome of mundane liberal-
ism; his speech to Tyson has the force of contemporary
relevancy:

You've got to be dispassionate,
Calm and civilized. I am civilized.
I know, for instance, that Beauty is not an
Absolute.
Beauty is a Condition. As you might say
Hey nonny yes or Hey nonny no.
But the Law's about as absolute an
Absolute- (pp.72-3)

At this point in the play Tappercoom turns to
the Chaplain for confirmation of his relativistic doc-
trine, but excessive devotion to his viol prevents the
Chaplain from functioning as philosopher or from ful-
filling any of his spiritual duties. This substitution
of art for religion may also be taken as pertinent to
contemporary attitudes. In this character Fry has
imaged the church of today as one small, dry voice un-
heeded by state or society. However, it is signifi-
cant, and ironically so, that to the hyperemotional
minister of religion Fry has given the solution of the
problem that perplexes the state officials: it is he
who suggests the proper treatment for both the mind, in
the case of Thomas, and for the body when Jennet faints.
The Chaplain, by reason of his private "fancy", wishes to see both mind and body come together in a dance. On the surface the desire can be traced to his love of music but it is also a concomitant of Fry's vision of life and of his comic theory, "...that, groaning as we may be, we move in the figure of a dance, and, so moving, we trace the outline of the mystery." Ultimately, the Chaplain's wish is figuratively fulfilled. His function, in correspondence with the microcosm, would seem to be that of the imagination, by reason of his dreamy disposition and excessive sentimentality without the corrective of common sense. His fanciful approach to all matters produces comic effects and becomes an instrument of brilliant dramatic irony. He effectively counterpoints the "porcous pomposity" of Tyson and the "civilized" pretensions of Tappercoom by his Polonius-like puttering. Obviously associated by his subjectivism with the Justice, the Chaplain's main flaw is complete submission to the state officials, to "those in authority over us." The primacy of the spiritual never enters the head of the "rhapsodical" Chaplain whose one preoccupation is "a skirmish or two of the bow" of his viol, "my better half" because -

Orpheus, you know, was very successful in that way, but of course I haven't his talent, not nearly his talent. (p.41)

Of the four officials the town councillor Humphrey is the most corrupt. He turns from Alizon (grace) to lust after Jennet and attempts to bribe her to satisfy his sensuality. She avoids "being cornered by a young lecher", who, however, is not merely a figure of concupiscence. His function in the plot is to motivate the heroic rescue of Jennet by Thomas for she adroitly uses Humphrey's offer of freedom to provoke an avowal of love from Thomas. The councillor is therefore a catalytic agent necessary to bring these lovers together. As a "dismal coprolite", a "blastoderm" lying in the muddy garden earth beneath the April rain, he represents the dung or humus required for the growth of spring blossoms. As a tempter he assumes the guise of Satan defeated by the courage and chivalry of Thomas. Earlier in the play we were prepared for this aspect of Humphrey when Nicholas describes a struggle with his brother:

O pandemonium,
What a fight, what a fight! It couldn't be more strenuous
Getting into heaven, or out again. And
Humphrey
Went twinkling like Lucifer into the daffodils.
When Babylon fell there wasn't a better thump. (p.11)
The allusion to *Paradise Lost*, suggesting Humphrey's identification with Satan, is significantly related to the wider context of the play. He had been the instrument used by Alizon's parents in withdrawing her from convent life. In the dramatic climax of the action he continues to be the evil agent when he bribes Jennet with an offer of freedom if she will yield to him. This incident completes his role of diabolical tempter akin to Satan in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, Thomas in rescuing Jennet evokes this image of a coiling serpent; his outburst against the seducer ends in a threat:

\[
\text{I'll knock your apple-blossom back into the roots} \\
\text{Of the Tree of knowledge where you got it from! (p.36)}
\]

This triumph over the devil and over the propensity of the flesh to evil— an effect of original sin— contributes to the spiritual aspects of the rebirth theme, of which more will be said later.

Humphrey is not only an image of concupiscence but also of malice and treachery, cupidity in its basest form. In the comic effects obtained by his swaggering behaviour and his defeat, physically by Nicholas and morally by Thomas, he is reminiscent of the devil in the moralities and the Vice in the interludes.
He threatens the soul's good whereas Tysoh and Tapper-coom are a menace to the bodily existence of their victim. 47

Nicholas, Humphrey's brother, belongs with their mother Margaret to the citizen group, allied with the mob and the officials in the lowest stratum of the microcosm. By the mischievous quirks of his nature, Nicholas adds a good deal of fun to the action. He tends to follow and imitate his satanic brother in an impish way, admitting that he loves only what Humphrey loves, and with whom he quarrels over Jennet and over Alizon. He delights in foiling his brother's plans for he "was conceived as a hammer/ And born in a rising wind." Humphrey, in the effort to keep what he loves from Nicholas, is a jealous nature, while Nicholas in scheming to thwart Humphrey's hopes, shows envy. These qualities are epitomized in their mother's description:

They're inseparable, really twin natures, utterly
Brothers, like the two ends of the same thought. (p.10)

47 It is significant that Humphrey uses wiles, not force, in his attempt to seduce Jennet. He uses reasons, "Legal reasons, monetary reasons-" in urging her to allow him to visit her prison cell.
Fry turns their mutual hatred to comic account. The ability to laugh at this aspect of the human predicament is "an irrelevancy,/ which almost amounts to revelation." Nicholas, we must remember, is "compounded of all combustibles", and when we investigate his function in the play we find that Thomas sums it up:

For the reason of laughter, since laughter is surely
The surest touch of genius in creation.
Would you ever have thought of it, I ask you,
If you had been making man, stuffing him full
Of such hopping greeds and passions that he has
To blow himself to pieces as often as he Conveniently can manage it - would it also Have occurred to you to make him burst himself
With such a phenomenon as cachinnation,
That same laughter, madam, is an irrelevancy Which almost amounts to revelation. (p.50)

We see Humphrey as the "hopping greeds and passions" and Nicholas as the cachinnation with which man blows himself to pieces, for in the latter's words

I'm the receipt God followed
In the creation. It took the roof off his oven. (p.9)

To the brothers Tappercoom assigns the ignominious task of taking Old Skipps to his hovel-home, an incongruous situation for the pair who had aspired, the one basely and the other quite decently, to Jennet's
love. We must conclude this survey of the three groups of characters with some comments on the "rag-and-bone merchant of this town, name of Matthew Skipps" as Tappercoom formally addresses the "evidence" produced by Richard and Alizon to prove that Thomas had not murdered nor Jennet bewitched the old man. As Skipps, in Tappercoom's words "floats in the heaven of the grape", he adverts with incoherence and malapropisms to the big moments of his life: baptism by immersion, sin and repentance, defense of his daughter's virtues, Provided he has "coabberation" of his death, he is willing to count himself "among the blessed saints." His state of intoxication amounts to ecstasy as he sings Alleluias and Glorias. By grotesque inversion, this specimen of the 'dregs of humanity' is depicted as inebriated with the celestial vision. It must be said that drunkenness apart, there is little of humanity about the rag-and-bone man whose disappearance set in motion the dramatic situation. However, he has a place in the symbolic structure. We can see him as a type of the folly that confounds wisdom: a foolish thing of the world chosen by God to confound the worldly-wise of Cool Clary.48 Perhaps too he represents

48 I Cor., 1, 27
those who in faith persevere and of whom Our Lord spoke in the Gospel: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father,"49 On the merely technical side, Skipps lends to the later part of the play the hilarious mirth supplied in the earlier portion by the antics of Nicholas, Humphrey and the officials. The play ends on a serious note suggestive of a morality, and in keeping with the traditional medieval drama, farce is introduced to counterpoint the serious theme.50 However, his dramatic function is outweighed by the symbolic purpose. Fallen out of the life of Cool Clary, Old Skipps is brought back by the paternal Providence of God to save the victims from the mob's irrational fears and the leaders' blundering egoism. Thomas and Jennet are saved by grace of which Richard and Alizon are the instruments and Old Skipps the proximate cause. "God writes straight with crooked lines."

49Matt., X, 29.
50The comic incident occurring just before the serious dénouement is similar to the gravediggers' episode prior to the catastrophe in Hamlet V, i.
It is possible that Skipps represents the concept of "symbolic action", the individual ritual which, according to Kenneth Burke is modern society’s substitute for "the lost tribal erotic dance". According to Burke’s dramatism the incident would be a folk element.

In an attempt to clarify what has been said about the "rebirth" theme, I shall point out that "renascence" seems to be the central concept of Fry’s comedy of the seasons. Each play ends with the happy union of lovers, who, having triumphed over obstacles, look hopefully to future joy. In A Phoenix Too Frequent Tegeus and Dynamene are saved from death by death itself (Virilius), and from the ashes of grief and despair they rise, phoenix-like, renewed by love. The action of Venus Observed concludes with the Duke looking forward to quiet splendour in his 'autumn' age


52 Ibid., p. 368.
shared with Rosabel. As the heroine she rescued him from philandering by setting fire to his observatory, a symbol of his sinful isolation. In *The Dark is Light Enough* Richard Gettner, considered by those "who only observe" (Fry's comment on superficial criticism) as a cowardly traitor, shifts frantically from standard to standard. Ostensibly he is seeking an ideal which he finds at last in the presence of the dying Countess. Although unable to give him the love he expects from her, she does inspire him with courage to face the firing squad and thus to follow her to winter's end in life.

In these three plays, as in *The Lady* the rebirth is accomplished by the mysterious power of love which Fry associates with the power of fire to consume as well as to enkindle with new life. For this reason we find his poetry saturated with allusions to the phoenix symbol, to fire, light, eclipses of light - of the sun and of love. The titles of the four plays and the seasonal connection in each, together with the birth-death cycle of the sun, are symbolic referents to the dominant rebirth concept. The action of *The Lady*, the spring comedy, is set during the time of the vernal equinox when the macrocosm comes to life and
Fry traces a rebirth in his little world. By the threefold structure of this world, depicted in the three levels of society, Fry embodies three kinds of love. These can be paralleled to the head, the heart, and the stomach. The lowest kind, manifest in the blind self-love of the mob and the officials and in the lust of Humphrey, has the destructive force of fire. The antithesis of this is the selfless spiritualized love of Richard and Alizon of which the archetype is Divine Love, in which man shares through grace, and this is symbolized by the enkindling or quickening power of fire. Between the two extremes is the natural love of Thomas and Jennet, potentially fitted to fall to the one or rise to the other level. By the self-sacrifice and charity of the grace-filled Richard and Alizon salvation comes to Thomas and Jennet, whose love, phoenix-like, rises from the ashes of despair and defeat. They are brought together in Act II by wily officials who, with their darkened intellects, move to one side like the shadow moving from the face of the moon. As the moon waxes to fullness in the macrocosm, so the love of Thomas for Jennet grows in the microcosm until its "interminable tumbling" washes over "the little oyster-shell"
of his heart, cleansing him of morbidity and enkindling within him hope of a new life through love.

Now we can perceive the power of Fry's paradoxical patterns. Thomas, in an effort to save Jennet, would lose himself. In so doing he finds her love to be the seed of new life. Jennet, who would save herself, is lost by the threat of burning in the fire of faggots or in Humphrey's passion. By choosing to reject moral death, she merits salvation from physical death which Richard and Alison effect by their act of charity. Thus redeemed, she in turn can share with Thomas the life newly-given by grace and become the means of enkindling this new life within him. Not in the fire lit through the baseness of those who would destroy her physically or morally is the lady for burning; rather she is for illuminating a man's dark despair with the power of love.

Their joyous union in a new life synchronizes with the new life in the macrocosm and the new life of grace at Easter. Thomas has had to conquer his "towering pride" and Jennet had to rise above her sense-level existence. Love gives them the power to "rid themselves of the old leaven" and to engender new life. This is the core action imitated in Fry's little world as Thomas and Jennet resolve the tensions
in the natural and the supernatural levels of human life. In their hand-in-hand exit we sense a 'heavenly harmony' for a microcosmic dance has ended the criss-cross conflict in which they had been ensnared. Set free by love, they move forward as dawn breaks on the darkened world to begin their spiritual odyssey and they pray "God have mercy on our souls."

In this study no attempt has been made to assess Fry's place among contemporary writers. However, it should be noted that the dynamic of love in the rebirth action of The Lady and its constant association in Fry's work with the fire symbol shows a close relation with a major theme in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. Perhaps a clue to this relationship may be found in the fact that Charles Williams has been an influence on the two greatest poet-dramatists of our time. On the surface, Fry may seem to lack Eliot's metaphysical depth and breadth of vision. If Eliot, in this comparison, can be designated the poet of the mind there is no doubt that Fry is the poet of

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53 The drunken reel of Old Skipps is a figure of the interior joy that must leap and dance in Jen-net's heart at his sudden appearance.

54 Cf. "Little Gidding": The only hope, or else despair/ Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-/ To be redeemed from fire by fire".

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the heart. In the micro-microcosm this "inland sea" -
the heart- Fry resolves the multifarious problems
pressing us into the daily experience of tragedy.
His comedies would seem to point to the heart where-
by the fire of love is to purge our fallen nature, so
that with the aid of redeeming grace man can rise
renewed by that "angle of experience where the dark
is distilled into light..."

The blaze of this fire
Is wider than any man's imagination.
It goes beyond any stretch of the heart.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{55}C. Fry, \textit{A Sleep of Prisoners}, p. 49.
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