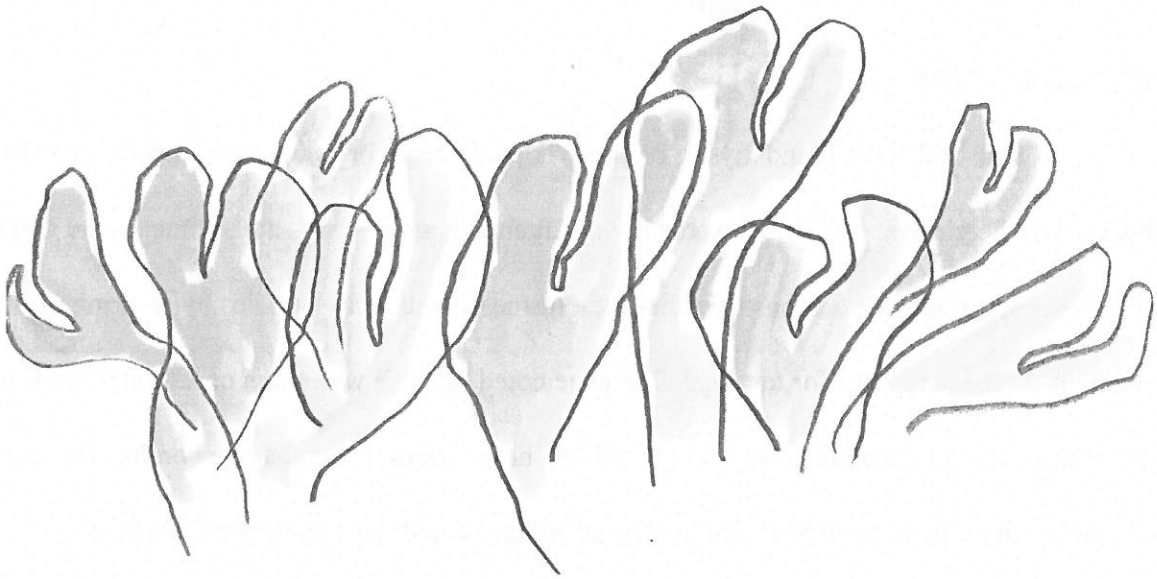

An April Anarchy:

Non-realist dramaturgical approaches to Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*

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INTRODUCTION

In June of 2018, I found myself on the Wikipedia page for Margaret Thatcher, perhaps because of the virulent attitudes towards her in Argentina, where I was at the time. I read that in one of her speeches, she demonstrated her steadfastness to austerity policies by assuring the public that "the lady's not for turning." The page noted that this was a pun on Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*, a play of which I had never heard. I found a copy online and read it in a cold, sunny park, hopeful to find a play on which I could work in the Senior Theatre Festival. I found it to contain a sensible lyricism that I had previously only found in Lorca and certain absurdist writers. But this time, the same breed of magnetic poetry was in a comedy, drawing me in even further. The play seemed to express a kind of wonder and silliness that I had not yet seen in a dramatic text. Many months later, my friend Hanna Woods committed to directing, sound designing, and editing the play, with the intent of keeping the lyricism but cutting some of the redundant and outdated language.[1] Clara Jacobs, Isabel Lane, and I all decided to act in the play. I also wanted to do some kind of additional analysis or design. So I signed on as the dramaturg and have thus worked on this play as both in that capacity and as an actor.

In this essay, I use dramaturgical analysis to explicate and justify the processes through which we worked. This dramaturgical justification presents my point of view of how to produce *The Lady's Not for Burning* (*LNFB*). My convictions are based on popular and critical reception at and since its premiere, as well as literary criticism of the play and other verse and prose dramatists. Popular reception includes newspaper reviews, from which I am able to glean the choices of a particular production, with little historical context or scope. Historical writing of the

period often places the play in the context of what came after it, namely absurdism and working-class realism. I will thus examine the ways John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and their respective movements so fully overtook the theatrical imaginations of Anglophone drama and caused plays like *The Lady's Not for Burning* to fall from favor and even incite disgust. But today there are a wide variety of approaches to dramatic texts in the mainstream, thus allowing new minds to crack open this play through methods thought unconventional at its premiere. *The Lady's Not for Burning* deserves a non-realist artistic and dramaturgical approach possible only with the vocabulary and aesthetics available today. This play deserves honest, critical and modern artistic attempts at placing the play within the collaborators' sensibilities instead of performing what we imagine a verse comedy set in the Middle Ages *should* look like.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Christopher Fry was born in 1907 to an Anglican preacher father who died three years after his son's birth.[2] He was raised in the English countryside by his mother during the First World War. He eventually adopted his mother's Quaker family name and religion as a young adult.[3] Fry wrote plays in his childhood, and once out of school worked as a teacher and in artistic and administrative roles in provincial theaters.[4] In 1938, Fry wrote *The Boy with a Cart*, a devotional play, for a church festival. He also directed with the Tunbridge Wells Repertory Players, and continued to write, in genres as disparate as musical comedy, devotional, and biography.[5] In 1939 he became the director of the Oxford Playhouse but had to leave upon the beginning of the war, into which he entered as a noncombatant volunteer. He returned to the Playhouse in 1944. In 1946, *A Phoenix Too Frequent* made its debut in the provinces and in the

same year was performed at the Arts Theatre in London.[6] Two years later, Alec Clues directed and starred in *The Lady's Not for Burning* at the Arts.[7] It met more success as a revival at the Globe staged by and starring John Gielgud alongside Pamela Brown, who both went on tour to the United States in 1950-51.[8] In 1950, during one week, four of Fry's works were being produced at the same time.[9] In the years following this peak of success, Fry continued to translate Anouilh and Ibsen, write for television and film as well as original comedies and religious dramas.

PLAY PRÉCIS

The Lady's Not for Burning explores what happens when one strange man enters a small town and asks to be hung while a concurrent witch hunt seeks to burn a woman. The man, Thomas, is a depressed soldier who sees no value in living. The woman, Jennet, is an alchemist's daughter who lives alone, and the quick, illogical condemnation from the town baffles her. The townspeople simultaneously believes that she has changed a man into a dog and that Thomas has killed this same man. The night happens to be that of the engagement celebration of the mayor's nephew, although the engagement itself becomes null as the two nephews quibble over the affection of both young women and the girl to whom one of the nephews was engaged falls for the mayor's clerk. The judge tortures the newcomers to find their guilt, but instead the mayor formulates a plan to have them confess their guilt. Eavesdropping, the men of the town take Jennet's confession of love to be an admission of witchcraft. She is to be burned the following day, but the prisoners are forced to revel in the engagement party of that evening. Jennet and Thomas find new ways of seeing the world through one another's eyes and they delight in the beauty of the world. One of the nephews propositions Jennet in exchange for her life, and she

finds that life would not be worth living if it is one of compromise. The other lovers return from their elopement with the man that was meant to be dead or a dog. Thomas and Jennet reconcile their differences and escape under the moon.

STATE OF THE BRITISH THEATRE AT THE TIME OF PREMIERE

British theatre historians and critics mostly write postwar narratives with theatre languishing in a post-Shaw stagnant haze, eventually to be revitalized in the mid fifties with *Look Back in Anger* and *Waiting for Godot*. Within this haze came *The Lady's Not for Burning*. The newly established National Arts Council gave way to a wider variety of theaters and plays, yet this largely consisted of upper-class, domestic plays detached from the world's events.[10] Kenneth Tynan writes that

> roughly two out of three London theatres were inhabited by detective stories, Pineroesque melodramas, quarter-witted farces, debutante comedies, overweight musicals and unreviewable revues…The accepted new playwrights then were Fry, Eliot and Anouilh.[11]

There was thus a variety of theatre, but the only 'serious' work was in verse. This trend of dramatic poetry manifested mostly in the thirties and forties, with commercial success really only coming to Fry and Eliot, at least in England. This trend grew partially from the growth of 'art theatre' as distinct from 'popular theatre.'[12] Tynan argues that verse drama's heightened texts

> were able to capture the British imagination in the forties because these plays gave us access to imagined worlds in which rationing and the rest of austerity's paraphernalia could be forgotten; they also reminded us that words could be put to other public uses than those of military propaganda, news bulletins and government regulations.[13]

Tynan astutely notes that it is not merely the frivolity of plot and character on which Fry became popular, but also the way in which he utilized language. Language for language's sake, not just

austere actable dialogue, but rhapsodizing in a distant world. It is in this context that T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry were able to theorize and practice verse drama.

LITERARY ANALYSIS IN CONTEXT

In his treatise on poetic drama, T.S. Eliot writes that the audience must not think that what the characters are saying is poetry, but merely the purest expression of the characters. To hear the words as verse would constitute a disruption of the illusion.[14] Fry, too, practices a sanctity of verse, yet allows the characters enjoy the language as much as the audience. Like a musical in which the characters and audience both delight in the use of song, *The Lady's Not for Burning* is unique because of the characters' delight in their heightened states. The characters relish the words that they use to express themselves. In the opening of the play, Thomas says that life "is the way / We fatten for the Michaelmas of our own particular / Gallows. What a wonderful thing is metaphor."[15] Thomas is aware of, and marvels at, his speech. The judge Tappercoom tells a joke and asks the room, "How is that, / How is that?"[16] Tappercoom is not providing the punchline for another character's set up at his expense, instead he delights in the construction of joke, so much so that he has to ensure everyone is listening. Instead of ignoring the ways in which they speak, the characters excite themselves by their own use of language. This makes the audience aware of the fact that they are watching a verse comedy, instead of pretending that their words are mere synonyms for something that could have been said in prose. The long monologues *are* the action of the characters. For example, Jennet is fiercely protective of her right to speak. In a scene in which she is being propositioned for her life, she monologues instead of bargaining. During one of these speeches, she asks a rhetorical question, Humphrey interrupts, and she responds "Don't speak, contemptible boy," then continues another monologue

with the reproach "I am interested / In my feelings." Instead of gaining her power through admonishing Humphrey in his contemptible actions, she is upset that he is interrupting her long speeches, which for her constitutes the self. This demonstrates the function of these monologues as an expression of the characters' souls. It is not merely the dialogue upon which the character acts, but the act of speaking by which the characters express their heart and love.

CRITICAL RECEPTION AT THE TIME OF PREMIERE

The play enjoyed immense success, yet critics simultaneously critiqued it for its supposedly flimsy constructions of plot and character, which reveal the utmost importance critics placed on character development. Hinchcliffe summarizes the response of *LNFB* in an overview of verse drama, that "critics agree that the language is decorative, that is blurs character differentiation…that the plays are badly constructed and lack seriousness."[17] Contemporaneous critics thus sought language that was antithetical to these descriptors; i.e. specific, serious, differentiated dialogue that develops characters. Characters are thus of utmost importance, illustrating the trend towards psychological approaches to dramaturgy in the early twentieth century. In the London *Times*, a 1948 review of the original production writes that once a "speech is over nothing has altered. We know no more of the speaker, nor feel that anybody cares. We have been amused but not interested."[18] Thus the critics sought characters who incite unfolding action through economical, swift dialogue.

On the other hand, there were many critics who found themselves delighting in the "neo-Elizabethan" stylings[19] that brought back an importance of language. For instance, one reviewer wrote of the 1951 tour that the play contained "everything that everyone has been taught to expect in the theater, multiplied by sheer exhilaration."[20] This "everything" that one expects from

the theater perhaps refers to Fry's adherence to the Aristotelian unities as well as the use of language as action, thus demonstrating Elizabethan and neoclassical European texts as the reviewer's reference for a theatrical standard. Perhaps it is this adherence that also gained it the Drama Critics' Circle award for best foreign play on Broadway during the 1950-51 season.[21] Critics also found that Fry had the "same sense of fun, the same keen tongue, and the same delight in words" as in *A Phoenix Too Frequent*,[22] and one newspaper reviewer asserted that Fry came from a lineage of Shakespeare and Shaw.[23] Thus, what critics valued and respected in *The Lady's Not for Burning* is Fry's commitment to past theatrical movements.

LOOK BACK IN ANGER AND *WAITING FOR GODOT*: THEIR IMPACT ON THE BRITISH STAGE

But something else was brewing in the consciousness of the British and out it came through the response to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* which premiered in London in 1955, and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which opened in 1956.

Waiting for Godot came to London in 1955 at the Arts Theatre and subsequently created great excitement about the future of the stage. Christopher Innes writes that Beckett was able to "set completely different criteria for poetic drama."[24] No longer did poetry mean verse. John Wain argued for the superfluity of verse, writing that "*Waiting for Godot* is the play of recent times that best deserves to be called a poem, and it is in prose."[25] This assertion demonstrates that a prioritization of the techniques contained in Waiting for Godot, and that these techniques, presumably subtext, metaphor, image, economical text and silence, are more effective than verse in transmitting "vivid, profound, and universal" messages.[26] Subtext, action, metaphor, and image were now replacing the action of language to which Fry aspired. In *Waiting for Godot*, the

characters are actively waiting and utilizing tactics to mitigate the effects of waiting, instead of talking about waiting, as Fry's characters would do. Kenneth Tynan wrote that he

> care[s] little for its enormous success in Europe over the past three years, but much for the way in which it pricked and stimulated my own nervous system. It forced me to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama; and having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough.[27]

These 'rules,' those strict rhythms of the unfolding of plot and character, as well as those expectations of classical work that Fy upheld, were only then able to be unfolded in front of the public.

Look Back in Anger was new and exciting in the ways Osborne presented the theatrical novelty of dignified working-class youth. Tynan writes that "[f]or the first time it was possible for a character in English drama to be poor and intelligently amusing."[28] Reality, as time passed after the war, became an appropriate subject worthy and appetizing for the public's palette. Naturalism became the aspiration, as critics found these characters "claim to give us access to what is truly, ordinarily, human," aided by subtext, which gives a "familiarly human" touch to any kind of text.[29] The content, that of the discontented British youth, aided the form, meaning the stripped-down vernacular text bolstered by existential subtext. Further, Osborne was meant to be writing for the youth, a distinct shift from the conservatism of verse drama. Its premiere and popularity signaled the "the moment at which drama starts saying something real again," according to Womack and Shepherd.[30] Historians thus align discontented youth with "something real" in the mid-20th century, leading to the position of conservative forms such as verse drama as its opposite. This has led to the distinct condemnation of these forms as trivial.

Subtext, image, and action, drawn forth by economical text and pressing subjects of youthful anger and existentialism, thus signaled new pathways for British theatre. Critics

heralded these works for their shedding of tradition, not for their adherence to any unities or expecations. Absurdism thus carved the pathway for non-realist aesthetics, and working-class drama firmly planted psychological, sociological realism as the norm. These two productions help to frame the ways in which *LNFB* has been treated since its premiere.

RECEPTION & PRODUCTION SINCE TIME OF PREMIERE

In the years since 1948, much of the same condemnation of verbosity that was present at the inception of *The Lady's Not for Burning* continued over the decades, soon asserted more as fact than opinion. For example, a *New York Times* writer deemed the 1983 production to be a "play of words rather than a play of action…[which] rains down on the audience unrelentingly… one has the sensation of being pelted to death by a torrent of sparkling jewels."[31] The acting was also apparently not up to the task of performing the heightened text, perhaps marking a change in acting training that is not up to the task of verse drama. However, this is not an absolute. A *Stanford Daily* reporter, Lee Projector, dissented in this consensus of language-bashing, writing that in *LNFB,* "language is as omniscient as God. Language is the key to the heart, the heart is the key to love, love is the key to language, language is the key to the heart."[32] Instead of positing the play as a conservative approach to dramaturgy, Projector finds language not to be a hindrance but rather the entire key to the play. Yet it appears that typically, those involved with or consuming the play focus entirely too much on the setting, casting aside Projector's intimation.

Fig. 1. "University of Central Florida, set design by Luke T.X. Hopper."

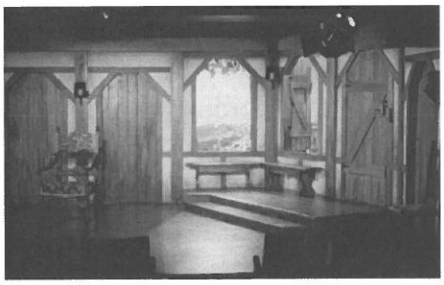

Fig. 2."Village Playhouse, Toronto, Canada."

I was unable to find any evidence of a production of the play that did not stage the play with medieval costumes and sets, save one 2001 production in Malibu.[33] This design trend occurs despite the entire play being essentially an anachronism. Clive Barnes wrote of a 1972 Chichester revival that the play is a "cute idea that people in the Middle Age could make modern-sounding jokes…a poor, inflated play…certainly worth revival, just to see how it stood up more than 20 years after its first extravagant success. That it does not stand up but falls down is worth knowing."[34] Thus, Barnes sees the play as a product of the past, based on a flimsy conceit of anachronistic humor. Yet the play makes no claim to focus on time, as Barnes and others note, the script opens with Fry's direction that the play takes place in "1400, either more or less exactly."[35] Even one British university staged it in their provincial hall built in 1390, and one person involved found that that location "suits the play so well. The cast find it really inspiring to rehearse in there; it makes them more inventive and very funny."[36] There are dozens of set designs that are altogether uninspired: wooden floors and walls, and an invisible fourth out on the lip of the stage. Another critic writes of a 2010 Chicago production that the "period-perfect costumes enhance the look and atmosphere."[37] Still another reviewer wrote of a 2015 youth production that it contained a "cinema-like soundtrack of Renaissance and film music that hit all the right narrative and emotional notes."[38] It is unlikely that music and costumes meant to evoke a period of time hundreds of years previous connects a modern audience to the thematic and emotional states contained within the script.

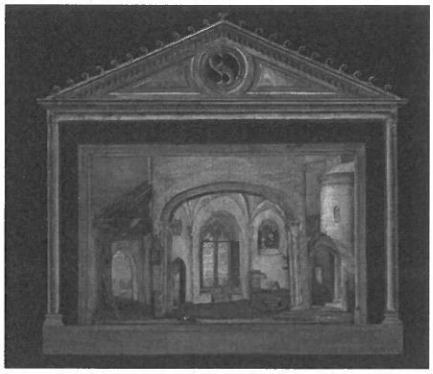

Fig. 3. Oliver Messel, "Set model."

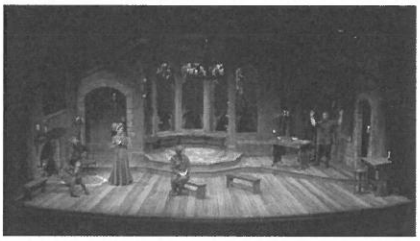

Fig. 4. "Peninsula Players, scene design by Jack Magaw."

Odd, then, despite critics' condemnation of the anachronistic text, such importance is often placed on the setting of the play, as previously noted in regards to careful medieval designs. This play is neo-medievalist, which can be defined as a relationship to medieval work that "allow for a more heterogeneous and disruptive relationship between the past, the present and the future," as opposed to working against or romanticizing the Middle Ages.[39] Within this play and in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, anachronistic text and 20th century ways of knowing construct an image of medieval world informed by modern sensibilities. Thus, Fry's construction of the lovers' idealistic society for the audience creates a world framed and freed by historical pasts, in which the beautiful mysteries of paganism can also inform the beauty of Christian worldview. An example of these various time periods melding is when the judge, Tappercoom, remarks that that "religion has made an honest woman of the supernatural."[40] Tappercoom reflects on the melding of pagan ritual into Christian religion, something to which a reference in the Middle Ages would be blasphemous. This assertion also demonstrates an awareness of the control of women's sexuality inherent in these systems. The supernatural, like Jennet, is a wild woman yet to be tamed, and the structure of Christianity will make her morally upright. The natural is also identified as pagan when Thomas remarks that "you would think by the holy scent of it our friend had been baptizing the garden. / But it's only the heathen rainfall."[41] Thomas makes fun of the ease in which a person can label nature either heathen/holy and thus condemn or reify something that is what we commonly perceive to be immutable; thus exhibiting a neo-medievalist philosophy and nullifying a need for historical accuracy.

The world of *LNFB* is one in where contemporary workings of bureaucracy occur simultaneously with pre-Enlightenment thought, though it seems stuck in the past. John Gielgud,

the Globe's 1949 director and star, himself considered doing a modern-dress version of the play and yet every major production and nearly every minor production thinks of the medieval setting as apparently integral to its performance.[42] Yet this is not so for every play set hundreds of years ago, as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, a perennially popular play on the subject of witches, is found often not adhering to temporal logic in its production. It is, in fact, faulted for placing other factors above 'historical accuracy.'[43] Critics write about the relationship to time and politics in both of these plays. I was surprised to read that one critic in 2010, described *The Lady's Not for Burning* a "political comedy," not examining as an anachronistic joke or as a love-filled language fest.[44] Miller thought *The Crucible* to be highlighting "the tragic process underlying the political manifestation," not a specific backlash to the McCarthy era, as it is often framed.[45] Critics write of *The Crucible* as a direct repudiation of McCarthyism; meanwhile write of *LNFB* as strictly a medieval play. Criticism often examines *LNFB* toward it as an escapist play from the wars, not as a direct response. Critics posit both plays as timely and simultaneously universal, yet only *The Crucible* is often staged inventively or at least, extra-temporally. Miller's work, of course, is easier to stage freed from its explicit time period because of its canonicity. *The Lady's Not for Burning* dropped off in popularity at the time in which economical writing and subtext came in vogue, in both working-class 'realist' drama and in absurdism. Both of these genres give the director large berth in which to choose staging, subtext, and overall vision. These possibilities remain wide open in any dramatic text, yet the choices made in the productions of *LNFB* demonstrate that it is read and produced as if the world of the play was immutable. This is not so, and living in an age with a wide acceptance of directors' interpretations, this play should be given the same manner of pushing and interpreting as *The Crucible*.

In Clive Barnes's outright rebuke of the 1972 Chichester revival, Barnes disparages not the production, but the play. What Barnes saw was "quite a cast, but less of a play," and that "the production was well staged." The fault here entirely on the shoulders of Fry, who wrote "a poor, inflated play…[that] falls down [today]."[46] Barnes goes on to say that "if the lady is not for burning, perhaps, by now, the play is."[47] He makes special note of the fact that in 1972, the nostalgia and hype that once surrounded this play is gone. Barnes posits himself and the 1972-present as more enlightened than the Fry-loving philistines of the past. Indeed, decades later in 2002 at another Chichester revival the reviewer wrote that the production "may not convince, but it's far more entertaining than one would have expected."[48] This review presents the spectrum of a play either 'convincing' or 'entertaining' the audience. This implies that entertaining is the realm of conservatively constructed saccharine work, whereas the serious work of contemporary theatre is meant to convince. This view of contemporary verse comedy has existed at least since the debut of *LNFB*, although Barnes posits himself as the contemporary voice of reason decades later.

Fry's work is often posited in a dichotomy of reactions to the world wars: escapism or realism. The former formulated as hollow, embarrassing 'entertainment,' and the latter as mature and responsible, the proper medicine. This formulation is strikingly similar to the ways in which critics derided the self-assuredness of Eliot and other verse dramatists, who, as Gassner argues, "have, quite frequently, written and talked about their work as though they were professional do-gooders bent upon raising the fallen estate of the stage. They have written essays on the necessity of writing poetry of the stage."[49] Whether in verse drama of the thirties and forties or in acerbic realism or the sparseness of absurdism in the fifties and sixties, theatre artists dictate what they

believe is working against the mainstream, as they employ conservative or avant-garde techniques in order to aliment the audience. Since the fifties, there stands a distinction between 'serious' dramas whose mixture of realist and non-realist directing, acting, and writing styles are all associated with the modern. This distinction places verse dramas, especially because of 'historically accurate' design and despite the best efforts of enthusiastic direction, as hopelessly lost in the past. The American mainstream is used to a mixing of styles, from decades of Shakespeare plays in new settings, or interspersing non-verbal, figurative movement into plays so as to bolster the metaphors already present in the script. Theatre artists must invigorate these plays relegated to the past with the tools that are in the American theatre mainstream today.

DRAMATURGICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

This play benefits from the time in which we are producing it, namely from the advent of alternatives to realism in the mainstream. Even the restriction upon our festival to be performed in the round would not have been mainstream in the decade following the premiere of *LNFB.* This relatively recent development in American drama allows a closer connection to the audience and a different vocabulary of movement and design. Through the proliferation of innovations in theatre in the U.S., collaborators can accomplish prioritizing the play over the period through what Tori Haring-Smith describes as non-realist dramaturgy. Realist dramaturgical analysis seeks answers about the world of the play as something concrete and actual, as was the trend in American dramaturgy in the mid- to late 20th century.[50] Instead of researching medieval philosophy or social structures, the approach to producing and analyzing this play has been to understand the world of the play as a world of its own, not an anachronism. This methodology comes from Elinor Fuchs's "Visit to a Small Planet," in which she contends that "nothing in the

play is without significance" and that those undertaking dramaturgical analysis must see the play as "another world passing before you in time and space."[51] By analyzing the play as a thing in itself, the play does not appear as a flimsy anachronism but as a full being in which the characters follow certain rules. Another non-realist dramaturgical approach includes the interrogation of images, borrowed from Gregory Gunter's collaborations with Anne Bogart.[52] Gunter finds images that provoke and flesh out the world of the play as a useful technique for interrogating the text. These can be images that literally represent the play's setting, images that relate to themes within the play, anything that helps crack open the world for the collaborators. When we chose this play, I looked for images that I believed expressed themes and moods of the play. Most of the images were expressionist and impressionist paintings from early-mid 20th century European artists. Many contain bright colors and vibrant landscapes, evidentiary of the way the characters wax poetic with beautiful images. The impressionist landscapes' careful consideration of the colors and shapes that converge together to create natural landscapes remind me of the wonder, mystery, and beauty *LNFB* evokes. The ways in which the characters relate to nature is through careful consideration and observation in service of a picturesque image, like these paintings.

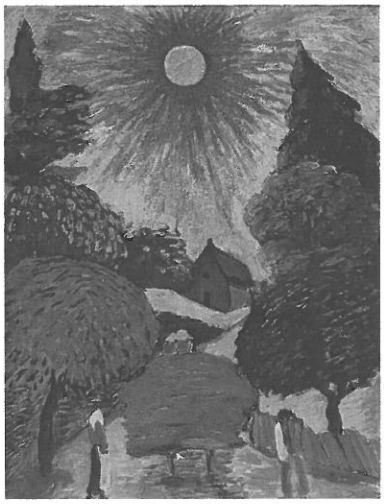

Fig. 5. Marianne von Werefkin, *Gleaming sun over Heuwagen.*

Fig. 6. Marc Chagall, *Over the Town.*

Figures that drew me in were often expressionistic. Garish, confused faces with exaggerated features such as these are useful for understanding this play because they reject verisimilitude. These characters' relationship to language is unlike humans in the drawing-rooms

of naturalism. These characters are playful, joyful, and are not meant to be character studies. These resemble the characters in the play because they feel larger than life, and relish their color and liveliness. Marc Chagall's paintings of couples flying felt to me an elegant representation of the end of the play, in which the characters have no place to go, and must find a way to escape to a place outside of society. I was also struck by images of imposing landscapes with small figures. I also discovered this through my own artistic inquiries, in which I created sketches and watercolors based on impressions of the play so as to better understand it. Sometimes I worked from specific portions of text, other times from my mood and mere inklings of the play's ideas. In these images of small figures in large landscapes, the characters attempt to create order and meaning with religion as a way to control nature, but they do not assert control over neither nature or society at the close of the play. In the play and these images, there remains mystery. In the images, this is expressed through the impressionist colors of the landscapes and the close gaze of the small figure imposed on the landscape.

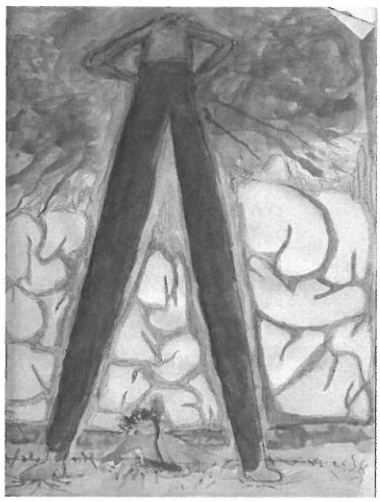

Fig. 7. A literal representation of offstage events, painted by me.

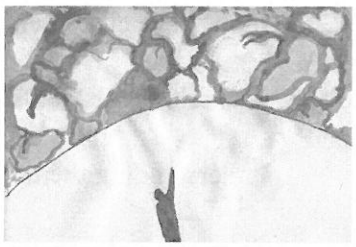

Fig. 8. A figurative representation of theme, painted by me.

Fry establishes a world in which the characters' monologues are things in which that the audience and the characters are both delighting. This approach to verse can be a way into the text for actors. During this rehearsal process, the director and I had actors write up on the board their favorite lines in the play. We went through the lines about which people wished to speak, and we had actors speak lines in various exaggerated as-if scenarios, or had people speak about

why they chose the lines that they chose and what it meant to them. Others jumped in and explained their differing interpretation of the text. We also inspected the text through table reads in which, Hanna would have the actors go around the table and say the dialogue in turn of the circle and explain what they thought the text was saying. Once again, people jumped in to offer various opinions or facts that influenced the actors' interpretations. This democratic approach makes the text less intimidating by having those in charge attempting lower status and giving everyone involved ownership over the text. This approach is particularly useful in a play in which the characters are conscious of and relishing in the text. Without understanding and owning the words, the actor/character cannot possess this particular and unique way of relating to the text. This, too, is a manner of non-realist dramaturgy, as Haring-Smith asserts that non-realist plays necessarily work against the traditional hierarchy of the director.[53]

It is also necessary to use non-realist approaches to the text because of the archetypal criticism of it. Gunnar Urang uses Northrop Frye's framework of fictional versus thematic modes to argue that *LNFB* works in the thematic, thus lessening the importance of the development of plot.[54] The characters Fry is developing, then, instead of the "texts and subtexts" of realism, necessitate the "texts and contexts" of non-realism: these characters can benefit from understanding them through "associative images."[55] Urang continues, writing that "[critics who disapproved] were looking for a fiction and Fry was giving them an allegory; they were looking for 'solid' characterization and Fry was giving them personified abstractions; they were thinking of Ibsen and Pinero while Fry's (conscious or unconscious) parallel was *Everyman.*"[56] Instead of fleshed out characters, these people more like figures, who lack the textual psychological depth

of realist plays. Therefore, it is unfair to judge the characters of *LNFB* to its largely prose counterparts in the theatre, what with their hyper-examined interior lives and sparse prose.

Every text has elements of realism and non-realism, this play deserves as much non-realism as has been given to canonical works, as in the productions staged by Robert Wilson or Ivo van Hove. On the first run of the show, one of the scenes had been falling flat. Hanna told us to imagine instead that the scene was much more full with subtext, as if we were in a Pinter or Beckett play. When we ran the scene, I found myself contorting my body as if it were wilting in order to highlight the desires and states of my character. Though our production largely relies on text to supply image, I would be elated to see a production that gives figurative movement and image the same importance as text.

ARTISTIC APPROACHES

Fig. 9. Vincent Van Gogh, *The Bedroom in Arles*.

It is imperative to note that these analyses of the play were not explicit in their current form at the beginning stages of planning production, but I want to explicate the choices made in this production in the light of my research. In the Senior Theatre Festival, the plays are necessarily performed in the round. Ada Hoch-Schneider and Michael Fortenberry were the scenic designers, and created a set within a low-walled octagon. The scenic artists painted floor and the single chair with strokes of blue, orange, and brown to emulate a wooden floor. These large strokes emulate that within impressionist paintings such as Van Gogh's "The Bedroom in Arles," in which the colors and strokes are lively and playful. Ada and Michael often returned to their interpretation that

characters are within an impressionist painting to help guide their design. Because the techniques the painters used on the stage are typical of scenic artists, it is difficult to know if the audience will interpret the stage as attempting verisimilitude or not. The scenic colors are warm, based on the importance of red as the color Hanna and I discussed in the fall as a monochrome possibility for the world of the play. We based our convictions from the film director Anna Biller, who frequently bemoans the lack of color in modern film on her Twitter. Biller often argues that "color should be used purposefully and with symbolic intent," a theory she puts into practice in her saturated films that draw on classic cinema.[57] Her assertion stands in opposition to what she views as contemporary mainstream film theory and practice, in which 'toning down' of color through dark and desaturated frames is the norm. In contrast, during one dramaturgy brainstorm session, one actor hypothesized that even at night, the colors the world of the play are bright and saturated. The pull toward bright colors demonstrate the joyful repudiation of what audiences have come to accept as realist aesthetics. Both in cinema and in the theatre, a general concession to psychological realism with gritty, dark lighting has dominated of late. Non-realist approaches to design draw attention to itself by subverting the audience's expectation of gloom and instead utilize the tools of color and delight at the designers' disposal. These wild and changing colors are highlighted by Rachel Dickenson's playful lighting design. Red, in particular was the color we discussed as representing the tight-knit community of Cool Clary. This is still present in the textured, warm-colored scene design that matches some of the costumes. The members of the Mayor's family all wear red, signifying their comfort in the warm-colored space as well as the power they possess in the town and plot. The costume design of the play in general is meant to highlight characterization, throwing the medieval setting out the window. For example, the

costume for Jennet is is a Regency era dress under a lace Victorian blouse with early-twentieth century leather shoes. Although these pieces all reflect a general acquiescence to a British past, it is indefinable to one particular period.

Hanna Woods's sound design creates a way into the text for the audience, establishing sonic moods of cinematic romantic comedy. Her introductory music as well as transition music consists of mostly the work of Samuel J. Hoffman. Songs such as "Lunar Rhapsody" includes the riffing of a theremin, thus adding a sonic jolt of retro-futurism to jazzy piano, harp, and chorus. The inclusion of the theremin within songs that otherwise sound like classic cinema reflect a historical imagining of the future, unmooring the audience from a specific point in time. Sound continues under the party during the third act, mostly Billy May's album "Billy May Plays the Standards," a big-band musical theatre album even more whimsical than Hoffman. Keeping a constant sonic presence evokes a soundtrack and the song itself gives the audience the impression that they are watching a forties musical about discontented lovers, not a verse drama about witch-burning. This analogue of an era and genre of cinema enforced through music helps the audience to understand the stakes and mood of the play. The practice of ebullience by way of music is revisited at the close of the play, when Thomas and Jennet are brought back onstage to take one last look at the set with a concentrated, purple light. The romantic, symphonic music swells as the characters kiss and decide to escape, conjuring up a zoom at the close of a movie made during the studio era.

Another way to bring the play out of obscurity is in the approach to acting. Apart from analyzing the text, speaking with loose voices and connecting to our bodies has been integral to the rehearsal process. A concern of Hanna's was the tendency for actors to slip into 'tight voice,'

that grating tone and rhythm of speech that indicates to an audience that one is acting. This is difficult to rid within untrained actors like ourselves, but we spent an evening of rehearsal discussing social causes of distorting our voices as well as strategies to loosen them. Hanna and I are also in a Tai Chi course this semester, and our instructor Jeffrey Daniel came into a rehearsal to help us relax into our bodies and work with, not against, tension. One exercise we learned, passing and holding an invisible ball containing different elements, has been useful as both a warming-up exercise and as a metaphor for giving our scene partners energy. These strategies helped us to relax into the verse and and make the words seem more accessible to the audience.

CONCLUSION

Despite the stagnant ways in which it has been produced, the play persists. Admittedly, partially in in narratives of theatre history which posit Fry as the 'loser.' It is understandable that the play should not be widely produced; the economics of producing an eleven-person play in verse is difficult to do in American theaters that are privately funded and are heavily restrained by budgets. But instead of relegating this play to the fringes, it and non-canonical poetry on the stage in general needs a place in English-speaking theaters. But it cannot just be done by slapping the script onto a "medieval" set.

The way to approach this text should not be understanding it as a challenge through which the actors much hurdle. Instead, the text and the world of the play should be mutable, much like canonical texts like Miller or Shakespeare. Verse should not be a challenge, but an opportunity. The actors should feel ownership over the text through a collaborative environment, aided by studying the text and asking questions. These non-realist dramaturgical, collaborative, and aesthetic approaches should all work in tandem with the text in order to highlight the love,

joy, and language within. The play should be cracked open by the collaborators through critical analysis and design that prioritizes the play over the period.

NOTES

[1] What jumps to mind is the physiognomy oft-cited upon Jennet's entrance, tying her dark skin to mystery and chaos.

[2] Iain Dunbar Kirkaldy-Willis, "Quaker Elements in Christopher Fry's Dramas," (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1966), vi. https://open.library.ubc.ca/handle/bitstream/132349/UBC_1966_A8

[3] Iain Dunbar Kirkaldy-Willis, "Quaker Elements," vi.

[4]Glenda Leeming. *Christopher Fry* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1990), xiii.

[5] Leeming, *Christopher Fry*, xiii.

[6] Leeming, *Christopher Fry*, xiv.

[7] "Arts Theatre," *London Times*, March 11, 1948, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/9WFHV4.

[8]Jay Carmody, "Fry's Dazzling Witch Spins Enchantment at Gayety," *The Evening Star,* March 20, 1951. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1951-03-20/ed-1/seq-18/

[9] Gunnar Urang, "The Climate is the Comedy: A Study of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning,*" *The Christian Scholar* 46, no. 1 (1963): 61-86.

[10] John Gassner, *Theatre in Our Times* (New York: Crown, 1954), 407.

[11]Tynan, Kenneth. *A View of the English Stage* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), 319.

[12] Gassner,*Theatre in Our Times*, 21.

[13] Gassner,*Theatre in Our Times*, 270.

[14] Jacob H. Adler, "Shakespeare and Christopher Fry," *Educational Theatre Journal* 11, No. 2 (May 1959), 95.

[15] Christopher Fry. *The Lady's Not for Burning,* 3, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JqnHlYqbD5DWPqLU9n7UVTldg1doWfNuNLgOCH3z6eQ/edit?usp=sharing
(note: I thought it important to use the edited version, so here is access to Hanna's edits, adapted from the Oxford University Press 1950 edition).

[16] Fry, *Lady's* 44.

[17] Hinchcliffe, Arnold P. *Modern Verse Drama* (York: Metheun, 1977), 54.

[18] "Arts Theatre," *London Times*.

[19] This same turn of phrase Tynan imagined would greatly embarrass the playwrights onto whom it was bestowed.

[20] Carmody, "Fry's Dazzling Witch."

[21] "Past Awards," *New York Drama Critics' Circle*, n.d. https://www.dramacritics.org/dc_pastawards.html#1951

[22] "Arts Theatre."

[23] Sam Zolotow, "Play by Fry Bows Tonight at Royale," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1950, https://www.nytimes.com/1950/11/08/archives/play-by-fry-bows-tonight-at-royale-the-ladys-not-for-burning-a.html.

[24]Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 405.

[25] quoted in William G. McCollom, "Verse Drama: A Reconsideration," *Comparative Drama* 14, no. 2, (Summer 1980), 100.

[26] McCollom, "Verse Drama: A Reconsideration," 100.

[27] Tynan, *A View*, 161.

[28] Tynan, *A View*, 272.

[29] Simon Shepherd & Peter Womack, *English Drama: A Cultural History* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 1996), 277.

[30] Shepherd & Womack, *English Drama*, 277.

[31] Richard F. Shepard, "Theater: Comedy by Fry," *The New York Times,* September 25, 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/25/arts/theater-comedy-by-fry.html.

[32] Lee Projector, "PLAY REVIEW: 'The Lady's Not for Burning,'" *The Stanford Daily,* May 15, 1963, https://stanforddailyarchive.com/cgi-bin/stanford?a=d&d=stanford19630515-01.2.17&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN-------.

[33] Michael Phillips, "Costumes a Mixed Bag in 'Lady's Not for Burning,'" *Los Angeles Times,* July 19, 2001, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jul-19-ca-23884-story.html.

[34] Clive Barnes, "Stage: English Festival: 'Taming of the Shrew' and a Revival of Fry Play Done in Repertory," *The New York Times,* August 22, 1972, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/08/22/archives/stage-english-festival-taming-of-the-shrew-and-a-revival-of-fry.html.

[35] Fry, *Lady's*, 1.

[36] Amy Cory, "Student Theatre to perform a Fry classic at the Guildhall," *University of Leicester,* February 26, 2010. https://www.le.ac.uk/ebulletin-archive/ebulletin/news/press-releases/2010-2019/2010/02/nparticle.2010-02-30.html.

[37] Tom Williams, "The Lady's Not For Burning," *Chicago Critic,* 2010, https://chicagocritic.com/the-ladys-not-for-burning/.

[38] Leslie Weisman, "'The Lady's Not For Burning' at Lumina Studio Theatre," *DC Metro Theater Arts,* April 21, 2015, https://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2015/04/21/the-ladys-not-for-burning-at-lumina-studio-theatre/.

[39] Krystyna Michael, "Neomedievalism and the Modern Subject in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral," *Postmedieval* 5, no. 1 (2014): 35.

[40] Fry, *Lady's*, 41.

[41] Fry, *Lady's*, 52.

[42] Samantha Ellis, "Theatre: Curtain up: No 12: The Lady's Not for Burning, at the Globe Theatre, May 11 1949, dazzles with its verbal pyrotechnics," *The Guardian*, May 28, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/may/28/theatre.samanthaellis.

[43] E. Miller Budick, "History and Other Spectres in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible,*" *Modern Drama* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 535.

[44] Katy Walsh, "Review "The Lady's not for Burning": Political Comedy Goes Long-Winded!" *Chicago Now,* September 21, 2010, http://www.chicagonow.com/the-fourth-walsh/2010/09/review-the-ladys-not-for-burning-political-comedy-goes-long-winded/.

[45] Miller, quoted in Budick, "History and Other Spectres," 536.

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[49] Gassner, *Theatre in Our Times*, 22.

[50] Tori Haring-Smith, "Dramaturging Non-Realism: Creating a New Vocabulary," *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 1 (2003): 52.

[51] Elinor Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," *Theater* 34 no. 2, (2004): 6. muse.jhu.edu/article/169652.

[52] Gregory Gunter, "Exploration Through Imagery: Gregory Gunter Talks about Working with Anne Bogart," in *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook,* ed. Michael Lupu, Susan Jonas, Geoffrey S. Proehl (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997): 176-179.

[53] Haring-Smith, "Dramaturging Non-Realism," 52.

[54]Urang, "The Climate," 64.

[55] Haring-Smith, "Dramaturging Non-Realism," 53.

[56] Urang, "The Climate," 67.

[57]Anna Biller (@missannabiller), "One thing I've always agreed with Eisenstein about is that color should be used purposefully and with symbolic intent," Twitter Post, August 12, 2018, https://twitter.com/missannabiller/status/1028721261373841408.

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Fig. 1. Anonymous, "University of Central Florida, set design by Luke T.X. Hopper," photograph, n.d, http://tdwarrior.tripod.com/pages/UCF.html

Fig. 2. Anonymous, "Village Playhouse, Toronto, Canada," photograph, 1991. *https://hiveminer.com/Tags/setdesign%2Cvillageplayhouse*

Fig. 3. Oliver Messel, "Set model," Wood, cardboard, fabric, and paint, 1949 (Victoria & Albert Collection), http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O126212/set-model-messel-oliver-hilary/.

Fig. 4. Anonymous, "Peninsula Players, scene design by Jack Magaw," photograph, n.d. https://www.courtneyoneill.com/Other/SCENIC-ART/.

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Fig. 9. Vincent Van Gogh, *The Bedroom in Arles*, oil on canvas (Van Gogh Museum), https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0047V1962?v=1.