

Christopher Fry's Definition of the Complete Pacifist in The Dark is Light Enough

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I N his own heart every man considers himself to be a pacifist. Even those who live by the sword take up the sword in the cause of peace, which cause they call "*Lebensraum*," or "making the world safe for democracy," or "the five-year plan," or which they call "peace," though usually with a qualification: "peace in our time," "peace in Northern Ireland," or "peace with honor." Peace is the only cause a soldier ever fights for.

Pacifists are as blind to their real condition as soldiers. It is the rare pacifist who carries his policies on the international scene into private life. Conscientious objectors to war have been known to quarrel belligerently with their wives, to strike their children in unjustified anger, and to turn non-violent demonstrations objecting to a war into violence against the police. The outbreak of violence is a common signal that the non-violent demonstration is over. One applauds the sincerity and deplors the superficiality of the pacifist who urges nations to live at peace, while unable to resolve his much simpler problems without violence. For what are the crimes of the warmonger but the daily crimes of all of us writ large? Scratch the skin of warmonger and pacifist, and find the same humanity.

Any mature understanding of violence and pacifism must begin with an acknowledgement of the violence in one's own heart, and in *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951)¹ Fry had defined the progression from the recognition of violence within to a complete pacifism. That play begins with the

personal violence of Cain and Abel, moves through the political assassination of Absalom by Joab but condoned by David, progresses to the sacrificial offering of Isaac by Abraham, and concludes with Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace, the flames being the inescapable violence of the human condition, which the pacifist must learn to endure without being violent in return.²

Although *The Dark is Light Enough*³ is three years later than *Sleep*, no other play intervened, and this paper assumes that Fry's perceptions of violence and pacifism remained constant during the interim. The chief difference between the plays is the surrealist, lyrical organization of *Sleep*, in the writing of which Fry was still discovering his own position on violence and pacifism, and the cause-and-effect plot of *Dark*, in which Fry is expressing what he has discovered earlier.

Though the literary form of the two pieces is very different, the intellectual content is much the same: violence as self-assertion, violence as loyalty to the state, violence as loyalty to God, and, finally, violence to be endured but not to be inflicted.

First, then, the plot of *Dark* embodies violence as self-assertion. As the play opens, one of the Thursday "at homes" of the Countess Rosmarin Ostenbridge is in progress, but the atmosphere is discontented. The Countess lives in her Austrian country house while the Hungarian-Austrian war is in progress during the winter of 1848-49. She lives at the boundary between the two nations, and the atmosphere is restless because, with war going on all around, the Countess is strangely absent from her "at home." Unknown to friends or servants, she has left by horse and sleigh in a blinding snowstorm to find Richard Gettner, the former husband of her daughter Gelda. Gettner is an Austrian who has joined the Hungarian army and has now deserted. Held in contempt by Hungarians, Austrians, and all of the guests, Gettner arrives at the "at home" with the Countess, and their arrival coincides with

the arrival of Gelda, who has been sent for from Vienna because of the disappearance of her mother. Into the party breaks Janik, a civilian geologist turned colonel in the Hungarian revolt. He and a troop of Hungarian soldiers have observed the Countess bringing Gettner to her house, they have also arrested Count Peter Zichy (Gelda's present husband, a moderate Hungarian who serves in the Austrian cabinet, who has followed his wife to the home of the Countess), and the Hungarians demand that the Countess surrender Gettner (his death will be certain as a deserter) as a condition for the release of Peter. All the guests advise the surrender of Gettner, whom they consider worthless, but the Countess stands firm in protecting Gettner, and Peter remains a prisoner of the Hungarians and Janik.

Before Act II opens, the Hungarians have left, encountered the Austrians, returned from battle to the house, and have occupied it as headquarters. The family and the guests of the "at home," stranded by the war, are in process of moving into the stables as the act opens. The atmosphere is as hostile as ever. Gettner has escaped from the house to the stable with a supply of liquor. On his way to the stable loft he meets Gelda alone, they discover that their marriage is not as dead as they had thought it was, and they kiss. As the others arrive, Gettner makes his way into the loft. Colonel Janik, a civilian friend of the Countess, is in the awkward position of dispossessing her to the stable. Eager to compensate for the crude necessity of war, he makes the concession of allowing Peter to join the company, though only in the presence of two Hungarian guards. No sooner is the company complete than Gettner, fortified by drink, makes his way down from the loft. The Countess persuades the guards not to arrest Gettner, and Gettner, expansively successful, announces before Peter that Gelda still loves him. To prove it, he kisses her, much to the disgust of everyone present. To lighten the atmosphere, the Countess suggests that the guards provide music. The guards take off their pistol belts to dance, and Stefan,

the Countess's son, disgusted by Gettner's reviving the feelings of the defunct marriage, steals the pistols and, unnoticed by the others preoccupied with the dance, forces Gettner to step outside to fight a duel. When the shots are fired, the dancing stops abruptly, the embarrassed guards miss their weapons, everyone but the Countess rushes outside, and they return to inform the Countess that Gettner has shot her son. Even so, she refuses to be judgmental against Gettner.

Act III opens with the Hungarians defeated, Stefan recovering from a gunshot wound, and the Countess in bed with acute exhaustion. Peter, released as a Hungarian prisoner, stops in at the house of the Countess just long enough to establish a good relationship with Gelda again, but Peter must hurry off to Austria to persuade the victorious government to stop their wholesale slaughter of Hungarian officers. Gettner is not in immediate jeopardy from the Hungarians as a deserter; he is, however, still in Hungarian uniform and in jeopardy from the Austrians. So Gettner steals a horse from the stable and rides toward Hungary, but he hears rumors along the way that the Countess is dying and arrives at her house during a Thursday "at home." The Countess, ill as she is, manages to attend. Janik, who formerly pursued Gettner as a deserter, is now being pursued by the victorious Austrians. He arrives at the "at home" just before Gettner, and the Countess now grants Janik the same impartial asylum that she granted Gettner earlier. When Gettner arrives, he and the Countess have a long talk together, and Gettner proposes marriage to her; the Countess is pleased but declines, and Gettner leaves, only to find the house surrounded by Austrians in pursuit of Janik. He returns to the Countess, but she has died during the few moments that he was gone. He calmly requests the servant to admit the Austrians, and for the first time in his life he does not run or hide.

From beginning to end, in spite of counteracting influences from the Countess, *Dark* is full of a hostile atmosphere, all the more ironic because the Countess intends the atmosphere to be "at-home" coziness.

Even Cain's anger with Abel disguised itself as moral outrage in *Sleep*. Jakob, a guest responsible for much of the hostility at the "at homes," disguises his antipathy toward the other guests as loyalty to the Countess. When Dr. Kassel deplors not only the absence of the Countess during a snowstorm, but her absence from the "at home" on a Thursday, Jakob suspects the good Dr. of mocking the Countess (p. 4); when Belmann refers to the Countess as inscrutable, Jakob suspects him of inventing "crackpot blasphemies" (p. 4); when Belmann criticizes the Countess for having married her young daughter to Gettner, Jakob promptly challenges Belmann to a duel two days hence; when Belmann disapproves aesthetically of one of the paintings of the Countess, Jakob defends it on the basis of "the creative value of the fault" (p. 57). Jakob's restlessness is always on the verge of breaking into violence. When the Countess is absent, Jakob laments: "No, no, we must be anxious. I should have/No peace for a moment if I thought I lacked anxiety" (p. 4). His restlessness needs only a cause to justify violence, and defending the Countess against imaginary insult is his cause. Jakob thinks Kassel's respect for the Countess is too familiar and Belmann's worship of the Countess ought to keep him from commenting on her flaws. A worry that Jakob might be sending Belmann to hell is his excuse for not fighting a duel on behalf of the Countess — not the loftiest argument for pacifism, but sufficient in Jakob's case to prevent his shedding blood.

If Belmann and Kassel are the good-natured, light-hearted Abels against Jakob's Cain, Belmann, Kassel, and Jakob are united as Cains against Gettner's Abel. Belmann calls him "that rag of hell," "that invertebrate,/That self-drunk, drunken, shiftless, heartless,/Lying malingerer . . ." (p. 6). It is so strange that Belmann should accuse Gettner of

restlessness, when his accusations are in themselves a symptom of his own restlessness.

Whoever hates his race,
His Emperor, his culture, or his mother
Wins — well, not his heart, which is apparently
Only locomotor,
But all the enthusiasm of his spleen. (p. 10)

The speech says as much about Belmann's spleen as it does about Gettner's. It seems as though all the restlessness that the men feel because of the unexpected absence of the Countess, rather than dissipating upon her return, focusses instead on Richard Gettner. Dr. Kassel, Belmann, and Jakob all agree that the Countess should not give Count Peter Zichy as a hostage in exchange for Gettner. Each remains in character: Dr. Kassel doing his best to weigh all alternatives carefully, Belmann deciding on the most humane course with a decidedly secular flavor, and Jakob arguing for the honor of the Countess. Each is unaware of his own violence:

Belmann: If ever there was a bad exchange, we've seen it now.
I feel indignant and aggrieved.
Kassel: And I seriously wonder
Whether the drive you took so far in the snow,
Rosmarin, is finished even yet.
Belmann: No good can come of it.
Jakob: No good will ever come of Gettner.
Countess: That may be true. (p. 37)

The violent person unaware of his own violence is never uncertain. Only the Countess is not so sure.

The certain certainties of Kassel, Belmann, and Jakob have a particular attraction for young people, not yet sure within themselves. Stefan is never entirely sure of his own judgment and ability to cope. His mother's absence makes him send for his brother-in-law, Peter:

My first thought, as it always is,
Was to tell my brother-in-law the trouble.
To me Peter treads the earth more surely
And reassures more instantly
Than any other man. (p. 5)

Stefan is not weak, but dangerously open to influences; not wicked, but very impressionable; not characteristically

violent, but able to contract the violence of others. At the beginning of Act II, Stefan is doing his best, not altogether successfully, to understand Gettner's position:

You just have to show me
Where you keep your sympathy
For the people I've most affection for
And I'll understand if I can. (p. 39)

But two things happen to change Stefan's mood. First, he is amazed to hear about the duel to which Jakob has challenged Belmann to defend the honor of the Countess (p. 58), and next, the drunken Gettner kisses Stefan's sister, Gelda. Stefan challenges Gettner to a duel, and when Gettner is unwilling, he provokes him into it, all to defend the honor of Peter and Gelda.

The theme of the duel is fascinating to trace through the play. Just at the point that Jakob is using Belmann's hell-bound agnosticism as his pretext for not fighting the duel, Stefan takes up the duel with Gettner. Both Jakob and Stefan are sure that they are issuing challenges in the cause of honor. Still, whether duels are fought or not has less to do with the moral necessities of honor than with the murkier necessities of violence. Violence is like an infection with its own irrational necessities. The violence in the situation and within the people is moving toward a duel; who fights it or against whom is beside the point.

The hostile attitude of Jakob, Belmann, and Kassel against Gettner, the hostile attitude of Jakob toward the other guests, and Stefan's vacillating attitude toward Gettner suddenly fixing itself on violence are all like the hostilities of the war between Austria and Hungary raging outside. Wherever hostility exists, each side considers itself as essentially non-violent, considers its case rationally based on a defense of honor, and is blind to its own violence.

Like *Sleep, Dark* embodies violence as self-assertion; both plays also embody the idea of violence as loyalty to the state. The permissive violence of David and the active violence of Joab against Absalom in *Sleep* is justified in the

minds of the instigators because it is intended for the good of the state.

Likewise, Janik in *Dark* also justifies his violence because it promotes the justice of the Hungarian claims against the Austrian tyranny. Janik first enters the house without being admitted or announced (p. 26); he demands Gettner's release; he keeps Count Peter prisoner when the Countess refuses to release Gettner; he occupies the house as his headquarters next day, sending the Countess to the stables; and he, the erstwhile geologist and civilian friend of the Countess, does this all, not out of contempt for her, but on behalf of the "downtrodden men,/The over-long injustice" (p. 51).

As a private person Janik is fond of the Countess. He, in fact, does not search her house for Gettner, he is willing to discuss the issues of war with the Countess, he kisses her hand, and he allows Peter to join his family. The civilized private person in Janik always runs counter to the military public person in him, as it must in any soldier.

In the soldiers sent to guard Peter too. Are the guards military "by nature or misfortune" (p. 60) the Countess wants to know, and the non-military response of Rusti and the military response of Beppi are amusing. Rusti is soon showing around letters from his wife. When Gettner appears, Beppi knows exactly what he should do, but when the Countess invites them both to undo their collars and sit down (p. 64), both guards oblige. Before long Beppi is playing the harmonica and Rusti is dancing, weapons and uniforms laid aside. When shots ring out and the duel is exposed, both guards turn suddenly military, but when the Countess pleads with them not to make her son's injury the occasion for Gettner's execution, they turn non-military again. For military identity is always an identity imposed from without; a military identity always runs counter to what is within. Military identity proves an outlet for the violence within people, but nothing more.

The inadequacy of a strictly military identity is evident when Janik, who before as a soldier condemned the Countess for sheltering Gettner from the Hungarians, returns to the Countess, at the play's end and after his defeat, as a private person, expecting the same kind of treatment as she gave Gettner before.

A military self is never enough, not even on the just side of a war. For even just wars are fought by military establishments which institutionalize violence, justify violence as the only means to freedom, and measure patriotism by the energy of the violence. Violence for the honor of Hungary or Austria is only a little less selfish, a little less narcissistic, than violence for personal honor.

In addition to violence as self-assertion for honor and violence as loyalty to the state, *Sleep* and *Dark* embody violence for God's sake. The honor of God is the motivation for Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in *Sleep*; his willingness to sacrifice Isaac is a combination of performing violence and enduring it, of activity and passivity.

The honor of God is at once Peter's consolation and his cause. When the Hungarians are completely broken, Peter consoles himself with the fact of the Incarnation:

Peter: The Hungarians are completely broken.

Gelda: It was what you were afraid of.

Peter: I was afraid

They'd lose the liberties they were beginning to gain

Lately; not that we should lose the humanity

We took of God two thousand years ago. (p. 79)

The Incarnation is for Peter a redefinition of the concepts *God* and *man*, which cannot be altered by any circumstances, a sure basis for confidence. But the Incarnation is also a process: a learning to become both a son of man and a son of God, along with Jesus Christ. Whatever else being a son of man means, it certainly means taking pains choosing the most Christlike alternative in a muddled situation. Whatever else being a son of God involves, it involves being permanently conditioned against disillusionment in failure.

Thus, Peter's chief concern is never his personal honor. When the Countess chooses to have the Hungarians keep Peter rather than surrender Gettner to certain death, Peter understands perfectly her reasons, though he is honest enough to confess conceit: "I wish there were no conceit in me/To let me bid myself against another man" (p. 35). When Gettner kisses Gelda and Gelda accepts the kiss, Peter is not pleased, to be sure, but neither does he stand on his honor: "It could be. I can see it could be" (p. 67). And when he makes up with Gelda afterwards, he is neither hurt (the barometer of private honor) nor angry (the barometer of public honor). Gelda says she thought she had "almost brought our world to an end/But you didn't greatly notice it" (p. 82). Personal honor, private or public, does not drive Peter.

Nor does loyalty to the state drive Peter, for he is loyal to two states: Austria and Hungary. He is Hungarian by birth, but serves on the Austrian cabinet, urging moderation towards the Hungarian rebels. As a captive to Janik's troops who are surprised by a troop of Austrian dragoons, Peter suddenly finds himself fighting for the Hungarian cause:

In the fight with the Austrian dragoons this morning
 I became the very passion I opposed, and was glad to be.
 I borrowed a sword out of someone's useless hand,
 And as long as the fighting lasted
 I was, heart and soul, the revolution.
 Janik thought he had won me over,
 But on the way back I convinced him otherwise.

Peter's only explanation:

I suppose
 There's no balance without the possibility
 Of overbalancing. (p. 59)

Peter is free from the tyranny of personal glory and patriotism, both.

But Peter never reaches serenity, for at heart he remains an overbalanced activist. Stefan sends for him and he rushes to Rosmarin's house "the moment/He could manage to get away" (p. 12). Taken captive by the Hungarians,

he fights valiantly on their side. Making up with Gelda in Act III, he can stay only briefly; he must rush off to Austria because the victorious government is "shooting and hanging/Every Hungarian of note who fought in the war":

What torments me
Is whether I might not have prevented it
If I'd never left Vienna: whether that ride here,
Whether Stefan's message of alarm for Rosmarin,
Wasn't the cause of these deaths and the endless consequences.
I'm too late, but I have to go there.
And, though I'm too late, every moment here
Makes me feel I'm betraying someone. (p. 80)

The concept of betrayal keeps coming up, for Peter is never sure he has done the right thing:

You make me think
I shall betray something either way,
Staying or going. If I stay, I think
Of nothing but getting to Vienna. If I go,
I think of nothing but what you have said to me. (p. 81)

Peter lacks a single workable criterion by which he can make moral choices and then, for good or ill, rest in them. Peter is that humanly understandable but logically contradictory phenomenon: the militant pacifist. He fights for peace the way Jakob fights for the honor of the Countess and the way Janik fights for Hungary, but in the cause of peace one should not fight at all. Is Peter not driven, at least to some extent, by violence? Is he not as unaware of the violence within him as Jakob and Janik?

All three learn something about the violence within themselves. Jakob sees it is not an isolated instance of outraged honor which drives him:

One always thinks if only
One particular unpleasantness
Could be cleared up, life would become as promising
As it is always promising to be.
But in fact we merely change anxieties. (p. 84)

The military Janik returns defeated, he for whom the Hungarian cause had become everything. He must be coaxed by the Countess to sing a bawdy song of the soldiers. Only after he sings does the Countess comfort him:

Child,
I know your cause is lost, but in the heart
Of all right causes is a cause which cannot lose. (p. 90)

The unselfishness in Janik's devotion to Hungary must grow into Peter's devotion to God; God is the only cause which cannot lose, though Janik will need to become a child to know that. Peter overcomes some of the snobbery inherent in any pacifist's scorn for the military, when he fights with Janik against the Austrians:

I'm no less convinced
Than I always was, they're doing themselves a wrong
And doing as great a damage to Hungary
As to Austria. But I know it now
In a different sense. I can taste it
Like a fault of my own, which is not the same
Flavour as the fault of some other man. (p. 60)

Jakob, Janik, and Peter all acquire insight into the violence which drives them, although they do not change significantly within the play. But their insight into the violence which drives them is essential if they are going to overcome the problem of violence, if not in the play then outside of it, if not in time then outside of it.

Two characters, Gelda and Gettner, change significantly within the play, but a discussion of them must wait for a discussion of the Countess.

The plots of *Sleep* and *Dark* embody the ideas of willingness to endure violence and unwillingness to inflict it. In the last dream in *Sleep* Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace of life are joined by the son of man under God's command, a *figura Christi*. None of the four are naively shocked at the violence that comes with living, all of them are willing to endure it, and none of them will inflict it. It is the position of the Countess in *Dark*.

She too is a *figura Christi*, surrounded as she is by her rock-like Peter, who "treads the earth more surely/And reassures more instantly/Than any other man" (p. 5), her James (Jakob = Jacobus = James), and her John (Janik): the three characters who acquire insight into their own violence, although they do not change within the

scope of the play. Besides, the Thursday "at homes" are reminiscent of Maundy Thursday, the Thursday of the foot-washing, the Lord's Supper, and the new commandment "that ye love one another." That the Countess leaves her nine guests in order to hunt up Gettner in spite of a blinding snowstorm and at great risk to herself is reminiscent of Christ's parable of the good shepherd, in which ninety-nine sheep are left for the sake of one. For readers unconvinced by these implications, Fry has Belmann make the point explicitly, again and again:

The goddess of it our Thursday world in her Godlike way,
Is God knows where. We can only hope
She will condescend to appear in her own time. (p. 4)

You know the Countess has the qualities of true divinity.
For instance: how apparently undemandingly
She moves among us; and yet
Lives make and unmake themselves in her neighborhood
As nowhere else. There are many names I could name
Who would have been remarkably otherwise
Except for her divine non-interference. (p. 5)

She has a touching way
Of backing a man up against eternity
Until he hardly has the nerve to remain mortal. (p. 5)

One man the Countess will never change
By her divine non-interference:
Ten kronen against Gettner's chances. (p. 61)

But simply to label the Countess a *figura Christi* is to make her into a static icon, just as Belmann, that clever but not particularly wise agnostic, does. To freeze the Countess into a *figura Christi* is to make the play into a static allegory and is to ignore the dynamic interplay between human and divine: the humanity we took from God two thousand years ago in the Incarnation. As man now is, Christ once was; as Christ is now, we may become. In this state of affairs, how is one to distinguish between a *figura Christi* and a Christian struggling to become more Christ-like? The Countess is a believable person and inhabits a world we recognize as our own. Her penmanship is illegible — "Three words, apparently/Entirely composed of E's" — (p. 4), she can be genuinely giddy when Janik kisses her

hand or Gettner proposes marriage, and she is curiously pre-occupied with a bawdy song. The Countess is no icon.

In many ways the Countess is like Peter. When Gettner calls to her to save him, she puts her own world down and takes his up, just as Peter responds to Stefan's call. Just as Peter is a Hungarian in the Austrian cabinet, so the Countess is an Austrian but lives next to the Hungarian border and has Hungarian friends, like the geologist Janik. Just as Peter, a member of the Austrian Cabinet, fights temporarily on the Hungarian side, so the Countess protects Gettner from Janik and his Hungarians and protects Janik from the Austrians. Just as Peter refuses to feel threatened when Stefan, Janik, Gelda, and Gettner use him for their own purposes, so the Countess refuses to feel threatened when Gettner and Janik use her.

One great difference between Peter and the Countess is that the Countess is not at all militant about her pacifism. She has learned long ago that violence cannot be organized or fought out of existence. The only effective locus for effecting the victory of peace over violence is the individual human heart: one's own. She has learned that "there is nothing on earth/Which does not happen in your own hearts" (p. 74) and in her own heart too. Peter pursues too militantly the situations where peace is to be made, and then feels he is "betraying" (pp. 80-81) the other causes when he concentrates on one. The Countess waits for situations to come to her. Then she makes perfect her will when she deals with them.

The Countess completely bypasses the intricacies of politics in pursuing peace. She never asks who started it, or what the issues are, or what are the circumstances surrounding the violent situation:

The arithmetic
Of cause and effect I've never understood.
How many beans make five is an immense
Question depending on how many
Preliminary beans preceded them (p. 97)

In the darkness of the human condition, where degrees of comparative guilt and the causes for a particular act of violence are impossible to discern, only one criterion functions: the least violent alternative is always best, no matter how unreasonable and unjust it may appear. Better that she die in a snowstorm than that Gettner be murdered when he is caught as a traitor. Better that her son-in-law, Peter, whom she loves, should be a Hungarian prisoner than that Gettner, whom she does not love particularly, should be shot. Better that Gelda should enter a bad marriage with Gettner by her own will than that the Countess should violently interfere with the course of life. Better that Gettner should go off free for wounding Stefan than that the Hungarians' punishment of Gettner should be added to Gettner's wounding of Stefan. Better that she should grant refuge to both Janik and Gettner at the same time than that she should decide which one to sacrifice. She is, from the perspective of the audience and reader, an amazingly complete pacifist.

She herself is aware of the incompleteness of her own pacifism, and remains preoccupied with the violence remaining within her. She questions her own motives in not interfering with Gelda's marrying Gettner:

I let you
Marry Richard, though I knew you would find
Happiness only by a fine shade,
Or in some special sense of happiness,
Or not at all. (pp. 55-56)

With so much risk involved, should not a little interference early have solved the necessity of greater violence later? All wars use a similar rationale, and though the Countess does not follow that rationale, she is human enough to entertain it as a possibility. Accepting as she is of Gettner — "Life has a hope of him/Or he never would have lived" — (p. 54), she confesses that she has not been accepting enough:

Richard, Richard,
What virtue I've missed! . . . I'm a fool to deny

What you so beautifully praise me for,
 But truth leaps in me, and I have to confess
 I haven't loved you. (p. 99)

All she did for Richard was done for "what any life may mean" (p. 100), but she is not satisfied with such impersonality. She promises, "I'll not/Leave you until I can love you, Richard," though she does not "mean/Necessarily here" (p. 101). Outside of time she will be able to love all people, even the unloveliest. Her present inadequacy in love — her awareness of the violence remaining within her — is her continuing impetus for growth.

Hence, the Countess has none of the moral superiority which the others demonstrate. Quite secure in their own virtue, Belmann sees Gettner as a "rag of hell" (p. 6), Jakob sees "no/Faith in Gettner" (p. 35), and Kassel agrees with the other two that the gulf separating Peter and Gettner is unfathomable. Janik's opinion of Gettner is no better: the Hungarians are right, Gettner has forsaken the right cause, therefore Gettner is wrong. To the extent that Peter speaks for the Hungarians in the Austrian government, he considers himself better than Gettner; he "wishes there were no conceit in me/To let me bid myself against another man" (p. 35). Belmann, Jakob, Kassel, and Janik attack ethical problems like sixth-graders doing true-false exams. Only the Countess understands:

Pray for him [Stefan],
 Not because I love him, but because
 You are the life you pray for. And because
 Richard Gettner is the life you pray for.
 And because there is nothing on the earth
 Which doesn't happen in your own hearts. (p. 74)

The stance of the Countess is the stance of the play. When Peter as a Hungarian on the Austrian side temporarily is taken with the Hungarian cause and fights against Austria, we applaud his high spirits and his impartiality. But then we begin to ask whether he is so different from Gettner, the Austrian who enlists on the Hungarian side and then deserts. Not judging by the results but by the condition of heart that produced them, is the denial of Peter

very different from the betrayal of Judas? In fact, Fry has Peter use the Judas word, *betrayal*, about his own moral dilemma in another situation (pp. 80-81). Untangling good from evil is next to impossible, given the complexity of the human heart. Judging the violence in others is a venting of our own violence. Seeing the violence in other people as our own makes self-righteous condescension disappear. Then the best and worst seem not very different from each other. "Let us," says the Countess, "say"

We are all confused, incomprehensible,
 Dangerous, contemptible, corrupt,
 And in that condition pass the evening
 Thankfully and well. In our plain defects
 We already know the brotherhood of man. (p. 21)

For the moral ambiguity which the Countess and the play recognize, the blinding snowstorm is the symbol. The snow is white, yet produces a darkness as effectively as any blackness. The white snow is dark enough to make the journey difficult. But the dark produced by the snow is also light enough, given the divination of the Countess, for her to reach her destination:

I have been as clever as an ostler,
 And driven alone, one human and two horses,
 Into a redeemed land, uncrossed by any soul
 Of sound, and always the falling perfection
 Covering where we came, so that the land
 Lay perfect behind us, as though we were perpetually
 Forgiven the journey. And moreover
 A strange prescience possessed me.
 One must have talent to go from a place to a place,
 But divination to go so deviously
 That north, south, east, and west
 Are lost in admiration, and *yet* to arrive,
 After a short experience of eternity,
 At the place and people one set out to reach . . . (pp. 16-17)

She is describing her journey in the snowstorm, but she might as well be describing her way through the blinding moral situations she confronts. The darkness of the moral situation is always light enough with the one absolute moral principle of the Countess: the least violent alternative is always best.

Her argument against Janik, in which she exploits his commitment to freedom, is a good example:

Your faith is, your country has been refused
 Its good rights, for many years too long.
 So be certain, whatever the temptation,
 No man is made a slave to you.
 To you Austria is a tyranny.
 Then, to the number of those men who die,
 And far beyond that number infinitely,
 Surely you will show
 One man over another has no kingdom.
 Otherwise, how shall I understand your war?
 Because I have respect for Richard Gettner's
 Wandering and uncertain will, *therefore*
 I have respect for your sheer purpose
 And for those many men I cannot
 Know by name who are waiting in the snow.
 But if you tell me Richard Gettner
 Has thrown away his claim to freedom
 By claiming that a man is free, then you
 And those in the snow, may as well march
 Against your guns and swords. They are tyrannous, too.
 Is it not a quaint freedom, that lets us
 Make up our minds and not be free to change them?
 Poor hope for me! I change my mind
 For pure relaxation, two or three times a day,
 As I get wiser or sillier, whichever it is I do.
 Must I save your cause for you, Colonel?
 If so, then not in my name or Richard Gettner's
 But in the name of all your nameless fellows
 Who trust their suffering is righteous
 I forbid you to invade the liberties of this house. (p. 30)

Janik is not persuaded by this definition of freedom; he calls it anarchy. So from one point of view the Countess loses. But the Countess has won what was her intention of winning. Before her speech Janik had said, "bring him [Gettner] out./Otherwise, I regret, we shall come in and find him" (p. 29); after her speech he considers searching the house "a dangerous delay" (p. 31), and puts forward the plan of keeping Peter hostage. Now the Countess must find new ways to deal with that situation. Nevertheless, without Janik's knowing it, she has won the argument. Janik does not search the house as he had threatened.

Sometimes situations are so complex that no argument, oblique or direct, can avert the violence. Irrational means are needed to avert violence. When the Countess is annoyed

with Belmann's sniping at Gettner behind his back and with Jakob's sniping at Belmann to his face, she proposes a non-argumentative solution:

We're continually coming together, as though to live
Pleasantly in one another's conversation,
And each time we find ourselves distracted
By what is happening to us. Do let us
For a short while abandon incident
And charm ourselves with something quite immaterial. (p. 61)

The diversion is provided by the Hungarian guard, who produces a recent letter from his wife, and the Countess is thoroughly absorbed in it. The Countess can also recognize in other people under great stress the need for something immaterial. When in Act III Janik appears, defeated, he cannot trust himself to speak for tears. The Countess then urges him to "First of all say any trivial thing;/We shall come presently to the other" (p. 90).

Usually the trivial, quite immaterial thing that averts the feelings of panic and violence is music. When in Act II Gettner appears before the Hungarian guards who are in duty bound to arrest him as a traitor, when Gettner kisses Gelda in front of the imprisoned Peter, and when Gelda confesses she loves Gettner too, then music is all that will serve:

How shall we manage, with time at a standstill?
We can't go back to where nothing has been said;
And no heart is served, caught in a moment
Which has frozen. Since no words will set us free —
Not at least now, until we can persuade
Our thoughts to move —
Music would underground us best,
As a tide in the dark comes to boats at anchor
And they begin to dance. (p. 67)

As Janik leaves for a hiding place in the turret in Act III, the Countess insists that he put her in mind of a bawdy song the soldiers sing; it is as much to alleviate Janik's hysteria as to satisfy her own curiosity. She herself needs the bawdy song as she contemplates how she will need to defend Janik against the Austrians, and again as she dies, alone. Music allays the violence and panic within when words no longer work.

Whether by argument or by non-rational means like music, the Countess arrives at her destination — the least violent alternative — as surely as she drives her horse and sleigh to Richard Gettner in a blinding snowstorm. She is like the butterfly in the epigraph to the play:

The weather was stormy; the sky heavily clouded; the darkness . . . profound It was across this maze of leafage, and in absolute darkness, that the butterflies had to find their way in order to attain the end of their pilgrimage.
Under such conditions the screech-owl would not dare to forsake its olive-tree. The butterfly . . . goes forward without hesitation So well it directs its tortuous flight that, in spite of all the obstacles to be evaded, it arrives in a state of perfect freshness, its great wings intact . . . the darkness is light enough . . . J. H. Fabre

Like the butterfly, the Countess finds the darkness light enough, which is to say that she finds warmth enough in the winter of our discontent, goodness enough in a wicked world, life enough in death.

That the darkness is light enough to enable the Countess to pursue her non-violent way non-violently is one important difference between the Countess and Peter. The other difference is that only in her presence do "Lives make and unmake themselves . . ./As nowhere else" (p. 5). There are two people particularly who "would have been remarkably otherwise/But for her divine interference" (p. 5): Gelda and Richard Gettner.

Gelda's problem is pride, the root of all other sin and violence. Violence increases in proportion to one's blindness to the violence within himself, which blindness is pride.

Gelda begins with pride in thinking herself capable of doing the impossible: marrying Gettner. Even the Countess, who did not oppose the marriage, saw that "loving Richard/Might be a heavy devotion and a long/Experience of daring" (p. 20). Gelda was sure she was equal to it; her pride is parallel to Jakob's unrecognized violence within and to Belmann's certain certainties. Just as Jakob and Belmann's personal violence is of less worth than Janik's violence on behalf of society, so Gelda's personal pride

progresses to institutional pride: a conventional, normal, society-approved marriage to "Count Peter the sturdy" (p. 8). Gelda's pride is a trifle complacent:

I am Peter's wife, and everything
Is so well with us, our marriage vows
Go on like dancers, with no thought in the world to carry,
Only to be as easy and loving as we are. (p. 36)

But Gelda is overconfident, for before long she is promising love to Gettner and kissing him both in public and private, in spite of her perfect marriage to Peter. Her neutrality is like Peter's own, his loyalty at once to Hungary and Austria. Just as the complete pacifism of the Countess supercedes the incomplete pacifism of Peter, so Gelda achieves a new willingness to look inside herself for pride and violence, and hence she becomes more humble and non-violent. "It may have been right," she says to Peter,

That first instinct, to put out with a lifeboat
For Richard, but on to it scrambled
Such a crew of pirates, my curiosity,
My pride, my ambition to succeed
Where I failed before, my longing to discover
What conversions could be made by love,
We all began to sink. (p. 81)

The pirates have been there all along, but only now does she recognize them as pirates. The Countess is shown only in full bloom, but before the play begins she must have gone through a series of experiences similar to Gelda's. Gelda's condition at the end of the play approaches humility.

But though one have the humility of Gelda and the passivity of the Countess and have not love, it profiteth him nothing. Gettner begins hostile and humble, hostile and passive, which is to say indifferent. He must progress toward a loving pride, which is to say self-respect, and toward a loving activity. His progress throughout the play runs counter to that of the other characters. The reason he is so disliked by the others is not only his hostility, but his pilgrimage toward wholeness running so incomprehensibly counter to theirs.

And yet the four stages from violence to passivity, abstracted from *Sleep* and applied to *Dark*, have a certain applicability to Gettner's progress from passivity to activity, from hostility to love. Before the play opens he was personally passive, personally hostile in his marriage, for he never consummated his marriage with Gelda. His reason was humility, for he knew he would be "The disappointee of expectations" (p. 45); he did not realize that he was being hostile toward Gelda, who meant to love and be loved. He is not so different from Jakob, Belmann, and Kassel; they do not recognize the hostility in their activity, just as he does not recognize the hostility in his passivity.

Gettner the anti-Jakob becomes Gettner the anti-Janik. Just before the play opens he deserts from the Hungarian army; in this situation, too, he is unaware of the hostility in his non-performance: "There's a dreariness in dedicated spirits/That makes the promised land seem older than the fish" (p. 18). No wonder the Countess taunts his passivity:

Richard sometimes reminds me of an unhappy
Gentleman, who comes to the shore
Of a January sea, heroically
Strips to swim, and then seems powerless
To advance or retire, either to take the shock
Of the water or to immerse himself again
In his warm clothes, and so stands cursing
The sea, the air, the season, anything
Except himself, as blue as a plucked goose.
It would be very well if he would one day
Plunge, or dress himself again. (p. 56)

He is as detached from causes as Janik is attached to Hungary.

In response to the taunt above, Gettner kisses Gelda in front of Peter: a clumsy and hostile action, but at least an action. But the action is not satisfying to Gettner:

They tell you to be a man of decision,
To take the cold sea in a courageous plunge,
And when you do they squint at you for a fool. (p. 65)

The action is not satisfying to Gettner because he is as paradoxically impacted between activity and passivity at this point as Peter is between the cause he is "betraying" and the cause he is devoting himself to at any moment, to

say nothing of how impacted both Gettner and Peter are between Austria and Hungary. Gettner is an anti-Peter.

The audience shares the surprise of the Countess when Gettner makes a decision, acts on it, and there is nary a trace of hostility in it. After years of passive postponement, Gettner finally proposes marriage to the Countess. No other character in the play could have cheered the deathbed of the Countess with anything so affectionate. Unconventional and indecorous by conventional standards, the proposal is just right for a Countess who at one point is afraid that Gettner is "trying to find words appropriate/ To visiting the sick" (p. 97). Gettner manages to raise a song of hope within her:

You, Richard!
You, of all men on the earth,
To be the one to say to dying things
'Be a beginning.'
And indeed, please God, to the last moment
I will begin (p. 98)

Gettner has become capable of an act of whimsical creativity worthy of the Countess herself. And the change in Gettner is permanent. He tells the maid to admit the Austrians after the Countess is dead. He does not run. Gettner, by a route opposite to that of anyone in the play, "arrives in a state of perfect freshness" at his selfhood. The dark is light enough.

The change in Gettner is the conversion of Judas. For you are the life you pray for when you pray for Judas — or Hitler. A pacifism which makes an exception of Judas and Hitler is not complete. The conversion of Judas makes the play aesthetically as satisfying as it is satisfying intellectually and religiously, for it provides a motion contrary to the rest of the play, and yet the contrary motion is curiously appropriate to the rest of the play since it can all be analyzed by the same categories. It is a complete play.

The changes in Gelda and Gettner belong in this study to demonstrate how the pacifism of the Countess super-

cedes Peter's. Not only does the Countess pursue non-violence non-violently, but the result of her non-violence is that in her presence "Lives make and unmake themselves . . ./As nowhere else" (p. 5). But making that point, one admires the aesthetic wholeness of *Dark*. Even the servants reinforce the theme. Bella's concern for the honor of the Countess justifies her lying and justifies her belittling Willi; Willi cannot lie, understands perfectly why Bella lies and forgives her for it, and does not mind being made the fool for the sake of the honor of the Countess (pp. 8-11). Bella tends toward Jakob and Janik's end of the violence continuum, and Willi toward Peter and the Countess's end. *Dark*, even to the incidental characters, is organized by theme.

That idea, the progressive stages toward peace, is the same idea as *Sleep*. Are the two plays the same?

The scope of *Sleep* is narrower than, and the scope of *Dark* broader than, the following passage from "Little Gidding," the fourth of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

There are three conditions which often look alike
 Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
 Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
 From self and from things and from persons; and, growing
 between them, indifference
 Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
 Being between two lives — unflowering, between
 The live and the dead nettle. This is the use of memory:
 For liberation — not loss of love but expanding
 Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
 From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
 Begins as attachment to our own field of action
 And comes to find that action of little importance
 Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
 History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
 The faces and places, with the self which, as it could,
 loved them,
 To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.⁴

Both plays agree with the poem that one cannot be attached to God unless one has been attached to lesser things first. To be progressively attached to God means that one is progressively detached from self, and from things, and from persons, but to be detached assumes an attachment to begin

with. Never to have been attached at all is indifference. When one is satisfied in God, one does not turn with puritanical condemnation toward those objects which have taught him to love previously. They are "transfigured in another pattern." The need for sex, for instance, is the disguised hunger for God; sex arouses hungers stronger than it can satisfy; no sexual encounter can be ultimately satisfying. The saint does not condemn sex or patriotism. The puritanical condemnation of sex or patriotism is indifference, not learning to love at all. The Fry plays agree with the Eliot poem and with each other here.

But the scope of *Sleep* is narrower than the Eliot poem, for *Sleep* makes nothing of the possibility of indifference. The scope of *Dark* is broader than the Eliot poem, for *Dark* not only brings up the possibility of indifference in the person of Gettner, but shows the path by which indifference too can become attachment to God.

The absence of indifference in *Sleep* and its presence and redemption in *Dark* is only one way in which the scope of *Sleep* is narrower than *Dark*. Already in *Sleep* Fry had distinguished the stages in the ascent through the creatures, but these stages are juxtaposed without transition; the stages are barely discernible in *Dark* because how one stage folds into another, in Gelda's case for instance, is part of the flow of life. In *Sleep* all four characters progress to the next stage simultaneously; in *Dark* all the characters are at different stages from each other. Gelda goes through all four stages, Gettner travels all four stages by a contrary route, and the Countess has well-nigh arrived at the beginning of the play.⁵ For all its brilliant surrealism, the dream form of *Sleep* remains abstracted from life. No viewer would ever think that four soldiers would really dream these four dreams in such eloquent succession. The illusion of reality is not even attempted in *Sleep*. The evocation of life during wartime in the court of the Countess in *Dark* provides, if not an everyday setting, at least a recognizable one, in which recognizable people hanker after God while

they are awake — even though not all of them realize what they are hankering for. Fry knew a great deal about overcoming violence in writing *Sleep*, but he had not yet experienced it sufficiently, or if he had experienced it, he had not had time to assimilate and articulate the experience. In *Dark* Fry knows what he knew in *Sleep*, but he knows it better and he knows more. The form of *Dark* is less splendidly experimental than the form of *Sleep*, but it does not need to be. In *Dark* man's soul thirsts for God in the very world we live in, which Fry evokes rather conventionally; what is unconventional here is Fry's evocation of the experience of that thirst. *Sleep* communicates the idea of the ascent to God through the creatures, *Dark* the experience.

Sleep has "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern." *Sleep* and *Dark* are and are not the same play.

NOTES

¹(London: Oxford University Press).

²Stanley M. Wiersma, *Christopher Fry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 13-17.

³(London: Oxford University Press, 1954). Further references by page in the text.

⁴*Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), pp. 40-41.

⁵The Countess is already detached, in Eliot's sense, in the very first act:

I see to have gone floating out
Of this interesting present
To some remote evening, a no-man's country.
Now it seems to me very strange
You should all be so occupied in living. (p. 22)

It's the perfection of sleep
To be awake to the dream.
If I were going to live forever
This would be the way: unconcerned
And yet reasonably fond. (p. 23)

Her early detachment has made some critics observe a static quality in the play. The dynamism of the play lies not in the character of the Countess, however, but in the reaction of all the other characters to her stability.