For B.A English Hons. Part-2; Paper-4

**The Fox by D.H Lawrence**

D.H Lawrence (11 September 1885 – 2 March 1930), described as “the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation” by E.M Forster, is a prominent literary figure of the twentieth century. He was a versatile literary talent who penned all time hit novels like Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love and Lady Chatterley’s Lover. He composed nearly 800 poems and wrote plays like The Daughter-in-Law. His critical works include Studies in Classic American Literature. His genius is also reflected in his painting works. Lawrence working class background and the tensions between his parents provided the raw material for a number of his works. Exploring issues of sexuality, vitality, spontaneity, instinct and emotional health, his collected works represent an extended reflection upon the dehumanizing effects of modernity. He wrote passionately against what he called “the cerebralization of feeling”. He attempts to show “the real flame of feelings” in his literary creations. As a realist, Lawrence uses his characters to give form to his personal philosophy which also includes his depiction of sexuality. He is viewed as a leader of modernist English literature and considered a visionary thinker. He studied and admired New England Transcendentalism, particularly the works of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Louisa May Alcott.
D.H Lawrence is also reputed as a prolific short-story writer. He has written nearly seventy short stories which include ‘The Prussian Officer’, ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’, ’The Fox’, ‘The White Stocking’ and ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’ as well as many lesser known works. In his short-stories, the settings range from the scenes of his Nottinghamshire boyhood and his teaching years to the world of his travels, but the stories always encompass the eternal in the particular. It was Lawrence’s genius to mirror the joy of life and human sexuality in the small scenes of everyday living. In D. H. Lawrence stories, ‘unlucky’ is usually used as a euphemism for ‘weak and ineffectual’, especially when applied to husbands and fathers. In all of his stories, D. H. Lawrence displays a willingness to confront the complex psychological issues of his characters, both male and female. The plot is not of importance in a story of Lawrence in which we find how a character reacts to a situation on different planes of existence conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The unknown modes of being are explored with the help of pregnant and original symbols. Lawrence believes in the ‘Dark Sun’ which connotes ‘awareness of divine otherness’.

*The Fox* is a novella by D. H. Lawrence which first appeared in *The Dial* in 1922. It is an escapist form of literature and a tragedy based upon some harrowing experiences of life, involving pain, suffering and torture. Set in the Berkshire district of England during World War I, *The Fox*, like many of D. H. Lawrence’s other major works, treats the psychological relationships of three protagonists in a triangle mating-complex of love and hatred. Without the help of any male laborers, Nellie March and Jill Banford struggle to maintain a marginal livelihood at the Bailey Farm. A fox has raged through the poultry, and although the women—particularly the more nearly masculine Nellie—have tried to shoot the intruder, he seems always to elude traps or gunshot. Once Nellie confronts the fox, but his
“demon” eyes hold her spellbound; she cannot fire her rifle. A symbol of masculine energy, the fox appears in Nellie’s nightmares as a dominating (and sexually threatening) force that both attracts and repels her.

Nellie March and Jill Banford are a bisexual couple. Dependent Jill tends to do household chores and finances while the self-sufficient Nellie deals with heavier work, such as chopping wood, repairing fences, and stalking the fox that keeps raiding their coops, although she is hesitant about killing it. Jill seems content with their secluded existence, but the frustrated Nellie is less enchanted by the solitude.

In the dead of winter, Henry Grenfel, arrives in the farm. With nowhere else to go while on leave, he persuades the women to allow him to stay with them in exchange for helping with the work. Tension among the three slowly escalates when his attentions to Nellie arouse Jill's resentment and jealousy.

Eventually Henry tracks and kills the fox. Just before his departure, he makes love to Nellie and asks her to leave with him, but she confesses she would feel guilty about abandoning Jill. After Henry returns to his ship, the women resume their regular routine. Henry returns unexpectedly while the two are chopping down a dying oak. He offers to complete the job and warns Jill to move away from the tree's potential path as it falls, but she refuses to listen and is killed when it crashes on her. Nellie sells the farm and she and Paul set off to start a new life together.

In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover, The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930), “The Princess,” and other tales depicting male sexual domination over a submissive female, Lawrence tampers with the pattern in significant ways. *The Fox*, also, seems to follow a pattern in which a sexually capable male is supposed to interfere
with a lesbian couple’s relationship and to dominate one of the partners. Lawrence, however, alters the rules of the game. For Lawrence, the symbol of male domination and aggressiveness is the fox. In popular myths cunning, deceptive, and rapacious, the fox is treated as compulsive as well. In *The Fox*, however, Lawrence treats as counterpart the dangerous male, the predator who, like a fox, overpowers his lover through sheer strength of will. Henry and the fox are compared; transposed and superimposed several times (Henry also has a strong smell from his muddy clothes, his gun, his maleness and his sweat.). Henry is described minutely, right down to his foxy-colored downy hair - as is the fox itself. Thus, this novella is replete with the depiction of Nature, both in the symbolism of the fox itself and in the poetic prose descriptions of the landscape and sky.

The fox signifies something that touches March deeply. Through its “sly” “impudent” and exasperating manner, it becomes a focus for March. The fox depicts a male-related sexual relationship. This gradually becomes apparent as Lawrence describes the appearance of Henry, and shows how March sees, even smells him as the fox – “She became almost peaceful at last. He was identified with the fox-and he was here in full presence. … She could at last lapse into the odour of the fox.” This says clearly that through the fox the male was present but not clearly so. At Henry’s arrival however, what had been unclear was now real.

The fox is a symbol of maleness. So in hunting the fox, March is hunting the male. Or at least she is hunting her own feelings, “her consciousness held back” as Lawrence puts it. This act is depicting once more something other than itself – March’s sexuality and her manner of dealing with it. Does she want to kill it? Or does she wish it to live? She is herself uncertain. When she confronts it in the fox she doesn’t even raise her gun till it has casually run away. It is Henry who kills the fox, and if Lawrence is using the creature to represent March’s barely allowed
sexual desires, her fantasy of a relationship with a male, then Henry kills this, confronting her with the reality of his desire for her.

Henry kills both the fox and Banford because they are escape routes for March. The fox was an escape into fantasy, and Banford was an escape into a traditional male/female role – March playing the psychological male.

The theme of this story is the danger of using coercion to get someone to submit to one's will. From the time Henry arrives, he manipulates Nellie and her relationship with Jill. On the surface, he appears harmless, but beneath, he is like the fox, a cunning predator. Henry masterminds Jill's death right in front of Nellie and Jill's father, knowing that neither of them will be able to hold him responsible for Jill's death. Getting rid of Jill is essential to Henry's devious plan to overpower Nellie. Nellie submits to Henry because she feels she has no other option, and this is where the danger lies. Henry has taken away Nellie's free will, and even though Nellie agrees to go to Canada with Henry, her heart is not in it. Henry has manipulated the whole situation, and Nellie is going to resent him for it.

“The Fox” reveals that life is a continuous challenge, a conflict against the obstacles placed by destiny. D.H. Lawrence wants to convey the message that is not always possible to overcome a problem, but what matters is never give up. Furthermore, on the metaphorical level, the fox stands for the male gender embodied by Henry, the soldier. Henry's arrival marks the second turning point. Initially Henry seems to be the solution to the two women's problems. Henry starts helping the two women doing hard work, and, above all, he manages to kill the fox. But to tell the truth Henry is just taking the place of the fox thus becoming a further obstacle on the women’s road. On the metaphorical level, Henry represents
a more dangerous and a slyer predator, whose favourite prey is March. He breaks the balance between the ladies.

Banford dies because of a fallen tree and March finally accepts to marry Henry renouncing to her desire of autonomy. Banford never desisted from pursuing her aim and therefore pays with her life. On the contrary, March renounced her desire of freedom, finally wondering whether she will ever be happy. In conclusion, The Fox is the story of two women’s challenge for autonomy. It turns out to be a great failure and shows us the reality and and forces us to reflect on what life may really mean.

Many critics are of the opinion that D.H. Lawrence’s “The Fox” was far ahead of its time of publication in 1923. While it offers some radical foreshadowing to postmodern thought the novel is still very much an artifact of its time. The nature of the relationships between these three characters is a popular topic scholars have ruminated upon ever since the novel’s publication. Feminists, gender and queer theorists, and postmodernists have a lot to say about roles of genders in relationships, the networks of power at work in them, and finally how contemporary thought might be situated in previous eras. Seymour-Smith’s appraisal of D. H. Lawrence is as follows:

“Much in his (Lawrence’s) writing is lovable and irresistible on any terms but his tiresomeness as a man also intrudes damagingly into it. He is full of insights, but as full of neurotic and unpleasant idiocies.”

....THANK YOU