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Foxy Ladies and Men with Guns: Desires and Fantasies in Two Modernist Fox Stories

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1 Introduction

The use of animals in fables has a long tradition in European (and in world) literature. Most of these allegorical stories can, in general, be easily decoded, for most of them are elaborated presentations of some truth or morale deemed to be universally valid. One of the most common animal characters that features in these allegories is the fox. The fox can be found in Aesop's fables, served as the basis of the medieval Reynard cycle, and through this cycle found its way into Chaucer's "The Nun Priest's Tale," later appearing in La Fontaine's tales, and so on. Over the centuries, "the stylized concept of the fox as a subversive, disruptive, intelligent marauder" (Asker, *Aspects* 38) has established itself in literature. Foxes, however, not only served as immutable characters in plots that follow roughly the same pattern. According to D. B. D. Asker, the "fox fairy" appears as a financial and spiritual helper in Japanese and Chinese tales, evoking connotations that transcend the traditions of the above-mentioned, intelligent, shrewd marauder-type of fox. Bearing essentially feminine traits, it opens up rather exciting (and disturbing) possibilities of interpretation in the fox-man relationship, with "an association of the fox with the fulfilment of the carnal desires of men" (*Aspects* 31). The vixen figure often appears as a truly carnivalesque figure, eschewing traditional morality, subverting established (male-dominated) systems, and with its trickster-like qualities, calling into question firm hierarchies, and mobilising various fantasies and desires (see the peculiar connotations of "the foxy lady" in contemporary popular culture).

In an especially revealing passage of his autobiography, Henry Green, one of the most idiosyncratic English writers of the twentieth century, compares the task of remembering to a foxhunt: "As we listen to what we remember, to the echoes, there is no question but the notes are muted, […] now no louder than the cry of the huntsman on the hill a mile or more away when he views the fox. We who must die soon, or so it seems to me, should chase our memories back, standing, when they are found, enough apart not to be too near what they once meant. Like the huntsman, on a hill and when he blows his horn, like him some way away from us" (97). Later in that chapter, however, after recounting a peculiarly embarrassing childhood event, it is the fox that he identifies with,

instead of the rememberer (the hunter): "Later, when the accident I have described disrupted me, I felt, and it is hard to explain, as though the feelings I thought I ought to have were hunting me. I was as much alone as any hunted fox," and this feeling persisted "until the fox I was was caught" (102). Green here reveals an intriguing dynamic between the hunter and the prey, opening up a field rich in the connotations of "hunting" and "haunting." In the man-animal, fox-hunter relationship, both can take the position of the victim and the killer alike, which is especially true in the gender-determined relationship of the male hunter and the vixen. A curious transference is often to be seen in this relationship that goes back at least to the time of Ovid and his story about Acteon and Diana: when the former is transformed by the gods into a stag and is violently killed, "a powerful residual element of sympathetic magic" is mobilised (Asker, "Vixens" 182), and through a process of animal metamorphosis, the hunter and the hunted change positions.

In what follows, I shall look at this "interpersonal" dynamics between the hunter and the hunted by examining two Modernist texts, "Lady into Fox" by David Garnett (1922) and "The Fox" by D. H. Lawrence (1923). Both stories emphasise the subversive quality of the animal figure, revealing the dynamism of this dyadic relationship. I am going to analyse "Lady into Fox" along the lines of a dream text and the structure of a double fantasy, and in the second part of the essay, I shall look at "The Fox" from the point of view of the Hegelian master-slave relationship.

2 A Case-Study of a Childless Marriage: David Garnett's "Lady into Fox"

2.1 The nature of the text

The first thing that astounds any reader of David Garnett's "Lady into Fox" is the way the author begins to shake his or her confidence in the authority of the text by blurring the boundaries of "real" and "supernatural." The tone Garnett employs in the first few pages of the story is not unlike any serious writing, or, let us say, a psychoanalytical case-history. He talks in a scientific tone, cites facts and asserts that "the sudden changing of Mrs. Tebrick into a vixen is an established fact" (7), a "true story fully proved" (8). A few pages later he goes on outlining the background of the events, relating Mrs. Tebrick's family name (which was—not accidentally—Fox), how she was married to Tebrick in 1879, how she spent her childhood and so on. At the level of form and diction everything seems to be acceptable for the reader to give credit to the narration. What is problematic, of course, is what the text is about, the transformation of a human being into an animal. However carefully the narrator wants to preserve his authority to tell us the case history, he seemingly contradicts himself. First he suggests that it is pure facts that he is going to write about, later he emphasises the profane nature of the miracle that may happen in a material world,

unsupported by the interpretive force of any authoritative text: "it is indeed *a miracle*; something from outside our world altogether; an event which we would willingly accept if we were to meet it invested with the authority of Divine Revelation in the scriptures" (9, emphasis in the original).

There is one option, however, with the help of which one may look at such a text in which the contradiction of impossibility and reality need not be resolved: approaching the story as a dream text (by definition a wish-fulfilling text). As Freud points out, miracle or fantasy taking the place of reality can only happen in dreams, where contraries and contradictions are simply not represented (Dreams 429). The narrator makes several references to dreams and dreaming in the main body of the text as well. After Silvia changes into a fox, her husband—quite naturally, we could add—exclaims, "Can it be she? Am I not dreaming?" (14). Later, he "had […] gone about paying off his servants and shooting his dogs as if he were in a dream" (22). When there is a hope that both Tebrick and Silvia are going to be able to "wake" from this dream-like state, he says, "Surely this affliction will pass soon as suddenly as it came, and it will all seem to us as an evil dream" (40). It is around this point that this dream-text about the fox begins to show its dangerous facet for both wife and husband. After Tebrick can do nothing but release Silvia into the woods, he starts to display more and more serious symptoms: "Indeed I am crazy now! My affliction has made me lose what little reason I ever had! […] I am thin and wasted by this consuming passion, my reason is gone and I feed myself on dreams" (95). Just like in the introductory pages, fantasy and dream totally replace what we could call "reality" or "normality." On the basis of these quotations we can conclude that the text of the novel can be regarded as a chronologically ordered, "polished" version of an extremely disturbing and neurotic dream-text. The question *whose* dream it is will soon be discussed.

Another important characteristic feature of the text is its *regressive* quality. According to the "classical" Freudian theory, dreams (and other psychological phenomena that display the surfacing of unconscious material) often display signs of regression, going back to infantile states of being. This regression appears in two ways in Garnett's story. On the one hand, as I shall demonstrate, the story of the transformation can be conceived of as an infantile regressive fantasy; on the other hand, the text's mode of representation is likewise regressive.

On a superficial level, "Lady into Fox" is an easily decodable allegorical story, in which the figure of the fox embodies an ancient Rousseauian notion of "back to nature," or, in an alternative approach, just like in Lawrence's "The Fox," the fox becomes the symbol of some primeval energy, an invigorating force that brings life, mysticism, freedom, and some sort of higher level of existence into the stale and limiting English post-war environment (see Asker, *Aspects* 38). The fox can be seen as the allegory of a natural, uncorrupted force that cannot live within the boundaries of modern civilisation, and is bound to be destroyed. What seems to be more important here is that the text exposes a

decided "indifference to reality as we ordinary perceive it" (Skura 140). Being an allegorical narrative, this story, just like regressive modes of consciousness, "ignore[s] the conventions of realism the way a child does" (Skura 140). The allegorical and regressive mode of representation is another factor that justifies one in evaluating the text as a dream, since dreams always look for the best, concretised and pictorial way of representation, being unable to signify abstract notions (Freud, *Dreams* 455). Here the figure of the fox (and that of the dogs, too) serves as a tangible, representable object. There is an important difference, however. While, in psychoanalytic terms, regression ignores or escapes from the "reality principle" for the sake of uncontrolled pleasure, allegories usually work the other way round: it is often the pleasant (subversive, disruptive, disturbing) story that is supposed to be replaced and concealed by the authority-giving, moral-driven, "serious" allegorical version. Thus, Garnett's story, conceived of as a dream text, reveals the potentially disturbing and desire-driven content of a conventional allegorical story or fable.

2.2 Silvia's fantasy

Regression into childhood is not only perceivable on the level of the narrative form, but on the level of the plot as well. To illustrate this, first we must take a look at Silvia's "case-history" to be able to show the motivating force that sets this regressive process in motion.

In the first few pages of the text the reader is informed that Silvia Fox was married, "after a short courtship" (10) to Richard Tebrick. The narrator ascertains that they were indeed a very happy couple. A look into the prehistory of this marriage may, however, also prove to be fruitful. Though the narrator does not attribute much importance to the fact that Silvia "having once hunted when she was a child of ten and having been blooded […] took great fright and disgust at it, and vomited after it was done" (10), one feels that this childhood event must be of great importance. We are also informed that "she had been strictly brought up by a woman of excellent principles and considerable attainments, who died a year or so before the marriage. And owing to the circumstance that her mother had been dead many years, her father bedridden, and not altogether rational for a little while before his death, they had a few visitors but her uncle" (12). It is impossible not to remember the case of Dora, Freud's patient, who also began to show signs of hysteria during the illness of her father, her hysteric coughing being the result of a transference and subsequent identification following the kiss given by "Herr K.," and who started to develop a father-complex. It is no wonder that after these preliminaries (the trauma of being covered by fox blood), Silvia "was reserved almost to shyness" (11). It is one year after the wedding that Silvia's fox-fantasy is set in motion. It is while fox hunting that memories of childhood begin to surface in a traumatic manner, the second event recalling and reinterpreting the first one in a traumatic way. Tebrick wants to force Silvia to go with him after the fox: she "hung back,

and he, holding her hand, began almost to drag her […] she suddenly snatched her hand away from his very violently [unusual of a shy wife!] and cried out" (13). This is naturally related to the childhood memory mentioned above, displaying the link between Silvia's nervousness and the infantile event, since in a dream, causal relations can be expressed with a scene of transformation: "The other method of representing a causal relation is adapted to less extensive material and consists in one image in the dream, whether a person or a thing, being transformed into another" (Freud, *Dreams* 427). In this climactic moment the infantile memory is mobilised and bursts out. But why is Silvia transformed into a fox, and why a fox?

When Silvia is transformed, she unconsciously identifies with the fox in her fantasy. This identification is, on a certain level, the result of her attachment to the two most powerful male figures in her life, her father and her husband. Her father, because he, like the fox, inevitably dies, and her husband, because of her intimate relationship with him. According to the Freudian theory, "identification is most frequently used in hysteria to express a common *sexual* element. A hysterical woman identifies herself in her symptoms most readily—though not exclusively—with people with whom she has had sexual relations or with people who have had sexual relations with the same people as herself. [...] In hysterical phantasies, just as in dreams, it is enough for purposes of identification that the subject should have thoughts of sexual relation without their having necessarily taken place in reality" (*Dreams* 233). It shall be remembered that, since wild animals often, as a result of a transference, stand for persons feared by the hysteric, the fox is an available figure for her to denote both her father and husband: "a dreaded father is [often] represented by a beast of prey or a dog or wild horse—a form of representation recalling totemism" (Freud, *Dreams* 536). Thus, according to this approach, Silvia's transformation into a fox is the result of her Oedipal identification of the two threatening male authorities in her life.

On the other hand, a fox can mean *herself* in a neurotic fantasy in relation to her husband. Thus she comes to mean a (potential) victim in the eyes of her husband who has a gun and has power over such a creature: during the story he could kill her at any moment. Thus, fox becomes a double symbol, at once motivated by Oedipal fantasies and identification with the father/husband, and produced by an identification with a victim position. Naturally, the whole process is instigated by her own name, Silvia Fox. In her neurotic fantasies, just like in dreams and with children, a proper name comes to mean an object (Freud, *Dreams* 412).

There are other factors that make it especially apt for Sylvia to identify with a fox. With the help of identification she can reach back to her infantile fantasies. After she changes into a fox, her husband "took her in his arms. She lay very close to him, nestling under his coat and fell to licking his face" (14). This is not at all unlike a scene when a child is taken up to his mother's breast, as it is pointed out in the story: "for when we are overcome with the greatest sorrow we act not like men or women but like children whose comfort in all

their troubles is to press themselves against their mother's breast" (15–16). Of course we need not neglect the Oedipal fantasies (Tebrick as a symbolic father) and the "normal" sexual aspects (Silvia licking her husband's face) in this scene, either. Similar infantile fantasies are mobilised when Tebrick makes a remark to his wife: "Silvia, what a light-hearted childish creature you are" (36). It is not surprising that apart from Tebrick, only her old nurse, Mrs Cork recognises her. After she comes back for a while she treats her like a child: "the old woman talked to her as though she were a baby and treated her as such" (61). Later Tebrick decides to move from Stokoe to Nanny's house, which is near Tangley Hall, where she "would feel at home," "having known it from her childhood" (65). Apart from these instances of identification, an animal is an excellent figure to represent a child: it is playful, it cannot eat properly, walks on all fours, cannot dress itself, cannot talk, does not observe the traditional rules of "civilised" behaviour. She gradually regresses into this childhood state: first she is able to recognise the cards they play with, later they are nothing more than sheets of paper.

Apart from regression and identification, another very important fantasy of Silvia is becoming independent of her husband, and leading a life of her own in the woods. One can thus observe a double movement: one backwards, into childhood, and one forward, leading to an independent life, and finding one's true self, fulfilling one's fantasies. We have to bear in mind that Silvia and Tebrick at this point have no children, so her desire for offspring is quite natural. This is all the more probable since generally in dreams "small animals and vermin [here the cubs] represent small children (*Dreams* 474). Mrs. Cork's statement, however, is revealing in this respect: "But whatever she looks like, you should trust her the same as ever. If you do, she'll do her best to be a good wife to you, if you don't I shouldn't wonder if she did turn into a *proper fox*" (58, my emphasis). That is, as long as Tebrick forces an emotional bond on Silvia, and is able exert power over her, she cannot be free and be rid of her neurotic fantasies, and lead a "normal" life again (that is, have a happy family and children). As long as she is bound to Tebrick, who expects his "fox to be as candid and honest with him in all things as the country girl he has married" (79), her wish cannot be fulfilled. It is only in the idyllic sphere of her fox-family that Silvia can experience the happiness she lacks in her real life. Of course the reality principle, symbolised by the hounds, does not let this fantasy be long-lived. In the final dramatic scene when the dogs tear her apart, she again tries to find a shelter in the arms of Tebrick, that is, regress again into an infantile fantasy. This solution has proved to be insufficient once, so the subject of fantasy has to perish.

2.3 Tebrick's fantasy

The peculiarity of the text is that it can be interpreted both as Silvia's and Tebrick's fantasy at the same time. As it has already been pointed out, the fox,

being a manifold, overdetermined symbol can mean at the same time Silvia's father as a sort of fearful totem, Tebrick, a similarly violent fantasy object, but also a vulnerable creature (a child or a weak woman) exposed to the violence of hunters, hounds and Tebrick.

In Tebrick's fantasy text, his wife is transformed into a fox that can be kept in captivity and be possessed exclusively. The sadistic desire fantasy of Tebrick, a hunter, naturally fancies an animal whose life depends entirely on him. First, the cruel aspect of the fantasy does not surface, for he keeps kissing and caressing his wife as if it/she was still a human being. The key problem with the transformation of his wife is that it has to be kept a secret from other people: "Having got her into the house the next thing he thought of was to hide her from the servants" (16). Tebrick starts to build a fantasy world, but, as Freud remarks, "he [the creative writer, the one who fantasises in general] is expected not to go on playing or phantasying any longer but act in the real world; on the other hand, some of the wishes which give rise to his phantasies are of a kind which it is essential to *conceal*" ("Creative" 134, emphasis mine). Indeed, Tebrick does not act the way that could be expected of an adult: instead of killing a fox, he looks after it, but this fantasy of his has to be concealed. At the beginning he tries to shut out the reality principle from the fantasy world: he sends the servants off, and shoots the dogs (that may kill his fantasy).

His wife as a fox represents at least two kinds of fantasy for Tebrick. On the one hand, as has been pointed out above, Silvia as a fox is an especially good way of representing a child-like state. Thus, the more "civilised" or polished fantasy of Tebrick would be an ambitious one: to have a child, who can be played with, who has to be taken care of, with whom he can go for a walk, who is funny and mischievous. On the other hand, his wife as a fox represents another, not so elegant undercurrent in his fantasy, a sadistic daydream. Being a wild animal, she is very difficult to keep under control, and so has to be punished again and again. After he presents a rabbit to her,

> when he went in what a horrid shambles was spread before his eyes. Blood on the carpet, blood on the armchairs and antimacassars, even a little blood spurted onto the wall, and what was worse, Mrs Tebrick tearing and growling over a little piece of skin and legs, for she had eaten up all the rest of it. The poor gentleman was so heartbroken over this that he was likely to have done himself an injury, and at one moment thought of getting his gun, *to have shot himself and the vixen, too*. (emphasis mine, 47)

After a few minutes, "though he beat her off four of five times even giving her blows and kicks, she still came back to him, crawling on her belly, and imploring his forgiveness with wide and sorrowful eyes" (47). No wonder that he—apparently out of pure compassion—"almost wish[es] her to be a mere fox than to suffer so much by being a half-human" (50). By transforming his wife

into a fox, he could maintain this ideal master-slave relationship and do whatever he wanted to her, without feeling guilt or remorse. If one recalls Silvia's nickname, given her by Tebrick, Puss (in expletive slang, in the form of "pussy" also means the female sexual organ) or his gun, which can equally serve as a phallic symbol, this daydream, doubtlessly, has strong sexual connotations. This sadistic fantasy has to be kept carefully in secret, first in the house, later, in the garden of Nanny's house surrounded by walls (cf. Te*brick*'s name!). As the narrator reports, "The next morning he looked about him at the place and found the thing that he most wanted, and that was a little walled-in garden where his wife could run in freedom and yet be in safety" (69). For a while Tebrick's fantasy provides him with a secure field, the only important thing is that the fox must not transgress this symbolic wall.

The situation becomes really dangerous when he sees that it is almost impossible to keep her back. Sadistic fantasies that seemed to have been successfully repressed now threaten to become charged with forces from the unconscious and transformed into motility. He resolves to release Silvia into the woods, that is, he seems to give up his fantasy. Of course he cannot simply give up his fantasy; what Tebrick wants to do is seemingly repress his fantasy by providing it another secure place. It is just after this repression of the sadistic fantasies that signs of hysteria and neurosis start to appear in him: "he went out of the room and up to bed, and lay down as he was, in his clothes, utterly exhausted, and fell into a dog's sleep" (85). He also starts to insult a hunter, prohibiting him to hunt around the premises, who understands nothing whatever of the situation. Tebrick begins to display more and more serious signs of neurosis. In search of his wife, he "dared not to go himself, lest his passion should master him and he might commit a murder" (89). He does not care about himself anymore, "gave up washing himself for a week or two at a stretch," eats next to nothing, turns away from civilization, and lives a secluded life (which is also a form of regression). It is worth quoting a longer passage that illustrates well his state of mind:

> All this disorder fed a malignant pleasure in him. For by now he had come to hate his fellow-men and was embittered against all human decencies and decorum. For strange to tell he never in these months regretted his dear wife whom he had so much loved. No, all that he grieved for now was his departed vixen. *He was haunted all this time not by the memory of a sweet and gentle woman, but by the recollection of an animal* […]. His one hope was the recovery of this beast, and of this he dreamed continually. Likewise both walking and sleeping he was visited by visions of her; her mask, her full white-tagged brush, white throat, and thick fur in her ears all *haunted* him. (91, emphasis mine)

When the repressed desire fantasy begins to be really dangerous, Tebrick tries to neutralize it with sublimation—he wishes to lead a religious life. His efforts prove fruitless since Silvia's uncle, Rev. Fox, seeing that his mental state is somewhat precarious, does not encourage him to join the church.

Following this, Tebrick attempts to cope with his neurosis by visiting his wife's fox-family in the woods. This stage corresponds to Silvia's infantile regressive fantasy. The civilized, ambitious layer of this fantasy is the same as that of his wife: to have a happy family with several children. Gradually, however, Tebrick discards all attempts at seriousness and regresses into a child-like state. "He understood, *or so he fancied*, what it was to be happy, and that he found complete happiness now, living from day to day, careless of the future […]" (emphasis mine, 109–110). When in an idyllic scene he carelessly plays with the cubs "all human customs and institutions seemed to him nothing but folly" (121). Finally "he had got a way of going doubled up, often almost on all fours […]" (125). However, this way of coping with his neurosis is not successful, either: the sadistic fantasy cannot be repressed with regression and done away with. Chased by hounds, Silvia, the fox, "ran straight to the open gate to him" (129). The censorship of the ego that blocked his repressed fantasy falls away, and the energy-charged sadistic primal scene now returns, but, having to meet the reality-principle symbolized by the hounds, it is bound to perish.

2.4 The Psychopathology of Marriage?

David Garnett's "Lady into Fox" shows several ways of coping with desire and the lack of wish-fulfillment: in the case of Silvia, two solutions are available. The first is a regressive infantile fantasy, with the help of which she identifies with a fox and wishes to be taken care of and treated like a child. (This is presumably a late wish-fulfillment, since she, owing to her family conditions, lacked the happiness a child can expect.) The other solution for her is to turn this infantile fantasy into an ambitious one: she desires to have children and a happy family, but *without* the help of her husband, and to lead a "natural" or "normal" life. We cannot ignore two other possible interpretations, one of them presenting her husband as a fearful hunter, a sort of Oedipal totemic figure with a gun, the other being an identification with the dead father in the form of a dead fox.

In the case of Tebrick, the lack of wish fulfillment surfaces in four ways: the first, and most prominent one is a sadistic daydream, by which he conceives of his wife as an object of violence, a victim, over whose life he has complete power. No wonder he gradually wishes his wife's entire transformation into an animal that can be done violence to without any censorship of the ego. He has to conceal this fantasy from other people, of which the symbol is a garden surrounded by walls. Secondly, when the sadistic fantasy begins to threaten his integrity, he tries repression, which corresponds with his releasing his fox into the woods. For a short time he does not have access to her, and this is the short period when he makes an attempt at sublimation (that is, wants to be a priest).

After this, he starts to regress—under the cover of an ambitious dream similar to that of his wife—by regularly visiting his "family" in the woods, slipping back gradually into a childlike state. However, Silvia—the repressed sadistic fantasy—returns to him and begins to *haunt* him. In the end, he cannot cope with this return, and Tebrick has to give the fantasy up by symbolically killing his wife.

"The plot implied, rather clumsily in my view, that there is some essential quality of foxness in Mrs. Tebrick […]. Her metamorphosis is meant to suggest a rebuff of the married state itself," Asker suggests (*Aspects* 40), unfolding the idea that Silvia was simply unprepared for marriage. For all the ambiguities of the "fox" symbol, we should not forget that, throughout the story, Silvia remains Tebrick's *wife*. That is, all biological and emotional bonds are overturned, and a "weak" legal bond represented by marriage is the only thing that survives into the fox-stage. If one follows the logic outlined above, that is, that Garnett's text unfurls a double fantasy, laden with all sorts of sadistic, masochistic and regressive motivations, and if one attempts to forget about the fantasy layer of the story, we might be able to catch a glimpse of what could be called—following the Freudian term—the psychopathology of married life. Let us imagine for a moment that Silvia does not turn into a fox: the result would be the narrative of a neurotic, shy wife, married too early and too soon to a man who drinks and does violence to her, and who eventually becomes a misanthrope. In this scenario, Silvia would feel uncomfortable in the confines of her home, would go to perhaps London (as rumour has it in the village) and find another man and her happiness, but Tebrick, ruined and enraged, would find them and kill Silvia. This could be the realistic story covered by both the allegorical and the dream text layer of Garnett's version.

3 Master(s) and Slave(s): D. H. Lawrence's "The Fox"

In a letter to John Middleton Murry in September 1923, D. H. Lawrence called Garnett's fox story "pretty piffle—just playboy stuff" (Warren et al., ed. 500). To Lawrence's mind, his version of the fox story (a story in which the central symbol is also a fox) is allegedly more mature, more serious, "deeper" and reveals layers of interpersonal connections that are painfully missing from Garnett's "playboy stuff." A careful reading of the two novellas, however, reveals that they centre on roughly the same ideas: female independence, male authority, mutual domination and the fox as a subversive element in these relationships. In what follows, I shall look into the changes in the structure of domination that unfolds in this claustrophobically close community between the three principal characters, March, Banford and the intruder, Henry. What is the initial situation modified by the appearance of the fox? What kinds of modification take place in this structure? How is this attraction connected to gender roles and, more specifically, to sadomasochistic relationships? How can the title be interpreted, that is, what or who is the fox in Lawrence's scheme? What is the role of identifications? Though I am aware of the fact that often it is

not the best method, in this case, however, a chronological presentation of the storyline seems an appropriate way in analysing the process of the modification of power relations.

3.1 March's "primal scene"

March's first encounter with the (real) fox can be evaluated as a "primal scene," which simulates an "ideal" or classic master-slave relationship as defined by Hegel and is based on a dialectic process in which the master is equally in the power of the slave he is attempting to subjugate. As Jessica Benjamin puts it, "If I completely control the other, the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist" (53). This initial structure is disturbed by the appearance of Henry, which distorts March's original contact with the fox, and repeats it in a considerably different manner. This relationship can be said to be a "real" master and slave relationship, which inevitably tends towards death and which risks death (Benjamin 63), the participants unconsciously being aware of this fact. By the end of the story, Henry manages to transform March from a "male" master-figure into a "masochist" mother figure. In relation to all this, it is going to be pointed out that in spite of the fact that the title promises the story of one specific fox, practically all three characters become foxes in the novella, so that by the end we cannot talk about *the* fox, but about the *position* of a fox that the characters subsequently occupy.

At the beginning of the story, a stable structure is suggested in the presentation of the two women, March and Banford, characterised by a clear distribution of gender roles, regardless of the two women's biological sex. Exactly what kind of relationship exists between the two women, and how they became acquainted with each other, are hard to determine; the 1968 film version makes lesbianism explicit (Preston 41, see also Wachman 176). March is introduced as a "male" participant in the relationship: "March was the more robust […]. She would be the man about the place" (3). Banford, on the other hand, is a "small, delicate thing with spectacles" (3). Later it is made clear that March does about four-fifths of the work around the house like a husband, while Banford is relegated to the position of a "wife" doing household chores. What asserts March's masculinity is that it is she who possesses the gun with which they try to ward off the fox that has been raiding their poultry. On the surface it may seem that there is a balance or harmony between the two characters, and that they are quite content with this distribution of the gender roles. This seeming harmony can, however, be questioned on the basis of little signs: their endless quarrels and the constant references to March's pursed lips may be seen as signs of repression. The fox, which is brought into the story as an intruder from the woods that steals hens, is an intruder in the relationship of March and Banford. In this respect March's first face-to-face encounter with the animal is of crucial importance. This meeting reasserts March's position as master, but at the same time challenges this position. Let us see what happens:

> She lowered her eyes, and suddenly saw the fox. He was looking up at her. Her chin was pressed down, and his eyes were looking up. They met her eyes. And he knew her. She was spellbound—she knew he knew her. So he looked into her eyes, and her soul failed her. He knew her, he was not daunted. (9)

What is taking place here is the creation of a subtle balance of mutual domination. The fox is in an inferior position, looking up at March, like a slave, while it is he that possesses her through the power of looking. Two aspects are significant here: one is the eye contact, which is exceptionally clear and makes the participants equal partners (in the sense that both of them are masters and slaves at the same time). The other is the metaphorics of copulation with the repeated assertion of "knowing" the female, with its archaic undertones, referring to an intimate sexual relationship. These two aspects are, in fact, the two different versions of one problem, and that is the problem of boundaries. As Benjamin remarks, "It should be noted […] that the break must never *really* dissolve the boundaries—else death results. Excitement resides in the *risk* of death, not in death itself"(63). In this "original" scene, the trope of intrusion is of utmost importance, and it is as if the two participants were aware of the subtle mechanisms of master and slave relationship, that is, they respect each others' frontiers, intrude into the other's sphere, but make sure that these boundaries are not dissolved. This encounter with the fox does not only reassert March as a master (making her a slave at the same time), but as a woman as well, which she is denied in her relationship with Banford. According to Peter Preston, the significance of the fox's appearance is that it painfully forces March into recognising her own sexuality (42) and helps to heal the scar that is the result of her divided personality (39); I would say, however, that this encounter widens the gap further between March's role at home as a "male" master and as a "female" "subject," thus reasserting her divided personality.

3.2 From male master to masochist mother

The appearance of Henry is an obvious repetition of the previous situation. The differences between the two situations, however, are more intriguing. Henry also makes March painfully aware of the (real, biological) difference between man and woman, and the stress must fall on the word "painfully." Her relationship with Henry is substantially different from her encounter with the fox. It is first and foremost characterised by reversals as compared to the previous scene. March (and several critics) often uncritically identify Henry with the fox she saw; to quote Asker, for instance: "the trope of the fox is unmistakable in that it represents (metaphorically) a male presence and threat that is used to expunge the all-female relationship of March and Banford" (*Aspects* 37). However, March does not seem to realise that, instead of Henry, it is *herself* who slowly

becomes "the fox" in this relationship. One evening, when they are all sitting inside the house, she is exposed to Henry's penetrating male gaze:

> She was very sensitive in her knees. Having no skirts to cover them, and being forced to sit with them boldly exposed, she suffered. She shrank and shrank trying not to be seen. And the youth […] glanced up at her with long, steady, penetrating looks, till she was almost ready to disappear […]. Her desire to be invisible was so strong that it quite baffled the youth. He felt he could not see her distinctly. She seemed like a shadow within a shadow. (18)

This scene is, on the one hand, a repetition of the "original" fox scene. The most important difference, however, is that, as opposed to the clear vision that characterised the encounter of March and the fox, here that vision is blurred or distorted (it is significant, by the way, that all the scenes charged with tension take place in the dusk or in darkness). Henry is ready to push March to the margins, like the fox was "pushed back" into the woods by the look of March. Here, March becomes the fox and Henry the person with a gun, with the important difference that he would be ready to extinguish her: "she shrank and shrank […] till she was almost ready to disappear." Henry does not maintain the boundary between March and himself; he wants to know her, but, at the same time, he risks killing her, and thus risks losing his status as master, because there would then be no one to give him recognition as a master if he extinguishes March. We now have three foxes altogether: the real animal, and March and Henry as foxes, with different roles. "The fox" now becomes a position (of the master and the slave at the same time) that is taken by various characters.

Indeed, a look into March's first dream of the two might serve to illustrate this point. In this dream she has a "painful" experience, as she dreams with a (the?) fox.

> She dreamed she heard a singing outside, which she could not understand […]. She went out, and suddenly she knew it was the fox singing […], he ran away and ceased singing. He seemed near, she wanted to touch him. She stretched out her hand and he bit her wrist and at the same instant, as she drew back, the fox, turning round to bound away, whisked his brush across her face, and it seemed his brush was on fire for it seared and burned her mouth with great pain. (23–24)

In fact there are two fox-figures in her dream: the one which is singing around the house (the "real" fox) and the other that bites March (Henry). This dream scene is often interpreted as March's longing for submission, since she identifies Henry with the fox. However, a choice (?) is symbolised in her dream between the harmonic, equal and dialectic relationship with the real fox, which is pleasant (she is "spellbound") and the violent, transgressive and risky relationship with Henry.

This difference becomes more emphatic when Henry proposes to March. Before that scene, eye contact is again emphasised: "Particularly he wanted March. She was a strange character to him […]. Her dark eyes made something rise in his soul, […] an excitement he was afraid to let be seen […]. He felt he must go further, he was inevitably impelled" (28). His is precisely the pleasure of the sadist who feels impelled by the slave's submission and interprets it as love. He seeks to prolong his pleasure and find new levels of resistance (Benjamin 58). Ideally, this prolongation serves to avoid the extinction of the object; however, it seems that that is precisely what Henry is especially bad at. Significantly, it is in darkness that he proposes marriage to her, which is another instance of the "blurred," "distorted" vision mentioned above. What is more, it is with a dead rabbit in his hands that he first thinks of marrying March (29), which is ironic considering the controversies involved in their relationship and is indicative of the risks Henry is running concerning the two of them. The whole proposal appears in the context of the sadistic framework of March's dream: Henry's voice is like the "the subtle touch" (32) of the fox in the dream, and after her refusal, he thinks that "he had missed" (32), as if March was a target to be shot at. One of March's objections is that she is old enough to be Henry's mother (32). Although it is not true, since Henry is around twenty, and the two women are around thirty (4), yet this aspect might enrich the discussion of the relationship between the two people. If, symbolically, March can be conceived as Henry's mother, this places their contact in the framework of Oedipality. In this case Henry's sadism would be fuelled by a boy's need of differentiation from and disidentification with the mother and a subsequent repudiation of the maternal body (Benjamin 76). This objectifying tendency seems to be reinforced by the next scene, in which Henry tries to force her to say yes and kiss her, which evokes her first dream. She can hardly articulate "Oh, I can't" (33), "she wailed helplessly […] as if semi-conscious, and as if in pain, like one who dies," which underlines the dangers in Henry's marrying March.

The following scene, when March is crocheting, can be read as a summary of the different power-relations and the positions of the fox that are occupied. It seems that while she is engaged in crocheting, she is dreaming about *the* fox:

> March […] was spasmodically crocheting. Her mouth was pursed in an odd way, as when she had dreamed the fox's brush burned it. […] In a sort of semi-dream she seemed to be hearing the fox singing round the house in the wind, singing wildly and sweetly, like a madness. With *red* but well-shaped hands she slowly crocheted the *white* cotton, very slowly, awkwardly. (37–38, emphasis mine)

Here the three fox figures are represented in one paragraph: Henry, who burns the face of March, the real fox singing, and she herself with red hands and white cotton.

3.3 "Something was missing": the bad master

It is at this point that power-relations begin to alter, and Banford, who has not played a significant role up till now, begins to emerge as an important factor. A rivalry begins for the domination of March, who, by now, has been converted from a master into a masochist.

To begin with, the importance of looking and gazing indicates that Banford starts to occupy the place of Henry, or rather imitate very faintly what Henry had done to March up till now. So far Banford's impaired eyesight has been remarked upon, but has not been of utmost importance. Now she stresses that her eyes are bad (38) and that she does not like to look at Henry. This seems to be the exact opposite of Henry's powerful male gaze; however, she tries to assign him a marginal position, just like Henry did to March. The real turning point comes when Henry and March announce that they are going to get married. "Never!", Banford exclaims. Why is she so anxious? Is her newly acquired position (that is, her starting dominance over Henry) under threat? Or does it upset the "subtle" balance of March and herself, described at the beginning? Most probably, since in their relationship, it is March that gave her recognition as a master, as the "man" around the house, and now that balance is threatened by Henry, who is making March a masochist subject. Banford simply *has* to acquire the position of the master if she is to survive. She acts as if her life depended on March ("I should be dead in a month" [49]), which is true: her existence as a master is risked by the marriage. Naturally, it is Banford who thinks of Henry as a "master": "He'd soon think he was master of both of us, he thinks he's master of you already" (49–50). This statement probably serves only to disguise that it is she who wishes to be the master of them.

One of the story's climaxes is Henry's shooting of the fox. There has been much discussion over why Henry kills the fox with which he is identified (cf. Preston 43). By now it is clear that it is another sign of Henry's attempt to dominate March to the extent of her extinction, repeatedly trying to transgress the boundaries of the dialectics of the master and slave dichotomy. When Henry announces that he has killed the fox, it is March who is frightened to death—not surprisingly, since her existence as slave/masochist becomes jeopardised. Henry, not realising that he is playing a very dangerous game, offers March the fur of the fox to wear (symbolically trying to transform her into a fox), which March—instinctively perhaps—refuses.

It is in this context of the violation of the master-slave relationship that March's second dream takes place. In the dream, she unconsciously tries to transform Banford into a fox (putting the fur under her corpse and covering her with the fox's skin). What is the significance of this wish fulfilment? There are at least two plausible explanations. One is that March tries to put her in the position of Henry (as a sadistic fox), and thereby exclude him. The other explanation may be that she attempts to transfer the position of the fox (as victim) to Banford. The decision is not easy, since the first option would mean

that March would reintroduce the slave-master dichotomy only substituting Henry for Banford, the latter would mean that she wishes Banford dead, which would be a catastrophe for her, since it is she who used to recognise her as a master and now would, as a master, confirm her position as a slave.

This tension culminates in the murder of Banford. Why does Henry kill her? Is it a willful act? According to the logic of the early Lawrence, "women tend to engulf or devour their loved ones" (Ruderman 110). In the first version of *The Fox*, Henry kills Banford because he feels that he is inextricably caught in her web (Ruderman 110). However, I want to suggest that both March and Henry have to face almost unsolvable dilemmas. After killing the fox, and looking at the two women approaching—naturally—in the dusk, he "realised that she was a woman, vulnerable, accessible, a certain heaviness had possessed his soul. He did not want to make love to her. He shrank from any such performance, almost with fear […] he held back from that which was ahead almost with dread" (73). By now Henry seems to be cognisant of the fact that instead of March he had killed the fox, but this was only a temporary solution. As for March, she also feels that should they continue their relationship, it would culminate in her extinction, and that is why she enters a new relationship with Banford and rejects Henry who still wants to marry her. After their separation, she sends a letter to Henry in which she states that "when you aren't there, I see what a fool I am. When you are there, you seem to blind me to things as they actually are. You make me see things all unreal and I don't know what. Then when I am alone again with Jill, I come to my own senses […]" (79). What March is longing for is the clarity of vision that she used to have when she was staring into the eyes of the fox, and for which she has been looking, trying to recreate the "original" scene. Henry's answer to the problem is killing Banford, because he is dimly aware that otherwise he would kill March.

What takes place after the murder seems to be the exact reversal of the original fox-scene, but actually it is a distorted version of that: "She sank down on the grass […]. He stood above her, looking down on her, mute, pale, and everlasting seeming. He never moved, but looked down on her […]. She gazed on him as if sightless, yet looking up to him" (92) March can never again regain the clear vision, the subtle and finely balanced master-slave relationship she once possessed for a moment, and she is doomed to have this limited, blurred sight. By now, however, from a "male master" she has managed to become a "proper" masochist: "She wanted to be alone: with him at her side" (97), which is exactly like the attitude of a masochist, who wants to search for aloneness *with* the other (Benjamin 72). "She *wanted* him to possess her, she wanted it, she wanted nothing else, now, still he did not quite succeed. Something was missing" (93). That something is precisely the security of the master-slave relationship, the dialectics that creates new tensions and prolongs the liaison, without extinguishing the other. No wonder Henry is not happy at the end, since he is aware of the fact that after two murders March may be, symbolically, the next victim. By the end of the story, alongside the five "M"s mentioned so far

(the progress of March from a male master to a masochist [symbolic] mother), a sixth "m" is introduced: melancholia, which begins to possess March, as a result of which she is unable to reflect on herself and her loss (Butler 23).

By now it is clear that this narrative is not about one fox, but the position of a fox, the fox as a metaphor whose site is occupied by all three major characters. The appearance of Henry starts to subvert the (after all, not that stable) initial structure, and he, taking the position of a (sadistic) fox subsequently forces the other two women to play the same role. He pushes March from the position of a masculine master to that of a masochist subject (partly, perhaps motivated by Oedipal fantasies of destruction), and threatens her with extinction, thereby forcing Banford to take the position of March's master, which leads to the death of the former. Henry does not prove to be a "good" master, and after killing the fox and Banford (Banford, the fox), he ends up in a particularly distressing situation, with the would-be victim March at his side.

4 Conclusion

In an era when social transformations profoundly questioned and redefined the role of women, both Garnett and Lawrence carried on negotiating the most prominent theme of the traditional realist novel, that is, married life and the position of women in these relationships. Moreover, in these two novellas, they managed to do this in a perfectly idiosyncratic way, using the allegory (or the disguise of an allegory) of the fox-tale to express profound concerns about domination, subjugation, identification and master and slave relationships. The common point in the two texts is putting women in the position of the fox, which unfolds the multi-layered significance of the genre of the fable. The peculiarity of Garnett's "Lady into Fox" is that both Richard Tebrick, the husband, and Silvia Fox, the wife, may be read as fox figures, with different aspects of meaning. In the former case, the husband appears as a threatening Oedipal figure, a wild animal, in the latter, Silvia as fox may also be interpreted in two ways: as a free animal, wishing to lead a life of her own, and—from the husband's point of view—a victim, prey, or a child (a weak figure that must be dominated). Both options leads to tragic consequences, that is, Silvia's death.

In Lawrence's tale, the theme of domination and identification is somewhat more subtly elaborated. All the three principal characters (March, Banford and Henry) take the position of the fox, but contrary to what seems obvious at first, that is, the identification of Henry with the fox, it can be argued that it is primarily March who is conflated with the fox figure. Henry's appearance repeats March's first encounter with the real fox, which is the perfect Hegelian master-slave relationship. The crucial difference is that Henry is unable to maintain that subtle balance of the original encounter, and threatens to dissolve the boundaries between March and himself. After the death of the real fox and Branford as a fox figure, now it is March's turn to be symbolically annihilated in

this male-dominated relationship. Eventually, both novellas offer new insights into what could be called "the psychopathology of married life."

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