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*THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE FOX and HENRY’S CHARACTERIZATION*

“The Fox “is one of the most famous Dof . H. Laurence’s short stories. But the title tricks the reader into thinking the plot will entirely focus on the animal. Instead, the protagonist of the story is not the fox, but two “young ladies”, who have partially to face with the wild beast during the management of their farm.

However, if you gather the elements of the denotative analysis of the fox, you will find out that they are useful to understand layers of meaning. The fox will not appear as a wild animal, coherently with the common perception, but he will shift on a metaphorical level.

On the very first time the fox is depicted as a demon, an evil creature (1, 2): he represents a danger for Banford and March’s security since he kills their hens, threatening their sustenance. It is interesting to notice that the writer chooses the subject pronoun "he" to refer to the fox (3): it contributesl to highlight the opposition between the male and the female gender. The fox becomes a symbol for the male gender, in opposition with the female gender, namely March and Banford . The narrator adopts the animal conflict fox – hens as metaphor for the relationship between men and women.

In the conflict, the fox wins the battle: he manages to kill their hens for a year without being captured (4). He turns out to be a cunning animal, whose hunting becomes quite impossible for March (5, 6). On the metaphorical level it means that the male gender prevails over the female one. Indeed, even if March and Banford try to run the farm autonomously, they are unable to face the obstacles and to go beyond their fears. The fox is too quick and too sly for the two women: he seems to circumvent the ladies deliberately, exasperating them both (5, 8).

In order to underline the connection between the fox and the man the writer exploits a metaphor taken from the animal field comparing the fox to a serpent. Therefore the idea of man communicated by the writer is not that of a fair and honest man, but of a cunning, sly and self-assured one.

After the analysis of the denotative level the reader can go deeper into the connotative level. That is why it is important to bring to surface the two different layers of meaning: on the denotative level the fox represents a concrete threat and a danger for the ladies, on the connotative level it stands for the male gender with all his social and psychological characteristics.

But in the text there is another male figure, a real man, a soldier. Indeed, one day, a young soldier called Henry, comes along and makes a huge impression on March. She has a strange feeling that Henry is the fox that she had seen earlier on the wood-edge and that had also made a strange impression on her. Like Henry, the fox seems to see through her and to know her thoroughly. Henry looks very much like the fox and seems to be similar by his nature.

"*The young man - or youth, for he would not be more than twenty - now advanced and stood in the inner doorway. March, already under the influence of his strange, soft, modulated voice, stared at him spellbound. He had a ruddy, roundish face, with fairish hair, rather long, flattened to his forehead with sweat. His eyes were blue, and very bright and sharp. On his cheeks, on the fresh ruddy skin were fine, fair hairs, like a down, but sharper. It gave him a slightly glistening look."(*7)

Something typical in the story is the constant reference to nature and different species of animals. Indeed, hens are referred to as women and the fox refers to men.

Henry wants to take control over the 'hens'. So the story implies that women need to have a man in order to be able to stop being irritated and delicate, and to have peace, just as "there was no peace till they (the hens/the women) were shut up and asleep".

In this case, 'being asleep' probably means being with a man and submitting oneself to that man. Henry enjoys being in control and superior to other people. The problem is that he thinks he should be that way in a marriage, too. In that sense, he is a pure intolerant man:

"*He wanted her to give herself without defences, to sink and become submerged in him. --- He wanted her to commit herself to him, and to put her independent spirit to sleep. He wanted to take away from her all her effort, all that seemed her very raison d'être. --- He wanted to take away her consciousness, and make her just his woman*."