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THE STORY OF A DEAD FOX AND A DYING FATHER: A COMPARATIVE ECO -CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE WORLDS IN *THE FOX* AND *YOU TOUCHED ME*
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ABSTRACT

D. H. Lawrence's fiction and other compositions have always received wide critical acclaim ever since it was published. But Lawrence's writings, especially his short stories were once again scrutinized with a renewed interest after the arrival of eco-criticism. Here in this paper I have tried to look into this aspect only. This paper looks how nature affects human beings and their lives. In this paper two different stories have been looked because of their several similarities. Both the stories looks how nature and natural aspects affect D. H. Lawrence's characters

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The Fox, one of Lawrence's best known novellas and *You Touched Me*, one of his most fascinating short stories tell about the efforts of two girls in their thirties to survive in their decayed farms. In *The Fox*, we find the struggles of two girls Jill Banford and Nillie March to run a farm on their own during the time of the Great War in England. Though the girls are having numerous difficulties in their enterprises, it seems that the farm, which is also known as the Bailey Farm offers something meaningful to live by during the time of the Great War. That is why it seems quite natural that the fox and Henry Grenfel, the young military comes in search of 'something' to this farm which will help them to survive in their adverse conditions.

In *You Touched Me* also we find the efforts of the two sisters Matilda Rockley and Emmie Rockley who try to survive in their decaying Pottery House. The two sisters had to live there not only in a decaying pottery house but also with an arrogant father who was on the verge of death. In this seminar paper I have tried to study the characters and their 'relationship' with their respective natural worlds from eco-critical point of view.

In many ways, *The Fox* and *You Touched Me* are very similar compositions. Both tell us about the struggles of two intimate girls; both are rural in setting and in both the writings one 'outsider' arrives only to upset the 'normal' lives of the two girls. In the novella, *The Fox*, at the very outset every character seems to be living harmoniously with the Bailey Farm itself. It seems that everyone is following the norms set by the natural world of the Bailey Farm. The two girls (Jill and Nillie), the fox and even the outsider Henry seem like becoming an integral part of the natural world of the Bailey Farm. The entire farm can be regarded as an

'ecosystem' in which these characters try to make a proper ecological balance. Apart from that, there is also an ongoing battle among the creatures living in the Bailey Farm for their survival which critic Ronald Granofsky compares with the natural selection process of Darwinian Theory.

As far as the story of *You Touched Me* is concerned, it does not seem at the beginning of the story that the characters are involved in a struggle for survival. However the lives of the two Rockley sisters do not seem easy. D.H. Lawrence in the very first line of the story explains that the two sisters are living with many troubles in the pottery house. Lawrence points out that-

The pottery house was a square, ugly, brick house girt in by the wall that enclosed the whole grounds of the pottery itself. (Lawrence, 117)

Besides, he also adds that the pottery itself was now closed, the great doors of the yard permanently shut. To increase their troubles there was their old father Mr. Ted Rockley, who was in his deathbed. The two girls had to nurse their father all the time apart from maintaining the house. The two girls were not married and they had been working hard for their living with the pottery household.

If we examine the situations of both these stories from the eco-critical point of view, then it seems that Lawrence regarded the world of his characters as a battlefield. The characters, whether human or non human had to survive among several harsh aspects of the natural world which they were part of. Lawrence believed that to survive in the battlefield, the competitor must have a certain amount of vitality within his/her character. This vitality, according to Lawrence comes from both physical as well as mental qualifications of the concerned character. In *The Fox* and *You Touched Me*, those characters are able to survive or express their dominance who have a particular kind of Lawrentian vitality within themselves. In *You Touched Me*, the two female characters do not show any prowess or vitality of their own. As a result, they are always dominated by other characters in the story. The father of the two girls, Ted Rockley, though a dying man, shows his great control over the two girls and other affairs of the household even from his deathbed. Although the father was dying but still, -

He too had his courage, as a rat has indomitable courage in the end. (Lawrence, 122)

This old man forces the younger girl Matilda Rockley not only to kiss 'the stranger boy' Hadrian but also to marry him. While Matilda had no choice of her own (although she had immense hatred for Hadrian), her elder sister Emmie Rockley kept on shouting in vain.

In a way, the location of the pottery house and the life of the old man seem very analogical. This is in the sense that both of them had 'captured' the lives of the two girls in a way from which they were unable to free themselves. Earlier we are informed that the two girls received many proposals of marriage from : --"the ugly industrial town full of men. But they were all colliers or pottery hands, mere workmen. The Rockley girls would have about ten thousand pounds' worth of profitable house-property. It was not to be sneezed at..." (Lawrence,122). In this way the pottery kept them arrested within the pottery household. In a similar way the old man had forcefully tied the knot of Matilda with Hadrian. To marry Hadrian meant that they would have to remain within the pottery household itself. Thus in *You Touch Me*, it appears that the characters and surrounding situation form an ecology in which the characters which have a special Lawrentian vitality could survive. However survival in the short story *You Touched Me* remains at the metaphysical level only.

In *The Fox* also only those characters are able to survive in the farm who are able to display a vitality of their own. The women who attempt to survive during the wartime by raising hens, fail measurably not only because of their gender but also because the 'person' who controls the farm (financially that is), Jill Banford, lacks the requisite vitality. This is suggested by the fact that Jill Banford requires spectacles to see properly. On the contrary, the keen eyed Henry Grenfel, who is often compared with the fox, is far better able to deal with the problems that arise in the farm. It appears that Lawrence repeatedly condemns Banford for the decadent condition of the farm. Now the whole farming enterprise itself is on the edge of survivability because the 'person' who controls the farm seems to be "a wrong person in a wrong place". Banford is repeatedly described as 'delicate' in health. In fact her father had given her the farm to invest in it: "for her health's sake,

and because he loved her, and because it did not look as if she would marry “. (Lawrence,7). At the age of thirty it already looks as though Banford is a looser in the competition for survival and mating.

In this way, both the texts represent two very adverse situations in which the characters are struggling to survive. The harsh natural condition symbolically represents the troubles of the characters from which they cannot escape. In both these stories a pair of girls had to suffer. It seems that the natural world of which they were also part conspired against them. Adverse natural objects always create problems in the lives of both the pairs of the girls. In both these works, the two face ‘a stranger’ young boy: Henry Grenfel in *The Fox* and Hadrian in *You Touched Me* respectively. It is not only that the names of the two young characters start with similar alphabet ‘H’, but they are also similar in upsetting the lives of the two pairs of girls. In *The Fox*, Henry Grenfel happened to be the grandson of the owner of the Bailey Farm. Lawrence makes it clear from the very beginning that Henry Grenfel, just back from Salonika with his military uniform is fit in physical terms not only to survive in the Great Wars but also in the harsh conditions of the Bailey Farm. In contrast to the weak girls, Henry Grenfel’s eyes were: “almost unnaturally clear and bright enough; it was the brightness of abundant health”. (Lawrence, 15). Therefore it is very much clear that when Henry Grenfel enters the Bailey Farm, he then straightly enters into a battle against the two girls. This battle had already been started by various elements of nature (for example- the fox.). In this sense Henry Grenfel is not an outsider; rather he is a dormant force of the nature which is already present within the Bailey Farm.

In the same way, Hadrian is also an ‘outsider’ to the Rockley family. He was adopted from an orphanage by Mr. Ted Rockley because --: “Ted Rockley, the father of the girls had had four daughters and no son. As his girls grew, he felt angry at finding himself always in a house hold of women” (Lawrence, 123). During his childhood, Hadrian was quite an ordinary boy. But after fifteen years when he had returned from the colonies his nature was changed. He now wanted to marry his ‘cousin’ Matilda, an idea that the old man admired very much. Hadrian enters into the natural world of the pottery house for the second time only to ‘upset’ the lives of the two girls. Like the pottery house itself Hadrian had also become an integral part of the lives of the two girls, especially Matilda. Hadrian has also entered into the lives of the two sisters because of their old and arrogant dying father like the decaying pottery house itself.

Apart from all these important human characters, there is one animal character (the fox) in the short story *The Fox*, which needs to be scrutinized more minutely. In *The Fox*, the fox creates much of the troubles faced by the two girls in the first part of the novella. If we consider the Bailey Farm as an ideal place of ecological balance then it seems that the fox is an expert hunter. However the fox appears to trespass its limitations by entering into the consciousness of Nillie March. In fact, the fox like Henry Grenfel and the Bailey Farm is also an integral part of the natural world. All these natural elements try to eliminate the weaker subjects of that given natural world. It must be noted that in the second part of the novella, Lawrence constantly compares the fox and Henry Grenfel. Besides, the writer also indicates that Henry Grenfel replaces the fox in the concluding part of the novella. Similarly, Hadrian also behaves like an ‘animal’ who try to enter into the personal lives of the two sisters and especially in the life of Matilda. Although Hadrian has not been compared with any animal, however the narrative of the writer in describing this character is almost analogical with the description of the Henry Grenfel in *The Fox*.

Another important similarity that we can draw in these two stories is the role of the (dead) fox and the dying father in *The Fox* and in *You Touched Me* respectively. In both these stories these two characters remain in the ‘periphery’ of the entire story; but in a sense they control the lives of almost all the characters, especially the pairs of girls. In both these stories, the two characters are (or will be) able to influence the life the two pairs of girls. In *The Fox*, the animal is able to upset the life and ‘consciousness’ of Nillie March even after its death. Similarly, in *You Touched Me*, the dying father of the two girls is able to change the course of his daughter’s life. We are well aware that Matilda’s father’s decision to make her marry Hadrian will ‘haunt’ her throughout her life. In both these stories, the two characters are ‘replaced’ (in the consciousness of the girls) with a ‘stranger’. This similarity proves that nature, sometimes in its natural form (as in the case of the

fox) and sometimes in a symbolic form (as in the case of the dying father of the two girls) is able to influence the respective pairs of girls who try to live with their own ideology and design in a particular natural world.

In this way, it can easily be noticed that Lawrence maintains some similarities while describing human and non-human characters and the natural world of which they are an integral part. A comparative and comprehensive study of the characters and other natural objects from eco-critical point of view can only offer us a way to understand the similarities and dissimilarities among all these aspects of nature in the works of D. H. Lawrence in general.

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