The context within which Lawrence participated in the debates on feminism and femininity can be seen in terms of two broad categories. One was the feminist movement itself or what is generally termed as the first wave of feminism; and secondly, a parallel male discourse which responded to, acknowledged the influence or at least the presence of, and at times reacted against the first. The conflict that seemed to emerge between the sexes during the first three or four decades of the twentieth century, especially during and after the First World War was more than a simple division between men and women and their respective discourses. While there is no denying that extremist ideas and voices manifested themselves at both ends of this framework or structure of sexuality and subjectivity, many of the modernist writers themselves were also embroiled within the debate though in a more cautious manner. That is to say, many of the projected images of men and women became sites on which both male and female activists thrashed out their debates and opinions that their respective positions entailed.

Sally Alexander, in her essay “Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 30s” describes two popular visual images of the working classes in the years between the two wars:

“the cloth cap and spare frame of the unemployed man whose wasted face and staring eyes still wrench pity from the onlooker; and the young working girl – lipsticked, silk-stockinged, and dressed, ‘...like an actress.”

(Alexander: 200)
She further states how the former image reinforced a bias especially among the middle classes in general regarding the intrusion of the American way of life, consumerism and the growing popularity of newer forms of mass entertainment. For them, the second image of the young Englishwoman typified all that was shallow and exploitative in the newer cultural milieu. This was also an image that, Alexander argues, was viewed with skepticism and even fear and anger by both feminists such as Ellen Wilkinson and Mary Agnes Hamilton, as well as by male writers such as J.B. Priestley and John Sommerfield.

This image of the young woman closely resembled, and actually overlapped with, the image of the flapper during the early 1920s. She was frequently accused of taking her freedom (that had been partially achieved after a hard-fought struggle) for granted, and hence, of moving away from feminist preoccupations. While both pre-War and post-War feminists had campaigned for equal pay, access to birth control and contraception methods, access to higher education and professional training, the custody of children, attention to women’s health, and housing facilities for women, this image of the young working women unconcerned with any of these issues seemed to go against the grain of the feminist cause. However, it was also true that the greater economic and political opportunities afforded to women during the 1920s and 1930s facilitated a clearer articulation of the individual woman’s subjectivity in literature, especially by sensitive women writers such as Virginia Woolf.

The First World War initiated a further change in the structure of the sexual division of labor set in motion earlier by the Industrial Revolution. As newer industries dealing with glass, chemicals, light metals, commerce, food products and other consumer products (Alexander: 203) were emerging and expanding, women were entering the new work environments and jobs created by such shifts — jobs such
as those of office cleaners, packers, saleswomen, typists and secretaries, and even bus and tram conductors. Though the wage equation was still tipped in favor of men and traditional notions of "women's work" as unskilled, low paid and unorganized still persisted, it was also evident that "[W]omen's political and industrial organisation, the vote, and changes in education, publishing, purchasing power, and with them habits of reading, writing and even remembering [had] deepened individual subjectivity" of women (Alexander: 203).

Besides being economically independent, usually in terms of a job, the young working woman during and after the First World War also sported signs of defiance—cropped hair, smoking cigarettes, wearing bloomers and shorter skirts. This brings us to the other conspicuous image of woman proliferating in the numerous modes of popular culture in particular—the image of the flapper. While the War and the economic and industrial changes it brought about were not exceedingly emancipatory for women as such, it did bring about, as mentioned earlier, a particular pungency and insistence in the articulation of their freedom, independence and subjectivity (or individuality) as being at par with the men's.

By the end of the War, in 1918, women above the age of thirty had attained suffrage, though it was only in 1928 that it became universal for women above the age of 18. In the 'intervening period, the "flapper" (the term "flapper note" was also applied to the idea of universal women's suffrage in popular parlance) came to represent the young woman who had just entered young adulthood but were below the age empowering them to Vote. She combined in the body and appearance attributes derived from the binary notions of masculinity and femininity and was typically projected as almost an androgyne, with her cropped hair, boyish looks, slim and slight figure, smoking cigarettes at times, taking up professions and thus
effectively competing with men in the public sphere, while preserving at the same
time, what was seen as her innate female sexuality and libido. Thus, the flapper
became a site for debates between the two discourses regarding the construction of
‘woman’ as an object of desire on one hand, and as an empowered human subject
(almost masculinized) on the other. Women’s sexuality had already become a staple
discussion topic of both sexologists and post-War feminist activists. Books like
Marie Stopes’s *Married Love* (1916) argued for an acknowledgement of women’s
sexual needs and did much to dissipate the suspicious attitude adopted by many pre-
War feminists against the idea of sexuality. (Interestingly, one of the slogans,
adopted in 1913 by the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) was “Votes for
Women and Purity for Man” (Simpson: 81). This was combined with a radical
advocacy of birth control and contraceptives, effectively aiming at debunking
traditional ideas of women as child-bearing machines while trying to strike a
tentative balance between the domestic and the public. Popular cultural products
such as the mass – circulation daily, the best-selling novel, and film underwent
radical transformation, chief among which was their catering to a target audience of
young working women, including those seen in terms of “flappers”.
“Society as a
whole had to come to terms with the loss of a generation of men and a surplus of
women in the reproductive age groups. Moreover, what for the majority had been
established pattern of sexual behaviour were now superseded by new ones. Marriage
and the conjugal family seemed particularly precarious. Equally important was the
influence of the changes in the pace of life in the larger urban centres. The twenties
were the decade of the suburban explosion, of the growth of a mass – market for
cheaply produced consumer goods and the flowering of forms of mass –
entertainment such as the film and wireless. ...And understandably, this sudden
broadening of the ‘feminine sphere’ exposed women, at all social levels, to diverse
influences against which the relative and protective narrowness of their experience had hitherto guarded them” (Melman: 7-8).

The flapper, or the disenfranchised woman, was also blamed for what was seen as her parasitic usurpation of men’s jobs, even as her habits and general behavior were stereotyped by her critics. Melman further identifies four themes – “the excess of young females; the competition between women and men in the economic and social spheres; the physical appearance of the young female; and... the perils for society of the enfranchisement of women under 30” (Melman: 17) – associated with contemporary debates on women’s place and her conduct in post-War British society. The Keynote in these debates and discussions was the ‘imbalance’ perceived between the sexes in terms not only of statistics but in terms of social, economic and political power as well. But it was significant that many of these discussions dwelt on the crisis of masculinity in post-War England, so that the ‘imbalance’ was in terms detrimental to men’s interests and individuality.

Apart from an early poem “Flapper”, Lawrence’s concern with the professional and modern woman reflects itself in such a story as “Tickets, Please”, initially written as “John Thomas” in November 1918. Its final appearance after several revisions and publications was in November 1922 in the collection England, My England. It is a wartime story carrying Lawrence’s incisive humor and mock-heroic mode on the exigencies of the War:

“To ride on these [tram] cars is always an adventure. Since we are in wartime, the drivers are men unfit for active service: cripples and hunchbacks. So they have the spirit of the devil in them. The ride becomes a steeplechase.”

(Selected Short Stories: 289).
Lawrence seems to echo some of the common terms of reference or description for the tram service and the people employed in it. The conductors are girls but they are “fearless young hussies”, in “ugly blue uniform, skirts up to their knees, shapeless old peaked caps on their heads,” they “pounce on the youths” who try to evade buying their tickets, “push off men at the end of their distance”, and [they] fear nobody – and everyone fears them”. In contrast the trams are driven by “rash young men, a little crippled, or by delicate young men, who creep forward in terror” (Selected Short Stories: 290). The power play takes place here between a group of female tram conductor led by the belligerent Annie Stone, and John Thomas Raynor, an inspector notorious for his womanizing, especially among the female conductors. While the girls, including Annie, share a professional sympathy with the drivers, Annie and John Thomas feel a mutual but subtle antagonism that kindles a surreptitious attraction between them, so that “they were as shrewd with one another almost as man and wife. But Annie had always kept him sufficiently at arm’s length” (Selected Short Stories: 291). The profession of a tram conductor was one of the higher paying professions (Simpson: 67) justifying the confidence and assurance of the conductors in the context of this story. The story, however, seems to conflate economic empowerment with abuse of power with the martial, pseudo-military images applied to Annie and her colleagues, while John Thomas is allied to the phallic male presence (Simpson: 67). From this perspective, the humiliation of the latter by the girl conductors could symbolize the absolute overturning of the gender roles in wartime and post-War England, something that, given Lawrence’s outspoken views in many of his essays and longer non-fictional works like Fantasia of the Unconscious, could imply the unnaturalness of the sexual and gender order in modern England.
However, given Lawrence’s ambiguousness and ‘duality’ regarding sexuality and gender, such a conclusion could become highly reductive, neglecting to account for the dialogic nature of most of his writings. For instance, in this story itself, though Annie is initially seen as a “flapper”, she registers a greater sensitivity than John Thomas, despite the fact that even this aspect is described in relatively conventional terms:

“She felt so rich and warm in herself whenever he was near.... The soft, melting way in which she could flow into a fellow, as if she melted into his very bones, was something rare and good. He fully appreciated this.”

*(Selected Short Stories: 293)*

In contrast to John Thomas’s temporary sexual attraction towards Annie, here is her perspective:

“Annie wanted to consider him a person, a man; she wanted to take an intelligent interest in him, and to have an intelligent response. She did not want a mere nocturnal presence.... When she started to take an intelligent interest in him and his life and his character, he sheered off. He hated intelligent interest.”

*(Selected Short Stories: 293)*

As a result, John Thomas leaves Annie, and in order to avenge this humiliation, she hunts up other “Old flames” – all women conductors – who had been similarly rejected, and ritualistically whips him with her belt (a stock male gesture), till he is sufficiently bleeding and thoroughly terrified. From being his sport, they have turned him into their sport. This story, by showing a community of women coming together in mutual solidarity and support in a collective show of power anticipates the more complex workings of women’s power as experienced and
reacted to by men in *The Fox*. The final section of the story subtly and with an incisive psychological probing repeats the earlier pattern of flirtation and subsequent rejection when the girls compel the man to choose one of them and then vociferously and contemptuously reject and humiliate him. One aspect that seems to link John Thomas with my main text of *The Fox* (which I will discuss later in the chapter) is the sly cunning that operates instinctively in him. The story ends on an uncertain note with the girls “tidying themselves hurriedly, with mute, stupefied faces” (*Selected Short Stories*: 300), uncertain of their victory. At the same time, Lawrence anticipates here the relatively sophisticated and sensitive treatment of questions of subjectivity and gender in *The Fox* by attempting to avoid the mind/body dualism that, for instance, one sees between Miriam and Paul (as well as Clara) in *Sons and Lovers*. The focalization constantly shifts between the characters, with the authorial sympathy usually allying itself with the passionate, warm and intelligent Annie.

It must also be taken into account that by this time, that is, during the 1920’s the Lawrences were staying as expatriates or exiles in Italy. Even during the War, Lawrence was constantly subjected to persecution due to his supposed proximity to German agents. During his stay at Cornwall and other places in England, prior to his final departure from the country, Lawrence was voicing serious concerns with England, its involvement in the War, his own traumatic experiences during the period, and English culture in general. After being driven from Cornwall on suspicions of espionage, Lawrence settled down temporarily at Chapel Farm Cottage in Hermitage, near Newbury. In a letter to Mark Gertler dated 16 February, 1918, he writes:
"It makes me swear - such a damned, mean, narrow – gutted, pitiful, crawling, mongrel world, that daren’t have a man’s work, and won’t even allow him to live. - Then, in this state of blankness, Dollie Radford wants this cottage, so I suppose we are to camp out like babes in the wood, and ask the robins to cover us with warm leaves.... Still I wait for the day when this foul tension of war and pot-bellied world will break, when we can meet in something like freedom and enjoy each other’s company in something like decency. Nowadays one can do nothing but glance behind to see who now is creeping up to do something horrible to the back of one’s neck.” (The Selected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. James T. Boulton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Such statements in his letters and essays (still further examples are “Is England Still a Man’s Country?” “The State of Funk”, “Matriarchy”) remain comments more upon post-War England society and the modernity manifest in it rather than being mere denunciations against women for being dominant and against men for accepting the mastery of women.

Lawrence perceives the problem of England during 1920s as being one of decadence, in the sense that certain purported beliefs and ideas regarding English culture have been perpetuated without any serious attempt at interrogating their validity in the present times, thereby reducing them to more platitudes. In his essay “Master in His Own House”, he employs the notion of “man thinking” in order to show how the “theory” of patterns or markers of English culture have became divorced from what the actual palpable reality is:

We still are ruled too much by readymade phrases. Take, for example:

A man must be master in his own house. There’s a good old maxim; we all believe it in theory. Every little boy sees himself a future master in his own house. He grows up with the idea well fixed. So naturally, when his not
master in his own house, his nose is conventionally out of the show, and they're absolutely in the wrong.

What we have to beware of is mass thinking. The idea that a man must be master in his own house is just a mass idea. No man really thinks it for himself. He accepts it *en bloc*, as a member of the mass.

*(Phoenix II: 546)*

What is important to see here is that Lawrence is responding to certain contradictions in English society, and the unwillingness of this society to acknowledge them. In this, Lawrence articulates a standard modernist position with the Nietzschean notion of the herd mentality against a perceived cultural and personal crisis and endorses the notion of "real individual thinking" that cuts across gender, though he still retains what amounts to a sense of insecurity in the changing structure of English society, blaming the changes largely on the men since they have become a crowd of enervated masculine presence:

The trouble is not in the women's bossiness, but in the men's indifference. This indifference is the real malady of the day. It is a deadness, an inability to care about anything. And it is always pinched by anxiety.

*(Phoenix II: 547, 548)*

Given the context Lawrence was writing in, moreover, and the dominant discourses in literary, intellectual, philosophical, psycho analytic and popular fields, his particular idiom necessarily partakes of the popular terms of reference, and the duality and ambivalence of Lawrence himself emerges through the fissures opening up within such discourses. For instance, here is an oft-quoted letter to Katherine Mansfield on 5 December, 1918:
First, I send you the Jung book, borrowed from Kot [S.S. Koteliansky], in the midst of his reading it. Ask Jack not to keep it long, will you, as I feel I ought to send it back. – Beware of it – this Mother-incest idea can become an obsession. But it seems to me there is this much truth in it: that at certain periods the man has a desire and a tendency to return unto the woman, make her his goal and end, find his justification in her. In this way he casts himself as it were into her womb, and she, the Magna Mater, receives him with gratification. This is a kind of incest.... In a way, Frieda is the devouring mother. – It is awfully hard, once the sex relation has gone this way, to recover. If we don’t recover, we die. – But Frieda says I am antediluvian in my positive attitude. I do think a woman must yield some sort of precedence to a man, and he must take this precedence. I do think men must go ahead absolutely in front of their women, without turning round to ask for permission or approval from their women. Consequently, the women must follow as it were unquestioning. I can’t help it, I believe this. Frieda doesn’t. Hence our fight.

Secondly, I do believe in friendship ...between man and man, a pledging of men to each other inviolably. – But I have not even met or formed such friendship. Also I believe the same way in friendship between men and women, and between women and women, pledged, eternal as eternal as the marriage bond, and as deep. – But I have not met or formed such friendship.

Excuse this sudden burst into dogma....


It is in the background of such open-ended comments that I would like to read The Fox. The Fox was first written by Lawrence as a short story in November 1918, which was slightly edited by him at the request of his agent, Pinker, in order to shorten it for publication. It eventually appeared in Hutchinson’s Story Magazine in November 1920. A year later, in November 1921, Lawrence revised his original manuscript, extending it to thrice its original length. The story initially was a simple
one in its shorter ending with Henry’s proposal of marriage which is almost immediately accepted and Banford’s reluctant defeat. While the analogy between the fox and Henry was still strongly present, the implications were not so sinister and pronounced as they became in the longer version which was more nuanced. By this time Lawrence had also finished writing *The Captain’s Doll* and in December completed *The Lady Bird*. Subsequently the three short novels were published together in a single volume by Secker in March 1923 as *The Lady Bird* in England and by Seltzer in America in November 1923 as *The Captain’s Doll* (Melissa Partridge and Keith Sagar’s Introduction to *The Complete Short Novels* by D.H. Lawrence: 17, 44).

The basic situation for *The Fox* was derived from Lawrence’s experiences during his intermittent stay at Chapel Farm Cottage, Hermitage, near Newbury in Berkshire in the period between 1918 and 1919 (*Complete Short Novels*: 16). There Lawrence and Frieda became acquainted with two women cousins – Cecily Lambert and Violet Monk, who tenanted Grimsby Farm at Long Laire, close to where the Lawrences were staying. The fact that they were running the farm all by themselves intrigued Lawrence who, with his wife would help in the numerous farm chores. Cecily Lambert had a brother, familiarly called Nip, who was a soldier in East Africa, and came to stay with them during that time on such leave. The Lawrences also became acquainted with him. Lawrence drew much from those young people’s behavior and appearances, which, however also made his models unhappy. Cecily Lambert criticized the work as “sheer fantasy” and complained that “it was execrable taste to belittle me for no fault of my own while accepting my hospitality” in her memoir (quoted in Delany: 355). Instead, she said, it was her cousin who looked boyish and was more “possessive and jealous” (quoted in Delany: 355). Lambert
gave a detailed account of her cousin, Violet’s manner and appearance in her memoir, which reveals the correspondence of the world of The Fox with the world of Grimsby Farm:

My cousin was a good-looking girl with dark wavy hair and velvety brown eyes, but an undefinable personality ... [she] was a strange mixture of overwhelming conceit and arrogance allied to a kind of meekness and unsureness in direct contradiction. In appearance she was very feminine except for a flat boyish figure, which was graceful... She loved doing mannish jobs carpenting, digging and rough jobs generally... In her very scarce spare moments as a complete contrast she would crochet lace with very fine white cotton and seemed to enjoy thin hobby. If by any chance visitors came, she would leave the entertaining entirely to me while she would go off and wash up or do jobs outside – anything to avoid the bother of talking.

At this time also a brother of mine was on sick leave from the East Africa War Zone... But far from having any amorous feeling towards the lady (my cousin), he actively disliked her ... I believe between them they mutilated a tree.

(quoted in Complete Short Novels: 16)

Delany, however, identifies the model for Henry not in Nip but in William Henry Hocking a farmer in Cornwall. On March 1916, the Lawrence moved to two cottages in a group of vacant buildings called Higher Tregerthen in Cornwall. There were owned by a Captain Short, a retired merchant mariner, who lived in St. Ives. Below these buildings was a farm named Tregerthen Farm, which was run by the Hockings, an old established local family. William Henry was the eldest son of the family and had been all the more forced to continue with his farming activities in order to avoid being conscripted and sent to the War (Delany: 216, 309, 355). Again in the novella,
Henry's captain is named Berryman, after Katie Berryman, a storekeeper at Zennor, near Tregerthen Farm in Cornwall (Delany: 355).

Of course, these details would have marginal impact on the dynamics of The Fox; nevertheless it is a way of estimating the degree and nature of Lawrence's experience and responses to the contemporary social and cultural milieu of his time.

The initial situation in The Fox can thus be also seen in terms of the historical and demographic shift of the nature of work and work culture at the turn of the century and particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth. There are two related strands in this context. One is the feminist advocacy of women laying claim on the land and becoming part of its production activities. As a result, this period saw a large number of women going out to work on the land, primarily through farming, even before the First World War facilitated the entry of a huge female population into industrial and tertiary work. Hilary Simpson observes that agriculture was promoted by feminist movements as a tool for acquiring and exercising independence. In fact, a suffragette dairy and farming school had even been set up at Checkendon (twelve miles from Hermitage, where Grimsby Farm was) which was run by two Cambridge graduates, Kate Lelacheur and Fanny Parker, and which generated money through its activities and produce for the WSPU (Women, Social and Political Union, the foremost and most vociferous suffragette organization at the time) and train women in ways to become self-sufficient (Simpson: 70-71).

The other strand of feminist consciousness articulating women's need for and strategies for acquiring independence emerges in this period's emphasis on the need for a feminist utopia, a concern that is even seen in writers like Virginia Woolf. Of course, this notion goes back at least to the nineteenth century Protestant sisterhoods
in (Christina Rossetti was attached to one, for example, though she never formally became a member) and later secular ones present both in reality and in women's literature during the period. One example was a co-operative shirt-making factory in the 1880s run by women. Edith Simcox in “Eight Years of Co-operative Shirt-making”, (1884) spoke about the dream of this community, which was to establish a self-reliant clothes-making factory where women will be owners, workers and equal partners of profit, while still offering economic and professional support to society at large (Auerbach: 22). Consequently, even when the organization ran at a loss, workers were paid regular wages and kept employed; moreover they did not give in to the demands and temptations of capitalism, so that its keynotes were cooperation and essential disinterestedness. However, the development and continuation of such societies always had a slight tentativeness.

In America, on the other hand, the possibility of a sisterhood was more aggressively pursued both in practice and in theory. One of the most prominent of this concept, though never actually realized in practice, was the projected “Adamless Eden” by Dr. Mary Walker (Auerbach: 28-30).

Walker planned this “Adamless Eden” in the 1890s as a colony for young women that would train women in farming and its associated activities, and thus, as she clarified in the newspapers, became efficient farmer’s wives. Yet, as Auerbach shows, the fact that Walker herself was incompetent and ignorant in the field of farming and domestic duties, as well as indifferent towards these, suggests that Walker had a more political intention in establishing such a sorority.

Both the above mentioned societies – one in practice and the other in theory – were (whatever the underlying intent might have been) on the surface benign female communities who would do selfless work and be able participants in a
heterosexual world. Against these images there arose fantasies of women who would dispense with their traditional feminine and nurturing roles and become more active agents of change, such as that described by Mary A. Livermore who outlined the emergence of women into public, political life in “Cooperative Womanhood in the State” (1891). Similar ideas were echoed in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Utopian fantasies: “Herland” (1915) and “With Her in Ourland” (1916) (Auerbach: 161-162).

In England, these communities were put more in the context of domesticity and as agents of healing a war-torn, and culturally and morally bankrupt world – the image of Florence Nightingale (imagined as ‘The Lady with the Lamp’ rather than an extremely efficient and able administrator) and her group of nurses during the Crimean War, or E. M. Forster’s Schlegel Sisters as the “Triumph of Privacy” in Howard’s End (1910) (Auerbach: 164).

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, engages more rigorously with the “dilemma of the integrity and good faith of a community of women squeezed between national and domestic tyrannies” (Auerbach: 165). Woolf in Three Guineas (1938) visualizes an “Outsider’s Society” that is precariously poised, being inscribed into the banality and passivity of the private realm and the cut-throat competition and overachievement of the public:

If the name it must have, it could be called the Outsider’s Society.... [I]t has the advantages that it squares with facts – the facts of history, of law, of biography; even, it may be, with the still hidden facts of still unknown psychology. It would consist of educated men’s daughters working in their own class – how indeed can they work in any other? – and by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace. Their first duty, to which they would bind themselves not by oath, for oaths and ceremonies have no part in a society which must be anonymous and elastic before everything, would be not to fight with arms.

(Woolf: 232)
Such a society would be autonomous and self-sufficient so as to liberate its members from oppressive conventions that deprive them of their freedom and volition:

...[W]e, daughters of educated men, are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. Each is bad. Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and end it?

(Woolf: 199)

However, Woolf also points out the paradox involved in such a society – in order to make an impact on society, it must withdraw itself from it, or at the most, lead an existence in the periphery by refusing to reciprocate the gestures of patriarchal society:

Such then will be the nature of her “indifference” and from this indifference certain action must follow. She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstration; to assert to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any clique or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose “our” civilization or “our” dominion upon other people. The psychology of private life, moreover, warrants the belief that this use of indifference by the daughters of educated men would help materially prevent war.

(Woolf: 234-235)

Given Woolf’s association of war and imperialism with patriarchal oppression, the potential of resistance in such a community is overwhelming.
However, it is questionable whether any amount of resistance will be given a cognizance by the structures of power that see these communities as outside itself and therefore less of a threat than if they were active within them. Woolf’s positing of a women’s community thus is both resistant as well as vulnerable, though her overwhelming arguments seem to provide a critical support to the principles of female independence and autonomy underlying the imagined community (not in the sense of Benedict Anderson). While Lawrence’s *The Fox* carefully avoids any overt engagement with feminism; it nevertheless can be seen in the context of such ideas on women current during the time. It can be seen as a response to the women’s movements (suffragettes and otherwise) and their celebration of particular kinds of femininity or travesties of conventional femininity, though, unlike in his non-fictional polemics, here the issue remains relatively open-ended. Hence *The Fox* can be seen as taking into account many of the issues of women’s employment and the nature and gender of work, especially in the backdrop of the Great War.

The initial situation in *The Fox* can also be seen in terms of the historical and demographic shift of the nature of work and work culture at the turn of the century and particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth century, with the feminists proposing agriculture and farming, in addition to industrial jobs as emancipatory fields opening up to women’s labor. Grimsby Form was, thereby, no exception from this perspective; in fact another farming establishment – a suffragette dairy and farming school – had been set up by two Cambridge women graduates – Kate Lelacheur and Fanny Parkes. While they trained women towards acquiring self-sufficiency and independence through work, they also raised money for the WSPU (Simpson, 70-71). While *The Fox* carefully avoids any overt engagement with
feminism, it does take into account many of the issues of women's employment and the nature and gender of work especially in the backdrop of the War.

Briefly, *The Fox* is about the intrusion of a young soldier Henry Grenfel (wavering between a boyish temperament and tentative advances into manhood), into the lives of two women, Banford and March, living together in a friendship with lesbian overtones, and the ramification of such an intrusion into the independent and seemingly self-sufficient way of life of the two women, resulting ultimately in March's ambivalent 'surrender' to Henry's will at the cost of Banford's death, or murder, at the hands of Henry. It is a more subtle exploration than "Tickets Please" of the ideas of emancipation working negatively on what for Lawrence is the organic relation between the sexes, and the natural world which upholds such a relation. The narrative, as the title implies, is regulated by the presence of the fox — first as a mysterious ancient male presence, as a thief and pest who attacks the poultry and therefore is a threat to the economic maintenance of the farm, then in a dual projection after the entry of Henry, of the man as fox and the fox as man, and finally, with the killing of the actual fox by Henry, the dislocation of the fox-man metaphor and total appropriation of the animal and male potency of the fox by Henry in an effort to assert his manhood. The fox thus becomes at one point the signifier of the masculine consciousness during the first half of the novella, against which March and Banford, in an act of female solidarity, at least initially, contend with.

During the time Lawrence was rewriting *The Fox* and was also in the last stages of writing *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, his "pseudo-philosophy" of "pollyanalytics", where he theorized vehemently against Freud on such topics as sexuality, parenting, education, marriage, dreams and the unconscious, *The Fox*, closely follows many of these ideas. Moreover, as stated earlier, it also raises
significant questions of autonomy and independence in the backdrop of the War even as these questions are negotiated through a complex intertextuality in which Freud and Frazer become significant presences.

Lawrence had read Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* during 1915-16 and acknowledged the latter’s influence, besides many others, on his formulation in the *Fantasia*. As Peter Balbert shows in “Freud, Frazer, and Lawrence’s Palimpsestic Novella: Dreams and the Heaviness of Male Destiny in *The Fox*” (*Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 38, Issue 2, 2006), many of the motifs in Frazer are incorporated into the narrative of *The Fox*, chief of which is the figure of the fox itself as an embodiment of the corn spirit who is ultimately sacrificed in order to preserve the fertility of the land.

Frazer says that in many cases, the corn-spirit appears as an animal, such as goose goat, a hare, cat, fox, dog, wolf, cow (ox or bull) and horse. The corn-spirit is believed to be present in any of these forms in and among the corn and to be killed or trapped when the last sheaf is cut or, in some cases, threshed’ (Frazer: 447-8). In certain cultures, where the corn-spirit is identified with a wolf or dog (and by extension with a fox), as in France, Germany and Slavonic countries, “his” (because it is usually taken as a masculine/male deity) fertilizing power resides in “his” tail (Frazer: 448). Its killing and subsequent regeneration in spring is an essential part of harvest customs (Frazer: 448). Furthermore, the corn-spirit is closely linked with the archetypal image of the stranger as agent of change. Not only the corn-spirit, but other deities (like Dionysus, Pan and Demeter), are also linked with animals as their medium of manifestation in the human world (Frazer: 464-479).
The novella opens with characteristic signs of infertility and disruption of the natural order. Banford and March have a heifer who constantly ventures out into the wild, or trespasses on the neighboring pastures. Unable to control or tame her, they have to sell her off. Then Banford’s grandfather, also a farmer, dies and the two women sell their other heifer who was expecting her first calf. Afterwards, they concentrate on raising fowls and ducks instead, finding them better manageable (Complete Short Novels: 135).

However, even here, they find that the fowls have a “tendency to strange illnesses”, an “exacting way of life”, and an “obstinate refusal to lay eggs” (Complete Short Novels: 136). From the perspective of Frazer’s anthropology, this scene can be seen in terms of a barren, unproductive land needing the rejuvenating presence of the corn-spirit, given that the land is usually construed as feminine while the corn-spirit (except for someone like Demeter) is usually cast as masculine. Thus, the infertility motif itself is an articulation of traditional gender roles that seek to transform themselves quickly into fixed identities in culture and thereby into the human world. March and Banford, living in isolation (at least metaphorical isolation); and with the latter’s grandfather dead, embark on a relationship of mutuality (whether it turns into an erotic or physical relationship is left open) and create a rarefied world for themselves that vehemently forbids the entry of dominant patriarchal structures, most conspicuously, the intrusion of the family. By doing so, they are venturing into a world where they will arrive at their own self-definition. At the same time, since this is a subversive act, they are shown (by the narrative that subscribes to the already existing structures of power in a man-woman relationship) as being outside the fold of fertile, creative, productive nature, in effect, in the words of Auerbach, “an antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and
biological rewards". (Auerbach: 3). As a result, the heifers have to be sold off and the hens and ducks are also sterile, suggesting that they are outcasts from the legitimacy of the natural cycle starting with the phenomenon of reproduction. Another aspect of this is their affinity with a notion or image that gathered a lot of currency during this point of time; the image of the "feral women" (a term used by John Lucas) in opposition to the woman who totally identified herself with the roles common to a family. The binary wedged into the identity of a woman in this manner was more applicable to middle-class women, however. These tendencies found their way into the fiction of the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, and can be seen in one such work; Charlotte Mews' *The Farmer's Bride* (1916), a book of poems, which was reprinted with eleven additional poems in 1921 (Lucas: 71). In the title poem, the young wife of the farmer attempts to escape from the confines of her marriage and the sexual demands of her husband; and is visualized/depicted as a hunted animal (rather than a wild one), shy, afraid, vulnerable, and extremely attractive (Lucas: 72). Similarly, but on a much more stringent note, Mary Webb’s *Gone to earth* (1917) features a female protagonist Hazel Woodus who is again forced into marriage, though "her real affinity is with the 'unfenced wild', the longing for which she inherits from her [gypsy] mother (Lucas: 73). Finally, she is released from her marital bondage and allowed to go into the woods by her husband, only to have her pursued by hounds and kill herself. Both these works Lucas argues, expose "the woe that is in marriage, and its revelation of a woman escaping from sexual bondage, no matter how kindly that may be meant, into a wilderness that has at its heart an implacable rejection of men" (Lucas: 73).

Given the context of the feminist movement and a more general emerging consciousness regarding women, Lawrence’s *The Fox* can be seen following the
same module, although with different ends obviously. March and Banford, seen from this perspective are like those wild, feral women who try to escape from their inscription into marriage and domesticity and try to carve an independent destiny for themselves as farming entrepreneurs whose land however, borders on the wilderness. Again, their relegation towards the margin by the narrative takes place at the very beginning of the novella through the image of the heifer who has gone wild.

However, this is immediately accompanied by the imposition of Culture against their feral nature through the mention of the War. The “War Conditions”, of course, take their toll, with food being scarce and of poor quality and the Daylight saving Bill proving impractical for the farming routine. Both Banford and March have middle-class affiliations in their disbelief in “living for work alone”:

“They wanted to read or take a cycle-ride in the evening, or perhaps March wished to paint curvilinear swans on porcelain, with green background, or else make a marvellous fire-screen by processes of elaborate cabinet work.”

*(Complete Short Novels: 137)*

Again, the female incursion into the masculine domain of farming is seen mostly in negative terms. Banford and March enact the traditional feminine and masculine roles; Banford, “a small, thin, delicate thing with spectacles,” “nervous and delicate”, “a warm and generous soul” *(Complete Short Novels: 135, 137)* conversational, delighting in keeping house and entertaining guests, while March does most of the farm work in “her puttees and breeches, her belted coat and her loose cap”, looking “almost like some graceful, loose-balanced young man” *(Complete Short Novels: 135, 137)*. It is also significant that it is March who persuades and convinces Banford to invest in the farm, she herself contributing
mostly her industry and farming skills. However, her masculine/manly appearance is contradicted by her passionate face, her crisp, dark hair, big, wide and dark eyes, and most strongly by her mouth "almost pinched as if in pain and irony" (*Complete Short Novels*: 136). The sterility brought upon their farm and livestock is equated both with the repression in March (which makes her inexplicable, mysterious and strange both to the narrator and to Henry) as well as with the friendship between the two women.

Again, March is tentatively identified with her favorite white hen, though March's big, dark eyes have "an almost satiric flicker" when she looks at her hens (*Complete Short Novels*: 136). When seen in the context of Lawrence's use of symbols and images, it becomes part of a pattern in which white is associated with the moon and the woman and 'dark' connotes a vital, deeper, intoxicating but buried state of being, achieving only with moderate success in dictating culture, since the modern industrial, impersonal life has sapped the authentic "individual consciousness" and given way to the "social consciousness" that has been discussed in Chapter Three. The basic premise here is that the darkness of March's eyes has to be brought into open manifestation by the masculine presence of Henry. This is all the more required, as far as the plot is concerned, since this community of women is determined to function independently of men.

In contrast, the fox is seen not merely as an intruder carrying off the hens from the farm but successively as an embodiment of the corn - "He was very yellow and bright, like corn" (*Complete Short Novels*: 149) - and as an archetypal hunter. Subsequently, both roles descend on Henry after his entry into the farm. It also carries with it connotations of phallic power and primitive procreative darkness and mystery, as the two (dreams) scenes (one of them being a dream sequence) where
March is fascinated and seared by the fox's tail show. It is, however, important to note that the peculiar effect of the fox is felt overwhelmingly by March in terms of the hunter and the hunted respectively, while Henry overturns this when he becomes the hunter instead, of both March and the fox, applying the same slyness and cunning the fox is supposed to possess. Thus the fox becomes the projection by this point, simultaneously of March and Henry's subjectivities expressed in roughly conventional terms of submission and aggression. For March, it is "an elusive and natural spirit of procreation that [she] both respects and reviles, it is difficult to avoid the sexual significance of the presence of the fox in her isolated and frustrated life... he embodies the Lawrentian 'otherness' that as yet March cannot accept, the unknowable passion she cannot engage" (Balbert). When Henry enters upon the scene, the inevitable equation between him and the fox made by March is offset by Banford's initially disinterested comments and replies increasingly becoming spiteful, contemptuous and vehement dismissal of him as boyish, wild, untrustworthy, and inconsequential. This is a drastic reversal from the initial compassion of Henry for Banford's brother. For Henry, however, there "wants a man about the place" (146), he dreams of taking over the farm as well as March. He cunningly compels the unsuspecting Banford to acquiesce to his staying on the farm, with a "smile like a cunning little flame" coming over his face, "suddenly and involuntary" (151), shrewdly finding it a good idea to marry March, considering her vulnerability to his presence and his hopes of securing the place for his own after their marriage. With this his huntsman spirit takes over as he speculates on the most effective way of capturing March:
"He knew, sly and subtle as he was, that if he went to her plainly ...her inevitable answer would be: 'Get out. I don't want any of that tomfoolery'
... He would have to go gently. He would have to catch her as you catch a deer or a woodcock when you go out shooting... it is a slow, subtle battle.... It is not so much what you do, when you go out hunting, as how you do it. You have to be subtle and cunning and absolutely fatally ready. It becomes like a fate. Your own fate overtakes and determines the fate of the deer you are hunting... there is a strange battle, like mesmerism."

"[I]t was as a young hunter, that he wanted to bring down March as his quarry, to make her his wife."

(Complete Short Novels: 163, 154).

These confrontations between Henry and March are played out in terms of recurrent progressions from light to a creative mysterious darkness, from open spaces to closed ones; for instance, from the daylight of the farm to an unconscious dream world (March's frequent day dreaming, her initial encounters with the fox); and from the open grounds outside the house to the closed dark confines of the toolshed (parallel to March's frequent withdrawal into the dark corner of their sitting room when Henry is there and signifying the cathartic encounters between March and Henry). Crucial to March's sexual projection of the fox and Henry as alter egos are her two dreams of the fox's tail burning her mouth, and Banford's death respectively. In the second dream, Banford is put into a coffin made of the firewood Henry had cut and, for want of anything better, she is covered by March by the pelt of the fox Henry had killed. In Freudian terms, the two dreams would become the unconscious substantiation of March's repressed desires. In the question of the apparent paradox of painful dreams and wish-fulfillment, Freud states in The Interpretation of Dreams:
An unconscious and repressed wish, whose fulfilment would only be felt as painful by the dreamer's ego, has seized the opportunity offered by the continued cathexis of painful day-residues, has lent them its support, and has thus made them capable of being dreamed. But the discord between the unconscious and the conscious — the repressed material and the ego — is revealed. The gratification in respect of the fulfilment of the repressed wish may prove to be so great that it balances the painful affects adhering to the day-residues; the dream is then indifferent in its affective tone, although it is on the one hand the fulfilment of a wish, and on the other the fulfilment of a fear.

(Freud: 396)

Such a reading is possible in spite of Lawrence's vehement assertion that "[m]ost dreams are purely insignificant, and it is the sign of a weak and petty nature to pay any attention to them whatever". (Fantasia: 194). Such a reading would also partially account for the submerged guilt that seems to haunt March regarding Banford, when she reflects on her relationship with Banford and compares it with the one with Henry. Lawrence's qualification on the significance of dreams immediately after the above statement also approximates / approaches the emphasis given to dreams by Freud, albeit in a different manner: "Only occasionally they matter. And this is only when something threatens us from the outer mechanical or accidental death — world. When anything threatens us from the world of death, then a dream may become so vivid that it arouses the actual soul. And when a dream is so intense that it arouses the soul — then we must attend to it" (Fantasia: 194).

Henry's will however, has to contend with Banford's will, while March, like the fox now in being the "quarry" becomes the site in which the two opposing wills play out their struggle for her possession. As Banford becomes increasingly shrill and intolerant towards Henry and seeks to disrupt the meeting between him and
March, Henry becomes increasingly hostile towards her and refocuses his "huntsman ... spirit" on her. Banford now becomes the object (literally) of his hatred as he continually refers to her as "the Banford" (italics mine) (Complete Short Novels: 177, 179). Again, it is Henry's masculine vision that visualizes or casts March, despite her masculine dress, as truly feminine, with "soft woman's breasts" and Banford, in spite of her delicateness, as hard and masculine, with "tiny iron breasts" (Complete Short Novels: 179, 180). March gradually succumbs to such visualization herself, considering it her woman's destiny to fail in her love in her, exertion towards the other, to find continual disappointment in such relationships. This suggests the degree to which March has imbibed the gaze of Henry and relinquished her subjectivity. Due to historical and cultural reasons, a man's presence depends on what John Berger, in Ways of Seeing, terms "the promise of power" that he manifests, whether it be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social or sexual power (Berger: 39). However the object of this power is always external to him; in other words, he is the subject who will exercise his power on the 'Other'. In contrast, a woman's presence is always with reference to herself; thus her attitude to herself, gestures, voice, opinions, taste, clothes and so on, are self-referential, that is, she is her own object (Berger: 40). This, however, is further complicated by the split in the woman, due to the fact that her social presence has always had to maneuver within a confined space allotted to her by male-dominated society. This split relates to the predicament of the woman, whose consciousness is constantly formed by the act of watching herself as others (chiefly men) see her. Consequently, "she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman (Berger: 40).
She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.

(Berger: 40).

So the woman watching herself becomes a mirror of the male subject looking at herself as the female object. March’s becoming conscious of her appearance and by implication adopting the patriarchal standards/codes accompanying that gaze marks the crucial point in the narrative where her sense of superiority and power starts to weaken. More immediately, Henry, seeing March uncharacteristically (though she avers it is her custom to wear a woman’s dress indoors) in a feminine dress of green chiffon, he now finds her “accessible and this realization seems to supplement/reinforce his as germinal masculine consciousness he now “felt a man, quit, with a little of the heaviness of male destiny upon him” (Complete Short Novels: 181). As Balbert sees it, this is how Henry successively manages to attain an increasing maturity; his killing the fox is his attempt to prevent March constantly identifying him with the fox, as a death-like interloper, to be followed by the murder of Banford through an ingenious planning that diverts any suspicion away from him.

The narrative, however, equally grants Banford, and more particularly March, their individual subjectivities and consciousness that put Henry’s point of view into another perspective of boyish fantasy and precociousness. It is most obvious in the narrative itself which frequently refers to him as the boy, both from the point of view of the implied author as well as from the points of view of March and Banford. I have earlier mentioned Banford regarding him like a brother. March, obviously, is not so absolute in her ideas: she is attracted by him, even though she
implicitly acknowledges the huge age – difference between them ("I’m old enough to be your mother"1 (Complete Short Novels: 155). However, after he leaves, all she remembers of him is “how he suddenly wrinkled his nose when he laughed, as a puppy does when he is playfully growling” (Complete Short Novels: 190), and his childish sulkiness. This is reinforced, through the constant interpellations of the epithet “boy” by the narrative for Henry towards the final section in which the points of view or focalization of March, Banford and the narrator seem to converge.

After the death of Banford, March seems to internalize the conflict between her and Henry which prevents her from submitting herself unconditionally (as Henry would have it) to him. At the same time, Lawrence also acknowledges the impossibility of a person giving up his or her freedom and responsibility totally to another though for him that is the ideal in any relationship. This would also seem to go against his creed of a male bludbrutherschaft (bloodbrotherhood) and male leadership enforcing mastery over the woman. It does not, however, in that Henry strives to quell any semblance of volitional/intuitive exertion by his wife:

“No, he wouldn’t let her exert her love towards him. No, she had to be passive to acquiesce, and to be submerged under the surface of love.”

(Complete Short Novels: 201)

The last image of sleep in the novella is March struggling in her will against an urge to sleep; in other words, she struggles against becoming just Henry’s woman. Like Women in Love, The Fox also ends on an open note with March pulling open her eyelids which are dropping into sleep and unconsciousness, still wary of giving in to any certitude about their relationship, and Henry futilely struggling against this, hoping that exile will bring in the necessary change in her desires.
As in *The Rainbow*, Henry's affiliations with farming — he had been brought up as a farmer's son — and with hunting, combined with his inability to articulate his opinions and wishes as precisely and confidently as March and Banford shows a certain lack of self-consciousness and development of his subjectivity when he first makes his entry. This fact is further reinforced by his closer affinity with nature and the natural order (what Peter Balbert in *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture*) terms “a merged state with the farm plants, animals and environment” (Balbert: 69) in contrast to March and Banford's deliberate distance from an involved farm life.

Notes

References and Works Cited


