THE FOX BY D.H. LAWRENCE: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING

Anisur Rahman
M.A. English, Gauhati University

The term psychoanalysis is in general a clinical term which is a process to investigate human mind through certain unique process and a therapy on the basis of the investigations. This therapy is used to cure the mental illness of patients by investigating the conscious and unconscious mind of the patient. And in literature, psychoanalytic criticism uses some of the techniques from psychoanalysis and applies them in terms of the characters and the things going on in their mind to interpret them. During the time D.H. Lawrence wrote the psychoanalysis was in its height of development especially through Sigmund Freud. And the theories of the psychoanalysts greatly influenced the writings of that period. This paper intends to look at how and why these devices have been used in the novella The Fox in order to shape the characters.

The novella is set and written during the First World War which had a devastating effect upon the society which led to a sense of ultimate chaos. One of which is that there was unmitigated shortage of men and which is why women had to suffer a lot especially in the fields depending solely upon themselves. Taking this First World War as the background of the novella The Fox of D.H. Lawrence presents those issues faced by the people after the war especially the predicaments faced by the women of that period. In this novella March and Banford happened to work together to earn their living but they could not celebrate a happy relationship because it is not fruitful as it is not productive and the central character March is shown as a character who is more disgusted with this infertile relationship. Something keeps going on behind her outward expression, in her unconsciousness, as if she was in need of something which she cannot express clearly. However, this unsatisfactory state is not expressed in the novella explicitly but through certain peculiar behaviors like gaze, code of speech and their way of reaction through which they states their mind and their need. And if we take the psychoanalysis to describe then it will be very easy to know her.
Before March’s encounter with the fox she is described as absent minded and present everywhere but nowhere and what she was thinking was also unclear, ‘what was she thinking? Heaven knows’. But the reason behind these is not stated apparently but it is merely said that March is not happy with the daily life she is having and she is very much willing to break up the tie with Banford. But soon after her encounter with the fox the novella turns into a different direction and we get a reason for her unbalanced status of mind. She needed a male figure to satisfy her need. And when the fox arrives she soon recognizes him as if they have met before. Their contact is shown as if two lost lovers have got their love back. They met their eyes in such way as if they knew each other for long. The primary intention of March was to kill the fox but the moment the encounter occurred she felt spellbound to stare at him. ‘She was possessed by him’. And instead of killing she follows the fox which immediately reveals her state of mind and her urgency of the need.

However, we cannot rationalize the search of the marauding fox by March because it is an animal and human being cannot fall in love with fox. But if we read the need of March psychologically then it becomes clear that she needed a man figure and so she simply recognizes it as a male figure. The fox here serves as a totem of man figure. Here the fox is as fuel to the development of her psychological need of sex. Moreover as Freud said:

“The whole sphere of love in such people remains divided in the two directions personified in art as sacred and profane (or animal) love. Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love. They seek objects which they do not need to love, in order to keep their sensuality away from the objects they love.”

Freud, *On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love*”(1992):

Thus the fox serves as a male substitute for March. And this enchantment remains for long as said in the novella “So the month passed. She still looked for him (the fox) unconsciously whenever she went towards the wood. He had become a settled effect in her spirit, a state permanently established, not continuous, but always recurring.”(Lawrence, *The Fox* p-12) And when Henry arrives in between March and Banford, Banford soon recognizes him as merely a man figure and calls him as her younger brother but March recognizes him with the fox. It is not that Banford was in no need of sexual relationship but March may have served that purpose because Lawrence describes her as more manly than Banford.

However, she finds her sexual needs inexpressible and that is why this urgency is expressed through various means especially through the dreams. The dream reveals the complete mind of March and the cause of her restlessness providing a result to her relentless search of something. The dream is symbolic of sexual need if we analyze it from Freudian point of view. The objects that are described in dream are like ‘mouth’ ‘tail’ ‘fur’ and to Freud these are highly sexual.
imagery in dream as he said: “The genitals may even be represented in dreams by other parts of the body: the male member by the hand or the foot, the female genital orifice by the mouth (italic mine), the ear, or even the eye.”, “the fur represents the pubic hair” (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* p-71). Dreams are undoubtedly the representation of our life from childhood. They either present our conscious self or experiences from childhood or they serve as future telling. In this respect both the dreams of March are symbol for one shows her unconscious mind while the other reveals her future. In her first dream she sees the fox singing and she cannot resist herself from going out symbolically representing her present condition of sexual need while in the other one she sees Banford as dead and in the later part of the novella we find that Banford is dead in the hand of Henry. And the later one is also working of her own mind as Freud said our mind can solve the toughest riddles even in sleep. The condition of the second dream is that Henry proposed March for marriage and Banford is resisting her to accept the proposal and hence it is very much possible that Henry can kill her in order to attain March. Otherwise, if March lives with him then surely Banford will be helpless. This also can represent March’s fear of losing Banford.

Henry on the other hand is the product of Lawrence’s work “*Fantasia of the Unconscious*” in which he stated that “The only rule is, do what you really, impulsively, wish to do. But always act on your own responsibility sincerely” (p-44). He is no doubt disgusted with Banford and he cannot tolerate her. He knew that if the relationship between him and March becomes impossible then it will be only because of Banford. So there is every possibility that he will think of killing Banford to remove the obstacle from his path. And that is why albeit he knew that the tree is going fall upon the way Banford is standing still he cuts the tree giving a light warning knowing that she would not listen to him so as to avoid the upcoming blame. So he just warns about the upcoming danger. And the incident occurred likewise the result comes as the death of Banford what he might have wanted.

Again what is important in March is her repressed emotion which occurs when our ego does not allow the id to come to the conscious or in other way when our conscious mind does not allow our desire to be fulfilled then the desire keeps hiding in our unconscious mind. But it does not hide forever but tries to find some safety valve to come out and they are very often in the form of dream. And here in case of March the condition is same. She is as such from the very beginning as shown by Lawrence. He reiteratively mentioned these conditions of her. He again becomes more directive when he says “there was something odd and unexplained about her” (Lawrence, *The Fox*) and then the Freudian symbology begins to work. The fox serves a phallic symbol and her recognition with the fox is absolutely sexual. And also because of this when Henry proposes her for marriage then she tries to turn her face aside but she could not and “a great relaxation seemed to have come over her.” (Lawrence, *The Fox* p-25). Again when at first Henry came then March no doubt resist her from talking with him but she keeps staring at him as “March sat with
her elbows on the table, her hands supporting her chin, looking at him unconsciously.” Such condition happens to her only because of her repressed condition. She is staying with Banford but she is not satisfied with her but she cannot express it to her. She is helpless in this regard and that is why she is repressed and in the unconscious mind. This repressed mentality is due to her age and unfulfilled sexual and mental needs.

Because of this repressed mentality the two sections of her mind keep fighting that is the id and the ego. And March is torn apart by the call of these two sections of mind; she is in a dilemma throughout the novella. She takes time in responding to the call of Banford when she stays in the arms of Henry. She constantly in the novella suffers from this dilemma. She fails to choose one between them because of the complexity of her choice. And also because of this she fails to fix her decision regarding her acceptance of Henry. She accepts him when he comes near but rejects when she is with Banford. Moreover, the dreams again, are very much expressive of her desire which she kept repressing in her mind.

Whatever may be, the novella comes to an end through these complexities. But the novella fails to give an apparent ending. March at the end seemingly accepts the proposal of Henry for marriage but she is not sure whether she would leave to Canada with him. This is because she needed rest from these complexities but the overseas seemed fake to her, the foreign land may not bring her the peach which she is yearning for. She also fails to decide because of the fear of losing her independence she has celebrated here living with Banford as Lawrence says: “she would not be a man any more, an independent woman with a man’s responsibility. Nay, even the responsibility for her own soul she would have to commit to him” (Lawrence, The Fox p- 70). By this open ending Lawrence might have wanted to give some chance to March to decide for her whether she wants to go or not.

The possible reason behind these psychological functionings in the novella is may be because of the development in psychic reading during that time and its influence upon the literary discourses of that period. The emergence of techniques like ‘stream of consciousness’ or interior monologue’ which entirely dealt with the psychology of the characters is also a reason for this. There again were people like Freud, Jung who inspired this trend of novel writing a lot and also the novelists of that period like Woolf, Joyce etc. Lawrence personally also worked on this field which is why most of his novels deal with this aspect just like the novella The Fox.

Bibliography:


