

Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles in Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox*  
and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*

*This thesis analyzes Sarah Hall's Mrs. Fox and David Garnett's Lady into Fox from the perspective of the subversion of traditional gender roles. Applying the gender performativity theory of Judith Butler, this research assesses the rebellion of the entire domination of the femininity in society by transformation into vixen. This thesis presents how the females revolt and liberate themselves in modern and postmodern era by means of inter-textual comparison. Hall's story is the postmodern inter-textual form of the Garnett's story. The female protagonist Sophia in Hall's short story and Silvia in Garnett's story represent postmodern and modern world's women respectively. The mysterious transformation of the heroines itself denotes subversion of traditional gender roles and the breach of patriarchal bondage in the quest of freedom from age-old repression, suppression, depression and over-exploitation. The female protagonists present the example of women's resistance in the given stories. The heroines challenge the deep rooted patriarchal norms and values and exercise their sexuality in the wild transforming into vixen. The society and social norms and tradition make the women meek and submissive by limiting them within the control of their husbands and by imposing all kinds of family task such as giving birth and taking care of children, satisfying their husbands and being loyal to them. But, both the major female characters in the stories Sophia and Silvia reject all kinds of stereotypical roles subverting the patriarchy's imposition that subordinated them and liberate themselves by transformation.*

*Keywords: Resistance, gender subversion, gender performativity, transformation, inter-textuality.*

This thesis analyzes Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* from the perspective of the subversion of traditional gender roles. The study explores the two short stories and demonstrates the potential abjection of unexpected transformation of heroines and the subversive potential of a mystical representation of life experiences to question and subvert patriarchal ideologies about the issues of sexuality and gender. This strategy of questioning and subversion is informed by the debates about these two issues in late-twentieth century, a period marked by the development of theories about sexuality and gender, by political movements towards sexual and gender freedom. Although the two stories are different in their focuses and concerns, both authors represent, through their female protagonists, by patriarchal societies, reflecting the contemporary view of gender and sexuality as constructed, complex, and fluid categories.

This research focuses on how the female protagonists Sophia Garnett and Silvia Fox in Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*, are dissatisfied with the traditional gender role. When their gloominess with the traditional gender role reaches climax, they rebel against marriage which has been held as an important social institution. Sophia and Silvia prefer the unconventional things.

This preference of the heroines brings them in conflicting relations with the contemporary patriarchal society. Sophia and Silvia are women who are not content with the traditional gender roles. They seek alternative relation which can be a replacement of marriage. Having been loved and protected from their over-possessive husbands, they cannot envisage the way out for freedom. Eventually, they resort to enigmatic transformation into vixen. The transformation itself seems allegorical in the stories. The crux of the matter is that the heroines loathe the stereotypical female role of reproducing children after marriage and being limited at home under the control of one man. Therefore, they resist and subvert the traditional gender roles through transformation.

This study comprises the fantasy fictions created by both the male and female writers. There are male writers who are supporters of feminism in the modern world. Since the research is focused on female protagonist's roles and the repercussions, woman writer's matter is justifiable to be presented first following the tradition of ladies first. From that perspective, the main objective of the present research is the subversion of the conventional gender roles in Sarah Hall's short story entitled *Mrs. Fox* from postmodern feminist's perspectives vis-à-vis David Garnett's novella called *Lady into Fox*.

Since the researcher has picked the fantasy fictions for the study of issue of subversion of traditional gender roles, it is essential to link the literary foreground to go ahead. In her seminal *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion*, critic Rosemary Jackson calls fantasy “a literature of desire” (3), one that “traces the unsaid and unseen of culture, that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (4). This argument, made in 1981, still holds true today. Fantasy literature abounds with creatures signifying desire, landscapes offering room for its exploration, and narrative techniques that facilitate what Tolkien calls “secondary belief” (49) into these worlds and the characters roaming them.

Turning to feminist literary fiction, the basis for the discussion and interpretation of women's writing has been explored by feminist literary criticism, which focuses on the way that literary practices provide an important perception of women's experiences and question the patriarchal assumptions that have dominated social relations.

As Rosanne Kennedy observes: “Feminist literary theory is a critical form of knowledge which analyses the role that literary forms and practices, together with the discourses of literary criticism and theory, play in perpetuating or challenging hierarchies of gender, class, race and sexuality” (306). The term “patriarchal,” as Chris Weedon puts it, “refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interest of

men.” According to the author, such power relations can take different forms, such as “the sexual division of labor,” “the social organization of procreation,” and “the internalized norms of femininity by which we live” (2). Besides, she argues that it is on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference that patriarchal power rests.

On the other hand, feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular, tries to distinguish certain notions that have often been appropriated and misused in contemporary discourses. These notions are relevant to the analysis of contemporary fantasy fiction.

Furthermore, several critics have strongly presented their views in their works regarding postmodern feminism and the subversion of conventional gender roles. Hutcheon argues that the similarities between feminism and postmodernism make possible for feminist writers (and feminist artists in general) to use postmodernist strategies to convey a questioning of patriarchy in their works. The author affirms that “there is a long tradition of institutional literature whose purpose is to tell women how to ‘appear’—to make themselves desirable—to men” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 155). Hutcheon claims that women writers can subvert such culturally prescribed and biased ways of representing women in literature. She argues that “postmodern strategies can be deployed by feminist artists to deconstructive ends—that is, in order to begin the move towards a change” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 149).

Iris Marion Young says that “Postmodern feminism might have begun somewhere in the early 1980s with the coinage of the term post-feminism which in fact looks critically at the various feminist theories of the past”(65) especially from the second wave of feminism. It also coincides with the third-wave feminism which began in the yearly 1990s. According to Marion, Postmodern feminist thought avoids the essentialist definitions of femininity that “was propagated during the period of modern feminism. Modern feminism worked

with the existentialist view on women which establishes the argument that “one is not born a woman”(76). Postmodern feminism is a body of scholarship that questions and rejects traditional essentialist practices, as established in and by modernity.

The use of postmodern strategies, however, relay to feminism a problem often attributed to postmodernism: that of a paradoxical complicity with the very values they seek to contest. This is one of the reasons many feminist critics question the close association between feminism and postmodernism. Yet, differently from postmodernism, feminist approaches “go beyond making ideology explicit and deconstructing it to argue a need to change that ideology” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 168). Through postmodernist parody and tactics of deconstruction, feminist writers present “new kinds of female pleasure, new articulations of female desire,” presenting, therefore, alternatives that can inscribe in order to subvert patriarchal traditions (160). Williams differentiates male and female fantasy fiction in terms of perspective:

Male fantasy is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy’s nightmare about the mother, recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother denigrated as “female.” “Female fantasy” creates a Looking-Glass World in which ancient assumptions about the “male” and the “female” are suppressed or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking on the father’s corridors of power. (107)

In other words, while the male fantasy conveys an obscure reflection of men’s anxieties about the female, their “other,” the female fantasy enhances the patriarchal oppressive ideologies that raise women’s anxieties. As it can be perceived, women’s experience of patriarchal repression is considered by Williams and most critics an inherent preoccupation of female fantasy fiction.

Although all these critics and reviewers examine these stories from different points of view none of them notice the issue of changing gender role in Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*. Since these stories are not analyzed using the perspectives of the subversion of gender role, the researcher claims that it is the fresh and original study. The traditional gender role challenged by Sophia and Silvia needs to be examined within the broader analytical framework. By using the theory of Judith Butler and Monique Wittig, the researcher probes into this topic. The sufferings faced by the husbands due to the wives' decision to reject the stereotypical gender role constitute the chief domain of this research.

The sexual adventure, deviant sexual passions and going beyond the limits of traditional sexual mores are some of the specific areas which would be probed with an analytical insight. Further, the feminine could not be theorized in terms of a determinate relation between the masculine and the feminine within any given discourse. The relation between masculine and feminine cannot be represented in a signifying economy. The masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified. The distinctions among the above positions are far from discrete. Each of them can be understood to problematize the locality and meaning of both the subject and gender. Luce Irigaray posits, "The interpretive possibilities of gender are in no sense exhausted by the alternatives suggested above" (43). The consequence of such sharp disagreements about the meaning of gender establishes the need for a radical rethinking.

In fact, each societal construct of masculinity varies over time and according to culture, age and position within society. Barbara Smith makes the following commentary on the notion of gender dynamic:

Men, though, while unique individuals, share one thing in common gender privilege. The socialization can lead boys and men to feeling justified in

subordinating women and girls. Exclusive role that women play in this socialization process itself is confining. The privileging of boys begins early with differential child-rearing strategies and parental expectations. Such strategies are usually reinforced by the more-present mother. (53)

Women, therefore, also contribute to the perpetuation of male behavior and males' sense of superiority. In effect, these sex roles confine people, forcing us to be what others want us to be. Gendered norms and behaviors are assimilated rather than being natural or genetic. While mass culture likes to assume that there is a fixed, true masculinity. The researcher views that there should be balanced coalition in terms of gender relations whether it is inside family or society. Otherwise, there is high chance of collision, being a source of psychosomatic trauma, separation or death of the close sexual counterpart as can be seen in fiction or in real life research.

This research makes postmodern feminism as well as gender performance theory as helping hand to study the two short stories *Mrs. Fox* by Sarah Hall and *Lady into Fox* by David Garnett. Judith Butler's notion on Gender as performance will be the main theoretical framework for the research. In addition to this, the theories of feminism and postmodernism by different noted writers such as Rosanne Kennedy, Fraser and Nicholson, Jane Flax, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Chris Weedon will be taken into consideration peripherally only but not as core substance while viewing, reviewing and analyzing the stories as far as possible.

As the researcher makes use of the theory of Butlerian feminism; the core concept of Butler's performance based gender is instrumental in conducting the analysis of the stories, *The Lady into Fox* and *Mrs. Fox*. The theory of 'Gender Performance' or 'Gender Performativity' was first coined in Judith Butler's 1990 book titled *Gender Trouble*. Butler's theories on gender identity and gender performativity were based on the notion

of destabilizing gender identities and categories. She considered the definition of what is meant by the signifier 'woman', in relation to the post-structuralist position of examining signs and signifiers. This study will link Butler's gender performance theories with the centralized ideology of feminism along with the effect and significance of the gender performativity in literary texts taken by the researcher.

The initial starting point for Butler's work is that gender identity cannot be biologically determined. In *Gender Trouble* Butler initiated a reinterpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (125). De Beauvoir distinguishes between gender and sex, whereby gender can be seen as a social creation centered on the 'natural' or biological differences of the sexes. Butler argues that "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a pre discursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along." (8).

Butler also uses Foucault's ideas on how the self-identity is constructed in order to develop the performative theories of gender, in which she argues that sex is not something stable and fixed, but should be considered as something which is open to fluidity. Butler sees body as a 'prison' of gender and sexuality in reference to Foucault's chapter on "Docile Bodies" whereby "the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (136), although there is some scope for resistance and malleability. Butler follows this in her work by arguing that society inscribes on our external physical bodies our internal gender and sexuality. This idea may also be a reference to Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish*, in that Butler is observing the physical form of the body as a personal 'prison' for individual identity. Butler's theories of gender performativity mean that our gender identities are performed or played out for observation by society.



Judith Butler's work arose out of a wider context of feminism and the feminist movement, and must be considered within the political, theoretical and social debates of feminist discourse. The first wave of the feminist movement occurred between the 1800s and the 1950s and challenged the status of women but not the gender roles or sexualities of women in society. The second wave of feminism and the precursor for modern feminist literary theory occurred between the late 1960s and 1980s and asserted that gender roles and questions of sexuality needed to be examined in relation to both the personal and political spheres. This wave of feminism addressed questions of gender inequality, critiqued patriarchy and identified the problem of androcentrism and the assertion that sex or gender is an unchanging, fixed, and biological given. The question of gender identity was now considered to be socially constructed and historically contingent. A further examination of gender roles was provided by Gayle Rubin who investigated the role of gender and sex and stated that a "sex/gender system" is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which those transformed needs are satisfied"(159). She further states that the "Sex/gender system" is a "social organization of sexuality and the reproduction of the conventions of sex and gender" (168).

The third wave of feminism emerged in the late 1980s and is prevalent today. The modern and current feminist theory prefers to deconstruct and demystify gender roles and sexuality. Gender is socially constructed and historically contingent, and biological gender does not necessarily determine gender, while at the same time there is a recognition that not all cultures historically or culturally believe in the existence of only two genders. Rubin also anticipated the movement of the feminism towards "the elimination of the oppression of women through the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles" (102).

The traditional idea of gender and sexuality involve the idea of 'heteronormativity' which refers to a view of heterosexuality as normalized behaviour in a society. This is characterized by two binary notions of sex or gender as male and female, where heterosexuality is the natural and normal accepted view of sexuality. Gender is determined biologically and not an assigned role of identity and sexuality is normative and natural if it fits into the framework of heterosexuality. Judith Butler presents her fundamental theories of gender as performative in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, with the arguments that drag is performative and in its destabilization of the performative iterations of gender, drag performances can be construed as a political escape from the structures of gender binary oppositions. In her follow up work *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Butler states that there should be no confusion that gender performativity is a qualified daily choice made by individuals. Here Butler argues that there is an iterability and repetition involved in gender performativity, which results in immense difficulty in trying to escape the constructions of naturalized restrictions of sex and gender through making conscious daily performative choices.

The question of gender performance is related to ideas of gender identity in society, whereby certain codes of behaviour are assigned according to gender. There is an initial essentialist view of social identity whereby gender is determined biologically and gender is an immutable and recognizable physical essence. However the concept of gender performance questions the essence of gender roles and identity as being determined by purely physical and biological factors. Instead gender identity is a performance or construction made up of behaviours and roles which are then assigned to a specific gender.

Gender then becomes a repetition of behaviours and acts, which are not natural or inevitable, are open to change and fluidity, and dependent on the context in which they are performed, and are part of a wider discourse of gender, sexuality and sex in society.

Butler insists that :

The reading of ‘performativity’ as willful and arbitrary choice misses the point that the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of norms (the ‘chains’ of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance) constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names (187)

Gender performance is learned both consciously and ingrained unconsciously on the psyche of the individual, who is unaware that they are performing a gender role, but accept the gender identity assigned to them by their own behaviour or performance and which is again interpreted and repeated within the discourse of gender relations in a cultural and social context. A key element of gender performativity is the iteration of the act, “Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (2). Butler’s stance is that gender performativity is a repetitive act which serves to perpetually reproduce itself:

Sex is not an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms (1-2)

The subjectivity of the individual is produced through producing and creating these norms and as individuals are constantly reinforcing and recreating the norms that experienced.

Butler uses post structuralist theories and applies a feminist perspective to explore and theorize gender male and female gender roles. Butler combines the concept of gender

identity with the concept of performativity. Butler's main points in relation to gender roles are founded in her assertion that gender identity is constructed and is effectively a form of performance or reiterated 'acting out', of what it means to be gendered either male or female. This gender performance means that people become tied in to a static or 'normalized' gender role which is culturally and socially defined as being a 'normal' 'male or female. Butler finds the idea of 'normal' gender roles restrictive as she asserts that an individual's gender behaviour or performance can have contradictory aspects, which result in instability in the gender performance. Butler asserts that the idea of 'true gender' is a difficult one, because the definition or qualities of gender are only part of a wider narrative that reinforces stereotypes and expectations of what it means to be male or female. She states that:

And words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (185.)

Butler states that although bodies are initially of indeterminate gender and are destabilized further in the performativity of gender, as well as by other categories of race, class and sexuality, which only serve to further destabilize the performative. Gender identity is therefore constructed as a fluid performance and not an essential essence of being. Under this construction, identity is free-floating and not connected to an "essence", but instead to a performance. The acts which are performed, are according to Butler, indicative of a wider social performance of behaviour in society and culture, which is not recognized as

being a 'performance'. Rather these acts, performances and behaviours are so entrenched in the psyche of the individual that they are regarded as 'natural' both to the individual concerned and in their appearance to society. She states that "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance" (95). Butler argues that gender is performative, and that no identity actually exists behind the acts that are supposedly expressing gender. These acts only serve to constitute an illusion of a stable gender identity rather than expressing it.

Butler wants identity to be both unified and fluid, and she promotes the idea that gender is performative and can subvert and challenge notions of self-identity and gender roles, nevertheless gender is "troublesome" (120). She also suggests that there is mysteriousness to sexuality which cannot be revealed or captured in language.

The performativity of gender can be examined through the notion that all gender roles are constructions which are performances being played out by an individual, and which are then either upheld or refuted by society. These gender 'performances' utilize and reenact the definition of what it means to be gendered male or female, and the gender identities are reinforced by the reiteration of the behaviour of the gender. This means that because the performance of the gender role is repeated it becomes a recognizable behaviour of that particular gender as part of a wider societal discourse.

However, Butler also states that the performances of the gender roles are open to interpretation and may not be exact copying, a process which she terms as 'slippage'. She is also concerned with the authenticity of these gender performances which can be changed, becoming exaggerated and fictional; they are nevertheless incorporated into wider social and cultural context as being natural and universal as true and legitimate gender roles. The fact that the performances can be reenacted and repeated by a multiple

of different individuals means that they become a powerful and recognizable mode of behaviour, with recognizable qualities assigned to a particular gender.

Butler noted that social constructionists writing before her have tended to separate out sex, gender and sexuality (and/or desire) as though these are discrete categories of human existence. Sex had been understood as the biological body, gender as the cultural understandings of the biological body and sexuality as an articulation of sex object choice. However, Butler cautions that these phenomena can never be understood separately, because each is positioned with/by the others. Thus, “intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (23). For example, to be a man (sex) is to be read as masculine (gender) and as heterosexual (sexuality). However, beyond this, part of being masculine is being heterosexual. Sexuality can thus never be divided from gender, because it constitutes an important aspect of what gender is.

Gender is thus not a stable attribute of identity, but something that must be constantly revealed and restated. With this in mind, Butler called on her readers to make gender trouble “through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (46).

Butler’s theories of gender performance can be used to examine literary representations of gender roles. Fluidity of gender performativity can be observed in Sarah Hall’s *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett’s *Lady into Fox*. The main female characters in aforementioned fictions are represented as ‘weak’ victimized’ female characters, who through the course of the narrative defy and challenge the gender roles of the female victims which are assigned to them by wider society. Without any special attributes to delineate from general women, the female protagonists in stories are normally referred to

as Silvia and Sophia, whereby they are somehow representative of all such ‘types of women’; these women are identified as passive, weak, docile, and identifiable as the “sort of women” that are ignored or abused by men and society in general. The body of the female characters undergoes a transformation although physically they remain the same female gendered outside, internally they discard the role of a docile weak female gendered victim of stalking, abuse and sexual violence, and progresses to adopt a new role of the violent ‘male gendered’ avenger. Whereas the female Silvia/Sophia shirks away from violence and “stay away from pain”, once they adopt the gender role of the male avenger they are not afraid of violence and are ready to accept a little pain if it means they will exact revenge and punishment on the male aggressors and transgressors of their female gendered self. At the same time they are willing to adopt key aspects of their female identity which they take on a sort of ‘drag’ act in having a ‘seductive’ red fur and going naked in the wild to enjoy sexual freedom. Both Silvia and Sophia used to be nice, but they are no longer prepared to adopt and perform the female gender roles, as they are no longer prepared to be abused or victimized. In the new form they are fluid in their gender performativity and adopt elements of feminine ‘naivety’ externally while experiencing ‘masculine’ anger and aggression internally.

The chariot of family life cannot move forward without amicable relationship between husband and wife. Physical as well as spiritual intimacy can bring happiness in conjugal life. The couple should be able to be soul mates not merely sex partners. Otherwise, complications may arise resulting in separation, estrangement and melancholy. In the stories undertaken for the study too, the male characters go through turbulent mental condition when their better halves change their character unexpectedly.

The first approach of this study is the comparison, in terms of literary genre and thematic concerns, of two writers that are often considered very different from each other.

Indeed, David Garnett and Sarah Hall differ significantly, especially in terms of style. The former is a popular writer of best sellers, related to mass culture and less revised in academic criticism in comparison to the latter. The latter is considered a postmodern writer, whose writing is sophisticated, dense and complex, mixing different literary traditions in a disruptive way. Probably because of such differences, there are no works that offer a direct comparison between Garnett and Hall. In this sense, the comparative analysis between these writers proves to be relevant for two reasons: they have never been compared before and their works are not usually discussed with such emphasis upon their fantasy characteristics. It is through fantasy characters that the works of both writers present discourses against sexual repression and the social imposition of gender roles.

In both the stories, a married couple are walking through the wood one day when the wife suddenly turns into a fox which comes as a shock and the husband takes his wife home and locks her up there but losing her humanness and becoming more like a fox. He tests her by buying a small animal and seeing if she will kill and eat it, which she does. She longs to flee which upsets him because he still loves her but eventually she does escape and starts living in the wild as a fox and one day, he sees her and she beckons him to follow her, and she proudly shows him the litter of cubs she has given birth to.

When Hall's lead female character Sophia returns to her husband with her cubs, she is still a wild instinctive creature. Unlike in Garnett's story, Sophia's husband has not been cuckolded by another male but by his own offspring. He has been demoted. He is now an observer of the natural affinity Sophia shares with her cubs. He did not grow them squirming within him, nor did he feed them from his teats. At the end of the story, he fantasizes about his wife coming back to him, presumably when the cubs have matured. He hopes she will 'walk through the garden naked, her hair long and tangled, her body



glorified by use', but he realizes that it is the fox he longs for, that her loss 'would be unendurable'.

Since this study incorporates the two stories linked loosely with each other, it is reasonable to scrutinize some similarities and differences. Hall shows the allegory of change brought on by pregnancy in her story called *Mrs. Fox* but Garnett's version *The Lady into Fox* is non-allegorical arrests the readers' psyche more influentially. The strong connection between the stories is the idea of pregnancy, and the isolating love of mother and children, as a sort of allegorical cause of the transformation.

Although both the stories encompassed in the present research are loosely connected with each other, David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* has just modern edifice whereas Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* has postmodern flavor in it. Therefore, the story of *Mrs. Fox* is more striking and evoking in the matter of feminism, patriarchal traits, gender, sex and sexuality in general. Hall clearly outlines the female personae from male point of view in her story:

The shape of her eyes, almost Persian, though she is English. Her waist and hips in the blue skirt; he watches her move – to the sink, to the table, to the chair where she sits, slowly, with a woman's grace. Under the hollow of her throat, below the collar of her blouse, is a dribble of fine gold, a chain, on which hangs her wedding ring. (1)

The heroine's body parts and her movement are exposed glamorously from male's perspective to spell out the female sexuality serving for the males' supremacy, used as their sex commodity and domination.

Next, the gender roles played by the female protagonist of the story in her postmodern tone can be observed as the following:

He bends to kiss her, his hands in his pockets. Such simple pleasure; she is his to kiss. He, or she, cooks; this is the modern world, both of them are capable, both busy. They eat dinner, sometimes they drink wine. They talk or listen to music; nothing in particular. There are no children yet.(1)

Hall goes ahead describing the prelude of their marital relationship. The husband is doubtful to his wife's appearance in the public. They have different feelings and positions, different taste of life although they are united by marital bond. They appear unusual to each other. The trick is to remain slightly detached. It signifies that the heroine defies traditional gender role and seeks freedom. According to him, she is unsolved mystery.

They move upstairs and prepare for bed. He washes his face, urinates. He likes to leave the day on his body. He wears nothing to sleep in; neither does his wife, but she has showered, her hair is damp, darkened to wheat. Her skin is incredibly soft; there is no corrugation on her rump. Her pubic hair is harsh when it dries; it crackles against his palm, contrasts strangely with what's inside. A mystery he wants to solve every night. There are positions they favour, that feel and make them appear unusual to each other. The trick is to remain slightly detached. (2)

The male protagonist in Hall's story seems to be sex fanatic because he has stray erotic thoughts and he occasionally uses pornography. To many feminists, pornography is the 'theory' on which the 'practice' of sexual violence is based. Allan G. Johnson in his book entitled *The Gender Knot*, mentions about male's observation of female counterpart on different ways. As John Stoltenberg argues, pornography reveals the connection between patriarchal oppression on the one hand and cultural ideas about sexuality on the other:

Male-supremacist sexuality is important to pornography, and pornography is important to male supremacy. Pornography institutionalizes the sexuality that both

embodies and enacts male supremacy. Pornography says about that sexuality . . . : Here's how to act out male supremacy in sex. . . . Here are the acts that impose power over and against another body. And pornography says about that action . . . : Here's who you should do it to and here's who she is: your whore, your piece of ass, yours. Your penis is a weapon; her body is your target. (143 )

And Thinking about Patriarchy pornography says about that sexuality, "Here's why":

Because men are masters, women are slaves; men are superior, women are subordinate; men are real, women are objects; men are sex machines, women are sluts. . . . Pornography also eroticizes male supremacy. It makes dominance and subordination feel like sex; it makes hierarchy feel like sex; it makes force and violence feel like sex; it makes hate and terrorism feel like sex; it makes inequality feel like sex.(144)

Male supremacy can be observed on the part of patriarchal society where women are nothing more than sex dolls. At this point, Hall presents her male protagonist as an erotic figure who observes female body as the subject of his entertainment as consumer commodity. The husband seems to be lustful lecher who always imagines about women and wonders what will happen to him in his wife's absence.

No man is entirely contented. He has stray erotic thoughts, and irritations. She is slow to pay bills. She is messy in the bathroom; he picks up bundles of wet towels every day. Occasionally, he uses pornography, if he is away for work. He fantasizes about other women, some of whom look like old girlfriends, some like his wife. If a woman at work or on the train arouses him, he wonders about the alternative, a replacement. But in the wake of these moments, he suffers vertiginous fear, imagines losing her, and he understands what she means. It is its absence which defines the importance of a thing. (2)

Very often, the husband could not satisfy his sexual thirst from his wife because she was a little detached and moody, kind of lost in some hidden thoughts and desires. Showing traditional gender role, feminine sex, sexuality and patriarchal traits in her work of fiction, Sarah Hall depicts the bed scene of Sophia and her husband before her transformation:

They kiss. He feels relief, but over what he's not sure. He untucks her blouse, slips his fingers under the waistband of her skirt. She indicates her willingness. They move upstairs and reduce each other to nakedness. He bends before her. A wide badge of hair, undepilated, spreads at the top of her thighs. The taste reminds him of a river. They take longer than usual. He is strung between immense climactic pleasure and delay. She does not come, but she is ardent; finally he cannot hold back. (3)

Gradually aversion to traditional gender roles sprouts in the minds of the heroines and defiance to the patriarchal bondage blossoms. Their gender role is subverted after the heroines' transformation. Although Silvia and Sophia are still females after transformation into vixen, the heroes cannot have sex anymore like they could before. This is the core turning point of arrest where the substance of research is located.

Thus, this research deals with the fantasy heroine named Silvia Fox and Sophia Garnett who launch frontal attack on the traditional gender role which western society demands strongly. The heroines are disinclined towards the social obligation to obey traditional gender role. The idea of being a mother is allergic and loathing to them. They feel circumscribed in English society. The traditional gender role fixed for women in the patriarchal society of England stunted her passion for exploring the unknown arena of joys and freedom. She no longer likes to be circumscribed and confined by social restrictions and conducts which an English woman is likely to face. By nature Silvia and Sophia are having uncompromising ideals.

Freedom is what they naturally sigh for. Of course all the norms and practices available in patriarchal society of England are not conducive to the struggle of women for freedom and identity. The dominant patriarchal ideology of the then English society favors those women who are willing to conform to the patriarchal status quo and ready to internalize traditional gender role. But the Silvia and Sophia do not seem to be fit into the casing of patriarchal society of England. Because they are audacious and inquisitive by nature, they tend to take the risk of exploring the unexpected territory of human experiences transforming as fox or vixen.

NeeruTondon, an Indian critic in her book *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift* describes the new woman in the following way:

The 'new woman' today challenges the traditional notions of 'Angel' in the house and 'sexually voracious' image. The 'new woman' is essentially a woman of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society and tries to improve it. The emerging 'new woman' is contemplative about her protest and fight against the general, accepted norms and currents. What is new and different about these women is that they are prepared to face the consequences of their choices. Their protest is not for equality only but for the right to be acknowledged as individuals capable of intelligence and feeling. (127)

In the stories taken for the research as well the social institution, marriage is called into question by Silvia and Sophia and they emerge as new women seeking freedom. Within the restriction, it is good to widen the horizon of freedom. They pass through those phases in their life over which they finally lose control and command. When women are compelled to assume traditional gender role and forced to make retreat from new modernist role, conflict and crisis arise. In their search for new experiences and freedom, women have to encounter several factors which drag their progressive pace and push

them ahead on the way to transformation. They are disturbed and disappointed by the conflicting attitude. As a result, the heroines of both the short stories transform into vixen to relish freedom to their full in the wild.

Individual freedom is the crux issue of postmodern feminism. The idea of postmodernism as a condition comes from Jean-Francois Lyotard's work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. As Lyotard describes,

The postmodern would be that which...puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable." In order to do this, authors and artists must work outside of the rituals of piety that have previously prevented people from portraying and encountering the unrepresentable. They must endeavor to "free" themselves, or to pursue artistic and professional fulfillment, by breaking from previous traditions, standards, or modes of expression. (81)

In this light, it is possible to establish that short fiction's heroines Silvia Fox and Sophia Garnett might have been presented as the testimony of postmodern feminists who liberated themselves by means of transformation.

Whatever stability and security marriage brings the heroines accept. In the beginning, they seem satisfied with this bright aspect and prospect of marriage. Yet they come to know that the fresh joy soon sinks below the marriage boredom. Despite the love and affection from their husbands, both Silvia and Sophia feel an incalculable hunger for subterranean freedom. They are inwardly tempted to establish extramarital affair. Slowly and gradually they seek for greater degree of freedom from their husbands. To avoid the

sickening pressures of the mundane and monotonous English life, they persuade their husbands to go for a walk in the wild. The couple goes for a brief walk in order to take fresh air of the heath and copse a bit far from their residential area. Within a few hours of their strolling in the heath, the heroines in both the stories suddenly transform and there appears a vixen.

In both the stories, the husband is perplexed but shows patriarchal behavior of protecting; controlling and possessing his wife may it be a pet like animal but is too cautious about societal blemish. He brings her home and hides her from the public. He even frees his servants from their duties. But increasingly aware of her new and fresh desires, the wife violently turns towards the bliss and joy of wild freedom and ardent wish of extramarital affair. By dodging the eyes of her husband, she ventures to run away from home. After her husband is really tired of controlling and caring her, he lets her go to the copse. As a result, the husband is most of the time lost in the turmoil and tension as to what will happen to her. She is divided between the wild fox and her human husband. Male supremacy is directly challenged by the female in the stories. This complicated premise of gender role, sex and sexuality attracts the postmodern feminism perspective of the stories.

What is known as postmodern feminism is often associated with the work of Judith Butler. Entire gamut of Butler's thought is marked, in part, by a linguistic turn. This tenet of thought puts forward a view of gender as a discursive construction and performance rather than a biological fact. Butler's view in this regard is cited below:

The theorists criticize the conflation of sex and gender, essentialist generalizations about men and women, and the tendency to view gender as fixed, binary, and determined at birth, rather than a fluid, mobile construct that allows for multiple gender expressions. The gender dichotomy of man/woman so

pervasive in Western culture can be understood in terms of the cultural imperative to be heterosexual. (59)

As claimed by Butler, postmodern feminism rejects a dualistic view of gender, heterosexual normativity, and biological determinism. They point to the inseparability of the body from language and social norms. Postmodern feminists argue against the assumption that all women share a common oppression.

In order to resist the oppression from the opposite sex, one has to find some way out. Being within the marital tie, the heroines of both the stories seem to be attached to their husbands on the one hand, and on the other they look mysterious and rather immersed in the hidden desires to keep extramarital relations being free from patriarchal bondage. They think about abandoning their husbands and being in relation with other sex partners like wild foxes. Their challenge to the stability and security brings pain along with the fabulous sense of individual freedom.

The heroines of the fantasy fictions finally leave their husbands after transformation for wild freedom because they can enjoy life in their own way. They have chosen to live with foxes without worrying about previous marriage. They come to know that in such a life also there are the restrictive measures. Wherever they live and whomsoever they interact with, patriarchal ideology aggressively holds sway over them. Their ignominious and iconoclastic search for freedom from the restrictive measures of marriage leaves them in the lurch of betrayal. Betrayal is supposed to bring profound sense of happiness and freedom in their life. That is why they take ignominious steps like dumping their husbands down and immersing in the extramarital adventure. It is difficult to tell pointedly if marriage as social institution robbed their sense of individual freedom or their unguided feminist tendency landed them in the embarrassing plight.



The concept of gender has long been central to feminist thought. However, its evolution over the past twenty years has resulted in a growing consensus among feminist theorists that gender relations need not correspond to anatomy. Simon Watney is critical of the trend to trace feminist essence within the transcendental site. His view is presented below:

Postmodernism with its denial of Universalist and transcultural identities such as gender or woman has impacted even further upon the desexualization of gender for those feminist theorists who subscribe to postmodern thought. Gender need not, in fact, be related at all to anatomical sex. One advantage of such a carefully constructed postmodern feminism is that categories such as the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family would be understood to be historically specific institutional categories. (142)

The heroines of the given fictions Sophia and Silvia would take precedence over ahistorical, functionalist categories like reproduction and mothering and resort to mystical transformation. When misery and despair well up in their heart, they are assaulted constantly by sporadic outburst of despair and elation. Their entire life is rendered futile, fruitless. Increasingly they come to know that their life is like a container without content and is at great danger. The husband's life also pushed to hellish dismay. Actually, this is the price they have to pay for individual freedom. Individual freedom of the oppressed gender is the basic ground of postmodernism.

Judith Butler, best illustrates the postmodern feminist position with regard to gender. She is profoundly influenced by the thinking of Michel Foucault, especially in regard to the death of the subject and the theory of the body. In agreement with Nicholson and Fraser, but contrary to Flax, Butler questions the "assumption that there is a subject-woman. In fact, the notion of the decentered self is essential to her postmodern

critique of gender.” (171). The consequences which follow from a thoroughly postmodern feminist theory of gender become most apparent in Butler's work. Citing Foucault's idea that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent, she notes the importance of the question of the subject for politics in general.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow. Rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time. It is instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. These acts give the illusion of an abiding gendered self. Butler's view is mentioned below:

The body performs or acts out what the dominant heterosexual culture determines to be normative for one sex or the other. In this way the dominant heterosexual culture conceals the fact that gender is performative. It need not be limited to those acts which the dominant culture determines to be normative heterosexual acts. The internalized norms inscribe interiority in female body.

(147)

The gendered body has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from some defect in the active force or from some material indisposition.

Butler characterizes gender as the effect of reiterated acting. It produces the effect of a static or normal gender while obscuring the contradiction and instability of any single person's gender act. This effect produces a narrative that is sustained by the tacit collective agreement to perform. On Butler's hypothesis, the socially constructed aspect of gender performativity is most obvious in drag performance. Rather, Butler suggests

that what is performed can only be understood through reference to what is barred from the signifier within the domain of corporeal legibility. Butler explains that “a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love. A feminine gender is formed through the fantasy which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love.” (154).

According to Butler, gender performance is only subversive because it is the kind of effect that resists calculation. She delivers the following aggressive claim:

Signification is multifarious. The subject is unable to control it. Subversion is always occurring and always unpredictable. The political potential of gender performances can be evaluated relative to similar past acts in similar contexts in order to assess their transgressive potential. Only the transgressive act is likely to guarantee freedom to an individual trapped in the bondage of tradition. (121)

Butler's concepts of gender performativity are a misguided retreat from engaging with real-world concerns. She suggests to her readers that this sly send-up of the status quo is the only script for resistance that life offers. Butlerian feminism is in many ways easier than the old feminism. It tells scores of talented young women that they need not work on changing the law.

Turning to the stories under research, Butlerian transgressive act is likely to guarantee freedom to an individual trapped in the bondage of tradition can be linked with the heroines' transformation of female human body into vixen. But at the same time it is a matter of social defamation and mockery for the husbands. So the husbands keep the matter a top secret. After transformation, the heroines got new husbands their children and wild freedom but their husbands were tensed with the fear what will happen to their wives and nearly lost their senses being envious, protective and over-reactive.

Both the husbands and wives were deprived of conjugal love, conventional family rearing and social flavor of life owing to unjustifiable individual hunger and hidden desires. Whether the heating cause is conventional patriarchal bondage or feminine freedom, it is the whole family to be burnt, suffered and damaged at last. There must be some delicate balance of love and compromise to keep every member safe in the family. The imbalance may arise from agnostic masculinity or femininity. But having been oppressed, suppressed and depressed from the male counterpart from the time immemorial, feminism has come into hot debate in the present day world.

Monique Wittig talks about the political assumption associated with the percolating principles and practices of feminism. Attention should be paid to these remarks in a sensitive way. Wittig discloses the following remarks:

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. (94)

It has been to find examples or illustrations of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures. By so doing it tends to support highly Western notions of oppression. The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical universality.

Without thinking about the consequences, Sophia decides to explore new and unknown sphere of experiences her transformation is by will not just by supernatural

force. While living with her husband she begins to be nostalgic to rural freedom. She abhors all the trends and regulations set by the normal course of social life.

The search for newness, freshness, and difference is special to Sophia and Silvia. Both of them have distaste towards seeking fresh experiences within the boundary of marriage. Normal and repetitive practices suffocate and stifle their passions. They can hardly survive without cultivating new experience.

The male lead character Mr. Garnett in Hall's *Mrs. Fox* derives satisfaction by being nostalgic about his lost wife after her transformation. He is afflicted with fuck-mania. But he waits hopefully so that his mind could improve to act normally and reasonably. The following lines describe how the husband is afflicted with sex mania as his search for extreme individualism hits its point of extremity:

It is a forgivable romance, high conceit – he knows. At night he lies in bed, not at its centre, but closer to the midway point. He thinks of Sophia, the woman he loved. He no more expects her to return than he conceived of her departure. But he imagines her stepping across the room, bare, and damp from the shower. And then he thinks of the fox, in her blaze, in her magnificence. It is she who quarters his mind, she whose absence strikes fear into his heart. Her loss would be unendurable. To watch her run into the edge lands, breasting the ferns and scorching the fields, to see her disappear into the void – no – how could life mean anything without his un-belonging wife?(32)

The above-cited paragraph makes a heart-rending description of a man who is facing tormenting condition because of the subverted gender roles on the part of his wife. At this point, gender subversion brings feminist politics discussion.

If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very

reifications of gender and identity. To trace the political operations that produces and conceals the juridical subject of feminism is precisely the task of a feminist genealogy of the category of women. To dwell upon the concept of feminist genealogy, Luce Irigaray makes the following observation:

In the course of this effort to question women as the subject of feminism, the unproblematic invocation of that category may prove to preclude the possibility of feminism as a representational politics. The identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics. Representation will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of women is nowhere presumed. (164)

The unproblematic unity of women is often invoked to construct solidarity of identity. A split is introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender. The distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed. Hence, gender is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way.

In Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*, the heroines Sophia Garnett and Silvia Fox resist traditional gender role. They are tempted towards extramarital affair and transform mysteriously. Their gloomy appearance and dislocated attitude somehow suggested their husbands about the forthcoming dismay from the beginning but they were not able to speculate what will exactly happen in near future. To the heroines in the given fantasy fictions, marriage seems to be a bondage from which extramarital affair can free them. Such rebellious choices and transformation of the heroines make them socially outlawed, ostracized and wild vixen at last.

The husbands on the other hand, begin to suffer from psychosomatic trauma of losing their dearest life partners. The husbands try their best to conceal privacy of the

transformation in order to be safe from the social exclusion, criticism and stigma. They try to protect their wives from the hounds even though they betray their husband and get lost in the wild. The sinister premonition of being troubled by the so-called beautiful better- halves puts the life of heroes in unforeseen ditch of frustration. The heroes face alienation and ostracism from social life owing to their wives who ventured to secure freedom to live a life of uncompromising ideal in the wild. From feminine perspective, the mysterious transformation itself denotes subversion of traditional gender roles and the breach of patriarchal bondage in the quest of freedom from age-old repression, suppression, depression and over-exploitation.

To cut the entire matter short, the fictional heroines' radical choice yields freedom along with intense sufferings like alienation and ostracism on the part of their husbands. The society harshly excoriates the negative transformation of the heroines and therefore, the husbands have to tell lies and the servants are terminated from their jobs. The antagonistic social prejudice and heroines' choice to seek freedom by transformation come into conflict. On the part of the heroine the outcome would be delightful sense of accomplishing individual freedom and boldness to give a jolt to what tradition dictates although she faces death at last. But on the part of the heroes the separation became unbearable and tragic with psychosomatic trauma never to be healed.

The primary finding of this research is that one has to endure plenty of harsh treatment, alienation and estrangement while challenging the deep-rooted patriarchy. The deep rooted patriarchy limits women in traditional gender role. Being confined in traditional reproductive role, a woman cannot cultivate her creativity and career. It is not only the female who gets into trouble while breaking the traditional bondage; the male partner is also equally suffered. In Sarah Hall's *Mrs. Fox* and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*, the female protagonist named Sophia and Silvia are affected inwardly because the social surrounding in

which they lived mocked their pursuit of happiness and their sexual fantasy. Patriarchal society is always intolerant of every freedom seeker woman, who does not comply with the patriarchal existing state of affairs.

Dissatisfied with the traditional gender role, the heroines of the fantasy fictions *Lady into Fox* and *Mrs. Fox* choose to live free life in the wild. The heroines feel that marriage restricted their inner longings and unidentifiable urges. Once, they acknowledge the restrictive influences of marriage, they transform into vixen and go to the wild world to relish freedom.

Depthless fulfillment of sexual hunger is the sole and whole concern of the heroes using their societal privilege, power and material possession. They regard female as a consumer product for their biological needs. This type of commodification of the female body is strongly challenged by the heroines. The heroines have other perceptions that the heroes cannot fathom. Over protective, possessive, and controlling nature of the patriarchal system is rebelled by transformation. They are tempted to break the marital tie, rather than keeping it intact and unharmed. The heroines' desire for wild freedom is dreadful and ironically ennobling. Only the search for freedom is not going to solve the problems. One has to be tactful and prudent as well to manage all the challenges that come on the way to freedom. While seeking freedom, it is necessary to abide by certain normative principle. It is not totally bad if desire for extramarital affair comes in one's mind but acting out the internal desire and transforming all of a sudden brings the heroines in trouble.

The society laughs at the transformation of the heroines and failure of their marriage. The society prides not on the couple's success but on their self-destructive and humiliating failure. All these responses begin to inflict pain in the husbands' mind. They try their best not to let anyone know the secrecy of the transformation of their wives. The male protagonists in the fictions seem possessive, protective, controlling and envious of other males even after their heroines' transformation. The heroines bear children as cubs and look



after them but they are themselves unsafe from lurking danger from the hunters and their hounds. Symbolically, it can be linked with the contemporary society that undue hunger of sexual freedom invites cruel adulteration, rape and murder at last.

Despite the fact that the husbands love them too much in an honest way, Sophia and Silvia leave them and go to copse to enjoy free sex and free life in burrows with other foxes. Marital loyalty is nothing for them. They just want to enjoy free life in the wild being totally free of societal bondage. Such an insane desire and wrong track of passion implant a traumatic blow to their loyal husbands. The hunger for extramarital relations and her inability to subdue this wild hunger are equally liable to the traumatic agony and torture on the part of their husbands. In the face of any kind of trouble and mishap the heroines cannot endure it. The controlling, protective and possessive husbands bear heart-rending tragedy. Tragedy is inevitable after deceptive and mystical transformation of the heroines. The hunting hounds attack the wild heroines and their life is wasted forever. Ultimately, death is panacea of all troubles.

In conclusion, the way women are brought up in society makes them fundamentally different from other men. No matter how much they struggle to be equal to men, they remain substantially different because they grow up by assimilating different sort of norms and values. The internalized codes and conducts compel woman to act and behave in a different way. The demonstration of difference brings them in conflicting relation with society. The society is too dogmatic and rigid to make dominant practices flexible. The heroines of the short stories taken for the study by the researcher meet the dismal consequences owing to their queer quest of freedom from the conventional norms of gender roles.

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