

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

presents

THE FOX

A play by Allan Miller

(adapted from the novella by D. H. Lawrence)

Premiere on 8 September, 2011

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 5, 6 and 7 September

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesday and

Fridays beginning 13 September

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Established in 1976

Dear English Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere **THE FOX** by Allan Miller on 8 September, 2011, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 5, 6 and 7 September. Bookings for this adaptation of the D.H. Lawrence novella have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be ordered from Samuel French, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR, England. theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allan Miller (born in 1929 in Brooklyn, N.Y.) is an actor, director, teacher and writer. He has acted in over two hundred films and television productions and in dozens of plays. Mr. Miller was artistic director of the Back Alley Theatre in Los Angeles for ten years, for which he received the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle (LADCC) Award for Distinguished Achievement. At the Back Alley Theatre he directed numerous productions, including his adaptation of **THE FOX**, for which he also received a LADCC Award for direction. He teaches acting privately and at colleges and professional schools, including Circle in the Square and Actors Studio in New York, Yale School of Drama, New York University and the Focus Theatre in Dublin. Some of his well-known students include Barbara Streisand, Dustin Hoffman, Meryl Streep and Sigourney Weaver. Since its first production in Los Angeles (1981) and later in New York (1982), **THE FOX** has been performed all over the United States and has toured England and Australia. The play has been translated into French, Spanish, German and Chinese.

ABOUT THE PLAY

THE FOX is based on the famous novella of the same title by D.H. Lawrence (1885—1930). Like the original, this adaptation is set in rural England in 1918, where two young women in an unconventional relationship are struggling to exist on an isolated farm. They are having trouble with their crops, their hens won't lay, winter is upon them and a fox has been pillaging their henhouse. A handsome young soldier appears who seems to provide a temporary solution to their problems. In exchange for food and shelter, he offers to shoot the fox and to assist them in other ways on the farm. The women invite him to stay with them a few days, a decision that has devastating consequences.

D.H. Lawrence was known for his love of symbols, and his novella **THE FOX** is a prize example of this. In the novella as well as in this adaptation, the title **THE FOX** applies both to the animal that has been raiding the henhouse and to the soldier who enters the farmhouse. The young man slowly works his way into the household. His engaging personality and erotic charms stir up emotions and divide the two female friends. What does he want? Both of the women? One of them? Their farm? Can their relationship survive this predatory force from the outside? They must decide whether to follow their minds or their passions.

“This is a rare adaptation that honours its source while having the guts to depart from it.”
(The Los Angeles Times)

“The adaptation, which draws profitably on the language of the original, saves Lawrence from seeming at all outdated.” (The New York Times)

Summary of
THE FOX

Setting: A farmhouse and shed in the English countryside.

Time: Shortly after World War I, 1918

ACT I, Scene 1

On a cold evening in November, Jill and Nellie, close friends in their 30s, are sitting near the fireplace in the living room. Three years ago they decided to find freedom from the pressures of society by settling down on this isolated farm. Since then, they have been struggling to make a living from their work here. As the play opens, they sense they are losing the battle. Winter is coming again. The house is getting cold, the barn needs mending, the ground is too hard to grow food, and a fox has been stealing their chickens.

On this particular evening they hear dogs barking in the distance, then a strange noise outside their house, and finally a knock on the front door. As a precaution, Nellie gets the shotgun. She is pointing the weapon at the door as a young soldier in his 20s comes in. He is on leave from the army and has come to see his grandfather, William Grenfel, whom he assumes still lives here. The women inform him that Mr Grenfel died around the time they took over the farm three years ago. They are surprised that the young man, whose name is Henry Grenfel, does not know that his own grandfather passed away. Henry explains that five years ago he ran away to Canada. There he joined the army, and was soon shipped to the battlefield in Greece. He has heard nothing from his grandfather for over three years.

The women invite Henry to come in out of the cold and they give him some bread and tea. He is curious about how two females are managing to run the farm on their own. He knows how difficult it is because he lived and worked here with his grandfather until he left for Canada. The women describe the problems they are having, including the fox that is killing their chickens. Henry claims that he can shoot the fox for them, as well as assist them in other ways on the farm. Jill invites him to stay with them a few days. Nellie, however, seems to sense danger and says very little to the young stranger.

ACT I, Scene 2

Early the next morning Jill is fretting because

Henry is no longer in the house. She fears that he has already left them. Nellie describes a disturbing dream she had the previous night. She thought she heard someone singing outside. "Singing? Who?" Jill asks. "The fox," Nellie replies. In the dream she went outside to investigate and came suddenly upon the fox. The animal was right at her feet, looking up at her. She wanted to touch him, but, when she reached out her hand, he bit her, and then ran off laughing. The dream obviously still preys on her mind.

Henry comes in carrying the shotgun, two pheasants that he has shot and some eggs that he gathered from the chicken coop. Nellie is angry because he took the gun without asking permission. Jill, on the other hand, is delighted to have some food for their table. Nellie goes out, leaving Henry and Jill in the living room. The young soldier wants to know why Nellie wears men's clothing. He prefers to see women in dresses, he says. Jill answers that Nellie dresses that way because of the mucky work she does on the farm. Jill goes to the kitchen, and Henry takes the pheasants outside. He finds Nellie in the woodshed where she is gathering logs for the fireplace. Henry apologizes for upsetting her earlier and asks her to shake his hand so he will know they are not enemies. Nellie assures him that they are not enemies but refuses to give him her hand. He senses that she is afraid of him. When he tries to carry the wood to the house for her, she insists that he has already done enough and that he should stay away from her.

In the meantime, Jill has busied herself with preparations for breakfast. When Nellie comes in with the wood, she notices that Jill has brought the table and chairs from the kitchen into the living room. She accuses Jill of doing this just to impress the soldier boy. "You've never been this concerned with any boy before," Nellie remarks. "What have you been thinking about him? Hm?" Jill cannot understand what has got into her friend. "I just like having somebody new to fuss over, you know that's the way I am," she explains. Nellie apologizes to Jill. She admits that she is letting her fears and dreams get the best of her. Jill goes to the kitchen to continue making breakfast.

Nellie is putting logs into the fireplace when Henry enters. They exchange a few comments

about their lives during the war. He asks Nellie if she is happy to have him in the house. "You'll hear me if I'm not," she replies. He takes that as a yes and smiles. Jill enters from the kitchen with poached eggs, and they are soon eating breakfast together at the table. Jill notices how comfortable and happy Henry looks, and wants to know why he is smiling. He replies, "I have two ladies to wait on me, a house to live in, and the woods nearby. I'll have hunting and walking and reading and talking. There's no man alive could want more. Is there?" Jill asks if he intends to marry one day and is curious about the sort of woman he is looking for. During his reply she catches him and Nellie staring at each other, and senses that Henry is captivated by her attractive friend. "Eat now, you're forgetting your food," she says. Jill continues to watch them both as she tries to eat.

ACT II, Scene 1

It is night, shortly after dinner. Nellie is in the kitchen doing the washing up, and Jill is clearing the table in the living room with Henry looking on. He is in high spirits and tries to engage Jill in some after-dinner merry-making, but she will have none of it. There is now a noticeable change in Jill's attitude towards him. When Nellie enters from the kitchen, Henry asks her to accompany him on a walk in the woods. Jill is steadfast against it. She says she was shopping in the village that afternoon and heard some very negative things from the townspeople about Henry's character and behaviour. They said that his grandfather had to do all the work on the farm because Henry was always off chasing rabbits or scaring the neighbours. Henry knows that what Jill says is true, but he nevertheless becomes furious upon hearing it. He says his grandfather used to whip him after people complained about his crossing their property, hunting on their land, fishing in their streams or just laughing at them for the small-minded, frightened things they are! Nellie, unlike Jill, is amused by Henry's angry tirade.

They hear the sound of dogs barking in the distance. Henry thinks it is the fox they are barking at. He grabs the shotgun and rushes outdoors. Jill is irritated at Nellie for allowing Henry to take the gun out again, especially after the fiery temper he just demonstrated. She believes he gets too excited and intense when he has the weapon in his hands. She also resents him for inviting Nellie to walk outside,

and is frustrated that Nellie is not as concerned as she is by the young man's behaviour.

ACT II, Scene 2

Later that night the women are waiting for Henry to return to the house. He has been gone for hours now, apparently still hunting the fox. Jill is tired and wants to go to bed, but she is afraid that Nellie will wait up for Henry. She refuses to go upstairs without her. "I've seen the way he looks at you," she says to Nellie, "and I've seen the way you look at him... We came out here to get away from looks like that, didn't we?" Nellie agrees that that was true, but feels that Henry has done nothing so far that should bother them. There is the sound of chickens screeching outside, followed by a gunshot. A few moments later, Henry enters the house holding a dead fox. Jill demands that he take the beast outside. She then becomes frantic when Henry asks Nellie to come outside with him. Despite Jill's wishes, Nellie accompanies Henry.

They go to the shed where Henry admires the beauty of the fox while Nellie strokes its fur. She is fascinated by the feel of the animal. Henry describes how he stalked the fox for hours and finally shot him. He tells Nellie he wants to give her the fox's fur and asks her to come closer to him so he can tell her why. At that moment Jill calls out to Nellie from the house. Nellie starts to leave the shed, but Henry stops her. He tells her that she should stop worrying about Jill and think about more worthwhile things, such as marrying him. As Jill hysterically continues to call out Nellie's name, Henry presses Nellie to say yes to his proposal of marriage. In desperation to get away from him, she finally says yes and rushes from the shed back into the house.

Jill, deeply distressed, wants to know what Nellie and Henry were doing for such a long time outside. When Nellie reveals that he asked her to marry him, Jill insists that her friend tell Henry to leave. She is convinced that what he is really after is the farm, and that he wants them to work it for him. "He wants me for his kitchen and you for his bed," she says to Nellie. There is a knock at the door and Henry enters. Jill glares at him and goes upstairs. Nellie tells Henry that she did not appreciate his foolish behaviour in the shed, and that, if he wants to stay with them, he must never do anything like that again. He claims he was not being foolish, that he is serious about marrying her.

ACT III, Scene 1

A few days later Jill returns home from the village where she has done some shopping. She complains to Nellie about Henry's table manners, his dirty boots and his constant prowling in the woods with the shotgun. These things, she claims, would bother Nellie too if it were anybody else other than Henry doing them. Jill does not like the way he looks at them. "He's too hot ... He's burning up with a need to make something happen," she insists. Henry enters the house and asks Nellie to go out into the forest with him. He wants to show her some rabbit hideouts and deer paths, he says. Nellie refuses to go and leaves him alone with Jill. Jill warns Henry that she will never let him marry Nellie and tells him he must leave the farm and never return. He replies that he will go only if Nellie tells him to do so.

Shortly thereafter, Henry encounters Nellie in the shed. Again, he presses her to marry him. He is convinced that she does not really love Jill, and is sure that she is attracted to him sexually. "You want the feel of me. You need it. Say you'll have me, Nellie. Say it!", he pleads. Henry grabs her and kisses her. She responds to the kiss and clutches him tightly. Jill suddenly appears in the doorway of the shed. She is incensed by what she sees. When Nellie informs her that she has agreed to marry Henry, Jill tries to separate the two. Henry pushes her away. Jill shrieks and runs back into the house. Nellie is now not sure she has made the right decision. She pledged herself to Jill years ago, she tells Henry, and does not want to break her friend's heart. She is also concerned about the age difference between herself and Henry. He is certain, however, that the only thing that will satisfy them both is to get married and establish a life together. His leave from the army is almost over. In fact, he must report back to the military camp that evening, he tells Nellie. Then, as soon as possible, he wants to return to the farm and marry Nellie before being shipped back to Canada. "You can't refuse me, Nellie, you know you can't," he says.

ACT III, Scene 2

That evening Jill is laying out the dinner things as Henry comes in with a load of wood for the fire. He tries to regain Jill's friendship, but she refuses to be reconciled with him. She calls him a thief and accuses him of marrying Nellie just to get the farm. Nellie comes downstairs wearing a pretty summer dress. "It's your

going away treat," she tells Henry. He is ecstatic over the change in Nellie's appearance. During dinner Jill and Henry bicker at each other about whether he can afford Nellie's passage to Canada after they are married. Nellie finally demands that they both show her some courtesy by ceasing to fight over her as if she were a prize pig. She asks Jill to respect her wish to marry Henry, and wants Henry to remember that it was Jill who invited him to stay with them in the first place.

Henry takes Nellie out to the shed to speak with her in private. He says he sees how much Jill means to her and is willing to live with them on the farm instead of returning to Canada with Nellie. "Just so we're together," he says. Dogs are heard barking in the distance. Henry gets the shotgun and runs outside to see if there is another fox preying on the chickens. In his absence, Nellie returns to the house and speaks to Jill about the possibility of Henry staying with them after he and she are married. Jill refuses to allow that. She fears that Henry, as the male in the household, would start ordering them around like a pair of labourers. He would eventually ignore Nellie, she claims, and finally leave her to go hunting somewhere else. "He's a fox, that's just what he is, but is a beast what you want to marry?", she asks Nellie. She cannot understand the strange hold that the young man has over Nellie. She is sure that Nellie does not love him; she is only drawn to him sexually, Jill believes. She pleads with Nellie to call off the marriage before it is too late.

Henry, disappointed that he was unable to kill another fox, enters with the shotgun. Nellie informs him that she has changed her mind about marrying him. She has finally come to her senses, she says, and realizes that she cannot destroy the life that she and Jill have made together. Besides that, he is an absolute stranger to her, and she does not want them to make fools of themselves. Henry blames Jill for persuading Nellie to change her mind. Without Jill, he believes Nellie would have accepted him for what he is, a man with a man's mind and a man's appetites. Jill calls Henry a snake, with poison in his teeth and destruction in his eyes. Nellie again has to intervene. After apologizing to Henry for whatever trouble she has caused him, she opens the front door and tells him to go. "Your leave is almost up. The train will be waiting,"

she says. On his way to the door, Henry picks up the shotgun. He points it at Jill and asks her if she has ever killed anything with it. Backing away from him, she answers that she has. When Nellie tells him that he will miss his train, Henry turns the gun on her. She freezes. Jill screams at him to put the gun away. He then swings the gun back and forth between her and Nellie, shouting "Hoo! Hoo!" Nellie orders him to stop. Jill makes a quick movement towards Henry. He rapidly swings the gun at her and fires. Jill falls to the floor, shudders once and then lies still.

Henry swears to Nellie that it was an accident, that he really did not intend to shoot Jill. "She

caught me all wound up," he explains. Nellie drops to the floor, gasping for air. He gathers her comfortingly against his body. She begins to cry. He assures her that she will be better off without Jill, that he will take care of her now and show her what a farm can really be like. "We'll keep the woods free though, for evenings. Just you and me. With the stars swirling whitely above ...!" He reminds Nellie that he has to catch his train now, and asks her to stand up. She rises and accompanies him to the door. "You wait for me, I'll be back," he says. He goes, leaving Nellie standing in the doorway.

Multiple Choice Exercise

1. Jill and Nellie live together (a. in an apartment in the city, b. on an isolated farm in the country, c. in a house in the suburbs).
2. Their chickens are being killed by (a. freezing weather, b. a disease, c. a fox).
3. Before he ran away to Canada and joined the army, Henry (a. lived with his grandfather on the farm, b. attended a boarding school in London, c. worked in a shop in the local village).
4. Early in the play Jill (a. dislikes Henry, b. is impressed by him, c. wants him to find accommodation elsewhere).
5. Nellie is awkward in the presence of the young soldier because (a. she never talks to strangers, b. he is impolite, c. she senses danger).
6. Jill's attitude towards Henry changes after she sees that he (a. will not help with the chores, b. is unable to shoot the fox, c. is attracted to Nellie).
7. Henry wants Nellie to (a. marry him, b. live with him in the village, c. continue living with Jill).
8. Nellie is (a. sure she wants to marry Henry, b. excited about living in Canada instead of England, c. torn between her loyalty to Jill and her attraction to Henry).
9. Jill is convinced that Henry (a. just wants the farm, b. really loves Nellie, c. would make a dependable husband).
10. Henry tells Nellie that shooting Jill was (a. intentional on his part, b. an accident, c. something that he deeply regrets).

Answer Key:

1. b, 2. c, 3. a, 4. b, 5. c, 6. c, 7. a, 8. c, 9. a, 10. b

Interpretative Exercise

1. What are some of the difficulties that Jill and Nellie are having on the farm?
2. Briefly describe how Henry disturbs the relationship between Jill and Nellie. What do you think his real motives are?
3. With which character or characters do you sympathize? Do your sympathies change during the course of the play?
4. Nellie finds both the fox and Henry fascinating. From the beginning she seems to see a resemblance between the two. Why do you think this is so? Describe how this is revealed in the play.