

Fantastic Mr Fox - The Transition from the Other

Fantastic Mr Fox has an ecocritical subtext as the relationship between animals and humans are explored thoroughly. However, relationships between different species are also explored, significantly between Mr Fox and the wolf, in a scene after the climax. The other and the privileged group act as a binary opposition to uncover the ecocritical message of the film: how humans have impacted the natural world and the transition from the other to the privileged group.

Fantastic Mr Fox was released in 2009, and directed by Wes Anderson. The screenplay was based on the book of the same title, written by Roald Dahl in 1970. It follows Mr Fox - a family man - who begins to start stealing again, as he can't resist his animal instincts. However, he finds himself being hunted by the infamous farmers, Boggis, Bunce and Bean.

The film sets up the two groups, which are in opposition, *the other* and *the privileged*. *The other* being the animals and *the privileged* being the farmers/humans. The animals have less power, without access to the technology the farmers do, and because of this they must use their intelligence. The farmers act as *the privileged* group, who are almost the embodiment of the "we will destroy everything to get something" trope. They represent the destructive side of humans, and the reliance of technology. The two groups are in conflict throughout the film to show the difference between the two, and how far humans have passed their animal instincts.

However, whilst the farmers do show they no longer rely on animal instincts, they demonstrate their animalistic nature in other ways. When destroying the tree, they approach like a predator rather than an intelligent human. This shows a secondary theme, which is that humans may now be privileged but aren't much different from the animals they hunt. Furthermore, the animals act more like humans, for example, they all have human jobs, such as Mr Fox who is a columnist. Again, this shows how the two groups aren't dissimilar and one group can easily be interchanged. Rather than a line with one group at the end, it's more of a cycle, with one group going from one to the other, via evolution or other means.



This all accumulates and the nail is hit on the head during the wolf scene, just after the climax. The scene unfolds as the group (Mr Fox, Kylie, Ash and Kristofferson) see a wolf in the distance. They attempt to communicate with the wolf yet it speaks no language. Mr Fox raises his hand as a sign of brotherhood then it runs away. It's a bizarre scene in that it holds no plot weight yet it seems to be one of the key scenes in decoding the meaning.

The wolf is the only animal throughout the film that doesn't walk on two legs or wear clothes. You could describe the wolf as *the true other* as it's truly nothing like humans. However, it is also nothing like Mr Fox or any of the other animals. Whilst, the farmers represent *the privileged*, the wolf represents *the true other*. This implies that the animals we see throughout the film are not truly *the other*, but rather in transition to *the privileged*. Whether or not you believe that the wolf is less privileged is irrelevant in that the film establishes that technology is a privilege. Therefore, the wolf has none, whereas the animals have access to some technology, mainly clothes, laws and a real estate market.

Mr Fox wells up with tears as he realises he is not a true "wild animal" like he has been saying throughout the film. He also claims to have a phobia of wolves - rather than a fear. This could be seen to be a phobia of how much he (and all the animals) have changed. Now that the transition has begun, he fails to recognise himself. This could be a comment on how far humans have changed from their prehistoric ancestors or how we are slowly changing the animals around us, such as domestication or destroying habitats, forcing animals to become more like us.



Furthermore, it could be a comment on our cultural impact on animals. Certain animals have certain ideas relating their cultural interpretation of said animal. *Fantastic Mr Fox* is specific in showing western interpretations of different animals. Foxes are seen as conniving tricksters and this is seen in the film, with Mr Fox creating a “master plan” in order to steal livestock. Kylie is another example of these anthropomorphisms, a frightened opossum who zones out at random moments. Therefore, our perceptions of animals have changed due to our culture. However, the wolf is a symbol of pure natural wildness, which is seen in this scene. The wolf remains animal-like, as culturally he is seen as a “pure animal” (Meaning truly animalistic and nothing like humans. Some cultures believe the wolf to be a symbol of evil or raw sexuality, yet still instinctual over calculated, making him more of an animal), whereas the group are all given human characteristics, such as calculation or self-actualisation.

Overall, *Fantastic Mr Fox* explores the relationship between humans and animals. It's explored both in subtext but also in a more meta way, looking at how the film itself is representing our cultural impact on nature - which does not affect it but our perception changes. It's interesting as a tale, which was originally meant to be about greed, existential identity and damaged family dynamics, that a part of its subtext is about humanities impact and the rise and fall of groups of people.

