
Witch's Curse: Hegemonic Narratives, Female Melancholy, and the Perseverance of Patriarchy in *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

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As witches and other sorceresses populate our imagination, they bears witness to our fascination with uncanny female subjects, but also confirm that powerful, extraordinary women continue to face ruthless misogyny. Psychoanalytical, feminist, and cultural theories have all made clear our ambiguous relationship to the magical woman's transgression of patriarchal gender norms.^[1] Sigmund Freud, for instance, claims that the monstrous woman is an incarnation of the male "castration anxiety," while Julia Kristeva connects her to motherhood and "primal fear."^[2] Barbara Creed celebrates the *femme castrator*, but also acknowledges that mainstream cinema tends to subjugate, discipline, or punish her since she is a threat to male dominance.^[3] Most theories follow similar lines of thought, exposing the various ways in which culture posits the magical woman as intriguing but precarious.

These analyses correctly identify that the archetype of the witch embodies deep-seated male anxieties, and therefore most narratives about the figure have a restorative function that return the unruly woman to patriarchal order. However, less has been said about the monstrous woman as a *product of* patriarchal oppression *born from* constraining gender norms. In the following analysis of the critically acclaimed and highly popular recent Hungarian film, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* (*Liza, a rókatündér*, 2015) my intention is to show that magical women, witches and the monstrous feminine are manifestations of *female melancholia* rooted in oppressive gender norms. Further, I argue that the binary way of thinking about mental health (sick vs. healthy, sane vs. insane, etc.) reduces narrative options available to the melancholic female subject; she must be either "cured" or destroyed. Finally, the film offers a rich ground on which to discuss both cinema's potential *and* its limits to rewrite hegemonic narratives about women's access to happiness.

Liza, the Fox-Fairy is a satire-fantasy-horror-romance hybrid movie by Hungarian director, Károly Ujj Mészáros. The film has drawn well over 100,000 viewers since its release in 2015, which is considered a major domestic success in a small country such as Hungary.^[4] In addition, it was critically celebrated as it won the 54th Hungarian Film critics' award for best debut and won several awards during the Hungarian Film Week in 2016. The film also received international honours at numerous fantasy

film festivals across the globe as well as Eastern European regional festivals.[5]

Adopted from a stage play by Zsolt Pozsgai, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* employs a strong metanarrative element and postmodern irony. Its self-referential humour creates a critical distance between the viewer and the film in an effort to highlight the ridiculousness of romantic fairy tales and narrative tropes - including their positioning of women. Károly Ujj Mészáros, in making the movie, admitted to having been inspired by David Lynch, Luis Buñuel, and Wes Anderson's surrealistic cinematographic styles, carefully crafted compositions and strong colour tones. The director also talked repeatedly about the influence of Japanese culture on his work, especially Japanese pop music from the 1960s and 70s.[6] This fascination is clearly present in the film's music score composed by Eric Sumo, which was elected "the 2015 year most successful soundtrack" by Hungarian critics, and was later released on vinyl as well.[7]

Beyond its music, the film's narrative also borrows heavily from Japanese mythology. The main protagonist, Liza is type of mythical witch creature, well-known in Japan. Michael Bathgate in his book, *The Fox's Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore* explores the immense religious, social, and economic significance of the shapeshifter fox-fairy in Japanese culture. Bathgate's discussion of the symbolism of wives as fox-shapeshifters confirms the previously aforementioned interpretations of the monstrous feminine. He observes that fox-fairies "express a basic anxiety regarding the fluidity of female identity and influence." [8] Further, in patriarchal economies, fox-women in Bathgate's account, embody "complex and uncertain dynamics" that undermine dominant social norms.[9] The shapeshifter woman, who seamlessly moves between the spiritual world and the real world - and between human and non-human hosts - is dangerous because her liminality exposes the fragility of well-established hierarchical structures and physical boundaries.

Liza, the Fox-Fairy tells the story of 30-years-old woman, Liza (played by Mónika Balsai), a home nurse who lives largely isolated from the world and is desperately searching for a meaningful, romantic relationship. While Liza takes care of a deceased Japanese ambassador's sick wife (which explains her intimate familiarity with Japanese language and culture), she struggles with loneliness until an imaginary, faux-1950s Nipponese pop music idol, Tomi Tani (played by David Sakurai) materializes in her imagination and she discovers that she has magical powers - of the dangerous kind. Tomi Tani's strange, magic world, where he murders and takes the soul of his victims seamlessly meshes with Liza's, creating a sense of magic realism in the film. Liza finds her escape and happiness in her fantasy as she talks, sings and dances with Tomi Tani while attending to her monotonous chores. However, this

relationship quickly turns toxic as Tomi Tani starts interfering with Liza's plans to find true love. First, he thrusts Márta néni, the ambassador's wife off her bed causing her death. He then introduces Liza to fox-fairies by pushing an old Japanese museum brochure in front of her. In the rest of the film, Tomi Tani is behind numerous suspicious "accidents" that kill Liza's love interests one after the other while all the evidence points towards Liza. The police launch an investigation and Liza herself gradually succumbs to the idea that she must be a cursed woman, an evil witch. Her despair grows culminating in a suicide attempt. However, she is saved by the courageous hero, Zoltán (played by Szabolcs Bede Fazekas), the only one to survive Tomi Tani's murderous machinations. Pushed off a ladder, electrocuted, and injured multiple times, Zoltán shows the resilience of a true romantic hero. He, having "tamed" Liza, earns her hand in marriage and they live happily ever after.

Witch-ness as Melancholia

Julia Kristeva in her book, *Black Sun*, defines melancholia as "an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief [...] a life that is unliveable, heavy with daily sorrows, tears held back or shed, a total despair, scorching at times, then wan and empty."^[10] A form of depression, melancholia has often been ascribed to the female condition. Kristeva, Judith Butler, Kaja Silverman and others have scrutinized such gendered nature of melancholia, but these theories tend to overlook a possible connection between melancholia and violence. They characterize melancholia as a pathological form of mourning and loss that *paralyses* rather than stimulates violence in the female subject. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* offers us a chance to examine melancholia in a new light. By connecting the monstrous female subject to melancholia, I make the case that the magical woman is a *product of* rather than a threat to patriarchy.

According to Freud, melancholia implies identification with, rather than mourning for, the lost object. The melancholic is "clinging to the object [of desire] through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis."^[11] Julia Kristeva further explains that, for the melancholic subject, "life that is unliveable, heavy with daily sorrows;" it is a "devitalized existence."^[12] Liza in this sense is clearly a melancholic character. Her life as a live-in nurse is full of loneliness and sorrow. She rarely leaves the apartment, takes sleeping pills to sleep, and has little contact with the outside world other than observing people at her favourite fast food restaurant, Mekk Burger. The film's narrator repeatedly describes Liza's life as "lonely" and "sad." The close ups, which show sadness and nervousness on her face, visually confirm her social and psychological isolation. Liza's growing detachment "is [slowly] absorbing her" into her imaginary inaccessible to the outside world.^[13]

Such intense visualization of Liza's inner psyche is not simply a matter of imagination, it is much more than that. Her embodiment of a dangerous, magical creature requires an act of *phantasy*. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* is indeed a "phantasy film" with a "ph," as Barbara Creed uses the term. Liza's dream is a phantasy that renders female sexuality as *difference* "grounded in monstrousness."[\[14\]](#) The fox-fairy, through her phantasies, engages in an "activity in wish fulfilment" to destroy and castrate her subject of desire.[\[15\]](#) In other words, Liza's embodiment of the monster-witch functions as a conduit for female melancholia and phantasies of violence.

The very first scene, which shows Liza at the police station being questioned about the murder of several men, is a close-up of her body that shows her shaking, dripping water, and wearing blood stained slippers. In a trembling voice, she admits "I am cursed...I am fox-fairy." The opening scene is a forceful indication that Liza perceives herself as dangerous and undeserving of love or - in psychoanalytic terms - as a woman with an impoverished ego.[\[16\]](#) While the film soon jumps back to the beginning of Liza's story, this first scene establishes the narrative expectations related to Liza's monstrous nature. At first Liza is unaware of both Tomi Tani's machinations and her own "magical powers." Soon, however, she gets the first hint from an exhibition brochure about fox-fairies, Japanese women who live alone in the forest and are cursed to seduce and kill men until they finally succumb to madness killing themselves.

Melancholia and loss are closely related in both Freud and Kristeva's theories in that the subject is not willing to "abandon [her] libidinal position" vis-a-vis the lost object that would allow mourning to start. Instead the subject replaces the lost object with phantasy object(s). The fact that Liza is described as "adopted" by the Japanese ambassador and his wife is an early indication that she may be suffering from profound loss. Later, Zoltán finds a letter from Liza's mother. Through his internal voice, we hear Liza's mother expressing her love for Liza, but also her plea that Liza behave in a "responsible way" with men as to avoid her own children growing up without parents as she had. What the mother's letter underscores here is that, indeed, Liza's melancholia is related to being an orphan but also that she perceives her vagina as a source of *danger*. In Barbara Creed's terms, Liza has a "vagina dentata" that needs to be carefully guarded.[\[17\]](#) This moment in the film is significant in two ways. On the one hand, it reveals simultaneous abandonment by and forced identification with the mother as one root cause for Liza's melancholia. On the other hand, it also explains how female subjectivity becomes reified through romantic stereotypes of the princess-virgin.

While loss, shame and inferiority are important aspects of the

melancholic psyche, Freud also describes a second product of the conflict between phantasy and reality. Due to its inability to admit loss the subject turns away from the external world and this turn inwards often results in destructive impulses. He calls this a “stage of sadism,” where the ego, unable yet to destroy itself due to narcissism, instead turns its destructive energy towards the outside world, into “murderous impulses against others.”[\[18\]](#) As the story progresses and one romantic loss follows another, Liza becomes engulfed by her own monstrous powers and turns increasingly inwardly. At the same time, she continues to live out her murderous phantasies through Tomi Tani’s actions.

The film repeatedly contrasts Liza’s longing for eternal spring and passionate love with her distress, frustration and loss. For example, at the Mekk Burger Liza observes a couple who seems to fall in love at first sight. However, right after the greatly charmed Liza leaves, the man grabs the woman’s breast and she beats him before running out of the restaurant. Later on, Liza tries to put a spell on another victim, Károly by using a magic cookbook to prepare the most perverse, outrageous food combinations (such as fish dill and watermelon soup and pork with chocolate pudding). Károly gobbles the food up like a swine and cannot stop talking about his wife who died. Ludvig úr, another hopeful contender for her romance-phantasy assumes that Liza is a prostitute and offers her money. Henrik, one of the last victims to Liza’s fox-fairy phantasy, has several sexual affairs throughout the film with Liza’s neighbour and other women. These men, in various ways, upset and disappoint Liza’s romantic phantasy.

It is precisely this clash between Liza’s phantasy and reality that manifests itself in her murderous impulses. Accordingly, Tomi Tani’s actions are the embodiment, through phantasy wish-fulfilment and magic realism, of Liza’s destructive desires, projected into the world as fox-fairy witchcraft. Liza’s phantasy world is rich in pastel colours and beautiful Japanese spring imagery, while her reality is characterized by decaying buildings, dark shades of brown and grey as well as minimalist mise-en-scène. Liza’s melancholia develops as she projects her personal loss into an impoverished world. Freud’s observation about the melancholic wife who, instead of accusing her husband, accuses herself of being incapable, finds a direct parallel in Liza’s statement “I’m a monster.”[\[19\]](#) Thus, internalizing her disgust with the macho, pathetic and patriarchal men.

As Liza’s desperation over the clash between her phantasy world and the real world grows, so does her resemblance with a fox-fairy. There are several visual markers of Liza’s transformation into a fox-fairy. For instance, she is surprisingly quick and precise with a butcher knife. At a certain point, a mysterious wind also shapes Liza’s hair into the image of a fox. Later in the film, Liza sees foxes forming more and more clearly as

shadows on the wall. The dangerous, violent nature of Liza's imagination is most clearly presented in a dream-scene, which takes place in Nasu, Japan in an enchanted forest. Liza is dressed as a Japanese geisha, with a fox tail, while Henrik appears in her dream as a samurai. Liza, pretending to be a frail woman, allures Henrik into the forest asking for his "help" as her parents suffered an accident. After Henrik follows her through a rocky terrain, she seduces and brutally murders him with her bare hands, at which point the camera shows her waking up in terror from a nightmare. Every time Liza is disappointed by reality, she retreats into such phantasies that she describes as "eternal spring rich with the fragrance of cherry blossoms." She gradually becomes obsessed with the idea of being a fox-fairy, a cursed witch.

Liza's transformation into a destructive fox-fairy is a critical symptom of this, second stage of melancholia. Through her murderous phantasy-acts, she turns her sadness and pain into violence towards the outside world, before she turns it towards herself. Understanding the monstrous female as a melancholic subject helps us see that Liza's murderous and destructive impulses are not so much an act of transgression and disruption, but that of self-preservation and anguish. Thus, a new interpretation of the monstrous female subject opens up - one that sees "witch-hood" as a manifestation of the psychological inhibitions induced by patriarchy.

The most powerful moment that discloses Liza's despair over loving and being loved "the right way" happens towards the end of the film, when she pleads with Henrik "Love me carefully, tenderly. This is not a fling, it is the eternal spring. I cannot be irresponsible with men." In this moment, the viewers are exposed to Liza's pain and anguish, as well as her melancholic desperation over the loss of her mother and over her severely constrained options for love. Liza's gradual acceptance of being a fox-fairy and her simultaneous withdrawal from the hostile world results in a "manic state."^[20] Freud describes the manic state as the third stage of melancholia, a sort of intoxication, a discharge of emotions where the ego is freed from its earlier inhibitions. Liza, in this new state, temporarily embraces her witch-like power by transforming herself into a highly sexualized object. After studying the rules of seductions in an issue of the magazine *Cosmopolitan* (Rule 1: "Pay attention to how you are dressing), she tailors the same short lace dress for herself as on the front page. She also buys a necklace from a television commercial and puts on makeup. The camera participates in Liza's self-objectification as it favours close-ups on her newly "enhanced" body. As Liza is turning herself into a sexual object, resembling a Barbie doll, her behaviour also changes. Learning the "rules of seduction," she moves and looks seductively at Zoltán and offers alcohol (Rule nr. 3) to her next victim, Ludvig úr.

However, Liza's free-flowing libidinal energy only amplifies her curse and Ludvig úr and Henrik both die soon after they engage with her. After Henrik's death, Liza's desperation escalates into a full manic episode. We see her running through the streets in despair in an effort to escape her curse. As Liza's manic state accelerates into full panic and anxiety so does the rate of men dying around her. The camera follows her on an (unintentional) killing spree, showing man after man drop dead as soon as they catch a glimpse of her. In this scene, Liza's phantasy world and reality finally mould into one continuous, inescapable nightmare breaking her completely. The murderous impulses, the subconscious manifestations of her melancholia gradually convert into an urge for self-destruction.[\[21\]](#)

Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun* claims that art and the imagination allows the melancholic subject to make meaning and thus re-enter the symbolic and ultimately heal itself. Kristeva asserts that creative imagination allows the transfer of "non-meaning" - death and loss - into meaning as a form of "a survival of idealization, [...] a miracle."[\[22\]](#) *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* is an excellent example of how narratives can serve as coping mechanisms for the melancholic psyche. But the film also demonstrates the ideological nature of those same narratives. More specifically, the stories we tell ourselves about magical women, female melancholia, and women's happiness are predetermined by what Shoshana Felman calls a "primordial masculine model."[\[23\]](#) In the second part of this analysis, I will show that cinematic representations of magical women often draw attention to, but rarely displace, patriarchal boundaries around women's love and happiness. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* simultaneously functions as a commentary on and a prime example of the ways in which visual and narrative representations of magical women carefully regulate female desire.

Fox-Fairies, Witches, and Male Desire

It is important to note that *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* speaks as much about male desire as it does about female desire and despair. The film serves not only as phantasy wish-fulfilment for the melancholic female subject but also as a male phantasy of heroism and a desire to tame the "vagina dentata."[\[24\]](#) While marginal male characters are portrayed as limited and ridiculous, the two main male characters in the movie embody common masculine cultural phantasies: the sexually charged, unreliable macho man and the overlooked, reliable romantic hero.

Henrik is the old lady's nephew who sees Liza as a younger sister and supports her just to upset his hostile family. Henrik is a Marlon Brando-like, hyper-masculine character surrounded by women who admire him and readily accept his sexual advances. He, characteristically, only

develops a romantic interest toward Liza after she has transformed herself into a sexy fox-fairy woman. Henrik is Liza's last hope to realize her phantasy-wish and to find a man who loves her the "right" way. The romance of course is doomed because of Henrik's promiscuity and premature death.

If Henrik is the prince who never quite arrives, Zoltán embodies another key male romantic phantasy: the lonely hero who is overlooked but who, in the end, proves to be the real prince. Zoltán loves Finnish Western films and is especially fond of the music. He rarely speaks. Instead, he admires Liza from afar but saves her repeatedly from the police and from self-destruction. Zoltán is a good handyman, and he is also resilient to Tomi Tani's murder attempts. In the end, he rescues Liza and breaks her curse. Although both men are masculine stereotypes, they each fulfil a male phantasy about containing women and saving them from their monstrous nature. While Henrik conquers women through sexual aggression, Zoltán saves Liza through selfless heroism.

Another important male character, Tomi Tani, is the product of Liza's phantasy. He is her 'Id', representing the destructive desires inaccessible to her melancholic conscience. Through Tomi Tani's character, the film de facto delegates the agency of the magical woman to a man, a romantic hero-turned-villain who shapes Liza's story to the outside world, but more importantly, to herself.

Further, men often carry the voice of reason in the film. For example, while on a date at Mekk Burger, Henrik lectures Liza about consumerism and the unhealthy quality of fast food. Liza carefully listens to Henrik's words. However, a close up of her face shows her lovingly looking at the small plastic figure that comes with every meal. She remains inside her phantasy and her emotional attachment to romance remains unchanged.

Overall, men seem to be aware of Liza's precarious state more than she is. They possess the knowledge that she lacks as she continues to fall back on gender stereotypes. An indication of this is the way in which Liza embraces female traits of servitude and helplessness. She cooks the most disgusting meals to seduce her second victim, Károly and she gladly repairs the holes on Zoltán's socks. She also seems unable to manage household repair tasks and explicitly complains about the lack of a man in the house. When Zoltán moves in with her as a tenant, he assumes all typical male chores from repairing the boiler and the toilet to fixing the electric sockets. Liza, in the meantime, fulfils her womanly duties by sewing, cooking and baking birthday cakes. In Felma's words, the "help-needing and help-seeking behaviour is part of female conditioning" and becomes the project of the entire movie.[\[25\]](#)

Another clear example of male desire at work is the way in which Liza is saved at the end of the movie. In a surreal scene, after taking dozens of sleeping pills, Liza is finally trapped in her phantasy world on the border of the life and death. She meets Tomi Tani at Mekk Burger, the space of her romantic hopes. Tomi Tani soon reveals himself to be the demon of death. As the frame shows cherry blossom trees decay and an immense dark storm mounting around the Mekk Burger, Tomi Tani professes his love for Liza and demands that she cross over to be with him forever. Liza initially fights his will, but when Tomi Tani threatens to also kill Zoltán, she immediately surrenders and is ready to die in order to save Zoltán. Liza's ultimate sacrifice breaks the forces of destruction visualized as a dark storm, causing the Mekk Burger with Tomi Tani crumble into small pixels and finally disappear. By giving up on love completely, Liza finally earns the right to love.

In the last part of the movie, the fox-fairy is tamed and safely returned to domesticity. In the physical world of the film, Zoltán, after several accidents that nearly kill him, finally reaches Liza and saves her by making her cough up the sleeping pills. Liza's curse is broken, her soul is healed by Zoltán's perseverance and her own willingness to self-sacrifice. Liza, like other magical women in cinema, achieves "true happiness" and sheds her dangerous powers when and only when she learns the "essential lessons of service, of selflessness, of domesticity."[\[26\]](#) Combining Liza's self-sacrifice with Zoltán's male heroism, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* offers the perfect cocktail to soothe male anxieties about the transgressive, powerful female subject.

Liza's access to happiness depends on her domestication, on her willingness to operate within the confines of such patriarchal structures as marriage and motherhood. The very last scene in the film confirms this interpretation in no uncertain terms. The frame shows Liza and her family in a car travelling through Japan. She is dressed, unlike before, neither as a shy virgin nor as an overly sexy woman but in simple blue jeans and a plain shirt. Zoltán is driving the car while their daughter sits in the back and the family is singing their favourite Finnish Western film song. Liza's face shows content, her gaze turns lovingly at Zoltán - an indication that her melancholia is cured because she found "true love" and has successfully assumed her female domestic role.

Bathgate observes that, in Japanese mythical traditions, patriarchal anxiety caused by fox-fairy wives is often resolved through descendants.[\[27\]](#) Accordingly, Liza's marriage and motherhood solidify her ambiguous, "temporary subjectivity" into a permanent, domesticated, fixed identity that accepts all patriarchal boundaries.[\[28\]](#) The film underlines Bathgate's conclusion that, "stories of fox wives thus appear less as fantasies than as correctives to a more basic fantasy."[\[29\]](#) This

basic male phantasy requires that female melancholic subject, unwilling to fulfil her normative gender roles, be either punished as dangerous and destructive or given a “happy ending” that restores normalcy in the patriarchal symbolic order.

Sarah Ahmed in her book, *The Promise of Happiness* observes that happiness is often coercive as it turns social norms into social goods. Liza’s happiness in this sense is delineated by binary options, which are also hierarchical. She must choose between being a princess or being a witch, a wife or a spinster, a monster or a human.[30] In her discussion of the aesthetics of female melancholia, Francis L. Restuccia warns about such “dangerous circularity of returning women to the patriarchal symbolic order.”[31] Liza’s melancholia is cured by traditional domesticity, or in psychoanalytical terms, by “transferential duplication,” where the lost mother is replaced by becoming one.[32] In the end, the film normalizes our expectations of what woman’s happiness means. Liza’s “happily ever after” is as reductive as the nature of the romantic tropes at which the film pokes fun at.

Witches, Postmodern Play, and Patriarchal Binaries

It is important to note that the film, through ironic meta-commentary, attempts to mock romantic tropes. The sinister beginning of the film, which presents Liza as mysterious and threatening is quickly interrupted by a male narrator who asserts with authority “Stop. This is stupid.” The voice then demands to go “back to the beginning of the story” and comments throughout the film on Liza’s actions, justifies her “irrational” behaviour offering the viewer full access to her inner psyche. The omnipresent narrator can freeze the frame, take viewers outside the diegesis, and rearrange events. Yet, in its attempt to create a self-referential distance between itself and the viewers, the film allocates outsized power to the omnipotent male narrator, another man to control Liza’s story. The irony and meta-narrative commentary may prompt viewers to reflect on romantic tropes, but they do nothing to liberate Liza from being trapped in her nightmare-like story. The film’s postmodern playfulness is completely lost on Liza, who functions fully within these tropes laid bare to the viewer. In other words, she is blind to her own naive dedication to the romantic clichés that the film itself ridicules.

At the end of the film, the narrator also assumes a corrective role. As an illustration, while the police chief’s conclusion to the story is that “love is like a dark pit,” the narrator’s voice overrides this dark assessment claiming that love is “birds of a feather flocking together.” The lesson, as stated by the narrator, is unambiguous: regardless of our differences, we have a chance to find “true love” if only we believe in it. This statement, given the film’s general scepticism about romance as a genre discloses

unexpected optimism about the myth of true love. It is soothing and stabilising in its compliance, and it stands in stark contradiction to earlier gestures of postmodern irony.

As a matter of fact, Liza earns her reward – her right to love – precisely because she demonstrates unyielding belief in fairy tales. It is her relentless commitment to “true love” that breaks the curse, and as finally Liza is ready to transform from a fox-fairy to a wife and a mother that patriarchal order is successfully restored. Liza’s self-sacrifice together with the happy ending underwrite the very same tropes that the film promises to subvert – the witch can turn into a princess and live to see her fairy tale-like “happily ever after” – but only if she is willing to sacrifice herself and to settle into traditional domesticity. This message is clear. While female melancholia is dangerous as it turns woman into a demonic virgin (a witch) or a sexy femme fatale (still a witch), her madness can be healed by the right man and by her self-sacrifice.

Ultimately, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* reveals cinema’s potential as well as limits to rewrite master narratives about women’s options for love and happiness. On the one hand, humour and postmodern narrative techniques bring traditional romantic stories into critical focus. On the other hand, Liza’s story turns into a “traditional female quest within ‘the realm of domesticity’”[\[33\]](#) as it falls into the trap of patriarchal binaries: either she has to face complete destruction or she has to return to normalcy and accept the kind of happiness defined by masculine desire. Her path out of witch-hood goes through domestication, sexualisation, and sacrifice. Liza’s story is another tale of curse and cure disclosing the immense difficulty to move beyond romantic stereotypes entrenched into our cultural subconscious, which regulate love and happiness. It seems that we are yet to rewrite our narratives in a way that allows magical women to exist outside of binary options that requires them to be cured or contained.

Liza’s real curse, in the end, is her inability to break out of her story. Similarly, the film’s own curse is its inability to address the monstrous female outside well-established binaries. Despite its attempts at postmodern irony, *Liza the Fox-Fairy* fails to offer language that is radical and permanently disrupts dominant visual and narrative tropes about magical women. While decidedly humorous, entertaining and self-aware, the film does not provide an answer to the question: how can we tell stories about the fox-fairies – magical women and witches – without having to either destroy them or restore them to normalcy, to their “proper” role as wives and mothers? How can we talk about female melancholia in a way that breaks binary systems such as sane vs. insane, rational vs. irrational? Further, how can we think about the female quest for love outside master narratives wrought by misogyny? Until we figure

this out, our stories will continue to solve the woman *as* a problem rather than solving the woman's problems.

Notes

[1] See the bibliography, especially Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Barbara Creed.

[2] See Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Volume XIV. Ed. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1953 and Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989.

[3] Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Popular Fiction Series. London ; New York: Routledge, 1993, p.7.

[4] Varga, "A Liza, a rókatündér már százezer nézőnél tart."

[5] "Liza, the Fox-Fairy."

[6] Arozamena, "Károly Ujj Mészáros, Interview."

[7] "Liza, the Fox-Fairy."

[8] Bathgate, Michael. *The Fox's Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 68.

[9] Bathgate. *The Fox's Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore*, p.69.

[10] Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989, pp.3-4.

[11] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 244.

[12] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 6.

[13] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 246.

[14] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*., p. 2.

[15] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 6.

[16] Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Volume XIV. Ed. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1953, p.246.

[17] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 2.

[18] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 252.

[19] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 248.

[20] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 254.

[21] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 252.

[22] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 103.

[23] Felman, Shoshana, Phyllis Chesler, Luce Irigaray, Balzac, and Patrick Berthier. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5, no. 4 (1975), p. 4.

[24] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 2.

[25] Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," p. 4.

[26] Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 205.

[27] Bathgate, *The Fox's Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore*, p. 68.

[28] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 103.

[29] Bathgate, *The Fox's Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore*, p. 69.

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