

Feminist Writings
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Tulips - Part 1

So, hi and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled feminist writings. We will begin with a new text today which is Iraqi Nights by Dunya Mikhail. So we just finished The Yellow Wallpaper in the last lecture and we saw the commonality between that and Sylvia Plath's Tulips in terms of looking at the female subject in a very reified male medical space and how that experience of reification is articulated through different experiential assertions of agency or the lack of it.

Now the Iraqi Nights which is a poem we would begin with today, we talked about a war situation and how the female voice emerges from that war situation, so we are talking about Iraq, war-torn Iraq this is Saddam Husain's Iraq and even in the Iraq after that and what is interesting in this poem is that how the contemporary order, the contemporary condition of Iraq is constantly connected with the mythical conditions.

So we have references to a mythical past, a prehistoric past and that connection between the mythical past and the contemporary present gives the very interesting temporal structure to this poem and which really sort of feeds into the experiential voice emerging out of it because what we see in the poem is a voice of agency, a voice aspiring to get some agency and that aspirational quality is very much there.

There is also a voice of nostalgia which one wants to go back and resurrect and retrieve and recover some of the glorious times in the past which are now gone and so this aspirational quality and a nostalgic quality, the forward-looking quality and a backward-looking quality are constantly connected to each other in a very interesting loop like structure which makes this poem not just important from the perspective of feminist writings but also from a perspective of memory studies because that is exactly how the memory works.

I mean it's forward-looking as well as backward looking, it moves forward in time as well as cutting back across time and how the connections are made is what makes the whole process of memory a very complex cognitive condition and of course when you have a poem like this which talks about the cognitive condition, we are looking at how you know the whole process

of de-familiarizing language is operative over here and that is one of the key things about almost any great works of poetry.

The process of de-familiarization, it de-familiarizes the familiar world, the very mundane world, the very mundane material world is de-familiarized into something else and it could be mythical, it could be metaphorical and its constant transition from the material to the metaphorical, is what we see in almost all great works of poetry not least when you have a poem like this which emerges of a very strong political condition such as a war-torn condition in Iraq for instance which is what the condition is over here.

And also from a more literal superficial perspective of memory studies you find this is very much a female voice, a voice aspiring for agency as I mentioned already which is critiquing this war which is obviously a man-made condition, literally a man-made condition, it is about the greed of men, the lust for power, territorilization, et cetera what happens to the civilians, what happens to the normal voices who don't want to be part of it. People, the poet, the speaker, this poet persona in the poem who happens to be the speaker is among the many normal voices and you find the poem at the end, by the time it will end.

We will find it end on an aspirational quality, it aspires for normalcy and normalcy becomes a desired condition in the time of war because everything is de-familiarized during the war, the everydayness as we know it is de-familiarizes, interrupted all the time and that interrupted quality of what war is what makes it such a traumatic experience so it is not just violence at a physical visceral level, it is also violence in an epistemic level.

The world as we know it, at the violence of level of knowledge, everything that you know around you changes, the grocery stores or the common lanes, the playgrounds, the schools everything changes from the war, everything becomes something else in the war, everything becomes war objects or totemic signs during the war. So when the poem ends we find that the speaker persona she wants to go back and retrieve that condition where everything was just the way it always has been.

So she wants the return of everydayness everyday reality back to the contemporary condition of Iraq. But just to begin with this poem will dive into the text right now but just to begin with this poem we find this constant connection between the mythical past, the pre-historical past and the contemporary present is what makes this poem very, very interesting from a

temporal perspective and that temporal perspective is very, very important for the purpose of our study.

Because we know we keep saying in feminist writings how space is a very important factor, how space generates identities or fractures identities, you know we have the experience of claustrophobia, emancipation and all that is related to space and how does a subject situate herself in a particular space, so for instance if we take a look at Sylvia Plath's *Tulips*, we find it is very much a spatial, a kind of a production of identity, machines in a very reified medical space and that not just confines her but also constricts her voice and similarly we find in *The Yellow Wallpaper* it is very, very spatial and how we find towards the end of the story, she morphs into *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I mean she is essentially in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in a very symbolic spatial kind of way.

So over here as well in *Iraqi Nights*, by Dunya Mikhail we find space is a very important issue between the space of Iraq, the space the civilian space of Iraq is constantly de-familiarized and that process, the experience of being de-familiarize is what gives this poem such a magnificently moving voice which is what we will hopefully tap as we move into the point.

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The Iraqi Nights

By [Dunya Mikhail](#)

Kareem James Abu-Zeid

1.
In the first year of war
they played "bride and groom"
and counted everything on their fingers:
their faces reflected in the river,
the waves that swept away their faces
before disappearing,
and the names of newborns.
Then the war grew up
and invented a new game for them:
the winner is the one
who returns from the journey
alone,
full of stories of the dead
as the passing wings flutter
over the broken trees;
and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.
The war grew old
and left the old letters.



So this is *Iraqi Nights* by Dunya Mikhail. So, I will just dive into the text and open with the first stanza which begins with this.

In, the first year of war

they played bride and groom”

and counted everything on their fingers:

their faces reflected in the river;

the waves that swept away the faces

before disappearing;

and the names of newborns.

So at the very beginning we have this very domestic symbol of a man and woman presumably playing bride and groom and counted everything on their fingers, so in the first year of war, when the war began, they played bride and groom so there's a ludic quality about the war which is being underlined, so by ludic obviously I mean playful as a game that has been played, a bride and groom game which is a game between man and woman a very domestic game, a very playful kind of activity, which is happening at the first day of war so you know and then we have the illusion of counting everything on their fingers, ‘their faces reflected in the river, the waves that swept away the faces before disappearing’, so we have this constant emergence of waves which are disappearing and sweeping away the faces.

So we have this domestic image of a man and woman playing a bride and groom game and then you have this illusion the waves coming in and a sweeping away those faces and disappearing, so this recurrence of war, the recurrence of violence in a war is something which is hinted at immediately in the very beginning of the poem. Okay.

before disappearing;

and the names of newborns.

So the names of newborns disappear as well. So we find it's very covert quality of violence which is being emphasized in a very opening stanza along with the ludic reference of playing this game of bride and groom.

Then the war grew up

and invented a new game for them:

the winner is the one who returns from the journey

alone,

full of stories of the dead

as the passing wings flutter

over the broken trees;

And now we find the question of agency creeps very, very carefully because the war grew up so there is an organic quality about the war, which is being emphasized over here. It is like an organism which grows and not just grows, it just consumes the human subjects around it, because what we are told is the war invented a new game for them, so the war gave them a game.

So, we find at the beginning we have this presumably man and woman figure playing a game which they have invented, a traditional game which they have replicated and are continuing to play but then as a war grew up, the war gave them a game, invented a game for them and what kind of game is that, the winner is the one who returns from the journey alone, full of stories of the dead as the passing wings flutter over the broken trees.

So the question of deadness comes in very, very clearly so the winner is and the war gave them a game and what kind of game is that, it is a game where the winner comes back, you know is only person who comes back, returns from a journey and what kind of journey is that, is a journey which has stories about the dead, so the war you know gave them that game, so it is a game about violence, a game about disappearance, a game about dead and it is a game about storytelling as well but what kind of storytelling, storytelling about people who are dead, storytelling about loss, so you know the sense of abandonment, a sense of loss, a sense of violence, a sense of disappearance is very much there palpably present at the very opening of the stanza in the opening stanza of this poem.

the winner is the one who returns from the journey

alone,

full of stories of the dead

as the passing wings flutter
over the broken trees;
and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.

This is a very important point that I just want to spend a little bit time on, the whole idea of forgetting the other half, so forgetting becomes the condition and during war, forgetting becomes a necessary cognitive condition during the war and part of the package of being a winner, I know because you know there is constant reference to the winner, so who is the winner in the game that a war has given them, the winner is someone who comes back from the war and with stories about dead.

A – the winner is the one who can must tow hills of dust, so what kind of hill is that, the hill of death really so the people were buried presumably, the hills of dust, so lightly that no one feels it and now the winner wears a necklace with half a metal heart for a pendant so obviously the reference is to injured soldiers of the war will come back with broken arms, broken limbs who come back, you know who are medical-ized, who wear artificial hearts, they are the winners because they come back from the war.

So it is a very platonic idea of war because you know this very famous quote of Plato if you remember ‘Only the dead have seen the end of war’, and that obviously has been played with a little bit over here, the dead have seen the end of war, but the winners, they come back undead and they come back to tell the stories of the dead, so the very ontology of winning something which is problematize over here.

So that we realized very soon the winner is not really the winner, people who come back from the war undead are the survivors, are the traumatized survivors, they're not... they're no

winner in a war which is what is being emphasized in the very beginning of the poem and it is reference to people wearing metal heart for a pendant and again look at the combination of the embellished and in medical, in a very you know seamless kind of way, so the pendant over here is obviously an embellished metaphor, metaphor embellishment, a luxury jewelry for instance that we know very well the pendant over here is actually a metal heart that has been given or transplanted into the human body because of trauma and violence of the war. Okay.

And then we are told... and the task to follow

is to forget the other half

So forgetting becomes the necessary or compulsory condition during the war. So that is something which is required, expected of the survivors, so they need to forget the other half, the half that dead, that are dead, the half that is buried in the hill, the half that is destroyed and disappeared and due to the war. So again the whole idea forgetting becomes compulsory activity.

So you find in the very beginning of the poem, we have this overt symbols of violence as well as the covert symbols of violence, it is more covert at the moment where we find it gets more and more direct as a poem progresses but what is also interesting is to see how the whole idea of war is told to us in every roundabout way. The whole report of the war is told to us in a very roundabout way, in a very de-familiarized way so we don't really get right into the heart of the gory details of the war.

But we see the replications of the war, told to us in a very symbolically couched terms and that symbolically couched terms are what makes us description actually more menacing, more cold in terms of reportage that we are told, we are getting out of the stanza and then we are told...

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before disappearing;
and the names of newborns.
Then the war grew up
and invented a new game for them:
the winner is the one
who returns from the journey
alone,
full of stories of the dead
as the passing wings flutter
over the broken trees;
and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.
The war grew old
and left the old letters,
the calendars and newspapers,
to turn yellow
with the news,
with the numbers,
and with the names
of the players.



The war grew old

and left the old letters,

the calendars and newspapers,

to turn yellow

with the news,

with the numbers,

and with the names

of the players.

So we have this organic quality of growth that is there, so the war is born, the war becomes new and you know then people play around the war they play bride and groom and the war grows old, grew up, so it becomes more argentic in quality and it acquires agency and it takes over the agency from the human beings and then it gives them a game and that particular game is about you know whoever wins that game comes back from the war injured, bruised and with stories about the dead people and then we are told the war grew old so there is an organic quality about the war.

It is like an organism growing up and decaying away with time, the wall grew old and left the old letters or the calendars and newspapers to turn yellow. Yellow being, this is very common symbol of jaundice condition so decadent condition, something which is decaying away with time to turn yellow with the news, with the numbers and the names of the players.

So the news, numbers and names, so the alliterations are interesting because what is telling you dramatically are the list of dead people, people who have lost not just their lives but their loved ones, their aspirations, their material possessions everything which have been taken away from them by the war.

So you know the war has taken away everything from them and the war grows old and older it grows the more it consumes from the people around them. So it has a consumptive quality about it. There is a decaying quality about it, there is a decadent quality about the war. And also what is most sinister is an organic quality about the war as well. The fact that is born and grows up and then grows old and begins to consume everything.

There is a cannibalistic organic quality about the war which is being sort of emphasized in a very opening stanza. So, at the very beginning we find a sense of the Menace which is brooding in the poem and it is very spectral presence of the war is actually a specter lurking around the entire landscape, consuming the landscape without really being talked off as directly and this very indirect spectral quality of the war is what makes it more menacing, is what makes it more of a sinister organism that is consuming the human beings, consuming the little lives around it you know at different points of time.

So that is the present condition that we had given, we had described by the particular stanza, this particular section and now we cut back interestingly into the mythical past and we see how the mythical past informs the present condition in a very complex way and its constant juxtaposition of the mythical pre historical past and the present gory the condition is what makes this poem temporally and especially temporally very, very interesting and quality and which makes it a very interesting poem from the perspective of memory studies as well which I have already mentioned.

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and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.
The war grew old
and left the old letters,
the calendars and newspapers,
to turn yellow
with the news,
with the numbers,
and with the names
of the players.

2.
Five centuries have passed
since Scheherazade told her tale.
Baghdad fell,
and they forced me to the underworld.
I watch the shadows
as they pass behind the wall:



So the second stanza tells us...

Five centuries have passed

since Scheherazade told her tale.

Scheherazade being this archetypal storyteller as we know the female storyteller, the archetype of the storytelling persona who keeps telling stories which never grow old you know and something which continues forever, Scheherazade.

Five centuries have past and Scheherazade told her tale.

So, we talked about a mythical past, you know we talked about this archetypal condition storytelling but that is something which has very much a part of the past, we are told that five centuries have passed since that happened, so there is a temporal quality which is given to us.

Baghdad fell.

and they force me to the underworld

I watch the shadows

as they pass behind the wall:

So you know this whole idea of I begins to become important over here and we get a sense of I obviously as a mythical figure, a porters of imagination and porters of inspiration and that the speaker persona is assuming in this particular section and it's reference of Scheherazade is important because we know the whole idea Baghdad falling, I mean this could be because of a Mongol invasion, this could be because of American invasion, we are not told which invasion exactly this is but we know we can guess, we can take any example any invasion and that would work equally well and then we're told...

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and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.
The war grew old
and left the old letters,
the calendars and newspapers,
to turn yellow
with the news,
with the numbers,
and with the names
of the players.

2.
Five centuries have passed
since Scheherazade told her tale.
Baghdad fell,
and they forced me to the underworld.
I watch the shadows
as they pass behind the wall:

none look like Tammuz.
He would cross thousands of miles
for the sake of a single cup of tea
poured by my own hand.
I fear the tea is growing cold:
cold tea is worse than death.

3.
I would not have found this cracked jar
if it weren't for my loneliness,
which sees gold in all that glitters.
Inside the jar is the magic plant
that Gilgamesh never stopped looking for.
I'll show it to Tammuz when he comes,
and we'll journey, as fast as light,
to all the continents of the world,
and all who smell it will be cured
or freed,
or will know its secret.
I don't want Tammuz to come too late
to hear my urgent song.



they forced me to the underworld.

I watch the shadows

as they pass behind the wall;

none look like Tammuz.

He would cross thousands of miles

for the sake of a single cup of tea

poured by my own hand.

I fear the tea is growing cold:

cold tea is worse than death.

So again this is a very interesting combination of domestic metaphors and spectral you know otherworldly metaphors, we are told, we have given the reference of Tammuz who was a companion of you know Ishtar, who is the poet persona in this particular poem, this particular section and Ishtar being the goddess of inspiration and you know the muse of inspiration, the muse of poetry and Tammuz being the companion of that particular muse and we are told that Tammuz would cross thousands of miles for the sake of for a single cup of tea and the whole idea it is very hyperbolic quality about crossing thousands of miles, it is juxtaposed but it is very domestic quality of consuming tea.

So we have this mythical, hyperbolic, exaggerated larger than life narrative constantly merging and this is very domestic mundane daily narrative so a dailyness and the mythical quality had constantly dialoguing with each other in his poem and it is very much a spatiotemporal strategy because what it does is it takes us to this mythical Baghdad of Scheherazade, Harun al-rashid and then brings us back to the contemporary Baghdad of American invasion war-torn Iraq et cetera, dictatorship, fascism and all the rest of it and you know that juxtaposition is very interestingly done also by this constant dialogic equality between the mythical and the mundane.

So we have Tammuz was a companion of Ishtar who crossed thousands of miles but then we were told he would come to have a single cup of tea and a cup of tea is a domestic metaphor, it is a part of the dailyness of life and that dailyness is also in a constantly dramatized in this point it is very much part of the mythical narrative.

So they are not really opposites of each other, they mythical and the daily they supplement each other in a very organic way and we find at the end of the poem the dailyness is what is aspired for, I mean she wants to go back and enjoy the dailyness of life, you know dailyness of going to a grocery store children going to school, of neighbors talking to each other and streets without a fear of bombing that dailyness becomes the aspirational quality of Baghdad in this particular setting and then we are told...

I fear the tea is growing cold:

cold tea is worse than death.

So, again we find a very interesting combination between the, a very domestic mundane thing a tea growing cold, we can't think of more domestic image than that, can we? You know it is about something which happens every day in everyone's home making a cup of tea and then that tea the cup of tea growing cold, it is a very daily common mundane, phenomenon but then that mundane quality about that particular section is merged into the sinister quality of death and we are told that cold tea is worse than death and obviously death comes loaded the all cancer images, archetypal images, contemporary gory images, political images et cetera.

So again the mythic method is interesting over here, the you know, the very hyperbolic mythical past, the very hyperbolic mythical condition and the very domestic condition are constantly dialogue with each other in this poem.

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none look like Tammuz.
He would cross thousands of miles
for the sake of a single cup of tea
poured by my own hand.
I fear the tea is growing cold:
cold tea is worse than death.

3.
I would not have found this cracked jar
if it weren't for my loneliness,
which sees gold in all that glitters.
Inside the jar is the magic plant
that Gilgamesh never stopped looking for.
I'll show it to Tammuz when he comes,
and we'll journey, as fast as light,
to all the continents of the world,
and all who smell it will be cured
or freed,
or will know its secret.
I don't want Tammuz to come too late
to hear my urgent song.



So we move to the third stanza over here which says...

I would not have found this cracked jar

if it weren't for my loneliness,

which sees gold in all the glitters.

Inside the jar is the magic plant

that Gilgamesh never stopped looking for.

So, again Gilgamesh is a Sumerian epic which has been referred over here and that again takes us back to the mythical past, a prehistorical past as it were, where it talks about larger-than-life heroes and monsters and it is something which is glorious, heroic, noble and that nobility, that heroic quality of the past, that larger than life quality about the mythical path is constantly merging with the current contemporary decadent present and this illusion to a cracked jar is important.

Because the cracked jar becomes a symbol of you know the brokenness of real life, the brokenness of lived life because the jar is obviously a space where you store things, things that you like things that you... things that nourish you, things that you know give you sustenance meaning in a domestic setting and that cracked jar, the fact that it has been abundant and decadent and it is destroyed by the reality becomes an allegorical symbol of the cracking up of contemporary life, cracking up of you know lived life and cracking up of nourishment to a large extent.

And we're told that you know I found the cracked jar because of my loneliness and this loneliness has a cognitive condition, an existential condition, a political condition have created by the war, the sense of alienation from everything around you, from everything that you know, everything that is meaning given and that meaning given mechanism of normal life is you know, it is interrupted by the war and like I said among the many things which a war does it creates obviously a sense of physical visceral violence but also epistemic violence, the world as you know it.

The level of knowledge that changes dramatically and during the war, so the grocery store becomes something else, the school becomes something else, the lane that you know

becomes something else so everything is re-territorialized and de-familiarized during the war and that sense of alienation emerges out of the re-territorialization and de-familiarization which is what has been captured so poetically in this section right.

So... inside the jar is a magic plant

that Gilgamesh never stopped looking for.

So the magic plant of immortality, the magic plant of constant inspiration is what Gilgamesh looked for and that is found in this cracked jar in the very domestic setting that the speaker persona discovers out of a loneliness right.

I'll show it Tammuz when he comes

and we'll journey, as fast as light,

to all the continents of the world,

and all who smell it will be cured

or freed, or will know its secret.

I don't want Tammuz to come too late

to hear my urgent song.

So, again the whole idea of calling out to companion, calling out to Tammuz to come and you know be her companion and travel with her across the world again it's very hyperbolic quality is interesting will travel will journey as fast as light, so again the whole idea, the whole aspiration to travel as fast as light it has a mythical, hyperbolic quality to it. And we also told that you know we travel to all the continents of the world and all will smell it, this particular plant that I found in a cracked jar, all who smell it will be cured or freed and or will know the secret. I don't want Tammuz to come too late to hear my urgent song.

So it is Birkettian quality about the arrival of Tammuz, this constant deferrer of the arrival of Tammuz who never really comes and this constant waiting for a hope to come, there is constant waiting for an optimism to come which never really appears, becomes a bit of a limbo state but also that limbo gives a sense of possible emancipation, the possibility of a possibility which is constantly deferred.

So deferral awaiting becomes, as we all know you know made famous by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* but at a philosophical on the logical level a waiting becomes a combination of hopelessness and hopefulness, so a waiting for something to come which never comes but you constantly wait for it in a sense that you know, you know somewhere in your mind perhaps you believe that if that comes that and everything we be cured everything will be emancipated.

So we continued to wait despite the deferral and Tammuz never turns up like Godot, Tammuz never turns up in this poem but then that wait is what gives a speaker persona, an aspirational quality and optimism to hold on to as she continues to wait and continues to make plans what it will do when Tammuz does arrive in the end.

We are never quite sure if he will arrive in the end or not but then we are told, we have given a list of things that she will do if he arrives so we are told that you know they'll journey together as fast as light, again very hyperbolic, very mythical and to all the continents of the world and all who smell it will travel with this magic plant and all who smell it will be cured or freed and will know the secret of immortality or inspiration and that is obviously a very utopian kind of desire which is based on his waiting. So when a waiting comes to an end then this is what going to happen but the waiting company continues to happen.

And so that gives a sense of combination of hopefulness and hopelessness which is part of the ontological condition of waiting, where it combines both sentiments together in a very asymmetric way. Okay. And then of course we continue to get this information about what she will do when Tammuz does arrive eventually.

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that Gilgamesh never stopped looking for.
I'll show it to Tammuz when he comes,
and we'll journey, as fast as light,
to all the continents of the world,
and all who smell it will be cured
or freed,
or will know its secret.
I don't want Tammuz to come too late
to hear my urgent song.

4.
When Tammuz comes
I'll also give him all the lists I made
to pass the time:
lists of food,
of books,
lost friends,
favorite songs,
list of cities to see before one dies,
and lists of ordinary things
with notes to prove
that we are still alive.



So the fourth stanza tells us...

When Tammuz comes

I'll also give him all the lists I made

to pass the time:

So, she has just made a list of things and also the word 'list' is interesting because a list is a mundane metaphor, you make a grocery list for instance but then this mundane metaphor is very seamlessly mixed into the mythical register, so this constant combination of two different semantic registers the mundane and the mythical is what makes this poem spatiotemporal a very complex in quality. So, we are told when Tammuz comes I'll also give him all the lists are made to pass the time.

lists of food,

of books,

lost friends,

favorite songs

list of cities to see before one dies,

and lists of ordinary things

with notes to prove

that we are still alive.

So, you know and this is the beginning of that point of the point where ordinariness becomes an aspirational quality in a war-torn condition, he wants to be ordinary, he want to be normal, he want to be daily at a level that was taken away from completely. So you know all she wants all that this poet persona wants to become ordinary again to do ordinary things like buying books and looking for friends, playing favorite songs and making lists of cities that they must see before they die. These are very, very ordinary domestic daily aspiration at very human micro level, very little things but you know that list becomes very, very important, that is reason why that list gets so seamlessly mixed or merged into this mythical register.

When Tammuz comes, his companion come, when he comes I'll make a cup of tea for him but when he comes I will make a list of things that we will do together and of course we don't know if that's ever going to happen but this wait, this listing of things, this aspiration to do things together is what gives us sense of hopefulness and it is lingering idea of hopefulness, is lingering presence of optimism which never quite leaves this poem despite the war condition that it is situated in right.

So, this list of ordinary things with notes, we will make little notes to prove that we are still alive despite the war condition, despite the de-familiarization, despite the re-territorialization which the war has brought at different levels of violence physical, epistemic, visceral and psychological right.

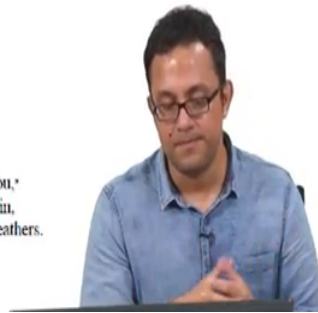
And that is the list that I am making in order to become ordinary again, when Tammuz does arrive we'll have a cup of tea and we'll become ordinary again. We will do ordinary things such as you know looking for friends, reading books, playing favorite songs and then making a list of favorite cities which we will see before we die and that idea of ordinariness becomes a very optimistic quality so there is a re-ontologization of ordinariness in the poem, ordinariness becomes an aspirational category over here, given the extraordinary condition that war has created out of de-familiarization and re-territorialization so ordinariness becomes a utopian condition, I want to be ordinary again when the war ends, but will the war ever end, will Tammuz come back and be my companion again that obviously it has no concrete

response but that waiting continues with a combination of hopefulness and hopelessness and a very Birkettian sense.

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4.
When Tammuz comes
I'll also give him all the lists I made
to pass the time:
lists of food,
of books,
lost friends,
favorite songs,
list of cities to see before one dies,
and lists of ordinary things
with notes to prove
that we are still alive.

5.
It's as if I'm hearing music in the boat's hull,
as if I can smell the river, the lily, the fish,
as if I'm touching the skies that fall from the words "I love you,"
as if I can see those tiny notes that are read over and over again,
as if I'm living the lives of birds who bear nothing but their feathers.



Okay so the fifth stanza is very a synesthetic in quality, it combines different sensory perceptions, a sense of touch, the sense of hearing, the sense of sight sense of smell, they all mixed together in very complex cognitive ways which is something which we saw already in some of the texts we have covered so far. So, for instance we saw that dramatically done in The Yellow Wallpaper when you know at some point if you remember the poet persona says I can smell the yellow and that's very synesthetic, it is a very complex cognitive condition where you can crisscross the sensors in a way, it is a very heightened sensory perception or sensory situation which can come out of an aberration or an epiphany or combination of both right. So, we have a similar situation over here which is really synesthetic in quality and we are told that speaker says.

It's as if I'm hearing music in the boat's hull,

and if I can smell the river, the lily, the fish,

as if I'm touching the skies that fall from the words "I love you,"

as if I can see those tiny notes that are read over and over again,

as if I'm living the lives of birds who bear nothing but their feathers.

So, this whole idea of touching different things, smelling different things, acknowledging the love that she has becomes part of the you know extraordinary aspiration in a war condition which obviously she is denied and she obviously becomes the everyman, the every woman in a war-torn Iraq and that voice of the every man who wants to do little things, wants to go back to ordinary things becomes very much part of the aspirational category that the poem continues to carry and dramatized through different lyrical symbols that we see. So, for instance hearing music in the boat's hull, smelling the river, the lily, the fish touching the skies, the fall from the words "I love you."

So again look at the way the word I love you which is very, very human and emotional and sentimental and beautiful and that is connected to this massive image of the sky is falling and again this constant combination between two different registers, the meaning the hyperbolic, larger than life and the domestic mundane is something which makes this poem so complex at spatiotemporal level you can cut back to the myth, cut into the present look forward to the future all in one sentence but just using symbols strategically which the poem does.

So the level of craft I think this is magnificent poem in the sense that you know the control of craft is so perfect by Dunya Mikhail because and not only is it a feminist poem, it's you know as a poem it captures the condition and the psychological condition, the political condition, the war-torn conditions so well.

And there is degree of viscosity about the condition, you can feel it through your senses but at the same time there is a discursive quality about the poem as well that we know exactly what has conditioned the viscosity, the war, the greed of man and then you know all you need from this particular condition is a return to ordinariness, you know little things like saying 'I love you', little things like aspiring for a cup of tea, little things like making a list of books and you know favorite songs and this little things were just denied to the citizens or human subjects during the war.

And that is what makes this poem so aspirational and quality and also the whole idea of re-ontologizing ordinariness that you know the ordinariness which take for granted which we consume and internalize every single day that can be interrupted during the war and that interruption can create an aspiration to go back to the ordinariness which is what this poem is all about right.

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6.
The earth circled the sun
once more
and not a cloud
nor wind
nor country
passed through my eyes.
My shadow,
imprisoned in Aladdin's lamp,
mirrors the following:
a picture of the world with you inside,
light passing through a needle's eye,
scrawlings akin to cuneiform,
hidden paths to the sun,
dried clay,
tranquil Ottoman pottery,
and a huge pomegranate, its seeds
scattered all over Uruk.



So and the sixth stanza is again being a continuation of the mythical symbols, we are referencing Aladdin's lamp for instance.

The earth circled the sun

once more

and not a cloud

nor wind

nor country

passed through my eyes.

My shadow

imprisoned in Aladdin's lamp,

mirrors the following:

So, you know again the return of the mythical order is interesting the way Aladdin's lamp comes back but this is Saddam's Iraq we are talking about and this constant mixing of the mythical and the present is again making it very spatiotemporal complex so what does a lamp show in present Iraq?

My shadow,
imprisoned in Aladdin's lamp,
mirrors the following:
This is what it reflects that lamp...
a picture of the world with you inside,
light passing to a needle's eye,
scrawlings akin to cuneiform,
hidden past to the sun,
dried clay,
tranquil Ottoman pottery,
and a huge pomegranate, its seeds
scattered all over Uruk.

So, this is very, very mythical. Cuneiform is first you know the material in which the first writing was done in Mesopotamia so it goes back to the very beginning of writing, the very beginning of human civilization where words are put into writing, what emotions found words and found letters which was what's happening and what happened in that part of the world. So it goes back to the glorious mythical past and resurrects it, but obviously the idea isn't contrasted with gory reality.

The decadent reality of today but there is constantly nostalgic quality about the past, is what gives us a sense of optimism that maybe that can be resurrected through ordinariness again, so let us go back and be ordinary again, let us say things which are ordinary, let us do things which are ordinary, let us purchase things which are ordinary and maybe through the ordinariness we can go back to the extraordinary reality of the myth again.

So we will pass a picture of the world with you inside, so the very inclusive picture of the lover inside light passing through a needle's eye scrawlings akin to a cuneiform, hidden paths

to the Sun, dried clay, tranquil Ottoman pottery, so the tranquility of Ottoman pottery which is obviously high art but the high art emerging out of tranquility is what is being emphasized over here, which is a complete contrast to the decadence emerging out of violence in the war so it's a complete diametrical opposite to what is being experienced at the present moment of time.

And a huge pomegranate its seeds scattered all over Uruk. So Uruk being the mythical name of Iraq, you know the huge pomegranate its seeds capturing all the Uruk it's a symbol of regeneration, symbol of birth, a symbol of growth fertility and of course as it appears along with a symbol of inspiration, creativity and regeneration.

So we have this very beautiful capsule of your top in images which are sort of conjured up by this epiphany and you know this is the aspirational quality that is desired in the poem in terms of connecting back to the past, the mythical past. But now the final stanza with which the poem ends which we will conclude with, we find that what is really aspired for is not the mythical past, what is really aspired for is the agency the freedom to do ordinary things again when the war closes, the freedom to be neighbors again, the freedom to go to school again, the freedom to go to a grocery store again without the fear of bombardment, without fear of dying, right? That is the ordinary thing which is being aspired for again, so the mythical path appears the very convenient subtext, but what is really aspired for is a go back and become normal again.

So normalcy is what is aspired for again and that is what I mean when I say the poem re-ontologizes the ordinariness, it tells us ordinariness is not something we should take for granted, is something which can go away when a war comes, so when you are in the middle of a war all you can want, through the mythical aspiration is to go back and be ordinary again and this is what the poem says with which it ends the final stanza which is a seventh stanza.

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7.
In Iraq,
after a thousand and one nights,
someone will talk to someone else.
Markets will open
for regular customers.
Small feet will tickle
the giant feet of the Tigris.
Gulls will spread their wings
and no one will fire at them.
Women will walk the streets
without looking back in fear.
Men will give their real names
without putting their lives at risk.
Children will go to school
and come home again.
Chickens in the villages
won't peck at human flesh
on the grass.
Disputes will take place
without any explosives.
A cloud will pass over cars



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Chickens in the villages
won't peck at human flesh
on the grass.
Disputes will take place
without any explosives.
A cloud will pass over cars
heading to work as usual.
A hand will wave
to someone leaving
or returning.



The sunrise will be the same
for those who wake
and those never will.
And every moment
something ordinary
will happen
under the sun.

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In Iraq,
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someone will talk to someone else.
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Small feet will tickle
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Chickens in the villages

won't peck at human flesh

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Disputes will take place

without any explosives.

A cloud will pass over cars

heading to work as usual.

A hand will wave to someone leaving

or returning.

The sunrise will be the same

for those who wake

and those who never will.

And every moment

something ordinary

will happen

under the Sun.

So, you know this is beautiful and evocative but if you look at the list of things these are things which we do every single day going to school, talking to neighbors, waving at people we like and you know doing different things as a community and also as individuals and we realize when read the section that these are things which are interrupted dramatically, existentially during the war so the whole idea of becoming ordinary again is where the poem aspires for doing little things, doing micro things which make, which give meanings to us as

human beings, as citizens sharing a space together as subjects and also as individuals and that is where the poem wants to be, wants to return to through these series of images.

So if you take a look at the images again you know markets opening for regular customers not for soldiers, not for veterans, you know small feet will tickle the giant feet of Tigris, so again this combination of different scales of existence, Tigris obviously being the river of Iraq the giant feet of Tigris tickled by small feet. Children will play in the river again gulls will spread the wings without the fear of being shot at right.

So they mean (())(37:40) shoot that gulls when they spread the wings. Women will walk the streets without looking back in fear, there will be no paranoid woman who would look back at fear, men will give the real names without putting the lives at risk, you know men will give the real names without you know being captured the fear of being captured, the fear of being interrogated or tortured children will go to school and come home again.

So schools have been just schools again, they have not become sights of destruction, they will not become sights of bombardment again chickens in the villages won't peck at human flesh, so we find you know this is what happens now, chickens peck at human flesh as a reversal of the normal order where chickens peck like vultures at human flesh, rotting human flesh which are caused the destruction of the war on the grass.

Disputes will take place without any explosives, so there will be no explosives you know to settle disputes, disputes will take place normally, ordinary, in a very ordinary civil kind of way. A cloud will pass over cars heading to work as usual, the series of cars going to offices and a cloud will pass over them, a normal cloud not a bombed cloud and they'd be no bombing on the cars the cars would just go to the offices and come back as usual.

A hand will wave to someone leaving or returning, people will feel normal again they will connect cognitively, existentially, emotionally to the neighbors waving at them when they see them and the fearlessly again.

And the final bit is, a sunrise will be the same for those who wake and those who never will, so there will be no darkness there will be no cloud of bombs, there will be no cloud of mushrooms, mushroom cloud of bombing which will happen in Iraq ever, there will be the normal sunrise and that will be the same for people who wake and people who are dead, normally, naturally and at every moment something ordinary will happen under the Sun.

So that's the aspiration with which the poem ends, we'll go back to being ordinary again, we'll repossess our ordinariness, we will re-own our ordinariness, do little things say little things make little less and be normal subjects again.

So you find you know this is how the poem ends and like I said this covers so many boxes, I mean from a feminist perspective this is a very strong feminist critique of the male greed which creates the war, greed for territorialization, lust for power and all the rest of it but also from a memory studies perspective this is so much about going back to time and then looking forward to time as well.

So we find you know this is a very key component in memory studies, when you remember something we don't really go back all the time we also look forward, so part of memory is also aspirational and quality when you remember something of the past we also aspire something for the future and that's part of the same narrative of remembering and that's something which we know from theories of memory and that's something which this poem does so well.

It keeps going back to the past, it keeps resurrecting the mythical past but what it is actually doing is looking forward to a future where those memories will come back again and consolidate into more contemporary forms and that consolidation into contemporary forms is what the poem aspires for through its aspiration for ordinariness again, right.

So that is what the poem is all about and we can reread it over and over again but these are narratives which we will operate with for the purpose of this particular course. So, we conclude Iraqi Nights with that and we will move on to new text in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.