

Feminist Writings
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Interactive Session – 1

SHIKRITI: Hello everyone, welcome to this NPTEL course on Feminist Writings by Dr. Avishek Parui, I am Shikriti Shandan.

And I am Mohit Sharma we are research scholars from the department of humanities and social sciences and today we will be discussing the two poems in the course which is.

SHIKRITI: “The Goblin Market and Tulips”.

MOHIT: Yeah, and “Tulips” by Sylvia Plath and we will discuss some themes and how the poems explore the female experience and because they are both written in different centuries, so how we will see how these experiences have shifted and evolve over the over the years and how the concerns are different in 20th century.

SHIKRITI: Yes, in 19th century and 20th century.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so these poems have already been dealt with by Sir and we are going to just go over the themes and some of the key concepts as Mohit suggested. Okay, so beginning with the, shall we begin with the Goblin Market then. So talking about the Goblin Market is written by Christina Rossetti in 1895 and so which tells us that it is the 19th century and the Victorian period.

MOHIT: Yeah, quite Victorian.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: This is a poem of two sisters Laura and Lizzie who are tempted by fruits by Goblin merchant men, this poem can be read as a fable but it also deals with lot of lots of issues concerning gender, sexuality, desire and consumerism and capitalism which was becoming more and more dominate in the 19th century.

SHIKRITI: Right, so I think before jumping into the poem it is important to understand the context of it like the 19th century settings. So we can see how industrialization is slowly starting and so we get this dichotomy between the rural and the urban during that time and we

also see when we talk about this poem as a feminist poem, so I think we could talk a little about the condition of women during that time in the 19th century which was mostly that they were home bound, they obviously were not supposed to have an aspiration or have a career outside, so they were thoroughly domesticated restricted to the domestic spaces and they were.

MOHIT: And the only avenue available to them outside of home was not in any any kind of agency but they were only they were sometimes they were prostitutes or they were.

SHIKRITI: Right, stuck. Yes, so the women were divided into we could say two, like as virgin you will say is the angel of the house and as versus the prostitute who is the outcast who is an outsider. So this poem also talks about in a way we could say there is a binary between the two sisters because Laura falls into that temptation.

MOHIT: The fallen woman and the pristine woman.

SHIKRITI: Right, So fallen woman here we could definitely say that Laura is here the fallen woman because she falls into the temptation of the Goblins and their fruits and she engages with them and comes back with a loss, with a lack that she does not, she is not able to, she is just basically withering away with time and whereas whereas Lizzie engages with men with the Goblins in a very different manner with with definitely with agency with transaction of money and then and she returns and she is not only able to bring that agency to herself but she can also transfer it to her sister in a way that she is also recuperating from the situation.

MOHIT: Yeah, and this combines the issue of sexuality, desiring female agency with the issues of capitalism, consumerism and the market economy which is invading the rural space as well which was which was supposedly the pure spaces of the western world.

SHIKRITI: Right, yes of course, right.

MOHIT: Because the urbanization had already consumed the city escapes, so.

SHIKRITI: They had, and again so again we can gross.

MOHIT: Binary emerges.

SHIKRITI: Binary emerges repeatedly, so.

MOHIT: The home and the market place.

SHIKRITI: The home and the market, the rural and the urban.

MOHIT: Yeah, and the familiar and the unfamiliar.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, familiar and the unfamiliar. So as we can say the defamiliarization of the home space, the home economy.

MOHIT: And the predominant theme which which links all of these binaries is the is the question of consumption.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And whether the consumption is inspired by greed, if it is reckless and what are the consequences of reckless consumption?

SHIKRITI: Yeah, it could show us the effects of capitalism because capitalism again advertising is a big part of capitalism, how it (())(4:24) us to different products, whether the need for the product develops only because the product already exists because it is due to advertising and marketing.

MOHIT: The need is created.

SHIKRITI: Right, that need is created. So even in this poem we can see that the Goblins they cry, they shout, they call day and night, morning and afternoon so there is no escape and so both the sisters are affected by it, but Lizzie can handle it in a different way even when she wants to respond to it she can hide her response because she knows that it is not something that we want, not something that is not conventional, not.

MOHIT: Something which will have consequences which is which is tempting but it is scenting with the evil behind.

SHIKRITI: Exactly, evil behind. So with (())(5:10) as an example.

MOHIT: (())(5:11).

SHIKRITI: Right, but.

MOHIT: We can see in the beginning like the beginning (())(5:15) one of the poem, the first stanza the long stanza is a list of products the fruits which luscious fruits that were Goblins

advertised to the people of that rural area and they roam around the (5:30) and the (5:32) and they advertise all kinds of there is a long list of fruits which they advertise.

SHIKRITI: Right. The other thing is interesting that the poem mentions that the sisters they make their own produce.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So they have a very independent economy, they do not depend on the outside market or the outside world. So they are very co dependent and very cocooned in their own beautiful, (5:54).

MOHIT: Self sufficient rural economy.

SHIKRITI: Self sufficient, right.

MOHIT: Economy which is being invaded by this market economy of capitalism which seems to control it and which seems to make it dependent on the capitalist machine.

SHIKRITI: Exactly. Right, the capitalist mode, yeah exactly, the structure of capitalism.

MOHIT: So we see how like with the arrival of the Goblin merchant men.

SHIKRITI: Yeah.

MOHIT: First of all it is very interesting how they are described like they are Goblin Merchant Men.

SHIKRITI: Yes.

MOHIT: So there is a masculine aspect to it, there is an animalistic aspect to it in the way they are described by as having different animal (6:27) which is sort of like there is a there is a greed attached to it, there is a wolfishness attached to it.

SHIKRITI: Right and along with the greed we can say that the poem has a lot of sexual metaphors also, so when you read the sections and how they are alluring you, so a feminist reading of the text can simultaneously tell us that the Goblins and the Goblin Market could also mean the male sexual temptation, the other perversion, right so that is also a way of looking at it.

MOHIT: Which allures the female into the state of fallenness.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: Which the resonances of which we see in the story of (7:05) later on and we also see the life of Christina Rossetti from which she was inspired (7:11) work.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, she was a social worker, a volunteer at.

MOHIT: St. Mary Magdalene "house of charity" in which they.

SHIKRITI: Where they believe that is possible to redeem the fallen women of the time. So I think the fallen women the idea of the fallen women is very interesting in the Victorian period because she was really there was a category of fallen women who was again (7:33) with the angel of the house and the faith of the fallen women was always bad, negative and there was no hope that she could get back to her life, because she was an social outcast and she was not permitted into the social circus at all. So but this, with this kind of portrayal of fallenness by Christina Rossetti I think she prints a different angle to it and she in the end gives us some hope of the character some hope to reading herself.

MOHIT: And the idea of idea of sexual the state of fallenness in sexuality is also juxtaposed against the idea of giving in to the (consumer consumption) desire of consumption.

SHIKRITI: So we can say that the very idea of fallenness itself is questioned by Rossetti because in Victorian culture in the 19th century they were very strict about their moral codes and conducts, right. So any divines from the morality or as we call it the Victorian morality we still use the term, so any sort of deviation would eventually introduce you to the category of fallenness.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: But here the way she is represented.

MOHIT: This idea is this idea is presented against the presented against the presented along with the idea of consumption and the state of having fallen into reckless consumption which gives us the which gives us the picture of the Victorian state at that time where consumption and capitalist reckless consumption was also begin to pervade the.

SHIKRITI: Any consumption was sin, yeah and it was considered to be a sin.

MOHIT: It was considered to be a sin.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so the consumption here we can see the consumption in two ways we can see it as a sexual consumption, we can also see it as a economic the consumption of products and economic consumption, but whatever.

MOHIT: That is a transgression.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, transgression and whatever way we interpret it, it is equally sinful and equally fallen and the predicament for a women in the 19th century would be the same.

MOHIT: I think here we can introduce the idea of (())(9:39).

SHIKRITI: Yeah.

MOHIT: Which and what is that idea of fallen of the fallen women.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT:And.

SHIKRITI: So the stereotypical fallen women and what faith (waits) awaits her.

MOHIT: Right, so there are two critical moments in the poem in which Lizzie warns Laura about the dangers of falling into this desire the temptation of consumption with abandoned and she gives the example of (())(10:05) who was supposed to have gotten married and which is the state of the proper Christian consummation of marital law.

SHIKRITI: Right, yeah.

MOHIT: But instead she fell into the temptation of the fruits which were given by the Goblin Merchant Men and then she pined away and then she withered and then she died.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: So that serves as a warning to Laura and to the readers as such that you know the idea of consumption can (())(10:30) you as such like, you become the consumed steed of the consumer.

SHIKRITI: Consumer, and but in the end it is interesting to note that what saved Laura was ultimately Lizzie's love and her protectiveness and her agency that saved Laura out of a situation and so there we can say that in this poem Christina Rossetti actually introduces these two female characters very differently and very independent in a very independent

fashion because it was not common for in the Victorian society for two women to live alone, two unmarried women without a family, so they were shown as like two very independent women and even throughout the encounter with the Goblins and how different the two sisters reacted to it differently and it shows us the different shades of femininity and female desire, how desire or how women are not passive recipients of sexual desire, they also can participate in or engage in sexuality.

MOHIT: There is a solidarity.

SHIKRITI: Solidarity.

MOHIT: Of like females there.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so it is sisterhood and solidarity of women.

MOHIT: And it is put against the it is put against the on slot of the like masculine economy.

SHIKRITI: Right and patriarchy of course, right.

MOHIT: And we see that like there is no other male character.

SHIKRITI: Character, yeah.

MOHIT: It is like they find for themselves, they not only protect their surroundings but the economy that they represent.

SHIKRITI: Exactly.

MOHIT: The rural economy that they represent.

SHIKRITI: And in that way they do not they are not dependent in dependent on any other man to fend for them.

MOHIT: We see we see different versus where they get up and they do the daily work, they churn the butter and they get the (())(12:14).

SHIKRITI: Right and even towards the end when they are Rossetti tells us that they are settled and they are married, their husbands no were.

MOHIT: They were telling their children stories.

SHIKRITI: Right, they are telling the children stories and even then we do not see the any male figure actually intervene. So we can say this is definitely a feminist poem because of its representation of femininity and it is addressing of issues like female sexuality, female desire and also issues of consumption and capitalist capitalism and economy and market. And I think it is interesting when we are talking about the bond between the sisters and how one saves the other, do you think that there is a connotation of and it is always it is said that there is a connotation of homoeroticism in the poem.

MOHIT: Yeah, definitely definitely, especially in the in the stanza that we see that are sleeping together.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: There is a sort of uncanny wipe in the air in which they are the only ones who can who are going to protect each other, so the idea of homoeroticism I think also comes from the fact that Lizzie has the agency to protect Laura, so it already sub verged the stereotypical female stereo images of the helpless women.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, the damsel in distress.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So you actually do not need a prince to come and save her like her sister. So the themes of homoeroticism or lesbian love in this poem I think has more to do with the solidarity between the sisters and how they we could say that both of them are mirror images of each other.

MOHIT: Right and how by getting away with the heterosexual heterosexual.

SHIKRITI: Heteronormativity.

MOHIT: Heteronormativity, they actually rest the agency in their own hands and going away with the idea of having a male rescuer all together.

SHIKRITI: All together.

MOHIT: They they.

SHIKRITI: Do away with their idea of the (())(14:05).

MOHIT: They are the fallen women, but they also save themselves.

SHIKRITI: Themselves, right. So.

MOHIT: Another interesting aspect which we encounter in this poem is that Goblins are the Goblins are described in a very non-western exhorted.

SHIKRITI: Oriental, yes.

MOHIT: Yeah, the metaphors is very oriental like in the sense like there is a common refrain whenever they talk about what kinds of things that Goblin (())(14:34) so the common refrain is men cell not such in any town. So the idea is that the things that they are bringing are produced in faraway places and then it says where sun shines and all at all hours. So these are exotic products brought on by exotic men who are Goblins having animal (())(14:57) so there is an invasion of the western house hold as well.

SHIKRITI: Yes, so it shows the the other, the (())(15:04) and the others.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So here the other is invading the space of the western home and the self contained space of the women.

MOHIT: So some of the binaries are being.

SHIKRITI: Subverted and because here because where we talk about perpetuated as well as subverted in ways because when we talk about women-women themselves are other to men.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So we have.

MOHIT: They are taking the centre stage in the in the in the in the local sphere but at the same time the purity of the local economies being threatened by the exotic other who are bringing things which are which are very which are tasty, which are (())(15:45).

SHIKRITI: Tempting.

MOHIT: Yeah, but which has a addicting quality to it which is what the which is what Lizzie warns Laura against and which is what (())(15:55) almost dies of.

SHIKRITI: Dies of. So basically the poem again coming back to it or probably repeating the same thing that the idea of consumption and production and consumption and advertising and temptation so all these are very important themes, so how the capitalist market (())(16:14) us to into buying products which then we feel the need of the products and the way they are advertised, the Goblins how they mention all the different fruits and you almost feel tempted to go and taste it.

MOHIT: And interestingly it is relevant even now, the concerns that were presented in the poem that almost 1 and a half century earlier are still relevant in this in the way that how advertising (())(16:41) us into reckless consumption, how the trackless consumption, ends up consuming ourselves and how we need to take a agency.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, but I think in a way that so between the two sisters it is also shown how they consumed differently, how Lizzie and Laura because when Laura consumes she is completely helpless and she does not have any agency at all, she is just an object in the hands of the capitalist if we can say let us call they capitalist Goblins. So, but then when we see that when Lizzie interacts with them or engages with them, she makes a transaction, she pays with a penny. So that penny is very important here because being a woman again being a woman she and being a consumer and being a woman, she can enter that male space that patriarchal space of capitalism and come out as a winner.

MOHIT: She is the she is the principled consumer who is consuming who is consuming with the idea of a transaction rather than something.

SHIKRITI: For her own pleasure.

MOHIT: For her own pleasure something being given without any exchange happening. So when a exchange happen when you transact with money you take control of the transaction that you are entering into.

SHIKRITI: When Laura with Laura the transaction was with a lock of hair which means that she is giving something personal of her and so there is.

MOHIT: Which ends up becoming much having far more consequences than she.

SHIKRITI: Much more because she comes back with a lack with a loss personal loss, right. But for Lizzie it is more of a economic transaction that she has also entered that space.

MOHIT: And when she gives that when we see that the it is a dead moment that the power of the Goblin start disintegrating.

SHIKRITI: Yes, so power shifts clearly from the Goblins to (Laura) sorry to Lizzie.

MOHIT: And then they attempted, and when they attack her and we see a long description of how in different ways they attack her, they mole her, they scratch her and in that in that very (())(18:34) scene of violence being affected upon Lizzie.

SHIKRITI: In fact we could say the sexual violence in fact.

MOHIT: Yeah, it is almost like a sexual violence which is being perpetuated on someone who is maintaining the integrity and maintaining the integrity of the transactions as well.

SHIKRITI: Transaction as well.

MOHIT: So here we see, here we see capitalist consuming tendency.

SHIKRITI: What we can call probably a consumer agency? Right, so because when consumers are not just passive against recipients because they can also exhibit some agency if we see in the case that Lizzie does like because she is the owner because she can pay with the (transaction) transactable amount and with the money. So has there has some agency and how she comes out of the situation of sexual violence or violence of luring of capitalism and how she can overcome all of that and also transcend that success or that agency to her sister and save her in the end.

MOHIT: So that it makes (())(19:33) front against the collusive forces of consumer greed as well as heteronormativity hegemony.

SHIKRITI: Hegemony, right.

MOHIT: That is being imposed on women.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, by patriarchy (())(19:45).

MOHIT: Which was all the more obvious at that time. Another interesting thing to observe in the poem is that how the invasion of invasion by Goblins turn the very familiar and domestic space into an unfamiliar space, so the invasion defamiliarizes the homely space that is inhabited by Laura and Lizzie and we see that in the descriptions like initially if the in the

beginning of the poem the places that they visit to collect food and to gather berries it is described in a very very pristine and very.

SHIKRITI: So there is a certain holiness attached to it.

MOHIT: It is the typical.

SHIKRITI: Purity the idea of the pure and which is construct sorry contrasted with the impurity of the Goblins.

MOHIT: Right, and when Laura has been addicted to the fruits given by the Goblin men and we see her pining away and Lizzie is being Lizzie is concerned about her sister, then it is at from that point onwards we start to see the defamiliarization happening in the homely scene and we encounter.

SHIKRITI: So can we probably yeah read section from the poems.

MOHIT: Yeah, I will just read the section. We see like “Moon and stars gazed in at them, Wind sang to them lullaby, Lumbering owls forbore to fly, Not a bat flapped to and fro Round their rest: Cheek to cheek and breast to breast Locked together in one nest”. So we see that in a in a very homely space where the sisters are sleeping and we are seeing the metaphors metaphors of bats and owls, so the an uncanny atmosphere start to set in.

SHIKRITI: Exactly, so that is the pretext of what is going to happen later on.

MOHIT: And the glands and the dales that they used to visit are now being haunted by Goblin men which again have made them a place which one should avoid visiting.

SHIKRITI: Right, this reminds me of a very interesting thing that when Christina Rossetti if you read the poem it is obviously it is long narrative and it has a fable like structure and it has rhymes and rhythms, so it is almost like a children’s poetry, right?

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So but I think that it is.

MOHIT: Emotive in that.

SHIKRITI: Emotive in that sense, but I think writing in the 19th century addressing issues like female desire, sexuality, sexual violence and even capitalism so all these issues being a

woman writer in the 19th century would have been very difficult for Christina Rossetti to address, the poet to address directly. So she can probably she used this form of a fable of a story so that she can talk about these issues in disguise, not very apparently, not on the face for which she would have probably faced very harsh criticism and may be not allowed to publish it at all, so.

MOHIT: And the concerns and the and the concerns and the that threat which is inherent in the system is being shown in the kind of defamiliarization and.

SHIKRITI: Again, yeah there is a yes, right.

MOHIT: Ominous atmosphere which is starting to setting, we see that threat inherent threat in the setting of the scene which gets verse and verse until Lizzie starts until Lizzie decides to take action which she does with the with going to the Goblins and paying with a penny what she wants.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And because of because she pays with the penny the fruits that the juices that Laura consumes from Lizzie's body actually ends up curing her. So that is very interesting to say that it is the idea of the principled consumption that saves you and the unprincipled consumption that actually (23:23) you.

SHIKRITI: (23:24) So moving on to the next poem that we are going to discuss today "Tulips" by Sylvia Plath.

MOHIT: Yeah, and in this poem we see the narrator is recuperating in the hospital and it is a very very very personal poem.

SHIKRITI: It is a very personal poem even confessional in modes.

MOHIT: Almost an invert account of how the female self is getting disintegrated in the poem, it is a very very intense poem and it chronicles the disintegration of the self-scene through the a female self.

SHIKRITI: Right, and we can also see in this poem it deals with depression, it deals with loss because as Sylvia Plath had miscarriage just while she was writing it before writing it and she was in a similar hospital setting. Okay, so it criticizes the medical institution and it talks about the medical gaze.

MOHIT: What like it talks about how the medical gaze and being almost sort of impresent in a medical institution sort of strips you of agency a very coherent idea of selfhood.

SHIKRITI: Of course subjectivity because from being a subject we can see that in this poem how the poet is turned into an object and she strip of her all of her subjectivity and she just becomes a set of numbers and collision of her body parts.

MOHIT: Yeah, which is being administered in a very objective and a very impersonal way by (())(24:59) of nurses and.

SHIKRITI: Very impersonal, nurses and doctors, again these even these people have are not really subjects because the poet cannot see them as human beings they are merely one body replaced by another body, so you cannot distinguish between so there is no human empathy, there is no human touch, so everything is about this mechanism that is operating in a hospital setting.

MOHIT: I think it is in this it is in the central question that the whole problem of the medical institutionalization which Plath deals with lies that the doctors and the people of that institution they treat you as a body, while you treat yourself as a self and the conflict between the two of these approaches is irreconcilable that we see that the narrator is exploring her own self which is which is not necessarily corporeal and while at the same time she is being treated, she is being dealt with and she is being she is being dealt with in a very impersonal and objective manner as a body by those who are supposed to treat her.

SHIKRITI: As a body, in a way that it makes her feel that her body has become a burden to her and she wants to get rid of it.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: Right and she wants to, okay we can come back to that probably later, would you like to read a section from this?

MOHIT: Yeah, so the poem starts with the narrator telling how she feels in the in the hospital ward that she is put in.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And we see that the descriptions are very strict down and they indicate a slow move away from the body corporeality and it is kind of a defamiliarization taking place in the

medical institution where you are getting more and more defamiliar detached from your body and your.

SHIKRITI: Selfhood.

MOHIT: And your selfhood as well.

SHIKRITI: And we can see that how in the hospital setting everything is white, right so obviously it stands for the pristine quality but it also stands for death and that spectral quality is there and which is very boldly contrasted with the redness of the “Tulips” again which reminds.

MOHIT: We will come back to the “Tulips”.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, we will come back to the “Tulips” and the symbolism later.

MOHIT: Like so the we see that in the first stanza she says “As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands”. So the hands are these hands, it is not my hands.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: “I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions”. So we already see a defamiliarization taking place.

SHIKRITI: From the very beginning.

MOHIT: From the very beginning that she as a consciousness is separating from her own body and she is observing her own body as if one of the paraphernalia of the things around her.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And then in the later on we see that she takes note of all the stuff around her and what is being done to her as she is being (0)(28:03).

SHIKRITI: As if she is just an observer, she is one of the other observers that like objectifying her body and observing her, so we can say we can look at the different modes or surveillance here how the through the machineries of the equipments of the medical institution and how the people.

MOHIT: They normally (0)(28:24), you they also control you.

SHIKRITI: They control you?

MOHIT: Because we are controlled by the machines which keep you alive they are controlled by the machines which keep your body (0)(28:32).

SHIKRITI: Which monitor you constantly.

MOHIT: Which monitor you, which keep you in a certain state and your movement and your agencies restricted.

SHIKRITI: Everything is restricted.

MOHIT: In a hospital.

SHIKRITI: In a hospital setting. Yeah, so this is also I think reminds us of what Michel Foucault says in discipline and punish and how that the body is under constant surveillance of the state and the objective is to control the body, turn it into a docile body so that the maximum output can be brought out of it.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So that there is no scope for deviance, there is no scope for abnormality in it so you get the make the body function it to its at most capacity so therefore we need the constant surveillance and what Foucault calls as a (0)(29:19).

MOHIT: (0)(29:19) Yeah, he gives examples of prisons and medical institutions, mental asylums and hospitals and he shows us how all of these institutions are operating under the same ideas of surveillance and controlling the body, controlling the movement, controlling the (0)(29:36).

SHIKRITI: Right, because all these spaces are actually inhabited by people who are deviant in the first place.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So if you see prisoners or the mentally ill people.

MOHIT: The idea of deviancy is being constructed in these places.

SHIKRITI: In these places, so anything that there is not.

MOHIT: Which is again a question that we see that dealing with in her latter body of (()) (29:54).

SHIKRITI: Right, exactly.

MOHIT: Even in the later stanzas we see that she talks about her body in more and more and detached terms like “My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water” and not just not just the body the defamiliarization and the decorporatization is.

SHIKRITI: And the comparison with a pebble means that the body is almost become inanimate.

MOHIT: (())(30:17).

SHIKRITI: Yeah, it is not even a living breathing human body, it has become an inanimate object.

MOHIT: And this detachment extends across the body to other other accompaniments.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: Relationships and your stuff and she talks about my patent leather overnight case I am sick of baggage and my husband and child smiling out of the family photo. So even though it is still my husband and child it is still they are smiling out a family photo.

SHIKRITI: Family photo, they are not near her, they she cannot feel their presence at all.

MOHIT: And the distancing has taken place and all of this combines in the next stanza which starts “I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat stubbornly hanging on to my name and address”. They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations. Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley I watched my teaset, my bureaus of linen, my books Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head”. And the very interesting line “I am a nun now, I have never been so pure”. So we see this is the culmination of all the (())(31:24) which is being which is happening all over these lines.

SHIKRITI: Right, so she is stripped of her individuality, she is stripped of her subjectivity of any agency that she can have over herself and she can see there is this distancing between her and the material world. So she within the medical institution she is turned into an object who has no idea of selfhood or no idea of subjectivity and who would just lie there performing

how they the medical institution wants her to perform or act so she would be performing that lifestyle and totally detached from her family life and any personal life. So everything that she had or she loved or she owned she can see them drifting away slowly.

MOHIT: Yeah, the subjectivity also like responds to this by stripping itself of all everything which it cannot which it can no longer connect to and that is why in the last line we see that the idea of death and the idea of purity are being they are clubbed together.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: They are compared with each other.

SHIKRITI: But I think this the idea of purity or pure she says that I feel.

MOHIT: I am nun now.

SHIKRITI: “I am a nun now, I have never been so pure”. So I think this idea of purity is also in a way ironic because I do not think she really means that she feels pure from inside. So what she means is that.

MOHIT: Death is the only pure thing left which has not been invaded by.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, there is everything is taken away from her, so she is like the tubular (()) (33:00) this blank space and nothing else she does not even own her body, she does not have ownership of her activities of her body or any control over anything anymore so she feels just like probably a new born child or a blank space, so that is why what she means by pure and in a very ironic way.

MOHIT: Yeah yeah, which shows us to the which shows us the extent to which the institutions which are repressive and hegemonic ideological in their own ways.

SHIKRITI: In the own way.

MOHIT: They act how much agency and subjectivity they can actually strip away from you.

SHIKRITI: Right and this is very interesting if you juxtaposes to the idea of consent because when you go to a space like a medical institution you voluntarily subject yourself to the treatment, so there is no (())(33:48) in the place, so that is why it is more of a ISA than RSA because there is not much (())(33:55) happening and you voluntarily submit yourself to it, but

it has the capacity through its constant surveillance and operation medical operations through examination and operation, it has complete autonomy over you and.

MOHIT: You are basically as an individual you are giving yourself over to the collective system that is a part of society.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And your individual autonomy is being obliterated.

SHIKRITI: Obliterated, so you just become a bed number or a certain patient with this case you become a case study.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: So that is very interesting in a way in a mental institution setting where they keep records of patients and where they maintain a very valid case study. So if you as a patient go back to those to the institutions and ask for your case study and so there was this very interesting book that I was reading it is called "wasted". So the patient goes back to the hospital to access her records and they cannot find it, so they say that she does not exist, just because she is not in the records as if her own subject hood is obliterated from the face of the earth.

MOHIT: The system kind of strips you are subject hood of any agency and any unique characteristic that you have.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: It turns it to a commodity which it can manage into its own system.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, you become from a human being to a set of symptoms.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: Set of symptoms and you become a problem.

MOHIT: And set of characteristics.

SHIKRITI: Characteristic.

MOHIT: You are defined by certain numbers and names like figures which are then used to keep track of you.

SHIKRITI: Right, and even in the say binary between health and illness, illness is always seen, it is not the.

MOHIT: Deviancy.

SHIKRITI: Deviancy, right. So illness itself is a deviancy something that needs to curing.

MOHIT: Something to be treated, something to be controlled, right.

SHIKRITI: Something that need curing and you cannot cure yourself, so you handover your body and your entire selfhood to a say experts quote, unquote experts who are supposed to know everything about curing us and therefore in the guise of curing the illness they are actually engaging in a their full autonomy over ourselves or in this case over Plath.

MOHIT: I think this is a very good point where to talk about mental health as well because that is also also theme which pervades (())(36:14) and it is also something which is which is associated with this poem.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And we see that it is the treatment of disease as a deviancy which also extends to the idea of question of mental health and what mental illness constitutes of.

SHIKRITI: Yes, because if you see.

MOHIT: And how it is defined.

SHIKRITI: Right, and if you see categories like hysteria or depression they are primarily understood at feminine illnesses.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So illness itself is a feminized in a way and when you talk about these certain category like hysteria was supposed to be understood as illness that was came out of the womb.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: So only women have wombs.

MOHIT: Wandering womb.

SHIKRITI: Yeah the wandering womb, so.

MOHIT: In often times the illness is characterized is as feminine is something which has been which has which has been caused by the systems of operation that have oppressed (()) (37:13) for long time which causes lot of physical as well as mental damage.

SHIKRITI: Yeah.

MOHIT: And once the disease is identified then it is associated with the female body, female biology and then that becomes a secondary mode of operation in which.

SHIKRITI: Right, very true that there is this in a way we see this pathologization of femininity itself.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: Like if you have too much of femininity being a woman if you are too female then you are called hysteric and if you are if you are masculine say if you are a masculine woman even then that is a deviance.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: Right, so there is this always this need to be the perfectly masculine man or the perfectly feminine woman or any deviance from it is pathologized and then obviously medicalized.

MOHIT: And both and both the body and the mind of and both the female body and the female mind is pathologized like you said and it is an impure body and the mind also is like imbued with historical tendencies.

SHIKRITI: Yes, of course because a women's body has more complicated hormonal functions or that is what medical science tells us and it is a way that it makes it more vulnerable to this kind of examination and scrutiny because women are supposed to have weaker bodies and weaker minds and whatever is weak can be violated more easily so that is the troop that the medical sciences or the mental health institutions use.

MOHIT: And more controlling.

SHIKRITI: Controlling, yeah.

MOHIT: And more control is sort after them they are sort to be controlled more.

SHIKRITI: Right, just like the prisoners that Foucault talks about in discipline and punish.

MOHIT: And here there is a very interesting comparison with the short novel the yellow wallpaper written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so even in Gilman story how we see, so it is very interesting that even Gilman's later writes in letter that she was administered the rest cure what is called the rest cure so that when she was undergoing her pregnancy and so for women for especially for middle class or upper class women during the 19th century Victorian times they were administered what is called the rest cure.

MOHIT: And the confinement.

SHIKRITI: (Confin) so which means that complete confinement for a period of 3 to 6 months and regulated diet and what is most interesting to observe is that they were supposed to disengage from all sorts of physical activity.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: So you are supposed to only rest.

MOHIT: It is basically household imprisonment.

SHIKRITI: Household imprisonment and in a way that they Perkins Gilman was almost she was not even allowed to write, so which became the primary problem for her, she used to hide her stuff and to express herself she had to write and she was not even allowed that much of mental exercise. So it is in a way returning the women to that infantile state that.

MOHIT: Yeah, it is in women is infantilized.

SHIKRITI: Yes, so that infantilization is we could say is predominant even in forms of treatment that are offered during the time.

MOHIT: And in yellow wallpaper we see how the confinement and the total infantilization of women actually leads to the disintegration of (())(40:30) her subjectivity, her mental health which draws a lots of parallels with this poem.

SHIKRITI: Her mental health, parallels with this poem because just like Plath here is in the hospital setting, Gilman was confined in a room and just like for Plath it is the “Tulips” and for Gilman it is the “The Yellow Wallpaper”

MOHIT: Yeah, “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Let us come to “Tulips”.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, and how it is “Tulips” is just not a bunch of flowers but how it is it is like a set of metaphors and symbols and it is also personified, lots of things are being done here.

MOHIT: And the tones and the tone is said in the first line where it writes that “tulips are too excitable, it is winter here”. And then we see how like she is confined in the hospital room which is all white and she is being stripped away of her agency bit by bit and she gets defamiliarzed from her body.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so the whiteness of the hospital and the redness of the Tulips.

MOHIT: Redness of the Tulips, the bright violent red. And then we see how it is interesting to see how Tulips being introduced in her room? Is like an anchor which keeps her type to the material reality which she is drifting away from.

SHIKRITI: Yes.

MOHIT: And that also becomes a it also becomes a violent gesture.

SHIKRITI: Yes, and you could also say that the Tulips symbolizes the trauma that she is currently going through the trauma of the child loss and the trauma the wound as if that raw of (())(41:53) wound is present in front of her and she is not even allowed to forget it, even if she wants to, she cannot escape that truth anymore.

MOHIT: Yeah, it is the narrator says that their redness talks to my wound it corresponds, so the wound that the bodily wound, the wound of miscarriage is being is being reflected back in and is being amplified in the redness of the Tulips which presents as a stuck contrast to the whiteness of the room.

SHIKRITI: Right, so can we also say that this Tulips then stand for say a very microcosmic representation of the society, how the world works because here is she lying in a hospital bed and stripped of all her subject hood subjectivity and their the Tulips are there as a reminder as a symbol of the worldly expectations and the societal structures and still where the dichotomy of power exists.

MOHIT: Yeah yeah, and like that they the Tulips represent a the whole hospital space is very it strips away it strips you away of your subjectivity and everything and then Tulip act to that disruptive physical presence.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: Which like in the last stanza she is drifting away she says “I am a nun now, I have never been so pure” and then Tulips enter and then Tulips kind of anchor her subjectivity out away from the decorporealization that she is experiencing.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: And back into the into the restrictive and the restraining physical reality that she is bound to and they will see that.

SHIKRITI: Right, so we could say that say flowers are supposed to mean a comforting presence.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: But in this poem it is completely opposed.

MOHIT: Completely opposite.

SHIKRITI: Completely opposed and that Plath bring us in a way that the flowers represent what the Tulips represent to her is something that is not that makes her completely uncomfortable, not only uncomfortable that triggers sort of mental illness in her where her depression is amplified and where she becomes more suicidal because it is a constant reminder of her loss and it is a constant reminder of that pain that she is undergoing which is again made more and more worse due to the in the hospital setting.

MOHIT: In the words that she describes the violence inflicted the mental violence inflicted by the mere presence of Tulips is like it is written in very expressive words like it says that

“The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me”. And then it in the next stanza in the last line it says “The vivid tulips eat my oxygen”. So it is almost towering, dominating and suffocating presence in the room.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: Which.

SHIKRITI: Which does not even allow her to live and breathe so.

MOHIT: Which threatens to completely overrun her subjectivity completely.

SHIKRITI: Over, yes completely.

MOHIT: We will just take a look at the last paragraph.

SHIKRITI: Yes.

MOHIT: Last stanza and we will see like the images that she is talking about and how like what this suffocation and the defamiliarization leads to and Plath writes that “The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves. The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;” so we already see a very strong comparison going on.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: “They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat, And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me. The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea, And comes from a country far away as health.” So the last two lines are very interesting where she writes comes from a country far away as health, so health is very clearly something very () (45:40) to her now.

SHIKRITI: Yes, a very distant space.

MOHIT: A very distant idea.

SHIKRITI: Yeah.

MOHIT: Both physically and mentally.

SHIKRITI: Mentally, yes. And what it does is very interestingly the hospital setting that instead of curing her body, it in fact even further disrupts her mind.

MOHIT: Yeah.

SHIKRITI: To a place that she no longer knows who she is, she no longer knows what health is what a healthy life represents, she feels like she is stuck in this.

MOHIT: It is as stranger in your own body.

SHIKRITI: Own body and she feels where she stuck in this present with that violent dangerous in fact Tulips staring at her, so between the window and the Tulip, so she stopped between the world and the presence of the Tulip.

MOHIT: It is also very strong (46:24) there.

SHIKRITI: Yes, and between.

MOHIT: She is almost like she is flattened out with the her physical presence is being completely dominated by the two gaze that come that is focus on her from the reality, the reality of the outer world which is by the window and the reality of the hospital space that she is confined in.

SHIKRITI: Space inside, so there is the overall patriarchal or societal gaze that is she as a woman is constantly facing?

MOHIT: Yeah, patriarchal.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, and there is also the medical gaze that she as a patient is facing and so and underneath all these different surveillances, different modes of surveillance her individuality is completely annihilated towards the end of the poem.

MOHIT: Yeah, and we see that the strangeness and the danger both of them are combined in a very nice analogy that she makes when she says that “they are opening like the mouth of some great African cat”. So we are we do not she does not say lion or tiger or some other cheetah or leopard, but some great African cat. So it is already something strange and something threatening which is coming in like you do not even know what it is but it will (47:36) you and then another association that I feel is in the last line that when she says “The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,” so warm and salt can refer to water the sea water, it can also refer to blood and it can also refer to tears.

SHIKRITI: Tears, yes.

MOHIT: So this is a very interesting thing in these two lines she is combining all the effects of that this.

SHIKRITI: That pain, the trauma everything comes together.

MOHIT: Yeah, the pain and trauma. And then (48:05) that she is made to feel in something it creates something which is as far away as possible from the ideal condition called health.

SHIKRITI: Health, so when so there is again this (48:18) position between what is supposed to be understood as health and what is illness and.

MOHIT: And you are supposed to gain regain your health in a hospital setting.

SHIKRITI: In a hospital setting, right which is.

MOHIT: (48:31) doing the opposite.

SHIKRITI: Or just the opposite for atleast for Plath it just (48:34).

MOHIT: Atleast this is something which is always a which is a possibility always present that the mental the setting the ideological apparatus that is societal apparatus that is the mental the health institution, it strips away of your subjectivity which is always an effect on the mental conception of the self.

SHIKRITI: Right, so we see that so in this poem we can totally understand that medical science or the institution of medicine does not incorporate any humanity or empathy, compassion and these kind of characteristics, it is based on rationality, it is based on scientific like based on science and.

MOHIT: The impersonality in the ruthlessness of the objective that they (49:32) to be implementing is something.

SHIKRITI: As a positivist outlook.

MOHIT: Yeah yeah yeah, it is something that actually strips you away of your humanity, strips you away of your subjectivity, can alienate you.

SHIKRITI: So the scope for all these in a within that gaze within the medical gaze that succumbs you.

MOHIT: The idea of looking at you as a number, as a data figure actually alienates you as an individual from the society.

SHIKRITI: Right and you can see a complete disembodiment that is happening here that you know she is again stripped away of all her physical traits and even her own body appears to her as a stranger it is just.

MOHIT: So much so that she actually desires to just drift away from all of that.

SHIKRITI: Drift away, loose her body so because it has become already a burden for her.

MOHIT: So interestingly this is the opposite of this is the opposite of what we saw in the Goblin Market, in the Goblin Market it is the overabundance of desire which is the problem, on the other hand in this one in this it is the stripping away of desire because the repressive setting is designed to control you by stripping you away of the desire is to bring of you away of your agency.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: On the other hand in Goblin Market it was the (())(50:51) and prospect of giving you some agency which will actually make you addict or into somebody who is who cannot control the consumption that he or she wants to engage in.

SHIKRITI: Engage in, yeah. So and also interestingly that we could say that in Goblin Market that the two sisters could act as a double of each other and they in the end they clearly one sister.

MOHIT: To complement each other.

SHIKRITI: Yes, complement each other, in the end one sister ends up saving the other, but here we see that in this poem Plath is completely alone and she does not have any alee like even her families only now become photographs and they are not physically present here, so they are of no idea what she is going through when you can see that Lizzie has constantly being supportive towards Laura she has always been trying to find solution to Laura's problem, but here there is seems to be nobody which extends further extends that this integration or mental disintegration that Plath would face.

MOHIT: Yeah, so the another interesting thing like further adding to your point is that she makes a lot of references to inanimate objects, she the imagery is very inanimate and strange as well, she talks about.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, so the body is constantly compared to inanimate objects.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: So telling us how strange and how again objectify how it has become an object and not a living breathing subject.

MOHIT: Right, it is a cut paper shadow.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, cut paper shadow.

MOHIT: Or it is something strange or the even the evil presents is something strange like a some great African cat. So like we see how this poem represents a consciousness struggling against the against the repressive apparatus of society which points its gaze upon you and like deprives you of all your authority and agency.

SHIKRITI: So this poem can be said to be a critic of the institute of medicine, it is a critic definitely of patriarchy and how and it actually shows how the how any institution be it a educational institution, medical institution, religious institution everything the organised is organised as a patriarchal structure and which being a woman in both the poems like where we could see that, how capitalism is patriarchal structure, in this poem we see how the medical institution itself is patriarchal in structure where it operates through modes of constant surveillance, examination and control of the physical body as well as the mental conditions and where the human beings are reduced to just near objects of study.

MOHIT: Yeah, and we see in both the in both the poems we see how societal forces be it economic forces in Goblin Market, or state forces or bio political forces which turns the subject into an object, which strips away strips you away of your subjectivity in Goblin Market it is it is the threat of the consumer being controlled by the market, while on the other hand here we see the subject as a docile patient which is being controlled by the state authority the institutional authority of the.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, institutional authority and in a larger the state authority.

MOHIT: Right.

SHIKRITI: Right so because.

MOHIT: As a patient which is the data point which can be controlled as a body and (O) (54:27).

SHIKRITI: Because again coming back to the point that in this as a divides and anything that is divides needs to be controlled so that it does not disrupt the normative structure of society should a whole, so.

MOHIT: The hegemonic structure should be perpetuated.

SHIKRITI: Maintained, yeah the power structure should not be disrupted. So but then we can say that although Goblin Market ends probably on a positive note that there is atleast some agency, certain liberation towards the end, if we talk about Tulips it is more depressing in its tone because there is no scope for agency, there is no scope for liberation or of the power dynamics to be shifting, there are definitely Plath as a poet sub verses protocols and she gives us the confessional mode or her personal impressions on settings, but then even towards the end escape from the body and escape from life is the only solution that she can probably.

MOHIT: There is no redemption unlike in the Goblin Market.

SHIKRITI: There is no redemption, right.

MOHIT: And I think this is very this is very topical because it is indicative of the shift in the understanding of the human condition that occurred that took place from 19th century to the 20th century.

SHIKRITI: To the 20th century, right. So when we come from the Victorian age to the modern age and how identity is further more fragmented, it is all the more disrupted, so that.

MOHIT: And the idea of a universal solution or universal moral or ethic that you can look forward to that is undermined.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, and that does not exist anymore. So if we can say that Laura and Lizzie can complement each other and both are like two halves that come together and become a whole when.

MOHIT: There is no such consolation in the case.

SHIKRITI: There is no such consolation in Tulips because it is again a post war world war poem and it is set in modern times after the war were there is total fragmentation, disintegration and there is no possibility of grand narrative of happiness to succeed.

MOHIT: Yeah, or some some narrative which you can scribe to to explain away things or to which you can look forward for some consolation, religious there is no such religious narrative or neither neither a narrative in human agency as well because we see how the structures pervade the structures actually control all of your agency and the power pervades through that structure to deprive you of any kind of resistance that you may think up of putting on.

SHIKRITI: And the structure of both the poems is also important to look at that while Christina Rossetti guise all her the points that she wants to make or all her challenges against the authority and patriarchy, she guises it in under in the guise of a fable or in the guise of the story or children's poem. But Plath's tone here is more confessional, it is more direct, it is more personal, so here she does not need to again take adopt the disguise of any story or fable I think that also is a commentary on the times and the setting and the authority of the female writer or how much she can contribute or how much is she allowed to write in a society.

MOHIT: Female consciousness is more closely scrutinized and more closely examined.

SHIKRITI: Examined.

MOHIT: In Tulips.

SHIKRITI: And even for the scope the author's the poets here in case in this case it is a poet, so the poet's scope for experimentation or writing the personal things I think in a way is more I would not say appreciated but it is more allowed in the modern period because it is still experimental and so many people or other poets have or female poets have worked with it, but when Rossetti was writing in 19th century it an impossibility.

MOHIT: And I think I think it is also because in Rossetti's times women were also expected to confirm to certain stereotype even even when they were writers and they have some sort of agency, so even when you are talking about a lot of stuff and even when you are critiquing the current prevalent forms of sexual practices or like economic forces which are changing the society around you, even then you are supposed to maintain a certain conventionality of

form and the conventionality of form in the text indicates a conventionality that you are forced to practice in reality as well.

SHIKRITI: Right, so but then we see that.

MOHIT: Which is something that she must adhere to even when she is critiquing something.

SHIKRITI: When she is writing. Yeah, so but we see that both these two poets both the female poets have very different ways of approaching their topic and very different ways of handling their subject, but both are definitely feminist poems which talk about female desire, female sexuality be it in Goblin Market and even Tulips talks about desire but in a very different way it is more related to loss and trauma and how women are subjectified and subordinated in a setting such as the hospital setting and but both the poem they talk about the female body, they talk about women's experiences in different settings where it be the economy on the market space or in the medical space where you were, but in both the cases the women are consumers, in Goblin Market they are consumers of the products, the products offered by the Goblin, where in the Tulips the patient is a consumer of the medicine or the medical industry.

MOHIT: In both the cases they are presented as passive consumers.

SHIKRITI: Right.

MOHIT: Like the idea of consumer.

SHIKRITI: Having agency.

MOHIT: The status of being a consumer also can like can be designed to deprive you of agency and in both the cases when you see that happening.

SHIKRITI: You see that happening, yeah.

MOHIT: As a passive consumer of products that is given to you by Goblins is being playing into the hands of the Goblins and at the same time when you are in the hospital you are the one supposed to be getting and getting nourishment and getting your health back but they are also your passive consumer so we see that the.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, because in the relationship of doctor and patient, the doctor obviously has more power than the patient that is how the system works and even when we say that we are

voluntarily concern we are giving concern and voluntarily incorporating ourselves in the hospital space, but definitely there is a discrepancy of power between the doctor and the patient and the doctor decides the fate of the patient.

MOHIT: In dynamic dynamic of the it shows us that the dynamic of consumption is also something which is decided by forces outside (())(61:15).

SHIKRITI: Outside, so the all those forces of repression that (())(61:17) so but then again I would just probably repeating myself that even in the Goblin Market that there is some agency towards the end that we get to see and be it through female (solidaration) solidarity sorry be it through female solidarity.

MOHIT: Principled consumption.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, through family, through sisterhood but here again but in case of Plath and Tulips she seems to be terribly alone and there is no community to support her, there is no possibility for solidarity, there is no possibility for an understanding between humans.

MOHIT: Which is which is a commentary on the.

SHIKRITI: Social conditions of the time.

MOHIT: Social conditions of the times, I think on that note we can end.

SHIKRITI: Yeah, we can end today's lecture, thank you.

MOHIT: Thank you very much for watching.