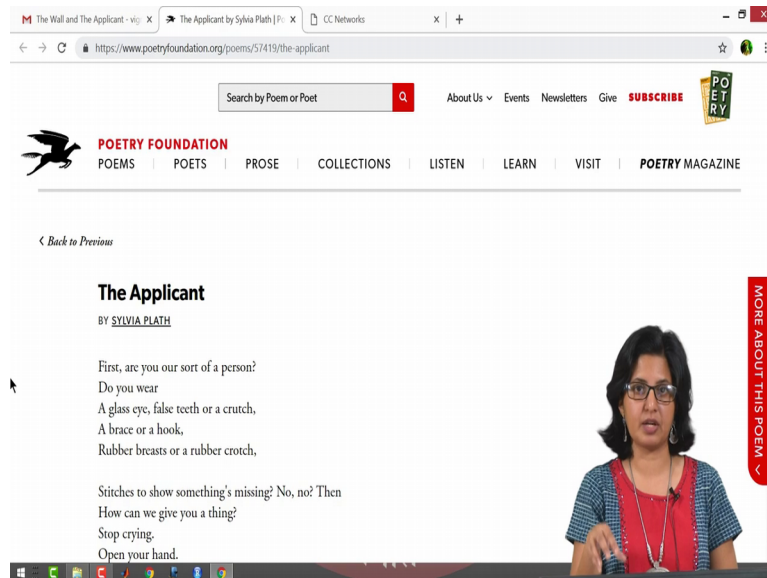


Introduction to World Literature
Professor Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
The Applicant

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Good morning and welcome today's session of this NPTEL course title introduction to world literature, we are looking another piece of poem, this is by Sylvia Plath was an American poet, she lived in late modernist period that is from the 1930 to 1960, she had died very young, she had died at the age of 30, she committed suicide, she was also the wife of the another fellow American poet Ted Hughes, there are a lot of personal details about her which would also help us understand the kind of poetry that she had been writing and the way in which the personal and the political intersect in her idea of feminism, in her ideas of self and in the way she looked at, various institutions which also act as fetters as far as moment and like concerned.

So the applicant is one of her poems where you find her at her best in terms of a humor and this is splitting contempt, so what is the title remind is of, when we see that it has the applicant, it reminds is of context of the job interview, it is about someone who is applying for a possession but gradually into the poem you realise it has got to do nothing with a job application, but this is about marriage and this is about placing marriage within the marketplace that had become by the time that her, this poem was getting written.

It said that this poem was written in October 1962 and it was first published in London magazine that was in 1963 and this appear in a book titled Ariel in 1965 and it is also

become a very classic volume of a powerful poetry by Sylvia Plath and there was also a lot of controversy surrounding its content and edit share because it was also posthumous in nature, to get a sense how this boom sounds and about the tone that it sets, the setting of it right at the outset tell, read out rate at the first couple of stanzas.

The applicant by Sylvia Plath, first are you our sort of a person, do you wear a glass eye, false teeth or a crutch, a brace or a hook, rubber breast or a rubber crouch, stitches to show something is missing, no, no, then how can we give you a thing, stop crying, open your hand empty, empty, here is a hand, to fill it and willing to bring teacups and rollaway headaches and do whatever you tell it, will you marry it. It is guaranteed, to thumb shut your eyes at the end and dissolve of sorrow.

The poem gives away what it is about right at the outside, it is about marriage and there is a man who is being asked a certain questions by the speaker and we also get to know that what are the powerful things behind the title of this poem that is not really targeting the man, it is not really targeting anyone in person, it is targeting the system, it also showing is how certain things are very deeply rooted, deeply in great that, there is no way of getting out of it.

So this is a poem that explores the meaning of marriage, the generosity row type and the social pressures and how this poem becomes extremely relevant and powerful is in the way how it shows that even men are victims of this stereotypes, they are also under a lot of social pressure to do what is required of depth and look at the series of questions at the beginning about whether there is a, there are artificially parts and it also draws it, draws attention to the kind of artificiality and kind of many unnatural things which were increasingly being used to boost the looks of both men and women.

It draws her attention to the artificiality which has set in by the 1960s and this poem is written in the 1960s and what is the relevant of 1960s is especially in the American and European context, that is a time when the second wave feminism had begun to set in, so when we look at this poem from the content of the second wave feminism, it becomes to make more sense, that is also the time when marriages as an institution began to be questioned from various angles and this is also the time that feminism as a movement, it began to move from merely the activist, political, articulation and it began to enter the households and in America.

Particularly this is the time the baby boom, the baby boom years are also happening, this is right after the Second World War and there is a lot of focus on the family, on making babies literarily and during this time, we also know that it is time in the beat generation happens there are a lot of things, the lot of protests going on from the fields of culture, music, writing, where there is a very active way in which voices are being raised and projected against this domination of institutions which also via extension try to reinforce the stereotypes of gender of institution related to marriage, about conventions, about conforming to certain things which are concerned, more important and perhaps articulating oneself and perhaps giving a sense of ages to see to oneself.

So this poem is also needs to be read in that context and as mentioned earlier, it is the system, it is the overall institution which is being targeted over here any also quite amazing the way in which she also brings in the political element, the political angle to get through such a lucently written poem.

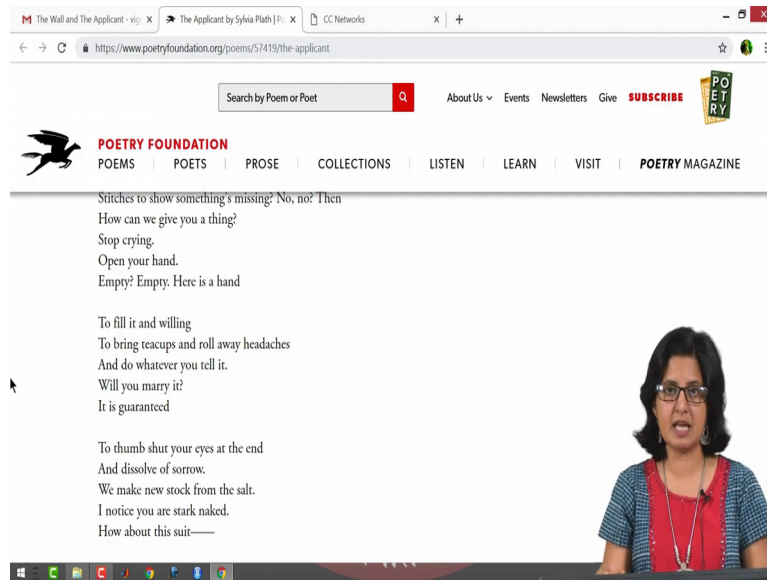
The subversion, which is taking place is in a very, very is a casting way and you need to be there to actually get it, you need to know the context, the political, social developments of that period to really get what she is hinting at, and as far as Sylvia Plath is concern she write very nonconformist are very controversial life, and she also believe that marriage is an institution which may totally take away the creativity that she was gifted with and if we look at it from along the lines of the revolution that is among to boa and magineo wolf had set in the way in which the magineo wolf spoke about a room of one's own the way in which she was trying to carve out a space for herself.

While being caught were then the domestic chaos and the muddiness of a feminist city, we find that Sylvia Plath is radically different from that, while a wolf writing we find hard trying to carve out the space, we find in Sylvia Plath, she is trying to get out of it completely, there is no way in which she is trying to negotiate in a peaceful way, she wants to get out of the system and she wants to show that the system is completely worthless and there is no point trying to negotiate with it in a non-radical is full way and then the easier way to get out of it, it gets better.

So that is kind of radical articulation that second wave feminism also bring in its it and it is not just about trying to refine and reform the system by staying wherein told, it is also getting out of it and radical ways as far as it is possible and this poem tells us about how ridiculous and how meaningless now a completely irrational this system is, the matted, the

process which goes on while one is trying to get into the system of marriage, while one is trying to fit oneself within the system of marriage.

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And hand obviously, here is a hand to fill it and willing to bring a teacups in rollaway headaches and do whatever you tell it, the hand of course signifies there is a woman whose hand is going to be given in marriage this man to whom the speaker is talking to, to whom the speaker is addressing and what is this hand supposed to do? What is this woman supposed to do, whose hand is going to be given in marriage to this man, this hand is supposed to bring teacups and rollaway headaches as muddiness it gets and that is the significance which also has been used to somewhat the entire institution and look at the way in which the hand, the woman is denied of any kind of agency, not to say that the man has a choice here, he is also being forced to be a part of this because this is an need, a social need, a compulsion that he feels.

I also wanted to recall the opening lines of bright and prettiness where generosity in 19th-century else is that, it is a well-known fact that a man who is in possession of good wealth is also looking out for a wife and that is kind of setting, the Sylvia Plath is also trying to somewhat requesting and radically reinvent over here.

So the poem continues to progress in the form of an interview, the man who is requesting over here, he has been interviewed over here and this man could be anyone, regardless of his background, his contacts, if you look at the way in which poem proceeds, we get to know that it really does not matter from where the man is coming, where he is been position it

remains pretty much the same, across time and space, and it becomes more relevant in the 1960s, of course and we can also say that it has really change even the contemporary, this mode of interviewing the expectation and what is being expected all of that remains the same in a very ironically and in the very alarming way.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:06)

The image consists of two screenshots of a video lecture. In the top screenshot, a woman with dark hair and glasses is reading from a screen. The screen displays the Poetry Foundation website with the poem 'The Applicant' by Sylvia Plath. The text on the screen is: 'Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then / How can we give you a thing? / Stop crying. / Open your hand. / Empty? Empty. Here is a hand / / To fill it and willing / To bring teacups and roll away headaches / And do whatever you tell it. / Will you marry it? / It is guaranteed / / To thumb shut your eyes at the end / And dissolve of sorrow. / We make new stock from the salt. / I notice you are stark naked. / How about this suit—'. The bottom screenshot shows the same woman reading the same poem, but the text on the screen has scrolled down to: 'We make new stock from the salt. / I notice you are stark naked. / How about this suit— / / Black and stiff, but not a bad fit. / Will you marry it? / It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof / Against fire and bombs through the roof. / Believe me, they'll bury you in it. / / Now your head, excuse me, is empty. / I have the ticket for that. / Come here, sweetie, out of the closet. / Well, what do you think of *that*? / Naked as paper to start / / But in twenty-five years she'll be silver, / In fifty, gold.'

Will you marry, it is guaranteed to thumb shut your eyes at the end and dissolves of sorrow, we make new stock from the salt, I notice you are stark naked, how about this suit, black and stiff but not a bad fit, will you marry it, so the man is being made ready for location and the black suit, which fits well, it is a symbol for marriage, the actual ceremony of getting married and you know that in this process, from the time the hand is being identified and handed over to the man and the ceremony of getting married.

This hardly any gap between this, there is no need to identify in such as love or connection are the romantic ideas for made each other, nothing of that sort, it is very, very ensemble, very, very straightforward because the man need to get married and as long as he is sure to have met the right kind of expectation, he also can be ready with this suit coat and married, it is as simple as that very, very matter of fact, and this is what Sylvia Plath is also trying to subvert and very, very brutally in a casting way.

And she is also trying to intervene in this debate about the role of women during this time and about questioning, what exactly the woman do in contributing to the social political developments of this poem, I want you to take, I want you to also think about the beat generation during this time, in the post-1977 or 1980s, feminist scholarship has also tried to address the question of the role of women in the 1960s, which is also considered as a very radical reinventing phase as far as music, literature and culture, especially in the context of your, when America was concerned and if you again take the case of the beat generation particular, we will also see it was an all man affair and the woman whenever a mention. They just where possession as either this partners or girlfriends of these leading beat writers.

So as much as the beat generation and the leading writers and that is of those times, much as they tried to subvert the system, much as they try to radically request the way in which things were getting institutionalised, patriarchy was very, very rarely requested and patriarchy could not be subverted in the ways that they were trying to hang this is something that poet writes as lights away Plaths also trying to get it and it is also about the complete lack of agency, not just from the side of the woman and also from the side of the man and this is what make this poem very, very real and very heart-hitting because mentioned earlier, there is no way in which the man is targeted.

It is the patriarchy, is the system which is being targeted in a very, very powerful way and what makes this almost exciting is the fact, this is being written even the for third way of the feminism had hit, even before third way of feminism had begun to sink it and this continues to be relevant, there is a cast semesters not lost, even when he this today after these decades which have passed in between and it continues to show how a woman is best treated as domestic thing and look at the way in which the pronoun it is being used completely, so it takes away any kind of identity that a woman is supposed to have, there is absolutely no way in which the woman is given a sense of agency or any other purpose to serve except being handed over in the marriage to the man who is question here.

Will you marry it, it is waterproof, shatterproof, proofs again fire and bombs through the roof, believe me, they will bury you in it, so there is a function that the woman is supposed to perform, but that is only within the context of marriage, unless she is located very conveniently within the institutional of marriage in connection with a man, her function is not complete and all, that is what this poem is also trying to subvert in question and very, very it is a castically undermine so.

And the strength and resilience of a woman which is expected of to marriage, that is also been mocked it over here about how it is waterproof, shatterproof, proof against fire and bombs and it is also questioning this idea of marriages eternity of it which is sanctified through the ceremony of marriage, through the ritual of marriage by indicating that the woman is supposed to stay strong, come what may and this is the idea, which is been radically questioning in the 1960s as with but at the same time.

If you are familiar with the history, the political history of America, you would also get to know that the 1960s is a time when the state is also into wading, in a powerful way to ensure that family as a system remains intact and that is one of the thing that is state is also using as a difference mechanism to bring the nation together, to build up closely necessarily, too deeply ingrain the values of the domesticity, the values of relationships in the context of family and writers like Sylvia Plath, they also find this extremely delimiting and as far as Plath is concerned and we also know this through the many writings that are available from her journals and specially in her work the bell job.

How she found the roots of patriarchy growing deep and deep into every system, which was getting institutionalised and how she found herself being suffocated with and such an extent that she has just decided to end her life and the young age of 30, while this poem remains very, very sarcastic, it is also about a certain kind of fear that Plath is expressing, the fear that the domesticity would interfere with her, creativity and that the mundane choose the daily life of domesticity, the kids about the, how the figure of her husband and everything would undetermined her writing seriously.

How that would undermine her personality itself and how that would radically change what she is and make her to fit into something that she it is not want to fit herself in, and that is the fear that this poem also captures in a wonderful way.

Now your head, excuse me is empty, I have the ticket for that, come here sweetie out of the closet, well what you think of that? Naked as paper to start but in twenty-five years, she will be silver in fifty, gold. It is talking about the permanent of this institution, of course it is overly presenting the very rosy picture, which is also the promise that this institution, apparently offers to one, but at the same time, the prospect is also very, very intoting and frightening as far as this poem is concerned and it talks about how this speaker, perhaps the speaker also stands for the society and it really does not matter what gender the speaker belongs to.

No matter what general the speaker belongs to, the voice is that of the society, if the society is speaking for the man and making decisions on the woman and seeing it. I have the ticket for it, it is all under control, I have taken care of everything and look at the term used here, sweetie come here, sweetie out of the closet, it is a word, in India ring word which also comes in as very, very condescending at this point of time, this not have any idea about love over here, it has upper hand and trying to tell the man and woman, though the addressee is mostly the man here, trying to tell the man and the woman that we have taken care of everything, you just need to do what is expected of you and not deviate from those conventions that you are supposed to follow.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:17)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57419/the-applicant>. The page features the Poetry Foundation logo and navigation menu. The poem text is as follows:

naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
In fifty, gold.
A living doll, everywhere you look.
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.
You have a hole, it's a poultice.
You have an eye, it's an image.
My boy, it's your last resort.
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

Sylvia Plath, "The Applicant" from *The Collected Poems*. Copyright © 2008 by Sylvia Plath.
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But in twenty-five years she will be silver and in fifty gold, living doll, wherever you look, look at the majority of the doll and I cannot help recalling that is how by Lipson late 19th-century and how Nora the lead to diagnose, how she is forced to work out of the doll house, the family wherein in which he was living, tired of being treated as a doll, tired of being

taken care of and this imagery is very, very hard to miss over here and in the late 19th-century as we know when the doll's house was first staged in.

Norway first and then across Europe, including Britain, it was a major blow to the conventions, when Lipsons place where stage, it was even considered as a open shoe which corrupt the society and in dolls house. Incidentally, the husband told he is not necessarily a bad sort of a person, he is the one who want to take care of the family, the only thing which he is denying wife Nora is a sense of agency and that is enough to make her workout, that moment when she really assist where there is worth staying with this man.

Hopeless is own owner, his own sense of reputation above everything else and the moment she really assist that she is, she was being treated as a doll and there also we find she is not necessarily blaming towel for, later she traces it back to the roots of it are being traced back to patriarchy, even though the torment self is not mentioned in any way and she realises that she was always treated as a doll, first by her father and later by her husband, she was always being treated as a doll, a very convenient arrangement.

Where she always told what to do? Where she is always taken care of her needs are being taken care, she has been baby talk to incessantly and this is something that begins to hit her very hard and once it realisation comes in, she find it difficult to stay back, not even for the sake of kids and that is the kind of radicalism that had hit your up from the late 19th-century and it only gets more and more cemented in a radical way.

But in the 1960s. What makes it even more phooey in it is the fact that during a time, even when mechanisms of the state, even in various institution are trying to hammer down the significance of the family, the significance of sticking to conventions, we find these voices moving away from what is expected, moving out of the confinement, moving out of the state is of a conforming and radically questioning these institutions in a value system of which could totally delimit the potential of not just one man, but also men in significant ways.

And from the 1960s onwards, we also find a lot of scholarship emerging from the context of feminism and this is also the time when we find that the next is between these various forms of systems undermine the possibilities of minorities in terms of ethnicity, in terms of gender, in terms of race, in terms of region all of these things are highlighted and signed up an intersection, a sort of dialogue across this various articulation, so this poem also needs to be

read in that larger context and not merely as an attempt to expose the flaw or inheritance valances of the institution of marriage, which is being questioned here, so what is this dolls supposed to do?

It can sew, it can cook, it can talk, talk, talk, it works there is nothing wrong with it, so as long as it works, as long as it can perform this basic functions everything is fine, if it can sew, cook and if it can talk, talk and talk, if it just entertain you and then do whatever is basically needed, maint close or feed you well, it should be fine, the man is been condition to accept that is nothing more than you should expect as long as the basic needs are meet its fine.

And what Plath find extremely problematic here, perhaps, is the complete absence of an intellectual compatibility that she also believed it, though she lived with a man who is also a fellow poet, Ted Hughes, we find that she was deeply dissatisfied and it is history also tells that soon after Plaths death, a Hughes was also deeply devastated, they did not have a very rosy marriage, there were issues always throughout and threw in her journals and in her writing soles had to convey that it is the institution which had to be plain, but it is impossible for an intellectually craving women and independent woman to stay happy within peace confinement.

One which was disagree where that one may choose to have different opinions about it and there was, of course, a lot of instances, perhaps to prove it. Otherwise, but the importance of this poem is that, it is a worded everything in this reduce everything to the minimal basic thing is that it is very hard hitting and it is difficult for not to see splitting contempt which is the throughout and look at the words which are used in this poem, there is nothing found about the way in which it is stated, it is very, very simple, it is broken down entire institution into very, very simple terms, about the basic functions, about the basic expectations which are also quite frightening in a significant way.

It works there is nothing wrong with it, you have a whole is poultice, you have an eye it is an image, my boy it is your last resort, will you marry it, marry it, marry it, there is a sense of urgency towards the end as if this is your last resort, you either get hold of it, you either claim it now or perhaps you will not get another chance, look at the amount of social pressure, which is being exerted, not just on the women, but on the man as well and looked at how the speaker is completely in control, completely in charge and here it not just the

woman whose been denied agency, the man does not seem to have an agency, I will not find,
we the poem is not even indicate that the man is trying to respond

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The Applicant

BY SYLVIA PLATH

First, are you our sort of a person?
Do you wear
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
A brace or a hook,
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then
How can we give you a thing?
Stop crying.
Open your hand.

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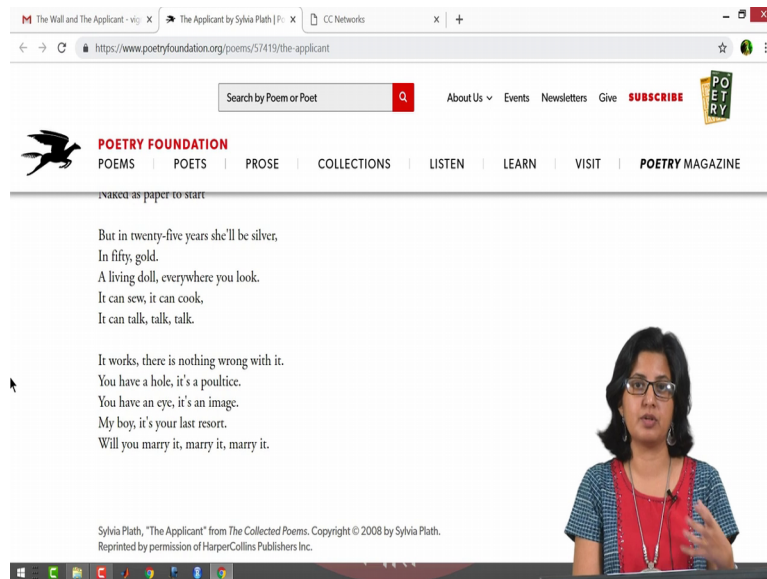
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We make new stock from the salt.
I notice you are stark naked.
How about this suit—

Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.
Will you marry it?
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
Against fire and bombs through the roof.
Believe me, they'll bury you in it.

Now your head, excuse me, is empty.
I have the ticket for that.
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.
Well, what do you think of *that*?
Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
In fifty, gold.



And that the only kind of respond that they could also tell this is addressing, how can we give you a thing, stop crying, open your hand, there is a desperation into which the man is also being forced into and by the end, it is almost like the sweating the man to agree, will you marry it, marry it, marry it, it seems as if as a sense of agency but it is not there at all, as a test of choice left the man has to either married or completely let go of this last chance, has poem says my boy, it is your last resort, looked the way the word.

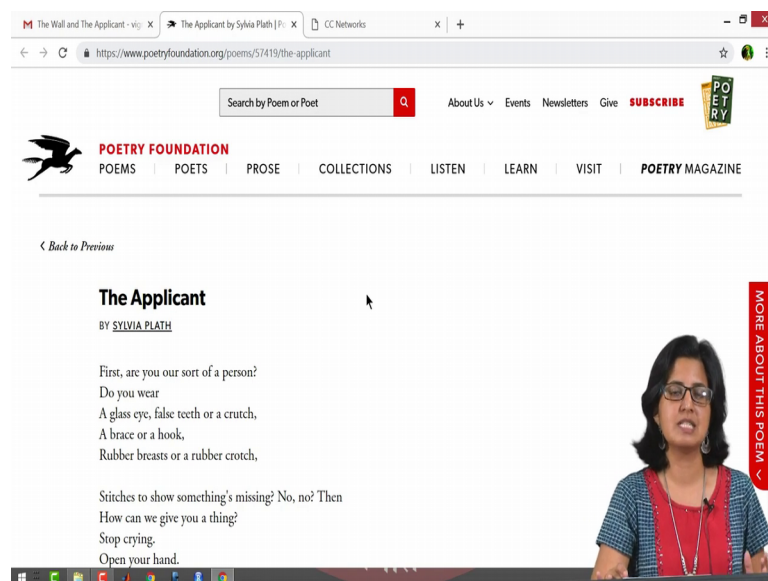
My boy is also used very, very condescending, very, very patronising and one of the larger things that this poem trying to do is that the victim of patriarchy need not be the woman alone, it is both the man and woman who are caught within this situation and this realisation has radically reinvented the kind of feminism, the kind of feminist politics that has come to stay from 1960s onwards and even today when the systems are be question and when the ideologies are be radically reinvented and reshaped when the politics is being defined and refined in multiple ways, in this realisation which remains at the heart of it.

It is realisation, it is dis-realisation which also continues to be seen as one of the foundational things when one talks about the feminism in the larger context, so in the framework of an interview, within the framework of very, very conventional interview, what the poem is trying to do is that, the mail interviewee is been given a chance to own something, so the woman is also seen as a property, will you marry it, marry it, marry it, it is almost like been given good property to own a good investment, something which you cannot afford to miss all, to claim right away, to claim your ownership over it and then use that as a commodity which we in the next twenty-five years, it becomes silver and in the next fifty years turn into gold.

So this is like a price procession and a good investment, so here the figure of the women, the moment she gets transformed into within this institution as a wife, she also becomes commodity, a thing of the marketplace, which will continue to if you certain returns in terms of pastiche, in terms of revenue, in terms of social upgradation in multiple ways, and it also enjoys that the application is also the right kind of person to receive it, so more than compatibility at an emotional level, at an intellectual level, what here it is been shown, is whether there is a social compatibility, which can also be showcased in very rosy ways and finally before we wrap up look at the framework of the poem, look at the structure of the poem.

The poetic lines break away when would it is very hard to some of the, there is no structure which can be identify, there is no form to which it sticks, at some level, it is also suggesting that to be able to fit in, to be able to fit in very, very, very well and to be able to claim this thing which is being offering in terms of marriage, in terms of the figure of a wife, you also need to lose something.

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The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Poetry Foundation website. The URL is <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57419/the-applicant>. The page features a search bar, navigation links (About Us, Events, Newsletters, Give, SUBSCRIBE), and a menu with categories: POEMS, POETS, PROSE, COLLECTIONS, LISTEN, LEARN, VISIT, and POETRY MAGAZINE. The main content area displays the poem "The Applicant" by Sylvia Plath. The text of the poem is as follows:

First, are you our sort of a person?
Do you wear
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
A brace or a hook,
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then
How can we give you a thing?
Stop crying.
Open your hand.

On the right side of the page, there is a vertical red button labeled "MORE ABOUT THIS POEM". A video player is overlaid on the bottom right of the page, showing a woman with glasses reading the poem.

Look at the beginning of a poem, where the speaker is also finding out whether it is something missing, which also indicates that it is not really perfection that the speaker is looking for, it is only about the willingness to give away something, the willingness to not remain true to oneself and the willingness to adapt and the willingness to fit into the conceptions that would make the applicant also a perfect one, someone who can really really fit in, so also an extension of the capitalistic economy, which had begun to set in and the expectations of the market place.

Finally, pay attention to the tone which also indicates a consumerism and the societal pressure, which also reads for stereotypes in multiple ways, and as we all know in the 1960s is the time when commercialism is a man when the demise of the market began to set in multiple ways, and we also see this influencing, the turn of events as far as the shift from modernism to post-modernism is concerned, we know about the various things with changed as far as the market place is concerned, about the ways in which the television shows began to change, about the ways in which the idea of culture, the idea of producing art for the consumerism society.

How all of those began to change, so this poem is needs to be read within that larger context to make sense of how it deliberately tries to set of it, particularly institution of marriage over here, within these frameworks out of which it is trying to break away as well, so as we wrap up, I wanted to pay attention to how it continues to be relevant in today's society in the contemporary world, where marriage and relationships, the institutionalise frameworks of it.

They continue to be situated the high-powered world of commercial market, and that is perhaps the greatest is the entire, that is hard-hitting, cast them, the spoon live as, lives us with and it continues to stay relevant across this decades, though this was published in the 1960s and Sylvia Plath herself and spoken thus about this poem, I leave you with that, in this poem, the speaker is an executive, a sort of exacting super salesman, he wants to be sure, the applicant for his marvellous product really needs it and will treat this, treat it right.

So it is the marketplace that she also had in mind and for your information that is also reading by Sylvia Plath herself, which is available on line and many say Hermia, Hermia say that it is one of the best that you can find in terms of her reading and hold, encourage you to act syntactically look at this poem and also be familiar with the ideas of the second way feminism, when in the context of which this poem and its articulation begins to make more sense.

Hopefully, will also get a chance to look at second way feminism and look at how that had radically change the way in which a womens writing began to be read and began to be conceived within the larger patriarchal structure, not just of society but also about literary reading and literary context and criticises, thank you for listening and look forward to see you in the next section.