

**Poetry**  
**Professor. S.P. Dhanavel**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture No. 62**  
**Judith Wright**

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)

**Judith Wright (1915-2000)**

- Historical and Literary Context
- Judith Wright
- "Woman to Man"
- "Eve to Her Daughters"
- Analysis



Hello. We will deal with the poetry of Judith Wright now in this lecture. She is an Australian poet. So, we will have a historical and literary context to begin with. Then, look into the life of Judith Wright and then discuss 2 poems "Woman to Man," "Eve to Her Daughters." And finally, give our opinion on these 2 poems and the poet.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:44)

**Historical and Literary Context**

- Discovery of the Australian continent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century
- British settlement and the Native Unsettling in 1788
- The World Wars I and II
- Australian colonial and postcolonial literature
- Traditional British poetry: Romantic and Victorian
- Modernist poetry and the American Influence
- Environmental and feminist poetry
- Postcolonial issues of exploitation and alienation
- Australian poets: Kenneth Slessor, Douglas Stewart, R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, Judith Wright, Kath Walker/Oodgeroo, **Gwen Harwood** as **Walter Lehman/ Francis Geyer (male name in 1961)**



Like America, like Canada, Australia was also discovered by Europeans in the sixteenth century. But then for settlement to take place in Australia, it took longer time. That is why the British settlement took place in Australia in 1788. That led to that Native Unsettlement. That means the indigenous people had to be unsettled. They had to go deeper and deeper into the forest, they had to lose their lands.

As members of the Commonwealth, Canada and Australia participated in the First World War and the Second World War. And this Australian experience like Canadian experience is largely colonial and post-colonial which has given rise to a literature called post colonial literature in Australia and many other parts of the world which were ruled by British people. As in the case of Canada, we have traditional poetry to start with in Australian poetry, Romantic, Victorian poetry in the beginning. And then, the waves of revolution came from Britain and America into Australia as it happened in the case of Canada.

Poets in Australia, as elsewhere began to think about environmental questions and also, the status of women. That is why this environmental poetry and feminist poetry plus post colonial poetry, because of oppression all these things go together. The primary questions we have in post colonial poetry or literature are relating to exploitation of the native people and alienation of both, the native people and the settled people.

We have well known Australian poets like Kenneth Slessor, Douglas Stewart, R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, Judith Wright, Kath Walker who has another name, Oodgeroo, that is the tribal name, indigenous name. We have a very interesting case of a woman poet, Gwen Harwood who had to publish her poems using men's name in 1961, she used two names we have here- Walter Lehman and Francis Geyer. When she sent her poems to editors in Australia in the name of male, these poems were accepted. But when she sent her poems in her own name as a woman, they were rejected. That is why we have this example here. But remember, in Germany, in 1848, Louise Otto was able to publish her article in her own name. That is why this feminist question whether it is nineteenth century or twentieth century or even today, twenty first century is very important for us. Feminist concern is very important for a humanity.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:03)

### Judith Wright (1915-2000)

- A notable Australian poet and environmental activist
- Committed to the land and the native people
- Against the grain of the White Man's burden
- Voice for the oppressed voiceless people and the land
- Opposed to war, technology, and destruction of nature
- Defense of the land, the people and human values
- Influenced by poets like Blake and Eliot
- **Poetry volumes:** *The Moving Image* (1946), *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *The Other Half* (1966), *Alive* (1973), *Phantom Dwelling* (1985)
- Well-known poems: "Remittance Man," "Woman to Man," "Request to a Year," "Eve to Her Daughters"



Judith Wright, as we said, is an Australian poet born in 1915 and she died in 2000. Her life is a remarkable life of dedication, commitment to the land, Australia. She is a notable Australian poet and an environmental activist. She was committed to the land and native people throughout her life. Even just before her death, she participated in a demonstration against atrocities on the native people.

In her blood, she was not for this white man's burden. She disbelieved this white man's burden, that is going to another land and preaching Christianity, converting them into Christians and then modernizing the land. She did not believe this. She became a voice for the oppressed, voiceless people and also, the voiceless land. She was opposed to war, technology and the destruction of nature. She defended the land, the people and also human values.

Interestingly, she was influenced by poets like two contrasting minds like Blake and Eliot. Blake is a romantic poet; Eliot is a modernist poet. These two elements, opposite elements come together in the feminist thought of Judith Wright. She published a number of volumes. Here, we have mentioned some- "The Moving Image," "Woman to Man," "The Gateway," "The Two Fires," "The Other Half," "Alive," "Phantom Dwelling." Some of the well-known poems are "Remittance Man," "Woman to Man," "Request to a Year," "Eve to Her Daughters."

(Refer Slide Time: 06:03)

## Woman to Man, Stanzas 1& 2

The eyeless labourer in the night,  
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,  
builds for its resurrection day—  
silent and swift and deep from sight  
foresees the unimagined light.

5

[The second stanza is about the nameless and faceless child which is the hunter and the chase as well as the third who lay between the couple.]



We have chosen two poems; the first is “Woman to Man.” Again, for copyright reasons, we are not able to show the whole poem to you. Please go to the text or Poetry Foundation website. We will read some lines and summarize some others. Here we have the first stanza:

“The eyeless labourer in the night,  
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,  
builds for its resurrection day-  
silent and swift and deep from sight  
foresees the unimagined light.”

That is the first stanza. The second stanza is about the nameless and faceless child which is the hunter and the chase as well as the third who lay between the couple. Here is a man and a woman, the woman has conceived a child and she is pregnant and so, she is describing her own experience of expecting mother.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:02)

## Woman to Man, Stanzas 3 & 4

[The third stanza shows that the child is the flesh and blood of the couple]

This is the maker and the made;  
this is the question and reply;  
the blind head butting at the dark,  
the blaze of light along the blade.  
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

20



Here, we have summarized the third stanza, the third stanza shows that the child is the flesh and blood of the couple. Some third emerges from these two people. Let us read the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza now:

“This is a maker and the made;  
this is the question and reply;  
the blind head butting at the dark,  
the blaze of light along the blade.  
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.”

The woman is really afraid, every pregnant woman will have some kind of fear about the future. How she will live, how she will give birth to the child, how will she be able to take care of the child, some fear will always be there. That is why a woman always has a second birth after the child birth.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:50)

### Thematic Contrast

- Woman and Man
- Laborer and Master
- Birth/Life/Love and Death
- Light and Dark
- Day and Night
- The Hunter and the Hunted
- The Maker and the Made
- The Question and the Answer
- Pain and Pleasure
- A woman's perspective of child bearing
- The fear and pain of giving birth to a child that is made up of the features of both parents



Let us pay attention to the thematic contrast in this poem. We have a number of contrasts in this poem. It is an amazing poem with full of contrast: Between woman and man, labourer and master, birth, life and love on the one hand and death on the other, light and dark, day and night, the hunter and the hunted, the maker and the made, the question and the answer, pain and pleasure. This poem deals with the woman's perspective of child bearing. The fear and pain of giving birth to a child that is made up of the features of both parents is presented in this poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:33)

### Poetic Devices

- **Repetition:** the eyeless, the selfless, the shapeless (1-2)
- **Alli and Asso:** the selfless, shapless, seed I hold (2)
- **Allusion:** resurrection day [the day of the child's birth]
- **Alli/Asso/Conso:** silent and swift and deep from sight (4)
- **Anaphora:** This is (6, 9, 14, 16, 17)
- **Metaphor:** This is the **blood's wild tree** that grows (14)
- **Metaphor:** the intricate and folded rose (15)
- **Paradox:** This is the maker and the made;  
• this is the question and reply; (16-17)
- **Alli/Conso/Asso:** the blaze of light along the blade (19)



A number of poetic devices are there in this poem. To begin with, we have repetition, 'the eyeless,' 'the selfless,' 'the shapeless.' The word itself is not repeated but the sound, the

structure “less, less, less” that is interesting, that draws our attention. Alliteration and assonance, we have in the second line- ‘the selfless, the shapeless, seed I hold.’ We have allusion to ‘resurrection day,’ the day of the child’s birth referred to in the poem. It also has a reference to Christ, the resurrection from his graveyard.

Then we have alliteration, assonance and consonance in line number 4, ‘silent and swift and deep from sight.’ Then we have anaphora which is remarkable in this poem, “this is” that is how the line begins and it is repeated in line 6, 9, 14, 16 and 17. That means it gives a structural foundation for the whole poem. This is it, this is the experience, this is life, this is love, this is death, this is the poem. We have a metaphor in line number 14, ‘This is the blood’s wild tree that grows.’ Blood’s wild tree; blood in the human body and that becomes wild tree that grows. Imagine a child growing in the womb of a mother.

Then we have another metaphor in the intricate and folded rose in line number 15. The whole paradox of this poem is summed up here,

“This is the maker and the made;  
this is the question and reply.”

What is that question? What is that reply? The poem is a question, the poem is also a reply. Why does a woman alone have this child conception? Why does she alone experience the difficulty of giving birth to the child? Then we have alliteration consonance and assonance in line number 19, ‘the blaze of light along the blade.’ We have indicated them in all different ways of highlighting. We underlined “l”, highlighted “a” put in bold. Blaze of light along the blade.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:58)

### Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter

- **Rhyme:** Lines 1, 4, and 5 in every stanza rhyme;  
➤ night, sight, light; face, chase, embrace; knows, grows, rose; made, blade, afraid
- **Rhythm:** iamb with a variation of trochee
- **Meter:** tetrameter; eight syllables and four feet
- **Enjambment:** line 4
- **Caesura and End-Stopped lines**

This is | the ma | ker and | the made;  
this is | the que | stion and | reply;  
the blind | head bu | tting at | the dark,  
the blaze | of light | along | the blade.  
Oh hold | me, for | I am | afraid.



We have some rhyming system in this poem. Lines 1, 4 and 5 in every stanza rhymed, they have some rhyme scheme. We have shown this in the example given here: “made” line number 1, “blade” line number 4 and “afraid” line number 5. We have the rhythm of iamb and also with some variations. The meter of this poem is tetrameter, there are 8 syllables and so they make up 4 feet. We have enjambment in only one case, that is line number 4. Then we have caesura and end-stopped lines for which, we have this example here.

“This is the maker and the made,

this is the question and reply,

the blind head butting at the dark,

the blaze of light along the blade.

Oh hold me, for I am afraid.”



(Refer Slide Time 11:57)

### Overall Impression

- The speaker of the poem is a pregnant woman who addresses her husband about the fears and pains she has about her conceiving and delivering the baby.
- The child is nameless and faceless but it has the physical features of both parents.
- The union of the woman and the man grows with nerves and veins like the tree and the rose.
- It is a symbol of the challenges of the pregnant woman.
- “Resurrection” and “the third who lay” evoke the religious image of Christ’s resurrection.
- The speaker wants the man to hold her as she is afraid of the pains of the delivery which the man can never experience, giving a feminist view of motherhood.



Let us see the overall impression we have for this poem. The speaker of the poem is a pregnant woman who addresses her husband about the fears and pains she has about her conceiving and delivering the baby. The child is nameless and faceless but it has the physical features of both parents. The union of the woman and the man grows with nerves and veins like the tree and the rose. It is a symbol of the challenges of the pregnant woman. “Resurrection” and “the third who lay” evoke the religious image of Christ’s resurrection. The speaker wants the man to hold her as she is afraid of the pains of the delivery which the man can never experience, giving a feminist view of motherhood in this poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:48)

### Eve to Her Daughters - I

It was not I who began it. [rebuttal]  
Turned out into draughty caves,  
hungry so often, having to work for our bread,  
hearing the children whining,  
I was nevertheless not unhappy. 5  
Where Adam went I was fairly contented to go.

[Eve's happy and submissive attitude]



We move on to the next poem, “Eve to Her Daughters.” This is much more open feminist. We will see this. It will be good if you can read the whole poem and then see how it is feministic on your own. It is more like a dramatic monologue that is why the poem begins with something like a rebuttal. Something, somebody has already said, so, it is a kind of reply so the speaker starts.

Unfortunately, we are not able to give the whole poem. We have summarized in between, as we have noted in blue colour.

“It was not I who began it.

Turned out into draughty caves,

hungry so often, having to work for our bread,

hearing the child whining,

I was nevertheless not unhappy.

5

Where Adam went I was fairly contented to go.”

This tells us about Eve’s happy and submissive attitude at the beginning.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:49)

## Eve to Her Daughters - II



I adapted myself to the punishment: it was my life.  
But Adam, you know . . . !  
He kept on brooding over the insult,  
over the trick **They** had played on us, over the scolding. 10  
He had discovered a flaw in himself  
and he had to make up for it.

[Contrast between Eve and Adam, Humans and  
God as well as Angels/Devils]



Then let us see the next section:

“I adapted myself to the punishment: it was my life.

But Adam, you know . . . !

He kept on brooding over the insult,

over the trick **They** had played on us, over the scolding. 10

He had discovered a flaw in himself

and he had to make up for it.”

Adam and Eve were created by God and they were asked to stay in this Garden of Eden. And there, they met this problem of sin and they were expelled from this Garden of Eden. And that is why we have this punishment.

Eve was able to adapt herself to the punishment easily, whereas Adam was not able to. He was always thinking about the pleasures of the Eden Garden. So, we have this “they” here, it is highlighted in capital T, that is why we have given this explanation: “They had played on us,” Gods and devils, angels. Adam and Eve became play things for Gods, their own competition and things like that.

Here, we have the contrast between Eve and Adam, in their attitudes to the punishments given by God. And also, we have the difference between humans on one hand and Gods and angels or devils on the other hand.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:07)

## Eve to Her Daughters – III and IV



Outside Eden the earth was imperfect,  
[change of seasons, hard work, bad cooking]  
(it was hard to compete with Heaven).

So he (Adam) set to work.  
[To make 'a new Eden' with all modern  
facilities/gizmos, investment, education for  
children, Abel and Cain]



We have summarized these sections. We have just quoted 3 lines from here.

“Outside Eden, the earth was imperfect,”

There is a contrast between Eden being perfect and Earth being imperfect. Earth is imperfect because of change of seasons, man has to work hard and even this cooking by Eve was found to be bad by Adam.

(“It was hard to compete with Heaven,) says Eve.”

Everything is perfect in Heaven, that kind of competition with perfection is not possible on Earth. She realizes it, but Adam could not be happy with whatever was available so he within brackets,

“so, he (Adam) set to work.”

Why did he start working? To make a new Eden with all modern facilities, gizmos, investment, education for children, that is Abel and Cain. It is a fantastic poem, within a few lines connects the past, biblical past, Genesis with our contemporary life.

Today, we have made all kinds of discoveries, inventions for our own comforts- air conditioners, cars, cell phones, technology, everything we have created, artificial intelligence, we have no end. We keep on working, we have no rest, keep on working to make our life more and more comfortable. To compete with the Garden of Eden, to achieve perfection. It is a beautiful poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:43)

## Eve to Her Daughters - V

You can see how his pride had been hurt.

...

-- he was always **mechanical-minded**. 30

He got to the very inside of the whole machine

...

As for God and the Other, they cannot be demonstrated,

and **what cannot be demonstrated** 35

**Doesn't exist.**

[limitation of patriarchal science]



Let us see the next one:

“You can see how his pride had been hurt.

...

Some lines we have omitted.

--he was always **mechanical-minded**. 30

He got to the very inside of the whole machine.”

...

He started understanding how the machine works and then made more and more machines.

“As for God and the Other, they cannot be demonstrated, 35

And **what cannot be demonstrated**

**doesn't exist.”**

It is a clear case of this limitation of patriarchal science. Pursuit of knowledge for the sake of human beings.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:24)

## Eve to Her Daughters – VI, VII, VIII

[Adam jealous and egotist]

[Eve was happier with the cave]

I would suggest, for the sake of the children, 45  
that it's time you took over.

But you are my daughters, you inherit my own faults of  
[character;

you are submissive, following Adam  
even beyond existence.

Faults of character have their own logic 50



We have another extract here. Adam is jealous and egotist, how to create a kind of perfect Eden in the Earth is the jealousy of Adam. And he is egotist, self centred, he thinks of himself, he does not bother about Eve or anything else. But Eve was happier with the cave, even if it is draught cave.

“I would suggest for the sake of the children 45

that it's time you took over.

But you are my daughters, you inherit my own faults of

[character;

you are submissive, followed Adam

even beyond existence.

Faults of characters have their own logic.” 50

(Refer Slide Time: 18:10)

## Eve to Her Daughters – IX & X

[The story of Adam and Eve plus Abel and Cain demonstrates the faults of the submissive character of women.]

Perhaps nothing exists but our faults?

At least they can be **demonstrated**.

But it's useless to make  
such a suggestion to Adam.

**He has turned himself into God,** 60  
**who is faultless, and doesn't exist.**

[The poem demonstrates the limitations of religious and scientific stories which women have to understand and help themselves]



Some more passage here, with some summaries. The story of Adam and Eve plus Abel and Cain demonstrates the faults of the submissive character of women as the speaker says. Then we have a passage:

“Perhaps nothing exists but our faults?

At least they can be **demonstrated**.

But it is useless to make

such a suggestion to Adam.

**He has turned himself into God,** 60

**who is faultless, and doesn't exist.”**

The poem, thus demonstrates the limitation of religious and scientific stories which women have to understand and help themselves. It is a completely feministic poem, rewriting the biblical story.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:54)

### Thematic Contrast

- Adam and Eve
- Work and Rest
- Crime and Punishment
- Praise and Humiliation
- Strength and Flaw
- **Eden and Earth**
- Perfection and Imperfection
- Mechanical and Original
- Centre and Periphery
- God/ Man and Woman

**Thematic Thrust:** The male story is a fable/ a lie.

**Rhetorical Effect:** Free yourself daughters



We have the thematic contrast between Adam and Eve, work and rest, crime and punishment, praise and humiliation, strength and flaw, Eden and Earth, perfection and imperfection, mechanical and original, centre and periphery, God/man and woman. Thematic thrust is on the male story, which is false according to the speaker and probably Judith Wright and many other women writers.

We have the rhetorical effect. If the story of man is false, do not believe it, then the women have to free themselves, that is why the rhetorical effect of this poem is from the speaker to the daughters. ‘Free yourself daughters. Free yourself from the falsehood of men.’

(Refer Slide Time: 19:47)

### Poetic Devices

- **Transferred epithet:** draughty caves (2)
- **Litotes:** I was nevertheless not unhappy (5)
- **Alliteration:** fleet-footed (14)
- **Blazon:** conveniences for living from lines 20 to 25
- **Alliteration:** modern means (23)
- **Anaphora & Polysyndeton:** repetition of “and” at the beginning of lines from 23 to 26
- **Alliteration:** mechanical-minded (30)
- **Antistrophe:** “demonstrated” at the end of lines 33, 34, 39, and 57






There are quite a few poetic devices in this poem. First, we have this transferred epithet in ‘draughty caves,’ this discomfort is attributed to caves. We have the case of litotes in ‘I was nevertheless not unhappy.’ The language itself is something different. Something quite contrasting in the whole informal context. We have alliteration in ‘fleet-footed’ that is, fast moving. Blazon, we have ‘list of convenience for human beings’ from refrigerator, cars, telephones, modern means of communication, that is what the poet says in the poem, that exactly is one alliteration- ‘modern means.’

Then we have anaphora and polysyndeton in repetition of “and” at the beginning of lines from 23 to 26. Then we have alliteration in mechanical minded in line number 30. We also have a very interesting antistrophe in this poem “demonstrated” at the end of lines 33, 34, 39 and 57. Science demonstrates, technology demonstrates, man patriarchy demonstrates but that demonstration is all lie, that is what the poet says.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:12)

- 
- ### Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter
- **Rhyme:** unmarked except for repetition of the pronoun “it” and proper noun “Cain”
  - **Rhythm:** common speech and conversational tone
  - **Meter:** non-metrical
  - **Poetic Form:** free verse and dramatic monologue
  - **Mode:** logical argument and persuasion of Eve’s daughters



The rhyme in this poem is unmarked, that means it is not very visible, except for repetition of the pronoun “it” and the proper noun “Cain.” Cain is repeated; similarly, “it” is repeated several times at the end of lines. The rhythm of this poem is common speech pattern and conversational tone. It is non-metrical that is, free verse. The poetic form is free verse and specifically, the form of the poem is dramatic monologue.

The speaker speaks to her daughters, there is a context, there is a listener, there is a purpose. The mode of the poem is logical argument and it is also a kind of persuasion of Eve’s daughters. Not to believe in men and pursue their own experiences, dreams and desires.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:08)

### Overall Impression

- Wright's poem is an address to women from the perspective of Eve to her daughters.
- It takes the shape of a dramatic monologue with the implied listener.
- The whole poem is an argument and also a narrative of **rewriting** the Biblical story of Adam and Eve.
- The story is continued right up to the present age of mechanization and man's effort to play God.
- Hence, the poet **demystifies** the creation myth and reveals that God does not exist and so man who attempts to become god does not exist.
- The world belongs to women, Eve's daughters.
- The open form opens up the world to women casually, but logically and powerfully.



We have the overall impression here. Wright's poem is an address to women from the perspective of Eve to her daughters. It takes the shape of a dramatic monologue with the implied listener. The whole poem is an argument and also a narrative of rewriting the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. We have to remember that rewriting, revisioning is an agenda of feminist poets.

The story is continued right up to the present age of mechanization and man's effort to play God. Hence, the poet demystifies or deconstructs the creation myth and reveals that God does not exist and so man who attempts to become God does not exist. It is a wonderful argument. The world belongs to women, that is Eve's daughters. The open form of the poem opens up the world to women casually, informally but logically and powerfully.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:12)

## Summary

- Historical and Literary Context
- Judith Wright
- "Woman to Man"
- "Eve to Her Daughters"
- Analysis



We have the map of Australia here, for one specific reason- Great Barrier Reef is a natural resource in Australia. Judith Wright spent her lifetime to protect this Great Barrier Reef in her country. This is an environmental concern which held the heart of Judith Wright throughout her life. This is only one example; she was interested in protecting the whole Australian land.

Let us see a summary now. We presented a historical and literary context for understanding the Australian poet, Judith Wright. It is an Australian context, so, we have to understand the colonial and post colonial literary, political, cultural traditions of the poet. She was interested in the land, in the people, in the language of the people and nature, particularly. So, she devoted herself to write about the land and the people.

We have two poems for discussion in this lecture, one is 'Woman to Man' and the next is 'Eve to her Daughters.' 'Woman to Man' talks about the relationship between the two and 'Eve to her Daughters' again talks about particularly the politics, the power behind the relationship between the two. The second poem is much more openly feminist. It draws our attention to the misconceptions we have about the Biblical stories and so the poet wants us to free the women from such misconceived notions. The analysis of the poems reveals that Judith Wright is an excellent poet, both thematically and technically.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:14)

## References

- Ackland, Michael. 2005. "Poetry from the 1890s to 1970." In *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby, 74-104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Gary. 2006. "The Two Threads of a Life: Judith Wright, the Environment and Aboriginality," *Antipodes*, 20 (2): 155-162.
- Sharma, Anita. 2015-2016. "The Poetry of Judith Wright: Representation of the Aboriginals," *Indian Journal of Australian Studies*, 8: 50-63.



We have some references for you. Thank you!