

Feminist Writings
Professor Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities and Social Studies
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
The Goblin Market - Part 5

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL Course entitled Feminist writings. We were looking at Cristiana Rossetti's poem The Goblin Market. And in this lecture we will conclude the poem, conclude our reading of the poem and focus our attention to the final stanza where the regeneration happens, where Laura comes back to health, the normalcy and healthy lifestyle and Lizzie, of course, comes back from the Goblin Men, the goblin market carrying the antidote for Laura's degeneration.

And we saw how in the previous lecture that symbolic significance of the penny is important because she walks into the market with penny, which is a marker of agency, a marker of her authority, a marker for ability to quantify the commodity because we are paying penny to someone, if you are paying a fee to someone for a commodity, you have the ability to commodify, to quantify the commodity and put a name to it, put a classification to it.

So that undercuts the anarchy and the menace of the market, as was embodied by the goblin men. And, of course, she comes back with the antidote in a very Christ like image, Lizzie walks back with bruises on her body, but these are bruises of healing and then Laura kisses her and drinks the syrup, the juice from her body, as an antidote to the decadence and degeneration that she had suffered, you know, doing her experience with the goblins in the market. Now, the poem ends very interestingly with, it cuts into the future in a way. And then we have Laura and Dizzy who are now wives, who are married and with their families and they tell the episode, they tell the episode of the Goblins to the younger children, presumably female children.

And what is interesting to know is the idea of sisterhood which is present the poem throughout, it is a very complex idea. It is not quite clear whether they are talking about sisterhood as biological kinship or sisterhood as friendship or sister is something quasi erotic in quality, that has never quite spelled out but what is obviously quite palpable is intimacy between that two female protagonists over here and that intimacy is extended on the future as well, in the sense that they marry and become wives.

But there is no mention at all about the husbands and we get to know that they said with the children, and tell them the warning tale of what happened with the goblin men and how one sister stood up for the other sister, and then they rescued each other in a tale of fall and regeneration. So, we take a look at this stanza where we are told that, this stanza which begins with words, with line.

Days, weeks, months, years

Afterwards when both were wives,

With children of their own;

Their mother-hearts beset with fears,

Their lives bound up in tender lives.

Laura would call the little ones

And tell them of her early prime

Those pleasant days long gone

Of not-returning time:

So obviously, when they become mothers and wives, then they call the children sometimes and tell them stories about the prime, tell them stories of what the events have happened which will not come back, not return in time.

Would talk about the haunted glen,

The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men.

The wicked outsiders, the evil outsiders again, the goblin men over here obviously they represent alterity, they represent a sense of otherness, a fearful otherness, menace, which comes with otherness, etc.

The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,

Their fruits like honey to the throat

But poison in the blood;

(Men sell not such in any town):

And that, that sentence has appeared already once in a poem, 'Men sell not such in any town'. So it obviously comes from outside, they obviously come from a, this degree of fearful foreignness, about these goblin men, about how you know, they become embodiment of a certain kind of menace, which comes from the outside, which does not quite have a name. They come from places where things are perversely pleasant, things are perversely abundant. And they come with fruits which are grown in such inorganic, unnatural conditions. And that is the tale, a tale of caution, tale of almost immorality fable, which is told to the young children of Laura and Lizzie subsequently and how they know they encounter the goblin men and how one sister fell for the enchantment and the seduction the goblin men and the other sister, Lizzie, rescued her through great pain and difficulty, and this is what the moral fable is. This what the story that just told to the children.

Would tell them how her sister stood

In deadly peril to do her good,

And win the fiery antidote:

So the antidote, of course, is a juicy syrup, which was smeared all over Lizzie's body, where should it not consume, but she brought back for her sister to eat of her and almost there is a cannibalistic quality about that image, if you think about Lizzie offers her sister her body, which is very Christ like, it becomes the healing body, which will then resurrect and regenerate the fallen woman, the fallen, the decadent dying sister.

And win the fiery antidote:

Then joining hands to little hands

Would bid them cling together,

"For there is no friend like a sister

In calm or stormy weather;

To cheer one on the tedious way,

To fetch one if one goes astray,

To lift one if one totters down

To strengthen whilst one stands.”

So, there is, there are certain critics who read, who bring in the lesbian angle into this poem in terms of how the whole idea of sisterhood becomes a sense of solidarity, becomes a community of solidarity, which is quite sexualized in quality. But then what is more important for us to remember is how the binary between the menacing men or the men who are carriers of menace, the men who are markers of menace and their sisters or females who stood together in terms of regenerating themselves in terms of healing themselves. How the binary works out in a very interesting ways?

So the whole poem if we go back and re-read it to which you should, you find, it is a very complex one, because among many things it does. It is a tale about feminist critique of masculine, mercantile behavior, masculine mercantile invasion and how the feminist critique undercuts to a certain extent the menace of the marketplace which is a very masculinist menace. It is about fearful men who looked very fearful, who come from the outside. There is an outlandish quality about these men and the merchandise and the outlandish quality of obviously defamiliarizes and deterritorializes the known landscape, the known idyllic landscape of this very English countryside.

And, of course, how the two sisters represent or embody that version quality of the landscape to a great extent and how that is obviously invaded by the merchant men and how the merchant men bring in ways the merchandise and fruits from different parts of the world. And of course, one cannot but notice the colonial (())(6:57) subtext to the poem and how these people come from different parts of the world. So perhaps one reading could be perfectly valid. Perhaps these are men who are non-British men. These are men who come from other parts of the world. They come in. They could be coming from other parts of the English colony perhaps, they bring in goods and merchandise and fruits from those places which contaminate the purity in the hygiene of the British model system, of the English moral system.

Now, of course, that reading is quite problematic because what it assumes and automatically is that the non-British, non-white outsiders even by default and the English white version

ladies who are embodiments of virtue by default and that binary is quite problematic in quality. But even if we do not subscribe to that reading it is possible to say how this poem opens up to different kinds of interpretations in terms of the dangers of unregulated consumption. The dangers are unregulated capitalism and the very male quality about that unregulated capitalism and how, if you take a look at the different scenes of violence in the poem which are very sexualized in quality.

For instance, when Lizzie walks in the marketplace and the merchant men they try to force feed her, they surrounded her and force feed her try to crown food into her mouth and this very frequent references to the juice and the syrup with which she is smeared, obviously carries a very erotic, and gory kind of you know, sort of allusion and then, of course, she emerges out of it victorious as she gets back her penny. So the penny becomes and again this is back. This is connecting back to one of the first arguments about this poem which is how in the moral economy, the sexual economy and the financial economy, are mapped onto each other in a very complex way in this poem.

So this penny, the fact that, you know, Lizzie holds onto the penny, the fact that she does not let go the penny and she managed to get her penny back. She flings the penny to the merchant men and that she gets it back because they are unable to force feed her. Getting back the penny becomes the marker of moral security, becomes the marker of sexual preservation, becomes the marker of sexual purity of moral purity. So the fact that she has a penny of course, gives her sense of ownership and agency in the marketplace. But the fact that she refuses to establish any kind of correspondence apart from that penny, she refuses to establish any correspondence with the sexualized self that becomes a marker off self-preservation, the preservation of her sexuality with which she undercuts and with which she essentially and symbolically decimates the goblin market.

We told you how the goblin men, they are very briskly disappeared along the glens, along the different parts of the landscape. So this poem is a very complex poem because, you know, space again becomes very important symbol in the poem, in the sense that the spatial metaphor, the spatial mappings very interestingly done. So we have the home space, the idyllic space who have been their cows and honey and butter has been churned. So, that is very idyllic and domestic and familiar and is a virtue (10:05) bother home. And in contrast to that we have the marketplace where things come and go, where everything is temporal in quality, where everything can very quickly change into something else, there is no

permanence at all and the lack of permanence, the lack of, you know, the (())(10:19) in the marketplace makes it a complete and perfect other of the home.

So the market is the other of the home spatially speaking and that spatial otherness, it obviously extends onto the physiognomic otherness in terms of how the goblin men look like, they look like and people with whiskers and tails and nails and they have cat like features, they have rat like features, and they fly in, they hobble in, they crawl in, they role in, the movements are not very human at all. So again, that becomes a part of the uncanny that is created by the marketplace, and the men in the marketplace, and how the poem becomes an example, how the domestic can be consumed by the uncanny.

But then again, the domestic get rid of the uncanny and recover from the uncanny and that sense it becomes very feminist poem about the necessity to stick together as woman against the invasion of dangerous and menacing men. So and again there are many other reasons we can deal with this poem, and as I mentioned in the beginning, you know, it started off, it was first produced as a children's poem, as a bit of a fairy tale for little boys and girls. But then it is interesting to see how it emerged with time, how it took up and assumed more readings for time, innocence, of being a very complex poem about consumption, contamination, sexual depravation, regeneration and sisterhood and sisterhood, of course, is a very-very loaded term, a very complex category of an identification of this poem because, as I mentioned, it could be a sort of a biological kinship.

It could be seen that some kind of a sexual kinship, it could be seen as a moral kinship and perhaps a combination of old and very asymmetric ways. So do read the poem many more times because I am sure the more you read it, the more readings will emerge out of it in terms of the different possibilities that a poem offers us, especially if you look at it from a feminist perspective. So it is a very important poem, it is a very important text, not least if you are doing feminist writings as in the world we stand today because and it is one those poems which take up different reasons, different points of time so you know one can read as how this idea of unregulated capitalism has a very male face.

The idea of unregulated, unprincipled capitalism become some masculinist menace and how that destroys and they can potentially destroy at least the idyllic quality of hygiene, cultural hygiene, mortal hygiene, sexual hygiene, etcetera and how that becomes the problem in a menace that is done away with by the time the poem ends with various acts of sacrifice, sort

of sacrifice and regeneration, so that we conclude *The Goblin Market* by Christiana Rossetti. I hope you found it interesting and as I mentioned, do read it many more times because when you read it, the more ratings will emerge out of it and we move on to new text in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.