

III B.A. English
Women's Writings in
English
17UENC52

Unit-I –Poetry

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English

Tulips

-Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath

- an American poet, novelist and short story writer
- Birth – 27th October, 1932 at Boston, Massachusetts
- Pen name – Victoria Lucas
- Husband – Ted Hughes
- Marriage - 1956 ; Separation – 1962

- Death – 11th February, 1963
- Clinically depressed and treated with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) several times
- Genre – Confessional poetry
- Works
 - *The Collected Poems* (1981)- won her the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry posthumously
 - *The Colossus* (poetry collection)
 - *Ariel* (poetry collection)
 - *The Bell Jar* – semi-autobiographical novel

Tulips

- Plath's most beloved and critically acclaimed poem
- Published in the collection entitled *Ariel*
- Initial title – *Sickroom Tulips in Hospital*
- Nine seven - line stanzas
- No rhyme scheme
- Inconsistency of lines represents the instability of the patient

Tulips

The speaker of the poem

- ✓ A patient
- ✓ Caught in a struggle between
 - ❖ life and death
 - ❖ responsibility and freedom
- ✓ Uses colour and flower imagery
- ✓ Desires for the simplicity of death
whereas the tulips encourage her to live
her life

Stanza 1

- Tulips too excitable
- Winter season - everything around – white - covered with snow, quiet, peaceful
- White colour - symbolic of peace, death and freedom for the speaker
- The light coming through the windows – heavenly light
- Her hands – detached as she does not own her body
- Not bothered of explosions (life, passion etc.)
- Name, day-clothes given to nurses, case history to anesthetist and body to surgeons so regards herself as nobody

Stanza 2

- The speaker's head propped, tries to shut her eyes and die but is unsuccessful
- The pupil of her eyes blamed for viewing everything around
- The passing of nurses with white caps compared to sea gulls
- All the nurses doing things similarly and mechanically – a vague action without individuality

Stanza 3

- The speaker's body considered as insignificant pebbles
- Nurses compared to water that runs over the pebbles gently
- The nurses make the speaker sleep with medicine/ injection
- The speaker feels tired of her responsibilities
- Husband and child similes are metaphorical for hooks – they grab her back into life and responsibilities

Stanza 4

- The speaker compared to a cargo boat
- Boat carries items and she has responsibilities
- She has been isolated from her associations
- Scared on her way to the surgery theatre
- Her possessions such as tea set, bureau of linen have slipped away
- Feels her body sinking due to sedation
- Finally feels herself purified as a nun

Stanza 5

- The speaker does not wish for any flowers which represent family and life
- She wishes to lie like a dead body
- Life is bad and death gives freedom
- The peacefulness of death dazes everyone
- Nothing is required after death
- The mouth is closed tightly
- The Communion tablet - Biblical reference for holiness

Stanza 6

- The colour of the tulips hurts, upsets and wakes up the speaker from trance
- The breathing sound of the flowers compared to a baby – makes her uncomfortable
- Her wounds are matched with the red colour
- The flowers float (happiness) while she sinks (unhappiness)
- The tulips suffocate her
- She feels closer to death rather than life

Stanza 7

- The speaker feels as if she is watched by the flowers
- It reminds her of her responsibility that is undesirable
- The flowers try to pull her away from the thin light of the window towards brightness
- She considers herself a ridiculous shadow in between the sun and the flowers
- The oxygen required to live is shared by the flowers in the room
- This makes her aware of her painful life on earth

Stanza 8

- The comparison of the room before and after the arrival of the tulips
- The room was calm earlier
- The tulips have made the room noisy
- The flowers are swirling in the room
- The speaker's emptiness and free world is disrupted
- She is brought back to reality and reminded of her commitment

Stanza 9

- The walls of the room also feel the warmth of life because of the tulips
- The flowers considered as dangerous animals to be caged
- The redness of the tulips engulfs her bringing her back to life and responsibilities
- She feels neither alive nor dead
- The sea depicting freedom and death appears to be far away from her due to the tulips

Discussion and Queries