

READING MATERIALS

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Short poem by Adrienne Rich called Aunt Jennifer's Tigers consists only of three stanzas but it tells the entire story of aunt Jennifer's life. Hard life of women in male-oriented society is the main theme of the poem. The author does not express her ideas directly but makes the readers to understand her through allusions and symbols.

Bright images and deep symbolism help readers to get the author's message. The author creates a picture of life of aunt Jennifer. There are several places in the poem which give allusion that aunt Jennifer is unhappily married and that she is oppressed by her husband. In the end of the second stanza Rich writes: "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band

Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (Rich). These words show that wedding ring is a heavy burden which makes aunt Jennifer unhappy. This woman is not satisfied with her life and her husband but she has no power to change it. In the society governed by men women have little freedom and independence. The author does not show all circumstances of Aunt Jennifer's life but she very vividly illustrates that this women is unhappy in her family life and she can not change it by her death. In the beginning of the third stanza Rich writes: "When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by." And this is another allusion on hard family life she can not escape. The image of ring, which becomes a symbol of oppression and torture of women is vivid. The author speaks about the wedding ring as about the kind of shackles which make women totally controlled by men. The author shows that marriage is one of many ways men use to oppress women. The image of tigers is more complicated for the interpretation. From the one side it symbolizes hidden aggression. Aunt Jennifer has to suppress her negative feelings in order not to make anger her husband. Like many women aunt Jennifer probably has to stand many humiliations from her husband. Bad attitude of her husband and unhappy family life result in negative feelings aunt Jennifer can not express feely. She expresses these feelings in her works. The line "They do not fear the men beneath the tree" may be interpreted as hidden fear of her husband. Tigers, which are mighty and strong animals are described by the author as way poor woman uses to express her true feelings and attitudes. In her dreams she possesses the power and ability to confront humiliation and oppression she experiences from men. The motif of hidden aggression is very transparent. The contrast between such peaceful occupation as knitting and the image which is knitted is stunning. The author contrasts a typical female occupation to the image which symbolizes strength and protest. Tigers symbolize not only suppressed feelings, but also become the symbol of great power and protest. They know no fear and they are

totally free. They are not afraid of man behind the tree and “They pace in sleek chivalric certainty”. From these lines it becomes evident that tigers possess qualities aunt Jennifer desperately lacks in her own life. She can not manifest these qualities in her everyday life and they become objects of her art. The author of the poem gives her readers an opportunity to enter inner world of ordinary women. This life may seem happy and easy at the first glance but the author shows the truth to her readers. Aunt Jennifer has no way to express her temper and her desires in her everyday life. Her strong characters and personal characteristics are suppressed in male-oriented society. In this society women are give definite roles and they can not break the rules and play any other roles. Aunt Jennifer is trapped by social norms and regulations and has not way to express her inner world. Prescribed social role limit women’s abilities to express themselves. Passion and desires are expressed in knitting. Aunt Jennifer shows her true feelings, needs and desires in her knitting. The poem is based on the contrast. The first stanza shows free and mighty animals, who know no fear and doubts. The tigers are free in their choices and they are not afraid of anything. In the second and third stanzas the author shows how the world of dreams may differ from reality. The image created by aunt Jennifer significantly differs from her own life. aunt Jennifer is oppressed by her life and she has no way to realize herself as personality. She does not feel free to express her feelings and desires. The author vividly illustrates that not only hard house work and burden of everyday responsibilities may limit female life. She shows that aunt Jennifer has free time for knitting but still she does not feel satisfied with her life and with her family relations. In reality she can not control her life and her free time and she has to limit herself by social roles defined by the society, which is controlled by men. Short poem by Adrienne Rich called Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers consists only of three stanzas but it tells the entire story of aunt Jennifer’s life. Hard life of women in male-oriented society is the main theme of the poem. The author does not express her ideas directly but makes the readers to understand her through allusions and symbols. Bright images and deep symbolism help readers to get the author’s message. The author creates a picture of life of aunt Jennifer. There are several places in the poem which give allusion that aunt Jennifer is unhappily married and that she is oppressed by her husband. In the end of the second stanza Rich writes: “The massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band
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