

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 6: AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS



AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

~Summary~

-by Adrienne Rich

Stanza- 1

"Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty."

Explanation: Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance and move across a screen or panel. The poet describes them as bright-coloured like the shining golden-yellow jewel topaz free inhabitants of the green forests, and are not scared of the men standing under the tree. These tigers move about with grace, elegance and confidence. Aunt Jennifer's tigers are not real or living tigers. They are images created by her on tapestry. Aunt Jennifer, who is held captive by the oppressive hand of a patriarchal society, creates in her art an alternate world of freedom. The tigers represent her dreams, her desire to be free from constant fear and oppression that govern her life. These majestic and fearless tigers also present a sharp contrast to Aunt Jennifer herself, who is bound by the constraints of married life.

Stanza- 2

"Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool;
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band;
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand."

Explanation: In the second stanza, Aunt Jennifer appears to be creating beautiful images of the tigers by using wool. But she finds it quite hard to pull even the ivory needle. She is so terrorized and tortured that she is unable to carry the weight of the wool. Her fingers flutter. The uncle's wedding band seems heavy on her hand. It suggests that she feels burdened with her marital responsibilities.

Through this stanza, the poet wants to convey the fact that a woman throughout her lifetime works to glorify the tiger', i.e., her husband, but she feels so much subjugated that the marital bond becomes a burden on her. This is also the reality of Aunt Jennifer's life.

Stanza- 3

"When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid."

Explanation: The final stanza reveals a sad truth. The poet says that even death will not be able to release Aunt Jennifer from the trauma she had to undergo during her lifetime. Her life will be a story of her ordeals and the oppression that she was subjected to. However, the tigers created by her will be eternal. They will always be proud and unafraid." Here we get a glimpse of an oft-quoted conventional theme in poetry that art endures beyond human life.

Perhaps the poet wants to say that the women themselves are creating these tigers. They need to break their shackles and be unafraid like the tigers themselves. One more thing that can be inferred from the poem is that Aunt Jennifer, who for long has borne the miseries she was subjected to, now longs for freedom from dominance and male chauvinism.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 104) (Think It Out)

Question 1. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?

Answer: Like the beasts of prey, the denizens of the forest are the tigers. They lead their lives far from the human settlements and are known as 'chivalric'. This highlights the honourable and majestic position they occupy in the animal world. So, the usage of words 'chivalric' and 'denizens' adds to our knowledge of the attitude of the tiger.

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Question 3. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'?

Answer: The image of 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band' suggests the weight of the tough and harsh experience of married life of Aunt Jennifer. The image is suggestive and the wedding band is symbolic. It indicates the marriage bond which is unbreakable between the wife and the husband.

Question 4. Of what or of whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified with in the third stanza?

Answer: The poet refers to the 'terrified hands' of Aunt Jennifer" in the third stanza. The unhappy memories which are old remain fresh in her mind. During her married life, she has gone through many horrible times and tests. These ordeals suppressed and crushed her, the effect of which is still visible. She is stuck with the ordeals which dominated her life.

Question 5. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by? Why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the meanings of the word 'ringed' in the poem?

Answer: The marriage experiences are addressed by the poet in the middle of constrictions. The word 'ringed' suggests that her unhappy married life or vicious grip is still holding her tightly. The word 'ringed' is used in two ways. First way is the conventional use where the ring

symbolises the sacred bond of marriage. The second way is the figurative use of 'ringed' which means surrounded or encircled.

Question 6. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character? What might the poet be suggesting, through this difference?

Answer: The tigers are 'prancing'. In 'sleek chivalric certainty' they pace and 'do not fear' the men under the tree. So, they are the symbols of beauty, fierceness and strength. On the other side, Aunt Jennifer is terrified and weak. Her hands are finding it hard to pull the needle through the wool. The huge weight of her wedding band is heavy on her hands. Her terrified hands are still ringed by the ordeals of her married life. The intensity is heightened by the contrast.

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Question 8. Do you sympathise with Aunt Jennifer? What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?

Answer: Yes, we sympathise with Aunt Jennifer as she has gone through ordeals and hardships during her married life. The speaker's attitude towards Aunt Jennifer is sympathetic. Many suggestive symbols and images are given by the poet to present a lady who has gone through terrifying and unpleasant periods and painful experiences during her married life.