

CHAPTER
06

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers



Adrienne Cecile Rich



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ABOUT THE POET

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Lifetime: May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012

Occupation: an American poet, essayist and feminist

Great Works: A Change of World; Diving Into the Wreck; On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose; Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience And Institution

Awards: National Book Award, Bollingen Prize, Griffin Poetry Prize,

INTRODUCTION

Adrienne Rich's poem 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' narrates the not so happy experiences of marriage. Aunt Jennifer makes prancing, sleek and chivalric tigers in the panel. But she is in the grip of suffering and terrors. They have crushed her and affected her married life. She has not yet freed herself from the bitter experiences of the past. It is ironic that she can create such sleek and prancing tigers.

PARAPHRASE OF THE POEM

1. Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance and jump over a screen. They are bright coloured like the shining yellow topaz. These 'denizens' or the dwellers of the green forests are brought in the panel by Aunt Jennifer. She creates them through her own hands. They don't fear the men standing under the tree. They pace in 'sleek' and 'chivalric' certainty.

2. Massive Weight of Wedding-band

Aunt Jennifer's hands are moving

about her wool. But the movement is not smooth and effortless. Aunt finds it quite hard to pull even the ivory needle. The heavy weight of the marriage once bonded her with her husband. It still sits heavily upon her hand. She still feels herself tied down by that weight.



3. Terrified Hands Still Ringed with Ordeals

Even when aunt is dead, 'her terrified hands' will tell the whole story of her unhappy life. Hardships and sufferings were the parts of her married life. They crushed her and it can be noticed by seeing her hands. But the tigers she made in the panel will go on 'prancing, proud and unafraid.'

GLOSSARY

Prance : walk or move around with high springy steps. (उछल-कूद)

Topaz : a bright yellow coloured stone. (पीले रंग का एक रत्न)

Denizens : here, an animal that lives or is found in a particular place. (निवासी)

Sleek : elegant. (मनोहर)

Chivalric :mighty (पराक्रमी)

Ordeals: extremely severe tests or experiences. (परख)

Fluttering : to move in quick, irregular motions as if being agitated. (थरथरना)

Terrified: scared, horrified (भयाकुल)

Ivory: cream-colored, off-white (हाथी दांत)

Beneath: Under (नीचे)

MAIN POINTS

1. Aunt Jennifer's tigers jump across a screen.
2. They are 'sleek and chivalric'. They pace with confidence and certainty.
3. She is using ivory needles and fluttering her fingers in the wool to create her tigers.
4. Her fingers find it hard even to pull the ivory needles.
5. The heavy weight of Uncle's wedding band still sits upon her hands.
6. Those sufferings and troubles that crushed her during her married life have possessed her mentally and physically.
7. When Aunt Jennifer is dead, her tigers will survive.
8. They will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

LITERARY DEVICES

(1) Symbols: (a) Uncle, (b) Aunt, (c) Tigers, (d) Wedding band, (e) Aunt Jennifer's hand.

(2) transferred epithet—'terrified hands' representing her being terrified.

(3) Pun— 'ringed': (a) ring in her finger which sits heavily on her and (b) difficulties which will always surround her.

(4) Irony—(a) a weak and submissive woman weaving a picture of tigers that are strong and fearless.

(b) brutal tigers are depicted chivalric and the cultured man is depicted as an oppressor.

(5) Contrast—the characteristics of Aunt Jennifer and that of the tiger.

(6) Alliteration—'fingers fluttering'

(7) Imageries—'bright topaz denizens in the world of green'

OBJECTIVE SHORT QUESTIONS

Q1. The attitude of the poet towards Aunt Jennifer is that of

- (a) hatred
- (b) love
- (c) sympathy
- (d) casual

Ans: (c) sympathy

Q2. 'Massive' means

- (a) high
- (b) huge
- (c) minimum
- (d) small

Ans: (b) huge

Q3. 'Proud' and 'unafraid'. These two adjectives have been used for

- (a) the uncle
- (b) the males in the society
- (c) the tigers on the forest
- (d) the tigers on the panel

Ans: (d) the tigers on the panel

Q4. "She was mastered by" is a reference made to the

- (a) hardships and difficulties that Aunt Jennifer faced during her lifetime
- (b) she was a slave
- (c) he had a rude master
- (d) her teacher taught her nothing

Ans: (a) hardships and difficulties that Aunt Jennifer faced during her lifetime

Q5. 'Still ringed' means

- (a) oppression will continue

- (b) too many rings on her fingers
- (c) ring of the bell
- (d) quiet and peaceful

Ans: (a) oppression will continue

Q6. Aunt Jennifer's family consists of

- (a) she and her husband
- (b) she and her tigers
- (c) she and her kids
- (d) she and her servants

Ans: (a) she and her husband

Q7. The word 'chivalric' in the context means

- (a) timid
- (b) arrogant
- (c) honourable and brave
- (d) malicious

Ans: (c) honourable and brave

Q8. The word 'prance' in the poem means

- (a) to jump ahead
- (b) to dance
- (c) to eat
- (d) to prowl

Ans: (a) to jump ahead

Q9. "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band" is a subtle reference to

- (a) male oppression
- (b) suppression at the hands of her husband
- (c) the heavy gold ring
- (d) the huge gold wedding band makes her uncomfortable

Ans: (b) suppression at the hands of her husband

Q10. What is Aunt Jennifer doing with wool?

- (a) she is embroidering a wall panel
- (b) she is knitting a scarf
- (c) she is making a ball of wool
- (d) she is knitting a cap

Ans: (a) she is embroidering a wall panel

Q11. The rhyme scheme in stanza one is

- (a) aabb
- (b) abab
- (c) ABC
- (d) abbe

Ans: (a) aabb

Q12. 'They pace' is referred to

- (a) the human beings
- (b) Jennifer's family members
- (c) the tigers
- (d) the lions

Ans: (c)the tigers

Q13. "Denizens of a world of green" means

- (a) residents of forests
- (b) residents of green buildings
- (c) live in green cages
- (d) live in green grasslands

Ans: (a)residents of forests

Q14. What do the Tigers do on the screen? They

- (a) sing
- (b) jump
- (c) catch the prey
- (d) prance

Ans: (d)prance

Q15. The poem 'Aunt Jennifer' is written by

- (a) Elizabeth Arden
- (b) Adrienne Rich
- (c) Kamla Das

(d) Sarojini Naidu

Ans: (b)Adrienne Rich

Q16. What would Jennifer's terrified hands tell after her death?

- (a) story of her life
- (b) her constrained married life
- (c) her strength to find her ways and beat the fears

(d) All these

Ans: (d)All these

Q17. How are tigers described in the poem?

- (a) as ferocious
- (b) fearless
- (c) chivalric
- (d) All these

Ans: (d)All these

Q18. Why did aunt embroider tigers on the panel?

- (a) to express her suppressed feelings
- (b) to express her strengths
- (c) to express her fighting spirit of a warrior
- (d) All these

Ans: (d)All these

Q19. What does wedding ring represent?

- (a) beauty
- (b) expenses
- (c) unnecessary pressures of her dominant husband and responsibilities of married life
- (d) none

Ans: (c) unnecessary pressures of her dominant husband and responsibilities of married life

Q20. What is aunt Jennifer loaded with?

- (a) weight of rings
- (b) weight of tigers
- (c) burden of household work
- (d) heavy responsibilities of married life

Ans: (d) heavy responsibilities of married life

Q21. What is the tone of the poem towards the end?

- (a) happy moments
- (b) resolving
- (c) hopeful
- (d) sad and tensed

Ans: (d) sad and tensed

Q22. What is the poet conveying through aunt Jennifer's tiger?

- (a) wild life
- (b) courageous tigers
- (c) tigers and their courage
- (d) female existence and their fear of men

Ans: (d) female existence and their fear of men

Q23. What did ordeals or tough times do in Jennifer's life?

- (a) they made her a hard hearted person
- (b) she developed hatred
- (c) she became weak
- (d) they crushed her artistic personality

Ans: (d) they crushed her artistic personality

Q24. What did marriage bring for Jennifer?

- (a) unhappiness
- (b) loss of freedom
- (c) loss of freedom and burden as if she has put on a heavy band
- (d) a heavy mountain

Ans: (c) loss of freedom and burden as if she has put on a heavy band

Q25. What is the purpose of creating animals which are completely a contrast to aunt's character?

- (a) to show her strength and ability of not giving up in the face of difficulties
- (b) her courage
- (c) her fears and strengths
- (d) none

Ans: (a) to show her strength and ability of not giving up in the face of difficulties

Q26. What is the significance of the word "ringed"?

- (a) responsibilities
- (b) heavy duties
- (c) fatty people
- (d) responsibilities that formed circles like a ring surrounding her finger

Ans: (d) responsibilities that formed circles like a ring surrounding her finger

Q27. Of what or of whom is aunt Jennifer terrified of in the 3rd stanza?

- (a) of tigers
- (b) of her death
- (c) of her old age
- (d) of her dominant husband

Ans: (d) of her dominant husband

Q28. Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?

- (a) because of fluttering fingers
- (b) because of trembling hands
- (c) because of her fears
- (d) because of the heavy weight of her marriage ring

Ans: (d) because of the heavy weight of her marriage ring

Q29. Which words depict the dominant and arrogant attitude of the wild animal in the poem ?

- (a) dominant
- (b) arrogant
- (c) adorable
- (d) denizens and chivalric

Ans: (d) denizens and chivalric

Q30. What issue does the poem Aunt Jennifer's Tigers address?

- (a) constraints of women
- (b) constraints of married life a woman experiences
- (c) constraints of women as a poet

(d) None

Ans: (b) constraints of married life a woman experiences

Q31. Who is the poet of the poem Aunt Jennifer's Tigers?

(a) Adrienne Rich

(b) Jonathan Aaron

(c) J. H. M. Abbott

(d) Mark Abley

Ans: (a) Adrienne Rich

Q32. What is Aunt doing in the poem?

(a) Cooking

(b) Embroidery

(c) Reading

(d) Sleeping

Ans: (b) Embroidery

Q33. What is presented through uncle's character?

(a) Male strength

(b) Man is powerful

(c) man is like tigers

(d) male chauvinism

Ans: (d) male chauvinism

Q34. Why are tigers given the name Aunt Jennifer's tigers?

(a) because she created them as an expression to her inner feelings

(b) because she brought them

(c) because she bought them

(d) because she nurtured them

Ans: (a) because she created them as an expression to her inner feelings

Q35. How do the Prancing tigers look?

(a) just like diamond

(b) just like Topaz

(c) just like coal

(d) just like stone

Ans: (b) just like Topaz

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q1. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?

Ans: Like all beasts of prey, the tigers are the denizens of the forest. They live far away from human settlements. They are called 'chivalric.' This indicates the majestic and honourable position that they occupy in the world of animals. So, the use of the words 'denizens' and 'chivalric' adds to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes.

Q2. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool'?

in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer is weaving tigers on the panel. Her hands are moving about her wool. She is finding the needle quite hard to pull. The weight of years of her married life is lying heavy on her hand. This makes the pulling of the needle so hard.

Q3. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of uncle's wedding band'?

Ans: It suggests the weight of the harsh and tough experience of Aunt Jennifer's married life. The image is quite suggestive. The wedding band is symbolic. It represents the unbreakable bond of marriage between the husband and the wife.

Q4. Of what or whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified in the third stanza?

Ans: In the third stanza, the poet refers to Aunt Jennifer's 'terrified hands'. The old unhappy memories are still fresh in her mind. She had passed through many testing and horrible times during her married life. These ordeals crushed and suppressed her. Their effect is still visible. So, she is still ringed with those ordeals that dominated her life.

Q5. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by? Why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the different meanings of 'ringed' in the poem?

Ans: The poem addresses the experiences of marriage in the midst of constrictions. The word 'ringed' is significant. It suggests that the vicious grip or her unhappy married life is still holding her tightly. The word 'ringed' has been used in two ways. First is the conventional use. Here the ring is a symbol of the sacred bond of marriage. The other is the figurative use of 'ringed'. It means encircled or surrounded.

Q6. 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?

Ans: The tigers are 'prancing'. They pace in 'sleek chivalric certainty'. They 'do not fear' the men beneath the tree. Thus, they are symbols of strength, fierceness and beauty. Aunt Jennifer, on the other hand, is weak and terrified. Her hands are finding it difficult to pull through her wool. The massive weight of the wedding band sits heavily on her hand. Her terrified hands are still ringed by the ordeals of married life. The contrast heightens the intensity.

Q7. Interpret the symbols found in this poem.

Ans: Adrienne Rich's 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers', is rich in symbolism. 'The massive weight of the wedding band' symbolises ordeals, hardships and worries of married life. 'Terrified hands', and 'ringed with ordeals' also indicate

those unpleasant experiences that are still clinging to Aunt Jennifer physically and mentally. ,

Q8. Do you sympathise with Aunt Jennifer? What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?

Ans: Yes, we do sympathise with Aunt Jennifer. She has experienced

hardships and ordeals during her married life. The attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer is equally sympathetic. The poet gives many suggestive images and symbols to present an old lady who has passed through painful experiences as well as unpleasant and terrifying periods during her married life.

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