

Poem - Chapter 6

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

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Question:

What does the title of the poem suggest to you? Are you reminded of other poems on tigers?

Answer :

The title, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", suggests that the poem is about Aunt Jennifer's knitted tigers that, with their chivalric, ferocious, bright and carefree attitude, become an alternate world of her creation. The tigers are the only means of free expression in her life, which is otherwise burdened by fear and struggles of the married life.

There are many other poems written about tigers, some of which are given below. "The Tiger" by William Blake

"Tiger" by Alec Derwent Hope

"Tiger Drinking at Forest Pool" by Ruth Padel

(A model answer has been provided for students' reference. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

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Question:

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

Answer :

Animals naturalised in a region or the inhabitants of a particular region are called denizens. Since the natural habitat of the tigers is forest, the poet has correctly defined it as 'denizens of a world of green'. Tigers are characteristically masters of their own domain.

The poet also refers to the tiger as being 'chivalric'. The exceptional heroic courage when facing danger is termed as chivalry. To explain this, the poet goes on to say that the tigers were not afraid of the men standing under a tree and went on prancing with 'certainty'. Since tigers are brave, ferocious and gallant creatures, the poet has used the term 'chivalric'.

Question:

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?

Answer :

Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool' because she is an old lady on whom age has taken its toll. The fluttering of Aunt Jennifer's fingers also signifies her oppressed mental condition which makes it difficult for her to even pull an ivory needle while embroidering.

Question:

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

Answer :

The 'wedding band' that the poet talks about was the wedding ring worn by Aunt Jennifer. The image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band' suggests that she was overburdened with duties and responsibilities, post her marriage.

Question:

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

Answer :

Aunt Jennifer is, probably, terrified of the oppression of her chauvinist husband. She lives her life under

constant pressure of duties and responsibilities of a married lady. The image of the wedding ring, even after her death, suggests that there is no escape whatsoever from the conventions of her marriage and that she had to succumb to them.

Question:

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 :

Aunt Jennifer has been living her life in accordance with the rules laid down by her husband. Her life lacks expression and is overburdened by the demands and duties of her married life. Although old and weak, she still has to face oppression by her husband. These are the ordeals that the poet talks about.

The use of word 'ringed', in the poem, is significant and appropriate because it correctly represents the vicious circle from which Aunt Jennifer is unable to free herself. The word 'ringed' not only indicates that she is wearing her wedding ring but also that she is bound by the responsibilities, fear and oppression of her marriage for entire life and, probably, after it too.

Question:

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 :

In creating animals that are different from her own character, Aunt Jennifer found a means of living an alternate life that is denied to her: a life that is proud, free, fearless and sure of itself. The tigers denote her yearning for power, freedom and fearless living.

Through this difference, the poet may be indicating the prejudices of the patriarchal society that is unfair to females, especially the married ones.

(A model answer has been provided for students' reference. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

Question:

Interpret the symbols found in this poem.

Answer :

The poet has expressed his views and concerns in the poem through a number of symbols. These include tigers, the men, a screen and, the most importantly, a ring. Aunt Jennifer has created tigers on a screen. These tigers

symbolise Aunt Jennifer's silent yearning for a life of freedom and power. The screen on which she knitted the tigers may represent the world in general. The men beneath the tree may represent people like her husband. She makes her tigers fearless, proud and free to prance about the screen or the world. The symbol of the heavy wedding ring she wore on her finger represents the ordeals and burdens of her married life which caged her in a vicious circle that, the poet indicates, will continue even in her death just as in her life.

(A model answer has been provided for students' reference. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

Question:

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

Answer :

Yes, the character of Aunt Jennifer wins our sympathy as a reader. Her ordeals and sufferings move the reader. Even the speaker in the poem shows sympathy and pity towards her. The speaker says that even after Aunt Jennifer's death, she will be terrified of her husband and the ordeals of her marriage