

Chapter- 6

Chapter Name – Aunt Jennifer's Tiger

by Adrienne Rich

About the poet

Adrienne Rich- Adrienne Cecile Rich was an American poet, essayist and feminist. Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland. She was called "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century". She was famous for poems that reflected women. Her first collection of poetry, *A Change of World*, was selected by renowned poet W. H. Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award.

The setting of Aunt Jennifer's Tigers-

The speaker talks to the readers in an anxious state. The speaker tells us the story of her aunt, who has been sewing the tigers on the screen and has been in a burdened marriage, where the aunt is not open and comfortable enough to withstand the apparent harsh uncle. The poem has been shown as an irony between the aunt's personal life and her embroidery object choice. The tigers in her hands symbolise courage, boldness and independence, whereas she is a fearful, weak woman and her life with her husband is disturbed to the level that even the wedding ring seems a weight. Her vivid imagination showing all the chains holding her back has been beautifully expressed.

The theme of Aunt Jennifer's Tigers-

Marriage is unequal due to male domination/Inequality: The woman at the centre of the poem, Aunt Jennifer, is nervous and fearful. She lacks inner conviction or 'certainty', unlike the tigers she portrays. Aunt Jennifer is 'mastered' in her life. She lives a life of inequality. She is so nervous that her fingers 'flutter' through the wool she uses in her tapestry or panel. The poet portrays the marriage of Jennifer as an unhappy one for her. Aunt Jennifer feels the burden of duty and obedience. The symbol of the wedding ring shows this that she wears. It is described as her husband's property: 'Uncle's wedding band'. It 'sits heavily' on her hand because he dominates her life. Her life with her husband is described as a life of 'ordeals'. The poem, therefore, provides a negative picture of marriage. The verse probably says that the 'Uncle' or husband behaves like a tiger, and the tigers are 'chivalric' like the husband should be. Each world is the reverse of what it should be.

The world of art is happier than the real world/Dream versus Reality: Aunt Jennifer's hobby is making designs and pictures from wool. Jennifer produces wool tapestries that she places on

panels. The creatures she puts there are free and proud, the opposite to herself. She is 'ringed' or mastered in marriage, and therefore she is not open but controlled. It seems that she creates a happier looking world than the one she lives in. She makes precise and brightly coloured pictures like the poem's sharp yellow tigers, pictured against a green background. These bright contrasting colours are probably more vivid than Jennifer's everyday world. Her artistic work will live on after she dies, as, according to the poet, her tigers will 'go on prancing'. The figures she creates are stronger and happier than she is. They are proud and 'prance' about, unlike their creator, who is nervous and fears her husband. The word 'prance' or parade contrasts sharply with 'fluttering', meaning trembling. The tigers do not fear the men the aunt places under some trees in her tapestry. Therefore, the imaginary tigers produced by Aunt Jennifer live a proud and free life that she can only dream about. Perhaps Aunt Jennifer uses art as an escape from her troubles. In her artwork, Jennifer imagines the kind of life she would have liked.

Values raised in the poem: Respect for women, equality, equity, gender sensitivity, empathy, feminism, value for art.

Central Idea of Aunt Jennifer's Tigers-

Rich's poems were usually based on political and gender-based issues, which showed the picture of how the world deals with females and how they wish to be dealt with. Aunt Jennifer struggled for freedom and equality in her marriage but could never win. She remained faithful and loyal to the bond even after such a burden. She wore the ring in her hands. While she made the tigers fearlessly prance on the screen, which will remain strong even after her death, she could not gather the same courage to improve her life. The poem's idea is to let the readers know the kind of stress a woman has to go through in her life and how she has to fight for her rights all the time. It also tells the woman to be strong in this male-dominated world like the tigers and not a victim.

Literary Devices used in the poem:

Comparison: The tigers are compared to knights from chivalry in the middle ages.

Imagery: The main images are of Aunt Jennifer as a fearful wife and, secondly, the magnificent tigers she creates in her panel. Images of precious substances run through the poem: 'topaz', 'ivory' and 'wedding band' gold.

Metaphor: The poet compares the yellow stripes of the tigers to a precious stone, topaz.

Contrast: [difference] The main contrasts are between nervous Aunt Jennifer and her confident tigers. Another contrast is between the strong yellow and green colours. The words 'prancing' and 'fluttering' contrast as well.

Mood/Atmosphere: Fear is the central atmosphere in Aunt Jennifer's life of 'ordeals' where her fingers tremble and show terror. An air of freedom and confidence dominates the atmosphere in her artistic creations. The men beneath the tree create an atmosphere of mystery. The image of Aunt Jennifer's corpse from the future is a bit eerie or creepy.

Hyperbole: [Exaggeration] The poet exaggerates the weight of her husband's wedding ring to make a point about how dominating he is.

Paradox: [apparent contradiction] Here, a trembling and 'mastered' woman creates free and confident creatures in her artistic endeavours. 'Fluttering' fingers produce something that has 'certainty'.

Tone: The tone appears cheerful when the poet describes the tigers. The style becomes sad and even creepy at times in describing the life of Aunt Jennifer. See the comment on sibilance below.

Repetition: The word 'prance' is repeated to emphasise the pride and freedom of the tigers. 'Ringed' echoes 'wedding band'. Various sounds are repeated, as indicated in the following few bullet points.

Alliteration: [repetition of consonant sounds at the start of nearby words], e.g. 'p' in 'prancing proud', emphasises the feeling of confidence expressed in the tigers' movements.

New words

- ✓ Prance: walk or move around with high springy steps.
- ✓ Topaz: a bright yellow coloured stone.
- ✓ Denizens: here, an animal that lives or is found in a particular place.
- ✓ Sleek: elegant.
- ✓ Chivalric: being courteous, esp. to women, an act of a gentleman.
- ✓ Ordeals: extremely severe tests or experiences.
- ✓ Prancing: to move around proudly.
- ✓ Fluttering: to move in quick, irregular motions as if being agitated.

Introduction

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' is a poem that reflects a stressed woman because of an ideal wife's social restraints and responsibility. She is a lady who lacks confidence, strength, and the same sense of fearlessness. She does not dare to go against the established and common way of life. Instead, she chose to rebel by her needlework. She rebels against her husband's dominance and her subdued life through embroidery. She gives tongue to her desire through the tigers reflected by her needlework. Her tigers represent what she lacks. Her tigers are brave, courageous, unafraid, proud and chivalric. Her husband desires a little honour, importance, and

value as a real wife. And she aims to bring an end to the social beliefs about women where they are treated as to be ruled by the dominating male society.

Summary/Understanding the Text:

The poet expresses the inner feelings of a woman - Aunt Jennifer. The aunt is embroidering an energetic, fearless tiger moving freely around the bright greenery.

She is living a life of submissiveness to her husband's command. He dominates her acts, and she fears him constantly. This pattern of the free and fearless tigers reflects her inner desire to live a free and courageous life. The tigers are graceful, elegant and bright.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers tremble as she embroiders. She is aged but still fears her husband. She does not enjoy the freedom to do anything as per her wish. She is scared of doing the embroidery, too and fears his wrath. Since the day she got married, she fulfilled her husband's demands. The wedding ring on her hand is a constant reminder that she belongs to her husband. The burden of a demanding marriage has exhausted her. The torment will not end until her death.

Even after her death, the ring will remain in her hand, and she will never be free. On the other hand, the tigers that she is embroidering will continue to move around freely forever. Her desire for freedom and fearlessness will live on through her tigers.

EXPLANATION OF THE POEM:

Stanza -1.

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,

Bright topaz denizens of 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 wall. They are bright coloured like the golden yellow jewel (topaz). They are the denizens (dwellers) of green forests. They are not afraid of the men standing under the tree. They are well-groomed (shining) and running fast on the panel with confidence.

(Here, Aunt Jennifer has knitted images of tigers on the panel. They are not genuine or living tigers. The images of tigers are created by an aunt on the panel with her own hands. The tigers represent her dreams.

She desires to be free from fear and oppression that control her life and wants to become brave like tigers.)

Stanza- 2

. Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool

Find even the ivory needle hard pull.

The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band;

Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

Explanation: Aunt Jennifer's hands are moving about her wool to create beautiful images of tigers. But the movement is not easy and smooth. Aunt finds the ivory needle very hard to pull through the wool. The uncle's wedding band seems very heavy on her hand. She feels burdened with her marital (wedding) responsibilities.

Through this stanza, the poet wants to carry the fact that a woman does not feel easy to carry her married life. Her humour does not matter before her husband. Her marital life is burdened for her. She feels so subjected that the marriage bond is a burden on her. This is also with Aunt Jennifer. (Aunt always fears her husband).

Stanza- 3.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hand 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 stage reveals aunt Jennifer will remain terrified always in her life and after her death. She will be confident with unpleasant, painful experiences after her death because her husband masters her. The tiger in the panel that she made will go on jumping. They will be proud and unafraid.

Conclusion-

The poem concludes with the lines, "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", which means that the speaker wants to convey that the burden of the marriage will always be on the shoulders of Aunt Jennifer and even after her death, she will be wearing the wedding ring which symbolises the trap. Simultaneously, the tigers will always remain immortal and be bold and live with complete freedom in their natural green homes on the screen.

Audio recording of the poem - <https://youtu.be/kOP2IIqVI-0>



MIND MAP**AUNT JENNIFER**

BY ADRIENNE RICH

**About the poet
-Adrienne Rich**

- A scholar and feminist
- Twentieth century poet
- Fighting for equal voting , legal and social rights for women
- She has published 19th volumes of poetry, three collections of essays and other

**Figure of
Speech/poetic
device /literary**

- ✓ Anaphora
- ✓ Metaphor
- ✓ Alliteration
- ✓ Personification
- ✓ Comparison

**Theme
of the lesson**

- Marriage is unequal due to male domination/Inequality.
- The world of art is happier than the real world/Dream versus Reality

**Lesson
Contents**

- The poet expresses the inner feelings of a woman - Aunt Jennifer.
- The aunt is embroidering a motif comprising of energetic, fearless tigers moving freely around the bright greenery.
- She is old but still fears her husband
- The burden of the demanding marriage has exhausted her.
- The torment will not end until her death.
- Her desire of freedom and fearlessness will live on through her

