Summary of Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers

This poem is a feminist poem which revolves around the theme of male domination and gender conflicts. Through this poem, it has been shown that women are not only harassed mentally but also physically by their male counterparts. Aunt Jennifer, who is a universal figure symbolizing all the women of this world, is victimized and tortured by her husband in the poem.

The poet begins this poem with one of the three quatrains (four-liner stanza) highlighting the creation of Aunt Jennifer who is knitting tigers on a piece of cloth. She has crafted beautiful tigers which are bright, yellowish and brownish in colour and unafraid of the men sitting beneath the tree. According to Adrienne Rich, tigers have their own style, standard of living and the best thing about them is their certainty. On the whole, the poet dedicates this whole stanza elaborating the quality and bravery of the tigers.

In second quatrain, the poet highlights the pathetic condition of Aunt Jennifer whose hands are fluttering as she is afraid of her husband who will come and molest her. Her pain can’t be explained in words as she is forlorn and unable to pull that light weighed ivory needle. The poet holds her wedding band responsible for her plight as she suffers due to that band. According to the poet, the whole pressure is created by that knot which she tied with her husband.

In third quatrain, seeing the gender oppression on Aunt Jennifer, the poet states that the only solution to Aunt Jennifer’s problem is her death. She will have to bear all this suppression till she dies. She is still ringed (surrounded) with the atrocities and molestation done by her husband as if she were an animal and her slave. On the contrary, the society which is male dominated, will not at all be affected with her death. Nobody will come to mourn at her death not even her husband. But the tigers, she has made in the panel, will remain ferocious, bold and unafraid till the end.

On the whole we can say that this poem is written to highlight the poor condition of ever suffering women of this world.