

## **ANY WOMAN - KATHARINE TYNAN**

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### **a. Thematic Analysis of the Poem**

#### **Stanza I**

The poem opens with a metaphorical statement. The speaker, evidently a woman, proclaims that she is an integral part of her house. She metaphorically equates herself to the pillars and keystone that support and strengthen the house. If these are taken away, the building will collapse. Similarly, if the woman is cut off from the family, the family will lose its integrity. Just as the keystone and pillars of a ruined house have no more existence, the disintegration of the family will destroy the woman completely. The speaker tries to establish that the identity of a woman and the harmony of family are complementary (mutually dependent).

#### **Stanza II**

Images drawn from everyday life situations make the stanza more palpable. The speaker claims that, without her, the earth wouldn't be a place worth living.

#### **Stanza III**

The woman provides love and warmth to the children and enables them to thrive. She says that the hearth stones would be colder, if she was not there. Peripherally she refers to her role in cooking food for the family. But she seems to imply her role in preparing the spiritual food in the family. It is her tactics that promote the growth of children as unique and precious citizens.

#### **Stanza IV**

Here the speaker identifies herself with the twist- another important material part of a house or building. She says that it is the love and care of a mother that retains her children in the family circle. At the same time she gives them confidence to move around freely, without any inhibitions.

#### **Stanza V**

The woman decorates the walls. To put it in another way, she herself is the decorations on the wall. It is the woman who lays the foundation of privacy by spinning curtains warp and woof, whenever and where ever necessary. An image drawn from animal life states that just like the mother bird shakes its fine feathers to prepare bed for its off springs, the mother sacrifices her desires and pleasures for the family.

#### **Stanza VI**

The woman is the wall that safeguards her family from impending dangers. She is the door against adversities and unpleasant situations. The stanza ends with a plea to Infant Jesus, not to take her away, till her children grow.

## **b. REVIEW OF THE POEM**

Any Woman by Katharine Tynan exposes the *thoughts and world* of a typical family oriented woman. The speaker is a woman asserting her identity through a series of metaphors. She describes her role in maintaining her family. The poem is 'a replica of a woman's private self and her experiences in the domestic sphere'.

The *language* of the poem is simple, prosaic and metaphorical. The speaker equates herself with each and every material part of her house. Repeated use of the expression 'I am' gives a hint of the self-importance she assigns to herself.

The reader would confront a number of architectural terms like pillars, keystone, etc. Other specialties of *vocabulary* include the usage of archaic word 'thou' in the second last line and 'a-wandering' for 'all wandering'. In addition to this she uses a number of idioms and conjunctions which are typical features of *feminine language*.

The *rhyme scheme* is 'abab' except for first stanza. A series of *metaphors* explains how and why she is an integral part of her house. It also justifies her prayer to Infant Jesus in the concluding lines. An interesting thing to note is that in her *appeal to Infant Jesus*, the woman highlights the nobility of Virgin Mary. This probably, is an attempt to highlight the role of a mother.

The poem *begins* with a clear assertive statement and *ends* with a prayer. Despite being too proud to be a woman, the speaker is very submissive to God. Her botherations about the family and her confidence are reflected throughout the poem.

The *allusion* in 'I spin the curtains, warp and woof' states how intricately the woman maintains privacy in her family.

The *image* of 'twist that holds together children in its sacred ring' specifically points to the spiritual basis of kinship. The image of mother bird shaking down indicates the self-effacing love of a mother.

The expression 'wind and snow' aptly *symbolise* adversities and unpleasant experiences in life. The poet employs almost ten *metaphors* to highlight how she is inseparable to the family.

To conclude, the poem in six stanzas delineates the pivotal role of woman in bringing up the children and maintaining warm relations within the family. The observations and statements of the speaker, however, does not challenge the framework of the patriarchal society. The poem portrays the self-effacing love of a self respecting mother who decorates, supports and sustains her family.

**c. EXPLANATIONS**

1. Take me away , and roof and wall

Would fall to ruin me utterly.'

The woman proclaims that she is the pillars and keystone of the house. If the pillars and keystone are taken away from the house, the building will collapse. The pillars and key stone have significance only when they support the building erect. When the building collapses, these too become part of debris. Similarly it is the woman who gives strength to the family to stay together. If she is taken away, the family will ruin. The scattering of her family in turn will annihilate her existence. The lines state that the identity of the woman and her family are complementary or mutually dependent.

2. I am the twist that holds together

The children in its sacred ring.

The twist connects the doors and windows to their frame. If the twist doesn't function properly, it will be difficult to close and open the doors and windows. Just as the twist lets the doors and windows move around it smoothly, the woman's love holds her children in the family sphere. She knows that as long as her love and care are extended to her children, they will remain in the right track.

3. I spin the curtains, warp and woof

The woman lays the foundation of privacy by spinning curtains warp and woof, whenever and where ever necessary. This is an explicit example of allusion, where the woman's role reminds the reader of the procedures followed in spinning fabric.

4. And shake the down to be their bed.

An image drawn from animal life states that just like the mother bird shakes its fine feathers to prepare bed for its off springs, the mother sacrifices her desires and pleasures for the family.

The self-effacing love of a mother is illustrated in this line.

5. I am their wall against all danger

Their door against wind and snow.

The terms 'wall', 'door', 'wind and snow' are symbols. The wall offers protection from dangers. Wind and snow represent adversities and unfavorable situations in life. Doors can be conveniently opened or closed as the situation demands. By using these symbols the speaker metaphorically declares that she guards the family from probable disasters.

6. Thou whom a woman laid in a manger

Take me not till the children grow.

Her prayer to Infant Jesus is that she may be granted life on earth as long as her children need her support. The reference is an allusion to the birth of Infant Jesus in a manger. His mother Virgin Mary had to suffer lot of hardship to give birth to the redeemer of mankind. The speaker, knowingly or unknowingly, glorifies motherhood by addressing Infant Jesus as 'Thou whom a woman laid in a manger'.

The closing lines of the poem plot the speaker as a pious, submissive woman.