

# Literary research paper: i stand here ironing

Literature, Russian Literature



Literary Research Paper - I Stand Here Ironing Kloss, Robert J. " Balancing the Hurts and the Needs: Olsen's 'I Stand Here Here Ironing,'. " Journal of Evolutionary Psychology 15. 1-2 (Mar. 1994): 78-86. Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter and Deborah A. Schmitt. Vol. 114. Detroit: Gale Group, 1999. Literature Resource Center. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. Kloss's, " Balancing the Hurts and the Need Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing'", points out that in the story, we get motherhood " stripped of romantic distortion. Kloss describes motherhood as a metaphor of developing a responsible selfhood, concluding that " We must trust the power of each to 'find her way' even in the face of powerful external constraints on individual control. " He also points out that from the mother's point of view, this may indeed be true, as she attempts in extreme adversity to balance her own hurts and needs. Kloss however states that common sense tells us that this simply cannot be true for the child.

Given her helplessness, what infant or toddler can possibly have it within her power or control to " find her own way. " He backs up his idea by pointing out the fact that while the mother can find reasonable and mature ways to satisfy her own needs and allay her hurts (e. g. , a job, a new husband), Emily must somehow, first as infant, then child, cope with and defend against persistent, overwhelming fears and fantasies as best she can.

Kloss brings out the point that caring figures always come and go--the woman downstairs, the grandparents, the mother, and the nurses. As the child moved from house to house to institution to yet another house, even the environment itself does not remain stable. Kloss goes on to describe the child's vantage point, it seems clear that nothing or no one can be depended

on. That these separations are traumatic to Emily can readily be inferred from the fact that they eventuate in significant symptoms such as a depression, asthma and as separation anxiety disorder.

Kloss supports his idea by stating that the sleep disorders typical of separation anxiety disorder also begin with Susan's birth when Emily begins having nightmares, crying out for the mother. He continues with his explanation of the mother who refuses to tend her in her anguish and gets up only twice when she has to get up for Susan anyway. The mother's indifference may be due to her exhaustion and distraction, but it is also possible to see it as stemming from hostility, perhaps unconscious.

I agree with the Kloss critic on that Emily as a child did not have power " to find her own way" out of the difficult situation. Emily had no one to trust or depend on. Deficiency of the mother's love and attention is what scared the child, making her the source of concern to psychologist and anguish to the mother. Through such hard life experience, Emily came to conclusion that the world itself is simply not to be trusted-ever: nothing, no one is reliable or can be counted on and be there for her through time.

Throughout the story, we can follow that Emily experiences at least one dozen traumatic separations from significant people and objects before she is even seven years old. I also agree with the Kloss's critic regarding Emily's developed separation anxiety disorder. Such disorder expresses itself as unrealistic fears that the mother will be harmed or that she will leave and not return, persistent refusal to go to school in order to remain home with the mother, persistent refusal to go to sleep without the mother.

Emily indeed expressed such symptoms in order for her to be with the mother. Bauer, Helen Pike. "A Child of Anxious, Not Proud, Love': Mother and Daughter in Tillie Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing.'" *Mother Puzzles: Daughter and Mothers in Contemporary American Literature*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Greenwood Press, 1989. 35-39. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter and Deborah A. Schmitt. Vol. 114. Detroit: Gale Group, 1999. Literature Resource Center. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. In Bauer's article, Bauer, Helen Pike. "A Child of Anxious, Not Proud, Love': Mother and Daughter in Tillie Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing'", she presents the idea that her mother's evocation of Emily's past life is an attempt to understand her daughter's character. Bauer points out that Emily has been an unhappy child. Although beautiful and joyous in infancy, nurtured by her mother, sensuously alive to light and music and texture, Emily was soon left with neighbors, then with relatives, and finally with day-care institutions to allow her mother, abandoned by her husband, to go out each day to work.

She clarifies that it is this displacement and deprivation, Emily's being shunted off to indifferent, unresponsive strangers, that her mother feels have created the somberness, the passivity and repression that seem to characterize the present Emily. Bauer goes on to describe the lack of money and lacks of time constitute the dimensions of the mother's powerlessness. She describes her decisions repeatedly in terms of having to do something. "I had to leave her daytimes"; "I had to bring her to his family"; "I had had to send her away again. Bauer states, the story is filled with expressions of compulsion and lack of choice: "It was the only

place there was. It was the only way we could be together, the only way I could hold a job.

" Bauer describes Emily sharing these constrictions. She points out her relocation to a convalescent home, she received " letters she could never hold or keep. " Back home, " she had to help be a mother and housekeeper, and shopper. She had to set her seal. Bauer goes on to describe Emily, like her mother, must accept the hard realities of life and act within its limitations. In this, they differ from Emily's father, who gives up the struggle and abandons his family. I disagree with this criticism. It first I too thought that all the hardships that Emily faced were due to the mother's powerlessness, lack of money and lack of time, however by analyzing the situation in more depth I came to conclusion that the mother simply did not love Emily. She managed to find time for her younger daughter despite the same situation.

I think Olsen involved the character of Susan in the story as a beautiful blonde, lively, lovely child in order to show the reader the dramatic difference Susan and Emily. Emily is a complete opposite of Susan. Emily, thin, dark, silent, awkward, is always aloof. For the younger children are the products of less austere times, members of a family with its attendant noise and comfort. Emily spent her young life without such easements. Like her mother, she has known long years alone and has felt their toll. Her mother understands this and fears for Emily.

If much modern fiction reveals a daughter's dread of reliving her mother's life, Olsen's story dramatizes a mother's dread of that fate for her daughter. It is obvious that Susan managed to get all the love and affection where as  
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Emily was at disadvantage. Frye, Joanne S. "'I Stand Here Ironing': Motherhood as Experience and Metaphor." *Studies in Short Fiction* 18. 3 (Summer 1981): 287-292. Rpt. in *Short Story Criticism*. Ed. David L. Siegel. Vol. 11. Detroit: Gale Research, 1992. Literature Resource Center. Web. 23 Mar. 2012.

In Frye's article, "'I Stand Here Ironing': Motherhood as Experience and Metaphor", she proposes the uniqueness of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" lies in its fusion of motherhood as both metaphor and experience. It shows us motherhood bared, stripped of romantic distortion, and reinfused with the power of genuine metaphorical insight into the problems of selfhood in the modern world. Further, into the article, Frye points out the story where we are drawn through a knowledge of the present reality and into participation in the narrative process of reconstructing and visualizing the past.

He brings to the attention that the narrator, we construct an image of the mother's own development: her difficulties as a young mother alone with her daughter and barely surviving during the early years of the depression; her painful months of enforced separation from her daughter; her gradual and partial relaxation in response to a new husband and a new family as more children follow; her increasingly complex anxieties about her first child; and finally her sense of family equilibrium which surrounds but does not quite encompass the early memories of herself and Emily in the grips of survival needs.

Frye also describes the metaphor of the iron and the rhythm of the ironing establish a tightly coherent framework for the narrative probing of a mother-

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daughter relationship. Frye goes on to describe the fuller metaphorical structure of the story lies in the expansion of the metaphorical power of that relationship itself. Without ever relinquishing the immediate reality of motherhood and the probing of parental responsibility, Tillie Olsen has taken that reality and developed its peculiar complexity into a powerful and complex statement on the experience of responsible selfhood in the modern world.

In doing so she has neither trivialized nor romanticized the experience of motherhood; she has indicated the wealth of experience yet to be explored in the narrative possibilities of experiences, like motherhood, which have rarely been granted serious literary consideration. When I first read "I Stand Here Ironing", I just saw a woman that has been through a tough time such as great depression and hard live circumstances.

However, after reading Frye's criticism I have realized that in fact the ironing symbolizes the probing of the mother-daughter relationships. The mother, trying to balance her own hurts and needs, does her best trying to help Emily balance hers, hoping out of desperation that the child may prove more than the inert dress from which she attempts to press the symbolic wrinkles and creases.

Abandonment by an irresponsible father, the innocence and ignorance of youth on the mother's part, an unstable home situation, chronic illness, birth order, poverty and deprivation--all these combine to affect Emily deeply, and perhaps irrevocably. The mother, trying to balance her own hurts and needs, does her best trying to help Emily balance hers, hoping out of desperation

that the child may prove more than the inert dress from which she attempts to press the symbolic wrinkles and creases.