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Theme Analysis- I stand here ironing by Tillie Olsen

The short stories normally tend to reflect the personal experiences of authors. The themes of such stories revolve around the personal experiences and about their understandings regarding the pressing aspects of life. This short story titled *I stand here* authored by Tillie Olsen is also the reflection of her life. This sort of story was originally published in 1961 and has been referred by many authors in their scholarly works. The central character of this short story is Emily, who is living a life away from her mother. Her mother has been through some difficult times in her life and for such reasons she could not provide her children with the life they needed. Emily's mother has also experienced some worst times in her personal life, one of which was the time when her husband left her in search of a better life for himself. Emily believed that because of such worst experiences of her, she remained unable to enjoy her time with her children. These experiences have developed her life into a feeling of sorrow and painful experience. Everything related to her children makes her remember that what she has lost. In her last phases of life when she is left alone, she believes that she is living a life away from her children which is slowly moving her towards the end of life. *I stand here ironing is about how life is worst in the absence of the most loved relations and how regression becomes an enduring piece of one’s life if anyone doesn't cherish the presence of children.*

Olsen has made use of metaphors in this short story. In the very beginning of the story, she has presented the idea about motherhood, her character, Emily's mother has been through this experience five times. At times, when she lived with her newborn she believed that being a mother is not what could be the ultimate end product of anyone's life. For her the vision and idea about life were different. She wanted to make herself more close to her husband so she can enjoy every moment of his presence. But unfortunately, such times for her couldn't last long. Her husband left her in a span of some time. The time turned bad for Emily's mother and she started treating herself as the one responsible for these bad times. The last note her husband wrote to her mentioned: "we could no longer endure this relationship(Olsen 292)”. This was what had been the pressing thought for her for the times throughout her life. She believed that the presence of children and lack of financial support from her husband has resulted in separation. He mentioned in his last note as what has forced him to go far away from her was his idea of “sharing want with us(Olsen 293)”. She believes that there is no other reason for him going far away from her other than his desire to spend the time together. Her five children and the expanded financial need have forced him to leave which he has referred to as the end of want between them.

Among her five children, Olsen’s character is attached to her elder daughter which she believes is most attached to her. Olsen has named this character as Emily. Emily is also what her mother believes her partner of the times of joy and sorrow. The time when Emily was born, her mother cherished that moment a lot. Emily makes her remember that time as well. She had spent a considerable time nursing her and taking care of her needs. But it all changed after the birth of her other children. Similarly, the times moved on and Emily had to leave her mother to support their financial burden. This was the time of much sorrow for her mother. She is experiencing one of her most precious belonging coming and going away from her. Every time when Emily say goodbye to her mother, which Olsen have mentioned as “I will have to leave in some times(Olsen 305)”. This makes her mother feel depressed and alone and in order to divert her attention away from her, she starts to Iron something. The relation of Emily's mother and Emily is the important theme of this short story. Olsen has developed this relationship in the most inspiring and attractive way possible. She has written about the times when they are together and when Emily departs. During her stay Emily’ mother kept her urging to stay with her for some more time. She says “Can’t you go some other time(Olsen 308)”, which shows that her mother cherishes the presence of her.

There is one other important theme shared by Olsen in I stand here ironing, which is about the character of Emily. Emily is the beautiful lady who has now grown up and has turned toward the practical world. This is not as beautiful as she has been raised by her mother. Emily's mother has been too protective of her. She has raised her in the most mannered way possible but not at everywhere she is there to protect her from the ills present outside. Emily who is an Asthma patient needs care and protection from many things in an open environment. This makes her mother more careful and protective of her. Whenever Emily returns back to her home, she finds her mother ironing something. She mentions her "to leave ironing every single thing of the home(Olsen 320)”. Emily is not aware that her mother does so in order to distract her mind from the thoughts of her children and from the one who has left her long ago. Emily which is now busy in her life has with time forgotten that her mother needs her attention. But at the same time, other ideas seem prevailing which is about the freedom Emily needs in order to remake and enjoy her own life. Since this short story is focused on the characters of Emily and her mother, therefore Olsen has remained too general in describing her lives. This has helped in developing the plot for this story.

I stand here Ironing is a collection of themes that appears very natural. In a first read, it appears that it has been taken from anyone’s real life, but with time it becomes clear that these are just the mere uses of metaphors and nothing else. Emily might be a lady somewhere in a real world but Emily of this story is for sure not present anywhere outside other than in this short story. I stand here ironing by Olsen has presented in the most beautiful manner the relation of a mother and a daughter and also what it feels like when anyone leaves her or his life partner in the middle of the pressing times. This could be the worst feeling in anyone's life and makes him or she think of committing any worse thing as like Emily's mother thought of doing. This short story suggests that life becomes like a hell when someone is not there to make the times enjoyable. This also suggests what could be the reason for one being too materialistic as like Emily's mother is. Therefore this story suggests that despite being too busy in life, one should never leave apart the most cherished and loved relations in life.

Works Cited:

Olsen, Tillie. *I Stand Here Ironing*. ProQuest LLC, 2002.