

tillie olsen i stand here ironing

Tillie Olsen I Stand Here Ironing: Exploring the Depths of Maternal Reflection and Social Struggle

tillie olsen i stand here ironing is a powerful short story that delves into the complex emotions and social realities of motherhood during the Great Depression. Through a reflective monologue, Olsen captures the struggles of a mother contemplating her relationship with her daughter, Emily, as she stands ironing clothes—an everyday task that becomes a metaphor for the weight of her memories and regrets. This story has resonated with readers for decades, offering profound insights into themes of motherhood, poverty, and societal constraints.

Understanding Tillie Olsen and Her Context

Tillie Olsen was an American writer known for her focus on working-class women and the challenges they face. Born in 1912, Olsen's own experiences of economic hardship and interrupted education deeply influenced her writing. "I Stand Here Ironing" was first published in 1961 and is often studied as a seminal piece of feminist literature that highlights the intersection of gender, class, and personal sacrifice.

Olsen's work emerged from a time when women's voices, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, were often silenced or ignored. By telling the story from a mother's intimate perspective, Olsen gives visibility to the struggles many women endured behind closed doors.

The Story's Narrative Structure and Style

One of the most captivating aspects of "I Stand Here Ironing" is its narrative technique. The story is presented as a single, uninterrupted interior monologue, where the mother reflects on her daughter's upbringing while performing a mundane household chore. This stream-of-consciousness style allows readers to experience the mother's thoughts and emotions in real-time, lending the story a deeply personal and authentic feel.

The Symbolism of Ironing

Ironing, an ordinary domestic task, becomes a central symbol in the story. It represents the repetitive, often invisible labor that women perform daily. The act of smoothing out wrinkles can also be seen as a metaphor for the mother's desire to fix or "smooth" the imperfections in her daughter's life.

Yet, the wrinkles remain—just as the challenges and missed opportunities in their lives cannot be undone.

Use of Time and Memory

The narrative structure allows the mother to move fluidly through time, recalling different stages of Emily's childhood. This nonlinear approach mirrors how memory works and emphasizes the ongoing nature of the mother's reflection and guilt. It's not just a recollection but a continuous process of understanding and reassessment.

Themes in Tillie Olsen I Stand Here Ironing

At its core, "I Stand Here Ironing" explores a variety of themes that remain relevant today. Let's unpack some of the most significant themes to better appreciate Olsen's craft and message.

Motherhood and Guilt

The story poignantly illustrates the feelings of inadequacy and guilt that many mothers experience. The narrator questions whether she could have done more for Emily, particularly given the difficult circumstances they faced. This honest portrayal challenges idealized notions of motherhood by acknowledging its complexities and imperfections.

Socioeconomic Struggles

Poverty and its impact on family life is a critical backdrop in the story. The mother's reflections reveal how economic hardship limited her ability to provide for Emily and influenced the daughter's development. Olsen critiques the social systems that trap families in cycles of deprivation, highlighting how external forces shape personal outcomes.

Individuality and Growth

Emily's character represents the challenges of growing up under constrained circumstances. Despite obstacles, she possesses a unique spirit and resilience. The mother acknowledges that while she couldn't control every aspect of Emily's life, Emily's individuality and strength are undeniable.

Literary Devices and Their Impact

Tillie Olsen's use of literary techniques enriches the story's emotional depth and thematic complexity.

Stream of Consciousness

The unbroken flow of the mother's thoughts immerses readers in her psyche, creating intimacy and immediacy. This technique reveals the fragmented and nonlinear nature of human memory and emotion.

Imagery and Symbolism

Olsen uses vivid imagery related to domestic life to ground the story in everyday reality. The ironing board, the worn clothes, and the household setting all serve as symbols for the mother's labor and love.

Tone and Mood

The tone is reflective, somber, and tinged with regret, yet also carries moments of tenderness and hope. This nuanced mood helps readers empathize with the mother's complex feelings.

Why Tillie Olsen *I Stand Here Ironing* Matters Today

Despite being written over half a century ago, "*I Stand Here Ironing*" continues to resonate because it addresses universal and enduring issues. The story invites readers to consider the sacrifices parents make, especially mothers, and the impact of socio-economic conditions on family dynamics.

In contemporary discussions about feminism, mental health, and social inequality, Olsen's story remains a touchstone. It encourages empathy for those whose struggles often go unnoticed and challenges readers to rethink simplistic narratives about motherhood and success.

Applications in Education and Literature

This short story is a staple in many literature and gender studies courses. Its rich themes and accessible style make it ideal for analyzing narrative

voice, character development, and social critique. Students often find Olsen's portrayal of maternal guilt and resilience deeply relatable and thought-provoking.

Inspiration for Writers and Readers

For writers, Olsen's masterful use of interior monologue offers a lesson in how to convey complex emotions through voice and structure. Readers gain a window into a world rarely spotlighted—the quiet struggles of working-class women—fostering greater understanding and compassion.

Tips for Analyzing Tillie Olsen I Stand Here Ironing

If you're studying this story or simply want to deepen your appreciation, here are some tips to guide your analysis:

- **Focus on the narrator's voice:** Pay close attention to her tone, word choice, and how her feelings shift throughout the story.
- **Consider the historical context:** Understanding the Great Depression and its impact on families enriches your interpretation.
- **Analyze symbolism:** Think about how household items and everyday tasks reflect larger themes.
- **Look for themes of identity and agency:** Reflect on how Emily's character is shaped by circumstances beyond her control.
- **Explore the story's structure:** Notice how the non-linear timeline affects your understanding of the mother's emotions.

Engaging with these elements can unlock deeper layers of meaning and help you connect with the story on a personal level.

The Enduring Legacy of Tillie Olsen I Stand Here Ironing

Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" remains a poignant exploration of motherhood, social hardship, and the passage of time. Its honest portrayal of a mother's reflections transcends its historical moment to touch readers

universally. By shedding light on the often invisible labor and emotional burdens of women, Olsen's story continues to inspire empathy and critical thought.

Whether encountered in a classroom, book club, or personal reading, "I Stand Here Ironing" invites us to pause and consider the quiet strength and vulnerability inherent in the human experience. In doing so, it affirms the power of storytelling to connect us across generations and social divides.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of Tillie Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

The central theme of 'I Stand Here Ironing' is the complex relationship between a mother and her daughter, exploring themes of guilt, poverty, and the challenges of motherhood during difficult times.

How does Tillie Olsen use the narrative structure in 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

Olsen employs a stream-of-consciousness narrative structure that reflects the mother's internal monologue, allowing readers to intimately experience her thoughts, regrets, and reflections on her daughter's upbringing.

What role does socioeconomic status play in 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

Socioeconomic status is a crucial factor in the story, as the mother's poverty and limited resources significantly impact her ability to provide for and nurture her daughter, contributing to her feelings of guilt and helplessness.

How is motherhood portrayed in Tillie Olsen's 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

Motherhood is portrayed as a complex and often challenging experience, marked by love, sacrifice, guilt, and the struggle to do one's best under difficult circumstances.

What is the significance of the title 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

The title symbolizes the mother's multitasking and constant labor, both physical and emotional. Ironing becomes a metaphor for the repetitive, often

unnoticed work of motherhood and reflection on her daughter's life.

How does the story address the impact of historical context on personal lives?

The story is set during the Great Depression and World War II era, highlighting how historical hardships such as economic struggles and societal expectations shape the mother's experiences and her daughter's development.

What literary devices does Tillie Olsen utilize in 'I Stand Here Ironing'?

Olsen uses literary devices such as stream-of-consciousness, symbolism (like ironing as a metaphor), and flashbacks to deepen the emotional impact and provide insight into the mother's psyche.

Why is 'I Stand Here Ironing' considered an important work in feminist literature?

The story is considered important in feminist literature because it gives voice to a mother's often overlooked experiences and critiques societal pressures on women, especially regarding motherhood and economic hardship.

Additional Resources

****Exploring the Depths of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing": A Critical Review****

tillie olsen i stand here ironing is a poignant short story that delves into the complexities of motherhood, societal pressures, and the intricate dynamics of family relationships during the Great Depression era. First published in 1961, Olsen's narrative remains a significant work in American literature, celebrated for its nuanced portrayal of guilt, regret, and resilience through a mother's reflective monologue. This article provides a comprehensive and analytical review of the story, examining its thematic richness, stylistic features, and cultural relevance—while naturally incorporating key terms like Tillie Olsen, I Stand Here Ironing, feminist literature, and narrative technique.

Contextualizing "I Stand Here Ironing" within Tillie Olsen's Oeuvre

Tillie Olsen's body of work often centers on marginalized voices, particularly women navigating economic hardship and social constraints. "I Stand Here Ironing" epitomizes Olsen's commitment to feminist themes and

social realism, capturing the intersection of personal and political struggles faced by working-class mothers. The story unfolds as a single, reflective monologue by a mother who contemplates her daughter's upbringing amid poverty and limited resources. Olsen's choice to present the narrative as an internal dialogue underscores the psychological complexity inherent in mother-child relationships.

The story's publication during the early 1960s, a time when feminist discourse was gaining momentum, further situates it as an important text for understanding gender roles and maternal expectations in mid-20th century America. Through subtle yet powerful storytelling, Olsen critiques societal norms that often blame women for familial hardships while ignoring systemic inequalities.

Thematic Exploration in Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing"

Maternal Guilt and Regret

At the core of "I Stand Here Ironing" lies the theme of maternal guilt. The narrator, a mother addressing an unnamed interlocutor—possibly a school counselor or social worker—reflects on her perceived failures in raising her daughter, Emily. This internalized guilt stems from the mother's inability to provide consistent care due to financial struggles and absence caused by work commitments.

The story's evocative language conveys a sense of remorse and helplessness, as the mother revisits moments of neglect and missed opportunities. This emotional depth invites readers to empathize with the protagonist's situation rather than casting judgment, highlighting the complex realities of motherhood under duress.

Socioeconomic Constraints and Their Impact

A significant aspect of Olsen's narrative is its exploration of how poverty and social marginalization influence family dynamics. The mother's reflections reveal the pervasive impact of economic hardship, which limited her choices and affected her daughter's development. The story subtly critiques the lack of social support systems that exacerbate such struggles.

This socioeconomic lens aligns "I Stand Here Ironing" with other contemporary works that examine class and gender oppression. The mother's narrative underscores how external factors often dictate personal outcomes, challenging simplistic notions of parental responsibility.

Identity and Self-Perception

Emily's evolving identity is another critical theme in the story. The mother's account portrays Emily as a complex individual shaped by circumstances beyond her control—her early childhood illnesses, emotional isolation, and the absence of maternal attention. This portrayal raises questions about nature versus nurture and the formation of selfhood within constrained environments.

Olsen's treatment of identity is nuanced, avoiding reductive stereotypes and instead presenting a layered portrait of a young woman grappling with her place in the world. The mother's simultaneous pride and sorrow reflect the ambivalence inherent in parental love.

Stylistic Features and Narrative Technique

Tillie Olsen's narrative style in "I Stand Here Ironing" is characterized by its stream-of-consciousness approach and fragmented structure. The monologue flows in a nonlinear fashion, mirroring the mother's introspective thought process, which oscillates between past and present. This technique enhances the emotional intensity and psychological realism of the story.

The use of a domestic, everyday activity—ironing—as the framing device symbolizes the repetitive and often invisible labor of motherhood. The act of ironing serves as a metaphor for the mother's attempts to smooth out the wrinkles of her daughter's troubled past, while simultaneously highlighting the futility of such efforts against larger forces.

Olsen's language is economical yet evocative, employing vivid imagery and subtle shifts in tone to convey the mother's complex feelings. The absence of dialogue and reliance on internal reflection create an intimate atmosphere that draws readers into the narrator's consciousness.

Comparisons to Contemporary and Later Works

"I Stand Here Ironing" shares thematic parallels with other feminist literature of its time, such as Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," which also explore women's psychological struggles within oppressive social contexts. However, Olsen's focus on motherhood and economic hardship offers a distinct perspective that foregrounds class issues alongside gender.

In more recent literary discourse, the story is often discussed alongside Toni Morrison's works, which similarly address the intersections of race, class, and motherhood. While Olsen's narrative centers on a white working-class family, its universal themes resonate broadly, contributing to ongoing

conversations about family, identity, and social justice.

Relevance and Impact of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" Today

The enduring relevance of "I Stand Here Ironing" lies in its candid portrayal of maternal challenges within a socioeconomically constrained environment. In an era where discussions about work-life balance, mental health, and systemic inequality dominate public discourse, Olsen's story provides historical insight into the persistence of these issues.

For educators and students, the story remains a staple in literature curricula due to its rich thematic content and accessible narrative style. Its inclusion in feminist and social justice anthologies highlights its significance as a tool for critical engagement with gender and class.

Moreover, the story's exploration of guilt and maternal love continues to resonate with readers who recognize the complexities of parenting in diverse contexts. Olsen's empathetic voice encourages compassion and understanding rather than simplistic moral judgments.

Pros and Cons of the Story's Narrative Approach

- **Pros:** The intimate monologue invites deep emotional connection and psychological insight, while the nonlinear structure effectively mirrors human memory and reflection.
- **Cons:** Some readers may find the lack of external dialogue and action limiting, potentially leading to a sense of narrative confinement within the mother's perspective.

Despite these minor limitations, the story's strengths in thematic depth and stylistic innovation have cemented its place in American literary canon.

Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" remains a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of motherhood, identity, and societal pressures. Through its evocative narrative and rich thematic layers, the story continues to inspire reflection on the complexities of family life and the enduring impact of economic and social conditions on personal development.

Tillie Olsen I Stand Here Ironing

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tillie olsen i stand here ironing: Fiction Laurie G. Kirsznner, 1993-09-23 Includes the fiction section from Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing 2/e with three student papers and works by women, minority, non-Western and contemporary authors.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Between Mothers and Daughters* Susan Koppelman, 1987 In this poignant multicultural collection of short stories by American women writers, mothers and daughters describe their conflicts and consolations, their trusts and mistrusts, their loves and hates. Including stories written between the 1840s and the 1990s, *Between Mothers and Daughters* explores the maternal and filial bonds between women and investigates the practice of family, exposing the complicated, bittersweet truths of women's intergenerational relationships. Newly revised and updated, this edition of the classic anthology includes several new stories and an expanded introduction that revisits this ancient relationship with fresh vision and insight. Book jacket.

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tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *On the Contrary* Martha Rainbolt, Janet Fleetwood, 1984-06-30 *On The Contrary* contains a balance of writings by men and women. The essays are presented in pairs, a man and a woman writing on each topic. This balanced juxtaposition allows students to discuss, think, and write about changing roles and relationships without being forced into either a feminist or traditionalist party line. The essays in each section reverberate suggestively with each other and this effect is reinforced by the discussion questions, writing topics, and introductory material. An additional table of contents arranges the essays according to rhetorical rubrics.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Mother Reader* Moyra Davey, 2011-01-04 The intersection of motherhood and creative life is explored in these writings on mothering that turn the spotlight from the child to the mother herself. Here, in memoirs, testimonials, diaries, essays, and fiction, mothers describe first-hand the changes brought to their lives by pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering. Many of the writers articulate difficult and socially unsanctioned maternal anger and

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tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Tell Me a Riddle* Tillie Olsen, 1995 Contains an authoritative text of the story, along with a chronology, critical essays, and a bibliography.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Critical Theory Today* Lois Tyson, 2006 This new edition of the classic guide offers a thorough and accessible introduction to contemporary critical theory. It provides in-depth coverage of the most common approaches to literary analysis today: feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, reader-response theory, new criticism, structuralism and semiotics, deconstruction, new historicism, cultural criticism, lesbian/gay/queer theory, African-American criticism, and postcolonial criticism. The chapters provide an extended explanation of each theory, using examples from everyday life, popular culture, and literary texts; a list of specific questions critics who use that theory ask about literary texts; an interpretation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* through the lens of each theory; a list of questions for further practice to guide readers in applying each theory to different literary works; and a bibliography of primary and secondary works for further reading. This book can be used as the only text in a course or as a precursor to the study of primary theoretical works. It motivates readers by showing them what critical theory can offer in terms of their practical understanding of literary texts and in terms of their personal understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Both engaging and rigorous, it is a how-to book for undergraduate and graduate students new to critical theory and for college professors who want to broaden their repertoire of critical approaches to literature.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Tillie Olsen* Panthea Reid, 2009-12-10 In *Tillie Olsen: One Woman, Many Riddles*, Panthea Reid examines the complex life of this iconic feminist hero and twentieth-century literary giant. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, Tillie Olsen spent her young adulthood there, in Kansas City, and in Faribault, Minnesota. She relocated to California in 1933 and lived most of her life in San Francisco. From 1962 on, she sojourned frequently in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Santa Cruz, and Soquel, California. She was a 1920s hell-cat; a 1930s revolutionary; an early 1940s crusader for equal pay for equal work and a war-relief patriot; an ex-GI's ideal wife in the later 1940s; a victim of FBI surveillance in the 1950s; a civil rights and antiwar advocate during the 1960s and 1970s; and a life-long orator for universal human rights. The enigma of Tillie Olsen is intertwined with that of the twentieth century. From the rebellions in Czarist Russia, through the terrors of the Depression and the hopes of the New Deal, to World War II, the Nuremberg Trials, and the United Nations' founding, to the cold war and House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, to later progressive and repressive movements, the story of Olsen's life brings remote events into focus. In her classic short story *I Stand Here Ironing* and her groundbreaking *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Yonnondio*, and *Silences*, Olsen scripted powerful, moving prose about ordinary people's lives, exposing the pervasive effects of sexism, racism, and classism and elevating motherhood and women's creativity into topics of study. Popularly referred to as Saint Tillie, Olsen was hailed by many as the mother of modern feminism. Based on diaries, letters, manuscripts, private documents, resurrected public records, and countless interviews, Reid's artfully crafted biography untangles some of the puzzling knots of the last century's triumphs and failures and speaks truth to legend, correcting fabrications and myths about and also by Tillie Olsen.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Upward Mobility and the Common Good* Bruce Robbins, 2009-12-21 We think we know what upward mobility stories are about--virtuous striving justly rewarded, or unprincipled social climbing regrettably unpunished. Either way, these stories seem obviously concerned with the self-making of self-reliant individuals rather than with any collective interest. In *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, Bruce Robbins completely overturns these assumptions to expose a hidden tradition of erotic social interdependence at the heart of the literary canon. Reinterpreting novels by figures such as Balzac, Stendhal, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Dreiser, Wells, Doctorow, and Ishiguro, along with a number of films, Robbins shows how deeply the

material and erotic desires of upwardly mobile characters are intertwined with the aid they receive from some sort of benefactor or mentor. In his view, Hannibal Lecter of *The Silence of the Lambs* becomes a key figure of social mobility in our time. Robbins argues that passionate and ambiguous relationships (like that between Lecter and Clarice Starling) carry the upward mobility story far from anyone's simple self-interest, whether the protagonist's or the mentor's. Robbins concludes that upward mobility stories have paradoxically helped American and European society make the transition from an ethic of individual responsibility to one of collective accountability, a shift that made the welfare state possible, but that also helps account for society's fascination with cases of sexual abuse and harassment by figures of authority.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: Protest and Possibility in the Writing of Tillie Olsen

Mara Faulkner, 1993 Tillie Olsen's fiction and nonfiction portray, with all their harsh contours, the lives of people who cannot speak for themselves or whose words have been forgotten or ignored. Olsen's writing is neither serene nor despairing. In this sensitive thematic reading, Mara Faulkner shows that its most subversive function is the assertion that human life can be other than and more than it is. Olsen's promise of full creative life aims to make her readers forever dissatisfied with physical, emotional, and intellectual starvation. Faulkner finds in Olsen's writing a triple-layered pattern combining protest against oppression (blight), celebration of courage and strength (fruit), and the heartening dream of a radically transformed future world (possibility). She focuses on four of Olsen's main themes - motherhood, the relationship between men and women, community, and language - and shows how, because of social and economic circumstances, potentially creative tensions become destructive contradictions: motherhood stifles women's lives, patriarchy and poverty turn men into enemies of women and children, communities force their members into betrayal, and language distorts or erases human experience. Olsen reveals, according to Faulkner, the overlapping oppressions of class, race, gender, nationality, education, and age that both link people and set them apart. Yet, she refuses to exalt suffering and deprivation. In this comprehensive examination of a literature of social consciousness, Faulkner approaches Olsen's works within their historical, social, and political contexts without treating them as propaganda. In fact, she shows that it is Olsen's compressed, poetic style that gives her writing its revolutionary power. She illuminates both the author's individual talent and the traditions in which her works were created - traditions of women writers of color, writers of the working class, and writers who were immigrants or children of immigrants.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: Teaching Writing Cynthia L. Caywood, Gillian R. Overing,

1987-01-01 This anthology explores the relationship between feminism and writing theory. The chapters cover the major issues: basic pedagogical theory and philosophical approaches to the teaching of writing, studies of problems encountered by female writers and writing instructors, and useful how-to essays on classroom technique. The authors also address important, provocative questions about power in the classroom--its use, abuse, and distribution. The book is based on the concept of equity, which the editors define: Equity does not mean to us the abolition of differences among individuals, nor does it imply a blanket imposition of an Orwellian homogeneity. It does not mean stifling some voices so that others may be heard; it does not demand the compromising of academic standards in the name of egalitarianism. Equity, as we understand it, creates new standards which accommodate and nurture differences. Equity fosters the individual voice in the classroom, investing students with confidence in their own authority. Equity unleashes the creative potential of heterogeneity. this definition of equity is at the heart of this anthology, and our attempts as teachers to model our pedagogy on this principle provided the impetus for assembling it. -- from the Introduction

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tillie olsen i stand here ironing: *Themes for English B* J. D. Scrimgeour, 2006-01-01 In *Themes for English B* a teacher ponders the nature of meaningful learning, both in and beyond the classroom. J. D. Scrimgeour contrasts his Ivy League education to the experiences of his students at a small public college in a faded, gritty New England city. What little Scrimgeour knows of the burdens his students bring to class--family crises, dead-end jobs, overdue bills--leaves him humbled. Fighting disenchantment with the ideals of higher education, Scrimgeour writes, How much I owe these students, how much I have learned. They know the score; they know they are losing by a lot before the game even begins, and they shrug, as if to say, 'What am I supposed to do, cry?' Scrimgeour's obligations to his students and his hopes for them glance off each other and sometimes collide with the realities of the classroom: the unread assignments and the empty desks. Is there too great a student-teacher divide? Can Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, or any other writer Scrimgeour teaches have something to say to a single mother with a full course load, two jobs, a sick kid, and a broken car? Yes, it turns out, and it is magic when it happens. The pupil inside the teacher emerges when Scrimgeour finds unexpected occasions for his own ongoing education. Pickup basketball games at a local park become exercises in improvisation, in finding new strengths to compensate for age and injury. His collaboration on a word-and-movement performance piece with a colleague, a dancer mourning the death of a beloved niece, leads him into unfamiliar creative terrain. A routine catch on a baseball field long ago, a challenged student in a grade school writing workshop, a yellowed statue of education pioneer Horace Mann: each memory, each encounter, forces revisions to a life's lesson plan. Scrimgeour's achingly honest, intimate essays offer clear-eyed yet compassionate accounts of the trials of learning.

tillie olsen i stand here ironing: Literary Contexts in Short Stories , 2006

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tillie olsen i stand here ironing: Better Red Constance Coiner, 1995 *Better Red* is an interdisciplinary study addressing the complicated intersection of American feminism and the political left as refracted in Tillie Olsen's and Meridel Le Sueur's lives and literary texts. The first book-length study to explore these feminist writers' ties to the American Communist Party, it contributes to a re-envisioning of 1930s U.S. Communism as well as to efforts to promote working-class writing as a legitimate category of literary analysis. At once loyal members of the male-dominated Communist Party and emerging feminists, Olsen and Le Sueur move both toward and away from Party tenets and attitudes - subverting through their writing formalist as well as orthodox Marxist literary categories. Olsen and Le Sueur challenge the bourgeois assumptions - often masked as classless and universal - of much canonical literature; and by creating working-class women's writing, they problematize the patriarchal nature of the Left and the masculinist assumptions of much proletarian literature, anticipating the concerns of second wave feminists a generation later.

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