

## 'A Woman's Hands' by Eva Bezwoda

Read through 'A Woman's Hands' on page 232 of Seasons Come to Pass and then read through the brief biography of the poet, Eva Bezwoda, provided above the poem.

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1. *A woman's hands always hold something:*
  2. *A handbag, a vase, a child, a ring, an idea.*
  3. *My hands are tired of holding*
  4. *They simply want to fold themselves.*
  5. *On a crowded bus, I watched a nun's empty hands*
  6. *Till I reminded myself that she clutched God.*
  7. *My hands are tired of holding.*
  8. *I'd gladly let them go, and watch a pair of hands*
  9. *Run ownerless through the world,*
  10. *Scattering cooking pots and flowers and rings.*
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1. In the first two lines the poet makes a generalisation about women's hands. She provides a list of things that women's hands often hold. Consider each of the items on the list provided in line 2. Do these items have a symbolic meaning? Does the list suggest something about the poet's or about society's attitudes towards the role of a woman?

A handbag, most of the time you will see a woman with a handbag, you will rarely find women without a handbag. This can suggest that the speaker is carrying a burden. You will only expect a woman to carry a handbag.

A vase, can be symbolised as carrying her, the speaker's, burdens and can represent that a woman is only seen as a decoration and with inability to do anything that is expected.

A child, normally a child is symbolic connected to something new or a new beginning and women have the most responsibility when it comes to raising a child and are mostly seen as their only function.

A ring, can suggest that she is property to her husband and that she is married. Marriage is normally expected from some women.

An idea, can represent an aim that the women have for their life but are dismissed by society or by their husbands.

2. In lines three and four the poet moves from a generalisation to something specific. What is the effect of the contrast?

It represents that she distances herself from the "mould" of accepted female behaviour according to society and their beliefs of the requirements of women. The speaker communicates her objecting attitude towards societies' norms for women and her unwillingness to fit into the norm that is created. She does not fit in by the "general" doing of women. The speaker does not only distance herself from society she also distances herself from other women.

3. Lines 5-7 provide another juxtaposition (or contrast). This time there is a contrast between the nun's hands and the speaker's hands. What could be implied in the contrast between lines 6 and 7?

As the nun's hands are not holding something physical, but figuratively "clutched God." she emphasises that she does not even want to hold on to anything figuratively. This can also be an indication that she is not a believer in any religion, as it is expected from society to believe in some other God or creator of the universe. She's opposed to do anything that is required by the norm of society.

4. The poet uses repetition in lines 3 and 7. How does the repetition affect the tone of the poem? (See page 47 of your *Introduction to Literary Studies* for a discussion of tone.)

The tone of the poem is dreadful and tired. The speaker is expressing her unhappiness towards societies expectation in doing things that should be done by women. Repeating that she will not do what is required in being the "perfect" woman. The is tired is living up to the expectation of societies norms. She is tired of trying to fit in and being in the system that is created for sheep and not standing up for themselves.

5. The last three lines make use of strange imagery. Discuss the image. What insight does this provide into the feelings of the speaker?

"I'd gladly let them go," this can be an indication that she lets her burden of being a "societies" women go or leaving the societies' norm. "and watch a pair of hands Run ownerless through the world" She wants to be free and not be classified in what she should do and should not do as a woman. She is her own person without the responsibility of fitting in the norm of what people have created. "Scattering cooking pots and flowers and rings" to stray from the road that society created for her as women, leaving the "cooking pots" being a provider for children and her husband "and flowers" only being a pretty face without functions "and rings" being forced to marry and be a wife, behind.

6. Consider the items listed in line 10. How do these items relate to the items listed in line 2? What insight does this provide into the feelings of the speaker?

This is another list that is required by society to "fulfil" a women's duties that she will not obliged to. She is opposed in what is required by societies norm and what they want her to do and what they do not want her to do. She is feeling frustrated and not free. She is bound to her burden in being a women and to fit in the societies norm in being a women and all the "duties" that the has to do to fit in.