

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 8: THE TREES



THE TREES

~Summary~

-by Adrienne Rich

Stanza- 1

The trees inside are moving out into the forest,
the forest that was empty all these days
where no bird could sit
no insect hide no sun bury its feet in shadow
the forest that was empty all these nights
will be full of trees by morning.

Explanation: The speaker of the poem observes that the trees in his house are moving outside into the forest which has been empty for a long time. It is important to understand that the trees are not actually moving, but it has been used as an imagery by the poet to show the destroyed forests and the false nature that humans have tried to keep in their houses. Since the forest outside was empty, no birds could sit on the branches of trees, no insects could hide in the trees and sunlight could never disappear under the shadows of the trees. The speaker feels that the empty forest will be full of trees by the next morning.

Stanza- 2

All night the roots work
to disengage themselves from the cracks
in the veranda floor.
The leaves strain toward the glass
small twigs stiff with exertion
long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof
like newly discharged patients
half-dazed, moving to the clinic doors.

Explanation: It seems like the trees work silently in the night in order to complete their mission of getting free from the boundaries of the house. Therefore, they work all night to free themselves through the cracks on the veranda floor. The leaves of the trees try very hard to put a lot of pressure on the glass so that they could break it. The small twigs have become very hard due to applying so much pressure to free themselves. The larger branches of the trees that have shrunk because of being inside the walls and under the roof, where they cannot grow much. They try to move slowly from there and look like newly discharged patients from a hospital, who become half-shocked on coming to the outside world.

Stanza- 3

I sit inside, doors open to the veranda
writing long letters
in which I scarcely mention the departure
of the forest from the house.
The night is fresh, the whole moon shines
in a sky still open
the smell of leaves and lichen
still reaches like a voice into the rooms.

Explanation: The speaker, who could be the poet herself, sits in her house, the doors of which open to the veranda. She is writing long letters. She hardly mentions in her letters about the trees that are moving out to the empty forest. The poet presents a conflict between man and nature. Man uses plants for interior decoration cuts trees to make a house for himself. Through these lines the poet is indicating towards a possible rebellion by nature against man as they strive to go outside the house into the open in a full moon night where the moon is shining in the open sky and the night is very fresh. The poet can smell the leaves and lichens coming from the trees that reach her room like a voice.

Stanza- 4

My head is full of whispers
which tomorrow will be silent.
Listen, The glass is breaking.
The trees are stumbling forward
into the night. Winds rush to meet them.
The moon is broken like a mirror,
its pieces flash now in the crown
of the tallest oak.

Explanation: The speaker listens to the sounds coming from the leaves and lichens of the trees. These sounds will not be there in the morning as the trees will move out to the forest in the night and will not be in the house by morning. Now, the speaker can hear the glass breaking due to the efforts of the twigs. As the glass breaks, the trees hurry outside and in doing so, they fall on each other and get struck at different places. As the trees go in the open, it seems like the wind is moving fast towards them to meet them. The tall trees can finally stand straight as they are free. They are so tall that they have broken the moon into pieces like a broken mirror. The moon now sits like the crowns on the heads of the tall oak trees. Again, the use of moon is an imagery to show that between the ground and the sky stands the trees; and one can only look at parts of the moon, and not the full moon, from under the trees.

Conclusion of The Trees

The Tree is a short symbolic poem and it focuses on the movement of trees that are initially indoors but seeking to escape to freedom in the forest. The trees represent the nature and womanhood in particular.

NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 100-101)

(THINKING ABOUT THE POEM)

Question. 1

- i. Find, in the first stanza, three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest.
- ii. What picture do these words create in your mind: "... sun bury its feet in shadow..."? What could the poet mean by the sun's 'feet'?

Answer:

- i. The three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest are the sitting of a bird on trees, the hiding of insects and the sun burying its feet in the shadow of the forest.
- ii. The sun radiates heat and the given words create a picture of the hot, radiating sun cooling its feet in the cool shadow of the forest. The sun's 'feet' refers to its rays that reach the earth.

Question. 2

- i. Where are the trees in the poem? What do their roots, their leaves, and their twigs do?
- ii. What does the poet compare their branches to?

Answer:

- i. In the poem, the trees are in the poet's house. Their roots work all night to disengage themselves from the cracks in the veranda floor. The leaves make efforts to move towards the glass, while the small twigs get stiff with exertion.
- ii. The poet compares the 'long-cramped' branches that have been shuffling under the roof to newly discharged patients who look half-dazed as they move towards the hospital doors after long illnesses and wait to get out of the hospital. The branches also have cramped under the roof and want to get out into the open to spread themselves in fresh air.

Question. 3

- i. How does the poet describe the moon:
 - (a) at the beginning of the third stanza, and
 - (b) at its end? What causes this change?
- ii. What happens to the house when the trees move out of it?
- iii. Why do you think the poet does not mention "the departure of the forest from the house" in her letters? (Could it be that we are often silent about important happenings that are so

unexpected that they embarrass us? Think about this again when you answer the next set of questions.)

Answer:

- i.
 - a) At the beginning of the third stanza, the poet says that the night is fresh and the whole moon is shining in the open sky.
 - b) At the end, the poet compares the moon shining through the crown of the tallest oak to a mirror that is broken into flashing pieces. This change is caused due to the trees stumbling out of the poet's house to escape. As they move outside, their branches block the moonlight making the moon look like it is shattered into many pieces.
- ii. When the trees move out, they break the glass on their way out. The smell of leaves and lichens still reaches those left in the room like a voice from afar.
- iii. The poet, like most people, tried hard to recreate the forest in her veranda; however, she then realised that the trees themselves wished to be freed from the captivity of indoor life and to go back to their natural habitat. This realisation causes her some embarrassment, as she held them captive against their will; hence she does not mention the departure of forests in her long letters.

Question. 4 Now that you have read the poem in detail, we can begin to ask what the poem might mean. Here are two suggestions. Can you think of others?

- i. Does the poem present a conflict between man and nature? Compare it with A Tiger in the Zoo. Is the poet suggesting that plants and trees, used for 'interior decoration' in cities while forests are cut down, are 'imprisoned', and need to 'break out'?
- ii. On the other hand, Adrienne Rich has been known to use trees as a metaphor for human beings; this is a recurrent image in her poetry. What new meanings emerge from the poem if you take its trees to be symbolic of this particular meaning?

Answer:

- i. Yes, the poem presents a conflict between man and nature. While nature is more free and unbounded, man prefers to live in bounded spaces and also wants to curb nature. He uses plants for interior decoration of houses, cuts trees to make a house for himself, kills animals for food or other purposes and cages them in zoos. In all these ways, man curbs nature and denies plants and animals the freedom in which they should live. The poem shows that trees and plants are rebelling against man as they strive to work their way out into the open. For instance, in the poem A Tiger in the Zoo, the poet presents the fact that animals feel bounded by cages. They can only take a few steps inside the cage, whereas they really want to run and leap into the open. This signifies the fact that plants and

animals feel caged by humans and want to break out from the imprisonment at the hands of humans.

- ii. If trees are symbolic of human beings, then it could be said that humans too want to break away from the shackles of the busy and selfish lives they lead. They also want to go out into the nature and be free. They work all day and sometimes all night to try and achieve something though they do not have the time to enjoy it. They keep striving hard in their routines as they feel cramped under the roofs of their homes and offices. Even they want to break free and go out into the peaceful nature.

Question. 5 You may read the poem 'On Killing a Tree' by Gieve Patel (Beehive – Textbook in English for Class IX, NCERT). Compare and contrast it with the poem you have just read.

Answer: The poem, "On Killing a Tree" by Gieve Patel explains the difficulty of cutting down a tree. The poet discusses the firmness and longevity of trees. He puts forth the significance of trees in maintaining natural balance. While 'The Trees' by Adrienne Rich, describes that the trees don't like to stay imprisoned decorating a house but they want to be free and move to the place where they actually hail from.