

The Trees

Introduction

This poem has been written by Adrienne Rich. In the poem, the poet creates strong visual images of trees trying to escape from the cities to the forests.

Summary

There are trees in the house of the poet which are moving out into the forest. The forest without trees looked empty, and the birds and insects do not stay in it. Also, no shadows can be seen in the forest. However, the poet feels that in the morning this scenario will change. The forest, which had been empty all these nights, will be full of trees by morning.

All through the night, the trees outside the poet's house remain busy. The roots of the tree try to disengage themselves from the cracks in the veranda floor. The leaves try to escape out of the glass windows and the twigs have become hard by the exertion undertaken by them to free themselves. The poet says that the large branches of trees have shrunk because of being forced to grow under the roof. Now, the trees are moving slowly outside, like patients discharged from a hospital.

The poet is sitting in her veranda, witnessing all this, while writing a long letter.

However, she hardly mentions the moving of trees in her letter. It appears that, for the poet, it was an expected and ordinary happening, which is not worth mentioning. The poet says that the night is still young and the whole moon is shining. The smell of leaves and lichen reaches her, as clearly as a voice is heard in a room.

She then says that all this will end today and tomorrow will be silent as the trees would have moved to the forest by then. The poet says that she can see the glass breaking and the trees stumbling forward. The wind rush forward to meet them. As they break open from their confined world, they stand straight and are so tall that they seem to break the moon into small pieces. The poet says that it appears as if the moon crowns the heads of the tall oak trees.

Message

This is a symbolic poem in which the trees represent not only nature but also womanhood. The poet was a feminist and she wants to say that it is high time now the women should break free from the chains of customs and religion and social perception that hold them back.



Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

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.

(CBSE SQP 2022-23, Modified)

- (a) Which poetic device is used in 'no sun bury its feet.....'? Explain.
- (b) State whether the following statement is True or False:
The extract uses trees as a metaphor for aliens.
- (c) The idea of a forest that has been 'empty all these days' is
(i) unnatural (ii) pleasant
(iii) magical (iv) legendary
- (d) How does the use of enjambment impact this extract?

Answers

- (a) Personification is the poetic device used in 'no sun bury its feet'. Personification is the practice of representing objects, qualities, etc., as humans. Here 'sun' has been represented as a human (having feet).
- (b) False
- (c) (i) unnatural
- (d) It builds momentum.
2. 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.

(a) Why will it be silent tomorrow?

(b) The glass is:

- (i) shining (ii) stumbling
(iii) breaking (iv) whispering

(c) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract:
rush : hurry :: flare :

(d) Which poetic device is used in 'The moon is broken like a mirror'? Explain.

Answers

- (a) It will be silent tomorrow because the trees would have moved out.
- (b) (iii) breaking
- (c) flash
- (d) Simile is the poetic device used in 'The moon is broken like a mirror'. Simile is the poetic device which compares something to something else, using the words *like* or *as*.



Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What happens when the trees stumble forward into the night? (CBSE 2020)

Ans. When the trees stumble forward into the night, wind starts blowing. It appears that the tall trees have broken down the moon into small pieces. The poet has used moon as an imagery. She wants to create a visual image. When we see moon through a tree, then we can only look at parts of the moon and not the full moon. So, the poet is saying that tall trees break the moon.

Q 2. What do the roots and leaves of the tree do?

Ans. The roots of the tree work all night to disengage themselves from the earth through the cracks in the veranda floor. The leaves strain themselves towards the glass in an attempt to move out.

Q 3. What kind of trees are there in the first stanza? How are they not useful for birds or insects?

Ans. The first stanza refers to shady trees with branches. These trees are in homes therefore they are not useful for birds or insects.

Q 4. Find, in the first stanza, three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest. (CBSE 2019)

OR

What are the three things that can't happen in a treeless forest? (CBSE 2017)

Ans. In a treeless forest, no bird can sit, no insect can hide, and there are no shadows.

Q 5. 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'?

Ans. The cool shadow of the trees come to our mind. The sun loses its heat under the shadow of a tree. Sun's feet refer to the rays of the sun that reach the earth.

Q 6. Where are the trees in the poem? What do their roots, their leaves, and their twigs do? (CBSE 2017)

Ans. The trees are in the house. The roots try to free themselves from the depth of the earth through the cracks on the veranda floor. The leaves make effort to move towards the glass (of the wall or windows) in order to break free. The small branches or twigs become stiff as they exert to free themselves.

Q 7. How does the poet describe the moon: (a) at the beginning of the third stanza, and (b) at its end? What causes this change?

Ans. In the beginning of the third stanza, the poet says that one can see the whole moon shining in the open sky. But in the end of the stanza, he says that the moon seems to be broken like a mirror and into small pieces.

The change is caused by the movement of the trees from the house towards the forest.

Q 8. Why do you think the poet does not mention 'the departure of the forest from the house' in her letters? (CBSE 2017)

Ans. The poet does not mention the departure of the forest from the house in her letter. I think it is because for the poet it is neither extraordinary nor unexpected. It appears that she had been expecting such a thing for quite some time and when it finally happens then she is not surprised by it.



Long Answer Type Questions ▾

Q 1. What message does Adrienne Rich want to convey through her poem 'The Trees'? (CBSE 2018)

Ans. 'The Trees' is a short symbolic poem that focuses on the movement of trees that are initially indoors but are now seeking to escape to freedom in the forest. The poem conveys two messages. The first is the exploitation of nature to fulfil our needs. The poet wants to encourage the practice of afforestation. The second is that of gender equality. The poet implies that women had been confined for a long time in their houses. They are denied opportunities for their growth. The poet says that the time has come for women to break free and make their own path. She says that once women realise their own potential then no one would be able to hold them back.

Q 2. Give the central idea of the poem 'The Trees'.

Ans. The central idea of the poem 'The Trees' is the liberation of women from confinement. The poet wants to say that for centuries women have been held back by customs and social prejudices. Their freedom has been completely taken away and they have been subjected to confinement in their houses. But now they are breaking free. They are coming out of their houses and are reaching new heights. They are breaking the age old customs and are willing to take risks to stride ahead in life. Now, the sky is their limit. The poet herself was a feminist and in the poem she has cleverly personified the trees as women. When she says that trees from the houses are moving towards forest, she wants to imply that the women are escaping from the confinement of their houses and making their place in the wide world which lies beyond their homes.