

The Trees

Can there be a forest without trees? Where are the trees in this poem, and where do they go?

* Environmentalism

→ women

Natural desire for freedom

* Hinting at nature's resilience

Fight for liberation

trees ↔ Newly discharged patients

① both confined in place that is not natural to them

② Both are eager to return to their natural surroundings

* Peace and vastness

Emphasizes nature's power

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.

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 half-dazed, moving to the clinic doors.

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.
* change is not easy

→ outside world * Feminism

* Breaking from confinement and societal expectations

* Empty forest → Symbolize a society dominated by men (Patriarchy)
* Balanced world

shows determinism

Personification

Simile

metaphor

* challenges women's face

women empowerment ♀

women's restricted lives within home

* Escape from the clinic (societal structure)

* Feeling overwhelmed to write about the loss

* Maybe the letter to someone who wouldn't understand... so avoids the topic

* She accepts the natural order of things

* Maybe she feel pressure to openly express her desires

* Environmentalism → The poem criticizes human actions that harm the environment. It highlights the importance of reflecting nature's balance.

* Feminist viewpoint → The poet might be using the trees as a metaphor for women's desire for liberation from societal constraints.

Moon → Symbol of feminine power - childbirth, protection,

- ① Speaker might be sensing the movement of trees
 - ② Echoes of natural world
 - ③ Trees' voices
 - ④ Suppressed voices of women yearning for liberation
- veranda glass
social barriers
→ sense of urgency/confusion

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.
* Brokenness doesn't diminish feminine power

ADRIENNE RICH

Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. in 1929. She is the author of nearly twenty volumes of poetry, and has been called a **feminist** and a radical poet.

Glossary

to disengage themselves: to separate themselves

strain: make efforts to move

bough: branch

shuffling: moving repeatedly from one position to another

lichen: crusty patches or bushy growth on tree trunks/bare ground formed by association of fungus and alga.

Thinking about the Poem

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'?
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?
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.)

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?
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.

Homophones

Can you find the words below that are spelt similarly, and sometimes even pronounced similarly, but have very different meanings? Check their pronunciation and meaning in a dictionary.

- The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
- When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
- The insurance was invalid for the invalid.

