



The Trees

About the Poet

Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. She was a famous poet, essayist and feminist. She has published nineteen volumes of poetry, three collections of essays and other writings.



Introduction to the lesson

The poem has a symbolic meaning, the trees are an extended metaphor for women. The poet says that the women have rested, healed and recovered and are ready for their primary purpose – to renew the empty forest of mankind.

The Trees Summary

The poet talks about trees symbolically. They refer to women who have been healed and are ready to move out of their houses to fulfil their primary purpose – to renew the forest of mankind. As women have remained indoors, the forest has become empty, the birds and insects rendered shelterless. The Sun's rays do not have the tree trunks and leaves to fall upon and thus, reach the earth. She says that the forest will be full of trees the next morning. The roots of the trees are working hard to separate from the floor of the veranda where they have remained fixed. The leaves and branches are moving towards the glass windows.

The Trees Summary

They are desperate to move out just like a newly discharged patient who has not recovered completely, moves to the exit door of the hospital in a hurry. The poet is sitting in her house with the doors of the veranda open. She is writing letters but does not mention this movement of the trees. It is night time, the sky is clear and a bright moon is visible. She can smell the leaves and lichen which seem to be calling out desperately. She hears the glass of the window pane breaking. The trees are moving out and the fast blowing wind embraces them. As the trees have reached the forest, the tall and strong oak tree overshadows the moon and it seems that the moon has been broken into several pieces.

The Trees Poem and Explanation

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.

The poet says that the trees are moving out of the confines of the houses, into the open forest. This is unrealistic as trees are immovable and hence, we realize that the poem has a symbolic meaning. We interpret that trees refer to females who have healed themselves and are ready to move out of their homes, into the forests to fulfil their primary purpose of filling the world with mankind. Further she adds that the forest has been empty for the past many days and so, no birds can be seen as they do not have any trees to sit on, on insects can be seen as they do not have any shelter and the Sunlight cannot form any shadows. The forest of humanity has remained empty for many days but will soon be full and bright.

Literary Devices:

Personification: Sun bury it's feet. Sun has been personified.

Enjambment: Continuation of a sentence to the next line (the forest that was..... trees by morning).

Anaphora: 2 lines begin with 'no'

imagery: "The trees inside are moving out into the forest" – shows kinesthetic imagery

**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.**

Word meanings

Disengage: remove

Strain: pressure

Twigs: small stem

Exertion: effort

Cramped: restricted

Boughs: branch

Shuffling: mixing

Discharged: send out

Dazed: stun

The slide features decorative plant illustrations. On the left, a light green stem with two branches extends from the bottom to the top. On the right, a similar light green stem is partially visible. At the bottom right, there are dark green and black leaves.

The poet explains the struggle done by the plants to reach the forest. She says that the roots worked for the whole night to separate themselves from the veranda floor. The leaves tried hard to reach the window of glass so that they could go outside. Even the small stems of the trees put much of their effort in order to set themselves free. The big branches were also trying a lot to go out from the roof of the room. We can say that women are desperate for a change and their effort is compared to that made by a patient who has been released from the hospital and he tries to move out in a hurry although he is confused. Maybe because they are half conscious and are under the influence of some medication, they are unsteady but in a hurry to leave the clinic.

Literary Devices:

Enjambment: continuation of sentence to the next line (the leaves strain.....

Half dazed)

Simile: trees compared to patients (like newly discharged patients)

personification: twigs and boughs have been personified.

**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**



Scarcely: barely

Departure: leaving

Lichen: crusty patches of fungus and algae on tree trunks, having a distinct smell

The poet says that she is sitting in her veranda, writing long letters. She does not mention about the trees leaving her house in her letters. She says that the night is very clear. She can see the complete moon which is shining. The smell of leaves and lichens is like a voice which is yelling and expressing a desire for freedom from the confines of the house.

Literary Devices:

Alliteration: 'long letters' forest from' 'sky still' 'leaves and lichen'

Enjambment: continuation of sentence to the next line (doors open....the house)

Imagery: the poet has tried to create a scene in which she is observing all the things happening (the night is fresh.....into the rooms)

**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.**



Whispers: murmur

Stumbling: trip over

Flash: glare, shine

Oak: A large, strong tree generally used for making furniture

Her head is full of the slow sounds made by the trees which are desperate to move out. These sounds will not be heard the next day. The poet asks the reader to listen carefully as a change is about to take place. She hears the glass window breaking and the trees stumble out into the night. The wind is blowing outside. It meets the trees. The moon is like a mirror and it appears to have been broken into pieces as the shadow of the oak tree divides the moon into many fragments.

Literary devices:

Simile: The moon is compared to a mirror (Moon is broken like a mirror)

**THANK
YOU**

