

On Killing A Tree

SUMMARY

The poem On Killing a Tree is a description of man's cruelty towards Nature. The poet says that it is not simple to cut a tree. The tree has grown slowly over the years absorbing air, water, sunlight and the remaining nutrition from the earth. The poet says that the growing stage of the tree is similar to humans.

The mere act of hacking and chopping won't be enough to destroy it. The bleeding barks will heal and the tree will start growing again. To destroy a tree completely you will have to pull it out of the earth's cave. Only then the strength of the tree is exposed. It is the most sensitive part of the tree because it was hidden for years under the earth. Man further tortures the tree by scorching and choking it in the sun and air. Finally the process of browning, hardening, twisting, withering takes place. And the tree is completely killed. Trees are our best friends but no one realizes it.

POETIC DEVICE

RHYME SCHEME

The poem has been written in free verse. There is no rhyme scheme and the length of the lines varies. Even the stanzas are not of equal length.

Alliteration is the repetition of sounds at close intervals. It is used to lend a lyrical or musical element to the poem.

Examples:

- The bleeding bark will heal.
(Here the poet has repeated 'b' and 'l' sounds.)
- The source, white and wet.
(In this line 'w' sound is repeated.)

Metaphor

The metaphor is a comparison between two unlike objects, but the word of comparison 'like' or 'as' is not used. Instead of stating that one thing is like another, the poet identifies one with the other.

Examples:

- The bleeding bark
Here the word 'bleeding' is a metaphor. The poet compares the sap oozing out of the bark of a hacked tree trunk to the blood of a human being or a living creature but does not use the word of comparison.
- Leprous hide
Here the uneven, discoloured bark of a tree is compared to the discoloured and gnarled skin of a person suffering from leprosy. But the poet does not use 'like' or 'as'.

Repetition 'is using a word, phrase, or clause a number of times with the purpose of emphasis or to provide unity to the poem.

Example:

- The root is to be pulled out-
Out of the anchoring earth;

It is to be roped, tied,

And pulled out – snapped out

Or pulled out entirely,

Out from the earth-cave.

Here the poet uses '*pulled out*' and '*out*' again and again to emphasize the effort involved in uprooting a tree and exposing its roots. It shows that the root of the tree is deeply fixed into the earth.

Enjambment

Enjambment is a figure of speech in which one line of poetry rolls on to the next line without any pause marked by a comma or a full stop. In this poem, there is enjambment in every stanza.

Example:

- Rising out of it, feeding

Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water,

Here there is no punctuation mark at the end of the first and the second line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second is carried on to the third.

- So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.

Here the first line moves on to the second without any comma or full stop at its end.

- Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again

To former size.

In these lines, full stop comes at the end of the third line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second rolls on to the third line.

Imagery

Here very strong imagery has been used and it shows the growth of the tree by taking nutrients from the earth and absorbing sunlight, air and water from nature.

Example:

Slowly consuming the earth Rising out of it, feeding upon its crust.

Absorbing years of sunlight, air, water. And out of its leprous hide sprouting leaves.

Personification

The poet portrays the tree as a human being throughout the poem.

Bleeding bark — the wounded bark is represented as bleeding.

QUESTION ANSWERS

1. Can a “simple jab of the knife” kill a tree? Why not?

Ans. No, a simple jab of a knife cannot kill a tree because it takes many years for a tree to grow and rise out of the earth. Moreover, only a chop cannot kill it because it will slowly rise again and grow to its original size.

2. What is the meaning of “bleeding bark”? What makes it bleed?

Ans. “Bleeding bark” refers to the area on the tree trunk where it has been hit with the axe. It bleeds because the wood cutter has wounded the tree by cutting and chopping it.

3. The poet says “No” in the beginning of the third stanza. What does he mean by this?

Ans. In the beginning of the third stanza, the poet has said “No” to lay emphasis on the fact that mere chopping of the tree would not kill it. The tree would grow again and retain its original size.

4. What is the meaning of “anchoring earth” and “earth cave”?

Ans. “Anchoring earth” refers to the roots of the tree that lie inside the earth and play the role of an anchor for the tree to grow. They ensure the security of the tree as they nourish it with water and nutrients. “Earth cave” refers to the ground on which the foundation of the tree is laid as it holds the roots and keeps the tree standing tall and protects it from adversities such as heavy rainfall or storm.

5. What does the poet mean by “the strength of the tree exposed”?

Ans. The strength of the tree lies in its roots, which the poet asks to snap out in order to kill the tree. Thus, the phrase “the strength of the tree exposed” refers to the roots of the tree being exposed to sunlight and air.

6. What finally kills the tree?

Ans. The tree is finally killed by the uprooting of its roots. When the roots, which had anchored it lying hidden in the earth for years, were dug out, the tree’s strength was exposed and this led to the death of the tree. It dried up after it had been uprooted.

Extra questions for practice

Q 1. What are miniature boughs? What happens if they are left unchecked?

Q 2. How does the tree heal itself?

Q 3. How does the poet describe the growth of the tree in the first stanza of the poem?

Read the stanza and answer the questions that follow :

So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs,
Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size.

- 1.Explain “hack and chop”
- 2.What do you mean by ‘not so much pain will do it’?
3. Where will the curling green twigs rise from?

Answers

A -1 :Miniature boughs are new branches which sprout where the tree was hacked or chopped. If they are left unchecked, they expand and become a huge tree. The chopped tree grows back to its former size.

A-2

The tree is equipped with a power to heal itself. When a tree is hacked or chopped, leaves sprout from the wounded bark. From close to the ground curled green twigs rise. Miniature boughs expand again to their former size. The tree, in time, grows back to its former size.

A-3

The poet says that the tree grows slowly getting its nutrients from the earth. Then it absorbs sunlight, water and air for many years. The bark of the tree looks ugly because it is rough and has crooked lines on it. It is very ironical that soft and green leaves come out of the leprous hide. Gradually, it grows into a big tree.

(a) Explain “hack and chop”?

Answer:

Hack or chop means to cut off something, usually with a sharp instrument or weapon.

(b) What do you mean by ‘not so much pain will do it’?

Answer:

It means that hacking and chopping of the tree will cause it pain but will not kill it.

(c) Where will the curling green twigs rise from?

Answer:

After hacking and chopping the curling green twigs will rise from the remaining part of tree that is close to the ground.

(d) What finally kills the tree?

Answer:

Uprooting the tree and exposing its roots to heat and scorching and choking them kills the tree.