

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

Beehive 8: On Killing a Tree by Gieve Patel

1. Summary

“On Killing a Tree” tries to persuade us not to kill trees. They have grown over many years, getting nourishment from the soil, the sun, water and the air. The earth has protected and anchored them. Trees have a strong desire to live and can re-grow even when they are hacked. We need to cut them out by their roots and let them dry out in the sun before they are completely destroyed.

Listen to this poem being sung. Click on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EEduoVigjM>

2. Stanza By Stanza Explanation

It takes much time to kill a tree,
Not a simple jab of the knife
Will do it. It has grown
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

It takes a lot of time to kill a tree. A simple jab will not do the job. The tree has grown over many years, rising out of the earth, feeding upon the soil, absorbing sunlight, air, and water. With all this nutrition, leaves begin to sprout out of its bark which is thick and rough like a leper's skin.

So hack and chop
But this alone wont 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.

A woodcutter can hack or chop, but that is not enough to kill the tree. This is not enough pain to kill the tree. The bleeding bark heals by itself. The trunk of the tree, close to the ground, will produce curled green twigs that will rise from the small branches. If their growth is not checked, then they will grow again to their earlier size.

No,
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,
And the strength of the tree exposed
The source, white and wet,
The most sensitive, hidden
For years inside the earth.

To kill a tree, you must pull the roots out of the earth that anchors, surrounds and protects it. This will expose the white, wet roots which are the source of the life of the tree. These roots have been hidden for years inside the earth.

Then the matter
Of scorching and choking
In sun and air,
Browning, hardening,
Twisting, withering,
And then it is done.

When the roots are left out in the hot sun, they will choke, brown, harden, twist and wither away. Then the tree will finally die.

3. Vocabulary

1. **Jab** – poke
The doctor **jabbed** me with an injection.
2. **Consuming** – eating and drinking
Humans are **consuming** the earth's resources too quickly.
3. **Crust** – covering, outer layer
I do not like to eat the **crust** of the cake because it is often hard.
4. **Absorbing** – suck in, or drink
The mud around my potted plant was so dry, it kept **absorbing** all the water I poured into it.
5. **Leoprous hide** – the skin of a leper.
The bark of the tree looked like **leoprous hide**.
6. **Sprouting** – growing, putting out shoots
My tulsi plant looked like it had died in the winter, but it started **sprouting** leaves in the summer.
7. **Hack** – cut with rough or heavy blows.
The wood-cutters **hacked** through the thick forest to clear land for building a house.
8. **Bleeding bark** – sap coming out of the bark of the tree
The **bleeding bark** of the rubber tree was oozing a milky, white sap.
9. **Miniature** – small scale
When I went to Agra, I bought a **miniature** marble Taj Mahal.
10. **Boughs** – branches
The **boughs** of the tree were filled with bright pink flowers.
11. **Unchecked** – free, without restraint
For generations, people shot tigers **unchecked**; that is why tigers almost became extinct.

12. **Expand** – grow in size
My family started to **expand** once my son got married.
13. **Former** – previous, earlier
I was much happier in my **former** school.
14. **Anchoring** – fixing, providing stability, grounding
We need strong ropes for **anchoring** the ship during the storm.
15. **Roped** – tied
All canvas covers of the tents were **roped** down to stop them from flying away during the storm.
16. **Snapped** – break suddenly and completely, typically with a sharp cracking sound
Many trees got uprooted and many branches **snapped** during the heavy storm.
17. **Earth-cave** – safe place dug out underneath the earth
Rabbits burrow into **earth-caves**.
18. **Exposed** – unprotected, uncovered
Exposed wires are dangerous; they can give nasty shocks
19. **Source** – a place, person, or thing from which something starts or can be obtained
Gangotri is the **source** of the Ganges river.
20. **Sensitive** – delicate, quick to detect or respond to slight changes, signals, or influences.
She is very **sensitive**; she starts sneezing as soon as the weather becomes even slightly colder.
21. **Scorching** – burning
Summer in the desert is **scorching**.
22. **Choking** – severe difficulty in breathing
She started **choking** during an asthma attack.

23. **Withering** – to become dry and shrivelled
I left my plant out in the scorching sun and so it started **withering**.

4. Questions

1. Can a “simple jab of the knife” kill a tree? Why not?
2. How has the tree grown to its full size? List the words suggestive of its life and activity.
3. What is the meaning of “bleeding bark”? What makes it bleed?
4. The poet says “No” in the beginning of the third stanza. What does he mean by this?
5. What is the meaning of “anchoring earth” and “earth cave”?
6. What does he mean by “the strength of the tree exposed”?
7. What finally kills the tree?

5. Literary Devices

1. **Rhyme Scheme of the poem:** There is no rhyme scheme in the poem. It is written in free verse. There is no rhyme or rhythm.
2. **Metaphor:** Indirect comparison
 - (i) Leprous hide - the uneven colour and rough texture of the surface of the trunk of a tree is compared to the skin of a person suffering from leprosy.
 - (ii) Bleeding bark - the sap coming out of tree where it is cut is compared to the bleeding from the wound in a human body.

3. **Alliteration:** Repetition of a consonant sound in 2 or more closely places words.
 - (i) bleeding bark - 'b' sound is repeated.
 - (ii) white and wet - 'w' sound is repeated.

4. **Repetition:** A word or sentence is repeated to lay emphasis on it.

'Pulled out' is repeated in Stanza 3.

No,
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,
And the strength of the tree exposed
The source, white and wet,
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