




## On Killing a Tree




*You must have observed people cutting down trees. But can they kill a tree? Is it easy to do so? Let's read the poem and find out what the poet says on killing a tree.*

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.

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.

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.

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

GIEVE PATEL

#### GLOSSARY

**jab:** sudden rough blow

**leprous hide:** discoloured bark

**hack:** cut roughly by striking heavy blows

**anchoring earth:** Trees are held securely with the help of the roots in the earth.

**snapped out:** chopped out

**scorching and choking:** the drying up of the tree after being uprooted

#### Thinking about the Poem

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?

## Trees

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

JOYCE KILMER

*When eating fruit, think of the person who  
planted the tree.*

VOLTAIRE

