

Keeping Quiet

- Pablo Neruda

About the Poem

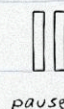
From the collection *Extravagaria* (1958), originally written in Spanish, translated into English by Alastair Reid. Included in the NCERT ~~Hornbill~~ Flamingo textbook, Class 12.

Central Idea

Neruda invites all of humanity to pause - to stop the rush of work, speech, war and violence for just one moment - and to introspect. Stillness, he insists, is not the same as death. *

Stillness is not Death

<- the key paradox
<- of the poem



pause

Form & Structure

Free verse - no rhyme scheme, no fixed metre. 5 unequal stanzas, conversational tone. First person plural ("we", "us") - binds reader & poet apart together.

Tone : reflective, gentle, persuasive.

The Poem (verbatim)

Stanza I

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.



Earth

Stanza II

For once on the face of the Earth
let's not speak in any language,
let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines,
we would all be together
in a sudden ~~tonetiness~~ strangeness.

Stanza III

Fishermen in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would look at his hurt hands.

<- stop hurting

<- nature



salt

[contd. on next page]

The Poem (contd.)

Stanza IV

Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

Stanza V

What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.
Life is what it is about;
I want no truck with death.

Stanza VI

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and could perhaps do nothing for once,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of ~~warning~~ threatening ourselves with death.
Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Summary

Meruda opens with a count of 12 - the hours of a clock, the months of a year, a number that signals completeness. He urges every person on Earth to share one moment of complete silence and stillness.

In that pause - no rushing, no engines, no speech, no movement of arms - the world would feel strange and together.



*
"It would be an exotic moment" ← - line 9

The fishermen would spare the whales ; the man gathering salt would notice his wounded hands. The warmongers would put on clean clothes and just walk with their brothers - a brief ~~escape~~ ceasefire.

Meruda clarifies : he does not want total inactivity or death. Life goes on - but the pause lets us understand ourselves instead of constantly threatening our own lives with stress, war and selfishness.

Major Themes

*

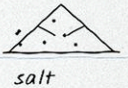
1. Silence is Creative, not Death

The poem's central paradox. Stillness lets the mind reflect; it is the soil in which ~~grass~~ self-awareness grows.

Stanza V denies any link with death.

2. Eco-philosophy (Nature)

Stop hurting nature. Whales unharmed, salt-worker sees his hurt hands - 'human labour can be gentler. Pause respects the planet that feeds us.'



3. Anti-war Pacifism

'Green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire' - chemical, ecological, conventional.

All victors leave no survivors. Just a single quiet moment would make enemies walk as 'brothers in the shade'.



4. Introspection / Self-knowledge

The deepest theme. We threaten ourselves with death by rushing forward without knowing why. Silence = understanding.



Literary Devices

Free Verse

No rhyme, no metre. Lines vary in length.

Mirrors the natural rhythm of thinking.

Paradox

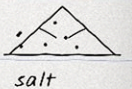
'Stillness' appears to mean inaction, yet Neruda calls it a creative force. 'Quiet' is set against 'sadness of never understanding ourselves' - silence cures noise.

Repetition / Anaphora

'wars with gas, wars with fire' ;
'let's not speak ... let's stop ...' ;
'count to twelve' (opens & closes the poem)
- builds a chant-like, almost prayerful tone.

Imagery

Visual : fishermen, whales, salt-gatherer,
clean clothes, shade. Aural : engines vs
huge silence. Tactile : 'hurt hands'.



salt

Symbolism

12 = completeness ; Earth = home ;
silence = peace ; shade = neutrality.

Key Quotations

① Opening

" Now we will count to twelve / and
we will all keep still. "

-> a universal call for collective pause.

*

② On Wars

" Those who prepare green wars ...
would put on clean clothes / and walk
about with their brothers in the shade "

-> war can be replaced by simple fellowship.

③ The Paradox

" I want no truck with death. "

<- = stillness
<- is not death

Pablo Neruda - in brief

Born Ricardo Neftali Reyes Basoalto, 1904,
in Parral, Chile. Pen name 'Pablo Neruda'.

Diplomat, senator, communist activist.

Wrote love sonnets, political odes, surreal
lyrics. Awarded the ~~Pulitzer~~ Nobel Prize
for Literature in 1971. Died Sept 1973.

Often called 'the poet of the people'.



Chile

Exam Pattern Points

Typical Question Types

(a) Reference-to-context (1+1+2 marks)

e.g. 'Now we will count to twelve...'

(b) Short answer (40-50 wds)

Why does Neruda use the number 12?

(c) Long answer (120-150 wds)

Stillness vs Death : Neruda's view.

Marker Tip

Always cite the line.


Mark 1 = quote ;

Mark 2 = device ;

~~Mark 4~~ Mark 3 = theme link.

Quick Revision (30 sec)

* Poet : Pablo Neruda (Chile, Nobel 1971)


* Source : Extravagaria (1958) 

* Form : free verse, 1st person plural

* Idea : a universal pause, count to 12

* Stress : stillness ?= death

* Themes : silence, ecology, peace, self.

* Devices : paradox, repetition, imagery, 
symbolism, free verse.

* Tone : reflective, gentle, persuasive.

"... and I will go. "