

Keeping Quiet¹

Pablo Neruda

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

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 strangeness.

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

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.

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

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with
death.
Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Not Everything is Now

Pablo Neruda

Something of yesterday remained
today

Shard of a pot or of a flag
or simply a notion of light,
algae of the aquarium of night,
a fibre that did not waste away,
pure doggedness, air of gold:

something of what has passed persists
diluted,
dying by the arrows of the aggressive
sun and its battles.

if yesterday does not endure
in this dazzling independence
of the dictatorial day in which we live,
why like a marvel of gulls
did it turn backward, as though it
would stagger
and mingle its blue
with the blue that had already
departed?

And I answer.

Inside the light
your soul circles
winding down until it dies out,
growing like the ringing of a bell.

And between dying and being born
again
there is so little
room, nor is the frontier
so harsh.

The light is round like a ring
and we move within its movement

¹ *Keeping Quiet* and *Not Everything is Now* are taken from the collection *The Hands of the Day*, published posthumously in 1968. Copper Canyon Press. Trans. William O'Daly (2008).