



## Understanding the Sense of Stillness and Eco-friendly Practices: An Eco-critical Interpretation of Pablo Neruda's "Keeping Quiet"

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### ABSTRACT

Eco-poetry is a portion of eco-criticism which concentrates on the relationship between man and the physical world. Eco-criticism can have a primary definition from an early anthology, *The Eco-criticism Reader (1996)*, where it says "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment". William Rueckart's proposes concept of poetry through ecological goals which is outlined in his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism". Firstly, poetry can function as a stored energy and reading poetry is a process of energy transfer and classroom work must draw into the poetry's energy to develop creativity and community, where all are interlinked by the pathways of energy. Secondly as a reader, while questioning other areas like pedagogy, history and social justice, we also need to question about carrying our responsibility towards world when we read texts and whether the texts have ecological visions. Thirdly, the readers have to see a text within ecological paradigms. This article will explore Pablo Neruda's poem "Keeping Quiet" through the lens of eco-criticism, a literary approach that highlights environmental concerns and human-nature relationships. Neruda's urge for silence and world-wide introspection is explained as an appeal for ecological awareness and an analysis of human-centric progress. The poem's focuses on silence or stillness, humbleness towards nature, and coexistence challenges anthropocentrism and positions nature as both a ecological teacher and a living entity. This analysis argues that "Keeping Quiet" is

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not only a poetic reflection on peace but also a powerful ecological statement compelling a reevaluation of humanity's impact on the nature. The study will indicate Neruda's *Keeping Quiet* as a demonstration of man's interdependence and significance of nature through poetry as a means for finding spirituality in the physical world. The study of this poem will give out some points through literary ecological concepts of Lawrence Buell and his four criteria for evaluating a text as embodied nature of environmental consciousness.

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## Introduction

Pablo Neruda is one of the prominent persons of twentieth-century poetry and Nobel Prize winner in literature (1971). Some critics' findings position Neruda poetry from eco-poetical point of view and mark him as a Place Maker (David Khosravi, et. al. 2016) and contest Neruda's eco-ethical standpoints toward the natural world (David Khosravi, et. al. 2017). Eco-criticism, as a field of literary theory, has become notable in last few decades by highlighting literature's role in shaping and displaying human relationship with the environment. It focuses on how texts participate with nature, environmental concerns, and the ethical suggestions of human behavior toward the environment. Eco-criticism is an analytical manner or approach that sees at the representation of nature and its scenario in cultural texts, giving specific attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric utilization of words when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and reports material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking literary texts with other ecological sciences and approaches. Taking into account of Pablo Neruda's "*Keeping Quiet*", often appreciated for its philosophical approach and peace seekers themes, also exhibits deep ecological concerns when study through critical viewpoints. This paper explores how Neruda uses poetic stillness and introspection as a call to re-imagine our ecological footprint and to readjust ourselves with the patterns of the physical world. Taking into account of Lawrence Buell's four criteria for evaluating a text on ecological consciousness and William Rueckart proposal of ecological concepts used in reading poetry, this article will provide some analytical view of Pablo Neruda's *Keeping Quiet* in an environmental consciousness and locate this poem within ecological framework.



### The Pathway to “Ecological Stillness: A Break from Ecological Harm”

Neruda’s *Keeping Quiet* holds a deep meditative and eco-spiritual quality which reflects the eco-mystical and at the same time life noticeable viewpoints. Regarding to this point, the poem begins with a requirement to “*count to twelve*” and “*keep still*,” suggesting a collective pause in human activity-

*Now we will count to twelve*

*And we will all keep still*

*For once on the face of the earth, (Pablo Neruda’s Keeping Quiet 1-3)*

This stillness is an ecological context as a moment of resistance which is a refusal to participate in the commercialism and environmental degradation. The age marked by industrial growth, environmental degradation, and geopolitical tension seen in the poem, Neruda’s appeal becomes a form of environmental resistance. The silence he appeals is symbolic moment where humanity stops its catastrophe march and listens—to each other and to the Earth. Stillness here becomes an act of environmental consciousness, an invitation to consider the cause unchecked human activity. The silence is an example of eco-mystical quality that clarifies Neruda’s ideology on mystical view. Rueckert holds that poetry is like a stored energy and by reading poetry becomes a transferred energy where all the interconnections serve as a pathway to engage in it. Here Neruda utilizes stillness and silence as deep meanings for recharging life as active actions. This can be seen as an act of conservative notion as well as movement.

Keeping quiet can be explained as a metaphorical withdrawal from exploitations, war orientation, and overconsumption of human behaviors that eco-criticism frequently identifies as main idea to the climate change. Lawrence Buell (2005) give key point in which literature presents “*knowledge responsibility for anthropogenic environmental damage*”. If we keep quiet for a moment, we shall be able to examine mistakes done by us. For example-

*Fisherman in the cold sea*

*Would not harm whale*

*And the man gathering salt*

*Would look at his hurt hands (Neruda’s Keeping Quiet, line 11-14)*



Here the fisherman is an example of all kinds of oppressors and killers. Neruda believes that after keeping quiet and self introspection the nature of oppression will change. The salt gatherer is the depiction of poor section of society. This section of society is working any level of works which frequently lead them into hardships. They worked any level of labors to earn their livelihood and hurt themselves. But after self introspection they would restrict their labor and can have healthy life. It is in this suspension of actions Neruda offers space for ecological restoring and settlement. Rueckart's view that through poetry, we can redirect our energy and this idea applies here where Neruda redirects us from constant consumption of man toward self reflection and stillness which promotes harmony with nature. Neruda suggested that by pausing ourselves from over exploitation behavior, we can reconnect ourselves with life sustaining processes of the earth. The poem gives us a reflection and restoring energy through pausing ourselves from exploitation.

### **Evaluation on Anthropocentrism and Progress**

Neruda critiques humanity's impulsive chasing of motion and progress. He writes,

*"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 (Neruda's Keeping Quiet, line 25-31)*

The lines suggest that this constant chase has obscured society to the consequences of its actions, both socially and environmentally. From an eco-critical standpoint, such movement often comes at the cost of ecological balance—manifested in urban expansion, environmental collapse, and unsustainable development. Lawrence Buell suggests criteria for evaluating the text in its environmental consciousness such as the human interest is not privileged over everything else. Here Neruda challenges the modern belief in continuous growth and productivity. Eco-critical theory often interrogates this ideology, advocating instead for a re-imagined relationship which humans are the part of ecological system. Rueckart view poetry itself as an effective force to environmental recovery or restoration. In this poem,



Neruda gives mindful consciousness by drawing the reader into quiet reflection and harmony which fosters ecological ethics-

*What I want should not be confused*

*With total inactivity*

*Life is what it is about:*

*I want no truck with death. (Neruda's Keeping Quiet, line 21-24)*

This is an important clarification or justification on silence. Here it is depicting silence is not a death rather as an awareness or redirecting force with living systems of what we have forgotten. Silence is a redirecting ourselves with nature.

In environmental consciousness text, Lawrence Buell gives out the point like humans accountable to the environment and shows any actions they perform which damage the ecosystem. In *Keeping Quiet* Neruda condemns war as war brings no progress. War gives 'victory with no survivors'. He writes-

*Those who prepare green wars,*

*War with gas, war with fire*

*Victory with no survivors,*

*With put on clean clothes*

*And walk about with their brothers*

*In the shade, doing nothing. (Neruda's Keeping Quiet, line 15-20)*

This critique leads into a challenge of anthropocentrism, the ideological belief in human superiority over nature. In ecological terms, these 'wars' are not just political or military armed war but environmental draining, destructive and the nature eroding war. Rueckert challenges the human-centered approach where nature is seen as resources to be utilized. But Rueckart advocates ecological responsibility as eco-criticism rejects this worldview, and so does Neruda, who insists that humans must humble themselves and "do nothing" briefly—not driven by nihilism or existential emptiness, but to foster awareness and renewal aspects. Neruda just wants people who prepare war with biological weapon and with atomic energy to keep quiet for a while so that positive introspection can be done for realizing mistakes in life.



## The Representation of Nature as an ecological Guide and Teacher

Environment is the process rather than a static condition. The poem further emphasizes nature's capacity to instruct and guide. In lines such as,

*Perhaps the Earth can teach us*

*As when everything seems dead*

*And later proves to be alive, (Neruda's Keeping Quiet, line 32-34)*

Rueckert admires balance and homeostasis- stability in ecological systems. He argues that human systems should follow these natural movements. These lines echoed the seasonal rhythms and regenerative forces where stillness is not stagnant but a vital part of cycle of life. Neruda indicates to do nothing for once is a revolutionary ecological plan. Neruda depicts the Earth as a dynamic, cyclical pause like winter in an ecosystem and regenerative force (Neruda 26–28). Rather than viewing nature as inactive background, he describes it as a fountain of insight—a subject core to eco-critical literature. Lawrence Buell conveys an atmosphere of the environment as a continuous process rather than static condition. This line completely encapsulated with that idea where Neruda illustrated the earth as an ongoing process- a life which emerges from apparent death. This cyclical view matches Buell's belief that ecologically conscious literature should reflect nature's dynamism.

The suggestion that life returns even after death underscores the resilience of the Earth, a concept that aligns with deep ecological thought, which promotes the intrinsic value of all life forms and ecosystems. Neruda's imagery points to seasonal regeneration and the possibility of rebirth—should humanity choose to pause and listen.

### Conclusion:

In “*Keeping Quiet*”, Neruda does not provide recommended solutions to environmental degradation, but rather a transformation—a silent awakening of the spirit and the senses. By advocating for global stillness, the poem encourages humbleness in the face of ecological systems, collective responsibility, and harmonizing the spiritual resonance with the pulse of the Earth. Through an eco-critical framework, “*Keeping Quiet*” emerges as more than a meditation on peace; it becomes a call for ecological consciousness and a poetic framework for sustainable living.



As literature increasingly engages with global environmental disaster, works like Neruda's remain vital for spreading awareness and inspiring environmental ethics. His poetic silence speaks volumes in an age where the noise of human activity threatens the quiet of the natural world.

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