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## Ode to Numbers

Pablo Neruda

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# Ode To Numbers

*Pablo Neruda*

Oh, the thirst to know  
how many!  
The hunger  
to know  
how many  
stars in the sky!

We spent  
our childhood counting  
stones and plants, fingers and  
toes, grains of sand, and teeth,  
our youth we passed counting  
petals and comets' tails.  
We counted  
colors, years,  
lives, and kisses;  
in the country,  
oxen; by the sea,  
the waves. Ships  
became proliferating ciphers.

Numbers multiplied.  
The cities  
were thousands, millions,  
wheat hundreds  
of units that held  
within them smaller numbers,  
smaller than a single grain.  
Time became a number.  
Light was numbered  
and no matter how it raced with sound  
its velocity was 37.  
Numbers surrounded us.  
When we closed the door  
at night, exhausted,  
an 800 slipped  
beneath the door  
and crept with us into bed,  
and in our dreams  
4000s and 77s  
pounded at our foreheads  
with hammers and tongs.  
5s  
added to 5s  
until they sank into the sea or madness,  
until the sun greeted us with its zero  
and we went running  
to the office,  
to the workshop,

to the factory,  
to begin again the infinite  
I of each new day.

We had time, as men,  
for our thirst slowly  
to be sated,  
the ancestral desire  
to give things a number,  
to add them up,  
to reduce them  
to powder,  
wastelands of numbers.  
We  
papered the world  
with numbers and names,  
but  
things survived,  
they fled  
from numbers,  
went mad in their quantities,  
evaporated,  
leaving  
an odor or a memory,  
leaving the numbers empty.

That's why  
for you  
I want *things*.  
Let numbers  
go to jail,  
let them march  
in perfect columns  
procreating  
until they give the sum  
total of infinity.  
For you I want only  
for the numbers  
along the road  
to protect you  
and for you to protect them.  
May the weekly figure of your salary  
expand until it spans your chest.  
And from the 2 of you, embraced,  
your body and that of your beloved,  
may pairs of children's eyes be born  
that will count again  
the ancient stars  
and countless  
heads of grain  
that will cover a transformed earth.

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