

8. TO THE FOOT FROM ITS CHILD

Pablo Neruda

COMPREHENSION I

1. What would the foot like to be?

The foot would like to be a butterfly or an apple

2. Line 1 of the poem convey

ANSWER: C) the child's ignorance of harsh realities.

3. What does the time teach the child?

The time teaches the child that it cannot fly, that it cannot be butterfly or an apple.

4. The line 'stones and bits of glass, streets, ladders and the paths in the rough earth

ANSWER : a) indicates hardships one has to face in life.

5. Why does the child's foot feel defeated?

The child's foot finishes the crawling stage and starts the walking stage. When it walks, it falls many Attempts. It is also condemned to live in the shoe and leads its life like a prisoner. It can never escape from Its responsibilities and hardships of life and thus feels defeated.

6. Which words convey the real experiences of the foot?

The words "But in time; bit by bit; in the dark; it grows to know the world; stones and bits of glass: streets, ladders and the paths in rough earth" convey the real experiences of the foot.

7. Which lines in the poem suggest transformation of the foot?

The lines, "and the tiny petaled toes of the child grow bunched and out of trim, take on the form of Eyeless reptiles with triangularheads, like worms" suggest the transformation of the foot.

8. "... condemned to live in a shoe" suggests that the foot is

ANSWER: C) forced to give up its dreams.

9. What does the line "until the whole man choose to stop" mean?

The line, 'Until the whole man chooses to stop' means death of the man/ end of life of the man indicating death.

COMPREHENSION II

1. We think of a foot as belonging to a person; but Neruda says 'To The Foot From Its Child'?

In this poem, the poet Pablo Neruda says, 'to the foot from its child' because the foot is unaware that it is a foot. It thinks it to be an apple or a butterfly.

Neruda uses child as a symbol of innocence and full of imagination. As life begins, a child has only its present and future. But here, in this poem, the foot is least aware of its future also. It is unaware of its present duties and responsibilities. It does not know that it has to face the different hardships of life. But the time teaches the foot the reality of life. The stones, bits of glass, ladders, streets, the path on the rough earth teach the hardships of life. It learns to lead its life in its own way accepting the bitter truth of life. It engages in field work, mining, ministries. It walks and walks without any rest, love or sleep. Finally, as the man becomes old, the footy also grow old, losing its transparency. It becomes opaque and dull losing color, shape. It grows calloused. It is attacked by diseases. Finally, the foot stops to walk and then

slowly descends to the ground.

2. Pick out the expressions that suggest the child's imagination is fertile.

The expressions in the last lines of the poem 'if they were burying it so that it could fly or so that it could become an apple' suggests the child's imagination is fertile.

3. What contrasting descriptions of the foot does the poet offer? Why?

A child's foot offers various descriptions in the poem. The foot as a child does not know that it is a foot rather it thinks that it is a butterfly or an apple. But the time teaches the child that it is a foot and it has to walk. It has to experience and face the responsibilities of its life. It finishes its crawling stage and starts to walk but falls in its attempts to walk. It feels the walking stage as a battle. Then it is confined to live in a shoe like a prisoner. Slowly, it gets accustomed to live in the darkness and accepts its life in its own way, staying away from its fellow foot out of touch and starts to live like a blind man. When the man grows old, the foot also grows old, it becomes rough, colorless, shapeless and grows calloused. The foot never expected its life to be that way and finally it is least aware of its death also. It never knows that it ceased to be a foot, when it chooses to stop. (Stop walking, death of the man). And then it had to descend to the ground.

4. The poem begins with the idea that child's foot is not yet aware that it is a foot; at the end the foot is unaware that it had ceased to be a foot. What is the poet trying to convey through these statements?

In this poem, the poet presents the dreams of an individual against the harsh realities of life as part of a system or society. As the poem begins with the lines, 'The child's foot is not yet aware of that it is a foot, but it dreams or thinks it would be a butterfly or an apple'. It describes the innocence of the child with unparalleled imagination.

It finishes the crawling stage and starts walking, for the time teaches the foot that it cannot become a fruit or a butterfly. When it starts to walk it falls frequently and thus feels defeated and then it is condemned to live inside the shoes. The foot lives in the darkness, like a prisoner and in the darkness it gets accustomed to the situation and leads its life in its own way, out of touch and reach of its fellow foot, like a blind man. The foot walks and walks and finally loses its transparency, takes different forms of shapes, transforms itself. It is stroked by diseases and finally stops to walk, when the whole man stops to walk. (Death of the man). This shows that man cannot stay young forever. The foot then descends to the ground and gets into the darkness. It thinks that it is buried so that it can become a fruit or a butterfly, where it keeps its imagination still fertile. The poet conveys that man is a prisoner in his life's struggle but after he dies his soul or spirit can transform into anything.

5. How can the foot fly or become an apple after it is buried?

The poet wants us to think of the concept of rebirth and soul. It is said that our body dies but the soul never dies. Soul can take any form of life.

The foot is released from its captivity of the shoe. It has been freed from its responsibilities, duties and its obligations of life. It hardly accepts the truth of its death because its imagination of becoming a fruit or a butterfly is still alive.

After the death, it slowly descends to the ground and gets into darkness again. The foot is unaware and does not understand why it is going into the darkness. It thinks it is buried because it is thus going to become a fruit or a butterfly. It feels as if it has retained its freedom.

6. How does Neruda describe the busy life of the individual as represented by the foot? (IMPORTANT)

The poet uses 'Foot' as a metaphor for his view of life. Life begins in infancy and in the poem, life begins as infant foot. The child's foot does not know that it is a foot. It thinks it to be a butterfly or an apple. But the time teaches the harsh realities of life. It walks on the stones, bits of glass, on the rough path of the earth. It accepts its responsibilities and leads its life in its own way.

The poet calls it as 'this blind thing'. After the crawling stage, the foot begins its walking stage, and serves

the role of a foot. It grows old, serves working in various aspects of life. It walks and walks, never stopping.

All the foot walks never making difference between the man's foot, the woman's foot, it walks up above, down below, through fields, mines, markets, and ministries (politics). It walk backwards, far afield, inward, forward, walking without any rest and sleep and love. It walks until the whole man chooses to stop. (death of the man). And then finally it descends to the underground, but unaware of its death, for there was everthything dark again. It never knew that it had ceased to be a foot. Thus the foot stays busy till the last day of his life and finally, loses its freedom completely.

7. What does the last stanza of the poem mean? Can you think of parallels in nature?

In the last stanza, the foot thinks, it is buried because it can become a fruit or a butterfly thus, for it keeps its imagination alive.

Parallels in nature can be like, after the death of the man, he is buried or burnt. His body decomposes or turns to ash and gets mixed with the soil and becomes a fertilizer, from which a seed can germinate and grow to a great height of a tree. OR it can become a caterpillar which weaves a cocoon around it and flies out a butterfly after few days.

Life is a cycle which completes its process till death. Life is transformed to one or the other, for we believe that soul never dies, just like the foot which waits for such a transformation.

COMPREHENSION III.

1. Examine hoe Neruda's poem works out the contrast between colorful dreams and humdrum reality of life.

Dreams are unlimited but reality is far different, where we have to face many challenges and obligations in our life. Hence, in this poem, the poet works out the contrast between colorful dreams and the humdrum reality of life and presents the dreams of an individual against the hard realities of life as a part of system or society.

Here, the foot is a metaphor for life and is personified. The foot does not know it is a foot, rather it thinks it to be a butterfly or an apple. It describes the innocence of the child with unparalleled imagination. It is unaware of its obligations, responsibilities. But gradually the time teaches the reality of life when it comes in touch with the stones, bits of glass, streets ladders and the different path on thorough earth. Then the foot realizes that it is not a Butterfly or an Apple. It has to lead the life of a foot where it has to face the harsh realities of life. Then, the foot feels defeated several times when it attempts to walk. The walking stage seems to be like a battle for the foot. Finally, it confines itself to live like a prisoner inside the shoe living its life like a blind man, without the touch of the other fellow foot. It is enclosed in the darkness and tries to know the world in its ownway. It is ready to faces the hardships and experience the struggles and responsibilities of its life.

Gradually ,the foot becomes old ad the man becomes old. Physically many changes take place in the foot, The soft and transparent nails becomeshard and opaque, and the tiny petaled toes takes the form of eyeless reptiles and triangular headed worms and later grows calloused. It is stroke by diseases and has scars and wounds in its toes.

This 'blind thing' walks without any rest till the whole man 'chooses to stop' or meet his death. When it descends to the dark ground to be buried, it is still unaware of its death because it experiences the same darkness when it was inside the shoes. But it can hardly accept the idea of its death but has a hope that it can become a Butterfly or an Apple. It can take its rebirth keeping its dream alive.

In this poem the saying, 'man proposes but god disposes' holds very true. The foot wants to become a Butterfly or an Apple; he cannot escape from its responsibilities and social obligations in his life.

2. *****

3. Is Neruda criticizing how society crushes childhood dreams forces people into rigid moulds? Yes, Neruda's poem is a criticism against the society that crushes the childhood and forces into rigid moulds.

The child (foot) is tied up to its responsibilities, challenges, and social obligations etc. Its dreams' of becoming a Butterfly or an Apple are shattered. For the foot, becoming an apple or a Butterfly is a symbol of freedom because it does not want to have the suffocating responsibilities of life. But as it grows to an adult. It is not permitted to have rest and its dream faculties are crushed. And its imaginations and dreams are burnt down, its natural instincts is peeled off. It moves around like a blind man mechanically doing its duty, no matter how painful it is. The foot becomes hard, colorless shapeless, losing its transparency. They don't have a moment of rest; they are deprived of love and sleep. They get a lasting rest only when the whole body 'chooses to stop' or when the die, but still keeping its dream alive. It finally, descends to the ground with a hope of keeping alive of its imagination of becoming a Butterfly or an Apple.

4. 'Foot' is a key word in the poem. Comment on Neruda's skillful use of the word and its associations in terms of imagery to convey his ideas.

The poet says 'To the Foot from Its Child', for we can understand a foot physically belonging to a person. It is a strong supporting part of the body, which takes forward toward the person's destination. In this poem the 'foot' is personified, who experiences his own thoughts, dreams etc. Here, 'Foot is philosophically like a child who is innocent and not aware of its future. It is not aware of the fact that it is a foot but thinks that it is a Butterfly or an Apple. The foot is condemned to live like a prisoner in its shoes, and forced to accept the harsh realities of life. It accepts the ordeals of life. As the foot grows into an adult, it starts its journey of life. It faces the odds, challenges and difficulties of life and experiences the different phases of life. It understands that it cannot escape from its life and finally learn to accept the hardships of life in its own way. It loses its transparency and becomes opaque and hard and grows Calloused. After its death, it slowly descends into the ground where it is dark again. The foot was never aware of its death. It realizes that it is not a foot anymore and then it is buried so that it could fly or so that it can become an Apple, keeping its imagination still alive.
