

## **Octavio Paz Lozano The Clerk's Vision**

Octavio Paz Lozano was a famous Mexican poet, writer, and diplomat. His powerful use of language and deep thoughts on society, identity, and life earned him many prestigious awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990. One of his lesser-known but impactful prose works is "The Clerk's Vision". It was translated into English by Eliot Weinberger.

In "The Clerk's Vision", the speaker talks about how boring and meaningless his daily life has become. He is tired of doing the same things over and over—waiting in rooms, going to boring meetings, and sending messages to important people who don't notice him. He wonders if his efforts and existence even matter. All he wants is to be seen, to feel like he exists. But instead of continuing to live like this, he makes a bold decision: he says, "No. I quit." This short sentence shows that he is done with trying to fit into a world that doesn't value him. He wants to break free from his boring and meaningless life.

The speaker reflects on how he could live a normal life by settling into routines, habits, or even obsessions. He imagines just staying quiet, dealing with his pain or hopes without causing trouble. On the surface, things don't seem so bad; he eats, sleeps, goes to the beach, enjoys holidays, and gets along with people. But deep down, he is worried about things like getting sick, not being able to sleep, and even dying.

The speaker talks about a 'little worm' as a symbol of the small worries that bother him, especially when he tries to sleep. He is also frustrated by how the future always seems to ruin the present, which never turns out the way he hopes. In the end, he decides to get rid of everything that society uses to define him—his ID, passport, name, and even his identity. He doesn't want to be labelled or controlled anymore.

The speaker steps back and looks at the entire world, from the biggest things to the smallest. He describes it as full of different people: kings and presidents, prisoners and judges, powerful leaders and the oppressed. He compares them all to stars, planets, and comets—some big, some small—moving through space, following invisible rules like gravity.

The speaker continues by talking about his place in the world. He says he doesn't belong to the powerful people, but he is also not trying to be a hero. He is not judging anyone, not punishing anyone, not even trying to forgive. He refuses to play any role in this broken system. He is confused about guilt and innocence, sometimes feeling guilty even when he's innocent, and vice versa. It is all mixed up. In the end, none of it matters anymore. He says again: I quit. This shows his deep frustration and his decision to leave a world that feels confusing and unfair.

The speaker looks back on his life—his past loves, conversations, and friendships. He remembers everything clearly and with a kind of sadness, but he doesn't wish to go back. More importantly, he says he feels no hope for the future. He once believed in hope, in giving people second chances, in forgiving,

and in sticking it out despite everything—but now he says “I quit” again. He is done with pretending that things will get better, with trusting in ideas, traditions, or moral rules that have failed him. He compares these once-solid beliefs to a “broken tower” that he no longer wants to defend. Instead, he chooses silence, waiting for something big, “the event,” to finally happen.

Then, he gives a haunting image of what this coming event might look like. At first, it seems like nothing, just a chilly wind. The media might call it a cold wave, and people won’t care. A few extra deaths won’t even be noticed in the statistics. But slowly, the strange cold spreads. Things start to feel off: Doors and windows rattle, and trees and furniture make unsettling noises. People begin to feel it in their bones, literally trembling and getting goosebumps. It becomes clear that something is very wrong. The wind, the cold, and the smell of blood in the air all create a dark, uncomfortable mood. This is more than just weather: it is a symbol of fear, change, and the arrival of something terrifying that no one can stop.

The speaker also talks about a strange, invisible force that can’t be avoided. It doesn’t matter if you go outside or stay inside; there’s no way to block it out. It is not something you can fight or even see clearly. This force isn’t like a person or an army; it is more like fear, doubt, and despair. It is something that spreads through everyone, getting deep inside, not just in the body but in the soul. It messes with people’s beliefs, their confidence, and their ability to trust. It reopens old emotional and mental wounds, making people feel pain they thought had healed. The speaker compares life to a knife—sharp, cold, and uncaring. It slices through us without mercy, showing how painful and cruel life can feel when everything seems hopeless.

The speaker says this force isn’t a glowing sword or a noble weapon—it is fear and punishment. It is already here, not in the future but in the present, even if people don’t fully realise it yet. We can feel it in the atmosphere: in whispers, nervous looks, and the breeze that seems to carry something dangerous. He ends with a strong image of a “purple insignia,” a mark that people already have inside them, showing that the struggle has started. And this light wind, this feeling of fear and change, is something from the past that’s getting closer to the present moment.

“The Clerk’s Vision” is a powerful reflection on modern life, identity, and the silent struggles many people face. Through the speaker’s thoughts and emotions, Octavio Paz shows how everyday routines, fears, and social systems can make a person feel invisible and hopeless. The speaker’s repeated decision to say “I quit” is not just about leaving a job—it’s about rejecting a world that no longer feels human or meaningful. In the end, the piece is a warning and a wake-up call. It reminds us to pay attention to the quiet signs of pain, fear, and change that are already around us and to ask what matters in life.