

A GLIMPSE (Walt Whitman)

- (1) A glimpse through an interstice caught,
- (2) Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar -room around the stove
- (3) late of a winter night, and I unremark'd seated in a corner,
- (4) Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently approaching and seating himself
- (5) near, that he may hold me by the hand,
- (6) A long while amid the noises of coming and going, of drinking and oath and smutty jest,
- (7) There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking little, perhaps not a word.

Commentary (A Glimpse):

A Glimpse is a free verse poem. Free verse poetry is generally patterned by speech and images rather than by regular metrical speech. Freedom also applies to lines. They can be shortened for speed, or segmented into words or syllables to slow down the reading.

A Glimpse is about remarking while being unremarked, advancing from outside to inside, from noisy "bar-room" to quiet look and soul, from coarseness around to silence inside. It is a poem of contradictions. In the poem, persona is surveying denizens of "a bar-room" contrasting the environment, "crowd of workmen and drivers", to his personal thoughts and beliefs.

The poem begins by creating a sense of a single image that persona decided to consider. "A glimpse through an interstice" could also suggest a single view of a single person or group on something. Both, "a glimpse" and an "interstice", in the first line could suggest invisibility or hiding. Also, it could mean considering a single snapshot which, as we later find out, contradicts quietness of persona and his soul to the charged atmosphere inside the bar-room. "Crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room" in the second line suggests warmth and friendliness of people ("workmen and drivers"). The fact that these people gathered at night could suggest that they are just relaxing after work and chatting with each other. The warmth of this situation is substantiated by contradicting it to "late" and "winter night" which can be interpreted as cold. "Unremark'd" in the second line separates the narrator from the rest of the "crowd". This emphasizes the fact that we observe the situation through his eyes and interpretation. Also, it stresses the idea of contradicting outside to the inside as the warm environment of the bar-room is later contradicted to the quietness inside him.

Second and third lines introduce "the outside" with respect to persona, but if we begin reading the poem but omitting these lines we get a completely different introduction to the situation in lines 4 and 5. These lines bring the inside of persona's thought. The narrator feels perfectly at home in the atmosphere of the bar-room but he inhabits this atmosphere differently from the way his fellows ("drivers" and "workmen") do. This is suggested by lines 4 and 5 as his lover is "sitting himself near" which emphasizes homosexuality. "Silently" in line 4 contrasts the atmosphere of "the outside" to the quietness of persona's mind and his relationship with his lover. "He may hold me by his hand" suggests warmth of their relationship which in a sense unites them with "the outside" but it at the same time emphasizes the difference of their relationship from the atmosphere of "the outside". This supports the idea of split subjectivity in the poem, "the outside" and "the inside", the environment and the individual.

"A long while" in line 6 substantiates the contradiction of quietness and warmth of relationship between persona and his lovers by suggesting that all this time they were sitting quietly and holding hands. "Noises of coming and going" supports the split subjectivity as what is underlying in the words of the poem and thoughts of the narrator is invisible to the fleeting passerby and even to the denizens of the bar-room. "Drinking and oath and smutty jest" brings the idea of charged male sexuality to the atmosphere of people, chatting in the bar-room. This also suggests that the narrator and his lover inhabit this sexually charged atmosphere differently from the way "the outside" does which thus separates them and opposes them to "the outside", even to the society in this case. The last line again emphasizes the current of this intersubjectivity which is shared by the narrator and his lover by opposing "quietness" to "warmth" which are both present in their relationship.

Thus, the meaning of the poem goes far beyond just remarking as it opposes the individual to the society as well as minorities (as emphasized by homosexuality) to societies in which they are unacceptable. Here the subjectivity is split, "the outside" is contradicted to "the inside" thus separating them and emphasizing that they cannot intercommunicate.