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Walt Whitman

I SIT AND LOOK OUT.

I SIT and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all  
oppression and shame,  
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with  
themselves, remorseful after deeds done,  
I see in low life the mother misused by her children, dying,  
neglected, gaunt, desperate,  
I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous  
seducer of young women,  
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to  
be hid, I see these sights on the earth,  
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and  
prisoners,  
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who  
shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,

I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons  
upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;  
All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look  
out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent.

Analysis=

The poems that Walt Whitman wrote in the second half of the 19th century differed radically from his earlier ones. The advent of capitalism had a tremendous impact on the lives of the people. In the manipulative and calculative rat race, principles were relegated and human concerns sidelined. People in such a situation, in response to the misery and atrocities around turned a detached observer as echoed in the title "I Sit and Look Out". The verb in the title 'sit' and its capitalization in the first line –is an attempt to underline the action of the onlooker. It implies that the speaker is idle and has no intention to do anything about the situation. Also, the idea of looking out highlights how he in the confinement of complacency, is far removed from the suffering multitudes. The verbal phrase 'look out' also points to his concern of his own safety. The use of free verse echoes the continuity of the situation. The tone of the poem is pessimistic and the imagery presented is apocalyptic.

I SIT and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame;  
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with themselves, remorseful after  
deeds done;  
I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children, dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate;  
I see the wife misused by her husband—I see the treacherous seducer of young women;

The speaker states that he 'sees' and looks upon the sorrows of the dystopian world; the oppression and shame. The idea of the speaker "looking upon" points to the fact that he considers himself at a higher altitude far away from all this. Paroxysmal sobs can be heard from youth stifled with the disillusionment of the World War. Having an albatross hung around their neck, they are remorseful for their actions. Still lower, the speaker visualizes the mother taken advantage of by her very own children. She lies emaciated, distressed dying in solitude, when she needs her children the most. The speaker also sees the wife misused by her own husband, and cheated by him. The husband comes across as a callous lover who seduces young women and ruthlessly deceives them:

"I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to be hid, I see these sights on the earth,  
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and prisoners,  
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,  
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;  
All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon, See, hear, and am silent."

His eyes demarcate emotions that attempt to camouflage themselves. These emotions pertain to jealousy and unrequited love that hides its feelings to mask the ego. For the speaker, these are mere sights, and he does not possess any insights regarding them.

The onlooker witnesses the aftermath of wars, virulent diseases and autocracy. He beholds martyrs and prisoners- a byproduct of the terrible battles fought. In a gruesome image, we picture sailors throwing people out of the ship so that the remaining survive. It sounds the policy of survival of the fittest. He observes the poor, laborers and negroes treated like objects in the capitalist world subject to penury, repression and deterioration. He catalogues this collective collapse of humanity piled one upon the other. He see, hears them, yet is silent. He neither analyzes these nor makes any comment on these sights. Thus the whole poem comes across as a satire on the standpoint of the modern observer.