What happens?

A confined view of a smoky city becomes an account of hurried, joyless human life.

The main idea

A narrow urban view expands into a criticism of a society that restricts attention, feeling and individuality.

1. “Like solid fog:”

Method: Simile

Built structures acquire the enclosing quality of an atmospheric obstruction.

2. “Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye”

Method: Personification

Looking becomes a frustrated need for nourishment.

3. “All closed, in multiplied identity.”

Method: Paradoxical phrasing

Repetition erases the distinctiveness identity should imply.

4. “The world seems one huge prison-house & court”

Method: Metaphor

The final judgement makes urban deprivation a form of punishment.

Form and structure

A single stanza of 19 lines in blank verse; the unbroken form can reinforce the oppressive continuity of the scene.

Development, voice and tone

Window view — Confined and dissatisfied. Smoke and opposite houses block the sky and give the eye little variety.

People and vehicles — Alienated. Movement offers no relief because hurried individuals fail to notice one another.

Closing judgement — Condemning. The apparent street scene becomes a metaphor for systematic imprisonment.

Context

Eliot describes an industrial urban environment, connecting smoke and repeated architecture to the experience of modern city life.

Comparison links

A Wider View: industrial confinement and the desire for more space. Thirteen: city life under restriction.

Recall question

How does the final prison image grow from the opening view?