

Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful in a Mercedes- Lawrence Ferlinghetti

MATCHES:

Limbo, What Were They Like?, Vultures, Nothing's Changed-Use of contrast
Blessing, Nothing's Changed-Wealth and Poverty

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI (White male poet):

1. Ferlinghetti was born in New York in 1919. As a teen he was arrested for petty theft.
2. He often travelled around America and Mexico as a stowaway .
3. He spent much of his adult life in San Francisco, where he enjoyed a cultural mix of people and races as well as enjoying the mix of music and art and free spirits (hippies!)
4. San Francisco was associated with people who wanted to escape the industrial 'rat-race' of America to a place where talent was much more important than wealth.
5. San Francisco like any other city had its own **underclass**-not all citizens enjoyed success and glamour.
6. Ferlinghetti became involved with a group of poets responsible for the 'Beat Movement'.
7. They were outsiders in the conservative/reserved world of 1950's America and they commented on the problems of America e.g., the gap between the rich and the poor and the emphasis on material/worldly possessions.
8. These poets used **beat** or **hip** language to make their reader look again at the outsiders in their culture.
9. Ferlinghetti often writes about politics and social issues as seen in this poem.
10. His work reflects his interest in the various cultures but a new culture began to threaten the old way of life in San Francisco. Property developers forced artists out and brought into the city a new wealthy type of San Franciscan.
11. The poem reminds us that every four-lane freeway and every hi-tech tower needs to have its garbage/rubbish removed before it begins to stink and someone has to do it. These underclass of people in the poem are essential to the smooth running of their San Francisco society.
12. Ferlinghetti became Poet Laureate in 1998. He spoke of the following:
13. *"I am astonished and outraged at how San Francisco is fast becoming a playground for the rich and witless. The gap between rich and poor increased more than 40% in the last two years. The blue-collar class (working class), artists, poets and musicians are finding it impossible to exist in this world of cell phones. When you've lost that you've lost San Francisco."*
14. Meaning that when you loose the heart of San Francisco, i.e., the working class and the artists the heart of San Francisco is gone.

SETTING AND CONTEXT:

1. This is a snapshot contrasting the rich and poor in America.
2. The poem is set in a particular time and place- 9a.m. in downtown San Francisco.
3. It seems to be making a broad statement about rich and poor in America.

4. The poem describes four people held together for a moment at a red traffic light. There are two scavengers (bin men) on their way home after their round. There are two beautiful people, an elegant couple on their way to an architect's office.
5. The garbagemen's day ends where the beautiful couple's day begins.
6. The poet compares the two pairs in detail, then seems to ask the question at the end of the poem-**Is America really a democracy?**

FORMS AND TECHNIQUES:

1. Free verse. Line length and page layout are used to control how the poem is read.
2. The language is as informal as the layout.
3. The title of the poem runs on to two separate lines. The reader's eyes switch from one line to the next and from one vehicle to the other. This is what Ferlinghetti wants in order to show the difference between the two groups of people.
4. The title refers to the garbagemen as **scavengers** as if they were more dependent on the garbage they collected rather than on their wages.
5. The **beautiful people** are not beautiful because of their looks but because of their wealth and social position/social class.
6. The garbagemen look down on the beautiful people because of their position above them in the garbage truck.
7. This is the reverse of what normally happens in society and is probably what caught the poet's eye in the first place.
8. Throughout the poem there is the use of capital letters but no punctuation. Instead of using punctuation he begins a new line when he wants us to pause in our reading. This slows the poem down and gives us time to appreciate each idea.
9. The poem is fragmented (broken up) on the page-somewhat like American society.
10. Line 3-4-**yellow garbage truck...red plastic blazers**-these are the bright colours we associate with the garbagemen. These colours are sometimes used to indicate danger.
11. The poem is very American in its perspective and in its choice of language; **stoplight** (Line 1); **downtown** (Line 2); **garbage truck** (Line 3); **hip** (Line 11); **grungy** (Line 17); **odorless** (Line 29 and look at the spelling!)
12. Line 5-**stoop**-refers to the foothold on which the garbagemen stand on the back of the truck.
13. Lines 6-7-**one on each side hanging on/and looking down into**-these phrases have two meanings.
 - (i) They are literally holding onto the truck for support, **however** they could also be seen to be just hanging on in society in terms of the work they do.
 - (ii) They are literally looking down into the elegant open top Mercedes, **however**, they could also be seen as looking down their noses at the beautiful in the Mercedes.
14. Line 11-**hip**-smart or fashionable outfit.
15. Lines 13-14-**The young blond woman so casually coifed/with a short skirt and colored stockings**-harsh 'c' and 's' sounds are associated with the beautiful woman in the Mercedes.
16. Lines 16, 23, 26 and 31-**And the**-repetition of this phrase links the poem together.

17. Line 22-**gargoyle Quasimodo**-a gargoyle is an ugly carving of head on Gothic style churches. Quasimodo refers to the Hunchback of Notre Dame-another deformed creature. It is a complete contrast to the elegant couple in the car.
18. Line 24-**also with sunglasses and long hair**-this is the only thing the garbagemen have in common with the beautiful people-sunglasses and long hair. Perhaps the only similarity between them.
19. Line 26-**And both scavengers gazing down**-this is a metaphor in which the garbagemen are said to be scavengers-there is a hint that they are like vultures.
20. Line 29-the garbagemen are watching the beautiful people as if in an **odorless TV ad**, however the garbagemen cannot see their own reality. The odorless TV ad the beautiful people are in is the complete opposite to their bin lorry.
21. Line 29 and 33-**as if**- repetition of this phrase to indicate the possibilities of American democracy.
22. Line 32-**holding all four close together**-all four share the same hopes and dreams in this freeze frame for the length of time it takes the light to change colour.
23. Lines 35-36-**small gulf...high seas**- seafaring imagery used at the end to make a political point about American democracy. There is a small distance between the two classes of people but the financial gap between them is high/large.
24. Line 37-**of this democracy**-a democracy is supposed to be a society where all citizens have equal rights and its citizens elect the government.
25. Ferlinghetti is making a political point here about the supposed opportunity and liberty available in America-the American Dream which is supposed to be available to all, but isn't.

THEME AND INTERPRETATION:

1. The poem contrasts people from either end of the social spectrum/classes.
2. It is a statement about the American Dream, which in theory means that anyone can achieve anything if they work hard.
3. The garbagemen have been working hard, but the poem suggests that crossing the gulf that separates them from the rich and beautiful people may prove to be difficult.

LANGUAGE:

1. The garbagemen are referred to as **scavengers**-these are like animals-a scavenger beetle lives of rotting flesh. However the term **beautiful people** is a compliment. So right from the start of the poem the garbagemen are at a disadvantage.
2. In Line 7 the garbagemen are **looking down** into the Mercedes clearly because the truck is taller than the car. However there is **IRONY** here also as one would expect the rich couple to be looking down on the garbagemen not the other way around.
3. The descriptions of the four people are very visual-we are forced to imagine what they look like.
4. Line 11-13-**hip three piece suit...hair casually coifed**. The rich couple are very fashionable.
5. Line 17-**grungy**-is used to describe the garbagemen.
6. Line 24-we see the younger garbageman has long hair and glasses like the Mercedes driver-this forces us to compare the two.

7. The poem is written in the present tense which gives it a sense of immediacy-we feel as if the poem is happening now. From another point of view it suggests that the gap between rich and poor is a problem now.
8. The language is modern, simple and sometimes colloquial (slang/commonly used words) Line 28-**cool couple**-Lines 12 and 24 use ‘&’ instead of ‘and’ as a short cut. This cuts down on the language of the poem as well as using hip language that the common people would use.

IMAGERY:

1. Line 3-4-**bright yellow...red plastic blazers...grey iron hair**- these are strong colours associated with the garbagemen.
2. Line 11-**linen suit**- and they both have blonde hair. The couple in the Mercedes are almost colourless.
3. Is the poet suggesting that the garbagemen have more colour in their lives? Are the young people actually boring and colourless?
4. Line 22 the older garbageman is compared to **Quasimodo**. This means something that is half made or almost finished. Ferlinghetti has used this image to give us a picture of what the garbageman looks like as well as suggesting that his life is half made, perhaps almost finished due to his old age.
5. Line 27-**as from a great distance**-all four are actually close together, stuck at a red light, but the distance suggests the immense difference between each of their lives.
6. Line 29-**odorless TV ad**- the dustmen watch the young couple and see their lives as impossibly perfect-the couple are almost unreal and their lifestyle is out of reach.
7. The closing lines of the poem involve a **metaphor** about the sea. If America is the high seas, the distance between the two vehicles is a **small gulf** that should be easy to cross. Yet a gulf can also mean a deep chasm/hole. It may look possible to cross, but really it is impossible. The lives of the two pairs may cross **for and instant**, but they will never be genuinely close together.