

Allen Ginsberg's poem a supermarket in california

Literature



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Allen Ginsberg's poem "A Supermarket in California" Allen Ginsberg's poem "A Supermarket in California" The poem ridicules two main vices in American society that were prevalent in the American society in the 20th century. These vices have continued to persist in the contemporary world. These are consumerism and lack of meaningful contact among people. Ginsberg wrote this poem when industrialization was at its peak. This has led to many changes taking place in the society. People were becoming more engaged in their jobs as opposed to building relationships amongst themselves.

The poem uses many images to pass its point across. The first image used in the poem is the evocation of names of other renowned poets (Burns, 2002). These poets have been mentioned to represent certain elements of the society based on their literary contributions through their poems. Among the poets mentioned in this poem include legendary poets such as Walt Whitman and Garcia Lorca. Walt Whitman was a very influential poet in the 19th century and is Ginsberg's idol in poetry. Whitman's poems were aimed at pointing out social ills that had been brought about by industrialization. He predicted that man would be drawn away from nature as they interact with machines. His name has been used in the poem as an image to represent the ideas he stood for as a poet. Whitman wanted the society to be more cohesive as opposed to people being drawn away from each other. Lorca, on the other hand was a Spanish poet with leftist political views for which he was killed. In the poem, his name represents the mistreatment of the minority groups who are ideologically opposed to the majority (Burns, 2002). Another image used in the poem is that of a 'neon fruit supermarket' as used in the fourth line of the poem. The supermarket symbolizes mass

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consumption that is a characteristic of modern day societies (Bowlby, 2002). The supermarket is filled with different types of foodstuff for people to consume. This shows just how much the society has become a consumerist society. The use of neon in the same line of the paragraph symbolizes the artificial nature of the society today.

Another important image used in the poem appears in lines 6-8, 'What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! (Bowlby, 2002)' The mention of wives, husbands and children in this line of the poem symbolizes the level of conformity to the mainstream values where each person goes about their own business, even children. Before industrialization individuals worked as a family or community but new developments have broken down social ties and everybody is on their own, struggling to fulfill their own dreams.

These images are still as relevant today as they were in the early 20th century. The society still grapples with the same issues such as the negative effects of industrialization and globalization just as it was before. These challenges can still be ridiculed in the contemporary world using the same imagery used by Allen Ginsberg in this poem.

References

- Bowlby, R. (2002). *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*. "A Supermarket in California". Columbia University Press.
- Burns, A. D. (2002). *Thematic Guide to American Poetry*. Greenwood Publishing Group.