

Theme: City Poetry

Text: Matthew Lee, *Across the Detroit River* 1998

Source: <http://www.innercitypress.org/podtroit.html>

Annotations:



2 moonscape – cp. cityscape / landscape **3** plywood - material made of layers of wood glued together **11** tilting – moving to the side; cryogenics - production of low temperatures **12** vibrant – full of energy **14** awning - rooflike structure made of canvas or plastic **16** street car (AE) – tram (BE) **22** stank – bad smell; horny – sexually excited; conventioneer – participant of a convention (Detroit has several convention centers) **24** fallow – not used for farming **25** Charlevoix – hotel (see illustration to the left) **28** Hudson's (see illustration below)



Assignments:

1) Use the title (*Across the Detroit River*) and the first line to point out the theme of the poem in a couple of sentences. [Contents]

2) Make clear in what light Detroit is shown focussing on its (different) citizens and its looks. Make sure to include some stylistic devices in your interpretation. [Analysis]

3) Make a suggestion for an illustration (other than the ones on this worksheet) to go with Lee's poem. Give reasons for your choice. [Evaluation – creative writing]

America this is how you look:

Shattered moonscape of vacant office buildings of Detroit,
Plywooded movie halls of the once-hopeful,
Offering a dream and then pulling it back like a mousetrap.

Reduced to crawling empty streets collecting cans, 5
Painting over the windows of busses.
Housing funds used to reduce landmarks to rubble,
Begging those who squeezed to come and re-embrace.
Twitching like a junkie, clutching a gun: 10
America this is how you look.
Frozen plains of tilting castles, the freezing air of cryogenics
Whips through the canyons of a once-vibrant downtown.
I've heard the soul music, I've heard the thump-thump-thump
You can't obscure rot with plywood and awnings.
Casinos and gambling cannot conceal the smell of rotting flesh 15
Raw bricks and decay, street cars to nowhere
The glory of the automobile has taken us to the graveyard
Hearts full of grease smoking while asbestos rises
From the sites of demolished dreams--
The law cannot preserve that which the titans crushed in their hands. 20
Jab with your pen the empty windows of urban renewal
I smell the stank of horny conventioners
Let the cold winds purify this ethos of greed
Let the temple of extracted sweat fall fallow and to seed
Crying from the watch towers of long-abandoned Charlevoix: 25
Demolish and replace with decadence.
The mind deprived of oxygen rhymes then grows still...
Demolish me inside Hudson's Department Store
If you kill dreams, kill me.
Ten thousand dumpsters cannot absolve you of your sin 30
Discarded bodies discarded buildings desecration
On your altar of opportunity your jail your guardian angel...
And wonder why you're naked and no liquor
Can soothe the pain, no music
Is loud enough, demolish and erase 35
But you cannot
Escape...