

IN PRAISE OF CONCRETE

Homage to Allen Ginsberg

The wonders of concrete I sing,
demanding shoe-sole devourer, ground of dangerous adolescent adventures
 down any and all unknown paths, smasher of dropped eggs and ripe peaches,
 scraper of knees and elbows, smotherer of weedlots, protector of ants,
 eternal enemy of the moist, dark, uncovered earth.

Concrete you are the end of eras,
herald of decades, augur of change from muted summer paths of nineteenth-century childhoods
 onto you, solid foundation of the twentieth century, domain of roller skates, bikes,
 and juvenile delinquents, beautiful canvas of urban dreams, mixing chalk,
 spit, coffee, and blackened gum onto city-large Pollocks revised daily by millions.

Without you there'd be no Skulsees, no Hopscotch,
no curbs & fire hydrants & hole-punched girders bearing traffic signs,
 no silver octagonal columns rising from pyramidal bases of
 poured, rounded squares of you.

Concrete! Trundled from site to site in elephant-colored bomb-shaped trucks,
 or mixed on the spot, your fat rivers of rough green batter pouring into sidewalk molds,
 sprinkled with pebbles like rock-sugar streusel of green & black & scratched-silver & chalk-
 white nuts, edges beveled with serrated-edged trowels held in thick muscled forearms
 emerging from rolled flannel sleeves, arms with milky green-gray splotches, speckled and
 matted with miniature hair-pulling nuggets.

Concrete how prolific you are!
 Producer of fortunes small and large, generator of loose change for low-level gangsters and
 brutally talented thugs who parlay a minor craft into major wrought-iron fenced and red-
 bricked mansions in the delicate bays of Long Island's north shore, the green recesses of
 upstate New York and the horsey hills lying all unsuspected behind the clever camouflage
 of industrial New Jersey.

Concrete, you are immense
 with your black lightning cracks, your white panels home to galaxies of blackened bubble
 gum, grass-sprouting slits, crevasses, miniature plateaus and ravines, the treacherous
 landscape of all creatures who live on or near you, the ants who emerge from your damp
 caves to walk upside down on cantilevered cliffs, or the prowling tomcats whose fierce
 amber eyes and midnight-sure paws, ignore your beautiful irregularities.

Oh concrete, the water streams endlessly down on you,
the oil-rainbowed rivers carrying bottle caps and gum wrappers and ice-cream stick rafts
to clogged sewers, the black rain of cities turning your fat grey pebbles a majestic purple,
spit-shining your neighboring squares of slate to blue-grey patent leather.

Concrete I love you in the summer
when the heat shimmers above you. I love your salt-stained endurance of winter
and the urban cool of your springs and autumns. Concrete you are mysterious as glass,
more durable than glazed tile, noble as marble, a worthy substance, deserving of praise.
And next I'll sing of your beautiful sister Tar, and after that, the wonders, far surpassing
the antique, pastel beauties of dull country roads and monotonous rural scenery,
the wonders of all city streets.

—Steve Turtell