

Sarah Sweeney

AMERICA

(dedicated to Allen Ginsberg)

America, America, I've got to cut through and talk to you at last,
I'm crouched in a white bathroom cubicle writing, with no cameras, quietly safe.
America your teachers are really useless...
with their warbling vendettas, bitter constraints,
and awful litanies berating my brain.
A fierce ignorance rises in my face with each bell to rise,
America, please don't make me go back. Not so soon.
America your regulations aren't for me, I know what I'm doing.

America I feel sentimental about the lilies. Lilacs are falling blanched with envy.
With the romance of your roads, open & singing, it's ridiculous. We're ridiculous.
Allen Ginsberg is still in fact the most enlightened man alive.
America there's really nothing wrong if you look at it right.

America it's amazingly easy being young & vital, a constant threat
I use my appearance & actions to my intentions.
I am heartbreakingly hopeful and self-conscious.
Housed now in your universities, I am in progress.
I am beacons from the tops of your mountains and I will never leave.

I am alive in your amazing array of lights.
Wandering endless streets in the chilling rain,
dancing to frighten your demons away.

In the America of pleasure gardens and ballad-mongers,
A broken-tongued brown piano rattles & croons from Harlem Heaven.
My smooth white hand stretches to the fullness of jazz chords
that I practice in my living -room, and every church hall I can find.
In the sound of radios detuned and rattling along the highway,
the intimacy of breath long-dried in the microphone,
Frank Sinatra is scowlingly alive.

America, sling your tattered '60s halo over that thick platinum skull for awhile.
America the '50s are dead, in old gray halls they kick & spin,
flaring gums to a white-leather dawn spread smooth like chrome
over the foreheads of skyscrapers on the skyline,
where stars glitter downright malicious.
We live in gorgeous orchards of wire

America I know what you still do to James Dean in your diner backlots at sunrise,
all sweet-eyed & howling with leather.

You deserve every metaphor in the world.
You're an apple-pie princess
basking in your lovely expression plated on the lake while
darkness rises in fumes all around, heavy-sooted fog over everything,
face still shining with the moon.
America, we've always known this, but when did you lose your flair for illusion?
America, with a manifesto song burning our throats
under your stadium lights
I'm climbing through the night.
I'll never sleep.
I could dream of you forever.
I sway from stars fading in your cold resuscitated dawn.