

October 12, 1966

A boy,
generally tall and in most ways blond,
waits just ahead of me
in line.
(God knows why or for what
we're waiting.
We wait only because the line
seems endless and forever durable.)
He smokes damply and quickly
between his teeth,
while I, whistling through my Kleenex,
read a poem upsidown.
And we are next to each other
and very close.
Then he disappears
into his indefinite world
leaving behind delicate ashes
dropped from the orange end
of his tremulous cigarette.
He is gone and unimportant.
But I watch the ashes die
on the tile, vinyl floor
and I am frightened
because all I will ever know
of that boy
is the uncertain memory of his form
and the dust of his ashes.

In line

Dans la guerre

Un jeune homme,
en général grand et (on peut dire) blond,
attend devant moi
dans la guerre.

(On ne sait pas pourquoi
on attend.

On attend seulement parce que la guerre
a l'air infini et, a jamais, durable.)

Il fume humblement et vite

entre les dents

pendant que je lis

un poème la tête en bas.

Et nous sommes ensemble

et très près l'un de l'autre.

Alors, il disparaît

dans son monde informe,

ayant laissé des cendres délicates

qui sont tombes

de sa cigarette tremblotante.

Il n'est pas ici

Il n'est pas important

mais je regarde les cendres muèrent

par terre, sur le plancher

et j'ai peur

parce que tout ce que je vais savoir

de cet homme

est la mémoire incertaine de sa forme

et la poussière de ses cendres.

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American Credo

If I had not been born in America

in the twentieth century

in the age of invention

If I had not grown up idolizing Walt Disney

Jungleland, Adventureland

it by an electrified Tinkerbell —

I

might have believed in the

thatched huts hidden under banana fronds;

outriggers floating beneath the

tropical bridal veils of Pascayan;

water buffalo rising from the rice paddies;

gaily skirted girls laundering in the river —

But

I've seen it all before,

This Fantasy to please my jaded senses

Don't expect me to take it seriously;

Though I've paid the price of admission

Despite the talk of

Philippine nationhood, drawbacks

of the floating pesos,

gross national product and land redistribution

I cannot take any of it seriously
Because my innermost soul believes

that this exotic country

was designed by an ingenious American;



that at the base of every banana tree
I will find a label "Made in Japan"

that the water buffalo

run on electric batteries;

that the washerwomen are mannequins
with cogs instead of hearts

I've seen it all before

Despite history and the bible

Walt Disney got there before God