

In line

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 upsidedown.

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 idle, 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.

October 12, 1966

Dans la queue

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

(On ne sait pas pourquoi  
on attend.  
On attend seulement parce que la queue  
a l'air infini et, a jamais, durable.)

Il fume humidement 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 délicats  
qui sont tombés  
de sa cigarette tremblotante.

Il n'est pas ici  
il n'est pas important  
mais je regarde les cendres maerent  
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.

Feb. 19, 1967  
Johanna Breedman



## 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  
lit by an electrified Tinkerbell —

I might have believed in the  
thatched huts hidden under banana fronds;  
outriggers floating beneath the  
tropical bridal veils of Pagsanjan;  
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  
Filipino nationhood, drawbacks  
of the floating peso,  
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 coqs instead of hearts

I've seen it all before  
Despite history and the Bible

for me,  
Walt Disney got there before God

## Man

In the glow of triumph,  
In the victory of success,  
You remember who you are.  
Murderer, swindler, mad!  
Inventor of insane tortures,  
Mother of the half-witted,  
Born to agonies,  
Buried beneath a weight of golden dreams,  
Gloating over the bomb, the rocket, the color TV;  
And having changed the earth to a  
Smog-filled, brow-beaten, terrorized land,  
You laugh - defying it all.

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"  
Man is man.

invitation to a game:  
for regina

does my nature drag  
through tedious convolutions? and -  
who last stepped on my soul?  
once-friend, do you laugh?

i've a goddess-given complex  
insecurity drowns my soul and i  
wonder why

am i a victim of the snoring huntress?  
and succumbing to her uncharms  
become uncharmed myself?

a happy room is full of terror for me  
because i am afraid  
i cannot hold it

if i have anything in common  
with the world it is only my humanity  
but where did i hide it?

"discard when used" - tell me only that,  
once-friend, and i am frightened  
to the knotting of my intestine

i die alone  
and my mind collapses under the weight  
of billiard balls  
i cannot use

january 13, 1967

## Graveyard of Children

"Tag!" the shout  
Tramp! the feet  
All play, all run  
Down a lonesome street.

"You!" the cry  
"Me!" the yell  
They dash, they scamper  
Down into Hell.

"Dark!" the wail  
Fright! the sob  
To scurry, to race  
The ghostly mob.

Soft! the silence  
"Sh!" the lull  
So patter, so pass  
The faraway soul.

We are Not Concerned

"I am hungry,"  
shivered a child,  
and there was no food  
to fill his belly  
and no clothes  
to warm his body.

So he died  
because he had  
nothing.

We never starve.  
We never freeze.  
Yet we kill  
and war.  
We scorn Jews,  
fear Russians,  
despise Europeans.

We are not concerned  
when they die.  
And when their children  
are bombed,  
we pin on medals.



what <sup>is left</sup> ~~remains~~ of democratic jubilation  
god's city on a hill recedes into the mire  
of our puritanical renunciation  
to cower uncouth before a self-imposed spire

the vision of revolutionaries has drowned  
with a gurgle in the water of washing-machines  
the convulsions of our twilit anthem are bound  
to fascist flags and protectors of backward queens

now only eager mothers of sons surrendered  
to public glory in devoted deception  
still believe we are a literally rendered  
version of the immaculate conception

there are those who continue the search for our most  
manifest destiny make awkward revelry  
over their misplaced petulance and slyly boast  
into reddened cups of domineered treachery

~~but for the most part~~ <sup>cherry-tinted</sup> the song of celebration  
is left to loyal elementary school teachers  
with angled bodies sense of flag and nation  
buried elusive in starry-spangled features

or lumpy verbosities voluntarily  
scrambling for piously prominent positions  
or men generous with equality who merrily  
pollinate the world with wise superstitions

honest prophets are defaced through over exposure  
decayed they wallow in the dust covered with mud  
gibbering mad sounds which insult the composure  
of monuments obscurely wrapped in blood

the words of the dead prophets flail the elation  
of ~~the teachers~~ <sup>our leaders</sup> who respectfully cover their ears  
against the cacophonous disintegration  
afraid they will taste the sea-bitterness of tears

August 2, 1968

## Sea - Change

Jan. 70

Beneath the fury of  
the rising writhing beast  
the black stones lie unseen:  
the chill light of moonbeams  
exposes only the sleek  
mysterious texture of  
the sea's unconquerable  
solitary motion

Through the passive heaviness  
of mud and brackish algae  
rocks erupt like black boils  
under the glaring haze of sun  
which illuminates  
the motionless tide  
lying mangy like  
a captive animal

**POETRY ASIA 1971**

**A white crescent moon  
fallen to the bottom  
of a sea puddle**

**Water Reflections**

**The puddle mirrors  
Raindrops dissolving in the  
image they contain**