

## **"A Speech: For Antidraft Rally, D.C. March 22, 1980." by Denise Levertov**

As our planet swings and sways  
into its new decade  
under the raped moon's weary glance,

I've heard the voices  
of high-school kids on the bus home to the projects,  
of college students (some of them female, this time)  
in the swimming pool locker room, saying,

'If there's a war -' 'If there's a war -'  
'I don't want to get drafted but  
if there's a war I'll go' - 'If there's a war  
I'd like to fight' 'If there's a war

I'll get pregnant'  
'Bomb Tehran' - 'Bomb Moscow' I heard them say.

Ach! They're the same ones, male and female, who ask,  
'Which came first, Vietnam or Korea?'  
'What was My Lai?' The same kids who think  
Ayatollah Khomeini's a, quote, 'Commie.' Who think  
World War Two was fought against, quote, 'Reds,' namely  
Hitler and some Japs.

No violence they've seen  
on the flickering living-room screen familiar since infancy  
or the movies of adolescent dates, the dark  
so much fuller of themselves, of each other's presence than of history (and the his-  
tory anyway

twisted - not that they have a way to know that)—

the dark

vibrant with themselves, with warm breath,  
half suppressed mirth, the wonder  
of being alive, terrified, entranced  
by sexual fragrance each give off  
among popcorn, clumsy  
gestures, the weird  
response of laughter when on that screen  
death's happening, Wow, *unreal*, and people  
suffer, or dream aloud ... None of that spoon-fed  
violence

prepares them. The disgusting routine horror of war  
eludes them. They think  
they would die for something they call America,  
vague, as true dreams are not; something they call

*freedom*, the *Free World*, without ever knowing what *freedom* means, what *torture* means, what *relative* means.

They are free to spray walls with crude assertions - numbers, pathetic names; free to disco, to disagree - if they're in school - with the professor. Great. They don't know that's not enough, they don't know ass from elbow, blood from ketchup, that knowledge is kept from them, they've been taught to assume if there's a war there's also a future, they know not only nothing, in their criminally neglected imaginations, about the way war always meant not only dying but killing, not only killing but seeing not only your buddy dying but your buddy in the act of killing, not nice, not only your buddy killing but the dying of those you killed yourself, not always quick, and not always soldiers.

Yes, not only do draft-age people mostly not know how that kind of war's become almost a pastoral compared to *new* war, the kind in which they may find themselves (while the usual pinkfaced men, smoothshaved, overfed, placed in power by the parents of those expendable young, continue to make the decisions they are programmed for) but also

they know nothing at all about radiation  
nothing at all about lasers  
nothing at all about how the bombs  
the Pentagon sits on like some grotesque  
chicken caged in its nest and fed  
cancerous hormones, exceed and exceed and exceed  
Hiroshima, over and over and over, in weight  
in power  
in horror  
of genocide.

When they say  
'If there's a war,  
I'll go,' they don't know

they would be going to kill

themselves  
their mamas and papas,  
brothers and sisters  
lovers.

When they say, 'If there's a war, I'll get pregnant,'  
they don't seem to know  
that war would destroy that baby.

When they say, 'I'd like to fight,'  
for quote, 'freedom,'  
for quote, the 'Free World,'  
for quote, 'America,'—  
for whatever they think they'd be fighting for,  
those children  
those children with braces on their teeth,  
fears in their notebooks,  
acne on their cheeks,  
dreams in their  
inarticulate hearts

whom the powerful men at their desks  
designate as the age group suitable for registration,  
they don't know they'd be fighting  
very briefly, very  
successfully,  
quite conclusively,  
for the destruction of this small  
lurching planet, this confused  
lump of  
rock and soil, ocean and air,  
on which our songs, cathedrals, gestures  
of faith and splendor  
have grown like delicate moss, and now  
may or may not survive  
the heavy footsteps of our inexcusable ignorance,  
the chemical sprays of our rapacious idiocy,  
our minds that are big enough  
to imagine love, imagine peace, imagine  
community - but may not  
be big enough to learn in time  
how to say no.

My dear  
fellow-humans, friends, strangers who would be friends  
if there were time—  
let us *make* time, let us unite to say  
**NO** to the drift to war, the drift  
to take care of little disasters by making a  
big disaster and then  
the last disaster,  
from which  
no witness will rise

no seeds.

**L**et us unite to tell  
all we have learned about old-fashioned war's  
vomit and shit, about new fashioned war's  
abrupt end to all hope -  
unite to tell what we know to the wholebodied young,  
unwitting victims lined up ready already  
like calves at the pen for slaughter;  
share what we know, until no more  
young voices talk of 'If there's a war,' but all say  
**N**o, and again no to the draft, and no to war,  
and no to the sacrifice  
of anyone's blood to the corporate beast that dreams  
it can always somehow  
save its own skin.

**L**et our different dream,  
and more than dream, our acts  
of constructive refusal generate  
struggle. And love. We must dare to win  
not wars, but a future  
in which to live.