

Vietnam Generation

Volume 3

Number 1 *Swords into Ploughshares: A "Home Front"*
Anthology

Article 3

1-1990

At the Justice Department, November 15, 1969

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Recommended Citation

Levertov, Denise (1990) "At the Justice Department, November 15, 1969," *Vietnam Generation*: Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/vietnamgeneration/vol3/iss1/3>

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AT THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

NOVEMBER 15, 1969

DENISE LEVERTOV

Brown gas-fog, white
beneath the street lamps.
Cut off on three sides, all space filled
with our bodies.

Bodies that stumble
in brown airlessness, whitened
in light, a mildew glare,
that stumble
hand in hand, blinded, retching.
Wanting it, wanting
to be here, the body believing it's
dying in its nausea, my head
clear in its despair, a kind of joy,
knowing this is by no means death,
is trivial, an incident, a
fragile instant. Wanting it, wanting
with all my hunger this anguish,
this knowing in the body
the grim odds we're
up against, wanting it real.
Up that bank where gas
curled in the ivy, dragging each other
up, strangers, brothers
and sisters. Nothing
will do but
to taste the bitter
taste. No life
other, apart from.