

## Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races

In my land there are no distinctions.  
The barbed wire politics of oppression  
have been torn down long ago. The only  
reminder  
of past battles, lost or won, is a slight  
rutting in the fertile fields.  
In my land  
people write poems about love,  
full of nothing but contented childlike  
syllables.  
Everyone reads Russian short stories and  
weeps.  
There are no boundaries.  
There is no hunger, no  
complicated famine or greed.  
I am not a revolutionary.  
I don't even like political poems.  
Do you think I can believe in a war  
between races?  
I can deny it. I can forget about it  
when I'm safe,  
living on my own continent of harmony  
and home, but I am not  
there.  
I believe in revolution  
because everywhere the crosses are  
burning,  
sharp-shooting goose-steppers round  
every corner,  
there are snipers in the schools...  
(I know you don't believe this.  
You think this is nothing  
but faddish exaggeration. But they  
are not shooting at you.)  
I'm marked by the color of my skin.

The bullets are discrete and designed to  
kill slowly.  
They are aiming at my children.  
These are facts.  
Let me show you my wounds: my  
stumbling mind, my  
"excuse me" tongue, and this  
nagging preoccupation  
with the feeling of not being good  
enough.  
These bullets bury deeper than logic.  
Racism is not intellectual.  
I cannot reason these scars away.  
Outside my door  
there is a real enemy  
who hates me.  
I am a poet  
who yearns to dance on rooftops,  
to whisper delicate lines about joy  
and the blessings of human  
understanding.  
I try. I go to my land, my tower of words  
and  
bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn't  
fade out  
the sounds of blasting and muffled  
outrage.  
My own days bring me slaps on the face.  
Every day I am deluged with reminders  
that this is not  
my land  
and this is my land.  
I do not believe in the war between races  
but in this country  
there is war.

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**