

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