DIVERSITY AND DIVERSE VOICES
IN THE
AMERICAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A FIGs ANTHOLOGY
(“Film Studies” Seminar 101, Fall 2016, Western Washington University)

The struggle to understand is our only advantage over this madness.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me

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INTRODUCTION

It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition. The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustices are commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one’s own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one’s strength. This fight begins, however, in the heart …

James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

During the Fall quarter of 2016, I had the honor of teaching the seminar component of a Film Studies FIGs Cluster at Western Washington University. The foundation of this course was built on Ta-Nehisi Coates’ recently published memoir, Between the World and Me, and from there we spent the quarter studying and discussing various films, works of art and music, and other texts that connected to our overarching theme of “Diversity and Diverse Voices in the American Cultural Landscape”.

We undertook this journey as a group of scholars who were interested in expanding our understanding of the rich diversity of the American experience, as well as the systems of privilege and power that sit behind the racism that persists in this nation. We did not shy away from the harsh light of reality, but also did not lose ourselves in the apathy of despair. And we walked away from the experience with an expanded sense of where we all stand as individuals and in groups, and with the mutual agreement that one can never stop learning when considering the topics at hand.

The scholars who undertook this course recorded their reflections of each week’s content in a journal, and a small group elected to spend the last half of the quarter perfecting a set of creative entries that address both individual and shared views of this journey. And so what started as a small assignment grew into the anthology at hand — a collective set of reflections that are raw — that are honest and compelling — that are full of righteous anger and compassionate love — and above all that reflect each individual’s desire to embrace the rich diversity that makes up the backbone of America and sits at the very core of the human experience.

And so for you, our readers, we bare our souls — we give you our hearts — we give you our hopes and our desires for a world that is shaped by love and understanding — and a world where the expansive exploration and listening of deep learning pave the way towards recognizing and addressing the injustices that cloak our daily lives. For as Coates so aptly states: “The struggle to understand is the only advantage over this madness.” Through this we can find strength — through this we can find peace.

Susanne L. Seales — anthology editor and FIGs instructor
THE ANTHOLOGY
"Untitled" … by Rachael Buselmeier

Lady Liberty who put the fire in your torch?
Was it the flaming houses in Mississippi
Or the crosses that burned in their yards?
Was it the collapsing tenements in Harlem
Or the fuse of a civil war cannon?

Americanism is a performance
An Uncle Sam mask of assimilation.
Gone are past generations.
Denial is the first step to being accepted
On land that is yours but taken, or
On land that was forced upon you
Raw beauty corrupted.

Atlas is black and underappreciated
The foundation of a system that hates him.
He struggles under the weight of the founding fathers while
Sisyphus pushes a rock that says equality.
Camus was wrong, Sisyphus isn’t happy
He can’t be if his mountain is shaped like America.

The absurdity is in the love
Of the abuser that is also provider.
Dreamy nightmares of dissociation
The only real escape is to laugh
And see shapes in the embers
Instead of flames.

It’s not a car crash
It’s cancer from sun exposure,
Long and ubiquitous,
Growing and pulsing,
under the surface, unnoticed.
It’s the gasoline in your drinking water,
A slow poison,
Until flint
Demands that ugliness be seen.
America
How do I love you if your every brick
Is heavy with hate?
America
What is free and what is brave
And where is home?
America
Can we make this work? Are you willing to put in the time?

A burning cross falls from its rooted position
Into a cop car sixty years in the future.
Flames illuminate the lifted hands of an innocent.
The car drives on engine burning
Into the front steps of a court house.
A chain of nameless figures files out and
Into a prison bus driven by the grand wizard
Who takes them back sixty years to see if they can tell a difference.
“Untitled” … by Callan Moore

Inky-blue water rushes into my lungs as I attempt to scream from beneath the ebony storm
   Nothing but airy bubbles burst from my meek cries; in the end, it amounts to nothing
   This is how it felt
   Voices never heard whispered around sails of the oaken bastilles we shipped them in
   How do I atone for sins forged in a past life?

The ocean remains dense with the agony shed between that forsaken passage
   An abyss was formed; still no man has braved the opaque unknown
   How can you ignore all the empty space?
   Lost words of those who were forced to the bottom of the chasm
   Where did humanity flee to?

Anemic skin of my ancestors poisoned the abounding ocean
   I ache to pull myself away from the shore; littered with scraps of the skeletons we could no longer hide in our closets
   The white crests of the waves we wept upon will surely give way to the azure ocean; we will overcome
   Implications that we cannot live in the darkness for much longer
   Why can’t you just open your eyes?

I don’t want to believe that I am somehow attached to these nefarious waters
   Haunted with the blood of a man who capitalized off the suffering of an entire race and the eradication of cultures; this genocide is still recognized as a holiday
   You can’t forget, you can’t forget about us
   Denying the imminent piece of myself that is connected to those who dug this bottomless pit, is just as much a sin as those who wielded the shovel
   Why do we celebrate the day that tainted the promise of a free nation?

It is so easy to rest upon the white caps of our innate privilege
   There will be no disregarding the power of this water when it gets tired of carrying us; when we realize, the current is pulled by our brothers and sisters
   The past will not hold us here any longer
   Cease looking over these waters as if they will not immerse you; the tides never change their rhythm, and 524 years will not change their course toward the shore
   Never turn your back on the ocean
   Whispers to shouts
   Never turn you back on the ocean
   You will not be warned when the waves engulf you.
“Acceptance in America” … by Leigh Wilde

Diversity
Safety, Freedom, Difference, Acceptance
These are the words that are supposed to define America
However,
It is hard to see that when schemes of walls separate us in choosing a president
While millions stand with this proposal,
Only few stop to be poked by the rose covered thorns of reality
The realization of how painful the idea to divide mankind further is
Because racial division and gender tension do not already create enough conflict
No, we must build a physical divider to signify just how accepting America is
America is accepting of
The idea of black existentialism and sees it as an excuse for media coverage
America is accepting of
The idea of oppressing the minority into complete and utter silence
America is accepting of
The idea that black lives matter but only because every other life matters
America is accepting of
The idea of kicking out the very people who suffered so long to get here
America accepts everything
Except for the suggestion of being different
We are taught at a young age to mold ourselves in ways that society allows
Heaven forbid you choose another pathway
Do not protest
Do not question authority
Do not rebel against what has been taught for decades
Or a label will be stamped across your forehead:
Martyr
Diversity
Safety, Freedom, Difference, Acceptance
These words are the standards America is held to
However
They seem to have a way of falling through
Conformity
Broken promises, Vulnerability, Oppression, Suffering
These are the words that also built the foundational structure of America
The land of façades
The home of strife.
“Untitled” … by Brooklin Pigg

I do not understand, but I am trying to understand
The struggles people of our country face –
The supposed land of the free that shackles anyone
Who does not camouflage with the white walls that surround us all in oblivion.
Smothering the minority in a blanket
Your favorite childhood one
Its aroma filling you with innocence and ignorance
You did not know
You did not know that people were hurting,
Are hurting
By this cycle perpetuated by the slander engrained on the bathroom stalls
Simply because we are too lazy to wipe it off
In art class you were given a color wheel with only one shade
When broken – it stains red
For we are the same no matter what colors cloak us –
Bodies being rainbows for our content – is that a thought we can discuss?
How can one claim a certain range is better than the rest?
I thought this was over
I thought this was dead
Peace is not here until not one desperate tear has been shed
Helplessness is a feeling we all know
Yet for people of color the extent is beyond my grasp
I can go to the doctor and watch my brother get a shot
But I will never see my brother get shot
For we are built on years of prejudice –
Preconceived notions that somehow we are better
Somehow we are more human
With the only thing making us more human being the humans we leave behind
The ones we drag through the dirt but continue to state that
“Hey you have nothing to be mad about
Because you have rights.”
Failing to explain that an announcement of rights does not take thoughts out of minds
Thoughts engrained for generations
To hate instead of love
To fight instead of embrace
Just because a black man claimed he had a dream
Does not mean we are living in that dream
Those require commitment and teamwork
And yet I still see so many gathering wood
   Building a fire
And letting that fire burn every shred of decency in its path –
   Laughing all the while
At those it scorns along the way.

“I Had a Dream” … by Jonah Bettger

I don’t know how long ago it was,
   But I had a dream.
It was on a seemingly normal night.
   In a very normal bed.
And a not very normal dream.
   This dream,
In a word,
Embodied disappointment.
I found myself standing next to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
On the bright stones steps
Of the Lincoln Memorial
And noticed
Somehow he had accidentally cut his hand.
Deep crimson blood running down
And staining the pure white of shirt as he raised his hand
And spoke.
And in that same instance,
My own blood had trickled down my palm
And tickled my wrist.
And in that same instance,
I was disappointed.
Our blood was the same,
Hot and boiling,
And ruining the innocent white sleeves of our shirts.
The same passion
But the twisted branches of our lineage
And history
The only sad difference.
I wanted to cry,
“Do we not bleed the same?”
To the apathetic, pale onlookers in the crowd,
Their faces drained of color;
Of deep crimson red.
And in that same instance,
My breathing had matched his,
Strong and unwavering.
And I was disappointed.
“Do we not breathe the same?”
The rise and fall of our chests
Waves.
A stark contrast to the frozen sea of people,
So unconcerned,
So unmoving.
A white, intimidating glacier.
As still as a cold, frozen lake in the morning;
A dark abyss you could never venture down,
But could easily fall into.
The sound of a fence rattling
Of people climbing over in the dead of night
Not only shook the wire barrier
But shook me to my core
The sound of nails scratching unwanted skin
Skin considered too dark.
Not beautiful enough.
So much so,
That only the sweet burn of chemicals
Could fix it.
The sound of a deafening blast of a gun pierced my ears.
And I was disappointed.
A shot that so easily tore through this strong man’s heart,
Could have just as easily ripped apart mine.
And yet, in a way, it still did.
And I was disappointed.
It was like staring into a mirror
As a blind person
And accepting the fact that I could not see the differences of my features
And certainly did not care.
And in that same instance,
I was disappointed
That people could not be blind
To the same things we hated.
And in that same instance,
I was disappointed
That
My bedsheets were black
And you could not see
The blood that remained on them
The entire history of them
My entire history on them
When I woke up
And discovered
I had accidentally cut my hand.
“Untitled” … by Rachel Devine

James Baldwin said it best:
“This country is only white because it says it is …”

This country, that chooses the content of your character
Based on the color of your skin

This country says that

A white murderer is mentally disturbed
And all Muslims are terrorists

Mexicans are drug dealers and criminals
Who are somehow stealing our jobs

Asian women are submissive and innocent wives
And Asian men are good at math but aren’t masculine enough to wed

Words are SO important

People don’t fit into our institutionalized box

Muslims can be vegans, who would never hurt a fly
Or volunteers at a food bank, spending their Saturdays giving Sloppy Joes to starving Americans

Mexicans are brilliant teachers who use their words to inspire our youth
Others are our youth, and spend their recesses standing up to bullies

Asian women can be feminists and scientists who don’t give a crap about marriage
Asian men can be millionaire movie stars and teen heartthrobs

This country decided that Black is darkness,
And White is innocence
And now these basic principles
Have led to systemic racism

Sirens ring in 2016
For having a hijab or fro

So take a step back
Question those around you
Question yourself – your motivations, your innermost thoughts
Don’t focus on feeling guilty
Focus on change
Do something
Confront a bias, protest, start a movement, anything
Maybe you can live in blissful ignorance, but others don’t have that liberty.
"Down On Our Knees" … by Kyle Johnson

What is a nation that oppresses some based on the color of their skin? Or for their ancestral heritage? What is a nation that watches black people hang from trees as they take their dying breaths and calls them explicit names? What is a nation that has seen African American churches burned to the ground and black people slaughtered by the Klan because they look different? This racism is systemic, in that it is on every level of society. Whether there were two separate drinking fountains for white and colored people, or restaurants that segregated colored from white, racism spread systemically in our nation.

Division among people is what has caused our corrupt nation to fall to its knees. We constantly divide ourselves when we choose to immediately deport immigrants from our country without giving them an option of becoming citizens. Racism provokes this offense. Offense incites retaliation. Retaliation breeds an unending feud, because the focus of each opposing group is to “get even.” In perspective, if a white person offensively punched a black person in the shoulder with racist intentions, then the victim might retaliate by punching back because they felt unjustly oppressed. Then, the white person would retaliate – and the fight will never end until one is dead or at least on the floor in defeat.

Not one group of people is “normal”. What we call “normal” can be completely different to another group. We all have different backgrounds. These differences are never a bad thing; however, our actions and their effects on others shape their impression of each other. Sometimes, if not most of the time, our impressions of cultures can divide race against race. The police shootings of black people make our police forces and white people look like the enemy, which is not something they want. White Americans are no greater than any other group. Let us not forget the self-evident truth in the Declaration of Independence that states that “all men are created equal … endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The only message skin color can send to us is an individual’s possible geographical origins, not their hierarchical rank in society. We, as humans, cannot get very much information about an individual just by looking at their skin color or by listening to the manner of their speech. Skin color should not arouse suspicion of people’s actions, because that is racist. As a human race, we need to learn to look at skin color and love it. We need to appreciate people for the bodies and backgrounds they have and embrace them lovingly.

Our reaction should not be that of hatred, but of hope and prayer, the two things that can never be taken from us no matter our circumstances. Hope and prayer can sow back together what was once torn. Hope and prayer make a difference between falling on our knees and falling on our faces. On our knees, we have hope; on our faces, despair. On our knees, we have a faster recovery than we do on our faces. On our knees, we show the world we are not giving up; on our faces, we tap out. On our knees, we show that we are not giving up on the world and that we are not giving up on the people in it.
“Untitled” … by Shelby LeAnn Mathwig

Enslaved, broken, beaten, gashed.
We all wonder why, but we are afraid to ask:
What is the story of a black man’s past?
And will he ever be, truly free at last?

America, freedom, patriotism.
How can we stand for those words, with so much racism?
And our disgusting sense of white elitism?
Almost like our own type of terrorism.

Slavery abolished, freedom “obtained”.
But what did that do for all the ones who endured the pain?
The ones who had to wince at the crack of a whip, or be constrained by a chain?
Even those who fought for that same freedom, and ended up slain?

Rise of the KKK, Jim Crow laws.
Burnings of homes, schools, and churches without probable cause.
Where is all of that freedom that was promised to all of our grandmas and grandpas?
The freedom so many fought for, day and night for years and years.

Lynchings, hate crimes, terrorist raids.
Occurrences that were no better than when blacks were bought, sold, and trade.
Making blacks much like illegal immigrants: desperate and afraid.
Never knowing where they were safe, so they constantly prayed.

Martin Luther King Jr, segregation.
What does that say about America as a nation?
When we obviously cannot even follow the emancipation proclamation?
It shouldn’t matter if someone is white, black, or Haitian.

“Freedom,” thousands of fights and sleepless nights.
That very freedom is difficult, no matter the amount of given rights.
No given rights can ever wholly forgive the actions of the whites.
That freedom appears as a laborious dream that is just within our sights.

Michael Brown’s shooting, police brutality.
It is time for us, as a nation, to face the reality.
We are all equal, no matter what race, gender, or sexuality.
Let us raise the amount of love for one another, no more fatalities.

Black, Muslim, straight, or gay.  
We all deserve to live to see the day,  
When we can push all of our inequalities away.  
And limit the amounts of hate today.

Blacks are blacks, whites are whites.  
That does not mean we have to separate our rights.  
If we were treated as equals, our humanity would reach great heights.  
No more fights, no more sleepless nights.

Black Lives Matter, NAACP.  
Still fighting for their equality, and a day for African-Americans to be at ease.  
Nobody is ever going to be the same, the Beatles said it best “Let It Be.”  
Kindness is free, and it doesn’t even take a college degree.

“Speak To Me” … by Chan Huynh

I’m afraid of the past,  
of a little me. Listening to my mother scold me,  
“Trust those men in blue, standing steadfast.”  
But after everything I’ve seen  
I’m afraid of those sworn under oath to protect people like you and me.  
I’m told to trust them with my life.  
However, I now find it impossible to do this.  
How can I believe in our justice system?  
One that won’t even put a murderer on trial.  
I’m afraid of the present —  
Of our world of silence,  
Our blissful ignorance,  
Unrecognized privilege,  
And our world of mouse clicks.  
Where a video of a cute dog  
Gets more attention,  
Than the social injustice that currently plagues our country.
We prioritize our patriotism
Over human beings in pursuit of a better life.
The same empty faces that
clean our houses or the hotel rooms that we stay in.
The same callused hands
Responsible for our cheap produce prices.
We dehumanize and treat these people like dirty animals,
Blame them for stealing the jobs,
Yet we prosper heavily from their blood, sweat, and tears.
The injustice is right in front of our eyes.
It’s on our screens and in the newspapers,
but we choose not to see it.

I’m afraid of the future.
I’m afraid that there’ll be a day
When trust no longer exists,
A day when we’re all enslaved
to the systematic racism that currently shackles our country,
Polarized to the point of non-communication,
When we’re fed more lies than truths.
A day where conversation ends,
And the world is blinded by its own silence,
When we’re too afraid to stand up for what is right.
On that day, all I’ll want in life
Is for you to Speak To Me.

“Breaking Off” … by Angela Lieske

It’s raining again. Downstairs I can hear mama complaining, her words traveling up the stairs to greet me at the doorway of my small bedroom, “all this rain in August,” I hear her say, “is just bad luck.” I hesitate before going downstairs and turn around to glance at the hundreds of tiny droplets sliding down the clean glass of my window, blurring my view of the street below. It has been raining too much for August, unusually contrasting with the bright afternoons common for this time of year. Mama has kept me inside mostly, and my blurry days without school were spent in confinement. Of course, the weather was not the only reason I’ve been kept inside this summer.

“Hey Emily,” Mama greets me with a smile as I stalk into the kitchen and sit down at my usual spot, “I thought you might never join us.”
I’m the last one to the breakfast table and my family’s faces are painted with impatience as I take the single empty spot at the end. I shift in my chair until I’m comfortable. The conversation continues but I do not join, instead choosing to sip my orange juice and stir my oatmeal.

“So the march is still running as scheduled then?” my brother asks eagerly, around a mouthful of oatmeal.

I watch Papa’s eyes light up at my brother’s eagerness, the warmth almost inviting. There has always been a rift between my brother and me; a separation formed not only through two years’ age difference but from personal beliefs as well. My brother has always chosen to follow blindly in my father’s footsteps, never asking any questions. Out of the corner of my eye I glance at my brother, practically shaking with excitement in the idea of dressing in white robes and marching under an ideology of hate. I suppose that he is Papa’s favorite.

“It’s only a little rain. Gettin’ wet won’t hurt us none.” Papa shares a grin with my brother before turning his gaze onto me. His eyes lock on me and I feel him taking in my appearance; my pink frock with a stain on the collar and my messy blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail. It’s fitting that this kitchen has no windows, as if the room is mirroring how trapped I feel. I drop my eyes from his and focus on the milky white skin of my left arm. I know what question is coming next.

“Will you be joining us today Emily?”

My father is a hypocrite. My mind drifts back to the countless Sundays I’ve spent in church, listening to the preacher speak of a God who loves unconditionally. I think of the ten commandments and of my mother teaching me to “love thy neighbor” before I could read. I think of my father wearing a white robe and burning crosses in people’s front yards, my brother joining him. I think of the time I asked papa why our claim to love everyone equally has a prerequisite of a pale skin tone, and his quick retort was to tell me not to ask questions. So, what can I say? Do I agree to go to the march and betray participate in the pointless violence against those slightly different than us, or do I stand up for what I believe in and risk losing my family in the process? Growing up in a house based on the fundamental hate of those different than us is tricky. Duty demands that I love my father, but I loathe him at the same time. How can I tell him he is wrong?

A hush has fallen over the table and I notice everyone looking at me. My mother’s eyes are soft, the same grey as the sky outside. She is studying me, awaiting my answer. I know that if I refuse she won’t take my side, even though she agrees with me. The grandfather clock in the sitting room ticks, punctuating each second of my silence. Tick…tock…tick…tock

I stand up and push in my chair, focusing on the squeak of wood on wood rather than my family’s stares. I take a deep breath and mount the stairs back to my small second floor bedroom. Every step I take away from them is an act of defiance, a stride into the unknown. I close my door softly and lean against it, feeling a massive weight leave my shoulders. No longer will I stand idly by while my family preaches hate and hypocrisy. No longer will I let them believe that I think the same way as they do. I know this will not come without a cost, and around my newfound resolve I can feel the squeeze of fear’s cold fingers. I breathe in deeply and walk across the room to my window, pressing my forehead against the window. Nothing in my life feels constant anymore, except for the flood of rainwater against the glass.
I am walking down a road, while the wind blows the trees and rustles the leaves next to me. I continue down this path for quite some time until I come to a crossroads. To the left, I see a dark and desolate wasteland, lifeless and unnerving, a place in which all hope for humanity seems to disappear. This dark path looks to have been used many times and is the road most traveled; whereas the path down to the right seems to be bright and full of joy and glee, as if it has no issues and everything and everyone is equal and in solidarity. It confuses me why the path of wrongdoing is so used and well-worn. Would people not realize their mistakes and try to correct them? Or do they simply follow the crowd? The path to the right looks as though it would make everyone happy and make everyone feel safe and protected, although it is true that there will be struggles and difficulties that will need to be overcome in order to follow it. Still, I don’t understand why only some choose to go down this path when it seems the obvious and best choice, despite the difficulties.

Now the time has come for me to make a decision. Do I follow the well-worn path down the left full of anger, hate, and corruption? Or do I go against the grain and help to make the path to the right the new way? I know the path to choose and I go down the path to the right and continue my journey. I meet with and talk to many new people along the way and we discuss our lives and our experiences. I am met with many difficult questions I am not sure how to answer, but I am also supported along the way, and given new ideas and new views on the experiences I have the people around me. In turn, I learn how to support others and help them acknowledge the difficulties that surround them and the issues that they cannot solve on their own.

I learn all these things on this road and yet I cannot stop thinking about why there is so few of us on this path compared to the other. What is down that other path that would be worth all that pain and all that suffering? Why would anyone willingly choose that path instead of one that is equal to all and has a sense of community? Why have people decided to stick to the traditions that were followed by those before them. And why do they feel as if they cannot deviate from those norms and traditions? As I continue on my journey I come to the realization that there are many more people like me that want this change and that I was not the first person, nor will I be the last to follow this path until it becomes the norm. There are those who come to the realization that they do not need to do what tradition dictates or what their parents did. It baffles me that it would take someone till so late in life to discover that society’s idea of normalcy does not have to be their own. It is up to the individual in the end and every person has a choice whether they stay on the path that the crowd follows or jump to a different way and start following their own road. The path I have described is the one that I have chosen to follow but it is not the same as the route of other travelers. It may not be the exact course you travel— for as the saying goes, to each their own – but in the end, it is the direction you are headed in that matters the most.
“Us” … by Maria Hescheles

Know what is good, and what is not
    Recognize your biases, put yourself in each other’s shoes
Know who you are, without taking it away from others
    Embrace each color, and the belief in humanity
Know what is happening around you, and acknowledge
    Be informed of challenges that affect people, even if it’s not you.

This is the time of acceptance
    Not everyone is like you, which is good
This is the time of equality
    Our differences make us individuals, and bring us together as groups
This is the time of peace
    Think before taking actions
This is the time of love
    Everyone has gone through challenges in their past, and can help others with theirs
This is the time of understanding
    To look from everyone’s point of view, not just yours
This is the time of thinking
    Confront the things that are stopping you and others in making progress.

We must look into our past to learn for the future
    Use our history, to move forward
We must look from every perspective
    Everyone’s point of view is different, try a new one
We must look and open our eyes
    You may believe racism is over, but it is alive
We must look and not let our privilege blind
    You may not feel discrimination, but it still exists
We must look to understand and act
    Become more knowledgeable, and do something to make a change
We must look past color
    Embrace our diversity, instead of letting it separate us
We must look eye to eye
    Join together, conjoin power
We must look together
    Understand one another’s perspective.

To find each other
    Instead of fighting against one another, stand with each other
To find us
    To stand together as a whole, without a hole between us
Equality
Is the goal
KNOW THIS IS THE TIME WE MUST LOOK TO FIND IT!

“Sitting by the river, I see” … by Anbo Du

This is a poem about faith. This is a poem about faith regarding the future of people in this world. It shows the wounds and scars that were left by past wars, and how these wars destroyed the faith. The faith that once supported thousands of warriors, has weakened through time. But what’s worse are the upcoming battles, where people have to face the enemies rising from their kin group, but they don’t have faith to support their strength. However, the last weapon they have carries them, encourages them to march. And that is hope. They still see hope in the future, just like their ancestors saw in the sky. So they march on, carrying the weight on their shoulders.

Baring a painful soul, I walk through the land of sorrow
while breezes pass by me, singing a dirge from the past.
I have a smile on my face, cutting through stains left by tears
Not knowing what is up front, history created by the past is what I depend on.
Tracing the whorls and ridges, I finally discover the common ground between the trees and me
We both carried the air filled with metal and blood
Wounded, yet still breathing.
This land is massive, dry and heavy
We paid a lot to stay alive
Mountains painted black and white, leaving bits and chips of an old beautiful lie
Singing the fairy tale, singing the ancient rhyme
Walking to the end of this land, there is a river coming down from the sky
Springing sweetness underneath, flowing flames of eternal fire.
Sitting by the river, I see faces of dead and born
Heroes in the past and future.
Sitting by the river, I see hands of friends and enemies
Broken and eroded.
Sitting by the river, I see eyes of ignorance and wisdom
Crying without dropping one tear.
Sitting by the river, I see nothing in this world.

Sky shines above with the thousands of stars that have died before us.
The constellation they form is that ancient map
Pointing out the future that we fear.
The brighter they shine
   The faster they die
So that dream is not what we fight for.
Sitting by the river, I see my people coming
   Led by the light shining from above.
Sitting by the river, I see stars burning in those eyes
The call from nature combining this power nobody ever saw before.
Sitting by the river, I see a fight worth fighting
The sword once soaked in that red blood is ready to be held.
Sitting by the river, I see hope coming towards me.

(All photographs from the private collection of Susanne L. Seales, except for the last one, “Dark Mountain”, which was taken from the Love This Pic website.)

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