

Unit 3 – Sam Ansaldi – Dec. 2, 2014

After viewing *The Whale Rider* (a few times I might add) I decided to review the scenes entitled “The Sacred School of Learning” and “Fathers and Sons”. The motivation behind choosing these particular scenes comes from the cultural importance associated with native learning and traditional ceremonies. As an outsider peering through the looking glass of another culture, exposure to traditional gatherings or cultural learning opportunities gives you rare insight, not only into a world unlike your own, but to the intricacies of a cultures heritage, past, present, and future.

The sun is warm on the skin. It makes your eyes squint even to catch a glimpse of it. There is a look of dismay on the faces who represent a time past bye. Their want to resurrect the glory of a fleeting culture dwindles as their eyes gaze upon the empty, paint chipped, weather beaten seats where once the power of so many have been reduced to the hope of so few. You can see the division of the old and the new as plain as day. The vacant youthful faces of this traditional society stand out like a metallic modern is ore as they look upon the unfamiliar historical landscape of their ancestors. “Why am I here?” Their voices make no sound, but their stares create the audible question that is even on the lips of most of their fathers. They, who their bloodline dictates as native, are just as much of an outsider here as I am.

There is a slight wind that carries with it the mineralized scents of the oceans mist, but even that doesn't seem to circulate the stillness of the energy within the outdoor amphitheater. But then there is a sound; it cuts through the airs stagnation like a masterly crafted Taiha slicing through the palpable fear of its enemy. A traditional welcoming song that sounds both beautiful and mournful ignites a small spark within the people and introduces me, as well as the students, to my first glimpse of the stored cumulative power of a time-honored culture overshadowed and displaced by an ever-growing modernized world.

Those who represent the old ways sit stoically on one side facing the youthful hope of a cultures resurrection on the other. There is an apparent diversification of both status and gender as those who are in a position of power (the male elders) sit in the front while the women sit silently behind. The students who have come (the young men only) repeat this process by sitting respectfully behind their fathers, all except for one girl. Paikia, as she is called, refuses to sit in the back with the other children. She has a direct lineage to the elders of that community, and while she shows a great love and respect for her cultures traditional ways she refuses to be subjected to the traditional limitations of her gender. She is a brave girl with a strong heart. It shines bright amongst the backdrop of hollow expressions, even as she is asked to leave the court.

This was to be their school to learn the traditional ways of their people; the old ways. This community, like so many others of aboriginal decent, had lost their place in a technologically advancing world that seemed to leave traditional values and practices behind with the ghosts of their stories. It was a time where a change was needed now more than ever. In order to regain the strength of their people they must take their teachings back to the beginning so that the new can learn the ways of those who preceded them. It was tradition that the elders relied on; it was the rules of old. But is that enough? Can we progress forward with only the teachings of our past to guide us, or will we be able to adapt to modernization while preserving our ancient heritage? For these elders, the answers to their future were sure to be found in the teachings of their past, and so the training commenced.

Strength, courage, intelligence, and leadership; these were the values of a chief. These were the teachings of this sacred school. The people were in search of a new leader, someone who could take

them from the darkness back into the light where the spirit of their culture could once again flourish and grow. The irony behind this is that characteristics such as these are highly sought after in institutions of modern education as well. Albeit the roads upon this journey to maturity and growth are likely to differ between this and other cultures, the anticipated outcome is the same. Just as they are looking for a future leader with the strength and wisdom to guide their people, those of us who are raised in a modern western society are striving to find our place in this world as well, and many without a direct link to the cultural history of our diluted lineages.

There is a pride in the historical teachings of their elder chief that is seldom seen in today's classrooms. What at first seems foolish to the young students, slowly progresses into a deep appreciation for their cultures ancient strengths. You can see it as they display their new found talents in front of their father's watchful eyes. It is seen even more in one child's face as his father leaves with a group of men that seem to spend more time on the wrong side of the law than the right. Have the strengths of their people vanished with the shadows of their ancestors, or will the revival of their cultural heritage resonate strongly enough in tomorrow's leaders to impact those who have lost their way on the path of today? For those of us who have been fortunate enough to view the inner workings of this and other traditional and modern societies, my answer is yes and no. To rely too heavily on one while discrediting the other is to foolishly turn a blind eye to the opportunities and beneficial teachings within traditional and contemporary societies. In order to successfully progress into a healthy future for all of our societies we must learn from each other, both old and new, and not dismiss ideas that differ from our own just because we are afraid or shortsighted.