

other books by Chrystos:

Not Vanishing

Dream On

In Her I Am

// Chrystos //
Fugitive Colors /

Winner of the 1994
Audre Lorde Poetry Competition
for Lesbians of Color

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Cleveland State University Poetry Center

They're Always Telling Me I'm Too Angry

especially when I mention land theft or rape or genocide
They go to therapy to understand themselves
pound anonymous pillows safely with a stranger
in the closed room of proper behavior
There is
no pillow I'm angry with
As far as I'm concerned I'm too tired to be angry enough
Angry that I can't go anywhere
without seeing demeaning images & outright lies about Indian people
I'm livid that we can't even keep the few pitiful acres we have left
if they happen to have uranium or copper or coal
Furious that I never feel safe alone on the streets
Angry that other People of Color
are sometimes as oppressive as whites
because whites taught them
everything they think they know about Indians
Riled that an Indian friend asked me why
I hang out with all those Black people
Angry with myself that I wasn't fast enough to say
Why do you hang out with all those damn white folks
Steaming mad that a million people in this country
which is no longer in a recession
have no place to live
while office buildings sit empty for years
Enraged that you can buy a submachine gun in Florida
about any other kind of gun any place you want
while the army & the cops amass more than enough weapons to kill
every person on earth
Furious that my cousin got shot in the head
& lives now barely able to say his name
I'm mad as hell at alcohol, crack & child abuse
I could easily kill several million random white folks
just to feel a little balance on this poor earth
But I've known since I was little that no matter how many
of us they kill
it's only ok for us to help them kill other brown folks
or to cheat each other or hate each other
or to buy stuff & imitate whiteness
or to act like our own people are the real problem

& we're above it all
This is the pillow I'm hitting without any repercussions
Angry that women are in therapy
while men have increased tenfold raping and murdering
Furious with child porn
the use of children to sell toilet paper & laundry soap
Spitting with rage at intolerance starvation waste greed
all of which are reflected in myself despite my efforts
to seek balance
Boiling mad at my inadequacies & terror
raging that I'm still tortured by terrible nightmares
more than 20 years after I last saw the man
who raped my childhood into razors & nut houses
a man to whom nothing has happened or will happen
a man who did it to many other children
a man who my aunt handed me a picture of & said
This is when we were all such a happy family
though she knows what he did
a man whom even my closest friends tell me I shouldn't kill
They're wrong
Furious with the beaten parents who didn't protect me
because they didn't think I was worth it
or that they were
who beat me to shut me up
Enraged that the Black medical student was suspended
for punching out a white one who wore blackface to a party as a joke
Ha Ha it's so funny when you pretend to be one of us
Ha Ha we're not angry when you do any damn stupid thing you please
then punish us for our feelings in the matter
Ha Ha we love it when you buy your children fake tipis & headdresses
& books by whites of our stories with pictures of us
as pink charming savages
Ha Ha we're so happy you want to get rid of us so you can have all our stuff
& rename it & explain it & defame it
I'm enraged with every lying son of a turd
who takes our taxes to go to Bermuda & relax
after spending our money to murder whoever is
the current enemy & it's sometimes us
I'm spitting with rage that most of my friends can barely scramble by
I'm angry that I can't sleep that I hate myself
that I can't write as well as I want

because I'm so damn angry I can't breathe
Furious that nobody else seems to be angry
& they don't want me to be either
Enraged at this whole sodden rotting mess they keep calling
civilization
as it poisons the air & the water & kills everyone in its way
which is so barbaric as to lock up its Elders
for the crime of not being able to care for themselves
which thinks of age as disease instead of wisdom
which persists in calling queers sick or depraved or immoral
despite the so-called separation of church & state
which doesn't exist
Red hot that I have to defend my anger
that sometimes I'm the nice one in comparison
to an even angrier woman
& then I'm treated with more respect
which demeans us both
I'm sick to death of blank eyes/zombies/nice girls
& lesbians who take drugs so they won't be depressed
as though depression is bad when it is a very rational
response to our lives
& I have spent my life living inside numbing depression
without drugs, gritting my teeth through another hour & resisting suicide
with my bare hands because I can't bear to let them win
when so many of my loved ones have blown their brains out in despair
I'm disgusted with drunks
& everybody who thinks
they're alive only to please themselves
even though some of them are my friends
I'd like to kill reality
which I don't understand
I want to blow up every stupid university
pretending that it is teaching something new
when all that's happening is that students are usually treated like fools
until they care only about a piece of paper
& whether I have a piece of paper or not
All the pieces of paper all the degrees are burning up in my anger
Everyone will have to face each other as human
I'm sick of everyone who asks
What do you do?
As though some corporate title or college bs

is an identity
I want to tie up all the white supremacists into crosses
set fire to their hatred
I want to fight back with every tendon of my weary body
run by a mind who remembers the toilet taste of jail food
knows the brutality of nut houses
arms that remember straight jackets & forced drugs & the screams
of women being dragged off to shock torture
knowing that to speak up too loudly means to be killed
because decent people
beat pillows or their wives instead of racism or hunger
because the idea of being nice is more important
than the idea of being real
It's the cotton candy we've all been eating
until I, at least, am sick to death
I'm furious with English-only laws
with Japanese-bashing celebrated
as some kind of special holy cleancut sport
Furious that anti-Semitism is as respectable as ever
& anybody who wants to talk about it must be a *pushy Jew*
I could kill those thousands of people who claim the nazi Holocaust
didn't happen
I'm angry that as these words rattle out of my mouth
I'm already cutting them back cooling them off
taking the sting out because I'm afraid of what I might do
if I hear one more damn time
WHY are you so angry?
Raging that common sense & kindness are passé
not quite with it
Angry that breast cancer kills twice as many women
as men who have died of AIDS/SIDA but we're all
still paying attention to the poor men
as usual
I'm blowing my top about clear cuts, abuse of resources
abuse of workers, torture of animals for testing cosmetics
with the terrifying idea that wearing fur makes a woman sexy or special
with the largest slave labor force in the world which is called
the u.s. bureau of prisons
Sick of everyone watching light-filled shadows on a screen
more important than life
that your average citizen spends more time

adoring those shadows than speaking to their own children
I'm furious with my incoherence
my inability to affect almost everything in my life
I'm angry with everyone who's said some appallingly stupid thing
about peace pipes or pow wows or totem poles or tipis
Furious that the accepted ways to solve our pain
are to pay somebody to listen to us
or to adopt some party line without deviation
& preach it to everyone else
or to get high or to buy yet another piece of crap we don't really need
or to disappear into games
Angry with organized & disorganized religions which fill people's lives
with ignorant laws or hocus pocus or convince them that pain is holy
although I reserve most of my venom for the catholic church
which ruined my life with lies I'm still unraveling
I'm angry that none of us lives to our potential
that we're frightened into being the least we can be
to survive
Outraged that so much is swept under rugs
that we can barely walk
Furious that almost everyone still uses the word *blind*
to mean ignorant or insensitive or clumsy
that millions of trees are slaughtered to print romance novels or spy chillers
& every kind of wall street garbage
until I'm ashamed
to put words to paper at all
Most of us can hardly function
poisoned by corporate nonsense
assaulted with unnecessary chemicals
making somebody who hates us a nice fat profit
Angry that my back hurts all the time
from cleaning the houses of the lazy wealthy for 20 years
not one of whom is as intelligent, creative, or powerful as I am
Angry that I'm going to die this angry
& probably not be able to change a damn thing
Enraged that every place I go is inaccessible
even when they've altered the bathrooms inside because it's the law
when a chair still can't get up the outside stairs or in the door
At the braille signs inside elevators when there are none outside it
Furious with ignorance & apathy those smug cousins in every family
I can't shut my heart to the pain thudding all around us

Here in my hands are all the faces of those I've seen begging
in doorways, on freeway ramps, on sidewalks
begging for change for a meal or a drink
whose desperation is now against the law
This is just the scratched raw surface of my anger
which is fueled by the righteousness
of knowing we don't have to live this way
We could embrace our profound connections
and our deep differences
learn from each other
Honor each other
begin to live without torturing
If you aren't as angry as I am we probably shouldn't try
to talk to each other
because I'm furious with your fear of anger
I'm angry that others are always telling me
that they feel the same way I do but they're afraid to say so
or they don't know how
or they'd lose their job or their lover
If you can speak
you can be angry
if you can't speak bang your fork
If you're furious with me
because I haven't mentioned something
you're angry about
get busy & write it yourself
There is no such beast as too angry
I'm a canary down this mine of apathy
singing & singing my yellow throat on fire
with this sacred holy purifying
spirit of anger

For Ayofemi Folayan